

The Path of Beliefs. Some Determinants of Religious Mobility in Latin America**El andar de las creencias. Algunos determinantes de la movilidad religiosa en América Latina**Abbdel Camargo Martínez¹

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to highlight some of the causes that led to the increase of new religious expressions in Latin America, which may be different or complementary to the historically dominant religion, Roman Catholicism. The research uses a procedural analysis to show how a process of religious conversion and mobility occurred in the region. This has implications for the social structure of countries, as well as community identity, the definition of national history and religious faith, which adapts to the present-day needs of the population.

Keywords: 1. religion, 2. change, 3. causes, 4. Mexico, 5. Latin America

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este trabajo es mostrar algunas causas del incremento de nuevas expresiones religiosas en Latinoamérica, mismas que pueden ser ajenas o complementarias al catolicismo romano, religión histórica y dominante en la región. A través de un análisis procesual, se observa cómo se ha establecido un proceso de conversión y movilidad religiosa en la región con implicaciones en la estructura social de los países, su identidad comunitaria, la definición de su historia y el campo confesional que se adecua a las necesidades actuales de los habitantes de los países de la región.

Palabras clave: 1. religión, 2. cambio, 3. causas, 4. México, 5. América Latina.

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INTRODUCTION

Latin America is currently undergoing a radical religious transformation due to the diversity of religious affiliations and a multiplicity of gods and representations of expressions of faith. This process marks a major shift in society and was exacerbated by Latin America's entry into global capitalism in the early 20th century, as faith in the region tended toward confessional pluralism. This transformation represents the establishment of new individual and collective religious practices that mark a change in – and in some cases, a weakening of – religiosity, which has historically been dominated by Roman Catholicism, and fosters a new theological understanding by man of the divine, his peers and institutional order, nature, the universe, and his place in it. This is a substantial change that goes beyond the realm of religion, where it is initially visible, as it points to transformations in the entire social structure of countries, their community identity and the way they define national history; at the same time, it marks the first step on the path of the region's entry into so-called “late modernity” (Young, 2012).

Available data shows an overwhelming trend toward change across the region. Suárez (2003) and the Pew Research Center (2017) report that simply during the periods between 1960, 1985, and 2010, the percentage of Protestants in national populations has doubled or tripled, and in other cases, growth has been exponential: Argentina has gone from 2.2% in 1960 to 5.5% in 1985 to 7.3% in 2010; Brazil from 7.8% to 17.4% to 23%; Chile from 10.8% to 22.5% to 18%; El Salvador from 2.2% to 14% to 35.7%; Honduras from 1.5% to 9.9% to 36.6%; Mexico from 1.9% to 4% to 8.3%; and Nicaragua from 4.3% to 9.3% to 26.5%. These countries are just a few examples. For his part, Bastian (2003, p. 53) reports that “in 1960, just five countries had a protestant population of over 5%: Chile, Haiti, Brazil, Panama, and Puerto Rico”. Currently, one in every ten people in the region are Protestant, and countries like Guatemala are now considered eminently evangelical (Cano, 2010). Taken broadly, the continent went into the 20th century with 6,400 Protestants, and had 30 million by the century's end (Parker, 1993).

The development of these new religious affiliations tells of a widespread movement across Latin America, despite differences on a regional and national level (Garma, 2007). Parker (2005) and Bastian (2005b) report noteworthy subregional distinctions upon analyzing trends toward religious pluralism in the region: 1) countries with a high number of members of evangelical alternatives (Brazil, Guatemala, Chile, Honduras, El Salvador, Panama, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, and Bolivia), where, in some cases, the Protestant population has grown exponentially (Bolivia, Dominican Republic, and Guatemala); 2) countries with a significant Catholic population, but which have begun to see a plurality of religious changes (Mexico, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Peru, Argentina, Venezuela, Colombia, and Paraguay); and 3) countries in which the decline in Catholicism is mostly due to an increase in non-belief (Cuba and Uruguay). As can be seen, this general increase in the Protestant population has entailed a drop in the share of Catholic or irreligious people.

