

PROTESTANTISM IN LATIN AMERICA

Virginia Garrard Burnett
University of Texas, Austin

- GOD AND PRODUCTION IN A GUATEMALAN TOWN.* By Sheldon Annis. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987. Pp. 197. \$27.50.)
- A IGREJA ELECTRONICA E SEU IMPACTO NA AMERICA LATINA.* By Hugo Assmann. (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1986. Pp. 171.) Published in Spanish as *LA IGLESIA ELECTRONICA Y SU IMPACTO EN AMERICA LATINA.* (San José, Costa Rica: Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones, 1987. Pp. 170.)
- PROTESTANTS AND THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION: MISSIONARIES, MINISTERS, AND SOCIAL CHANGE.* By Deborah J. Baldwin. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990. Pp. 203. \$26.95.)
- PROTESTANTISMO Y SOCIEDAD EN MEXICO.* By Jean-Pierre Bastian. (Mexico City: Casa de Publicaciones Unidas, 1983. Pp. 241.)
- PROTESTANTISMO Y LIBERALISMO EN AMERICA LATINA.* Second edition. By José Miguez Bonino, Carmelo Alvarez, and Roberto Craig. (San José, Costa Rica: Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones, 1985. Pp. 91.)
- SPIRITUAL WARFARE: THE POLITICS OF THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT.* By Sara Diamond. (Boston, Mass.: South End Press, 1989. Pp. 292. \$12.00 paper.)
- TONGUES OF FIRE: THE EXPLOSION OF PROTESTANTISM IN LATIN AMERICA.* By David Martin. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990. Pp. 352. \$39.95.)
- EL PROTESTANTISMO EN CENTRO AMERICA.* By Wilton M. Nelson. (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Caribe, 1982. Pp. 102.)
- IS LATIN AMERICA TURNING PROTESTANT? THE POLITICS OF EVANGELICAL GROWTH.* By David Stoll. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990. Pp. 424. \$24.95.)

Protestantism as a religion and a lifestyle has attracted so much popular and scholarly attention lately that one might suppose it to be an entirely new phenomenon in Latin America. In point of fact, Protestants (usually missionaries from the United States) have been active in Latin America since the nineteenth century. Until the 1960s, however, most Latin Americans perceived Protestantism to be so culturally and theologically beyond the pale of their experience that it remained confined to the most marginal sectors of Latin society.

For a variety of reasons, this perception has changed over the last twenty years, resulting in what some writers have called a “Protestant explosion.” Nearly half a dozen Latin American nations—including Chile, Brazil, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras—are said to have Protestant populations exceeding one-quarter of the general population. Of these, Guatemala is reported to be at least one-third Protestant, followed closely by El Salvador and Brazil. Even in places where the Protestant percentage of the population remains in the single digits, Protestants seem to be an increasingly influential force in social and political spheres. To cite only one example, Protestants in Peru (who account for less than 5 percent of the national population) were credited with rallying key support for Alberto Fujimori in the 1990 presidential election.¹

The “Protestant explosion” has also generated a spate of new books on religion in Latin America. Several influential studies on Protestantism appeared in the 1960s—the work of Christian Lalive d’Epinay and Emilio Willems immediately come to mind.² But it was not until the 1980s that the topic commanded much attention in the scholarly community. The recent studies are clearly indebted to the ground-breaking work of Lalive d’Epinay and Willems but tend to focus on two key questions that the past two decades have cast in high relief. The first appears simple but is elusive: why has Protestantism become so attractive to Latin Americans, especially after so many decades of marginality? The second question is equally problematic: what kind of impact can religious change be expected to have on nations that are theologically, culturally, politically, and sociologically grounded in Roman Catholicism?

