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*'Bendecidos, Encendidos, y En Victoria':*  
Transformative Theological Strategies amongst  
Latina/o Immigrant Charismatic Catholics in the United States

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**ABSTRACT**

*'Bendecidos, Encendidos, y En Victoria'*: Transformative Theological Strategies amongst Latina/o Immigrant Charismatic Catholics in the United States

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This work argues that Latina/o immigrant Charismatic Catholicism does not encourage passive hope for heavenly rewards but rather emphasizes active strategies for transforming the self and the world. This study responds to two major concerns in the field of religious studies: the concern that Pentecostal forms of Christianity emphasize an interior, feel-good religiosity that detracts from actions to transform circumstances; and how theologians might share the theological insights of marginalized communities that do not have native PhD-authorized theologians. This work applies an innovative method of generating theological insights based on ethnographic research. Specifically, it enumerates Latina/o immigrant Charismatic Catholic, or *carismático*, theological perspectives on sin, salvation, and conversion; it then applies the lenses of postcolonial studies and Pentecostal studies to reveal the myriad transformative strategies inherent to these theological perspectives.

When theologizing sin, *carismáticos* identify sin based not upon a prescribed list of prohibited behaviors but rather upon discernment of whether any given behavior pulls one's attention away from God. The theological perspective produces self-awareness, self-discipline, and moral self-transformation in many *carismáticos*. When theologizing salvation, *carismáticos* emphasize that the post-resurrection Jesus is a palpable, living presence who assists them in overcoming difficulties in their everyday lives. Befriending this all-powerful and deeply loving ally is a transformative strategy that provides the confidence and hope necessary for Latina/o immigrants to persevere in their struggles to thrive in their new, often-hostile homeland. When

theologizing conversion, male *carismáticos* emphasize how conversion helps them to end their addictions, while female *carismáticas* emphasize that conversion transforms depression and sadness into joy. The transformations that conversion effects for *carismáticos* include increased self-esteem, moral self-improvement, and stronger familial relationships. *Carismático* religiosity also engenders transformation within the *carismáticos*' communities. It inspires greater devotion to God and the Church, and as a result *carismáticos* provide their parishes with increased financial contributions and participation in ministries. *Carismáticos* also feel called to evangelize by manifesting God's love, resulting in outreach assistance to people in their broader communities.

This study provides an innovative methodological model that contributes both to ethnography and theology. The theological aspect of this method demonstrates that familiarity with a religion's beliefs can provide insights regarding which doctrines a religious community downplays, and the significance of these lacunae. The ethnographic aspect of this method reveals the highly-varied theological perspectives that exist within a single religious community and under a single doctrine, a diversity that traditional, single-perspective approaches to writing theology can often obscure.

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## CHAPTER 1 – METHODOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION

At the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in 2008, a panel entitled “Liberation Theologies for the Twenty-First Century” raised some uneasy questions for me regarding whether my current doctoral focus on medieval Christianity was the best application of my scholarly endeavors. While I was passionate about mysticism amongst medieval women on the margins, panelists Rosemary Radford Ruether, Emily Townes, Ada-María Isasi-Díaz and Tink Tinker exuded a passionate blend of scholarship and activism that resonated deep within me. Their reflections on how to make theology relevant to a world rife with injustice initiated my quest to merge my passion for scholarship with my drive to challenge prejudice and discrimination. A year later I changed my area of specialization to contextual theologies due to the impulse towards justice and equality inherent to these schools.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Classic examples of contextual theologies include African-American James Cone’s *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Orbis, 1970); U.S. feminist Elizabeth Johnson’s *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (Crossroad, 1992); Womanist Delores Williams’s *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Orbis, 1993); Mexican immigrant María Pilar Aquino’s *Our Cry for Life: Feminist Theology from Latin America* (Wipf & Stock, 1993); Robert Shore-Goss’s *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1993); Nancy Eiesland’s *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Abingdon, 1994); Chinese immigrant Kwok Pui-Lan’s *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Westminster John Knox, 2005); Native American George “Tink” Tinker’s *American Indian Liberation: A Theology of Sovereignty*

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In this dissertation, I offer the scholarly fruits that resulted from attending this panel. This introductory chapter presents the methodological background of this project in two sections. In the first section, I present an argument for ethnography as a theological method and describe the Latina/o immigrant Charismatic Catholic (*carismático*) community in which I conducted theological ethnographic research. I then introduce four methodological concerns that an ethnographic study in this particular community presents: the risk of “going native,” the difficulty of producing cohesive theology from plural voices, the risks inherent in placing native theologies into systematic frameworks, and the influences that the researcher’s personal interests can exercise in such a project. I also discuss how I address these concerns in my dissertation. I conclude the first methodological section by introducing the primary theological concern of this project, namely, exploring the ways in which the *carismáticos*’ religiosity bolsters their efforts to transform themselves and their communities. The second section of this introductory chapter provides an overview of secondary literature that relates to this current work. I briefly outline the main arguments and the lacunae in the literature. I then introduce theories from the secondary literature on Latina/o Pentecostalism that are useful for discovering how this form of religiosity offers transformative strategies to its practitioners. Finally, I briefly introduce postcolonial theories that address how agency manifests in subaltern peoples.

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(Orbis, 2008); and Korean-American Sang Hyun Lee’s *From a Liminal Place: An Asian American Theology* (Fortress, 2010).

## SECTION I – METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Contextual theologies respond to the concern that when the large majority of theologians share a relatively narrow range of characteristics, the resultant language used for God in theological discourse can easily become too narrow in scope. Numerous theologians have exposed the theological dangers that occur when scholars writing Christian theology represent too narrow a range of the human population. Examples include black theologian James Cone, who explains, “God is more than what any one people can elaborate and express,” and “ultimate reality... is too mysterious to be exclusively limited to one people’s view of God.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, he argues, no single set of experiences – including the white, economically privileged, heterosexual male experiences that have predominantly shaped Christian theology – can “exhaust the significance of God.” Feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson likewise argues “insofar as male-dominant language is honored as the only or the supremely fitting way of speaking about God, it absolutizes a single set of metaphors.”<sup>3</sup> In short, God language becomes idolatrous, positing a God limited to male characteristics. Theologians from many different contexts have demonstrated how, whether intentional or not, exclusively male theology perpetuates sexism, exclusively white theology perpetuates racism, exclusively heterosexual theology perpetuates homophobia, and so forth. My in-depth study of contextual theologies

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<sup>2</sup> James Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 173, 205.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1992), 18.

convinced me of the necessity for a robust, diverse community of theological scholars contributing a rich variety of cultural perspectives in the field of Christian theology.

I have been less clear, however, about my own role within this field. While it is true that the work of white, middle-class United States feminist theologians – those who represent my own context – is far from done, it is also clear that my people have been fairly well represented in the past four decades of academic Christian theological discourse. I am more concerned about the countless other theological voices that have not yet spoken in Christian theological scholarship. Although the contextual theological method indeed diversifies elite theological discourse, it does not exhaust the necessary approaches to ensure full inclusion of theological perspectives of marginalized communities. For many of the world's most-marginalized communities, the possibility of one of their members obtaining an advanced theological degree in the near future is slim. Additional strategies are necessary in order to ensure that the theological insights of all marginalized communities, particularly the most socio-economically disenfranchised communities, find representation in established Christian discourse. It feels more urgent to focus my academic efforts on remedying this imbalance than to write from a perspective that dozens of feminist theologians have already represented eloquently and powerfully.

These insights lead me to ponder what actions a privileged scholar such as myself can take to correct the ongoing imbalance of representation in academic theological discourse. The best answer I find is ethnographic research.<sup>4</sup> Ethnography is a fieldwork process wherein

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<sup>4</sup> There is another answer to this question, an equally important approach, which is to encourage and support native theologians in communities that are as yet underrepresented in

researchers interview, observe, and participate in events and activities in order to gain insight into the rich contours of a group of people. Through this method the theological insights of communities that have not yet produced PhD-bearing theologians can enter academic discourse. As Christine Helmer argues, “ethnography... extends the horizon of theological discourse by widening the range of sources for religious reflection and by expanding the range of interlocutors.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, ethnography, by its very nature, *emphasizes* diversifying the sources of academic knowledge.

As Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen outline in *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*, the goal of ethnography is not only to seek underrepresented viewpoints but also to “take them seriously as a source of wisdom.”<sup>6</sup> In so doing, Scharen and Vigen argue, “the turn to ethnography... makes the bold claim that what non-academics think, live, know,

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academic circles. An outstanding example is Margaret Farley and Letty Russell’s work with the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians and other, related groups of theologians in Africa. Their dedication to mentoring, supporting, and finding resources for African women theologians to develop the academic presentation of their theological insights is a striking example of how privileged scholars can make a place at the academic table for theological voices that have not been afforded sufficient representation.

<sup>5</sup> Christine Helmer, *Theology and the End of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 161.

<sup>6</sup> Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen, eds., *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 16.

practice, do, and experience matters in a fundamental (not merely illustrative) way.”<sup>7</sup> An ethnographic approach in theology affirms that the voices of all communities matter, not just those whose members have the necessary resources to obtain advanced degrees. My dissertation therefore grounds itself in an ethnographic approach, following the lead of scholars such as Aana Marie Vigen, Melissa Browning, and Todd Whitmore who have so effectively applied ethnography in Christian ethics. I seek to determine whether such an approach can be equally effective in recording the systematic theology of a community.

In seeking a research site for my ethnographic theological study, I found an apt community within the confines of my own place of worship. My blended Roman Catholic parish of English- and Spanish-speakers strove toward unity but struggled with sharp differences and inequalities between the two language groups. One Spanish language group in particular seemed to bear the brunt of marginalization, the *círculo de oración*, a Charismatic prayer group that gathered every Friday night in the sanctuary. This prayer circle is part of the international Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) in its Spanish-language manifestation, the *Renovación Carismática Católica Hispana* (RCCH), the Hispanic Catholic Charismatic Renewal. I overheard numerous derisive comments about this group from both sides of the language divide, from disdain for their practice of speaking in tongues to accusations that they are not actually Catholic. This jarred with my own experience of the *carismáticos*, the members of this prayer group, as amongst the most devout, sincere, and dedicated members of the parish. The anti-*carismático* prejudice I’d encountered as well as increasing national hostility towards immigrants who cross our southern border sharpened the urgency I felt about this work. There was a clear

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 67.

need to present accurate information regarding the members of this community and the theological convictions they hold. I thus commenced ethnographic research with the intention of generating a contextual theology from a perspective other than my own.

### **A Note On Terminology – Latina/o v. Hispanic**

Almost immediately upon beginning my research, I came upon the conundrum of whether to use the adjective “Latino” or “Hispanic” when describing this community’s ethnicity. When the *carismáticos* refer to themselves as an ethnic group, they use the word “*hispano*” four to five times as frequently as they use the word “*latino*.” Religion scholar Gastón Espinosa explains the primary reason for this: most immigrants from Latin America use the term “Hispanic” because it is the term used in the broad society of the United States and also on many government documents and applications. However, Espinosa also points out that the “word ‘Hispanic’ was created and used by the government as an umbrella term to include people from twenty-two Latin American countries and Spain.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, it was a category created for a group of people who do not necessarily categorize themselves as a single group. Furthermore, Espinosa explains, “Hispanic also tends to point to the community’s roots in Spain (ancient Hispania) rather than its immediate roots in Latin America (Latino), which includes Spanish, indigenous Indians, blacks, and other multi-ethnic people.”<sup>9</sup> As a result, Espinosa concludes, many Latin Americans, particularly those with high levels of education, prefer the term Latino because it points toward their countries of origin rather than toward the Spanish colonizer.

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<sup>8</sup> Gastón Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals in America: Faith and Politics in Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 10.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Based on my concern regarding the colonial implications of the term Hispanic, I use Latino when speaking from my own voice in this work. Furthermore, scholars also point out that in Spanish a man is *latino* and a woman is *latina*; therefore using Latino as a generic term registers as problematically as the generic pronoun “he” registers in English. I follow their lead in using Latina/o as the generic term when speaking from my own voice.

However, when *carismáticos* identify themselves as Hispanic I leave the term in place. This most frequently occurs in organizational titles: the international, national, and regional organizations all name themselves the Hispanic, rather than Latino, Catholic Charismatic Renewal. This being said, neither adjective comes up with particular frequency. Other than when referring to organization names, these terms surface primarily when the *carismáticos* distinguish themselves from “Anglos” (English-speaking non-immigrants). Even when this is the case, they are most comfortable identifying themselves based on nationality, “*mexicanos*” being the most frequent because of the local immigrant population. They also identify nationalities when addressing a group: “We are Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, from Guatemala, from Bolivia, from El Salvador, from Costa Rica.”<sup>10</sup> Yet typically such a list concludes with a statement such as “it doesn’t matter where we come from. Today, we are a family!”<sup>11</sup> This final declaration points towards their preferred appellation: *carismáticos*. The group identity they

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<sup>10</sup> “*somos mexicanos, puertorriqueños, de Guatemala, de Bolivia, del Salvador, de Costa Rica,*” transcription of preaching at a mass celebrating the anniversary of the local RCCH, August 24, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> *No importa de dónde vengamos, en este día de hoy, somos una familia,*” transcription of preaching at a mass celebrating the anniversary of the local RCCH, August 24, 2013.

most privilege is not national origin or a broader ethnic category; rather, it is their identity as Charismatic Catholics. Nor is this unique amongst the RCCH; Lois Ann Lorentzen and Rosalina Mira note, for instance, that in the Pentecostal church in San Francisco where they conducted fieldwork, the members “may be born-again women, janitors, Latinos, Mexicanos, Salvadorans, but they are first of all born-again.”<sup>12</sup> I follow the lead of the people whose communities I visited and, wherever possible when there is a need to refer to them as a group, name them *carismáticos*. Because this term has not been adopted into English, I follow Spanish grammatical conventions in using *carismático/s* when referring to men, *carismática/s* when referring to women, and *carismático/s* when referring to a mixed group.

### **Methodological Concerns**

I knew from the beginning of my research that it would be impossible to write an “objective” *carismático* systematic theology as a non-*carismático*, one that represents only “their” positions. There is no neutral location or objective position from which the ethnographer-theologian may engage the community members, much less write. Because of this, the scholar must make conscious decisions regarding what style of engagement to undertake with the community and how to write about what results.

When deciding how to engage the community one is researching, ethnographers have long been concerned about the risk of “going native.” A classical statement of this appears in the

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<sup>12</sup> Lois Ann Lorentzen and Rosalina Mira, “*El Milagro Está en Casa: Gender and Private/Public Empowerment in a Migrant Pentecostal Church*,” in *Latin American Perspectives* 32 no. 1 (2005): 61.

*American Journal of Sociology* in 1955. Sociologist and anthropologist Arthur Vidich articulates his concern:

If the participant observer seeks genuine experiences, unqualifiedly immersing and committing himself in the group he is studying, it may become impossible for him to objectify his own experiences for research purposes; in committing his loyalties he develops vested interests which will inevitably enter into his observations. Anthropologists who have “gone native” are cases in point; some of them stop publishing material entirely.<sup>13</sup>

Vidich argues that unqualified immersion and committed loyalty to a group renders it impossible for the researcher to maintain objectivity and therefore results in “vested interests” influencing observations. Subsequent works on ethnographic method, such as James Clifford and George Marcus’s *Writing Culture*, question Vidich’s assumption that it is possible for an ethnographer to avoid vested interests. “Ethnographic truths,” Clifford argues, are “inherently *partial*,” partial here holding two meanings, “committed and incomplete.”<sup>14</sup> No researcher observes without the interpretive lenses of culture and experience. It is thus incumbent upon the ethnographic researcher to make deliberate decisions and explicit declarations regarding the partiality that shapes the written product.

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<sup>13</sup> Arthur Vidich, “Participant Observation and the Collection and Interpretation of Data,” *American Journal of Sociology* 60 (January 1955): 357.

<sup>14</sup> James Clifford, “Introduction,” in James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 7.

I made my decisions regarding which form of partiality I would adopt based on the models of psychological anthropologist Tanya Luhmann and ethicist Luke Bretherton. Luhmann took a highly-engaged approach in her ethnographic research on magic practitioners in present-day Britain: “I participated in their world. I joined their groups. I read their books and novels. I practiced their techniques and performed in their rituals.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, as much as was possible for an outsider, she shaped her life to look like their lives. In a similar vein, Luke Bretherton makes an argument for apprenticeship as a facet of ethnographic research: “Rather than autonomous distance and observation, [apprenticeship as a form of learning] demands immersion and commitment to do the work well and to seek the best for the practice at all times. Through apprenticeship in what is studied and through practicing... one can check whether one has understood the practice properly.”<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, he argues, without apprenticeship one cannot be certain that one has accurately understood the practice at all.

Such an approach to ethnographic research appealed to me. I reflected that the closest approximation of “apprenticeship” in this community was the postulant process for becoming a member of the parish prayer circle leadership team. With the guidance of the coordinator of the *carismáticos*, I began the disciplines assigned to postulants. I not only attended but fully participated in *carismático* rituals and events, read their books, and practiced their daily

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<sup>15</sup> Tanya Luhmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 190.

<sup>16</sup> Luke Bretherton, “Generating Christian Political Theory and the Uses of Ethnography,” in Pete Ward, ed. *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 154-55.

disciplines such as praying the rosary and reading the daily Mass readings. I intended neither to become a *carismática* nor to avoid becoming one. Rather, I undertook the practices with an open mind to see what might result.

While the ethnographer who adopts the apprenticeship method risks “going native,” this method gives the richest insights into the lives in the community one is studying. Tanya Luhrmann relates a striking example of this:

One evening I was reading a book about Arthurian Britain and the early Celtic isles.... I allowed myself to get deeply involved with the story, reading not the way I read a textbook but... giving way to the story and allowing it to grip my feelings and to fill my mind. I read late into the night. And as I woke the next morning, I saw six druids standing against the window, above the stirring London street below. I *saw* them, and they beckoned to me. I stared for a moment of stunned astonishment, and then I shot up out of bed, and they were gone.... I saw them as clearly and distinctly and as external to me as I saw the notebook in which I recorded the moment, my sentences underlined and marked by exclamation points. I remember it so clearly because it was so singular. Nothing like that had ever happened to me before.<sup>17</sup>

It is only because Luhrmann gave herself entirely to the practices of the community she was studying that the visceral reality of a vision – and thus a new level of understanding of her subjects’ experiences – was possible. A similar occurrence happened to me during the prayer circle gathering on the evening that I committed myself to a postulant’s practices. When I went

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<sup>17</sup> Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*, 192.

to the altar so that a *carismática* could lay her hands on me in prayer, the moment she touched me I experienced an ecstatic rush of disorientation, buzzing in my ears, and whirling lights behind my closed eyes. Not wanting to draw attention to myself, I did not fall over in a faint as occasionally happened to individuals at prayer circle gatherings, but it took considerable effort for me to remain upright. I do not claim that I therefore know what *carismáticos* experience during healing prayer. However, its similarity to what *carismáticos* describe merits classifying it as a parallel experience. It gave me a richer understanding of how *carismático* religious experiences can register as immediate, absolute, and entirely unwilling.

Did Luhrmann and I risk “going native”? Perhaps. However, there is a firm distinction between “going native” and taking on the role of ethnographer-apprentice. As Bretherton points out, while apprenticeship “entails listening and doing what one is told,” it does not imply “uncritical acceptance of the norms and behavioral processes embedded within the practice.”<sup>18</sup> While there is a risk – though I would argue it is a very small risk – that a researcher may shift from critical analysis to the uncritical acceptance of “going native,” the risk is nonetheless justifiable. Without a commitment to participating as fully as possible in the community’s activities, a whole facet of what ethnography can reveal is missed. A researcher who takes an open-minded approach and consequently has experiences parallel to – though not the same as – the experiences of the community gains a fuller understanding of the community’s experiences. Such experiences are unavailable to the researcher who remains uninvolved due to an illusory pursuit of objectivity.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 155.

Just as researchers must make conscious choices regarding what form of participation to adopt, they must also deliberately decide how their interests will influence the written result of ethnographic research. Personal interest exerts influence in three primary ways in the current project. First, my gender studies background impels me to scrutinize gender roles in a way that *carismáticos* do not. I immediately noticed, for example, the disproportionate ratio of women to men at every event I attended. While my gender studies training may prompt me to devote considerable attention to this disparity, doing so would heavily privilege a topic the *carismáticos* did not once bring up of their own volition. Yet my gender studies training has taught me that gender roles operate on every layer of a culture. Following the community's custom of rarely mentioning gender roles would be to disregard the detrimental effects of gender inequality. In this project, I balance my gender studies biases with the community's biases by emphasizing gender roles to a degree that is foreign to the community, while at the same time restricting my gender observations to addiction and caretaking, the only gender roles the *carismáticos* identify with any frequency.

The second way that personal interest influences this ethnographic theology project is my desire to fit the insights from an oral, lived-theology tradition into the categories of academic systematic theology. I do this in order to make the *carismáticos'* perspectives accessible to academic theologians. Yet the *carismáticos* do not emphasize systematic theology topics such as explaining the specific mechanism by which salvation works (soteriology) or the specific roles of the three persons of the trinity (Christology, pneumatology). As theologian Robert Schreiter points out, theologizing in local communities tends not to be a conscious, systematizing effort, but rather to be an "occasional enterprise," an enterprise that is "dictated by circumstances and

immediate needs rather than the need for system-building.”<sup>19</sup> The *carismáticos* theologize from a space of daily struggle to provide for their families. As a result, they emphasize topics such as joyful human relationship with a loving, transformative God, yet not in a way that easily fits into the category of theological anthropology. Such a dilemma requires the ethnographic theologian to choose where to dwell on the continuum between importing a community’s insights into a pre-existing systematic grid and creating a new system that arises organically from the community’s theological worldviews.

Schreiter, in discussing the former approach of articulating a local theology using existing theological structures, notes that a “theology that emerges from such a model is replete with the categories, names, and concerns of a local culture, yet looks like Western theology and is relatively easily understood by Westerners.”<sup>20</sup> While rendering a local theology comprehensible to academic theologians can facilitate a new theological voice entering an academic conversation, there is a price to this translation project. Schreiter warns that such an approach “often will try to force cultural data into foreign categories.”<sup>21</sup> In spite of the drawbacks of this approach, I choose in this current project to use induction to form structures and categories that, while the data suggests them, are not endemic to the population. I make this choice in light of the already-experimental nature of the ethnographic approach to contextual theology. By fitting the *carismáticos*’ perspectives into broad categories familiar to academic

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<sup>19</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies: 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), 26.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

theology I hope to make the results of this experimental method as accessible as possible to systematic theologians. In the Conclusion, I reflect on the degree to which arranging the *carismáticos*' perspectives into systematic categories did justice to their confessional, evangelical styles of speaking about God.

The final way that personal interest influences this work is my desire to create a single theology from a community of considerable diversity whose varied beliefs are not always in agreement. Presenting a single, coherent theology from this data – if such a thing were even possible – would do disservice to the many-textured richness of *carismático* theological perspectives. As Robert Schreiter points out, “no culture is ever so simple that a comprehensive explanation and description can be given. Nor is it ever so static that all is entirely cohesive and consistent.”<sup>22</sup> I therefore strive to present the *carismáticos*' diverse voices in a way that neither glosses over tensions and conflicts nor overemphasizes them. Wherever notable contradictions exist I analyze what these tensions reveal rather than obscuring certain perspectives in order to postulate “the” *carismático* perspective.

At the same time, there was not merely disunity or “chaos and confusion,” as the bishop's liaison was fond of phrasing it. There were strong recurring themes that unified the diverse voices of the community. Schreiter addresses the task of teasing core theologies out of diverse voices through a “semiotic domain,” an “assemblage of culture texts relating to one set of activities... which are organized together by a single set of messages and metaphoric signs.”<sup>23</sup> To apply this concept to the specific field of ethnographic theology, the key to articulating the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 80.

common theological threads within a community's diverse voices is to identify single messages and common metaphors that surface regarding a given topic.

The "culture text" in the *carismático* community is not primarily the written word but rather the extemporaneous preaching and testimonies that abound in prayer meetings. Within these oral "texts," common messages and metaphors not only exist, but play a strong role. Furthermore, these common messages and metaphors recur with enough frequency to suggest a community process that shapes not only the way religious stories are told but also the *carismáticos'* subsequent religious experiences.

Marie Griffith and Elaine Lawless both encountered these communal themes in their ethnographic studies on Christian communities and offer some insightful reflections on this phenomenon. Lawless notes that there is "clearly community collaboration on the 'authentic' story, its structure, its components;"<sup>24</sup> and Griffith remarks that while these narratives are "constructed from individual experiences," they are also "framed in the structuring terms of the community."<sup>25</sup> These two scholars point out the interplay between individual experience and community influence. I observed this taking place in my community as well. Individual *carismáticos* have conversion experiences and tell the stories to the community of the prayer circle. This communal recounting of individual conversion stories reveals certain elements that these stories have in common. The more frequently these common elements surface, the more

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<sup>24</sup> Elaine Lawless, "Rescripting Their Lives and Narratives: Spiritual Life Stories of Pentecostal Women Preachers," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7 no. 1 (1991): 60.

<sup>25</sup> Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 18.

the community perceives them as universal, highlighting their significance and assuring their place in a communal narrative structure. This resultant communal narrative structure, and the common elements within it, in turn shape newcomers' understandings of what constitutes a conversion experience and helps them to interpret and give meaning to their own, subsequent religious experiences.

This is not to argue that the *carismáticos* are being anything but sincere in relating their experiences. The fact that culture shapes experience does not make experiences any less real, true, or authentic. Furthermore, as Marie Griffith points out, "no narrative is a pure reflection of the life it depicts."<sup>26</sup> Religious narratives "do not follow a fixed chronological order or give equal weight to all events in one's life; they constitute a series of vignettes constructed with an end in view."<sup>27</sup> The intention behind telling a story, as well as the communal understanding of the significance of particular events, shapes a story's structure and contents.

This need not be a detriment to the ethnographic theological project. On the contrary, these common themes within the semiotic domain of the oral "texts" illuminate the theological convictions that the group – or at least the majority of its members – holds in common. Schreiter further argues that when the majority of people in a community consider a statement to be true, the theologian may legitimately identify it as a communal conviction: "If the cultural description can be affirmed as true by a significant segment of the culture itself... then the description can be considered valid."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>28</sup> Schreiter, *Local Theologies*, 47.

In the current study, I take two approaches to determining whether a significant segment of the *carismáticos* consider my theological assertions to be true. The first, as outlined above, is to emphasize the themes that recur frequently in preaching and testimonies. My second approach is to submit my work to *carismático* leaders and to inquire whether I accurately represent the common convictions of the community.<sup>29</sup> In the Conclusion, I discuss these leaders' perspectives on the degree to which the narrative descriptions I articulate accurately represent the *carismáticos'* communal perspectives.

### **Patient Suffering is Godly: A Recurring *Carismático* Theme**

In the course of my research, a concern arose that was significant enough that it became the organizing structure by which I framed the *carismáticos'* contextual theologies. This concern came to light regarding the adamant *carismático* belief that God is present with them in their struggles. Illustrating the concern that arose for me in response to this perspective first requires developing this theological viewpoint in greater detail. During an interview, a *carismática* explained how she responds to struggles that confront her in daily life:

Whatever problem you have, be it family member who has an illness, you don't despair, because... you're always thinking that God is the one who controls

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<sup>29</sup> I adopt this practice of asking the community to review the manuscripts from the Participatory Action Research approach to ethnography. See Alice McIntyre, *Participatory Action Research* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008), 54-57.

everything. Even though we despair, if we leave things to God, he will put everything into place.<sup>30</sup>

God, for this woman and for the majority of *carismáticos*, is a caring deity who offers not only to give comfort but also to take control of everything. Thus there is a frequent *carismático* call to “have patience and trust in the Lord” when faced with suffering.

This conviction, in many cases, both arises from and strengthens the belief that since God is in control of everything, God also intends everything that comes to pass. Two women discussed this topic on a radio program that the local *carismáticos* produce:

Alicia: In times of difficulty, sickness, economic problems, family problems, we would like things, at that moment, to be how we want them. But our time is not the Lord’s time. In the Lord’s time things will be set right and I believe that in some way God permits these trials so that we seek him.... We only seek him in times of trouble and he loves us so much that he troubles us so that we continue realizing that we need him... right?

Francisca: It’s the truth.... Perhaps the situation is going to make us more mature in faith, stronger in faith.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> “*Cualquier problema que tenga, ya sea de enfermedad, de uno mismo de sus familiares, no se desespera, porque... siempre está uno pensando que Dios es el que controla todo. Aunque nos desesperemos, si le dejamos las cosas a Dios, él es el que va a poner todo en su lugar.*” Interview with the author, May 20, 2014.

<sup>31</sup> Alicia: *Nosotros en los momentos de dificultad, de enfermedad, de una situación económica, familiar, uno quisiera que al momento las cosas sean como nosotros queremos.*

In this scenario, God causes illness and economic problems so that humans, through trusting God to alleviate the problems in God's own time, may strengthen their faith.

Carlos, preaching dynamically at a parish retreat, further develops this theological concept of the spiritual benefits of suffering:

Christ had to go through the cross of suffering to become... the glorious king of the universe.... Thus we have to have the faith... to go through our cross. What act is our cross of suffering? Believing in Jesus but also accepting our problems and our daily illnesses, because they are the means of purification, the means of salvation, the means of achieving sanctity.<sup>32</sup>

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*Pero el tiempo de nosotros no es el tiempo del Señor. Todo el tiempo del Señor se van a arreglar las cosas y yo creo que de alguna manera Dios permite estas pruebas para que también nosotros lo busquemos... Como que lo buscamos solamente en los aprietos y él nos ama tanto que nos aprieta para que sigamos dándonos cuenta que nosotros lo necesitamos... ¿verdad?*

Francisca: *Es la verdad... Tal vez esa situación nos va haciendo madurar más en la fe, haciéndonos más fuertes en la fe.* Transcription of *Radio Alabaré* radio program, September 29, 2013.

<sup>32</sup> *“Cristo tuvo que pasar por la cruz del sufrimiento para llegar a ser... el Rey glorioso del universo... Entonces nosotros tenemos que tener fe, pero esa fe nos tiene que llevar a caminar y pasar por una cruz. ¿Cuál acto es la cruz del sufrimiento? Creer en Jesús pero también aceptar nuestros problemas y nuestras enfermedades diarias porque son los medios de purificación, los medios de salvación, los medios de alcanzar la santidad.”* Transcription of preaching at a parish retreat, November 24, 2013.

For Luisa, Alicia, Francisca, and Carlos, patient suffering is godly. Not only does it strengthen faith; it is the pathway to salvation and sanctification.<sup>33</sup>

This perspective on patient suffering became a central concern for me when several of my colleagues protested that Charismatic Catholicism is distracting the *carismáticos* from activism such as immigration reform struggles. My colleagues expressed their concern that the *carismáticos*' chosen form of religiosity shifts their focus toward a joyful, comforting inward relationship with God. My colleagues argue that while joy may serve as a distraction, and

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<sup>33</sup> This is not to say that the *carismáticos* invented this justification, even glorification, of Christian suffering. Classicist Judith Perkins, in *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 14, 30, demonstrates that even the earliest Christians “chose to foreground their own suffering in their early texts and... picked the suffering in the founder’s life to emulate.” These early narratives, Perkins argues, “functioned to construct Christians as a community of sufferers” and “relentlessly repeated this message.” She continues: “Christian subjects enacted it to the point that in the early centuries even pagan contemporaries who know almost nothing about Christianity knew that Christians were sufferers.” Such a focus on glorified and redemptive suffering did not end with early Christianity but has pervaded the tradition so that now, as Perkins concludes, “one thing everyone knows about Christianity is that it centers on suffering in the exemplar of the crucified Christ.” Thus I outline the *carismáticos*' positive perspective on suffering not to argue that they have introduced something novel, but rather to illustrate their particular manifestation of this quintessentially Christian belief.

comfort may be a compensation that makes suffering bearable, such religiosity pulls *carismáticos*' attention away from the work necessary to transform their situations of suffering.

Such criticism abounds in scholarly literature. Latina/o Catholicism scholar Timothy Matovina notes the tendency of social activist Catholics to perceive “Pentecostal and [Charismatic Catholic] focus on prayer and personal conversion” to be a form of religiosity that “excludes or even openly resists faith-based social involvement.”<sup>34</sup> Theologian Andrea Hollingsworth notes feminist fears that “a Pentecostal emphasis could promote an oppressive ‘pie in the sky’ form of spirituality and Spirit doctrine in which women are encouraged to passively endure their daily suffering and subordination, but cope by escaping regularly to Charismatic prayer.”<sup>35</sup> Political scientist Edward Cleary declares that Charismatic Catholicism is “portrayed by many as inward looking and deeply conservative” while liberation theology is “believed to be the embodiment of social justice and human rights.”<sup>36</sup> Anthropologists Barbara Boudewijnse, André Droogers, and Frans Kamsteeg edited a collection of essays entitled *More Than Opium: An Anthropological Approach to Latin American and Caribbean Pentecostal Praxis* in order to challenge the assumption that Latina/o Pentecostals dedicate themselves to opiate religiosity. The list goes on.

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<sup>34</sup> Timothy Matovina, *Latino Catholicism: Transformation in America's Largest Church*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 116.

<sup>35</sup> Andrea Hollingsworth, “Spirit and Voice: Toward a Feminist Pentecostal Pneumatology,” *Pneuma* 29 (2007): 194.

<sup>36</sup> Edward Cleary, *The Rise of Charismatic Catholicism in Latin America* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2011): 7.

There is logic to these perspectives. Cleary's work, for instance, demonstrates that conservative political movements in Nicaragua received the support of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in battling the liberation-theology supported revolutionary movement.<sup>37</sup> However, I found in the course of my research that these perspectives do not accurately represent the active and engaged demeanor of the *carismáticos* that I met. This suggests a lack of adequate information, and addressing this lack became one of the primary objectives of my writing. Thus my dissertation holds two primary, intertwined objectives. I seek to provide the closest approximation possible to a systematic theology of themes that are prominent for the *carismáticos* such as sin, soteriology, and conversion; and to explore the ways in which the *carismáticos*' religiosity aids them in transforming themselves and their communities.

## SECTION II – THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I discovered that my concern regarding the lack of good information was not unique. Gastón Espinosa wrote his most recent work, *Latino Pentecostals in America*, to rectify a lamentable scholarly lacuna. He observed that the story of United States Latina/o Pentecostals in any denomination had rarely been told outside of the Latina/o Pentecostal community, and that Latina/o Pentecostals “still languish in the shadows of American, Latino, and Pentecostal history, politics, and society.”<sup>38</sup> Although he acknowledges this has begun to change, his own work making a major contribution to this trend, it remains true that United States Latinas/os who practice Pentecostal Christianity remain on the margins of the scholarly literature.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>38</sup> Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals*, 1.

To clarify terminology, the word Pentecostal, derived from the feast of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit first descended, has two different meanings. As a general term, Pentecostal refers to Spirit-inspired Christianity as found in both Protestant and Catholic communities. As a specific term, it refers to the diverse, autonomous Protestant congregations that practice this Pentecostal form of Christianity. Charismatic refers specifically to movements within established denominations such as Lutheranism and Catholicism that incorporate Pentecostal belief and worship into their existing traditions.<sup>39</sup>

### **Latina/o Pentecostal Literature**

United States Latinas/os who practice Pentecostal Christianity in its Charismatic Catholic form certainly remain on the margins of Charismatic Catholicism in general in the United States. Andrés Arango observes that while the *Renovación Carismática Católica Hispana* (Hispanic Catholic Charismatic Renewal or RCCH) is quickly expanding in the United States, “unfortunately in many locations they are still considered ‘second.’” Arango laments that in many dioceses, “the English-language movement enjoys considerable benefits, such as economic resources, adequate space, ministers with full-time salaries, etc., while many Hispanics are left

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<sup>39</sup> For my definitions of Pentecostal and Charismatic I rely on Barbara Boudewijnse, “A Farewell to Mary? Women, Pentecostal Faith, and the Roman Catholic Church on Curaçao, N.A.,” in Barbara Boudewijnse et. al., eds., *More Than Opium: An Anthropological Approach to Latin American and Caribbean Pentecostal Praxis*, ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 99.

with only secondary resources.”<sup>40</sup> This unfortunate trend holds true for scholarship regarding the CCR as well. Following the trend that Espinosa noted regarding Latina/o Pentecostals in general, the English-language Charismatic renewal predominates in published works. Andrew Chesnut notes this academic lacuna and laments that Latin America’s “most vibrant Catholic lay movement has received precious little academic attention.”<sup>41</sup> I, too, found that scholarship treating of the CCR in North America typically presents the white, English-language Charismatic renewal as universal and normative and thus either does not mention the RCCH at all, or only in passing.<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, Latina/o Charismatic Catholics also “languish in the shadows” of specific research on Latina/o Pentecostal religiosity in the United States, where the majority of research focuses on Pentecostal Protestants. For instance, religious historian Daniel Ramírez’s excellent

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<sup>40</sup> Andrés Arango, “Aporte de la Renovación Carismática Católica a la Comunidad Hispana en los Estados Unidos,” (Masters Thesis, Franciscan School of Theology, 2009), 72.

<sup>41</sup> Andrew Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits: Latin America’s New Religious Economy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 64.

<sup>42</sup> For instance: Joseph H. Fichter, *The Catholic Cult of the Paraclete* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1976); Meredith B. McGuire, *Pentecostal Catholics: Power, Charisma, and Order in a Religious Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982); Mary Jo Neitz, *Charisma and Community: A Study of Religious Commitment within the Charismatic Renewal* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1987); Thomas J. Csordas, *Language, Charisma, and Creativity: The Ritual Life of a Religious Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) and *Body/Meaning/Healing* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002).

scholarship on the early development of Mexican Pentecostalism in the United States and Mexico examines only Protestants in the era before Charismatic Catholicism developed.<sup>43</sup> Latina/o religion scholar Gastón Espinosa's work treats primarily of Latina/o Assemblies of God, with Charismatic Catholics surfacing only in shorter articles on the broader topic of the spread of Latina/o Pentecostalism as a whole in the United States and Latin America.<sup>44</sup> Religion scholar Arlene Sánchez Walsh's ethnographic study focuses on Pentecostal Protestants in the Assemblies of God, Victory Outreach, and Vineyard communities.<sup>45</sup>

This is not to say that no one has written on the RCCH. There is a respectable number of books that treat of the RCCH, but the focus is almost entirely on Latin American countries. For instance, religion scholar Andrew Chesnut, historian Todd Hartch, anthropologist Henri Gooren, and the authors of the essays in *More Than Opium* all cover the RCCH, but only south of the United States border.<sup>46</sup> Edward Cleary, while he does treat of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban

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<sup>43</sup> Daniel Ramírez, *Migrating Faith: Pentecostalism in the United States and Mexico in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

<sup>44</sup> Gastón Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals in America: Faith and Politics in Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); and Gastón Espinosa, "The Pentecostalization of Latin American and U.S. Latino Christianity," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 26 no. 2 (2004): 262-92.

<sup>45</sup> Arlene M. Sánchez Walsh, *Latino Pentecostal Identity: Evangelical Faith, Self, and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

<sup>46</sup> Andrew Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits: Latin America's New Religious Economy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Todd Hartch, *The Rebirth of Latin American Christianity*

Charismatic Catholics who emigrate to the United States, addresses only the effects that these *carismáticos* have on Catholicism in the United States without addressing what Charismatic Catholicism *becomes* amongst Latina/o immigrants once they settle in the United States.<sup>47</sup>

There is also scholarship on the RCCH in the United States, but it appears only as articles or short subsections in books with a larger scope. Timothy Matovina, for example, provides significant insights on the RCCH in *Latino Catholicism: Transformation in America's Largest Church*, but because of the larger scope of the book, the RCCH appears only in one chapter as part of a larger discussion of apostolic movements in parishes. Gastón Espinosa and theologian Jeff Gros also research Charismatic Catholics in the United States, but only as a subset of their broader work on Protestant and Roman Catholic Pentecostalism in both the United States and Latin America.<sup>48</sup> Religion scholars Anna Peterson and Manuel Vásquez, in “Upwards, Never

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(New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Henri Gooren, “The Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Latin America,” *Pneuma* 34 (2012) 185-207; and Barbara Boudewijnse, André Droogers, and Frans Kamsteeg, eds., *More Than Opium: An Anthropological Approach to Latin American and Caribbean Pentecostal Praxis* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998).

<sup>47</sup> Edward Cleary, *The Rise of Charismatic Catholicism in Latin America* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> Gastón Espinosa, “The Pentecostalization of Latin American and U.S. Latino Christianity,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 26 no. 2 (2004): 262-92; and Jeffrey Gros, “Challenges of Pentecostal Spiritualities in a Post-Modern, Post-Eurocentric World,” in Robert J. Schreiter, ed., *Plural Spiritualities: North American Experiences* (Washington, D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015).

Down’: The Charismatic Renewal in Transnational Perspective,” discuss Salvadoran *carismáticos* in Washington D.C., but only as a secondary point in an essay that focuses on *carismáticos* in El Salvador.<sup>49</sup> Theologian Neomi DeAnda’s article “History, Renewal, and *El Camino de la Leche*” touches only briefly on the RCCH, primarily noting the lack of scholarship on this religious group.<sup>50</sup>

There is one exception to this lacuna, which I will highlight before outlining the questions and arguments that predominate in this body of literature. Andrés Arango, current coordinator of the committee that oversees the RCCH throughout the United States and Canada, first encountered the RCCH in his home country of Colombia and began serving in the movement when he moved to the United States. He earned his Master of Theological Studies degree from the Franciscan School of Theology in 2009. His Masters thesis, “*Aporte de la Renovación Carismática Católica a la Comunidad Hispana en los Estados Unidos*” (Contribution of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal to the Hispanic Community in the United States) is currently the only scholarly work dedicated entirely to the RCCH in the United States, but has not been published. In his two-part thesis, he presents a pneumatology based on

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<sup>49</sup> Anna Peterson and Manuel Vásquez, “‘Upwards, Never Down’: The Charismatic Renewal in Transnational Perspective,” in Anna L. Peterson, Manuel A. Vásquez, and Philip J. Williams, eds., *Christianity, Social Change, and Globalization in the Americas* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

<sup>50</sup> Neomi DeAnda, “History, Renewal, and *El Camino de la Leche*,” in Néstor Medina and Sammy Alfaro, eds., *Pentecostals and Charismatics in Latin America and Latino Communities* (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

Scripture, tradition, and “the actual movement of the Divine Spirit” in ecclesial movements that are “developing a true ‘practical pneumatology;’” and he analyzes the movement of the Holy Spirit in the RCCH particularly.<sup>51</sup> He demonstrates the value and contributions of the RCCH in the United States and also argues, implicitly and explicitly throughout his thesis, that “Jesus’s life was full of the Holy Spirit and thus his followers must be baptized with this same Spirit, in order to live a new life and endlessly proclaim the mystery.”<sup>52</sup> He uses the RCCH in the United States as an example of a current ecclesial movement that fulfills this call. As the coordinator of the organization that oversees the entire RCCH movement in the United States and Canada, he serves as an authoritative source throughout this dissertation regarding the larger picture of the movement of which the prayer circles in the city where I conducted my study are but a single, small part.

Even including Arango’s important work, it remains true that all current published scholarship on the RCCH in the United States is either an article or a subset of a larger work that focuses on a broader topic. Furthermore, those who have done ethnographic research on the RCCH have limited their studies to countries south of the United States border. Henri Gooren did his ethnographic research in Nicaragua and Paraguay; and anthropologists Allard Willemier Westra and Marjo de Theije conducted theirs in Brazil. The only (partial) exception to this is Manuel Vásquez and Anna Peterson’s work with Salvadoran *carismáticos* in Washington, D.C.;

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<sup>51</sup> Arango, “Aporte,” 3.

<sup>52</sup> Arango, “Aporte,” 18.

however, their qualitative research consisted only of interviews.<sup>53</sup> None of the limited research on the United States incarnation of the RCCH has been a full, participatory ethnographic study. These are the gaps that this current work seeks to fill.

### **Themes in Latina/o Pentecostal Literature**

In placing my work within a particular scholarly conversation, I follow Gastón Espinosa's lead in increasing Latina/o presence in a scholarly space that has been predominately Anglo. This mirrors my motivation for pursuing an ethnographic approach to contextual theology: making a place at the academic table for Latinas/os who have been held at the peripheries of scholarship on their religiosity. It is thus the questions of Espinosa, and other scholars who are increasing the available scholarship on Latina/o Pentecostalism in the Americas, that I engage in my own work.

The bulk of scholarship on Latina/o Pentecostalism focuses on three broad questions. The first question, which preoccupies a large portion of scholars in this field, is the reason for the recent explosion of Pentecostalism in Latin America. Each scholar takes a different approach to this complex question. Todd Hartch, for instance, argues that evangelism, prophetic commitment to the poor, emotional religious experience, and lay involvement explain the rapid

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<sup>53</sup> Anna Peterson and Manuel Vásquez, "'Upwards, Never Down': The Charismatic Renewal in Transnational Perspective," in Anna L. Peterson, Manuel A. Vásquez, and Philip J. Williams, eds., *Christianity, Social Change, and Globalization in the Americas* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

expansion of this movement.<sup>54</sup> Andrew Chesnut makes a religious marketplace argument to explain the pace of expansion: “Charismatic Christianity has prospered in the unregulated market of faith because its religious specialists produce the standardized products, faith healing and pneumacentric spirituality, that popular consumers demand.”<sup>55</sup> Daniel Ramírez and Gastón Espinosa also address the topic of Latina/o Pentecostalism’s rapid expansion, though their focus is correcting assumptions that Latinas/os joined the Pentecostalism movement fairly late and primarily via Euro-American missionary efforts. They demonstrate that Latinas/os were present from the beginning of the Azusa Street Revival in 1906 and were instrumental in the expansion of Pentecostalism in the United States. In doing so, they greatly enhance and nuance the Latina/o presence in Pentecostalism’s origins and its growth in the Americas.<sup>56</sup>

The second question that captures the attention of Latina/o Pentecostalism scholars is the relationship between Pentecostal Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. Of primary interest to

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<sup>54</sup> Todd Hartch, *The Rebirth of Latin American Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>55</sup> Andrew Chesnut, “Charismatic Competitors: Protestant Pentecostals and Catholic Charismatics in Latin America’s New Religious Marketplace,” in Lee M. Penyak and Walter J. Petry, eds., *Religion and Society in Latin America: Interpretative Essays from Conquest to Present* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 222.