Such a considerable drop in parishioners in the region has led to the assertion that Catholicism is experiencing a *crisis* in the region, as the general drop in the number of followers has been observed in countries like Brazil, Chile, and Mexico. Indeed, Mexico and Brazil have the highest number of Catholics in the world, but their number has fallen: Mexico lost 4 percentage points in 10 years² and in Brazil, the Catholic population dropped from 73.7% in 2003 to 68.4% in 2009, a loss of a little over 5 percentage points (Barranco, 2011b; Martínez García, 2011; National Institute of Statistics, Geography, and Informatics [INEGI], 2005). The Brazilian case is extreme, as in just 10 years the number of evangelical Christians went from just over 26 million in 2000 to roughly 42 million in 2010 (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics [IBGE], 2010). This is remarkable as Brazil is the most populated country in the region, with 207 million inhabitants out of a total of 625 million in Latin America in 2015 (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [ECLAC], 2015). Altogether, it should be noted that the prevailing unanimity of Catholicism in the region at the turn of the 20th century, with figures between 95% and 98% of the population, dropped to 80% by the century's end (Bastian, 2003) and sank to 72.1% in 2010 (Pew Research Center, 2012, 2017).

Even so, it must be stressed that these changes do not mean that the Latin American population is abandoning Catholicism in favor of Protestantism. However, in light of the religious pluralism of recent times, the region can no longer be considered eminently Catholic, giving rise to the question, "What is producing this change in countries' confessional affiliations?" This study seeks to answer this question using a procedural analysis, and present some causes of this increase in new religious expressions that are defining contemporary Latin American reality.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

Whereabouts in the region has this change in religious identity occurred? Setting aside a general perspective of religious diversity across countries, it is noticeable that the strongest changes are concentrated in outlying, border and marginal areas. For example, in the early 1990s, Parker (1993) identified a religious affiliation among the less educated, marginal urban population of rural origin in Chile, where there are relatively fewer Catholics. The same was found in Brazil in research by Rodrigues Brandão (1987a, 1987b), who observed an increase in the number of Protestants in expedited immigration centers on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo since the 1970s. Similarly, Bastian (2003, p. 57) considered data on the density of the Protestant population in the Central American region and observed that it was "concentrated in outlying rural areas populated by Afro-Caribbean and native

² While the total population of Mexico grew by 40% in the last 20 years, the Catholic population only increased by 30%, in contrast to the Protestant population, which rose by 174%, from 1.8% to 4.8% of the total population (Marroquín, 2007).

peoples” (Petén in Belize, La Mosquitia, the Isthmus of Panama, northern Guatemala) who grew up on the fringes of cities as a result of the migration of settlers”. Furthermore, in Bolivia, Pentecostal churches have worked actively toward evangelizing and organizing churches, mostly on the outskirts of cities, where they achieved a high growth rate (González & Cardoza, 2008, p. 246).

The case in Mexico confirms this trend given that, as observed by Bastian (2003, p. 57), “by the 1980s Protestantism in the country was clearly established in northern states, where it reached 5% of the population, above the national average (which was 3.7%), and in the rural and indigenous south (Tabasco, Yucatán, Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Quintana Roo), where the number ranged between 8% and 12% of the total population”. This geographical pattern was cemented twenty years on – i.e., in the early 2000s – as the majority of the non-Catholic population is located on the borders, rural population centers (native peoples) and large semi-urban peripheries. Some authors (Hernández, 2007; Roberts, 1967; Willems, 1967) argue that expanding cities and borders display characteristics that make these areas relatively less bound by the rigidity of traditional social order, and more open and receptive to social transformation process, and consequently, religious dissent is more visible.

By contrast, Catholicism – as an institution – has lost credibility and strength across vast areas of Latin America, as conservatism, in its thinking, discourse and practices, has meant that the Catholic Church – even in its diverse missionary orientations³ – has closed itself off and become inflexible toward parishioners’ ideological needs, thus giving way to other religious expressions that seek new adherents.

