

Pentecostals, Politics, and Public Space in Latin America

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Present-day Latin America presents an intriguing panorama to the student of religion and politics. In the first place, the region's most venerable political structures are undergoing profound change. Latin America has long been noted for its pronounced statism and political authoritarianism. However, all across the region a transition to democratic government is currently under way. This transition is manifested in contested elections, a proliferation of political parties, and a general pattern of military withdrawal from the political arena. It is also marked by a growing trend toward the privatization of many state functions. It is true that some scholars view these developments with skepticism and have raised serious questions about the depth and durability of the current wave of democratization.¹ Nevertheless, despite this undercurrent of caution, there seems to be a consensus that for the time being political authority in Latin America derives more from the ballot than from the bullet.

A shift of similar magnitude is occurring in Latin American religion. Whereas Latin America was pervasively Roman Catholic for four and one-half centuries, not merely in religious terms but culturally, today it is the fertile ground of dynamic Protestant expansion. The historical Protestant churches labored for a century to penetrate the Catholic monopoly with only limited success. In scarcely two generations Pentecostalism, which in several senses of the word is a more popular brand of Protestantism than the historical variant, has spread exuberantly throughout the region. At present Pentecostalism appears to be replacing Roman Catholicism as the religion of the common people.²

How will the simultaneous democratization of Latin American politics and "Pentecostalization" of Latin American religion affect each other? This question is already being posed.³ In raising it, some writers have stressed the social consequences that may flow from the rapid spread of evangelical churches; others have

stressed Protestantism's political effects, particularly in stimulating and providing support for democratic values and practices.⁴ At the same time, other writers are skeptical that religion and politics can interact in a mutually beneficial way. They see in the predominantly Pentecostal character of Latin American Protestantism today an apolitical, otherworldly religion that is, on its own terms, entirely apathetic toward politics. According to this point of view, although Pentecostal religion may facilitate authoritarian politics through passivity or by lending itself to the manipulations of the "Christian right," it does not foster democratic values or encourage the sense of civic commitment that is necessary to democratic politics.⁵

These conflicting interpretations of Pentecostalism and politics are not new. Indeed, this debate was first framed by two pioneering researchers, Emilio Willems and Christian Lalive d'Epina. As early as the 1960s they recognized the degree to which Pentecostalism had become an established, popular religion in Latin America. For example, from his studies of Brazil and Chile, completed in 1960, Willems concluded that "the major Pentecostal sects have a larger constituency than all the historical Protestant churches together."⁶ Willems studied both the historical Protestant churches (focusing especially on Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists) and Pentecostals, offering systematic comparisons between the two types of churches on a range of issues. Lalive d'Epina focused on the Pentecostal experience in Chile. The two writers agreed that Pentecostalism is a religion of the poor, that it offers both psychological security and the minimal material security necessary to cope with a hostile environment, that it affords emotional release more than it challenges the intellect, that it encourages ceaseless proselytizing on the part of its members, and that it rejects the temporal realm in favor of cultivating the spiritual life. But whereas Willems saw signs to suggest that Pentecostalism might help promote modernization and democratization, Lalive d'Epina argued forcefully that the evidence pointed to the opposite conclusion.

Lalive d'Epina stressed the degree to which pastors dominated Pentecostal churches, defining the terms of membership, the nature of worship, and the relation of the church to the larger society.⁷ He argued that in this respect Pentecostal churches exhibited an episcopal model of church organization rather than a congregational model. In fact, he compared the Pentecostal mode of organization to the hacienda system, with its hierarchy, paternalism, and subordination. In this comparison he sought to capture what he saw as the deeply paradoxical nature of Pentecostalism. On one hand, Pentecostalism represented a radical break with the existing society, its values and class structure. On the other hand, it reproduced one of the most traditional and conservative features of the old social order by organizing its members in a "quasi-military hierarchy."⁸ Under the sway of an authoritarian leadership, Pentecostal churches withdrew their members radically from society, thereby depriving them of any opportunity to influence or alter it, especially in political terms. Lalive d'Epina himself put it this way: "While

Pentecostalism disalienates the individual to begin with, since it allows him to overcome his uprooting and isolation by offering him entry into an organized, protective group, it then in turn alienates itself and 're-alienates' its members, since it looks upon itself as alien to the 'world' and effectively makes its members strangers to society."⁹ On the basis of this analysis, he argued that Pentecostalism would not be a positive force for change as Latin America pursued modernization. He concluded that it would be "a force for order rather than an element of progress, a defender of the status quo and not a promoter of change."¹⁰

