

**EVANGELICALS – PENTECOSTALS – CHARISMATICS:
New Religious Movements as Challenge for the Catholic Church**

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As Christianity has expanded around the world in modern times, newer churches have often trampled the divisions and labels that have become so familiar in Europe and America. To illustrate this, let me describe a healing revival in Uganda, at which a woman reported being cured of a spinal complaint. After this event, “a whole stream of people . . . stood up one by one to declare joyfully what Jesus had done for them. They had been dumb, mad or psychologically disturbed; crippled, epileptic, hemorrhaging; they had had cancer, epilepsy and asthma. By turns they declared that they had been healed by prayer and the power of the Lord Jesus. So many people wanted to testify that in the end the parish catechist simply resorted to calling out the afflictions and doing a headcount of those who had been healed.” This may sound like the typical currency of charismatic movements the world over, except that this particular example occurred in a Roman Catholic church, through the ministry of an Indian priest, and the initial miracle described took place during the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. The practice is thus that of a “new religious movement,” but the church itself is anything but new!

In this instance more than most, it is important to begin by defining terms. People use various terms to speak of religious movements that do not fit into traditional or mainstream patterns. In the English-speaking world, the most damning term is that of “cult,” which means a fanatical and exploitative group, while “sect” is more neutral and social scientific. European languages of course draw different distinctions about cults and sects. In order to avoid such distinctions, scholars use the non-judgmental term “new religious movement” (NRMs) to describe both types of movement. However, English-speaking scholars would never use that term to describe most of the movements that we are discussing at this conference. If you consult the literature published under the NRM term – much of which is written in English - you are likely to encounter very fringe movements indeed, groups like Scientology, the Hare Krishna movement, or the Unification Church of the late Rev. Sun M. Moon. This is an important distinction, because so much of the “NRM” literature treats its subjects as pathological, with “conversion” as a kind of sickness.

I will focus here on one particular aspect of the newer movements, namely the charismatic and Pentecostal movements that have been so conspicuously successful over the past century, and which of course are vastly more respectable. In their way, they also represent a mainstream of their own.

THE GROWTH OF GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY

During the nineteenth century, European and American empires sought to spread their religious traditions around the world. As those empires perished, the religions began to grow mightily. Some of the greatest triumphs have been won by precisely the structures created by colonial authorities, which retain the passionate loyalty of indigenous peoples

long after the empires themselves have dissolved. Despite all the scholarly attention justifiably paid to the distinctive Pentecostal and African indigenous churches (Zionist, Ethiopian, prophetic), the most successful structures across the global South are still easily recognizable to any European or North American. After decades of Protestant growth in Latin America, the Roman Catholic Church is still overwhelmingly the largest single religious presence on that continent, and the great majority of people still define their religious life in Catholic terms. If 60 or 70 million Latin Americans are Protestant (a fair estimate) then 500 million are not: most are, at least nominally, Catholic. In Africa, likewise, the leading churches are Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, and so on, and will likely be so for the foreseeable future. Catholicism, of course, has been at the forefront of Christian growth across that continent, and its successes have been enormous. As recently as 1955, the church claimed a mere 16 million Catholics in the whole of Africa, but that population grew to 55 million in 1978. Today, Africans account for one-eighth of the world's Catholics, and by 2025, Africa's 230 million Catholics will represent one-sixth of all members of that church worldwide. Any assessment of the challenge from "sects" must take account of that wider context.

In many areas, though, older groupings proved inadequate for a changing society. Much of the most spectacular Christian expansion in recent decades has occurred not within either the Protestant or Catholic realms but in new independent denominations. Growth outside the traditional churches has been very evident in Latin America. Catholicism represented the religion of the overwhelming majority of the people as recently as forty years ago, but since that time, there has been a marked defection to Protestantism. In 1940, barely a million Protestants were recorded in the whole of Latin America. Since 1960, though, Protestant numbers in the region have been growing at an average annual rate of 6 percent, so that today Protestants make up between 10 and 15 percent of the whole population, 60 or 70 million people.

In addition to growing in overall numbers, the nature of Protestantism itself has changed substantially over the last half-century, with the expansion of Pentecostal sects. According to reputable observers, by 2000, charismatic/Pentecostal numbers worldwide were increasing at the rate of around 19 million each year. The Center for the Study of Global Christianity states that the number of charismatic/Pentecostal believers was 582 million in 2000, potentially rising to over 800 million by 2025. Already there are more Pentecostal Christians in the world than there are Buddhists. By 2050, Pentecostals might rival Hindus in number. And that is from a movement that was essentially new at the end of the nineteenth century. Is there any doubt that Pentecostalism was the most successful social or religious movement of the twentieth century?