THE EXALTATION OF AN EMERGING RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

Which religious identity has tended to dominate this change in the region? Although no one religion can be singled out as having benefited from this pluralistic scenario, it has become apparent that Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal groups have received the most converts from Catholicism⁴. Why is Pentecostalism so prominent in these changes? One reason may be the way its instrumental pragmatism (White, 1995) is tied to the region’s cultural tradition. Indeed, as Robles (2001) put it, Pentecostalism is characterized by its

³ Those of a conservative or Charismatic orientation, and those that follow liberation theology.

⁴ According to Bastian (2003), “literature provides data for different religious groups but this can sometimes be confusing. The concept of Protestantism encompasses both historical religious movements (Lutherans, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists) and more recent religious movements, which include mostly Pentecostal groups (Assemblies of God, Church of God, etc.). In reality, no distinction is made between religious affiliations, but it is estimated that the vast majority of movements labeled as Protestant, 80% or more, are Pentecostal” (p. 51).

strong capacity for adaptation to local environments and great flexibility in its principles and practices, while representing a religious offer that is culturally subjective, intimate, sense-based, not corporative or dogmatic, fundamentally individualistic and existential, and transmitted from churches that are practically a network and expand in a network, and which, as an institution, are very relaxed and present and efficient in media, with non-institutionalized actors who are familiar with their medium and use common language that is both accessible and unique (p. 80).

As pointed out by the Argentine sociologist Fortunato Mallimaci (2004, p. 41), “Catholicism barely tolerates religious pluralism, instead seeking to delegitimize new beliefs”. By contrast, the great virtue of Pentecostalism has been its capacity to adapt and coexist with different models of civilization and cultural contexts in the most isolated parts of the planet, and it is this characteristic that has provided the religion great flexibility with respect to criteria and conditions that may come into conflict with modern-day civilization (Barranco, 2011a). In this regard, Bastian states, “Pentecostalism, for instance, is Protestant in its origin but when it spreads throughout the world, it is transformed into endogenous movements” (2005b, p. 328). In this way, from 1950, with the emergence of major national churches in the region (for example, the Church of Christ in Brazil, the Methodist Pentecostal Church in Chile, or the Church of the Light of the World in Mexico), Pentecostal churches became *local churches* that, due to their flexibility, reintegrated endogenous religious practices in an imaginary tied to the biblical-Christian tradition (Garma, 2007).

Religious syncretism is one of the most striking features of Latin American Christianity, as historically it has distinguished itself by incorporating various traditions and systems of practices and beliefs, which have become intertwined with the historical and cultural structure of the *ethos* of the countries in the region, and therefore, current Pentecostal practice may be the result of cultural content that is more compatible with the ideological matrix and historical environment of Latin American social structure, which has earned it a large number of adherents. This represents a genuinely Latin American expression that, according to Bastian (2005b, p. 326), “is based on a feeling of emotion whereby a religious movement is formed and felt and not just thought, thus achieving a strong affinity with the Latin spirit, which would explain its wide-ranging dissemination among popular strata across the region”.

In sum, a syncretic religious tradition continues to dominate the religious landscape in a large part of the region due to the emergence of a multiplicity of forms of worship arising from different traditions and which bring together saint worshipping, Bible reading, healing processes, and a fundamental belief in the supernatural and magical elements – a relic left from the preservation of ancestral religious elements – which come together with faith practices that receive ever greater media attention while based on elements made possible by hypermedia.

THE DETERMINANTS OF RELIGIOUS MOBILITY

What factors may explain this change in the system of beliefs and religious practices in the region? Although religious pluralism in Latin America is eminently marked by a multiplicity of factors, our approach will focus on aspects that influenced countries' socio-cultural modernization as direct factors that have contributed to the reshaping of the modern-day religious landscape. Therefore, although there are regional differences that may vary depending on each country's history, in general, religious pluralism in the region may be framed within three social change processes:⁵ 1) processes of economic change, urbanization, and industrialization experienced by capitalist Latin American societies from the mid-20th century; 2) the prevailing system of political representation in the countries; and 3) the emergence of the technological revolution, which has bolstered cultural transfer.