Conceding that Pentecostalism was less congenial to political involvement than historical Protestantism, especially in the North American context, Willems nevertheless thought he detected ways in which Pentecostalism might be a positive factor for social and even political change. He did not necessarily expect that influence to be exercised through the direct integration of Pentecostals into the political arena. Rather, he envisioned an indirect influence through the shaping of the political culture of the region and the personal values of the people. Willems noted the fundamental egalitarianism inherent in Pentecostal theology. Every convert is understood to have received the Holy Spirit, thereby becoming a full and equal member of a spiritual community. Furthermore, each convert shares in the mandate to evangelize others not yet in the faith; he or she becomes a prophet. As Willems observed, "Vested in religious symbolism, it [prophetism] constitutes a mode of social control which may be exercised by any member of a congregation over anybody else, including the pastor. It minimizes the social distance between the common members and the pastor, between laity and clergy. It is an institutionalized way of keeping authority within the group in a state of continuous flux."¹¹ In short, Willems viewed the Pentecostal churches as having a congregational mode of organization that facilitated egalitarian relationships.

Pursuing this theme of egalitarianism, Willems argued that the poor in Chile and Brazil chose Pentecostalism as a "symbolic protest against the traditional social order."¹² Indeed, he went on to call Pentecostalism "a symbolic subversion of the traditional social order."¹³ The poor, he argued, were choosing "an egalitarian denomination in which the individual, particularly the layman, is in full control of church affairs."¹⁴ Active participation was expected and enthusiastically embraced despite the fact that it imposed demanding responsibilities on each member. Willems concluded that Pentecostalism, as a conscious rejection of the old hierarchical and authoritarian mode of organization in religion and an eager embrace of equality and participation, had the potential to instill a more democratic ethos into new generations of Latin Americans.

In the time since Willems and Lalive d'Epinau wrote, Pentecostalism has continued its aggressive growth throughout Latin America. It has begun to make inroads in countries such as Peru, where it had almost no presence when Willems was conducting his research. In countries such as Guatemala, its growth was explosive during the 1970s and 1980s, leading some writers to see it as a natural religious corollary to political authoritarianism and repression much as Lalive

d'Epinau had suggested.¹⁵ Less noted was the dramatic growth of Pentecostalism in Nicaragua during a period when the country was experiencing a popular leftwing revolution.¹⁶ Though disparate in political direction, however, Guatemala and Nicaragua shared a widespread social dislocation caused by economic modernization and protracted, violent political conflict. Indeed, throughout Latin America this has been the context in which Pentecostalism has been studied over the past two decades.

Today, however, the context is changing. If present trends hold, in the years ahead Pentecostalism will function in a milieu that is considerably different from that of Willems and Lalive d'Epinau's time. Not only politics but society itself may be more democratic in Latin America's future. Moreover, Pentecostalism will have sunk even deeper roots into Latin American soil. Future studies are likely to show with ever greater clarity how much diversity actually exists among Pentecostal churches.

In anticipation of that future, this seems a good time to ask the old questions again in relation to the newly evolving societal context. As practiced in Latin America, is Pentecostalism uniformly apolitical? Does it encourage passivity, quiescence, or lack of interest in politics and government? Insofar as lack of interest in politics is evident in Pentecostal behavior, can this be explained by theology, or does it derive more from an ethic of social conduct that is imposed within congregations regardless of theological understandings? To the extent that Pentecostalism is in fact political, does it have anything to contribute to the building of a more democratic society or polity? Scholars have scarcely begun to explore empirically the ways in which Pentecostalism might contribute to the formation or strengthening of an active civil society. Could Pentecostalism serve to energize the poorest classes to take a more active role in civil society in those Latin American countries where a viable civil society already exists? Where a viable civil society has yet to be constructed, can Pentecostalism play a meaningful part in its formation? Questions such as these have a special urgency in a time of democratic transition. No definitive, empirically based answer can be given here, but some interesting possibilities can be explored.

Reframing the Question of Pentecostalism and Politics

The present trend toward democratization in Latin America has had an interesting effect on scholarship. Concern with revolution has waned as revolutionary movements and regimes have exhausted their energies and lost their attraction. Marxist analysis has declined in relevance correspondingly. Pronounced religious revivalism has turned some scholars back to Weber and other "nonmarxist" sociologists of religion. Meanwhile, political scientists have shown increasing interest in electoral behavior, political parties, and the ways in which forms of political organization (e.g., the type of electoral system, whether the system is parliamentary or presidential) affect the building and maintenance of democratic govern-

ment.¹⁷ In light of these shifts, a theorist who has been adduced infrequently with regard to Latin America, Alexis de Tocqueville, may be helpful in exploring the possible interrelation of Pentecostalism and politics in this time of transition.

