

# **THE EMERGING LATINO PRESENCE IN THE SOUTHEAST OF U.S.A.**

by  
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I want to express my background before to say anything about Latinos. The main reason to do it is because I am convinced that my personal, family and social experiences influence on my thoughts. First, I am a Latino that was born in Latin America and I emigrated to U.S.A. as an adult. Second, I was raised in a traditional Latino family that was Roman Catholic for 12 years. My parents emigrated to Lima from two small villages in Perú to find a job. Third, I have been a very active member, leader and pastor in the Baptist churches for 29 years. I have worked with kids, youth, singles and adults. And have served in six churches in Peru, Argentina and U.S.A. And fourth, I did my theological studies in Baptist, Ecumenical, Roman Catholic and Methodist seminaries with emphasis on Social Ethics and Bible Studies.

## **I. THE LATINOS IN THE SOUTHEAST**

- A. They are mostly Latinos of first generation. Nevertheless, these types of Latinos are connected with Latinos of second generation that emigrate from traditional Latino cities like New York, Los Angeles or Miami. All of them have contributed to the North Carolina economy 9 billions 200 hundred thousand in 2004. The first generation group face some major social problems such us language barrier, cultural shock, family conflicts in the intent to adjust themselves to the country.
- B. They are mostly Undocumented immigrants. But we have a large number of them with documented residents. They are mostly singles (never

married, divorced and separated) and with their partners in Latin American. They have an average of age of 31 years and are working in different areas of the labor such us landscaping, restaurants, construction, cleaning business, painting, offices and others. We have a less percentage of the total population which is working like any other professional in the area. The number of middle class Latinos is increasing yearly.

- C. They are not being reached by the established churches well enough. We have an average of 120 hundred thousand of Latinos in Charlotte and surround areas. And we have about of 90 Latino missions, fellowships, churches, etc. If we put all attending together we would have around of 10,000 people. Latinos express a higher degree of trust in churches than other social institutions and consider to religion as a very important part of their life.
- D. They are coming from Latin America searching for a better life. This largest immigration of undocumented Latinos to U.S.A. begun on the 90s and it's a consequence of the policy of the globalization of the economy. During the decade of the 90, after the implementation of NAFTA, the number of the undocumented immigrants grew up more than 100%. Therefore, the currently illegal immigration to the U.S.A. must be understood as a reality or problem with multi-dimensions (legal, economy, political). The current illegal immigration in U.S.A. (and other countries in Europe) is not a phenomenon of one direction only (South-North), but

two direction (North-South). This have to be understood as dialectic, structural and complex situation.

## II. A SOUTHEAST OF U.S.A. THAT HAVE CHANGED

- A. The Southeast is a mission field right now. We have learned that the mission's fields are Africa, Latin America, Asia, Australia, etc. But, now we have millions of un-reached people living surround of our churches. This mean we have to re-think the message, context, church, mission and un-church people.
- B. The Southeast is a social context suffering a process of transformation. We have several ethnic groups living here and they are not planning to leave. This part of U.S.A. as a traditional region with a majority population of Anglos and a minority population of African American, its going to become multiethnic. We are moving to be multicultural society like New York, Chicago or Boston. But, this growth is been to fast and now we are currently facing problems of inter-relations among these groups. Examples of this is problem are the daily conflict between Latinos and African Americans.
- C. The Southeast is going to be more liberal. Most of the Latinos immigrants are nominal Roman Catholics and tend to prefer a government with social concern and policies. This is particularly true on issues such health, public education, work, etc. A pluralistic region is raising and we are seeing the first stage. There is a mix of rural thoughts and approach to the life and religion with an urban thoughts and perspectives about the life and faiths.

### III. NEW CHALLENGES TO THE ESTABLISHED CHURCHES

A. The Churches might makes a difference acting with solidarity during this kairos of the Southeast. This is true of any religious o secular non-profit organization. The main work to be done from the non-Latinos to the Latino community is empower them. New immigrants want to meet “good Samaritans” and new friends to work with.

B. The Churches must complete or improve their mission work done. Mainline churches are mostly answering to the social needs of the immigrants through some program. There is a sense of social ministry. Nevertheless, they are doing very few work or effort to work with them to build Spanish fellowship or missions. Evangelical churches are mostly answering to the spiritual need of the immigrants. There is a sense of save the “souls”. Nevertheless, they are not answering to the social needs. We have to dialogue and improve both approaches.

C. The Latino churches must work with inter-denominational, ecumenical and coalition understandings. These churches must relate to the others protestant and evangelical churches with pro-active actions. But, also with others religious and non-religious organizations, private and public entities that serve to Latinos.