The alchemy of economic well-being

Studies on the topic agree that the spread of Protestantism in Latin America can be explained by social disruption linked to the expansion of the market economy, the region's demographic explosion, historical particularities, and local politics. A broad dissemination of individual religious freedom marked a key ideological perspective from the mid-20th century onwards, in which the growth of the market economy was based on a policy of import substitution in the region. Following the implementation of this model, the share of industrial production in GDP in Latin America rose from 19.5% in 1950 to 25.2% in 1980, remaining constant until 2015 (ECLAC, 2016). Similarly, the urbanization process in the region has been characterized by accelerated demographic growth in urban agglomerations, population centralization, and spatial segregation in an unequal social structure. Thus, between 1960 and 1990, the urban population in Latin America increased from 36.4% to 46.6%, and in the most urbanized countries this figure increased from 61.9% to 77.5% (Parker, 1993). ECLAC (2005) projects that the urban population in Latin America will reach over 82% of the total population by 2025. This structural dynamic, caused by the modernization of Latin American societies, produced a mixed picture in terms of access to capital and consumer goods, as a result of a shift to the tertiary sector and urbanization in societies, along with an increase in the informal sector and a realignment of social classes within social groups. In this respect, Parker (1993) argues that "Latin American societies, in their unequal incursion into modern capitalist development, keep the vast majority of popular sectors in conditions of extreme

⁵ Bastian (2003, 2004) reported two factors of change that play a role in transforming religious identities in the region – economic and political factors – but this analysis will be extended to the three factors mentioned, on account of the dynamics of the contemporary religious expressions prevalent in the area.

poverty and hardship, and they are only marginally integrated into capitalism and the dominant capitalist lifestyle” (p. 131).

Currently, 40% of the total population of Latin America live in poverty to some degree (11.8% are destitute or living in extreme poverty and 28.2% in poverty), according to data by ECLAC (2016). The difficult living conditions experienced by this marginal, proletarianized, poorly educated mass with high birth rates result in the implementation of survival practices based on ties of solidarity (Lomnitz, 1975), limiting the thresholds of uncertainty produced by the lack of housing and clothing and poor health conditions. What impact did these processes have on religious tradition in Latin American societies? Certain authors believe a “heterogeneous modernity” has been established in Latin America (Suárez, 2003, 2005), in which multiple processes have defined the type of religiosity of the people of the region. Social and cultural uncertainty has given rise to a religious context characterized by a heavy dependence on supernatural powers (Marzal, 1970, cited in Parker, 1993), which counterbalances what they are denied by the dominant society and the system in which these peoples are immersed: the institutional fulfillment of their needs (Bentúe, 1975).

According to the Chilean sociologist Parker (1993), “the change in the traditional worldview of peasants who have become proletarianized was initially caused by their uprooting from their traditional farming community, in which the cycles of nature determined their life cycle, influencing their beliefs and religious rituals” (p. 112). The author believes that industrialization and urban life led to a reorganization of the religious landscape, as they have encouraged migration processes that facilitate integration and receptiveness toward a different system of beliefs and ideas. The capitalist method of production is progressively extending its cultural influence across all walks of life, insofar as it penetrates each society, disrupting symbolism: man’s relationship becomes less dependent and the development of productive forces makes the world less mysterious and arbitrary. Peasants’ providentialist religiosity is transformed by a commitment to growing rationalism and the sense of autonomy tends to displace any religious meaning in the marginal mass.

Thus, urbanization processes and the technification of productive activities in traditional societies – based on popular religiosity subject to the dominant Christian ideology – gradually transformed elements of the past (considered backward or folkloric), giving way to a modern, homogeneous religiosity. As a result, interpretations asserted that Latin American society – as a whole – was undergoing a process of transition from the traditional, rural, and religious to the modern, urban, and secular.

