

## CHALLENGED BY PLURALISM: CHURCHLY EXPANSION INTO MAGIC AND PROPHECY – THE NEW ROLES OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN LATIN AMERICA

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Doña Concha is a sixty-five year old lady in a lower middle-class barrio of Guatemala City. She is a devout Catholic, a lector at mass and a so-called extraordinary minister of Communion. But she is also a preacher and a healer. She heals physical and psychological illnesses and she tumultuously exorcises demons in the basement of the parish church, where she gathers with her Charismatic prayer group every Wednesday. Doña Concha and the Charismatic Renewal movement, of which she forms part, embody the new religious roles into which Catholics and the Catholic Church in Latin America are expanding at the beginning of the twenty-first century. These new areas include quasi-shamanic faith-healing, which earlier belonged to the popular religious realm of the *curandero* or the wise woman, far outside the guise of the official Roman Church. It also includes ecstatic celebrations where participants fall into trance, speak in tongues and receive divine messages. Such celebrations were hitherto reserved to Afro-Caribbean cults and – more recently – to Neo-Pentecostal church communities. Finally Doña Concha and her group provide strong intercessory prayers for people with family and marital problems, men who suffer from unemployment and people who believe to be victims of spells and witchcraft, all afflictions against which one could also have sought up a wise woman or a “white” (or “black”) witch.

In an article entitled “Priests from the Charismatic Renewal of the Holy Spirit: Witch Doctors, Magicians or Professional Sorcerers?” (2008)<sup>1</sup>, the Mexican anthropologist Luis A. Vázquez Pasos points out all the similarities between the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (and the priests attached to the movement) and the characteristics of magic and

shamanism in ‘primitive’ religion as described by Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Marcel Mauss and others. He concludes that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) has created a magic version of Catholicism with a much broader popular appeal than traditional dogmatic Catholicism (2002:81). By allowing and embracing the CCR, the leadership of the Catholic Church, the bishops, has created a platform from which the Church can effectively counter the increasing religious pluralism in the form of Pentecostals, esoteric movements, fortune tellers and witches, that challenges the hegemony of the Catholic Church in Mexico (ibid.:79).

Vázquez’s observations are valuable and his comparison of Catholic Charismatic practice to classic theory of magic and religion is compelling. In this article I will expand his argument, building on both Weber’s sociology of religion, as applied by Vázquez, and by its interpretation and further development by Pierre Bourdieu in his theory about the religious field and the competition found therein. Both Weber’s and Bourdieu’s theory will be presented below; here it suffices to remind that both operate with three basic types, forms or aspects of religion: the priestly, the magic and the prophetic. My argument is as follows: The CCR represents not only a Catholic expansion into the realm of magic religion, but also into the prophetic sphere.

In a situation of increased religious pluralism and competition, this double Catholic expansion enables the Catholic Church to play on three religious strings and in that way more effectively than a solely priestly religion to counter Evangelical/(Neo-)Pentecostal, resurgent pre-Columbian and Afro-Caribbean, and expanding esoteric and occult religious agents. The price of the Catholic expansion into magic and prophetism is a relative loss of priestly authority that is reflected in a downgrading of Catholicism from being an integral common religious-cultural grid of Latin America to becoming one confessional actor among others.

In order to unfold the argument, I will (a) briefly introduce the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) in its Latin American context, (b) present the theories of Weber and Bourdieu, and (c) apply the theoretical framework to the CCR and to the contemporary religious landscape of Latin America.

## **II. THE CCR IN LATIN AMERICA**

Prior to the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the role of a lay woman like Doña Concha in the Catholic Church was to ‘pray, pay

and obey', as a popular American saying goes. Her place was in the pews or in a lay group, organized and led by a priest or religious sister. In Guatemala, like in many other Latin American countries suffering from extreme priest shortage in the period between Independence and the mid-twentieth century, Doña Concha might have played an important role outside the Church in domestic religion and in the popular religious manifestations of her *barrio*, teaching her children and grandchildren the basic catechism, praying the rosary at the home altar or at the *velaciones* of funeral celebrations. Her role as a leader of a Charismatic prayer group, as a preacher and as a healer, working with the acceptance of the parish priest in the Church compound, tells us about the changes within the Catholic Church since the Council.