Again, a word about definition is in order here. Historically, the chief religious division in the Western Christian world was between Roman Catholics and Protestants, the latter term including all those groups that descended from the great ideological split of the Reformation. The key difference is that Protestants rely on the Bible alone as the source of religious authority, rather than on tradition or the institutional church. In this broad division, the Pentecostal movement should logically be considered Protestant, since it grew out of other Protestant churches, namely Methodism and the Holiness tradition, and it preaches a fundamentalist reliance on scriptural authority. Across Latin America, the

term *evangélico* refers indiscriminately to both Protestants and Pentecostals. (In Ethiopia too, the word *Pentay* signifies Protestant.) Increasingly, though, observers differentiate Latin American Pentecostals from Protestants because of growing divergences between the two in matters of faith and practice. One central division is that Pentecostal believers rely on direct spiritual revelations that supplement or even replace biblical authority. Across the continent, Protestants and Pentecostals remain at arm's length, chiefly because they appeal to different audiences. While Protestants serve a largely middle-class audience, Pentecostals derive their support chiefly from the poor, sometimes from the very poorest sections of society.

In practical terms, Pentecostalism implies a fervent and Spirit-filled worship style; a commitment to a total and emotional conversion experience, which changes lives utterly; and a belief in supernatural phenomena, of prophecy, trance and vision. Healing and spiritual warfare are cardinal tenets, with the expectation of signs and wonders. Pentecostal churches are strongly focused on promises of healing, miracle, and transformation. In recent years, these churches have been profoundly affected by prosperity teachings, the belief that prayer and faith will bring greater wealth, health and success.

A DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

It would be easy to speak of this global phenomenon in terms of mass conversions to Pentecostal and evangelical churches, and indeed, many individuals have made that transition. But demography is also enormously significant. One reason for the success of Pentecostal and Independent churches is that they are centered in regions with extremely high population expansion, so of course they are growing very fast as a proportion of the world's Christians.

Take the continent of Africa. In 1900, Africa had around 100 million people, or six percent of the global population. In 2005, the number of Africans reached one billion, or fifteen percent of humanity. By 2050, Africa's population will be between two and two and a quarter billion, which will then be about a quarter of the world's people. Those numbers do not count African migrants in Europe and North America. If we take the three East African nations that would become Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, then in 1900 they were occupied by just seven or eight million people, in an area not much smaller than Western Europe. By 2000, the three countries had a combined population of 90 million. By 2050, they might have 260 million.

Now set those numbers aside those for Europe. The 400 million Europeans alive in 1900 have grown to 730 million today, but in relative terms, as a share of global population, Europe is in steep decline. Europeans made up a quarter of humanity in 1900, as against 11 percent today, and falling to a projected eight percent by 2050. In 1900, Europeans outnumbered Africans by four to one. By 2050, Africans should have a three to one advantage over Europeans.

Of necessity, these changes have an immense impact on the shape of Christianity worldwide. As recently as 1900, Europe accounted for over two-thirds of the "Christian

world”, with North America a distant second, and Africa barely on the map. By 2050, by far the largest share of the world’s Christians will be found in Africa, which should have a billion or more believers. About a third of the world’s Christians by that point will be African, and those African Christians will outnumber Europe’s by more than two to one. The Christian world will have turned upside down.

Of course, then, there are tens of millions more members of evangelical and charismatic churches – as also of Catholic and Anglican bodies! A rising tide lifts all boats, and this demographic growth is more like Noah’s Flood.

EXPLAINING PENTECOSTAL SUCCESSES

Besides the demographic change, social and economic changes within the Global South countries have given a mighty impetus to newer charismatic and Pentecostal churches. We can scarcely speak of “Southern” Christianity in any homogeneous way, both because of the very diverse cultures in which the faith has grown in recent years, and the many different social, economic, and political settings. Having said this, though, many of the new churches do have certain features in common, which set them apart from the traditional Christianity of Europe and North America. And in this regard, we can understand the African independent congregations in very much the same context as the Pentecostal movements of Asia and Latin America.

I will emphasize certain common features underlying the success of Pentecostal and independent churches:

- *The uprooting of local communities during mass migration.
- *The growth of megacities and mass urbanization.
- *The success of churches and religious groups in providing facilities for health, education and welfare, and the absence of official alternatives.
- *The practical support and instruction offered to poor families.
- *The radical sense of alternative community and substitute family provided by the churches.
- *The special appeal of new churches to racial minorities and the dispossessed.
- *The special appeal to women.
- *The churches’ promise of healing – physical, spiritual, psychic and social.
- *The churches’ commitment to spiritual warfare and deliverance.
- *The culture of spectacle offered by revivals and crusades.
- *The spread of American styles of marketing and promotion.