The increase in population did not facilitate or balance out the opposing market forces, but instead strengthened them. By way of example, the Mexican population went from 19 million in 1940 to 119 million in 2015 (Bastian, 2005a, 2005b; Inegi, 2015). In other words, the population grew at exponential rates in just over 60 years, and the reality in Mexico can be extended to the whole region, as two of the most populated cities in the world are located in Latin America: Mexico City and its metropolitan area, with 20 million

inhabitants, and São Paulo, with a little over 13 million. As reported by Bastian (2003, p. 88), “the notion of marginality is not a mere matter of individual income, but is part of the spatial and physical organization of cities”. With the consolidation of a solid economic structure, which brought together certain groups within countries, came the development of a marginal mass of workers – both in cities and in the countryside – that survived in informal economic chains and undertook migrations that connected rural and urban areas. This is a contradiction of the system, due to the juxtaposition of a privileged sector and a marginal mass, a situation that characterizes the antagonistic socio-economic modernity of the Latin American reality.

Emigration, marginalization, and exclusion are factors akin to the state of anomie that prevails among the poorest populations that need to reconstruct their identity and life project to survive. As a result, the demand for new symbolic goods of salvation is particularly strong among these sectors. These people are, without a doubt, receptive to new religious proposals and seek alternatives that allow them to take control of their situation and improve it through their own efforts using new and accessible cultural media in an expanding religious market. Therefore, economic variables – level of income, education, urbanization, technification, etc. – and migration processes can be seen as factors of religious diversification (de la Torre, 2007a, 2007b). Together with the development of this unequal and dependent economic structure, which served as the basis for the industrialization process in Latin America, it is also necessary to analyze the systems of political representation that provided an outlet for the establishment of discrete social strata and models of power use that permeate a religiosity emerging from the presence of new faith options.

The transcendence of identity based on political tradition

Historically, Latin American religiosity has been characterized by its syncretisms. Colonial rule introduced a new model leading to the intermediation of Christian elements that merged with the prior magical understanding of natural elements, and natural divinity was supplanted by saintly intervention. As Catholicism was the imposed and dominant ideology, its representatives spared no effort in upholding it as the homogeneous religion of the whole region and subordinating traditional forms of connection with the divine – based on popular religiosity – substantially. As reported by Bastian (2004, p. 155), “upon the ruins of pre-Columbian societies, liquidated both by their demographic decline and the clash between civilizations, Catholicism forged the worldview and symbolic practices both of the masses and the elite, who were able to preserve some elements of original cultures by redefining them through complex intermixing processes (*mestizaje*)”.

As the dominant institution, Catholicism tolerated the presence of religiosities subordinated to the imposed belief system, in which popular practices began to superimpose themselves on institutional religious practices among those who identified as Catholic. A clear example can be seen in Mexico, where control of religious celebrations was in the hands of grassroots social organization – confraternities and stewardship associations (known as

mayordomías) – which rejected direct interference by the Catholic Church (de la Peña, 2004), a situation that was exploited by the religious system and the dominant elite erected by the colonial system. The *cacicazgo*⁶ system in Mexico, for example – a structure established by the colonial system – was readopted by the 20th-century revolutionary state to ensure control of indigenous populations through this system of mediation between the wider society and ethnic communities. Thus, the state helped to form a mixed-race elite that became *caciques*. This was acknowledged – or imposed – by the state itself, and as local leaders, these *caciques* employed a series of ritual celebrations to consolidate social control, the limits of which are reflected only in continual arbitrariness, dispossessions and intraethnic and community separation (Bastian, 2005a).

During the colonial era, the dominant elite represented a significant share of the interests of Catholic hierarchs, who benefited from the labor and exploitation of an impoverished and idolatrous population. It should be noted that at this time, religion and politics were closely linked, such that a homogeneous religious ideology was constructed across the region. As Latin American countries gained independence, in most states the balance of power and the hegemony of interests that served the Crown and the elite groups of the colonial system were broken or altered. Nonetheless, despite this secular measure that separated roles across Latin America, the Church's impact on public aspects of social life continues to hold substantial weight and the political system of Latin American countries has found itself tied to the ecclesiastical power implemented by the Catholic Church in the region over 500 years ago.

