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COMMENTARY

The Future of Christianity in Latin America*

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Abstract. The Christianity of the future in Latin America will remain dominant but now plural and competitive. The decline of Catholic monopoly and the surge of Protestant and Pentecostal churches, visible since the 1980s but with deeper roots, are explained in the context of social, cultural and political changes that have drawn churches into public space in new ways. The impact of democracy, violence, and a newly open civil society on churches and religious life is visible in new ideas about rights and associational life and in the withdrawal of the institutional churches from political confrontation, diversification of political positions and multiplication of voices in all churches.

Keywords: Protestantism, Pentecostals, Neo Pentecostals, civil society, politics, violence, democracy, rights

Introduction

Writing about the future of Christianity in Latin America reminds me of a comment by Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez who some time ago wrote:

At present we are in the position of those trying to decide whom a newborn child resembles. Some will say the father, others the mother. Some will even find that the

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Fig. 1. Evangelical street preacher in the Guatemalan market town of Solalá, 1968.

child has this grandfather's nose or that aunt's eyes, whereas still others will be of the opinion that the child does not remind them of any family features known to them. Better to photograph the child and decide later on whom it resembles.[1]

A photograph I took almost 40 years ago may be a good place to start. The photograph records my first encounter with an evangelical street preacher in Latin America, which came in 1968, in the Guatemalan market town of Solalá (see Figure 1). The market was in full swing, and in the midst of people buying, selling and bargaining, a Protestant preacher was working the crowd. The majority of Guatemalans are Indians, the audience was entirely comprised of Indian men and women, and the speaker, I remember, was preaching the Gospel in Kakchiquel, the language of the region. Holding a Bible in his hands, he illustrated his sermon by pointing to a hand-painted canvas that depicted heaven, hell, the judgment of the nations, the temptations of this world, and the ways of the righteous and of the sinner. I found the scene stirring enough to save the slide for more than three decades, but at the time it seemed little more than an interesting sideshow. The religious experience was new, as was the leadership: ordinary, often non-white, and barely lettered men using a popular language, who recall the circuit-riding

[1] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People* (Maryknoll NY, 1984), p. 92.

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preachers of nineteenth-century North America. The signs were there, but they slipped by most observers. None of it fitted into the accepted scheme of things at the time.

From the vantage point of 2008, it is easy to see this preacher as a precursor of the wave of Protestant, especially Pentecostal Protestant religion that swept Guatemala and all of Central America in subsequent years.[2] He and others like him have since then gone on to transform the religious landscape and the public presence of religion throughout Latin America. The five-hundred-year monopoly of Catholicism has been replaced by religious pluralism. Particularly in the big cities (and Latin America is a heavily urban continent), the religious scene is a blooming confusion of churches, chapels, street preachers, and television and radio evangelists competing for attention and vying for members and a share of public goods and public space.

Catholicism Past and Present

Latin American Catholicism entered the twentieth century monopolising the religious field, but to borrow the language of economics, the church was a lazy monopolist, its power and position guaranteed by law, custom and elite links. Lazy monopolists have little incentive to keep day to day operations vital, and as a result the church was left vulnerable to new challenges and competitors – including innovative religious expression – that began to appear with growing force as the twentieth century passed its midpoint.

The world of Catholic monopoly seems a distant memory today. The public face of religion and the ways in which religion is present in the public sphere have been utterly transformed. The past was marked in many countries by multiple images and symbols of religious-civic fusion such as *Te Deums* with the presence of political and ecclesiastical 'authorities' at the highest level, or the repeated joint presence of politicians, clergy and military officers at the inauguration of public works, the opening of stores or factories, and a wide range of events. This omnipresent triad offered a public affirmation of the identification of 'the church' (only one was recognised) with political and economic power and social hierarchy. The public face of religion now is quite another matter: street preachers abound, men (mostly men) working public spaces with a Bible, a loudspeaker and something to stand on. New churches proliferate, and new voices jostle for space and attention. Where there was monopoly now there is pluralism, where a limited number of spaces were once officially reserved for religious practice (with a

[2] On these changes see in particular, Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala: Living in the New Jerusalem* (Austin, 1998); and David Stoll, *Between Two Armies: In the Ixil Towns of Guatemala* (New York, 1993).

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limited number of authorised practitioners), now there is a rich profusion of churches, chapels and mass media programming, not to mention campaigns and crusades that carry the message to hitherto 'profane' spaces like streets and squares to beaches, sports stadiums, jails, bars and nightclubs.

This new landscape challenges the traditional role of the Catholic Church as the church – officially acknowledged wielder of moral and social authority within the boundaries of a defined national territory. In Casanova's terms, the church is no longer *church* – a religious institution with an official or semiofficial monopoly in a given territory – but rather one actor among many in an open civil society.[3] But making this change work is no easy task, and learning to live in a world that no longer can be defined by one church in mutual alliance with one state can be unsettling. Institutions long accustomed to public support may find competition and cultural openness provides less opportunities for growth than signs of decay, cultural peril and disintegration.

One way to appreciate the extent of change is to consider how the state of religion, society and politics looked to the region's Catholic bishops when they met in 2007 at Aparecida, Brazil, for their Fifth General Conference.[4] This was the latest in a line of conferences of the region's Catholic bishops that have set an agenda for Latin American Catholicism, and provided a new moral vocabulary with which activists and believers can understand the world.[5] Earlier conferences at Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979) gave many activists and social movements a sense of legitimacy and put important concepts into the shared understandings of the region. From Medellín came the idea that sin can refer to more than individual moral failings – whole social structures can be sinful if they are built on and continue injustice – and the concept of 'institutionalised violence', that unjust societies can condemn many to needless early death through poverty and disease, and that this is sinful. Puebla made famous the commitment to a 'preferential option for the poor', meaning that given a choice, church resources and people should side with the poor and accompany them in their struggles.[6] Aparecida can also be understood as an effort by Pope Benedict XVI to continue the policies of his

[3] Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago, 1994) p. 217.

[4] I discuss Aparecida in detail in Daniel H Levine, 'The Future as Seen from Aparecida' in R. Pelton (ed.), *Aparecida: Quo Vadis* (Scranton, 2008).

[5] For prominent examples of this point of view see Gustavo Gutiérrez, 'La Opcion Preferencial por el pobre en Aparecida' *Paginas*, Lima, no. 206 (August 2007), pp. 6–25; and Cecilia Tovar, 'Retomando el Camino de Medellin: La V Conferencia General del Episcopado en Aparecida'. *Paginas*, Lima, no. 206 (August 2007). pp. 42–51.

[6] Although conservatives have regularly insisted that this 'preferential option' is not 'socially exclusive' and embraces attention to the poor in spirit, the documents have generally been taken as intended to focus attention on the materially poor, the oppressed, and the excluded.

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predecessor John Paul II, while placing his own mark on them and becoming acquainted with and open to what is, after all, the major Catholic region of the world.

