

**SAMUEL RODRIGUEZ  
& DR. ROBERT CROSBY**

**Foreword by Robert Morris**

**WHEN FAITH  
CATCHES FIRE**



**EMBRACING THE SPIRITUAL PASSION  
OF THE LATINO REFORMATION**

**Praise for**  
*When Faith Catches Fire*

“*When Faith Catches Fire* is both an exploration and a celebration of the ‘sal-safication’ of the church—God’s work among Latinos and Hispanics in the United States and worldwide. This topic is prophetic and indispensable.”

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and author of *All the Places to Go*

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“*When Faith Catches Fire* is a faithfully documented work which reflects the growing influence of the Latino people in the United States and the positive effects it has had upon this nation.”

—REV. ALBERTO M. DELGADO, MA, THD, president  
of South Florida Hispanic Ministers Association

“The passionate fire from the heart of this book will serve as a rallying cry to all Latinos and beyond. Now is the time we must unify in the gospel of Jesus Christ and reach this world for Christ.”

—DR. RONNIE FLOYD, senior pastor of Cross Church  
and past president of the Southern Baptist Convention

“Samuel Rodriguez and Robert Crosby masterfully submerge us into the enthusiasm, passion, and hope of the Latino church.”

—GUILLERMO AGUAYO, co-founder of *Salvemos a la Familia*  
 (“Save the Family”), Lima, Peru

“Truly, God is at work today and the Hispanic and Latino church has caught fire. Rodriguez and Crosby have captured this divine work in a remarkable way in *When Faith Catches Fire*. These younger leaders and scholars have encapsulated the genuine key to living, uniting, and changing the world . . . *with passion!*”

—DR. ROBERT E. COOLEY, president emeritus,  
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“*When Faith Catches Fire* shines an informed light on Latinos among us, a multiethnic population of Christian faith shaping the future of the American church.”

—DR. MARK DEYMAZ, pastor of Mosaic Church in central  
Arkansas and president of Mosaix Global Network

“In *When Faith Catches Fire*, the authors educate the reader on the flourishing Latino church in America and give us imagination for what’s possible when the church is less segregated, more multicultural, and embraces the beauty of different cultures.”

—GABE LYONS, founder of Q-Ideas and author of *Good Faith, unChristian*, and *The Next Christians*

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CATCHES FIRE**

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# WHEN FAITH CATCHES FIRE

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OF THE LATINO REFORMATION

SAMUEL RODRIGUEZ  
& DR. ROBERT CROSBY

Foreword by Robert Morris



WATERBROOK

## WHEN FAITH CATCHES FIRE

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To Dr. Jesse Miranda and Dr. J. Don George:

*Two servants of God committed to a church that is both multiethnic and multigenerational. We honor you as our exemplars, and we ask for a double portion of your passion for God and his people.*

---

Do not forsake me, O God,  
till I declare your power to the next generation,  
your might to all who are to come.

—Psalm 71:18

I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God,  
which is in you.

—2 Timothy 1:6

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## FOREWORD

For many years it's been on my heart to see the church come together. In fact, I think that's what heaven will look like—all nations and ethnicities worshipping God together as one, just as it was prophesied in Revelation 7:9–10. However, many of us have issues of the heart that only God knows about and only God can heal. Our prejudices and pride isolate us and divide the body of Christ. It can happen to all of us. In fact, it happened to me.

When my daughter, Elaine, was three years old, she was playing with a friend of a different race. As I watched them play, the Lord spoke to my heart and asked, *Is it all right with you if your daughter marries someone of a different ethnicity?* I thought about that question and quickly responded in my heart, *Of course, Lord! If he loves God and loves Elaine and is a man of character and integrity, it's fine.* Then the Lord said, *No, that's not what I asked. I asked if it is all right with you.*

I knew what God was saying to me. In essence it was, “Robert, you have some issues in your heart because of the way you were raised and where you grew up. Racial prejudices and beliefs were imparted to you that you didn't even know about, and I want to deal with it all.” In the following days and weeks, God started opening my eyes and changing my heart.

And that's exactly what I hope this book will do for you. As you read *When Faith Catches Fire*, I believe you'll be deeply affected and your eyes will be opened to something phenomenal God is doing today in the Latino church. The Spirit of God is igniting the faith and influence of Hispanic Christians and churches all over the world and right here in our communities.

One of the most exciting things about *When Faith Catches Fire* is that it's a collaborative project written by Samuel, who is Hispanic, and Robert, who is white. These two dynamic leaders have joined together to help shine a light on

something God is doing among us. You'll be inspired and challenged by their personal stories and great insights.

The Latino Reformation is not only a blessing; it is a gift to us and an opportunity that pastors, church leaders, and Christians everywhere should embrace. God is using it to reignite our passion for him. It's one thing to have faith; it's another thing to see that faith catch fire! And that's exactly what's happening with Hispanic believers. The passion they have for God stirs me deeply, and I hope it spreads to churches across our nation.