Just as Protestantism is not new to Latin America, it is also not a completely new focus of scholarly discourse. An established, if small, body of literature on this subject dates back several decades. The oldest, if least reliable, works are those that might be called the “confessional studies” of Protestantism in the region. Books like José María Ganunza’s provocatively titled *Los sectas nos invaden*, Antonio Quarranciono’s *Sectas en América Latina*, and Mildred Spain’s *And in Samaria: A Story of Fifty Years’*

1. Many of the commonly cited statistics on Protestant growth in Latin America are compiled by the Servicio Evangélico para América Latina (SEPAL), a Protestant-sponsored research organization that has attempted to collect scientific data on evangelical growth since 1980. SEPAL’s methodology is derived from a research design explained in *World Christianity: Central America*, edited by Clifton Holland (Monrovia, Calif.: Missions Advanced Research and Communications Center, 1981). This methodology has recently come under fire from some academic and church scholars, who suggest that the statistics for Protestant growth may be inflated.

2. See Christian Lalive d’Epinay, *El refugio de las masas: estudio sociológico del protestantismo chileno* (Santiago: Editorial del Pacífico, 1968); published in English as *Haven to the Masses: A Study of the Pentecostal Movement in Chile* (London: Lutterworth, 1969). See also Emilio Willems, *Followers of the New Faith: Culture Change and the Rise of Protestantism in Brazil and Chile* (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967).

Missionary Witness in Central America, 1890–1940 were usually written by religious partisans and exemplify the polemical and highly sectarian works that made up most of the early literature on the topic.³ Because such books were frankly subjective in nature, they need not be discussed here other than to note that they appear with great regularity in the citations and bibliographies of most recent studies. With these kinds of antecedents, it is not surprising that a large portion of the contemporary scholarship on Protestantism in Latin America has a strong undertone of political or theological polemic.

Much of the modern work is based on the premise that Protestantism is inextricably bound by culture, custom, history, and politics to the “Protestant nations” of Western Europe and particularly to the United States. This premise has a sound historical base, given the fact that the vast majority of foreign missionaries to Latin America have long come from the United States. Moreover, at least until the middle years of the twentieth century, U.S. Protestant missionaries explicitly stated that their mission was as much to encourage “a new liberal, dynamic order like that which Protestantism had inspired historically” as it was to convert Catholics to their own brand of Christianity (Bonino, p. 25). As a result, much of the scholarship examines Protestantism in Latin America as an external phenomenon, imposed and orchestrated from outside.

Wilton Nelson’s *El protestantismo en Centro América* typifies this genre. A missionary in Costa Rica for many years, Nelson rejects the notion that simple “cultural imperialism” underlies the expansion of Protestantism in Latin America. His straightforward narrative history, objectively stated, outlines the close relationship between liberal government in Central America and Protestant missionaries from the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nelson ably demonstrates that during most of the nineteenth century, almost all Protestants in Central America were foreigners—Britons, Americans, Germans, and West Indians. It was only during the last decades of the nineteenth century that liberal leaders withdrew the legal restrictions on limited religious diversity and allowed missionaries to proselytize the general population. This change occurred because liberal leaders and missionaries shared a similar vision for a modern Central America: they hoped to see increased political stability, economic development, and a cultural evolution resembling that of the United States. This shared vision, however, translated into a popular perception among potential converts that conversion amounted to rejection of their own Latin spiritual and cultural

3. José María Ganunza, *Los sectas nos invaden* (Caracas: Ediciones Paulinas, 1978); Antonio Quarranciono, *Sectas en América Latina* (Guatemala City: Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, 1981); and Mildred Spain, *And in Samaria: A Story of Fifty Years’ Missionary Witness in Central America, 1890–1940* (Dallas, Tex.: Central American Mission, 1940).

heritage. Several decades would pass before many Central Americans would find the “Protestant package” particularly enticing.

The study by José Miguez Bonino, Carmelo Alvarez, and Roberto Craig, *Protestantismo y liberalismo en América Latina*, covers much of the same ground as Nelson’s work but approaches the subject from a perspective that is both dependency-oriented and theologically based. The authors date the relationship between liberal government and mission work back to 1821 and point out the parallel between the appearance of Protestantism in Central America (or at least the appearance of influential Protestants in the form of British investors) and the emergence of the export-oriented coffee economy. Tracing this relationship into the late twentieth century, the authors suggest that this link explains why Protestantism in Central America currently tends to translate into political passivity or even support for repressive regimes.