When Tocqueville wrote about American democracy in the 1830s, he took some pains to highlight the importance of religion in the development of democracy. He traced American democracy to Puritan roots and, in effect, sharply contrasted religion's political role in North and in South America. Whereas Roman Catholicism had reinforced social inequality in Latin America, Puritanism had encouraged in North America a "social state" marked by equality of condition and social mobility. This latter social order was, in turn, highly conducive to democracy in government. Tocqueville ended a lengthy discussion of North American colonial history with these forceful words: "I have already said enough to put Anglo-American civilization in its true light. It is the product ... of two perfectly distinct elements which elsewhere have often been at war with one another but which in America it was somehow possible to incorporate into each other, forming a marvelous combination. I mean the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom."¹⁸ In fact, Tocqueville was so impressed with Protestantism's positive role as to conclude that in America "freedom sees religion as the companion of its struggles and triumphs."¹⁹

Is there a prospect that in Latin America today freedom can see religion as the "companion of its struggles and triumphs"-that democracy can advance with religion's support? During the 1960s and 1970s those who participated in the Catholic church's *comunidades eclesiales de base* (Christian base communities/CEBs) certainly took this view, albeit in a politically more repressive context than the present.²⁰ The development of CEBs at the grass roots, together with the work of creating a theology of liberation, was aimed directly at fostering greater freedom, including political freedom, in Latin America.²¹ However, as a resource in the struggle for political freedom the base-community experiment faltered, in no small measure because of the resistance of hierarchical authorities within the church. In recent years the CEB as a form of "new social movement" has been overtaken by events; the numbers of CEBs have dwindled, and they have adopted a less overtly political orientation. But what about the Pentecostal churches? Is there any point in asking whether they can be an ally to freedom? I will argue that there is, but first a bit more must be said about Tocqueville's analysis of the contributing factors in American democracy in order to see what relevance that analysis may have for Latin America.

Tocqueville insisted repeatedly that the distinguishing characteristic of American democracy (and therefore of the coming democratic age) was "equality of condition."²² When he compared America with Europe, what stood out in Tocqueville's mind was the absence of any form of aristocracy in the former. He considered that the political forms adopted in America, including administrative decentralization, a free press, and a multiplicity of civil associations, reinforced the effects of equality of condition. Americans had developed a political culture

of which the love of equality was the most pronounced feature. Potentially, Tocqueville thought, this love of equality could conflict with and undermine Americans' attachment to liberty. Should that occur, he argued, despotism might arise from democratic soil.

The culprit in this pessimistic scenario – the danger to be found in the love of equality – was something Tocqueville called "individualism." For Tocqueville, individualism was a sentiment, a "habit of the heart" that led men and women to withdraw from the society of their fellows, to consider that they owed nothing to others and were owed nothing by others. It threatened to create a kind of social anomie in which people existed in proximity to one another but without social bonds of any kind.²³ By discouraging cooperation and participation in common endeavors, individualism opened the way to one of two undesirable extremes: anarchy or despotism. In other words, apathy toward collective action was the greatest danger produced by equality of condition. What impressed Tocqueville about America and made the country a model to be emulated by others was the efficiency with which Americans had learned to avoid this danger.

Tocqueville went on to argue that "Americans have combated by free institutions the tendency of equality to keep men asunder, and they have subdued it."²⁴ He described the "immense assemblage of associations" that had been generated in America, demonstrating what he saw as the "necessary connection" between equality of condition and the "principle of association."²⁵ He also saw a healthy reciprocity between explicitly political associations and civil associations, each serving to reinforce and invigorate the other. In short, Tocqueville described an America in which a vigorous civil society combined with free political institutions to preserve equality of condition while avoiding the dangers of individualism.

Perhaps more than at any other time in the region's history, Tocqueville's analysis speaks directly to the conditions of Latin America today. Some countries are undergoing redemocratization after lengthy interludes of militarism; others are embracing democratic politics for the first time. In the former, for example, Chile and Argentina, civil society survived the ravages of military rule but in a somewhat truncated form and had to be "reconstructed."²⁶ In the latter, for example, El Salvador, Haiti, and Paraguay, to a large degree civil society has yet to be created. In each type of country the grip of aristocracy is weakening in both urban and rural society.

I do not say that inherited and customary inequality have disappeared, only that they are less and less binding. The certainties of the old system of social inequality (exhibited most tellingly in the patron-client networks that Latin Americanists have studied for years) are being replaced for more and more poor Latin Americans by the uncertainty of something similar to Tocqueville's "equality of condition." When Willems and Lalive d'Epinay wrote about Pentecostalism, Latin America's population was 40-50 percent rural. What Tocqueville called the "chain of aristocracy" still bound half the population in a prescribed order of inequality. Today the population is nearly 75 percent urban.²⁷ Formerly "rooted"

men and women have been uprooted by the millions by political conflict, economic modernization, and the militant free-market policies of the present moment. Their situation cannot be compared directly with that of 1835 America, where persons had begun to "lose their class identity for each other." Nevertheless, in a crucial sense relentless urbanization, coupled with strict, market-oriented economic policies, has broken the chain of aristocracy and "sever[ed] every link of it."²⁸ In this new context, Pentecostalism may have the potential to generate a different kind of impact from the one commonly attributed to it.