To this day, God continues to grow my heart and deepen my love for people of all ethnicities and backgrounds. The end of my personal story is that my daughter ultimately married a wonderful young man who loves the Lord with all of his heart and loves my daughter. He is a man of character and integrity, and he is African American. Can I tell you we now have some of the most beautiful and wonderful grandchildren you have ever seen? We absolutely do!

I'm so thankful God dealt with things in my heart that I didn't even know were there. As you read this book, will you ask him to open your heart and give you the eyes to see so he can do the same for you?

ROBERT MORRIS

Founding Senior Pastor, Gateway Church, Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas

Best-selling author of *The Blessed Life*, *The God I  
Never Knew*, *Truly Free*, and *Frequency*

## INTRODUCTION

# Those Salsafied Christians!

### *Embracing a More Passionate Faith*

One consequence of the growing Latinization of American society is the increasing Pentecostalization of American Christianity.

—Dr. Luis E. Lugo, director, Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion and Public Life

There is something about a fire, something so compelling about a flame, something that catches our attention and makes us want to stop whatever we are doing and draw closer. Whether blazing amid logs under a living-room mantel or encircled by stones at a campsite, a fire quickly becomes the hearth, and heart, of a family or a community. There is a magnetic attraction. It keeps people warm, illuminates their interactions, and becomes a focal point that brings people together.

And fire is an ideal metaphor for passion, a burning and consuming force that is unquenchable. It is also a fitting image for faith. When belief moves from mere mental assent to a deep, convictional belief, it does something powerful. *Faith catches fire.*

Latino Christians are catching the fire. In many ways they are changing their world today, and in the past five years, they have changed mine (Robert’s)! In fact, Latino Evangelicals, “up from 14 percent in 2006 to 18 percent in 2013,” are the “fastest-growing religious group in the country.”<sup>1</sup> There is just

something about their faith in God and the ways so many of them experience it, practice it, embrace it, and live it that I find absolutely compelling. There is a passion burning in the souls of so many Latino Christians today, blazing trails of local, regional, national, and global change. The jury is no longer out on this. The tipping point has hit. In the next few years (and decades), their influence will continue to grow and be felt in the church, in business, in government and politics, in the economy, in arts and sports, and in the important and pressing arena of race relations.

If the white Euro-American church has led the way in stewarding the last millennium, then quite possibly the Hispanic church is being called on to rise up and steward the next one. If the white church has filled the practical role of the global Elijah for the past several decades, serving as prophet-leader, then she now needs to recognize that a new Elisha (that is, the Latino church) has been busy working in the fields and is ready to bear a mantle of responsibility, an anointing of ministry, and servant-leadership for days to come.

The change isn't coming.

It's here.

We are convinced a major change is upon us. But far too many churches, pastors, Christians, leaders, government officials, and others have not yet acknowledged what is growing up all around them. That is one of the main reasons we have joined together to write this book.

## Reformation

As this book releases, this very year we celebrate the five-hundredth anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. At that critical point in history, an uncertain monk with a certain fire burning within challenged man-made misconceptions that were fueling ministerial malpractices of all sorts and relegating the Word of God to popes, priests, and prelates. Martin Luther unsuspectingly sounded the clarion call of reform to a church much in need of it.

Today we are watching a different type of "reformation" occur. A few years

ago, I (Samuel) was interviewed by Elizabeth Dias, a reporter for *Time* magazine, on the phenomenal growth of the Latino church. As we pored over multiple statistics and stories on the growth of this movement, I suggested to her that this represents “a Latino Reformation.” Her eventual cover article concurred: “What I discovered signaled a Latino Reformation.”

The Latino Reformation is in full swing.<sup>2</sup>

Our prayer is that this book will bring awareness and inspire action. As you read it—we urge you to really *read* it, *fully read* it—you will find something much more than just interesting or informative insights. You will realize there is something compelling and dynamic going on all around us, something not to be missed.

A soul moment.

God is blessing the Latino church in the United States and across the world in incredible ways. One of the most notable ways is the spiritual passion that seems to characterize so much of Latino spirituality, faith, community, service, and worship.

While much of America and the rest of the world focus on an immigration *problem*, the church should and must focus on an immigration *opportunity*. While government officials squabble over what it takes to become a citizen of our nation, Christians have an opportunity to welcome hundreds of thousands of souls as citizens of the Kingdom of God. While politicians are arguing their opinions, church leaders need to be busy serving and winning souls of every color and background and to find ways to welcome them into their churches, their homes, and their hearts.

## Catching the Fire

Latino Christians are the most open and passionate souls I (Robert) know or have ever known. In the past five years, my wife, Pamela, and I have been amazed to see the soul-full faith lived in the lives of so many Latino Christians, from Los Angeles, California, to Lima, Peru. God is doing something special

among this group, and the rest of the church needs to see and embrace it.

No one in recent years has challenged me or taught me more about growing my soul than Latino Christians, and one of those I most respect is my co-author on this book, Samuel Rodriguez. Latino Christians have become to my wife and me such an encouragement and example of passionate, wholehearted, open-souled, and on-fire Christianity.

