

Introduction to the Cambridge History of Religions in Latin America

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Atgoffir staff a myfyrwyr Prifysgol Cymru Y Drindod Dewi Sant bod hawlfraint ar y darn hwn ac ar y gwaith y cafodd ei gymryd ohono. Gwnaed y Copi Digidol hwn o dan delerau trwydded CLA sy'n caniatáu i chi:

- fynd at gopi a'i lwytho i lawr;
- argraffu copi;

Sylwch bod y deunydd hwn yn UNIG at ddefnydd myfyrwyr sydd wedi cofrestru ar y cwrs astudio fel y nodir yn yr adran isod. Caniateir i holl staff a myfyrwyr eraill ddarllen y deunydd yn unig ac ni ddylent ei lwytho i lawr ac/neu argraffu copi

Mae'r Copi Digidol hwn ac unrhyw gopi digidol neu brintiedig a ddarparwyd i chi, neu a wnaed gennych, o dan delerau'r Drwydded hon, i'w ddefnyddio gyda'r Cwrs Astudio hwn. Gellwch gadw copïau o'r fath ar ôl i'r cwrs ddod i ben, ond at eich defnydd personol eich hun yn unig. Bydd pob copi (yn cynnwys copïau electronig) yn cynnwys y Rhybudd Hawlfraint hwn a bydd yn rhaid eu dinistrio ac/neu eu dileu pan fydd Prifysgol Cymru Y Drindod Dewi Sant yn galw am hynny.

Ac eithrio'r hyn a ganiateir gan gyfraith hawlfraint, ni chaniateir copïo, cadw neu ddosbarthu pellach (yn cynnwys drwy e-bost) heb ganiatâd deiliad yr hawlfraint.

Mae gan yr awdur (ac mae'r term hwnnw'n cynnwys arlunwyr a chrewyr gweledol eraill) hawliau moesol dros y gwaith ac ni all staff na myfyrwyr achosi, na chaniatáu, i'r gwaith gael ei aflunio, ei lurgunio neu ei addasu mewn unrhyw ffordd arall, neu ei drin yn ddiraddiol mewn unrhyw ffordd, a fyddai'n niweidiol i anrhydedd neu enw da'r awdur.

Mae hon yn fersiwn ddigidol o ddeunydd hawlfraint a wnaed dan drwydded gan ddeiliad yr hawl, ac ni ellir sicrhau ei chywirdeb. Cyfeiriwch at yr argraffiad cyhoeddedig gwreiddiol os gwelwch yn dda.

Trwyddedwyd i'w ddefnyddio ar gyfer y cwrs HPRS5007 - Exploring Religions in Latin America

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Introduction to the Cambridge History of Religions in Latin America

VIRGINIA GARRARD-BURNETT, PAUL FRESTON,
AND STEPHEN C. DOVE

The *Cambridge History of Religions in Latin America* is a timely publication, for at least three reasons. The first is the historical and contemporary centrality of religion in the life of Latin America, a region that has itself been growing in global importance. A second is that the Latin American religious field is undergoing an extremely rapid process of change. Third, Latin America is important because of its religious distinctiveness in global comparative terms. In this Introduction, we expand briefly on each of these factors.

Historical Centrality of Religion in Latin America

We suggest that it is possible, even useful, to view the entire history of Latin America as religious history. The Spanish and Portuguese conquest of the New World was, both legally and ideologically, a "religious" endeavor, the conversion of its native peoples being the *sine qua non* of conquest and colonization. As we shall see, despite pockets of resistance, the "spiritual conquest" of northern Latin America was more or less complete by the end of the sixteenth century.

Much of South America, at least those areas touched by European conquest and colonization, however, had been evangelized by the end of the seventeenth. Robert Ricard's notion of a "spiritual conquest" (a phrase he coined in the early 1930s that refers to both the spiritual and institutional expansion of Roman Catholicism in the New World) does not begin to convey the complexity and ambiguities of faith and practice among native people in the conquest zones. It does, however, provide a sense of the pervasive Catholic hegemony – social and ideological, as well as spiritual – that would define Latin America for most of its history. Indeed, during the colonial period, the region was not even known as "Latin America," but simply as part of the realm of Christendom located in the overseas colonies of the Iberian Catholic kings. So dominant

was the hegemony of the colonial Church, not only in terms of its institutions but also in its sway over hearts, minds, and fealty, that the reduction and marginalization of the Church became a chief preoccupation of nation-building statesmen in the nineteenth century.

The colonial religious history of Latin America, marked by conquest, colonization, resistance, accommodation, and adaptation, closely parallels the region's secular history and shares many of the same themes. Although we find it important to sketch out the institutional history of the Iberian Catholic Church in the New World – this being the “bones” that give structure to our historical understanding – this work also engages the more recent historiographical studies that examine the intersection of religion with race, ethnicity, gender, and secular culture. We also recognize that Christianity posed, and to some extent, continues to offer, important epistemological problems for non-Western peoples and their established belief systems. Thus, this volume explores the spiritual dimensions of what Hans Sieber called the “creolized religions” that emerge from the collision and conjunction of European, indigenous, and African cosmovisions.

That said, there is no question that Catholicism was at the center of Spain and Portugal's conquests of the Americas. The stereotype of conquest in the name of “God, Gold, and Glory” is based in fact, but the role played by Catholicism and Catholic identity (as opposed to an individual Iberian's personal beliefs and pious practice) is much more complex than this basic equation suggests. Certainly, the Roman Catholic Church was as powerful a political player as existed anywhere in Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and this accounts in part for why the rationale for conquest and the rules for its conduct were cast in terms that melded religious and imperial motives quite seamlessly.