Disputing the Pessimists

Optimism about Pentecostalism's potential for positive contributions to civil and political society in Latin America is relatively rare. For example, one seldom sees the enthusiasm for its democratic potential expressed by Amy Sherman, who has argued that Pentecostalism could pave the way for Latin American democracy by promoting the values of toleration and participation. In her view, Pentecostalism is inimical to "big government" and offers "biblical support for such free-market propositions as private property, economic initiative, and man's creative capacity."²⁹ Although one might quarrel with some or all of these assertions, the point is that Sherman's reading of Pentecostalism's democratic affinities is fairly unusual. Her analysis draws heavily on David Martin's argument that Pentecostalism may serve to undergird democracy even if it is not explicitly oriented to politics, but Martin's analysis is less overtly ideological and partisan. As did Willems, he stresses the participatory and egalitarian nature of Pentecostal congregations, which he considers "sociologically consonant with democratic polities and ... part of the popular base on which such polities might rest" but not themselves basically political.³⁰

In contrast to Martin's rather tepid optimism, there is a great deal of pessimism to be found on the part of other writers. Among the most vigorous arguments against the democratic potential of Pentecostalism are those of Jean-Pierre Bastian. Bastian contrasts historical Protestantism and Pentecostalism. The former articulated a form of "radical liberalism" that challenged the prevailing political culture of Latin America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The latter is "top-down and authoritarian" and represents "a relay point for the vertical social control of a society blocked in its evolution toward a liberal and democratic modernity."³¹ In Bastian's view, much of the success of Pentecostalism can be attributed to state patronage, and the religious movement itself has adopted the corporatist strategies and organizational forms characteristic of the traditional Catholic culture of Latin America.³²

Judging from the uncompromising nature of his conclusions, one might guess that Bastian would find little utility in the application of a Tocquevillean analysis to the study of religion and politics in Latin America today. Yet he himself offers some data that might support just such an analysis. For example, he cites studies

of Mexico, Brazil, and Ecuador that show rural people using Pentecostal movements to challenge power structures that dominate and exploit them.³³ Bastian counters the thrust of these studies by emphasizing what he sees as the extreme paternalism, even authoritarianism, of intrachurch governance and leadership among Pentecostal churches. He describes the Pentecostal pastor as a "cacique," a "caudillo" who is "the absolute master" of the religious enterprise.³⁴ In making this case, of course, Bastian is reprising the argument of Lalive d'Epinay. However, he extrapolates from the experience of a number of very large Pentecostal denominations that may not be at all typical of the vast majority of Pentecostal churches throughout Latin America. One could argue that the majority of Pentecostal churches in Latin America are relatively small and much less centralized and authoritarian than Bastian contends. At the very least, this is an issue that calls for further research.³⁵

In the meantime, let us consider the evidence that can be gleaned from the more typical Pentecostal church. By its very nature Pentecostalism is an extremely fragmented religious movement. Charisma and the free interpretation of signs and wonders are centrifugal forces that pull constantly against efforts to impose doctrinal orthodoxy or monolithic pastoral authority. Most Pentecostal churches are "small groups with a high degree of interpersonal relations that are local in orientation and dedicated to the 'work of the lord' in their immediate neighborhoods and adjacent areas."³⁶ Pastor and congregation alike will be from the neighborhood where the church is located, the church will have little institutional structure, and it will have a surprisingly democratic mode of organization. Within the church, relationships are more horizontal than vertical, and women play a prominent role in all aspects of church life except the pastorate itself. The lives of all members of the church are centered on the religious community, which places strong demands on their time, energy, and resources.³⁷ Such intense involvement certainly could deflect Pentecostals' attention from the daily concerns and routines of politics, but it could also teach them a lesson that Tocqueville thought crucial in a democratic age: that they "become powerless if they do not learn to help one another."³⁸ Where better to learn such a lesson than in the "moral association" known as the Pentecostal church?

Pentecostals are "born-again" Christians, and the significance of being born again bears emphasizing. It means, in effect, taking on a new identity, becoming a new person who lives in a new way. The underlying theology that guides this new life can be sharply dualistic, dividing life's experiences into good and evil, holy and diabolical. When faith is understood in this way, daily life is experienced as a constant struggle to resist the temptations of the old life. To be effective in this struggle believers adopt strict standards of personal behavior, and this has important individual and social repercussions. Among other things, it can lead to sobriety, faithfulness in marriage, the assumption of greater responsibility within the family, and increased reliability in the workplace. This dualistic theology is a

far cry from the "social gospel" of liberal Protestantism, but it clearly has association-building qualities if it can strengthen families, purify neighborhoods, and sustain religious communities.