The success of the various Global South churches is largely a by-product of modernization and urbanization. As predominantly rural societies have become more urban over the last thirty or forty years, millions of migrants are attracted to ever larger urban complexes, which utterly lack the resources or infrastructure to meet the needs of these “post-industrial wanderers.” More than a billion people—over one-sixth of the world—are illegal squatters living on the fringes of a Third World city. Sometimes people travel to cities within the same nation, but often they find themselves in different

countries and cultures, suffering a still greater sense of estrangement.

In such settings, the most devoted and fundamentalist-oriented religious communities emerge to provide functional alternative arrangements for health, welfare, and education. This sort of alternative social system has been a potent factor in winning mass support for the most committed religious groups, and it is likely to become more important as the gap between popular needs and the official capacities to fill them becomes ever wider.

Medieval Europeans developed the maxim that “town air makes free,” and for all its horrors, urbanization today does promise a new political and religious autonomy. In Latin America especially, the move to the cities over the last half-century has liberated ordinary people from traditional religious structures. No longer were they restricted to the only churches that landowners would permit on their estates, which in virtually every case were Catholic. Yet while liberating themselves, people were also seeking social structures not so very different from what they had previously known when they had lived in small villages, or on landed estates: there were features of village life that they missed badly. The new Latin American churches provide the uprooted with the kind of familiar structure to which they were accustomed. In Africa too, independent churches find their firmest support in the swollen cities, among migrants and the dispossessed. On both continents, the pastors of the new churches exercise a paternalistic role reminiscent of familiar figures from rural society, of landlords in Latin America, of tribal authorities in Africa. The congregations replace the family networks that prevailed in the older villages.

In Brazil, for instance, the São Paulo metropolitan region has some 20 million people, and the city’s growth has been virtually unplanned: at least 1.5 million live in the dire poverty of the *favelas*, the shantytowns. But alongside the poverty, we also find dramatic evidence of church growth. São Paulo’s annual March for Jesus attracts some 2 to 3 million participants, organized by such thriving evangelical denominations as *Renascer em Cristo*.

Similar urban pressures have had similar consequences elsewhere in Latin America. In Chile, one of the great centers of Protestant expansion, the greater Santiago area has over 6 million people, over 40 percent of the national total. The population of Peru, again, has grown from 10 million in 1960 to around 30 million today. This growth has been disproportionately urban and in fact concentrated in one city, namely Lima, with its 8.5 million people—more than a quarter of the national total. Urbanization has been particularly rapid in Central America, driven by the dual forces of natural disaster and rural guerrilla wars, so that some 60 percent of Salvadorans now live in cities. And as elsewhere, urbanization is generally accompanied by evangelical expansion.

Africa offers similar stories of speedy urbanization. One of the most important, in terms of the future significance of the region, is the vast Nigerian city of Lagos. In 1950, Lagos was a ramshackle port community with around a quarter of a million people. The official population in 1990 was 1.3 million, but the surrounding metropolitan region had then grown to 10 million people, and today it approaches 20 million. Today, the population density of Lagos is about 20,000 people per square mile, and the city suffers desperately

from congestion and pollution. Although Lagos is divided between Christians and Muslims, the city has played host to some of the largest evangelical gatherings in world history, with the biggest revivals claiming attendance running into the millions. Revivals organized by the Redeemed Christian Church of God have gathered congregations running into the millions.

Arguably, what we are now witnessing in the global South is very much what occurred in the North when it was passing through a comparable stage of social development. We can trace countless parallels between Pentecostal growth today and the much-studied story of English Methodism in the century after 1760, the most rapid stage of that nation's industrialization. Then as now, popular sects arose to meet the needs that could be filled neither by secular society, nor by the established churches, which had scarcely a foothold in the burgeoning cities. The new Dissenting churches were a triumph of cooperative endeavor, at once providing material support, mutual cooperation, spiritual comfort, and emotional release in the bleak wastes of the expanding industrial society.

RADICAL COMMUNITY

Churches provide a refuge during a time of immense and barely comprehensible social change. Harvey Cox aptly writes of modern urban centers that "sometimes the only thriving human communities in the vast seas of tarpaper shanties and cardboard huts that surround many of these cities are the Pentecostal congregations." A study of new Pentecostal churches in the barrios of Bogotá, Colombia, notes that "the *compañerismo* [fellowship] of the believers is comparable to the intimacy of a large family gathering." In sociological terms, Pentecostals offer the attractions of a classic sect. They demand high involvement and participation by members, who in return receive significant rewards of emotional satisfaction and intimate fellowship. Believers have joined a tight-knit new family, in which members strive to help each other confront and overcome the pressures of multiple deprivation. The greater the investment in a church – or any other enterprise – the greater the profit derived, whether financial, spiritual or emotional. Sects are "greedy groups."