From my connecting with Hispanic pastors and churches in the United States to enjoying fellowship and ministry together with brothers and sisters in Peru, Ecuador, Spain, Argentina, and Chile, there is just something about Latino passion for God, for one another, and for the Kingdom of God that is compelling. Added to that are my friendship and interactions with Samuel and my respect for the work he and the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference (NHCLC) are doing around the world.

After overseeing a merger in 2014 of NHCLC and Conela (a Latin America-based organization that serves Latin churches across the world), Samuel now leads the organization. Collectively it is estimated that this coalition represents around five hundred thousand churches worldwide. This is one of the largest networks of believers anywhere. Also, earlier this year Samuel had the honor of becoming the first Evangelical Latino ever to participate in a swearing-in ceremony of a US president. When asked about the invitation to be a part of this event, Samuel said, “The opportunity to speak on the quintessential political platform in the world, and to be able to lift up Jesus on that stage before that global audience, without a doubt is one of the greatest privileges I have ever received in my life.” He added, “It’s a God-graced opportunity that one cannot turn down.”<sup>3</sup>

## Here Is the Church

The face of global Christianity is changing. More than we know, the change is happening in our heads, hearts, and hands. Do you remember reciting this as a child?

Here is the church.  
Here is the steeple.  
Open the doors, and  
See all the people!

This two-handed, rhyming childhood ritual tapped our earliest imaginations about the church. Testing more than our dexterity, this rhyming exercise formed ideas and expectations in our minds about where, how, and with whom we worship.

In my young mind at that time, I (Robert) pictured the church as a building whose architecture pointed toward heaven and opened up to reveal a place teeming with people, really wiggly people, and to be really honest, at that point for me—really wiggly white people. My understanding of church has evolved and expanded since my childhood. While our faith is forever tethered to the person of Jesus and our essential beliefs, I now understand that, throughout history, it has experienced both sweeping and subtle adjustments of form and function in order to reach an ever-changing world. As Heraclitus of Ephesus, the famed Greek philosopher, once said, “Everything changes and nothing stands still.”

Samuel and I decided to write this book for a few key reasons: (1) we believe the most staggering and significant demographic change facing the church today is the phenomenal growth of the Latino church in North America, South America, and other parts of the world with an infectious passionate faith; (2) we are convinced that much of the non-Hispanic church in the United States and other parts of the world is unaware of this significant development; and (3) we want to make sure that as many Christians as possible are “making the most of every opportunity” for the gospel and especially the ones the Latino Reformation presents to us now (Ephesians 5:16).

The Latino Reformation is impacting the nature of all the church in worship, politics, and servanthood. Not only are these changes occurring in multiple cities, communities, regions, and nations, the potential of more impact is sitting

latent in the lives and hearts of many Latinos yet waiting to be welcomed, affirmed, and encouraged by open souls, both ours and yours.

### A Not-to-Be-Missed Moment

The United States Census Bureau projects that between 2014 and 2060, the US population will increase from 319 million to 417 million.<sup>4</sup> “By 2030, one in five Americans is projected to be 65 and over; by 2044, more than half of all Americans are projected to belong to a minority group.”<sup>5</sup> You read that correctly: *more than half*, which means that the current minorities will become the new majority. That will make America a majority-minority nation.

Dorothy, we are not in Kansas anymore.

We believe the church’s greatest opportunities are now multiethnic and multigenerational and that open souls will take the lead. Whether you’re a neighbor, pastor, teacher, government leader, or businessperson who wants to reach out to Latinos, this is the book to help you do so, to help you understand more of the significance and immediacy of the opportunity. The wise will do so out of their insight, but all leaders should do so nonetheless, if only for their own survivability. This book holds ideas and approaches that will help. Our hope is that it may become a de facto manifesto for the Latino Reformation movement as well as a quintessential clarion call and wake-up call to evangelistic and discipleship action.

### A Lit-Up Church

The church is awakening. It is waking up to its prophetic mandate to be light in the midst of darkness. The Latino church stands poised to light a passionate fuel. The Latino church may be one of the most lit-up churches in the twenty-first century. It is being placed on a stand and shining as never before. The Latino church is no longer following behind and begging for crumbs. By the

grace of God, it is leading growth, outreach, and healing among much of the global church today.

And, as mentioned, we believe the Latino church is the new Elisha. First Kings 19:19–21 is taking place before our eyes: in effect, the Latino church has been breaking ground with the ecclesial plow for many decades. However, the Latino church has now grown tremendously and developed compelling skills and graces. She is rising to the needs of the hour. She is also looking for partnering churches, pastors, leaders, and others to become *Latinos del corazón* (that is, “Latinos of the heart”). These open-souled people will be used to open doors for the Latino Reformation to rise in their communities.

The changes are happening all around us, so rapidly that it is staggering. But they are also occurring and emerging so naturally that you could easily miss them. Are you ready for it? Are you catching the fire and passion of the Latino Reformation, or are you, your family, your church, and your community missing it? Will you live with an open soul or a closed one?