Pentecostal theology is usually premillennial and apocalyptic. Converts firmly believe in Christ's return "accompanied by the rapture of the saints."³⁹ Until then their lives unfold in the midst of a struggle between two cosmic forces, God and the devil. God's struggle with the devil for control of human lives is manifested in signs and wonders, which can range from transcendent, all-encompassing events such as war, waves of political repression, or earthquakes to the much more particular level of one individual's hunger, illness, or personal tragedy. The gifts of the Spirit are used to cope with such calamities. In Pentecostal worship these gifts are demonstrated in the power to lay on hands and encourage healing or to speak in tongues. As we have seen, these powers are not monopolized by the pastor, although he must certainly possess them. The power to lay on hands and speak in tongues lies at the core of Pentecostalism, and one is struck by how egalitarian, participatory, and indeed communal this power is. Participation is essential because personal experience is more central to worship than knowledge or training. Members are qualified to participate on the basis of their own suffering and openness to God's healing grace. Symbolically, by laying on hands and speaking in tongues they mediate grace to one another. This produces what one writer calls the "permanent spontaneity" of Pentecostal worship, a facet that would seem to militate against excesses of authoritarianism on the part of the pastor.⁴⁰ As Juan Sepulveda observes, in Pentecostalism "the traditional division between the 'qualified agents' who convey a legitimate religious speech, and the ones who only participate as consumers of such speech, disappears."⁴¹

To summarize, although Pentecostal theology may have the immediate effect of drawing a convert's attention away from political affairs and social involvements, it is not inherently hostile to the concerns and values of civil society or of politics. Access to the gifts of the Holy Spirit is empowering, and it is actively shared. Laying on of hands and the search for healing are communal or, in Tocqueville's terms, associational activities. As they are practiced over time, there is no reason to think they would not be extended to concerns of the body as well as the soul. They could easily grow into a concern for education, health care, insuring against future calamity, and other similar social concerns.

Pentecostals in Civil and Political Society

The fact is that Pentecostals are already active in civil society in Latin America. Everett Wilson's study of the Liceo Cristiano, an extensive system of private schools established in El Salvador by the Centro Evangelistico, a Pentecostal congregation, demonstrates vividly the extent to which Pentecostals have begun to fill the public space with social works, even in countries with a weakly developed civil

society⁴² The scope of the Liceo is impressive; it enrolls 24,000 students on thirtyfour campuses nationwide. What began as a strictly educational enterprise gradually expanded to include the provision of "rudimentary medical and dental services and supplementary nutritional and welfare services for the students and their families."⁴³ Wilson's study makes two further points related to the present argument. First, the Liceo experience is being duplicated in many other Latin American countries, where Pentecostals are busy creating the social infrastructures that are needed to sustain community building among the poor. Second, although international church bodies play an important role in this endeavor, the driving influence and control are usually local. The entire experience can teach Pentecostals about "the close tie that unites private to general interest." In this way, "local freedom ... leads a great number of citizens to value the affection of their neighbors and of their kindred, [and it] brings men together and forces them to help one another in spite of the propensities that sever them."⁴⁴

Let us recall that Tocqueville's concern about democratic societies was that individualism would encourage apathy. However, the apparent indifference of Pentecostals to public affairs may not be the apathy that so alarmed Tocqueville, at least not in the long run. Those who join Pentecostal churches have had negligible influence in the political arena to begin with. If democratization continues, they may have greater influence in the future, and experience can teach them the limits and potential of that influence. Clearly, those who can generate viable systems of education working from the grass roots are capable of exerting a broader influence in society.

In the meantime, there is a role to play in strengthening civil society. For most poor Latin Americans, membership in a Pentecostal church is likely to be their first experience of actual social equality. Active participation in the church is also apt to be a new experience and their first exposure to associational life. Finally, the new powers acquired through conversion and participation are exercised in an association that is "civic" in Tocqueville's sense of the word; members associate and cooperate to meet common needs. Poor people in Latin America may be far more likely to learn the "principle of association" this way than through participating in elections, joining political parties, bringing suits in the courts, or engaging in the activities of conventional, secular interest groups. Moreover, learning the principle of association in this way encourages what Tocqueville called "administrative decentralization," which fosters civic-spiritedness at the local level because so many practical, immediate issues are decided there.⁴⁵

Having emphasized Pentecostalism's potential relevance to civil society, we should not ignore the fact that Pentecostals have not turned their backs on politics itself everywhere and at all times in Latin America. Guatemala's experience is already well known. Two evangelicals (both of them men with a strong Pentecostal orientation) have served as president of the country, one of them having been popularly elected. The former military leader and born-again Christian

