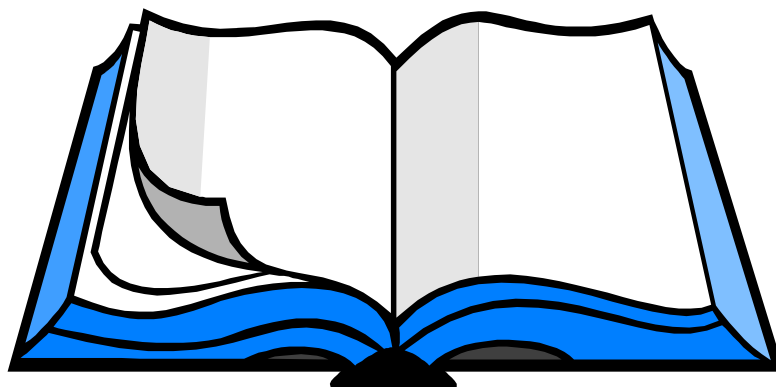


"HAVING
FAVOR WITH
ALL THE
PEOPLE"



(Acts 2:47)

Strategies for Evangelization To Resistant Groups

Daniel R. Sanchez, DMin, PhD.

Author's Message

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, from the depths of my heart I want to thank God that you have received Christ as your only and sufficient Savior, that you have the presence of the Holy Spirit in your lives and that you cherish the sweet hope that you will go to the presence of the Lord, either when He comes in the clouds or when your existence here on earth ends. I am also convinced that you have family members, friends and neighbors who have not yet had the experience of salvation and that your desire is to be instruments in God's hands so that these people will have the joy of being transformed by the presence of Christ in their hearts. My prayer is that this book will instruct and inspire you to continue to grow in your spiritual life and be more effective in your service to the Lord.

Allow me the privilege of introducing myself. I am Daniel Sanchez, born in the United States, but of Spanish heritage from my great-grandparents who immigrated to the state of Texas in 1880. Although the family had designated my grandfather to be a priest in the Catholic Church, he came to know Christ as his personal savior. Because of this, I was blessed to be born into a Christian home. At the age of twelve, I received Christ as my personal savior, which brought a peace to my heart and a sense of purpose in my life. Before this, I asked myself the question that the poet Unamuno asked, "What was I born for?" Shortly after my conversion, I began to feel a desire to serve the Lord. While still in high school, I had the privilege of planting a church among Hispanics with a Catholic background. By God's grace, that church continues to win souls for Christ. When I finished my studies in college, I went as a student missionary to Guatemala to minister especially among indigenous tribes. This experience confirmed my call to be a missionary. Upon returning, I decided to study in a seminary with a very Biblical and conservative doctrine. During my student years, I started my second Hispanic church in a city near the seminary. Through that experience, I learned a lot about how to evangelize and disciple Hispanic people with a Catholic background.

When I earned my Master of Divinity degree from the seminary, I married a very consecrated young woman who also felt a call to be a missionary. Shortly after this, a mission board sent us to serve in the Republic of Panama. There, I served as academic dean of a theological seminary and my wife served as a professor. There

also with the support of my wife I served as pastor of a church. We both had radio programs and participated in ministry with students at the University of Panama.

After serving in Panama for four years, we had to return to the United States because our six-month-old daughter was diagnosed with leukemia. Two weeks before we learned of our daughter's illness, I received an invitation to serve on the Home Mission Board in the United States. At first, I declined the invitation stating that the Lord had called us to be missionaries in Panama. As we became aware of our little girl's illness, we recognized that the Lord was opening the door for us to serve on the Home Mission Board in Atlanta, Georgia. Our dear little daughter was in remission for two years and we strived to make every day in her life filled with happiness and love. Then the time came when the angels came and took our precious little daughter into the presence of God. As humans, we deeply felt the absence of our beloved little daughter, but as believers, we were comforted and strengthened by the presence of the Lord.

After serving for six years on the National Mission Board, I accepted the invitation to be the Director of Missions at the New York State Convention. There the challenge was to train people to evangelize, disciple and plant churches among groups of many different nationalities. The years I served there were very rewarding as I saw many people accept Christ as Savior and witnessed the planting of a number of churches. During that time, I enrolled at Fuller Theological Seminary and earned a Doctor of Ministry degree with such outstanding professors as Donald McGavran, Peter Wagner and Ralph Winter. In this program of study, I learned a great deal about missionary methodologies including church growth. I had served in New York for six years when I received an invitation to be Professor of Missions at Southwestern Theological Seminary where I had been a student. That was in 1985.

By the grace of God, next year I will celebrate 40 years of being a professor in this seminary. During this time, I have had the great privilege of training missionaries who have served in many countries around the world. One of the privileges I have had has been to visit many of my students in the fields where they serve as missionaries. This has given me the opportunity to teach and preach in more than 50 countries of the world including Russia, China, Cuba and other countries in Asia, Europe, Africa and most of the countries in Latin America. In addition to this, I was

able to enroll in Oxford, England where I obtained a Doctorate in Philosophy (PhD) with an emphasis on theological contextualization.

During these years on the faculty, I have had the opportunity to write a number of books. I wish with all my heart that I had the financial resources to give all these books to people in many countries. What I have decided to do is to write this book with key portions found in several of the books I have written on evangelism, discipleship, church planting and missionary work among syncretistic groups. For people who wish to obtain these books I have included the information from Amazon. My heart's deep desire is that this book will provide instruction and inspiration for all of you who are serving the Lord with great devotion and sacrifice in many countries of the world.

His Servant in Christ, Daniel R, Sanchez

INTRODUCTION

All believers have the firm conviction that we must share the message of the gospel with our relatives, our neighbors and even with people throughout the world. The Great Commission of the risen Christ has not been cancelled. *"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have taught you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* (Matthew 28:18-20).

In these glorious words of our Lord Jesus Christ we find that, He who has all power sends us to make disciples of all nations to teach them all that He has taught us and promises to be with us every day until the end of the world.

With deep humility, we thank God that throughout the Hispanic world there are many people who are obeying the Great Commission and as a result, many are receiving Christ as their only and sufficient personal Savior.

The number of Evangelicals in Latin America is increasing every day. In this year (2024) the percentage of Evangelicals looks as follows: Guatemala 47%, Honduras 39.0%, El Salvador 30.1%, Nicaragua 29.1%, Costa Rica 26.1%, Brazil 24.8%, Venezuela 22.9%, Dominican Republic 21.5%, Bolivia 18.7%, Peru 17.7%, Colombia

16.8% and Panama 16%.¹ The other countries have lower percentages of believers than these but all are growing.

"According to statistics in Latin America, every hour an average of 400 Catholics move to Protestant sects."²

A survey reveals the reasons why so many Catholics are joining evangelical churches.³

Seeking a personal connection with God	81%
They like the worship style of the new church	69%
Desiring more emphasis on morality	60%
Found a church to be most helpful to members	59%
Evangelistic effort of the church	58%
Personal problems	20%
Seeking a better financial future	14%
Married to a non-Catholic	9%

We are glad to know that many Catholics are seeking a personal connection with God and are finding it in evangelical churches. At the same time, we should be concerned that there are many Catholics, who have not received Christ as their savior. The number of Catholics varies from country to country.

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Religious Affiliations of Latin Americans

	Catholic	Protestant	Unaffiliated	Other
Predominantly Catholic				
Paraguay	89%	7%	1%	2%
Mexico	81	9	7	4
Colombia	79	13	6	2
Ecuador	79	13	5	3
Bolivia	77	16	4	3
Peru	76	17	4	3
Venezuela	73	17	7	4
Argentina	71	15	11	3
Panama	70	19	7	4
Majority Catholic				
Chile	64	17	16	3
Costa Rica	62	25	9	4
Brazil	61	26	8	5
Dominican Rep.	57	23	18	2
Puerto Rico	56	33	8	2
U.S. Hispanics	55	22	18	5
Half Catholic				
El Salvador	50	36	12	3
Guatemala	50	41	6	3
Nicaragua	50	40	7	4
Less than half Catholic				
Honduras	46	41	10	2
Uruguay	42	15	37	6
Regional total*	69	19	8	4

(adjusting for each country's population size)

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*Regional total does not include U.S. Hispanics.

Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

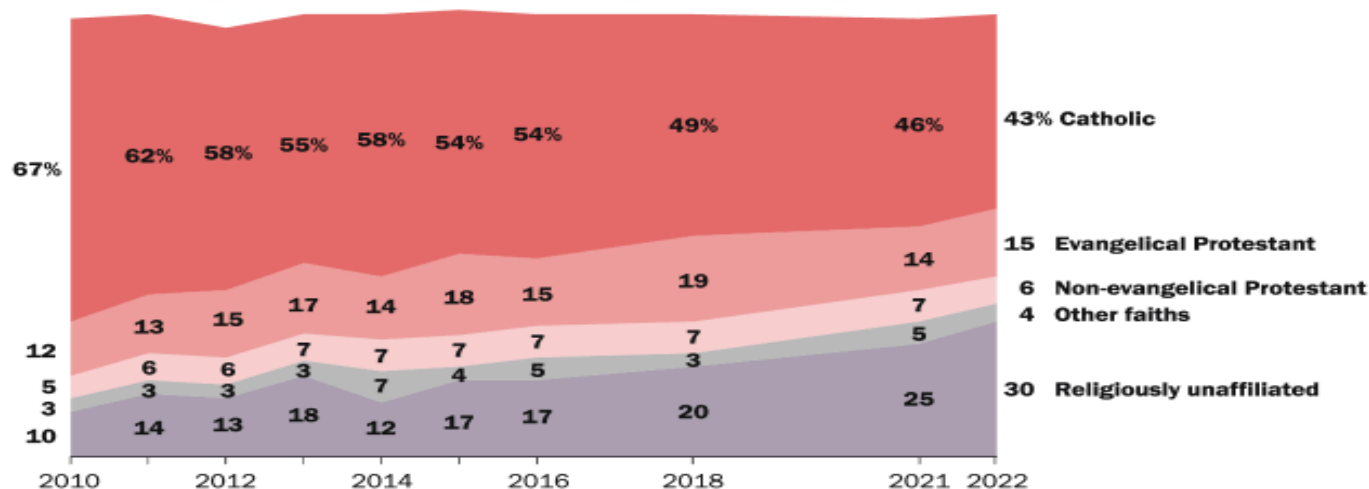
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As we can see in this graph, in Paraguay 89% identify themselves as Catholics and 7% as Protestants. In contrast, in Guatemala, 41% are Protestant and only 50% identify themselves as Catholic. We are also saddened by the number of people who are not affiliated with any religion. In Uruguay, 37% do not participate in any religion.

The picture of Latinos in the United States provides cause for both complacency and compassion.

Steady decline in share of U.S. Latinos who identify as Catholic

% of U.S. Latino adults who identify as ...



Note: Respondents who did not answer the question are not shown.

Source: Pew Research Center's National Survey of Latinos, 2010-2016, 2018, 2021-2022. The survey of Latino adults was conducted by telephone through 2018 and subsequently moved online to the American Trends Panel. Data for 2021 and 2022 are weighted to targets drawn from the previous year's National Public Opinion Reference Survey.

"Among U.S. Latinos, Catholicism Continues to Decline but Is Still the Largest Faith"

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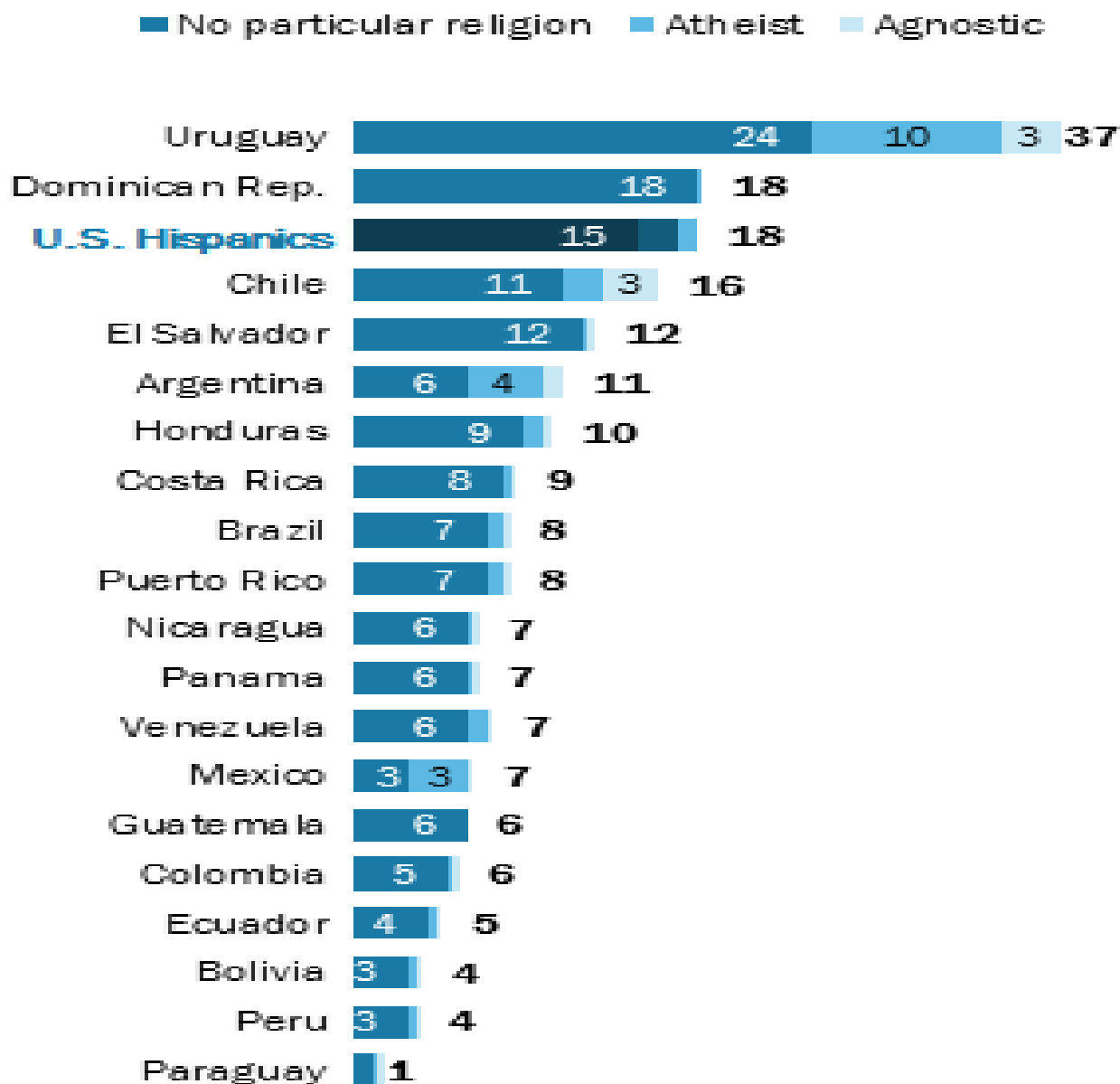
As we can see in this graph, the number of Catholics has decreased from 67% in 2010 to 43% in 2022. In contrast, the number of Evangelicals and Protestants has grown to 21%. A deep concern is the number of Latin Americans who are not affiliated with any religion. In the graph above, we see that 30% of Hispanics in the U.S. do not identify with any religion. In the graph below, we see the situation in Latin America. These include those not affiliated with any religion, atheists and agnostics. Uruguay is the country with the most people who are not affiliated with any religion, 24%. In addition, 10% are atheists and 3% are agnostics for 37% of people not affiliated with any religion.

In view of this, we have a great challenge not only to guide Catholics to have a personal experience of salvation but to communicate with people who have no interest in any religion or who are atheists (who do not believe in God) or agnostics (who think that, as humans, we cannot know anything about the absolute).

As we can see in the graph below, the first five countries (Uruguay, Dominican Republic, United States, Chile and El Salvador) have the highest number of unaffiliated, atheists and agnostics. For these we must also pray and find relevant ways to communicate the gospel message to them.

Unaffiliated Identity

% who describe their religion as ...



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This leads us to ask the question: How can we evangelize so many people who blindly follow the Catholic religion and the unaffiliated, atheists and agnostics to fulfill the Great Commission in our countries?

In the book of Acts, we see evidence that the early Christians were effective in sharing the gospel. In 2:41 we see that **"3,000"** people were converted. In 4:4 **"5,000"** men believed." In 6:7 "And the word of the Lord increased, and the number of disciples **multiplied greatly in Jerusalem**; also many of the priests were obedient to the faith." In 12:24, **"the word of the Lord increased and multiplied."** In 16:5, **"the churches increased in number daily."** In 21:20, the Bible says that there were **"thousands of Jews who had believed."**

This leads us to ask the question, "How did the early Christians get so many people to respond positively to the gospel message?" Part of the answer is found in Acts 2:47, which indicates that the early Christians ***"had favor with the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."***

In chapter 2 of the book of Acts, we find the answer to this question. First of all, they heard the preaching of the Word of God (2:38-40), they accepted the message (2:41), they were baptized (2:41), they were discipled (2:42), they shared what they had (2:42), they prayed (2:42), they observed the Lord's Supper (2:42), they saw evidence of God's presence through miracles (2:43), they were united (2:44), they shared their goods to help the needy (2:44,45), they gathered in the temple and by the houses and "ate together with gladness and singleness of heart" (2:46), they praised God (2:47) and they were esteemed by all (2:47).

From reading this passage of God's Word, it is evident that these early Christians had a genuine salvation experience and that they lived the Christian life and ministered to the needy in such a way that non-believers could not help but admire them and show receptivity to their message. As a result, "daily the Lord added to the church those who were being saved" (2:47).

It is evident that the testimony of the life of the early Christians was so genuine that the unconverted were attracted to the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. Someone has asked the question, "IS IT POSSIBLE THAT PEOPLE NEED TO ACCEPT US BEFORE THEY ACCEPT CHRIST AS THEIR SAVIOR?" In other words, the testimony

of our life must precede the verbal testimony we give to people. People need to trust us and what we are telling them before they put their trust in Jesus Christ. This is a tangible way to **"have favor with all the people."** In his book *Evangelism and the Early Church*, Michel Green states, "People not only heard the gospel, they saw it in action and were moved to respond." ⁴

This brings us to the question that with God's help and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit we want to explore. "How can we find favor with the people in our day?" It is not a matter of them simply changing the name of their religion or moving from one religion to another. The goal is for people to have a salvation experience in Jesus Christ through which they receive forgiveness for their sins, experience a deep peace in their hearts, feel the presence of the Holy Spirit as they face the challenges of life and have full confidence that when their life here on earth is over they will go to the heavenly abodes.

I. Finding Favor Through Evangelism

There is much we can learn from the way Jesus shared the message of salvation with the Samaritan woman. She was a person with some religious notions but whose lifestyle indicated that there was a spiritual void in her soul that she did not know how to fill. The fact that Jesus Cultivated Friendship, Created Interest, Understood her Situation, Focused on Salvation and Communicated Progressively is a model for us as we converse with people who have a Catholic background. Let us ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we study this Bible passage.

Jesus and the Samaritan woman

Introduction

The essential message of the gospel is the proclamation to the world that God loves fallen humanity enough to give His Son as a ransom for their sins (John 3:16-17; 1 Timothy 5:5-6; Hebrews 9:28; 1 John 2:2). God's genuine love cannot be demonstrated more clearly than by offering a means by which the person in sinful rebellion (Job 13:23; Isaiah 53:6) is restored to a proper relationship with God and becomes God's family (John 1:12; Galatians 3:26). The gospel is permeated with the

one-sided, undeserving demonstration of God's affection that offers it absolutely completely (Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:19).

God's love as presented in the gospel provides adequate motivation for those who proclaim this life-changing message. It is not enough to simply be able to articulate the "steps of salvation" with great precision. Like the Master, the message of God's love must be delivered by a loving messenger (2 Corinthians 6:11-13). As is often the case, in matters of salvation the messenger is usually the first thing our Roman Catholic friend confronts, before his ear is attuned to the gospel itself (Romans 10:14-15; 1 Corinthians 1:22-25). For this reason we are urged to ask how does the evangelical Christian demonstrate love in sharing the gospel?

In the study that follows, we prepare seminar participants to share their faith by focusing on the opportunities, challenges and attitudes that prepare the ground in people's lives for an abundant harvest. Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman offers us a valuable lesson for putting our compassion into action. Christ's example will challenge us to step out of our comfort zones in many ways in favor of reaching the lost.

Jesus as the methodological model

Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-42) is rich instruction for evangelical Christians who take witnessing seriously. This story helps to keep in mind key issues when working with those who have not experienced the new birth who have questions pertinent to their relationship with God. The possibilities inherent in this story by nature are many. By way of inference, this story highlights the personal implications that follow from Jesus' reaching beyond the conventions of His geographical and social context. Although He was willing to go beyond traditional boundaries, He was able to look with deep discernment at the person in need in order to identify the universal longing we all have in common. In doing so, Jesus knew how to deal with the life of the lost. Finally, in a four-part progression Jesus was able to begin with a person where they were and inexorably move forward to encounter Him as their Savior. Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman will challenge all who wish to work with people very different from

themselves. He will show us how to work with people respectfully but decisively. Note the following aspects.

