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**A Pentecostal Theology of Social Concern in Central
America**

PhD, Douglas Peter Petersen

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Abstract

Pentecostalism in Latin America has become the focus of scholarly investigation at least in part because of interest in its potential for playing a significant social role in the region. While studies have generally related the Pentecostal movement to social crisis, the dislocation of the masses brought on by economic deprivation, the break-up of traditional society and the consequent loss of traditional values, Pentecostals display assertiveness and resistance to the status quo in their struggle for a better life.

An assessment of the largest Pentecostal group in Central America, las Asambleas de Dios, demonstrates that its growth has occurred in areas of severe social deterioration and its essential character derives from the aspiration for change. Moreover, important Pentecostal emphases, including the appeal to the supernatural and the group's eschatological expectation, reflect the adherents' search for health and well being. An analysis of the practical consequences of this theological orientation, moreover, shows that in fact Pentecostals have expressed considerable social concern. As a case study the development of the Latin America Child Care programme demonstrates the extent to which this orientation has been applied institutionally.

This thesis proposes a Pentecostal hermeneutic as a theological foundation and means of development of the movement's social tendencies. Making use of the hermeneutical circle, the author relates the Old and New Testament teachings of Spirit baptism and spiritual empowering to demonstrate both their inherent compatibility and their application in the emergence of Pentecostal social programmes in Central America.