



**THE  
REBIRTH OF  
LATIN  
AMERICAN  
CHRISTIANITY**

**TODD HARTCH**

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THE REBIRTH OF LATIN AMERICAN  
CHRISTIANITY

Todd Hartch

# The Rebirth of Latin American Christianity



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*Gaudium et Spes* also addressed economic development, an area of special interest to Latin America. All economic activity, it argued, must be based on the needs and the dignity of the human person. It thus rejected laissez-faire capitalism and collectivization alike, since they both made human beings into means rather than ends. Basic rights included work, a wage that provided the necessities of life, and the freedom to found and to join unions. Although they should start with dialogue and negotiation, workers could legitimately resort to strikes to protect their rights.<sup>8</sup>

The document affirmed the value of private property but made clear that such a right was not absolute. The traditional Catholic concept of "the common destination of earthly goods" put the right to the material goods that correspond to basic human needs ahead of the right to private property or the right to free trade. A section seemingly written specifically for Latin America applied this idea to "extensive rural estates which are only slightly cultivated or lie completely idle for the sake of profit, while the majority of the people either are without land or have only very small fields." In such circumstances "insufficiently cultivated estates should be distributed to those who can make these lands fruitful."<sup>9</sup>

### *Medellín and Puebla*

The official Catholic response to the military dictatorships, Protestant expansion, and Vatican II came at the general conferences of CELAM in 1968 and 1979. After the close of Vatican II, the Latin American bishops had about two years to prepare for CELAM's general conference in Medellín, Colombia. At various meetings and conferences they examined conditions in the region in light of the recent council and with a growing appreciation for data from the social sciences. Several factors influenced the preparations.

First, several members of the Brazilian bishops' conference—with Dom Helder Camara, Archbishop of Olinda and Recife leading the way—began to emphasize that justice and economic development needed to be at the heart of the upcoming Medellín meeting. Camara, for instance, used principles gleaned from *Gaudium et Spes* and data from the growing number of Catholic social science "think tanks" that were sprouting throughout the region to point to unjust economic and political structures that the church should condemn and transform. "The number one problem is not priestly vocations; it is underdevelopment," Camara warned CELAM. A person subjected to dehumanizing and debilitating

poverty simply had no real choices. "Such a person," he made clear, "cannot choose to be anything much less a priest." With most peasants either subjected to neo-feudal oppression or relegated to subsistence on minuscule and inadequate plots of land—even as rich landowners kept enormous tracts of land idle—the region needed exactly the sort of agrarian reform envisioned by *Gaudium et Spes*. The church, and in particular its bishops, must expose the scandal of rural exploitation and advocate the needed reforms. Camara also called for radical changes in international relations. "The problem," he argued, "is not aid, but justice." The contradiction between rich nations' hefty profits on their investments in Latin America and the abysmally low prices for the raw materials that the region exported was a "discrepancy that cries to heaven for vengeance." The bishops, he believed, should work to rectify this situation by supporting a Latin American common market and efforts to reform international trade.<sup>10</sup>

A second influence on the preparations for CELAM was occurring at the same time, as a network of theologians had begun to develop a theology that incorporated sociological and economic data, history, and Marxist analysis. They would have a major impact on CELAM. Starting at a meeting in 1964 in Petropolis, Brazil, this group, which included Gustavo Gutiérrez, Juan Luis Segundo, and Lucio Gera, took pains to look closely at Latin American reality, as painful as it was, before building their theological systems. Chief among their concerns was "dependency," an economic concept in vogue at the time that pointed to the plight of nations of the "periphery" whose economies relied on exporting cheap raw materials but who were forced to pay exorbitant prices for the finished goods produced by the industrialized nations of the "core." In this theory, the prosperity of the core caused the poverty of the periphery; in effect, the underdevelopment of Latin America resulted not from the region's failure to institute proper economic policies but from the development of Europe and North America. Gustavo Gutiérrez did not present his talk "Toward a Theology of Liberation" until a month before the Medellín conference, but the notion of "liberation" that he and others were using began to circulate in the intellectual currents of the church. Consequently, in the years before Medellín, Gutiérrez and a network of priests, theologians, and progressive bishops laid the theoretical groundwork for the concept of liberation that figured prominently in the Medellín documents.<sup>11</sup>

A third influence on CELAM arrived in 1967 when Pope Paul VI released *Populorum Progressio*, an encyclical on economic development

that extended and made more specific some of the council's recommendations. Paul rejected colonialism and called for a new global economic order of justice and compassion. He argued that every person had "the right to glean what he needs from the earth" and that rights of private property and free trade, although legitimate and important, were subordinate to the principle reaffirmed in Vatican II that "created goods should flow fairly to all." He repeated the council's call for the expropriation of unused landed estates and condemned "unbridled liberalism" as dangerous and deficient because "economics is supposed to be in the service of man." Wealthy nations, he said, had a duty to aid developing nations directly and to make the terms of trade more just, even to renegotiate loans to make them easier for the poorer nations to repay. "Continuing avarice" on the part of the wealthier nations, he warned, "will arouse the judgment of God and the wrath of the poor."<sup>12</sup>

Paul had reaffirmed the social teaching of Vatican II and had rephrased it in a way particularly suited to the developing world in general and to Latin America in particular. His rejection of colonialism, his harsh language toward the rich, and his elevated vision of human affairs served as an invitation to boldness, especially for the progressive Latin American bishops. If the pope had already blazed the trail, they could surely follow him by applying the council's recommendations and his encyclical to their specific situations. He even gave some encouragement for the small number of bishops with ties to the far left; although the encyclical generally advocated peaceful approaches to development and condemned violent uprisings for creating "new injustices" and "new disasters," it contained one sentence that showed that Paul VI had not absolutely ruled out revolution. Situations of "manifest, longstanding tyranny" and severe infringements of human rights, he implied, could justify armed revolt.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, when the Latin American bishops convened in Medellín, from August 26 to September 6, 1968, many of them had spent the previous six years in an intense period of reflection, growing familiarity with one another, and increasing understanding of the socioeconomic reality of their region.<sup>14</sup> They had come together as a group in Rome and had imbibed the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* and the heady sense of change and possibility that emanated from the council. For three years they had been meditating on the implications of the council for their region. It is hard to imagine a series of events more likely to mold them into the kind of body that produced the bold and transformative document that soon came from the conference.

The urgency that the bishops felt shone forth from Medellín. The poverty, violence, dependency, and oppression around them led them to rededicate themselves to "a true scriptural poverty" and to call the whole People of God to work for "a new order of justice" and for the region's "liberation at the cost of whatever sacrifice."<sup>15</sup> First, the bishops called the entire continent to conversion, the prerequisite for the structural change that was clearly needed. Then, rejecting both capitalism and Marxism as damaging to the dignity of the human person, they called for a return to the principles established in Catholic social teaching. Echoing the council and *Populorum Progressio*, they advocated radical commitment to justice and peace at every level of society. In the international arena, they condemned the ways in which more powerful nations exploited weaker ones and asked for a greater role for international organizations. On the national level, they called for agrarian reform through land redistribution and for programs of "concientization" that would form true social consciences in the different strata of society. On the local level, the bishops endorsed "small basic communities," in which groups of Catholics could meet together for study, service, and activism.<sup>16</sup>

After serious reflection, the bishops concluded that because they lived in a poor region, they had a special duty to identify with and to serve the poor. Money and personnel should be distributed in a manner that gave "preference to the poorest and most needy sectors" and that demonstrated "solidarity with the poor." Priests, religious, and laity should all seek not merely to aid the poor but "to share the lot of the poor." When the church lived in this way, she would give the world "a clear and unmistakable sign of the poverty of her Lord."<sup>17</sup>

Accordingly, in the midst of the Cold War, in the middle of a region dominated by military governments with little respect for human rights, the Catholic bishops came out squarely for justice, liberation, human rights, and identification with the most vulnerable members of society. The Medellín conference served as a watershed, not so much because of new concepts but because of the bishops' willingness to adopt them publicly and emphatically. In fact, from a historical perspective, the episcopacy's open identification with and defense of the poor could be considered the real ending of the colonial era, as the church finally ended its traditional support for the status quo. Despite decades of pressure from liberal governments, the Latin American church usually had managed to remain in some measure part of the establishment. Medellín officially rejected that role. Henceforth, the bishops said, the church would side with the poor.



The network of Latin American theologians led by Gustavo Gutiérrez responded enthusiastically to Medellín. These theologians had already contributed significantly to the conference through their development of a theology that took seriously Latin America's situation of dependence and its need for liberation. In the years directly after the meeting, they fleshed out their ideas into a full-fledged theology of liberation. After presenting influential lectures and articles in 1969 and 1970, in 1971 Gutiérrez published his groundbreaking *A Theology of Liberation*, in which he took sociological analysis and dependency theory for granted but said that they required another crucial concept from the social sciences. "The theory of dependence," he said, "will take the wrong path and lead to deception if the analysis is not put within the framework of the worldwide class struggle." He was calling not only for the church to use Marxist class analysis to understand the realities of Latin American society but also for the church to join that struggle on the side of the oppressed. "To deny the fact of the class struggle," he argued, "is really to put oneself on the side of the dominant sectors. Neutrality is impossible." For Gutiérrez, therefore, Christ's work of salvation, in the sense of forgiveness of human sin, was only part of the larger work of liberation, which encompassed support of the oppressed and the creation of a just society.<sup>18</sup>

Other theologians, such as Leonardo Boff and Hugo Assman of Brazil and Juan Luis Segundo of Uruguay, joined Gutiérrez in developing their own book-length contributions to the field. Presbyterian José Miguez Bonino of Argentina and Methodist Rubem Alves of Brazil began to elaborate Protestant versions of the new theology. In general, these thinkers, Protestant and Catholic, shared a few key ideas: they rejected the concept of economic development and replaced it with liberation; they insisted on history and current reality as the starting point of theology; they embraced dependency theory and class analysis; they saw traditional theology as reductive, in the sense of limiting salvation to spiritual healing, when true liberation encompassed the whole individual and the entire society. Clearly, such an approach would transform theology itself, as one early practitioner made clear: "Theology, then, is to be fully included under the historical sciences and subordinated to the social sciences that analyze the facts of collective human life." In fact, he continued, "theology will be an 'evangelical' rereading of politics as a liberation praxis, and a 'political' rereading of the gospel."<sup>19</sup>