In this manner, Latin America's colonial past has permeated the system by which power is represented and exercised in the countries of the region – a political system that, as stated by Bastian (2003), “is represented by the hierarchized interests of clans and families brought together by ties of reciprocity or dependency, and is subordinated according to social stratification and racial differentiation structures” (p. 91). Power in Latin American countries was held by the white, mixed-race and Catholic elites, and these same family clans constituted the core of political parties that have given rise to the systems by which national identities are represented. Bastian (2003, p. 91) reports that “this corporative verticalism in the reproduction of political power has taken various forms of patronage, patriarchy, caciquism, caudillism or populist messianism, all expressions of a simultaneously protective and repressive power”.⁷

These ways of exercising power in Latin America have also carried over into other structures of representation. Thus, unions and political parties have managed to use

⁶ TN: Lands ruled by a *cacique*, or leader of an indigenous group; chieftainship, caciquedom.

⁷ Suárez (2003) notes the cycles of construction of authoritarianism in Latin America: Stroessner in Paraguay (1954), Barrientos in Bolivia (1964), Videla in Argentina (1976), and Pinochet in Chile (1973). In addition to the institutional authoritarianism represented by partisan ideologies, as is the case with the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in Mexico – which was in power for just over 70 years – this whole authoritarian system proposes a modernization of structures revolving around caudillism, authoritarianism, and repression.

corporative and clientelist models, arising from a social structure based on community ties that are both unequal and fostered, in horizontal solidarities. The same has occurred with the ecclesiastical structures of the top layers of the Catholic Church, which were rigidly constructed and participated politically. Although Latin America has been going through a phase of democratic transition since the 1980s, it has been unable to carry over the benefits of representative democracy to forms of management of social representation and public power; furthermore, social discontent and endemic inequality still predominate in social structures that wear countries down, as reported by Bastian (2003): “Poor autonomous social mobilization is compounded by clientelist manipulation by parties that mobilize subordinate collective actors and not autonomous individual citizens” (p. 92). Consequently, it is fitting to wonder whether the expansion of various religious structures and forms in Latin America – principally across the most impoverished sectors – is a response to a political system firmly rooted in servile practices based on authoritarian traditions in which the political and religious spheres are forcefully controlled in the different countries.

The Catholic Church and its representatives, who operated under vertical hierarchies and are corporatively functional, have yielded to new forms of religious organization and expression in which horizontal affiliations are more frequent; the leader or pastor may be a neighbor, relative, or family member. In other words, new religious models have emerged in which *everyone* may pronounce and make use of *the Word*. Therefore, and as speculated by Bastian (2003, p. 93), “it is possible that the spread of new religious movements that have no qualms about entering into corporativist political negotiation is also explained by a context of weak political representation and a general mistrust of traditional actors in nations’ partisan political identity”.

The age of immediacy

The economic world – specifically, the market – emerges as a key element in reshaping the system of religious beliefs and practices in the region. As a factor in the cultural universe of the global economy, religion is ever more closely tied to complex commodification processes, which defines, in part, its current specificity (de la Torre & Zúñiga, 2005). In this context, it may be suggested that the process of pluralism in Latin American religious identity must not be taken as a vertical loss of faith by the region’s peoples and countries, but as part of globalization processes in which the individualization and subjectivation of beliefs are part of contemporary religious practices and experiences (Hervieu-Léger, 1999). According to Bastian (2005b):

[...] globalization in religion means that the processes of religious expansion are less closely tied to colonial and imperialist political expansions than before, and instead, increasingly, religion develops through arrangements in networks based on the local

needs and demands of groups and individuals seeking identity, cultural and social advancement, and personal restructuring (p. 330).

Semán (2005) also stressed the pursuit of well-being and *prosperity*, and Peter Berger remarked that capitalism permeates religion by imposing its market logic, as “religious tradition, which was previously imposed in an authoritarian manner, has now become a product dependent on *marketing*, and has to be sold to a clientele that is no longer under an obligation to make a purchase, and as a result, pluralism is a situation mostly dominated by the logic of market economics” (Berger, 1999, p. 198).

