

resources into their online services. El País too is betting on the net. One wonders how much longer books on Latin American media will not have the Internet as the starting-point for their analysis.

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Paul Freston (ed.), *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. xxx + 250, £24.95, pb.

With the political transformations in Latin America during the 1980s and 1990s, researchers turned their attention to the role of community-based organisations, new social movements, and non-governmental organisations in challenging authoritative politics and fostering democratic institutions. The relationship between politics and religion in the popular and scholarly imagination has been of two polar images cleaved along the liberal-conservative line. On the one hand, progressive Catholic clergy organised the poor and disenfranchised into community action and collective welfare through the introduction of base ecclesiastical communities that encouraged participation in politics. On the other hand, socially conservative Evangelical and Pentecostal churches threatened to alter community relationships through a practice of disengagement with national and local politics while focusing on individual spiritual well-being. Social scientists engaging in the study of religious pluralism in Latin America have tended to be less than sympathetic to Evangelical Protestantism's growth and presence, seeing in these churches a link to US imperialism, inauthentic cultural expression, and, perhaps offering the most consternation in light of the coalescing of democracy in the region, their avowedly apolitical stance while simultaneously espousing socially conservative values at the community level (such as prohibitions on drinking, dancing, and sexual expression).

This new collection of essays, edited by Paul Freston, complicates the association between Evangelical Christianity and conservative politics derived from too-easy comparisons with the US context of religion and politics. The case studies provided (Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Peru and Brazil) help correct this facile association by demonstrating that the neo-liberal economic and political paths these countries have travelled on through the past 20 years or so have affected the ways in which local Protestant churches engage with politics both at the electoral and community level. Each essay provides a brief historical overview of the roots of Protestantism in the country studied, which demonstrates the long history of involvement of both Historical and Evangelical Protestantism in politics. Indeed, these churches' early presence in many Latin American countries owes much to an invitation by Liberal governments wishing to decrease the influence of the Catholic clergy and hierarchy in the region.

It is in the observation of the contemporary political scene of each country, however, that the edited collection provides crucial insight into the ways in which political participation by Evangelical groups has changed over time. The essays combine a detailed analysis of Evangelical electoral politics with ethnographic study of local community action to provide a window into civic participation beyond the voting booth. The authors caution against a naïve understanding of Evangelicals as a

voting block, as they demonstrate through electoral analysis that no monolithic pattern of voting can be asserted to exist. Indeed, even patently Evangelical or Pentecostal parties, when they have been formed, fail to garner the majority of Evangelical votes, as is made expressly clear in both Zub's contribution on Nicaragua and Samson's overview of Guatemala. Several of the essays (Samson's, Rodríguez's on Peru, and Fonseca's on Brazil) explore the tension between electoral politics and the support or critique of authoritarian and/or corrupt regimes. Rodríguez's article explores initial Evangelical support for Fujimori, including the self-coup, while also demonstrating that the response from various Evangelical church leaders was far from unified. Fonseca offers a most enlightening examination of Evangelical politicians in Brazil, demonstrating how leaders of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, a Brazilian phenomenon, have worked out a broad strategy of political involvement through placing candidates in multiple parties with various ideologies. To form their own Evangelical party would significantly weaken the Church's political clout, both at the state and national level. The recent shift of the Church's leading pastors towards embracing social welfare concerns helped align the Church with Lula's Workers' Party, proving that leftist politics and Evangelical Christianity are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, it is a relationship that has become more institutionalised in Brazil as the Catholic Church's influence on leftist political participation has waned.

Several authors balance the focus on electoral politics with ethnographic evidence of local-level participation of Evangelical Christians in community-based organisations. One of the broad themes across the collected essays is that Evangelicals are changing the face of politics in the region not necessarily through party politics but by their very participation in church and community activities. In his introduction, Freston points to Tocqueville's observation that the United States' democratic character is due to the way that Protestant churches encourage participation in internal church affairs and structure religious services in more egalitarian ways. This point is elaborated on by several of the authors (Palacio on Mexico, Rodríguez and Samson) who provide interview and observational data about the civic participation of Evangelicals, complicating the view of Evangelical's assertion of non-involvement in 'things of this world' in favour of only spiritual or 'otherworldly' activities. Although these sections of the chapters showed the most promise in helping reorient the discussion on Latin American religious politics, they were also the most underdeveloped.

The collection closes with an excellent essay by Daniel Levine, who draws on his years of experience working on issues of religion and politics in Latin America to provide a possible direction for future studies. Levine's comments help place the preceding essays in perspective, demonstrating their strengths while also urging researchers to take the next steps. In particular, he urges complementing an analysis of electoral politics, which is the collection's major strength, with an investigation of the ways in which lived theological practice and community level civic participation may co-constitute one another, drawing Latin American Evangelicals more and more into civil society and redefining certain theological tenets in the process. This edited collection is an excellent stepping-stone into the next phase of the research agenda for those interested in the intersection of religion and political life in Latin America.