Jesus *cultivated* friendship (John 4:1-6)

When leaving your geographical environment

John 4:4 says that Jesus "had to pass through Samaria." The Gospels show evidence of at least four trips Jesus made between Galilee and Jerusalem during His ministry. It is likely that He traveled between Judea and Galilee on a regular basis. To get from one region to the other, however, on the way was Samaria, a region viewed with much disdain and acrimony cultivated for more than three centuries. In an ironic quirk of fate, traveling through Samaria offered the shortest distance linking Jews from the northern and southern regions.⁵ However, travel through Samaria demanded a great social cost that Jews regularly refused to pay. Many Jews simply avoided any contact with the Samaritans and traveled back and forth through Perea, on the eastern side of the Jordan. The Gospels show that Jesus also, on occasion, used this less controversial route (Matt. 19:1; Mark 10:1).

So how are we to understand Jesus' decision to go through Samaria? Was it born out of convenience, to save a day in order to reach Galilee sooner? Although some scholars argue that the trip through Samaria was necessary to shorten the time of the journey and perhaps avoid confrontations with the Pharisees (John 4:1-3), the use of "had to" (*from dei', dei*) in the text indicates programmatic and theological usage in John. Scholars have shown that the term is often used to suggest a "divine necessity." As is evident elsewhere in John (e.g., 3:14, 30; 9:4) Jesus was motivated to travel through Samaria primarily by a sense of His Father's will. There was no desire to evade Samaria, nor did He struggle with rationalizing the need to travel by a different route. God wanted Him to travel through Samaria and so He does. It is as simple as that.

Application: Jesus' journey through Samaria challenges our presumption to determine beforehand that we fully know God's will (James 4:13-17). Since God is sovereign, He may require us to go "the second mile" to demonstrate our willingness to change out of love for the lost. Often, this happens by going beyond

our comfort and well-worn patterns in ministry. Openness to God's authority to lead our way even into uncomfortable situations (e.g., Paul's trip to Jerusalem, Acts 21:7-14) may be a necessary preparation for being used by God to bring people different from us to faith in Christ.

By going outside of your social comfort

The social cost of dealing with the Samaritans was not insignificant. There is a need to understand several aspects. As many scholars note, the hostility between Jews and Samaritans dated from the Assyrian resettlement of northern Israel (2 Kings 17:14-23). Bringing in Gentile peoples produced a mixed race of inhabitants that scrupulous Jews simply could not accept. Intertestamental history also reveals that the Samaritans claimed religious legitimacy for themselves that went all the way back to Moses and the Pentateuch (Deuteronomy 11:29; 27:12; Joshua 8:23). Both peoples claimed Moses as the foundation of their religious identity so it is easy to see how the Jews and Samaritans viewed each other with disfavor (Nehemiah 4; Ezra 4).

Josephus, the Jewish historian, recounts the building of the temple on Mount Gerizim by Sambalat during the time of the Persians.⁶ Clearly, to the pious Jews who believed that the temple in Jerusalem was the only sanctuary of Jehovah, the Samaritans could only appear to them as apostate heretics. Although John Hyrcanus, the Hasmonean monarch destroyed the temple in 128 B.C., the Samaritans still worshipped at the site and maintained that their faith was superior. The unwavering theological stance of the Jews in Palestine during this time did not allow room for interaction with the Samaritans. Many Samaritans for their part also held very firm positions with only Jerusalem being mentioned (Luke 9:51-56).

Finally, it is also possible that the Samaritan woman was indirectly alluding to some Jews' fear of ritual contamination by any kind of interaction with Samaritans. One commentator captures the woman's underlying issue "There was a bit of sarcasm in what the woman replied, as if she had meant to say, 'We Samaritans are like dust under your feet until when you want something, then we are good enough!'⁷ No wonder the Samaritan woman was surprised that Jesus spoke to her (v. 9). The issue was not that a man would ask a woman for something to drink during the

heavy midday heat (Gen. 24:17; see Job 22:7), but that a Jew would ever stoop to ask a Samaritan for anything.

Application: When Jesus began his interaction with the Samaritan woman, he did so against the tide of well-embedded hatred and suspicion between the Jews and Samaritans. However, history teaches fall and us that all things built with human hands eventually crumble. Human prejudices also fall. Reaching out to people of different faith and tradition such as the Roman Catholics will expose us to similar circumstances. No one likes to have his faith questioned because of someone else's beliefs, especially when there is a perceived air of superiority deserved or otherwise. Remember that outreach is to bring people into a saving relationship with Christ. It is not our place to win the argument at the expense of losing the person. As we will soon note, the message of Jesus transcends the arguments between the Jerusalem and Gerizim factions. Note that while the Catholic Church may see conversation as dealing with the legitimacy of the Catholic faith as opposed to the "Protestant" faith, it is really not about either of those issues. Like Jesus, we must be willing to step out of our social comfort zone in order to witness to Roman Catholic friends.

Jesus created interest: (John 4:7-14)

By recognizing the value of a felt need

At the noon hour, and with the sun nearing its zenith, the heat of the day was in full force. Arriving at Jacob's well, the drink of cool water offered much needed refreshment. Water, of course, is one of the absolute necessities of life and ranks among the most basic needs in Maslow's hierarchy of human needs. Someone has said that the human body is composed of approximately 70 percent water. Like air and food, life cannot be sustained without water.

Jesus recognized the need we all have when we are thirsty, for He sets aside all other interests until it is satisfied. In doing so, He uses this common point of contact to reveal the need we all have for His life-giving message.

Application: Often the ability to discern a felt need can only be experienced when we try to "walk in the other person's shoes." This involves learning as much as we can from that person's life experiences and cultural world, and taking time to get to know them personally and understand their situation. While "understanding" people who are quite similar to us socially is challenging enough, now working with people with whom we have little or no apparent common ground will test us to the limit. A relatively simple thing, such as the offer of something to eat that is not part of our regular diet, if not dealt with well, will cause a complete breakdown in the chances of fruitful results. Let's face it; many evangelical Christians are unwilling to embrace their own "Samaria," even though, ostensibly, they are committed to going where Christ leads them. "Samaritans" have a God-given right to exist as Samaritans and it is not our job to adjust their culture to accommodate our sensibilities. Many well-meaning evangelical Christians will never understand the problem of the lost person simply because they refuse to sacrifice some personal comfort.

By relating to the spiritual need

Felt needs are a great vehicle to relate to the gospel message. John's gospel uses several metaphors directly related to basic human needs (e.g., Jesus as the bread of life [John 6:35], the water of life [John 7:37], light [John 8:12], etc.). In this case, Jesus does not allow the woman's cynical attitude to prevent him from making the spiritual connection. His reference to "living water," literally can mean a source of water as opposed to ponds, cisterns or cisterns (Gen. 26:19; Lev. 14:5). However, there is also a symbolic use suggesting God's ability to quench the thirst of the soul (Isaiah 41:17; 44:3; 55:1). Although Jesus' mention of the water he offered was preached as a "gift from God," the woman only heard what she was able to understand in her spiritual state (vv. 11-12). Although Jesus insisted on the spiritual dimensions of his offer, she seemed to have misunderstood the gift of water as something magical, which would free her from future need of water (v. 14). Clearly, the woman did not understand Jesus' teaching, but what is important to note is that because of the intervening conversation the woman stayed and went from being a cynical purveyor of stagnant water to showing a genuine desire to drink of the "living water" Jesus was offering her (v. 15).

Application: It must be understood that "felt needs" are real issues in the living and quality of life. Perhaps because they are so basic, it is often difficult to see beyond them as analogical bridges to illustrate a greater spiritual need. In reaching out to our Catholic friends, analogies to the fundamental needs in life can be useful means of introducing them to God's saving grace. People often make a quick spiritual connection, but there are always those who initially do not understand. The commitment to share the gospel should have no time limit and should use every possibility to make the gospel clear and understandable. Receiving the gospel is a spiritual exercise and those who have not experienced God's gift are spiritually dead and suffer from a darkened understanding (2 Corinthians 4:4-6; Ephesians 2:1; 4:17-18; 1 Peter 4:6). As long as there is genuine interest, the evangelical Christian witness should not grow weary, no matter how slow some progress, or misunderstanding, which is often the case. As Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman of the water of life eventually a new possibility began to dawn in her life. She would quench the thirst of her soul and experience a different life. By cultivating our friendship, we are in a better position to create interest in spiritual matters by helping them see that our need for Jesus is basic and universal. One way to do this is to share our testimony that the different kind of life Jesus Christ has worked in us.

Jesus understood their situation (John 4:16-18).

By examining their spiritual condition of loss

Jesus' inquiry into the Samaritan woman's marital status is open to interpretation. While some scholars believe that Jesus was defending himself against a charge that the inappropriateness of discussing an intimate matter with the woman alone and in public seems unlikely, the Gospels are replete with occasions when Jesus' actions angered "the religious morality squads" of the day (Matthew 9:11; 11:19; 12:9-14; Mark 2:16; Luke 6:7; 15:1-2; John 8:1-6; and others).

Undoubtedly, her primary reason had to be to prepare her heart to receive the living water of the gospel. Asking her to bring her husband (v. 16) quickly led her to the pathological condition of her life. Often, people try to segregate the "spiritual" from the "secular," believing that both spheres of life can operate independently

of each other. Jesus, however, saw no such line of demarcation. Jesus did not overstep the mark in considering his marital status. The gospel in its power presents the sovereignty of God to all aspects of life.

It is important to note that His request for the woman to bring her husband was not presented in a condemnatory tone. Although the woman was a sinner even in the more liberal spheres of marriage and divorce in the culture, an attitude of judgment toward her is not presented.⁸ However, Jesus exercised the "steadfast love" that helped the woman realize the need for salvation by forcing her deplorable marital history to the surface and reinforcing her need for spiritual transformation.

Application: The decision to examine the delicate moral issues in the lives of those we wish to reach for Christ should not be taken lightly. Although Jesus had the data necessary to present the seriousness of his moral lapses to the Samaritan woman, an unbiased understanding is not available to us. Yet, to the degree that the relationship matures and as comfort levels grow, people will reveal painful episodes in their lives that call for healing. Moral failings, so common in our modern culture, are as common among Roman Catholics as among people in general. In critical times such as these, it is important to remember that, although Jesus did not approve of the woman's lifestyle, he had to have a tone of compassion. When dealing with Roman Catholics, remember that assurance of salvation and the declaration of total forgiveness of sin are not taught in the Catholic Church. Dealing with issues of sinful behavior often tends to lead us to easy but harmful extremes of contradictory judgments or non-confrontational permissibility. God requires nothing less than mercy and justice from His servants.

By finding the redeemable fragment of his life

The woman's response to Jesus, though laconic (brief, dry), was true, "I have no husband." Although it is implied that her marital history was well known in the community (see vv. 28-29), acknowledging the immensity of her marital failure is not something she could readily admit without further bruising her ego. It is important to note Jesus' treatment of her. Although she could have presented her disappointment and insincerity to him, she focused on the positive in her response.

Paul's instruction to the Philippians helps us here. As believers we are to "abide" in the most honorable and noble aspects of life (Philippians 4:8). The apostle used the verb "abide" to basically express the idea of *giving reason* or bearing *in mind*, etc. Paul wants us to follow what Jesus did in our practice in looking at the Samaritan woman, Jesus credited to her account what little could be saved from the disaster of her life. Jesus is an expert in this deal. Of Him, it is said in Matthew 12:20 "He will not finish breaking the broken reed, nor quench the smoldering wick, until He causes righteousness to triumph." Jesus took the opportunity to demand His basic honesty: "In this you have spoken the truth" (v. 18). As long as the ember burned the work could be done, his conscience was not irreparably damaged and God could still fan the fire of the gospel in his life (see Titus 1:15-16).

Application: It is well known truth that, like the coin, every story has two sides. Painful life experiences are often the result of external abuse, but destructive personal behavior also takes its toll. Remember that the gospel begins with an understanding of man's fallen nature (Romans 3:23). The gospel is "good news" specifically because it is God's way of redeeming our lives from the clutches of sin and death (Luke 4:18-19; John 10:10; 1 John 3:8). When taken seriously the gospel will force us to face the root cause of destruction and discomfort in life. Honestly and transparently in the person, understanding and mercy must be provoked in the child of God. Thus, by awakening in the person an interest in a new way of life, Jesus kept the dialogue on a positive note. She continued to listen to Him as she sensed that He was willing to see the best in her.

Jesus *focused* on salvation (4:19-24)

By avoiding discussions of "religion"

As noted, the Samaritans had a distinct set of theological beliefs, based in part on their "alternate" understanding of Scripture. Unlike the Jews, who recognized the authority of the Torah, the prophetic books and the Writings (Tanak), the Samaritans accepted only the writings of Moses (Pentateuch) as inspired. The Samaritans believed that Moses had identified the proper site for the worship of

Yahweh as opposite Mount Ebal - Mount Gerizim (Deuteronomy 27:1-28:68). They also believed that Abraham had offered Isaac on Mount Gerizim rather than Zion near Jerusalem. However, Jesus did not intend to favor either place. As the captain of the hosts of the Lord who met Joshua near Jericho, His sword could not be purchased or assumed in any way (Joshua 5:13-15).

It must be emphasized that from the Christian perspective both the Samaritan religion and first-century Palestinian Judaism were equally illegitimate expressions of Yahweh worship (v. 21 see v. 24). For Jesus, both traditions had missed the mark. Worship of God was not dependent on geographic location, something both religions emphasized. Stephen, the first-century Christian martyr, paid with his life for proclaiming that faith in Christ frees worshipers from attachment to earthly localities, no matter how significant they are to their faith (see Acts 7:48).

Application: Opportunities to engage in prolonged theological debate create a lot of energy, but in the final analysis, it is misdirected. They rarely lead to a decision to receive Christ. We must be able to exercise discernment and know what the person really needs and have the fortitude to stay focused "on the goals of the kingdom." There is a reason why surgeons do not allow the patient to eat food for twelve hours before the operation. Undigested food in the intestines, even if it is nutritious in itself, can be deadly, even in the simplest of surgical operations. Likewise theological debate on non-essential matters of religious tradition only muddies the water and keeps the lost from focusing on their need for the Savior.

Evangelical Christian witnesses should take into account the importance that Roman Catholics give to making pilgrimages to religious shrines. For example, there are shrines to Mary in many countries of the world. While some are well known and endorsed by the Catholic Church (e.g., Portugal, Fatima; France, Lourdes; Mexico, Guadalupe; etc.), other sites may be no more than private homes or in the open countryside. Such pilgrimages are usually held to fulfill vows and to add merit, either for oneself or for a loved one. Remember that Jesus introduced real worship by elevating the conversation beyond geographical matters. Don't risk offending your Roman Catholic friend by attacking their pious practices. Stay on message and continue to demonstrate the need for worship filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and based on a personal relationship with the Father through Jesus Christ.

When believers understand the sufficiency that Christ gives, they will see the needlessness of many religious practices.

Finally, it should be noted that people often want to consider theological issues specifically to avoid dealing with the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. The Samaritan woman could have dealt with such distracting tactics in Jesus. Again, we need to partner with the Spirit of God (Acts 8:12-17) and not become a hindrance or obstacle to His work of salvation. This is not to say that there is no place for discussing religious differences. However, you will agree that discussing points of theology is more productive when speaking with a person who has been moved by the Spirit to have the mind of Christ (John 14:17; 1 Corinthians 2:11-13, 15; 1 Peter 2:1-3). Having a theological discussion with someone dead in trespasses and sins does not hold out much hope (2 Corinthians 2:14).

By focusing on the "relationship"

Jesus responded to the woman's religious issue by elevating the conversation to the ultimate need, felt or otherwise: "the true worshipers will worship the Father in *spirit* and in *truth*" (v. 23). The religion of the Jews and Samaritans was narrow and nationalistic (see Acts 16). Jesus makes it clear that "Spirit" and "Truth" are necessary for worship. They are not exclusively under the guardianship of any "provincial" group, no matter how venerable it may appear to be. One commentator interprets the Spirit and Truth uttered by Jesus in this way: "worship will be manifested in the *sphere of the spirit* [Spirit] (Romans 1:9; Ephesians 6:18), in the inner life of man as opposed to worship in a particular place . . . and it will be worship of God *as he really is* [Truth], i.e. worship with first-hand knowledge as opposed to that which is mediated by symbolism."⁹ It seems clear from both concepts that Jesus emphasizes the need to worship in the "inner sanctuary of the heart" (see 1 Kings 8:27; Isaiah 66:1; Micah 6:6-8; Mark 14:58; Luke 17:21; Acts 7:48; 17:25), which can only be through a *personal relationship* with God.¹⁰ Spirit relates to the subjective inner part of the person, while Truth relates to the unmediated presence of God, the Being who is the object of our worship (1 Corinthians 13:12). Thus, true worshipers are those who have a spiritual relationship with Him.

Application: The concept of a personal relationship with God is difficult to communicate to Roman Catholics. Rich in symbolism and full of mystery, many of them are amazed and overwhelmed by the implicit message of religious pomp. For them, God is totally transcendental and can only be learned through meditation, priests and the sacraments. The revelation of God as our heavenly Father, however, can be an effective metaphor to emphasize the need for a personal relationship. One's personal witness may be the best way to communicate the possibility of experiencing real communion with God through Jesus Christ. Let us remember that Jesus did not focus on **religion** but on **relationship**.

Jesus communicated the message progressively
(4:9, 11, 19, 29)

The various ways in which the Samaritan woman refers to Jesus give us an idea of her growing understanding and appreciation for this man she has just met.

The initial impression she had of Him was that He was "*Jewish*."

The woman's initial impressions of Jesus were probably formed by the accumulation of the centuries of hatred, animosity and suspicion stored up against the Jewish people. Her recognition of Him as a Jew is in juxtaposition to her as a Samaritan. The encounter reveals in a very succinct way the existence of an ongoing rivalry that prevents them from seeing each other with the goodwill of a common humanity. This is further affirmed by the author's parenthetical explanation in v. 9: "as the Jews use nothing in common with the Samaritans." By her attitude, the Samaritan woman reminds Jesus of the great challenge He confronts in His mission to seek and save that which is lost.

Application: There are those who have a very vague or even negative perception of the person of Jesus Christ. This may be true because of a limited understanding of the Gospels, because of the unbiblical religious practices of those around them, or because of hurtful relationships with people who call themselves Christians. The issue we have to face is how can we help them to know the real Christ and get to the point where they desire to have a personal salvation experience through faith in Him?

Their attitude toward Him improved as they called Him "*Lord*."

Almost all commentators agree that John has not given us the whole text of the conversation. There must have been a considerable exchange between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. What is clear is that during the conversation the iron curtain of hatred began to fall. The term "lord" can be translated as "Lord" (from *kurie*, *kurios*) appropriately translated as "lord" in its three uses suggests a growing respect of the woman for Jesus (vv. 11, 15, 19). Jesus treated her differently and so the woman begins to treat him with respect. Moreover, she did not treat him with the negative attitude toward all Jews. The respect grew. She was no longer controlled by the negative attitude toward Jews. The respect that grew toward Him allowed her to put aside the futile rivalries and focus on the substance of the problem; how could this gentleman draw living water when he had no vessel with which to draw it?

Application: What will we need to do to get our friends and family to have a respectful attitude toward the Christ of Scripture? The Bible recognizes the power of kindness and treating people with respect (Proverbs 25:21-22; 2 Timothy 2:24-25). Often a good word and a pleasant disposition go a long way toward reducing tensions. The evangelical Christian witness should not be fooled by paralyzing prejudices but develop a genuine concern for people. Trust in the power of love. Many testify that there are often no greater friends than those we win by demonstrating love.

Subsequently, she began to call him "*Prophet*."

The recognition of Jesus' wife as a prophet was a step in the right direction. Although Palestinian Jews revered the prophets of old (Matt. 10:41; 23:29; Heb. 1:1), and believed the prophetic writings to be inspired (Acts 13:15), the stature of the prophets in Samaritan culture was not well known. For example, we know that the Samaritans did not consider the prophetic writings to be inspired. Nevertheless, as this account implies, the prophetic gift was recognized. The woman came to understand that Jesus was not merely a mild-mannered gentleman. Instead, He had divinely granted powers, as exhibited when He divulged to her His entire marital

history. At least the woman recognized that Jesus was a spokesman for God. She began to feel in an uncomfortable position as she realized that God had noticed her sinful situation.

Application: Paul acknowledges the gift of prophecy in several of his letters (Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28; Ephesians 2:20; 3:5; 4:11). Although we often associate prophecy as the ability to see the future (e.g., John on Patmos, Revelation 1:3), prophets always had contemporary relevance in Israel as well as in the church (1 Corinthians 14:31). As Paul shows, the prophets often brought words of encouragement to the church. This is something the Christian is required to do when working with people who struggle to make a commitment of faith in Christ.