In the run up to Aparecida, the world that Catholic leaders saw around them was like night and day compared to the one in which most had been born and raised. The unquestioned Catholic monopoly was gone, replaced by a plurality of churches and a new presence of religious competition (for members, space, public sanction and goods) throughout the region. Statistical reports (including national census data and a series of surveys and studies) confirmed what they could see every day. The numbers of men and women identifying themselves as 'Catholic' was in steady decline, while those declaring affiliation to Protestant (especially Pentecostal and neo Pentecostal churches) had grown, along with a smaller, but still notable segment that affirmed no connection to any church or religion. Surveys also regularly report a substantial sector that declares itself *católico en mi manera*, (or as Mallimaci and Villa put it, *cuenta propista*, on one's own) picking and choosing the kinds of issues on which they adhere, or even listen to 'official teachings'.[7]

The decay of monopoly and the growth of pluralism in religious expression and organisation have been accompanied by processes that have moved religious groups, issues and leaders off centre stage of public debate, contestation, coalition formation and political discussion. This is an inevitable consequence of transformations that have accompanied the democratisation of civil society and politics of the last two decades. There are many more options and vehicles for expression now than in the past; church leaders can no longer monopolise the public expression of religious comment, nor can they count on being king makers or critical veto players. The effort is bound to run into multiple figures working the territory. There is simply a lot of competition out there. The convergence of these multiple pluralisms means that simple references to church and state, much less exclusive attention to the institutional Catholic Church (or to the statements of its official leaders and spokespersons) no longer suffice as a guide to understanding religion, or its place in society and politics in Latin America today.

A close look at the organisations and vehicles of mobilisation that the church presumably 'controls' and could use to further its agenda, reveals that the bishops' capacity to manage groups and members is much weaker than they would like or that they often imagine. Many of the 'resources' that prelates commonly list or rely upon turn out, on closer inspection, to be hollow shells, groups that exist more on paper than in reality. Even where

[7] Fortunato Mallimaci and Martha Villa, *Las Comunidades Eclesiales de base y el mundo de los pobres en la Argentina. Conflictos y tensiones por el control del poder en el catolicismo* (Buenos Aires, 2007).

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groups are in existence, members prove much less malleable than the evidence of formal ties and documents might indicate. Catholic bishops have long relied on models of organisation that operate with close clerical supervision and control. But the effort to ensure loyalty by insisting on separate groups with built in clerical supervision runs into the problem of control in a world where citizens have too many skills, connections and possibilities to engage to be treated as sheep by a shepherd, or to be controlled or moved *en bloc* in traditional ways. In this world, loyalty is more likely to be secured through provision of spaces and engagement, not by demarcation of boundaries.[8]

If the last half century has witnessed dynamic and far reaching transformations in what religion means in Latin America, these changes are all the more startling coming from Latin America itself, a part of the globe where for so long the monopoly of the Catholic Church seemed secure, if never wholly unchallenged. Change arising from within religion (any religion) was in any event a surprise to most social scientists, who remained firmly in the grip of theories of secularisation (and related ideas about of modernisation) according to which the progressive spread of science, education, industrialisation and urban life would cut the ground out from under religion. In this view, religion would simply fade away, disengaging from state institutions, fading from public life and becoming a matter of scattered, and declining, personal devotions or ritualised markers of the passage of life stages.

Such theories provided the underpinning for enduring academic fashions that pushed researchers to topics other than religion in search of a meaningful research pay off and an effective career boost. The power of academic fashion and intellectual blinkers cannot be denied, but there are also *facts* that break through our concepts, inconvenient facts that force themselves on us and make us reconsider the foundations of our approaches. What are the facts that have broken through in Latin America to remind us of the power of religion, not just to sustain itself but also to change itself as part of a changing world? A brief list, in no particular order, makes the point.

Expectations of inevitable secularisation have been upstaged by the prime fact of an explosion of multiple churches and religious spaces.[9] It is not that

[8] Catalina Romero, 'Religion and Public Spaces. Catholicism and Civil Society in Peru', in Frances Hagopian (ed.), *Contemporary Catholicism, Religious Pluralism, and Democracy in Latin America* (Notre Dame IN, 2009) argues that the public space emerging within the church is a space of liberty where believers encounter others (both believers and non believers) in voluntary associations, personal development courses, as well as in the arts, music expressive mobilizations the internet and mass media.

[9] Fortunato Mallimaci, 'Catolicismo y política en el gobierno de Kirchner', *América Latina Hoy Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, vol. 41 (December 2005), p. 60, 'In today's Argentina, people do not believe – be it in politics or be it in religion – more or less than in other periods, but in a different way'.

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Latin America is 'becoming Protestant', to cite the title of David Stoll's important early book; it is, rather, becoming pluralist for the first time in its 500 year history.[10] Although the political orientations and social connections of the churches range across the ideological spectrum and up and down the social hierarchy, a fact that presses itself on our attention is that with rare exceptions all the churches now support some form of political democracy and open civil society. This is a cultural shift of prime significance, with roots in debates within the churches as well as in the end of the global Cold War which loosened once immutable religio-political alliances. The relation of churches to civil society (both the idea and the reality of independent groups) is a third fact. Catholic and later Protestant churches sponsored and protected a range of social movements: land leagues, housing coalitions, neighbourhood groups, or human rights organisations, to name a few. This entailed serving as a conduit for resources and information, training leaders, bringing church inspired activists together with grass roots groups and providing legal defence if needed. With the restoration of democracy and the declining status of many of these movements, churches continue to shape civil society through less mobilisational civic networks along with institutions such as schools, new media outlets, cooperatives and health centres.

Much as one dislikes stratigraphic metaphors, it is worth noting that these new facts and the eye catching changes in religion's public faces are under girded by 'deeper' long term social, cultural and political transformations that provide the raw materials and the dynamic of the process. These fifty years have seen *significant migration*, mostly rural to urban but also intra rural, accelerated in cases like Peru or Central America by extremes of civil war and violence, but present everywhere. Cities have grown and bigger cities have everywhere grown faster than smaller cities. I have already pointed to the important political fact of democratisation which has brought with it an end to civil wars and widespread political violence. Two related facts are expanded literacy and access to mass media along with drastically reduced barriers to organisation and public participation. Together with the growth of cities, these facts set the scene for competition among churches and between churches and other groups, and provide both means and targets for those seeking to gain or hold members, acquire resources and get a public hearing. The preceding lays out what are, in my view, the bare bones that define the situation of religion in Latin America today. These are the developments that together broke through the intellectual blinders of ideas about secularisation, and forced scholars and observers to come to grips with the

[10] David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?* (Berkeley, 1990); Daniel H. Levine, 'Pluralism as Challenge and Opportunity' in Frances Hagopian (ed.), *Contemporary Catholicism, Religious Pluralism, and Democracy in Latin America* (Notre Dame IN, 2009).

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new experiences of religious practice, meaning and community being created on the ground in Latin America and with the ways in which these interacted with political and social transformations to create a very different world from the unquestioned monopolies of the past.