### A Faith Fiesta!

Experiencing a passionate and celebratory faith is one of the major characteristics of Latinos and the Latino church today. Dr. Samuel Pagan, an elder scholar in the Latino Reformation movement, says that for Latino Evangelicals, “Faith is a fiesta!”<sup>6</sup> He cites Revelation 7:9–12, in which the Bible prophesies a time of people “from every nation and tribe” (Revelation 7:9, NLT) standing together before God’s throne and celebrating.

The segregated, bland, faith “line drawings” that existed for many years around the world are changing. God is pulling out his most vivid and diverse palette and adding color to it all. For the openhearted Christian and the willing pastor, God is ready to transform churches from a monochromatic, monolithic presentation of Christendom to a multiethnic, kingdom-culture, colorful presentation that has power and incorporates and reconciles the three

elements of passion, purpose, and promise. As a result, a more soulful Christianity is emerging, one that fills the heart, feeds the mind, and fires up the faith.

With all the racial tension we have seen reemerging around the nation and the world, I (Samuel) believe the Latino church can serve as the bridge, as the antidote to much of the racial tension right now between the African American community and the Anglo community, particularly in the areas of race relations, faith relations, and even law enforcement. In a real sense, we believe that God wants to use the “brown” to help unite the “black” and the “white” in America today. In this book, we will show and address some of the ways that it is already happening and can happen.

### Not Really a Race

Latinos are not a race. This is confirmed in a Pew Research report that notes, “Federal policy defines ‘Hispanic’ not as a race, but as an ethnicity.” However, the same Pew study notes that 67 percent of Hispanic adults surveyed said that “Hispanic” to them is a race (11 percent) or both a race and an ethnic background (56 percent).<sup>7</sup>

The term *Hispanic* was first used in the 1980 census,<sup>8</sup> but Hispanics can be of almost any race. Also, they come from and live in many nations. Thus, Hispanics have a view of race that is quite different than many other groups in the United States.<sup>9</sup>

“The Latino community in the United States is diverse and includes more than twenty-two nationalities, though in many locales it can and does take on particular national and/or regional identities. This rich diversity has made it difficult to find a suitable umbrella term to describe it. In general, Latinos born in the United States refer to themselves as ‘Americans’ or by their country of origin (for example, ‘Mexican American’). Similarly, Latino immigrants refer to themselves almost exclusively by their country of origin or by the um-

rella term given to them by the larger Euro-American society—Hispanic or Latino.”<sup>10</sup>

A 2012 study by the Pew Research Center’s Hispanic Trends group notes that 51 percent of Latinos have no preference between the terms *Hispanic* and *Latino*. Thirty-three percent still prefer *Hispanic*, which is more traditional. Fourteen percent now prefer *Latino*.<sup>11</sup>

Latinos are a conglomerate, a convergence of black and Anglo and Asian. What brings them together is the language and not the color of their skin, because it is the language component and the cultural threads that derive out of the Spaniard or the Spanish collective experience. For Latinos, language matters. Words matter. Juana Bordas notes that “Spanish . . . is spoken in twenty-two countries and is the language spoken by most people in the Western Hemisphere.”<sup>12</sup>

That language of Latinos is passionate and very metaphorical, very poetic. While the American world and the Anglo world are more Geoffrey Chaucer and *The Canterbury Tales*, the Latino world is Miguel de Cervantes and *Don Quixote*. In the Quixote world what you have is a perpetual metaphor, where everything is seen through the eyes of a metaphor and the lens of God’s creation, with picturesque applications and allusions. The Anglo world thinks more in linear, sequential, anal-retentive, logical ways or in more of a bland representation.

One of the ways Latinos will be a bridge is through their language.

## A Growth Explosion

I (Robert) am excited to see how God is raising up leaders today in the Latino church. It is quite clear to me that Samuel is one of those leaders at the epicenter of the Latino Reformation. It is in his blood, in his DNA. He carries a mantle of leadership responsibility in this movement and is a protégé of some of the most respected elders in it.

After a few months of exposure to the Latino church community (actually, communities, as there are so many of them), my wife and I noticed it was much more than the doctrines or church-development methods of Latinos that were getting into our hearts and minds and making an impression. More so it was their passion and strong sense of community that captivated our souls and transformed our view of the church: a more vibrant, bold, and engaging church.

Our travels to various parts of South America and among Latino Christians and churches in the United States have without exception always left us with one major feeling: *not wanting to leave!* Exposure to these faith communities in various parts of the world consistently serves to fire up our faith. For a couple of years, we tried to describe what we were seeing and experiencing in the Hispanic church that we were too often missing in the white church ethos or culture. We searched for an adjective or two and we fell short. Some of the words we now use include

- personable
- powerful
- engaging
- community oriented
- family (*familia*)
- alive
- welcoming
- magnanimous, a great word that needs to be rediscovered in the church and in the world today

We searched for a fresh, vibrant term to describe what happens to people impacted by this passionate experience of the Latino Reformation. We wanted a spicy and even fiery term that would say it well.