This sense of family and fellowship is crucial for understanding the wide and remarkably diverse appeal of the new Christian congregations. By no means all draw from the very poorest. The older Protestant denominations in Latin America and East Asia commonly appeal more to middle-class groups, who have expanded as a result of modernization, but whose goals and aspirations were hard to fulfill within older social structures. For David Martin, the older Protestantism of Latin America "provided a vehicle of autonomy and advancement for some sections of the middle class, conspicuously so in Brazil, and provided channels of mobility for some who would otherwise have been condemned to poverty."

Yet it is among the very poor that the churches have won some of their greatest recent victories. In Latin America, Pentecostalism has appealed particularly to the very poorest, including Brazil's black population and the Maya Indians of Central America. Indian peoples alone constitute a potential base of real strength, accounting for perhaps 40 million of the continental population—20 million in the Andean nations, 16 million more

in Mexico and Guatemala. The traditionally disfranchised find in the churches a real potential for popular organization. Based on his study of new churches in Belém, Brazil, Andrew Chesnut notes that “in late twentieth-century Brazil, Pentecostalism stands out as one of the principal organizations of the poor.” The churches provide a social network that would otherwise be lacking and help teach members the skills they need to survive in a rapidly developing society.

Given the history of much of Latin America, any movement that makes inroads among the poorest must of necessity be crossing racial boundaries, and much of the recent revivalism in Brazil has occurred among those of African descent. Despite the nation’s vaunted multiracialism, Brazil’s blacks and *mestizo* people have been largely excluded from political and social power, and that fact has been reflected in religious institutions. Broadly speaking, darkness of skin directly correlates with poverty and political weakness. Though blacks make up about half the national population, they represent only 2 percent of congressional representatives and a tiny fraction of the corporate elite. In the Roman Catholic Church too, Afro-Brazilians supply only 1.5 percent of bishops and priests. Not surprisingly, blacks provide willing recruits for new churches in which they can rise to leadership positions and to which they can bring their own cultural traditions. According to Paul Freston, the typical Brazilian Catholic is elderly, rural, white, and male; the typical Protestant is young, urban, dark, and female.

THE REFORMATION OF MACHISMO

The new churches succeed because they fulfill emerging social needs, and this is as true in matters of gender as of race. No account of the new Southern movements can fail to recognize the pervasive role of women in these structures, if not as leaders then as devoted core members. Carol Ann Drogus writes of Latin America that “most Pentecostal converts are women . . . women are crucial to the maintenance and expansion of Pentecostal churches.” They are the ones who bring in their menfolk, their sons, brothers and husbands. We perhaps hear an echo of the words of American historian Ann Braude, who wrote that “women’s history *is* American religious history.”

Especially in Latin America, much of the best recent scholarship on Pentecostalism stresses the sweeping changes that religious conversion can make in the lives of women and their families. A North American audience is accustomed to seeing religious believers as reactionary on issues of women’s rights, but the new churches play a vital role in reshaping women’s lives, in allowing them to find their voices. As in nineteenth-century England or North America, evangelical religion has encouraged a new and exalted view of the family and of domesticity, placing much greater emphasis on male responsibility and chastity. The reshaping of gender roles echoes through global South Christianity, and Latin American churches often present Jesus as divine Husband and Father.

In practical terms, the emphasis on domestic values has had a transformative and often positive effect on gender relationships, what Elizabeth Brusco has memorably called a “Reformation of Machismo.” Membership in a new Pentecostal church means a significant improvement in the lives of poor women, since this is where they are more

likely to meet men who do not squander family resources on drinking, gambling, prostitutes, and even maintaining second households. Drogus quotes one Pentecostal woman who reports that “I met a wonderful man. He never drinks, never smokes, he is polite, and he has a good job.” As in matters of race, Christianity is far more than an opium of the disinherited masses: it provides a very practical setting in which they can improve their daily lives.

MIRACLES

When trying to understand religious movements, scholars apply the familiar techniques of social science and see change as a function of such familiar categories as modernization, race, class, and gender; but such an approach always runs the risk of missing the heart of the matter. People might join churches because, consciously or otherwise, they see these institutions as a way of expressing their social aspirations, but other elements also enter into the equation. Members join or convert because they acquire beliefs about the supernatural realm, and its relationship to the visible world. Just what are these teeming masses seeking from their churches and revivals?

The seemingly diverse Southern churches have in common many aspects of belief and practice, and these characteristics differentiate them from older Northern Christianity. We have to stress the critical idea that God intervenes directly in everyday life. For both Pentecostal and independent sects, and often, for mainstream churches as well, the sources of evil are located not in social structures but in types of spiritual evil, which can be effectively combated by believers. Southern religion is not otherworldly in the sense of escapist, since faith is expected to lead to real and observable results in this world. The believer’s life in this world is transformed through conversion, and the change echoes through every aspect of their lives, from ethics of work and thrift to family and gender relations.