The most general characteristic of Latin American Catholicism over the long span of its history is a pattern of occasional practice, heavy devotion to saints and shrines, and syncretism manifest in everything from the incorporation of pre conquest calendars or deities into Catholic devotions, the persistence of traditional beliefs about healing, and sporadic bouts of reform. Such reform movements typically strove to control antinomian behaviour (especially alcoholism) associated with the ritual cycle of fiestas and saints' days, to ensure a more Christocentric worship in place of 'excessive' devotion to saints, and to purify 'popular' religion and syncretic practices.[11] Over the centuries such campaigns had at best partial and short-lived success. The fact that Catholic practice remained dependent on the availability of ordained clergy, and that ordained clergy were scarce in most countries and very unevenly distributed in the best of cases, reinforced the pattern of occasional practice. Following the fall of China in 1949, waves of Catholic clergy came to the region, spurring a succession of reform movements that opened spaces for lay participation and social and political mobilisation with church support.[12] Two noteworthy efforts to break the mould of sporadic and clerically dependent practice are the base ecclesial communities, which go by different names, but are commonly referred to as the *comunidades eclesiales de base* (CEBS), and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR).[13]

Beginning in the 1970s, small group-based practices based on lay leadership began to appear throughout the region. In theory, such communities recreate aspects of the primitive church ('wherever two or three are gathered in my name'). They share a common pattern of reading the Bible, reflecting

[11] Devotion to saints and commemoration of apparitions is of course widespread in Catholicism and in the case of Latin America dates back as far as the Virgin of Guadalupe, who appeared miraculously to Juan Diego on a hill outside of what is now Mexico City on 12 December 1531, not long after the conquest of Mexico by Cortez. Long venerated as the patron saint of Mexico, this brown-skinned virgin is a perfect incarnation of the absorption of the faith into the life and culture of subordinate peasant masses.

[12] Bruce J. Calder, 'Interwoven Histories: The Catholic Church and the Maya, 1940 to the Present' in Edward L. Cleary and Timothy J. Steigenga, (eds.), *Resurgent Voices. Indigenous Peoples, Political Mobilization, and Religious Change in Latin America* (New Brunswick NJ, 2004), pp. 93–124.

[13] It is important to be clear on the meaning of the title. To call these communities ecclesial (as was the case in Latin America) is to evoke the original sense of 'church' in Greek, which is *ekklesia*, or to convoke or call together. It is therefore a profound misunderstanding to refer to such groups as ecclesiastical (evoking images of hierarchical institutions). Although to be sure they arose within the Catholic Church, their basic self understanding is community oriented, not juridical. They were never conceived as mini parishes.

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on its meaning, and organising some form of community action out of the solidarities and shared understandings derived from those readings. An enormous literature examines the theory and reality of CEBs and their links to liberation theology and this is not the place for a detailed discussion,[14] though it suffices here to make a few points. The very concept of the CEB was so vague (community groups centred on the Bible) that there was a tendency to count almost any small group as part of the category, resulting in unreliable accounts of their numbers. Further, because the groups were and remained religious at root, they often failed to meet the expectations of secular analysts or political figures who saw them above all as potential allies. Such expectations rested on the idea that something like a congregational model of religion was emerging here with small groups reading and discussing the Bible, and in the process learning valuable civic and social skills (social capital). The newly emerging citizen was nurtured here, and in religiously related social movements, and could then put the new skills and activist dispositions to work in broader areas.[15]

The passage of time, and the accumulation of empirical research, has cast doubt on the validity of these expectations. Many of the movements created in recent years failed and many activists found their expectations blocked, both within the church and, ironically, by the restoration of democracy that led activists to turn to more direct political action and church leaders to retreat from open support.[16] The explosive growth of Pentecostal and Neo Pentecostal churches, often led by a new generation of religious entrepreneurs running notoriously tight and hierarchical ships, has also undermined the belief that the growth of Protestantism would necessarily mean the spread of congregational forms of religious practice, and its associated impact on the democratisation of culture and religion, not to mention

[14] William. E. Hewitt, *Base Christian Communities and Social Change in Brazil* (Lincoln, 1991); and Daniel H. Levine, *Popular Voices in Latin American Catholicism* (Princeton, 1992).

[15] The trends applied both to Catholics and later to the newly visible Protestant sector. The perspective is deeply Tocquevillian and inspired David Martin to find echoes of the cultural transformations of the Reformation. See his *Tongues of Fire: Protestant Expansion in Latin America* (Oxford, 1990). On the parallel to Tocqueville, see Rowan Ireland, 'Popular Religions and the Building of Democracy in Latin America: Saving the Tocquevillian Parallel', *Journal of Inter American Studies and World Affairs*, vol. 41, no. 4 (1999), pp. 111–36.

[16] As Frederick Harris reminds us, participatory ideals can find it hard to survive within theocratic structures. See his *Something Within: Religion in African American Political Activism* (New York, 1999), p. 183. On gender and barriers to mobilisation, also Carol Ann Drogus and Hannah Stewart-Gambino, *Activist Faith: Grassroots Women in Democratic Brazil and Chile* (University Park, PA 2005). On the problems of sustaining mobilisation, see Daniel H. Levine and Catalina Romero, 'Movimientos Urbanos y Desempoderamiento en Perú y Venezuela', *América Latina Hoy*, no. 36 (April 2004), pp. 47–77. For a very different point of view on the crisis of liberationist movement see Frank Goetz Ottman, *Lost for Words. Brazilian Liberationism in the 1990s* (Pittsburg, 2002).

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politics.[17] Founder-leaders of new churches – such as Brazil's Edir Macedo of the Universal Church of the Reign of God (Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus, or IURD) – works with and exemplifies conventional currents of authoritarian leadership in the culture, reinforcing them with new and highly effective tools including creative use of the mass media. The powerful dramaturgy of much Neo Pentecostal practice, and the way in which it reinforces the power of priests and cuts down on spaces for congregational practice and experience, reinforce this view. In this vein, Kramer quotes an IURD bishop describing the priest as 'super hero of the people', 'an example of Christian prosperity and dominion [who] wields the universal power of Christian prayer on behalf of the community'.[18]

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) arose from initiatives in the United States in the late 1960s that were an attempt by Catholics to combine Pentecostal-like practices of baptism in the Holy Spirit with core Catholic devotions to the Virgin Mary and the saints. The movement spread rapidly through college campuses, received cautious approval from the US Catholic Bishops (who insisted on supervision by priests and bishops) and began an outreach to Latin America in the 1970s. As the Vatican and local episcopal conferences began to be alarmed by the spread of Pentecostal Protestantism ('the invasion of the sects') initial caution among the hierarchy turned to support and sponsorship that was more open, if still tempered with concerns about the need to maintain hierarchical control and clerical supervision. The CCR has grown very rapidly, displaying an astute use of mass media that rivals its Pentecostal competitors. The net result has to been to bring common Pentecostal practices like speaking in tongues or *glossolalia*, exorcisms and belief in divine healing into a prominent place in Catholic experience. All emphasise the experience of direct contact with the Holy Spirit.[19]

[17] Jean Pierre Bastian, *La Mutación Religiosa de América Latina. Para una sociología de cambio social en la modernidad periférica* (Mexico City, 1997) goes further and argues that, far from laying the bases of a new Reformation with democratising cultural and political elements, the expansion of Pentecostal Christianity in Latin America has reinforced existing cultural and political strains of authoritarianism.

[18] In 'Spectacle and the Staging of Power in Brazilian Neo-Pentecostalism', *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 32, no. 1 (January 2005), pp. 95–120. Eric Kramer describes these leaders and the dramatic staging and spectacle that surrounds them, in terms that recall recalls Paul Gifford's account of prophetic and charismatic leaders in Ghana. See Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy* (Bloomington IN, 2004).