The CCR emerged in the enthusiastic and confused aftermath of the Council years, which opened the Catholic Church to hitherto unseen new ways of religious expression and lay engagement. It formed a somewhat delayed part of what is known as the 'second wave' that brought Pentecostal beliefs and practices into the traditional denominations as intra-ecclesiastical awakening movements, later known as the Charismatic Renewal. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) ascribes its origin to a retreat held in February 1967 where several faculty members and students from the Catholic Duquesne University in Pittsburgh (USA) experienced an 'outpouring of the Spirit' with Spirit baptism and speaking-in-tongues. The movement grew quickly and Charismatic prayer groups spread rapidly to other Catholic universities and eventually to the Catholic parishes in the USA and across the borders to Catholics worldwide, including Latin America. The spread of the CCR within the different countries in Latin America at the beginning of the 1970's followed a pattern: It was generally introduced by North American priests, mostly Jesuit and Dominican, who, by invitation from interested local bishops or influential priests, arranged 'Life in the Spirit' retreats. Here the participants were introduced to the Charismatic signs, such as speaking-in-tongues, faith healing and the experience of Spirit Baptism. After their initiation, priests and nuns spread the movement to Catholic educational institutions and from there to the parishes (Chesnut 2003:67-69). After this introduction by clerics and religious sisters, the movement rapidly became distinctively lay-borne, and although it is still supervised by priests, it works with an impressive degree of independence.<sup>2</sup> Today there are around 100 million Charismatic Catholics in Latin America, but there is great uncertainty

about the number. This is due to the gradual spread of Charismatic practices to other Catholic lay groups and the mushrooming of Charismatic prayer groups not attached to the CCR.<sup>3</sup> In countries like Brazil and Guatemala up to fifty percent of Catholics have been defined as Charismatics (Pew Forum 2006:60-80) and although these numbers are most probably exaggerated, they tell us about the scope of the movement, which is today – by far – the biggest lay movement in the Catholic Church.

The core of Charismatic spirituality is not primarily a distinctive theology or understanding of the Scripture, but the concrete and very joyful and ecstatic experience of the divine through different religious practices, mostly carried out in the religious community. There are five traits that characterize a Charismatic prayer meeting: First, the vivid and rhythmic songs of praise (*alabanzas*) that open the assembly and are accompanied by palm clapping and arm waving. The second is the vivid oral character of prayers, preaching and individual testimonies, which are carried out with great pathos in a popular language. A third feature is Spirit baptism, which is a type of religious trance where worshippers experience the reception of the Holy Spirit after often intensive intercessory prayer and laying on of hands by fellow believers. Faith healing of physical and psychological distresses is another component, which cannot be underestimated in a Latin American context. It is carried out in the same way as Spirit baptism and is often combined with it. The last characteristic element is speaking-in-tongues during sessions of prayer, which is less prominent in Catholic Charismatic groups than in classical Pentecostal churches. The same applies to receiving and speaking words of prophecy (Zimmerling 2002:37, 85-87, 253, 271-279).

Charismatic Catholic spirituality and practice is thus characterized by its focus on the experiential and ecstatic elements in Christianity that either play a minor role or are absent in traditional Catholicism and Protestantism. Similar to Pentecostalism, the essence of Charismatic spirituality is an experience of a ‘personal encounter with Jesus’, and prayer meetings revolve around receiving, and reviving this encounter, rejoicing in it, and applying it to challenges of daily life. Like Pentecostalism, Charismatic Catholicism is passionate and joyful, the ecstatic and mystical self-delivery to God lies at the heart of its spirituality and is often articulated in a quasi-erotic language.<sup>4</sup> If it was not for the abovementioned statue of the Virgin Mary and the Marian devotional acts, the Catholic Charismatic prayer meeting is almost indistinguishable from a Pentecostal service. The