Exhortation occurs when we stand as God's representatives and faithfully pronounce God's non-negotiable measures of right and wrong. The opportunity to "exhort" is easily presented when we confront the Roman Catholic Church's teaching on sin. Roman Catholics have been taught to classify sins as venial (the least serious and forgivable through confession) or mortal (unforgivable). An understanding of the biblical concept of sin is essential to recognize our need for a Savior. The point here is that as heralds of the gospel we must exercise our own "prophetic" gifts. When we do so, we must be faithfully committed to the Word of God, but we must act in a spirit of humility lest we ourselves fall (Romans 11:20; 1 Corinthians 10:12; James 4:6; Jude 20-23).

Many nominal Christians with a Roman Catholic background have no difficulty thinking of Jesus as a person sent by God. That is a great place to start. The problem lies, however, in the fact that they have no biblical understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. To many, Jesus is either a helpless child in Mary's arms or a dead Christ on the cross. Although Jesus went through the stages from the cradle to the cross, the fact is that He neither remained an incapable child nor a dead man on the cross. He rose from the dead and is seated at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. Through meaningful relationships and Bible study, we must commit ourselves to leading these nominal Christians to come to an understanding of the real Jesus of the Bible. Simply knowing that Jesus was a prophet sent by God is not enough for a person to be saved.

She finally recognized him as the "*Messiah*".

John notes that it was the same woman who brought up the subject of the Messiah (v. 25). It is entirely possible that Jesus' total rejection of nationalistic religion gave him reason to wonder if someone who spoke with such boldness could be none other than the Messiah. He not only spoke intimately to his personal life (vv. 16-19) but also passed judgment on religion in general and predicted the establishment of true worship (vv. 20-24).

Like the Jews, the Samaritans also had messianic expectations. In the writings of Moses, particularly in Deuteronomy 18:15-18, this idea is initially presented. Josephus notes that there was also a messianic zeal in Samaria during the time of Jesus.¹¹ The Samaritans anticipated the one who would reveal new truths about God and man.

The woman's comment about the Messiah gave Jesus the opportunity to lead the conversation to an immediate climax: "It is I who speak to you" (v. 26). With language reminiscent of Isaiah 52:6 (*I am the one who says, Here I am!*), and the undeniable connection to Exodus 3:14 (*I am the one I am, God answered Moses*), Jesus affirmed that He is the fulfillment of her hope, and He does so by proclaiming divinity! Although the encounter between Jesus and the woman is ended by the arrival of the disciples and His subsequent discussion with them (vv. 27, 31-38), the woman was surely affected. Indeed, she goes away leaving the well behind, and forgetting her pitcher (v. 28). Later, in the village, she recounts to the people her stupendous encounter with Jesus and asks, "Is not this the Christ?" There is the impression that even with the woman's proclamation of Jesus she still had some reservations. Although the woman is not recorded as explicitly confessing Jesus as the Christ, it is evident from what follows the encounter that her testimony caused many in the village to seek Jesus (vv. 30, 39-42). Significantly, John 4:42 implies that, like many in the village, the woman had gone beyond speculation to full acceptance of Jesus as her Savior.

Application: Recognizing Jesus as the only Savior sent by God is crucial to human redemption. The process that takes a person only part of the way to recognize him

as Savior does not go far enough (see Matthew 16:13-17; Mark 8:27-29; Luke 9:18-20). Often, people see Jesus as an enlightened religious figure, like Buddha, Muhammad, or an Eastern mystic. Roman Catholics, while seeing Jesus as the Messiah, also tend to grant salvific roles to the saints, and to the Virgin Mary. Like the Samaritan woman, people need to wrestle with their poor perceptions until they see the uniqueness of Jesus' ministry. Somehow, they need to be carefully instructed until they come to see the unique place Jesus has in salvation history (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; one Timothy 2:5). **It is important to keep in mind that for many Catholics it takes time for them to come to understand the plan of salvation. In these cases, Bible study (e.g., the Gospel of John) can help them to progressively understand the concept of salvation by grace and not by works.**

Conclusion

Jesus' discussion with His disciples when they returned from the village is instrumental in giving us a handle on how to interpret this story. John shows us that the encounter with the Samaritan woman is to be prized for its evangelistic implications. When the disciples returned they were so caught up in the bonds of ancient rivalries (v. 27) that they only focused on Jesus' apparent lapse. However, Jesus used the opportunity to show them the great harvest that awaited them in Samaria, if they had eyes to see beyond their prejudices (vv. 31-38). Jesus' outreach to the Samaritan woman at the well is a powerful example that challenges us to reach beyond ourselves with confidence knowing that God will reach many with the gospel.

Review

We need to go out of our way **geographically** and **socially** if we are going to reach Roman Catholics and witness to them effectively. We can invite them to a dinner, to see a movie, to go to a sporting event. The idea is to cultivate friendships to open the way for witnessing.

We can create interest in **spiritual matters** by relating to the **felt needs** experienced by each person. If they have lost a loved one we can visit them.

We must avoid the **spirit of condemnation** when confronting people's sin and remember that God is powerful and willing to forgive all who come to Him.

We must honestly recognize the **positive aspects** of their lives that build self-esteem and focus on what they can become through the grace and power of Jesus Christ.

We must focus on what is **essential for salvation** and avoid discussions that create relational barriers instead of bridges of trust. Follow Jesus' example. **Remember, the goal is not to win the argument but to win the person!**

We must communicate patiently, trusting in the work of the Holy Spirit in the mind of the sympathizer to create understanding of the person and gift of Christ.

Two Experiences

Our suggestions to Cultivate Friendship, Create Interest, Understand the Situation, Focus on Salvation and Communicate Progressively are based on the model Christ used and our experience in sharing the message of salvation with our beloved family members, neighbors and colleagues who have a Roman Catholic background.

Example of cultivating friendship

When we moved to New York and bought a house, we realized that we were the only evangelicals on the block. As we left the house or returned home, we would sporadically say hello to our neighbors. One day we were invited to a gathering celebrating the Independence Day holiday. In talking with my wife, she told me she didn't want to go because "they were going to be drinking and smoking." She became angry when I sarcastically replied, "Are you afraid you are going to be tempted to get drunk?" But then in a kinder tone I asked her "how are we going to evangelize them if we haven't befriended them?" She then agreed. When we entered the house, I went to the kitchen to choose a soft drink (a Coke not a Beer). I tell you that during that entire celebration I did not make it out of the kitchen

because person after person came to converse with me saying, "They tell me you are a pastor and I have a question or a problem." During that night, several ladies conversed with my wife.

After several months when Christmas time arrived, my wife, my children and I were getting ready to enjoy a delicious dinner that my wife had prepared to celebrate Christmas Eve. Then it came to my mind the lady who lived across the street from our house who was alone with her two daughters because her husband had abandoned her. This prompted me to suggest to my wife that we invite this lady and her daughters. When she arrived at our house, she was very happy that she would not have to be alone with her daughters on Christmas Eve. As a result of that visit, that lady invited my wife to have a Bible Study at her house with the other neighbors. As a result of those Bible Studies several people came to know Christ as their savior and others came closer to God. This is an example of how we can cultivate friendships with people that will open the door for us to share with them the message of salvation.

Example of concentrate in relation

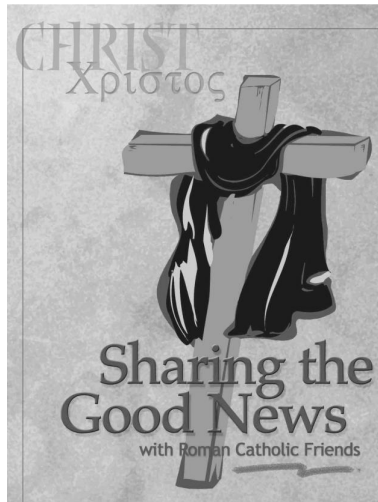
One Sunday a lady visited us at church. After the service, I greeted her and introduced her to my wife. I said, "We are glad you are visiting us." She replied, "I am Catholic but I thought I would visit you and I hope I didn't offend anyone by coming to your church." I replied, "In no way have you offended us. We are very glad you came to participate in our worship." I then asked her, "Would it be all right if my wife and I visited her for more conversation?" She replied, "It will be my pleasure to receive you in my home." Later that afternoon we went to visit her and she was surprised that we were there. As we sat in the living room of her home she asked me, "what are the differences between Evangelicals and Catholics?" I smiled and said, "There are differences, but is it okay if I tell you what we have in common?"

She replied, "Yes I am interested to know what we have in common." Then I asked her, "Do you believe in God, the creator of the heavens and the earth and our maker?" She answered me, "Yes, of course, I was taught that in catechism." Then I asked her, "Do you believe in Jesus, the son of God born of the Virgin Mary?" She answered me, "Of course I believe that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary." I then asked her, "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Divine Trinity?" She answered me, "I affirm my belief in the most holy trinity every time I make the sign of the cross in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." I replied

I was glad that we have all these beliefs of the Word of God in common. Then I said to her, "I have one last question do you believe that Jesus died for the sins of mankind?" She answered me, "Yes, during Lent and on Good Friday I think a lot about Jesus' suffering on the cross." Then I asked her, "Do you believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and that, **if you repent of your sins and ask Jesus for forgiveness, he will forgive your sins, bring a peace to your heart and give you the assurance that when you die you will go directly to heaven to be in the presence of Jesus?**" She answered me saying, "I didn't know that, tell me more that I can be forgiven and be assured that I go to heaven when I die." After I explained the plan of salvation in more detail she said, "This is very new to me. Please give me more time to think about it, could you come next week so we can continue our conversation?" I replied that my wife and I would gladly come back the following week. Then I said, "Please bring me your Bible." She went into the other room and brought it. Then I said, "I am going to put this bookmark at the beginning of the Gospel of John. During this week do me the favor of reading it." She assured me that she would be happy to do so. When we returned the following week, the first thing she did was to take my hand and tell me, "**I have already received Christ as my Savior.**" My wife and I were overjoyed and gave her instructions on how to continue to grow in her spiritual life. **One observation, if we had focused on differences, we would still be having a conversation without her having accepted Christ as her savior. That is why it is good not to get into debates about religion but to focus on relationship.**

Note: This is a portion taken, with the permission of the authors; from chapter 3 of the book that appears here which can be obtained through Amazon. This book helps the reader to know the teachings of the Catholic Church as compared to what the Word of God teaches. The reader will learn how to answer the questions of Catholics using the Bible as the only source of information and leaving the door open for the person to understand more and more about the salvation that God offers through His beloved son Jesus Christ. The book also includes instruction on how to witness to different types of Catholics. In addition, the book includes suggestions on how we can use celebrations (birthdays, anniversaries, births, etc.) to share the Gospel message with our Catholic family and friends. I tell them that my wife and her siblings heard the gospel message for the first time at a birthday celebration.

Daniel R. Sanchez and Rodolfo Gonzalez, *Sharing the Good News With Roman Catholic Friends*



This book should be used to train the members of our churches to know how to witness in an informed, positive and loving manner. The idea is to build bridges of communication and establish trust so that they will listen attentively and receive Christ as their only and sufficient Savior. The nine chapters of this book contain much more information on how to guide our Catholic friends to receive Christ as Savior, to find answers to their questions, to understand Biblical doctrines and to know how to guide their family members to receive Christ as Savior.

Gospel in the Rosary

A book I wrote especially to guide Catholics to have an experience of salvation in Jesus Christ is one that bears the title, *Gospel in the Rosary*.

When the Apostle Paul was invited to speak at a meeting of Greek philosophers in Athens, he noted that they had an altar "to the unknown God." Instead of criticizing them for their idolatry, Paul used this as a bridge when he told them, "It is of that God whom you worship without knowing him that I speak to you." (Acts 17:23)

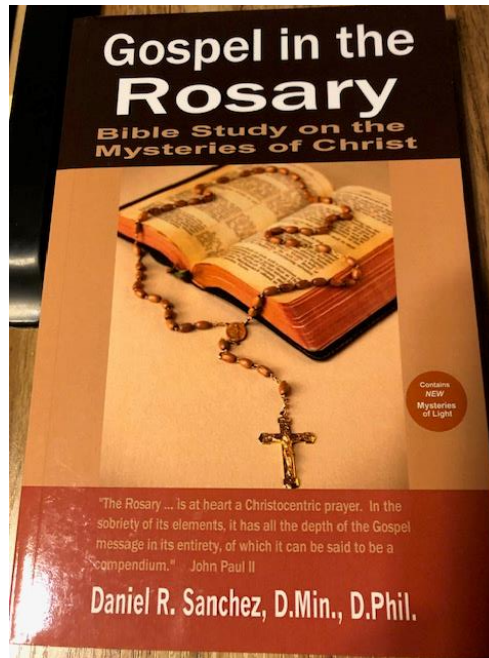
The book, *Gospel In The Rosary: A Biblical Study of the Mysteries of Christ* was written with the purpose of creating a bridge of communication and trust with people who have grown up in the Roman Catholic tradition and who feel shy or are against participating in "Protestant Bible studies." However, if they are invited to study what the Word of God teaches about the Mysteries of the Rosary they are willing to do so because this is something they know and feel comfortable doing.

In fact, each of the mysteries studied in this book are taken from events in the life of Jesus taken directly from the Word of God. For example, the Sorrowful Mysteries are: The Agony of Jesus in the Garden, The Scourging, The Crowning with Thorns, The Carrying of the Cross and The Crucifixion.

The Bible says, "*So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God*" (Romans 10:17). (Romans 10:17) Without entering into any discussion about religion, without criticizing and without pressuring, the objective is for people to discover for themselves what the Word of God says and through the work of the Holy Spirit to awaken an interest in receiving Christ as their personal savior.

In order for this to be achieved, we share the following tips.

Get copies of the book *Gospel in the Rosary* (for you and the participants) Available on Amazon



Order through Amazon

Instructions on how to use this book.

Read the book carefully at least once to gain a good understanding of its contents.

Pray much to the Lord that He will give you wisdom and that the Holy Spirit will begin to touch the heart of the person you are going to invite to participate with you in the study of the Mysteries of the Rosary.

Take time to cultivate the friendship of the person you are inviting to study with you.

Choose the best time each week for the meeting.

Begin the meeting with a conversation about the family and say a prayer mentioning the needs to God.

Study one lesson per week. If it is necessary to take two weeks for some of the lessons, no problem. The objective is for the person to understand what the Word of God teaches about that mystery.

Help the person to discover for himself what the Word of God says. If at first he does not understand, ask him to read the portion once more.

Ask the person to read the Bible portion and the explanation.

If the person does not yet understand what the Bible says, you can explain the meaning of some words.

Do not enter into any discussion about what the Catholic Church teaches. Simply encourage them to read for themselves what the Bible says.

Do not criticize the Catholic Church, its priests or its doctrines. Allow the person to become aware of the difference between what the Catholic Church teaches and what the Bible teaches. This will give opportunity for the Holy Spirit to work in the person's heart.

If the person asks you a question that you cannot answer, tell him/her that this is a very important question and that it will be good that during the week you are praying and studying the Bible to find the answer.

It will be important that you answer the questions only with what the Word of God teaches. This way if they have an argument it is not with you but with the Word of God.

If the person expresses a belief that is not Biblical, instead of telling him that it is wrong, the best response is, Would you like to know what God's Word says about it? Then assign the appropriate portion for him to read.

If the person has not made a decision to receive Christ as his only and sufficient Savior, invite him to continue studying the Bible. You can study the Apostle Paul's Letter to the Romans, then to the Galatians. Then you can study the book of Hebrews. These can be done one chapter at a time always praying that the Holy Spirit will help them to understand and apply what the Word of God teaches.

Be patient. Some people have a hard time understanding Biblical truths that are contrary to what they have learned in the Catholic Church.

After the person has received Christ as their savior, they can be guided in the discipleship study found in this book, which you have already studied.

An example of one of the chapters in this book is chapter 3 entitled **The Nativity of Jesus**.

THE NATIVITY OF JESUS

(Luke 2:1-20)

There is no story more beautiful and more inspiring than that of the birth of our Lord Jesus. Every Christmas people try to depict this wonderful event through dramas, choral presentations, nativity scenes, decorations, paintings and in many other ways. Despite all these efforts, nothing can better communicate the meaning of this glorious event than the study of the Holy Scriptures. There we find a clear and moving description of the birth in the manger, the message of the angels, the joy of the shepherds, and the homage of the magi.

The Birth Of Jesus

(Luke 2:1-7)

The birth of Jesus is the culmination of a series of miracles. As we saw in the last lesson, the appearance of the angel and the announcement that a virgin would give birth to a child were supernatural events. An additional miracle is that the place where Jesus was to be born was announced seven hundred years before his birth. The prophet Micah had said: "As for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, small among the clans of Judah, out of you shall come forth for me a ruler of Israel, descended from an ancient family" (5:2). How could this prophecy be fulfilled when Mary and Joseph did not live in Bethlehem but in Nazareth? The answer is found in Luke 2:1-5.

We see in verses 1 to 3 that Augustus Caesar, the emperor of Rome, ordered everyone to be counted in the census (enumerated). This census was taken to collect taxes and to find out who was old enough to serve in the Roman army. The difficult

part of this was that people had to return to the town of their birth to be counted in the census. Verse 4 explains that since Joseph was of the family of David (the king); he had to go to Bethlehem. However, he did not go alone, he went "with Mary, who was betrothed to be married to him and was with child" (v.5). It is very interesting to note, then, that God used this census for our Lord Jesus to be born in Bethlehem (the city where David's palace had been).

While there, "the time came for her to give birth" (v.6). Mary and Joseph had not planned to be in Bethlehem for the birth of the baby Jesus. However, in God's providence, they were in that historic and important city when the time of the birth came.

To reach this city, Joseph and Mary had to walk 80 miles. After their arrival, they began to look for an inn to stay in. Compared to the hotels of our day, the inns were very primitive. They simply provided rustic spaces to sleep, to prepare their own meals, and a separate place to keep animals. Because so many other people had arrived for the census, Joseph and Mary "had no lodging for them in the inn" and had to stay in the place where the animals were kept (v.7).

Many people talk about where they were born. Some were born in a hospital, others in their homes, but few have been born in a place as humble as a stable surrounded by donkeys, sheep and camels. There was no clean, soft little bed in a warm, ornate room for the baby Jesus, but he was laid on straw in a manger. As much as we may want to embellish the Christmas scene, we cannot escape the fact that the cradle of the son of God was a manger where animals eat. His desire to manifest God's love for us was so great that he was willing to be born as the poorest of the poor.

Despite the circumstances in which the baby Jesus was born, there was undoubtedly a deep joy in the hearts of Mary and Joseph, as they knew that the angel's message had been fulfilled and the Savior of the world had been born.

The Message of the Angels

The important and wealthy people of the city were too wrapped up in their business to realize what had happened that night. The message of the birth was given to "shepherds" (v.8). Shepherds were not considered important people in Jewish society

at that time. The Jews who considered themselves very religious despised the poor shepherds because they did not perfectly follow the rules, customs and ceremonies of Jewish law. In spite of this, the shepherds of the Bethlehem region performed a very important task in caring for the sheep that were to be offered in the Jewish temple sacrifices. It is very likely that, in bringing the sheep to the temple, they had repeatedly heard the parts of the Bible that spoke about the Savior of the world who was to come. Although they did not have much knowledge about their religion, they had simple and sincere hearts. That is why they were chosen to hear the first announcement of the birth of the child Jesus.

As we see in verses 9 to 11, an angel appeared to these shepherds. This angel was surrounded by the glory of God manifested in a shining cloud. As we can imagine, when the shepherds saw this, they were frightened. However, the angel calmed their fears by giving them the message of Jesus' arrival. This message was very important for several reasons:

A Message of Peace

First, this was a message of peace. The angel said to the shepherds, "Do not be afraid." Throughout his ministry, Jesus preached a message of peace. Repeatedly he told his disciples, "Do not be troubled" (John 14:1). He also told them, "I leave you my peace. I give you my peace, but I do not give it to you as those who are of the world give it to you. Do not be anxious and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). Because Jesus came to bring peace to hearts, he was called "the beginning of peace" (Isaiah 9:6). As we study the angel's message to the shepherds, it is important to ask ourselves, do I have peace in my heart? If I die tonight, do I have the peace in my heart that I am ready to meet God? What do I need to do to achieve that peace?

A Message of Joy

Second, this is a message of joy. The angel said to the shepherds, "For I bring you good news, which will be a cause of joy to all" (v.10). This was a message of joy because it brought good news that Jesus had been born. It was also a message of great joy because it was for all the people. The shepherds whom the religious leaders

had excluded were now included in God's plan. This "for all" message also includes us. Sometimes we feel that we are undeserving and try to do something to attain God's favor and mercy. But, the angel's message assures us that God sent us his son to communicate that he loves us very much and wants us to receive his help and blessings. Again, as we study this story we must ask ourselves, How much joy do I have in my heart? Jesus came to bring joy into our lives. Jesus said, "Thus I speak to you that you may rejoice with me and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11). He explains that this joy comes when we are united to him, as he remains united to us (v.4). This means that we have invited him to come into our hearts and guide our lives.

A Message of Salvation

Third, this is a message of salvation. The angel said to the shepherds, "Today a savior has been born among the people of David, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (v.11). At that time, many Jews were looking for a political savior to deliver them from the Roman Empire. Others were looking for a savior to deliver them from their illnesses and physical limitations. However, the angel's message is that of a Savior who would deliver them from the bondage of sin and death. Today many are also looking for saviors. People who can free them from the things that enslave and oppress them such as vices, fears, diseases and guilt. None of them can save them like Jesus. Only Jesus can save us from our sins, from a confused and purposeless life and from eternal damnation. In light of the angel's message, it is important that we ask ourselves, have I received Jesus as my Savior?