To cynical modern eyes, it is difficult to reconcile the zealous Christian rhetoric of the conquistadors with the more peaceable sensibilities that we now associate with an ideal ethic of “Christian behavior.” But for many Iberians in the sixteenth century, Christianity and, specifically, Catholicism was a militant faith, and Catholicism was so fully interwoven with what we now consider to be secular issues such as identity and citizenship that it was impossible to untangle the different strands. Columbus left Spain on his first voyage in 1492 just five months after the North African Moors abandoned their last Iberian outpost in the southern city of Granada. The Spanish liberation of Granada signaled the end of the 700-year occupation of the peninsula by Muslim North Africans. The struggle to evict the Moors, known as the *Reconquista*, lasted several centuries, during which time the Spaniards identified themselves first

as Christians fighting the infidels, and only secondarily as allegiants of the various Iberian kingdoms.

As many of the first Spaniards in the New World were themselves veterans of the *Reconquista*, it is not surprising that they would bring with them the crusaders' mentality and methods. The *Reconquista* gave Spaniards a perspective on civil hierarchy in which religion was a deciding factor. Like all Europeans at the time, Iberian people in the early sixteenth century identified the known world of the West not so much by secular geopolitical definitions, but rather in terms of "Christendom." For Iberians, the world was divided into the dichotomy that the Argentinean scholar and statesman Domingo Faustino Sarmiento would much later designate as "civilization and barbarism." The definition of who comprised the category of "civilized," the "*gente decente*" (decent people), invoked a much wider range of criteria than we might suspect from our vantage: it measured the "civility" of a people by the color of their skin, their class, general conduct, material achievements, art, eating habits, mode of dress, and, above all, religion. Loyalty to the holy Catholic faith might have little to do in a practical sense with personal morality and ethics, but it clearly defined political fealty and social identity. Thus, although the Aztec cities might be quite "civilized" in Spanish eyes, the Aztec people's religious beliefs and bloody rituals relegated them to the category of barbarians, deserving of conquest and in need of redemption. In turn, the religion of the Europeans seemed equally confounding to the indigenous people.

The process of the conversion of the Americas was both ambitious and ultimately ambivalent. Through some coercion and a significant amount of innovation on the part of the friars – methods to attract natives to the faith sometimes included plays and dances, ballads and songs, translated into the language of the listeners – indigenous people under Spanish control, with some notable exceptions, converted readily, if only nominally, to Christianity. Although Catholic orthodoxy deeply permeated the spiritual lives of many converts as time went on, for others the "conversion" was entirely superficial. Some clung tenaciously to their own beliefs, occulting them behind a Catholic veneer. Others superimposed Christian doctrine onto a traditional context, producing a body of belief that they considered to be Catholic but that bore little resemblance to orthodox European faith or ritual. This meant that, from the beginning, Catholicism was molded by local preferences and conditions into a wide variety of forms and mutations that belied the ideal of a single, dogmatic, orthodox, and unitary universal Church.

The fusion of religious ideas and imagery also became common in Latin America among slaves, whom Europeans brought to the New World from

Africa in ever increasing numbers from the second half of the sixteenth century until well into the nineteenth century. For Africans, the process of conversion, mirroring their circumstances, was even less voluntary than it was for the New World natives. All the same, Portuguese slave holders in Brazil and Spaniards in the Caribbean and coastal zones where slavery was practiced on a large scale generally did not feel an obligation to go much beyond a perfunctory conversion of their charges. Under these circumstances, slaves managed to covertly maintain much of their own religions, hiding them from their masters by lending the Catholic saints the qualities of their own spiritual entities, and obscuring the meaning of certain religious practices, such as drumming, into what appeared to be harmless entertainment. With the passage of time, African beliefs began to coexist more comfortably with Christian ones, producing systems of religious bricolage such as Brazil's Candomblé or Cuba's Santería that are neither fully African nor fully Christian and are unique to the regions and peoples from which they originated.

However, the reach of the Church in colonial Spanish America and, to a somewhat lesser extent, in Portuguese America (where the Church was neither as rich nor as powerful) stretched beyond the conquest of hearts and spirits. As an institution, the Catholic Church was the single most influential political and economic player in the colonial world, with a presence and authority that often exceeded that of the Crown. At one level, Church and Crown shared a power in both practice and parity, as evidenced by the arrangement known as the *patronato real* (in Portuguese, *padroado*), that allowed the Crown (rather than Rome) to maintain the Church and propagate the faith, including the establishment and construction of all churches and monasteries and to administer collection of the tithe. By a more ordinary measure, however, the Church was more of an actual presence in the remote regions of the New World than the colonial government, located in the distant regional capitals of Mexico City, Lima, Buenos Aires, or Quito (or Salvador and later Rio de Janeiro in the Portuguese possessions), could ever hope to be. Even in areas so isolated that a priest might pass through only once every few years to perform basic sacramental services such as marriages, baptisms, and masses for the dead, a community would typically maintain a chapel and organize itself according to the spatial schema imposed by the colonial Church, the *parroquia*. Local inhabitants would also observe the major celebrations, obligations, and rhythms of the liturgical calendar, thus investing community members with a sense of belonging in their view toward the Church (if not always toward the clergy, whom they often thought to be rapacious) that they did not necessarily feel toward the Crown or, later, the state.