Jose Efrain Rios Montt is currently head of the Guatemalan congress. Guatemala has generally been considered an exception in Latin America, but it is not really such an aberration. As Pentecostal churches become more rooted and secure, one factor motivating them toward a greater interest in politics may be a desire to rectify generations of discriminatory treatment by the state in favor of Roman Catholicism. In the name of fair play and for the sake of protecting evangelical interests, they may assume a more active role in the political arena. Alberto Fujimori's aggressive courting of the evangelical vote in Peru during the 1990 presidential campaign and his strong support from that sector in the balloting illustrate the potential receptivity of Pentecostals and other evangelical Protestants on this issue.⁴⁶

Speaking more generally, it is clear that Pentecostals are now taking more interest in elections in various Latin American countries. They have even run for office, with some success, in Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Peru, among other countries.⁴⁷ New evangelical parties have been created recently in El Salvador and Nicaragua, and this too is a trend that may well spread.⁴⁸ Moreover, Pentecostals clearly have opinions on political issues and are willing to express them. One interesting result of polling is that their attitudes are not uniformly conservative or reactionary. Roberto Zub's discussion of the 1990 elections in Nicaragua is instructive. Whereas some leftist observers had speculated that 90-95 percent of Protestants voted for candidates of the conservative United Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO) coalition, analysis of the data suggested otherwise. Sixty-eight percent of the members of the Foursquare Gospel Church voted for UNO, but it should be noted that this church's membership is more middleclass and business-oriented than that of other Pentecostal churches and UNO was explicitly a probusiness party. Sixty percent of Assemblies of God members voted for UNO, but almost 20 percent voted for the revolutionary party, the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Sandinista National Liberation Front—FSLN). Only 38.5 percent of the members of the Church of God voted UNO, and nearly a quarter voted Sandinista.⁴⁹ These data hardly fit the stereotype of a uniformly reactionary religion.

Although data from Nicaragua may not be generalizable to the rest of Latin America, Zub's results certainly suggest the need for further investigation of the degree to which and the circumstances under which Pentecostals and other evangelicals may embrace politics. Compared with other groups in civil society, Pentecostals in Nicaragua were more interested in entering the political arena. When asked if an evangelical party could be organized in Nicaragua, two-thirds of Church of God members and more than 85 percent of Assemblies of God members said yes. Asked who among a range of existing or potential political actors could most effectively solve the country's economic problems, the single most common answer given by Pentecostals was "an evangelical government."⁵⁰ Very few Pentecostals pointed to existing political parties as competent to deal

with the nation's economic difficulties, thereby confirming the expected skepticism regarding traditional political parties. But neither did they point to "private enterprise" as the answer. Some answered "God" but in percentages well below their appeal to an evangelical government. Such findings certainly challenge the stereotype of Pentecostals as passive, indifferent, or even hostile toward politics.

When Zub's findings are juxtaposed with those of Kenneth Coleman and his colleagues at the University of North Carolina, who examined extensive survey data gathered in El Salvador in 1989 by the late Martin Barb, S. J., what emerges is the profile of a more aware and discriminating Pentecostal citizen than has been supposed. Father Baro's surveys were conducted in the late stages of a protracted internal war. The results indicate that Protestants were almost as sensitive to the existence of social injustice in Salvadoran society as Catholic or religiously unaffiliated respondents.⁵¹ As Coleman suggests, a perception of injustice is the necessary first step toward demanding government action.⁵² Salvadoran Protestants of all types strongly supported a political solution to the war-negotiations with the rebel forces of the Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front—FMLN). In large numbers (nearly 70 percent) they favored making political concessions to the guerrillas such as the purification of the armed forces in order to root out violators of human rights.

Finally, Baro's data strongly challenge the common assumption that Pentecostals uncritically accept the legitimacy or efficacy of the powers that be or show a marked preference for the most conservative political parties and movements. For example, the 1989 elections in El Salvador were won decisively by the Alianza Republicana Nacional (National Republican Alliance—ARENA) party, the most conservative party in the race. However, evangelicals voted for ARENA at a significantly lower rate than Roman Catholics and expressed much more skepticism as to the likelihood that ARENA would reduce human rights violations in the country. As Coleman put it:

This finding suggests the opposite of the "common knowledge" about religio-political alliances in Central America.... [In El Salvador] poor Protestants doubted the integrity of electoral processes and the possibility of reform, while more affluent Catholics were generally willing to take a chance on the possibility that U.S. pressure for electoral reform might produce meaningful outcomes. Whatever the political implications of Protestantism in El Salvador, they do not entail a close association with the governing rightist party or with the electoral processes that brought ARENA to power.⁵³

With Pentecostals supporting and even participating in the Workers' party in Brazil, on the one hand, and showing a strongly critical attitude toward conservative parties or governments in Nicaragua and El Salvador, on the other, one is driven to conclude that Latin American Pentecostalism may be much more complex and open to politics than we once thought.