The Angel's Sign

The angel not only gave them a message, he gave them a sign: "You will find the child wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a stable" (v.12).

This angel was accompanied by a choir of angels singing, "Glory to God in the highest! Peace on earth among men who enjoy his favor!" At that time, it was customary to pay singers to celebrate the birth of a child. It is very beautiful to think that the child Jesus who was born into such a poor situation was not serenaded by earthly singers (as was the custom then) but serenaded by heavenly angels sent by the heavenly Father.

The Faith of the Shepherds

We must admire the faith of the shepherds. After having received the angel's message, they did not remain debating whether what they had seen was true or not. They immediately decided to go to Bethlehem to see what had happened (v.15). We see in them an attitude similar to that of Mary. They believed and obeyed.

By their simple faith, they "found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the stable" (v.16). When the shepherds arrived at the manger and told what they had seen and heard, no doubt Mary's heart and Joseph's were filled with joy to know that the heavenly Father had taken it upon himself to announce the birth of Jesus. The shepherds, who were considered the most insignificant, were also filled with joy for having the privilege of being the first to see Jesus (v.20). In the Bible we find that, time after time, Jesus admired, not those who had more religious knowledge, but those who had sincere faith, as did the shepherds.

The Adoration of the Shepherds

The birth of our Lord Jesus was a very joyful event. The angel told the shepherds that he brought "good news that will be a cause of great joy to all" (v.10). The choir of angels joyfully sang "Glory to God in the highest" (v.14). Arriving at the stable, the shepherds observed the deep joy in the hearts of Mary and Joseph. And having seen the divine face of the infant Jesus, the shepherds "returned giving glory and praise to God" (v.20).

This whole birth scene is full of joy. But there is a very sad expression there. It is the one that says, "And she laid him in the stable, because there was no room for them in the inn" (v.7). It is sad that the son of God had to be born among the animals because human beings did not give him room in their homes. The sad thing about this is that this scene is repeated every day because there are many people who have no place in their hearts for Jesus. Just as Mary and Joseph went from door to door looking for a dwelling place for the son of God to be born, Jesus is looking for a dwelling place in our hearts. Jesus says, "Behold, I am knocking at the door; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to his house and we will dine together" (Revelation 3:20).

How beautiful to think that, in a spiritual way, we can invite Jesus to come and live in our hearts and accompany us on life's journey. We find this idea in a canticle that says:

You left your throne and crown for me
coming to Bethlehem to be born.
But to you the entrance to the inn was not given
And you were born in a manger.
Come into my heart o Christ
Well, there is room for you in it.
Come into my heart o Christ, come
Well, there is room for you in it.

We will receive the joy of which the angels sang and which the shepherds experienced if we invite Christ to come and dwell in our hearts.

Bible Memory Verse

"Behold, I am knocking at the door; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into his house, and we will dine together" (Revelation 3:20).

Prayer

Dear Jesus, it saddens me to know that you had to be born in a manger because people were so busy and so wrapped up in their own activities that they had no room for you. I invite you to come into my heart and guide me so that I may enjoy your presence and live for you. Thank you for hearing my prayer, amen.

An Experience:

In Guatemala, a lady began to invite her neighbors to participate in the Bible Study using the book *Gospel in the Rosary*. The word spread and she had 40 Catholics in that study. She invited me to participate in one of the sessions. An elderly lady asked me why I had not included the last two mysteries (the Assumption of Mary and the Coronation of Mary). Before I could answer, the daughter replied, "Mom, it's because those mysteries are not in the Bible and we are learning that there are many things that the Catholic Church teaches that are not in the Bible. During that

visit, I talked with several Catholics who had already received Christ as their personal savior. The book can be used in groups or one on one. The objective is that by participating in these purely biblical studies they will come to hear the message of the Gospel.

II. Finding Favor Through Discipleship

As we read the New Testament, we all realize that the Apostle Paul discipled Timothy, Titus, Philemon and many others. But one question we must answer is, **Who was the first to disciple Saul of Tarsus?** If you mention Barnabas, you are talking about a very dedicated person whose name means "Son of Consolation," but he was not the first one to disciple Saul. As we read Acts 9:10-19; 22:12-16 we realize that Ananias, not the husband of Sapphira but a believer in Damascus, was the first to disciple Saul of Tarsus. By focusing on Ananias, we see his person, his hesitancy, his obedience, his love and his ministry.

His Personhood

Ananias was a devout man who had a good testimony among those who knew him well. *Then one named Ananias, a devout man according to the law, who had a good testimony among all the Jews who dwelt there (22:12).* He was in contact with the Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straightway, and seek in the house of Judas one named Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,¹² and hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias, who comes in, and lays his hands upon him, that he might recover his sight (9:10,11).

His hesitation (9:13, 14)

He is distressed by the suffering that Saul has inflicted on the saints. *Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how many evils he has done to your saints in Jerusalem (v.13).*

Moreover, he knows Saul's plans and even here, he has authority from the chief priests to seize all who call on your name. (v.14).

But the Lord reassured him. The Lord said to him, "Go, for this is a chosen instrument of mine, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel; ¹⁶for I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake" (9:15, 16). (9:15, 16). He no longer "breathes threatenings and murders."

And the Lord said to him, "Arise, and go into the street called Straight, and seek in the house of Judas one named Saul, of Tarsus; for behold, he prays" (9:11).

He is waiting for you. "And he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias, who comes in and lays his hands on him that he may regain his sight." (9:12).

I have a special task for him. The Lord said to him: "Go, for this is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: ¹⁶ for I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake" (9:15, 16).

His obedience:

"Then Ananias went and entered the house, and laid his hands on him and said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the way by which you were coming, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'" (9:17). Even though he had genuine reservations, Ananias obeyed the Lord and went.

His love

He calls this persecutor "Brother Saul" (9:17). How surprisingly tender! This greeting admitted Saul into the communion of saints. It erased all past guilt. He who was the recipient of love would later write the chapter on love (1 Cor. 13).

His ministry

Ananias ministered to Saul's physical needs: "That you may regain your sight" (9:17).

Then he ministered to their spiritual needs: "That you may be filled with the Holy Spirit" (9:17).

It also helped to clarify Saul's call: "You will know his will, you will see the Righteous One and hear the word of his mouth" (22:14) because you will be his witness" (22:15).

Ananias then encouraged Saul: "What are you waiting for? Get up and be baptized" (22:16).

What does it take to be an effective discipler?

1) Devotion to the Lord;

2) Obedience to its Commission;

3) Love of perspectives; and

4) Ministry to converts.

God used this consecrated and obedient man to guide this terrible persecutor and turn him into an amazing apostle. It is of utmost importance that we know that we have to be good disciples in order to be good disciplers. May God help us to be useful instruments in His hands in the conversion and discipleship of those who, in turn, will be used mightily in the work of His Kingdom (2 Tim. 2:2).

Need for Contextualized Discipleship

In our day, we unhappily have in our churches brothers who have been converted, but have not experienced a discipleship that takes into account their Hispanic culture and their Catholic background. In a church where he was interim pastor, I received a phone call from a deacon who said, "I am seriously ill in the hospital and I want you to come to confession." In all the time, I had been a member of that church I had never been instructed as to the Biblical doctrine about confession. In other churches, there are members who have Catholic-influenced beliefs. This is what has motivated me to write a book entitled: *Hispanic Biblical Discipleship*. The content of the book is purely Biblical. In it, I use the catechism method that includes questions and answers. So that there is no confusion regarding human traditions, all the questions are answered with Bible verses. The question I try to answer in this book is, "As a pastor, what would you want new believers with a Catholic background to learn and practice in order to be healthy and active members?"

The material in the following book outline attempts to answer that question:

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In the chapter about the family, it deals with cultural issues such as machismo focusing on the positive characteristics of the man who protects his family, but clearly indicating what the Bible teaches about marital unfaithfulness and the treatment of the wife and children as a taskmaster. On the other hand, I give attention to what the Bible says about the Hispanic concept of Marianism. If it is true that Mary, the mother of Jesus submitted to the will of God regarding the birth of her son, this does not mean that they should submit to all kinds of oppression in the different spheres of their lives. In short, there are cultural concepts that are not in agreement with what the word of God teaches and which should not be allowed to flourish in the lives of Christians.

The chapter on Christian stewardship is of great importance. People with a Catholic background have the concept of occasional almsgiving but not the concept of tithing. The discussion in this chapter begins with wise money management so that families have sufficient resources for tithing and giving.

I have dedicated a chapter to the vocabulary we use in our churches. A young woman who received Christ and joined an evangelical church told me, "I had to learn a new vocabulary to understand what was being said in church."

SALVATION

An example of the content of this book is Chapter 1. In this chapter, we will see what God's word teaches about salvation and the implications of this teaching for your life.

What does the word "salvation" mean?"

In the Bible, the word salvation means rescue from sin and death, renewal of the spirit, restoration to a right relationship with God and the assurance that you will go to heaven at the end of your existence here on earth. ¹²

Who is the savior?

Read the following quotes from God's Word to answer this question.

The angel of God gave this message to Joseph about Mary

Mary will have a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be so named because he will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21).

Jesus himself made it clear that he is the savior of the world

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not die but have eternal life (John 3:16).

Jesus answered him: I am the way, the truth and the life. Only through me can you come to the Father (John 14:6).

For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10).

St. Peter explained who the only savior is

This Jesus is the stone which you builders despised, but which has become the chief cornerstone. ¹² There is salvation in no one else, for in all the world God has given us no one else by whom we can be saved (Acts 4:11-12).

St. Paul proclaimed that Jesus is the savior

But God proves that he loves us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

The Word of God teaches without question that Jesus Christ is our only Savior. He was the only one who died for us.

What is the nature of salvation?

Salvation is a gift from God

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

The sin of one man cannot be compared with the gift of God, for by one sin came condemnation; but the gift of God out of many sins makes men righteous. (Romans 5:16).

For if death reigned as a result of one man's crime, much more shall those whom God in his great goodness and free gift makes righteous reign in the new life through one man, Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:17).

Then he said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink from the spring of the water of life, without cost to him. (Revelation 21:6).

In these verses, we see that salvation is a gift from God. Because it is a gift, nothing can be done to deserve it. The only option is to receive it in faith.

How does one receive salvation?

To receive salvation, a person must place his faith in Jesus Christ, repent of his sins and allow Jesus Christ to guide his life.

What does it mean to put your faith in Jesus Christ?

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not die but have eternal life (John 3:16).

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: but he that believeth not the Son shall not have that life, but shall receive the chastisement of God (John 3:36).

Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you and your family will be saved (Acts 16:31).

I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God, so that all who believe may attain salvation, first of all the Jews, but also those who are not Jews. ¹⁷ For the

gospel shows us in what way God makes us righteous: it is by faith, from beginning to end. The Scriptures say, "The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:16-17).

Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you, whoever heeds what I say and believes in him who sent me has eternal life, and shall not be condemned, for he has already passed from death to life. (John 5:24).

However, we know that no one is recognized as righteous by fulfilling the law, but only through faith in Jesus Christ. For this reason, we also have believed in Jesus Christ, so that God may recognize us as righteous, thanks to that faith and not because we keep the law. For no one will be recognized as righteous by fulfilling the law. (Galatians 2:16)

Thanks to Christ, you also who heard the message of the truth, the good news of your salvation, and embraced the faith, were sealed as God's own with the Holy Spirit, whom he had promised (Ephesians 1:13).

For this very reason, I suffer all these things. But I am not ashamed of it, for I know in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to keep that which he has committed to me until that day. ¹³ Follow the pattern of sound teaching which you have received from me, and live in the faith and love which we have through Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 1:12-13)

Believing in Jesus Christ means more than simply mentally accepting the fact that Jesus is the son of God. In the Biblical sense, believing involves an act of the mind and will. It means believing in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and entrusting our life and future to him. A person may say that he "believes in a doctor," but it is not until the person puts his life in the doctor's hands that he can be said to believe in the doctor.

What is the importance of repentance?

God's Word teaches that repentance is absolutely necessary to attain salvation. The Bible uses two words to explain this concept (in Greek *metanoesate*) which means to repent and (*epistrepho*) which means to turn to God. Repentance involves a total change of direction in a person's life in which he/she feels sadness for his/her sin, turns his/her back on the past life and surrenders to God to live a new life in Christ.

Therefore turn to God and be converted, that he may blot out your sins (Acts 3:19).

But first I preached the message to those who were in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all the region of Judea, and also to the non-Jews, inviting them to be converted, and to turn to God, and to do works that would demonstrate that conversion. (Acts 26:20)

Jesus emphasized repentance

I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, that they may turn to God (Luke 5:32).

No, I tell you; and if you do not turn to God yourselves, you will also die (Luke 13:3).

I tell you that likewise there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who is converted than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to be converted (Luke 15:7).

In his name will be proclaimed to all nations to turn to God, so that he will forgive them their sins. Beginning at Jerusalem, (Luke 24:47)

St. Peter insisted on repentance

Peter answered them, "Turn to God and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, that God may forgive you your sins, and so he will give you the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38).

It is not that the Lord is slow in keeping his promise, as some suppose, but he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to die, but everyone to turn to God (2 Peter 3:9).

The Prodigal Son gave a sign of repentance

The son said to him, "My Father, I have sinned against God and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son." (Luke 15:21)

King David acknowledged his sin and repented

By your love, O God, have compassion on me; by your great tenderness, wipe away my guilt. 2 Wash me from my iniquity, cleanse me from my sin! 3 I acknowledge that I have been rebellious; my sin is not erased from my mind. 4 Against you I have

sinned, and against you alone, doing what is evil, what you condemn. (Psalm 51:1-4)

The believers in Antioch gave evidence of their repentance

However, some believers from Cyprus and Cyrene came to the city of Antioch and spoke also to the non-Jews, telling them the good news about Jesus, the Lord. ²¹ The power of the Lord was with them, and so there were many who left their former beliefs and believed in the Lord (Acts 11:20-21).

Jesus gave St. Paul the command to preach repentance

I send you to them that you may open their eyes and that they may no longer walk in darkness, but in light; that they may no longer follow under the power of Satan, but may follow God; and that they may believe in me and so receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance in God's holy people." (Acts 26:18)

I have told Jews and non-Jews alike to turn to God and believe in our Lord Jesus (Acts 20:21).

Repentance involves acknowledging our sin before God, asking for forgiveness and being willing to change our way of thinking and living. This includes abandoning the old life of sin and surrendering to God to live according to his will. If we do not repent, we cannot receive God's forgiveness and the salvation of our soul.

Apart from believing in Jesus Christ as our savior, must we do anything to merit or earn our salvation?

But God our Savior showed his kindness and love for mankind,⁵ and, without our having done anything good, out of pure mercy he saved us by washing us and regenerating us, and by giving us new life through the Holy Spirit. ⁶ For through Jesus Christ our Savior he gave us the Holy Spirit in abundance,⁷ so that, after he had made us righteous through his goodness, we might have the hope of inheriting eternal life. (Titus 3:4-7)

God saved us and has called us to be a holy people, not because of what we have done, but because that was his purpose and because of the goodness he has had toward us from all eternity, through Christ Jesus. ¹⁰ That goodness has now been gloriously displayed in Christ Jesus our Savior, who destroyed the power of death and through the gospel brought immortal life to light. (2Timothy 1:9-10)

And if it is of the goodness of God, it is no longer of the deeds; for if it were, the goodness of God would no longer be goodness (Romans 11:6).

For by the goodness of God you have received salvation through faith. This is not something you have earned yourselves, but it is a gift from God. It is not the result of one's own actions, so that no one can boast about anything (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

And now, after God has made us righteous through the death of Christ, all the more shall we be saved from final punishment through him (Romans 5:9).

I do not want to reject the goodness of God; for if righteousness were obtained through the law, Christ would have died in vain (Galatians 2:21).

But God, in his goodness and freely, makes them righteous, through the liberation accomplished by Jesus Christ. Where, then, is man's pride before God? It is eliminated! For what reason? Not because he has fulfilled the law, but because he has believed.²⁸ Thus we come to this conclusion: that God makes man righteous by faith, independently of the fulfillment of the law. (Romans 3:24, 27, 28).

God saved us and has called us to be a holy people, not because of what we have done, but because that was his purpose and because of the goodness he has had toward us from all eternity, through Christ Jesus.¹⁰ That goodness has now been gloriously displayed in Christ Jesus our Savior, who destroyed the power of death and who, through the gospel, brought immortal life to light. (2 Timothy 1:9-10)

In these Bible passages, we clearly see that there is nothing a person can do to merit or earn his salvation. As Paul says in Galatians 2:21 "if a person were to ask by his good works to earn salvation, then it would not have been necessary for Christ to die on the cross." Salvation is achieved only through a decision of faith that a person accepts Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as the payment for his sins and receives Him as his savior.

Are the good things we may do necessary to attain (merit) our salvation or the result of our being saved?

What St. Paul teaches

For by the goodness of God you have received salvation through faith. This is not your own doing, but God's gift.⁹ It is not the result of one's own actions, so that no

one can boast about anything;¹⁰ for it is God who made us; he created us in Christ Jesus to do good works, following the way he prepared for us beforehand. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

For God has shown his goodness by offering salvation to all mankind. ¹² That goodness of God teaches us to renounce wickedness and worldly desires, and to lead in the present time a life of good judgment, righteousness and piety,¹³ while the happy fulfillment of our hope arrives: the glorious return of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ He gave himself to die for us, that he might redeem us from all unrighteousness and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, making us his own people, intent on doing what is good. (Titus 2:11-14)

The good works we do are the result of the salvation we have received. We do not receive salvation because we have done good works.

What James teaches

My brethren, what good is it for a man to say that he has faith, if his deeds do not show it? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or sister lacks the clothes and food needed for the day;¹⁶ if one of you says to them, "Fare you well; wrap up warm and eat as much as you like," but does not give them what their body needs, what good is it to them? ¹⁷ So it is with faith: on its own, that is, if it is not demonstrated by deeds, it is a dead thing (James 2:14-17).

James is not saying that deeds (works) contribute to salvation. What he is saying is that faith that is genuine impels people to do good works because they have received salvation.

One may say: "You have faith, and I have deeds. Show me your faith without deeds; I, on the other hand, will show you my faith with my deeds." (James 2:18)

What we do is a demonstration of genuine faith. The person does good works not to attain salvation, but in gratitude because by faith he has received salvation.

You believe that there is only one God, and in this you do well; but the demons also believe it, and tremble with fear. ²⁰ Do not be foolish, and recognize that if one's faith is not accompanied by deeds, it is useless faith (James 2:19-20).

He gave himself to die for us, that he might redeem us from all unrighteousness and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, making us his own people, intent on doing good (Titus 2:4).

But the hour is coming, and it is now, when those who truly worship the Father will do so in a true way, according to the Spirit of God. For the Father wills that those who worship him should do so. ²⁴ God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in a true way, according to the Spirit of God. (John 4:23-24).

But God has laid a foundation that stands firm, in which it is written, "The Lord knows those who belong to him," and "All who call on the name of the Lord are to depart from wickedness." (2 Timothy 2:19)

Having "beliefs" is not enough. Genuine faith is demonstrated when a person not only "believes in God" but has placed his trust in Jesus Christ as his savior.

Thus was fulfilled the Scripture that says, "Abraham believed God, and therefore God accepted him as righteous." And Abraham was called the friend of God (James 2:23).

Because Abraham put his faith in God, he was accepted by God. Abraham proved that his faith was genuine when he was willing to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice.

And the angel said to him, "Do not harm the boy, for I know that you fear God, for you did not refuse to give me your only son. (Genesis 22:12).

God did not allow Abraham to offer his son as a sacrifice, but He did recognize that Abraham had genuine faith because he obeyed Him

Paul explains Abraham's experience

But then, what shall we say that Abraham, our ancestor, gained? ² Actually, if Abraham had been recognized as righteous because of his own deeds, he would have reason to boast, though not before God. ³ For the Scripture says, "Abraham believed God, and therefore God reckoned this to him and recognized him as righteous." ⁴ Now if anyone works, the payment is not given to him as a gift but as something deserved. ⁵ On the other hand, if anyone believes God, who makes the sinner righteous, God takes his faith into account to acknowledge him as righteous, even though he has done nothing deserving of his favor. (Romans 4:1-5).

In short, we can do nothing to merit God's favor. Jesus Christ did everything necessary to pay for our sins on the cross. Once we have received Christ into our hearts, our deep gratitude to him motivates us to do good works to serve him and for him to receive glory and honor.

Is salvation the result of religious ceremonies or a personal experience?

Salvation is the result of a personal experience with Jesus Christ.

All the prophets had already spoken of Jesus, and had said that those who believe in him receive forgiveness of sins through him (Acts 10:43).

One of them was named Lydia; she was from the city of Thyatira and sold fine purple cloth. This woman, who worshiped God and was listening, was moved by the Lord to give her full attention to what Paul was saying. She was baptized, along with her whole family (Acts 16:14).