In the 1970s and into the 1980s these liberation theologians seemed to be leading the Latin American church into a new era. In 1985, Edward

Cleary, for example, saw the networks of intellectuals and activists as "the driving force of the Latin American Church" and argued that among these networks, "at the core is a group of intellectuals, most of them active in the elaboration of a theology of liberation." These theologians were in his mind the "inner force" of the church. They had elaborated not only a new theological methodology but also a new ideology and way of life that influenced everything from church documents to local communities.<sup>20</sup>

Many bishops, however, had doubts about liberation theology, about the increasingly progressive trajectory of CELAM, and about the radicalization of many Latin American priests. The emergence of liberation theology and of groups of priests dedicated to socialism in the years directly after Medellín suggested to many bishops that the principles elaborated at CELAM lent themselves to misinterpretation and radicalism. The election of conservative Colombian bishop Alfonso López Trujillo as secretary general of CELAM in 1972 signaled a retrenchment of sorts, as a majority of moderate and conservative bishops turned to the pugnacious López Trujillo as a sort of dam against further radicalization. López Trujillo did not reject the teachings of Medellín but rather interpreted them in a way that emphasized continuity and harmony with previous church teachings. He had written a thesis on "Marx's Conception of Man" and had no sympathy for the liberationists' dalliance with Marxism, and had been asked by Paul VI to investigate the new theology. As the secretary general and later president of CELAM, he dedicated himself to the defense of what he called "the formidable ecclesial accomplishment" of Medellín and of Paul VI's teachings in *Populorum Progressio* and 1975's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, which, to him, meant protecting the legacy of the meeting and the papal documents from liberationist distortions.<sup>21</sup>

Even as conservatives and traditionalists were complaining that the church was becoming too political, and liberationists were asserting that their perspective was the key to the church's future, in 1975, on the tenth anniversary of the closing of Vatican II, Paul VI surprised both groups by affirming the direction taken by the Latin American bishops at Medellín while simultaneously closing off some of the more radical interpretations of the documents. In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul argued that the gospel could not be reduced to a mere spiritual message. Since evangelization involved the church's attempt to convert "both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs," it necessarily spoke to issues and areas of life far beyond the confines of the church and

religious practice. "Evangelization," he made clear, "involves an explicit message . . . about the rights and duties of every human being, about family life without which personal growth and development is hardly possible, about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and development." The church therefore had a duty to work for the liberation of those mired in "famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty, injustices in international relations and especially in commercial exchanges, situations of economic and cultural neo-colonialism." **Far from being a distraction from evangelization, the church's work in these areas flowed directly from the gospel message. Mission and justice were integrally related.** Traditionalists who rejected the social mission of the church were rejecting basic Catholic doctrine.

At the same time, Paul cautioned liberationists to avoid any sort of reduction of Christianity to a political project. Advocates of liberation, he said, were tempted to limit the church's mission to "a simply temporal project," but if this were to happen, the church would lose its "fundamental meaning." There was, and had to be, a "specifically religious finality" to the gospel message that could never be eliminated or watered down. "The Church links human liberation and salvation in Jesus Christ," he said, but they are not the same thing.<sup>23</sup> Advocates of liberation denied that they advocated such reductionism, but it was clear that Paul had laid down real limits for the new theology. With the pope having firmly supported the church's commitment to justice and liberation, there was no real possibility that the church could ignore or erase Medellín, for the pope had tied Medellín's principles to Vatican II and to the social doctrine of the church more generally and he had affirmed, developed, and clarified those principles in quite recent writings. He also had signaled to the liberationists, though, that they were in danger of departing from the teaching of the church if they overemphasized politics and downplayed the religious aspects of the faith.

Despite the pope's clarifications, it was evident that there would be a struggle over the meaning, legacy, and implementation of Medellín, over the direction of CELAM, and over the influence of liberation theology—with López Trujillo and his supporters on one side and the liberationists and their allies on the other—at the third general meeting of CELAM in Puebla, originally scheduled for October 1978. López Trujillo and his allies argued that they did not reject Vatican II, Medellín, or Paul VI's recent social teaching, but in fact were defending those documents from distortions. In their own minds they were integrating the principles of

Medellín with the doctrinal foundations of the church. On the other side Gutiérrez and his allies felt that they were defending the true legacy of Vatican II and Medellín.<sup>24</sup>

The deaths of Paul VI and his successor John Paul I just a month later delayed the Puebla conference until January 1979. Meanwhile, both conservatives and progressives were jockeying for position, sensing the meeting's potential to define the legacy of Medellín and to set the trajectory for the application of its principles in the coming decades. López Trujillo and his conservative and moderate allies in CELAM made sure that bishops rather than theologians would control the conference. In Puebla only the invited bishops and other official participants could enter the Palafox Seminary where the meeting took place and where all the participants ate and slept. Almost all theologians and social scientists had to stay outside, even if their own bishops had invited them. Progressives and their moderate allies scrambled to buttress their own possibilities for influence; many progressive bishops decided to bring their liberationist advisors to Puebla even though they had to reside and work outside of the official meeting.

Both sides courted French theologian Yves Congar, an architect of Vatican II who had written a generally supportive but somewhat critical book about liberation theology. The liberationists prevailed upon him and seventy other French theologians to sign an open letter urging the Latin American bishops not to give up the principles and spirit of Medellín. López Trujillo, hearing that the letter was soon to be released, traveled to France to convince Congar to remove his name. Despite a vigorous discussion in which López Trujillo told the aged theologian that the liberationists were manipulating him and that the Latin American bishops had no plans to repudiate Medellín's principles, Congar refused to back down and the letter was released.<sup>25</sup>

**Longer and more nuanced than the Medellín document, the Puebla "Final Document" did bear the stamp of bishops as opposed to theologians. The new document introduced the term "preferential option for the poor"—which is often associated with Medellín but did not appear in that document—even as it placed that option squarely in the context of evangelization. The bishops concluded that evangelization was the "fundamental" mission of the church, and in fact that the church "lives to evangelize." In this way, the bishops embraced Medellín's basic principles and consciously affirmed its "vision of reality" but also identified unacceptable extremes. As John Paul II had encouraged CELAM to do, the bishops developed and clarified Medellín's conclusions in light of**



Vatican II and Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* and *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. In a manner evocative of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, which it quoted extensively and repeatedly, the document spoke of "Christ the Liberator" and throughout advocated the "liberation" of the poor and oppressed. At the same time, as Paul VI had done, it cautioned against violence, class struggle, partisan political activity by priests, and "applying social analyses with strong political connotations to pastoral work."<sup>26</sup>

What did the "preferential option for the poor" actually mean as outlined in the Puebla document? First, it meant priority for the poor in evangelization, because the poor were "the first ones to whom Jesus' mission is directed." The message in evangelization had to include forgiveness of sin and communion with God. Second, since evangelization included "the duty to proclaim the Christian vision of the human person to all peoples," in Latin America the church could not preach a purely spiritual gospel but also must emphasize the "inviolable nobility" of even the most seemingly insignificant and marginalized persons. Third, the preferential option meant denouncing all violations of human dignity, including repression, kidnapping, arrest without due process, large gaps between rich and poor, widespread poverty, and direct exploitation of the poor by the rich. Similarly, it meant denouncing "liberal capitalism," "Marxist collectivism," and the ideology of the repressive "National Security State," all of which led to "institutionalized injustice." Fourth, it meant active work on behalf of human dignity and continual encouragement of the various sectors of the population, from students to soldiers, to construct a just and humane society that respected the "universal destiny" of the goods created by God and produced by human beings. They affirmed John Paul II's statement that there was "a social mortgage on all private property," meaning that private property, although good and generally conducive to human flourishing, had limits. Governments could legitimately expropriate unused agricultural land, as Medellín and popes Paul VI and John Paul II had affirmed. Finally, the option for the poor did not exclude the rich or any other category of person. In fact, the bishops also called for a "preferential option for young people" and even called dialogue with politicians a "priority."<sup>27</sup>

Puebla thus clarified and preserved the social teaching of Medellín in a way that did not entirely please liberationists or conservatives, but did not horrify them either. In the end, the importance of Puebla was measured not so much by which ecclesiastical party scored more points, but by the reaffirmation and elucidation of Medellín's orientation toward the

poor and toward justice. At a meeting many feared would be dominated by López Trujillo and a conservative cabal, the Latin American bishops came out squarely for "the preferential option for the poor" and for justice, and not just in one or two peripheral lines. The poor and the justice due them appeared on almost every one of the document's 172 pages. Regardless of the plans of any group before or during the meeting, what the bishops actually produced made clear that "the promotion of justice is an integral and indispensable part" of the evangelization and the mission of the church. There was no turning back.<sup>28</sup>

## Conclusion

While I have focused here on the Catholic bishops, Protestants were also developing a new social conscience. For instance, the Protestant Iglesia y Sociedad en América Latina (ISAL, Church and Society in Latin America), founded in 1961 in Peru, called for Protestants to commit themselves to social justice, even if it meant deemphasizing evangelism.<sup>29</sup> Most prominently, at the International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974, two Latin American evangelicals played leading roles in pushing the 2,500 delegates to take a stand in favor of social justice. At the time, many evangelicals did not see social issues as an integral part of mission—many believed, in fact, that such action could distract Christians from proclamation and conversion, which they saw as essential. Rene Padilla of Ecuador responded to such concerns by attacking the "truncated Gospel" of American Christianity. He challenged his fellow delegates not to fall into the trap of portraying the evangelization of the world as a technological problem that American efficiency and the "systematization of method" could solve. Instead, he argued for a recovery of the whole gospel, a gospel that included ethics, politics, and economics and that had little to do with statistics.<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, Peruvian Samuel Escobar pointed to Jesus's seminal statement that he had come "to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind" and to evangelical leaders such as John Wesley and William Wilberforce who had worked against slavery. He asked whether evangelicals of his day stood with the oppressors or the oppressed and called for a new kind of missionary who both evangelized and worked for social justice.<sup>31</sup> In the end, Padilla and Escobar's position carried the day and the "Lausanne Declaration," a seminal document in the history of the world evangelical movement, included a strong endorsement of social

justice, based on God's identity as both creator and judge: "We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men and women from every kind of oppression." The delegates expressed sorrow for having seen evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive and instead proclaimed it a "necessary" part of the Christian faith. The gospel compelled evangelicals "to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist."<sup>12</sup>

These statements had special significance in the context of Protestants' usual political situation in Latin America. Foreign missionaries to Latin America, who could lose their visas if they caused political problems, had deemphasized the political implications of their faith. Their converts not only inherited this apolitical faith, but also, as small religious minorities in overwhelmingly Catholic countries, had their own reasons for keeping their heads down. To speak out, as ISAL, Padilla, and Escobar were doing, in a way that linked the gospel with social justice put them at risk. That some of the region's more thoughtful evangelical leaders had done so indicated the seriousness of the injustices confronting the region and perhaps, although none of them admitted as much, the influence of Catholics.