The Church was also the most pervasive economic institution in colonial Spanish America and Brazil, at a time when few other international financial organizations existed to serve the region. The Church acquired vast funds through bequests; tithes; fees paid for sacraments; dowries of young women who entered convents; rentals on Church-owned properties; and ownership of real estate outright, which it possessed, theoretically at least, in perpetuity. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Church was the largest landowner in all of Latin America and also the primary financial institution from which most *criollos* (New World-born Spaniards) borrowed money to buy land or to invest in other ventures. The Catholic Church was also a key benefactor of honor and status, the coveted social currency of Iberian life. A vocation in the Church was avidly sought out by pious, wealthy families who might have second sons who could not inherit their fathers' lands, or daughters who wanted to become nuns out of a real sense of religious vocation or to avoid the only alternative open to them, that of wife and mother.

The Church put much of its money into education and the intellectual life of the colonies, over which it had virtually sole control until the late eighteenth century. With the exception of a few Crown colleges, the Church (most often the Jesuits) founded and operated all the schools in Spanish and Portuguese America; as a result, every educated person during the colonial period was the product of an ecclesiastical education. The Church, moreover, was the keeper of public morals and intellectual hegemony. The Spanish Inquisition, established by Queen Isabella in 1478, monitored the influx of dangerous or subversive thought into Spanish America (such as Lutheran tracts or books written by the Enlightenment philosophers) and guarded religious and political conformity.

By the end of the colonial period in Latin America, the Christendom model (that is to say, the hegemony of Christian symbols, iconography, calendrical methods, social mores, hierarchical values – in short, the vast epistemology of Christianity, far beyond the basic issues of belief and practice) had left a deep imprint on Spanish America, if somewhat less so in the Portuguese colony. It is hardly surprising, then, that when independence came to Latin America in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church found itself caught between the two elite polarities of the state-formation project. These were the Liberals (modernists who viewed the Church as backward and also as the state's only real competitor for new citizens' hearts and minds) and the Conservatives (who saw the Church as the holy bastion of the status quo). The Church was also the source of a ready-made catalog of potent symbols and images, already heavy with valence for the general population, which

new political actors could either combat or incorporate into the trappings of nationhood. Such was the case, most famously, with the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico, who was co-opted from strictly Catholic significance into the symbol of Mexican nationalism; or the less well-known Sacred Heart of Jesus in Ecuador, which became the focus of Ecuadorian national identity under Conservatives in the nineteenth century.

When modernizing Liberals gained control of most areas of Latin America in the second half of the nineteenth century, their agendas carried a powerful anti-Catholic subtext. Under Liberal rule, Protestant missionaries, mostly from the United States, undertook work in much of Latin America, offering a new variety of Christianity that Liberals valued as much – or more – for its emphasis on literacy, education, and opposition to Catholic hegemony as for its religious teachings. As Liberal anticlerical measures brought more and more stress to the institutional Roman Catholic Church, it slowly began to recede in the social and religious landscape of the region. The official Church's decline was particularly evident in two zones located far from state and ecclesiastical authorities, where its institutional resources had always been stretched thin even in more favorable times. These were the densely populated but nearly inaccessible indigenous areas and the frontier regions far from the metropolises of the emerging nation-states.

While the institutional Church began to vanish from the nineteenth-century countryside, Catholicism as a lived religion emphatically did not. To the contrary, a type of popular Catholicism as practiced and interpreted by an enthusiastic local laity quickly emerged to supplement and eventually replace orthodox Catholicism in many indigenous regions and on the far geographic frontier, where it blossomed without benefit of clergy. The manifestations of popular religion in these areas were not merely reactions to the reduced presence of the Church, but also represented local adaptations of vital elements of the faith. In many areas, this unlicensed "folk Catholicism" typically grafted elements of local spirituality, legend, and shamanism onto orthodox Catholic dogma, resulting in a fusion of indigenous and Catholic beliefs that were specific and resonant to a given locality and community. In many indigenous regions of northern Latin America, Mesoamerica in particular, it would be the *cofradías* – the religious sodalities introduced by the Spaniards during the colonial period – that assumed religious authority over local practices and beliefs, building up a body of *costumbre*, or local custom and practice, that became the unique religious marker of identity in indigenous communities. Elsewhere, traditional beliefs that centuries of Christian contact had never effectively snuffed out reemerged into the public forum.

In the early twentieth century, the now more autonomous and therefore “Romanized” Catholic Church sent missionaries to Latin America to weed out syncretic practices and reintroduce Catholic orthodoxy into communities where “folk Catholicism” (i.e., Catholicism filtered through the lens of local beliefs, imagery, and parochial tastes) prevailed. But the weeding-out was far from successful. Rural folk Catholicism survived, alongside the multitude of sanctioned and unsanctioned popular devotions found across the continent – the candles, novenas, prayers to uncanonized saints, images, holy powders, charms, and pilgrimages – around which everyday people built their religious lives, whether the official Church approved of them or not. People’s religious imaginations, then as now, were rich and voracious, and they eagerly embraced spiritual innovations – Spiritism, or African practices, for example – without feeling any particular sense of disloyalty or contradiction with the teaching of the Holy Mother Church. This devout but often ad hoc religious life both inside and outside the official Church continued to define the lives of many “ordinary” Catholics across the Americas.

The formal institutional Church did not, of course, disappear with the Liberal reforms of the late nineteenth century. During the decades prior to World War II, despite some new initiatives to address the increasingly injurious effects on Catholicism of modern capitalism, secularism, and totalitarian political movements, the institutional Roman Church continued to take for granted that Latin America was an unassailable Catholic bastion, despite the hostility of its many secular and anticlerical governments. This was true inasmuch as people almost universally considered themselves to be Catholic, if only nominally so. In the Brazilian census of 1940, for example, Catholics still comprised more than 95 percent of the population. But by mid-century, new kinds of ideologies – mostly political – had, for many, begun to flame the passions that active Catholic religiosity had once kindled.