Then the jailer called for a light, ran in and, trembling with fear, threw himself at the feet of Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and asked them, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? They answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your family. And they spoke the message of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. That same hour of the night the jailer washed their wounds, and then he and all his household were baptized (Acts 16:29-33).

One of the criminals who were hanged insulted him: "If you are the Messiah, save yourself and save us too!"⁴⁰ But the other rebuked his companion, saying to him, "Have you no fear of God, you who are under the same punishment?"⁴¹ We are rightly suffering, for we are paying the just penalty for what we have done; but this man did nothing wrong."⁴² Then he added, "Jesus, remember me when you begin to reign."⁴³ Jesus answered him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise (Luke 23:39-43).

The Bible shows that when Lydia and later the jailer put all their faith in Jesus Christ, they received salvation. The criminal next to the cross of Jesus could not participate in any religious rite to try to attain salvation. The only thing he did was to put his faith in Jesus and Jesus assured him that he would go to heaven. That is why the Bible says: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not die but have eternal life.* (John 3:16).

Can we be sure of our salvation?

Amen, I say to you, whoever heeds what I say and believes in him who sent me has eternal life, and shall not be condemned, for he has already passed from death to life. (John 5:24)

This testimony is that God has given us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son. 12 He who has the Son of God has this life also; but he who does not have the Son of God does not have it. I write this to you who believe in the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:11-13)

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone take them from me (John 10:28).

But if we live in the light, as God is in the light, then there is union between us, and the blood of his Son Jesus cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7).

You were once spiritually dead because of your sins and because you had not put off your sinful nature; but now God has made you alive together with Christ, in whom he has forgiven us all our sins. ¹God canceled the debt document that was against us and that bound us; he removed it by nailing it to the cross. (Colossians 2:13, 14)

I am sure that God, who has begun a good work in you, will bring it to completion until the day of Jesus Christ's return (Philippians 1:6).

God's Word emphatically teaches that we can be assured of our salvation, not because of anything we have done but because of what Christ did on the cross by paying the debt of our sins. We have the promise that Jesus Christ will continue to do His work of helping us grow in our spiritual life every day of our lives.

Is the salvation experience necessary?

Jesus stated that a person must have a total spiritual change in his life in order to go to heaven when he dies. He indicated that this change is so radical that the one way to explain it is as if the person is born again.

Jesus said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3).

Nicodemus did not understand this because he was thinking in physical terms.

Nicodemus asked him, "And how can one be born when he is old? Can he enter again into his mother's womb and be born again?"⁵ Jesus answered him, "Amen, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶What is born of human parents is human; what is born of the Spirit is spirit.

⁷ Do not be surprised that I say to you, "All must be born again." ⁸ The wind blows where it wills, and though you hear the sound of it, you know not whence it comes, nor whither it goes. So are all those who are born of the Spirit (John 3:4-8).

Jesus explained that he was talking about a spiritual change.

Nicodemus asked him how this could be. Jesus answered him:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not die but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. He who believes in the Son of God is not condemned; but he who does not believe has already been condemned because he does not believe in the only Son of God. ¹⁹ Those who do not believe have already been condemned, because, since they were doing evil things, when the light had come into the world they preferred darkness to light. (John 3:16-19)

The Word of God convincingly teaches that salvation was made possible because Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for the sins of mankind and that those who put all their faith in him receive salvation.

Seven hundred years before this happened, the prophet Isaiah described how Jesus was to die.

But he was pierced for our transgression, he was tormented for our iniquities; the punishment he suffered brought us peace, by his wounds we were healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, but the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:5-6).

We must take the words of Jesus Christ seriously:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not die but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ He who believes in the Son of God is not condemned; but he who does not believe has already been condemned because he does not believe in the only Son of God. ¹⁹ Those who do not believe have already been condemned, because, since they were doing evil things, when the light came into the world they preferred darkness to light. (John 3:16-19)

In this first lesson, we have studied what God's Word teaches about salvation. Salvation is a gift from God motivated by His love. Salvation was made possible

when Jesus died on the cross to pay for the sins of mankind. Because Jesus did the complete work of our salvation on the cross, there is nothing we can do to merit or attain our salvation. Salvation is received when a person repents of his sins, puts his trust in Jesus Christ and receives Him as his personal Savior.

Before moving on, it is absolutely necessary to ask: Have you asked God for forgiveness for your sins and have you placed all your trust in Jesus Christ as your only Savior? If you have, this is a time to pause and thank God, that He has granted you to have this experience that has brought you from darkness to light and from condemnation to eternal life in Jesus Christ.

If you have not had this experience, this is the right time to pray to God and receive Jesus Christ as your only savior.

You can pray this prayer: "Our Father in heaven, thank you for loving me so much that you sent your Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross for me. I repent of my sins and ask for your forgiveness. I receive Jesus as my only Savior and Lord and I promise to follow and serve Him with all my heart. Thank you Lord that you have heard me, forgiven me and made me your child. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen."

After you have received Christ as your personal Savior, it is absolutely essential that you spend time each day studying God's Word to grow in your spiritual life and learn how to share the message of salvation with your family, friends, neighbors and others.

MEMORY VERSE

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not die but have eternal life (John 3:16).

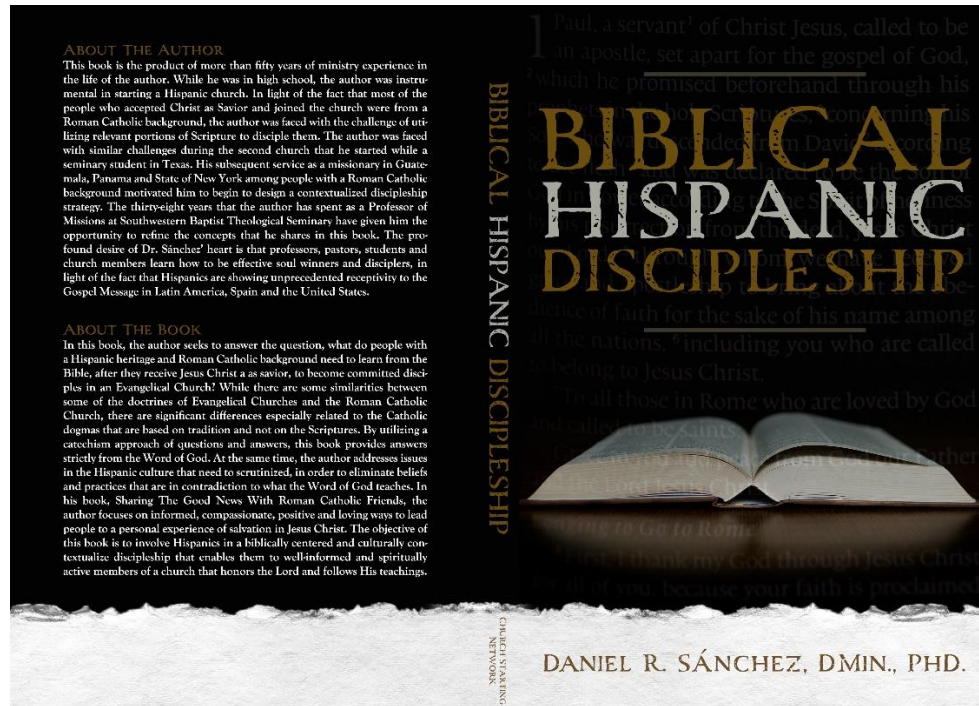
BIBLICAL TRUTH

Salvation is a gift from God and is received when one acknowledges that he has sinned, repents and trusts in Jesus Christ as his only and sufficient savior.

What does this Biblical truth mean to you?

PRAYER:

Our Father in heaven, from the depths of my heart I thank You that You sent Your Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross to make it possible for me to be forgiven of my sins, to receive Your peace in my life and to have the assurance that when You call me I will be enjoying the blessings of heaven.



This book is accessible on Amazon under the title:

Daniel R. Sanchez, Hispanic Biblical Discipleship

III. Find Favor In Church Planting

Church planting is absolutely necessary to fulfill the Great Commission. The imperative (command) of the Great Commission is "make disciples." After Christ's resurrection, the disciples dedicated themselves to fulfilling the Great Commission. They did this by winning souls to Christ and discipling them in congregations. In Acts 2:41 and 42 we read, *"So those who received the word were baptized; and that day there were added to them about three thousand souls. And they continued daily in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."* The new believers were not abandoned as orphans, but were received as part of the church that was being formed.

Paul's General Methodology

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus was a miracle due to divine intervention. The question is, how did he fulfill the Great Commission? He did it by winning people to Christ and gathering them into churches.

The methodology Paul used in Ephesus was part of the general methodology he employed in the establishment of the other churches. In his book *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally*, David Hesselgrave outlines what he calls the "Pauline Cycle" for church planting.¹³ He suggests the following outline:

Commissioning missionaries (Acts 13:1-4)

In Antioch, while the church was fasting and praying, the Holy Spirit told them: "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (v. 2).

It is important to note that it was not the church that called them, nor was it the church that motivated them to go. The church simply recognized the fact that the Holy Spirit had already called them to missionary service. The task of the church was merely to release them to do the work that had been assigned to them. We see here, once again, that the Holy Spirit is the initiator in the church planting task. In a sense, we can say that the church at Antioch made it possible for there to be a church planting team. It did so by providing

the training environment in which church planters could hone their church planting skills in other cultures. The church also facilitated the task of the church planters by providing their continued moral support and prayers as they started churches in distant places. Thus, the church at Antioch was more of a "cooperating church" or a "facilitating church" than a "mother church" for the new churches that were springing up throughout Asia Minor.

Contacting the public (13:14-16; 4:1)

In the early days of his church planting ministry, Paul began the custom of going first to the Jewish synagogue in the city in which he arrived. There he usually met three types of people: (1) Jews; (2) proselytes; (3) people who feared God. In most cases, those who accepted the message were in the last two categories. When the Jews denied him access to the synagogue, Paul simply looked for other places to meet (e.g., the school of Tyrannus) and went on with the task of finding those willing to hear the gospel.

Communicating the gospel (13:17 ff.; 16:31)

It is important to note that Paul used a wide variety of methods to communicate the gospel. He preached in synagogues, taught in rented premises, proclaimed in palaces (during his trial), witnessed by rivers, evangelized in homes, led people to Christ in prisons, spoke of Christ in the marketplace, communicated the gospel in stadiums, used his contacts as a tentmaker to reach others with the gospel (Priscilla and Aquila) and even used the experiences of being attacked by the mob and suffering shipwreck to proclaim the good news of the gospel. If Paul were alive today, he would undoubtedly use every means at his disposal (including fax, e-mail, videoconferencing) to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ. By proclaiming the gospel to those who had previously been excluded from the family of God (Gentiles and outcasts) he made it known that these new believers were first-class citizens in the kingdom of God (Eph. 2).

Convincing his listeners (13:48; 16:14, 15)

Paul took the Great Commission seriously. His goal was not merely to proclaim the gospel but for his hearers to be converted so that they could begin to live a life of Christian discipleship.

Congregating believers together (13:43)

Paul knew that in order to properly disciple the converts he had to gather them into congregations. These congregations met in rented halls, family homes and wherever space was available. The important thing was not the place but the congregation of believers. There is no instance in which Paul took into account the place where the congregation met as a basis for determining whether the group could be considered a church. In fact, he repeatedly uses the expression "the church that is in his house" in his writings.

Confirming faith (14:21, 22; 15:41)

When Paul and his missionary team saw people accepting Christ as Savior, they immediately proceeded to draw up plans to disciple them. "After preaching the gospel and making many disciples in that city, they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the minds of the disciples and exhorting them to continue steadfastly in the faith" (14:21, 22). Here we note what we see so often in their ministry as well as in the ministry of the other apostles: a deep dedication to providing a firm foundation (the teachings of Christ) for the emerging churches.

Consecrating leaders (14:23)

"And after they had appointed elders for them in every church..." (14:23a). It is significant to note that they referred to each of these congregations as a "church". The appointment of elders in each of these young, struggling congregations demonstrates that Paul and his fellow church planters expected, beyond any doubt, that they would become strong, responsible, reproducing churches. Their appointment of elders was a statement of faith as well as a practical step to ensure that they had the leadership they needed to achieve their full potential.

Caring for believers (14:23; 16:40)

"And when they had prayed and fasted, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed" (14:23b). It is important to note that the believers were placed in the hands of the Lord and not of the church that had sent

them. Although it would be important for them to know that their fellow believers cared about them, the new congregations were put on a direct line to their Maker, the "Lord," to whom they were to turn in times of need or persecution. This implies trusting the Holy Spirit as much as the new believers and their newly appointed leaders. Is it possible that when we show paternalism toward new believers and new congregations we are also showing paternalism toward the Holy Spirit? Is it possible that this kind of attitude implies that the Holy Spirit cannot guide and strengthen churches in the early stages of their development? Paul and his fellow church planters saw themselves as facilitators (midwives) in the process of letting the life of Christ flow into new believers and, in this way, giving birth to these new churches.

Continuing to foster relationships (15:36; 18:23)

"After a few days, Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us go back now and visit the brethren in all the cities where we have preached the word of the Lord, to see how they are doing'" (15:36). It is important to note that Paul and Barnabas felt a deep and abiding concern for the welfare of those whom they had won to the Lord. It is also significant to note that they did not call them "sons" but "brothers". We see in this an interest that seeks to facilitate the continued spiritual growth of new believers, but also a respect for them knowing that, ultimately, they belong to the Lord and not to them.

Calling the cooperating churches (Acts 15)

The question of whether Gentiles had to become Jews culturally and ceremonially in order to be considered fully Christian was of crucial importance to the church. To have imposed on the Gentiles the practices of the Judaizers would have resulted in Christianity being limited to being a sect of Judaism. The issue could not be resolved by a single local congregation. We do not notice that the church in Jerusalem had called the other churches together as if it had had a superior position to the others. The fact that the church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas (a former member of the church in Jerusalem) indicates that there was some degree of autonomy that each of these churches enjoyed, and also a sense of fellowship as sister churches. Acts 15:2 seems to indicate that it was the church at Antioch that took the initiative in this matter.

What are some conclusions we can draw from our study of Paul's methodology in Ephesus and his general methodology for starting and developing other churches?

First, we see that Paul and his fellow church planters recognized repeatedly that the Holy Spirit was the divine Director in all these efforts. A question for us is, what can we do to make our structures, methodologies and terminology sensitive to facilitate the Holy Spirit's work of bringing new churches to full maturity rather than obstructing His work?

Second, it is evident that prayer undergirded every evangelistic and church planting effort. The church in Jerusalem was born in a prayer meeting. The missionary career of Barnabas and Saul began in a prayer meeting. When church planting teams encountered opposition and persecution, they did not contact the denominational headquarters but went directly to God in sincere and fervent prayer. Undoubtedly, the facilitating churches covered every effort with their prayers. What is our prayer strategy for church planting?

Third, the goal of the apostles was the establishment of responsible, reproducing churches, built on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

Fourth, the terminology used by the church planters was conducive to maturity and accountability. They used words like "believers, brethren, disciples and churches (including house churches)". There is no difference between the terminology used to refer to new believers and new churches and that used to refer to more mature Christians and churches. In other words, it was a terminology that uplifted, empowered and encouraged them and not one that created an attitude of inferiority and dependency. New congregations were treated as if maturity was a given.

Conclusion

The apostle's methodology contains the essential ingredients for church planting. The ways of doing it may vary from one generation to the next, but the essential points of Paul's strategy are still valid today as we dedicate ourselves to commissioning missionaries, contacting the public, communicating the message, convincing the listeners, gathering the believers, confirming the faith of the members, continuing the relationships and congregating the churches. Using this methodology, the apostle Paul, in

the space of ten years, was able to plant churches in major cities in Asia Minor and even in Europe.

EVANGELISTIC FOUNDATION

Evangelism is an indispensable part of church planting. The church planter needs to approach people who do not know Christ or who do not attend any church, befriend them, establish a level of trust, communicate the basic truths of the gospel, lead them to have a personal faith in Jesus Christ, baptize them into the fellowship of the church and lead them in ongoing discipleship. Reliance on the guidance and work of the Holy Spirit, as emphasized in the previous chapter, is the first step in the evangelistic task.

When it comes to evangelization methods, many tend to think that there is only one method and generally this is the one that intimidates them or one with which they feel very uncomfortable.

Evangelization Methods

A study of the New Testament reveals that the Holy Spirit led the early church to use a wide variety of evangelistic methods. These included mass evangelism, cell group evangelism and personal evangelism.¹⁴

Mass evangelization

The early church used a variety of methods of mass evangelism. While they were able to do so, they preached the gospel in the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 5:42). As they spread to other regions, they preached in the synagogues. The strategy of Paul and his companions was to go first to the synagogue in each city and present Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. When the doors of the synagogue were closed to them, they found other public places. Paul, for example, used the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9). Christians also preached in the open air (Acts 3), in the marketplaces (Acts 17:17) and in the stadiums (Acts 17:19).¹⁵

In each case, we see that the early church adapted its methodology to the circumstances, not limiting itself to a single method. When it encountered

obstacles in using one method, it simply looked for other ways and other places to preach Christ.

Evangelization in cell groups

Evangelizing in cell groups was another method used by the early church. In Acts, we find that the family was the basic social unit. This is noted in the concept of the Greek word *oikos*, which basically included family, close friends and sometimes domestic workers. Acts mentions the *oikos* or cell group in households used for prayer (12:12), fellowship (21:7), the Lord's Supper and fellowship (2:46), worship (20:7), witnessing (10:22-24; 16:32), instruction (5:42) and discipleship (18:26). The New Testament mentions the homes of Jason (Acts 17:5), Justus (Acts 18:7), Lydia (Acts 16:15), Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:16; 16:15) and the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12).¹⁶ The cell group in the homes made use of the fundamental unity of the society of that time. One of the most effective means of communication was the family.

In addition to this, as McGavran states, cell group evangelism included having family members as leaders.¹⁷ This automatically contributed to the presentation of the message in ways that were relevant to the local culture and made it possible for many cell groups to be established in homes. They did not depend on the availability of large buildings to carry out their evangelistic strategy.

Personal evangelization

Christians in the early church used a variety of methods of personal evangelism. These included visitation evangelism, spontaneous evangelism and friendship evangelism.

Evangelization through visits

It consisted of constant efforts to witness to people at specific times in specific places. It was said of the early Christians that "every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching the good news that Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 5:42).

Spontaneous evangelization

Unexpected opportunities in the normal course of life were used to witness. Paul, for example, spoke to some women who had gathered on the banks of a river resulting in the conversion of Lydia (Acts 16:14). Also, after his shipwreck, Paul took the opportunity to witness to the chief man of the island (Acts 28).

Evangelization through friendship

The New Testament records several examples of evangelism through friendship. Andrew brought his brother Simon Peter to the Lord so that he could listen to him: "He first found his brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah'..." (John 1:41). Philip did the same with his friend Nathanael (John 1:45). Cornelius did something similar with his relationships and friendships when he had "invited his relatives and his closest friends" so that they could hear the gospel (Acts 10:24). Thus, the barriers of distrust and unbelief were overcome because the person extending the invitation was someone they trusted. When Nathanael, for example, expressed his doubts about Jesus by asking, "Can there be any good thing from Nazareth?" (John 1:46), Philip answered him simply "Come and see." Because Nathanael trusted Philip, he went and found salvation in Jesus.

Subtle evangelization

In addition to employing direct methods of evangelism, the early church used subtle methods. In his book *Evangelism in the Early Church*, Michael Green presents the possibility that first-century Christians may have used decorations in their homes as a way to arouse the interest of their visitors in order to tell them about Christ.¹⁸ Some of these decorations were mosaics with scenes of the Lord's Supper, the symbol of the fish and of people in an attitude of prayer.

Literary evangelization

The Gospel of Luke is an example of the literary evangelism carried out by the early church. Luke writes to Theophilus "that you may know the truth of the things in which you have been instructed" (Luke 1:4). These "things" were those "which Jesus began to do and to teach" (Acts 1:1, 2). The book of Acts is another letter from Luke to Theophilus to instruct him further in the faith.

The other Gospels are efforts to present the life, ministry and message of Jesus Christ to different audiences in particular. John, for example, explains his purpose in writing when he says: "But these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

Summary.

Although Christians did not have the technological tools we have today (radio, television, telephones, computers, fax machines, airplanes, etc.) they used all the means at their disposal to evangelize. When one door closed, they looked for another in order to continue their task of fulfilling the Great Commission.

Contextualizing the evangelization methodology

One of the most demanding but exciting tasks facing the church planter in the 21st century is to contextualize evangelistic methodology so that it is relevant to the enormous variety of groups that make up today's society. How can we communicate the venerable truth of the gospel in such a way that people not only understand, but also respond positively? How, then, can we contextualize our evangelistic methodology? The following suggestions are intended to get us to start thinking of original ways to do this and to develop our own methods appropriate to the environments in which we live.