Audiences respond enthusiastically to a gospel that promises them blessings in this life as well as the next. To quote an observer of Brazil’s emerging churches, “Their main appeal is that they present a God that you can use. Most Presbyterians have a God that’s so great, so big, that they cannot even talk with him openly, because he is far away. The Pentecostal groups have the kind of God that will solve my problems today and tomorrow. People today are looking for solutions, not for eternity.” As a Pentecostal pastor in the same country explained, “We have salvation, but salvation is in heaven. We are here on earth. Jesus will come but he’s not here yet.”

Much the same points could be made about the rising churches across most of Africa and Asia. Over the past decade, aggressively marketed prosperity churches have enjoyed a real boom, especially in West Africa. Paul Gifford, for instance, has published an excellent (and often disturbing) analysis of the most prominent leaders, such as Bishop David Oyedepo of Nigeria’s Winner’s Chapel, or Nicholas Duncan-Williams of Ghana’s Action Chapel.

People want prosperity—or at least, economic survival—but just as critical is the promise of health, and the desperate public health situation in the new cities goes far toward

explaining the emphasis of the new churches on healing of mind and body. Apart from the general range of maladies that affect North Americans and Europeans, the Third World poor also suffer from the diseases associated with deprivation, hunger, and pollution, in what has been termed a “pathogenic society.” Child mortality is appallingly high by Northern standards. The attacks of these demons of poverty are all the graver when people are living in tropical climates, with all the problems arising from the diseases and parasites found in those regions. As well as physical ailments, many psychiatric and substance abuse problems drive desperate people to seek refuge in God. Although shantytowns and *favelas* were never easy places to live, they became infinitely more dangerous when drug use and trafficking expanded from the 1980s, with all the attendant perils of gangs, drug wars, and easy access to heavy weaponry.

Taking all these threats together—disease, exploitation, pollution, drink, drugs, and violence—it is easy to see why people might easily accept the claim that they were under siege from demonic forces, and that only divine intervention could save them. The promise of healing must of necessity extend to communities and societies, no less than the individual. At its worst, a Faith Gospel of success and health can promote abuses and materialism, and it is easily mocked. Yet a doctrine promising glory in this world as well as the next has undoubted appeal.

The practice of healing is one of the strongest themes unifying the newer Southern churches, both mainstream and independent, and perhaps their strongest selling point for their congregations. In Africa, the explosion of healing movements and new prophets in the first quarter of the century coincided with a dreadful series of epidemics, and the religious upsurge of those years was in part a quest for bodily health. Today, rising African churches stand or fall by their success in healing, and elaborate rituals have formed around healing practices. Healing is equally central in many of the new churches of Latin America. When Andrew Chesnut explored the upsurge of Pentecostalism in the Brazilian city of Belém, he placed issues of health and sickness at center stage, since these issues so often occur in the conversion narratives told by believers. Addiction problems are usually to the fore: Chesnut argues that “More than any other reason, it is the desire to be cured of alcoholism that impels Brazilian men to convert to Pentecostalism.”

Issues of healing, whether of mind or body, dominate the everyday life of the churches of the poor. Accordingly, “in some churches, faith-healing so dominates the liturgy that the sanctuary resembles a hospital.” Nowhere in the global South do the various spiritual healers encounter serious competition from modern scientific medicine, since this is so far beyond the reach of most of the poorest. For most ordinary people, Western medicine implies the assembly-line treatment of public hospitals, where any chance of receiving adequate treatment is outweighed by the dangers of catching new infections.

Healing is the key element that has allowed Christianity to compete so successfully with its rivals outside the Christian tradition, with traditional religion in Africa, with various animist and Spiritist movements of African origin in Brazil, with shamanism in Korea. To some extent, the churches are forced to share the same intellectual universe as their competitors.

ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

In passing, I point to many analogies between the new Pentecostal churches and the distinctive forms of Islam that have been so successful in recent years. As we look at Pentecostals, we stress their detachment from older local forms of faith and society, and their movement to new globalized and industrialized societies. This is symbolized especially by the abandonment of old languages and dialects and the adoption of the global tongues in which pastors hold their revivals – English and French, Spanish and Portuguese.

But Muslims have shared many of the same patterns, as so many millions have made comparable migrations. Olivier Roy stresses how deeply integrated Islam was in its countries of origin, with its ties to particular communities and clan structures, to shrines, saints, and sacred landscapes, all of which were severed with the move to Europe, so that Islam was deterritorialized. While early immigrants kept their personal memories alive, none of these traditions were available to younger generations born in Europe, who were cut off from their roots. Roy remarks that, “The religion of their parents is linked to a culture that is no longer theirs.” (How thoroughly that phrase applies to Christian Pentecostals!) Young Muslims respond by turning to a new universalized or globalized Islam, which in practice offers the sternest and most demanding standards of the Wahhabis or Salafists. But in return, believers receive a vision of themselves as the heroes of a glorious historical narrative, in which faith defeats the temporary and illusory triumph of disbelief and paganism. Add to that the excellent social services offered by radical mosques and we understand the appeal of new and often fundamentalist forms of Islam.