<sup>56</sup> Daniel Ramírez, *Migrating Faith: Pentecostalism in the United States and Mexico in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); and Gastón Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals in America: Faith and Politics in Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

scholars is how the fraught, competitive relationship between these two branches of Christianity has influenced each denomination. Todd Hartch exemplifies the most common approach and elucidates the ways that Pentecostalism has influenced the CCR.<sup>57</sup> Anna Peterson and Manuel Vásquez represent a smaller number of scholars who supplement this discussion of Pentecostal influences on the CCR by highlighting the aspects of Roman Catholicism that cause the CCR to differ from Pentecostalism.<sup>58</sup> Only Timothy Matovina, in *Latino Catholicism*, posits a network of *reciprocal* influences between Pentecostalism and the CCR, challenging the prevalent assumptions that Pentecostalism heavily shaped the CCR without itself undergoing any change as a result of the encounter.

The third subject that arises frequently in Latina/o Pentecostalism scholarship is the common assumption that “Pentecostals are so heavenly-minded that they are no earthly good.”<sup>59</sup> Scholars question several facets of this popular conception, including assumptions of political conservatism, social disengagement, and personal disempowerment. Regarding political conservatism, theologians Néstor Medina and Sammy Alfaro demonstrate that Latina/o Charismatic and Pentecostal movements “embody a wide range of political expressions.”<sup>60</sup> In

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<sup>57</sup> Hartch, *Rebirth*.

<sup>58</sup> Peterson and Vásquez, “Upwards.”

<sup>59</sup> Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals*, 360.

<sup>60</sup> Néstor Medina and Sammy Alfaro, “Introduction: Renewal Across the Americas: Contours, Present Challenges, and Future Prospects,” in Néstor Medina and Sammy Alfaro, eds., *Pentecostals and Charismatics in Latin America and Latino Communities* (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

particular, the works of political scientist Timothy Steigenga and Pentecostalism scholar Calvin Smith demonstrate this political complexity.<sup>61</sup> In tackling the question of social disengagement, Calvin Smith argues, “without losing their sense of the heavenly, Pentecostals, by and large, are thoroughly *this*-worldly, practical and concerned with the here and now, engaging the political and economic spheres at various levels.”<sup>62</sup> Gastón Espinosa, Edward Cleary, and anthropologist Angela Hoekstra demonstrate Latina/o Pentecostal social outreach and activism throughout the past century.<sup>63</sup> Other scholars address the ways in which Latina/o

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<sup>61</sup> Timothy J. Steigenga, “The Politics of Pentecostalized Religion: Conversion as Pentecostalization in Guatemala,” in Timothy J. Steigenga and Edward L. Cleary, eds., *Conversion of a Continent: Contemporary Religious Change in Latin America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 256-79; and Calvin L. Smith, “The Politics and Economics of Pentecostalism: A Global Survey,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 175-94.

<sup>62</sup> Calvin Smith, “The Politics and Economics of Pentecostalism: A Global Survey,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 183.

<sup>63</sup> Gastón Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals in America: Faith and Politics in Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Edward Cleary, *The Rise of Charismatic Catholicism in Latin America* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2011); and Angela Hoekstra, “Rural Pentecostalism in Pernambuco (Brazil): More than a Symbolic Protest,” in *More Than Opium: An Anthropological Approach to Latin American and Caribbean Pentecostal Praxis*, ed. Barbara Boudewijnse et. al. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 145-67.

Pentecostalism is a personally-empowering resource. This question is of particular interest to theologian Elizabeth Conde-Frazier and anthropologists Hanneke Sloomweg, Barbara Boudewijnse, and Angela Hoekstra, all of whom demonstrate ways in which Pentecostalism is an empowering, liberating resource for women.<sup>64</sup>

### **Latina/o Pentecostal Transformative Strategies**

These challenges to the popular conception that Pentecostals are “so heavenly-minded that they are no earthly good” directly pertain to the question that drives my own research: what evidence is available to challenge the assumption that the *carismáticos*’ religiosity distracts or impedes them from transforming their situations of suffering? I found, in the many works I read, numerous Latina/o Pentecostal strategies for personal and community transformation. I present these strategies now as a theoretical background for relating this scholarship to my research question and to the RCCH in the city where I conducted my fieldwork.

Many Pentecostal scholars counter the claim of social disengagement by enumerating the forms that Pentecostal activism has taken in Latina/o history. Following is a representative,

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<sup>64</sup> Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, “Testimonios: Relato, Agencia, y la Mujer Latina,” in *Vivir y Servir en el Exilio: Lecturas Teológicas de la Experiencia Latina en los Estados Unidos* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairós, 2008), 125-48; and Hanneke Sloomweg, “Pentecostal Women in Chile: A Case Study in Iquique,” Barbara Boudewijnse, “A Farewell to Mary?: Women, Pentecostal Faith, and the Roman Catholic Church on Curaçao, N.A.,” and Angela Hoekstra, “Rural Pentecostalism in Pernambuco (Brazil): More than a Symbolic Protest,” all in *More Than Opium: An Anthropological Approach to Latin American and Caribbean Pentecostal Praxis*, ed. Barbara Boudewijnse et. al. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998).

rather than exhaustive, list of this body of scholarship. Calvin Smith argues that “from earliest times Pentecostals have been keen to ameliorate their societies,” demonstrating the veracity of this claim through examples of Pentecostal work with homeless, impoverished, orphaned, and addicted people.<sup>65</sup> Espinosa counters the “solely otherworldly” Pentecostal stereotype through an extensive illustration of political activism in Latina/o Assemblies of God, from social work in local communities to a notable presence in larger movements such as the Cuban Refugee Ministry in Florida, the Hispanic Land Grant Struggle in New Mexico, the United Farm Workers’ struggle in California, and the national campaign for comprehensive immigration reform. Edward Cleary provides extensive documentation of RCCH social justice work in Colombia, highlighting the work of Padre Rafael García Herreros’s *Minuto de Dios* with the urban poor in Bogotá and Bishop Alfonso Uribe Jaramillo’s work with peasant farmers in Sonsón and Yarumal.<sup>66</sup> The *carismáticos* in my research, however, made no mention of direct political activism. I explore the reasons for this later in the Introduction and also in the Conclusion.

Gastón Espinosa argues that evangelization, while often categorized as a spiritual endeavor, is also a form of transformative social outreach amongst Pentecostals. This religious act of proclaiming the Good News, Espinosa explains, is a vehicle for not only the spiritual but also the physical transformation of the community beyond the church, through what Espinosa describes as “evangelistic social work and outreach.”<sup>67</sup> This approach “seeks to use social

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<sup>65</sup> Smith, “Politics,” 180.

<sup>66</sup> Cleary, *Rise*, 54-76.

<sup>67</sup> Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals*, 322.

action, civic engagement, political participation, and acts of mercy as vehicles through which to demonstrate and incarnationalize the love and saving grace of Jesus Christ to a broken and suffering world.”<sup>68</sup> Because Pentecostal evangelization encompasses not only the spirit but also the mind and body in this way, the command to evangelize includes within it a demand to transform the community outside the doors of the church. The *carismáticos* in my study encourage each other in manifesting God’s love to those in need outside the church in this manner, although their emphasis is on everyday, individual encounters rather than formal outreach programs. I discuss this *carismático* evangelistic social outreach in Chapter 7.

Other Latina/o Pentecostalism scholars counter the claim of Pentecostal disengagement and disempowerment through exploring the ways in which conversion to Pentecostalism is a personal strategy for improving one’s material circumstances. Angela Hoekstra, based on her study of Brazilian farmers, notes that conversion to Pentecostalism can improve economic conditions since the convert tends to spend less money on worldly pleasures and therefore frees up resources for “more useful things such as better housing and education.”<sup>69</sup> Calvin Smith argues along a similar line, asserting that “greater disposable income, together with a new world view, positive outlook on life, and work ethic, can contribute to social upward mobility.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Angela Hoekstra, “Rural Pentecostalism in Pernambuco (Brazil): More than a Symbolic Protest,” in *More Than Opium: An Anthropological Approach to Latin American and Caribbean Pentecostal Praxis*, ed. Barbara Boudewijnse et. al. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 155.

<sup>70</sup> Smith, “Politics,” 181.

Hanneke Sloomweg catalogs the changes that occur for impoverished women when they convert to Pentecostalism, including improved marriages, a supportive community, improved material situations, and healing from ailments.<sup>71</sup> Allard Willemier Westra, in an ethnographic study of religious plurality in Brazil, notes that non-Pentecostal women remark on the stable marriages, regular family income, and better educational opportunities that the Pentecostals enjoy.<sup>72</sup> Although “women never talk about the conversion as a consciously selected course of action to improve their situation,” as Hanneke Sloomweg notes based on her ethnographic work in Chile, scholars who have explored this question tend to agree with Sloomweg’s conclusion that women’s conversions to Pentecostal Protestantism are nonetheless “strategies for changing their social position.”<sup>73</sup> Although the *carismáticos* did not speak of conversion in terms of material improvements, in the Conclusion I present the evidence that this often-unconscious transformative strategy is also at work in the communities I visited.

Another personal transformation strategy that Latina/o Pentecostalism scholars elucidate is the capacity of Pentecostalism to cultivate self-esteem and a feeling of personal dignity. Hoekstra argues that Pentecostal teachings on eschewing worldly indulgences engender “feelings

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<sup>71</sup> Sloomweg, “Pentecostal Women,” 64-68.

<sup>72</sup> Allard Willemier Westra, “Market Behavior among Brazilian Consumers of the Divine,” in *More Than Opium: An Anthropological Approach to Latin American and Caribbean Pentecostal Praxis*, ed. Barbara Boudewijnse et. al. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 127.

<sup>73</sup> Hanneke Sloomweg, “Pentecostal Women in Chile: A Case Study in Iquique,” in *More Than Opium: An Anthropological Approach to Latin American and Caribbean Pentecostal Praxis*, ed. Barbara Boudewijnse et. al. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 69.

of dignity” vis-à-vis neighbors who tend to ruinous excess, dignity which in turn “motivates people to... avoid self-destructive behavior.”<sup>74</sup> As a result, Hoekstra concludes, Pentecostals’ “attempts to differentiate themselves from ‘the world’ seem to be a strategy for reinforcing self-esteem.”<sup>75</sup> Elizabeth Conde-Frazier develops this idea at greater length in an article on the power of *testimonios* in the lives of evangelical Latinas:

Many voices of authority exist in a woman’s life from a very young age.... These voices can be from our fathers or mothers, from pastors, or from the women who teach us to be women. Another important voice exists in our lives: our own voice.... If [the other] voices are dominant, they suppress our voice and thus suppress the voice of the Spirit in us.... When the voice of the woman is repressed, it restricts the flow of Christ’s headship and will in her life, because she learns to hear that voice through the filter of the dominant, authoritative voices. A “call” in a woman’s life is the Spirit challenging her to come out of herself, challenging her to restore the authority of the voice that God placed in her so that she may come into being.<sup>76</sup>

Conde-Frazier affirms the God-given authority of a woman’s authentic voice and her sense of calling. Conde-Frazier also posits a God-given responsibility to heed one’s authentic voice and to manifest one’s gifts. In short, this is a religiosity of self-affirmation and self-empowerment. Espinosa also treats of this self-affirmation when he speaks of Latina/o Assemblies of God

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<sup>74</sup> Hoekstra, “Rural Pentecostalism,” 162.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Conde-Frazier, “*Testimonios*,” 133-4.

members seeking to “identify and unleash their unique spiritual gifts in order to bring about Christian renewal and social change in the Latino community and American society.”<sup>77</sup> In these perspectives, Pentecostalism serves as a powerful resource for affirming one’s self-worth and one’s ability, indeed one’s duty, to manifest God-willed transformation in the church and the world through heeding one’s authentic voice.

A variety of scholars outline the empowering effects of this self-affirming religiosity in the lives of Pentecostal and evangelical women. Both Conde-Frazier and Espinosa demonstrate how this particular perspective on the Holy Spirit authorizes women, whose broader culture denies them public leadership roles, to serve as pastors, missionaries, writers, prophets, and healers. Andrea Hollingsworth cites Colombian fieldwork that demonstrates how Pentecostal conversion “transformed traditional gender relations by giving women a moral authority in the home to challenge their husbands’ drinking, gambling, and adultery.... Pentecostal conversion often resulted in a domestication of husbands and an increased sense of autonomy in wives.”<sup>78</sup>

Angela Hoekstra, in her article “Rural Pentecostalism in Pernambuco,” provides perhaps the best illustration of this self-affirmation aspect of Pentecostalism. Her particular focus is the Pentecostal church’s egalitarian structure as it plays out amongst rural farmers in Brazil. Due to this egalitarian structure, Hoekstra argues, when farmers who labor under plantation owners join a Pentecostal church, they have “an opportunity to be able to live amongst equals.”<sup>79</sup> This, she concludes, renders Pentecostal conversion a “meaningful symbolic protest against traditional

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<sup>77</sup> Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals*, 14.

<sup>78</sup> Hollingsworth, “Spirit and Voice,” 199.

<sup>79</sup> Hoekstra, “Rural Pentecostalism,” 158.

rulers,” an act of protest that engenders “an antagonistic attitude against the dominant class.”<sup>80</sup>

She demonstrates through her ethnographic research that through its egalitarian, empowering religiosity, ultimately “Pentecostalism organizes the poor and stimulates them in the struggle for land rights.”<sup>81</sup>

Scholars who focus specifically on the Charismatic Catholic form of Pentecostal religiosity also note its potential for building self-esteem. Marjo de Theije, in her ethnographic study of Charismatic Catholic women in Brazil, notes that for many women, the parish prayer group serves as an empowering “eye-opener.” She elaborates, “for some it might be an incentive and legitimation for change, as in the case of [a woman] who gained the courage to divorce her abusive husband. Her testimony clearly revealed that she had learned to defend herself since she joined the [RCCH]. Her identity changed from that of a dependent housewife to a self-confident woman and mother.”<sup>82</sup> Andrés Arango also notes that within the RCCH, the prayer circles “have promoted the development of leaders” not only of prayer circles but also of parish ministries. This has improved self-esteem in many *carismáticos* who, as a result of their leadership, now “feel important and useful in the hands of God.”<sup>83</sup> Boudewijnse, too, notes that the Pentecostal

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 154, 158.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>82</sup> Marjo de Theije, “Charismatic Renewal and Base Communities: The Religious Participation of Women in a Brazilian Parish,” in Barbara Boudewijnse et. al., eds., *More Than Opium: An Anthropological Approach to Latin American and Caribbean Pentecostal Praxis*, (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 236.

<sup>83</sup> Arango, “Aporte,” 89.

perspective on the Holy Spirit allowed Roman Catholic Charismatic women on Curaçao to “to speak up, to assert themselves,” even to the point of refusing to say the Hail Mary as a “[revolt] against an ideology that kept them subordinate; an ideology that told them to be humble, docile, and mute.”<sup>84</sup> Amongst the *carismáticos* I studied, these transformational strategies of bolstering self-esteem and encouraging self-empowerment surface most frequently for women, particularly in addressing domestic struggles, which I discuss in Chapter 6. The topic also arises in prayer circles as these Latina/o immigrants affirm their worth in the face of discrimination, which I discuss in Chapter 7.

This discussion of building self-esteem points toward the broader field of postcolonial studies, a discipline that focuses a great deal of attention on transformative strategies amongst subaltern peoples. Saba Mahmood, in her fieldwork with Muslim women in Egypt, noted that cultivating self-esteem is a creative, transformative strategy inherent to their religiosity. She asserts that the women she studied “[cultivate] self-esteem, a psychological capacity that... enables one to pursue self-directed choices and actions unhindered by other people’s opinions... [as] a means to achieving self-directed goals.”<sup>85</sup> Mahmood locates building self-esteem within a broader framework of ethical formation, a transformative strategy consisting of “practices, techniques, and discourses through which subject[s] transform [themselves] in order to achieve a particular state of being, happiness, or truth... and transform themselves into the willing subjects of a particular moral discourse.”<sup>86</sup> This concept, too, is useful in analyzing Latina/o Pentecostal

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<sup>84</sup> Boudewijnse, “A Farewell to Mary?”, 112.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

transformative strategies. Anna Peterson and Manuel Vásquez, for instance, remark that ethical formation is a feature of the Salvadoran Catholic Charismatic Renewal. They specifically observe that Charismatic Catholicism offers a “narrative of continuity” and of “progressive self-improvement” to Salvadoran *carismáticos*.<sup>87</sup> Ethical formation is the transformational strategy that the *carismáticos* in my study discuss most explicitly and most frequently. In Chapter 3, I demonstrate how ethical formation is inherent to their theological understandings of sin; and in Chapter 5 I discuss the ways in which conversion to Charismatic Catholicism is an ethical formation process.

Postcolonial studies scholars also shed interpretive light on the *carismáticos* as colonized people experiencing further discrimination as immigrants in their new homeland. Whether documented or not, the *carismáticos*, as Latina/o immigrants, face unemployment, low wages, subpar working conditions, and often need to work multiple jobs in order to support their extended families. If they are undocumented, they face the added strain of having no legal recourse in the event of workplace exploitation or other forms of discrimination. They face constant derogatory assumptions and discrimination based upon those assumptions.

James Scott, anthropologist and political scientist, studies activism in subaltern groups and thus provides greater understanding of the *carismáticos*' transformative strategies. Scott argues that subaltern peoples engage “neither in overt collective defiance of powerholders nor in complete hegemonic compliance, but in the vast territory between these two polar opposites.... If subordinate groups have typically won a reputation for subtlety – a subtlety their superiors often regard as cunning and deception – this is surely because their vulnerability has rarely permitted

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<sup>87</sup> Peterson and Vásquez, “Upwards,” 204.

them the luxury of direct confrontation.”<sup>88</sup> The last point bears repeating: the vulnerability of subordinate groups rarely permits them the luxury of direct confrontation.

This postcolonial studies lens suggests that for the *carismáticos*, direct confrontation of those in power, such as public protest against United States immigration law, would most likely be self-destructive rather than helpful in alleviating suffering. These immigrants left their homelands to pursue economic opportunities in the United States that would provide for their immediate families and their extended families back home. Political actions such as protesting United States immigration law, particularly for the undocumented, would undo the often-costly actions they have taken to transform their situations and would have a devastating impact on those whose wellbeing depends on them. Postcolonial scholars, who recognize that subaltern groups such as the *carismáticos* do not have the luxury of directly confronting those in power, are therefore particularly attuned to strategies that, while upon initial glance may not appear socially active or engaged, are in fact profoundly transformative.

Postcolonial feminist theologian Kwok Pui-lan, writing on the theological perspectives of colonized women of color, develops this idea:

From reading the texts of these women theologians, I do not find that they rest their hope on the final eschaton, on an unpredictable utopia, or on historical progress. History for them is too full of ambiguities and unpredictable twists and turns to be constructed as linear, progressive, or sprinkled with unchecked optimism. The hope for some of the disenfranchised women may be a place to

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<sup>88</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University, 1990), 136.

dry their fish on the beach, seeds for next spring, or money enough to send their children to school. The future is not a grand finale, a classless society, or even a kingdom of God.... [Theirs] is a historical imagination of the concrete and not the abstract, a hope that is more practical and therefore not so easily disillusioned, and a trust that is born out of necessity and well-worn wisdom.<sup>89</sup>

Kwok points out that forms of resistance aiming toward historical progress or a classless society are not *desirable* to many subordinate peoples. Having discerned that history is ambiguous and capricious, they act to manifest aspirations that are practical, concrete, and therefore less likely than utopic visions to be disillusioned. The *carismáticos* most clearly demonstrate this practical, concrete hope for the future in their conceptions of Jesus's roles as resurrected savior, as discussed in Chapter 4; and in their strategies for transforming their communities, as described in Chapter 7.

### **Chapter Outline**

In the chapters that follow, I apply theological analysis to the *carismáticos*' beliefs and practices to determine the core theological convictions inherent to this religiosity. I then place these theological perspectives in conversation with Latina/o Pentecostal and postcolonial scholarship on transformational strategies, as outlined above. This religious-studies inflected theological analysis demonstrates that the *carismáticos* are not passive in the face of suffering but rather *emphasize* the greatest transformation of self and world possible within the limits of United States immigration law.

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<sup>89</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 37-38.

Chapter 2 explains my research method, outlines the history of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in its global and local manifestations, and describes the practices and demographics in the particular community I studied. Chapter 3 describes *carismáticos*' theological insights regarding sin, explores the relative influences of Roman Catholicism and Pentecostalism on these beliefs, and demonstrates how these beliefs serve as transformative strategies for the *carismáticos*. Chapter 4 explores *carismáticos*' theological insights in regards to soteriology, measures the relative influences of Roman Catholicism and Pentecostalism, and argues that *carismático* soteriologies provide transformative confidence and hope in daily struggles. Chapter 5 explores *carismáticos*' conversion narratives regarding addiction recovery, demonstrates the theological convictions inherent to these narratives, argues that these beliefs serve an ethical formation function, and discusses how addiction is gendered amongst the *carismáticos*. Chapter 6 delineates *carismática* women's narratives regarding the power of conversion to heal depression, analyzes the theological convictions inherent to these narratives, points out potentially problematic aspects of these beliefs for women, demonstrates how certain women are theologically resisting these aspects, and argues that Charismatic Catholicism offers depressed women a strategy of cultivating self esteem. Chapter 7 demonstrates the myriad ways in which *carismático* religiosity and beliefs encourage *carismáticos* to transform their families, their parishes, their Church, and the wider world around them. In Chapter 8, the Conclusion, I demonstrate how each of the theories introduced in Chapter 1 offers insight into the *carismáticos*, argue that the *carismáticos*' narratives reveal a transformative strategy that existing theories do not address, and return to the methodological questions raised in Chapter 1 to offer the insights on these issues that I gained through my work as an ethnographer-theologian.

The contributions this dissertation makes to Religious Studies are twofold. First, due to the lack of a monograph or an ethnographic study on Latina/o immigrant Charismatic Catholics in the United States, this dissertation fills a gap in academic publications regarding a large religious community in the United States. Second, it offers a methodological example of combining ethnography and systematic theology. As far as I'm aware, no systematic theologian has applied ethnography to develop and articulate an academic theology from the perspective of a group other than his or her own. I will discuss these contributions in the Conclusion.

### **A Note on Divinity Names**

Transcription from an interview with a *carismático*:

Me: You say “He,” pointing to the sky. Who is “He”?

Miguel: Oh, God, Jesus, yeah.

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Christian theologians spend a great deal of time contemplating the Trinitarian mystery: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one God. When initially contemplating the directions my research might take, I looked forward to learning *carismático* perspectives on the roles of each of the three persons of the Christian Trinity. In the course of my research I realized I would have to rethink this goal. As Miguel's words so neatly encapsulate above, there is a great deal of fluidity and collapse regarding Father, Son, and God amongst the *carismáticos*.

The following example illustrates the sort of God-language that pervades Charismatic gatherings: “Holy Father, here we are... we want to be new creatures, Lord, because we were made in your image and likeness. My divine God, we are here, you can make us anew, my

Jesus, because we are clay in your hands, Lord, and you mold us little by little.”<sup>90</sup> In the words of this *carismática*'s prayers, Jesus is the divine God, the Holy father in whose image and likeness humans were made. Such blended divine language abounds. Another example is a call to praise the “Lord of Lords, who is going to be present this evening, blessed and praised be you, Lord Jesus, dear beautiful Father.”<sup>91</sup> Nor do *carismáticos* find confusion or disconnect in praying to the Father when kneeling before the Eucharist displayed for adoration:

Loving Father, Father of glory, were are here for you to give us your heart. Here are your people, here we are before your presence... here we are in adoration.

Blessed and praised be you, Lord. Thank you, Father, for giving us these intimate moments with you, Lord... not only praying but, more than anything, being in adoration, Lord.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> “*Padre santo y aquí estamos mi divino Señor, porque nosotros queremos ser esas criaturas nuevas Señor, porque nosotros fuimos hechas a imagen y semejanza Señor a ti. Mi divino Dios, aquí estamos Señor, tú nos puedes hacer de nuevo, mi Jesús, porque nosotros somos de ese barro en tus manos Señor y tú nos vas moldeando poco a poco.*” Transcription of preaching at a *servidores* vigil, October 8, 2013.

<sup>91</sup> “*Señor de Señores, que hoy en esta tarde se va a hacer presente, gracias. Bendito y alabado seas Señor Jesús, papito lindo.*” Transcription of preaching at a parish prayer circle, June 27, 2013.

<sup>92</sup> “*Padre amoroso, Padre de la gloria, aquí estamos que nos des tu corazón. Aquí estamos tu pueblo, aquí está señor ante tu presencia... aquí estamos en adoración. Bendito y alabado seas Señor. Gracias Padre, porque nos das esos momentos íntimos*

From this *carismático* perspective, God the Father is Jesus the Son, physically present in Eucharist. In the same vein, Abraham, the father of faith, is a “courageous man who left everything to follow Jesus.”<sup>93</sup> As a result, I follow the *carismáticos*’ convention when using titles for the divine in this work and default to the all-encompassing word God when they speak of Jesus, the Lord, and the Father, unless another specific title is more appropriate.

Regarding the Holy Spirit, in formal prayers, invocations, and songs the Holy Spirit appears as the person whom God sends to empower human beings to transform the world in accordance with God’s vision. However, in informal preaching and *testimonios*, where the *carismáticos* speak most directly from their own experiences, the Holy Spirit generally appears only in passing while Jesus-who-is-God-who-is-the-Father plays a central role. I suspect that this reflects the general lack of development of pneumatology in the Western Christian tradition, a suspicion that Andrés Arango confirms. He states that when he asks Latina/o Catholics the question “who is our God,” “generally people answer ‘Father God,’ others Jesus, occasionally some say the Holy Spirit.... This is perhaps due to the fact that through the centuries an excellent Christology has developed and many of the faithful are accustomed to having a filial relationship with the Heavenly Father, but we still lack a solid theology of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>94</sup> As a result, because my research focuses on *carismáticos*’ direct experiences of God and the effects of these

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*contigo Señor... no sólo pidiendo sino en adoración más que todo, Señor.”* Transcription of preaching at a parish prayer circle, October 4, 2013.

<sup>93</sup> “*hombre valiente que dejó todo para seguir a Jesús.*” Transcription of preaching at a regional convention, April 28, 2013.

<sup>94</sup> Arango, “Aporte,” 1.

encounters, and because the *carismáticos* report meeting Jesus-who-is-God-who-is-the-Father in these encounters, it is the conflation of the first two persons, rather than the third person of the Trinity, that is the central divine figure in this work.

## CHAPTER 2 – INTRODUCTION TO THE *CARISMÁTICOS*

In this chapter, I present the methodological and historical background of this project in three sections. In the first section I outline my ethnographic study, describing the sites, research activities, and participants. I also touch on how the *carismáticos* received me and perceived my project. The second section outlines the history of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal as a whole and its manifestations in Latin America, as well as the Spanish-language Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the city where I conducted my research. The third section delineates the specifics of Charismatic Catholicism in the community I studied, including the size of the local movement, its leadership structure, the demographics of the participants, and a description of their religious practices.

### SECTION I – METHOD

I conducted my research in a large Midwestern United States city where the Spanish-language Charismatic prayer circles, diverse in worship style and nationality, gave me a sense of the range and flavor of expressions of *carismático* beliefs and practices.<sup>95</sup> The diocesan website for this city listed eighty-one Spanish-language Charismatic prayer circles. I contacted the parishes within forty-five minutes of where I was living and visited the eight parishes whose prayer circles had the most active participation and were open to my attending as a researcher. The three parishes I chose as my research sites represented a historically high level of participation and a great deal of national diversity. I established St. Augustine as my primary research site because it had the largest number of active attendees, around eighty at any given

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<sup>95</sup> To protect the confidentiality of the research participants, this paper uses fictitious names for individuals, parishes, and cities, and omits identifying information.

prayer circle, all of whom were Mexican. I attended every event they held for a period of six months, including weekly prayer circles, weekly leadership team meetings, and every special event they hosted. I chose Christ The King as a secondary site because of the large number of active participants, around fifty at any given prayer circle. It had great national diversity: attendees were from a variety of Latin American countries including Colombia, Guatemala, and Honduras. I chose St. Rose of Lima as a secondary site for two reasons. First, it was one of the two parishes where the local RCCH began in 1973 and two of the founders of the local *Renovación* were still in attendance. Second, while historically it had a high level of participation, forty years after its founding it was a relatively small prayer circle, around fifteen participants at an average prayer circle meeting, a good contrast to my other two research sites. St. Rose of Lima's participants were primarily from Puerto Rico and Cuba. At these two secondary sites, I attended prayer circles every other week. I attended four leadership team meetings at Christ the King, but only one at St. Rose of Lima since, by the time my fieldwork was underway, the leadership team had stopped meeting.

From October 2012 to July 2014 I attended 113 events and conducted 24 interviews, with the bulk of the fieldwork occurring between June 2013 and May 2014. I made an audio recording of each of the events except for one regional leadership team meeting, where the bishop's liaison requested I not do so. I also recorded each of the interviews. Several Spanish teachers in Guatemala, whom I'd met when studying there, generated Spanish transcripts from the audio files. I in turn translated each transcription from Spanish to English, with the exception of one interview in English, of which I made the transcript.

The interviewees were primarily members of the parish prayer circle leadership teams, or *servidores* (servants), as they name themselves. My decision to interview primarily *servidores*

was based on the intention of my research. To be a *servidor* requires regularly attending prayer circle and leadership team meetings, and completing both an eleven-week “Life in the Spirit” seminar and a postulant year during which the new member becomes familiar with the leadership team members and the responsibilities of the position. Each *servidor* must also serve in a parish ministry beyond the prayer circle because, as one *servidora* explained, “a servant has to serve.”<sup>96</sup> *Servidor* is not an elected position nor is there a limit to the number of *servidores* at any given parish; anyone who is interested and dedicated may become a *servidor*. This structure provided a convenient way for me to determine which of those who name themselves *carismáticos* have the deepest commitment and the most experience, and therefore would be most likely to hold a well-informed “*carismático*” point of view.

Of the interviewees, eighteen were *servidores*, thirteen women and five men. Four of these *servidores* also served as *coordinador* (coordinator) of their parish *servidores*, a primarily administrative position similar to a committee chairperson. I also interviewed three men and two women who were not *servidores* but who were active, regular attendees at their parish prayer circles. Finally, I interviewed a pastor who served as the bishop’s liaison for the regional RCCH. The gender division amongst the interviewees, in total, was thus sixteen women and eight men, a ratio approximately equal to the ratio of women to men at any given event.

My decision to conduct my research in only one city necessarily limits the universality of my data. For instance, nearly all of the prayer circle participants in this city were working class immigrants, whereas the *carismático* population in a city such as Miami is more dominantly middle class. In addition, in spite of the large number of parish prayer circles in the city where I

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<sup>96</sup> “*un servidor tiene que servir,*” interview with the author, November 18, 2013.

conducted my research, *carismático* numbers and participation are gradually diminishing in this location, as compared to locations such as Miami and many cities in Texas where the *carismático* population is larger, more active, and increasing in number. Finally, choosing a large city precludes including the perspectives of *carismáticos* in a small town or a city where the *carismático* population is sparse.

### **My Reception Among the *Carismáticos***

The *carismáticos* were, without exception, welcoming and enthusiastic. In part, this was due to the warm hospitality that is characteristic of *carismáticos* in general. As I learned later, they consider warm smiles, welcomes, and embraces to be one of the truest hallmarks of a *carismático*. Another factor in my ease of entrance was the support I received from the bishop's liaison for the RCCH. A well-respected figure in a community that values obedience to church authority, the liaison is also seminary-educated in theology and a doctor of canon law and thus understands the world of academic research. He openly acknowledged me and introduced me at every event he attended and encouraged the regional steering committee to inform local leaders about his approval of my research. He also wrote a letter of introduction for me to present when I attended events. These measures, he explained, would help me overcome the only barrier he suggested I might find: the concern amongst attendees at an event that I could be "*La Migra*," the immigration police.

I also found that I gained access because of my status as a doctoral scholar. Typically in this community, my association with academia might have been a barrier. In general, the *carismáticos* view academic knowledge with some level of misgiving due to the often-secular orientation of the university. One *carismático* stated, "in the university... there isn't religion, it's science there, they call it science... they think that human beings are very smart, smarter than

God.”<sup>97</sup> Many *carismáticos* are dubious regarding the value of academic theological studies.

Elena, matriarch of her parish prayer circle, articulates this view with great eloquence:

I always say to [the Lord], “help me to understand, because there are things that I don’t understand. I know, Lord, that you are a mystery and that it’s impossible to understand everything. I’m a limited human being.” Limited, because I never had theological studies or that type of thing. But the Lord gives himself to us, the simple people.... The Lord gave his greatest, most marvelous things to the poor people, the simple people, a thing that he didn’t give to the wise, and it [says this] in the Bible.<sup>98</sup>

Many *carismáticos* would agree with Elena that theological studies are unnecessary and perhaps even a hindrance since God reveals his greatest things to the simple. Yet the *carismáticos* did not express any particular misgivings about me because they did not perceive me as the typical (from their perspective) atheistic university scholar. Many remarked that “you have something

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<sup>97</sup> “*En la universidad... no hay religión, allí es ciencia, lo llaman ciencia... piensan que el hombre es muy listo, es más listo que Dios.*” Interview with the author, February 19, 2014.

<sup>98</sup> “*Yo siempre le digo: ‘ayúdame a entender, porque hay cosas que yo no entiendo. Yo sé Señor que tú eres un misterio y que es imposible entender todo. Soy un ser humano limitado.’ Limitado porque, pues uno nunca tuvo estudios teológicas o cosas por el estilo. Pero el Señor se nos da, a la gente sencilla. Él no tiene que diga: ‘voy a reservar esto.’ No, el Señor le dio sus cosas más grandes, más maravillosas a la gente pobre, a la gente sencilla, cosa que no le dio a los sabios y está en la Biblia.*” Interview with the author, February 13, 2014.

of God in you,” or noted the “freedom and joy and happiness” with which I was praising God.<sup>99</sup> While I did not share many of the *carismáticos*’ religious beliefs, it is true that I found joy in many of their worship practices and many commented upon this.

As a doctoral scholar in whom the *carismáticos* also discerned “something of God,” I found that many of the *carismáticos* considered me an ambassador of sorts, someone who lived *in* the world of academia yet was not *of* the atheism that concerns them a great deal. They valued this for two reasons. First, they appreciated that a scholar was making an effort to disseminate accurate information about the RCCH. One woman commented that my research was going to “favorably affect the community” through providing information to priests who might otherwise reject the Charismatic renewal based on incorrect perceptions.<sup>100</sup> Another noted that she had read a great deal of inaccurate information on the *carismáticos* and she expressed her hope that my writing would counteract this misinformation.<sup>101</sup>

More commonly, however, the *carismáticos* valued my research because, in their eyes, it held considerable potential for communicating something that means even more to them than accurate information. Valentina, a regular attendee at the prayer circle at Christ The King,

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<sup>99</sup> “*tú tienes algo de Dios en ti,*” interview with the author, February 19, 2014; “*con la libertad y con el gozo y la alegría que está alabando al Señor,*” transcription of preaching at an evangelization retreat, June 8, 2013.

<sup>100</sup> “*va a afectar favorablemente a la comunidad,*” interview with the author, January 30, 2014.

<sup>101</sup> Field notes from a healing retreat, June 29, 2013.

expressed the most common perspective from which the *carismáticos* viewed my research.

Our interview ran quite late but she told why that didn't matter:

It's lovely to talk about the Lord. I don't care if I'm late.... I speak to every person I can about the Lord, or rather, I speak to every person that the Lord puts in my path so that I may speak to them about these things. It's very exciting for me. Speaking is a way of teaching, or at least transmitting, a bit of faith to someone who perhaps doesn't have that faith.<sup>102</sup>

Valentina sees my research as an opportunity for her to teach others about God. Manuel, coordinator of his prayer circle, states this more explicitly: "Hopefully... God gives you the discernment of how to state the testimonies, how to make the testimonies touch hearts, open people's mentality, open their eyes so that they truly see a God who is with us."<sup>103</sup> The *carismáticos* take advantage of every opportunity to share with others the joy they have found in

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<sup>102</sup> *"Muy rico hablar del Señor. No me importa tardarme... Toda persona que yo pueda hablar del Señor, le hablo. toda persona que yo pueda, sino toda persona que el Señor me ponga en el camino para que yo le hable de estas cosas. Eso es muy emocionante para mí, hablar es una manera de enseñar o por lo menos transmitir un poquito de fe a una persona que a lo mejor no tiene esa fe."* Interview with the author, February 10, 2014.

<sup>103</sup> *"Ojalá que... Dios te de el discernimiento de cómo acomodar los testimonios, de cómo hacer que estos testimonios toquen los corazones, abran la mentalidad de las personas, abran los ojos para que vean verdaderamente a un Dios que está con nosotros."* Interview with the author, February 19, 2014.

converting to Charismatic Catholicism and nurturing an intimate relationship with a loving God. They thus perceived my research as an exciting opportunity for them to share their stories with people, such as English-speaking academics, whom they would never be able to reach otherwise. I believe this, more than any other motivation, made the *carismáticos* eager to share their stories with me.

Their desire that my work be an evangelizing vehicle for Charismatic Catholicism created a fascinating challenge regarding how to balance their concerns and mine. This community is an evangelizing community that gathers in prayer circles for two primary purposes: to revive and energize themselves spiritually and to share stories so that others might be encouraged to forge a transformative relationship with God. The *carismáticos* reach out to mainstream Catholics who are despairing and hurting as the *carismáticos* themselves were before they experienced their inner conversion, hoping to bring these despairing people the same joy that their own conversions brought. Because the *carismáticos* are impelled to share their joy, as Valentina explained above, they take every possible opportunity to share their testimonies. This is the primary worth they find in my research.

This puts me in a quandary related to the concern of “going native,” as outlined above. The *carismáticos* earnestly entreat me to join in as a “native” sharing the good news about God’s transformative love. Yet the discipline of Religious Studies is one to which evangelizing is anathema. On the one hand, there is my commitment to honor the research community that has been so generous to me; and on the other hand, there is my academic discipline that abhors evangelizing scholarship. In this current project, I address this dilemma by using the *carismáticos*’ own words to describe their experiences. In doing so I hope to demonstrate the strength and power of their transformative spiritual commitments while maintaining the critical

rigor required of my academic discipline. I discuss the degree to which I achieved this goal in the Conclusion.

My commitment to giving the *carismáticos*' words authoritative force dictated the order in which I wrote. I completed the ethnographic portions first, presenting and analyzing the *carismáticos*' perspectives in and of themselves in the bodies of Chapters 3-7. Only after these sections were complete, and the *carismáticos*' perspectives represented as faithfully as possible within the structure of systematic theological language, did I turn to secondary, theoretical works in the concluding sections of each chapter and in the Conclusion. In this conversation between *carismáticos* and scholarly theory, I apply the theories to shed further light on the primary sources, namely, the *carismáticos*' words, beliefs, and practices.

## SECTION II – HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

Charismatic Christianity in its current form has very old roots. The *carismáticos*, and undoubtedly many Pentecostals, trace the origin of their religiosity back to the first Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus's disciples. “[The RCCH] has always been in our Church, it was born the day of Pentecost,” one *carismática* proclaimed.<sup>104</sup> Historians of religion, however, emphasize the roots of Charismatic Christianity in the Protestant Reformation, the Great Awakenings in the eighteenth century United States, the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906, and the innumerable Pentecostal denominations and movements that emerged

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<sup>104</sup> “*Siempre ha estado en nuestra Iglesia, nació el día de Pentecostés.*” Interview with the author, February 19, 2014.

as a result.<sup>105</sup> All of these movements played a role in developing Holy Spirit-centered forms of Christianity, a fertile field into which the seeds of Charismatic Catholicism fell when Pope John XXIII pronounced at the opening of the Second Vatican Council in 1962, “renew your wonders in our time as though for a new Pentecost.”<sup>106</sup> The Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR), a global movement, was but one response to this call.

Pentecostalism scholarship tends to emphasize the influence of Pentecostal Protestantism on the CCR: the Pentecostal movement “helped birth the Charismatic movement;”<sup>107</sup> or “CCR practices like speaking in tongues clearly stem from Pentecostal origins.”<sup>108</sup> Andrés Arango argues that Pentecostalism “brought a new flow and understanding of the Divine Spirit in the present world” which in turn brought “a new understanding of pneumatology to the Catholic Church.”<sup>109</sup> Specifically, Arango attributes Pentecostal influence to the Roman Catholic theological understanding that “charisms are not reserved for a group of ‘holy people’ but instead are for all those who open themselves to the Holy Spirit.”<sup>110</sup>

Arango also argues that the struggles to bring the Charismatic Renewal into mainstream Protestant churches during the 1950s eased the way for a similar incorporation of the

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<sup>105</sup> For a more detailed treatment of the origins of Charismatic Christianity and Latinas/os’ involvement in its development, see Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals*, 6-10, 22-59.

<sup>106</sup> Andrés Arango, “Aporte,” 46.

<sup>107</sup> Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals*, 9.

<sup>108</sup> Matovina, *Latino Catholicism*, 116.

<sup>109</sup> Arango, “Aporte,” 46.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

Charismatic Renewal into the Roman Catholic Church. Amongst other things, Arango notes, the Protestant Charismatic movements were a locus for Roman Catholics to receive Baptism in the Holy Spirit – a laying on of hands through which the Holy Spirit activates God’s gifts in the baptized individual – and bring it to their own, nascent movement. Daniel Ramirez, in the *Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, also points toward an informal influence: “Scant attention has been paid... to the broader impact of regular, quotidian contact over decades between Catholics and their [Pentecostal Protestant] relatives and neighbors.... The ubiquity of decades-old Pentecostal *coritos* (songs) in the music repertoire of Catholics – of all stripes – hints strongly at long-standing permeation across confessional boundaries.<sup>111</sup> In other words, Charismatic Catholicism emerged in a world steeped in Pentecostal religiosity, and the Pentecostal style of many CCR practices demonstrate that this popular religious movement did not emerge in a vacuum.

Pentecostal Protestantism was more than a fertile field that helped germinate the CCR. It also was a liability to the Roman Catholic Church on two different fronts. First, it was an appealing movement that lured many mainstream Catholics away from the Church. It also lured many CCR members as well. Pentecostals mentored the fledgling Charismatic Catholic movement and in its initial stages, both Catholics and Pentecostal Protestants attended CCR prayer meetings. The Pentecostal mentors were successful enough in presenting their religiosity that many CCR participants “left the Catholic fold for Pentecostalism and in several cases

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<sup>111</sup> Daniel Ramirez, “Pentecostalism in Latin America,” in Cecil Robeck, Jr. and Amos Yong, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 127.

become Pentecostal pastors,” as Matovina describes, particularly during the early years of the CCR.<sup>112</sup>

The number of mainstream and Charismatic Catholics leaving the Church for Pentecostal Protestant denominations, Matovina explains, led to widespread efforts to “enhance the Catholic allegiance and identity of participants.”<sup>113</sup> Such efforts included incorporating traditional Catholic devotions such as Eucharistic adoration and praying the rosary into prayer circle meetings, as well as accentuating Church authority and doctrine in preaching.<sup>114</sup> In doing so, the CCR was not incorporating practices extrinsic to the movement. Rather, it was enhancing the presence of the primary source for CCR religiosity, namely, Roman Catholicism.

Tim Matovina identifies the “premier sources” for CCR religious practices as Catholic, not Protestant. Henri Gooren also characterizes the CCR as a Catholic lay movement, rather than an essentially Pentecostal form of religiosity, even if it began “in ecumenical cooperation and worship with Protestant Charismatics” and incorporated Protestant Pentecostal hymns and other forms of worship into its liturgy.<sup>115</sup> To illustrate the primacy of Catholicism over other influences on the CCR, Matovina points particularly toward apostolic movements.<sup>116</sup> By the middle of the twentieth century, he explains, Roman Catholics in the United States were increasingly turning toward these movements within the Church that fostered “intense religious

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>113</sup> Matovina, *Latino Catholicism*, 117.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 117-18.

<sup>115</sup> Gooren, “Catholic Charismatic Renewal,” 203.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 116.

experience, personal transformation, knowledge of one's faith, and fervor to evangelize others."<sup>117</sup> Such movements better met the spiritual needs of Roman Catholics in the changing society and were increasingly popular as the century progressed.

Prominent amongst these apostolic movements is the *Cursillo de Cristianidad*, which began in Mallorca, Spain in 1948 as a preparation for the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage. The *Cursillo* movement traveled to Colombia in 1953 and to the United States in 1957. While it predated the CCR, the *Cursillo*'s primary elements – instructive preaching on the fundamentals of the Roman Catholic faith, song, prayers, Mass, Eucharistic Adoration, and praying the rosary – bear striking resemblance to the subsequent CCR and demonstrate the influence of prior apostolic movements on the CCR.<sup>118</sup> Participants report that their *Cursillo* experience “enabled them to transcend faith as a mere custom or unconscious habit and enter into a deeper, more personal relationship with God in Christ” also strongly resemble the subsequent CCR. Andrés Arango, as well, argues that the *Cursillo* movement “played a fundamental role at the beginning of the CCR,” particularly when “a great number of leaders from this movement met at their Annual Conference in 1966” and openly demonstrated a “desire to experience a renewal in the Roman Catholic Church.”<sup>119</sup>

The examples above illustrate the intermingled religious influences on the CCR within an increasingly ecumenical Christian world. This inevitable intermingling renders scholarly arguments for a unilateral influence of Pentecostal Protestantism on Charismatic Catholicism

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 110-11.

<sup>119</sup> Arango, “Aporte,” 47.

unsatisfactory. Although this reciprocal influence is underplayed in recent scholarship, even scholars such as Todd Hartch, who devotes his writing to Protestantism's "profound influence on Catholicism," does acknowledge that the "rivalry between the two forms of Christianity... has been mutually beneficial."<sup>120</sup> Matovina in particular challenges the assumption of unidirectional influence of Protestantism on Catholicism with evidence of a reciprocal relationship of influence between the two. He identifies several clear examples of Latina/o Catholicism's influence on Latina/o Pentecostal Protestantism, including "[Latino Catholics'] strong belief in divine providence, mirrored in the faith of their Pentecostal counterparts; the penchant for popular religious expressions that Latino Protestant theologians claim has shaped Pentecostal *coritos* (songs); and the increasing enshrinement of Our Lady of Guadalupe images" in Pentecostal congregations.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, as Matovina delineates, there is not only Latina/o Catholic influence in Pentecostal congregations but also an ongoing phenomenon of Pentecostals converting to Catholicism via the CCR. Marian devotion and the sacraments provide the primary draw of the CCR for Pentecostals, particularly for former Catholics who resonate with Pentecostal religiosity but miss Roman Catholic devotions and sacraments unavailable to them in Protestantism.