Some of the things we have appreciated the most in our observations have been

- a familial and extremely *welcoming sense of community* that draws you right in and leaves you finding yourself not wanting to leave

- a deep conviction, almost a simple assumption, that the only way to experience power in your life and ministry is by *engaging deeply in practices of prayer*
- practices of *joy-infused singing and worship*
- a passion in *preaching the gospel that is underscored by a sense of prophetic immediacy and urgency*
- a powerful but natural *merging of evangelism and compassion*, of help and of hope, of giving people the gospel and the kind assistance of a good neighbor

Latino Christians have purpose, passion, and promise. One of the benefits of a more soulful (soul-full) Christianity is its holistic approach: it is both vertical and horizontal. In contrast, non-soulful (soul-less) Christianity is either predominantly vertical *or* horizontal. Soul-full faith is vertical, which means we look up to God and it's about God and his kingdom, and soul-full faith is horizontal, which means it's about our families and communities.

So we sought for the word, and we believe we found one: *salsafied*.

Latino Christians in the United States, Latin America, Spain, and other parts of the world are experiencing and practicing a more salsafied, or a fiery and passionate, faith and life. That's it. Once the word emerged, it just stuck with us. And while we believe it is a form of biblical Christianity being practiced and enjoyed by many Latinos, I also believe that through demographic changes, people movement, immigration, and influence, God wants a more passionate faith in the lives of non-Hispanic believers as well.

## Open the Doors

As little children we were playfully instructed to put our two little hands together and say,

Here is the church.

Here is the steeple.

Now that we're adults, let's take those same hands and reach out to Latinos in our communities and in our churches, businesses, organizations, homes, and hearts, and remember to . . .

Open the doors, and  
See . . .

Not just a handful of wiggly white little fingers but a palette of colors, including the brown, the white, and the black.

Open the doors, and  
See . . .

Not just some, but

*All* the people!



PART ONE

# Living with Passion

*Loving God with All Your Soul*



# A Soul Moment

The Latino Protestant boom is transforming  
American religious practices and politics.

—Elizabeth Dias, *Time*

**S**ergio de la Mora was twelve years old when he was described as the best skateboarder in Santa Barbara, California. Today he pastors one of the fastest-growing churches in the United States. But his journey involved some deep challenges.

“My brothers used to take me in their low riders to the skateboard parks, and the cultural tension was there,” de la Mora recalls. “Here was a young skateboarder getting dropped off as his brothers were part of a gang.” He wanted to reject gang life, and he hoped to ride his skateboard away from it.

When Sergio started junior high school, however, he gave in and became a gang member. He gave up his dream of skateboarding out of that life, he recalls, “simply because of peer pressure.” At age thirteen, he got into drugs more heavily, and after a gang fight was hospitalized when a rival stabbed him in the back.

When Sergio got out of the hospital, his father took him on a walk through a cemetery. He said, “Sergio, what do you see?”

Sergio said, “Dead people.”

Then his father asked, “When did they die?” Sergio reminded him that this information was engraved on their tombstones.

“No, they didn’t,” his father answered. “A lot of these people died before they got here. If you don’t have a vision for your life, you’re gonna already be dead.”

Not long after, Sergio found a tract about a church. He attended a service, heard the gospel, and became a follower of Christ. He now pastors Cornerstone Church, one of the fastest-growing churches in the United States. From the moment of Sergio’s conversion, his faith caught fire, and the light of that growing flame is now impacting thousands.<sup>1</sup>

## Transformational

We live in a transformational moment, and the Latino church is uniquely poised to engage it. Old things are fading faster than ever before. New things are emerging. The faithful and nimble will seize the moment. The unfaithful and reluctant will most likely completely miss it.

Do not remember the former things,  
Nor consider the things of old.  
Behold, I will do a new thing,  
Now it shall spring forth;  
Shall you not know it? (Isaiah 43:18–19, NKJV)

At one and the same time, as a nation and world, we are facing great divisions and yet great opportunities to unite; we live amid age-old contrasting cultures and worldviews that can push us all apart, and yet current technological and collaborative tools can bring us together. Arguably, never in history have we possessed more ways to come together, and ironically, neither have we possessed so many things that can separate us.

Management consultant and educator Peter Drucker more than twenty years ago noted the changes of an epochal era such as we find ourselves in today. He discerned and defined such a moment in time this way:

Every few hundred years in Western history, there occurs a sharp transformation. . . . Within a few short decades, society rearranges itself—its worldview; its basic values; its social and political structure; its arts; its key institutions. Fifty years later, there is a new world. And the people born then cannot even imagine the world in which their grandparents lived and into which their own parents were born.

We are currently living through just such a transformation.<sup>2</sup>

Drucker's words strike a poignant ring in our minds and hearts. We see such sweeping changes occurring around us today locally, nationally, and globally. We are living in such a moment.