Lemieux (1993) highlights that “from this point of view, the religious aspect of Latin American societies soon based itself on a system that promulgated the private use of faith, imposed in a competitive religious market”. On this basis, Bastian (2004, p. 13) reports, “The notion of a market for the world of beliefs is not just a metaphor, but rather an effective method of organization for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods of salvation in a society governed by liberal economics in which markets are the places where values are defined, through the negotiation of power relationships between operators.”

In view of the above, it can be said that it is the open dynamism of a competitive market of religious economies that characterizes modern-day Latin American societies, which imposes itself on the monopoly of the prevailing ideology in the region: the Roman Catholic Church.

Argyriadis, de la Torre, Gutiérrez Zúñiga, and Aguilar Ros noted that

Belief systems are being reshaped by the current globalizing environment, where ritual objects and spaces, expertise and skill sets become commodities in a dynamic better described by the growing sphere of action of cultural industries than by specific proselytizing missions. In this manner, commercial logic is both the result and the cause of the heavy stream of religious meanings and their decontextualization (2008, p. 16).

Robert Greenfield (2006) mentions the *great spiritual supermarket* that came to the fore in the mid-20th century with the emergence of counterculture, when the religious monopoly had to compete with other religious views of the world. From that time on, it was no longer possible for religion to continue imposing itself, but rather it had to market itself; so it was that religious pluralism became, first and foremost, a market situation (Vallverdú, 2003).

In this context, “traditional” aspects are thrown into crisis and certain elements of these traditions have been progressively withdrawn from their respective original historical, territorial and cultural frameworks and have been circulated through global networks by cultural communication and information industries, religious goods, or waves of South-North migration (Argyriadis *et al.*, 2008).

Undoubtedly, migrations have accelerated these processes by which prior religious identity is reassessed, as population mobility is associated with the pursuit of new social integration codes that seek to channel new forms of community association imposed by an ever more interconnected world, where many former cultural resources appear to be thrown into question and crisis (Odgers & Ruiz Guadalajara, 2009). As they are not part of the social structure within their new context, migrants must make use of their social and cultural resources to deal with the contingencies of their new reality, and develop a strong capacity to adapt and introduce greater flexibility into their traditional systems. This capacity for adaptation provides an opening for migrants to reframe their ideological beliefs, including their religious identity.

In this context, it is possible to note “a decline in religion understood in terms of ritualized and bureaucratized power structures while new personal and community-based forms of religion that tend towards disintegration, fragmentation, and mobility thrive” (Vallverdú, 2003, p. 435). Within this new environment, religiosity occurs in other lands, is practiced by new subjects, and takes on new meanings in the framework of cultures produced by transnational cultural industries. The Catholic religious tradition prevailed in Latin American societies until the early 1950s, when the vast majority of consumers of religious goods of salvation accepted the inevitable intervention of priests as producers of symbolic Catholic goods. However, after this period, communities sprang up that did not require formal, unequivocal or exclusive ties and tolerated individual, household or occasional religious practices.

Bastian (2003) points out that “the market has changed and independent ventures offering salvation have multiplied. There is a certain parallelism between the economic and religious environments: growth in the informal economy appears to coincide with growth in informal religions. And like in the economy, this ‘other path’ in religion is also a means of survival, which in this instance is symbolic” (p. 12). However, far from being marginal, market logic predetermines the fate of a religious sphere that is transitioning from a monopolistic to a competitive religious economy, giving fresh impetus to the notion of a free religious market with a powerful capacity to adapt to local environments.

Thus, in the face of a closed-minded and hierarchical Catholic faith, new, different and alternative models of attachment to the sacred have manifested themselves in the region. Pentecostalism, which is well suited to the transnationalization process of religion, is noted for ventures that develop strategies for the commercialization and multilateral distribution of symbolic goods, and which develop a range of practices and beliefs. For example, forms of praise have incorporated sacred and institutional hymnody from different national musical traditions that have transformed forms of worship in recent years (for example, salsa, gospel, zamba, and reggaeton music). In this sense, music has been an effective evangelization strategy in various churches, as an emerging process by which Pentecostal religious practices are associated with musical expressions in vogue, and is therefore a phenomenon that promotes the growth of evangelical Christian congregations, while having a significant impact on youth, whatever their social background (Hernández, 2011).