The point of this historical overview is not to argue the degree to which the RCCH is Pentecostal Protestant or Roman Catholic. Rather, I engage this question in order to illustrate the varied influences that contributed to the unique movement that is the CCR, a point which this work develops further from a theological perspective. Such a historical overview of the

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<sup>120</sup> Hartch, *Rebirth*, 4.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

reciprocal influences between the CCR and Pentecostal Protestantism demonstrates the complex genealogy that characterizes both the CCR and Pentecostal denominations – and any other form of popular religiosity within the religiously-diverse United States of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

### **History of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the United States**

The most widely-known origin story for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal begins at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh in 1967. Ralph Keifer and Patrick Bourgeois, two lay professors from the Department of Theology, read about the Pentecostal movement and became particularly interested in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.<sup>122</sup> As a result, they attended a Charismatic Presbyterian prayer group and received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit at their second visit. Subsequently, Keifer and Bourgeois held a Charismatic retreat at Duquesne, from which emerged the first Catholic Charismatic prayer group. From Duquesne, the CCR movement spread to Notre Dame University, Michigan State University, University of Iowa, and other Midwestern universities. By the end of 1967 it was already spreading rapidly throughout the United States.

While no one questions the veracity of these accounts, there is considerable debate regarding the degree to which the Duquesne University Charismatics can claim to be the ancestors of the entire subsequent CCR movement. Michael McClymond, in the *Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, posits a nearly-simultaneous eruption of Charismatic Catholicism

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<sup>122</sup> In outlining the early history in the CCR, I rely heavily on Arango, “Aporte,” 46-50 and Espinosa, “Pentecostalization,” 272-75.

in 1967 in both the United States and Colombia.<sup>123</sup> Todd Hartch's research concurs with the simultaneous-rather-than-causal relationship between the birth of the CCR in the United States and in Colombia, arguing that it was Protestants rather than fledgling members of the CCR that initiated the Catholic Renewal in Colombia. He writes that "American Protestant Charismatics, including Harald Bredesen and Samuel Ballesteros... came to Colombia in October 1967 and won over Father Rafael García Herreros of the *Minuto de Dios* ministry in Bogotá and Father Diego Jaramillo" who was working for the Colombian bishops' conference at the time.<sup>124</sup> Thus Hartch posits an autonomous origin to the CCR in Colombia via Protestant allies, similar but unconnected to the Protestant-assisted beginning of the Duquesne University movement. Edward Cleary, as well, points out a founding figure unconnected with Duquesne. Dominican priest Francis MacNutt received the Baptism of the Spirit at a Protestant retreat in Tennessee in 1967 and subsequently "was one of the principal figures in introducing United States Catholics to the [Charismatic] healing ministry."<sup>125</sup> MacNutt also traveled to Ecuador and Peru in 1970 and played a strong role in the RCCH's development there.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Michael McClymond, "Charismatic Renewal and Neo-Pentecostalism: From North American Origins to Global Permutations," in Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. and Amos Yong, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 35.

<sup>124</sup> Hartch, *Rebirth*, 114.

<sup>125</sup> Edward L. Cleary, "The Catholic Charismatic Renewal: Revitalization Movements and Conversion," in Timothy J. Steigenga and Edward L. Cleary, eds., *Conversion of a*

These assertions of multiple origins resonate with McClymond's caution against a "Big Bang theory of global Pentecostalism" asserting that Pentecostalism as a whole developed from a single, central point. Rather, McClymond argues, "we should think of the twentieth century as a String-of-Firecrackers. Each new bang was separated from the others in time and space and represented a diffusive center for new Pentecostal-Charismatic ideas or practices."<sup>127</sup> It is fruitful to apply this concept not only to the macrocosm of global Pentecostalism, as McClymond does, but also to the microcosm of the CCR. Daniel Ramirez, referring to the Duquesne origin story, cautions against "seeking genealogies that link Catholic Charismatic groups in Latin America to points of origin in United States Catholic universities," preferring a genealogy of "multiple and overlapping origins."<sup>128</sup> This multi-faceted understanding of CCR origins fits the data much more comfortably. Andrés Arango, on the other hand, while he acknowledges that "different Catholics in different countries were experiencing the Baptism in the Holy Spirit in Protestant circles around the same time that this experience was happening in the United States," argues that "these were isolated moments."<sup>129</sup> Arango asserts that the prayer group at Duquesne University indeed founded an entire movement, whereas the other

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*Continent: Contemporary Religious Change in Latin America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 161.

<sup>126</sup> Henri Gooren, "The Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Latin America," *Pneuma* 34 (2012): 188.

<sup>127</sup> McClymond, "Charismatic Renewal," 44.

<sup>128</sup> Ramirez, "Pentecostalism," 126.

<sup>129</sup> Arango, "Aporte," 53.

contemporary Catholic Charismatic groups founded only a single community. The point in reviewing these perspectives is not to argue the degree to which the CCR can trace all of its current branches to a single ancestral prayer circle at Duquesne University. Rather, the point is to demonstrate that the CCR is an organic, popular movement, emerging more or less concurrently in a variety of places from a variety of influences.

### SECTION III – DESCRIPTION OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The combined influences of the United States English-language CCR and the Spanish-language RCCH in Latin American countries birthed the RCCH in the United States. In the city where I did my research, the local RCCH movement began in 1973. Martina, coordinator of the prayer circle at St. Rose of Lima, is writing the history of this local movement and she told me the story: a Puerto Rican man, while visiting his sister in this city, made a trip to Indiana where some friends invited him to a Spanish-language Charismatic Catholic prayer circle. Delighted with what he experienced, he returned to his sister's house and held the city's first RCCH prayer circle there, with his sister and a few of her friends in attendance. At the next house gathering twenty people came, and from this seed the movement spread throughout the city.<sup>130</sup>

In the early stages, the local RCCH movement found guidance from Latin American Charismatics who visited the United States and also from local Latina/o Pentecostals. Martina spoke of the Pentecostal influence: "They were Pentecostals. They were from another religion and there were [people from] many religions who came and they brought a lot from other

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<sup>130</sup> Interview with the author, March 27, 2014.

religions to... those who began [the RCCH].”<sup>131</sup> As outlined above in the global history of the CCR, this Pentecostal influence drew many Catholics away from Roman Catholicism. Martina reports that in the first two decades of the local RCCH, many members began to reject the rules and authority of the Roman Catholic Church. They obeyed bishops and the Pope only if it suited them, lost interest in the Mass, and turned to priests only for access to the Eucharist.<sup>132</sup> She was particularly chagrined to report that many of these local CCR participants left the Roman Catholic Church to join Pentecostal churches or to form Charismatic churches of their own: “Many Catholics started their own churches, because in another religion they could have their own little group of people and do what they wanted.”<sup>133</sup> Martina then named the founders of the local RCCH movement: “Eight people began [the local RCCH], Sofía, Emilia, Mariana González who died.” These three had remained in the Catholic Church. However, “Margarita Gutiérrez, another religion, she went to another religion. José Rodríguez, another religion. Juanita Rodríguez, another religion. Mrs. García, she has no religion at all. And... there was

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<sup>131</sup> “*Serán pentecostales, serán de otra religión y hubieron muchas religiones que vinieron y se llevaron mucho de otras religiones, a muchos de los que empezaron.*” Interview with the author, March 27, 2014.

<sup>132</sup> Interview with the author, March 27, 2014.

<sup>133</sup> “*Muchos católicos pusieron su propia iglesia, porque en las otras iglesias podían tener su propio grupito de gente y hacer lo que querían porque la renovación durante tiempo empezó a coger una estructura... entonces ellos dijeron, no, mejor yo hago lo mío.*” Interview with the author, March 27, 2014.

one more, another religion. They were all Catholic, right? Catholics born to Catholics, but for some reason, they lost [their Catholic faith].”<sup>134</sup>

As described above for the global movement, the local RCCH movement became much more structured and much more Roman Catholic in response to this early trend of conversion to Pentecostalism. It is common to hear preachers and *dirigentes* proclaim triumphantly “we’re one hundred percent Catholic!” A woman who was chatting with me after a parish prayer circle averred that if she had to choose between the RCCH or the Church, she would choose the Church.<sup>135</sup> There is also a strong emphasis on Marian devotion and Eucharistic adoration, Roman Catholic practices that the RCCH adopted in the early years when it sought to emphasize its difference from the Pentecostals. The RCCH also manifests its Catholicism in its propensity for inspiring vocations. During the course of my research, Daniel, a *servidor* at St. Augustine, and Rafael, the coordinator at Christ The King, both commenced studies to enter the permanent diaconate as a result of their life-transforming involvement in the RCCH.

At the time of my research, there were eighty-one prayer circles in the city and environs where I conducted my study. However, it is impossible to determine the precise number of *carismáticos* in the region because there is no precise measure for determining who, exactly, is a

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<sup>134</sup> “*Empezaron ocho personas, estaba Sofía, Emilia, Mariana González que murió... Margarita Gutiérrez, otra religión, se fue a otra religión. José Rodríguez, otra religión, Juanita Rodríguez otra religión. Señora García, esa no tiene nada. Y otra más, otra religión. Todos eran Católicos, verdad. Católicos de Católicos, pero por alguna razón... ya perdieron.*”

Interview with the author, March 27, 2014.

<sup>135</sup> Field notes, May 24, 2013.

*carismático*. In the Pew Research Center's 2013 survey of over 5,100 Latina/o adults, for instance, 52% of Roman Catholic participants reported being Charismatic.<sup>136</sup> Yet Charismatic prayer circle attendees typically represent only a small fraction of parish members. Clearly Latina/o self-identification as Charismatic Catholic does not indicate regular participation in RCCH events. Unfortunately, the Pew Study did not inquire into the criteria that led Latina/o Catholics to identify themselves as Charismatic.<sup>137</sup> The Pew Study is useful for illustrating, however, that *carismático* is a fluid category in the Latina/o Catholic population, and the number of *carismáticos* in any given Catholic group depends upon the criteria of the person doing the counting.

### **RCCH Leadership**

The RCCH has been a lay-led movement since its beginning. The strongest leadership presence in the day-to-day activities of the prayer circles is the *servidores* group. The *servidores* elect internal leaders, typically a coordinator, a sub-coordinator, a secretary, and a treasurer. In addition, each week the coordinator assigns two temporary leadership roles to *servidores* for the upcoming prayer circle meeting. The first is the *dirigente* (leader) who leads prayers and praise and directs the flow of the prayer circle meeting. The second is the preacher, who is either a *servidor* from the parish prayer circle who has undergone preacher formation or a regional, national, or international preacher whom the coordinator invites to preach at the parish gathering.

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<sup>136</sup> Pew Research Center, *The Shifting Religious Identity of Latinos in the United States* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2014), 94.

<sup>137</sup> For further analysis of the problematic aspects of the Pew Study finding on Hispanic Charismatic Catholics, see Matovina, *Latino Catholicism*, 115-16.

The *Comité Timón* (Steering Committee) and the *Comité Central* (Central Committee) provide oversight at the regional level. The *Comité Timón* consists of the bishop's liaison, a coordinator, a sub-coordinator, a treasurer, a secretary, and eight additional elected members. The much larger *Comité Central* consists of the *Comité Timón*, the supervisors (*carismático* volunteers who oversee each of the ten geographic areas into which the region is divided), and the coordinators and music leaders from each of the parish prayer circles in the region. Oversight of the regional leadership comes from the national governing body, the *Comité Nacional de Servicio Hispano* (National Committee for Hispanic Service). Leaders of the RCCH formed this organization, which covers the United States and Canada, in 1990 to serve a coordinating function for Spanish-language prayer circles throughout the two countries. Amongst its leadership functions is hosting an annual formation conference for leaders of regional and local RCCH groups.

### **RCCH Demographics**

Shifting the focus to the microcosm of the three parishes where I conducted my research, what sort of person is involved in the RCCH? Without exception the prayer circle attendees are Latina/o immigrants for whom Spanish is their first language. The majority of the *carismáticos* in these three parishes are also of a particular social class, age group, and gender. As mentioned earlier, the vast majority of attendees are working class immigrants. The few middle class attendees are primarily from Colombia. While there are some younger attendees, the vast majority are over forty. When children and teens attend, they are always with their parents. Attendees in their twenties and thirties are rare. Regarding gender, as also mentioned above, women are in the majority and men represent only 20%-40% of attendees, except at the rare events geared only toward men.

Both the gender imbalance and the lack of young people are not specific to the RCCH; rather, they reflect broader cultural perspectives on religion. During an interview, I asked Rafael, the prayer circle coordinator at Christ The King, why there were so few men who attend RCCH events. His response spoke more broadly of Catholicism:

[Many people say that] they are still a bit young to go to church, but when they are older they will start going. Football comes first, beer comes first, friends come first, and sprees come before going to church. Many people don't even go to mass. "That's for the excessively pious," they say... "oh, I'll start going next year," or "I'm twenty, I'm still very young, I'm not going to waste my life thus. I'll go when I'm fifty."<sup>138</sup>

Rafael illustrates that Latina/o cultural norms assign certain activities to certain ages: younger people party, older people go to church. Because he spoke in response to a question about men, Rafael's answer implies that men in particular are prone to neglecting church in their younger years, although this doesn't explain why there are fewer men even amongst the older attendees at the prayer circles. When I asked Martha, a *servidora* in her parish prayer circle, the same question, she suggested a reason for why men as a whole are less religious: "I think that men are

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<sup>138</sup> "Cuando estén más grandes van a empezar, que porque ahorita todavía están jóvenes para meterse a la iglesia. Está primero el fútbol, está primero la cerveza, está primero el amigo, está primero la parranda que ir a la iglesia. Muchos no van ni a misa, 'eso es para santurrones' dicen.... '¡O! Voy a empezar, para el otro año empiezo,' o 'tengo veinte años, yo estoy muy joven todavía, no voy a perder mi vida ahí. Cuando tenga cincuenta.' Interview with the author, December 3, 2013.

a bit more hard, and by that I mean hard in the heart, like they say, ‘no, that isn’t for me, it’s for women and no one else.’” When I asked her why she thinks men are “a bit more hard,” she answered “I believe that it’s due to culture, and to convenience. They don’t want to stop what they’re doing in order to go to church.”<sup>139</sup> These two *carismáticos* indicate that the gender and age imbalances in the prayer circles reflect a broader trend in the Latina/o community: younger people prioritize partying over church, and men of any age are less willing than women to give up their leisure activities for church.

### **RCCH Events**

The large majority of *carismático* events focus on praise and worship. The categories of events are myriad: *círculo de oración*, an evening prayer meeting in the parish church sanctuary; house meeting, an evening prayer circle meeting at someone’s home; day-long retreats with various themes, such as women, men, family, healing, or evangelization; *vigilias*, evening vigils for all of the *servidores* in a given area; leadership formation events; events to celebrate the feast of Pentecost; anniversary masses celebrating the founding of the local or national or international RCCH movements; and regional conferences and conventions. The format of these events is nearly identical, whatever the name the *carismáticos* give them. Before each of these events, the organizers gather to pray and in particular to pray over the *dirigente* and the preacher. Music then opens, closes, and pervades the *carismático* worship gatherings. They name their songs

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<sup>139</sup> ‘yo pienso que los hombres son un poquito más duros, me refiero duros a corazón, como que ellos dicen: no, eso no es para mi, es para la mujer, nada más.... Yo creo que por las culturas, por su comodidad, no quieren dejar lo que ellos hacen por ir a la iglesia.’ Interview with the author, March 4, 2014.

*alabanzas*, praise, for music is how they praise and worship God, not only with singing but also with dancing, clapping, and dynamically acting out lyrics. After the opening song, there is typically a standard set of three Roman Catholic prayers: the *Ven, Espíritu Santo* (Come, Holy Spirit); the *Padre Nuestro* (Our Father); and the *Gloria* (Glory Be). Many *dirigentes* also add the *Dios Te Salve María* (Hail Mary) as a fourth prayer.

Another common practice, which not only opens an event but also recurs throughout it, is a call and response. Two specific forms are heard at almost every event. The first proclaims the glory of Christ, following a formula wherein the *dirigente* or preacher asks the questions and the gathered crowd responds: *¿Quién vive? ¡Cristo! ¿Y en su nombre? ¡Gloria! ¿Y con Cristo? ¡La Victoria!* (Who lives? Christ! And in his name? Glory! And with Christ? Victory!) The second begins with the speaker calling out, “*¿Cómo está el pueblo de Dios?*” (how are God’s people?) to which the crowd responds, “*¡Bendecidos, encendidos, y en victoria!* (blessed, on fire, and victorious!). This call and response expresses the *carismáticos*’ convictions that God blesses them, the Holy Spirit sets them afire, and through Christ’s resurrection they are victorious. After the opening, there follows a mixture of five elements: short scripture readings; music; preaching; prayer for pardon where they kneel in contrition and pray for God’s forgiveness; and *oración y alabanzas*, prayer and praise to God, during which each person prays unscripted prayers aloud, spontaneously and passionately, resulting in cacophonous yet reverent praise of God.

Preaching is the centerpiece of the gathering and takes up the majority of the time at most events. Typically, preaching begins with a scripture reading that determines the theme to be developed. There are three standard approaches to choosing which scripture passage will serve to organize preaching content. The first is to select a daily reading, either from that day or a

recent day, from the Roman Catholic Lectionary, the book that contains the scripture readings that the Church has appointed for each given day. The second method for selecting a scripture passage is praying and meditating on the message that God wishes the preacher to present and choosing the scripture passage God reveals, which may or may not be a reading from a recent or upcoming mass. In this instance, it is common to hear a preacher say “the Lord gave me this Psalm” or similar words.<sup>140</sup> These two techniques are the most common ways that preachers at prayer circles and smaller events determine their themes. At larger events, such as retreats and conferences, organizers choose a brief Bible passage such as “do not be afraid, I am with you” (Isaiah 41:10) or “be merciful just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36) to serve as the event theme. The preachers then adopt this theme as the central message of their preaching.

One preacher explained a different approach to selecting a preaching theme. If he is visiting a parish to preach, he speaks with the prayer circle coordinator beforehand. In particular, he inquires whether any specific issues are confronting the community or whether there are any messages the coordinator feels it is important for the prayer circle attendees to hear. He then shapes the content of his preaching based on those topics. This approach is uncommon. It is also uncommon for a preacher to preach about public topics such as troubling world or community events, other than to make a passing reference to them.

Preaching is intended to instruct and to inspire. The contents are therefore a blend of two elements, teaching about the Word of God as revealed in scripture and Roman Catholic doctrine and offering testimonies of how the Word of God plays out in the daily lives of the preachers and

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<sup>140</sup> “*El Señor me regaló este salmo,*” transcription of preaching at a parish prayer circle, August 8, 2013.

the people they know. Preaching is unscripted and passionate. Unscripted does not mean unprepared, however. On the contrary, preachers devote a considerable amount of time to preparation. Martha, who had fairly recently completed her preaching training with the RCCH, explained her method to me:

When they choose me to preach, I pray and I ask God to illuminate what he wants me to say and he gives me the reading. When I read the gospels, when I see a reading, God gives me peace and I sense, with peace, how to talk about that reading. That's when I know that it's God giving me the reading so that I may go to church and share it.... [The day before I preach] I start praying and... I ask God to illuminate what he wants me to share.... The Lord gives me what I'm going to talk about. Sometimes I note down what the Lord has given me on a piece of paper. There are times that I don't say all of it, but I say the most important things.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> “*Cuando a mi me escogen para predicar, yo hago mi oración y le pido a Dios que me ilumine qué es lo que él quiere que yo hable y él es el que me regala la lectura. Cuando yo leo el evangelios, cuando veo lectura, Dios me da la paz y me siento en paz como para hablar de esa lectura. Es cuando sé que Dios es el que me está dando esa lectura para yo ir a la iglesia a compartirla... El día de mañana miércoles me pongo en oración y... estoy pidiéndole a Dios que me ilumine qué es lo que quiere que yo vaya a compartir. Así me preparo.... El Señor me va regalando que es lo que vaya hablando. Hay a veces que, que anoto en una hojita que es lo que el Señor me ha estado regalando, pero hay a veces que no las digo todas porque es mucho a veces, y pero sí digo lo más importante.*” Interview with the author, March 4, 2014.

Different preachers prepare in different ways, but they share a common practice of praying and reflecting on what God is asking them to share. They view preaching as a sacred trust and take their responsibility to inspire and instruct their fellow *carismáticos* very seriously.

Many events, after the preaching, offer *sanación* (healing prayer). The preacher calls anyone in need of prayer to come forward to kneel before the altar. Frequently, members of the event's leadership team walk between those who are kneeling, laying hands on them and praying over them individually. At larger events Catholic ritual is prominent in closing an event. Whenever a priest is available, the *carismáticos* close, or perhaps open, the event with a mass. They also have Eucharistic adoration; they display the Eucharistic in a golden monstrance and kneel before it, basking in Jesus's real presence among them. To close larger events they also have jubilant Eucharistic processions, which often open these events as well. They wave napkins or tissues in the air, sing, and call out praises. They rush up to the monstrance and touch it with their tissues, which then become sacred objects to be placed on household altars, under pillows, or in Bibles.

There are other elements common to smaller events such as parish prayer circles. Many *círculos* begin with the rosary half an hour before worship commences. Early in the circle gathering, too, the *dirigente* asks "who is here for the first time?" The form of welcome varies from group to group, but includes applause, a welcome from the *dirigente*, and a welcome song during which everyone at the event comes by and offers the newcomers an embrace. It is also common at prayer circles, when there are a few minutes left after the preaching and *sanación*, for the *dirigente* to invite people forward to offer testimonies of how God is working in their lives. During the event there are typically two baskets available: one for prayer petitions and one for offerings. At the conclusion of the gathering, the *dirigente* makes two general prayers: one over

the petition basket that God may hear the prayers of his people; and one over the offering basket that God may bless these donations that benefit the parish prayer group, the parish church, and the regional RCCH leadership. After these prayers typically the *dirigente* offers a general prayer for the well-being of the group and a final song closes the event.

There are two events that emphasize music rather than preaching: concerts and *noches de alabanzas*, or praise nights, both of which primarily feature music, with short scripture readings, spontaneous *alabanzas*, and brief prayers sprinkled between songs. There are also gatherings that emphasize business such as *servidores* meetings. These meetings include music, scripture readings, *alabanzas*, and prayer, but typically the majority of the time is devoted to administrative business that pertains to running the prayer circle. The meetings of regional leadership teams, the *Comité Timón* and the *Comité Central*, contain very little praise or worship and focus almost entirely on organizational business.

There are two other events that are unique. The first is the Life in the Spirit seminar, which is common to the CCR as a whole. For the RCCH in the United States, the seminar is an eleven-week course based on a Charismatic text *Id y Evangelizad a los Bautizados* (Go and Evangelize the Baptized). José Prado Flores, a Mexican lay Charismatic Catholic preacher, wrote this text that teaches the fundamentals of Catholic Charismatic conviction and that carries the *nihil obstat* and *imprimatur* approval of the Roman Catholic Church. The acme of every seminar is the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, a ritual of calling the Holy Spirit to descend upon the seminar participants and the participants' reciprocal commitment to live Spirit-centered lives. The second unique RCCH event is the annual fundraising banquet, an elegant sit-down dinner. This event is singular in its distinctly secular flavor: a DJ plays popular music from the United States and Latin America; a hired band plays old, popular songs from Mexico to which many

people sang along; and there is a cash bar, none of which ever has a place at *carismático* events geared for worship or preaching. The banquet also features award presentations and fundraising activities including a live auction that the bishop's liaison leads. There is very little to distinguish this banquet from any other fundraising event in a Roman Catholic organization, and it has very little in common with any other *carismático* event I attended.

### CHAPTER 3 – *CARISMÁTICO* THEOLOGIES OF SIN

I argue in Chapter 2 that the RCCH is the product of many influences, both Roman Catholic and Pentecostal Protestant, and that the movement emerged more or less simultaneously in a number of different places. It is not surprising, then, that the *carismáticos*' theological beliefs also display a broad range of influences and sources. This chapter begins with a brief outline of the varied theological sources the *carismáticos* cite, paying particular attention to the role that personal experience plays in forming *carismático* convictions. I then explore how these sources contribute to *carismáticos*' theological perspectives on sin. I outline where sin surfaces as a topic in *carismático* practices and preaching and what *carismáticos* proclaim regarding sin. I focus in particular on the most prominent themes that arise: the lure of material pleasures, sin as separation from God, the wide varieties of behaviors that the *carismáticos* characterize as sinful, the question of what makes sin *sinful*, and the *carismáticos*' certainty regarding forgiveness of sins. I then explore the relative influence that Roman Catholicism and Pentecostalism exercise on these *carismático* beliefs. Finally, I argue that *carismático* perspectives on sin serve as a transformative strategy that aids ethical formation.

#### **Theological Sources**

The broad range of influences on *carismático* theological beliefs is apparent in the variety of theological sources that the *carismáticos* cite. Listed in approximate order of frequency with which each occurs, the sources cited include scripture, by far the most popular theological source; preaching from parish priests and *carismáticos*; song lyrics; Vatican documents; saints' lives; papal writings; documents from CELAM (*Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano*), the council of Roman Catholic bishops of Latin America; devotional literature; and stories from Catholic popular culture. To this broad, eclectic range of theological influences is added an even

more eclectic theological source that is second in importance only to Scripture and Roman Catholic teaching: personal religious experience. The experiential nature of the *carismáticos*' religiosity, particularly how they experience the divine in *lo cotidiano* (the immediate spaces of everyday lives), plays a vital role in shaping what the *carismáticos* emphasize in the other sources and how they understand them.

In relying on personal experience as a theological source, the *carismáticos* are hardly unique. Latina/o theologians such as María Pilar Aquino, Roberto Goizueta, and Loida Martell-Otero, to name but a few, write from many different religious and social spaces yet hold in common the recognition that Latina/o theology “arises from our experiences being part of the life of our communities.”<sup>142</sup> Speaking specifically of Latina theology, Martell-Otero states “it is the articulation of a given praxis, a reflection on *una manera de ser* (a way of life) in a community that struggles daily with issues of survival within a context of economic injustice and multilayered discrimination.”<sup>143</sup> When *carismáticos* reflect theologically on their “way of life” amidst injustice and discrimination, the most important element that makes a *carismático* theology *carismático* is how the specific contours of RCCH conversion form their understandings of who God is and what God does.

While *carismáticos*' perspectives are the product of considerable theological reflection, for the most part these perspectives are unavailable to those who take the traditional theological

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<sup>142</sup> Loida Martell-Otero, “Introduction: *Abuelita* Theologies,” in Loida I. Martell-Otero, Zaida Maldonado Pérez, and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, *Latina Evangélicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 5.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 6

studies approach of reading formal, scholarly texts. *Carismáticos* live their theological convictions rather than publish them in print. As Mark Cartledge points out, “Pentecostals [do] not do theology in a standard Western mode but via songs, poems, testimonies, and dances... the oral nature of theology [is] distinct from the literary forms of theology.”<sup>144</sup> For this reason, as argued in the Introduction, ethnography becomes an indispensable tool for academic exploration of *carismático* theologies, for it is only through recording and transcribing the songs, preaching, and testimonies of this oral culture that the full range of *carismático* theological expressions become available for theological analysis. Only then can a scholar of theology gain an adequate understanding of what personal religious experience reveals theologically to the people in these communities.

### ***Carismático* Perspectives on Sin**

A prayer circle gathering offers a starting point for outlining the *carismáticos*' theological perspectives on sin. On an August evening, around ninety-five *carismáticos* gather in their parish church, fifty women and twenty five men with their children.<sup>145</sup> The large majority stand in the first twenty rows, with a couple dozen scattered sparsely in the rear two-thirds of the sanctuary. In the first twenty-five minutes of the gathering, they vigorously applaud Jesus; loudly proclaim with raised arms their spontaneous praises to God; move about the pews to

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<sup>144</sup> Mark J. Cartledge, “Pentecostal Theology,” in Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. and Amos Yong, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 254; where he relies heavily upon Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 18-19 and 269-72.

<sup>145</sup> Field notes, August 1, 2013.

lively music, personally greeting newcomers and old friends alike; and enthusiastically sing “*En el Cielo Se Oye*,” (“In Heaven is Heard”) with half the crowd readily turning, jumping, and shouting for joy when the lyrics call for this form of praise to God.

Manuel, a large-framed Mexican man in his thirties, is the *dirigente* for the evening. Usually a soft-spoken man of few words, he guides these exuberant opening activities with animated volume, forceful gesticulation, and even, at one point, spontaneous praise in tongues. He paces across the stage wearing a black Ralph Lauren polo shirt, blue jeans, and white running shoes, holding a wireless microphone in his left hand and frequently gesturing emphatically with his right. Yet now, as the crowd finishes singing another song and concluding applause dies away, Manuel becomes still and drops the volume and tone of his voice. The *carismáticos* in the pews fall silent and cease much of their restless movement as Manuel quietly announces:

We’re going to reconcile ourselves with our Creator. We’re going to recognize that we are sinners, because if we say that we haven’t sinned, then we are the greatest sinner. I want to ask you, please, beloved brothers and sisters, in the love of the Lord, close your eyes. Meditate on the words that I’m going to share from the Bible, trying to ask our Lord for pardon. “Submit yourselves, then, to God; resist the devil and he will flee from you, move closer to God and he will move closer to you. Purify your hands, sinners, and sanctify your hearts, indecisive ones. Recognize your misery, lament it and weep. What is fitting for you is weeping and not laughter, sadness and not joy. Humble yourselves before the

Lord and he will lift you up.” Humble yourselves before the Lord, beloved brothers and sisters.<sup>146</sup>

At Manuel’s request, the *carismáticos* lower themselves to the kneelers and close their eyes. All but a few clasp their hands in a gesture of prayer, some resting their arms on the back of the pew in front of them, others raising their clasped hands to their bowed foreheads. They hold this meditative prayer posture while the choir reflectively sings “*Consuela, Señor, Mi Alma Triste*” (“Console, Lord, My Unhappy Soul”).

Of the three parishes where I conducted my research, St. Augustine, where the above scenario took place, incorporates contrition for sins the most formally and regularly into prayer circles and *servidores* vigils. Meditating on sins and seeking God’s mercy are part of the standard format for both sorts of gatherings at this parish. At Christ The King, incorporating this practice in the prayer circle meetings was left to the discretion of the *dirigentes*. On one

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<sup>146</sup> “*Vamos a reconciliarnos con nuestro Creador. Vamos a reconocer que somos pecadores, porque si decimos que no tenemos pecado entonces, somos el más grande pecador. Quiero pedirles, por favor, queridos hermanos, en el amor al Señor, que cierren sus ojos. Mediten las palabras que voy a compartir de la Biblia, tratando de pedirle perdón a nuestro Creador. ‘Sométanse, pues, a Dios; resistan al diablo, y huirá de ustedes; acérquense a Dios y él se acercará a ustedes. Purifíquense las manos, pecadores; santifiquen sus corazones, indecisos. Reconozcan su miseria, láméntenla y lloren. Lo que les conviene es llanto y no risa, tristeza y no alegría. Humíllense ante el Señor y él los ensalzará.’ [Biblia Latinoamericana, Jas 4:7-10]. Humillémonos ante el Señor, queridos hermanos.*” Transcription of preaching at prayer circle meeting, August 1, 2013.

occasion, for instance, the *carismáticos* at this parish dedicated a few prayerful minutes to reflect on their sins and “ask the Lord for pardon,” but this formal act of seeking pardon for sins occurred only occasionally during the prayer circles at this parish, and not at all during *servidores* meetings.<sup>147</sup> Christ the King *carismáticos* do, however, open each prayer circle with a rosary, a weekly practice that begins with the Act of Contrition: “It weighs on my soul to have offended you; I firmly intend never to sin again, to separate myself from occasions for offending you, to confess and to carry out the penance that is placed upon me.”<sup>148</sup> The prayer circle at St. Augustine also begins each *círculo* with this Act of Contrition as a prelude to the rosary.

Beliefs about sin were common in the preaching at all of the parishes where I conducted my research, even at St. Rose of Lima, where no formal practices of acknowledging one’s sinfulness occurred during my fieldwork. Here, a preacher referred to himself and the gathered *carismáticos* as “men and women incapacitated... by sin” who “remain lame through sin,” and “who come here to sit down, that the Lord... says to you: ‘Let me heal you.’”<sup>149</sup> At Christ the King, one hears, “the psalmist says it well: ‘In sin our mother conceived us.’ Lord, you know

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<sup>147</sup> “*pedirle perdón al Señor,*” transcription of preaching at prayer circle meeting, July 12, 2013.

<sup>148</sup> “*Me pesa en el alma de haberte ofendido; propongo firmemente nunca más pecar, apartarme de las ocasiones de ofenderte, confesarme y cumplir la penitencia que me fuere impuesta.*” Field notes, June 13, 2013.

<sup>149</sup> “*hombres y mujeres incapacitados...por el pecado;*” “*quedamos cojos por el pecado;*” “*venimos aquí, a sentarnos y que el señor...te dice: déjame sanarte.*” Transcription of preaching at prayer circle meeting, September 28, 2013.

how much tendency we have to sin. St. Paul, that very great saint, that great evangelizer, says, ‘I want to do good and evil is what is presented to me.’ We would be liars, Lord, if we said that we are always in triumph and in victory.”<sup>150</sup> At St. Augustine one hears, “how do you feel, slave of sin? The sin that is in you is dominating you, and you give free rein... to that which dominates you.”<sup>151</sup> These representative practices and narratives reveal common *carismático* convictions: the dramatic pause amidst jubilant praise emphasizes the gravity of their sinfulness, while the invitation to sit a spell and hear that Jesus longs to heal them confirms God’s willingness to forgive.

### **Sin As Separation From God**

*Carismáticos* do not limit themselves to a general confirmation that sin is problematic. They rigorously scrutinize *why* sin is problematic, and again, their religious narratives on this topic elucidate communal beliefs. As one preacher summarized it, “in committing a sin, we are

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<sup>150</sup> *Bien dice el salmista: “en pecado nos concibió nuestra madre,” Señor, y tú lo sabes cuánta tendencia tenemos al pecado, Señor. Dice San Pablo, ese santo grandísimo, ese gran evangelizador, quiero hacer el bien y es el mal el que se me presenta. Seríamos mentirosos, Señor, si diríamos que estamos siempre en triunfo y en victoria.* Transcription of preaching at a prayer circle vigil, September 13, 2013.

<sup>151</sup> “¿Cómo te sientes, tú, esclavo del pecado? Te está dominando el pecado que hay en ti y le das rienda suelta... a eso que te domina.” Transcription of preaching at evangelization event, June 6, 2013.

separating ourselves from God.”<sup>152</sup> For *carismáticos*, God is love and loving relationship with God constitutes the non-negotiable center of the Charismatic Catholic life. It is thus unsurprising that *carismáticos* define “sin” as that which impedes that loving relationship. The language of “we are sinners” becomes more specified in statements such as “I was separating myself [from God],” “[things] move you away a bit from God,” and “[one] grows apart from God.”<sup>153</sup> Separation, moving away, growing apart from God; this distance language that pervades their narratives expresses the *carismáticos*’ understandings of why sin is a problem.

In discussing what causes one to grow apart from God, to sin, *carismático* narratives often feature the theme of the allure of *el mundo*, the secular world of popular culture. *Carismáticos* articulate a strong positive-negative dualism between the things of God and the things of *el mundo*. The latter is often characterized as the catalyst that causes distance from God. No one articulates this better than Adriana, a *servidora* at St. Augustine. She invited me to her apartment for our interview, and as I entered and took a seat on the couch, a television perched on the table across the small room from me blared a Spanish-language comedy program from its immense screen. On the same table, candles, crosses, and framed religious images surrounded the television’s base. As I settled into my seat, Adriana walked to the table, lit one of

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<sup>152</sup> “*Al cometer un pecado... nosotros nos estamos alejando de Dios.*” Transcription of preaching at retreat event, June 29, 2013.

<sup>153</sup> “*Yo me estaba... apartando,*” transcription of preaching at evangelization retreat event, June 8, 2013; “*te van alejando un poco de Dios,*” *servidora* interview with author, February 19, 2014; “*un hombre que se aleja de Dios*” transcription of preaching at evangelization retreat event, June 8, 2013.

the candles on it, and turned off the television. Within a minute of beginning the interview, this theme of the lure of *el mundo* surfaced:

I grew up in a Catholic home, right? But there are times that the things of the world shine more than the things of God, and they shine very beautifully and they dazzle you. It's like when you go to Las Vegas and you see so many lights that you want to try everything and you want to do everything and you feel like you're free. Yes, you forget that you're going to have to give account to God for your acts. And you say "it's my life and I want to live it thus because I only have one and I want to live it, I have no more than one life." And the things of the world absorb you, those brilliant lights, and they move you a bit away from God.<sup>154</sup>

A few months prior to our interview, Adriana was preaching to the gathered *servidores* at St. Augustine before a prayer circle meeting and offered this reflection on the same theme:

There was a seeker and this seeker went to the house of a monk who was in the Egyptian desert. And when the seeker entered and opened the door, he was surprised at what he saw there in the monk's house. When he entered, he saw a

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<sup>154</sup> *"He crecido en un, en un hogar católico, ¿verdad? Pero hay veces que las cosas del mundo brillan más que las cosas de Dios y brillan muy bonito y te deslumbran. Es como cuando vas a Las Vegas y ves tantas luces, que quieres probar todo y quieres hacer todo y te sientes como libre. Sí, olvidas que vas a tener que dar cuentas a Dios de tus actos. Y dices es mi vida y la quiero vivir así porque es una y la quiero vivir nada más tengo una vida. Y las cosas del mundo te van absorbiendo, esas luces brillantes y te van alejando un poco de Dios."* Interview with the author, February 19, 2014.

small table, a cot, a few utensils, a Bible, and a prayer book; and the seeker said to him: “But where is your furniture?” And the monk said to him: “And where is yours?” And the seeker said to him: “Well, I’m just passing through.” Thus are we, we are just passing through, and sometimes we focus more on the things that remain, that spoil, that get moth-eaten, we don’t seek the reign of God.<sup>155</sup>

The ideas that Adriana emphasizes – the dazzling lights of the world that distract one from God, the things that spoil that take one’s focus from the reign of God – recur with frequency, via a variety of themes, in *carismático* events and interviews.

*Carismáticos* are extremely rigorous when analyzing what behaviors distance one from God – even television and popular music can be problematic. Rafael, prayer circle coordinator at Christ The King, explained in an interview: “When you pray less, the world begins to pull at you... things drag you back. Because if I stop praying... I feel like watching more television....

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<sup>155</sup> *‘Era un buscador y que fue ese buscador a la casa de un monje que estaba en el desierto egipcio y cuando entra el buscador y abre la puerta, se sorprendió con lo que vio ahí en la casa del monje. Cuando entra, vio una mesita, una camita, unos cuantos utensilios y una biblia, un libro para orar y el buscador le dice pero cómo ¿dónde están tus muebles? Y el monje le dice ¿y dónde están los tuyos? Y el buscador le dice: pues yo no más ando de paso. Así nosotros hermanos, nosotros andamos de paso y a veces nos enfocamos más de las cosas que se quedan, que se echan a perder, que se apolillan, no buscamos el reino de Dios.’* Transcription of preaching to *servidores* before prayer circle event, June 18, 2013.

Instead of praises, instead of other things, you begin to listen to worldly music.”<sup>156</sup> *Carismático* narratives in fact *focus* on those sins that are often overlooked or deemphasized in mainstream Catholicism, sins which are congruent with the values of popular United States culture and therefore require particular rigor and devotion in order to avoid. Mainstream Catholics might be surprised, for instance, to hear Isabel, preaching at a men’s retreat, proclaim that the contents of one’s refrigerator and the posters on one’s wall can be sinful:

Strip your walls, take down all of those posters of naked women that you have, open your refrigerator and throw away the beer that you have chilled for this weekend. Put the only true God on all of your walls. He is the one who can... fill your emptiness. Don’t go seeking... beer any more, don’t put drugs in your body.<sup>157</sup>

Following the thread of her thinking, drinking beer and enjoying pornography are seeking to fill emptiness with something other the one true God; that is, drinking and pornography shift one’s

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<sup>156</sup> “*Cuando le baja la oración, el mundo te empieza a jalar porque si no oras, ¡eh! Te... las cosas... te van arrastrando para atrás. Porque si yo dejo de hacer oración... me da por ver más televisión... en vez de alabanzas, en vez de otras cosas, es, empiezas a escuchar música de, del mundo.*” Interview with the author, December 3, 2013.

<sup>157</sup> “*Desmantela tus paredes, quitar todos los posters que tienes de mujeres desnudas, abre tu refrigerador y mete a la basura la cerveza que tú has enfriado para este fin de semana, y coloca en todas tus paredes al único Dios verdadero. El que puede... llenar tu vacío. No busques más, no busques en la cerveza, no te metas droga en tu cuerpo.*” Transcription of preaching at a men’s retreat, June 23, 2012.

attention from God. *Carismáticos* speak in a similar manner regarding infidelity. A popular international *carismático* preacher denounced infidelity, along with several other vices, at a regional convention:

If you want God to be the one who governs your life you will have to let yourself become uncomfortable, because it hurts. There are things that it hurts to leave behind.... If you don't uproot it, you will not be blessed. If you are incapable of renouncing, you will not be blessed. You who are listening to me... you have a vice, you look at pornography, you're unfaithful to your wife, you consume alcohol, you smoke cigarettes, you know what is harming you.<sup>158</sup>

This preacher categorizes infidelity together with pornography, drinking alcohol, and smoking; all of them must be abandoned if one wishes to obey God's will and receive God's blessing.

*Carismáticos* speak similarly about other activities acceptable in popular culture, including shopping, working too many hours, and gossip. All of these habits – pornography, infidelity, drinking, smoking, doing drugs, consumerism, workaholism, gossip, television – have one thing in common, in the eyes of *carismáticos*: they prioritize the cravings of the flesh.

Although the word “sin” does not appear in any of these instances, in light of the assertion that

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<sup>158</sup> *“Si tú quieres que Dios sea el que gobierne tu vida, deberás dejarte desacomodar porque eso duele. Hay cosas que a uno le quitan que duele... Si uno no arranca no será bendecido, si uno no es capaz de renunciar, no será bendecido. Usted que me está escuchando... tiene un vicio, visita pornografía, es infiel a su esposa, consume alcohol, fuma cigarrillo, usted sabe que eso le está haciendo daño.”*

Transcription of preaching at a regional convention, April 28, 2013.

“in committing a sin, we are separating ourselves from God,” the *carismáticos*’ religious experiences have taught them that the converse is also true: each choice and action that separates one from God is committing a sin and this distance from God is the primary problem that Catholics must strive to avoid. It is what makes sin *sinful*.

At the same time, the majority of *carismáticos* do not consider socially-condoned behaviors such as drinking and partying to be inherently evil. Daniel, a popular local preacher, asked the crowd at an evangelization event, “drugs, alcohol, dancing, parties. In excess, are they good or bad?” “Bad!” responds the crowd, in unison and unequivocally.<sup>159</sup> Adriana, whose Charismatic conversion brought an end to her behavior of drinking to fill her emptiness, also developed this theme of excess, not the behavior itself, being the source of danger: “I won’t tell you that suddenly, now, I don’t drink. Yes, I have one or two drinks... when I go to parties, a glass of wine, but now you are more conscious... what your limit will be... You have more control of yourself.”<sup>160</sup> This inherent self-control and moderation that conversion provides allows, for instance, a Charismatic former alcoholic to state “for five years I haven’t drunk at all” and to add “in those five years, I drank wine, champagne, but it wasn’t to get drunk, it was

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<sup>159</sup> “*Las drogas, el alcohol, el baile, las fiestas. En exceso, ¿son buenas o son malas? ¡Malas!*” Transcription of preaching at an evangelization event, June 6, 2013.

<sup>160</sup> “*Ahora no te digo que no tomo, de repente. Sí, tomo una que otra... cuando voy a fiestas, un vino, pero ya tienes más conciencia... qué límite vas a llegar ... Tienes más control de ti.*” Interview with the author, February 19, 2014.

simply when I went to a dance, or a toast at the end of the year.”<sup>161</sup> This statement, which might seem contradictory, does not register as such for many *carismáticos*. The injurious aspect of drinking is the *disposition*, the attempt to “put your pain to sleep” and to flee problems, rather than any inherent evil in alcohol itself. What makes a behavior become a vice, an addiction, a spiritual problem, is its misuse to hide from problems and pain.

Not all *carismáticos* agree. Sofía, a matriarch of the community who has been dedicatedly involved with the local Charismatic movement since the first meeting over forty years ago, believes that whenever people go dancing, they are with the Devil.<sup>162</sup> Gladys, preaching at a parish prayer circle, likewise equates worldly pursuits and addiction with evil:

The wide path, I tell you, is money, perdition, gambling, prostitution, alcoholism, drug addiction. This way is quick, but who knows if, when you want to open the door, it will open. When the Lord says “no, you are not among my friends, you aren’t from here,” the Word of the Lord says that the gnashing of teeth and lamenting will be heard.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> “*Cinco años que no tomé para nada. Después de los cinco años, tomé vino, champagne, pero no era como, como para emborracharme, simplemente era cuando salía a un baile, un brindis, o en el fin de año un brindis.*” Interview with the author, April 3, 2014.

<sup>162</sup> “*Me voy a bailar... voy a hacer esto, voy a hacer lo otro. Con el Diablo estás.*” Transcription of discussion at a house prayer circle, June 25, 2013.

<sup>163</sup> “*El camino ancho, como les digo, es el dinero, la perdición, los juegos, la prostitución, el alcoholismo, la drogadicción. Ese camino es rápido pero quién sabe si cuando quieras abrir la puerta se vaya abrir. Cuando el Señor diga ‘no, tú no perteneces*

Gladys's statement doesn't explicitly state whether drinking and gambling are inherently the agents of the Devil. However, given her perspective that they are at the very least the wide path that leads to damnation, it is hard to imagine Gladys affirming that drinking and gambling – in moderation – are acceptable. Although Sofía and Gladys's convictions that drinking, dancing, and gambling are inherently evil surface at times in other *carismáticos*' perspectives, most of the *carismáticos* in my study locate a behavior's problematic core in the *use* of that behavior to distract one's attention from God, not within the behavior itself.