The oppression was so extreme and so widespread that Christians were forced to ponder the connections between their faith and issues of justice and peace. The Protestants showed that this reassessment of the relation between gospel and justice could happen in a faith based mostly on the Bible. The Catholics demonstrated that the depth of the hierarchy's attention would lead to popular acceptance of the new justice agenda. Individual Protestants and some Protestant bodies came to virtually identical conclusions, but, with no pan-Protestant distribution mechanism or authority structure, these ideas did not produce the same impact that the Catholic statements did.<sup>13</sup> Some Protestants always participated in the struggle, but Catholic bishops and Catholic organizations led the fight. Nowhere was that more true than in Chile and Brazil.

## 4

## *Prophetic Christianity in Brazil and Chile*

IN 1989, PEOPLE in the United States learned of the deaths in El Salvador of four American churchwomen who were raped and murdered by a death squad working for the government. But the women's work and gruesome murders represented just one small chapter of the larger story of the growth of prophetic Christianity in Latin America.<sup>1</sup> The development of the church's teaching on justice and the public proclamation of the church's preferential option for the poor, as exemplified in the CELAM conferences at Medellín and Puebla, would have meant little as mere statements of principle. The obvious injustice in most Latin American nations during the 1970s and 1980s made clear that Christians had to take action. In following the line of prophetic resistance laid out for them in the CELAM documents, bishops knew that they were taking serious risks, but they felt that to be neutral or passive would betray the people's trust. During this period not only bishops but also religious sisters, priests, lay Catholics, and Protestants of various sorts denounced injustices and stood up for the poor and oppressed, often risking their lives in the process. We focus here on Brazil and Chile, but similar things were happening throughout the region.<sup>2</sup>

### *Brazil*

Even before Vatican II and Medellín, the church in Brazil was developing its own option for the poor, in large part due to a bishop, an intellectual, and several lay movements. The bishop, Helder Camara (1909-99), had served as national chaplain of Catholic Action, the influential lay



personal dignity of man."<sup>47</sup> When Christians were willing to shed their own blood in defense of others, they made clear that their religion had substance. Neither mere emotional piety nor some antiquated cultural relic, this living faith made real moral demands. Even those who rejected Christian theological claims could not dismiss the suffering and death of Christians. At the most basic level, suffering and martyrdom made Christianity credible.

## 5

## *The Heartland of Pentecostalism*

IN JANUARY 1985 a barber named Pablo Bottari, along with his wife and two children, attended an outdoor rally held by evangelist Carlos Annacondia in San Justo, Argentina. Bottari, an elder in a conservative Free Brethren church, was surprised by the shouting and clapping during the period of praise and worship and by the "food stands and general informality of it all." He was even more taken aback when Annacondia preached a short sermon and then cried out, "And now listen to me, Satan! I come against you in the powerful name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth! I rebuke you, I bind you and I order you to get out of this place! Out!" After several minutes of such rebuking, Annacondia began his ministry of healing and deliverance. Bottari's astonishment increased when he saw people, including his wife, "falling to the ground when they were prayed for" and others who manifested "convulsions, spasms, yelling, crying, fainting, vomiting and occasional violence" as they were delivered from demons.<sup>1</sup>

When his wife emerged from her spiritual swoon she expressed thanks for what she described as a deep personal encounter with God. Despite discomfort with much of what was happening around him, Bottari decided that he too had felt the presence of God. Both the "spiritual authority and power" of Annacondia and the testimonies of those who said that their teeth had been healed, including some who said they had received miraculous bridges, crowns, and fillings, impressed him. A few weeks later, evangelist Edgardo Silvosio spontaneously anointed and prayed for Bottari in the middle of a church service because, he said, God had instructed him that Bottari would soon have a "renowned public ministry." Later in 1985 Bottari did indeed start a public ministry, first as part of Carlos Annacondia's prayer team and then in the

evangelist's deliverance tent, where, during crusades, he ministered to people who manifested demonic symptoms. By 1986 Bottari was the leader of Annacondia's deliverance ministry. In the next twelve years, he estimates, he personally freed 20,000 people from their demons and oversaw the deliverance of 500,000 other people. In 1996 Bottari took a pastoral counseling position at Buenos Aires's Central Baptist Church and developed a deliverance ministry focused on pastors and church leaders.<sup>2</sup>

Many Catholic and secular Latin Americans scoffed at the kinds of experiences described by Bottari, but, even as they scoffed, the same sorts of things were happening in Catholic settings. For example, in Bottari's hometown of Buenos Aires during the 1990s, Catholics were singing contemporary praise songs, engaging in "spiritual warfare," speaking in tongues, giving prophecies, interpreting prophecies, and experiencing supernatural physical and spiritual healing—the so-called Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR).<sup>3</sup> Despite the disdain, born of ignorance, with which the intelligentsia treated them, the Pentecostal movement and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal were not weak colonial versions of more robust North American phenomena. Rather, Charismatic Catholicism and Pentecostal Protestantism utterly transformed Latin America between 1970 and 2000. Pentecostals and Catholic Charismatics were not the fringe, although many observers continue to see them that way—but rather the main attraction. These two heavyweights were fighting for the title of most influential religious movement in Latin America.<sup>4</sup>

In 2006, a study by the Pew Foundation estimated that Pentecostals or Charismatics (with both groups counted together as "Renewalists") made up 49 percent of Brazil's urban population, including almost 80 percent of all Protestants and half of all Catholics. The same study found that in Chile about three quarters of all Protestants and one quarter of all Catholics were Renewalists, amounting to 30 percent of the nation's population. In Guatemala the majority of Catholics and vast majority of Protestants—about 60 percent of the population—were Renewalists.<sup>5</sup> Although some scholars have disputed these numbers, even if they overcount Renewalists by as much as 30 or 40 percent they still represent a religious sea change. In most Latin American countries, since 1960 the most successful religious movements have emphasized the power of the Holy Spirit. We begin with the Pentecostals before turning our attention to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the next chapter.

## A Global Movement

Although there were similar revivals in Wales (1904), India (1905), and Korea (1907), the modern Pentecostal movement often traces its roots to Azusa Street in Los Angeles in 1906. A humble black preacher from the Wesleyan "Holiness" tradition named William Seymour, who had studied the possibility of experiencing a new "baptism in the Holy Spirit," led a series of small meetings in private homes in which people began falling to the floor and speaking in tongues. When crowds of those eager to see and to experience these strange phenomena became overwhelming, Seymour rented a dilapidated church building at 312 Azusa Street. The loud and lively services scandalized local elites and many church leaders but attracted a stream of visitors, first from Los Angeles and then from the nation and the world, over the course of three years. At Seymour's "Apostolic Faith Mission" these visitors found intense prayer and worship and various ecstatic phenomena, such as speaking in tongues, spiritual healing, deliverance from demonic forces, shaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and being "slain in the Spirit," which involved falling to the ground in a sort of trance. Seymour and others interpreted these manifestations as experiences similar or closely related to the account in the book of Acts, in which the disciples "were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." They also saw the manifestations as fulfillment of a prophecy in the book of Joel of a "latter rain," or a new and more abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In the key passage, God had promised, "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit." Members of the Holiness movement who had been seeking this new Pentecost had predisposed themselves to see Azusa Street as the answer to their prayers.<sup>6</sup>

Often, an encounter with the Holy Spirit at Azusa Street led first to speaking in tongues and then to a devotion to Christian life and mission. A Chicago pastor named William Durham described it this way: "It seemed to me that my body had suddenly become porous," he said, "and that a current of electricity was being turned on me from all sides." After lying on the floor for two hours, Durham believed that he had received a great spiritual gift from God. The next night, after Durham's body shook for three hours, he began to speak in tongues, which he perceived as



evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit. "Then I had such power on me and in me as I never had before," he said. "And last but not least I had a depth and of love and sweetness in my soul that I had never even dreamed of before, and a holy calm possessed me, and a holy joy and peace, that is deep and sweet beyond anything I ever experienced before, even in the sanctified life."<sup>7</sup> Another visitor, Arthur Shepherd, said that after a period of shaking and another of being in a trance he could sense new life entering his body. "Soon," he said, "my jaws and my tongue began to work independently of my volition and the words came out in a clear language." He felt that he had received new power for mission and service.<sup>8</sup>

In 1906 and 1907, the revival spread throughout Los Angeles and neighboring communities, and then to other cities such as Memphis, Cleveland, Indianapolis, and Dunn, North Carolina, as the curious came to Azusa Street and then brought its phenomena back to their homes. These new apostles proved prone to schism, with division often taking place along racial lines. In the end, Azusa spawned at least twenty-six different Pentecostal denominations, including the Assemblies of God, the Church of God in Christ, and the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee).<sup>9</sup>