[19] In Chesnut's terms, the CCR is *virgophilic*, while Protestant Pentecostas are generally *virgophobic* and *pneumacentric*. See R. Andrew Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits Latin America's New Religious Economy* (New York, 2003). Note that more than imitation is at issue here. Steigenga documents a broad pattern of 'Pentecostalisation' of religious belief and practice with elements like the direct experience of charismatic power, a judgmental image of God, pre millenarian beliefs, and speaking in tongues diffused throughout in the Christian community without regard to denominational boundaries. See Timothy Steigenga, *The*

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Alternatives to Catholicism

Religious alternatives to Catholicism have been present from the beginning in Latin America, but they were often suppressed, hidden or incorporated with syncretic Catholic practices. As pluralism and democratisation have lowered the barriers to the expression of religious alternatives, a number have acquired an important presence throughout the region. Apart from the growth of Protestantism (in particular Pentecostal Protestantism), religious alternatives with noteworthy visibility in the twentieth century (and which arouse intense concern in the Catholic hierarchy) include Afro Brazilian and Afro Caribbean devotions (*Macumba*, *Umbanda*, *Candomblé* and *Santeria*), and a loosely defined category of New Religious Movements that encompasses groups ranging from Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses or new revelations like the Israelites of the New Pact in Peru, to cults like the Children of God, or supposed revivals of indigenous religions which carry claims to political autonomy. Semi orthodox regional devotions such as the *Santa Muerte* in Mexico, the *Difunta Correa* in Argentina, pilgrimages to the shrine for Padre Cicero in Northeast Brazil, or to José Gregorio Hernandez in Venezuela, are a continuous presence in the history of Catholicism. They become of concern to the Catholic hierarchy when, as in the case of the Santa Muerte, they grow in numbers and challenge the church's authority, but in total they are not a significant threat.[20]

The central challenge to Catholicism, and the chief source of concern for its leaders, comes from the growth of Protestantism, the emergence, in recent decades, of a sector self-described as 'Catholic in my own way' (*católico a mi manera*) and of those declaring no religion at all.[21] In the last century, the Protestant community in Latin America has grown from a numerically insignificant collection of small churches mostly attached to immigrant

Politics of the Spirit: The Political Implications of Pentecostalized Religion in Costa Rica and Guatemala. (Lanham MD, 2001), pp. 44–8.

[20] Information on Santa Muerte or Difunta Correa is mostly available via the internet. (eg. http://www.speroforum.com/site/print.asp?idarticle=1283). On the Israelites of the New Universal Pact, see Manuel Marzal, *Los Caminos Religiosos de los inmigrantes de la Gran Lima el caso de El Agustino* (Lima Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 1988), pp. 342–72; on new indigenous movements, see contributions to Cleary and Steigenga, *Conversion of a Continent. Religious Change in Latin America*; on Padre Cicero, see, Ralph Della Cava, *Miracle at Joaseiro* (New York, 1970). There is also a small Jewish community scattered across the region (with significant, if shrinking numbers, only in Argentina) and small numbers of Muslims and Hindus, mostly attached to immigrant communities. There have been no significant millenarian movements in Latin America since the nineteenth century; the Canudos in Brazil or the Caste War in the Yucatán.

[21] Cristián Parker, '¿América ya no es católica? Pluralismo cultural y religioso creciente', *America Latina Hoy Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, vol. 41 (December 2005). pp. 33–56; Fortunato Mallimaci, 'Catolicismo y política en el gobierno de Kirchner', *América Latina Hoy Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, vol. 41 (December 2005), pp. 57–76.

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communities (English Anglicans Welsh Methodists, German or Swedish Lutherans, Scottish Presbyterians) to a notable presence everywhere claiming a tenth to a third of the population in major countries.[22] There have also been longstanding Protestant missionary efforts, mostly directed at rural – and primarily Indian – populations, either in the Amazon or Orinoco basins or in Mesoamerican or Andean mountain ranges.[23]

With growing force from mid century on, Protestant churches and missionary groups redirected their attention to populations in urban areas, which is, after all, where most of the people are. Some of these efforts began much earlier than is commonly realised. The Pentecostal movement, which began following the Asuza Street revival in Los Angeles in 1906, was brought to Latin America not long after, with Swedish missionaries of the Assemblies of God arriving in the city of Belém in northern Brazil in 1910.[24] Since that time, Pentecostal Christianity has experienced its own waves of change. In Brazil for example, each wave came with a distinctive style: the first wave (1910–1950), arriving with early Swedish missionaries of the Assemblies of God, stressed speaking in tongues; the second wave (1950–1970) emphasised gifts of divine healing; and the third wave, including the hugely influential Church of the Universal Reign of God (IURD) which has moved massively and with great success into the use of television, 'privileges the

[22] Statistics on church growth are controversial but there is general agreement on the overall pattern of Catholic decline from overwhelming domination to around 80% across Latin America as a whole. Pentecostal and Neo Pentecostal churches constitute the leading edge of Protestant growth above all in the region's megacities and poor barrios that surround them, and countries that have been through massive violence and civil war (R Andrew Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty* (New Brunswick NJ, 1997), and also his *Competitive Spirits;* Paul C. Freston, *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Latin America* (New Cork, 2006); Virigina Garrard Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala*; Darío López, *Los Evangélicos y los Derechos Humanos. La Experiencias del Concilio Nacional Evangélico del Perú 1980–1992* (Lima, 1998); David Smilde, *Reason to Believe. Cultural Agency in Latin American Evangelicalism* (Berkeley, 2007); and David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?* There is much variation among sources (World Values Survey, national censuses, World Christian Database), and little consensus on details such as growth numbers for specific groups or denominations, persistence or conversion vs. losses or slippage over time, or precisely how recruitment works. The very dynamism of the field undermines the validity of snap shot accounts. Whatever the trend lines, Edward Cleary urges caution in making future projections. There is too much inconsistency between sources, a lot of double counting, and misinterpretation of statistics. See Edward L Cleary, 'Shopping Around: Questions about Latin American Conversions', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 28, no. 2 (2004), pp. 50–4.

[23] Protestant churches and missionaries were invited by nineteenth century anticlerical governments, as part of their dual campaign against the local power of the Catholic Church and their desire to 'civilise' their own country by making it more appealing to Northern European (white and Protestant) immigrants. Garrard-Burnett *Protestantism in Guatemala* details how Guatemala was divided up into mission zones allocated to distinct Protestant groups.

[24] R. Andrew Chesnut, *Born Again.*

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concept of spiritual warfare (visibly enacted through exorcistic ritual) and prosperity theology'.[25]

Over the last several decades, Protestant churches in the region have developed local leaders and resources, cut ties of control with foreign missionaries, and in some cases established wholly new home grown churches.[26] Protestant expansion has also benefited from a by-product of global political change. The end of the global Cold War turned the evangelising energies of many North American churches to building organisations and winning souls in the former socialist bloc. Resources were directed away from Latin America, making it easier for local leaders and local foundations, already emergent, to consolidate their positions.[27] The pluralisation of religious offerings is part of the emergence of a public space that is more open, diverse and easy to access than ever before. It is now common in major cities to see old cinemas or markets converted into Pentecostal churches while at the same time the churches themselves construct massive, new purpose-built places of worship.