The global Church had begun much earlier to address the threat to its spiritual hegemony in a papal encyclical issued by Pope Leo XIII, popularly known as the “working man’s pope.” In 1891, the pivotal encyclical *Rerum Novarum* advanced the position that social morality and the principles of justice and charity should regulate the relationship between capital and labor. Although this encyclical resulted in important new currents in Catholic social thought and praxis, *Rerum Novarum* had a much greater effect in Europe than in Latin America, at least in the first half of the twentieth century. In 1931, Pope Pius XI furthered this thinking with his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, which spoke to the ethical implications of these issues; but the Church nonetheless failed to regain the political and economic viability that it had lost in Latin

America over the course of the long nineteenth century, even as the people themselves remained staunchly Catholic throughout most of the region.

This changed dramatically, however, in the postwar period, when the spread of communism through Eastern Europe and then to Cuba served notice that no land could be considered inexorably Catholic, not even in Latin America. It was in the immediate wake of the Cuban Revolution of 1959 that the Church began to take stock of the fact that it needed to establish a broad new paradigm to combat a variety of forces that threatened its ancient base of influence over the faithful across the Catholic world. First among these were the "isms," such as communism, Protestantism, and secularism that combined with urbanization and other demographic changes to pull people away from traditional lifestyles and worldviews. But at its root, the most serious danger was modernity itself; by the mid-twentieth century its emphasis on extreme individuality, materialism, and reification of capitalism offered a grave challenge not just to the Church, but also to religion in general. And the Catholic Church knew it.

With this in mind, in October 1962 Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council. The objective was to "open the Church to the world" and, essentially, to reclaim Catholicism's moral and temporal authority by reasserting its relevance to people living in modern times. In particular, Vatican II offered a renewed emphasis on the Church's role in the problems of the secular world. It is this last element that caught the interest and enthusiasm of many clergy in Latin America, who believed that Vatican II signaled a new commitment in the Church's obligation to the poor. In 1968, the Bishops' Conference of Latin America (Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano – CELAM) convened its second General Conference in Medellín, Colombia, at which the bishops called for a specific application of Vatican II to the region. The conference articulated the Church's "preferential option for the poor" and called for biblically based consciousness raising ("*conscientização*" in Portuguese or "*concientización*" in Spanish) to help the poor take control of their lives in the secular world. This action-based faith became known as Liberation Theology, and it had a galvanizing effect throughout Latin America, bringing thousands of the faithful to an informed understanding of their beliefs and to social action for the very first time.

Within a decade, however, the official Church had begun to move in a different direction. In 1979, the Latin American bishops met again, this time in Puebla, Mexico, where they issued documents that suggested a subtle but definitive official distancing from Liberation Theology. One factor behind this retreat was the Church's sense of responsibility for the literally thousands of clergy and lay Catholics who had become politicized

through consciousness raising, and who had died or “disappeared” because of their work for social justice through the Church. (The assassination of El Salvador’s Archbishop Oscar Romero in March 1980 would only underscore this preoccupation.) Second, a year earlier, in 1978, Karol Józef Wojtyła had been elected pope and taken the name of John Paul II. He turned out to be a charismatic but conservative pope whose experience in communist Poland had made him wary of Church association with revolutionary popular movements. Undergirding these concerns was the bishops’ not altogether incorrect perception that Liberation Theology had become a divisive issue within the Catholic Church structure, pitting radical against conservative and rich against poor, and threatening to wrench apart the *corpus christi*, the very body of the Church itself.

As time went on, the Vatican continued to encourage the Latin American bishops to distance themselves from Liberation Theology, as many of them in fact always had. It bears noting that in Argentina – home to then-Jesuit provincial Jorge Mario Bergoglio, now Pope Francis – the official Church and the military enjoyed a close symbiotic relationship during the Dirty War against the political left, which unfolded during the heyday of Liberation Theology. The Argentine case points to the fact that Liberation Theology, even at its apex in the late 1970s, and despite its fame and high moral purpose, was actually a minority movement in worldwide Catholicism, even within Latin America. In 1992, CELAM convened once again, this time in Santo Domingo, where it issued yet another series of pastoral letters that further distanced the formal Church from the precepts of Liberation Theology. The fifth CELAM, which met at Aparecida, Brazil in 2007, seemed to indicate clearly that the Church’s focus in the new century would be on ecclesial and family-focused social matters, such as prioritizing opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage over other types of pastoral concerns.

Yet history is not without its surprises. The election in 2013 of Pope Francis, the first Latin American pope, did not mark a return to Liberation Theology by any means. But it did signal a turn toward what might be called a Latin American ecclesial sensibility for the poor and disenfranchised, and a movement away from the emphasis on sexual strictures for the faithful and on institutional protection that had preoccupied his predecessors and provoked the alienation of many Catholics worldwide. It is too early to tell if Pope Francis’ pastoral directives will refocus and invigorate global Catholicism in the twenty-first century, and whether his papacy will help to staunch the flow of Catholics out of the Church, especially in Latin America. But at this writing, the winds of change appear to be gently shifting once again in the Catholic Church’s direction.

Looking Forward

We conclude this section with a word on the contemporary importance of religion in Latin America. If the historical importance of religion in the region is generally recognized, its contemporary role is often overlooked. In part, this is due to the fact that in global comparative terms, the region can be characterized as *tranquilly religious*,¹ rather than either *secularized* or *defensively religious*. That is, it is at the same time among the most highly religious regions of the world, but its religiousness is not as socially and politically contentious (much less, violent) as in some other parts of the world.