Although the historical sections of *Protestantismo y liberalismo en América Latina* are a bit predictable and sometimes overdrawn, the theological inquiry is intriguing. Bonino (an Argentine and a prominent Methodist theologian) points out that Protestantism originated as a “protest” movement and has provided the momentum for remarkable social change in other parts of the world. He notes that although contemporary Protestantism has no praxis comparable to Catholicism’s theology of liberation, Protestantism does not actively discourage social action, as many Latin Americans erroneously believe. Bonino and his coauthors argue that modern Latin American Protestants’ political passivity is a direct legacy of the churches’ missionary heritage. They conclude that U.S. missionaries so mingled Protestant theology with their own conservative political ideology that it has become impossible for Latin American evangelicals to separate one from the other.

Two studies that seem to bear out the first part of Bonino’s argument rather convincingly are Deborah Baldwin’s *Protestants and the Mexican Revolution: Missionaries, Ministers, and Social Change* and Jean-Pierre Bastian’s *Protestantismo y sociedad en México*. Baldwin’s historical study focuses on the efforts of Protestant missionaries and converts in Mexico from the nineteenth-century Reforma of Benito Juárez through the presidency of Venustiano Carranza. According to her thesis, Protestant work in Mexico was inextricably linked with the United States and with liberal government, just as it was in most of the rest of Latin America. Yet uniquely in Mexico, the strongest relationship lay between Protestant missionaries and so-called radical liberals, who eventually found a voice in Francisco Madero rather than in the institutionalized “positivism” of Porfirio Díaz.

Through careful analysis of mission records, secular and religious newspapers, and archival material, Baldwin proves that American Protestant missionaries and native Mexican converts alike were early and vocal

supporters of Madero's quest for the presidency. Mexican converts were avid supporters of the revolution when it came, and American missionaries, although less enthusiastic, actively lobbied the United States against intervening in Veracruz. Baldwin also demonstrates that far from being politically passive, Protestants during the Mexican Revolution readily embraced radical change. She suggests that because "converts had already broken with traditional religion," they found it easy "to break with the established [political] order" (p. 178).

Jean-Pierre Bastian's *Protestantismo y sociedad en Mexico* also covers the revolutionary period and brings many of the same conclusions later reached by Baldwin into a contemporary context. An ecumenical Protestant theologian, Bastian has written a number of articles criticizing the ties that continue to bind Latin American Protestantism to the United States. His study of Mexico attempts to use sociological and theological evidence to prove that these ties are neither necessary nor inevitable.

Bastian takes to task the Mexican anthropologists who he contends have described the "rapid spread of Protestantism as the advance guard of ideological penetration by the United States." He concedes that this characterization may in fact be true for those urban "national churches" (to use his term) that derive their theology, bureaucratic forms, technology, and funds from the United States. Bastian argues, however, that this affection for things American is emphatically not true for rural churches in the more remote areas of Mexico, particularly in the largely indigenous areas of the far southeast. Using sociological surveys from these regions as evidence, Bastian shows that rural churches usually draw not on foreign models but on native tradition to forge a homegrown Protestantism that fits into the local context. The attraction of such rural churches, he concludes, is that they offer converts some continuity with the wholeness of the old symbolic universe of the indigenous belief system.

Bastian's contentions notwithstanding, the notion of Protestantism serving as "the advance guard of ideological penetration by the United States" has attracted a wide following among scholarly as well as popular writers. Sara Diamond's *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right* and Hugo Assmann's *A Igreja Eletrônica e Seu Impacto na América Latina* represent some of the best scholarship of this school. Of the two studies, Assmann's is the more narrowly focused. He is concerned primarily with the impact of U.S. televangelists in Latin America. His study examines the types and quantity of religious programming from the United States that are broadcast in the region, specifically in Brazil. Assmann comments that the most popular religious programs of U.S. origin rank in three categories: most popular are those that are entertaining ("no one can deny," he notes dryly, "that Jimmy Swaggart has an exceptional musical talent"); in second place are programs featuring "faith healing"; and third are those that articulate some aspect of "health and wealth theology" (a description

not used specifically by Assmann). “Health and wealth theology” refers to the belief (considered heretical by many conventional Protestants) that God rewards the faithful in the temporal world with tangible signs like good health and financial success.