One notable case of a successful new church is the IURD, founded in Rio de Janeiro in 1977 by Edir Macedo. The Universal is generally viewed as Neo Pentecostal and syncretic, combining elements of local religious practice (such as *Umbanda*) with classic Pentecostal beliefs and practices, with heavy emphasis on health and healing, exorcism of demons, and a promise of prosperity through faith. In little more than 30 years, the IURD has experienced meteoric growth, controls major media resources, and has now begun to send missionaries to other countries.[28] The IURD and other Pentecostal churches in Brazil[29] have in common an astute use of the media, including

[25] Eric Kramer, 'Spectacle', p. 97. The dramatic staging characteristic of some Neo Pentecostal churches is a significant part of their public impact, which is magnified by astute use of the media and regular public rituals of exorcism (in Portuguese, *descarrego* means literally discharging or unlocking, that is, releasing a person from a spiritual affliction caused by possession). All of these elements greatly enhance the power of the pastor who is the medium for channeling, through the congregation, the divine power that makes release possible (Kramer, 2005).

[26] Darío López, *La Seducción del Poder*, documents a transition in leadership among the evangelical churches in Peru from foreign missionaries to Peruvian natives starting in the 1970s.

[27] Chesnut, *Born Again* and *Competitive Spirits*; Tomás Gutiérrez Sánchez, *Evangélicos, Democracia y Nueva Sociedad. Ensayos de historia política* (Lima, 2005).

[28] Virginia Garrard Burnett discusses IURD missionary outreach in the United States. The church is also active throughout Latin America, and in parts of Africa. Virginia Garrard-Burnett, 'Stop Suffering? The Igreja Universal del Reino de Deus in the United States' in Edward L. Cleary and Timothy J. Steigenga (eds.), *Conversion of a Continent. Religious Change in Latin America* (New Brunswick NJ, 2007), pp. 218–38.

[29] These include the International Church of the Four Square Gospel (*Igreja do Evangelho Quadrangular*), established in 1955 with links to the famous North American evangelist Aimée Semple McPherson, Brazil for Christ (*Brasil Para Cristo*, BPC) established in 1955, and God is Love (*Deus É Amor*) established in 1962.

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radio and particularly television, to promote crusades and evangelisation campaigns; incorporation of local music, intense use of exorcism (referred to in the IURD as *libertaςao* or liberation) as a central element in ritual practice; emphasis on divine cure. For its part, the IURD explicitly rejects the separation of the community of the pure, asceticism and limits in favour of achievement and integration into the rhythms of ordinary urban life.[30]

Why Protestantism, and in particular this specific form of Protestantism? There are many competing explanations.[31] Earlier changes in Catholicism (including innovations with Protestant features like the emphasis on small, bible focused participatory groups in the CEBs) in a sense opened the way to Protestantism, but Protestant growth is a much more massive and general phenomenon. The continuing appeal of divine healing and the possibility of a change in the way life is lived is immensely attractive to people with urgent physical and emotional needs, suffering from what Chesnut calls the pathogens of poverty, namely, alcoholism, violence (including domestic violence), gastrointestinal disease and status marginality.[32] There is the further appeal of literacy and new forms of community to populations literally on the move, above all recent migrants to the periphery of major cities all across the continent. New faiths and the community they bring offer a way of opting out of the extremes of violence associated with internal war (as in Central America or Peru), state repression, or simply with the precarious conditions of the life that poor people lead in urban slums and squatter settlements, including gang warfare, the constant threat of assault, and drugs. Whatever the case, the common thread to note is that conversion to the new churches is a bridge to a different life, a kind of forward-looking contract between the convert and the church (and its leaders). *Pare de Sufrir*, Stop Suffering, as the signs visible everywhere say, is a powerful call to people who are in fact suffering the effects of poverty, dislocation and violence.[33]

[30] Chesnut, *Born Again*, p. 46 quotes Edir Macedo, who contrasts his church with traditional Pentecostals: 'We have few relations because other Pentecostals are too fanatical mixing faith with customs. One thing has nothing to do with the other. Traditional Pentecostals for example, base themselves on doctrine rooted in the time of Jesus. We, on the contrary, do not prohibit anything. In the IURD it is prohibited to prohibit. People are free to do what they understand to be right. Our obligation is to teach them that they, on their own accord, have to make the decision whether or not to do this or that' (quoting a document entitled '*O dinheiro é um bem*' or 'money is a good thing').

[31] I exclude arguments that rely on suppositions of anomie, 'loss of culture', or dislocation. On this point, see Steigenga, *The Politics of the Spirit* chapters 1 and 2.

[32] Chesnut, *Born Again*.

[33] This is similar to the general thesis advanced by Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris. *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics World Wide* (Cambridge, 2004) that religious belief is tied to levels of existential security, but makes the argument in much more fine-grained terms.

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Violence, Democracy, Civil Society

In an influential book published almost 40 years ago, Ivan Vallier argued that for Catholicism to retain influence and a capacity to shape Latin American culture, society and politics in the future, the institutional church had to withdraw from politics. Breaking the mutual dependence with power and privilege would free the church to provide the kind of cultural and ideological consensus that in his view were a prerequisite to modernisation.[34] Vallier's work played a major role in bringing social science perspective to the study of Catholicism in Latin America which had been dominated by legal historians. His work was both empirical and normative: he believed that the path he outlined was measurable and already in progress, and he also argued strongly that it was a good thing, an essential element in the process of development and modernisation. Setting aside the evident functionalist predilections of this kind of analysis (the dubious notion that social order and 'modernisation' require cultural consensus), Vallier's also ran up against a more practical difficulty. In the very moment that he called for withdrawal from politics in the pursuit of unified cultural leadership, new tendencies emerged in Catholicism anchored in liberation theology and alliances with the Left. Political engagement was demanded but now it was not with established power or existing institutions, but rather in opposition to dictatorship, in pursuit of social justice, and a new kind of politics. The influence of liberation theology was felt in various ways in subsequent decades: in the authorship of Church documents critical of injustice, in the establishment, staffing and legitimation of important Church institutions directed to issues like land, housing, or human rights; and in general in the articulation and justification of a position that brought churches and their leaders and activists into direct, often violent conflict with increasingly fearful and repressive military regimes, promoting social justice and democracy, not only in documents and speeches but also through the provision of material and organisational support.

As this position evolved, elements in the churches along with related groups and activists moved to the centre of the very political conflicts that Vallier hoped to supersede. Conflict, not consensus, dominated the relation between religion and politics in the decades after Vallier wrote. This posture carried high costs: surely there must be an easier way to retain influence.[35]

[34] Ivan Vallier, *Catholicism, Social Control, and Modernization in Latin America* (Englewood Cliffs NJ, 1970).