The religious tranquility of Latin America comes out in Inglehart's analysis of the World Values Survey. The region is characterized by strong emphasis on traditional values such as religion, but also on the free choice and self-expression that are more common in wealthy countries. Thus, says Inglehart, Latin America rivals the Islamic world in the importance given to religion (even if the level of practice is only moderate in global terms). But in subjective well-being and sense of being in control of one's life, the region rivals the Nordic countries.

Similarly, the Pew Forum's 2014 survey of religion in Latin America shows that belief in God characterizes more than 99 percent of the population of Guatemala and Nicaragua, and more than 90 percent everywhere in the region with the exception of Latin America's persistent outlier in questions of religion, Uruguay (and even there belief in God is as high as 81 percent). Those who say religion is very important in their lives range from 90 percent in Honduras down to 41 percent in Chile and only 28 percent in Uruguay; but answers in fourteen of the nineteen Latin American countries surveyed are (often far) higher than the 56 percent response in the supposedly very religious United States.²

Rapid Change in the Latin American Religious Field

Latin America was born under the sign of Christendom, the territorial and monopolistic conception of a Christian world. It was an export of a particular incarnation of the European Christendom model, characterized by the

1 Paul Preston, "As duas transições futuras: Católicos, Protestantes e sociedade na América Latina," *Ciencias Sociales y Religión/Ciências Sociais e Religião*, 12, no. 12 (October 2010): 13–30.

2 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region* (Washington, DC: 2014). pewforum.org/files/2014/11/Religion-in-Latin-America-11-12-PM-Full-PDF.pdf.

triumphalism of the Iberian *reconquista* and by the caesaropapist rule of the Church by the Spanish and Portuguese Crowns. The religious motifs in colonization (however sincerely held), allied to the fact that the colonizers either dominated numerically or at least retained political control after independence, meant that the Christendom model left a huge imprint.

Royal patronage, of course, often kept the Catholic Church on a shoestring and impeded the development of an indigenous clergy. With few priests, formal practice was always low, and "popular" Catholicism was lay-run and often heterodox. Yet it put down such deep roots that for long after the formal "deregulation of the religious market" (in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries) there was little overt abandonment of the Church. Ironically, in the last few decades, Latin America has become the heartland of global Catholicism (numerically, and in occupancy of the throne of St. Peter) at the very time its hegemony there has been eroded. This traditionally Catholic world is now fast changing, resulting mainly in a growing pluralism within Christianity (growth of Pentecostalism; new initiatives within Catholicism) but also in a growing pluralism beyond it, marked among other things by a rise in the number of people who claim "no religion."

The novelty of Latin America as compared to religious change in other parts of the world is that a previous Catholic near-monopoly is being eroded by Protestantism *from within* (not significantly stimulated by missionaries or immigrants) and *from the bottom up* (not by top-down "national Reformations"). Latin America's Catholic Christendom is being penetrated directly by voluntarist evangelicalism without going through a "Protestant Reformation" first. This is different from the northern European model, which went from Catholic Christendom to national reformation, followed by the growth of voluntarist evangelicalism in free churches and in pietistic movements within the state church. It is also different from the southern European model in which Catholicism remains hegemonic in the religious field (though creating a substantial antireligious sector) and all forms of Protestantism essentially fail. It also differs from the US model of plural colonization and denominationalism as the deliberate solution to Church-state relations.

Latin America's internally driven change increasingly affects even those who remain Catholic. What was previously a culturally determined identity ('if you are Latin American you are Catholic') has become an identity to be chosen and affirmed in the face of well-known and broadly available alternatives. In any case, the traditional Catholic claim to be an essential part of Latin American identity had lost plausibility as pluralism has increased and Protestantism (especially in its Pentecostal forms) has become deep rooted.

This inherently unstable and bottom-up transformation is already resulting in diverse patterns across the region, and thus in growing religious diversity *between countries* within Latin America. The 2014 Pew survey *Religion in Latin America*, which covered the whole of the region except for Cuba, illustrates what is happening. Although the 425 million Latin American Catholics constitute some 40 percent of Catholics across the globe, they now represent only 69 percent of Latin Americans. Some countries are still considerably above that regional average: Paraguay is 89 percent Catholic; Mexico, 81 percent; Colombia and Ecuador, 79 percent. But others are far below it: Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador only 50 percent; Honduras on 46 percent; and Uruguay at just 42 percent.

Meanwhile, Protestants now constitute 19 percent of the Latin American population. Much of this growth is extremely recent, as more than half of Latin American Protestants are converts (the figure for Colombia reaches 74 percent). But Protestant expansion, though region-wide, is far from uniform. At the top end, we find four neighboring Central American republics: Honduras and Guatemala on 41 percent, Nicaragua on 40 percent, and El Salvador on 36 percent. Next come Puerto Rico (33 percent) and Brazil (26 percent). At the other end of the scale, Paraguay is only 7 percent Protestant and Mexico 9 percent. Although Protestants have not overtaken Catholics in any Latin American country, they come closest in Honduras (41 to 46 percent).

The Pew survey employs two other categories: "unaffiliated" and "other religions." The "unaffiliated" are 8 percent regionally, varying from a low of 1 percent in Paraguay and 4 percent in Bolivia and Peru, to a high of 18 percent in the Dominican Republic and an extraordinary 37 percent in Uruguay. Few of those, however, are atheists: 10 percent in Uruguay, but no other country passes 4 percent. Meanwhile, the category of "other religions" is only 4 percent regionally, and never above 6 percent in any country.