Assmann’s analysis unfortunately does not take into full account a significant fact: Brazil had a sizable evangelical population long before modern televangelism came into being (sharing with Chile the longest history of popular Protestantism in Latin America). Nor does he fully grapple with the fact that Protestantism is growing rapidly in poor rural areas of Brazil, where access to television—religious or otherwise—is limited. His conclusion is nevertheless compelling: those Brazilians who convert to Protestantism because of U.S. religious programming also emulate the cultural norms and secular values preached by those programs.

Sara Diamond’s *Spiritual Warfare* takes a much broader look at the interplay of Protestantism, politics, and culture. Written from a Marxist perspective, the study is concerned with the growing influence of the so-called Christian Right in the United States and how its ideology influences the internal politics of Western nations, including those of Latin America. Diamond relates how the now defunct “Moral Majority” emerged in the United States from the malaise of the presidency of Jimmy Carter to become a potent political power broker during the first administration of Ronald Reagan. She outlines how the unyielding anticommunism of conservative Christians in the United States was partly responsible for rallying U.S. support for the Contra war in Nicaragua. Diamond also asserts that conservative Christians must claim responsibility for Guatemala’s born-again President, Efraín Ríos Montt, who presided over the war that killed thousands of Guatemalans in the early 1980s under the twin banners of divine blessing and anticommunism.

Diamond attributes the emergence of the “Christian Right” to both internal as well as external factors. Like Assmann, she believes that influential televangelists like Pat Robertson intentionally manipulate their viewers to accept a prescribed body of political and social ideas that have basically nothing to do with Protestant religion. More important, Diamond suggests that the internal dynamics of some modern fundamentalist (particularly Pentecostal) churches in the United States and Latin America encourage their members to be subservient to pastoral authority and to accept church teachings without question. *Spiritual Warfare* is especially useful in explaining the mechanics of authority and control employed in such churches.

Diamond’s findings nicely complement the work of Lalive d’Epinay, who has compared the authority of Pentecostal churches to that of the hacienda in Latin America. His influential study of Chile, *El refugio de las masas*, and Willems’s *Followers of the New Faith* are the two classic works on Protestantism in Latin America published during the 1960s. Both books

are built on Max Weber's classic equation of the relationship between the "Protestant ethic" and the rise of modern capitalism.⁴ These important studies were the first to evaluate Protestantism as an internal, rather than an external, force in Latin American society.

Like Weber, Lalive d'Épinay and Willems found a clear relationship between the development of modern capitalism and concomitant social changes such as rapid urbanization, industrialization, and the growing popularity of Protestantism. Both authors, however, refuted Weber's notion that Protestantism generates the kind of industrial entrepreneurship that promotes capitalism. They argued instead that the inverse tends to be true in Latin America: capitalism and "modernization" produce the very kinds of social dislocations that make the Protestant religion increasingly attractive to those sectors affected most—the poor.

Of these two classics, Willems's work most closely follows the Weberian model. An anthropologist, Willems conducted a study of religious allegiance in Brazil and Chile during the 1960s that established the basic framework for future study of the Protestant phenomenon in Latin America. At the time he was writing the work, Brazil and Chile were the only traditionally Catholic nations in Latin America that seemed to be experiencing a measurable shift in popular religious affiliation (although other countries, notably Guatemala, were also undergoing a similar change that escaped the notice of scholars until later). Willems found that in Brazil and Chile, Protestantism attracted the most new converts in two "ecological zones" (to use his term). The first zone was in urban areas, where Willems found that the dearth of traditional institutions and structures forced poor rural migrants to seek out new kinds of associations, of which Protestant churches were but one viable option. This finding led Willems to posit that "heavy concentrations of Protestants are correlated with changes strongly affecting the traditional structures of society." He suggested, however, that the converse might also be true: "Protestants can be expected to be relatively weak in areas that have little or no exposure to such change."⁵

The second "ecological zone" where Willems located large numbers of Protestants was among landowners in Minas Gerais with medium-sized holdings. Willems discovered that most Protestants under study fell into this category prior to their conversion, not as a result of it. He found that Protestants in Minas Gerais practiced "ascetic behavior" that contributed to their economic advancement. But this behavior (mainly, saving money that might previously have been used on alcohol, smoking, gambling, or the like) amounted to no more than "penny capitalism."