[35] There are, to be sure, exceptions. One notable instance was Argentina, where the Catholic hierarchy collaborated with and legitimated the military's 'dirty war' against subversion through the 1970s. See, among others, Fortunato Mallimaci, 'Catolicismo y política en el gobierno de Kirchner', *América Latina Hoy Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, vol. 41 (December 2005), pp. 57–76; Fortunato Mallimaci, Humberto Cucchetti and Luis Donatello, 'Caminos

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Such a stance reveals less a search for influence, as conventionally defined, than a new sense of mission (centred on ideas about social justice) and a new openness to initiative and leadership by lay persons. The concept of influence articulated by Vallier and those who followed his lead turned out to be too undifferentiated: influence for what?[36]

One could argue that the preceding is too much about politics, and not enough about the 'core' of religion, which has to do with worship, ritual practices, and the development and spread of the message in enduring organisations. But the truth is that from the beginning Catholicism has been so entangled with institutions and symbols of power in Latin America that the line between religion and politics is easily blurred and in any case, difficult to specify or maintain with clarity. The issue is not so much separation or distinction of religion from politics as it is to identify evolving and changing syntheses and how different forms of synthesis affect both politics and religion considered separately. Newly confident and growing Protestant and Pentecostal churches have in most cases followed the paths laid down long ago by their Catholic predecessors: making deals with government and exchanging political support for material help and legitimation. They have even attempted, with only limited success, to found explicitly Protestant political parties, a strategy abandoned by the Catholic Church with the decline of Christian Democratic parties.[37]

Three aspects of this process have had particular significance in shaping the pattern of change within religion and in this way affecting the content and potential direction of the future of Christianity in the region. These are the character of violence, the restoration of democracy, and the emergence of civil society.

Violence

The last 40 years have been a time of much violence in Latin America. The specific character of this violence (repressive, revolutionary, associated with

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Sinuousos. Nacionalismo y Catolicismo en la Argentina Contemporanea', in Francisco Colom and Angel Rivero (eds.), *El Altar y El Trono. Ensayos sobre el catolicismo iberoamericano* (Bogotá, 2006), pp. 155–90; Emilio Mignone, *Witness to the Truth: The Complicity of Church and Dictatorship in Argentina* (Maryknoll NY, 1988); Horacio Verbitsky, *Doble Juego. La argentina católica y militar* (Buenos Aires, 2006); and also his *El Silencio. De Paulo VI a Bergoglio. Las relaciones secretas de la iglesia con la ESMA* (Buenos Aires, 2005).

[36] Such as Thomas C. Bruneau, 'Church and Politics in Brazil: The Genesis of Change', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1985), pp. 271–9, and also his *The Church in Brazil: The Politics of Religion* (Austin, 1982); and Anthony Gill, *Rendering unto Caesar: The Catholic Church and the State in Latin America* (Chicago, 1998).

[37] Freston, *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Latin America*, provides a broad survey on this point.

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civil wars, urban gangs and domestic abuse) has shaped the pattern of religious change both for Catholics and Protestants. To begin with Catholicism, the move of the Church and many key institutions from pillar of the established order to public critic, defender of democracy, and provider of legitimation and resources to social movements and contestational groups of all kinds turned the Church itself into a target of violence. Bishops, priests, nuns and lay activists were abducted, jailed, tortured, killed, 'disappeared' and exiled in substantial numbers everywhere, but with particular significance in Central America and the countries of the Southern Cone (Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay). This experience combined with the diffusion of concepts derived from liberation theology, reinforced an identification of the Church with the victims of violence, and underscored the 'option for the poor' enshrined in the documents of the region's Catholic bishops at their 1979 meeting in Puebla, Mexico.[38]

These converging influences opened the Church to new ideas about rights and helped turn it (and its institutions) into major defenders and promoters of human rights. In cases like Brazil, Chile, Peru and El Salvador, the Catholic Church, with support from others and access to important transnational networks, put resources behind the promotion of human rights and defence of the victims of repression, helping families, providing legal defence, locating the bodies of the 'disappeared'. The defence of classic human rights (freedom from torture or arbitrary arrest) was accompanied by promotion of organising efforts (for example of rural workers) and of the right to participation by those without resources. With the settlement of civil wars across the region and the restoration of open democratic politics, the prominence of commitment to rights and open support of organisations working in this area has come into question. With not-so-subtle nudging from the Vatican, the Catholic hierarchy in key cases has moved away from confrontational stances, preferring to concentrate resources on more conventional moral issues and on responding effectively to Protestant competition. The decision in 1992 to close Chile's famous Vicariate of Solidarity, which had been a central source of support and leadership in this area, marked an important milestone.

The commitment to rights as an element of religious discourse and action has been studied for the most part in the context of Catholicism, but there are comparable developments within Protestantism, as specific churches and grassroots groups joined in ecumenical efforts (in grassroots communities and national organisations) to defend rights in the context of extreme

[38] Penny Lernoux, *Cry of the People* (New Cork, 1982); Daniel H. Levine, 'Pluralidad, Pluralismo y la creación de un vocabulario de derechos', *America Latina Hoy Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, vol. 41 (December 2005), pp. 17–34; Anna Peterson, *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion: Progressive Catholicism in El Salvador's Civil War* (Albany, 1997).

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violence. The experience of Peru is a case in point. In Peru, rapid growth and diversification of Protestant and Pentecostal churches through the 1980s and 1990s was accompanied by massive violence, in which Protestant and Catholic activists alike found themselves caught between the violence of the Shining Path guerrillas and the repressive actions of the state and military. As the count of victims rose, the National Council of Evangelicals (*Concilio Nacional de Evangélicos del Perú*, or CONEP) created structures and took public positions in support of human rights, as local churches and activists collaborated with Catholic groups in grassroots efforts. Echoing the moves by the Catholic Church noted above, in the Peruvian case the ebbing of the threat of violence and the settlement of civil war spurred pressures within the Pentecostal churches to restore emphasis on evangelisation (spreading of the Word) as the primary task of the churches.[39]

Not all the region's Catholic churches shared this commitment. Argentina is the most well known and best documented case of continuing alliance of the church with military rule, an alliance which reached the point of complicity in human rights abuses.[40] But Argentina's experience cannot be read exclusively in these terms. In the 1970s, there were important movements that shared the ideas of liberation theology, promoted social mobilisation, and allied with radical elements in Peronism to form the basis of the Montonero revolutionary organisation. They were defeated. The subsequent defeat and discredit of the Argentine military, and the election of a Peronist government opposed to long standing accommodations with the church (the government of Nestor Kirchner) has opened the country to a genuine pluralism, which is still resisted by the Catholic hierarchy.[41]

The impact of violence on the life of religion in Latin America is not limited to issues of rights. The very intensity of the violence made millenarian ideas about the end of times seem very proximate to many caught in the middle of the struggle.[42] Extremes of violence and internal warfare, particularly in Central America, Peru and Colombia, have accelerated internal migration creating waves of refugees, as individuals, families, and sometimes whole communities, fled to the relatively safety of cities. The settlements at the urban periphery where most internal migrants end up have been prime recruiting grounds for the new churches. Other kinds of violence – no longer political but now driven by gangs, drugs and crime – of course remain a central fact of the urban life of the poor. Opting out of this violence by

[39] López, *Los Evangélicos y los Derechos Humanos.*
[40] Verbitsky, *Doble Juego* and also *El Silencio*, Mignone *Witness to the Truth.*
[41] Mallimaci, 'Catolicismo y política en el gobierno de Kirchner'.
[42] Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala*; Peterson, *Martyrdom*; Steigenga, *Politics of the Spirit.*

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opting into a new community of the saved has been understandably attractive to many.[43]