Contextualizing mass evangelization

Many believers still have vivid memories of the crusades of Billy Graham and Luis Palau. Interestingly, both evangelists have used their campaigns in connection with church planting efforts. In Rosario, Argentina, Luis Palau was the preacher for a united evangelistic campaign in the city that resulted in 42 new congregations.¹⁹ In Orlando, Florida, USA, more than 30 congregations were birthed in connection with a Billy Graham crusade. In both cases, the mass evangelistic activities were a phase of a church planting strategy that had been developed locally.²⁰

Others have used tents or rented buildings where they have held mass

evangelistic meetings for months or even years by reaching and discipling people and forming the core group around which the congregation would develop. These are just a few examples of the use of mass evangelistic activities for the express purpose of church planting.

Contextualizing evangelization by means of visits

Visitation evangelism is vital in church planting. This makes it possible for church planting teams to find people who have no contact with any church or evangelical Christians. Sometimes, when church planting team members go out to visit, they find people on whom the Lord is already working through some circumstance in their lives and who are eager to hear the gospel. In many cases, those who accept Christ on the first visit are those who have already been cultivated.

In these cases, the visiting believer helps them understand the gospel and make a decision they may have been considering for some time. But, in many cases, these are the exceptions.²¹ The question we have to answer is, what should we do when the people we visit do not show interest in hearing the gospel or do not understand what we are saying? We should try to find out their attitude towards the gospel (and/or evangelicals) and let this determine our strategy. If we cultivate their friendship and gain their trust, the time will come when we can lead them to Christ. Our methodology for evangelism through visitation should be adapted to the level of receptivity in the community in which we work.

It is obvious that, if a community in general is reluctant to the gospel, an evangelistic methodology that aims to obtain a decision on the first visit will not yield great results. In the following paragraphs, we will give ideas on how to cultivate those who at first do not seem receptive to the gospel. In addition, it is important to note that we should not discard the concept of visitation simply because it has not worked in the past in reluctant communities. What we need to do is to continue to look for the types of visitation that are best suited to the local context.

Contextualizing spontaneous evangelization

Spontaneous evangelization is important because it reaches people whom the Lord may have put in our path. Philip's experience with the Ethiopian

eunuch is an example of this type of evangelism. It is important to have an idea of how much the person knows about the gospel and what his or her attitude toward it is. Then we can present the gospel in a way that he can understand it. Remember that the first question Philip asked the eunuch was not, "Do you accept Christ?" but, "Do you understand what you read?" In Philip's case, the eunuch already possessed some knowledge of the Scriptures and was spiritually hungry. He just needed someone to explain the Scriptures to him. Therefore, it is important to recognize that in some cases all we can do is sow the seed and pray for our interlocutors. Spontaneous evangelism reaches people whom the witness may not know well.

Contextualizing evangelization through cell groups

Many believers are using their home for evangelism in many ways: 1) inviting someone over for a meal; 2) having small group social gatherings during which a brief testimony is presented, followed by friendly conversation; 3) having Bible study groups;²² 4) offering special classes (sewing, cooking, piano, nutrition, money management, painting, crafts, diet, etc.); 5) forming special clubs (book clubs that include good Christian books); 6) inviting new neighbors into the neighborhood; 7) being available for counseling when advice is needed; 8) watching Christian and Christian movies, and 8) watching Christian and Christian movies that include good Christian books.); 5) form special clubs (book clubs that include good Christian books); 6) invite new neighbors into the neighborhood; 7) be available for counseling when advice is needed; 8) watch Christian movies and discuss them; 9) help a child or youth with their homework, etc.

Contextualizing evangelization through Christian service

One of the debates on evangelism relates to three distinct emphases: presence, proclamation and persuasion.²³ The goal of evangelism by presence is to establish a Christian presence in a community through good witness and the manifestation of compassion in response to human need. Evangelism by proclamation focuses on communicating the gospel in such a way that people hear and understand it. Evangelism by persuasion aims to convince people to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior.

There are those who emphasize evangelization by presence alone, others by proclamation alone, and still others by persuasion alone. Interestingly, in the New Testament one finds these and other types of evangelism. In Acts 2, for example, we find that the believers went from house to house proclaiming the word (v. 46); they persuaded people by preaching (v. 40); but they also established a Christian presence so that they helped those in need (v. 45). For this reason, the people thought well of them (v. 47).

There are many cases in which it is necessary to establish a Christian presence in a community in order to erase negative impressions and misconceptions that people have of the gospel and evangelicals. Many close their minds immediately if the first thing they hear from us is that we want them to make a decision related to their religious life. But in many cases, this attitude changes if they have the opportunity to see us as compassionate people interested in helping them in any way we can.

The first step toward this type of evangelism is to discover the needs of the neighbors in the community. After finding out what these needs are, it is necessary to find believers willing to serve the Lord in one of these ministries. In many cases, it will be necessary to train brethren to know how to carry out their ministry.

Some of these ministries will be directed to individuals, others to families and others to needy groups. Some of these groups may be people from other countries who need to learn the language and customs. Others may be drug addicts; alcoholics; people who have lost a loved one; parents of teenagers who have serious problems; couples who need to know how to improve their marriage; parents of handicapped children; unemployed people who need to develop their skills in order to get suitable employment; families of prisoners; the elderly who need help and companionship or young mothers who need to learn how to raise their children. They may also be residents new to the community who need to know how to navigate in a new environment; children who need weekend and vacation activities; women home alone all day; families who need to learn how to manage their finances; widows or widowers who need to adjust to life after losing a spouse.

Contextualizing evangelization through friendship

Friendship evangelism is indispensable in order to reach certain types of people. It is necessary when the person has no knowledge of the gospel

and, through Bible studies, is helped to gradually understand the implications of the gospel. It is also necessary when the people to be won have negative attitudes toward the gospel.

Friendship evangelism is necessary to reach those who only hear the message from the lips of someone they trust. When the gospel is communicated through friendship or family ties, the sympathizer has great confidence in the witness, thus greatly increasing the likelihood of accepting the message. A survey conducted to determine why people become members of Christian churches reveals that 10% do so on their own initiative; 20% as a result of the ministry of the pastor and 70% (in some churches 90%) as a result of the influence and work of family and friends.²⁴ These percentages would undoubtedly be different in each country and in each community; nevertheless, we can affirm that the ministry of family and friends is indispensable to reach those who only pay attention to someone they trust.

Therefore, the strategy should be one that encourages members to cultivate the friendship of their neighbors, colleagues and acquaintances in order to be in a better position to witness in a way that is relevant to the lives of those they want to win to Christ.

This then leads to the first question: Who are the people in my spheres of influence?

Family members

In your world are those people with whom you have strong ties. These are the people who make up your immediate family. In your Jerusalem, there are also other relatives, such as your parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins. They are the ones who are closest to you. You know them, you know their needs and they trust you. You, then, are in the best position to witness to them about the gospel in a way that is relevant to them. They are the ones God has placed in your sphere of influence for a purpose. Sometimes we have a tendency to focus our evangelistic efforts on strangers, forgetting those closest to us.²⁵

Friends

Aside from your family and relatives, there are those with whom you deal on a daily basis. These are the people with whom you share interests (your friends) and a community (your neighbors). You may not be as close to them as you are to your family but you can deepen your level of communication until they are willing to listen when you tell them about the Lord.

Neighbors

There are others in your neighborhood with whom you do not share a friendship but who have needs that can be a channel through which to communicate the gospel. Even if you do not consider them as close friends, you can take the time to get to know them better, cultivate a friendship to discern the best way to present the gospel to them.

Conclusion

The early church obviously used a wide variety of evangelistic methods under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The task of contextualizing evangelistic methods is one of the greatest challenges for church planters today. A very important principle to keep in mind is that somehow (using whatever method may be most relevant) church planters must establish significant contact with a large number of unchurched people.

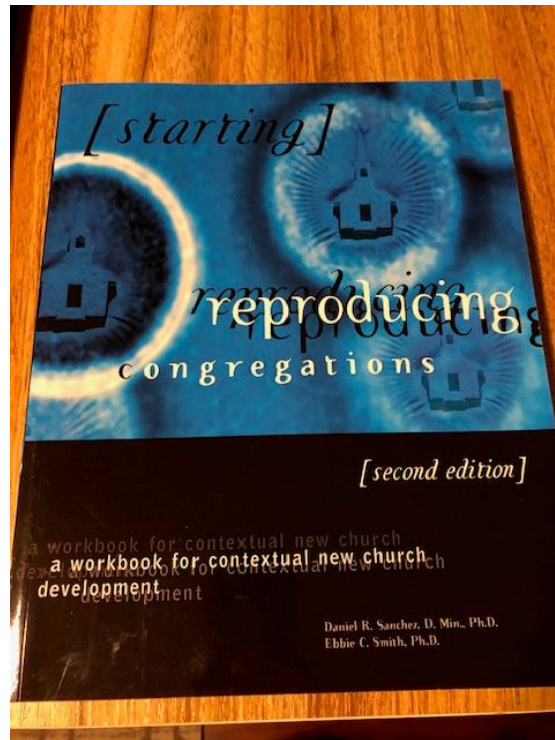
Various church planters may be more comfortable with particular evangelistic methods. The important factor here is which method will be the most effective for my target group? If the church planter learns that his most comfortable method is not the most effective in the community, he should be willing to learn new methods to be more effective.

These portions, with permission of the authors, are taken from the book

Daniel R. Sanchez, *Planting Reproductive Churches*

<https://www.amazon.com/Plantando-Iglesias-Reproductivas-Daniel-S%C3%A1nchez/dp/0984620788/>

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IV. Finding Favor With The Syncretists

Introduction

Today we will turn our attention to the subject of syncretistic worldviews. Latin Americans have syncretistic beliefs and practices.

Many Latin Americans - including substantial percentages of both Catholics and Protestants - say they subscribe to beliefs and practices often associated with Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Brazilian or indigenous religions. For example, at least one-third of adults in all countries surveyed believe in the "evil eye," the idea that certain people can cast curses or spells that cause harm. Beliefs in witchcraft and reincarnation are also widespread and are held by 20% or more of the population in most

countries. Other beliefs and practices vary widely from country to country. For example, a majority of Mexicans (60%) and more than a third of Bolivians (39%) say they make offerings of food, drink, candles or flowers to spirits, but only one in ten Uruguayans (9%) do so. Overall, the survey finds the highest levels of indigenous or Afro-Caribbean religious practice in Panama, where the majority of people (58%) - including 66% of Panamanian Catholics and 46% of Protestants - participate in at least three of the eight indigenous faiths and practices mentioned in the survey.¹

At the beginning, we will attempt to define the term "syncretism."² We will then discuss the factors that contribute to syncretism and conclude with the presentation of contemporary examples of syncretism.

Definition of the term "Syncretism"

In the encyclopedia edited by Dr. Miguel De La Torre entitled, "*Hispanic American Religious Cultures*," the author gives a historical review about the use of the term "syncretism." He explains:

The earliest use of the term "syncretism" occurs when Plutarch chose it to describe how the Cretans quarreled among themselves but quickly reconciled with foreign enemies. By the sixteenth century, Erasmus used the term to describe the reconciliation achieved between those who had theological disagreements. The term came to imply the mixing of ideas or concepts - especially religious ideas and concepts - that were incompatible. Today the term is used among religious thinkers primarily to describe the mixing or blending of a "pure" religious faith with a "pagan" religion.³

In his chapter entitled "Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity," Alan R. Tippett confirms the origin of the term "syncretism" and defines it:

¹ Search Statistics, Society and Religion, 2024 and from Wikipedia, Study of Religion.

² There are people who prefer not to use the term "syncretism" Miguel de la Torre, for example, asserts that those who are members of an established religion use this term to give the impression that syncretism is an "impure religion" while theirs is "pure." Miguel A. De La Torre, *Hispanic American Religious Cultures*, Volume Two, Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2009, 540. This does not necessarily mean that we cannot use this term. What it does mean is that we must be aware of this trend and be vigilant about syncretistic ideas that may be introduced into our Christian worldviews. However, after accepting this admonition we must be aware that it is not a matter of comparing one religion with the other or using one religion as the model for evaluating the other but of examining each worldview in the light of the Scriptures. This is what we propose to do in this dissertation.

³ Ibid.

I believe that the derivation of the word takes us back to the political events in ancient Crete where two parties united (*sunkretizo*) giving birth to a name meaning the union of opposites (two Cretan parties against a third party, forming a new unity, *sunkretismos*).⁴

Syncretism can be defined as the union of two forces, beliefs, systems, or doctrines so that the united form is a new thing, neither one nor the other.⁵

The *Diccionario De La Lengua Española, Real Academia Española* (Spanish Dictionary) defines syncretism as, "A philosophical system that tries to reconcile different doctrines."⁶ In his *Diccionario Hispano Americano De La Misión*, (Hispanic American Dictionary on Mission) Pablo Deiros describes syncretism as:

A mixture or combination of beliefs, ideas, practices, or attitudes. Frequently, it refers to the blending of animistic beliefs or customs with doctrines, customs and practices of the Roman Catholic or evangelical churches. It also refers to the replacement or elimination of essential gospel truths through the incorporation of non-Christian elements of a person's mentality.⁷

Charles H. Kraft defines syncretism as, "The blending of Christian assumptions with the assumptions of worldviews that are incompatible with Christianity and what results is not biblical Christianity."⁸ Gailyn Van Rheenen defines syncretism as:

The practice of reframing Christian beliefs and practices through cultural accommodation to the extent that consciously or unconsciously these are harmonized with those of the dominant

⁴ Alan R. Tippett, "Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity," in Tetsunao Yamamori and Charles Taber, eds, Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1975, 32.

⁵ Alan R. Tippett, "Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity," in Tetsunao Yamamori and Charles Taber, eds, Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1975, 17.

⁶ *Diccionario De La Lengua Española, Real Academia Española*, Twenty-second Edition, 2001, 2069.

⁷ Deiros, Pablo Alberto: *Spanish-American Mission Dictionary*. Casilla, Argentina : COMIBAM International, 1997 ,

⁸ Charles H. Kraft, "Culture, Worldview and Contextualization," in Ralph D. Winter, Steven C. Hawthorne, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, Pasadena: William Carey, 1999, 390.

culture... the result is that Christianity loses its distinctive nature and speaks with a voice that reflects the culture.⁹

As we can see from these definitions, syncretism encompasses more than a mixture of beliefs and concepts. This term also includes the mixing of customs and practices and both the elimination of essential gospel truths and the incorporation of non-Christian elements. Such syncretism can penetrate a worldview both consciously and unconsciously. This mixture results in a Christianity that is not faithful to the teachings of the Word of God.

Factors Contributing to Syncretism

There are numerous factors that cause syncretism among people who receive the gospel message in the different cultures of the world. Among these causes are partial conversion, non-contextualized discipleship, non-contextualized training of leaders, importation of expressions of faith and spiritual and human aspects.

Partial Conversion

By the term "partial conversion," we mean that, because the gospel has not been explained to them in a clear and substantial way, there are people who make a decision to "receive Christ" without understanding the implications of such a decision. The writers of the Willowbank report emphasize the need to understand the radical nature of conversion. They explain:

We are convinced that the radical nature of conversion to Jesus Christ needs to be reaffirmed in the contemporary church... Conversion involves a break with the past so complete that it is explained in terms of death. We have been crucified with Christ. Through his cross, we have died to a godless world, its perspectives, and its patterns. We

⁹ Gailyn Van Rheenen, "Cosmovision and Syncretism," Copyright ©2003 by Gailyn Van Rheenen. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

have also "taken off" the garment of the old Adam, our past and fallen humanity. Jesus warned that turning our backs on the past can involve painful sacrifices, even the loss of family and possessions (e.g., Luke 14:25).¹⁰

One of the dangers in communicating the gospel message to people from animistic cultures is that they may think that receiving Christ means only adding to the collection of gods they already have without rejecting unbiblical beliefs and practices. In the book of Joshua, the decision is clear, "choose this day whom you will serve..." (24:14). To prevent syncretism, the whole gospel must be presented in a way that takes into account the worldview of the people. Van Rheezen affirms this when he says:

Often the gospel has been presented in partial forms and has not had active contact with the dominant themes of the local culture. Using the words of Christ to Paul (Acts 26:18) there has often been only a partial "opening of the eyes" to perceive the wonderful works of God in Jesus Christ. There has been a "turning from darkness to light" and "from the power of Satan to God..." The full dimensions of the Gospel have not had adequate contact with the culture.¹¹

Non-Contextualized Discipleship

What Van Rheezen says about communicating the Gospel applies to discipleship. In many cases, imported discipleship programs have been used which, by the way, deal with important issues (e.g., prayer, Bible reading, etc.) but not with the issues that people face in their daily lives related to animistic beliefs and practices. This is why it is often the case that people who secretly identify themselves as "Christian" turn to healers or fortunetellers to try to solve their problems. There is a pressing need for contextualized models of discipleship to be designed.

¹⁰ Willowbank Report, "Lausanne Committee," in Ralph D. Winter, Steven C. Hawthorne, Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, Pasadena: William Carey, 1999, 394.

¹¹ Gailyn Van Rheezen, "Cosmovision and Syncretism," *Copyright ©2003 by Gailyn Van Rheezen. Used by permission. All rights reserved.*

Non-Contextualized Leadership Training

In his book, *Solomon Islands Christianity*, Allan R. Tippett, after having made a meticulous study of the independence movements, concludes that when a mission (group of missionaries) fails to produce an indigenous Church, the result will be a syncretistic movement. He explains: "when there are great deficiencies in the indigenous instruction of the pastors, the movement tends to be syncretistic."

Van Rheenen expresses concern about non-contextualized instruction. He explains:

Following Western patterns of thought, Christianity too often communicates at the cosmological level without dealing with the issues of everyday life. Western Christianity has great interest in questions concerning origins (Where did we come from? How did we become what we are?), destiny (Where are we going?), and the ultimate meaning of life (What is the ultimate purpose of life?). In the rest of the world, however, people are more concerned with practical, everyday issues such as sickness, death, drought, financial success and romance... The end result is too often a two-tiered Christianity. New believers follow Christ on the cosmological level but use traditional ways of thinking when dealing with everyday problems.¹²

Importing Expressions of Faith

Charles Kraft believes there are two paths leading to syncretism. He explains:

One such path is to import foreign expressions of the faith and allow new believers to connect the assumptions of their worldviews to these practices with little or no direction from missionaries. The result is a "nativist" type of Christianity or, as in Latin America, a "Christ-Paganism." Roman Catholic missionaries, especially, have fallen into this trap by assuming that when people practice so-called "Christian"

¹² Gailyn Van Rheenen, "Cosmovision and Syncretism," Copyright ©2003 by Gailyn Van Rheenen. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

rituals, and use "Christian" terminology, that their meaning is the same as that of European Christians.

The other path to syncretism is to dominate the Christian practices of the recipient people to the degree that both surface level practices and deep assumptions are imported. The result is a totally maladaptive type of Christianity that requires people to worship and practice the faith according to foreign models and develop a special set of assumptions for church situations that are ignored in the rest of their lives. Their traditional worldview remains untouched by biblical principles.¹³

Spiritual and Human Aspects

In addition to considering missiological factors, it is important to recognize that there are also spiritual and human factors that can contribute to syncretism. Under the spiritual aspects, we must include the work of Satan. The analogy that Jesus gave about the spirit-possessed house that is left free but when it becomes empty it is possessed by even more spirits (Matthew 12:43-45) gives an indication of the persistent work of Satan. As mentioned in the dissertation on animism, new believers have to learn how to overcome in confrontations with the enemy.

As for human factors, there is a tendency to maintain a connection with the past. Consciously or unconsciously, people have a tendency to retain assumptions and beliefs even when they have adopted a new faith. It is interesting to note that most of the Judaizers who caused the apostle Paul so much trouble were "Pharisees who had been converted" (Acts 15:5). They had apparently received Christ as their Messiah, but had retained at least part of their sect's assumptions.

This is not a complete list of factors that contribute to syncretism. As we have seen, there are both external and internal factors that contribute to syncretism. Although with good reason several of these factors are attributed in great part to the work of missionaries and workers with a Western worldview orientation, it is important to emphasize that due to the fact that many missionaries are being sent from countries that were recipients of the gospel message, they are prone to

¹³ Charles H. Kraft, "Culture, Worldview, and Contextualization," in, *Perspective on the World Christian Movement*, Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1999, 341.

commit the same errors in the countries to which they go. These errors can also be committed in cross-cultural work within the same country.

Contemporary Examples of Syncretism

Unfortunately, throughout the world there are many examples of syncretism. Due to lack of time and space and being that we are presenting these dissertations in a Latin American country, it will be beneficial to present three examples of syncretism in this region of the world. These will be examples of syncretism in Catholicism, Santeria and Protestantism.