Almost as quickly, the revival jumped to other countries. Sometimes it was carried by semi-official missionaries of the Apostolic Faith Mission, such as Frank Bartleman, who spread the message in Palestine, Europe, and Asia, and A. G. and Lillian Garr, who carried the new anointing to India, Japan, and China. The revival also came to new areas through already established missionaries who visited Azusa Street and then returned to the mission field.<sup>10</sup> Finally, and probably most important, the new Pentecostalism spread through lay Protestants, travelers and migrants, who shared it in the course of their journeys.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s the revival entered non-Pentecostal churches in what was soon called the "Charismatic Renewal." Members of mainline Protestant churches who had attended the Azusa revival and other Pentecostal events had often experienced speaking in tongues and related phenomena, but their denominations did not welcome the new form of spirituality. But soon the environment began to change. In 1960 Dennis Bennett, an Episcopal priest in Van Nuys, California, lost his job for speaking in tongues. His explanation that tongues represented "a freeing of the personality in expressing one's self more profoundly, particularly toward God" won over about a third of his congregation, but the rest were scandalized enough to demand his resignation. In his next position in Seattle, however, a friendly bishop gave him the freedom to

pursue the Pentecostal gifts, which eventually transformed a once struggling church into a thriving congregation of more than 2,000 people. Over the next decade, the Charismatic Renewal spread quickly across denominations so that by the 1970s almost every church and denomination had its pocket of "Charismatics." They acted more sedately than their Pentecostal cousins and had different theological interpretations of Pentecostal phenomena, but Lutherans and Methodists and even Catholic nuns were speaking in tongues, praying for healing, and receiving dreams and visions.<sup>11</sup>

Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Renewal grew spectacularly in the century after the Azusa Street revival, particularly in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. In many countries around the world, Pentecostals today constitute a majority of Protestants. In most nations Pentecostal churches are the fastest growing and most dynamic churches. In fact, it is clear that, at least from a numerical perspective, Catholicism, with 1.1 billion adherents, and Pentecostalism (including Charismatics) with 600 million, make up the two major sectors of contemporary World Christianity.<sup>12</sup> The speed of the Pentecostal and Charismatic ascent is truly remarkable.

### *Protestant Pentecost in Latin America*

Latin America has a special place in the global explosion of Pentecostalism because of its geographical, political, demographic, economic, and cultural connections to the traditional birthplace of the movement (both Los Angeles and the United States more generally), because of the unmatched success of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements within its borders, and because of its role in spreading the new spirituality to Africa, Europe, and the United States. Starting with the first person healed at Azusa Street in 1906, who was Mexican, Latinos became enthusiastic exponents of the new Pentecost and carried it around the United States and to Mexico, Puerto Rico, and other Latin American lands.<sup>13</sup> Starting in Chile in 1909, Pentecostalism spread to South America, finding particularly enthusiastic receptions in Brazil and Argentina but affecting every Latin American nation to some degree.<sup>14</sup> At first, foreign missionaries played an important role, but local believers took over the work at an early stage. To a greater extent than in mainline and fundamentalist missions, the new churches quickly became self-supporting and self-propagating.

For example, the Chilean Pentecostal movement started with William Hoover (1856-1936), a Methodist physician and missionary from Illinois who became the rector of the Colegio Inglés in Iquique, northern Chile, in 1889 and pastor of a church in Valparaíso in 1903. Hoover's successful but controversial methods, including street preaching and close contact with the poor, kept him in constant conflict with mission authorities in the United States and with more traditional missionaries in the field. In 1909, in the midst of escalating tensions with the mission board, Hoover received a pamphlet on a Pentecostal revival taking place in India. After following the directions in the pamphlet, he began speaking in tongues and soon shared this gift with members of his church. The Pentecostal experience spread throughout his denomination and into other evangelical churches, mostly in poor urban areas. After the mission board compelled Hoover to resign and local church authorities expelled many advocates of spiritual gifts, Hoover and Chilean pastors started the Iglesia Metodista Pentecostal (Pentecostal Methodist Church) to free themselves from foreign control. In the coming years, the denomination prospered, growing to 520,000 members by 2000, even as it suffered a major church split in 1933 that produced the Iglesia Evangélica Pentecostal (Pentecostal Evangelical Church), another important Pentecostal body. Despite splintering into many churches, the movement as a whole grew among the marginalized sectors of society and, with the exception of Hoover, with little foreign involvement.<sup>15</sup>

Brazil had a similar experience. In 1910 Swedish immigrants Gunnar Vingren and Daniel Berg received the baptism in the Holy Spirit at the Chicago church of William Durham and believed that God was calling them to mission. Without any official standing or financial backing the two men arrived in Pará, Brazil, and took whatever work they could find. But their lack of financial support actually worked to the benefit of their mission, as their poverty prevented the growth of an economic divide between them and their converts. Tensions arose only in the 1920s when more missionaries arrived. After 1930, when the nationals and missionaries took responsibility for different territories, the nationals saw greater growth.<sup>16</sup>

Bolivia, on the other hand, provided a counterexample. This country attracted many Pentecostal missionaries, particularly a large Swedish community that boasted "hundreds of missionaries, millions of Swedish kroners to spend on social programs, a complete Swedish school for missionary children, its own radio communication system, its own airplane,

[and] a proper Swedish consulate." Despite some notable successes, including the work of Astrid Jansson among the Weenhayek (Mataco) people, the large concentration of missionaries seems to have worked against the success of the mission. Only when the missionary presence waned or when movements independent of missionary control developed did Pentecostalism thrive.<sup>17</sup>

The movement's approach to leadership development contributed to its rapid growth. In contrast to Catholic priests, who were required to hold the equivalent of a graduate degree before starting their ministries, and mainline and fundamentalist Protestant pastors, who often required significantly more education than those in the pews, Pentecostal pastors generally had the same educational background as their congregations. In Chile in the 1960s, for example, 56 percent of Pentecostal pastors had not even finished primary school and only 7 percent had finished secondary school, while no pastors in other Protestant churches had failed to finish primary school and 43 percent had university degrees.<sup>18</sup> This dearth of education among Pentecostals had certain disadvantages, but it had one overwhelming advantage—pastors came from the same environment as their congregations and had no intellectual and class issues that separated them from their flocks.

A second advantage of the Pentecostal approach to leadership was that it was inexpensive, accessible, and practical. As people without many financial resources—and virtually all Pentecostals until the 1980s were poor—most Pentecostals could not even consider secondary education, university training, or graduate theological education. Even staying in primary school, if one was available, posed significant financial obstacles, since a family might need children to work rather than keeping them in school. Instead of earning degrees, Pentecostal leaders proved themselves through a series of progressively more important challenges: "Soon after his conversion he starts as a preacher in the street, where he proves the depth of his convictions and the quality of his witness. He will then be given responsibility for a Sunday school class and will accede to the status of a preacher: he will then have the right to lead worship. If he gives satisfaction, his pastor may entrust to him the task of opening a new preaching place in his neighborhood. . . . If he succeeds in gathering a small group, the elders and the pastor will regard this as adequate proof of his vocation, because they are convinced that it is not man who converts, but the power of God within him; a vocation which does not bear fruit cannot be of God."<sup>19</sup>



The candidate's spiritual authority also received particular scrutiny. Throughout all of these steps, he needed to demonstrate the ability to heal, to cast out demons, and generally to display the supernatural gifts valued by Pentecostals.<sup>20</sup> Poor churches thus did not waste resources on those who liked studying theology but had no affinity for the demands of daily ministry. Similarly, candidates did not study esoteric theories with little practical application but rather learned and practiced exactly what Pentecostal churches required. A weakness, of course, was that few Pentecostal pastors had the theological resources to deal with complex doctrinal, philosophical, and moral issues and most had little understanding of Christian history and tradition.

A third strength was that instead of separating ministerial candidates during years of college and seminary, the Pentecostal method propelled them into sustained social contact with the people around them. Where priests and seminary-trained Protestant pastors could become alienated from their roots by years of immersion in academic study, those who climbed the Pentecostal leadership ladder became, if anything, more attuned to their people and their culture. Preaching on street corners, door-to-door evangelism, healing the sick (common in their neighborhoods), and attempting to start a church on a shoestring budget, all while supporting themselves by working at some other job, gave them a deep understanding and appreciation of the struggles and tribulations of the poor.

Thus, by the 1950s Pentecostalism had established itself in Latin America. Other Protestants still looked down on it as a fringe phenomenon, but it had thoroughly indigenized itself. The political, social, economic, and cultural atmosphere of the 1950s and 1960s in Latin America provided an ideal environment for the next stage of Pentecostal development, which included explosive growth, the formation of new national denominations, and the achievement of a certain prominence (sometimes notoriety) in national affairs. These achievements resulted from Pentecostalism's strongly indigenous character and its ability to expand without missionaries and at low cost, even as its critics tended to charge that it was funded and directed by foreigners.

### *The Option of the Poor*

Urbanization and industrialization tended to create "zones of misery," or rings of shantytowns around capitals and industrial centers. Lured by the promise of a better life, migrants settled in the only places they could

afford—slums that lacked electricity, running water, sewers, schools, police stations, and, important for this story, Catholic churches. These areas, full of transplants from different regions of a country, had no common culture, no traditions, and often no real local government. To make matters worse for their poor and desperate residents, crime and disease ran rampant in these slums.