4. Max Weber stated this argument most succinctly in *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).

5. Willems, *Followers of the New Faith*, 13.

From this conclusion, Willems deduced that the lure held by Protestantism for middle-sector landowners was not its material attractions. Rather, Protestantism's emphasis on the individual appealed to a sector who, because of their rather anomalous position in Latin American society, were already tending toward individualism. Willems concluded that the "absence of [an] hacienda system and [the] presence of a rural middle class created conditions under which religious dissent may develop."⁶

Lalivé d'Epinay's *El refugio de las masas* also looks at the demise of traditional society as an explanation for the rise of Protestantism. A Swiss sociologist, the author conducted a study of religious preferences in urban Chile during the mid-1960s. It revealed that a surprising percentage of urban residents, particularly new urban migrants from the countryside, identified themselves as Protestants. Although Chile was the first country in Latin America to allow Protestants to practice their faith legally and had a long history of missionary activity dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, Protestantism had long been perceived as a "foreign faith." Protestant membership prior to the 1960s had been largely confined to the foreign population of expatriate Germans and British living in Chile. Lalivé d'Epinay was among the first to perceive that Protestantism was becoming more popular among native Chileans. He was also one of the first to note the particular growth of Pentecostal churches, which had no association with the older "traditional" denominations that had been in the vanguard of the earlier missionary movement.

In an attempt to understand this shift in religious affiliation within the context of the rapidly changing political and economic climate in Chile, Lalivé d'Epinay noted that the vast majority of recent Protestant converts were new migrants from the countryside into the cities. Moreover, Protestants tended to be among the least successful of the new migrants at the time of their conversion; that is, migrants who failed to find employment were the most likely to gravitate toward Protestantism. Migrants were especially attracted to Pentecostalism, which is distinguished by an emphasis on the initiate's "baptism in the Holy Spirit," manifested by such outward signs as speaking in tongues and miraculous healing.

Within the Pentecostal churches, Chileans living in cities could hope to find a sense of belonging, a supportive community of the faithful, and a rigidly defined code of behavior as prescribed by the church's pastor and sanctions. Lalivé d'Epinay hypothesized that Protestant, and particularly Pentecostal, churches recreated for displaced migrants the security and authority that the hacienda had once provided. Thus to rural folk cast adrift in the city, Pentecostalism offered a new social unit and a pater-

6. *Ibid.*, 95.

nalistic authority that no other organization, not even the post-conciliar Catholic Church, could supply.

A more recent anthropological study by Sheldon Annis, *God and Production in a Guatemalan Town*, empirically tests some of the key hypotheses of these earlier works in the setting of contemporary rural Guatemala. Unlike most scholars writing on this topic, Annis did not go to Guatemala specifically to study Protestantism but rather to analyze the social impact of tourism as measured by textile production in San Antonio Aguascalientes, a Cakchiquel Indian community. In the course of his research, Annis discovered that not only the mechanics of textile production but the very meaning of production varied significantly in San Antonio, depending on the religious affiliation of the informant. The result is a theoretically and empirically rich micro-study of ways in which religious change has altered the economic and social patterns in an indigenous village.

Annis's study is important for several reasons. First, San Antonio Aguascalientes is a "traditional" town by most measures. A weavers' village, it is linked inextricably to the outside world by its market networks but still retains the bonds of language and custom that form the *costumbre* of the classic indigenous community. San Antonio Aguascalientes has been touched by the many trials that have plagued Guatemala over the past two decades—earthquakes, civil war, and the uncertainties of economic change. Yet the community has suffered considerably less from these crises than many other highland communities. In addition, San Antonio enjoys a degree of economic prosperity because of demand for its textiles and its proximity to important tourist centers like Antigua and Guatemala City.

By many measures, then, San Antonio is an instructive testing ground for the earlier theories of Lalive d'Épinay and Willems. On the one hand, the stresses of recent decades have begun to erode "traditional society" in San Antonio, but not nearly to the extent to which Willems and Lalive d'Épinay had surmised as necessary for Protestantism to take root. On the other hand, while San Antonians might be prosperous by Indian standards, they would hardly fit the description of the "rural middle class" that Willems found in Minas Gerais.

