

## INTRODUCTION: RELIGION AND POLITICS IN LATIN AMERICA

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Recent developments in Latin America have shown that religion can definitely not be dismissed as a significant agent/factor in politics and society. The role of liberation theology and the explosive growth of Latin American Pentecostalism have together marked the resurrection of religion as a viable political determinant. The explosive growth of Latin American Pentecostalism during the second half of the twentieth century, particularly from the 1980s onwards, has been instrumental in capturing the attention of academics from various disciplines, leading to a boom in academic research exploring the cultural, social and political impact of Pentecostalism in the region. A central question in this regard is whether the political impact of the cultural, religious and ideological elements of Latin American Pentecostalism is one of retaining the socio-economic and political status quo or a harbinger of change. The Latin American Pentecostal presence is also having a major impact upon other religious expressions across Latin America.

During the recent decade the relation between religion and politics has also manifested itself in a certain tendency towards religious populism. A growing number of Latin American politicians seem to be embracing religion. Many analysts see a growing political manipulation of religious fervour in the region, alongside a greater church influence in state affairs. In few countries is the church pulling its weight more visibly than in Nicaragua. In November 2006, Daniel Ortega won the presidential elections by dropping his earlier Marxist rhetoric and running as a religious Catholic. During the 2006 electoral campaign, Roman Catholic Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo threw his backing behind his once arch-rival Ortega, who reciprocated by backing the church-supported law banning therapeutic abortions. In Ecuador, conservative banana industry magnate Alvaro Noboa won the first round of the presidential election in October 2006 by posing as *El mensajero de Dios* (God's messenger). He was later defeated in the November runoff election by leftist populist Rafael Correa,

who in the final leg of the campaign presented himself as a fervent Catholic. Last but not least, in Paraguay, ex-‘bishop of the poor’ Fernando Lugo won the presidential elections in April 2008, and assumed the presidency in August 2008 after being granted laicization by the Pope.

This thematic section explores some of the diversity of relationships between religion, politics and society in Latin America. The articles address the complex interdisciplinary interplay between the religious and the political and social spheres in the region. The articles cover various sub-themes, such as ‘prosperity theology’, charismatic renewal, religion and multiculturalism, religion and ethnic identity, religion and political elites and the relationship between religious and political elites; political parties and religious affiliation and values, and religious actors as providers of welfare and security. Most of the articles in this thematic section were first presented as drafts in the session “Religion, politics and society” at the 6<sup>th</sup> Nolan Conference, held at the Institute of Latin American Studies, Stockholm University, in April 2012. The authors of the articles represent the fields of history, religious studies, theology, political science, social anthropology and comparative politics.

Modern Pentecostalism is predominantly a Protestant phenomenon, and Neo-Pentecostalism, as implied by its name, is a variety of Pentecostalism having its origins in the charismatic movement. Neo-Pentecostalism differs from ‘traditional’ Pentecostalism primarily in its emphasis on the temporal world. The Neo-Pentecostal doctrine of the so-called ‘theology of prosperity’, the belief that God miraculously bestows material blessings on the faithful, is one of the most dynamic movements in Latin American Neo-Pentecostalism today. In her article “Neo-Pentecostalism and Prosperity Theology in Latin America: A Religion for Late Capitalist Society” Virginia Garrard-Burnett, professor of History and Religious Studies, explores the expansion of ‘prosperity theology’ in Latin America as an aspect of global Pentecostalism. Prosperity theology speaks to the material wants and needs of people living in a world in which success is measured almost exclusively by affluence and consumption. The attraction of prosperity theology lies in its direct appeal to people’s desires to use religion towards personal socio-economic advancement. The article explores the expansion of prosperity theology through the lens of one of the most rapidly growing ‘health and wealth’ denominations in the early twenty-first century, Brazil’s *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*, as a response to the challenges of neo-liberal economic policies and the pressures of the global economy.

The growth of Evangelical churches has led to a more pluralistic and embattled religious field that has created challenges for the Catholic

Church. Due to huge demographic, political and cultural changes which have accelerated since the mid-twentieth century, a pluralistic religious field has been created. The article by theologian and social anthropologist Jakob Egeris Thorsen, "Challenged by Pluralism: Catholic Expansion into Magic and Prophetism", explores how the Catholic Church in Latin America reacts to the situation of increased religious pluralism and competition. At the time when Roman Catholicism enjoyed a monopoly over institutionalized religion, it represented a perfect example of a 'priestly religion'. 'Magic religion' flourished among the popular classes but never challenged the official religion of the Catholic Church and Protestant 'prophets' were kept out by law. But in the present situation of increased religious pluralism and competition, both Evangelical 'prophets' and self-confident pre-Columbian and Afro-American 'magicians' have openly challenged the priestly monopoly of Catholicism. By using the example of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the largest lay movement in the Latin American Church, this article demonstrates how the Catholic Church has effectively entered the religious competition within the fields of prophets and magicians, and how this is currently challenging the priestly identity of the Catholic Church in Latin American societies.

The recent growth of Evangelical churches in Latin America has entailed an increased focus on various aspects of the political, social and cultural consequences of this Evangelical expansion. Social anthropologist Martin Lindhardt's article, "Pentecostalism and politics in neoliberal Chile", explores historical and contemporary relationships between Pentecostalism and politics in Chile. The article discusses possible affinities between Pentecostalism as a religious culture and democratic principles and values. The author argues that although Pentecostalism may contain certain democratic qualities, there is a striking compatibility between Pentecostal theistic understandings of politics and social change, on the one hand, and a neoliberal social order characterized by widespread political apathy and disenchantment and a predominating privatized rather than communal sense of progress, on the other.