Most frequently, the *carismáticos* use this theme of shifting one's time and attention away from God to explain the mechanism by which sin distances the sinner from God. Others, however, frame this distancing in Eucharistic terms: "I don't want to live my whole life in sin without receiving you," Elena says, when describing how she felt when she was living with a man to whom she was not married in the Church.<sup>164</sup> From this theological perspective, Elena lamented because sin prevented her from receiving God in communion; this was the literal means by which her sinful behavior distanced her from God. Others frame the mechanism by which sin separates one from God in purity language: "What distances us from God is sin, impurity, because God is pure, God is holy and we are pure sin. That is what distances us from

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*a mis amigos, tú no eres de aquí,' dice la Palabra del Señor se van a oír el rechinido de dientes, el arrepentimiento."* Transcription of preaching at a parish prayer circle, October 10, 2013.

<sup>164</sup> "yo no quiero vivir toda mi vida en pecado sin recibirte." Interview with the author, February 13, 2014.

God.”<sup>165</sup> In this perspective, that which is utterly pure – namely, God – cannot abide that which is utterly impure – namely, sinful humans.

Whether it is committing an act that the Roman Catholic Church categorizes as barring one from receiving communion; or performing an action that makes one impure and thus draws a barrier between the impure human and the pure God; or spending time dancing rather than focusing on God at the prayer circle; or filling oneself with alcohol, pornography, sex, or shopping and ignoring the things of God; the varied *carismático* narratives boil down to a single, shared conviction. One either nurtures closeness to God or one closes the door to God, and even popular cultural activities such as watching television can close that door. This conviction illustrates how conversion to Charismatic Catholicism can lead *carismáticos* to speak of sin in ways that are within the bounds of Roman Catholicism and at the same time not typical of mainstream Latina/o Catholics.

### ***Carismático* Confidence in God’s Mercy**

There is also a distinct Charismatic cast to how *carismáticos* understand and respond to pardon for sins. Consider the following illustration of “praise for pardon,” a *carismático* practice that expresses a particular theological conviction. A week after the Charismatic prayer circle meeting described at the beginning of this chapter, the *carismáticos* again gather at St. Augustine Church. The crowd is rather small this evening: only about sixty-five are in attendance. Verónica is the *dirigente* this week, a fashionable Mexican woman in her mid-thirties. She

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<sup>165</sup> “*Lo que nos aleja de Dios es el pecado, la impureza, porque Dios es puro, Dios es santo y nosotros somos puro pecado. Eso es lo que nos aleja de Dios.*” Interview with the author, February 7, 2014.

wears white pants that reach just below her knees and a turquoise top with short sleeves. Her straight black hair is gathered in a knot high at the back of her head. High-heeled, cork-soled sandals add six inches to her height. As Manuel did the previous week, Verónica interrupts exuberant praise for solemn contrition, and the attendees kneel, still and silent – only a pair of hands shift now and then – to ponder with closed eyes Verónica’s softly-spoken words and the choir’s song of contrition.

In the stillness and silence that follows the end of the song of contrition, Verónica reflects quietly on the need for pardon. Verónica then asks the people to stand “to continue praising and glorifying our Lord;” and, in a loud, enthusiastic voice – the energetic *dirigente* has returned – she calls out for a response: “Do you want to continue praising and glorifying God?” “Amen!” responds the crowd.<sup>166</sup> In a louder and more emphatic voice Verónica repeats: “*Do you want to continue praising and glorifying God?!*” “Amen!” the people shout again. Verónica asks them to lift their hands and announces, “we’re going to give him praise of thanksgiving for the pardon that he granted us!”<sup>167</sup> At this signal, the *carismáticos* in the pews begin proclaiming, quietly at first then with growing volume, spontaneous praises to God. A cacaphony of voices speaking varied phrases rises from the crowd. Verónica speaks rapidly into the microphone, her voice rising above the praise of those in the pews:

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<sup>166</sup> “¿*Quieren seguir alabando y glorificando a Dios?*” Transcription of preaching at prayer circle meeting, August 8, 2013.

<sup>167</sup> ¡*Vamos a darle una alabanza de acción de gracias por el perdón que nos dio!*  
Transcription of preaching at prayer circle meeting, August 8, 2013.

Yes, my holy Father, we thank you, Lord, for the pardon that you've given us. Thank you, Lord, for looking upon us, for filling us with love, for filling us with tenderness, for filling us with compassion. Thank you, Father, because you have turned your eyes towards us, because you have lifted us from the dust, you've lifted us from misery and sin. Thank you for your love, Lord. Thank you, Lord, for your look of compassion, and thank you for submerging us in the loving heart of your son Jesus.<sup>168</sup>

These *alabanzas* last for about forty seconds, and Verónica ends with the call and response “¿Quién vive?” “¿Cristo!” The choir starts singing a joyful rendition of “*Alabaré*” (I Will Praise). The people dance, clap, and raise their arms high in the air. The time for exuberant praise has returned.

This practice of giving praise for God's pardon is the standard closing when the *carismáticos* kneel to reflect on and feel remorse for their sinfulness. To provide another example, Adriana, the *dirigente* at the prayer circle two months later, proclaimed the following words:

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<sup>168</sup> “*Sí, mi padre Santo, te agradecemos, Señor, por el perdón que tú nos has dado. Gracias, Señor, por mirarnos, por llenarnos de amor, por llenarnos de ternura, por llenarnos de compasión. Gracias, Padre, porque tú has puesto tu mirada hacia nosotros, porque nos has sacado del polvo, nos has sacado de la miseria y del pecado. Gracias por tu amor, Señor; gracias, Señor, por tu mirada de compasión, y gracias por sumergirnos en el corazón amoroso de tu hijo Jesús.*” Transcription of preaching at prayer circle meeting, August 8, 2013.

Now, my brothers and sisters, we're going to give praise, praise of thanks for this pardon, because the Lord lifts us, encourages us, gives us spirit in each moment to revive ourselves, to give us a new opportunity, a new beginning. He isn't a God who leaves us lying down, brothers and sisters!<sup>169</sup>

The *dirigentes'* proclamations affirm the loving, caring, ever-present, and ever-compassionate God: he casts a "look of compassion" on his beloved people, "submerging us in the loving heart" of Jesus. God looks upon those lying in the dust of sinfulness and gives them love. Furthermore, this is a God not just of loving looks but of action and transformation. God does not "[leave] us lying down." God "lift[s] us from misery and sin." Finally, this *carismático* perspective, representative of many *carismáticos'* convictions, affirms that God isn't merely a rescuer God who takes over the lives of hopeless, passive victims. This is an empowering God. This God "encourages" by granting not only new beginnings but also the "spirit in each moment to revive ourselves." God does not "do for" helpless creatures, but lends to struggling, stumbling creatures whatever is needed so they may help themselves. Not just once, or just once in a while, but *in each moment*. This is a God who provides a renewing, inexhaustible resource to human beings who fall into the dust through sin so that they may, over and again, help themselves to stand.

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<sup>169</sup> "*Ahora, mis hermanos, vamos a dar una alabanza, una alabanza de gracias por este perdón, porque el Señor nos levanta, nos anima, nos da nuestro espíritu a cada momento para reanimarnos, para darnos una oportunidad nueva, un comienzo nuevo. No es un Dios que nos deja tirados, hermanos.*" Transcription of *servidores* meeting before prayer circle meeting, October 3, 2013.

### Theological Influences on *Carismático* Perspectives

This outline of the *carismático* theologies of sin that emerge from the common elements in their religious narratives provides the material for a detailed analysis of how the multiple religious influences on the RCCH play out in *carismático* beliefs. Timothy Matovina observes that the “premier sources” for Charismatic Catholic religious practices are not Protestant but Catholic. To test out whether this also holds true for RCCH *theologies*, I explore the ways in which *carismáticos*’ beliefs and practices regarding sin follow distinct Roman Catholic lines. I then delineate the ways in which Pentecostalism has also influenced RCCH perspectives to tease out the intertwined relationship between these two primary theological influences and to determine whether the “premier sources” for *carismáticos*’ beliefs are as Catholic as the sources for their practices.

Exploring the degree to which *carismático* beliefs are Catholic requires establishing authoritative Roman Catholic teachings to serve as criteria for Catholicity. The first source that I use is the Catechism of the Catholic Church, a cue which I take from the *carismáticos*. During my fieldwork, I heard preachers quote the Catechism on such varied topics as faith, angels, baptism, obedience to the Church, and the qualities of the Holy Spirit. At one of these events, the woman preaching told the attendees where to find a passage in the Catechism. She admonished, “make a note of it. When you go home, read it, and if you don’t [have a Catechism], buy one.”<sup>170</sup> Her words suggest that, at least from her perspective, having a

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<sup>170</sup> “*Lo apunta. Cuando llegue a su casa lo lee, y si no, cómprese uno.*” Transcription of preaching at a women’s retreat, May 19, 2012.

Catechism at home is the *carismático* norm and not having a Catechism is an oversight in need of correction.

A preacher from St. Augustine also stated that reading the Catechism was an important *carismático* practice for him: “I read the Catechism of the Catholic Church to completely ground what I preach... I read the Catechism a lot because it’s the foundation of the Catholic Church, of what we believe as Catholics.”<sup>171</sup> A *servidora* from Christ The King also reminisced with a touch of wistfulness regarding classes on the Catechism that a previous diocesan leader of the RCCH offered: “ah, it was beautiful. The Catechism of the Catholic Church.”<sup>172</sup> Such endorsements of the Catechism point me toward the validity of the Catechism as a measuring stick for *carismáticos*’ adherence to Roman Catholic doctrine. Furthermore, *carismáticos* are adamantly obedient to the Vatican, thus using the Catechism is consistent with the standards to which the *carismáticos* hold themselves. Finally, the Catechism provides a comprehensive source for official teachings on Roman Catholic principles.

However defensible it is to use the Catechism as a measure of official Roman Catholic teaching, using the Catechism alone cannot give sufficient insight into the degrees to which, and the ways in which, *carismático* theological perspectives reflect their Roman Catholicity. Roman Catholic theology is not merely the product of Vatican proclamations, but also the result of

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<sup>171</sup> “*Leo el Catecismo de la Iglesia católica para fundamentarme completamente que estoy hablando... Yo leo mucho el Catecismo porque es el fundamento de la iglesia católica, de lo que nosotros creemos, como católicos.*” Interview with the author, March 15, 2014.

<sup>172</sup> “*Ah, era algo bello. El Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica.*” Interview with the author, May 5, 2014.

theological reflection in and upon history. Thus, when analyzing the Catholicity of the *carismáticos*' beliefs, I also rely on Karl Rahner's *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*. This six-volume encyclopedia of theological topics carries the *nihil obstat* and *imprimatur* approval of the Roman Catholic Church. Although it is doubtful that the *carismáticos* in this study had read Karl Rahner – they certainly never quoted him! – nonetheless prominent Roman Catholic theological currents shape *carismáticos*' perspectives indirectly through priests, devotional booklets, and other sources with which *carismáticos* come in direct contact. I therefore use this highly-respected and comprehensive encyclopedia as a guide to Roman Catholic theological currents that would be influencing the *carismáticos*.

### **Roman Catholic Influences on *Carismático* Perspectives**

The Roman Catholicity of *carismático* perspectives on sin is perhaps most palpable in their practice of contrition. In the midst of exuberant praise and joyful dancing, the tone shifts and drops so that all in the sanctuary might acknowledge the gravity of their sinfulness and seek God's pardon. This Charismatic prayer circle practice embodies what is declared in the Catechism: "the root of all sins lies in man's heart," sin is "disobedience" and "an offense against God," and while God shows "mercy to sinners," to receive this mercy sinners must recognize their sins and "admit [their] faults."<sup>173</sup> When *carismáticos* ponder their sinfulness and seek God's mercy, not only in the prayer circles but also every week in the *servidores* meetings, they demonstrate not only familiarity with Church teaching on sin, but also the seriousness with which they regard it.

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<sup>173</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., 1846-50, 1873.

When *carismáticos* characterize sin as a choice that turns one's attention away from God, they also proclaim a Roman Catholic theological conviction. Karl Rahner, in *Sacramentum Mundi*, speaks of "the definitive obdurate refusal" in which the "free act" opposes "God's self-communication in love."<sup>174</sup> The Catechism, too, instructs that the choice of sinful pursuits "turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him."<sup>175</sup> Furthermore, the Catechism concept of "inferior goods" strongly resonates with the *carismáticos*' recognition that the things of *el mundo* are empty yet dangerous temptations that turn one from God. These concerns regarding the dangers of *el mundo* also resonate with Piet Schoonenberg's delineation, in *Sacramentum Mundi*, of the dangers of "evil example" from one's environment. Evil example exposes one's values to "doubt and denial" through giving "an impulse in the opposite direction." Schoonenberg concludes "such a temptation, when reinforced by social pressure, may be too strong for [one's] moral forces."<sup>176</sup> This official presentation of Roman Catholic theology parallels Adriana's warning about the allure of the "shining lights" of *el mundo*: worldly temptations of *el mundo* specifically pressure one into choosing away from God and toward popular values that are contrary to God. In holding this conviction, the *carismáticos* are decidedly Roman Catholic.

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<sup>174</sup> Karl Rahner, "Punishment of Sins," in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, Vol. 6: *Scandal to Zionism* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 93.

<sup>175</sup> *Catechism*, 1852.

<sup>176</sup> Piet Schoonenberg, "Sin and Guilt," in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, Vol. 6: *Scandal to Zionism* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 90.

Yet the *carismáticos* differ from the *Catechism* and *Sacramentum Mundi* in their strong emphasis on sin as distancing oneself from God. Unlike the Roman Catholic sources, *carismáticos* are much more likely to employ phrases such as “turning away from God” rather than use the word “*pecado*” (sin) when they speak about specific problematic behaviors. Furthermore, the *Catechism* makes a strong distinction in types of sin that most *carismáticos* do not. Roman Catholic teaching distinguishes mortal sin, a grave offence that violates God’s law and thus requires reconciliation with God, from venial sin such as gossip that “offends and wounds” one’s neighbor but “does not deprive the sinner” of “friendship with God.”<sup>177</sup> There are thus three categories of behavior in Roman Catholic teaching: godly behavior, sinful behavior that damages a relationship with a fellow human being but not with God, and sinful behavior that deprives the sinner of God’s friendship. While *carismáticos* doubtless recognize a distinction between the mortal sin of murder and the venial sin of gossip, when they speak of behaviors there are but two categories: either a behavior brings one closer to God and thus is not sinful, or it distances one from God and therefore requires correction.

This is likely due to the second arena in which *carismático* beliefs differ in emphasis from Roman Catholic teaching. As Karl Schoonenberg outlines in *Sacramentum Mundi*, Roman Catholic theology posits a strong social aspect to sin. While sin arises from “the free decision taken by man,” it is not done in isolation. “Man is always someone who is bodily in the world,” Schoonenburg continues, and “he embodies himself more and more, by contact with the world, especially with his fellows. Hence too much attention should not be paid to purely inward sins.” Because of the social nature of human beings, sin is ultimately and above all “against men,”

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<sup>177</sup> *Catechism* 1856, 1863.

against “what is demanded by his and his neighbour’s being.” Schoonenburg concludes: “God himself is offended in man when we disregard God’s summons to love. Just as love of God and man is a unity, so too sin is against both.”<sup>178</sup> Roman Catholic theology of sin thus identifies two aspects to sin: there is an internal aspect to sin – sin against God – and the external aspect of sin – sin against fellow human beings. This distinction leads in turn to the distinction between venial sin against a human being and mortal sin against God (and often a human being as well). Most *carismáticos*, while they would not disagree that sin has a social dimension, focus on the sin against God, not the sin against the fellow human being. As a result, the venial/mortal distinction does not register for them. Either one turns away from God or one does not.

In spite of this difference in emphasis that exists in *carismático* and mainstream Roman Catholic perspectives on sin, *carismático* beliefs about sin derive primarily from their “premier source,” Roman Catholicism. Most prominent amongst the uniquely *carismático* emphases are distancing oneself from God (while deemphasizing more abstract concepts of “sin”) and sin against God (while deemphasizing sin against fellow human being). Both of these emphases highlight a human being’s internal disposition, particularly one’s internal disposition to choose for or against God. It is in this emphasis on the inner aspect of sin that the Pentecostal influence is most apparent in *carismático* theologies of sin.

### **Pentecostal Influences on *Carismático* Perspectives**

While determining official authoritative sources for Roman Catholic teaching is fairly straightforward, it is a fraught enterprise with Pentecostalism, a religion of independent

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<sup>178</sup> Schoonenberg, “Sin,” 88-89.

congregations. My criteria for determining whether a belief is quintessentially Pentecostal derive from a handful of essays that identify the common currents running through diverse Pentecostal theological perspectives.<sup>179</sup> Theologian Dale Coulter in particular outlines Pentecostal perspectives on sin, of which the prevailing view is that sin is the result of “conquering forces hostile to God and the self.”<sup>180</sup> That is, sin results when external forces – “demonic powers” – that God has not yet conquered gain victory over the heart of a human being.<sup>181</sup> While this isn’t the only Pentecostal view on the cause of sin, it is a prevalent one and, Coulter notes, “cultures in the global south,” including Latin American cultures, are particularly likely to “retain a strong belief in the prevalence of evil forces against which they must struggle as part of daily life.”<sup>182</sup> For instance, sociologist Cecília Loreto Mariz noted in her fieldwork in Brazil that from the Protestant Pentecostal perspective, “individuals do not deliberately choose

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<sup>179</sup> Allan Anderson, “Pentecostal and Charismatic Theology,” in David Ford, ed., *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 589-607; Dale Coulter, “‘Delivered By the Power of God’: Toward a Pentecostal Understanding of Salvation,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10 no. 4 (October 2008): 447-67; and Miroslav Volf, “Materiality of Salvation: An Investigation in the Soteriologies of Liberation and Pentecostal Theologies,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26 no. 3 (Summer 1989): 447-67.

<sup>180</sup> Dale Coulter, “‘Delivered by the Power of God’: Toward a Pentecostal Understanding of Salvation,” in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10 no. 4 (October 2008): 455.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 451.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 455.

evil but are dominated by it.”<sup>183</sup> In general, Pentecostal Protestants emphasize human powerlessness in the face of supernatural forces when discussing the causes of sin.

Some *carismáticos* share this conviction regarding the role of powerful demonic forces in causing sin. However, the majority of *carismáticos* espouse a Roman Catholic emphasis on human free will to choose for or against God as the causal factor in sin. Both of these *carismático* perspectives on the cause of sin – overpowering demonic forces or human choice – display an underlying Pentecostal influence on the RCCH: the drama of sin unfolds in a battle within human hearts. Whether that drama is a war between God and Satan or the struggle to choose against sin, it is an interior phenomenon. This Pentecostal focus on the interior aspect of sin in turn prompts *carismáticos* to deemphasize social aspects of sin and instead to emphasize that sin is a choice against God that one makes in one’s heart.

In spite of this Pentecostal influence, *carismático* perspectives on sin remain strongly Roman Catholic. Perhaps the greatest contrast between the *carismático* and Pentecostal perspectives on sin manifests in the contrition practice with which this chapter began. Pentecostals, on the one hand, believe that sin arises from conquering demonic forces and therefore, Cecília Loreto Mariz notes, conclude that “individuals do not deliberately choose evil but are dominated by it, and consequently are not responsible for their bad deeds, but are, rather,

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<sup>183</sup> Cecília Loreto Mariz, “Deliverance and Ethics: An Analysis of the Discourse of Pentecostals Who Have Recovered from Alcoholism,” in Barbara Boudewijnse et. al., eds., *More Than Opium: An Anthropological Approach to Latin American and Caribbean Pentecostal Praxis*, (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 205.

mere victims of evil.”<sup>184</sup> Because of this theological perspective that “denies the rational assumption that individuals are able to choose good or evil,” Mariz concludes, Pentecostals “[place] no emphasis on the notions of guilt or repentance.”<sup>185</sup> *Carismáticos*, on the other hand, take a strongly Roman Catholic stance. A leader at a preachers’ formation event illustrates this when he says, “God said to Adam and Eve, ‘you have everything here. I have put the world in your hands you have everything that you need to feed yourselves, but don’t touch that tree because the day you do, you are going to die.’ This is freedom. Thus, *servidor*, you must not be always blaming Satan.”<sup>186</sup> Human choice, rather than Satan, is to blame for sin. As a result,

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<sup>184</sup> Cecília Loreto Mariz, “Deliverance and Ethics: An Analysis of the Discourse of Pentecostals Who Have Recovered from Alcoholism,” in Barbara Boudewijnse et. al., eds., *More Than Opium: An Anthropological Approach to Latin American and Caribbean Pentecostal Praxis* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 205.

<sup>185</sup> Cecília Loreto Mariz, “Deliverance and Ethics: An Analysis of the Discourse of Pentecostals Who Have Recovered from Alcoholism,” in Barbara Boudewijnse et. al., eds., *More Than Opium: An Anthropological Approach to Latin American and Caribbean Pentecostal Praxis*, ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 205.

<sup>186</sup> “*Les dijo Dios: ‘Adán y Eva, ahí tienen todo. El mundo lo he puesto en sus manos y ahí tienen todas estas cosas para que ustedes se alimenten, pero no toquen aquel árbol porque el día que lo hagan van a morir.’ Ahí está la libertad. Así es de que hermano servidor, no hay que echarle la culpa siempre a Satanás.*” Transcription of preaching at a preachers’ formation event, October 20, 2103.

*carismáticos* place a very Roman Catholic emphasis on the role of human choice in causing sin, and the contrition practice arises from this belief.

At the same time, there is a uniquely *carismático* aspect even to these strongly Roman Catholic contrition practices. This aspect comes to light when viewed vis-à-vis the penitential rite of the Roman Catholic mass, the closest mainstream Catholic practice to the *carismático* contrition practice. In this rite, which occurs directly after the entrance and greeting, the gathered faithful confess to having greatly sinned, in thoughts and words, in deeds and omissions. The faithful then ask Mary, the angels, the saints, and their gathered brothers and sisters to pray for them. The rite concludes with the priest's words of absolution: "May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life." As with the Charismatic practice of kneeling to ponder one's sinfulness and implore God's mercy, so here, too, Catholics acknowledge their sinfulness and seek God's pardon.

However, a difference emerges in the subsequent event. In the Roman Catholic Mass, the priest uses a tone of supplication: *may* God have mercy on us and forgive us our sins. The *carismáticos*, in a contrasting move of utter confidence, thank God for the pardon granted. There is no subjunctive "may" here. They stand, they lift their hands, they raise fervent and joyful voices in thanks for a pardon *already granted*. "Yes, my holy Father, we thank you for the pardon that you've given us." "We're going to give praise, praise of thanks for this pardon." Their conversion experiences of encountering a loving God teach them utter confidence in God's faithfulness. There is no need for the "may" that leaves space for doubt, space for a "may *not*." There is only *post factum* gratitude.

This does not contradict official Catholic teaching. On the contrary, the Catechism affirms, "if we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse

us from all unrighteousness.”<sup>187</sup> However, in mainstream Roman Catholic practice, such as the penitential rite in the mass, there is still the subjunctive, still a tone of the implied unfulfilled, still a space left for doubt. The *carismáticos* embody and proclaim with utter Charismatic confidence a theological certainty that the Catechism implies but mainstream Roman Catholic practice downplays: God *does* have mercy, no question, no exceptions.

The confidence underlying this uniquely *carismático* emphasis in the Roman Catholic act of contrition is useful in demonstrating that *carismático* beliefs are more than a combination of an “outside” Pentecostal source layered onto mainstream Roman Catholicism. While Pentecostalism and mainstream Catholicism form the warp threads onto which the tapestry of *carismático* theologies are woven, there is also a weft that is uniquely *carismático*. This weft is personal experience, as described at the beginning of this chapter. The *carismáticos*’ experiences stemming from their conversion to Charismatic Catholicism provide them, in this instance, with ineffable certainty both of their sinfulness and of God’s utter mercy.

To summarize the contents of this chapter so far, *carismático* religious narratives reveal common convictions: sin is due to human choice and as a result, sin requires repentance through contrition practices. Furthermore, *carismáticos* do not rest on an abstract doctrine that sin is problematic; they rigorously scrutinize *what* makes sin problematic. Sin is the result of prioritizing things of *el mundo* over things of God, a choice which separates one from God. As a result, *carismáticos* characterize not only illegal actions such as murder and stealing as sinful, but also any behavior that turns one’s attention from God, including popular cultural activities such as watching television. At the same time, because the focus is on separation from God and

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<sup>187</sup> *Catechism*, 1847.

not the sinful behavior in and of itself, *carismáticos* allow potentially-sinful activities such as drinking as long as they are done moderately enough that they do not pull one's attention from God. In examining Pentecostal Protestant and mainstream Roman Catholic theologies, it becomes clear that while there is Pentecostal influence in this *carismático* focus on inward aspects of sin, *carismático* theological perspectives on sin are decidedly Roman Catholic. Finally, certain aspects of *carismáticos*' views on sin are uniquely *carismático*, particularly their confidence in God's pardon for sins, and these unique theological perspectives derive from *carismáticos*' personal experiences.

### **Transformative Strategies in *Carismáticos*' Theologies of Sin**

Returning to the larger question of this dissertation, the above analysis of *carismáticos*' theological perspectives on sin serves to demonstrate that the *carismáticos*' religiosity does not encourage passivity. The option of believing that humans are passive victims of evil forces, and thus not responsible for their sinfulness, is available to the *carismáticos*. However, they emphasize instead the Roman Catholic doctrine of human responsibility for sin. In doing so, *carismáticos* require of themselves and each other ongoing, active choices for God and against the disorienting temptations of *el mundo*.

Mahmood's theory of ethical formation as a transformative strategy, as outlined in the Introduction, provides a lens that reveals how these choices against sin and for God are ethical formation strategies. *Carismáticos*' committed vigilance to avoid even minor behaviors that distract one's attention from God assist *carismáticos* to "transform [themselves] in order to achieve a particular state of being," to use Mahmood's words. Adriana turns off her television sit-com so that the dazzling lights of the world don't distract her from God. Daniel avoids parties and dancing that would distance him from his Father's house. Rafael chooses to listen to

praise music rather than worldly music. Sofía refuses to let daily tasks keep her from connecting with God at mass. Isabel exhorts men to take down pictures of nude women and to replace them with pictures of Jesus. In all of these instances, and countless others that the *carismáticos* relate, they use deliberate techniques (turning off the television) to achieve a particular state of being (centeredness on God), precisely what Mahmood delineates as ethical formation. Gabriela, a *servidora* at St. Augustine, explicitly described in an interview how being a *carismática* has helped her to grow as a human being:

As a member of the Charismatic Renewal I am a bit ‘renewed.’... Before, I liked the movies, I liked to go to public dances... I liked to go to rodeos. I was involved in all the things of the world.... But now, my priority is the things of God.... I prefer to go to a Charismatic retreat than to a dance, because for me, the dance doesn’t fill me, doesn’t satisfy me, doesn’t give me anything for my spiritual life. The retreat fills me, it gives me more understanding, more wisdom.<sup>188</sup>

Gabriela is passionate when she discusses how worldly distractions left her empty but, as a result of her choice to prioritize the things of God, she has gained spiritual satisfaction, understanding,

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<sup>188</sup> “*Como miembro de la Renovación Carismática ya soy un poco ‘renovada’... yo antes me gustaba al cine, me gustaba ir a los bailes públicos... me gustaba ir a los jaripeos. Yo andaba en todas las cosas del mundo... Pero yo ahora mi prioridad es las cosas de Dios... Yo prefiero irme al retiro a irme al baile, porque para mi, el baile no me llena, no me satisface, no me da nada para mi vida espiritual. El retiro me llena, me da más entendimiento, más sabiduría.*” Interview with the author, November 18, 2013.

and wisdom. In short, her theological perspectives have helped her to form herself into the godly woman she chooses to be.

In conclusion, the *carismático* theological conviction that sin is the result of human choice prompts believers to undertake ongoing self-examination in order to remain centered on the things of God. Common themes in *carismático* narratives relate how in an unmoderated state human beings tend towards the shining lights of *el mundo* with its drugs and alcohol, concerts and dancing, prostitution and pornography, television, consumerism, and gossip. However, the structure of Charismatic Catholicism provides a criterion for judging the relative harm of these pursuits: how much does this activity distract one from the things of God? While *carismáticos* develop their capacity to avoid those things that disrupt their God-centered orientation, at the same time they acknowledge that their tendency to make sinful choices can still incapacitate and enslave them. “We would be liars, Lord, if we said that we are always in triumph and in victory” states the preacher at Christ the King, quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

While *carismáticos* may not be triumphant and victorious in each specific moment, nonetheless, in the larger scope of their salvation journeys, they are *bendecidos, encendidos, y en victoria* – blessed, on fire, and in victory. They are *bendecidos*, blessed with a God who doesn’t leave human beings “lying in the dust of sinfulness” but rather gives them love. Through the love of this God they are *encendidos*, set afire as God lifts, encourages, gives them new opportunities, new beginnings, and a new spirit to revive themselves in each moment. As a result, the *carismáticos* find themselves more and more *en victoria*, victorious over the temptations of *el mundo* and enjoying increasing self-control, moderation, spiritual satisfaction, understanding, and wisdom, the states of being that they strive to achieve through the ethical formation inherent to their religiosity.

## CHAPTER 4 – SOTERIOLOGY

In the previous chapter, I delineated the *carismáticos*' theological convictions that sin results from choices that distance the believer from God and that contrition practices facilitate forgiveness of sins. Yet what makes this forgiveness possible? In this chapter, I tease out common threads in *carismático* religious narratives in order to outline *carismático* theologies of salvation, or soteriologies. I begin with an outline of their soteriological beliefs, giving particular attention to the *carismáticos*' emphasis on Jesus's post-resurrection presence in the daily lives of Latina/o immigrants. I then describe *carismático* perspectives on how Jesus heals, liberates, and lends strength in daily struggles; and I analyze the relative influence of Roman Catholicism and Pentecostalism on these *carismático* soteriological beliefs. Finally, I argue that their perspectives on sin serve the *carismáticos* as a transformative strategy that provides confidence and hope in facing the difficulties that confront them in their daily lives.

### ***Carismático* Soteriological Perspectives**

In prayers, preaching, and reflections on Bible readings, *carismáticos* frequently offer affirmations of salvation based on scriptural promises. Carlos, a local *carismático* preacher, proclaimed at a parish retreat, “through Adam and Eve we were destined to live eternally far from God, but through the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus, we are destined to live eternally in everlasting life.”<sup>189</sup> Adriana, reflecting on Romans 5:12-21, summarized this classic

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<sup>189</sup> “*Por Adán y Eva nosotros estábamos destinados a vivir eternamente lejos de Dios, pero por la muerte y resurrección de Cristo Jesús, nosotros estamos destinados a vivir eternamente en la vida eterna.*” Transcription of preaching at a parish retreat, November 24, 2013.

Christian formula in simpler language: “Sin entered through Adam, through disobedience.... Through one single man sin and death entered, and by one single man, our Lord Jesus Christ, salvation entered, eternal life entered.... We know that he conquered death so that death would not exist.... Death is conquered, our Lord has given us eternal salvation.”<sup>190</sup> The *carismáticos* demonstrate a similar familiarity with formulae regarding judgment, the end times, and the afterlife, the crucial moments in the salvation journey of the individual and of humanity as a whole. Although the topic arises infrequently, preaching narratives demonstrate a communal understanding of the judgment and afterlife: “We have to be well-prepared, because the Lord will come and we don’t know at what moment, at what hour.”<sup>191</sup> “God will make a judgment, each person will have a judgment before God.”<sup>192</sup> “When one stays faithful, we know that the recompense of God... is something great that awaits us.”<sup>193</sup> “When you take the bread of life,

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<sup>190</sup> *“Por Adán entró el pecado, por la desobediencia... Por un solo hombre entró el pecado y la muerte y por un solo hombre que es nuestro Señor Jesucristo, entró la salvación, entró la vida eterna. Él tenía que venir a darnos... la vida eterna porque sabemos que la muerte él ya la venció, que la muerte no existe... la muerte está vencida, ya nuestro Señor nos dio la salvación eterna.”* Transcription of preaching at a *servidores’* vigil, October 22, 2013.

<sup>191</sup> *“Tenemos que estar bien preparados porque el Señor vendrá y no sabemos en qué momento, en qué hora.”* Transcription of preaching at parish prayer circle, November 7, 2013.

<sup>192</sup> *“Dios va a tener un juicio, cada quien va a tener un juicio enfrente de él.”*  
Transcription of conversation at a house prayer meeting, July 2, 2013.

<sup>193</sup> *“Cuando uno se mantiene fiel, sabemos que... la recompensa de Dios es algo grande*

Jesus will fulfill his promise and he will raise you on the last day.”<sup>194</sup> Vigilance, judgment, recompense, resurrection, salvation; *carismático* narratives demonstrate a firm grasp of Christian soteriological formulae.

The *carismáticos*' understandings of salvation, however, are more than obedient recitation of Church teachings. The *carismáticos* do not simply learn the words well enough to repeat them. Rather, they ingest and metabolize the Christ event formulae, representing them in illuminating metaphor. Adriana uses an extended metaphor to describe salvation at a vigil meeting of the *servidores* of her parish prayer circle:

Our Lord Jesus Christ was the promise, he is the antidote. It's like when sickness comes, we need a vaccination to be able to get well. Jesus Christ is the antidote to sin. He had to come to inject us with pardon, to grant us pardon. They give you a vaccination when you are sick because of an illness, a virus, if they know what poison to counteract. Because sin was in us... he came to give us the antidote, to give us eternal life.... We were sick, we were dying, but he arrived as the antidote. He came to us to inject life, he came to inject salvation.... He paid a very dear price for that antidote, he gave his own blood. The antidote we have is blood injected into us to grant us pardon. It's the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ

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*que nos espera.*” Transcription of preaching at a *servidores* vigil, November 12, 2013.

<sup>194</sup> “*Cuando tomas el pan de vida Jesús cumplirá su promesa y te resucitará en el último día.*” Transcription of preaching at a parish evangelization retreat, June 8, 2013.

injected into us so that... our Lord Jesus Christ might bring us to salvation from the evil that a single man brought to us.<sup>195</sup>

Through the creative application of virus and vaccine as metaphors for sin and salvation, Adriana demonstrates not only that she is familiar with salvation formulae, but also that she has absorbed them and can express the Christ event in creative, innovative new ways based on her deep-seated understanding.

While the *carismáticos* both recite and metabolize the Christ event of crucifixion and resurrection in their religious narratives, this formula comes up with surprising infrequency. Adriana's lengthy treatment was a rare exception to the rule that Christ's salvific crucifixion,

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<sup>195</sup> *“Nuestro Señor Jesucristo, él era la promesa, él es el antídoto. Es como cuando viene la enfermedad, que necesitamos esa vacuna para poder sanarnos. Jesucristo es el antídoto del pecado. Él tenía que venir para inyectarnos ese perdón, para darnos ese perdón. Esa vacuna, cuando uno está enfermo le dan a uno, porque una enfermedad, un virus le dan a uno, si saben que veneno es para contrarrestar. Porque ya el pecado ya estaba entre nosotros... Él venía a darnos ese antídoto, darnos la vida eterna... Estábamos enfermos, estábamos moribundos, pero él ya llegó siendo ese antídoto. Nos vino a inyectar la vida, nos vino a inyectar la salvación... Él lo pagó con un precio bien caro, ese antídoto él lo dio con su propia sangre. Ese antídoto que tenemos nosotros es sangre inyectada dentro de nosotros para darnos el perdón. Es la sangre inyectada dentro de nosotros de nuestro señor Jesucristo... para que, a ese mal que nos trajo un solo hombre, por nuestro señor Jesucristo nos llegó la salvación.”*

Transcription of preaching at a *servidores* vigil, October 22, 2013.

death, and resurrection come up only briefly and in passing. It is not that salvation through Jesus Christ is unimportant to the *carismáticos*. On the contrary, Jesus the saving God is the central figure of their religiosity. However, in the preaching they tend to refer to the saving Christ event as something that is a given, a foundational truth about which there is no need for lengthy description or reminder. The same is even more true of the afterlife: during my sixteen months of fieldwork I noted only eleven instances where the *carismáticos* talked about the final judgment, and only sixteen times when they discussed a heavenly reward.

Instead of crucifixion, judgment, and afterlife, the piece of the resurrection and ascension narrative that the *carismáticos* highlight with greatest frequency is Christ being *alive* post-resurrection. As outlined in Chapter 2, at some point at almost every event there is a raucous call and response that affirms that Christ lives: *¿Quién vive? ¡Cristo!* Manuel, in an interview, outlined the importance of *¡Cristo vive!* with succinct eloquence:

Through the prayer circle... Christ comes forth from where he is and walks with us, embraces us, kisses us, wipes away our tears, he himself... he is there dancing with us, he is crying with us, he is joyful with us. In every prayer circle Christ is there.... Jesus Christ [is] not a dead God whom they beat, crucified, and left buried; he is a living God, I know that he is alive, I've seen him, I've felt him, all the others feel him.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> “*Por medio del Círculo de Oración... Cristo sale de donde está y camina con nosotros, nos abraza, nos besa, nos limpia nuestras lágrimas, Él mismo... acá Él está danzando con nosotros, acá Él está bailando con nosotros, Él está llorando con nosotros, Él está alegre con nosotros. En cada Círculo de Oración ahí está Cristo... Jesucristo no*

When the *carismáticos* cry out *¡Cristo vive!* they affirm not only that he was brought back to life on the third day, but that he lives, walks, embraces, kisses, and dances among his believers. The *carismáticos*, in their narratives, express a communal, experiential understanding of the affirmation that Jesus rose again.

### **Jesus's Post-Resurrection Presence**

Further dimensions of the *carismático* conviction that Jesus is alive and present surface in their belief in Jesus's real presence in the Eucharist. Julio, while preaching at a parish evangelization retreat, articulates a particular *carismático* nuance to this doctrine: "While they were eating Jesus took the bread in his hands and having spoken the blessing he broke it and gave it to them... and [the passage is] speaking about those who were with him. When we come to the holy Eucharist, who is with Jesus? We are!"<sup>197</sup> For *carismáticos*, the real presence is not merely an abstract theological mystery but the physical proximity of a living person with them in the room. "He is here with us!" is a common cry proclaimed when the Eucharist is present.

Two particular narratives from my fieldwork exemplify common *carismático* theological themes on how the Eucharist facilitates Jesus's physical presence in their lives. The first

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*[es] un Dios muerto que lo golpearon, lo crucificaron, y lo dejaron enterrado; es un Dios vivo, yo lo sé que está vivo, lo he visto, lo he sentido, lo sientan todos los demás."*

Interview with the author, February 19, 2014.

<sup>197</sup> "Mientras comían dice, Jesús tomó en sus manos el pan y habiendo pronunciado la bendición lo partió y se lo dio... y está hablando de los que estaban con él. Cuando nosotros venimos a la santa Eucaristía, ¿Quién está con Jesús? ¡Nosotros!" Transcription of preaching at a parish evangelization retreat, June 8, 2013.

example comes from Camila, a prayer circle matriarch, speaking to the assembled *carismáticos* on an evening when Eucharistic adoration was the focus of the prayer circle gathering:

We can't see it physically, but our souls know that you [Jesus] are present in this sacrament. Our souls know, they jump with joy before the presence of the one who created them... He is present here, brother, sister, he hears you in this moment. He is in heaven as well as is in the consecrated host! We know this, it is Jesus alive, made flesh, made bread, for your love and for mine. It the living Jesus, the Eucharist. In this moment open the doors of your heart and let him enter. Tell him to make his home in you, to live in you.<sup>198</sup>

The second example of Eucharist facilitating Jesus's presence comes from an interview with Verónica, a fashionable Mexican mother in her thirties who is relatively new to the prayer circle *servidores* team. She was speaking about her initial concern that she hadn't had any of the direct mystical encounters common amongst her fellow *carismáticos*. She began by telling me what

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<sup>198</sup> “*Nosotros no podemos ver físicamente, pero nuestras almas saben que tú estas presente en este sacramento. Nuestras almas saben, saltan de gozo ante la presencia del que les ha creado... Él ésta aquí presente hermano, hermana, él está escuchándote en este momento. Así como está en el cielo, ¡él está en la hostia consagrada! Lo sabemos, es Jesús vivo hecho carne, hecho pan, por tu amor y el mío. Es Jesús vivo Eucaristía, en este momento abre las puertas de tu corazón y déjalo entrar. Dile que haga morada en ti, que él viva en ti.*” Transcription of preaching at a parish prayer circle, September 6, 2013.

she heard a preacher say:

“God isn’t a feeling to feel, God is a reality who is with you. Whether you see him or not, God is with you. It’s a promise that he made to you and God never breaks his promises. God promised to be with me every day of my life,” he says, “and he is with you.”... Now I come to the *Santísimo* [Eucharistic adoration], and I say: “I don’t see you with my physical eyes, but I see you with the eyes of my soul, I know that you are here in living presence, in real presence, that you see me, that you hear me.” Something inside of me makes me come to the *Santísimo*, to be there for two, three hours, simply knowing that God our Lord is there, and to accompany him in his sole presence.<sup>199</sup>

These are but two of the many examples of *carismático* understandings of how the Eucharist manifests Jesus’s presence in their lives. Two important theological points regarding Jesus’s post-resurrection location emerge from these representative narratives regarding the real

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<sup>199</sup> “*Dios no es un sentimiento para sentirlo, Dios es una realidad que está contigo. Lo veas o no lo veas, Dios está contigo. Es una promesa que él te hizo y Dios nunca falla a las promesas. Dios prometió estar conmigo todos los días de mi vida,*” dice, “*y él está contigo.*” ..*Ahora, yo vengo al Santísimo, y digo: “no te veo con mis ojos físicos, pero te veo con mis ojos del alma, sé que tú estas aquí en presencia viva, en presencia real, que tú me miras, que tú me oyes.” Algo dentro de mí me hace venir al Santísimo y estarme dos, tres horas ahí, simplemente sabiendo de que Dios nuestro Señor está ahí y acompañarlo en su sola presencia.*” Interview with the author, February 7, 2014.

presence in the Eucharist.

The first point is that Jesus, post-resurrection, is *in* the Eucharist and thus is in the same physical space as the *carismáticos* who kneel in adoration. This concept pervades both Camila's and Verónica's statements, in phrases such as "our souls... jump with joy before the presence of the one who created them," "this is Jesus alive, made flesh," "I know that you are here in living presence, in real presence," and so forth. Furthermore, as explained in Chapter 1, the *carismáticos* conflate Jesus and God both in language and in attribute. These passages are no exception. Camila speaks of the presence in the Eucharist as the one who created human souls and the living Jesus; Verónica refers to the Eucharistic presence as the God of the Psalms who promises to accompany us in every moment of our lives. Since the Father and the Son are both God, the *carismáticos* seamlessly interweave the attributes of God the Father into the presence of God the Son in the Eucharist.

This understanding of the *carismáticos'* views on the Father and the Son help clarify the second theological point regarding how the Eucharist manifests Jesus's presence. Camila calls to the gathered *carismáticos*, "tell him to make his home in you, to live in you." Kneeling before the displayed Eucharist gives *carismáticos* the opportunity to allow Jesus-who-is-present to enter their hearts and dwell in them. Jesus's Eucharistic presence blends into – and facilitates – presence in human hearts. Thus, for the *carismáticos*, Jesus, post-resurrection, is not only in the room when the Eucharist is present but also dwells in their hearts and in their beings.

Nor do the *carismáticos* limit Jesus's present-day location to these two spaces, the Eucharistic host and human hearts. *Carismáticos* draw on Matthew 18:20 as a further resource in locating Jesus post-resurrection: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there

among them.”<sup>200</sup> *Carismáticos* cite this verse at gatherings to affirm, since multiple people are gathered in Jesus’s name, that Jesus is therefore physically present with them. For instance, a preacher at a parish evangelization retreat prayed these words aloud (conflating Father, Lord, and Jesus): “Holy Father, thank you Lord, because you are in the midst of us, because in your word you say that where two or three gather in your name, there you are, Lord, there you are, Father of love and Father of mercy, thank you Lord!”<sup>201</sup> The *carismáticos* take seriously and literally Jesus’s biblical promise that where two or more are gathered, he is *there*.

Other *carismáticos*, in speaking about Jesus’s location post-resurrection, share Camila’s perspective: he is in heaven, awaiting to welcome his believers whose salvation he assured. Still other *carismático* preachers proclaim that “Jesus is beside you, the person beside you is Jesus,”<sup>202</sup> referring to the scriptural affirmation that one encounters Jesus in other people.<sup>203</sup> Many *carismáticos* believe Jesus to be in all of these places: in the Eucharist, in human hearts, where two are more are gathered, in the people standing beside them in the pews, and in heaven. Furthermore, most *carismáticos* feel confident concluding that if scripture and tradition confirm

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<sup>200</sup> New Revised Standard Version

<sup>201</sup> “*Padre Santo gracias Señor, porque estás en medio de nosotros, porque en tu palabra dices que donde dos o tres se reúnen en tu nombre, allí estas tú Señor, allí estas tú, padre de amor y padre de misericordia, gracias Señor.*” Transcription of preaching at a parish evangelization retreat, June 8, 2013.

<sup>202</sup> “*Jesús esta a su lado, el hermano que está a su lado es Jesús.*” Transcription of preaching at a parish prayer circle, June 20, 2103.

<sup>203</sup> For instance, Matthew 25:35, “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat...”

that Jesus is in each of these different locations post-resurrection, then Jesus must in fact be everywhere, in every moment.

Thus a *carismático* who is a general contractor can proclaim with confidence, “when you go up a ladder, Christ Jesus is going to be with you, look, believe it! Christ Jesus is going to be there chatting with you, is going to be holding the ladder for you, because Christ is like that.”<sup>204</sup> Another contractor from the same prayer circle states, “when I’m in my van and I’m on the highway... when I see the sky, the air, the highways, the people, I see Jesus.”<sup>205</sup> In more intimate terms, a prayer circle *servidora* says, “he is my best friend, I always feel that he’s with me. Now I don’t feel alone like I used to.”<sup>206</sup> In short, the *carismáticos*’ combined narratives reveal their collective belief that the post-resurrection Jesus everywhere: on his heavenly throne, on the highways, in the consecrated host, and on the worksite holding a ladder.

### **Jesus’s Post-Resurrection Actions**

For the *carismáticos*, however, Jesus being physically present in every moment and in every place is not the end of their soteriologies but merely the foundation for that which gives Jesus’s resurrection the greatest significance to them. In their narratives, it is not merely the fact that Jesus is present, but rather *what* Jesus is doing while he is present, that demonstrates fully

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<sup>204</sup> Transcription of preaching at a house prayer meeting, July 2, 2013.

<sup>205</sup> “*Cuando estoy en mi camioneta... y voy en la carretera... cuando veo el cielo, el aire, las carreteras, la misma gente, veo a Jesús.*” Transcription of discussion at a *servidores* meeting, October 1, 2013.