The institutional Catholic Church, unprepared for what amounted to the creation of entire new cities over the course of just a few years and suffering from both a priest shortage and a growing panic about the superficiality of the faith in places that *did* have priests, responded weakly. The hierarchy sent few priests to the shantytowns and built few churches, and virtually no schools in these areas. In effect, most of these new urban areas had to fend for themselves as far as religion was concerned. From the migrants' perspective, this institutional neglect proved more damaging than might have been expected. Since rural folk Catholicism had a strong local element that revolved around local patron saints, specific sacred places, and festivals infused with local customs, it did not transfer well to the new urban environments where people came from different regions of a given country, where the sacred caves and springs were only a distant memory, and where people from other regions had no familiarity with the rituals and distinctive calendars of their neighbors. Consequently, even devout migrants faced a religious dilemma: how could they keep the faith in the new environment?

The global contest between the United States and the Soviet Union and the related phenomenon of decolonization added another complication. Latin America served as a battleground of the Cold War. Sometimes this took benign form, for instance, in President John F. Kennedy's attempt to win allies and to foster development through the Alliance for Progress. On the other hand, many actions of United States—such as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)-sponsored coup that deposed progressive Guatemalan president Jacobo Arbenz in 1954, the attempted invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in 1961, and the invasion and occupation of the Dominican Republic in 1965—reinforced and exacerbated Latin American suspicions of that neighbor to the north. Meanwhile, many African colonies of European nations gained their independence in the 1950s and 1960s, especially in the landmark year of 1960, when seventeen nations became independent.

Consequently, the 1950s and 1960s offered significant opportunities for Pentecostal expansion and for the creation of national denominations,

both of which finally brought Pentecostals to the attention of politicians, social scientists, and the Catholic hierarchy. With Catholics and historic Protestants underserving the urban poor, Pentecostals had methods and "religious products" almost perfectly aligned with the needs of this immense "religious market."<sup>21</sup> At the same time, despite claiming to be apolitical, Pentecostals experienced the winds of nationalism, anti-Americanism, and decolonization in a way that, while rarely radicalizing them, still made them receptive to the idea of severing ties to missionary societies and mission boards. The new denominations that they created completed the indigenization process and eventually made Latin America the true heartland of Pentecostalism.<sup>22</sup>

In Chile, after decades of growth, in the 1960s Pentecostals were attracting academic attention, most notably from scholars Emilio Willems and Christian Lalive d'Epinay, and starting to set their sights on public influence. Having grown from a handful of people in 1909 to more than 500,000 in 1960, they began to feel less like a peripheral group than one that could change society. For instance, in 1967 the leader of one denomination had a transformative experience at a conference in Berlin, but not in the traditional Pentecostal way. "I, who am nothing," he said, "found myself with the great men of this world. I, the least important, was with the great theologian X and with the great evangelist Y . . . and when I passed through London, a minister received me. . . . This is what God has done with us, with me who am the least of all." His congregation answered each line of his report with "Amen" and "Alleluias," perhaps seeing his elevation in the world as a sign of their own improving circumstances. Pentecostals also developed the financial wherewithal to erect large buildings, such as the "basilica" of the Iglesia Pentecostal de Chile in Curicó and the "cathedral" of the Iglesia Metodista Pentecostal, for which construction began in 1967.<sup>23</sup> When Pinochet came to power in 1973, some Pentecostals made the fateful decision to align themselves with the new regime. That Pinochet would consider Pentecostals worthy of his attention as a counterweight to the Catholic Church indicated the great numerical success that Pentecostals had achieved by the 1970s and their increased prominence as public actors.

Pentecostals also enjoyed marked successes in Brazil in the 1980s and 1990s. By the early 1990s five new Pentecostal churches were opening their doors every week in Rio de Janeiro alone.<sup>24</sup> In the poorest neighborhoods of Rio there were seven Protestant (almost always Pentecostal) churches for every Catholic church.<sup>25</sup> Their primary clientele, the urban poor, were struggling mightily. After visiting Brazil, American theologian

Richard Shaull found that most Pentecostals lived with "broken families, material deprivation, addiction to drugs and alcohol, and the culture of violence surrounding them" but that they could nevertheless experience "ecstasy and joy" because through their faith "the impossible becomes possible time and again."<sup>26</sup>

Across the region, healing and exorcism played important roles in the growth of Pentecostal churches. Because of their location in poor and even desperate neighborhoods, where the lack of sanitation services made disease more likely and where people's poverty put expensive medical treatment out of reach, Pentecostal churches put a special emphasis on divine healing, which often served as a decisive factor in attracting potential converts. In a similar vein, in an atmosphere in which people took the spirit world for granted and in which they explained suffering by reference to curses and demonic possession, Pentecostals provided the sought-after deliverance.

Believers also found emotional and spiritual encouragement for their difficult lives. The Pentecostal style of praise, prayer, and preaching seemed to meet believers' needs in a profound and powerful way:

A typical Latin American Pentecostal service takes place in a large, poorly decorated meeting hall, with a full-blown band leading the singing, shouting, whistling, clapping, and dancing. As the service begins, the congregants become deeply immersed, their eyes closed, some crying, others singing at the top of their voice or "speaking in tongues," and still others lifting faces and hands toward heaven. The music goes on and on, building from soft strains to a fast, arresting rhythm that after nearly two hours reaches a deafening climax—and suddenly drops back again to quiet strains. With the entrance of the pastor, the whole congregation shouts and claps, while he begins to preach a simple message of salvation through Jesus: you must convert now, while there is still time; no more drinking, cheating, and lying; the Lord is coming soon. The music softly restarts while the pastor asks all who want to "accept the Lord" to come forward. As the leaders pray, the people start falling down—"slain in the Spirit," the outward expression of the Holy Spirit come into their lives.<sup>27</sup>

The music, which ranged from rock to local popular styles, almost always took a form that seemed natural and appropriate for the expression of deep personal emotions in a given sociocultural milieu. Even if not "slain

in the Spirit," worshippers often entered a trance-like state that could last for thirty minutes or more. Whatever the exact nature of this occurrence, believers experienced it as a direct and almost physical encounter with the divine. "I feel it in the heart as odd, something strange . . . a kind of electricity inside," said one Chilean woman. "This is how I feel it when I'm in church, and there are instruments, and they dance, and all that. I feel an electricity which is mine, as if the whole body has needles."<sup>28</sup> Preaching did not so much explain or teach as challenge and encourage. The "altar call" near the end of a service invited personal response, highlighting the active participation of the congregation. They were worshippers—not spectators—who consciously responded to what they perceived as God's call in their lives.

Gifts such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing served a dual purpose. First, they met individual needs in a powerful and decisive way. Tongues, for instance, gave new spiritual vitality to those who had become dry and tired, while prophetic "words" provided the type of personalized encouragement that made believers feel God's special concern. Healing, similarly, met an obvious crisis in a believer's life, in a way that had special relevance in the lives of the poor. Second, the more dramatic charismatic phenomena served as a major means of what one scholar has called the "re-enchantment of the world."<sup>29</sup> If modernity had stripped away layers of religious explanations of the world, Pentecostalism had the ability to re-infuse reality with the supernatural. Its practitioners did not reject science per se but rather seemed able to live supernaturally in urban environments. Rural migrants had brought their own supernatural folk Catholicism to the city but never had as much success as Pentecostals.

A new wave of Pentecostalism, often referred to as neo-Pentecostalism, emerged in the 1970s and became a major religious player in the 1980s. Although there was no black-and-white difference between the newer version and its predecessors, neo-Pentecostalism tended to differentiate itself in three ways: an emphasis on "health and wealth," an elevation of "spiritual warfare," and an appeal to the middle and upper classes. Pentecostals had long practiced physical healing and, to a lesser extent, understood themselves to be in a spiritual battle; this new wave added financial prosperity to the mix. It also built on the foundations that other Pentecostals had built among the poor to reach into upper social strata, where people often latched onto the financial aspects of the message.

The most prominent example of neo-Pentecostalism was Brazil's Igreja Universal do Reino do Deus (IURD, Universal Church of the

Kingdom of God), started by Edir Macedo in 1977. The IURD grew dramatically in the 1980s and became a political and cultural force in the 1990s. By the 2000s it had hundreds of foreign missionaries, including dozens in the United States. At the heart of the IURD's appeal was its bold reliance on spiritual warfare, not in some vague philosophical way, but in direct confrontation of the spirits, saints, and deities of other religions—Umbanda, Mucumba, Candomblé, and Catholicism. In a backhanded way this direct attack took seriously the concerns of the poor, who believed strongly in those spiritual forces, and offered them the sort of spiritual protection that they longed for but were not receiving elsewhere.<sup>30</sup>

Together, Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals changed the religious landscape of Latin America dramatically. As Paul Freston argues, Pentecostalism and organized crime became the two institutions that "really functioned," in poor urban areas that were "virtually untouched by other sectors of civil society or indeed the state." In fact, Freston contends, Pentecostal pastors acted as one of the few forces against violence in those neighborhoods, "whether by dissuading young males from becoming criminals, converting prisoners, or providing 'protection' for potential victims of violence."<sup>31</sup>

### *Argentine Pentecost*

Although all Latin American nations experienced Pentecostal growth in the second half of the twentieth century, the most remarkable developments took place in Argentina. During the years after the fall of Juan Perón in 1955, conservatives and the military (who ruled the country from 1966 to 1973) tended to see the Catholic Church as a bulwark of Argentine nationalism, even as a group of priests, the Movement of Priests for the Third World, signaled the emergence of a Catholic left. When the military came to power again in 1976 and waged their infamous "Dirty War" against their leftist opponents, the Catholic left often fell victim to "disappearances" and violence. After the military's rule came to an end in 1983 the hierarchy faced a crisis on two fronts. First, it was criticized for its inaction during the years of human rights violations by the military—in stark contrast to the bishops of Chile and Brazil. And then the new administration of President Raul Alfonsín tried to separate church and state and to introduce various new laws that undermined Catholic teaching on marriage and family.<sup>32</sup>



se religion involves what is deepest and most important in people's  
Without minimizing the significance of the latest debt crisis or po-  
pheaval, is it not at least possible that the profound religious experi-  
recorded in this chapter are ultimately more influential? If religious  
matters—and the Reformation demonstrates that it does—the  
statal transformation of Latin America is one of the major stories of  
especially when combined with the similar transformation that  
ce inside Catholicism.