**The time we are living in is a moment because the Latino population in the United States is rapidly growing.** Consider these metrics of change:

- Of the US population growth between July 1, 2013, and July 1, 2014, almost half of the 2.5 million people were Hispanic.<sup>3</sup>
- The Hispanic population in the United States has increased from 12.5 percent of the total population in 2000 to 17.6 percent in 2015.<sup>4</sup>
- In New Mexico, Hispanics represent almost half of the population.<sup>5</sup>
- In California, Hispanics are 39 percent of the population.<sup>6</sup>
- “The Latino population in the United States grew by 43 percent in the last decade.”<sup>7</sup>
- By 2050 one in three Americans will be Hispanic.<sup>8</sup>

**It is a moment because Christianity is rapidly growing and changing among Latinos and around the world.**

- “The center of Christianity has shifted from Europe to the global South [that is, Latin America, Africa, and developing parts of Asia including the Middle East]. . . . In 1980, more Christians were found in the global South than the North for the first time in 1,000 years.”<sup>9</sup>

- “Today, the Christian community in Latin America and Africa, alone, accounts for 1 billion people.”<sup>10</sup>
- The massive Christian population in Latin America is becoming much more Pentecostal or Charismatic. “In Brazil, for example, the Assemblies of God has 10 million to 12 million members, while the American Assemblies of God church has 2 million to 3 million. So now, the Brazilian church is the big brother and the United States is seen as mission territory.”<sup>11</sup>
- “Today, Brazil not only has more Catholics than any other country, but also more Pentecostals.”<sup>12</sup>
- The newly elected mayor of Rio de Janeiro, Marcelo Crivella, is a Pentecostal-Evangelical. The *Washington Times* reported his astounding election this way: “In this city renowned for bacchanalian excess and tiny bikinis, the election of a conservative evangelical bishop as mayor stands out as yet another surprise in a year of global electoral earthquakes.”<sup>13</sup>
- “A century ago, 80 percent [of Christians] lived in North America and Europe, compared with just 40 percent today.”<sup>14</sup>
- Pentecostals comprised “5 percent of Christians in 1970,” but “today one of four Christians is Pentecostal or Charismatic.”<sup>15</sup>

**It is a moment because Christianity is not dying! However, it is rapidly growing, shifting, and changing among Latinos and around the world.**

- “In 1970, 41.3% of all Christians were from Africa, Asia, or Latin America. By 2020, this figure is expected to be 64.7%.”<sup>16</sup>
- In Brazil, “Protestants and Independents combined represented 12.9% of the population in 1970 but are expected to grow to 28.8% by 2020.”<sup>17</sup>
- Pentecostal and Charismatic believers “in Latin America have experienced astounding growth, from 12.8 million in 1970 to 181.3 in 2010 and an expected 203.0 million by 2020.”<sup>18</sup>

- “Pentecostals [in Latin America] are gaining an increased role in public life. Guatemala has recently had two Pentecostal presidents, and a Pentecostal political party has been founded in Nicaragua.”<sup>19</sup>
- “Millennials are the most racially diverse generation in American history. . . . Some 43% of Millennial adults are non-white.”<sup>20</sup>

**It is also a moment because the largest Assemblies of God church in America is a predominantly Latino church in Chicago.**

### A Latino “Reformation”?

Although Catholicism was first brought to the Western hemisphere by boat all the way from Spain, the largest Catholic nations as of 2010 are actually Brazil, Mexico, the Philippines, the United States, Italy, and Colombia.<sup>21</sup> The global church has grown much more Latino in the past century. Elizabeth Dias reported, “The Catholic Church has also enjoyed a 500-year monopoly on the region. Latin America, unlike Europe, never had a Protestant Reformation. Thus, Christianity was almost entirely synonymous with” Roman Catholicism.<sup>22</sup> The region had no Martin Luther or John Calvin, until, perhaps, now. Today, the leader of the Catholic Church for the first time ever is a Latino: Pope Francis.

Dias explains that “Catholics comprised 81% of Latin America’s population in 1996, and Protestants made up only 4%.” She adds, “By 2010, Protestants had jumped to 13% of the population while Catholics dropped to 70%.” Samuel told her, “We are in the first generation of the Hispanic Protestant Reformation, and that reformation has taken place primarily via the conduit of the Pentecostal charismatic movement.”<sup>23</sup>

But how will this Latino Reformation continue to affect the United States, Latin America, and the world? The passionate faith of these believers is so strong that in many parts of Latin America the Catholic Church is now copying

some of the practices, worship forms, and approaches of its sister Pentecostal churches. In some ways and places we are observing the Pentecostalization of Catholicism.

I (Samuel) sincerely believe that we are the first generation of the Latino Protestant Reformation. You can see it all around us. Predominantly Catholic Latin America, for instance, did not truly experience the impact of the sixteenth-century European Protestant Reformation until the 1970s and 80s. This was primarily through the influence of evangelistic, Pentecostal television, missionary efforts, and radio programs.