Democracy

The restoration, or – for the Dominican Republic and Paraguay – the creation of democracy was accomplished almost everywhere in Latin America in a ten-year period that began in the mid-1980s. Militaries withdrew from office (if not from power), civil wars were concluded, political parties reestablished, and open politics reinstituted. The impact of these transformations on religion is not easy to reduce to a few points, but several issues warrant special mention. Although it took a long time, it is now fair to say that both Catholic and Protestant churches are committed to the legitimacy of democracy in theory and practice. This is a major cultural change, and has been accompanied by an uncoupling of specific churches from predetermined political alliances and position. The Catholic Church is no longer a reliable supporter of conservative politics: the bishops defend democracy in general terms[44] and with a spur from the Vatican have substantially reduced the institution's role as political protagonist and sponsor and defender of civil society.[45] Protestant and Pentecostal churches are no longer bound to the obsessive anti-leftism of the past. The end of the global Cold War freed them in this regard, while the sheer pace of their expansion has pulled a broad range of people with already formed careers, skills, and orientations into the churches. The result has been a much more diverse political presence.

Explicitly religious ties to political parties – be they Catholic for Christian Democrats or specifically Protestant parties or candidacies – have weakened substantially. Some Pentecostal churches have tried for direct political representation (through specifically Protestant parties or alliances), with mixed results. In Peru, early alliances with Alberto Fujimori proved chastening and collapsed with his regime. In Brazil, the Assemblies of God have been supplanted as the key Pentecostal political force by the rapid growth of the IURD, which deliberately places candidates in parties across the ideological spectrum.[46] The very idea of a confessional state, which resonates strongly in some fundamentalist circles around the world finds little echo here.[47] There

[43] See Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits*; Smilde, *Reason to Believe*.

[44] Daniel H. Levine and David Smilde, 'The Church and the Chávez Government in Venezuela', *Catholic Herald* (London), September 2006.

[45] Hannah Stewart-Gambino, 'Las Pobladoras y la Iglesia Despolitizada en Chile', *América Latina Hoy Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, no. 41 (2005), pp. 121–38.

[46] Ani Pedro Oro, 'A Igreja Universal e a política', in Joanildo A. Burity and Maria das Dores C. Machado (eds.), *Os Votos de Deus. Evangélicos, política, e eleiçoes no Brasil* (Recife, 2005) pp. 119–48.

[47] Paul C. Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America* (Cambridge, 2001).

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have also been cuts in church sponsorship of social movements and a return to more traditional lobbying on a core group of conventional issues surrounding subsidies, education, sexuality and reproductive issues and public morality, and thus away from the social justice issues that dominated public debates in the 1980s and 1990s.[48]

Civil Society

The fact of a more open, plural, accessible and less regulated civil society affects the character of religious change by lowering barriers of entry to the newly competitive market and providing incentives for the construction of rules of coexistence among the churches. Interchurch competition remains intense and highly visible everywhere in Latin America, but the sheer physical diffusion of evangelicals and their institutions throughout the society has also dampened the edge of alienation and difference between Catholics and Protestants, particularly in large urban areas where most Latin Americans live. Most of the empirical work of which I am aware affirms that evangelicals (the preferred umbrella term for Protestants in Latin America) are much like their Catholic neighbours in everything but churchgoing: they participate in organisations in similar ways, they live in the same neighbourhoods, and they consume in comparable patterns. These are concrete changes that lay a basis for cooperation in meeting the ordinary needs of community life. In a public sphere open to all, it is in the interests of all to keep it open.[49] In the long run, this can reinforce the commitment of any group to maintaining an open political life.

The erosion of monopoly is not limited to statistics of membership or church attendance. The Catholic Church no longer monopolises the moral sphere in the name of religion: its leaders and official voices must share the airwaves, TV screens, public platforms, and arenas of power with representatives of these other churches. The creation of a plural and open civil society also affects the internal life of churches, bringing ideas about participation and equality into the daily life of the institution where it often runs into resistance. Even within the admittedly broad net that the Catholic Church casts, there is growing diversity of opinion visible in publications, schools, and group positions, leading Catalina Romero to speak of the development of public space and civil society *within the church*. 'Through these different forms of association and the construction of new spaces for encounter and interaction', she writes, 'the church has renovated itself and infused religious meaning in everyday life problems. In the last decade, this

[48] Drogus and Stewart-Gambino, *Activist Faith;* Ottmann, *Lost for Words.*
[49] Casanova, *Public Religions*, p. 217.

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space has begun to close once again due to the intervention of a number of bishops who are trying to take back control of public space in the church itself and in the way the church expresses itself and is represented in civil society, political society, and the state'.[50] What Romero identifies for Peru is general in the region: groups proliferate while many prelates, fearing division and loss of control, have tried to rein them in by cutting funds to dissident groups and striving for greater control over schools, universities and publications.

Much of Catholic tradition is indeed built around hierarchy, and a top down concept of authority, with power and knowledge descending across a large number of levels in complex social settings. But this is not the only Catholic model available on which to build. Romero states it forcefully: 'Understanding persons as friends of God is quite different than looking upon them as serfs, in the same way that inviting them to follow God's project is different than ordering them to follow the law'.[51] The seemingly sudden shift to openness and open competition seems to preoccupy the bishops, but it is also a source of potential energy and commitment in as yet unknown forms. In Latin America today, religion is a buzzing, blooming confusion of possibilities, full of innovation and charged with social and cultural energies.

The Future of the Future

Christianity will remain dominant but the Christianity in question will clearly be very different from the past. Latin America is indeed 'turning pluralist' but expectations of a thoroughgoing transformation of Latin American culture, society and politics arising from religious change – something like a new Reformation with comparable consequences in economic and political life – are to say the least, premature.[52] In the agenda and routines of most of the new churches, political and economic issues are secondary to those of conversion, salvation and personal transformation. As these work out in practice, there may be clear spin-offs in changing patterns of family life and economics (if only by the constraints imposed on what anthropologists refer to as the 'male prestige' syndrome of serial monogamy, irresponsible parenthood, drunkenness, promiscuity and sporadic violence) but these are not the specific goal. These are spirit-filled and nascent forms of religion, more focused in the short term on intensity and directness of experience

[50] Romero, 'Public spaces', p. 22 (manuscript).
[51] *Ibid*., p. 41 (manuscript).
[52] For such expectations, see among others Martin, *Tongues*, or Amy Sherman, *The Soul of Development: Biblical Christianity and Economic Transformation in Guatemala* (New York, 1997).