Leadership  
churches and  
advancing  
reasons  
option for the poor?  
a 'bottom-up' approach  
from 'services'?

Situation  
(But in  
the voice of  
intense poverty  
& violence)

Ultimately based in mission -> b  
become popular

# The Heartland of Charismatic Catholicism

*As night falls, the largest Catholic church in downtown Sao Paulo is filled with raucous "hallelujahs" and the beat of drums and electric keyboards. Hundreds of worshipers, many in T-shirts, raise their hands and shout "Amen" as if at a Baptist revival. . . . Services are animated, marked by catchy music, faith healing, and speaking in tongues.<sup>1</sup>*

THE CATHOLIC CHARISMATIC Renewal (CCR) might be even more significant than the rise of Pentecostalism. But it is less visible. If few inhabitants of the global North are aware of the rapid growth of Pentecostal churches and the strong Pentecostal influence on other Latin American Protestants, even fewer have recognized the growth of the CCR. Yet in 2000 there were more Catholic Charismatics in Latin America, 75 million, than there were Pentecostals, at most 66 million.<sup>2</sup> In 2011 Edward Cleary described the CCR as "the most important religious movement in Latin America," but it still tended to attract less scholarly and journalistic attention than either Pentecostalism or liberation theology.<sup>3</sup>

The Charismatic Renewal came to the Catholic Church in 1967 when a group of students from Duquesne University in Pennsylvania began crying, laughing, and speaking in tongues during a retreat. The experience next arrived at the University of Notre Dame, which began hosting international CCR conferences that grew from eighty-five people in 1967 to 30,000 in 1974. As the movement spread across the United States and then the world, reaching 350,000 adherents by 1974, it also occasioned

considerable confusion and criticism. A significant factor in the survival of the CCR was the encouragement it received from Belgian Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens (1904–96). The cardinal first encountered Charismatic American nuns at a conference in Philadelphia in 1972, and, after some investigation, was impressed. In 1973 he told the 23,000 participants at Notre Dame's annual conference, "I will tell you a secret which will help you to welcome the Holy Spirit: it has a name; it is union with Mary." His advocacy of the renewal at the highest levels of the Vatican, including to Pope Paul VI himself, and his intervention to keep the CCR distinctively and clearly Catholic both eased the movement's acceptance into the church and ensured that its members stayed within the confines of Catholicism.

Like Charismatic movements around the world, the Latin American CCR usually explained its beginnings with reference to the United States and its awakening of 1967, but Colombia appears to have experienced the rise of a contemporaneous Charismatic prayer group not directly connected to the United States.<sup>4</sup> Better documented is the impact of a team of American Protestant Charismatics, including Harald Bredesen and Samuel Ballesteros, who came to Colombia in October 1967 and won over Father Rafael García Herreros of the *Minuto de Dios* ministry in Bogotá and Father Diego Jaramillo, then working for the Colombian bishops' conference. In 1968 Ballesteros wrote García Herreros, "God wants me to go to Colombia to work in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ" and asked if he and his wife could work with the *Minuto de Dios* ministry. At first, García Herreros wondered what a Protestant minister could contribute to a Catholic ministry, but he too sensed that God was at work. At a time when Protestants and Catholics had little to do with each other, Ballesteros impressed the Colombians during his six-year ministry in Bogotá. "With love and openness," said Jaramillo, "he worked with the parish priests and preached Jesus Christ tirelessly, without any trace of proselytism." In 1969 students began Charismatic prayer groups at a *Minuto de Dios* school and at a seminary where Jaramillo served as rector. In 1971 the priests of *Minuto de Dios* asked the Colombian bishops to support what they saw as "a true explosion of the Holy Spirit" that had the potential to enliven the church in the whole nation. In 1972 García Herreros established contact with the Word of God Charismatic community in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and asked for help. A string of North American Charismatics, including Protestant pastor and author Henry Frost, visited *Minuto de Dios* in the next few

years. By 1973 young lay Colombian Charismatics were evangelizing throughout Latin America.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, an American Dominican priest named Francis MacNutt played an important role in spreading the renewal. In 1967, independent of the Duquesne revival, MacNutt had had his own experience of spirit baptism at a Protestant conference where he met Agnes Sanford (1897–1982), an important Protestant Charismatic leader in the 1960s and 1970s. After she gave him a prophetic "word" that he would help to restore the ministry of healing in the Catholic Church, MacNutt became one of the leaders of the CCR in the United States and wrote the seminal book *Healing*. In addition to many retreats, conferences, and lectures in the United States, he visited Bolivia and Peru in 1970, the Dominican Republic in 1971, and Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Mexico in 1972.<sup>6</sup> These visits, on which MacNutt was accompanied by a team that included both Catholics and Protestants, usually centered around a "Life in the Spirit" retreat that introduced Latin Americans and missionaries to baptism in the Spirit, speaking in tongues, and divine healing. For many participants, the powerful personal experience of the Holy Spirit served as a sort of second conversion that propelled them into a higher level of spiritual commitment and into new ministries in the church. Many participants became advocates and teachers of the renewal in their own parishes, starting with small groups devoted to prayer. In MacNutt's last major contribution to the renewal in Latin America, he worked with Father García Herreros to organize the first Encuentro Carismático Católico Latino Americano (ECCLA, Latin American Catholic Charismatic Conference) for the leaders of the incipient movement in Bogotá in February 1973. MacNutt himself soon faded from the picture after marrying a Protestant named Judith Sewell and ending his public ministry, but ECCLA continued to hold biennial meetings for thousands of participants across the region.<sup>7</sup>

The CCR took on different characteristics in different countries, but it grew quickly almost everywhere. Mexico, for example, took a somewhat different path from Brazil and from the mainstream of the movement, mostly due to its emphasis on catechesis and evangelization through the Sistema Integral de Evangelización (SINE) and Escuelas de Evangelización San Andrés (mentioned in Chapter 2). In Colombia, largely through the *Minuto de Dios* ministries, the CCR put more of an emphasis on social action. In the Dominican Republic, Canadian priest Emiliano

Tardif played a major role in popularizing the movement and won such acclaim for teaching and healing that President Lionel Fernández called for a national day of mourning at his death in 1999.

The CCR's ability to revitalize Catholicism and to bring in weary and marginal Catholics eventually outweighed the qualms that the Latin American bishops had about the movement. Although few bishops personally participated in the movement, all the national bishops' conferences eventually endorsed it or created national coordinating bodies, although the Brazilian bishops, the most progressive national group in the 1970s and 1980s, did not do so until 1994. The Argentine bishops had their own fears, but still decided to support the renewal in 1989:

In considering the phenomenon of the Charismatic Renewal, one important issue is its context, the spread of the sects, which is a serious matter for which the Church still lacks an adequate pastoral response. In this situation the Charismatic Renewal can provide a significant service because it uses a similar vocabulary: highly religious language, openness to the transcendent, faith in the gift of healing in the fullest sense of the term, etc.<sup>8</sup>

Many bishops across the region shared this rationale. Even bishops with doubts about Charismatic theology and practice offered some support to the renewal because of its success at resisting the specter of Pentecostal growth. The bishops might not have loved the CCR, but they liked it far more than the prospect of losing millions more Catholics to the Pentecostals. This sometimes tepid support sufficed—the CCR thrived and recently became, numerically at least, more successful than Pentecostalism itself. The CCR made the bishops' support easier by gradually becoming more consciously Catholic, less ecumenical, and more tied to the hierarchy. After a period of experimentation in the 1970s, the CCR increasingly emphasized Catholic distinctives like the Virgin Mary, the Eucharist, and submission to ecclesiastical authority.

Our particular focus here is on Brazil and Bolivia. In a manner similar to the rise of Argentine Pentecostalism, the Brazilian and Bolivian Charismatic movements began humbly but became influential in their own countries, throughout Latin America, and around the world. As these examples show (and as Chapter 10 demonstrates at greater length), the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements were not just exotic religious phenomena. They were a major way—surpassed, perhaps, only

by migration, telenovelas, popular music, and trade—in which Latin American populations interacted with each other and with the rest of the world.

## Brazil

Brazil's CCR, today the region's largest and most vibrant, started largely because of the influence of two American Jesuits, Edward Dougherty and Harold Rahm, and a Brazilian priest, Jonas Abib. In the early 1970s Rahm organized a series of retreats called "Prayer Meetings in the Holy Spirit," a Brazilian equivalent of the "Life in the Spirit" retreats taking place in the Spanish-speaking countries, and in 1972 he wrote the influential book, *Sereis Batizados no Espírito* (You will Be Baptized in the Holy Spirit). He also had a long and successful ministry to drug addicts that incorporated spiritual aspects of the CCR into the recovery process.<sup>9</sup>

Dougherty, convinced of the great value of the Charismatic experience in his own life, tried to share it with as much of Brazil as he could. In 1972 and 1973 he held retreats in every state capital, hoping that participants could then pass on what they had learned. He then focused on the media, recognizing the potential especially of television for propagating the Charismatic message. His early efforts stirred the ire of liberationist priests and bishops, who felt that he was minimizing the social aspect of the gospel, but he persevered, eventually building up a group of 70,000 financial supporters called the Associação do Senhor Jesus (ASJ, Association of the Lord Jesus) and starting the *Século 21* television network and *Brasil Cristão* magazine. His studio produced a five-hour Sunday afternoon show called "Praise the Lord" and several soap operas with Catholic themes, among its many offerings.<sup>10</sup>

In 1979 Abib started *Comunidade Canção Nova* (New Song Community), which combined two important features of the CCR: covenant communities and popular Catholic worship music. Covenant communities, groups of mostly lay Catholics who live in some sort of communal arrangement to pursue holiness and mission together, allowed participants in the CCR to grow in their faith in a protective and nurturing environment. *Canção Nova* hoped to build communities of trained and committed Catholics who would produce and disseminate contemporary-style Catholic music. Within a few years of *Canção Nova*'s founding, artists such as Francisco José dos Santos (known professionally as Dunga) were selling millions of CDs and the community was sponsoring radio stations



across the country. By 2004 the community had 254 television stations and a huge church, the Centro de Evangelização "Dom João Hipólito de Moraes," which could seat 70,000 people—the largest Catholic church in Latin America.<sup>11</sup>

With the help of the groundwork laid by Dougherty, Rahm, and Abib, the CCR slowly but steadily grew into a major force in Brazilian life. Starting with a handful of people in 1969, the movement grew to 10,000 adherents in 1970, 2 million in 1989, and as many as 33 million in 2008.<sup>12</sup> The combination of the relational approach—retreats, small groups, and covenant communities—with extensive use of the mass media, proved to be a winning formula for modern, urban Brazil. More than other sectors of the church, and much more than their progressive critics, Charismatics saw the potential of radio, music, magazines, and television to reach mass audiences who craved spiritual direction—both people outside the movement and those already in it. The relational side of the movement then met some of the deep needs for connection and intimacy created by the fragmentation and dislocation of urban modernity.