Conclusion

The age-old problem in Latin America, as Tina Rosenberg points out, is that so many of its people have been "inhabitants" rather than "citizens."⁵⁴ Far from exercising any of the power of the state or any influence in the society, they have merely been subject to the exercise of power and influence of others and have never thought of the state as in any way belonging to them. When persons such as these join Pentecostal churches, it is hardly surprising that they display indifference toward government and politics; they were already alienated from them. Lalive d'Epinaï set the tone for one scholarly view of these converts by describing them as "re-alienated." Numerous writers from Lalive d'Epinaï to Bastian have therefore seen Pentecostalism as simply confirming poor Latin Americans in their status as inhabitants rather than citizens.

Writers from Willems to Martin have, however, offered a more optimistic assessment. In highlighting the "congregational" aspect of Pentecostal experience, they point to ways in which Pentecostalism might favor the development of a citizenry among the poor in Latin America. For the sake of democracy, one can hope that their optimism is justified. After all, Pentecostalism is filling up a great deal of the social space in Latin America today, especially within the ranks of the poor. Therefore, its capacity to foster or mediate civic behavior or lack thereof will be important for both civil and political society. Among the tens of millions of Latin Americans who are merely inhabitants of their countries today, many are or will become Pentecostals. As their countries proceed with the transition to formal political democracy, how many of these millions of Pentecostals will also find that church membership facilitates their personal transition from inhabitant to citizen? What I have argued in this essay, more in the spirit of Willems than in that of Lalive d'Epinaï, is that the high degree of participation Pentecostal membership encourages is a necessary attribute of civil society. The increased sense of personal efficacy that conversion and membership bring can help to overcome the alienation that is so threatening in a state of increasing equality of condition. The finding of one's voice in the context of an association has the potential to take members of Pentecostal churches beyond the cultivation of the spiritual life alone. It can, although there is no guarantee that it will, lead to participation in the wider activities of civil society – fostering education, creating structures to find or deliver health care, seeking legal protection for their churches and religious activities, and so on. To the extent that this happens, Pentecostalism will become a companion to freedom in a democratizing Latin America.

NOTES

1. Among the many useful articles to appear on this topic in recent years, the following bear mentioning in connection with the present discussion: Jan Knippers Black, "Elections and Other Trivial Pursuits: Latin America and the New World Order," *Third World*

Quarterly 14, 3 (1993), pp. 545-554, on the distance that can exist between the holding of elections and the establishment of democratic institutions; Tina Rosenberg, "Beyond Elections," *Foreign Policy* 84 (Fall 1991), pp. 72-91, on the essential distinction between "inhabitants" and "citizens"; and Philippe C. Schmitter, "Dangers and Dilemmas of Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 5, 2 (April 1994), pp. 57-74, on the many dilemmas that confront those who would construct democratic polities.

2. Numerous scholars have described Pentecostal growth in Latin America. Two who can be cited here because their work will be discussed further in this chapter are David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1990), and David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

3. The emerging literature examines evangelical Protestantism in its many variations, but interest focuses increasingly on Pentecostalism. Particularly when one is discussing evangelicalism at the popular level, Pentecostalism is typically what is involved.

4. On the first point, the best-known recent work is Martin, *Tongues of Fire*. See also Carmelo Alvarez, ed., *Pentecostalismo y liberación: Una experiencia latinoamericana* (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Departamento Ecueménico de Investigaciones, 1992), esp. pp. 89-100. On the second issue, in addition to Martin, see Amy L. Sherman, "The Public Role of Evangelicals in Latin America: Implications for the Consolidation of Democracy," paper presented at the International Studies Association convention, Atlanta, Ga., March 31, 1992.

5. For particularly vigorous arguments in this vein see Sara Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right* (Boston: South End Press, 1989); Enrique Dominguez and Deborah Huntington, "The Salvation Brokers: Conservative Evangelicals in Central America," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 18, 1 (January/February, 1984), pp. 2-36; Jaime Valverde, *Las sectas en Costa Rica: Pentecostalismo y conflicto social* (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Departamento Ecueménico de Investigaciones, 1990); and Heinrich Schafer, *Protestantismo y crisis social en America Central* (San Jose, Costa Rica: Editorial Departamento Ecueménico de Investigaciones, 1992), esp. pp. 215-233.

6. Emilio Willems, *Followers of the New Faith: Culture Change and the Rise of Protestantism in Brazil and Chile* (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967), p. 134.

7. Christian Lalive d'Epinay, *Haven of the Masses: A Study of the Pentecostal Movement in Chile* (New York: Friendship Press, 1969), p. 122.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

11. Willems, *Followers of the New Faith*, p. 139.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 249.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

15. In addition to Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?* and Dominguez and Huntington, "The Salvation Brokers," see also Linda Green, "Shifting Affiliations: Mayan Widows and *Evangélicos* in Guatemala," in Virginia Garrard-Burnett and David Stoll, eds., *Rethinking Protestantism in Latin America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993),

pp. 159-179, and David Stoll, *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), esp. pp. 167-195.