<sup>206</sup> “*Es el mejor amigo, siempre lo siento que está conmigo. Ya no me siento sola como antes.*” Interview with the author, March 11, 2014.

what “Jesus is savior” means to the *carismáticos*. The first insight that *carismático* narratives give into *what* Jesus is doing is glimpsed in the *servidora*’s words, as quoted above: “I always feel that he’s with me. Now I don’t feel alone like I used to.” *Carismáticos* emphasize that Jesus is with believers in times when previously they would have felt alone.

Time and again the *carismáticos* preach a comforting reminder to each other: the God-who-is-Jesus is with them, particularly when they feel alone in their troubles. Manuel, the coordinator of his parish prayer circle, speaks of this in terms of Jesus calming storms:

Jesus has the power to calm the storm in our life. Christ Jesus wants us to put the storm that we are passing through in his hands, in his own hands. Christ Jesus wants us to put it in his holy hands, because he can calm everything, he calms it completely, an unshakeable peace remains.<sup>207</sup>

Rosa María, preaching at a women’s retreat, speaks of Jesus as “the one who – in moments of trial, in moments of anxiety, in moments of breaking – doesn’t abandon us but rather tells us ‘I am beside you.’”<sup>208</sup> Jesus’s post-resurrection presence gains a specificity in these examples that

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<sup>207</sup> “*Jesús tiene poder para calmar esa tempestad en nuestra vida. Cristo Jesús quiere que se la pongamos entre sus manos, en sus propias manos esa tempestad que estamos pasando. Cristo Jesús quiere que la pongamos en sus santas manos, porque él puede calmarlo todo, él lo calma completamente, se queda una paz irrompible.*”

Transcription of preaching at a house prayer meeting, July 2, 2013.

<sup>208</sup> “*¡Gloria a Cristo Jesús! Yo te invito a que te pongas de pie y le des un aplauso... a él que está aquí presente, a él que en momento de prueba, en momento de angustia, que en*

are representative of myriad similar statements by other *carismáticos*: Jesus is present at a person's side at all times, including – and in the eyes of many, most particularly – in times of trouble.

*Carismáticos* are also specific regarding the ways that Jesus has assisted people in times of trouble. The common themes found in their religious narratives on the forms of assistance that Jesus lends fall roughly into three overlapping categories: *sanación* (healing), *liberación* (liberation), and lending strength. *Sanación* is a healing act, most commonly healing from physical illness. Roberto, a local deacon preaching at a regional conference, described one such healing act: “My cancer went away, the Lord cured it. I don’t have cancer now, I’m free of cancer through the glory of the Lord. The Lord healed me, because the Christ whom I preach is a Christ of power, is a Christ who heals.”<sup>209</sup> There are many such testimonies of Jesus performing healing acts, and the *carismáticos*’ understandings of the ways in which Jesus heals vary considerably.

While Deacon Roberto isn’t specific about the manner of healing, others provide details on the healing mechanism. Renata, a mother and long-time member of her parish prayer circle, had been suffering from hemorrhages for ten years. She tells the story of how Jesus healed her:

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*momento de quebrantamiento, no nos abandona sino que nos dice ‘yo estoy a la par tuya.’”*

Transcription of preaching at a women’s retreat, May 19, 2012.

<sup>209</sup> “*Ese cáncer se fue, el Señor lo curó. Ya no tengo cáncer, estoy libre de cáncer por la gloria del Señor. El Señor me sanó, porque el Cristo que yo predico es un Cristo de poder, es un Cristo que sana.*” Transcription of preaching at a regional conference, October 6, 2013.

I remember that I prayed with all my heart and in a way in which I had never approached my Jesus because the reading about the woman with the hemorrhage touched me so much... Jesus had compassion on her and healed her with his power. I remember that I said to him that day: “Lord, if you had compassion on that woman then, have compassion on me now, I believe you are present here.” They were passing through with the *Santísimo* while they were offering healing, and I said to him, I’m standing praying to him, I’m talking with him and I say to him: “I can’t touch you because there are so many people,” but “I believe that you with your shadow, with only your shadow, you’re going to do a miracle.”... I say that he healed me because when I went to work that Monday... I was cleaning the house and I felt like something burst in me, like something broke or happened inside of me and there was a lot of blood, hemorrhages like I’d never had began and I was shocked.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> *Yo me acuerdo que yo le pedí con todo mi corazón y como nunca me había acercado a mi Jesús, yo le pedí con todo mi corazón porque esa lectura me tocó mucho a mí, de la persona esa que tenía esas hemorragias... Jesús tuvo compasión de ella y la sanó con su poder. Entonces yo ese día, yo me acuerdo que yo le dije: “Señor, si Tú tuviste compasión de esa mujer en aquel entonces, ten compasión de mí ahora, yo creo Tú estás aquí presente” y estaban pasando al Santísimo en ese, en ese rato cuando da la sanación, entonces yo le di, yo estaba parada orando con Él, yo estaba hablando con Él, le dije: “Yo no te puedo tocar porque hay mucha gente”, pero, “Yo creo en que Tú con tu sombra, con solo tu sombra, Tú vas a hacer el milagro.” ..Yo digo que Él me sanó*

Renata then relates how she went to the hospital for an emergency hysterectomy, a surgery she had been wanting but hadn't been able to afford. She then explains the relationship between Jesus's healing power and her insurance policy:

[Jesus] was preparing the way because I didn't have insurance, but soon before this happened, through the grace of God, I got a job with health insurance to cover me because [Jesus] already knew what was going to happen to me, and I say that Jesus was there in everything.... It would have cost him nothing to heal me in the moment [the *Santísimo* passed by], but there are many ways in which he heals.

Renata discerns Jesus's healing work as his finding her a job with health insurance so that she could afford the hysterectomy that would stop her hemorrhaging. Others discern Jesus's healing work in dreams or visions. During an interview, Gladys, a *servidora* at St. Augustine, related how Jesus healed her in a vision:

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*porque para mí a, cuando yo fui al, a trabajar el lunes... yo limpiando la casa cuando yo sentí como que algo me explotó dentro de mí, como si algo se rompió o algo pasó dentro de mí y eso fue mucha, mucha sangre, empezaron las hemorragias más fuertes que nunca había tenido y yo me asusté... Él estaba preparando el camino porque yo no tenía aseguranza, y recién, por la gracia de Dios, me dan ese trabajo y ya me cubre la aseguranza porque Él ya sabía lo que me iba a venir, entonces yo digo que todo, en todo, estaba Jesús allí acomodando todo y era para que todo fuera, yo digo que a Él nada le costaba sanarme ese momento, pero hay muchas maneras de cómo Él sana.” Interview with the author, March 11, 2014.*

There were times when my head hurt a great deal. One time, it was like I entered a dream and I saw the divine child Jesus. He brought pills, and I said, “give me one” because I was in great pain and I couldn’t get out of bed. I said to him, “give me one, little child, give me one so that my headache goes away,” and he stuck out the bottle of pills. This was the vision that I had and the headache went away and hasn’t returned.<sup>211</sup>

Gladys experiences Jesus’s healing as something performed through a vision. Renata discerns Jesus healing her through providing health insurance. Other speak of Jesus healing them through prayer or through a fellow *carismático*’s touch. Although the *carismáticos* vary in their understandings of the ways in which Jesus heals, they are in full agreement that Jesus does, in fact, heal illnesses when he is physically present with them in their daily lives.

The *carismáticos* also understand *sanación* as healing illnesses that are not physical. They speak of Jesus healing spiritual and emotional unwellness as well, particularly in their language of “Jesus healing hearts.” A preacher at a women’s retreat speaks of this spiritual sense of healing:

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<sup>211</sup> *“Había veces que me dolía mucho la cabeza. Una vez entré, como entré sueño yo vi al divino niño Jesús que traía las pastillas, y yo le decía: dame una, porque era un dolor bien fuerte que yo no me podía levantar de la cama. Le decía: dame una niñito, dame una que se me quite el dolor de cabeza. Él asomaba así las pastillas, el frasco y eso fue una visión que yo tuve y se me quitó el dolor de cabeza y ya no me ha vuelto.”*

Interview with the author, March 4, 2014.

Tell Christ to heal you! He is healing hearts, he continues healing hearts broken by anger, by hatred, by the past. Tell Christ to continue healing you, that you want to leave your former life behind. Allow him to heal your interior heart, allow him to heal physical illness!<sup>212</sup>

*Carismáticos* speak of Jesus healing emotional illness as well, depression being the most common form. In the following example, a woman whom Jesus cured from depression offers advice to a friend:

You have to say, “I reprimand this in the name of Jesus, and put it at the foot of the cross so that he sends it where it belongs.” All day, say, “come Lord Jesus with your Holy Spirit, take away these bad thoughts, Lord, I can do it in you who strengthens me.” Speak to him all day so that he lifts all those fears that you have, because thus it happened to me.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> “*¡Dile a Cristo que te sane! Él está sanando corazones, él sigue sanando corazones roto por el rencor, por ese odio, por ese pasado. Dile a Cristo que te siga sanando, que quieres dejar tu vida. Permítele que sane tu corazón interior, ¡permítele que sane esa enfermedad física!*” Transcription of preaching at a women’s retreat, May 19, 2012.

<sup>213</sup> “*Tienes que decir: yo reprendo todo esto en el nombre de Jesús y los colocó en sus pies de la cruz para que él los envíe al lugar que les corresponde y todo el día decir: Señor, Ven Señor Jesús con tu espíritu Santo, quítame estos malos pensamientos Señor, todo lo puedo en ti que me fortaleces, háblale todo el día para que se lleve todos esos*

*Sanación*, in its full scope of healing depression, headaches, hemorrhaging, cancer, and hearts broken by anger, is what the *carismáticos* report Jesus is *doing* in his post-resurrection presence with them.

*Sanación*, particularly in its forms of emotional and spiritual healing, blends into the second way that Jesus assists the *carismáticos* as he is present with them: *liberación*, liberation. Whereas *sanación* refers to healing pain and illness, *liberación* refers to freeing believers from anger, foul language, addiction, and the influences the Enemy. While *carismáticos* are able to articulate this difference, they commonly pair these words in the phrase “*sanación y liberación*,” demonstrating that for the *carismáticos*, healing and liberation are intertwined, even inseparable. A preacher links healing and liberation while praying aloud at a parish prayer circle:

I ask you, Lord, to touch their minds and their hearts, to heal the injured heart, to break the chains of anger, of hatred, of resentment. Because it doesn't please you, heal all illness, Lord. Heal cancer, diabetes, because only you have the power to heal and liberate.<sup>214</sup>

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*miedos que tú tienes porque así me pasaba a mi.*” Transcription of discussion at a house prayer meeting, July 2, 2013.

<sup>214</sup> *Te pido que toques su mente y su corazón Señor, que sanes ese corazón herido Señor, que rompas esas cadenas Señor de rencor, de odio, de resentimiento. Porque eso a ti no te agrada Señor, sana Señor toda enfermedad. Sana Señor Jesús ese cáncer, esa diabetes, Señor, porque solamente tú tienes el poder Señor para sanar y liberar.*

Transcription of preaching at a parish prayer circle, October 10, 2013.

Here, the preacher links healing injured hearts to freeing believers from anger and summarizes Jesus's powers in the combined phrase "to heal and liberate." Likewise, the preacher at the women's retreat quoted above states in the same breath, "allow him to heal your interior heart, allow him to heal physical illness!" Healing and liberation are two, often inseparable, examples of how the physically-present Jesus aids those who are hurting.

In addition to healing and liberation, the *carismático* narratives bear collective witness to a third way that Jesus assists people in their troubles. Above, Manuel spoke of Jesus holding the ladder for a painter. Miguel, who is also a contractor, gains assistance from Jesus with his work, as well: "When I have don't have a lot of work, I say 'Jesus, you said you wanted me to follow you, right? You said you're going to help me, so I need some work, so I've got to work.' And I feel like he says 'all right,' and somehow work comes up."<sup>215</sup> Many *carismáticos* speak similarly of God-who-is-Jesus assisting them in times of underemployment. Deportation and immigration issues are also a common site of Jesus's salutary intervention. Gabriela, a mother of two grown boys, gave testimonies of divine help for her undocumented sons. In the following story, she relates how Jesus the Just Judge gave practical assistance in a situation of possible deportation:

[My son] was driving on the highway. He wasn't able to drive because he had been deported.... Then he... saw that the police were following him. He was carrying the prayer [of the Just Judge] in his bag.... When he saw that they were going to stop him, he says, "I remembered that I was carrying the prayer that you had given me, and I put my hand where I was carrying the prayer [and] said, 'My God, may your will be done, because now they are going to deport me.'" ... The

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<sup>215</sup> Interview with the author, November 22, 2013.

police stopped him and... asked him for his identification, and he gave it to him, and the policeman wrote the ticket. The miracle was that when [my son] saw the ticket, the ticket didn't have his name on it, it only had the police report but my son's name didn't appear on it.... I said to my son, "God saved you, son. God saved you... only because you put your hand where you were carrying the prayer."<sup>216</sup>

In this instance, Jesus, in his form as the Just Judge, offers practical assistance by stopping a police officer from writing Gabriela's son's name on a ticket, thus making the infraction untraceable and saving her son from deportation. In each of these instances, Jesus is a living, active, intervening presence whose post-resurrection assistance is not only spiritual but also

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<sup>216</sup> *“Él iba en la carretera manejando. Él tampoco podía manejar porque estaba deportado... entonces dice que vio que la policía lo iba siguiendo. Cargaba la oración en su bolsa... Cuando él vio que lo iban a parar, que lo único dice má, dice, ni siquiera le pedí lo único que agarré el, me acordé que traía la oración que usted me había dado y me puse mi mano donde yo traía la oración dice. Pues dije “Dios mío que se haga tu voluntad, porque ahorita me van a deportar”... La policía lo paró y que lo paró y que le pidió pues su identificación y que él se la dio, y que él, el policía hizo el ticket. Qué fue el milagro que cuando él vio el ticket, el ticket no llevaba su nombre, sólo llevaba el reporte del policía pero el nombre de mi hijo no aparecía. El nombre de mi hijo no apareció.... A mi hijo, le digo: “Dios te salvó hijo. Dios te salvó le digo y mira que sólo porque pusiste la mano donde tú llevabas tu oración.” Interview with the author, November 18, 2013.*

comfortingly practical in struggles such as unemployment and deportation where Latina/o immigrants may feel particularly powerless and alone.

There is one additional way that *carismáticos* speak of Jesus giving assistance, both practical and spiritual: Jesus gives them strength. This is a broader narrative theme that in many ways overarches all of the previously-mentioned forms of assistance. One preacher at a healing retreat named Jesus “a brother who offers us everything, who offers us eternal life, new life, new strength, who offers to wipe away our tears, to heal our wounds.”<sup>217</sup> Here, offering strength is part and parcel of Jesus’s comforting and healing work. Deacon Roberto, who gave his *testimonio* regarding Jesus healing him from cancer, emphasizes the strength that Jesus lends in difficult moments: “Strength is only in Christ. He strengthens us in difficult moments, in moment of pain, in moments of worry. He is always with us.”<sup>218</sup> The post-resurrection Jesus “is always with” the *carismáticos*. Furthermore, he is not only *with* them, he is also *doing for* them: healing, liberating, assisting, and lending strength.

### **Roman Catholic Influences on *Carismático* Soteriological Perspectives**

When speaking about the post-resurrection Jesus, *carismáticos* emphasize his helping presence in day-to-day struggles rather than his role in procuring their salvation. “Jesus as

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<sup>217</sup> “*Un hermano que nos ofrece todo, que nos ofrece vida eterna, que nos ofrece vida nueva, que nos ofrece nuevas fuerzas, que nos ofrece que, limpiar nuestra lágrimas, que nos ofrece sanar nuestras heridas.*” Transcription of preaching at a healing retreat, June 29, 2013.

<sup>218</sup> “*La fortaleza, solamente, en Cristo. Él nos fortalece, en los momentos duros, en los momentos de dolor, en los momentos de angustia. Él siempre está con nosotros.*” Transcription of preaching at a regional conference, October 6, 2013.

eternal savior” is something the *carismáticos* do not articulate to any great degree. It is not that salvation through Jesus Christ is unimportant to the *carismáticos*. However, in their preaching they refer to the salvific Christ event only in passing. The same is even more true of the afterlife. Miguel, a contractor from Mexico and a father of three, summed up the pervasive attitude toward salvation and the afterlife that I found amongst the *carismáticos*: “I feel more calm right now.... If I go to the doctor and he says Miguel you’re going to die tomorrow, believe me I’m going to be a little nervous, but you know, what do you say?” He shrugs. “He wants me. Yeah.” In short, Miguel – like the majority of *carismáticos* I met – simply doesn’t sweat the afterlife. Certainly he is “a little nervous” because of the *carismáticos*’ sense of what is at stake with the judgment that occurs after death, as outlined above. Yet Miguel displays a certain casual assurance that all will be well for him after death.

In this relative disregard for atonement and the afterlife, the *carismáticos* display a quintessentially Roman Catholic faith in the reconciling powers of Church sacraments. Julio, preaching at a parish retreat, outlines this Roman Catholic belief that is not unique to the *carismáticos*: “Jesus’s promise is marvelous: he will raise us on the last day! But if we don’t take communion, do you believe that he’s going to raise us? The Lord isn’t going to raise those who don’t eat his body and blood.”<sup>219</sup> Building on this theme of the mandatory link between salvation and the sacrament of communion, he cites Jesus in Matthew 26:28: “This is my blood

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<sup>219</sup> “*Maravillosa la promesa de Jesús, nos resucitará en el último día, pero si no comulgamos, ¿cree usted que nos va a resucitar? El señor no va a resucitar a los que no comen su cuerpo y su sangre.*” Transcription of preaching at a parish evangelization retreat, June 8, 2013.

with which the covenant is confirmed, blood that is poured out for many.”<sup>220</sup> Julio then points out a significant detail in this passage: “Here, the Word of God doesn’t say ‘blood that is poured out for *everyone*.’ No, ‘for *many*.’ Who are the many of which the Word of God speaks? We who do the will of God, we who confess and receive the sacraments of the Church.”<sup>221</sup> In short, on the day of resurrection, Jesus will save only those for whom he poured out his blood: namely, those who partake in the sacraments of reconciliation and communion. This belief allows a certain assurance for Catholics who are diligent in their observance of sacramental requirements.

The *carismáticos*, furthermore, emphasize that one cannot know when the moment of judgment will come – be it at the time of one’s death or at the time of Jesus’s Second Coming. This uncertainty provides a strong motivating factor for steady and faithful devotion. Thus the *carismáticos*, for whom obeying the mandates of the Church is an indispensable part of their faithful devotion, do not feel a great deal of concern regarding salvation and the afterlife and what will happen to them when Jesus comes in his glory. As a result of this Roman Catholic conviction, they do not give the afterlife a great deal of emphasis in their preaching.

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<sup>220</sup> “*Esto es mi sangre con la que se confirma la alianza, sangre que es derramada en favor de muchos,*” *Dios Habla Hoy* version.

<sup>221</sup> “*Aquí la palabra de Dios no está diciendo ‘sangre que es derramada en favor de todos.’ No, ‘en favor de muchos.’ ¿Cuales son esos muchos de lo que habla la palabra de Dios? Los que hacemos la voluntad de Dios, los que nos confesamos y estamos cumpliendo con los sacramentos de la Iglesia.*” Transcription of preaching at a parish evangelization retreat, June 8, 2013.

The Roman Catholicity of *carismáticos*' soteriological convictions also manifests in their beliefs regarding Jesus's post-resurrection location. Jesus's real presence in the Eucharist is, of course, distinctly Roman Catholic. Furthermore, when Camila urges those kneeling before the Eucharist to open their hearts, let Jesus enter, and ask him to make his home in them, this also resonates with Roman Catholic teaching. Her words recall the Catechism, which states, in its discussion of the Lord's Prayer, "'Our Father who art in heaven' is rightly understood to mean that God is in the hearts of the just, as in his holy temple. At the same time, it means that those who pray should desire the one they invoke to dwell in them."<sup>222</sup> References to scriptural promises that Jesus is present whenever two or more are gathered in his name, or that one encounters Jesus in other people, also have firm Roman Catholic roots, as both are commonly cited in mainstream Catholicism.

### **Pentecostal Influences on *Carismático* Soteriological Perspectives**

Yet the Pentecostal influence is strong in *carismáticos*' emphasis that Jesus lives, walks, embraces, kisses, dances, cries, and is someone whom the *carismáticos* can see, feel, and touch. This perspective is not foreign to Roman Catholicism, particularly Latina/o Catholicism. Cuban Catholic theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz, for example, writes of Jesus as the faithful companion who walks and talks with those who suffer in their daily lives and who seeks personal relationship with his believers.<sup>223</sup> Personal experience is also a strong factor in *carismáticos*' understandings that Jesus is present, always, everywhere; this becomes most apparent when the

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<sup>222</sup> *Catechism*, 2794.

<sup>223</sup> Sammy Alfaro, *Divino Compañero: Toward a Hispanic Pentecostal Christology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 113.

*carismáticos* speak of Jesus accompanying them in their daily lives, on the highways and ladders of life. Yet it is Pentecostalism that has the most palpable presence in these beliefs.

Theologian Miroslav Volf explains that Pentecostals do not “side with classical Protestants in claiming that salvation is spiritual and inward only, since that would be opting for only half the gospel. Salvation concerns both the inner and outward ‘man;’ the gospel is good news for both soul and body.”<sup>224</sup> The gospel, in this perspective, is not just the good news of eternal salvation but also good news of healing for the body in earthly life. Theologian Dale Coulter concurs, pointing out that God, to the Pentecostals, is “immanently involved in the liberation of creation” which encompasses “palpable changes” both internal and external.<sup>225</sup> The Pentecostal Jesus cares for the spiritual *and* the physical well-being of those who follow him.

Moving from these broad overviews of Pentecostal theology as a whole towards Latin American Pentecostals in particular, Pentecostalism scholar Allan Anderson notes that the “Pentecostal ‘full gospel’ ... contain[s] good news for all life’s problems, particularly relevant in the societies of the developing world where disease is rife and access to adequate healthcare is a luxury. ‘Salvation’ is an all-embracing term, usually meaning a sense of well-being evidenced in

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<sup>224</sup> Miroslav Volf, “Materiality of Salvation: An Investigation in the Soteriologies of Liberation and Pentecostal Theologies,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26 no. 3 (Summer 1989): 459.

<sup>225</sup> Coulter, “Delivered,” 451.

freedom from sickness, poverty, and misfortune, as well as in deliverance from sin and evil.”<sup>226</sup> Here the links between Pentecostals and *carismáticos* become explicit: salvation that comes from Jesus includes physical healing, alleviating poverty, and averting misfortune. Theologian Sammy Alfaro notes that Latina/o immigrant Pentecostals in the United States “view Jesus as *El Divino Compañero* – their Divine Companion – the one who walks with them in midst of pain and struggle and makes provision for their needs through his Spirit.”<sup>227</sup> All of these statements are apt descriptions of the *carismáticos* as well. Thus when the *carismáticos* speak of *sanación*, Jesus healing bodies and healing hearts; *liberación*, liberation from that which afflicts them; and the practical assistance that Jesus provides on the worksite or when encountering law enforcement officers, the influence of Pentecostal mentors is clear.

To summarize the points made in this chapter thus far, the common threads within *carismático* religious narratives reveal soteriologies that emphasize the attributes of Jesus that address Latina/o immigrants’ most pressing concerns: a loving God who heals, who liberates, who accompanies, who assists, and who offers strength to Latina/o immigrants in the United States, who are often weary in body and in spirit. The *carismáticos* emphasize these themes to remind each other in the oft-discouraging journey of daily life that they are not alone, that Jesus is not only *with* them now, but *doing* miracles on their behalf. That is not to say that Jesus, for the *carismáticos*, is only a healing and liberating companion who transforms daily life as

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<sup>226</sup> Allan Anderson, “Pentecostal and Charismatic Theology,” in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 596-97.

<sup>227</sup> Alfaro, *Divino*, 134.

Latina/o immigrant Charismatic Catholics live it while on earth. As demonstrated above, the common threads in their narratives *also* affirm that Jesus ascended into heaven, is seated at God's right hand, and will come again in glory. Their specific narratives delineate the particular ways in which these Roman Catholic and Pentecostal promises of spiritual and physical healing, liberation, and salvation have manifested in their personal experiences. Encounters with Jesus in *lo cotidiano* lead the *carismáticos* to a dynamic, flexible, lived theology of the myriad ways in which Jesus is intimately involved in the most mundane of everyday moments.

### **Transformative Strategies in *Carismático* Soteriologies**

Returning again to the larger question of whether *carismático* religiosity encourages passivity, Kwok Pui-lan's postcolonial perspective elucidates the transformative nature of *carismático* soteriological convictions. As outlined in Chapter 1, Kwok argues that many disenfranchised people hold a "historical imagination of the concrete and not the abstract, a hope that is more practical and therefore not so easily disillusioned," the hope for a place on the beach to dry their fish, seeds for the next planting season, or sufficient money to send their children to school. From this perspective, when the *carismáticos* gather to offer their contrition and to pray for healing and liberation, they are not merely escaping into a two-hour, feel-good prayer session. Rather, they are taking action to enlist the efficacious aid of the post-resurrection Jesus who intimately involves himself in the messy imperfections of human lives in order to heal and transform. Their personal experiences, and the experiences their fellow *carismáticos* report, offer concrete hope that once again Jesus will hold a ladder, liberate from addiction, alleviate loneliness, heal cancer and hemorrhages and headaches, or prevent deportation. Having crossed the southern border of the United States, often at great risk, in order to secure a stronger economic future, the *carismáticos* place their trust in Jesus's salvific intervention not only in the

eternal timeframe but also, more urgently, in the temporal timeframe where their children's well-being depends upon concrete assistance. In making these prayers, personal experiences have taught the *carismáticos* that they are taking concrete action to manifest practical aspirations that will transform their lives and the lives of their families.

Yet the *carismáticos* add another dimension to this practical hope. Kwok emphasizes that disenfranchised women rest their hope on seeds for next spring rather than the final eschaton or the Kingdom of God. Certainly, the *carismáticos* emphasize Jesus's aid in the concrete and practical and de-emphasize the end-times as do the women about whom Kwok writes. Yet there is an additional explanation for why the *carismáticos* might deemphasize concepts such as afterlife and eternal salvation, beyond Kwok's conclusion that disenfranchised people hold a historical imagination "of the concrete and not the abstract." *Carismáticos'* experiences of Jesus aiding them in concrete, earthly situations also bolsters their confidence that Jesus *can* and *does* fulfill his promises. These concrete experiences of earthly healing and liberation feed *carismático* confidence that Jesus fulfills the grander, more abstract promises of forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation.

In conclusion, the soteriologies emerging from the common threads of *carismático* religious narratives are grounded in Roman Catholic formulae of crucifixion, resurrection, and salvation. Yet these formulae, and discussion of the afterlife, are relatively infrequent in the *carismáticos'* narratives. Instead, the common threads of these narratives emphasize *carismático* convictions that Jesus is present in the here and now. Certain facets of this belief are decidedly Roman Catholic – particularly Jesus being present in the Eucharist, in human hearts, when two or more are gathered, or in one's fellow human beings. Yet the facet of Jesus's presence that emphasizes Jesus healing, liberating, lending practical assistance, and accompanying Latina/o

immigrants in their daily lives shows a strong Pentecostal influence. Yet these Pentecostal-influenced experiences in turn gain a Roman Catholic flavor when the *carismáticos* display firm confidence that Jesus will forgive them their sins, a forgiveness of which, as Roman Catholics, they feel in great need. Their experiences of being *bendecidos y en victoria* – blessed and victorious – with Jesus aiding them in their daily struggles allows them to be *encendidos* – on fire – with exuberant confidence that they will also be *en victoria* in the eternal scope as well.

## CHAPTER 5 – ADDICTION AND CONVERSION

Juan, a Mexican father of three in his late forties, sits across the Formica tabletop from me at a bustling urban McDonalds. I turn on my portable digital tape recorder and set it on the table between us. I have seen him preach numerous times at Charismatic prayer circles, but he's meeting with me today to share his testimony in fuller detail. It is toward the end of a long, cold, winter, and throughout the interview he remains bundled in a thick black winter jacket and a black and red knit cap. Over a background of conversations at nearby tables and piped-in fast food restaurant music, Juan fills in the details of his journey from alcoholic drug addict to *carismático* preacher and musician:<sup>228</sup>

I had a lot of problems with addiction. I had drunk alcohol since I was twelve or thirteen. I was a drug addict. For two years I wanted cocaine, I wanted to have all the cocaine in the world. I did cocaine daily. Not weekly, no, daily. It was like Tylenol, like a medicine. My head hurt, my chest hurt, my feet hurt, I felt sad? Cocaine, cocaine, cocaine. I was afraid to sleep, to close my eyes, because when I slept my nose exploded with blood because of how hard I had to work to breathe. I was bathed in blood, my whole face was bathed entirely in blood, and I felt like I was dying. I couldn't touch my nose. It hurt me a lot to take [cocaine] through my nostril, I bled tremendously, I couldn't do it through the nose any

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<sup>228</sup> Juan's story is a composite of his interviews and testimonies he gave as a preacher.

While I have deleted repetitive elements and in certain passage re-arranged minor elements in order to craft a more coherent narrative, every word is his, as is the structure of his narrative. For the full, Spanish version of Juan's story, see the Appendix.

longer. I put it in my mouth and I began to chew the drug. My mouth fell asleep and I started to eat my lips, my mouth, and I began to bleed because the drug put them to sleep, completely to sleep. I didn't feel them.

The addiction threw me completely to the ground. I was twenty-seven, I was very young. That was one of the sorrows it gave me, to die with my children so young, my very young wife, and it made me very sad. That is why I sought programs, I sought help through the spiritual need I felt, the need to live better in regards to my health, and more than anything, morally. I felt empty. I sought recovery in AA programs for drug addicts. I sought something to help me to recover as a person. Then they talked to me about the [Charismatic] prayer circle. I went and I found the solution for everything that I was seeking.

The first time that I went to the prayer circle, I felt good morally. I felt at peace, I felt tranquil, and I liked it. They prayed for me and I left for home very happy. That was my conversion, that day, the day that I made the decision to go to the circle the first time. This day arrived in order to give the glory to God. I went looking for help, and yes, I found it. After my first day, I didn't go back to taking drugs. I took drugs like two more times after my first day. But now it's been seventeen years since I've done drugs. Nothing. No drugs, no drunkenness, no. Seventeen years that I don't know what another woman is. After the prayer circle, [I am] completely clean.

Thus I believe in Christ. I've returned to the house of my Father. My Father embraced me, he pardoned me. My change is by means of the prayer circle, because if I hadn't met God through the prayer circle, I believe that I

would be dead. I liked to fight a lot in the street because of cocaine and alcohol. When they invited me to the prayer circle, I met God, and God is the one who heals everything, and it is he who healed me. [He can] do everything, and the addiction disappeared. God has put me here in the prayer circle and I'm certain of the one I am following and the one I'm serving, and I give thanks to God. I can't thank him enough for everything that he has done. Sometimes I still cry from emotion, that I see myself there with my sons, and my wife also preaching, singing, and leading. I don't deserve such love from God because of what I was.

Thus I now go to preach the Word of God, to sing, in any place. I go wherever, far, near. I've gone very far to do it, and I always bring gratitude, giving thanks to God because my addiction was utterly killing me. To see my children and my wife suffering, and now, well, after I entered the prayer circle, there's happiness in my house, there's a spirit that moves very differently in my house. That is a tremendous change. Before, my character was outside of the love of God. There was cursing, foul language, pushing, fighting. My character was very violent, my words were very violent, but now, well, I have a very different character. Now my character is moderate. My character is according to the word of God, the will of God. I show the love of God through my character, I lead other people to correction, my children, but everything is based on the love of God. In my character I always show the love of God.

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In the previous two chapters, I outlined the *carismáticos*' perspectives on sin and salvation. Two concepts are of particular relevance to the current chapter: distance from God

makes sin *sinful*; and the transformative possibility of encountering Jesus in the here and now. In this chapter, I explore how these two concepts play out in *carismáticos*' narratives of conversion to Charismatic Catholicism, with a particular focus on how addiction recovery results from this conversion. I begin with an outline of the types of addictions most prevalent amongst *carismáticos*. I then delineate the narrative formula that pervades conversion stories amongst former addicts: they sought relief from the pain their troubles brought through addiction; addiction made the troubles worse; and meeting God in the prayer circle ended addiction. I then explore the theological convictions displayed in these narratives and demonstrate how Charismatic Catholicism provides a strategy of ethical formation for addicts. Finally, I discuss the gendering of addiction in this community and consider the cultural factors behind this phenomenon.

Juan's story, as he shared with me above, represents the quintessential *carismático* conversion narrative: his troubled, despairing life seems to be without remedy; he meets God at the prayer circle; and afterward, his transformed life inspires grateful joy. This form of testimony – the journey from addiction to a transformed life after turning to God – is ubiquitous amongst the *carismáticos*. It is perhaps the clearest instance of a common theme running through *carismático* religious narratives. The common elements of this “addiction-recovery-through-conversion” communal theme are thus fruitful resources for teasing out shared *carismático* convictions.

### **Patterns of Addiction**

In the course of my fieldwork amongst the *carismáticos*, thirty-five people addressed the topic of addiction during fifty-one of 137 events and interviews; that is, addiction came up as an area of concern in approximately thirty-seven percent of events and interviews. Because, as

demonstrated in Chapter 3, the *carismáticos* are scrupulous regarding what constitutes sin, it is not surprising that the category of “addiction” includes a broad range of substances and behaviors. Certainly, the most common forms of addiction – alcoholism and drug abuse – garnered the most attention. Of the ninety-four references to specific types of addiction, alcohol was the most frequent, coming up forty-eight different times (51%). Characteristic observations about alcohol as addiction included statements such as “God wants... to tell you not to... go to bars anymore.... Don’t believe the commercials on TV that offer Budweiser, Miller Light, don’t believe them.... God knows you want to abandon your home... in order to seek things that fill your pain, something that puts it to sleep.”<sup>229</sup> Drug abuse came up twenty-four different times (26%), Juan’s testimony above being the most detailed description of this addiction.

However, the catalogue of addictions that the *carismáticos* abhor extends far beyond the most common afflictions of alcoholism and drug abuse. Sexual excess, in the forms of infidelity, prostitution, and promiscuity, is the third most common spiritually-damaging addiction or vice the *carismáticos* condemn, and it surfaced eleven times (12%) during my fieldwork. When listing addictions, the *carismáticos* often refer to sexual promiscuity alongside alcohol and drug abuse. “You have a vice... you’re unfaithful to your wife, you consume alcohol, smoke cigarettes, you know what is harming you. Get away, my brothers, leave,” proclaims an

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<sup>229</sup> “*Dios quiere... decirte que no busques más en esos lugares, que no te metas más a las barras... tú no le creas, a los comerciales que pasan en la televisión y te ponen que la Budweiser, que la Miller Light, no le creas... Dios que conoce que quieres abandonar tu hogar... por irte a buscar cosas que llenen tu dolor, algo que lo adormezca.*” Transcription of preaching at a Men’s Retreat, June 23, 2012.

internationally-renowned preacher at a regional convention.<sup>230</sup> Similarly, pornography is also an aspect of “sex as vice” that concerns the *carismáticos*, a topic that came up five times, usually paired with alcoholism: “The only God... knows that you have taken refuge in alcoholism, knows that you seek pornography and that you have reached a level that it has been a vice for you.”<sup>231</sup>

The *carismáticos* identified three other addictive vices of concern to them. Gambling as an escape also appeared in lists alongside alcohol and drug abuse three different times: “We want to flee the problem and many of us flee or cover up or turn to vices, right, where we forget. We go to drink, to drugs, or perhaps to gambling; something that distracts me so I don’t have to remember the problem that I have.”<sup>232</sup> Smoking came up twice, including the statement cited above that lists it alongside alcohol and infidelity. Finally, a local preacher at an evangelization retreat made a fascinating statement on one additional form of addiction: “The internet, the I-pad,

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<sup>230</sup> *“Tiene un vicio... pornografía, es infiel a su esposa, consume alcohol, fuma cigarrillo, usted sabe que eso le está haciendo daño. Arranque mi hermano, parta...”* Transcription of preaching at a Regional Convention, April 27, 2013.

<sup>231</sup> *“El único Dios... sabe que te has refugiado en el alcoholismo, sabe, que tú buscas en la pornografía y qué has llegado a un grado que ha sido un vicio para ti.”* Transcription of preaching at a Men’s Retreat, June 23, 2012.

<sup>232</sup> *“Queremos huir del problema y muchos de nosotros, huimos o cubrimos o nos vamos a los vicios, verdad, dónde nos olvidamos, donde nos vamos a tomar, a las drogas, o vamos quizá a los juegos, algo que me distraiga, de que yo no me acuerde del problema que yo tengo.”* Transcription of preaching at a Healing Retreat, June 29, 2013.

the I-phone... all types of programs are bombarding [people], especially those who are addicts and isolate themselves and say, ‘it’s nothing bad.’”<sup>233</sup> Alcohol, drugs, gambling, smoking, technological gadgets; when speaking of addictions the *carismáticos* emphasize not the particular behaviors but their common characteristic of shifting one’s orientation away from God. For the purpose of this chapter, which treats of the conversion away from addictions and toward God-centeredness, I too categorize testimonies based on what each reveals about the conversion process rather than on particular addictive behaviors.

### **Addiction Narratives**

All of the varied behaviors listed above share one crucial aspect that qualifies them all as “addiction” for the *carismáticos*. Each of these behaviors, according to the *carismáticos*, is an attempt to find refuge from problems, to put pain to sleep, to isolate, to flee, and to provide forgetfulness and distraction from problems that have become overwhelming. Yolanda, preaching at a weekend healing retreat, relates the following story:

I was very much in love when I got married and [my husband’s] family... didn’t accept me. I am from Mexico and my husband is from Puerto Rico. My husband’s family treated me as if I were a cockroach. They even sang “*la cucaracha, la cucaracha*” to me.... When my husband’s family said “you are a cockroach,” I believed it... and thus my marriage began to destroy itself.... I began to drink... and I thought about what his family did to me, to have revenge

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<sup>233</sup> “*Los tiene la internet, el I-pad, I-phone, la música, todos tipo de programas, los está bombardeando, especialmente a aquellos que son adictos y se aíslan y dicen: ‘es que no es nada malo.’*” Transcription of preaching at an evangelization event, June 6, 2013.

on my husband.... What blame did my husband have for what they did to me? It was that he didn't speak.<sup>234</sup>

In Yolanda's case, she began to drink out of anger, in order to punish her husband for his silence in the face of his family's ridicule. Trouble with the family was also the impetus behind Miguel's gambling, though in his case the domestic problem was marital:

We started having a lot of problems, my wife, we [had] so many problems, you know, we [were] almost going to split up. She started doing her own stuff and I started doing my stuff. So I kind of get this hole, like, you know, this thing was bothering me, like something was missing in me. So I started going to the casino... because when I get in the casino... there was this part missing in me, I go in there, I play roulette, and I get a table... I put the money on there, and I'm feeling, you know, that thing is filling the hole I have.... I started going to the casino more and more.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> “*Yo me casé muy enamorada y la familia de él... no me aceptaba. Yo soy de México y mi esposo es de Puerto Rico. A mi me trataban, hermano, la familia de mi esposo como si yo fuera una cucaracha, hasta me lo cantaban “la cucaracha, la cucaracha”... Que cuando la familia de mi esposo me decía, verdad, “eres una cucaracha,” yo me lo creía... y por eso mi matrimonio empezó a destruirse... Yo empecé a tomar... y pensé a lo que me hizo su familia a mi, a tener como venganza con mi esposo... ¿Qué culpa tenía mi esposo de lo que ellos me hacían? Era que él no hablaba.*” Transcription of preaching at a healing retreat, June 29, 2013.

<sup>235</sup> Interview with the author, November 22, 2013.

Marco, a dramatic, dynamic young adult preacher, pursued promiscuity, drinking, and drugs for a different reason: “We young people seek the love of the world because we don’t receive love from our parents.... I sought love in pleasure, in sex, in alcohol, in drugs.... We young people fall into prostitution, into licentiousness, because we seek to fill that space [inside us] with love.”<sup>236</sup> Drinking due to family problems, gambling due to marital strife, promiscuity due to lack of parental love; these narratives all point toward a common theme found in many conversion testimonies. Social situations result in a troubled life, and as a result, many Latina/o immigrants turned to addictions to flee the pain of these social troubles.

However, each and every one of these *carismáticos* found that pursuing addictions ultimately failed to fill the emptiness. Marco provides the fullest example of what *carismáticos* who were addicts eventually discovered:

Perhaps you... think that drugs, or sex, or pornography, or gossip, you say that that is happiness, young people. That isn’t happiness. I was wrong before because I thought that those things were making me happy.... We young people fall into prostitution, into licentiousness, because we seek to fill the space [inside us] with love. But the love of the world, it’s a love that brings us death. It’s a false love.... The love of men always is going to be... a love that disappoints you,

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<sup>236</sup> “*Los jóvenes estamos buscando el amor del mundo, porque no recibimos el amor de nuestros padres... yo voy buscando el amor en el placer, en el sexo, en el alcohol, en las drogas... y los jóvenes caemos en la prostitución, caemos en el libertinaje, porque andamos buscando llenar ese espacio del amor.*” Transcription of preaching at a parish prayer circle, January 13, 2014.

a love that limits you, a love that knocks you down, a love that injures, a love that is going to lead you to drugs, alcohol... It's a love that is only human, of the world.<sup>237</sup>

This theme, the ultimate emptiness of addictions and the distractions of the world, recurred throughout my fieldwork. The *carismáticos* learned this difficult lesson only after attempting, fruitlessly and hopelessly, to find the solution in avoidance and addiction and discovering that addiction only exacerbated their problems.

Juan tells his story, as outlined at the beginning of this chapter, beginning with his hellish cocaine addiction that threw him “completely to the ground.” Realizing that fleeing his troubles via addiction was only increasing his problems, he sought assistance and, when invited to the Charismatic prayer circle, he made the decision to go. Since attending the prayer circle, he

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<sup>237</sup> *“Tal vez tú... piensas que las drogas, o el sexo, la pornografía, el chisme, tú dices que eso es la felicidad jóvenes, hermano. Eso no es la felicidad. Yo estaba equivocado antes porque yo pensaba que esas eran cosas que me hacían feliz... Los jóvenes caemos en la prostitución, caemos en el libertinaje, porque andamos buscando llenar ese espacio del amor. Pero el amor del mundo es un amor que nos lleva a la muerte. Es un amor falso... El amor del hombre siempre va ser así, un amor que le defrauda, un amor que le, que le limita, un amor que le tumba, un amor que lastima, un amor que le va llevar a las drogas, al alcohol... Es un amor que solamente humano, mundano.”* Compilation of transcriptions of Marco’s preaching: parish prayer circle, November 15, 2013; parish prayer circle, February 13, 2014; *Radio Alabaré* broadcast, February 16, 2014.

concludes by saying he hasn't taken drugs, been drunk, or been unfaithful to his wife for seventeen years. He is no longer violent or foul-mouthed but rather shows the love of God in his character and as a result there is happiness in his house and all of his family participate in the prayer circle.

Many other *carismáticos* tell stories that echo the themes of Juan's testimony: the failure of flight via addiction to solve one's problems; the discovery that addictions distract one from God, the only source of effective solutions to life's problems; and a transformed life after encountering God in the prayer circle. As one further example of this conversion narrative, Ricardo relates the intertwined stories of his own conversion and that of his office building's landlord. He begins his testimony telling of a day when the landlord stopped by Ricardo's office to chat:

He said, "I don't have a family. My family left me due to the disorder of my life, going out with women, vices, drug addiction." The way he appeared, he looked like he was lost. Unshaven, he hadn't bathed, his clothes were dirty, everything. He said "they left me, and since then it's like my life doesn't matter to me."... Several times he came and saw me reading the Bible and it made him curious.... I began to chat with him. I said "look, I was living a very disorderly life.... My life was completely different. I was one of those people who wasn't even bringing home a goat. I was one of those drunk people, lying in the street."... He began to get interested in this business because of how he was going through life.... And he said "what happened?" I said "my life has been changing through this. That is why I read the Bible, I am walking the path." Then he says "What do you believe has made your change?" and I said "Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ has made the

change.”... I said to him “God, Jesus Christ, can change things... it’s never too late to come the feet of the Lord,” and he left. Several days passed and I didn’t see him. One day I went to take a check to his office. It was clean, the ashtrays were gone. Three or four months later, it looked like he had used 200 liters of bleach to clean the floor.... The next day he came to my office, to collect the rent again, and he had bathed, he wore a uniform, like a work uniform, and he had shaved. He came thus and started to chat, and I said “what happened? You look really good!” ... and he said “Jesus Christ.”<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Dice “yo no tengo familia, mi familia me dejó, este, por mi desorden de la vida, por andar con mujeres, por andar en los vicios en la drogadicción.” Por la forma de su aspecto de él, se miraba que estaba perdido. Barbón, sin bañarse, la ropa, todo. Dice “me dejaron y por eso es que, de ahí para acá, ya, mi vida como que no me importa.” Me llegó a ver algunas veces leyendo la Biblia y se le hizo curioso a él... Comencé a platicarle. Le digo “mira, yo vivía en una vida muy desordenada.” Él ahora me mira e incluso me dice, que “¿Cómo le hago para trabajar como trabajo, que muy ordenado, que muy, que hago las cosas bien?” él me dice, y le digo, “yo no era nada parecido a esto. Mi vida era completamente diferente, completamente diferente, le digo, yo era de los que no traían ni el chivo a la casa, yo era, ¿verdad?, de las personas que andaba borracho, que andaba en la calle, tirado.” ..Él comenzó como a interesarse en ese negocio, porque como que él por allá andaba, ¿verdad? Y dice “¿y qué pasó?” Le digo “por medio de esto mi vida ha ido cambiando, por eso es que leo la Biblia, estoy en este camino. Dice entonces “¿Qué crees que haya hecho tu cambio?” Yo le decía “Jesucristo, Jesucristo ha hecho mi cambio.” ..Le digo “Dios, Jesucristo, puede cambiar las

Ricardo concluded his testimony saying, “I wouldn’t exchange a moment of the life I’m living now for the one I was living when I was an alcoholic, when I was in my crazy lows. I wouldn’t exchange a moment of it for anything.”<sup>239</sup> The elements of Juan’s story echo here: Ricardo and his landlord were so consumed by their addictions that they had become useless to their families. Both turned to Jesus Christ, the true center from which their addictions had distracted them. As a result, as implied in the testimony, both of them abandoned their addictions and now lived transformed, well-ordered lives.