prayer groups are also healing communities, where the wounds of broken relationships, addictions, and physical and psychological abuses are laid open, cured in the communal prayer and intercession, and testified about for the spiritual edification of group and individual. The importance of this function, which constitutes another similarity with the Pentecostal churches, cannot be overestimated. Finally, Charismatics are highly missionary: They stress the need for personal conversion of all baptized Catholics. They arrange revival rallies and organize door-to-door mission campaigns. Charismatics stress the sinfulness of society and popular culture, which is seen as plagued by immorality. Charismatics work for a thorough change of society through the moral conversion of individual hearts. Within the Catholic Church they conceive themselves as 'truly' Catholic as compared to the many Catholics who practice their faith with less intensity and without the same moral rigor (Chesnut 2003:89; Thorsen 2012:168). With this basic information in place, let us turn to Weber's classical sociology of religion and its interpretation and further elaboration by Bourdieu.

### III. IDEAL RELIGIOUS TYPES

In the section dedicated to the sociology of religion in Weber's monumental *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Eng: *Economy and Society*) published posthumously in 1921, Weber presents three ideal types of religious experts: The priest, the prophet and the sorcerer/magician, who influence and characterize religious life (1976:260). Before describing them in detail, Weber's notion and use of ideal types need explanation. Ideal types are general embracing concepts that furnish a conceptual framework into which all individual cases can be brought for analysis. In his presentation of Weber's ideal types, Daniel L. Pals contrasts them with generalizations in natural science, which are identified by a single common trait or characteristic. Whereas a generalization is a minimum qualification, an ideal type is almost the opposite; it is a purposeful exaggeration, which does not exist in its pure form in reality but whose breadth allows us to compare phenomena across time and place (2006:156). Weber himself used them not just in his study of religion, but throughout his wide-ranging work. Ideal types do not only describe arch type institutions and persons (such as 'the priest') but also processes of change and transformation, such as 'disenchantment' in the process of secularization. Weber's ideal types are best understood as interpretive

categories that provide us with the tools for framing comparisons and explaining actions (2006:157).

Let us then examine Weber's ideal religious types in theory. Though the different types – magician, priest and prophet – are regarded as ever present, their influences vary considerably and a certain evolutionary element is present for Weber: The development of organized religion (priesthood) from magic is the result of a process of urbanization and rationalization. It is furthermore important to emphasize that in real life the limits between the three types are fluid and overlapping (1976:259).

The first ideal type is “the magician” or “the sorcerer” (*der Zauberer*), who is the basic religious expert in all societies; he (or she) is an individual who is regarded as religiously talented (‘charisma-gifted’), i.e. having privileged access to the supernatural world by managing mechanisms of religious ecstasy or by the ability to manipulate the spirits through rituals. The skills of the magician are requested for many purposes: healing of illness, securing of a successful hunt or an abundant harvest, or other physical and material needs that an individual or a community might have (Pals 2006:166; Weber 1976:246). The magician does not have any formal education, nor is (s)he a guardian of a well-defined belief-system; (s)he is a skilled and pragmatic navigator in the spiritual field and is paid for the services provided. The magician does not uphold a regular cult, but (s)he operates on an ad-hoc basis (Weber 1976:260).

The second ideal type, ‘the priest’, is distinguished from the magician in various ways. The priest performs the regular cult honoring the gods on behalf of society, whereas the magician manipulates the demons for a concrete individual purpose. Priestly authority is bound to the office, not to individual charisma. The priest holds a formal education and propagates a well-defined theology (i.e. a rationalization of the metaphysical conceptions) and a set of ethical teachings. Since the priesthood is often originally developed from a guild of magicians/sorcerers it will often contain many magical aspects, which have nevertheless been standardized and ritualized (Weber 1976:259-260). If the priesthood does not stem from the magicians, it might also be the outcome of a process of ‘routinization of charisma’ (another Weberian ideal type) of ‘the prophet’, to whom we will now turn (Pals 2006:157).