If religious change in Latin America is going to produce internal diversification, what does the Pew snapshot tell us? One of us (Freston) feels that we can start to see some distinct "zones" emerging. The first zone is that of *Christian near-parity*, comprising Central America and the Caribbean lands of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. At the core of this zone are the four northern Central American countries that are approaching parity of Catholics and Protestants, both being highly practicing. Then there is a fringe, in the southern part of the Central American isthmus and in the Caribbean, that represents a weaker version of the same trend.

The second zone, which can be called *Christian pluralism*, is constituted by Brazil, where there is still a substantial Catholic "lead," but with

a larger-than-regional-average Protestantism that continues to grow quickly and a Catholicism that is still not highly practicing.

The third zone is that of *eroding Catholic dominance*. It comprises a swath of South America from Venezuela, through Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, to Bolivia. This zone still enjoys relatively strong Catholic percentages (all close to or above three-quarters of the population), with Protestant communities that are below the regional average but sometimes quite fast-growing in recent times. Fourth, there are two geographically distinct zones of *resistant Catholic dominance*, represented by Paraguay and Mexico, the only two countries whose Catholicism remains above 80 percent and whose Protestantism is still in single digits.

Lastly, there is a zone of *religious and nonreligious pluralism*, comprising the Southern Cone countries of Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay. The last of these, of course, stands out for its very unique percentage of "unaffiliated" (37 percent), which almost rivals its percentage of Catholics (42 percent) and makes it the only country where Protestants (15 percent) are not the second force. But there is also something of a larger Southern Cone pattern developing (even spilling over somewhat into the two southernmost states of Brazil). Thus, Uruguay, Chile, and Argentina constitute the three Latin American countries that give least importance to religion in life. They are the only countries that have double-digit indices of low commitment on Pew's "Religious Commitment Index." And they are also the countries with the lowest percentages of Catholics who describe themselves as "charismatic."

A recent volume on the notion of "Latin America" talks of its double origin. One source was in a network of Iberian-American intellectuals in France, such as the Colombian poet José María Torres Caicedo, whose 1857 poem *Las Dos Américas* exalted "the race of Latin America," which "has before it the Saxon race, its mortal enemy." Caicedo regarded the Catholic religion as a key part of the common cultural heritage of the "raza de la América latina." The other source of the concept was among French politicians and intellectuals close to the emperor Napoleon III, with their notion of a Latin racial union under the leadership of France, the only nation capable of resisting the rise of the Protestant countries and the Anglo-Saxon race.

"Latin America" is thus born as a defensive concept, a child of the nineteenth century and its essentialist racial and religious thought, whose originators would presumably find disturbing the degree to which the region has since been de-Catholicized. There was, it is true, another sector of the *criollo* elite that expressed admiration for the pragmatism and efficiency of the United States, the emerging power of the time. But that elite sector sought

support for its pro-Americanism in the work of the racial theorists of the period. The current de-Catholicization of Latin America is quite different; it has emerged from grassroots sectors, disproportionately nonwhite. In any case, Protestant growth is only one way in which the supposed common heritage of Latin America is under fire. The similarities created by Iberian conquest, Catholic religion, and largely *criollo* post-independence governance are being challenged by increasing economic diversity, indigenous "awakening," and broader religious pluralism.

A second comment about the current religious transformations is that it is possible to see them not so much as a betrayal of "Latin America," but rather as the belated outworking of alternative projects that were aborted in the early years of the European presence in the region. In the 1530s, Bartolomé de las Casas wrote about *The Only Method of Attracting All People to the True Faith*. "The means to effect this end are not to rob, to scandalize, to capture or destroy them, or to lay waste their lands." Instead "the one and only method of teaching men the true religion was established by Divine Providence for the whole world, and for all times: that is, by persuading the understanding through reasons, and by gently attracting or exhorting the will." In justification of this method, Las Casas cited reason, the Church Fathers, Christ, the Apostles, and the "most ancient tradition of the Church."³ In addition, Carlos Garma, mentions the early attempts to use indigenous languages in evangelization and to produce a native clergy, projects that were later abandoned by the colonial Catholic Church and reintroduced centuries afterwards by Protestant missionaries. It can be argued that the Lascasian project of peaceful persuasion, and its corollaries of communication in the language of the people by a clergy that has emerged from the people, is reintroduced by historical Protestantism, popularized by Pentecostalism, and brought full circle as it is taken up by various forms of contemporary Catholicism, from the Base Communities to the Charismatic Renewal. Of course, the ambiguities of Las Casas himself are not absent from these contemporary implementations, whether under Catholic or Protestant guise.

Be that as it may, authors such as Grace Davie and David Martin have stressed how Latin America used to mirror Latin Europe in its religious field, but has now shifted somewhat in the direction of the United States, driven by Pentecostals' rejection of syncretism in favor of a pluralistic model of the

3 Lewis Hanke, *The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1949), 7; George Sanderlin (ed.), *Bartolomé de las Casas: A Selection of His Writings* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1971), 158.

religious field. We would phrase it somewhat differently: from being similar to southern Europe, Latin America has moved somewhat in the direction of the United States (in the sense of greater Christian pluralism), but also in the direction of sub-Saharan Africa (with its multitude of thriving Pentecostal and charismatic forms of Christianity).

The final comment on the religious transformations in the region is that they are probably approaching some important tipping points. Catholic decline and Protestant growth will both have their limits. In the case of Brazil, the Protestant ceiling will probably be reached within two or three decades, as a result of two main factors. First, Catholic decline (currently at about 1 percent per year) will not go on indefinitely; there is a solid nucleus of practicing Catholics that will not disappear. Second, Protestantism currently receives only just over one of every two people who abandon Catholicism. And besides, the Catholic Church is slowly learning to compete better.