### **Theological Convictions in Conversion Narratives**

The *testimonios* outlined above illustrate the conversion-as-addiction-recovery narrative form that pervades the *carismático* community. As outlined in the Introduction, when a particular religious narrative form surfaces again and again from different members of a

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*cosas... nunca es tarde para llegar a los pies del Señor,” ya, se iba. Y así pasó unos días, que no lo miraba yo. Un día que fui a llevar el cheque a su oficina. Estaba limpia, ya los ceniceros no estaban. Después que habían pasado como tres meses o cuatro, se miraba que la había limpiado, yo creo que le ha de ver echado unos doscientos litros de cloro ahí para que se limpiara el piso... Yo puse atención pero no le dije nada. Después otro día, llegó a mi oficina, otra vez por la renta, y venía bañado, hasta con uniforme, de esos que usan así como para trabajar, y rasurado. Llegó así, y comenzó a platicar y le digo, “¿Qué pasó? Te ves muy bien” ...Y me dice “Jesucristo.”* Transcription of preaching at a men’s retreat, June 23, 2012.

<sup>239</sup> *Yo la vida que estoy viviendo ahorita no la cambio por un momentito de los que vivía cuando andaba en el alcoholismo, cuando andaba en mis hondas locas. Un momento de éstos no los cambio por nada.* Transcription of preaching at a men’s retreat, June 23, 2012.

community, its structure and elements are strong indicators of a community's shared convictions. Below, I outline key *carismático* theological perspectives that the conversion-as-addiction-recovery narrative illuminates.

The first of these theological perspectives that the communal narrative reveals is the *carismáticos*' belief, based on the night-and-day contrast between the hellish life of addiction and the breathtaking love they experienced after conversion, that excess and addiction are directly counter to God.<sup>240</sup> Gladys, as quoted in Chapter 3, avers that to the person who pursues “money, gambling, prostitution, alcoholism, and drug addiction” the Lord will say “no, you are

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<sup>240</sup> There is one fascinating exception to the otherwise unanimous conviction that everything about addiction is counter to God. Claudia, a preacher at a women's retreat, proclaimed the following: “Give thanks to God for the husband who makes you go down on your knees, who is a womanizing alcoholic. Give thanks to God for him, because if he weren't an alcoholic you wouldn't go down on your knees.” (*Dale gracias a Dios por ese esposo que te hace doblar las rodillas que es alcohólico mujeriego. Dale Gracias a Dios por el, porque si el no fuera un alcohólico tu no te doblaras tus rodillas*). Here, Claudia represents a popular *carismático* belief that God intends or at least condones everything, even cancer, even the death of a child, even a husband's alcoholic womanizing, because of its higher good; in this case, bringing the wife to her knees due to such suffering, without which she wouldn't have hit bottom and turned to God in surrender. While other *carismáticos* state this explicitly about disease and death, only Claudia applies it to demonstrate that even addiction is a blessing for which to give thanks to God. Transcription of preaching at a women's retreat, May 19, 2012.

not among my friends” and “gnashing of teeth and lamenting will be heard.”<sup>241</sup> Similarly, Sofía, who declared that anyone who dances is with the Devil, also states that the person who dances and gets drunk “isn’t with God” but rather is “doing things that don’t please God.”<sup>242</sup> Elena, a matriarch of her parish prayer circle, is very blunt: “God abandons... drunks, because drunks can’t enter the Kingdom of Heaven if there isn’t conversion, if there isn’t repentance.”<sup>243</sup> The combined testimonies of the *carismáticos* make a clear theological declaration that God and addiction are irreconcilable opposites.

Examining the communal *carismático* narrative of conversion-as-addiction-recovery also reveals theological convictions regarding *why* God and addiction are utterly opposed. While on the surface the explanations of what drove *carismáticos* to addiction may seem varied – in-laws’ ridicule, a marriage splitting up, lack of parents’ love – there is a single, coherent theme: lack of love, particularly from one’s family, prompts addictive behavior. A few *carismáticos* articulated this explicitly. A local preacher on the Spanish-language Charismatic radio show lamented, “I know that many people get depressed from lack of love... we are always seeking love, love in

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<sup>241</sup> Transcription of preaching at a parish prayer circle, October 10, 2013.

<sup>242</sup> “*Me voy a bailar, voy a emborrachar, voy a hacer esto, voy a hacer lo otro. Con el diablo estás, no estás con Dios... estoy haciendo cosas que a Dios no le agrada.*” Transcription of discussion at a house prayer circle, June 25, 2013.

<sup>243</sup> “*Dios aborrece... a los borrachos, porque los borrachos no pueden entrar al reino de los cielos si no hay conversión, si no hay arrepentimiento.*” Transcription of preaching at a parish prayer circle, September 5, 2013.

things, right? Or we fill that emptiness with drugs, right, perhaps in gangs.”<sup>244</sup> In every case during my fieldwork, addiction served as an attempt to fill the emptiness left by lack of love. Thus, in its barest definition based on the *carismáticos*’ perspectives, addiction is an ineffective, destructive response to lack of love.

The theological implications of this point become clearer through further examining the *carismáticos*’ communal conversion narratives. Marco, quoted earlier regarding how lack of parental love led him to sexual licentiousness, develops the theological point when preaching to a youth group audience regarding what his addiction and conversion experiences taught him:

You... think that... sex, or pornography... is happiness, young people. That isn’t happiness. I was wrong before because I thought that those things were making me happy, until I discovered the one who is true happiness.... True happiness is when you have contact with Jesus, it’s when you let Jesus enter your life... it’s when Jesus dominates your life, your heart, your thoughts, it’s when Jesus is number one in your life.... The love of the world, it’s a love that brings us death. It’s a false love, a love that doesn’t compare with the love of God.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> “*Yo sé que mucha gente se deprime por falta de amor... que siempre estamos buscando ese amor, ese amor y en cosas verdad, o lo llenamos ese vacío en, en, en con drogas, verdad, a lo mejor en gangas.*” Transcription of Radio Alabaré broadcast, February 16, 2014.

<sup>245</sup> “*Tú... piensas que... el sexo, la pornografía... es la felicidad, jóvenes. Eso no es la felicidad. Yo estaba equivocado antes porque yo pensaba que esas eran cosas que me hacían feliz, pero hasta que descubrí quién era realmente, quién es realmente la verdadera felicidad... La verdadera felicidad es cuando tú tienes una comunicación con*

Later, Marco elaborated on this theme during a radio broadcast that the local *carismáticos* produce:

The love of men always is going to be... a love that disappoints you, a love that limits you, a love that knocks you down, a love that injures, a love that is going to lead you to drugs, alcohol.... That is a love that doesn't transcend. It's a love that is only human, of the world. But the love of God goes beyond, the love of God is where he brings us to live in his presence.<sup>246</sup>

Marco had sought happiness in the addiction of promiscuity. However, once he encountered the depth and infinitude of God's love, Marco discovered he had been wrong. The fleeting happiness of what *el mundo* offers – be it promiscuity, alcohol, gambling – could not even compare to the happiness he found when he experienced God's love, a love that brings humans

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*Jesús, es cuando tú dejas entrar a Jesús en tu vida... es cuando Jesús domina tu vida, tu corazón, tus pensamientos, es cuando Jesús es el número uno en tu vida... El amor del mundo es un amor que nos lleva a la muerte. Es un amor falso, es un amor que no se compara con el de Dios.*" Transcription of preaching at parish prayer circles, November 15, 2013 and February 13, 2014.

<sup>246</sup> *"El amor del hombre siempre va ser así, un amor que le defrauda, un amor que le, que le limita, un amor que le tumba, un amor que lastima, un amor que le va llevar a las drogas, al alcohol... Ese es un amor que no trasciende. Es un amor que solamente humano, mundano. Pero el amor de Dios va más allá, el amor de Dios es en donde nos lleva a vivir en su presencia."* Transcription of Radio Alabaré broadcast, February 16, 2014.

to live in God's very presence. From this composite of Marco's *testimonio* and the *testimonios* of other addicts, a theological portrait of God emerges: God is love, and God's love is that which fills the human emptiness that nothing else can fill.

To summarize the *carismáticos'* communal theology of conversion-as-addiction-recovery, when addicts surrender promiscuity in favor of God's love, drugs and alcohol in exchange for Charismatic conversion, they discover that God indeed has something much better in mind than the fleeting oblivion that addiction provides. God doesn't intend addiction, but rather intends human beings to turn toward God and to experience God's loving and helping presence. Addicts who turn toward God and away from addiction discover that God is eager to transform lives for those who express their willingness. This God, the converted discover, offers an infinite, everlasting love that far surpasses the capricious love of human beings; and this love even has the power to bring human beings into God's presence.

### **Transformative Strategies in Charismatic Conversion**

Inherent to the intertwined journey of conversion and addiction recovery is an explicit transformative strategy, namely, ethical formation. Juan's story is perhaps the most explicit example of Charismatic-Catholicism-as-ethical-formation that I encountered in my fieldwork:

[My cocaine] addiction threw me completely to the ground. I sought help through the spiritual need I felt, the need to live better in my health, and more than anything, morally. They talked to me about the [Charismatic] prayer circle. I went and I found the solution for everything that I was seeking. The first time that I went to the prayer circle, I felt good morally. I felt at peace, I felt tranquil, and I liked it. That was my conversion, that day, the day that I made the decision to go to the circle the first time. After my first day, I didn't go back to taking

drugs. Now it's been seventeen years since I've done drugs. No drugs, no drunkenness, nothing. Seventeen years that I don't know what another woman is.

After the prayer circle, [I am] completely clean.<sup>247</sup>

Juan's story is a showcase for the ethical formation inherent to *carismático* religiosity: when he was in his addictions he felt empty and lacking morally; he sought help and made the decision to go to the prayer circle; metabolizing the ethics of the *carismáticos* has allowed him to remain clean from drugs, alcohol, and infidelity. A self-identified moral lack is transformed into moral fortitude through the empowering theological resources available to the *carismáticos*.

Miguel, another *carismático* in Juan's parish, lived different particulars of the same theme: he was spending too much time and money at the casino; he prostrated himself during Eucharistic adoration and asked for help; he started attending the *círculo*; he stopped going to the casinos; and now he is very active in the prayer circle and he organizes a men's group that repairs the parish buildings and does work on the grounds. In his own words, "this thing has made me happy."<sup>248</sup> The prayer circle, for Juan, Miguel, and dozens of others I met during my fieldwork, serves as a communal moral compass for ethical formation. It is also an empowering resource through which the *carismáticos*, to use Mahmood's words, find the inner strength and inspiration to "transform [themselves] in order to achieve a particular state of being." When the *carismáticos* surrender addiction in favor of God's love, the result is not only the joy of finding

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<sup>247</sup> Composite of Juan's preaching at a prayer circle on September 12, 2013 and his interview with me on March 15, 2014.

<sup>248</sup> Interview with the author, November 22, 2013.

unquenchable divine love but also the satisfaction of ethical formation that renders them increasingly capable of making morally sound choices.

### **Gendering of Addiction**

As a final note, a pattern emerges from the testimonies related above. Of those who explicitly stated they struggled with addiction in the past, six were men and two were women, a 3:1 ratio. Analyzing the full set of ethnographic data from my research reveals that the ratio is actually higher: in the twenty instances when a specific individual was mentioned as having a problem with addiction, sixteen were male, a 4:1 ratio of male addicts to female addicts. When reflecting on these statistics in light of the ratio of male to female *carismáticos*, approximately 1:2.5, it becomes clear that addiction – or at least the *reporting* of addiction – is highly gendered in this community. Combining the statistics yields the estimate that in a hypothetical 50% male and 50% female group of *carismáticos*, more than 90% of those who report struggling with addiction would be male, a ratio of 12:1. Further data analysis reveals that in the fourteen instances during my fieldwork when addiction as a general topic was addressed to a specific gender group, eleven times (79%) it was addressed to men alone, usually in a mixed crowd; while the other three times it was specifically addressed both to men and to women.<sup>249</sup> Not once were women alone specifically referred to as addicts.

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<sup>249</sup> This does not include the countless times when those struggling with addiction were referred to as *hermanos*. In Spanish, while this word can refer to a mixed group of women or men, it can also serve to address men alone in its literal meaning, “*brothers*.” Thus in all of these references to addicts as *hermanos*, it is unclear whether the speaker is referring to all *carismáticos*, or to the men alone.

To some degree, these statistics amongst the *carismáticos* are but an exaggerated reflection of the Latina/o immigrant community as a whole in the United States. Research on alcohol dependency, by far the most common form of addiction the *carismáticos* report, indicates that 33% of Latino men report frequent and/or heavy drinking, while only 12% of Latina women report drinking to the same degree, a ratio of 2.75:1 of men to women. The statistics on other forms of addiction show a similar trend: Latino men are two to three times as likely as Latina women to smoke marijuana and three to five times as likely to do cocaine. The reason for this gendered trend, and the more dramatically gendered 12:1 ratio of male to female alcoholics found amongst the *carismáticos*, is primarily cultural. Sociologist Angela Hoekstra describes the Latino male role as centered around a “virility complex,” in which “frequent sexual intercourse, drinking, and expressions of aggression are essential to prove masculinity.”<sup>250</sup> This cultural link between drinking and masculinity yields a heavy cultural sanction against Latina women drinking alcohol;<sup>251</sup> in Mexico, for instance, public drinking for women is “considered a negative reflection on moral character.”<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Hoekstra, “Rural Pentecostalism,” 152.

<sup>251</sup> See J. Mora, “The Treatment of Alcohol Dependency Among Latinas: A Feminist, Cultural, and Community Perspective,” *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly* 16, no. 1-2 (1998): 163–77.

<sup>252</sup> William Armando Vega et. al., “Illicit Drug Use Among Mexicans and Mexican American in California: The Effects of Gender and Acculturation,” *Addiction* 93 no. 12, (1998): 1848.

This sanction does not hold absolutely, of course; Adriana, quoted above, is but one example of *carismáticas* who acknowledge that they abused alcohol in the past. Another *carismático* spoke of having an alcoholic mother, and two women referred to themselves as former alcoholics. Yolanda, who drank alcohol out of anger to punish her husband whose family rejected her as a cockroach, is one of these. Yet she acknowledges she was not maintaining the sanctioned gender role when she was constantly bringing home beer to chill it in the refrigerator: “I began to drink and my husband said, ‘Yolanda, now you seem like the man and I seem like the woman!’”<sup>253</sup> In short, the cultural norm is that men drink and women don’t. It is thus not surprising that at *carismático* events, the large majority of those identified as alcoholics are male, even though women predominate in any *carismático* gathering. This trend of exaggerated gendering of addictive behaviors amongst *carismáticos* is even more dramatic in regards to addictions other than alcoholism. The three times that drug addicts are identified by gender, they are all men. Infidelity, when gendered, is framed as an “unfaithful husband” rather than an “unfaithful wife.” Pornography is “nude women.” This demonstrates the degree to which the *carismáticos* gender addiction as a solely male vice.

The only possible exception to this is prostitution. I include prostitution as addiction because the topic was handled in the same way – often in the same sentence – as addictions such as alcoholism, drug abuse, and so forth. I recorded five instances during my fieldwork when the topic of prostitution came up. In three cases, prostitution appeared in a generic list of vices proclaimed to a mixed-gender group, thus not allowing for any conclusions regarding whether or

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<sup>253</sup> “*Empecé a tomar y él me decía, mi esposo: Yolanda, ¡ya tú pareces el hombre y yo parezco la mujer!*” Transcription of preaching at a healing retreat, June 29, 2013.

not it was gendered. In two other instances, however, prostitution was patently a gendered vice. At a men's retreat a preacher proclaimed "let us not seek Jesus in prostitution!"<sup>254</sup> Clearly in this instance, given the audience, it refers to men seeking prostitutes, a male vice. In another instance, however, Juan preached to fellow parents about "see[ing] our daughters in prostitution, in alcoholism, in drug addictions."<sup>255</sup> Here, Juan includes young women in prostitution in the same category as alcoholics and drug addicts; thus prostitution is also a female-gendered vice. Based on these instances, and the broader context in which *carismáticos* condemn all forms of promiscuity, it is reasonable to conclude that prostitution is the only equally-gendered form of addiction: it is a vice both for the man who pays the prostitute and the woman who practices prostitution.

Having established the striking degree to which addiction is gendered male in the *carismático* community, I return to the question of why the *carismáticos* report male addiction to a much higher degree than the Latina/o immigration population in general. I believe the discrepancy is primarily, if not solely, due to the way in which the data is gathered. The data for Latina/o immigrants comes from clinical studies; therefore self-reporting is private and confidential. The data for the *carismáticos* comes almost exclusively from recordings of public preaching. Even privately-conducted interviews occurred within the context of audio recording and the understanding that the interview contents may be published. Therefore, it would be anticipated that the cultural censure of women's drinking, for instance, would hold more sway

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<sup>254</sup> "No le busquemos [a Jesús] en la prostitución." Transcription of preaching at a men's retreat, June 23, 2012.

<sup>255</sup> Transcription of preaching at a Praise Night event, October 19, 2013.

over public *carismático* preaching than confidential self-reporting in clinical studies. Again, this is not to claim that the *carismáticos* are being less than honest in any way when they preach. Their religiosity is highly communal. Therefore the truths they preach are communal truths, truths emerging from the collective experiences of the group members. Such communal truths engender characteristic narrative forms such as the conversion testimony and tend toward a structure of universal norms, albeit expressed in diverse particulars. It is thus logical to conclude that communal truths beyond religious norms – such as Latina/o cultural norms regarding gender behavior – would be incorporated in presentations of the communal truth.

Therefore, when assessing the data, it is important to claim neither that male addiction is four times more prevalent amongst *carismáticos* than it is in the general Latina/o immigrant population, nor that the *carismáticos* are misrepresenting the prevalence of female addiction. The data must be understood within its communal religious context. This contextual understanding reveals that, while the prevalence of the conversion-from-addiction narrative is not a statistically accurate means for assessing how addiction itself occurs along gender lines, contextual analysis does allow for a conclusive statement that addiction-themed conversion testimony is much more prevalent among men than women, and a great number of men include addiction recovery in their conversion narratives. This is not to say that every man presents his conversion testimony in the addiction recovery framework – after all, statistics suggest that two-thirds of Latino immigrant men do not struggle with substance abuse. Nor does this mean that women never frame their conversion testimonies as addiction recovery. During my fieldwork, three women's conversion stories included addiction as a key element. However, it remains true that the conversion-from-addiction narrative format is most customarily available to men and is very popular amongst them. In the next chapter, I address the questions that follow from this:

what form of conversion narrative is customary and popular amongst women, and what communal theological convictions does this narrative illuminate?

In conclusion, male *carismático* conversion narratives tend toward a theme of addiction recovery. These narratives begin with the pain of social problems and the attempts to flee this pain through drinking, drug use, or gambling. Yet flight exacerbates these problems because addictions do not address the root of the problem, namely, lack of love. However, encountering God in the Charismatic prayer circle leads to a discovery of just how good God's love can be. Part and parcel of this transformation is a response of abandoning addiction and developing moral fortitude. In their journey from addiction to conversion, these men discover they are *bendecidos* – blessed with the breathtaking, everlasting love of God that, through filling the emptiness left from lack of love, enables them to be *en victoria* – victorious over the vicious cycle of addiction.

## CHAPTER 6 – DEPRESSION AND CONVERSION

In a low-rent apartment, twenty-two people gather. Juana and Luis, with their two young sons, welcome sixteen *carismáticos* and me. The young son of two of the prayer circle members also joins us as we crowd into the small living room, with its torn and patched carpet and chipped paint. Some people stand beneath a large kickboxing trophy, others sit beneath a large flat-screen TV and children's drawings taped to the wall, some sit on a couch beneath family photos and soda bottle flower vases, and still others stand beside a wall-mounted, tinsel-adorned altar to the Virgen de Guadalupe.

Juana and Luis have marital problems. They sought the prayers and assistance of their *carismático* friends from the parish church, which prompted this evening's gathering. A lively prayer gathering ensues: singing and clapping, acting out song lyrics, Bible readings, preaching, and *alabanzas*. Towards the end of the evening, Juana and Luis kneel on the floor while the *carismáticos* lay hands on them and pray over them for several minutes.

Afterward, Juana and Luis speak to the group about their experience. Luis, a quiet man, offers a few reflections. Then Juana, with several *carismáticos* gathered around her, speaks at length about her struggles when she goes to church. She describes her experiences with phrases such as, "I go to church but it's hard work for me to enter;" "I felt something horrible, nasty, being in church;" "sometimes, the more I go to church, the worse I feel;" and "it [gives] me a sense of despair that fear enters me, that I don't want to enter the church."<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> "Yo voy a la iglesia pero me cuesta mucho trabajo entrar ;" "Pero era algo horrible que yo sentía estando en la iglesia, feo;" "entre más voy a la iglesia mas, a veces más mal me

The *carismáticos* respond with concerned support. They inform her unequivocally that she is suffering from depression, but that there are many resources available to her. Margarita, a mother in her forties, suggests using holy objects: holy water, exorcized salt, exorcized oil, a St. Benedict medal. The women also encourage prayer. Verónica, the fashionable mother in her thirties whose words regarding Eucharistic adoration appeared in Chapter 4, declares: “You need to defeat it yourself with prayer. Yes! With your rosary, with a prayer.”<sup>257</sup> Silvia, the elderly matriarch of the group, also urges Juana to seek someone to pray *for* her: “When you go [to the prayer circle] on Thursday and the woman prays over you, tell her to pray for you and you’re going to see how the Lord is going to take it away from you.”<sup>258</sup> The *carismáticos* also emphasize the importance of turning to written resources. While one woman suggests a religious booklet entitled “How to Send Away Depression,” Alejandra, coordinator of the parish *carismáticos*, is less enthusiastic about such writing. “Many times,” she reflected,

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*siento;*” “*me dio una desesperación que es un miedo que me entra que yo no quiero entrar a la iglesia.*” Transcription of conversation after prayer circle meeting, July 2, 2013.

<sup>257</sup> “*Necesita vencerlo usted misma con oración. ¡Aja! Con su rosario, con una oración.*” Transcription of conversation after prayer circle meeting, July 2, 2013.

<sup>258</sup> “*Cuando vaya los jueves a la que ore por usted, dígame que ore por usted y va ver como el Señor se lo va a quitar.*” Transcription of conversation after prayer circle meeting, July 2, 2013.

“there isn’t much need of such books. The word of God is more than sufficient. You have to study the psalms.”<sup>259</sup>

Having offered these resources, Alejandra concludes with the heart of the matter, upon which all agree: “More than anything you have to open your heart to vanquish all those fears in the name of the Lord, and look, ask him, ask the Lord.”<sup>260</sup> Elaborating upon this idea, Margarita delineates her cure for depression:

Take your Bible, read, pray the rosary. When you take communion, offer that communion for your fears. When you drink the blood of Jesus, tell him to wash you, to purify your bad thoughts, all those things that you carry and that don’t let you turn yourself totally over to him. Offer it to him. Offer him all of it because I also experienced all those fears that made me afraid, but little by little I opened my heart to God and he had mercy on me. Thus as he had mercy on me also he’s going to have mercy on you and he transforms us little by little, he makes us new creatures, he gives us new clothing.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> *“Muchas veces no hay tanta necesidad de tantos libros. La palabra de Dios es más que suficiente. Usted tiene que estudiar los salmos.”* Transcription of conversation after prayer circle meeting, July 2, 2013.

<sup>260</sup> *“Pero más que nada usted tiene que abrir su corazón a vencer todos esos miedos en el nombre del Señor, y mire, pídale, pídale al Señor.”* Transcription of conversation after prayer circle meeting, July 2, 2013.

<sup>261</sup> *“Mete tu Biblia, lee, ponte a rezar el rosario. Cuando comulgues pues ofrécele esa comunión por tus miedos. Cuando tomes esa sangre de Jesús, dile que te lave, que purifique tus*

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In concluding the previous chapter, I raised questions regarding what form of conversion narrative is popular primarily amongst women and what theological convictions this communal narrative form demonstrates. In this chapter, I explore *carismática* women's narratives in which conversion heals depression. I begin with an outline of the types and frequency of depression amongst *carismáticos* and also demonstrate that it is gendered female in this community. I then delineate the narrative formula that pervades conversion stories amongst formerly-depressed women: social problems, particularly husbands' addictions, cause despair, but conversion to Charismatic Catholicism alleviates their depression. I then commence a theological analysis of these narratives by demonstrating that when conversion is associated with subsequent joy, depression becomes a mark that the individuals who suffer from it do not have the faith necessary for true Charismatic conversion. I outline the convictions of women whose depression disappeared when they converted and conclude this theological analysis with minority narratives that theologically resist potentially problematic aspects of *carismático* attitudes toward depression. Finally, I argue that Charismatic Catholicism offers depressed women a transformative strategy for cultivating self-esteem.

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*malos pensamientos, todas esas cosas que traes y que no te dejan entregarte totalmente a él. Ofréceselo. Ofrécele todo eso, porque yo también pasé por todo esos miedos que me daba miedo, pero poco a poquito, yo le fui abriendo mi corazón a Dios y él tuvo misericordia de mi, y así como tuvo misericordia de mi también va a tener misericordia de ti y él poco a poco nos va transformando, nos va haciendo nuevas creaturas nos da nueva vestidura.”* Transcription of conversation after prayer circle meeting, July 2, 2013.

## Characteristics of Depression

The topic of depression arose at thirty of the 137 events that I attended during the course of my fieldwork. At these thirty events, I recorded thirty-three *carismáticos* offering their theological perspectives on “*depresión*,” a word that maps similarly enough to its English cognate to warrant a translation as “depression.” The use of the word *depresión* amongst the *carismáticos*, however, is descriptive rather than clinical; their descriptions of *depresión* do not map neatly onto depressive disorders that the American Psychiatric Association identifies. Because of the *carismáticos*’ generalized use of the word “depression,” and because my ethnographic data is based upon *carismático* preaching and self-reporting rather than clinical data, the conclusions I reach address the attitudes revealed in the *carismáticos*’ public statements rather than scientific observations regarding clinical depressive disorders in the *carismático* communities.

From the *carismáticos*’ perspectives, there are two related yet distinct forms of depression. Although the *carismáticos* do not distinguish these two forms linguistically – that is, both forms are simply named *depresión* – careful analysis of how they describe *depresión* allows for a differentiation in forms. The first form is evidenced in phrases such as, “[it’s] so depressing when we had those floods, when those tornados happened recently, right? Houses totally destroyed”;<sup>262</sup> or “frustration can come when we want to start a new business but it goes

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<sup>262</sup> “*Tan deprimente cuando tuvimos ese, esas inundaciones, verdad, cuando pasaban esas, esos, esos tornados ahora últimamente, verdad, las casas destruidas totalmente.*”

Transcription of preaching at regional healing retreat, June 29, 2013.

badly... We get frustrated, and we feel bad and depression can come”;<sup>263</sup> or, in the case of a mother who had a premature baby who was dying, “a moment came when I was very physically weak from surgery. Emotionally I was very depressed, very weak.”<sup>264</sup> These episodes of depression are responses of sadness or low spirits due to an event such as a new business going poorly or a dying newborn. Clinically, this condition is termed “adjustment disorder” or, more informally, “situational depression.” Because there is a single identified cause, it is implied that resolution of or healing from that event will also alleviate the depression the unique event caused.

In contrast, others report, “I fell into depression. I have seen depressed people, but I believe that few fell as I did, for twenty years.... I was so depressed that I started to bite my hands, I lost a lot of weight and I was nothing more than skin and bones;”<sup>265</sup> or “I spent three

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<sup>263</sup> *“puede venir una frustración en donde nosotros queremos empezar un nuevo negocio y que nos vaya mal... nos viene la frustración y nos, nos sentimos mal y puede venir la depresión.”* Transcription of preaching at regional healing retreat, June 29, 2013.

<sup>264</sup> *“Llegó un momento que... yo estaba muy débil físicamente, con la cirugía, emocionalmente yo estaba muy deprimida, muy débil.”* Interview with the author, February 19, 2014.

<sup>265</sup> *“Yo caí en una depresión, yo he visto personas deprimidas, pero creo que como yo caí pocas, y fueron 20 años ...yo llegue tanto a la depresión que yo llegaba a morderme las manos, yo bajé de peso muchísimo yo ya nada mas era cuero y huesos.”* Transcription of preaching at regional healing retreat, June 29, 2013.

months, without trying a bite to eat, without sleeping or anything;”<sup>266</sup> or “I felt that I wasn’t good for anything, like any depressed person, that your life has no meaning, you don’t want to live, everything is sad.”<sup>267</sup> In each of these instances, the symptoms are severe, ongoing, and also generalized: the speaker is sad about everything, not just a death or a business difficulty. This is chronic, rather than situational, depression. Furthermore, in the thirty events where depression arose as a topic, situational depression was mentioned in only five instances, and only in passing. Chronic depression, on the other hand, was often discussed at length, including at two of the four events where a situational form of depression was also mentioned. Thus it is chronic depression that the *carismáticos* emphasize, and thus it is also the emphasis of this chapter.

### **Gendering of depression**

Who are these people who report chronic depression? In my research amongst the *carismáticos* all thirteen people who spoke of or were described as suffering from chronic depression were women. Situational depression, on the other hand, does not appear to be gendered, although the sample in my research – three women and two men at a total of four events – is too small to be firmly conclusive. It can be stated conclusively, however, that in my fieldwork, when *carismático* men are linked to the word *depresión*, it is only in cases of

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<sup>266</sup> “Yo ya pasé tres meses, ya sin probar bocado, sin dormir ni nada.” Transcription of conversation at a house prayer meeting, July 2, 2013.

<sup>267</sup> “Me sentía que no servía para nada, que, como es cualquier persona deprimida, que no tiene sentido tu vida, no tiene ganas de vivir, como triste todo.” Interview with the author, March 11, 2014.

situational depression. For instance, Miguel, a general contractor from Mexico, reports “I get so, kind of tired, or depressed.”<sup>268</sup> Yet the temporary nature of his depression becomes clear in his next phrase: “I come [to the Charismatic prayer circle] and I start dancing and I start raising my hand [in praise]... and I... relax, and take everything away from me.... Whatever I have, I just let it go.”<sup>269</sup> The only other instance of a depressed man is from a woman’s report that her dad “became very sad, depressed to see that my mom was very sick,” again, a case of situational depression.<sup>270</sup> These two instances are the only place in my sixteen months of ethnographic research where *carismático* men were reported as depressed, and both were situational with their passing nature either implied or explicitly stated.<sup>271</sup> Thus gender analysis in relation to

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<sup>268</sup> Interview with the author, November 22, 2013.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> “*Se ponía bien triste, deprimido de ver que mi mamá estaba bien enferma.*” Interview with the author, May 5, 2013.

<sup>271</sup> There is one possible exception: on their weekly radio program, the *carismáticos* included in their list of intercessions “for Mahit, who is imprisoned and is in depression.” (“*Por Mahit que está encarcelado y está en depresión,*” Radio Alabaré broadcast, February 9, 2014). This is a male who is depressed, and there is no definitive evidence that he does not suffer from chronic depression. I hesitate to include Mahit as a *carismático* male who is chronically depressed for two reasons, however: First, Mahit is a Hindi name that is not used in Latin America; thus it is extremely unlikely that he is a Hispanic *carismático* but rather a friend of a *carismático*. Second, the only other instance of prison-based depression is couched more in situational rather than chronic depression: “many people in hospitals, in jails, are in depression.”

depression amongst the *carismáticos* in my research reveals that men report only situational depression, and that rarely; whereas women report both situational and chronic depression.

This is not to say that only female *carismáticas* suffer from chronic depression. All studies on depression amongst United States Latina/o immigrants find depression amongst men, with percentages of men who experience depression ranging between 5% and 20%.<sup>272</sup> Each of these studies also report findings such as, “Hispanic females are at a greater risk for experiencing psychological difficulties than their male counterparts.”<sup>273</sup> These studies cite many reasons for

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(“*Muchas de las personas que están en depresión en hospitales, en las cárceles,*” transcription of preaching at a prayer circle, February 13, 2014). While imprisonment is a prime example of situational and chronic depression intertwining, I still believe it is inaccurate to categorize Mahit as a chronically depressed male *carismático*.

<sup>272</sup> e.g. S. Wassertheil-Smoller et al., “Depression, Anxiety, Antidepressant Use, and Cardiovascular Disease among Hispanic Men and Women of Different National Backgrounds: Results From the Hispanic Community Health Study/Study of Latinos (HCHS/SOL),” *Annals of Epidemiology*, 24 no. 11 (2014): 822-830; W. Vega and H. Amaro, “Lifetime Prevalence of DSM-III-R Psychiatric Disorders Among Rural and Urban Mexican Americans in California” *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 55 (1998): 771-782; and Marcia A. Shobe and Javier Boyas, “Gender Differences in Depression Among Mexican Immigrants: The Role of Human and Financial Capital,” *Hispanic Health Care International* 9, no. 2 (2011).

<sup>273</sup> V. Nelly Salgado de Snyder, Richard C. Cervantes, and Amado M. Padilla, “Gender and Ethnic Differences in Psychosocial Stress and Generalized Distress Among Hispanics,” *Sex Roles* 22 nos. 7/8 (1990): 450.

more frequent occurrences of depression amongst female Latina immigrants, including the greater strain that employment status, family conflicts, lack of marital support, and stress from changes associated with immigration have on women due to gender role differences.<sup>274</sup> Yet none of these studies claim that Latino men do not suffer from depression. However, in my fieldwork, only women report chronic depression through phrases such as “I fell into a terrible depression” or “I went through a very difficult stage of depression, anxiety, panic.”<sup>275</sup>

The studies do not offer any explanations regarding male reticence to report depression. However, the “virility complex” that casts drinking as “manly” is likely at play in the silence regarding male chronic depression. If Latino men must prove their masculinity through frequent intercourse, drinking, and aggression, as Hoekstra describes, then the fearfulness, lethargy, and lack of productivity often associated with chronic depression would at the very least drive men to mask these symptoms and not admit to them in public.<sup>276</sup> The result is that research based on what *carismáticos* report publicly, as in this current study, provides important insights into community attitudes regarding depression, but does not provide scientific data on how depression manifests amongst *carismáticos*.

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<sup>274</sup> Jacqueline M. Golding and Marvin Karno, “Gender Differences in Depressive Symptoms Among Mexican Americans and Non-Hispanic Whites,” *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 10, no. 1 (1988): 14; and Snyder et al., “Gender,” 451.

<sup>275</sup> “*Yo caí en una depresión horrible*,” Transcription of preaching at a daylong retreat, June 29, 2013; “*Pasé por una etapa muy difícil de depresión, de ansiedad, de pánico*,” Interview with the author, February 7, 2014.

<sup>276</sup> Hoekstra, “Rural Pentecostalism,” 152.

## Depression Narratives

The previous chapter demonstrated that men attribute the cause of their addictions to social troubles, particularly lack of love. Women attribute their depression to a similar cause. One woman commented, for instance, “I argued with my husband. We argued, we fought, we argued.... It was like sadness wanted to come to me, depression, for that reason.”<sup>277</sup> In this case, there is a narrative parallel between what causes addiction and what causes depression. Yet the relationship is not merely a relationship of parallelism. There is also a causal layer to the relationship between what men’s addictions and women’s depression. This causal relationship emerges through examining how *carismáticos* speak about women’s responses to men’s addictions.

In analyzing the words of women whose partners are addicts, it becomes clear that a husband’s addiction can *become* one of the social causes of that which a woman needs conversion to heal, namely, depression. Elena, a grandmother and matriarch at St. Augustine, preached about her past: “I was suffering a lot through my partner’s alcoholism.... I was trembling from head to foot, because fear eats away at our soul.”<sup>278</sup> Juan, the cocaine addict featured in the previous chapter, described some of what his wife suffered:

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<sup>277</sup> “*Discutía con mi esposo. Discutíamos, nos, nos peleábamos, discutíamos... como que me quería llegar la tristeza, como depresión por lo mismo.*” Interview with the author, November 18, 2013.

<sup>278</sup> “*Yo sufría mucho por el alcoholismo de mi pareja... Yo temblaba de pies a cabeza, porque el miedo nos carcome el alma.*” Transcription of preaching at a parish prayer circle, November 7, 2013.

It seemed like my wife carried a cocaine detector. She found me with it wherever I was.... She would say, “what is this? “Oh, a friend left it there.”... [One time] she grabbed it and flushed it down the toilet, and I cursed her. I said, “you threw it into the toilet! You don’t know how much that cost. You don’t know what you threw in the toilet!” She threw it away, crying from anger, from rage.<sup>279</sup>

In these reports, male addiction results in women suffering, crying from anger, and having fear eat their souls away.

One woman, preaching at the same women’s retreat, spoke directly of the impact that a man’s addiction can have on a woman’s psychological health:

How many of us have husbands who are into the alcohol day and night, and we wake up to see a heartbreaking scene? One of my sisters said to me,... “it makes us depressed. Listen to me. He arrived home at night, dead drunk, and woke up in such a humor that oof! You can’t say anything to him because you’re so careful.” And us? There isn’t an opportunity for anything for us, there isn’t time for us, there isn’t a moment we dedicate to ourselves... and we live in depression,

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<sup>279</sup> *“Parece que mi esposa traía detector de cocaína. Me la encontraba donde quiera... Decía: ¿Qué es esto? ¡Ah! Déjalo ahí un amigo... la agarraba y la tiraba al baño, y yo la maldecía. Decía: “¡Me echaste eso al baño! No sabes cuánto costaba. ¡Tú no sabes qué echaste en el baño!” Ella llorando de coraje, de rabia, la echaba.”*

Transcription of preaching at a parish prayer circle, September 12, 2013.

in total sadness, a totally destroyed home, where we only draw breath. Sadness and grief.<sup>280</sup>

This preacher draws a direct correlation between male addiction and female depression, not just in the instance of the particular woman she quotes, but as something that “we” experience, that is, Latina women in general. Thus there cannot be a pure parallel between the causes of male addiction and female depression. While there is the similarity that both are attributed to social causes, there is also a fundamental difference: when a husband does not convert to alleviate his social problems but rather flees them via addiction, he *becomes* one of the social problems that *causes* the depression for which his wife *needs* conversion to heal.

Whatever the differences may be behind the social causes of addiction and depression, there is strong agreement that conversion provides a lasting solution to depression just as it does for addiction. Several women in the vignette that opened this chapter report that surrender to Jesus Christ converted their depression into joy. Other previously-depressed *carismáticas* I met during my fieldwork also spoke with joy about how prayer, faith, and the surrender of

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<sup>280</sup> “¿Cuántos de nosotros nuestro esposo está en el alcohol de día y de noche y nos despertamos y vemos ese cuadro desgarrador? Decía una hermana mía... “Y nos da depresión. Óyeme, en la noche llegó hasta las chanclas y amaneció en un humor que ¡uff! No le puedes decir nada porque cuidadito.” Y nosotros? No hay oportunidad para nada para nosotros, no hay un tiempo para nosotros, no hay un momento en que se nos dedique a nosotros... y qué estamos viviendo una depresión, una total tristeza, un hogar totalmente destruido, donde sólo se respira. Tristeza y dolor.” Transcription of preaching at a women’s retreat, May 19, 2012.

Charismatic conversion was indeed sufficient to heal their depression. Experiences reported during ethnographic interviews, public preaching, and inspirational testimonies to some degree must be understood as a cultural narrative, and as stated earlier, should not be interpreted as evidence that no formerly-depressed *carismática* has ever descended into an episode of chronic depression post-conversion. At the same time, it is also true that these women consistently manifest, in informal as well as formal interactions, the joy they report feeling. This affords me confidence that what they report is true: Charismatic conversion relieved them of chronic, perduring depression, even if clinical research might reveal occasional episodes of relapse. Their experiences are frequent and powerful enough to result in a communal narrative that Charismatic conversion and subsequent efforts to stay spiritually aligned to God *do* alleviate chronic depression. Based on these narratives and the common conviction within them, these *carismáticas* offer conversion as the only effective cure for depression, just as men offer conversion as the only effective remedy for addiction.

### **Theological Convictions in Depression Narratives**

The combined narratives outlined above demonstrate a communal theological belief that formerly-depressed women hold in common with formerly-addicted men. Just as the male narratives revealed a shared conviction that addiction is directly counter to God, the narratives about female depression reveal a similar belief that depression, too, is counter to God. To understand this theological implication fully, however, requires clarifying the connection between Charismatic conversion and joy.

Silvia, a wise and rather stern matriarch of her prayer circle, speaks of her conversion and its results in a way that makes this connection explicit:

The day that I came to the holy prayer circle, I came with a doctor's diagnosis of colon cancer. That day, that first day... I praise and I bless the Lord for that moment because my life made a 180-degree turn.... That day I came home leaping and jumping, because the Lord had pardoned me.<sup>281</sup>

This narrative of post-conversion joy is ubiquitous amongst *carismáticos*, whatever the particular details of the prior unhappiness may have been. To give but one other example from my fieldwork, one woman explained her before- and after-conversion experiences thus, "I didn't have love for my children or husband. I was angry, but God has come into my home.... The Lord Jesus has come into my home, the Lord Jesus came to bless me, and I feel that blessing in my being, I feel peace, I feel joy, I feel love."<sup>282</sup> The conversion narratives of *carismático* women and men carry a prominent common thread: joy is the hallmark of conversion; perduring, deeply-rooted joy in a God who can and does transform lives.

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<sup>281</sup> *"El día que yo llegué al santo círculo de oración, yo venía con un diagnóstico del doctor de cáncer en el colon. Ese día, ese primer día... yo alabo y bendigo al Señor ese momento porque mi vida dio un cambio de ciento ochenta grados... Yo ese día llegué a mi casa saltando y brincando, porque el Señor me había perdonado."* Transcription of preaching at a parish prayer circle, October 3, 2013.

<sup>282</sup> *"No tenía el amor a mis hijos a mi esposo. Estaba enojada, pero Dios ha venido a mi hogar... el Señor Jesús me vino a dar la bendición, y esa bendición la siento dentro de mi ser, siento esa paz, siento alegría, siento amor."* Transcription of conversation at a house prayer meeting, July 2, 2013.

Yet when joy is the hallmark of conversion, depression implicitly becomes the hallmark of a *carismático* who hasn't had the full Charismatic conversion that grants unshakeable faith in God's loving providence and resultant unwavering joy. As a result, the *carismático* preachers frequently speak of depression as if it were anathema to a *carismático*. A prime example is a declaration that an internationally-renowned *carismático* preacher made at a regional convention: "It isn't right that a *carismático* gets depressed, saying "I believe in Jesus Christ and I'm depressed"... I don't believe in that [kind of] faith, because if I believe in Jesus Christ, I have problems but I am blessed!"<sup>283</sup> The crowd erupted in spontaneous approval, applauding and shouting out *¡Amen!* Local preaching echoes this message that a true *carismático* does not suffer from depression, proclaiming, "the Lord didn't make us to be always depressed, always crying, always downcast, always complaining! The Lord made you for Heaven!"<sup>284</sup> or, more explicitly, "God will bless, will multiply, will give to you. But if your life is aligned to the will of God, even though it doesn't happen like that, you're not going to be depressed.... Even when you see... a poor prognosis, all these bad things, you're going to

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<sup>283</sup> "*No hay derecho que un hermano se deprima, es que yo creo en Jesucristo y tengo una depresión, perdóname yo no creo en esa fe, porque si yo creo en Jesucristo, ¡yo tengo problemas pero soy dichoso!*" Transcription of preaching at a regional convention, April 27, 2013.

<sup>284</sup> "*¡El Señor no nos hizo para estar todo el tiempo en depresión, todo el tiempo llorando, todo el tiempo cabizbaja, todo el tiempo quejándote! ¡El Señor te hizo para las alturas!*" Transcription of preaching at a women's retreat, May 19, 2012.

trust.”<sup>285</sup> No matter how bad things are, even if prayers aren’t answered, true *carismáticos* do not get depressed, but rather trust in God and know that they are blessed.

Due to this conviction, unhappiness, for the *carismáticos*, becomes a weighted indicator that unhappy people have not undergone true Charismatic conversion and thus lack the faith that would allow them to be happy no matter their circumstances. Furthermore, and as a result from this perspective, when *carismáticos* speak of themselves as suffering from chronic depression, they speak only in the past tense. This holds true both in public preaching and private interviews. This is not to argue that lack of reference to perduring chronic depression means that no formerly-depressed *carismático* has ever descended into chronic depression post-conversion. However, emphasizing that *carismáticos*’ narratives present chronic depression only in the past tense demonstrates the degree to which the *carismáticos* believe that chronic depression is anathema to the true *carismático*.

As mentioned above, *carismáticos* acknowledge that moods may fluctuate due to troubling events. *Carismáticos* from time to time acknowledge situational depression as a present-time factor in their lives. Other *carismáticos*, such as Alejandra, the coordinator at St. Augustine, use the word sadness to express a similar experience:

Now when... I begin to feel a bit sad I say, “Lord, I can’t be sad because I praise you and I bless you. In this sadness that I’m feeling, Lord, you are here, you

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<sup>285</sup> “*Dios bendecirá, multiplicará, te dará. Pero si tu vida está alineada por la voluntad de Dios y aunque así no sucediera, tú no te vas a deprimir... Aún cuando tú veas... este pronóstico malo, todo esto malo, tú vas a confiar.*” Transcription of preaching at a Charismatic retreat, June 8, 2013.

manifest yourself in this sadness.”... It’s not that we don’t pass through trials, we pass through trials, but grasping the hand of Jesus it’s easier to get by.<sup>286</sup>

Even Alejandra, a hope-filled, inspirational *carismática*, experiences sadness and trials and speaks freely about those feelings without shame. However, all of these narratives reveal a shared perspective that for the *carismáticos*, while true conversion does not require an *absence* of sadness or situational depression, it does require a non-permissive attitude towards it. Sadness and depression are not ignored or denied; yet they are not allowed to linger and become deep or chronic. Sadness and situational depression are acknowledged only in order to banish them rather than to honor them.