‘The prophet’ is a gifted individual who experiences himself to be called by God or the gods to proclaim His/their will to the world. With divine authority, the prophet either proclaims a new revelation or

the renewal or purification of an existing tradition (Weber 1976:268). His emotional preaching will present a coherent sensuous teaching or systematic theology, and challenge the authority of both priests and magicians. The prophet will demand listeners to take a stand towards his teaching and gather a community of disciples and followers around himself, who adhere to his doctrines and strong ethical demands on life conduct (1976:275). Like the magician, the prophet's authority is bound to personal charisma, not to an office or order, but some characteristics distinguish them from each other. The prophet primarily proclaims a divine message with contents and commands, the magician merely manipulates the demons. The prophet is an idealist and does not receive any payment or priestly salary, the magician charges customers for his services. That said, the categories are fluid, and many prophets possess a magic charisma as well, the best example being Jesus of Nazareth, who exorcises demons and heals with spit and mud, as referred to in Mark 7:24-37. The difference is that the magical acts of the prophet point to his preaching and are conducted in order to substantiate the teaching (1976:269, 271). When the prophet dies, his followers will try to keep his charisma alive and secure the survival of his message. In this process a socialization of the disciples will begin, where the members develop fixed rights and duties within their group. A community is about to be built, and as the routinization of the prophet's charisma continues, the disciples can eventually evolve into a new priesthood (1976:275-276).

#### IV. THE RELIGIOUS FIELD

Bourdieu starts out from Weber's theory, but shifts the focus from the ideal types to the relations between them, a theme merely hinted at by Weber (Bourdieu 2006:120; Weber 1976:261).<sup>5</sup> According to Bourdieu, we can best understand what a priest, a magician and a prophet is if we look at their internal struggle and competition for 'religious capital' in 'the religious field'. Here we meet two core concepts from Bourdieu's general sociological theory, which must be explained before we proceed. Bourdieu understands the field as a space of action in which agents and institutions struggle over the production and consumption of a form of capital. In this struggle or competition, the position of the agents in the field places them in a structured relationship with one another in which capital is produced, pursued, consumed and accumulated (Rey 2007:44). Fields can be relatively autonomous in relation to the wider society, and will often have their own rules, ways of domination and legitimate ways of

expression. The field of art is structured differently from the field of politics or the field of religion. 'Capital' is another broad notion in Bourdieu's thought and covers not just economic capital, but also social and cultural capital. Cultural capital is for example education and language skills, whereas social capital represents the value of a person's networks or membership of a specific group (e.g. the nobility). Economic capital is self-explanatory. Apart from these three types there is symbolic capital, which is not in itself another form of capital, but appears when one of the three is recognized as a value by other agents within a specific field (Bourdieu 1998:108). To provide an example: money does not provide an agent with symbolic capital within the field of avant-garde literature, but poetic skills and profound knowledge of art and literature do. Religious capital is a complex whole of symbolic systems (myths and ideologies) and religious competencies (mastery of practices and bodies of knowledge), which the Church both manages and seeks to maintain a steady demand for among the laity, as Terry Rey sums up by citing Bradford Verter (Rey 2007:94).

Bourdieu understands Weber's religious ideal types as agents in the religious field who stand in a structured relationship to one another and to a fourth category, the laity, whose attention, affection, loyalty and money they compete for. The goal for the agents is to secure or define "the monopoly of the legitimate exercise of the power to modify, in a deep and lasting fashion, the practice and worldview of lay people" (Bourdieu 2006:126). They try to inform, shape and control the religious 'habitus' of people, depending on the power and position that each agent occupies within the religious field.<sup>6</sup> This power depends on the transactions between agent and lay people: All the power that the various religious agents hold over the lay people and all the authority they possess in the relations of competition that develop amongst them can be explained in terms of the structure of the relations of symbolic power between religious agents and the various categories of lay people over whom that power is exercised (2006:129).