CATHOLICS AND SECTS

There is no theological reason why Catholics, Anglicans and others should not provide exactly the same services and functions that make the Pentecostals so attractive. As I suggested at the beginning, Catholic and Anglican churches are quite capable of adopting Pentecostal habits in terms of healing and spiritual warfare. They can also offer services that appeal to similar emotional and aesthetic tastes. I think of Brazilian priests like Father Marcelo Rossi. And surely, Catholic churches can offer “radical community” as well as healing? By Euro-American standards, most flourishing mainline denominations in Global South countries already are “charismatic” in the broad sense.

In some parts of the world, traditional churches have indeed contained Pentecostal advances. In many ways, the religious culture of the Philippines looks very much like that of Latin American countries that in recent years have witnessed an explosive growth in evangelical and Pentecostal churches. Yet the Philippine Catholic church has suffered no such mass defections, nor are any on the horizon, because Catholic authorities have devised highly effective ways to channel and build on popular religious enthusiasm. If the Catholic church cannot defeat Pentecostals, then it must join them. It does this through a series of lay organizations and societies that draw wholly on charismatic worship styles, but which remain within the church’s very big tent. And whether by design or accident,

these organizations have proved uniquely suitable for preserving the faith among a global diaspora.

Several such charismatic orders operate both within the Philippines and around the world, including *Bukas Loob Sa Diyos* (“Open in Spirit to God”) and Couples for Christ. Perhaps the most widespread globally is El Shaddai, founded in 1984 by Brother Mike Velarde. This group claims some seven million members in the Philippines, where it has long been a significant political force. The group’s style is thoroughly Pentecostal, with a heavy dose of spiritual warfare theories. Although he remains within the Catholic orbit, Brother Mike looks like a classic megachurch preacher or televangelist, and El Shaddai meetings are highly revivalist. Believers are encouraged to rely directly on God’s favor. Those attending the meetings – mainly poor, predominantly female - hold passports in the air in the hope that they will be able to find work in foreign countries. Some hold umbrellas upside down as a symbolic statement of the blessings they hope to receive. Always, they seek healing in mind and body.

Why, then, has the Catholic Church done so poorly in other parts of the world, especially Latin America? A famous maxim holds that “cults live on the unpaid bills of the churches.” But which unpaid bills have allowed the growth of the charismatic and evangelical sects? If we look at the various ways in which Pentecostals exercise their appeal, then it is difficult to see how that could be challenged by any of the theological or disciplinary changes so often advocated within the Catholic church. If for example we point to a particular alleged weakness within the church – for example, its hierarchical and bureaucratic structure – then in fairness we must explain why these long-standing features have not prevented that church enjoying such phenomenal success across the African continent.

By far the church’s greatest contemporary weakness is in the lack of adequate numbers of priests, and of vocations. The Catholic tradition is highly dependent on its clergy, and the church is strongest where its priests and religious are ablest and most numerous. Unfortunately, though, the church faces a massive and growing imbalance between the Catholic faithful and their pastors. Though we can understand the historical circumstances that have led to this situation, it almost seems as if the church has scientifically allocated its available resources to create the minimum possible correlation between priests and the communities that need them most. I would also add here the steep decline in vocations to religious orders, who once performed so many of the church’s vital tasks.

The North–South imbalance is quite stark. The Northern world, Europe and North America, presently accounts for 35 percent of Catholic believers and 68 percent of priests; Latin America has 42 percent of believers but only 20 percent of the priests. In terms of the ratio of priests to faithful, the Northern world is four times better supplied with clergy than the global South. To understand what these figures mean, we recall the endless complaints about priest shortages in Europe and the United States, and the dreadful consequences for parish life. But priests are in far shorter supply elsewhere in the world, where. While the ratio of priests to faithful is about one to 1,600 in the United

States, the corresponding figure for Mexico is one to 6,400; in Brazil and the Philippines, it is 1 to 8,400. If the North American priest shortage really is such a disaster, as many argue, how can we begin to describe the situation in the South?

The lack of priests is enormously damaging for Catholicism across Latin America. In Brazil, Protestant pastors already outnumbered priests by the mid-1980s, and today they outnumber priests two to one. Some Brazilian Catholic parishes notionally have fifty thousand members. Among Mexican Protestants, in contrast, the customary ratio of pastors to believers is 1 to 250, making them far more accessible than Catholic clergy, some of whom might notionally have fifty villages under their care. In practice, the Latin American churches would collapse without its devoted network of lay catechists, who so rarely receive the praise they deserve. While many Latin American Catholics have little access to either priests or churches, Pentecostal believers can turn to a strictly local church with a few hundred members, where the pastor is familiar and accessible. In consequence, the story of the modern Latin American church has been summarized in these grim terms: “The church opted for the poor, but the poor opted for the Pentecostals.”