### Is It Really a Reformation?

But is it accurate to call this movement and growth among Latino Christians a *Reformation*? Alberto Delgado, founding pastor of Alpha & Omega Church, a megachurch in Miami, agrees with the concept of a Latino Reformation. He said, “A reformation is to *reform* something that has lost its form. This is occurring among Latinos. This is a new season. The growth and change going on among Latino Christians could even serve to connect other groups together—whites, African Americans, Asians and Latinos.”<sup>24</sup>

Not everyone, however, agrees that *Reformation* is the most appropriate term for what is going on among Latino Christians. “I like the term *awakening* more than *reformation* in this case,” says Albert Reyes, president of Buckner International. “What we are seeing is something Philip Jenkins spotted early on and wrote about in his book *The Next Christendom*. He noted that the majority of the Church’s growth is in the Global South.”<sup>25</sup>

“It is a ‘reformation’, yes,” says Dr. Samuel Pagan, dean of Hispanic Studies at the Jerusalem Center for Biblical Studies. “But perhaps it is more of a ‘counter-reformation.’” All in all, Pagan warns against overly generalized and grandiose views and versions of the role of the Latino Reformation. He stresses something else, citing that, at best, we all can hope to simply make “a modest

contribution” to the work of God in the world today. He notes that this is “because the Kingdom of God is big and our work, by comparison, is small.”<sup>26</sup>

“Latinos are turning not just to Protestantism but to its evangelical strain. . . . More than 35% of Hispanics in America call themselves born-again, according to the Pew Forum, and 9 out of 10 of evangelicós say a spiritual search drove their conversion. ‘People are looking for a real experience with God,’ says [pastor Heber] Paredes. That direct experience comes largely from exploring the Bible. ‘We do the best to preach with the Bible open. When they read the Bible, they find a lot of things they didn’t know before. They may have had religion, but they did not have an experience.’”<sup>27</sup>

Parenthetically, this is our Latino Reformation. What does that mean? It took four hundred years for Martin Luther’s reformation to saturate Latin America. The past fifty years really reflect the beginning of our reformation. Therefore, we have yet to see the fullness of Latino Evangelical growth in America and abroad. But it is happening now right before our eyes.

### Something Underlined

From time to time in church history, God seems to underline certain aspects of faith in order to bring a course correction to his people. When we go all the way back to the major and minor prophets of the Old Testament, we see that God’s love for his people was so faithful and determined that when they fell into seasons of complacency or disobedience, he refused to remain silent. He sent prophets among them to convey and sometimes display his heart and Word to them. Amid the Dark Ages, the Reformation emerged, and God underlined the role of the Word of God in the life of the church and the individual Christ-follower (that is, Luther’s *sola scriptura*).

Now the predominant growth of the church is shifting to the global south. The world and the church are starting to wake up to this tectonic event. The shift numerically and proportionately is stunning. Yet what might God be

underlining for the global church amid all of this? What might he be saying to us in all of this? In a word, we believe it is *passion*, spiritual passion: a passion for God and for loving God, a passion for Jesus and for the fullness of his Spirit in our lives, and a passion for people and for loving people.

Latinos are catching and communicating *passion* in fresh and empowering ways. They are engaging a more *soulful* Christianity than most. Of this, we are convinced. We believe in the *Imago Dei*, or the “image of God,” and the *Missio Dei*, or the “mission of God,” but we also believe God is underlining something else today for his church: the *Passio Dei*, or “the passion of God.” The passionate writer of Hebrews said, “Our God is a consuming *fire* (12:29, ESV).”

*“Nuestro Dios es fuego consumidor!”*

### Tozer Nailed It!

One Christian pastor and writer who early on saw the danger of a diminishing passion in the church was A. W. Tozer. In 1948, he summed it up this way:

Current evangelicalism has . . . laid the altar and divided the sacrifice into parts, but now seems satisfied to count the stones and rearrange the pieces with never a care that there is not *a sign of fire* upon the top of lofty Mount Carmel. But God be thanked that there are a few who care. They are those who, while they love the altar and delight in the sacrifice, are yet unable to reconcile themselves to the continued *absence of fire*.<sup>28</sup> (emphasis added)

As a follower of Jesus, has your soul been truly ignited? Has your faith caught fire?

Through no fewer than three sweeping movements of the past 250 years, God has sought to raise and to rouse his people with a deeper passion. Although each of these epochal movements in the church is unique, they all have one thing in common: *passion*.

## Three Sweeping Movements and Moments

While the Reformation of 1517 brought sweeping ecclesial change, in the past few centuries there have also been several stirrings or movements within the church. In the Western Hemisphere these have included, but not been limited to, the following.

### *The Evangelical Movement*

During the transformative revivals of the First and Second Great Awakenings in America and beyond, God stirred a fresh *passion for the lost* in his people. Through great leaders and voices such as Wesley, Whitefield, Edwards, Finney, and others, great passion emerged for a heartfelt response to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### *The Pentecostal Movement*

From the earliest days of the twentieth century and the fires of Azusa Street, many Christ-followers became freshly and deeply aware of the work of the Holy Spirit. Great movements of prayer, healing, and evangelism evidenced this across the world. God stirred a *passion for the Spirit* and his presence.