16. Abelino Martinez, *Las sectas en Nicaragua: Oferta y demanda de salvacion* (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Departamento Ecueménico de Investigaciones, 1989).

17. A stimulating example of the sort of article that has appeared recently is Juan Linz, Arturo Valenzuela, and Pilar Domingo, "The Failure of Presidential Democracy," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 27, 3 (1995), pp. 740-763.

18. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 1, trans. George Lawrence, ed. J. P. Mayer (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), pp. 46-47.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Superb accounts of the CEBs can be found in Phillip Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984), and Scott Mainwaring and Alexander Wilde, eds., *The Progressive Church in Latin America* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

21. Nicaragua is a particularly vivid case in point. See John M. Kirk, *Politics and the Catholic Church in Nicaragua* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1992), and Michael Dodson and Laura Nuzzi O'Shaughnessy, *Nicaragua's Other Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

22. In addition to vol. 1, pp. 50-57, see also *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, ed. Phillips Bradley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), pp. 94-97.

23. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, pp. 98-99.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

26. Manuel Antonio Garreton, "Popular Mobilization and the Military Regime in Chile: The Complexities of the Invisible Transition," in Susan Eckstein, ed., *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 259-277.

27. Michael J. Kryzanek, *Latin America: Change and Challenge* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), p. 27.

28. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, p. 99.

29. Sherman, "The Public Role of Evangelicals," p. 18.

30. Martin, *Tongues of Fire*, p. 22.

31. Jean-Pierre Bastian, "The Metamorphosis of Latin American Protestant Groups: A Sociohistorical Perspective," *Latin American Research Review* 28, 2 (1993), p. 56.

32. Jean-Pierre Bastian, "Religion popular protestante y comportamiento político en America Central: Clientela religiosa e estado patron, Guatemala y Nicaragua," *Cristianismo y Sociedad* 24, 88 (1986), p. 42.

33. Bastian, "The Metamorphosis," pp. 46-47.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

35. In his *Las sectas en Nicaragua*, cited above, Abelino Martinez makes clear that the great majority of Pentecostal churches in Nicaragua are small congregations with a low level of "institutionalization." Just how typical is this type of Pentecostal church across the breadth of Latin America?

36. Luis Samandu, "El Pentecostalismo en Nicaragua y sus raices religiosas populares," *Pasos* 17 (May/June, 1988), p. 2.

37. Luis Samandu, ed., *Protestantismos y procesos sociales en Centroamerica* (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Universitaria Centroamericana, 1990), p. 245.
38. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, p. 109.
39. Martinez, *Las sectas en Nicaragua*, p. 29.
40. Adonis Nino Chavarria, "Breve historia del movimiento Pentecostal en Nicaragua," in Alvarez, *Pentecostalismo y liberacion*, p. 55.
41. Juan Sepulveda, "Pentecostalism as Popular Religiosity," *International Review of Missions* 78, 309 (January, 1989), p. 87.
42. Everett A. Wilson, "Latin American Pentecostalism: Challenging the Stereotypes of Pentecostal Passivity," *Transformation* 11, 1 (January March, 1994), p. 19.
43. Ibid. Wilson goes on to show how these rudimentary services evolved into formation of the Clinica Medica Cristiana and a sophisticated school lunch program.
44. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, p. 104.
45. Matthew Mancini, *Alexis de Tocqueville* (New York: Twayne, 1994), p. 40.
46. Phillip Berryman, "The Coming of Age of Evangelical Protestantism," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 27, 6 (May/June, 1994), p. 10.
47. Ibid.
48. Roberto Zub, "The Growth of Protestantism: From Religion to Politics," *Envio* (December, 1992), pp. 19-30. The initial efforts of evangelical parties in El Salvador and Nicaragua, in contrast to those in Guatemala, have not been very successful. But one of the parties in El Salvador, the Movimiento de Unidad, ran a Pentecostal candidate for president of the country in the 1994 elections. It is surely too soon to tell whether these parties will be able to build effective electoral bases.
49. Ibid., p. 24.
50. Ibid., p. 27.
51. Coleman indicates that, although Baro did not attempt to differentiate Pentecostal respondents from other Protestants, it can be assumed that the vast majority of non-Catholic unaffiliated respondents in the survey were Pentecostals.
52. Edwin Eloy Aguilar, José Miguel Sandoval, Timothy J. Steigenga, and Kenneth M. Coleman, "Protestantism in El Salvador: Conventional Wisdom Versus Survey Evidence," *Latin American Research Review* 28, 2 (1993), p. 130.
53. Ibid., pp. 134-135.
54. Rosenberg, "Beyond Elections," pp. 29-30.