In his article, "Pentecostals and Politics in Argentina: A Question of Compatibility?", PhD student in Religious Studies, Hans Geir Aasmundsen, deals with how the Pentecostal community has been trying to define its position politically since the fall of the dictatorship and the return of democracy in 1983. The article examines how Pentecostal political projects need to be compatible with the religious project in order to be successful. Pentecostals who engage in politics need to legitimize their project and activities in religious terms in order to get support and votes from the Pentecostal community. From the 1990s, the focus was, and still

is, on the struggle for religious freedom and equality, but from the 2000s a new attitude towards the political sphere has developed: Pentecostals now find their way into politics through a commitment based on certain 'interior' and 'exterior' values. 'Interior' values relate to their understanding of a Pentecostal habitus: honesty, sincerity and thrustworthiness, whereas 'exterior' values are related to the Pentecostal conception of God's natural order: pro-life/anti-abortion, anti-homosexuality, and pro-family. The article analyses the content of this 'value ideology' and discusses whether or not this new political approach will evolve into a more explicitly formulated political base for the Pentecostal community in Argentina.

The article "*Te Deum Cristiano Evangélico: 'The Evangelical' in Guatemalan Politics*" by PhD student in Comparative Politics, Maren Christensen Bjune, speaks directly to those of Lindhardt and Aasmundsen. As the country with the largest group of Evangelical Christians in Latin America, Guatemala has had several experiences with *evangélicos* in politics. But in recent years there has been an increase in direct political participation by representatives of Evangelical communities, by internal strategies as well as by invitation. Despite the heterogeneous character of Guatemalan Evangelicals, in national politics 'the Evangelical' can be considered as *one* single analytical category, as defined by official Evangelical representatives themselves as well as by other members of the polity. By examining the type and nature of the alliances and cooperation entered into and initiated by Evangelical representatives, the author argues that these are indicative of an endorsement of the socio-political status quo in Guatemala.

Thus, Lindhardt and Christensen Bjune pose similar questions concerning the political impact of Latin American Pentecostalism in two country-specific contexts, Chile and Guatemala, and reach similar conclusions. Pentecostal political participation and involvement in Guatemala is consistent with maintaining the socio-political status quo, whereas in Chile there is a striking compatibility between Pentecostal perceptions of politics and the predominant neo-liberal socio-political order. Aasmundsen's article on Argentina is not concerned with the systemic socio-political impact of Pentecostalism, but also employs the concept of compatibility in his analysis of different Pentecostal political projects. In order to be successful Pentecostal political projects and activities need to be legitimate, i.e. compatible with the Pentecostal religious project.

In his article, "The Intersecting Identity Politics of the Ecuadorian Evangelical Indians", social scientist Rickard Lalander deals with an aspect

of the relation between religion and ethnicity by focusing on the intersectionality of religious and ethnic identities in processes of political mobilization in the Ecuadorian province of Chimborazo. The specific research question of the article is whether there is a certain persistent identitarian hierarchy between ethnic and religious identification among Evangelical Indigenous peoples, or whether it changes according to particular social and political contexts. The author hypothesizes that in political contexts, the ethnic identity weighs heavier than that of religion, whereas in the private sphere religious identification is generally superior. Exploring this intersectionally defined identity dilemma through an empirical analysis of the social movement Ecuadorian Federation of Evangelical Indians (FEINE) and its political electoral movement *Amauta Jatari* and their complex relationships and strategies of alliance-building with the broader Indigenous movement in Ecuador, Lalander finds, as hypothesized, that generally the ethnic identity is superior to the religious one in socio-political contexts.

Nicaragua is the setting of Einar Berntzen's article "Religion and Politics in Nicaragua: What Difference Does a Revolution Make?" Representing the field of comparative politics, the author focuses on the power relations between the Catholic Church and the Nicaraguan State in a comparative and historical perspective. Despite the fact that the Republic of Nicaragua constitutionally has been and still is a secular state, both Church and State have used each other in their power struggles. The Church-State relationship has broken down twice in the last quarter of the twentieth century: in the 1970s under Somoza, and in the 1980s under the Sandinistas. However, the Sandinista electoral defeat in 1990 signalled the return of the traditionally tight relationship between the Church hierarchy and the State. Ever since his electoral defeat in 1990, Daniel Ortega was unrelenting in his efforts to redeem himself by regaining power, but the legacy of animosity between the Sandinistas and the Church represented a formidable obstacle to Ortega's objective. The article is an interpretative case study which aims to provide a theoretically informed and historically and comparatively grounded synthesis of the democracy-constraining character of Ortega's two step collusive pact-making strategy of regaining the presidency. The successful culmination of the strategy was achieved through an unholy alliance between Ortega and Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo, by which Ortega espoused the institutional interests as well as the moral policy preferences of the Catholic Church. The latter was sealed by the FSLN voting in favour of abolishing therapeutic abortion two weeks before the November 2006 elections. The article argues that the

criminalization of therapeutic abortion is a product of the collusive character of Ortega's political strategy of regaining the presidency.

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