Today we believe something else is occurring among the people of God that will also have a long-standing impact on the global church. *Time* ran a cover story on this phenomenon, identifying it as the “Latino Reformation.”<sup>29</sup>

### *The Latino Reformation*

While the Evangelical movement was about renewing the priority of the church, the Pentecostal movement underlined the power available to the church through the Spirit. The Latino Reformation in the United States is about *a people*, a people of God who are emerging with a unique and focused set of passions and values. Some in the movement like to refer to themselves as the *Evangélicos*. We believe that God is raising up the Latino Reformation, in part, to stir up a *passion for unity and justice* in the church, and not a minute too soon.

In the Latino Evangelical movement in the United States, the *Evangélicos* note they have found a happier experience at their new churches for a few reasons, including the opportunity (1) to engage their faith with personal expressions, events, and festivities that reconnect them to their cultural traditions; (2) to hear messages that inspire hope amid life's hardships; (3) to find pathways as immigrants to serve, grow, and lead in a new land; and (4) to experience a more soulful faith through celebration.<sup>30</sup>

According to Jonathan Calvillo, a researcher at UC–Irvine studying California-based Latino Evangelical congregations,

There is a lot more flexibility and freedom (than in Catholicism) in terms of starting new churches and leadership roles. You can go from leading a Bible study to being a pastor in less than a year, which creates new pathways for gaining respect and status previously not available to them.<sup>31</sup>

These three movements and moments in the church of the past two hundred and fifty years are signs of God stirring the passion of his people yet again. One is Evangelicalism. Another is Pentecostalism. But today, yet another dynamic has been added to this mix: it is the Latinization or, if you will, the *sal-safication* of the church. The explosive growth and emergence of Latino or Hispanic believers is bringing a fresh passion to the face and flavor of the global church.

### *A Defining Moment*

Sergio de la Mora recalls another transformational moment in his life, one that forever changed his approach to ministry. It occurred when “God distinctly told me to stop being the pastor I *wanted* to be and start becoming the pastor the community *needed* me to be.” It “changed the course of our church forever.”<sup>32</sup>

Becoming the “pastor the community needed” involved changes for de la

Mora, including becoming a multiethnic church, adding a Spanish service, remodeling their church facility to fit the community, moving from a single-site to a multisite campus “crossing state lines and international borders,” creating a system to make disciples, and breaking with expendable traditions in order to reach a new generation.<sup>33</sup>

### What Too Many Churches Are Missing

There is great cause for concern among churches today. In his book *The American Church in Crisis*, David T. Olson says that despite some optimistic church trends in certain polls, “On any given Sunday, the vast majority of Americans are absent from church. . . . If trends continue, by 2050 the percentage of Americans attending church will be half [of what it was in] 1990.”<sup>34</sup> Olson continues,

In the monoethnic world, Christians, pastors, and churches only had to understand their own culture. Ministering in a homogenous culture is easier, but monoethnic Christianity can gradually become culture-bound. . . .

In the multiethnic world, pastors, churches, and Christians need to operate under the rules of the early church’s mission to the Gentiles. . . .

As the power center of [global] Christianity moves south and east, the multiethnic church is becoming the normal and natural picture of the new face of Christianity.<sup>35</sup>

### Passio Dei

Sometimes it helps us to just stop and pull the lens out a bit, to consider a sweeping overview of what God has been doing in and through the church. In a sense, the first three centuries after the day of Pentecost and the birth of the

church was a moment of truth. Much of the challenge of the church's becoming established was in the area of doctrinal purity, or *orthodoxy*.

By the sixteenth century, the church was so "established" it had become controlled and, in some senses, corrupt. Such a system of corporateness, of a works-based religion, had emerged within the church that nothing short of reform would do. That began in the form of a man named Martin Luther. His confrontations were exacting and impactful. Belief as a matter of the heart had to not only be redefined but also recaptured, along with the good work of making the Word of God accessible to the masses. Also, while the overblown role of the priest was reduced, the priesthood of the believer was underlined and re-formed. This was a moment of faith for the church and the reestablishment of right practices, or *orthopraxy*.

Today we find ourselves at another important moment, a soul moment. Through the phenomenon of the Latino Reformation, God is lighting a fresh fire in the souls of his passionate worshipers and followers. This is a soul moment for the church and the resurrection of *right passions*. There are no less than seven ways the Latino Reformation is changing the world. We will look at each of them in the next chapter.

We know that God is devoted to purifying and preparing the Bride of Christ for Christ himself. This includes *right beliefs*, *right practices*, and also *right passions*. God is doing today something beautiful and not to be missed. He is restoring a deep passion to his people. He is cultivating a more vibrant faith and a more soulful Christianity for those who are willing.

Right passions for God. Theologians would call it *orthopathy*. But there is another word we like that may make it a bit plainer.

The word?

*Salsafication*.

The salsafication of the church.



## FEED THE FIRE

### Questions to Ignite Growth and Change

1. *What is it about fire that people find so compelling?*
2. *What does faith look like when it “catches fire”?*
3. *What kinds of things help to ignite our faith?*
4. *Which aspects of Sergio de la Mora's story did you find most interesting?*
5. *Does this season in time seem transformational? In what ways?*
6. *What could you, your family, and your church do to make the most of this moment?*
7. *What aspects of the growth of the Latino church catch your attention?*

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