This perspective on Brazil has been challenged by Alves, Cavenaghi, and Barros, who characterize the state of Rio de Janeiro (45.8 percent Catholics; 29.4 percent Protestants; 15.6 percent "nonreligious"; 9.2 percent "other religions") as the most religiously diverse in the country. This diversity is accentuated in the poor urban periphery of Greater Rio: 37.4 percent Catholic and 34.5 percent Protestant. Many *municípios* already have more Protestants than Catholics. This region, they point out, seems to be two decades ahead of the rest of the country; the current indices for Brazil as a whole are strikingly similar to those of Metropolitan Greater Rio twenty years ago. And, they stress, there does not yet seem to be any "floor" to Catholic decline.

Whatever the case, the changes in Latin America, which have been dramatic enough, appear set to be even greater in coming decades. We are not far from a tipping point in which old patterns of relationships among religion, state, and society not only will be questioned but also may be entirely changed. Multidimensional pluralism, numerical decline, relative institutional weakness, and the effects of democracy and the fragmenting of civil society may lead to Catholic loss of "churchly" status, in which the old sociopolitical roles will have become unsustainable. We can call this critical moment the "Catholic transition."⁴

However, there will also be a "Protestant transition," a ceiling on Protestant growth and therefore on its political aspirations. This ceiling will not be

4 Paul Freston, "As duas transições futuras: Católicos, Protestantes e sociedade na América Latina." *Ciencias Sociales y Religión/Ciências Sociais e Religião*, 12(12), October (2010): 13–30, at 28.

uniform throughout the region. But everywhere, it will radically change the nature of Latin American Protestantism and its relationship to society, politics, and other religions.

Several factors might favor stronger Catholic resistance to Protestant advance than in the past. One is demography. Catholic clericalism and "heavy" territorial structure struggled in eras characterized by demographic mobility. But now, population growth is slowing, internal migrations are diminishing, and urban growth is going more to medium-sized cities, all of which should favor Catholicism's capacity to react. A second factor is Catholic adaptation. It was almost inevitable that Catholicism would suffer heavy losses once real religious competition began. But that is only a first moment. As Froehle and Gautier say, "In countries [outside Latin America] where the Church has long existed side by side with evangelical Protestants in an open, pluralist setting, Catholics have developed particularly strong forms of local parish life, commitment to practice and participation, and a sense of stewardship and relatively high church giving. In other words, the Church has learned from the strengths characteristic of these other Christian traditions."⁵ It is probably not coincidental that the most vibrant Catholic movement in much of Latin America today, the Charismatic Renewal, began in the United States and fits well with the Latin American Church's need to reinvent itself in a more "denominational" context. Significantly, the 2014 Pew survey found that, across the region, 40 percent of Catholics now identify (at least when asked in a survey) as "charismatic." The Catholic Charismatic Renewal is, par excellence, a Catholicism for a religious field based more on a "denominational" model; it promotes a reaffiliation to the religion of one's birth, helping it to survive in a model of competitive pluralism in which religion is more and more a conscious individual choice. (Interestingly, the Pew survey also found that in the Central American countries that have near-parity of Catholics and Protestants, the Catholics are highly practicing.)

We can thus foresee a religious future comprising a Catholicism that is slimmer but revitalized, more practicing, and committed; together with a large but stable (and highly fragmented) Protestantism; and finally a considerable sector of non-Christian religions and of "non-religious." In this pluralist future, Catholicism would maintain its position as the largest single religious confession, with residual social and political privileges, especially as the divided Protestants would struggle to create solid representative institutions.

5 Bryan Froehle and Mary Gautier, *Global Catholicism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), 132.

What else can we foresee? For instance, will Latin America simply be the last part of the old Christendom to secularize? Of course, if secularization is structurally determined by modernity, that is obviously the case, and the current explosion of Pentecostal churches and of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal must be a temporary effervescence. If, however, secularization is culturally contingent, one of several possible "modernities," then factors such as the differential impact of the Enlightenment on Latin American society (largely confined to elites), the current reassertion of indigenous peoples (especially in the Andean and Mayan regions), and the deep grassroots penetration by Pentecostal and Catholic charismatic spirituality might pull Latin America in a different direction.

*The Importance of Latin America in Debates about
Religion and Globalization*

In debates on religion in a globalizing world, Latin America is often the "Cinderella region," overlooked in comparison to Europe and North America, and even to Africa and Asia because of their more recent de-colonization and massive presence of the other world religions. But Latin America deserves more global comparative attention, for several reasons.

One reason is that it illustrates possible futures for religion in globalizing times, in which the dichotomous "relativism versus fundamentalism" model posited by various scholars is nuanced by attention to "hybridity" and "peaceful conversionism," both of which are flourishing in Latin America. The former is, of course, a classic Latin American response, building on a tradition of synthetic heterodoxies at the popular level. But overlapping with this, while also introducing significant modification, is the conversionist response best exemplified by Pentecostalism. Latin American Pentecostalism is a major example of a religious globalization that is conversionist rather than diasporic; and in terms of cultural and political implications, there is a fundamental difference between diasporic globalization and conversionist globalization. The fact that Latin American religious change is due largely to conversion points to an important contrast with Europe, where the new religious pluralism results more from immigration and secularization.