After its steady growth in Brazil throughout the 1970s and 1980s, some non-Charismatics began to take note of the CCR in the early 1990s, but it was Father Marcelo Rossi who brought the movement to a much broader audience. Born in 1967, and thus part of the second generation of Catholic Charismatics, Rossi was inspired by Pope John Paul II and by two untimely deaths in his family to pursue a deeper Christian life and, eventually, the priesthood. After his studies at a seminary influenced by Father Abib and Canção Nova and his ordination in 1994, Rossi began to attract so many people to Mass that he received permission from his diocese to turn an old factory in São Paulo into one of Brazil's first Catholic megachurches, the Santuario Terço Vizentino (Sanctuary of the Byzantine Rosary), which could seat 30,000 people. Because crowds quickly overwhelmed the church and its surrounding neighborhood, Rossi had to build an even bigger church, Santuario Mãe de Deus (Sanctuary of the Mother of God) in 2001. It soon boasted a weekly attendance of 190,000.<sup>13</sup> In the Mass itself Rossi followed the rubrics (mandatory directions for the celebrant) but afterward he often began what he called "the Lord's aerobics," a combination praise service, exercise class, and prayer session.<sup>14</sup>

Starting in 1998 Rossi made a steady stream of CDs (including several multi-million selling albums), movies, and radio and television shows. In 2007 he organized a music festival and Mass that attracted 4

million people.<sup>15</sup> Rossi's appeal proved somewhat elusive for many non-Charismatics, but it seemed to stem from his youthful appearance, his athleticism, his confident Catholic message, and his indigenization of that message in the form of popular music and culturally relevant language. Whatever his secret, his celebrity made the CCR almost unavoidable in Brazil.

### *Bolivia's Mansion*

*The heart of the meeting is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which is prayed for by all who want it. This is achieved by the laying on of hands, as everyone prays aloud seeking the presence of the Holy Spirit, first in Spanish and then in tongues. At the end of the meeting there is a time of silence for hearing messages from God (prophecies).*

—Description of Friday Mass at La Mansión, Santa Cruz, Bolivia, 1978.<sup>16</sup>

Bolivia, with its indigenous majority and high rate of poverty, did not seem like the ideal spot for the development of the CCR, which tended to appeal to middle-class Catholics. In fact, during the 1950s and 1960s, the trend among educated Bolivians was toward progressive Christianity. The former seminarian Nestor Paz Zamora, for instance, became increasingly radicalized during the 1960s, and joined the guerrillas of the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army) in 1970. Statements such as "It is the right of every Christian to be a revolutionary—it is the right of every revolutionary to join the revolution" and "Taking up arms is the only effective way of protecting the poor from their current exploitation and of creating the new man" took on lasting resonance when he died just three months after joining the guerrillas. Many members of the middle class and many missionaries came to believe that "to be a Christian is to be on the left."<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, or perhaps as a reaction against the trend toward progressivism, the nation became one of the regional centers of the Charismatic movement. Starting with Francis MacNutt's first retreat in May 1970, the Charismatic experience found fertile ground among North American Dominican missionaries, such as priests Patrick Rearden, Ralph Rogawski, Daniel Roach, and Crisóstomo (Cris) Geraets and Sister Helen Raycroft. These Dominicans brought the revival

to several of Bolivia's main cities, but the ministry of Geraets and Roach in Santa Cruz had the most influence.<sup>18</sup>

Geraets and Roach had a powerful encounter with the renewal in January 1971 but at first struggled to see how the CCR fit with the Dominican approach to liturgy and spirituality or how it would work with the traditional Bolivian religiosity. They started a Charismatic prayer meeting at the university where they worked in the city of Santa Cruz, the leading city in eastern Bolivia, but a revolution ended classes for several months and most students went home. The priests took advantage of the lull at the university to devote themselves to prayer and to reading Protestant and Catholic perspectives on the Charismatic movement. When Pentecostal evangelist Julio Cesar Ruibal became a national sensation in January 1973, provoking even Catholics to think about spiritual gifts, Geraets and Roach responded with their first retreat, during which many Charismatic phenomena appeared. With a corps of adherents from their prayer meetings and the recent retreat, the two priests then began celebrating Charismatic Masses outdoors on the grounds of La Mansión, a mansion in downtown Santa Cruz that a wealthy family had given to the local diocese.<sup>19</sup> After the group grew quickly from fifty to 120 people, they built the "Pahuichi," a rustic structure with a thatched roof and no walls that could seat 600.<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, Geraets had been devoting several hours of every day to studying and writing, as he tried to build a synthesis of Dominican rationality and Charismatic spirituality that would work in Bolivia. By the late 1970s he had arrived at a basic formula that attempted to respect liturgical norms while still giving free rein to the Spirit. Mass started with contemporary style praise songs and spontaneous prayer by members of the congregation. After the first reading, there would be testimony in which a few people related what God had done in their lives. Because Geraets preached for twenty-five minutes, longer than most priests at the time, and allowed spontaneous songs, prophecies, and speaking in tongues to break out at certain points, and because the exchange of the peace could last for twenty minutes, Mass generally lasted for two and a half hours, much longer than non-Charismatic Masses.<sup>21</sup>

As early as 1976 Geraets began to argue that the renewal had had a profound impact beyond La Mansión and beyond the walls of the city's churches. Responding to the stereotype that Santa Cruz and eastern Bolivia were happier and calmer than the rest of the country, Geraets said it was the result of "the new awakening of the Catholic faith by the New

Pentecost," which had changed people's lives, marriages, and families.<sup>22</sup> As clearly has noted, the belief that interior renewal could spark exterior social and political changes, common within the CCR, marked a significant change for Geraets, who had spent his early years as a missionary fighting for social justice. La Mansión did not ignore the poor—most of its adherents were poor—and its classes did teach the preferential option for the poor, but it did not emphasize social or political action. Instead, it promoted the evangelization and catechization of the poor and their mobilization as evangelists, catechists, and leaders in the church.<sup>23</sup> In the words of one participant in the 1970s: "We know that the church in Bolivia is poor and we trust that God acts precisely in poverty; we are humble witnesses of the Holy Spirit's work in our people and we want to share our experience with all Bolivians of good will."<sup>24</sup>

Such an attitude, more in line with the approach soon to be taken by Pope John Paul II than with the leading bishops of the 1970s, made liberation theologians suspicious if not downright antagonistic, but it clearly appealed to the poor themselves. By 1978 Sunday Mass was attracting 2,000 people every week, but that was just the beginning of La Mansión's activities, which included a schedule of daily Masses that focused on a specific topic or practice: prayer for the dead on Monday, marriage and family on Tuesday, penance and deliverance on Wednesday, conversion on Thursday, and speaking in tongues and other spiritual gifts on Friday. Also taking place throughout the week were small prayer groups, with forty-two in action in 1977.<sup>25</sup>

### Charisma and Catechesis

A distinctive element of La Mansión was its emphasis on education and leadership development. Because of the Dominican commitment to study, teaching, and evangelization, Geraets and Roach soon saw that it was not enough that the two of them understood how the renewal related to classical Christian doctrine. They needed to teach their people and, even more important, to train new teachers to multiply the effect of that teaching. In 1980 they opened the Saint Thomas Aquinas Pastoral Institute, which slowly developed into a four-year program of thirty-five different courses, starting with the "Life in the Spirit" seminar and including courses such as Moral Theology, Church History, and the Social Teaching of the Church. Starting with 150 students, the institute soon grew to over 700, a large number for a predominantly lower-class city. In fact, so

many Catholics who could not read wanted to participate that the Institute had to start a literacy program as well. In later years the institute took up the Vatican's "new evangelization" program, expressing its purpose as "teaching Catholic doctrine to lay people committed to evangelizing their parishes to fulfill Pope John Paul II's call for 'new ardor, new expressions, and new methods' in evangelization." Geraets also encouraged the development of several teams of musicians, numbering fourteen in 2007, who not only performed at the various Masses and meetings but also began to write and record their own songs.<sup>26</sup>

The emphasis on evangelization was not merely theoretical. In the early 1980s Geraets and three younger Bolivian priests who spoke indigenous languages began evangelistic campaigns in the villages around Santa Cruz, at times going head to head with Pentecostals doing the same thing. Geraets could no longer go into the villages after he developed some health problems in the 1990s, but he, other priests, and the musical teams continued to evangelize the neighborhoods of Santa Cruz.<sup>27</sup>