Popular Religiosity

Many of the people who identify themselves as "Latin Americans" and "Catholics" practice what has been termed "Popular Religion." This type of devotion is also known as "popular Catholicism, popular piety, popular devotion, *sensus fidelium*, and popular religiosity." As Gilberto Cavazos-Gonzalez asserts, the Catholic Church has recognized and promoted the practice of popular religion. He explains:

Recognizing that Christian spirituality is nourished not only by the Sacred Liturgy of the universal Church, in its Constitution on the Liturgy (*Sacramentum Concillum* (12-13) the Second Vatican Council (1963) supports the use of what is called popular religion, pious exercises and religious practices of the local churches.¹⁴

Although the Second Vatican Council supported popular religion, the Latin American Episcopal Council in Medellin, Colombia (1968) admonished that popular religiosity is basically composed of "promises, pilgrimages, countless devotions based on the sacraments" that have more to do with social activities than with genuine Christian life."¹⁵

¹⁴ Gilberto Cavazos-González, "Religión Popular," in Miguel A. De La Torre, ed., *Hispanic American Religious Cultures*, Volume Two, Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2009, 713.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Cavazos-Gonzalez points out that Pope Paul VI in 1975 wrote an Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* in which he endorsed popular religiosity as a way towards a "true encounter with God in Jesus Christ" (EN 48).¹⁶

The Catholic Church's support of popular religiosity is clearly seen in devotion to Mary. The document of the Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, affirms the cult of Mary:

The sacred synod teaches this Catholic doctrine cautiously and at the same time admonishes the children of the church that the worship, especially the liturgical worship, of the Blessed Virgin be generously promoted, and that the practices and exercises of devotion to her, recommended by the authoritative teaching of the church in the course of the centuries be highly esteemed, and that those decrees which were given in primitive times concerning the worship of the images of Christ, of the Virgin and of the saints, be religiously observed.¹⁷

The cult of Mary mixed with local traditions is seen in different forms throughout Latin America. In Mexico, we see the veneration of the Virgin of Guadalupe. This tradition is based on the alleged appearance of the Virgin Mary in 1531 to Juan Diego in Tepeyac, the place where the Indians worshipped the goddess Tonantzin. According to this tradition, the painting of Mary was engraved on Juan Diego's cape and continues to be an object of adoration to this day.

Cavazos-Gonzalez explains:

To the native Nahuatl the name seems to be a reference to the Goddess Coatlicue (skirt of serpents) who as Tonantzin (our mother) appeared at Tepeyac and who is the mother of the god Quetzalcoatl (feathered serpent) whose return they expected... To the Spanish mind of the Middle Ages, this seems to be a reference to Genesis 3:15 which in the Vulgate is incorrectly rendered as "she (*ipsa*) will crush your (serpent's) head" instead of (*ipsum*) referring to the offspring of the woman. .. Bishop Zumarraga believed that "Coatlaxopueh" was a

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, New York: Costello Publishing Company, Inc., 1979, 421-22.

mispronunciation of Guadalupe, the title by which Mary was venerated in Extremadura, Spain. As a result, Our Lady of Tepeyac is universally recognized as Guadalupe.¹⁸

The name Mary used for herself "Coatlaxopeuh" (pronounced quatlashupe) and the native interpretation in contrast to the Spanish interpretation reflects the mixture of worldviews found in devotions to Mary. This mixture is also seen in the characteristics that devotees find in Mary. One of these is the feminine spirituality in most traditional religions. Nestor Medina explains:

In many places, Mother Earth or *Pachamama* has been replaced by devotion to Mary. In other places, *Pachamama* is presented with Marian overtones. As Diego Irarrázabal says, "Mary has been *Pachamanized* and her communities have been Marianized."¹⁹

Maria is known by different names throughout Latin America. Cavazos González provides a list:

Argentina-Nuestra Señora de Lujan;

Bolivia-The Virgin of Copacabana;

Brazil-Aparecida;

Chile-Nuestra Señora del Carmen;

Colombia-Lady of Chiquinquirá;

Costa Rica-Santa María de los Ángeles;

Cuba-Nuestra Señora de la Caridad;

El Salvador- Virgen de la Paz;

Ecuador-Nuestra Señora del Quinche;

Spain-Santa María del Pilar;

¹⁸Gilberto Cavazos-González, "Virgin Mary," in Miguel A. De La Torre, ed., *Hispanic American Religious Cultures*, Volume Two, Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2009, 570.

¹⁹ Néstor Medina, "Native Americans," in Miguel A. De La Torre, ed., *Hispanic American Religious Cultures*, Volume Two, Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2009, 401.

Guatemala-La Virgen del Rosario;
Honduras-Nuestra Señora de la Concepción;
Nicaragua- Virgen del Viejo;
Panama-Nuestra Señora de la Antigua;
Paraguay- Señora de Caacupe;
Peru-Virgen de la Merced;
Puerto Rico-Our Lady Mother of Divine Providence;
Dominican Republic-Nuestra Señora de Altagracia; and
Uruguay-La Virgen de los Treinta y Tres,
Venezuela- Señora del Coromoto.²⁰

Due to lack of time and space, we will not be able to give an overview of the worldviews behind each of these devotions to Mary. These popular devotions include processions, pilgrimages, pledges, sacrifices, feasts and a myriad of practices that reflect the mixture of native worldviews and Catholicism. Although Catholic theologians make a distinction between adoration and veneration, the truth is that many of the people who participate in acts of devotion to Mary see it as adoration. Ignacio Manuel Altamirando expresses this when he says: "The day in which the Virgin of Tepeyac is not adored in this land, it is certain, that it will have disappeared, not only the Mexican nationality but even the memory of the dwellers of present-day Mexico."²¹

These expressions of devotion to Mary are not only the practice of two parallel religions but also a mixture of the worldviews of both, hence, a syncretism. Medina affirms this when he says:

It would be a mistake to conclude that these are simply contextual expressions and appropriations of devotion to Mary the Mother of Jesus. Although there are Christian elements in each of the Marys venerated by all

²⁰ Ibid., 571-576

²¹ Quoted in David A Brancing, *La Virgen de Guadalupe: Imagen y Tradición*, Mexico: Taurus, 2001. 9.

people, a careful analysis of their origins and development reveals that they are an amalgam of indigenous and European religious elements.²² The new expressions are ways in which the indigenous population adopted, adapted and reinterpreted Christian elements without completely abandoning their native religions and practices.... Interweaving the elements of indigenous religions with Christian ones is very much related to the non-exclusive and cumulative quality of indigenous religions.²³

Santeria

Santeria is a syncretistic expression that needs to be qualified apart from the others. Miguel de la Torre asserts that "among Latinos/as, the term syncretism is used to describe non-Christian faith traditions that use symbols, concepts and ideas, specifically Santeria, but also other traditions with indigenous roots such as curanderismo (going to the medicine man) or espiritismo (Spiritism).²⁴

Donaldo Moore defines Santeria as follows:

It is an Afro-Caribbean religion that combines animist and pantheistic aspects with ancestor worship and Cuban Catholicism. It is a syncretistic religion that mixes the belief in the orichas or gods of the Yoruba pantheon, a people of southwestern Nigeria, with Catholic saints. It is sometimes identified as the religion of the orichas.²⁵

The worldview of those who practice Santeria is based on the pre-Christian Lukumí-Yoruba faith and is not based on Christianity or the Bible. Nestor Medina gives a detailed explanation of the worldview:

²² Néstor Medina, "Native Americans," in Miguel A. De La Torre, ed., *Hispanic American Religious Cultures*, Volume Two, Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2009, 401.

²³ Néstor Medina, "Native Americans," in Miguel de la Torre, ed., *Hispanic American Religious Cultures*, Volume Two, Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2009, 399-400.

²⁴ De La Torre, op. cit., 540-.

²⁵ It is also known in Cuba as the Lukumí religion and the Regla de Ocha (Rule of Saint) while in Brazil the same phenomenon is called Candomblé. The African name for Santeria is Ocha. Literally the name **Santeria** means the worship of saints. There are several Afro-American traditions, due in part to their dependence on oral traditions, as they do not have a sacred book as a guide.

This religion believes in a creator God known as "Olodumare" and a group of hereditary emissaries called "orichas" who have delegated or borrowed power. Key beliefs include a concept of reincarnation and the fulfillment of destiny assigned by Olodumare. Human purpose and reason are conceptualized within a framework connected to nature, the sacredness of Olodumare's planetary creation, free will and destiny, universal laws, and recognition of binary principles of constructive and destructive forces that may be natural or supernatural. Beliefs include the sacredness of a small group of farm animal sacrifices. This religion has no concept of the Christian Satan or the power of the devil or concept of hell. The philosophy focuses on balance in the here and now and the resolution of life's trials and tribulations. It is not based on the idea of miracles or life after death. At the core of their beliefs is the concept that Olodumare distributed knowledge and that, therefore, all religions have truth but none has a monopoly on truth.²⁶

Santería contains a vast collection of myths, tales or legends (**patakí**) that provide a rationale for many of its ceremonies and customs and make them more understandable. Although there are more than 400 divinities of which ten-and-six are actively worshipped²⁷, the ones that form the main base are Obatalá, Ochún, Yemayá, Oyá, Changó and the Warriors who are Elewá, Ogún, Ochosi and Ozún. Rites of initiation, divination and magic are celebrated around these orichas who are deities and saints.²⁸

The syncretism of Santería is found in the coupling of Catholic saints with pagan deities. Donald Moore gives a summary of this:

For the santero, the person initiated into the religion of the Orisha, the deities are supernatural entities and emanations of **Olofi**, the Creator God of human beings and the other saints. The divinities have two

²⁶ Néstor Medina, "Santería," in Miguel de la Torre, ed., *Hispanic American Religious Cultures*, Volume Two, Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2009, 506-7.

²⁷The 16 are Elewá, Obatalá, Orunla, Changó, Ogún, Ochosi, Babalú-Ayé, Aganyú, Oricha-Okó, Inle, Osain, Obba, Yemayá, Oyá, Ochún and the Ibeyi. The five orichas that compose the foundation of Santería are Elewá, Obatalá, Changó, Yemayá and Ochún.

²⁸Donald T. Moore, "La Santería," VIII:6 (Nov.-Dec., 1993): Dr. Donald T. Moore, 616 Jefferson St., La Cumbre, Rio Piedras, P.R. 00926. Tel. 789-1040

aspects, one of which is the control of a variety of human endeavors, endeavors and interests and the other is the representation of different elements or forces of nature. Some of the main ten-and-six that are worshipped are the following:

Obatalá, represented by the Catholic saint of the Virgen de las Mercedes, is the father of the orichas, the patron of peace and purity.

Orunla, also known as **Ifá** and **Orúnmila**, is the patron saint of priests (**babalawos**) and the main diviner of the Yoruba pantheon. He is represented by the Catholic saint St. Francis of Assisi.

Yemayá, the patroness of the seas and motherhood for being the first mother of humanity, is the mother of fourteen of the most important orichas, including Changó. She is usually represented by the Virgin of Regla.

Ochún, the younger sister of Yemayá and the prodigal mistress of love, marriage, gold and rivers, is Changó's favorite concubine. She is represented as the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, the patron saint of Cuba.

Oyá, the queen of the dead, owner of the flame (fire) and patroness of the cemetery, is one of the beloved favorites of Changó and this daughter of Yemayá is often represented by Santa Teresa and the Virgin of Candelaria. Puerto Rico is known as the land of Oyá.

Changó, the divinity of virility, the patron of fire, lightning and thunder, provides victory over enemies and all difficulties. This son of Yemayá is represented with the image of Santa Bárbara. He committed incest with his mother and had three other wives including Ochún and Oyá.

Four deities form the group identified as **the Warriors**. They are Elewá (Elegua, Eleguá or Elegguá), Ogún, Ochosi and Ozún. **Elewá** is the guardian of the gates, including that of the dead, and the messenger of Olofi and the other orichas. Without him, nothing can be accomplished.

He is the main deity of the santero's divination. He is usually represented by the Catholic saints of St. Anthony and the Infant of Prague or Atocha. In addition, he is represented by another image: a stone in the shape of a head, often found behind a door of the house.

Ogún, a son of Yemayá represented by the image of San Pedro, is the patron of metals and of all people who work.

Ochosi, the son of Yemayá represented by the image of San Norberto, is the patron saint of hunters.

Ozún, the oricha who always accompanies Elewá, warns the santeros when danger approaches. He is represented by the image of San Juan Bautista.²⁹

The attraction of Santeria for many is divination. Through this practice, people believe they can choose a better destiny in the future life, change their fate in this life and improve their situation in matters of health, love, and money. What gives a sense of security to many people is that this is done under the supposed approval of Catholic saints. The blending of worldviews is so subtle that practitioners do not know when they are passing from one to the other.

Syncretism in Protestantism

Those of us who are evangelicals tend to think that syncretism occurs in other religious traditions but not in our own. It is important to recognize that syncretism can occur in all contexts due to the fact that with the exception of tribes living in total isolation there is always a variety of worldviews in the regions where people are born and raised. Gailyn Van Rheezen asserts that in her own North American culture there is a danger of syncretism:

Syncretism occurs because the Christian community tries to make its message attractive and appealing to those outside its fellowship... When major shifts in worldviews occur within the dominant culture, the church has difficulty in separating what is eternal from what is

²⁹ Ibid.

temporal.... syncretism occurs when Christianity decides to accept the assumptions of society... For example, in my country there are two totally different types of worldviews, theism and secularism woven into the souls of ordinary Christians and competing for their allegiance. American Christians recognize God and desire to be faithful to him. They believe that God sent Jesus to die for them and live with the hope that they will eventually live with God in heaven. At the same time, they have a firm belief in human abilities through science to solve all human problems. They tend to divide the world into two large portions, the natural and the supernatural. They believe that only natural powers, which can be empirically analyzed, operate in the natural world. Therefore, Christians often seek medicine and therapy for illness without relying on the Great Physician. In other words, prayer and healing are divorced as if God has little to do with life. Many study the sciences without reflecting on the Creator who sustains the universe. Thus, science and religion are disconnected. This can lead to the belief that humanity, with its scientific knowledge, is self-sufficient, capable of solving all of life's obstacles and does not need God.³⁰

Kraft gives an example of a similar attitude when he says that, "In America there is a syncretistic, unbiblical Christianity that sees the 'American way of life' as identical with biblical Christianity or that assumes that, by generating enough faith we can pressure God to give us anything we want..."³¹

In addition to the syncretism that occurs as a result of the blending of deistic and naturalistic worldviews, there are types of syncretism that are a blend of deistic and animistic worldviews. In such contexts it is worth asking the question, how many of the assumptions continue to be part of the way of thinking when people with an animistic background make a decision to receive Christ? One way to know the answer is to analyze how many animistic practices continue to influence the lives of believers. For example, how many are still influenced by such beliefs as the

³⁰ Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Worldview and Syncretism*, *Used by permission. All rights reserved*

³¹ Charles H. Kraft, "Culture, Worldview and Contextualization," in Ralph D. Winter, Steven C. Hawthorne, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, Pasadena: William Carey, 1999, 390.

evil eye, bad air, cleansings, fear, fate, destiny, the day of the dead, veneration of the dead, fetishes and other animistic beliefs? How many of the believers still secretly turn to healers or fortunetellers when they have illness or problems? How many have a concept of prayer as if it were magic that can be manipulated (controlled) using prescribed formulas or phrases to get what is desired instead of submitting to the will of God?

Syncretism of worldviews can be very subtle and devastating. The main reason is that it can give a person a false confidence about their relationship with God and their eternal future. In addition, syncretism can undermine the spiritual growth of believers, deprive them of a sense of victory in their lives and undermine their evangelistic ministry to people who are still in spiritual darkness. The more we understand the types of syncretism and its effect on people, the more we can minister to them and enable them to live victorious lives.

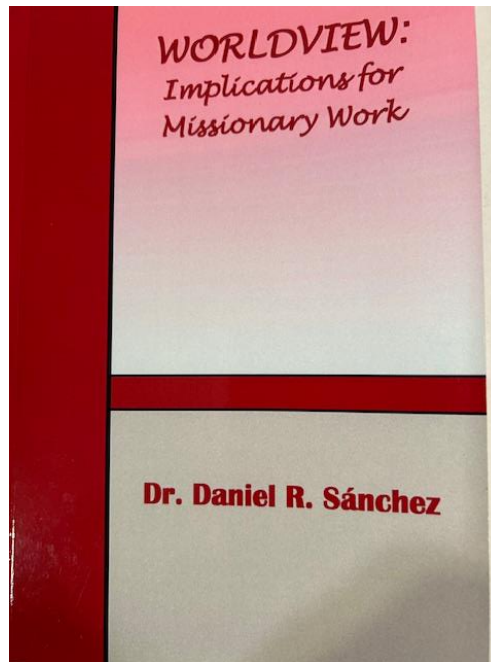
This portion, with permission of the author, is taken from chapter 3 of the book *Worldview: Implications for Missionary Work*. Other chapters focus on The World Concept, The Animistic Worldview, The Monotheistic worldview and The Postmodern Worldview. To obtain this information, the person can obtain the book through Amazon.

Daniel R. Sanchez, *Worldview: Implications for Mission Work*

<https://www.amazon.com/COSMOVISION-Implicaciones-misionera-Trabajo-Spanish/dp/0985284277/>

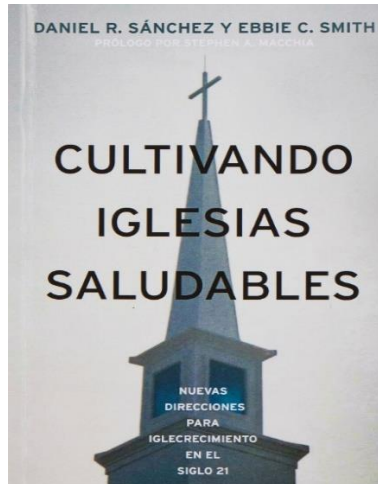
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This book helps people who want to share the message of salvation with people from other cultures. By studying the worldview of other people, the believer in Christ will understand that person's core beliefs and know how to present the message of salvation in such a way that the person can understand and accept it.



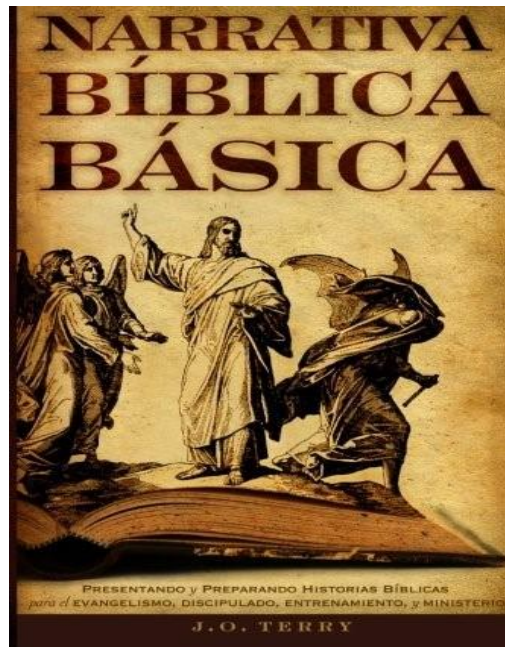
Other books we have published that are available through Amazon include the following:

Daniel R. Sanchez and Ebbie C. Smith, Growing Healthy Churches



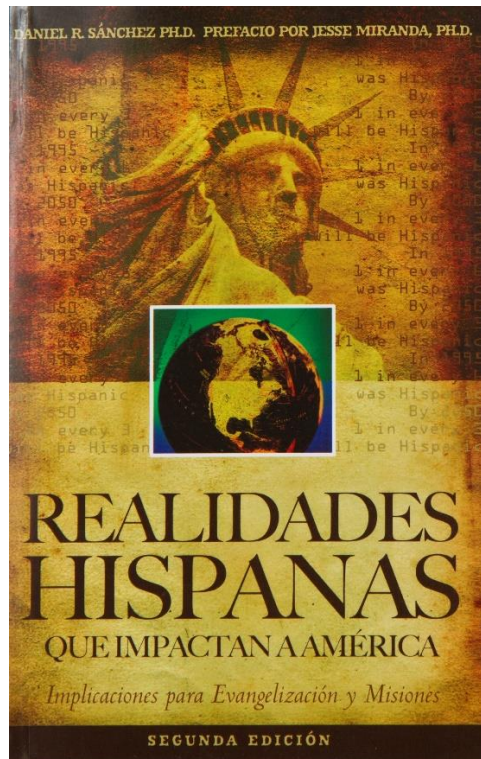
This book provides excellent strategies for church growth. However, it takes into account that growth must be healthy for the church to fulfill its mission. This book is not intended to reorder or defend the church growth movement. It simply calls for a balance in the means by which healthy growth can be achieved. The ultimate goals are that the ideas can be applied to churches to help these congregations better reach the lost and unchurched in their area.

In every country there are a good number of people who cannot read. However, this does not mean that they cannot learn. In fact, they learn a lot as oral communicators. Using stories, they communicate from one generation to the next the oral history of their group. In this world there are more than 6,000 groups unreached by the gospel. Among these, more than 85% cannot read. One of the main reasons why they have not been reached with the gospel message has been that in the past only literary methods were used to try to communicate with them. The author of this book, J.O. Terry worked for many years with missionary Jim Slack in the Philippines. In reaching out to oral communicators, these missionaries realized that if they used biblical stories, the oral communicators could hear, understand, retain and share what they heard. This book shares clear methodologies for evangelizing, discipling and starting churches among oral communicators. Missionaries who are using these strategies in many countries around the world are seeing wonderful church growth. But it is not only among the tribes in isolated places that oral communicators are found. Many of them are in metropolitan areas and need to be reached with Bible stories to evangelize and disciple them.