The priest enjoys the authority of the office and the material and symbolic power of the institutional church. He does not have to legitimize himself since his authority comes by virtue of his position. The institutional church can punish people by excommunication, whereby they use their social and moral weight in an immense panoply of symbolic power. The prophet, on the other hand, has to win his authority continuously from his surroundings, using his

charisma in a confrontation with the established tradition and by the use of anathema and appeal to his own divinely sanctioned authority – “You have heard ..., but I say to you” (Bourdieu 2006:128). Bourdieu rejects Weber’s notion of charisma as a ‘gift of grace’ unexplainably bestowed on individuals. Instead of this psycho-sociological theory of charisma, Bourdieu argues that the charisma is the outcome of the relationship between the followers and the prophet, where the prophet can embody, represent and give voice to the feelings and aspirations that existed prior to his arrival (2006:130). A prophet is thus an individual who is socially predisposed to live out and express dispositions (religious, political, ethical) that are already present in a latent state amongst his addressees (2006:131).

The sorcerer/magician does not directly compete in the struggle between prophet and priest about the right worldview. Since (s)he is not concerned with a systematic interpretation of the world, but dedicates himself/herself to solving concrete problems for customers who have a magico-religious interest. Bourdieu does not only describe magic religion as the most primitive or essential form of religiosity, but often also as the remnant of a former religion suppressed by a prophetic movement and subsequent church. Both priest and prophet will look with disdain on the primitive, un-learned magician and the primitive mechanisms (s)he applies to manipulate the former gods, now labeled as ‘demons’ by the new religious establishment. The practice of the magician is denounced as primitive, superstitious and as ‘folk religion’ (2006:128). Magic is not taken seriously by the other two competitors, and the magician is content with operating semi-clandestinely; his/her ambitions are neither converts nor expansion.

The main religious competition is therefore between priests and prophets, where there exists an almost dialectical relationship. The prophets are ‘initial producers’ of a systematic worldview and are counterposed by the agencies of reproduction, the church and its priesthood (2006:127). The prophet represents discontinuity, the priest continuity, and hence they are in opposition, while at the same time, part of the same religious field. The prophet is exceptional and discontinuous; the priest has a rational and routinized approach to religion. The outcome of the competition between prophet and priest depends on both the symbolic force and the strength of the groups mobilized by either, as a result “[a]ll outcomes are possible, from the physical suppression of the prophet to the annexation of the prophecy, with a whole range of possible compromise solutions in between” (2006:131-132). In case the movement of the prophet survives, either

eradicating the old priesthood or by insertion into it, a process of prophecy-conservation begins. For, if the message of the prophet is to survive the initial stage and the person, it is necessary for “prophecy to die as prophecy, i.e. as a message breaking with routine and contesting the accepted order, for it to survive in the priesthood’s doctrinal corpus, where it becomes the daily small-change of the original rich fund of charisma” (2006:127).

The symbolic power of a religious agent depends on the amount of religious capital (s)he is able to produce and negotiate within the field. The more extensive the volume of transactions between an agent and the laity is, the greater the ability of an agent to modify (in a deep lasting fashion) the practice and worldview of lay people; i.e. the greater the power and the more important the position of the agent in the religious field. By looking primarily at the structural relationship between the agents in the field, Bourdieu wants to raise the analysis from an inter-actionist or interpersonal level to a structural level. In that way he wants to evade Weber’s endless concrete descriptions of variations of and deviations from the ideal types and to capture some general principles that define the concrete interaction of the actors (2006:121-122).

Bourdieu’s theory about the religious field has found many critics. Here I shall only mention one objection that has relevance for this article and must be taken into account. A major criticism has been that his ‘theory of religion’ is first and foremost a ‘theory of Catholicism’ because his way of presenting the religious field as constituted primarily of religious specialists and institutions confronting a consuming laity mirrors the traditional relationship between the Catholic laity and the powerful all-embracing institution of the Roman Catholic Church. Since this study is not interested in a theory of religion per se and is studying a phenomenon within the Catholic Church, one could object, this criticism would not be an obstacle – almost on the contrary. It is nevertheless, because if Bourdieu’s theory is a ‘theory of Catholicism’, it would be necessary to specify, and label it ‘a theory of North Atlantic mid-twentieth-century Catholicism’ as it was found in Europe and North America prior to and in the first three decades after the Second Vatican Council, where a strong Catholic institution was a monopolistic sole provider of religious goods in religiously homogenous societies or communities. In many Latin American countries the situation was slightly different, because the institutional church had been severely weakened after the independence from Spain and Portugal, when the