In this way, solemn cults have been transformed by pastors into forms of praise that exalt splendor, ecstasy, and ostentation, many of which are broadcast on television shows.

These ministries of praise, which have become cult spectacles, are anchored to a transnational sense of business. Thus, an audiovisual musical circuit has been created with an industry of evangelical song made up of Latin American professionals joined by charismatic ministers who fill soccer fields or stadia. This has produced priests like Father Calvo in São Paulo, Brazil, for example, who has sold a hundred million records and won a Grammy (Bastian, 2005b, p. 339).

In sum, mass media has been a successful tool for religious penetration as it enables the transmission of a number of messages, narratives, myths, beliefs, and images from countless web pages, electronic media like radio, and recordings that do not need to be made in the same country or region. In other words, it is a form of deterritorialization of churches made possible by their receptiveness toward the codes of mass culture (Parker, 2005, p. 44) – a contemporary para-ecclesiastical phenomenon constructed in hypermedia-based virtual environments that create new faith options.

CONCLUSIONS

Doubts have been cast on the historical hegemony of the dominant religion in the region due to a process of conversion, change and religious mobility currently in place in Latin America. The key areas of change presented in this study – the economy, politics, and globalization – exhibit a clear transfer of religious values through present-day hypermodernity, based on powerful mechanisms by which ideas, values, and practices are disseminated. A regional reality supported by the circularity of capital and consumer goods, the impoverishment of the population, turmoil arising from inequality and social marginalization, the lack of autonomous social movements and a closed political arena all facilitate the appearance of new religious affiliations and loyalties in the region, which is open to change and the selective reframing of its identity.

In this context, Pentecostal churches – both local and international – have found greater acceptance among converts and are characterized by a juxtaposition of diverse and powerful discourse framed in the traditional religious register and supported by the hypermodernity of media. Media coverage of religious reference, and the continued use of this practice (in which preachers and religious presenters are shown in high-impact television standards), constitute a venture by the transnational network that has gone beyond the working classes and caught the attention of the middle and upper classes in recent years. Indeed, therein lies the great novelty: “Latin American Pentecostalism is breaking away from sectors associated with social marginalization to legitimize itself culturally within upper social strata, where the hypermodernity of media has played a crucial role” (Bastian, 2005b, p. 340). It is noted,

therefore, that the change in religious identity in the religion no longer reflects a distinction based on social class, or a unique religious practice.

With that in mind, it was necessary to draw on contextual specificity to conduct a closer analysis of this regional reality, as apparently this is a process of “Latinized” religious modernity (Bastian, 2004) based on the internationalization of external beliefs and practices that have broken with the monopoly of the dominant religious tradition. This religious modernity, characterized by openness and dissemination, is based on a model of networking that is little institutionalized and hugely flexible, and disseminated by new systems of missionary practices and a preference for electronic resources. It is a competitive religious model in which different *belief ventures* mobilize in order to establish new parameters for collective affirmation.

This new reality brings to light a model of transnationalization in religion, characterized by “the establishment of a multilateral dissemination of the religious system, which crosses borders and cannot be pinpointed to a specific location, is not determined by state interests, and instead, is set in a market situation” (Bastian, 2005b, p. 328). This model operates based on a system of networks that can be seen as organizational rather than institutional, and is part of a process of international dissemination. Furthermore, the model is defined by the fact that the dissemination of religiosity is able to adapt to local environments, as it mixes with pre-existing systems and can co-exist with different traditions (Castilleja, Cervera, & Villar, 2010; Cortés & Carreón 2010; Guerrero Jiménez, 2005). Parker (2005) noted that this system of plural beliefs in the region serves as a response to the social constraints of large sections of the Latin American population, in particular the popular sectors – migrants and natives – who, in dire living conditions, have found in these religious expressions a sense of mystery and transcendence.

Translator: Joshua Parker

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