To return now to identifying the theological conviction that men’s addiction narratives and women’s depression narratives share, when *carismáticos* associate joy with God, they conclude that depression is counter to God. If joy results when one opens one’s heart entirely to God and becomes fully spiritually aligned, then lack of joy, i.e. depression, must be the result of spiritual misalignment. *Carismáticos* state this link between spiritual misalignment and depression explicitly. A *carismático* preacher at a prayer circle declared, “if you don’t let Jesus enter in your [fishing] boat, in your life, you’re going to continue catching nothing, you’re going

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<sup>286</sup> “*Ahora cuando... empiezo a sentir un poquito de tristeza digo: ‘Señor, yo no puedo estar triste porque yo te alabo y te bendigo. En esta tristeza que yo estoy sintiendo, Señor, tú estás aquí, tú te manifiestas en esta tristeza.’ ... No es que no pasemos prueba, pasamos por pruebas, pero agarrados de la mano de Jesús es más fácil llevarlo.*” Transcription of conversation at a house prayer meeting, July 2, 2013.

to continue catching sadness, suffering, apathy, depression.”<sup>287</sup> In another example, a preacher at a day-long parish evangelization retreat stated, “if your life is aligned to the will of God... you’re not going to be depressed, you’re not going to turn to depression or anxiety medication to calm you... you’re going to trust.”<sup>288</sup> In both these instances, there is a choice either of opening one’s heart and thus aligning oneself to Jesus, or of suffering the consequences of spiritual misalignment, namely, depression. In short, the *carismáticos*’ narratives reveal a common theological conviction that depression, like addiction, is certain evidence that an individual is spiritually misaligned.

On the surface there are many parallels between addiction and depression: they are gendered analogues of spiritual misalignment that only conversion can cure; they both stem from social problems that only the joy of God’s love can heal. These parallels hold fast only on a certain level, however. Latina immigrant women bear greater social stress than do men, as outlined in the studies above. Women do not have the culturally-sanctioned escape from their stresses that men do; and furthermore when men’s excessive escape becomes addiction it increases women’s stress and suffering. The result, unsurprisingly, is that women become

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<sup>287</sup> “*Si tú no dejas que Jesús entre en tu barca, en tu vida, tú vas a seguir pescando nada, vas a seguir pescando dolor, sufrimiento, apatía, depresión.*” Transcription of preaching at a prayer circle, November 15, 2013.

<sup>288</sup> “*Si tu vida está alineada por la voluntad de Dios... tú no te vas a deprimir, tú no te vas a ir a la pastilla para la depresión para lo de la angustia, para calmar... tú vas a confiar... y si nosotros logramos esperar y no desesperar, vamos a ver la gloria de Dios.*” Transcription of preaching at parish retreat, June 8, 2013.

depressed, in many cases due to men's inability to handle their own social problems in a constructive way. Furthermore, women have the added pressure that in the eyes of their community, their depression identifies them as not being a true *carismáticos*. In many cases, women report that spiritual misalignment was a correct diagnosis of the root of their problems since conversion cured their depression. However, the underlying *carismático* assumption that since conversion works in the large majority of the cases means that spiritual misalignment is the sole problem in *all* cases adds guilt over spiritual inadequacy on top of women's already-existing depression symptoms. Women are blamed for depression just as men are blamed for their alcoholism; both spiritual illnesses are attributed to spiritual misalignment. Yet in the case of depression, no matter how often it is true that spiritual illness is the sole cause of depression, the illness may be physical as well, a biological disorder leading to chemical imbalance.

Further complicating these struggles of depressed *carismáticas* is a common belief that unhealed depression signals something that lack of healing from any other disease does not. Ongoing depression is the only disease for which the *carismático* community attributes a failure to heal as solely due to lack of faith in the unwell individual. A different perspective predominates in narratives regarding other forms of illness or disability – cancer, seizures, paralysis – as demonstrated in the following three quotes. One preacher shared his theological perspective on illness at a parish retreat:

Sometimes... illness is the means to sanctify ourselves in the Lord, because without a cross there isn't victory. And Christ had to pass through the cross of suffering to become what we are celebrating today, the glorious king of the universe.... We have to have faith... [and] believe in Jesus but also accept our

problems and our daily illnesses, because they are the means of purification, the means of salvation, the means of achieving sanctity.<sup>289</sup>

Martha, the coordinator of her parish Charismatic prayer circle, agrees, developing this idea: “Whatever problem you have, be it a family member’s illness, you don’t despair... when you know God truly... you are always thinking that God is the one who controls everything.”<sup>290</sup>

Manuel, a Mexican father of three, brings this perspective to its logical close:

You have to see God as he is. If he wants to, he does it; if he wants to, he doesn’t do it.... He is going to continue being God and is going to continue doing his will, even if I am in pain, even if [my wife] is in pain, even if you are in pain, God is going to continue being God and the will of God is singular and no one can manipulate it.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> “*A veces... la enfermedad son medios para santificarnos en el Señor, porque sin cruz no hay victoria. Y Cristo tuvo que pasar por la cruz del sufrimiento para llegar, a ser lo que hoy estamos celebrando, el Rey glorioso del universo... Tenemos que tener fe... [y] creer en Jesús pero también aceptar nuestros problemas y nuestras enfermedades diarias porque son los medios de purificación, los medios de salvación, los medios de alcanzar la santidad.*” Transcription of preaching at a parish retreat, November 24, 2013.

<sup>290</sup> “*Cualquier problema que tenga, ya sea de enfermedad de uno mismo de sus familiares, no se desespera... cuando uno conoce de verdad a Dios... siempre está uno pensando que Dios es el que controla todo.*” Interview with the author, May 20, 2014.

<sup>291</sup> “*Hay que ver a Dios como es. Si él quiere lo hace, si él quiere no lo hace y... Él va a seguir siendo Dios y va a seguir haciendo su voluntad, aunque a mí me duela,*

From these three narratives a twofold *carismático* theodicy, or theology of suffering, emerges in regards to physical disease: an omnipotent God intends illness as a means to purification and salvation; therefore continued illness is the will of God, a vehicle to increased sanctification.

Yet in the case of depression, *carismáticos* never attribute ongoing illness to the will of God but invariably to the spiritual weakness of the woman who suffers from it. The advice of the women counseling Juana about her depression, which opened this chapter, bears witness to this. They suggest that if Juana would only open her heart to turn everything over to the Lord, then her depression would disappear. The theological implication of this belief is that Juana is depressed not because it is God's will, but because she does not have enough faith and devotion.

To summarize the arguments thus far, the communal perspectives gleaned from *carismáticos'* narratives regarding depression declare that in the majority of cases, addiction and depression are spiritual misalignments which conversion alone can alleviate. There is no evidence in the fieldwork to recommend disbelieving these self-reports. Yet, while Charismatic conversion has proven effective in the majority of cases of depression and thus is a valuable resource for these women, two areas where the analogue of depression and alcohol breaks down point toward two places where this resource is not enough.

### **Differences Between Alcoholism and Depression**

The first case of the analogue breaking down is that Latina immigrant women as a whole have greater levels of social stress than men. Furthermore, when men turn to socially-sanctioned

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*aunque a Adriana le duela, aunque a ti te duela, Dios va a seguir siendo Dios y la voluntad de Dios es única y nadie la puede manipular.”* Interview with the author,

February 19, 2014.

addictions for escape, the stress factors on women increase even further and chronic depression results in many cases. *Carismático* beliefs can, at times, uphold this dynamic. Typical *carismático* advice to women whose husbands are addicts follows a theological pattern that two preachers exemplify. The first example is from a man preaching at a parish evangelization event:

You say to a woman, when her husband is hung over in the morning, “make some soup for him.” The first time the woman makes soup, but the second time she says, “may he die from a hangover.”... He’s going to come home [drunk again]... but prepare delicious soup for him. The Lord is here when you prepare the soup. [Your husband will say to himself] “I’m going to see and I’m going to remember the Holy Spirit, and I’m going to give thanks for the soup and I’m going to ask that each taste helps me not to drink, not to take drugs, not to take cocaine.”<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> *Dice uno a la mujer cuando está de cruda el hombre en la mañana “prepárele su sopita.” La mujer la primera vez hace sopita, la segunda vez dice “que se muera de cruda”... Señora , que siempre se queja en la fabrica con las amigas, “hay, no, va a llegar bolo este desgraciado,” ahora va a llegar y le va a decir “sabes que llego borracho.” Pero le prepare una sopa bien rica. El señor esta aquí cuando le prepare la sopa. “La voy a ver y me voy a acordar del Espíritu Santo, y le voy a dar gracias por esa sopa y le voy a pedir que cada trago que me tome me ayude a no beber, a no meterme mas droga a no meterme más cocaína.”* Transcription of preaching at a parish evangelization event, June 3, 2013.

The second example of *carismático* advice to women whose husbands are addicts comes from a woman preaching at a regional conference:

We, as women, as daughters of God, as members of a church... have a great responsibility to rebuild the domestic church. We women can do it with the help of the Holy Spirit, and those husbands who resist, one day they're going to see themselves at the feet of Jesus as my husband is too. My husband was an alcoholic, amongst other things, and today he's a man who seeks God, who serves God.<sup>293</sup>

These examples represent the customary *carismático* advice to a woman coping with a husband who is an addict: be endlessly patient, for God's will is sovereign and anything that comes to pass, even things like alcoholism that seem to be pointless suffering, are part of God's mysterious design.

Thus, for example, when Elena says that she was trembling with fear due to her partner's alcoholism, she prefaces it by saying "the Lord brought me to his feet because I was suffering a

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<sup>293</sup> *Nosotras, como mujeres, hijas de Dios, miembros de una iglesia, nosotras somos muy responsables, tenemos una gran responsabilidad de reconstruir la iglesia doméstica. Que la mujer, lo podemos lograr con la ayuda del Espíritu Santo y esos esposos que se resisten, un día lo van a ver prendido a los pies de Jesús como está mi esposo también. Mi esposo era alcohólico y otras cosas más, y hoy es un hombre, un hombre que busca de Dios, le sirve a Dios.* Transcription of preaching at a regional conference, October 5, 2013.

lot through my partner's alcoholism.”<sup>294</sup> She implies a relationship between a man's alcoholism and her arriving at the feet of the Lord, that is, conversion to Charismatic Catholicism. This conviction becomes explicit during preaching at a women's retreat: “Don't lament! Give thanks to God for your husband who makes you go down on your knees, who is a womanizing alcoholic. Give thanks to God for him, because if he weren't an alcoholic you wouldn't go down on your knees!”<sup>295</sup> Here what Elena implies becomes explicit: God is to be thanked – that is, God is responsible – for the alcoholic husband, without whom a woman might not have turned to God and experienced Charismatic conversion.

This communal perspective has strengths. *Carismática* women do report that persevering in kindness as a vessel of the Holy Spirit and bearing witness through the testimony of example has resulted in spousal transformation. It can be an effective resource in changing situations of suffering. It also gives women a choice, allowing them to exert some control over their responses in situations that might otherwise be out of their control. It remains true, however, that gender norms cause the stress inherent to Latina/o immigrants in the United States to affect women more heavily and negatively than men; and these same social norms sanction men's behaviors that can increase women's suffering. Furthermore, the *carismático* theology of patient

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<sup>294</sup> “*El Señor me trajo a sus plantas porque yo sufría mucho por el alcoholismo de mi pareja.*” Transcription of preaching at a parish prayer circle, November 7, 2013.

<sup>295</sup> “*¡No te lamentes! Dale gracias a Dios por ese esposo que te hace doblar las rodillas, que es alcohólico mujeriego. Dale gracias a Dios por el, porque si el no fuera un alcohólico tu no te doblaras tus rodillas.*” Transcription of preaching at a women's retreat, May 19, 2012.

endurance at times doubtless contributes to upholding the status quo rather than transforming the situation.

The second case of the addiction-and-depression analogue breaking down is that while *carismáticos* diagnose both addiction and depression as spiritual illnesses that are the responsibility of the individual, the cause of women's depression may not be solely spiritual. These women may suffer from a physical disease that prevents them from experiencing the joy associated with Charismatic conversion. Furthermore, chronic depression, the single disease gendered as exclusively female in this community, is the only illness for which lack of recovery is attributed solely to lack of faith on the part of the woman who suffers.

### **Theological Corrections from Within the Community**

These two areas where the addiction-and-depression analogue does not hold true, while being sources of suffering that women bear more than men, are also sites of *carismático* theological innovations that challenge the status quo. The first instance of such an innovation is an alternative to patient endurance when a woman has a husband who is an addict. Juan's description of his wife's reaction to his cocaine addiction, as quoted above, provides a glimpse into this alternative. Juan reports that his wife possessed an uncanny awareness of when he had cocaine, that she would question him regarding it, and when pushed to the limit she flushed his cocaine down the toilet. Juan also notes that after flushing it down the toilet, his wife declared, "*¡otro vicio no más!* No more vices!" Juan's words demonstrate that *carismáticas* respond to husbands' addictions in ways other than the *carismático* ideal of patient perseverance. While the deacon introduced this idea when he stated that women, after preparing soup for a husband's first hangover, might wish their husbands to die of the second, the deacon's message implies that women's hostility is not an appropriate response. Juan does not draw this same conclusion.

Although he reports cursing his wife at the time for flushing it down the toilet, in his preaching he never criticizes his wife for her response. On the contrary, Juan's post-conversion perspective that addiction was wrong and conversion to God was right imply that his wife's response came from the godly perspective.

This theme of challenging an addiction rather than solely displaying patient perseverance in the face of it also came up in a women's retreat. Patricia, a local preacher who was discussing the Annunciation, interpreted Mary's question "how can this be?" in the following manner: "Twice Mary asked 'why'?" Why don't we ask, 'why do you have to treat me thus? Why do you have to drink alcohol in order to be able to come home? Why do our children have to see all of our problems?'"<sup>296</sup> In this interpretation, Mary, the most privileged amongst all the saints for *carismáticos* – and for Latina/o Catholics in general – sets scriptural precedence for women questioning male authority figures, with challenging a husband's alcoholism amongst the specific examples of what she could model. What Juan only implies this preacher states explicitly: God is on the side of women who challenge their husbands' addictions. While this perspective represents a very small minority of *carismáticos*, it nonetheless demonstrates a theological option for challenging gender norms that might sanction a status quo that is not in the women's best interests.

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<sup>296</sup> "Dos veces María pregunta ¿por qué? Por qué nosotros no preguntamos: '¿por qué me tienes que tratar así?... ¿por qué tienes que tomar alcohol para poder llegar a la casa?... ¿por qué tienen que ver nuestros hijos todos nuestros problemas?'" Transcription of preaching at a women's retreat, May 19, 2012.

A second theological innovation addresses the popular conviction that chronic depression is solely a spiritual illness for which conversion is the only remedy. Experience has led at least one *carismática* to a different theological conclusion. Verónica, quoted above suggesting that Juana defeat her fears with prayer and the rosary, discovered that prayer and surrender to God were simply not enough to alleviate her depression. While her advice to Juana demonstrates her commitment to prayer as a healing resource, Verónica's experience causes her to speak up from a perspective that differs from the traditional *carismático* approach to depression:

God is the one who heals... but yes, you also need to go to the doctor so that he gives you medicine. You have to go. What you have is *depresión de pánico* ("depression from panic," i.e., anxiety-related depression)... It's your mind, a disorder of your mind. I tell you this because a priest explained it to me thus. It's a disorder of your mind, and it's controlled by medicine.... You, with your faith, with this bit of faith you have, you're going to move forward, because God is great and powerful and can do everything. But yes, you also need medicine.... Each one does their part, Christ gives half, you give a part, and the medicine gives another part. God gave science to the doctors so that you are cured. Who is curing you thus? It's God through the medicine. That is, yes, you have to go to a doctor, a believing doctor.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> "Está Dios que es el que sana... pero sí, también necesitas ir al doctor para que te dé medicina. Tienes que ir. Lo que tú tienes es depresión de pánico... es tu mente, es un desorden de tu mente. Esto lo digo porque el Padre así me lo explicó. Entonces, es

Here, Verónica offers resistance to the traditional *carismático* formula that lays the blame for women's ongoing depression on lack of faith. She does not eschew the role of faith and prayer in healing. She first encouraged Juana to pray, particularly with the rosary. Later in the conversation, she also affirms that God is the one who heals, and that Juana's faith in the God who is great and can do all things will help her move forward. These statements make it clear that Verónica is firmly rooted in her Charismatic faith.

However, Verónica doesn't limit the options of how to obtain God's healing to the more traditional approaches of prayer, scripture, holy water, and saint medals. In addition to these, she is very firm in her conviction that Juana must allow God to heal her through medicine as well. This is rooted in Verónica's understanding from her own experience that chronic depression is not just a spiritual disorder, but also a "disorder of the mind" that requires medicine to control it. Verónica shifts depression out of the category of lack of faith, identifying it instead as a physical disease. Her faithful approach to depression, then, is parallel to the standard *carismático* response to physical diseases such as cancer: pray continually and undergo all available medical treatment.

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*un desorden de tu mente, que pues eso se controla con la medicina... Tú con tu fe, con esa poquita de fe que tú tienes, vas a salir adelante, porque Dios es grande y es poderoso y él todo lo puede. Pero también sí, necesitas la medicina... Cada quien pone su parte, Cristo pone la mitad, tú pones una parte y la medicina pone otra parte. La ciencia Dios la da a los doctores para que de ahí también te cures. ¿Quién te está curando ahí? Es Dios a través de la medicina. O sea que sí, tiene que ir al doctor, con un doctor creyente."* Transcription of conversation after prayer circle meeting, July 2, 2013.

Verónica's perspective does not negate the *carismático*'s obligation to radiate joy; the experiences of the large majority of *carismáticos* have taught them that true Charismatic conversion brings happiness. A *carismático* worldview that would allow for some *carismáticos* to be unhappy – in the way that *carismáticos* suffering from cancer are allowed to feel weakness and pain – would require a clear distinction between chronic spiritual depression and chronic medical depression, a distinction that not even the wisest of pastoral counselors or psychiatrists can make. Given the difficulties that this worldview poses to *carismáticos* who suffer from a physiological chemical imbalance, Verónica's perspective does offer resources to those who suffer from depression that prayer alone cannot cure and for whom the joyful Charismatic state remains elusive.

Verónica's approach to finding healing from depression does not undermine the core *carismático* belief that God is the one who heals, that God can “do everything.” She is careful to turn to a priest, a source of authority that the *carismáticos* greatly revere, so that her approach to overcoming her depression is in no way counter to the will of God. The priest and the Catholic doctor provide for her a theological option of God working through medicine, of a God who “gave science to the doctors so that you are cured.” Verónica thus uses her own experience, in combination with spiritual advice from a respected authority source that resonates with this experience, to develop a theology of God's healing. A theology wherein God gives science and medicine to doctors both safeguards the *carismático* imperative that God be the source of healing and expands the traditional “faith healing” categories of scripture, prayer, and holy objects to include medication if the traditional methods prove insufficient.

For Verónica, medicine is not *separate* from faith healing, but an *additional category* of faith healing. She makes this clear in an interview when she states, “I went through a very

difficult period of depression, anxiety, and panic. After I joined the prayer circle, my life changed 100%.”<sup>298</sup> One of those changes, she explains, was starting to take psychiatric medication. Yet she does not say that her depression disappeared and her life changed 100% due to the prayer circle *and* medication; she gives the entire credit to the prayer circle. For Verónica, medicine is not a category separate from encountering God, converting, and being healed through faith via Charismatic Catholicism; it is part and parcel of it. She thus expands the concept of faith healing to include the medicine that may be necessary in cases of chemical imbalance or mental disorder.

Verónica, like Juan and the preacher cited in the previous examples, represents a small minority perspective. Yet there is evidence that these minority perspectives signal burgeoning theological perspectives rather than anomalies or vestiges. Verónica, Juan, and his wife are all amongst the younger members of the local RCCH movement; Verónica is in her thirties and Juan and his wife are in their forties. This suggests that challenging the gender status quo may be a perspective found in a younger generation that, in spite of its novelty, is beginning to surface in public *carismático* preaching. Particularly in the case of Verónica’s innovation, there is also evidence that as a result of the shift amongst *carismáticos* towards giving full obedience to Church authority, *carismáticos* may be metabolizing the guidance of seminary-educated Roman Catholic authorities who are more familiar with scientific innovations such as psychiatric medication. Verónica mentions that a priest’s influence shaped her theological perspective.

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<sup>298</sup> “*Pasé por una etapa muy difícil de depresión, de ansiedad, de pánico. Y después de que entré al círculo de oración, mi vida cambió al 100 por ciento.*” Interview with the author, February 7, 2014.

Thus these perspectives that challenge the gender role status quo may be harbingers of a slowly-shifting theological trend resulting from increased respect for Roman Catholic authority figures and shifts amongst younger generations away from strict cultural gender roles.

To summarize the discussion of depression thus far, social stresses for many Latina immigrant women result in depression; and when men seek to escape their social stresses in addictive behaviors, the pressure on women increases. Many *carismática* women have found that conversion to Charismatic Catholicism cured their depression and brought them joy. However, this association of true conversion with lasting joy means that those who do not express ongoing joy – even if it is a result of physical rather than spiritual illness – seem not to have had a true conversion. While the most common successes amongst *carismáticos* lead them to recommend patient endurance in the face of male addiction and posit prayer and conversion as the only effective means to cure depression, certain younger voices offer alternative theological options. Some *carismáticos* accept or even encourage women who explicitly challenge their husbands' addictive behaviors or who take psychiatric medication.

### **Transformative Strategies in Depression Narratives**

The varied depression narratives above share a common transformative strategy: building self-esteem. This theme surfaces when Margarita speaks with confident joy about being a new creature clothed by God in new clothing; when Alejandra and Gabriela relate that they are empowered to banish sadness by recalling that God lives in them; when Verónica relates that through enlisting God's aid she has the ability to defeat depression through prayer. The way in which *carismático* theologies can help build the self-esteem of depressed women is most apparent, however, in Yolanda's story of healing from depression. As related in the previous chapter, Yolanda experienced emotional devastation when her husband's family treated her as if

she were a cockroach. She related that this rejection, and the desire for vengeance on her husband for not defending her, led her to drinking and, subsequently and likely as a consequence of drinking, into terrible depression. Her words about the healing effects of conversion reveal the self-esteem building strategy inherent to *carismático* theologies:

At the time, it hurt me... but now it makes me laugh.... Do you know why it makes me laugh now? Because I know that this cockroach is a precious pearl in the hands of God! Glory to the Lord, to my Holy Father, it is he who makes us beautiful, loves us and values us!<sup>299</sup>

For Yolanda, befriending God has transformed her self-esteem, allowing her to embrace the affirmation that she is a precious pearl. Or, to use Mahmood's language when she speaks of the transformative strategy of building self-esteem, befriending God has affirmed Yolanda's worth, thus allowing her to be "unhindered by other people's opinions," even those of her in-laws. Women's conversion stories of healing from depression demonstrate how *carismáticos'* theologies of a loving God serve as a strategy that can transform the low self-esteem of a depressed woman.

In conclusion, the women whose narratives appear in this chapter have found a wide variety of religious resources for addressing their chronic depression. Some use holy water,

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<sup>299</sup> *"En aquel tiempo me dolía... pero ahorita ya me da risa... y ¿saben por qué me da risa ahora? ¡Porque se que está cucaracha es una perla preciosa en las manos de Dios! ¡Gloria al señor, a mi padre santo, es él el que nos hace bellos, amarnos, y valorarnos!"*

Transcription of preaching at a regional healing retreat, June 29, 2013.

some pray the rosary, some read the Bible, and some model patient endurance in the face of a troubling situation. Others interpret a religious response to depression as questioning the social situations that cause depression. Verónica takes psychiatric medication that God offers as a healing resource. From a twenty-first-century scientific and liberal perspective, the latter choices might seem “better,” “more effective.”

Yet Kwok, as quoted in the Introduction, offers an alternative lens more appropriate for viewing the women in this chapter, the perspective of impoverished women of color from the global South. Kwok speaks of the priorities of such women as “a historical imagination of the concrete and not the abstract, a hope that is more practical and therefore not so easily disillusioned.” This perspective shifts the focus to considering what practical, concrete options are actually available to the *carismáticas* in this chapter. Some have the means to afford medical care; some have sufficient resources and social support and are thus able to risk challenging social and familial norms. Some do not have medical insurance or access to health care; for some the well-being of multiple generations of family members depends both on the woman’s caregiving and the income of a single male head of household. In short, the most practical and viable solution for a given woman may not be the choice that liberalism and a scientific approach to mental health might privilege. For women without access to mental health care, or women for whom challenging the status quo would endanger themselves and their families in their current life situations, other strategies are more practical and viable. For such women, prayer and conversion are the most practical and viable option. Their sisters provide living examples that it is also an efficacious option.

It is very difficult to determine, from an outside perspective, what option is the most viable and effective for a given woman in a given situation. What is clear from these women’s

stories, however, is that the variety of methods they have found to address depression reveal tremendous creativity and tenacity. Whatever burdens their social situations may place on their shoulders, these formerly-depressed women demonstrate that due to their faith-inspired perseverance they are able to experience themselves as “*en victoria*,” victorious over the chronic depression that previously crippled them.

## CHAPTER 7 – WORLD TRANSFORMATION

On a humid July evening, nineteen people gather in the sanctuary of St. Rose of Lima parish for the weekly Charismatic prayer circle. As is customary, this small group is subdued yet attentive as the evening's preacher steps to the wooden ambo to the left of the altar. Gerardo, a *servidor* from this community, offers his testimony tonight. A balding man in his sixties with a dark moustache, he wears black slacks and a long-sleeved white shirt, top button unbuttoned, with fine embroidery down the front. He puts on reading glasses in preparation to begin his preaching by reading Ephesians 2:19: "You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God." Taking off his glasses and gesturing with them in his right hand, Gerardo offers the following reflection:

The Word says, "we are co-citizens with the saints, we are relatives of the Lord, relatives of God." Now we're not strangers, we aren't foreigners, it doesn't matter that we weren't born in this country.... We know that to God we're not strangers.... The word of the Lord says that we're not strangers, and we are all children of God. Thus we don't feel like strangers, we are a family!<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> *"Dice esta Palabra: somos conciudadanos de los santos, somos familiares del Señor, familiares de Dios, nosotros ya no somos extraños, no somos forasteros, no importa que no hayamos nacido en este país... Sabemos que para Dios no somos extraños... Dice la palabra del Señor que no somos extraños, que todos somos hijos de Dios. Entonces no nos sentimos extraños, ¡somos una familia!"* Transcription of preaching at a parish prayer circle, July 6, 2013.

In this chapter, I demonstrate the myriad ways in which *carismático* religiosity and beliefs contain strategies that provide for community transformation. I delineate how Charismatic Catholicism shapes its adherents into people who transform their families, their parishes, their Church, and the wider world around them. I explore the theological convictions inherent to these perspectives and argue that the belief that there are many ways to transform the world is in and of itself a transformative *carismático* theological strategy.

In the previous chapter, women's voices spoke of how their Charismatic religiosity provides them with an ally who builds their self-esteem. Conde-Frazier's and Espinosa's perspectives on Pentecostal religiosity encouraging self-empowerment, as outlined in the Introduction, specifically treat of the empowerment that the Holy Spirit grants to women. Espinosa, for instance, speaks of Pentecostal Latinas following a call to ordination, which, in addition to granting a self-affirming sense of fulfilling a divine purpose, also provides "one of the few routes to upward social, economic, and ecclesiastical mobility for Latinas that does not require a college degree, seminary training, or the ability to speak fluent English. In this respect, it is... a vehicle for female empowerment."<sup>301</sup> Pentecostal pneumatology serves as a resource to women for manifesting transformation in self-confidence, in socio-economic status, and in the community that one serves.

While both Conde-Frazier and Espinosa speak solely of the empowering effects of this pneumatology for women, neither give any reason to believe this empowerment belongs to women alone. Indeed, I found striking evidence of this Spirit-facilitated empowerment at work both in women and men amongst the *carismáticos*, fueling and inspiring both self- and

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<sup>301</sup> Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals*, 315.

community transformation. The most dramatic example is Rafael, the coordinator at Christ the King who began studies to enter the permanent diaconate as mentioned in Chapter 2. During a conversation after a parish prayer circle, Rafael explained to me that he was enrolled in a GED completion program. The motivation, he told me, was that the Spanish-language permanent diaconate program required a GED for enrollment, and he felt such a strong calling to the diaconate that he would do whatever was required to achieve the calling that God placed before him. Espinosa's description of women's Spirit-led vocations providing them with social and ecclesial advancement despite their lack of college degrees or the ability to speak fluent English forcibly calls Rafael to mind. Fieldwork with this working-class Latina/o immigrant community demonstrates that not only women, but men such as Rafael, with little education or socio-economic status, are also in need of a transformation-inspiring theology of self-empowerment. This is precisely what they find in the RCCH.

### **Transforming the Prayer Circle Community**

Gerardo's interpretation of Ephesians 2:19, as outlined above, is a first example of the transformative power of the prayer circle. Gerardo responds theologically to the degrading Latina/o immigrant experience of being dismissed as strangers, foreigners, aliens through proclaiming what Charismatic Catholicism has taught him: as Charismatic Catholics, the *carismáticos* are something even better than United States citizens. They belong to God's immediate family and are co-citizens with the very saints.

As with Yolanda's proclamation that she is a precious pearl, not a cockroach, here again there is an affirming *carismático* theological perspective that builds self-esteem and undermines any power that derogatory opinions may have to diminish one's sense of worth. Yet Gerardo's declarations differ in one significant way from Yolanda's: it is through the community that

*carismáticos* have access to this transformative self-esteem-building strategy, and it is in order to build up the self-esteem of the community that Gerardo speaks as he does. Through the *carismático* community, which gathers to encourage its members to become devoted children of God, it is possible for the *carismáticos* to be amongst those whom God recognizes as family. It is to build up the self-esteem of the community, not just the individual, that Gerardo emphasizes words of communal belonging: citizens, families, relatives. The *carismático* community emerges as an affirming family, a community of belonging and dignity that ameliorates the loneliness, powerlessness, and sense of abandonment so common amongst immigrants.

### **Transforming the Family**

Nor do the *carismáticos* simply become members of the prayer circle as a self-beneficial transformative strategy. They also seek, through the influence of preaching and exemplary deeds, to shape themselves and each other as community members who work to transform not only the prayer circle community but also the communities of their families, their parishes, their Church, their immigrant communities, and the wider world around them. Juan's story of addiction recovery in Chapter 5, for instance, demonstrates that the moral influence of the prayer circle transforms not only the *carismático* individual but also the *carismático's* family. Juan reports that after his conversion, there is "happiness in his house" due to his demonstrating "the love of God" with his character and meting out discipline only as correction, and only according to the Word and will of God. A similar theme arose in Chapter 6 in the words of the woman who related that "God has come into my home" since she became a *carismática* and instead of being angry, she is able to feel and show love to her husband and children.

Ricardo, a local preacher addressing men gathered at a retreat, speaks of the responsibility to help one's family to strengthen and transform, and of the way that Charismatic religiosity helped him to be willing to accept this responsibility:

About three years ago one of my sons was doing very badly in school. I got a note from the school saying that we had to help him read. My first reaction, even though I was walking in the ways of the Lord, even though I knew something of the Lord, was to get angry.... Then the Spirit of God said to me from afar, "well, help him, you blockhead! Start working with him, start doing something, he needs you!" I began to spend an hour each day helping him read.... It was rough there with him, my dear brothers, it cost me a lot... but if we don't take action, we're not going to do anything. I began to pray to God that he help me be there with my son, to sit with him, to help him. Two weeks later I got a note from the school saying that they didn't know what was happening, but the boy was doing well and was advancing a great deal. At the end of the year he earned honors for how he had advanced in in reading.... God doesn't ask us to go to save the world... [he asks you] to make the change here, in the family, to begin with your family.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> *“Uno de mis hijos hace como tres años iba muy mal en la escuela. Me llegó una nota de la escuela de que necesitábamos ayudarle leer. Mi primera reacción, ya estando en los caminos del Señor, ya conociendo algo del Señor fue enojarme, mi primera reacción fue enojarme... Pues el Espíritu de Dios allá de lejos me decía, pues, ¡ayúdale, tarugo! Ponte trabajar con él, ponte hacer algo, él necesita de ti. Comencé hice de mi tiempo una hora al día*

Ricardo demonstrates here how, as a *carismático*, he demanded conscious effort of himself to help his son, even if it cost him a great deal. He transformed himself not only for his private benefit but also to be a transformative presence within his family.

### **Transforming the Parish Community**

The *carismáticos* also seek to mold themselves, through their religiosity, into believers who work to transform their parishes. This manifests most clearly in the requirement that any *servidor* must have a ministry in the parish because a *servidor*, a servant, must serve, and not only in the prayer circle. Andrés Arango notes that the RCCH has been a “school of formation” for many lay ministers in their parishes:

Many parishes around the country, in order to develop their liturgy, depend on leaders from prayer groups to serve in ministries as lectors, musicians, greeters, Eucharistic ministers, catechists, catechumen sponsors, and so forth.... The objective of the RCCH isn't to form a “church” parallel to the Catholic Church,

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*para comenzar a ayudarlo a leer... yo estaba que me llevaba la fregada allí con él, mis queridos hermanos, me costaba mucho trabajo... Pero si no nos ponemos al acción no vamos a hacer nada. Le comencé a pedir a Dios que me ayudara a estar allí con él, a sentarme con él, ayudarlo. A las dos semanas me llegó una nota de la escuela que no sabían que estaba pasando pero que el niño iba bien y ya estaba avanzando mucho. Al final de año se gana el honor de todo lo que había avanzado en la lectura... Dios no nos pide que vayamos a salvar el mundo... aquí en nuestra familia, si comienzas con tu familia a hacer ese cambio en tu familia.”*

Transcription of preaching from a men's retreat, June 23, 2012.

but on the contrary, our prayer groups ought always to link us to the parishes and in particularly to their liturgical life.<sup>303</sup>

I observed, during my fieldwork, that there is a disproportionately high percentage of *carismáticos* serving in and leading parish ministries. Araceli, a woman who has been involved for several decades in the RCCH in Colombia and in the United States, observed that the *carismáticos* in a parish “attract more people, they keep the community united, they are supportive, and they have awakened a feeling of collaboration.... For me, between a parish that doesn’t have a Charismatic group and one that does, well, the one that has a Charismatic group has the advantage.”<sup>304</sup> *Carismáticos* in a parish also provide a material advantage: Edward Cleary notes that “Charismatics tend to be more generous than other Catholics in contributing economic support to the church,”<sup>305</sup> and my fieldwork observations support this point.

### **Transforming the Roman Catholic Church**

The *carismático* commitment to being a transformative presence is not limited to the parish. *Carismáticos* see themselves as the vanguard of the Holy Spirit’s movement to renew the faith and vigor of the entire Roman Catholic Church. *Carismáticos* do not prescribe a rigorous self-scrutiny for *carismáticos* alone, in order to create a morally superior clique within the

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<sup>303</sup> Arango, “Aporte,” 87.

<sup>304</sup> “*Atraen más gente, mantienen a la comunidad unida, son solidarios, han despertado bastante el sentido de colaboración, eso se puede ver... para mí un, una parroquia que no tiene grupo carismático y una que sí lo tiene, está en ventaja la que sí lo tiene.*” Interview with the author, January 30, 2014.

<sup>305</sup> Cleary, “Conversion,” 170.

Roman Catholic Church. On the contrary, the *carismáticos* proclaim that through the Charismatic Renewal, the Holy Spirit “came to heal the church, to heal and liberate it, to renew it with its strength and with its power!”<sup>306</sup> The *carismáticos* thus see themselves as instruments of the Holy Spirit and as the vanguard of a movement through which the Holy Spirit intends to renew the faith and vigor of every single member of the Roman Catholic Church. They are the agents without which God could not renovate the Church to conform to what God has envisioned for it all along. Sofía, one of the founders of the local movement, reflected on the significance of the RCCH to the Church:

The Charismatic Renewal has been the greatest gift that God has been able to send to my Church. The Renewal came to give life to the Church. The Church has existed for centuries... but God wanted something to come to his Church to make it grow, to give it life.<sup>307</sup>

While the *carismáticos* conceive of themselves as a force of renewal within the Roman Catholic Church, their intention is not to disrupt. As Henri Gooren points out, the

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<sup>306</sup> “*Vino el Espíritu Santo por medio de la Renovación Carismática, a sanar la iglesia, a sanarla a libertarla, ¡a renovarla con su fuerza con su poder!*” Transcription of preaching at a regional conference, October 5, 2013.

<sup>307</sup> “*La Renovación te voy a decir que ha sido el regalo más grande que Dios ha podido mandar a mi Iglesia. La Renovación vino a darle vida a la Iglesia. La iglesia existe desde siglos atrás... pero Dios quiso que viniera algo a su iglesia para que creciera, darle vida, darle lo que era el verdadero función del espíritu santo dentro de nuestra Iglesia, ese era del corazón de la Iglesia.*” Interview with the author, February 19, 2014.

Charismatic approach to renewal is “aimed at reactivating individual Catholics and not at directly transforming the institutional church.”<sup>308</sup> *Carismáticos* seek to renew the Church through encouraging an increasing number of members to be channels of the Holy Spirit, a strategy which from *carismático* perspectives carries two advantages. First, recruiting additional channels for the Holy Spirit gives *carismáticos* greater assurance that their movement is renewing the Church according to *God’s* will rather than the human will of an individual leading a specific Church-reforming effort. Second, activating myriad individual channels allows transformation to occur on myriad fronts, a point to which I return at the end of this chapter.

### **Transforming The World**

Furthermore, many *carismáticos* hold the conviction that the Holy Spirit is transforming not only the Roman Catholic Church but the entire world. As a result, many *carismáticos* pronounce a religious imperative to transform the world. It is true that, as quoted above, Ricardo says, “God doesn’t ask us to go save the world.” Yet a few moments before Ricardo had stated “[the Bible] tells us that we have everything we need in order to make a change in our lives, in order to make a change in our society.”<sup>309</sup> Placing these two statements in conversation with each other, when Ricardo states, “God doesn’t ask us to go to save the world,” he amends that God asks that “[you] begin with your family, to make the change in your family.” Ricardo

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<sup>308</sup> Gooren, “Catholic Charismatic Renewal,” 204.

<sup>309</sup> “*Nos está diciendo que nosotros tenemos todo lo que necesitamos para hacer el cambio en nuestras vidas, para hacer el cambio en nuestro, en nuestra sociedad.*” Transcription of preaching from a men’s retreat, June 23, 2012.

implies not that God doesn't want his believers to transform the world, but rather, that the transformation begins with transforming whatever is unwell in one's family. Personal acts to assist the individuals in one's immediate sphere of influence *are* world-transforming acts.

Emilia, one of the founders of the local RCCH movement, affirms and expands upon this idea:

If the world knew God in the way that we know him, it wouldn't be like it is now in Venezuela, in Syria. It wouldn't be like that. Look how the world is. There are so many killing themselves here in [our city]. What do these young people lack? What happened where they were born? What do they need? It's because they don't know love, no one has given them love. Perhaps their parents brought them up as believers, but you have to evangelize the parents so that they know how to give love to their children.... God has to be in the center of our lives, and I believe the Holy Spirit is the one who unites us in love.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> “*Si el mundo conociera a Dios de la forma que se conocemos, no estuviera como está ahora en Venezuela, no estuviera como está en Siria. No sería como estuviera ya. Porque mira como está el mundo, no hubiera tanto tantos matándose, aquí en [...]. ¿Qué es lo que falta de esos jóvenes? ¿A dónde nacieron qué pasó? ¿Qué es lo que le hace falta? Porque no conocen el amor, nadie se lo ha dado. Los padres los crían como quizá creyendo pero ay que evangelizar los padres para que sepan dar amor a los hijos.... Dios tiene que ser el centro de nuestras vidas y yo creo el espíritu santo es el que nos une a nosotros en el amor.*” Interview with the author, February 19, 2014.

Emilia here offers an informal pneumatology in which the Holy Spirit unites humanity in love. As a result, she declares, parents must not only bring their children up in the Catholic Church so that God is the center of their lives but must also show them love. Parental love, from Emilia's standpoint, makes it possible for the children who learn this love to be the Holy Spirit's agents in uniting the world with love. Thus, from Ricardo and Emilia's *carismático* perspectives, actions towards those in one's immediate sphere of influence are not merely one part of transforming the world; they are the most basic, necessary, and effective means of transforming the world.

Espinosa's demonstration of evangelization encompassing not only spirit but mind and body, as outlined in the Introduction, is also helpful in understanding how changing the world is inherent to *carismático* religiosity. Pentecostals, Espinosa explains, use social outreach work to "demonstrate and incarnationalize the love and saving grace of Jesus Christ to a broken and suffering world."<sup>311</sup> Thus Pentecostals incorporate social outreach into their evangelizing and proselytizing efforts as a means to draw converts through demonstrating in actions, not just reporting in words, that God seeks to transform their suffering into joy. The *carismáticos* demonstrate a similar impulse to demonstrate God's love in concrete ways. Andrés Arango catalogues some of the ministries through which *carismáticos* blend evangelism and social outreach:

They visit the sick: they pray for their physical healing but most importantly they bring them the love of Jesus. They visit the imprisoned: I have recently heard of communities that have gone to jails in this country, visiting and in particular

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<sup>311</sup> Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals*, 322.

bringing Life in the Spirit seminars to Hispanics so that, in spite of being behind bars, they experience the true liberty that the Spirit of God gives. They feed those in need: some prayer groups have organized themselves to go through the streets of their cities, seeking homeless Hispanics to bring them something to eat and at the same time speaking to them about the love of Jesus. Many prayer groups and Charismatic communities have also served as liaisons between Hispanic employers helping new immigrants, or others that have been without work, to obtain the necessary income to support themselves and their families. Thus the RCCH has discovered a new call to be an instrument of development for Hispanics in the United States, not only spiritual but also integrally.<sup>312</sup>

Arango affirms here that like the Pentecostal Protestants, *carismáticos* do not evangelize merely through speaking about Jesus's love but also, and perhaps more convincingly, through manifesting and bearing witness to that love through transformative works.

The examples from the *carismáticos* in my fieldwork were, in general, are less organized than those that Arango describes. For instance, one evening at the St. Augustine prayer circle the *dirigente* invited a young man forward and explained to the crowd that this young man's mother was in the hospital and that the medical expenses were tremendous. The young man was not a regular attendee at the prayer circle and he mostly looked down at his hands while the *dirigente* explained the situation. As the choir began the closing song, fifteen or more people in the pews approached the young man and gave him money. Someone hugged him and held him for a while as he cried; and during this time another twenty people came up and tucked money into the

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<sup>312</sup> Arango, "Aporte," 84.

young man's hand.<sup>313</sup> Another example of this spontaneous and unstructured form of outreach that is typical of the *carismáticos* in my study is visiting of the sick, which Margarita, a relatively new *servidora* at St. Augustine, practices:

My mom is in a rehabilitation center and there are a lot of people there who are also recuperating. It's very lovely when I arrive because they are waiting for an embrace, a kiss, a smile, a caress. I realize that God is in each one of them and that he has mercy on them. When they see me arrive, they know that I will greet them, embrace them, kiss them. I go and talk to them, I tell them that God loves them, that God is with them, and I feel so happy.<sup>314</sup>

This type of outreach, where individuals take whatever opportunities their daily lives offer them to embody kindness and radiate love, was most typical in my fieldwork. Furthermore, as a general rule the *carismáticos* in my fieldwork did not accompany these acts of kindness with proselytization as is the custom with Pentecostal Protestants. Certainly, they speak of God: Margarita assures the people in the rehabilitation center that God loves them and Arango notes

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<sup>313</sup> Field notes from a parish prayer circle, August 8, 2013.

<sup>314</sup> “*Mi mamá está en un lugar de rehabilitación, y allí hay muchos que también se están recuperando. Es muy hermoso cuando uno llega allí, porque ellos están esperando un abrazo, un beso, una sonrisa, una caricia. Allí me doy cuenta que Dios está en cada uno de ellos y está misericordia de ellos. Cuando ellos me ven llegar, ya saben que los saludo, les doy un abrazo, les doy un beso. Me pongo allí a hablar con ellos, a decirles que Dios los ama, que Dios está con ellos y me siento tan feliz.*” Transcription of conversation at a *servidores* meeting, October 1, 2013.

that *carismáticos* doing outreach speak of Jesus's love. Yet in general these words are offered in the spirit of reassuring individuals of their worth in God's eyes, without accompanying attempts to persuade them to convert to Charismatic Catholicism or to surrender their lives to Jesus in order to save their souls.

This practice of demonstrating love without attempts to proselytize likely stems from two particular aspects of Roman Catholicism that influence the *carismáticos* I met. First, these *carismáticos* are confident that, as baptized and faithful members of the one true Church, all will be well for them after death, as outlined in Chapter 4. The one-hundred-percent-Catholic *carismáticos* do not feel the Pentecostal Protestant urgency to preach and to effect conversion in order to save the souls of fellow Catholics. The second Roman Catholic influence that likely informs their reticence to preach in an overt manner is the model of St. Francis of Assisi, the non-Biblical saint the *carismáticos* cite far more than any other. More than once I heard *carismáticos* reference the words attributed to Francis: "Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary."<sup>315</sup> This popular saintly admonition to preach in deeds, not words, influences the *carismáticos* to preach through action but without the accompanying proselytizing that characterizes the social outreach work of many Pentecostal Protestants.

### **Theological Convictions Underlying Community Transformation**

These examples, from the microcosm of the immediate family to the macrocosm of the global Roman Catholic Church, demonstrate that *carismático* religiosity prompts transformation.

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<sup>315</sup> Or, as a *carismático* preacher phrased it during a regional conference: "*es necesario proclamar el evangelio siempre, cuando sea necesario, hay que usar las palabras.*" October 6, 2013.

All of the transformative strategies named in the Introduction and developed in Chapters 3-6 come into play in this chapter: Gerardo demonstrates how prayer circle members build their self-esteem through affirming that they are co-citizens with the saints. Juan and Ricardo form themselves ethically into fathers who manifest God's love in their homes. An improvement in material circumstances is implied when Ricardo helps his son build a firm foundation for his future through increased success in school. There is public activism when *carismáticos* form themselves as ministry leaders in their parishes and help to heal and liberate the Church through being the Holy Spirit's vessels for Roman Catholic renewal. There are also numerous examples of Kwok's "historical imagination of the concrete" and a practical hope that is not easily disillusioned: giving money to a young man to help cover his mother's medical expenses, helping children do better in school, assisting their parish community financially.

There is also a theological dimension to each of these community-transforming practices. Margarita speaks with conviction that God works through her to demonstrate God's love for those who are recovering from illness and injury in a rehabilitation center. *Carismáticos* assert their theological conviction that God has adopted them, a twofold blessing wherein they have a family in each other and they belong to God. Ricardo holds a theological conviction that the Spirit of God works through the close circle of family members to transform the world, one person, one family at a time. Sofía declares her belief that the Holy Spirit works through the individuals in the CCR to renew the faith and vigor of the entire Roman Catholic Church. All of these theological threads woven into *carismático* narratives seem, at first glance, quite diverse: God has great love to the sick; God builds up self-esteem in Latina/o immigrants; the Spirit of God transforms the world one relationship at a time; the Holy Spirit renews the faith and fervor of the Catholic Church. Nonetheless, these diverse proclamations reveal a common *carismático*

theological conviction: God is a God of transformative love who uses varied hands, in varied, ways to mold everything and everyone to the beautiful image that God intends.