José Casanova emphasizes how globalization undermines territorially based national religion, with its monopolistic claims that parallel those of the nation-state. Under globalization new forms emerge or are strengthened in all world religions, at individual, group, and societal levels. Individual mysticism, always an option for elites and religious virtuosi, becomes more generally available (reaching at least the middle classes in Latin America); at the

group level, there are expanded possibilities for voluntary associations on the 'denominational' model; and transnational churches, freed from territorial constraints, reappear as globalized imagined communities. Thus Catholicism reemerges as a transnational religious regime, progressively gaining control over national churches. In 1999, Pope John Paul II consecrated Guadalupe as Virgin of all the Americas and urged bishops to cease viewing themselves as national hierarchies. And although Catholicism attempts to maximize the spaces offered by globalization to a transnational religion with a centralized structure, its upstart rival in Latin America, Pentecostalism, exemplifies the response of a decentralized religion with no territorial roots.

A second reason for greater attention to Latin America is that the debate about religion and modernity needs to be more global. Both history and recent changes contribute to the importance of Latin America for discussing these large questions of religion and modernity. The three most globalized religions (in numbers, geographical spread, and social influence) are currently Islam, Catholicism, and Pentecostalism, and Latin America is now a major site for the latter two. Catholicism and Protestantism (especially in Pentecostal form) now constitute (along with Islam) the major grassroots religious actors in poor and volatile regions of the world. Latin America exemplifies the new global reality of Christianity as a major religion of the world's poor and powerless. As such, the region must be included more in attempts to make the debate about religion and modernity global in scope. This debate has been dominated by a discussion of Europe (the secularization model) and North America (the market model); any attempts to go beyond are usually limited to a discussion of Islam. But the idea of "multiple modernities" challenges the assumption that modernizing societies are convergent and that either Europe or North America are "lead societies." A third reason for recommending greater global awareness of Latin American religion is that it increasingly matters not only to the region itself but also to other parts of the world, whether through transnational migration of Latin Americans, missionary exporting in various forms of religious transnationalism, or through the growing geopolitical and economic importance of key actors such as Brazil and Mexico.

Lastly, Latin America is important for current global debates on religion and human rights. The region has (courtesy of Pentecostalism) become a major site of controversies surrounding proselytization. It also at times illustrates the tension between the Catholic Church's support for religious freedom and its desire to hold on to its privileged position in traditionally Catholic areas of the world. The current moment, in fact, may be the worst of both worlds for religious contribution to the defense of human rights in the region.

On the one hand, the Catholic Church no longer enjoys unchallenged hegemony but has not yet adjusted to the new situation; if it had to combat a new round of repressive regimes, the old methods of resistance would be less effective. At the same time, Pentecostalism is still largely alienated by the culture of the human rights movement, which has difficulty incorporating a lower class religious movement that is successful at proselytizing under a competitive pluralist conception of the religious field, and struggles to relate to Pentecostalism's discourse of individual empowerment through the discovery of personal agency.

Contents

The Cambridge History of Religions in Latin America covers Latin American religious history from pre-Conquest times until the present. (Our definition of Latin America includes the Spanish-speaking Caribbean.) We begin with an analysis of religion before the Conquest, both in the "New World" as well as in both the relevant parts of the "Old World," Europe, and Africa. We proceed with an examination of the religious dimensions of, and reactions to, conquest and colonization. We then look at the institutionalized colonial Church and at various dimensions of the *criollo* Catholicism that resulted from it.

One of the overtly religious novelties of the post-independence period is the possibility for Protestant Christianity to establish itself. Another significant religious transformation stemming from the nineteenth century is Catholic reform, responding not merely to the arrival of religious rivals but also to the strengthened contact with global Catholicism by the late nineteenth century and the dramatic transformations of global Catholicism after the mid-twentieth century. Transformations within Catholicism are matched in the second half of the twentieth century by changes in the non-Catholic religious field, as religious pluralism comes to Latin America.

We then look at aspects of the relationship between religions and the State in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, whether that should be understood as a "deprivatization" of Latin American Catholicism or as merely a transformation of what had always been a public religion. Deprivatization seems to be more clearly the case with Protestantism in the region, above all in the case of the Pentecostals. The Pentecostals are also the main (but not the only) reason for asking whether Catholicism at the end of the millennium is undergoing erosion or renewal. Whether it is being eroded or renewed (or both), its nature has certainly changed as it seeks to find its way as one religious option among others, while still replete with many of the advantages and disadvantages of its former status.

One of the greatest forces behind the transformations in the religious field has been gender, especially the changes in women's rights and roles that are the theme of subsequent chapters. And, as shown next, indigenous peoples are another highly significant factor in religious change, especially in some parts of the region, involving the two main branches of Christianity as well as the revival of indigenous traditions. The African diaspora in Latin America is the theme of the following chapters, both in its religious pluralism and in the strengthening and transformation of the Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Caribbean religions.

We then cast an eye over an increasingly important phenomenon, that of Latin American religious transnationalism, both within the region and far beyond. Latin American religious phenomena have become global players, not merely in accompanying the diaspora of Latin Americans but also in relation to the religious lives of some North Americans, Europeans, Africans, and Asians.

We further explore the religious pluralism of contemporary Latin America in the following chapters, which examine not only the other "world religions" but also smaller new groups (such as the Mormons), as well as some phenomena that are peculiarly strong in the region (such as Spiritism) or that represent original syntheses (such as Luz del Mundo). But pluralism goes beyond religion (while also representing its "other face"), as various forms of secularization increasingly occur within Latin America. Finally, in a concluding chapter by one of the most experienced scholars of Latin American religion, Daniel Levine, puts much of this history and contemporary transformation in broader perspective.

A note on sourcing in this volume. Because this project is encyclopedic in scope, we have opted to omit much of the scholarly apparatus of footnoting, except in the case of direct quotations. However, please note that all references are readily provided in the bibliography that follows each chapter.

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