Like Willems and Lalive d'Épinay, Annis finds genuine material advantages to becoming a Protestant, which he sums up in a phrase he heard from his informants: a convert travels, both economically and spiritually, *del suelo al cielo* (p. 81). Through careful analysis of household incomes, expenses, landownership, and business practices in the community, Annis finds that Protestants in San Antonio earn and save more money than their Catholic counterparts because they no longer pay what he calls "a Catholic cultural tax" (p. 90). That is, Protestants no longer pay for the "vices" mentioned by previous writers; they do not belong to

income-leveling *cofradías*; nor do they channel their extra income into the communal “*milpa* technology” that has long been the basis of community subsistence.

Even more important, Annis attempts to assess the changing attitudes of Protestants in San Antonio toward their community by measuring the production and marketing of San Antonio’s most important commodity, textiles woven on backstrap looms. Through interviews and surveys, Annis find that Protestant women, while still often likely to wear and sell the *huipil* (the handwoven blouse which denotes the village of the wearer), are markedly less likely than their Catholic sisters to endow it with any special symbolic value. Moreover, although Catholic women tend to weave complex and aesthetically rich *huipils* for their own use, Protestant women are more likely to weave *huipils* for their marketability.

Annis’s findings thus suggest that Protestantism is a compelling agent of social transformation and as such threatens to undermine many of the traditional values and lifeways of Latin Americans at a time when they are already under siege. Yet, paradoxically, this transformational quality seems to be the very attraction of Protestant churches, particularly Pentecostal churches: they offer a means of survival in a rapidly changing and often hostile environment.

Such is David Stoll’s conclusion in his ambitious new book, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth*. Stoll, an anthropologist, wrote an earlier book on the Wycliffe Bible Translators, in which he examined the relationship between the U.S. government and Wycliffe missionaries, who have been accused of sharing information gleaned at remote mission sites in Latin America with the Central Intelligence Agency.⁷ His new book is much more comprehensive than the earlier work, and it is one of the first major studies to attempt a broad analysis of Protestant growth all over Latin America in light of its popularity over the last twenty years.

Despite its title, Stoll’s new book explores much more than just “the politics of evangelical growth.” The first chapters cover much of the same ground as Diamond’s study. Stoll traces the development of the neo-evangelical movement in the United States and illustrates how this movement has nurtured Protestant church growth in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Ecuador. He then proceeds to sort out the bewildering variety of “theologies” that give definition to some of the most popular trends in Latin American Protestantism. Most of them are based to some extent on millenarianism, the belief that the trials of this world will end with the imminent second coming of Christ. In the meantime, believers are to

7. David Stoll, *Fishers of Men or Founders of Empire? The Wycliffe Bible Translators in Latin America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cultural Survival, 1982).

follow a strict code of godly behavior so that they may be “lifted up” at the coming of the new day.

In Latin America, acceptance of this belief has tended to translate into the much noted failure of Protestants to take part in progressive political activity and the tendency to support the political and social status quo.⁸ The Protestants’ tendency toward political passivity contrasts strikingly with Catholic Latin Americans, especially in those areas where liberation theology has become a powerful movement.

In a key chapter, Stoll asserts that the contrast between liberationist Catholicism and conservative, passive Protestantism is one of the keys to understanding the popularity of Protestant churches in contemporary Latin America. He observes that Protestantism is most popular in Latin America among the poor, the disaffected, and the displaced—the very groups that liberation theology seeks to champion. Stoll explains, “Evangelical Protestantism is so successful that it calls into question the claims made for its greatest rival, liberation theology” (p. 308). According to Stoll, radicalized Christians, who believed that “saving souls [made] little sense apart from changing a social order that ruin[ed] so many lives,” alienated many who sought spiritual succor (p. 309). The political stance demanded by liberation theology is also demonstrably dangerous, as mutilated bodies in El Salvador continue to attest. For Latin America’s poor, then, embracing liberation theology means “forsaking the traditional function of religion as a sanctuary from oppression” (p. 313). Refusing to accept this change, the masses seek refuge in Protestant churches.