In Africa, too, the church has over the last fifty years enjoyed probably the most rapid numerical expansion in its whole history, but the clergy shortage raises questions about how long this boom can be sustained. Some Nigerian dioceses have only one priest for every eight thousand Catholics. The scale of the problem becomes obvious when we compare the European situation. Europe as a whole has one priest for every 1,450 Catholics; the African ratio is 1:4,700. To put the issue in sharper focus, compare the ancient Catholic land of Italy with the rising church of the Congo. Italy’s 57 million Catholics are served by 26,000 parishes, giving an average of 2,200 of the faithful for each parish. With 33 million believers, the Congo has just 1,300 parishes, an average of 25,000 Catholics per parish. For the church hierarchy, this issue of resource distribution is far more immediately pressing than any social or theological controversies.

CHURCHES AND SECTS

For two reasons, the religious situation in the Global South is likely to change substantially in coming decades. One is a natural kind of evolution that will make them more mainstream and more like traditional churches, creating a kind of harmonization with older-established denominations. The other is the common danger that Catholics, Pentecostals and other churches face from secularization.

Much of the character of newer Pentecostal and Independent churches is a function not of their theology or of their accommodation to local societies, but of their very newness. In understanding the character of the new Christianity, it is helpful to use the division between “churches” and “sects” that is so basic to the academic study of religion.

A century ago, sociological pioneer Max Weber tried to define the differences between Europe’s religious organizations, in passages that sound as if he is analyzing the present-day religious realities of global North and South. *Churches*, in Weber’s view, are formal bodies that intellectualize religious teachings and restrain emotionalism in their services. They offer believers a formal liturgy and set prayers, in ways that portray the divine as

remote from daily life. *Sects*, by contrast, are overtly emotional and spontaneous, and encourage individual mystical experience; they tend toward fundamentalism, while shunning the intellect as a possible source of danger. The prayers of the sects indicate a firm belief that the divine is ever-present, ever-ready to act in everyday life.

Sociologist Ernst Troeltsch further developed this theoretical division, as he contrasted the upstart quality of the sects with the deeper roots of the churches. The matter of recruitment was critical. Most sect members are voluntary converts, whose lives are largely controlled by the organization, so that the sect becomes a small exclusive fellowship of people seeking spiritual perfection. Churches, in contrast, are larger and better-established bodies, whose members are customarily born into the organization. Churches also attract members of higher social status and educational level than do the sects. Additionally, the two types of structure differ widely in terms of their leadership. Sects demand that leaders demonstrate spiritual and charismatic gifts; churches are run by formally trained ministers, who operate within a bureaucratic framework.

What most strikingly unites the otherwise diverse Southern churches is that in most cases, Christianity as a mass popular movement is a relatively new creation, so that first- and second- generation converts are well represented in the various congregations. They simply cannot assume that members are likely to be born into the group. In terms of the sociology of religion, this means that they are classic sects, with all that implies for leadership, worship style, and degree of commitment. They are fundamentalist and charismatic by nature, theologically conservative, with a powerful belief in the spiritual dimension, in visions and spiritual healing. In practice, leadership roles in Pentecostal and independent churches are open to anyone who is accepted as having spiritual gifts, regardless of any formal education or theological training.

The literature on new and emerging religious movements not only provides good models for understanding the distinctive practices of such groups, but it also predicts their future development. As time passes, successful sects become more churchlike in their own right, more formal and bureaucratic. Crucially, they might insist that clergy acquire formal academic training, rather than merely being “called by the Spirit.” The history of Methodism from the eighteenth century on provides a classic model of such a process. As sects drift away from their origins, they in turn spawn a new generation of enthusiasts who seek to recapture the charisma and spiritual power that they believe to be integral to religious experience. Churches beget sects, which in turn become churches, until they in turn beget new and still fierier sects. The cycle has recurred many times and will continue ad infinitum.

As Southern churches grow and mature, they will assuredly lose something of their sectarian character, and become more like the major churches, with all that implies for the nature of leadership, worship style, and so on. They will move toward the mainstream, just as Methodists and Quakers did in their day. If past precedents are anything to go by, Southern religious organizations will become more formal and churchlike, and just possibly more skeptical toward claims about healings and prophetic visions. A change from sects to churches accelerates as their host societies modernize, as Western medicine becomes more affordable and gains more credibility. African and

Asian societies might undergo the same kind of secularization that Europe experienced in the eighteenth century, when concepts such as witchcraft and prophecy gradually fell out of favor.