Teams and individuals from La Mansión also traveled to Bolivia's other cities to spread the CCR. In 1975, for example, Ricardo Suárez Selum and a friend, who had experienced the renewal in Santa Cruz, came to La Paz to attend a university. Their attempts to interest local priests in Charismatic prayer meetings met with some interest in the Don Bosco School, but eventually the meetings were shut down over the issues of tongues and prophecy. A few months later Geraets brought a team of twelve from La Mansión to help Suárez and others start prayer groups. By early 1976 a few groups were meeting regularly and one local priest had embraced the renewal to such an extent that he traveled to Santa Cruz for two weeks of training. He returned to La Paz and worked diligently to build up various prayer meetings and Masses, but in 1977 the other priests of his parish turned against the renewal and forced him to end all Charismatic activities. Some of the disappointed Charismatics left the Catholic Church and joined Pentecostal bodies; others simply moved to Charismatic groups in other parishes, such as the ones led by Juanita de Garafulich, a widow who had entered the renewal movement after attending a retreat sponsored by La Mansión in 1974.<sup>28</sup>

In another example of La Mansión's influence, in 1976 five religious sisters from Colombia, who had experienced the CCR in their country, invited Geraets and a team of lay catechists to Oruro to conduct a series of meetings on the renewal. A prayer meeting at the Vetania school, where the sisters taught, soon began.<sup>29</sup>

La Mansión also spread the Charismatic message through retreats and the mass media. In 1980 La Mansión began to draw thousands of Catholics from around the country and the region to Santa Cruz for annual conferences on themes such as "Virgin Mary, Mother of Hope, teach us to evangelize" (1987) and "Jesus Christ, abundant life for all" (1996). Large groups from Paraguay, Argentina, and Peru and speakers from Venezuela, Mexico, and Ecuador demonstrated both the influence of La Mansión on the larger Latin American Charismatic movement and La Mansión's connectedness to that larger movement.<sup>30</sup> In the 1980s the center also started producing radio and television shows and both Geraets and Roach had daily shows on local channels. In 1996 Geraets and Roach built a studio that produced a wide variety of music and television programs, including children's shows and ecological shows, as well as more straightforward Catholic preaching. By 2011 the studio was broadcasting Sunday Mass in Santa Cruz, as well as in Guayaramerín, Riberalta, Trinidad, Tarija, and other communities, and a national television network had picked up the annual conference. "In an age as influenced by television as our own," argued the center's website, "evangelization, catechesis, and efforts to mature the faith cannot avoid this medium. Put at the service of the Gospel, it can extend the word of God to all creation without limits."<sup>31</sup>

Of course, many Bolivians harbored suspicions about La Mansión's growth and influence. For liberationists in the church and for the political left in general, the rise of the CCR seemed like a step backward. During an era in which indigenous rights and socialist politics were prospering, as typified by the victory of Aymara coca farmer Evo Morales and his Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement to Socialism) in the presidential election of 2005, some activists saw La Mansión as a source of distraction and reaction. For example, one observer of the 2007 annual conference characterized it as a sort of factory for the production of false consciousness. "Not once during the entire week was the economic misery of millions of people around the world questioned," he noted. Instead, the various speakers took poverty for granted and subtly supported the nation's business class. "The principal goal of this kind of event," he said, "is to alienate people from reality, to make them blame themselves for their problems, and to make as many Charismatics as possible."<sup>32</sup>

Such criticisms had little effect on La Mansión. Despite the death of Geraets in 2001 and Roach's poor health in the 2000s, La Mansión continued to prosper. In 2011, there were 141 prayer groups affiliated with the

Critiques



center meeting in Santa Cruz. At the center itself the daily schedule contained a full slate of prayer meetings, Masses, and training sessions and the pastoral institute continued to train hundreds of new students each year. After seven additions, the original Pahuichi had been torn down and replaced by a new one, which could (and did) seat 4,000 on normal Sundays and could be stretched to accommodate 7,000 during Holy Week.<sup>33</sup>

### Conclusion

"Pentecostalism was born in the United States," says Donald Dayton, "but it is discovering its destiny in Latin America."<sup>34</sup> More than in any other region of the world, Spirit-filled Christianity in its Protestant and Catholic versions has thrived in Latin America. In the Protestant world, although non-Pentecostal churches still exist, there is very little doubt that Pentecostalism is the new mainstream. Pentecostals not only outnumbered other Protestants but also heavily influenced non-Pentecostal churches. Many historic and fundamentalist churches used Pentecostal music and musical styles to such an extent that their singing was "indistinguishable" from that of Pentecostals. Sometimes the influence went far deeper, with many churches that would not have described themselves as Pentecostal adopting practices such as the laying on of hands and the anointing of the sick, to the extent that it was increasingly difficult to tell who was and who was not a Pentecostal.<sup>35</sup> In the Catholic world, the Charismatic movement was not as dominant, but it was better able to compete with Pentecostalism.

Perhaps most important, the CCR restored the confidence of Catholics. In contrast to the Mexicans who guarded their homes with signs that rejected "Protestant propaganda," Brazilians influenced by Marcelo Rossi and the CCR started adorning their homes and cars with stickers that said, "I'm happy because I'm Catholic."<sup>36</sup> This confident public Catholicism was poised to become a major force, not just in the religious marketplace but in the political and social spheres as well. The CCR's facility with mass media and urban popular culture, in combination with its institutional base in the church, put it in an excellent position to influence Latin American society in a way that the region had not seen since the colonial period. Liberation theology and the progressive church had hoped to do this, but their almost folkloric view of popular culture, their tense relations with the hierarchy and the Vatican, and their failure to deliver the kind of profound religious and spiritual experiences craved

by the popular classes undermined that effort. Protestant Pentecostals came much closer, primarily because they provided spiritual goods that Latin Americans wanted, but their alienation from the Catholic Church, into which the vast majority of the continent was still born and which had shaped the culture of the region for five centuries, presented more of a barrier than many supposed. The CCR's simple ability to provide both divine healing and the Virgin Mary gave it a huge advantage.

The Pentecostal/Charismatic story highlights again the Protestant influence on Latin American Catholicism. The dramatic rise of Pentecostal churches in the second half of the twentieth century shocked the Catholic hierarchy. Having just begun to come to terms with historic Protestantism—a result of the ecumenism promoted by Vatican II—they found themselves face to face with something totally different. Dealing with Lutherans and Methodists—still seen by many as "sects"—had seemed difficult enough, but to take seriously independent churches led by untrained men from the popular classes who prophesied, healed, and spoke in tongues seemed outrageous. How could such unorganized, undisciplined, impoverished churches pose a serious challenge to an institution that had made Latin America? Slowly, however, it dawned on even the most unobservant bishops that these Pentecostal churches were popping up everywhere, especially in the poorest neighborhoods. The rise of Pentecostalism thus served as a wake-up call: these new churches had something that the people wanted and that the Catholic Church was not delivering.

Protestants also had a more direct influence, helping spark nearly every instance of the Catholic Charismatic movement in Latin America. Francis MacNutt came to Latin America for the initial conferences with Protestants as part of his team; in Colombia, the Baptist Samuel Ballesteros played a major role in bringing the renewal to the priests at Minuto de Dios; in Bolivia, Geraets devoted years of his life to studying Protestant writings on the renewal. In the end, both rivalry and cooperation contributed to the CCR. It is, of course, unclear what will happen next, but if the CCR does help Catholicism reemerge as the dominant religious force in Latin America, it will be a Catholicism with Protestant roots.

Another important aspect of the rise of Spirit-filled Christianity in Latin America was its restoration of the emotional, spiritual, and supernatural elements of religion in the region. Especially in comparison to liberation theology and the progressive church, Pentecostalism and the CCR made clear that many people needed more than political plans and moral

urgency. As pressing as economic and social issues were in their lives, the poor still wanted miracles and ecstatic experience. This is not to say that the progressive church could not prosper or that social criticism has faded from the church, but it did imply that progressive Christians would need to provide at least some access to miracles and emotional release if they wanted to hold onto the poor. A religion without the supernatural simply could not compete with religions that provided healing, exorcism, and direct contact with the divine.

Finally, the growth of the CCR pointed to the importance of bishops but also to the limits of their influence. There is little doubt that if the Latin American bishops had uniformly opposed the renewal—in the sense of prohibiting it in their dioceses—it would not have prospered, at least not as a movement inside the Catholic Church. Their approval, sometimes amounting to little more than grudging acceptance, meant that the CCR could grow and develop as an authentic Catholic movement. On the other hand, it is also clear that for the vast majority of bishops, the CCR was problematic in its liturgy, theology, and general ethos. It was a movement that they did not initiate, a movement that began and developed outside of the episcopal palaces, the chanceries, and the seminaries. It came rather from small prayer groups, new communities, and odd priests. It displayed a facility with mass media and friendliness to consumer culture that seemed crass and superficial when compared to the sacrificial witness of the prophetic church. The bishops accepted it because of its substantial orthodoxy, its evident popular appeal, and its approval by the Vatican. In short, the most successful Latin American Catholic movement of the twentieth century came not from the bishops but from the people—and the Protestants.

## *Rise of the Laity: Catholic Action and Base Ecclesial Communities*

"I WANT to meet each one of you to tell you, 'Return to the bosom of the Church, your Mother!'" said Pope John Paul II in Mexico in 1990. "Come back, then, without fear! The Church is waiting for you with open arms to reintroduce you to Christ. Nothing would make the heart of the Pope happier during this pastoral trip to Mexico than the return to the bosom of the Church of those who have left." The pope mentioned the dangers of "sects" eleven times in the course of his visit.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, it was clear to the pope and to most concerned Catholics that playing defense would not be enough to revive Catholicism in Latin America. The Catholic laity faced real problems, even crises, for which Protestantism provided genuine answers; only by revitalizing lay spiritual life in ways that dealt directly with those problems and crises could the church reverse the tide. Urbanization, secularization, and economic distress required new ways of being Catholic.

For the inhabitants of urban shantytowns, the challenge was especially daunting. Deprived of the rich communal religion of their rural homes, they confronted religious deserts in which institutional Catholicism had almost no presence—often no church, no priest, and no school—and in which migrants from different regions of a given country had no common folk religion to embrace. In rural areas they had experienced poverty, but as part of a community, and in cultural and religious contexts that provided them with support and a religious lens through which to make sense of their struggles. In the urban "zones of misery" they were alone, not just separated from family and friends but also from the sacred geography and spiritual practices of their hometowns.