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than on the structure of the movement itself. Their very intensity is what provides the driving edge of growth.[53]

Robert Orsi has underscored how difficult it is for scholars of religion to enter into the logic and appeal of spirit-filled religious movements. By disciplinary training and tradition, they are committed to an ameliorative and benign view of religion, and attracted to themes like empowerment, transcendence, movement building and civil society. Orsi suggests replacing these with a more complex and less optimistic portrait in which the engagements that religions frame with the world may proceed in ways that are not so easily channeled into beneficial effects.[54] As the academic study of religion evolved in the United States, he writes, it was inconceivable that religion would be anything but good religion in this social and intellectual setting, good meaning acceptable in belief and practice to this domesticated modern civic Protestantism. Proponents of the academic study of religion claimed a place in university culture by asserting that the study of 'religion' – meaning the denominationally neutral version of Christianity recast as an ethical system – was good and even necessary for American democracy. Outside the walls of the academy, the winds of religious madness howled (in the view of those inside) – fire baptised people, ghost dancers, frenzied preachers and gullible masses, Mormons and Roman Catholics. Religion, as it took shape in the academy, was explicitly imagined in relation to these others and as a prophylactic against them.[55]

Orsi's comment reminds me of an experience of my own with academic blinkers. A few years ago, I attended a conference on religion, culture and politics in which respectful attention was paid to mock ups of *Candomblé* shrines and to videos of Afro Cuban dance and its relation to the traditions of Afro Cuban *Santeria*. But a film that recorded exorcisms at a huge meeting of an IURD congregation in Brazil, with the raw emotional power of thousands urging on the pastor with shouts of *Sai* (Begone!) or *Fora o Demonio* (Out with the Devil!) elicited little more than nervous titters. Manifestations of the power of the spirit make academics nervous: they are like the ghost in the machine. If we are to grasp the power of the spirit-filled religions growing now in Latin America, and their tamer versions in the Catholic Charismatic movement, we must get past the difficulties that such experience presents to rationalist academics, and grasp the reasons for their appeal.

It is striking how much of the change discussed in this article was unanticipated. Scholars missed it, some because of commitments to theories of

[53] Warner refers to such churches as nascent and spirit filled, more movements than institutions. R. Stephen Warner, *New Wine in Old Wineskins: Evangelicals and Liberals in a Small Town Church.* (Berkeley, 1988).

[54] Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth. The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton, 2004), p. 170.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 186.

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secularisation and the presumed inevitable decline and privatisation of religion, others because of fascination with progressive liberationist tendencies, others perhaps, as Orsi suggests, because of their inability to capture the nascent, spirit-driven character of new Pentecostal churches within conventional academic categories.[56]

If the dominance of Christianity per se in the region is not in question, what remains to be worked out is just how the churches and their followers will fill the less regulated and more democratic public spaces that Latin America is likely to present in the future. Religions are present in the public spaces of Latin America now in very different ways from the past. There is a notable popularisation of language and a diffusion of arenas for religious experience that parallels the 'storming heaven by the back door', that Nathan Hatch points to in his work *The Democratization of American Christianity*.[57] This is evident not only in classic evangelical 'campaigns and crusades' but also in the effective use of mass media, radio and television, and the adaptation of popular music, visible in the appeal of Christian rock and evangelical *salsa*. The process is visible everywhere with a clear incorporation of contemporary language and musical themes and the prominent role played by individuals with media careers in the new churches in Brazil.

Although it is always risky to extrapolate from current trends into the future, some elements of continued transformation seem well established. There will be continued intense competition among churches and denominations in an ever-broadening range of arenas and media, continued diffusion of intense, spirit-filled forms of religious practice, growing independence of Latin American Protestant churches from northern sponsors, and growing projection out of Latin America by these same churches as they carry their message elsewhere in the global South, and also to the North. There will be no successful reconstruction of Catholic monopoly, and no major new confessional political parties of any affiliation. The

[56] For too many academics, Orsi writes, 'True religion, then, is epistemologically and ethically singular. It is rational, respectful of persons, non coercive, mature, non anthropomorphic in its higher forms, mystical (as opposed to ritualistic), unmediated, and agreeable to democracy (no hierarchy in gilded robes and fancy hats), monotheistic (no angels, saints, demons, ancestors), emotionally controlled, a reality of mind and spirit, not body and nature. It is concerned with ideal essences not actual things, and especially not about presences in things. Students of mine over the past twenty years in classrooms in New York City, Indiana and Massachusetts have unfailing refused to acknowledge as 'religious' the practice of putting holy water into an automobile's transmission (as pilgrims to a Bronx Lourdes shrine commonly do). Whatever this is, it is not 'good religion'? All the complex dynamism of religion is thus stripped away, its boundary-blurring and border-crossing propensities eliminated. Not surprisingly, there is only one methodology and one epistemology for studying this 'religion' – critical, analytical, and 'objective' (as opposed to subjective, existentially engaged, or participatory), *Between Heaven and Earth*, p. 188.

[57] Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, 1989).

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association of intense religious change with a return to democracy and civic opening that has followed periods of widespread violence and repression suggests a pullback from confrontational politics and a renewed public stress on conventional moral issues including education, censorship, family, sexuality and reproduction, along with competition for state subsidies and privileges which are both markers of legitimacy and indispensable tools for growth.[58]

Does the pattern of religious change outlined here contribute in some measurable way to 'modernisation' or 'development,' however these notoriously unclear terms may be defined? The question has no clear or unequivocal answer. The expectation that religious change in Latin America would provide the cultural foundations for democracy, entrepreneurship, or related phenomena on the lines of the Protestant Reformation are at best exaggerated, at worst a misleading and mechanical application of models derived from one historical experience to other, quite different contexts. This is not to say that Latin American societies, or their varied religious experience, are therefore properly classified as *traditional* or *non modern*, much less *non-western*. Latin America has been part of the Western world from the very beginning, but of course it is the Iberian version of that world that set the tone and established the dominant institutional patterns. Latin America is nothing if not varied, and concepts like tradition or traditional are clearly inadequate for a continent that displays such accelerated urbanisation, relatively high literacy, education, and media penetration, and which includes the eighth largest economy in the world (Brazil).

The question is better phrased as one that addresses the specific ways in which religious change participates in – drawing strength, accelerating, and in some instances providing shelter from – the overall pattern of economic, demographic, social and political transformations commonly conflated under the heading of 'modernisation and development'. When 'all that is solid

[58] Gender issues had a prominent place in the Catholic bishops' 2007 meetings at Aparecida. The bishops lamented growing cultural upset and confusion (*desconcierto*, 10) that undermine the unifying legacy of the faith and the normative guidelines it provides. In their view, such confusion is nowhere more evident than in an 'ideology of gender' (40) brought to the region and diffused by global cultural forces, which undermine family, community solidarity, and unleash an uncontrolled individualism (36, 47, 51, 503). References are to numbered paragraphs and sections of the Aparecida documents, in Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, CELAM, *V Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano y del Caribe*, Documento Conclusivo (Bogotá, 2007). Citations from the documents use two formats. Translations from the Spanish are mine. The Catholic Church has remained active in efforts to lobby legislatures and executives to ban abortion in all cases, most recently in Nicaragua and El Salvador. For a general view of the dynamics of church and state around issues of sexuality, family law, divorce and abortion, see Mala Htun, *Sex and the State: Abortion, Divorce, and the Family Under Latin American Dictatorships and Democracies* (New York, 2003).

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melts into air'[59] religion need not disappear (as classical secularisation theory anticipated) but can change in ways that use the tools of modernity and mass communication to continue the core religious project placing individual and proximate acts in contexts of ultimate significance and building meaningful communities in a world that is very different from the one Columbus imagined he was finding when he searched for the Indies, but landed in what came to be called America.

[59] The phrase comes from Marx's description of the impact of capitalism on traditional life. See Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London, 1982), for a stimulating discussion of the cultural aspects of modernity.

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