Conceivably, the new churches themselves could become key agents of modernization. Studies of Latin American Pentecostalism note how believers gain a new sense of individual respect and responsibility, together with habits of thrift, sobriety, and literacy, and similar observations can be made of their African counterparts. A growing Pentecostal community tends to create a larger public base for the growth of democratic capitalism and, in the long term, perhaps for greater secularism. At the same time though, as churches become part of the establishment, newer and more radical bodies will spin off from them. In the coming decades, the newer Christian communities will develop at least as much diversity as those of the old Europe did in the Middle Ages, or the early modern period.

SECULARISM

I would also ask whether our focus on sects and new churches might be a diversion from the most pressing issues potentially facing both Catholics and Pentecostals alike, especially secularization. I particularly note major historic changes that are under way in the world's demographic profile.

Several factors shape a country's religious outlook, and prosperity and the welfare net certainly play a role. But a country's fertility rate also tells you a lot about its attitudes towards religion. When a country develops economically, women are urgently needed to enter the workforce, rather than remain in the home. Meanwhile, shifting religious values place less pressure on women to have large families. In turn, smaller families mean diminished links with religious structures - fewer children to put through religious education or First Communion classes. And couples that have decided to limit families tend to run up against church policies on issues of contraception and abortion. When you separate sexuality from conception and child-rearing, you are more open to non-traditional family structures, including gay unions. Whatever the reason, European experience indicates that countries where the fertility rate falls well below replacement (2.1 children per woman) might be facing rapid secularization.

With that figure in mind, we look at the countries of Latin America, and especially the most economically developed. A few decades ago, all had classic Third World population profiles, and very large families. In the 1960s, for instance, Brazil's fertility rate hovered around 6 children per woman, alarming those who warned of a global population explosion. By 2012, though, Brazil's figure was 1.82, far below replacement. Chile and Uruguay both record similar rates of 1.87. Argentina is still above replacement, but the rate is falling fast. That's a social revolution in progress, and a gender revolution.

In religious terms, these countries present a complex picture, with strong evidence of continuing passion for religion, to the point that Protestants claim to be living through a new Reformation. At the same time, though, the world is changing, with signs of secularization that would have been unthinkable not long ago. Nine percent of Brazilians

now say they follow no religion, and the proportion of nones is much higher among the under-20s. As so often, Uruguay emerges as the region's most secular country, with 40 percent having no religious affiliation.

Gay marriage offers a useful gauge of transformation. Uruguay passed a national civil union law in 2009, and now seems on course to establish full marriage rights. Brazil approved same sex unions in 2004, with gay marriages following subject to some local discretion. Argentina legalized same sex marriage in 2010. Abortion laws offer a more mixed picture, but generally, we witness a major trend towards liberalizing morality laws, on issues that both Protestant and Catholic churches hold dear. Over the coming decade, we will probably see liberal reforms on all these issues triumphing in several more countries, with the churches doing little more than fight rearguard actions.

Obviously, Latin America is a vast and complex region with many widely differing societies, and no single model works across the whole continent. Most significant, though, is the clear set of trends that we see in several of the most influential countries, especially Brazil. Although Brazil is a long way from European secularization, we can foresee the emergence of a triangular political set-up, with Pentecostals, Catholics and seculars, and a constantly shifting balance of coalitions and alliances.

Of the three groups, the Catholics are undoubtedly the weakest, because the desperate shortage of priests has so reduced the church's strength on the ground. Also, most of the new "nones" are former Catholics who abandon the church without making the transition to Pentecostal congregations. This is very bad news for a church that officially lists Brazil as one of the world's largest Catholic nations. In practice, many of those notional Catholics have already defected to other faiths, or to none.

FUTURE TRENDS

As we look to the future, we inevitably ask what role the new churches will play in the global religious scene. Inevitably, I believe, they will grow mightily in numbers, and develop much tighter institutional structures. In response, the Catholic Church can certainly try to compete where that is feasible; but it is also important not to become so focused on that competition as to neglect the arguably much more serious danger arising from secularism. Indeed, there are many issues on which Catholics and Pentecostals might easily make common cause in these matters.

It will be obvious that I do not view the challenge of emerging churches as too grave threat for the Catholic Church, which ideally might be able to learn much from its present-day competitors. Ultimately I turn back to the famous words of the English historian Lord Macaulay, writing in 1840, who tried to explain why the church had flourished and endured so long, and found the answer in its near-infinite capacity to incorporate zealous reform movements within itself, so they did not need to break away to form new sects. I cite his famous conclusion: "Nor do we see any sign which indicates that the term of her [the Papacy's] long dominion is approaching. She saw the commencement of all the governments and of all the ecclesiastical establishments that

now exist in the world; and we feel no assurance that she is not destined to see the end of them all. She was great and respected before the Saxon had set foot on Britain, before the Frank had passed the Rhine, when Grecian eloquence still flourished at Antioch, when idols were still worshipped in the temple of Mecca. And she may still exist in undiminished vigour when some traveller from New Zealand shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, take his stand on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's."