### **Theology of Multiform Agency**

The point to cataloging the diverse strategies that the *carismáticos* use to transform their communities is not to establish that any particular strategy is “the” *carismático* transformative strategy. Not all of the *carismáticos* do all of these things; doubtless there are some for whom Charismatic Catholicism is a feel-good practice in which they dance, sing, and praise once a week, and nothing more. I certainly heard complaints along these lines from some of the dedicated *carismáticos* during the course of my fieldwork. The point, rather, is to illustrate that the members of this religious community, vastly diverse in nationality, in socioeconomic status, in education level, in age, in legal status, and in gender, employ a variety of transformative strategies, in a variety of ways, to a variety of degrees, all as a result of joining the RCCH.

Furthermore, what I observed and heard during my fieldwork prompts me to argue that the theological perspectives the *carismáticos* preach appeal to Latina/o immigrants precisely *because* they provide a variety of transformative strategies to diverse participants, for whom direct resistance and confrontation involve varying levels of risk. The particular aspect of Latina/o Charismatic Catholic theology that allows for multiple strategies is a threefold pneumatology. The first tenet of this perspective is that humans must surrender themselves to God so that his Holy Spirit might work through them. Manuel, a Mexican father of three and the coordinator of his parish prayer circle, explains, “one is an instrument... pure, grimy, however

we are; but one is an instrument that God, in his great love, needs in order to do things.”<sup>316</sup>

Humans are God’s hands on earth, instruments without which God could not “do things,” could not act. The second tenet of this pneumatology addresses the types of actions that God takes when God acts through these instruments. The *carismáticos* pray, “may we be capable of committing our lives so that you can act in them... [so that] you can transform this world;”<sup>317</sup> and they observe, “when we let ourselves be guided by his Holy Spirit, [God] can transform not only our own lives but also the lives of those who surround us.”<sup>318</sup> The actions that God takes through the instruments of human beings are actions that transform the world – the world of the self and the world of those who surround the self. Juan summed up the third and final tenet of this pneumatology during an interview:

St. Paul said in his letter, “to be a single body we have hands, we have feet, we have eyes to be a complete person.” In the church, too, there are different gifts, someone sings, someone preaches, someone welcomes people, someone even

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<sup>316</sup> “*Uno es un instrumento... limpio, sucio, como estamos, pero es un instrumento que Dios en su gran amor, lo necesita para hacer estas cosas.*” Interview with the author, February 19, 2014.

<sup>317</sup> “*Seamos capaces de entregar nuestras vidas para que tú en ellas puedas actuar, puedas... transformar este mundo.*” Transcription of conversation at a house prayer meeting, July 2, 2013.

<sup>318</sup> “*Cuando nosotros nos dejamos guiar por su Espíritu Santo, él puede no solamente transformar nuestra propia vida sino la vida que es de los que nos rodean.*” Transcription of radio program, July 7, 2013.

cleans the bathrooms.... For me that is the *carismático*, the one who manifests what the spirit reveals to him, not simply saying... the presence is seen only in mass, no, the presence of God is brought to many other places, in many other forms.<sup>319</sup>

The pneumatological perspective in its entirety thus proclaims that God, through the Holy Spirit, gives a variety of gifts to different people in order that, together, they might fulfill the many and varied plans that God has for transforming the world.

This perspective not only permits but indeed *requires* varied transformative strategies. This theological necessity for varied gifts coheres with Latina/o immigrants' needs, as the postcolonial theorists argue, to utilize strategies on a broad continuum between complete passivity and direct confrontation. It is a theology wherein God demands that humans act on their own behalf, yet at the same time it does not dictate a specific, preferred form those actions must take. It proclaims a God who transforms the world, a vast and many-faceted task, through utilizing diverse peoples with varied gifts as instruments of this transformation.

In conclusion, the *carismáticos* hold varied theological convictions regarding God's commitment to transform the world. Ricardo describes how God worked through him as an

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<sup>319</sup> “*San Pablo lo dice en su carta, para ser un solo cuerpo tenemos manos, tenemos pies, tenemos ojos para ser una persona completa. También en la iglesia son diferentes carismas, el que canta, el que predica, el que da la bienvenida a las personas, hasta el que lava los baños... Para mi ese es el carismático, lo que manifiesta lo que el espíritu le revele, no simplemente en decir... en la misa solamente ahí es donde se ve la presencia de, no, en muchas otras se lleva, en muchas otras formas se lleva la presencia de Dios.*” Interview with author, November 22, 2013.

instrument to help his son succeed in school. Araceli describes how *carismáticos* feel God calls them to bolster their parish communities through financial and ministerial contributions. Sofía sees God working through the examples and works of *carismáticos* to renew the entire Roman Catholic Church. They collectively demonstrate a conviction that God sends them to transform the world through loving interactions with the people who surround them in their daily lives. Each of these individuals works in unique ways to be God's hands and heart manifesting in their individual circles of influence in whatever situations arise. Such a theology of multiform agency is particularly apt for a community for whom public visibility presents varying levels of risk. The *carismáticos* experience themselves as *bendecidos* – blessed to have encountered a loving, transformative God and grown close to this God in their prayer circles. Their gratitude for this blessing sets them afire – *encendidos* – to be a transformative force in their communities. Their transformative fire galvanizes the members of their community to be *en victoria* – victorious in schools, in rehabilitation centers, in parishes, in the Roman Catholic Church – as the *carismáticos* seek to transform the violence of this world one heart at a time.

## CHAPTER 8 – CONCLUSIONS

In the Introduction, I named the two primary objectives of this work. The first is to explore the ways in which the *carismáticos*' religiosity bolsters their efforts to transform themselves and their communities. The second objective is to provide the closest approximation possible to a *carismático* systematic theology of sin, soteriology, and conversion. In this chapter, which is divided into two sections, I outline the theoretical and methodological discoveries that I made during the course of my research. In the first section, I return to the theoretical perspectives introduced in Chapter 1 and demonstrate how each offers insights into the *carismáticos*' religiosity and theologies. I then argue that the *carismáticos*' religious narratives generate an additional theory of transformative strategies amongst subaltern peoples. I then demonstrate how this theory manifests in *carismáticos*' perspectives on soteriology, addiction, and depression. In the second section, I explore the answers that this project offers to the methodological questions raised in the Introduction, placing particular emphasis on the benefits a theological approach offers to ethnography and the benefits an ethnographic method offers to theology. I conclude with the particular methodological insights that I gained as an ethnographer-theologian.

### SECTION I – THEORETICAL CONCLUSIONS

The numerous examples in the preceding five chapters demonstrate the varied ways that *carismáticos*, while demanding of themselves profound trust in God, do not merely wait in passivity for future heavenly rewards. On the contrary, their religiosity allows and even demands transformative activity. Several theories from Pentecostal studies and postcolonial studies, as outlined in the Introduction, provide lenses that reveal the transformative strategies inherent to Latina/o immigrant Charismatic Catholicism. Angela Hoekstra, Calvin Smith,

Hanneke Slootweg, and Allard Willemier Westra, for instance, argue that conversion to a Pentecostal form of Christianity functions as a strategy to improve material circumstances. While, unlike the Pentecostals in the secondary literature, the *carismáticos* never explicitly stated that their material circumstances improved after conversion, this theoretical lens makes more visible the ways in which conversion did have this effect. Juan, for example, cursed his wife for flushing his cocaine down the toilet and shouted “you don’t know how much that cost!” This narrative strongly suggests that more income will be available to Juan and his family when he no longer spends his money on cocaine, an implication that becomes visible due to Calvin Smith’s observation that Pentecostal/ Charismatic conversion “shifts wages from alcohol, gambling, and prostitution to the family.”<sup>320</sup>

Similarly, when Kwok Pui-lan states that the “hope for some of the disenfranchised women may be a place to dry their fish on the beach” or “seeds for next spring” and that theirs is “a historical imagination of the concrete and not the abstract, a hope that is more practical and therefore not so easily disillusioned,” this too provides a glimpse into a facet of *carismático* soteriologies that might otherwise be hidden.<sup>321</sup> Their convictions that Jesus will hold a ladder, liberate from addiction, alleviate loneliness, heal cancer and hemorrhages and headaches, and prevent deportation prove to be, when seen through Kwok’s lens, hope for things that are concrete, practical, and genuinely *possible* precisely because of their viability. In light of the fact that the *carismáticos* entered the United States in order to positively transform their lives and the lives of their families, a soteriology of a powerful ally is precisely the survival strategy required

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<sup>320</sup> Smith, “Politics and Economics,” 181.

<sup>321</sup> Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 37-38.

for them to hold on to the advantage they gained when they crossed the border. Furthermore, in a society that is frequently hostile, enduring and thriving is in and of itself an act of resistance that asserts dignity and self-worth in the face of discrimination. The *carismáticos* in my study may not partake of the political activism that the secondary literature describes for Latin American Charismatic Catholics and Latina/o Pentecostals. However, postcolonial scholars bring to light why this is the case and also point out the myriad other ways in which Charismatic Catholicism serves as a transformational force in the lives of the *carismáticos* and their communities.

Beyond simply applying Pentecostal and postcolonial theories as a lens for viewing the *carismáticos*, this study – through blending ethnography, religious studies, and theology – demonstrates the ways in which *carismáticos* consciously adopt Pentecostal and postcolonial transformative strategies as part of their religiosity. For instance, Mahmood argues that Muslim women who are unable to overtly challenge disempowering situations in their lives cultivate their self-esteem as a transformational strategy. Pentecostalism scholars, as outlined in the Introduction, demonstrate the particular ways in which self-esteem improves due to Spirit-filled religiosity: Pentecostalism authorizes its adherents to unleash their spiritual gifts in order to transform community and society, provides women moral authority to challenge their husbands' excesses, galvanizes farmers in the struggle for land rights, and in general helps them to feel important and useful in the hands of God. In my study, *carismático* religiosity bolstered self-esteem in two different ways. First, Charismatic Catholicism offers encouragement to women who suffer due to familial strife: Yolanda didn't have to believe that she was a cockroach because becoming a *carismática* taught her that she is a precious pearl; a preacher encourages women to adopt Mary as a biblical model for standing up for themselves and challenging

husbands' behaviors that are harming them. The second way that *carismático* religiosity boosts self-esteem is through affirming the worth of Latina/o immigrants: Gerardo preaches that Latina/o immigrants, labeled as foreigners and strangers in their daily lives, become citizens with the saints as they are adopted into God's family in the prayer circle. In each of these instances, *carismáticos* consciously apply what they have learned from their Charismatic religiosity – they are precious in spite of what anyone else might say – in order to bolster their self-esteem.

Similarly, *carismático* religiosity explicitly demands ethical formation, another transformative strategy that postcolonial and Pentecostal scholars identify. This strategy, common to Pentecostals of every denomination, specifically manifests in the *carismático* perspectives on sin that require scrutiny of one's disposition in every situation, no matter how socially acceptable a particular behavior may be. In constantly asking themselves whether a given pursuit moves them closer to or further from God, *carismáticos* bring about self-awareness, self-discipline, and moral self-transformation. The general Pentecostal tendency toward ethical formation also manifests amongst the *carismáticos* in their perspectives on conversion. As Juan relates in his narrative of addiction recovery, conversion provided a prayer circle community that helped him “feel good morally” and that encouraged him toward ongoing moral self-improvement. Pentecostal and postcolonial theory holds true in the microcosm of the local RCCH I studied: *carismático* religiosity is morally and ethically transformative.

Gastón Espinosa, as outlined in the Introduction, offers a further theoretical perspective on transformative religious strategies: evangelization encompasses social outreach through the Pentecostal desire to demonstrate, not just speak about, God's great love for human beings. The *carismáticos* in my study practice this Pentecostal outreach-as-evangelization, although unlike the Pentecostal Protestants in the United States who make regular forays into public activism, the

*carismáticos* I studied find outreach to be most transformative in everyday, individual encounters within the circles of one's immediate influence. Juan brings peace and order to his home through manifesting God's love in his daily life. Ricardo hears the Holy Spirit calling him to help his son succeed in school. Sofía sees the Holy Spirit calling each of the *carismáticos* to develop their Roman Catholic fervor and faith so that their personal transformations may inspire their fellow parishioners. Each of these perspectives are examples of how *carismático* religiosity galvanizes its adherents to transform the world one person at a time in their individual spheres of influence.

### **God as Powerful Ally**

Analyzing the *carismáticos*' narratives from a theological perspective also brings to light a transformative strategy that religious studies and historical perspectives alone may not reveal. The first glimpse into this transformative strategy comes in Chapter 4. Manuel speaks of Christ wiping away his tears and holding his ladder at work; Renata speaks of Jesus always with her and keeping her from feeling lonely; Roberto reports how Christ healed his cancer; Miguel speaks of Jesus who finds him work when things are slow; and Gabriela relates how Jesus stopped a policeman from writing her son's name on a ticket. The converted *carismáticos* speak with conviction that God is with them in their struggles. Isabel, preaching at a men's retreat, states, "the true God is the one who gives you a hand,... who gives you love in moments of loneliness, who sleeps with you in your bed when you feel alone, sad, and abandoned."<sup>322</sup> Nearly

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<sup>322</sup> "*El único y verdadero Dios es aquel que te lleva de la mano... es aquél que te da amor en los momentos de soledad, es aquél que duerme contigo en tu cama cuando te sientes solo, triste y abandonado.*" Transcription of preaching at a men's retreat, June 23, 2012.

every *carismático* offers testimonies regarding the assistance, often miraculous, that God has provided them when difficulties arise.

The *carismáticos*' theological language of a God who is with them in any situation, aiding them and transforming troubled situations, points towards a transformative strategy that does not appear in Pentecostal literature. *Carismáticos* transform their often-difficult life situations through aligning themselves to the most powerful ally they can access, namely, God, whom they describe as king, limitless, crowned with power, great, strong, invincible, the one who can do anything, the God of infinite power, the God of the impossible. They proclaim, "my father, God, is the master of everything. He is the master of everything that exists!"<sup>323</sup> Furthermore, their experiences tell them that they are beloved of God, that they are friends and children of God; thus the mightiest, the strongest, the most powerful being in the universe is *their* friend, is on *their* side. Such a friend permits them to declare triumphantly, "we are not going to be defeated, because who can defeat God? No one! No one can defeat him. So if we are with him, we are always going to be victorious!"<sup>324</sup> These narratives reveal the *carismáticos*' common conviction that God is their ally, and emphasize that he is a *powerful* ally – the most powerful in the universe, an ally who can never be anything but victorious.

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<sup>323</sup> "Mi Padre Dios es el dueño de todo. Es el dueño de todo cuanto existe."

Transcription of preaching at a regional convention, April 27, 2013.

<sup>324</sup> "No vamos a estar derrotados, porque ¿quién puede derrotar a Dios? ¡Nadie! A él nadie lo puede derrotar. Entonces si estamos con él ¡siempre vamos a estar victoriosos!"

Interview with the author, December 3, 2013.

The *carismáticos* also demonstrate how turning to a powerful ally is an empowering resource. Rosa María, preaching at a women's retreat, describes the ways in which God is an empowering ally:

These days we live in difficult times. And the Lord wants you to get up... [to] put yourself in the thick of it and get up like a victorious woman... to fight for your family, fight for your children, fight for your livelihood, fight for your dreams, because each one of you has to have a dream. Dreams are important but there will be people who will try to extinguish your dream. But as a brave woman you get up and you say, "yes, you see my limits. Yes, you see that I cannot achieve it. But I am not alone in the battle. I am with the giant Powerful One who sees me as a victor in any situation, in any circumstance. He fights my battles and he doesn't see me as defeated but he sees me as a victorious woman!"<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> *"Hoy día vivimos momentos difíciles. Y el Señor quiere que tú te levantes... te pongas en la brecha y te levantes como mujer victoriosa... y luches por tu familia, luches por tus hijos, luches por tu economía, luches por tus sueños, porque cada una de ustedes tiene que tener un sueño. Los sueños son importantes pero va haber personas que van a tratar de apagar tu sueño. Pero como mujer valiente tú te levantas y tú dices: "sí, tú ves mis límites. Sí, tú ves que yo no lo puedo lograr. Pero yo no estoy sola en la batalla. Yo estoy con el Poderoso gigante que me ve como vencedora ante cualquier situación, ante cualquier circunstancia, él pelea mis batallas y él a mí no me ve como derrotada si no que me ve como una mujer victoriosa".* Transcription of preaching at a women's retreat, May 19, 2012.

Yes, God is fighting Rosa María's battles. However, that does not mean that God allows her to sit by passively, awaiting whatever outcome God may have ordained. God demands that she get up and fight for her family and her dreams no matter who might try to dissuade her. Isabel, preaching at a men's retreat, goes further: "The Word isn't going to be able to work if we don't put in our part.... The Lord does the rest. We put in one, he puts in ninety-nine. That is what God does in our lives."<sup>326</sup> Here, Isabel goes so far as to suggest that God will not assist *carismáticos* in their troubles unless they first act on their own behalf. They may do only one percent, but it is the crucial one percent of exercising their own transformative capabilities. From this perspective, relying on God as a powerful ally is not a scenario of being rescued as helpless victims. Rather, befriending God includes, even requires, implementing active strategies to improve one's own condition. God, as a powerful ally, demands *carismáticos*' self-empowerment.

This theory of underprivileged peoples aligning themselves to the most powerful allies possible is not a new theory in and of itself. Postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha, for instance, describe how colonized people seek to align themselves to the more powerful – the seemingly all-powerful – colonizer.<sup>327</sup> There is also a degree of resonance to *carismático* strategies of allegiance in Homi Bhabha's distinction between "being English and being

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<sup>326</sup> "La Palabra no va a poder trabajar si nosotros no ponemos un poquito de nuestra parte ... el Señor pone el resto. Nosotros ponemos uno, y él pone el 99. Eso es lo que Dios hace en nuestras vidas." Transcription of preaching at a men's retreat, June 23, 2102.

<sup>327</sup> See, for instance, the "Preface to the Routledge Classics Edition" in Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), ix-xxv.

Anglicized.”<sup>328</sup> While the *carismáticos* align themselves to God and transform themselves into godly people (“being Anglicized”), they can never become gods (“be English”). However, *carismático* perspectives differ in every other respect from those of scholars such as Bhabha. First, the *carismáticos* align themselves to an infallible, immortal ally, whereas the colonizer is but a mortal power whose fallibilities are all too apparent to the colonized. Second, as outlined in Chapter 4, the *carismáticos*’ experiences and Roman Catholic teaching affirm that God dwells within the believer; thus *carismáticos* can share in the being of their all-powerful ally in a way that the Anglicized can never share in being English. Third and finally, while the colonizer claims to be acting in the best interest of the colonized while only ever working to the colonizer’s own benefit, the authority of Scripture, Roman Catholic teaching, and the *carismáticos*’ own experiences affirm that God only, ever works for the best interest of the created being.

*Carismáticos*’ testimonies regarding God’s actions to thwart law enforcement officers even imply that God takes their side against those who hold temporal power. Gabriela reported that God stopped a police officer from writing her son’s name on a ticket, thereby preventing the young man’s deportation. Gabriela also related that when her younger son got into an accident while driving drunk, God kept the officer from noticing that her son was inebriated, once again preventing deportation. While an outsider might interpret this as God being devious like an older brother who gets a younger brother out of a well-deserved punishment, from Gabriela’s theological perspective as a *carismática* Latina immigrant, God refuses to let unfair laws harm

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<sup>328</sup> Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 128.

her family. While those in power might consider God tripping up the legal system to be a form of “cunning and deception,” as Scott argues, in the eyes of this subaltern *carismática* mother, this theological understanding is a subversive strategy to thrive in the face of an unjust system.

This is not to claim naivety on the part of the *carismáticos*. They are fully aware that aligning themselves to the all-powerful ally doesn't yield a carefree life of riches and glory. However, they make a long-term, spiritual investment: while they may not triumph in their earthly lives, their ally is the master of eternity and thus they attain the ultimate victory. They have invested in the eternal framework and, from this theological perspective, they have aligned themselves to an ally far more faithful and powerful than any temporal power or reigning government. The *carismáticos'* narratives thus bring to light a new theory of transformative strategy. While aligning oneself to a more powerful ally in the human realm ultimately assures that one remains subordinate, befriending an all-powerful and deeply loving divine ally is a transformative strategy that provides confidence to persevere in the midst of struggles, knowing that victory will ultimately, always belong to those who befriend the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Examples from the previous chapters provide illustrations of how this theory plays out in specific situations for the *carismáticos*. For instance, in the chapter on addiction Marco relates how his allegiance with God brought him an incomparable, divine love that filled the emptiness that his unloving parents and his resultant promiscuity left in him. Ricardo describes how in allying himself to Jesus Christ he left behind a life of lying drunk in the streets and found peace and joy in God that addiction was never able to bring him. Depressed women enlist the aid of the one who has mercy and who transforms them into a new, joyful creatures. Margarita

counsels Juana to align herself to God-as-ally through sacramental objects: holy water, exorcized salt and oil, religious medals. Alejandra speaks of “grasping the hand of Jesus” which makes it “easier to get by.” Verónica speaks of availing oneself of the assistance God offers through doctors and medicine. In each of these instances, aligning oneself with the all-powerful ally, the Doctor of Doctors, is a potent, efficacious, and transformative resource that the *carismáticos* utilize.

To claim that “befriending an all-powerful ally God” is a theoretically innovative transformative religious practice is not to claim that God as helpful ally is a new academic concept. As outlined in Chapter 4, Ada María Isasi-Díaz writes of Jesus as the faithful companion who walks with those who suffer and Sammy Alfaro notes that Latina/o immigrant Pentecostals speak of Jesus as their Divine Companion who provides for their needs. It is hardly novel to claim that underprivileged peoples seek aid from a God who is on their side. Nor is it innovative to argue that disenfranchised people seek to align themselves with powerful allies. However, it requires a religious studies lens to demonstrate that Latina/o immigrants’ social struggles, and the transformative strategies that address these struggles, shape theological understandings of what sort of ally God is and what kinds of acts this ally God performs. Similarly, it requires theology and religious studies lenses to demonstrate that postcolonial concerns regarding the narcissism of powerful allies are eliminated when one posits *God* as the powerful ally. The theological perspective in particular demonstrates that the most powerful ally available can also be an empowering, liberating force.

## SECTION II – METHDOLOGICAL CONCLUSIONS

In the Introduction, I outlined not only the theological contributions but also the methodological contributions I intended this project to make. The innovative combination of

ethnography and theology that I demonstrate in this work makes an offering both ways – it shows what theology can offer to ethnographers, and what ethnography can offer to theologians. For ethnographers, this work demonstrates that an ethnographer theologian familiar with the religious beliefs of a group does not necessarily produce overly-biased, “insider,” or “confessional” scholarship. Furthermore, insider knowledge of a theological tradition allows the ethnographer to have an eye for what’s missing. That is, the theologian ethnographer deeply familiar with theological subtext can glean a great deal of understanding of the religious community based not only on what theological choices the group makes in a positive sense, but also on what theological moves the group might have chosen but did not. For instance, knowing the *carismáticos* have the concept of the social dimension of sin available to them highlights their distinctive focus on whether a behavior separates one from God rather than the customary Roman Catholic emphasis on how much a behavior offends the dignity of another human being.

Ethnography, in turn, brings to light aspects of a community’s theologies that might remain elusive to a solely textual approach to theological research. For instance, an ethnographic research approach can reveal that under a single doctrine – in this instance Roman Catholic teaching – there exist multiple theologies. In this ethnographic study I demonstrate two instances of plural theologies existing under a single doctrine. The first instance is that under the umbrella of a single Roman Catholic doctrine exist *carismáticos*’ theological perspectives that differ from other Roman Catholic subgroups, even those to which, on the surface, *carismáticos* seem closely related, such as Latina/o mainstream Catholics. For the *carismáticos*, watching *fútbol* on television can distract one’s attention from God and thus is sinful, a theological conviction that the majority of Latina/o mainstream Catholics would contest. The second instance of plural theologies existing under a single doctrine that emerge from my research is

that within even a single prayer circle there exist multiple *carismático* theologies. Some *carismáticos* attribute the cause of depression to an individual's lack of full surrender to the God who can transform sorrow into joy. Others believe that the Enemy causes fears that make one reluctant to attend church. Verónica understands depression to be a physical disease for which God provides science to doctors in order to heal those who suffer from it. All of these varied theological positions are defensible within the bounds of a single body of Roman Catholic doctrine. Ethnography is particularly useful for revealing these myriad theologies that can exist under a single doctrine.

More broadly speaking, ethnography also has tremendous methodological potential for presenting non-textual theologies to academic theologians. In the process of my fieldwork, I made two methodological discoveries regarding how to write theology using this technique. The first is that personal experience is a highly influential theological source for the *carismáticos*, an insight that Latina/o theologians such as María Pilar Aquino, Roberto Goizueta, and Loida Martell-Otero point out is a hallmark of Latina/o Catholics in general. Furthermore, I discovered that in this community the *carismáticos* both collect and share their personal religious experiences via the *testimonio* oral narrative. This is not a one-way-street in which individual experience alone shapes narratives. When *carismáticos* share their narratives, common experiences gain significance and are highlighted in subsequent narratives. Narratives thus shape subsequent narratives and also subsequent personal experiences. Understanding these dynamics of religious narratives proved crucial in the ethnographic theological project of presenting the theological perspectives of a religious group. Identifying common narrative threads provided a means of overcoming the methodological challenge of how to identify

common convictions within a community of varied individuals whose perspectives were at times contradictory.

Teasing out the communal theological convictions led to the next methodological insight: how to present theological insights emerging from personal experience rather than systematic categories to an academic community that highly privileges systematization. I explained in the Introduction my concern that placing the *carismáticos*' perspectives into foreign theological categories in order to make them comprehensible to academics might distort *carismático* theologies. However, I found that the *carismáticos*' theological perspectives resisted systematization. The *carismáticos* certainly referenced, for example, the highly-systematized formula by which Adam brought sin into the world and Jesus defeated sin once and for all. Their discussions of sin, however, focused not on explanatory frameworks but rather on the practical question of how to be godly people in everyday life in spite of inherent sinfulness. Similarly, *carismáticos* referenced the crucifixion-and-resurrection soteriology formula but did not emphasize it. Rather, *carismáticos*' approaches to soteriology tended to focus on practical questions such as how Jesus redeems everyday struggles and how one can tap into that quotidian assistance via conversion much. Theirs is a theology of everyday life. *Carismáticos* focus not on Adam and Eve's choice to disobey God, but rather their everyday temptations to prioritize the things of *el mundo* and thus disregard the things of God. They focus not on God's demonstration of redeeming love in sending Jesus to salvific crucifixion that humans may have eternal joy, but rather on how encountering God's love through conversion brings joy, *sanación* (healing of bodies and hearts), and *liberación* (liberation from anger and addiction) in day-to-day earthly life. As Kwok Pui-lan states it, their soteriological vision focuses on "the concrete and not the abstract."

As a result of this practical, everyday-life focus of their theologies, the *carismáticos*' theological insights elude systematization. These insights arise from moments, not systems. However, a theologian may place the *carismáticos*' perspectives as moments on the systematic theological timeline of original perfection-current sinfulness-eternal perfection. The *carismáticos* place themselves between the second and third steps. They focus on what one may do to live well in spite of current sinfulness and on how Jesus's sacrifice allows one to have glimpses of eternal joy in *lo cotidiano*. This approach of presenting theological moments in an existing systematic framework, as demonstrated in the current project, renders the *carismáticos*' theologies accessible to academic theologians while being faithful not only to *carismático* perspectives but also *carismático* categories.

The *carismáticos* who offered me feedback agree that it was a successful project. I submitted the first draft to the *Comité Timón*, the bishop's liaison for the RCCH, and Martina, the St. Rose of Lima prayer circle coordinator who is also writing a history of the local movement. Due to my strong desire not to distort *carismático* theological perspectives through my attempts to make them comprehensive to academic theologians, I specifically asked these *carismático* leaders to point out anything they felt did not accurately represent the RCCH and to let me know if there was anything vital regarding the RCCH that I had missed. The bishop's liaison answered on his behalf and on behalf of the *Comité Timón*, and Martina provided me with a separate response. The response was unqualified approval. The bishop's liaison stated his belief that it is a "great tool of study" for anyone seeking more knowledge about the RCCH and that it is also a "good cultural enrichment" that could be of assistance to anyone interested in

becoming more closely involved with this specific spiritual experience.<sup>329</sup> Martina replied, “I definitely think it is very accurate to what I know about the Charismatic Movement.... I don’t have any negative comments. On the contrary, I have discovered a lot from your writing.”<sup>330</sup> While I do not necessarily interpret these responses to mean I have accurately captured every nuance of *carismático* beliefs – politeness and appreciation may have prompted Martina and the bishop’s liaison to let smaller matters pass – I am comfortable interpreting these responses to indicate that these two community leaders, at least, feel that my desire to render the *carismáticos*’ theologies accessible to academic theologians did not excessively distort the *carismáticos*’ perspectives.

In the Introduction, I discussed the dilemma of balancing the *carismáticos*’ desires that my project serve an evangelizing purpose with the opposing priorities of the religious studies discipline. My method of addressing this concern was primarily stylistic. That is, I framed all religious claims either as quotes or neutral statements: “Renata discerns Jesus’s healing work in his providing her with a job to covered health insurance so that she could have the hysterectomy necessary to stop the hemorrhaging.” I avoid language that makes direct statements regarding God, e.g. “Jesus healed Renata’s hemorrhaging.” At the same time I also avoid phrases with a doubtful or pejorative tone such as “Renata claims that Jesus healed her by providing health insurance so she could have the necessary hysterectomy.” My intention in doing so was to allow the *carismáticos* to speak for themselves and, on my part, to perform analyses to determine to what degree their beliefs function in a transformative manner, not to what degree their beliefs are

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<sup>329</sup> E-mail correspondence with the author, July 5, 2016.

<sup>330</sup> E-mail correspondence with the author, July 3, 2016.

accurate. In doing so, I leave it in the readers' hands to determine how convincing they find the *carismáticos*' testimonies and whether or not they choose to experience these testimonies as the good news that the *carismáticos* intend.

The strongest influence my scholarly interests exercised over the contents of this work was due to my gender studies analysis commitment. The religious studies desire to demonstrate that *carismático* religiosity contained inherent transformative strategies merely adopted a perspective that the *carismáticos* themselves emphasize in their practice of bearing witness to God's greatness: becoming a *carismático* results in profound transformations in the self and, as a result, in the community. However, the gender studies lens highlighting inequalities between men and women was not something the *carismáticos* emphasized. That is not to say it is an entirely foreign category. After all, the *carismáticos* explicitly identified male addiction as a destructive force that causes great difficulty, both materially and emotionally, for women. While I dedicated a greater percentage of my attention to this concern than do the *carismáticos*, I believe this is the scholar's prerogative and, based on my own interactions with *carismáticos* and the feedback from Martina and the bishop's liaison, I do not believe it led me to make any statements with which the *carismáticos* would disagree.

In conclusion, my colleagues who know the *carismáticos* only by reputation frequently assume these Latina/o immigrants gather in their prayer circles for a private, feel-good, passive religious experience. However, being attentive to the *carismáticos*' perspectives on their religious practices reveals a very different religious landscape. The *carismáticos*' understandings of sin require rigorous self-examination to assure that each action reflects their God-centered morality. *Carismáticos* elect for a soteriological focus on the significance of Jesus being alive post-resurrection, thereby providing themselves with the confidence and faith that an

ever-victorious ally God inspires. *Carismáticos*' experiences of God's infinite love provide an alternative to addiction and a source of joy that alleviates depression. *Carismáticos*' theological convictions that the Holy Spirit works through them to transform the world facilitate their providing greater stability to their families; greater resources to their parishes; and greater demonstrations of God's love that transform, tiny step by tiny step, the lives of hurting people they encounter beyond the doors of the church. As a result of their religious convictions and practices, the *carismáticos* do not experience themselves as passive partakers of an opiate religiosity but rather as *bendecidos, encendidos, y en victoria*: blessed to be partners in God's transformative work; on fire to renew themselves, the Church, and the world as channels of the Holy Spirit; and victorious in the eternal picture, no matter how much those on the outside dismiss them as pitiable, oppressed people.

## APPENDIX

Full transcription of Juan's story

### **Preaching at Charismatic prayer circle, September 12, 2013.**

Yo me quise acabar la cocaína en dos años. Miren, hermanos, ahí está mi esposa. Hermanos, yo no respiraba, donde yo respiraba con mi nariz, me salían sangre, los cuajarones, me bañaba, a veces en las noches despertaba con toda, así miren hermanos, no les miento, con toda la cara ensangrentada, explotada, la fuerza que hacía por respirar. Cuando me iba a trabajar le decía a mi esposa, ya no me esperes, ya no me esperes, esto ya se acabó aquí, una persona a sus veinticuatro, veinticinco años, decir eso. Ya no me esperes. Decía, me decía mi esposa, otro vicio ya no, mira si ya no te aguanto con el alcohol.

Porque miren porque hasta parece que mi esposa traía detector de cocaína, donde quiera me la encontraba, donde quiera. Decía: Qué es esto? Ah! Déjalo ahí un amigo, bendito sea Dios que el coraje las fuerzas que Dios me daba, la agarraba y la tiraba, al baño, y yo la maldecía. Decía: ve que hija de la Chimoltrufia. Me echaste eso al baño, no sabes cuánto costaba. Tú no sabes qué echaste en el baño y ella llorando de coraje, de rabia, la echaba. Y eso era de ocho días señores. Eso eran ocho, ocho por ocho días. Decía: Juan otro vicio no más.

Un señor ya grande, me invitó a alcohólicos anónimos a un programa a donde se rehabilitan los drogadictos y alcohólicos y me llevó con él. Llegué al hospital donde todo lo pueden, me sanó. Miren hermanos, no me podía tocar la nariz. Me daba miedo, me daba miedo bañarme, me daba miedo que el agua me corriera. Mi nariz estaba desecha, voy con el doctor y me dijo: no sé qué hacer. Hacen drogas? Sí. Sí hago drogas, me dice: la droga te lo ha acabado. Ya no, necesita, ya dejar eso. Entonces yo cuando le quería hacer a la droga. Yo creo que los varones saben de lo que estoy hablando, la bolsita, una bolsita, me la metía a la, a la, a la muela y

las empezaba a masticar, me la empezaba a tragar, la cocaína me la empezaba a tragar, como nosotros sabemos que es los efectos de la cocaína, se me dormía la boca y me la empezaba a comer, me empezaba a comer la boca, los labios. Porque la droga me los dormía todo, completamente dormida, no sentía, y me la empezaba a comer los labios... todos mis labios desechos y ya no me hacían cambiar.

Y ese día se llegó para darle la gloria a Dios hermano. Tengo 17 años que no sé lo que es la droga. Que no sé lo que es una borrachera, que no sé lo que es una mujer fuera, y esto es para darle la gloria. Y por eso yo creo en ese Cristo, mi hermano, que ha regresado a la casa de mi padre, que el padre me abrazo, el padre me perdonó, ya no, mire, cuando llega el, ese hijo mayor y le dice: Oye, después de que yo he estado aquí ayudándote, después de que yo te he estado, estado contigo siempre, no soy capaz de él. Miren. El padre le enseña al hijo, a perdonar y a olvidar aquel hijo que estaba muerto, está vivo, aquel que estaba perdido lo hemos encontrado.

#### **Interview with the author, March 15, 2014**

Por la necesidad que sentía espiritual y la necesidad de vivir mejor, saludable en la, en mi salud, y más que nada moralmente que me sentía vacío. Entonces yo buscaba algo de recuperación adentro de programas de alcohólicos anónimos de drogadicción, porque yo estaba dentro de esos hábitos, de drogadicción de alcoholismo y yo buscaba algo que me ayudara a restablecerme como persona, y pues, me hablaron del círculo de oración, fui y yo pienso que ahí encontré mi, la solución para todo lo que yo buscaba.

Que me hacía tener un temperamento un carácter fuerte. Amanecer enojado, no estar consciente de lo que hablaba no estar consciente de lo que decía, de lo que hacía, era un carácter muy enojado tal vez, cuando, se me pasaba la droga o el alcohol. Y, y tenía un carácter muy,

muy, muy fuerte. Soy, soy estricto, yo mi vida personal soy bien estricto con mis hijos y soy estricto en mi casa, pero una cosa es ser estricto y otra cosa es tener mal carácter. Ahora sigo siendo estricto pero mi carácter lo he cambiado por, por ser estricto, ahora, el carácter que tengo yo en mi casa lo pongo con mi ejemplo. Porque sé lo que me conviene y lo que no con mis hijos. Ahora mi carácter es moderado. Ha, mi carácter es según la, la, la palabra de Dios, la voluntad de Dios, según lo que, con mi carácter mostrar el amor de Dios, con mi carácter mostrar, a, a, dirigir, a otras personas, a, la corrección, de mis hijos, pero todo a base del amor de Dios. Y entonces, a, el carácter fuera del amor de Dios, pues era maldiciones, malas palabras, a, empujando, físicamente, hmmm. Peleando. El carácter era muy, muy, muy e, violento, muy violento la palabra muy violento pero ahora pues sí es un, un carácter muy diferente, ahora tendré un carácter, pero siempre, me fijo que en ese carácter muestre yo el amor de Dios, siempre.

La base, mi cambio, es eso, mi cambio es a base del círculo de oración porque tal vez si yo no hubiera conocido a Dios por medio del círculo de oración, yo creo que ya muerto estaría, por lo mismo de la cocaína, del alcohol, de, de, me gustaba pelear mucho, en la calle, entonces yo creo que ya, tal vez hubiera conocido a, a Dios, por otra religión, por, por otro, movimiento adentro de la iglesia católica, pero Dios, me puso ahí en el círculo de oración, entonces yo tal vez hubiera ido con los testigos de Jehová, tal vez hubiera habido cambio, pero Dios me, me ha puesto aquí en el círculo de oración y estoy seguro de lo que, como dijo Pablo: estoy seguro de a, lo que estoy siguiendo y a quien estoy sirviendo, ese, estoy seguro de donde estoy y le doy gracias a Dios.

Yo fui al círculo de oración por primera vez porque yo andaba buscando un programa donde rehabilitar mi vicio, el alcohol y la droga, yo andaba buscando un, un grupo pero no en,

pero no espiritual, no en la iglesia, lo andaba buscando, yo lo andaba buscando en la calle.

Pero un día mi esposa me llevó a misa y, y en misa encontré una persona que me invitó al círculo de oración, es lo que yo andaba buscando por eso, creo, por eso creo que Dios ya me andaba buscando, porque sentía la necesidad y más que nada yo pertenezco a una familia, donde son cristianos, no son católicos pero son cristianos y mi mamá, mi papá y otros dos hermanos son de la renovación carismática en México, en México, entonces ellos oraban, cuando yo me hablaban por teléfono, ellos oraban, me decían, estamos orando por ti, porque te compongas, porque mi esposa les decía que yo aquí andaba muy mal, andaba en las drogas, andaba en el alcohol. Y ellos decían, estamos orando, orando.

Entonces yo al llegar a misa, una persona me, me invitó, al círculo de oración, yo no sabía, yo estaba ignorante qué era el círculo de oración. Entonces la primera vez que yo fui al círculo de oración, pues me sentí bien, moralmente, y me llenó como que yo tenía, yo me dormía y tenía mucho miedo y ese día que fui al círculo de oración, pues se me quitó como que me sentí en paz, me sentí tranquilo y me gustó... Y más que nada la paz interior que, que, que sentí en esa noche, oraron por mi y me fui muy contento a mi casa. Y, y fue como seguí, e, el círculo de oración por lo mismo no, la base es, es que yo estaba buscando un programa pero no en la iglesia.

Y me, y me fui, y no, ahí fue la conversión mía, ese día, oraron por mi, y todo estuvo, a, le doy gracias a Dios por todo, por ese día que este, tome la decisión de ir por primera vez al círculo, sino hubiera, sino me hubiera decidido a, a ir, pues no, no hubiera pasado nada, ese día lo tenía Dios para mi y pero, yo fui, porque yo me estaba muriendo por dentro, a el alcohol, las drogas, todo, todo, todo lo que, hay en una cosa, de, en unas cosas de vicio, en los hábitos, todo,

todo, yo sentía morirme por dentro y yo estaba buscando donde y por eso es por lo que fui al círculo de oración, por, por buscar ayuda, y sí, sí la encontré.

Después de mi primer día, todavía como dos veces me drogué, después de mi primer día pero, a, fui al círculo de oración y fui un tiempo, después caí, caí, y volví, a tomar, pero ya las drogas ya, ya cuando fui al círculo de oración, no, las drogas ya no tomaron parte de, de mi, a, cuando fui al círculo de oración ya no, ya casi las drogas ya no, volví a tomar, como dos veces después, pero ahora, ahora, ahorita, ahorita actual, ahorita tengo como, como 17 años que no, no, no drogas, nada, nada, no drogas, no, a, no borracheras, no, después del círculo de oración ya todo limpio.

Sí, tenía mucho problema la adicción, mucho, mucho problema, yo le hice dos años a la droga a la cocaína, y en dos años, fumé mucha cocaína, que yo ya no, me la metía por la nariz sino yo me la ponía en la, en la boca, en las muelas, en los dientes de atrás y la empezaba a masticar, la droga, porque ya por la nariz me dolía mucho, sangraba, sangraba tremendo, ya no podía yo por la nariz, estaba tapada, estaba bloqueada, la nariz, entonces la droga me la metía en los dientes, y la empezaba a mascar, entonces, los labios se me dormían, estaba dormido por la droga, entonces me los empezaba a comer, me comía mis labios, mi boca me la comía y me empezaba a sangrar todo pero era por la droga que yo me comía porque por la nariz ya no podía, entonces era una adicción tremenda que en dos años me acabó, me acabó, yo tenía mucho miedo dormirme, tenía miedo cerrar mis ojos al dormirme porque cuando me dormía me explotaba la nariz con sangre, por la fuerza que hacía de respirar, entonces me bañaba, me bañaba de sangre, completamente la cara, y me limpiaba todo, todo de sangre, o sea yo sentía morirme, realmente, la adicción, me tiró al suelo, completamente.

Por eso yo tenía la necesidad de buscar, yo no buscaba a Dios, yo buscaba componerme, yo no buscaba a Dios, yo, yo buscaba, por eso es por lo que al principio te dije, que el círculo de oración lo tiene todo, o sea, tiene una restauración, tiene a Dios, tiene todo lo que uno necesita para poder vivir, es un complemento tremendo, todo, todo, lo tiene, y la adicción, pues en dos años, yo, he tomado alcohol, desde, doce, trece años, pero las drogas, dos años la cocaína, me, me quiso matar, porque yo le hacía diario, diario, a la cocaína le hacía diario, no cada ocho días, no cada semana, no, diario, diario, me dolía la cabeza y me fumabas cocaína, era como la Tylenol, como una medicina, me dolía la cabeza, me dolía el pecho, me dolían los pies, me sentía, triste, cocaína, cocaína, cocaína, entonces es por lo que la cocaína me quiso, matar, entonces yo, mi, yo me daba triste porque mis niños estaban chiquitos, mi esposa muy joven. Te platico esto cuando yo tenía 27 años, entonces yo estaba muy chiquito, muy joven, entonces era una de la tristeza que me daba, de que morirme y mis niños chiquitos, mi esposa muy joven y me daba mucha tristeza conmigo por eso es por lo que yo busqué programas, busqué ayuda, yo buscaba ayuda no buscaba a Dios.

Pero cuando me invitaron al círculo de oración pues encontré a Dios y Dios es el, el sanador, no, el que sana todo eso, y fue el que me sanó, fue el médico, yo buscaba otros médicos, pero el medico fue el que me buscó a mi, el medico que todo lo pudo, lo puede y la adicción se desapareció, déjame decirte que, todos los lunes, un amigo mío, me entregaba la cocaína, todos los lunes, me la daba en una, en una cajita de cigarro, me la llevaba a mi casa, todos los lunes pero desde que yo entré al círculo de oración, yo dije Señor, cómo y cómo le voy a decir a mi amigo que ya no me la lleve yo nunca le dije a mi amigo, él solo dejó de ir, ya no me llevó nada, entonces por eso creo, ahora creo por eso toco mucho la guitarra a Dios por, que no puedo agradecerle todo el, todo lo que me hizo más, tú conoces a mis hijos que tocan conmigo, o

sea es, es una gratitud tremenda no, que no hayo como, cómo agradecerle a Dios, de tener a mis hijos tocando, para mi no es trabajo, para mi es bendición, y gratitud a Dios, todavía lloro a veces de emoción, de que me veo ahí yo con mis hijos mi esposa, también predicando, cantando también, dirigiendo, también dentro o sea yo no merezco tal, tanta, tanto amor de Dios para lo que yo fui.

No. Y esa adicción pues eso es lo que me hizo recapacitar, la adicción, y, de, de buscar una ayuda de buscar un psicólogo, de buscar un doctor que me ayudara a mi adicción, pero, pues el doctor, el doctor de doctores, pues me encontró a mi no, y a él es ahora al que le sirvo soy su ayudante de ese doctor que me ayudó a mi, ahora por eso predico donde quiera palabra de Dios, voy a cantar a donde quiera, voy a cantar donde, donde vaya, lejos, cerquita, he ido muy lejos, a, hacerlo y siempre lo llevo con esa gratitud, dándole gracias a Dios por, porque esa adicción me, completamente me estaba matando, me sentía muerto yo con esa adicción, ver a mis hijos, ver a mi esposa sufrir, y ahora pues ya, después del círculo de oración, pues entré al círculo de oración, pues hay, hay una felicidad en mi casa, hay un espíritu que se mueve en mi casa bien diferente, ahora música del mundo, ahora música cristiana, palabras, palabras, ofensivas a palabras de amor ahora, o sea yo no un, un cambio muy tremendo, no simplemente la adicción de la droga sino adicción a otras cosas también.

Yo era una persona drogadicta, como te platico, en dos años me quise acabar la cocaína, toda la cocaína del mundo me la quise acabar, el alcohol, tomé desde mis trece años, a mis veintisiete años, o sea, fue algo no, que yo no buscaba a Dios, yo buscaba un, algo que me ayudara, pero la renovación carismática, pues me dio todo, me dio a Dios, me dio la sanación, me dio la liberación de todo, y todo, esto está en medio de todo no, estoy bien contento.

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