This book can be obtained through Amazon at

Hispanic Realities was written by Dr. Daniel Sanchez to promote evangelism, discipleship and church planting among Hispanics in the United States. Hispanics are the fastest growing group in the United States. They have grown from 9.6 million in 1970 to 63.6 million in 2022. In addition, this group has spread throughout the country. Over the years, Hispanics have been showing receptivity to the message of salvation to the extent that today almost a quarter of Hispanics are evangelicals. In addition to reviewing growth statistics, this book shares contextualized strategies for evangelizing different generations of Hispanics and planting churches among them. Although the original purpose of the book is to help missionaries and pastors working among Hispanics in the United States, this book can be of great use in multicultural regions by applying the principles of evangelism, discipleship, leadership training and church planting in those settings.

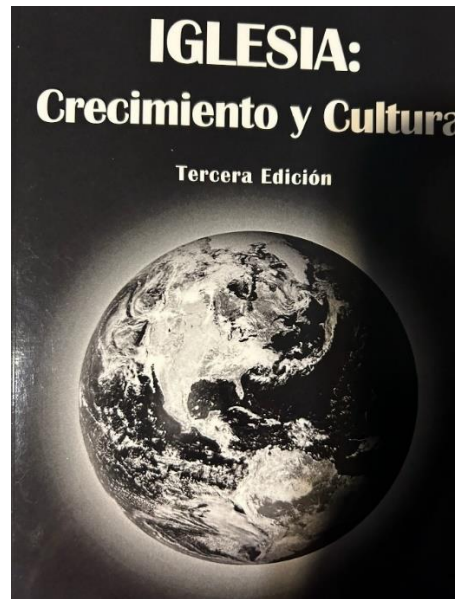


This book is available on Amazon

<https://www.amazon.com/Realidades-Hispanas-Impactan-Am%C3%A9rica-evangelizaci%C3%B3n/dp/0982507968/>

Daniel R. Sanchez, Church: Growth and Culture

This book, Church: Growth and Culture, focuses on contextualizing strategies to people in different cultural settings. The first chapter focuses on the biblical basis for contextualization. The author, based on the Word of God, points out how he adapted the presentation of the message to different people when dialoguing with Nicodemus, the Samaritan Woman and Zacchaeus. He presented the same message but did so in different ways to talk about the new birth, the water that quenches spiritual thirst and in offering fellowship to a tax collector who was hated by the people. The book also includes information about how the apostle Paul contextualized the presentation of the message when teaching in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch (speaking in Hebrew and beginning with the patriarchs and prophets, presenting Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophecies). In Athens, however, Paul speaks to them in Greek and begins the preaching with an allusion to the Altar to the Unknown God to establish a bridge of communication quoting even from their philosophers with the purpose that they convert and serve God who has made himself known. Expanding on the theme of contextualization, the author presents the contextualization of evangelization and church growth. In the last part of the book, the author presents A Process for Contextualized Church Growth. There is much for church leaders to gain from reading and studying this book for their development, cultivation, evangelism and missions program.



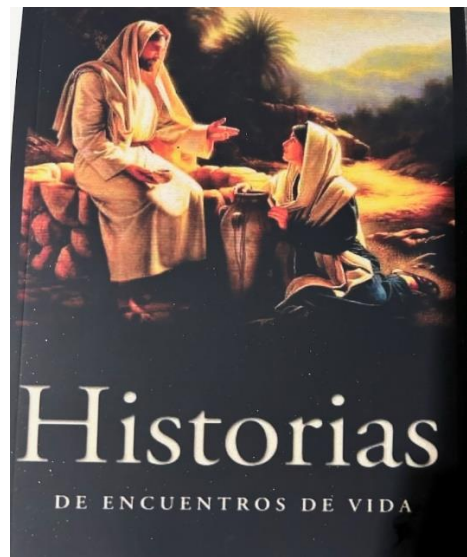
Daniel R. Sanchez, *Church: Growth and Culture*

<https://www.amazon.com/Iglesia-Crecimiento-Cultura-Tercera-Edici%C3%B3n/dp/0984620745/>

The book *Life Encounter Stories* was written with the purpose of helping believers share the message of salvation in an informal and relaxed way by doing three things: 1) Listening to the person's story, 2) Telling our story and 3) Telling the story of Christ. The authors indicate that many people are willing to talk about several topics: 1) Joys and Accomplishments, 2) Influences (or people) that have impacted their life, 3) Pains and Difficulties and 4) Changes and Challenges. The idea is that one is willing to listen when people talk about these topics. After listening with great interest, we can tell a similar story in our lives, but emphasizing the difference that Christ's presence has made in our lives. This opens the door to tell the Story of Christ and lead the person to put their faith in the one who can completely change their life and give them the strength to live a victorious life.

After this introduction, the authors recount incidents in which they conversed with people by listening to their stories. For example, author Daniel Sanchez shares the experience he had talking with Marguerite Oswald, the mother of Lee Harvey Oswald, the assassin of President John F. Kennedy. At the graveside of Lee Harvey Oswald, Dr. Sanchez listened to the story of the assassin's mother. She tried to explain what had happened with theories that exonerated her son of guilt. But at the end of the conversation, realizing that Dr. Sanchez was a student at Southwestern Seminary, she said, "The only person who visited me when my son was killed was a student at your seminary." Then she added, "That Sunday that my son was killed, in the afternoon many government representatives gathered at the cathedral in the capital." Then with tears in her eyes, she told me, "They prayed for Rose, President Kennedy's mother, for his widow Jackie and for their children Caroline and John John, but they did not pray for me and in that hour I needed God." The book mentions the rest of the conversation and many other stories told by authors Sanchez and Terry. In short, the goal is to listen to the person's story, tell our story and then tell the story of Jesus Christ.

<https://www.amazon.com/HISTORIAS-ENCUENTROS-Spanish-Daniel-Sanchez-ebook/dp/B09C6L3G6X/>



Conclusion

The primary purpose of this book has been to share with you concepts and resources related to evangelism, discipleship, church planting and religious syncretism that are found in some of the books that by God's grace I have had the privilege of writing. It is my prayer that these concepts may be useful for teachers, students, pastors and church members.

The second purpose of this book has been to familiarize you with books that can be useful in designing seminary classes and training church members to be more effective in evangelizing people, discipling them and leading them to be faithful and productive church members.

UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE



Daniel Sanchez greeting Evangelist Billy Graham

In 2011, I had the privilege of being part of a committee that went to invite Evangelist Billy Graham to come and preach an evangelistic campaign at the Cowboys Football Stadium in Dallas.

During that week, Dr. Graham was preaching an evangelistic campaign in Fresno, California. Our committee arrived on Thursday and that night we went to the stadium to participate in the campaign. That night a cowboy singer with his guitar led the congregation and presented the special music. The message was powerful and hundreds of people came forward indicating their decision to receive Christ as their personal savior as the hymn "Just As I Am" was sung.

Friday's service was totally different. So many young people arrived that they had to open the second stadium of the university to accommodate the large crowd. The music that night was rock and roll in the style of that type of singer, but with purely Christian words. As expected, there was a lot of movement when he sang at such a high volume. However, there was silence when Dr. Graham began to preach and they listened to him as if he were their grandfather. At the time of the invitation, so many young people were coming to the front that those who were already there were being instructed to move further to the front so that there would be enough room for all who were arriving. It was a very moving scene to see so many young people making their decision for Christ. When our committee met with Evangelist Graham, he confided in us that he personally did not like that style of music and that because of the high volume it hurt his senses. But he added, "If this is what I have to do to get many young people to hear the gospel message, I'm willing to do it."

The Saturday morning service, focused on sharing the message of salvation with the children, was totally different. There they sang songs that the children could sing. Those who presented the message of salvation to the children were people dressed as vegetables (carrots, tomatoes, cucumbers, etc.). They used vocabulary that the children could understand. When the invitation time came, it brought tears to my eyes to see many moms and dads holding hands with their little children, who were making their decision to receive Christ as their best friend and savior.

These three scenes brought to my mind what the Apostle Paul said:

What then is my reward? That preaching the gospel, I freely present the gospel of Christ, that I may not abuse my right in the gospel. ¹⁹ Therefore, being free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might gain the

greater number. ²⁰ I have become to the Jews as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to those who are subject to the law (though I am not subject to the law) as subject to the law, that I might gain those who are subject to the law;²¹ to those who are without law, as though I were without law (not being without law of God, but under the law of Christ), that I might gain those who are without law. ²² I have become weak to the weak, that I might gain the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. ²³ And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may become a partaker of it (1 Corinthians 9:18-23).

"And continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread in the house, they did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, having favor with the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (Acts 2:46, 47)

Note: These resources are available through Amazon as print or digital books on Kindle.

Daniel R. Sanchez, *The Gospel In The Rosary: A Biblical Study Of The Mysteries Of Christ*

<https://smile.amazon.com/Evangelio-Rosario-Estudio-Biblico-Misterios/dp/0977243389/>

This book contains a series of purely Biblical studies focusing on the significant events in the life of Jesus that are found in the Mysteries of the Rosary. The objective is to interest people with a Catholic background who would not go to an evangelical temple but who are willing to study what the Rosary says about the Word of God.

Daniel R. Sánchez, *Life Encounter Stories*

<https://www.amazon.com/HISTORIAS-ENCUENTROS-Spanish-Daniel-Sanchez-ebook/dp/B09C6L3G6X/>

Through the study of this book a person can learn to communicate the message of salvation in an enjoyable conversation that begins by listening to the person's story (including problems they are going through), telling their own story (how Christ has helped them face similar situations) and then telling the story of Christ (the message of salvation).

Daniel R. Sanchez, *Cosmovision: Implications for Mission Work*

<https://www.amazon.com/COSMOVISION-Implicaciones-misionera-Trabajo-Spanish/dp/0985284277/>

This book helps people who want to share the message of salvation with people from other cultures. By studying the worldview of other people, the believer in Christ will understand that person's core beliefs and know how to present the message of salvation in such a way that the person can understand and accept it.

Daniel R. Sanchez, *Hispanic Realities*

<https://www.amazon.com/Realidades-Hispanas-Impactan-Am%C3%A9rica-evangelizaci%C3%B3n/dp/0982507968/>

This book describes ten characteristics of Hispanics in the United States. After surveying the cultural and religious pilgrimage of Hispanics in this country, the authors communicate how to share the gospel, evangelize and congregate Hispanics in churches that are relevant to the context in which they find themselves.

Daniel R. Sanchez, *Planting Reproductive Churches*

<https://www.amazon.com/Plantando-Iglesias-Reproductivas-Daniel-S%C3%A1nchez/dp/0984620788/>

This book begins by establishing the Biblical, spiritual and cultural foundations for church planting in a Hispanic context. After analyzing a number of church planting models, the author helps readers choose the model that best fits the social and religious context in which the church planter finds himself. The reader finds the material in this book to design a successful and practical strategy for starting a church that can be reproduced.

Daniel R. Sanchez, *Cultivating Healthy Churches*

<https://www.amazon.com/Cultivando-Iglesias-Saludables-Direcciones-Crecimiento/dp/0982087594/>
(printed book)

<https://www.amazon.com/Cultivando-Iglesias-Saludables-Daniel-Sánchez-ebook/dp/B072FJBZRG/>
(Kindle)

This book analyzes the factors that help a church to grow. In addition to discussing in detail what helps a church grow numerically, the author emphasizes what contributes to healthy growth. The goal is for the church to become larger (because there are many people who need to be won to Christ) and to become healthier (so that members grow spiritually in those congregations).

Daniel R. Sanchez, *Church: Growth and Culture*

<https://www.amazon.com/Iglesia-Crecimiento-Cultura-Tercera-Edici%C3%B3n/dp/0984620745/>
(printed book)

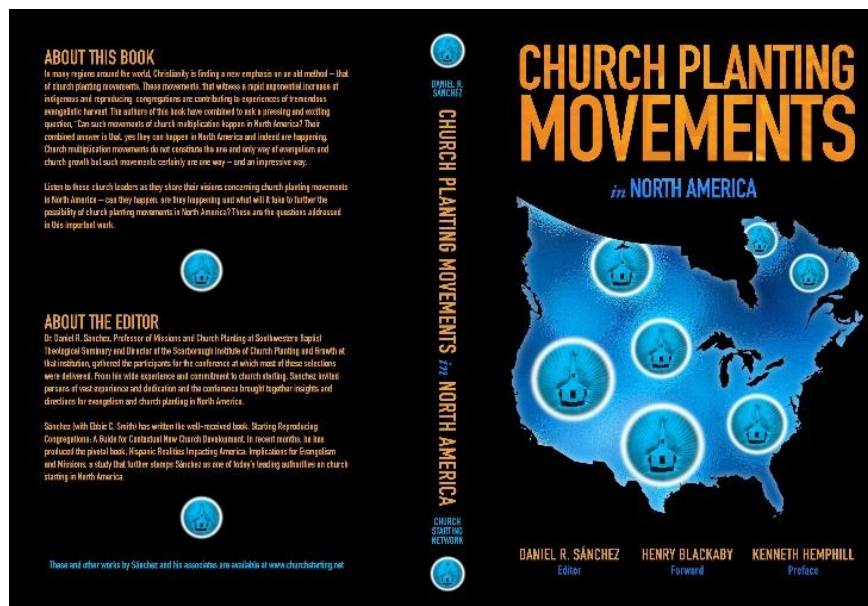
This book focuses on the contextualization of church planting and church growth. Beginning with studies on how the gospel message was contextualized in the New Testament, this book discusses in detail-contextualized strategies for evangelism, discipleship and church planting in the Hispanic context.

Daniel R. Sanchez and J.O. Terry, *Biblical Narrative for Church Planting*

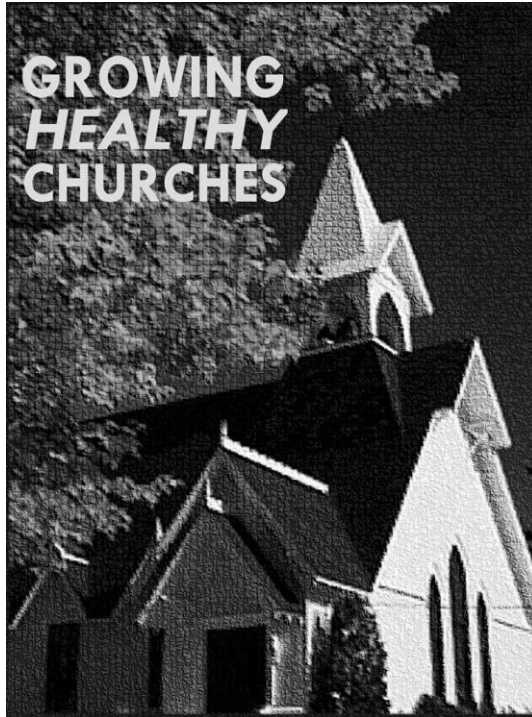
<https://www.amazon.com/NARRATIVA-B%C3%80BLICA-PLANTAR-IGLESIAS-Spanish/dp/B095L5M2J5/>

Recognizing that Christ used the method of storytelling (such as parables) very effectively, this book instructs people to know how to evangelize and gather in groups people who cannot read but who grasp the message of salvation through Bible stories. This method is being used very effectively not only among indigenous groups but also among people in metropolitan areas who prefer oral communication.

- ¹ These statistics were taken from Search Statistics, Society and Religion, 2024 and Wikipedia, Study of Religion. https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2014/11/PR_14.11.13_latinAmerica-overview-18.png
- ² Franz Damen, Las Sectas, avalanche or challenge?" Cuarto Intermedio (Cochabamba, Bolivia, No.3, May, 1987:45.
- ³ Survey conducted by PEW Foundation, Religion in Latin America. These statistics were taken from Search Statistics, Society and Religion, 2024 and Wikipedia, Study of Religion.
- ⁴ Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003, 26,
- ⁵ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 20.118; life 269.
- ⁶ *Antiquities* 13.9.1; *Wars* 1.2.6
- ⁷ Merrill C. Tenney, *The Gospel of John*, TEBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 54.
- ⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, TEBC (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1971), n. 43, 264.
- ⁹ G. H. C. Macgregor, *The Gospel of John*, (New York: Happer & Row, 1928), 105.
- ¹⁰ Ibid. 106.
- ¹¹ *Antiquities*, 13.9.1; *Wars* 1.2.6.
- ¹² S Leticia Calçada, al al, Holman's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Nashville: B&H, 2008, 1434.
- ¹³ David Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980).
- ¹⁴ For a more complete discussion see, Daniel R. Sanchez, *Church: Growth and Culture* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1993), 21-56.
- ¹⁵ For further discussion see Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), 194-207.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 207-208.
- ¹⁷ Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* 217 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), 217.
- ¹⁸ Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 216-18.
- ¹⁹ E. Edgardo Silvano, "In Rosario it was different - crusade converts are in churches," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 14, No. 2 (April 1978): 83-88.
- ²⁰ For an analysis of Church Planting connected with a Billy Graham Crusade see: M. Rodney Webb, *Church Planting as a Method of Assimilating New Converts from the Tampa Bay Area Billy Graham Crusade*, D.Min./Missiology project, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2001.
- ²¹ Ralph Neighbor states that in the United States only five percent are in this category. Ralph Neighbor, *Target Group Evangelism: Reaching People Where They Are* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1975), 18. In some countries the percentage may even be smaller while in others it might be much greater.
- ²² See Carlos Mraida, *La Iglesia en las Casas: Manual Para Círculos Familiares* (The Church in Homes: Manual For Family Cell Groups) (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Asociación Bautista Argentina De Publicaciones, 1988).
- ²³ Elmer L. Towns, "Evangelism: The Why And How," in *Church Growth State of the Art*, ed., C. Peter Wagner (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986).
- ²⁴ Lyle Schaller, *Assimilating New Members* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978), 76.
- ²⁵ W. Oscar Thompson, *Concentric Circles of Concern* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1981), 21.



GROWING HEALTHY CHURCHES



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This book is the product of more than fifty years of ministry experience in the life of the author. While he was in high school, the author was instrumental in starting a Hispanic church. In light of the fact that most of the people who accepted Christ as Savior and joined the church were from a Roman Catholic background, the author was faced with the challenge of utilizing relevant portions of Scripture to disciple them. The author was faced with similar challenges during the second church that he started while a seminary student in Texas. His subsequent service as a missionary in Guatemala, Panama and State of New York among people with a Roman Catholic background motivated him to begin to design a contextualized discipleship strategy. The thirty-eight years that the author has spent as a Professor of Missions at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary have given him the opportunity to refine the concepts that he shares in this book. The profound desire of Dr. Sánchez' heart is that professors, pastors, students and church members learn how to be effective soul winners and disciples, in light of the fact that Hispanics are showing unprecedented receptivity to the Gospel Message in Latin America, Spain and the United States.

ABOUT THE BOOK

In this book, the author seeks to answer the question, what do people with a Hispanic heritage and Roman Catholic background need to learn from the Bible, after they receive Jesus Christ as a savior, to become committed disciples in an Evangelical Church? While there are some similarities between some of the doctrines of Evangelical Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, there are significant differences especially related to the Catholic dogmas that are based on tradition and not on the Scriptures. By utilizing a catechism approach of questions and answers, this book provides answers strictly from the Word of God. At the same time, the author addresses issues in the Hispanic culture that need to be scrutinized, in order to eliminate beliefs and practices that are in contradiction to what the Word of God teaches. In his book, *Shining The Good News With Roman Catholic Friends*, the author focuses on informed, compassionate, positive and loving ways to lead people to a personal experience of salvation in Jesus Christ. The objective of this book is to involve Hispanics in a biblically centered and culturally contextualized discipleship that enables them to be well-informed and spiritually active members of a church that honors the Lord and follows His teachings.

BIBLICAL HISPANIC DISCIPLESHIP

I Paul, a servant¹ of Christ Jesus, called to be
an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,
which he promised beforehand through his

BIBLICAL HISPANIC DISCIPLESHIP

prophets in the Holy Scriptures concerning his
Son, who was designated from David according
to the promise, that he would redeem the
people from all their iniquities, by purifying
to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good
works, who are obedient to the faith for the sake of his name among
all the nations,² including you who are called
to belong to Jesus Christ,

to all those in Rome who are loved by God
the Father and called to the Father
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
that you may have glory and honor
forever and ever. Amen.

Grace and peace to you from God the Father
and from Jesus Christ our Lord,
before and forever. Amen.

I thank my God through Jesus Christ
our Lord now because your faith is proclaimed
in all the world.

As you obey the commandments that you have
received from the Father, the Son and the Holy
Spirit, and keep the love that you have
received from the Father and the Son, so that you
may continue to have the fruit of the Holy Spirit,
and so that you may be able to share the glory
of the Father through Jesus Christ our Lord,
forever and ever. Amen.

Now I want to thank you very much for the
faith that you have in Jesus Christ the Son of
God, and for the love that you have for one
another, as you obey the commandments that
you have received from the Father, the Son and
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DANIEL R. SÁNCHEZ, DMIN., PHD.

CHURCH TRAINING
NETWORK

GOD'S INCREDIBLE — PLAN —

A Guide to the Place of Human Action in the Efforts to
Share God's Salvation with the Peoples of the World

Ebbie C. Smith



Foreword by R. Keith Parks

Church Starting Network