The other major new book, David Martin’s *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*, takes a somewhat different tack than Stoll’s study. An English sociologist of religion, Martin believes that politics per se are largely peripheral to developing an understanding of Protestantism’s appeal in contemporary Latin America. He contends that the explosive popularity of Pentecostalism in the developing world can be attributed to the fact that churches offer stability and personal empowerment to their members, who tend to live in the sectors most threatened by what used to be called “progress.” Martin suggests that at their most basic level, Pentecostal churches provide a way for members to regain some control over their own lives, especially in circumstances that make the rest of the world seem capricious and cruel. The churches promise converts a “better life, [clearly defined] moral standards, economic prosperity, and personal dignity” at a time when other sources of authority—the traditional community, old-time Catholicism, and the hacienda—have begun to disintegrate (p. 281).

8. Two obvious exceptions are Guatemala, where some evangelicals actively assisted General Rios Montt’s right-wing regime, and Nicaragua, where key Protestant sectors lent their support to the Sandinistas. In both cases, it can be argued that evangelicals were following the biblical injunction to “submit to the authorities in power” (Romans 13:1).

Although Martin is primarily concerned with Latin America, he also takes a brief comparative look at other areas of the developing world where Protestantism is enjoying growing popularity, most notably in South Korea and Africa. Although these comparisons become a bit strained at times, they help to illustrate the larger points of *Tongues of Fire*. Most useful of all is Martin's comparison of the development of Methodism in the peripheral areas of Britain in the eighteenth century, in Wales, Scotland, and the American colonies. Martin describes how social conditions like rapid industrialization and the increased marginality of the poor nurtured the rise of early Methodism in the British world. This process, he suggests, closely parallels the growth of Pentecostalism in contemporary Latin America. Martin observes that in embracing Methodism, "Many people at the margins of the social hierarchy [in the British periphery] were able to make their autonomy visible without directly challenging the whole political order" (p. 33).

Tracing the evolution of American Methodism down to the groups that are now most active in Latin America, the fundamentalists and the Pentecostals, Martin indirectly concurs with Weber, Bonino, Diamond, and Annis in concluding that Protestantism, capitalist economics, and U.S. culture are so intertwined in Latin America that it is difficult to separate one from the other. Yet Martin denies that this intermingling necessarily forges what he calls "the Americanization of Latin American religion." He suggests the converse instead: Pentecostalism in Latin America may actually represent the "Latinization of American religion" (p. 282). Martin concludes, "The aspiration of a better life, broadly understood in terms of moral standards, economic prosperity, personal dignity and health of body and mind, has some kind of U.S. attachment [for Latin Americans], even though people simultaneously recognize that the U.S. is morally chaotic" (p. 281).

Despite this clear tie to the United States, Martin maintains that on some levels Protestantism (especially Pentecostalism) is more Latin than American. He points out that under some circumstances, Protestant churches have actively contributed to the "cultural and linguistic revitalization" of various threatened groups, as when Protestants teach speakers of Maya languages to read and write their own languages. Moreover, Martin recalls Lalive d'Épinay in noting that Pentecostalism in Latin America tends to unite "the very old and the very modern" (p. 282). Modern Pentecostalism may indeed have its origin in the United States, but its authoritarian emphasis lies closer to Latin America's own social roots (p. 282).

Finally, Martin echoes Stoll's assessment that the apolitical stance of Latin American Protestantism is one of its greatest attractions. Martin, however, credits this passivity to a different source, arguing that the political passivity of Latin American Protestants has less to do with their

ties to the conservative United States than to the “peaceability” that has been inherent in Protestantism since Methodism emerged. “Peaceability is of the essence,” he concludes, “and the poor of Latin America may well feel that up to now political zealotry has only increased their misery” (pp. 286–87).

In summary, Martin’s rhetorical question continues to reverberate: Is Protestantism the Americanization of Latin America or the Latinization of U.S. religion? The works reviewed here suggest that no single paradigm or theory has yet emerged to explain satisfactorily the allure that Protestantism holds for modern Latin Americans. But as Protestant churches continue to grow, so will the body of literature on this multifaceted topic.