number of priests was decimated due to the expulsion of Spanish clergy and the prohibition of various religious orders by new liberal governments (Schwaller 2011:117). Catholicism survived because of – sometimes slightly heterodox – folk religiosity, not because of a strong institutional Church. The first relevant criticism of Bourdieu's theory comes from Daniele Hervieu-Léger and Cristián Parker, and its basic point of attack is that Bourdieu suffers from a reductionism that does not give voice to and does not acknowledge the creative religious agency of the laity (Rey 2007:124). The lay Catholics in Latin America, and probably everywhere, are not only consumers of religious goods in a market or field, they are also producers of those goods (2007:125; Parker1996:239). We should thus rather look at the complex interplay between laity and institution, where religious authority and popular practices meet and are negotiated between actors in the field. In Latin American Catholicism for example, both popular Marian devotions and the recent rising Charismatic wave are popular phenomena of which the Church is not entirely in charge, rather the institution makes efforts to control, guide and take possession of the phenomena in a complex interplay with the laity.

## V. THE RELIGIOUS FIELD IN LATIN AMERICA

After this introduction to the sociologies of religion of Weber and Bourdieu, let us try to identify the main religious actors within the religious field in Latin America before we narrow our view down to the CCR and address the theses of this article. For the sake of clarity we will start by making a small leap back in time and describe the religious landscape of the continent around 1950, before the great reforms of the Catholic Church in connection with the Second Vatican Council and the Medellín conference (1968), before the explosion of Latin American Evangelical Pentecostalism and before the age of major social unrest, civil wars, and military dictatorships.

Six decades ago, the Catholic Church and its ministers would have made a perfect example of a priestly religion. In most countries, the Church had a de facto monopoly. Latin America was *the* Catholic continent, and almost the entire population was baptized and hence at least nominally Catholic. In spite of more than a century of tensions with (and sometimes even persecution by) the new independent Latin American states, the Catholic Church remained deeply attached to the states and elites in the hemisphere. No school, hospital or bridge would be inaugurated without the presence of and blessing by a Catholic cleric (Levine 2009:405). Priests had received a formal

education and training that enabled them to celebrate mass (in Latin), grant absolution to the confessing sinner, conduct the proper burial ritual for the deceased and teach the catechism of the Church to new generations. Priests held their authority through their ordination and their attachment to the Church institution, not through personal charisma. Though Latin America was still overwhelmingly Catholic in 1950, the monopoly of the Roman church had been broken in most countries already in the last decades of the nineteenth century, when religious freedom was introduced nearly everywhere. In the beginning, only the traditional Protestant denominations (Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican) made use of the new freedom to establish churches for migrants from Northern Europe. These were not outwardly missionary and hence their presence did not cause much controversy with the Catholic public (González 2008:184). But from the beginning of the twentieth century onwards, Evangelical churches and mission companies established missions throughout Latin America aimed at converting as many Catholics as possible (2008:206).

According to Bourdieu, prophetic movements thrive in periods of social and cultural change, which can help explain why Protestantism could grow as explosively as it has in Latin America within a few generations (2006:130). Today around 15 per cent of all Latin Americans are Protestants, most of the Evangelical-Pentecostal type (Barrett 2001:387). The Evangelical churches, which quickly passed the missionaries into local hands, displayed and continue to display many of the characteristics of a prophetic religion: They challenge the claim of the Catholic Church and its priests to stand as intermediaries between God and the world. They offer another Christian worldview, which stresses the need for personal conversion and a personal relationship with God. Last but not least, they provide another way of interpreting Scripture and they introduce a new ritual practice centered on preaching and the personal experience (often through ecstatic practices) rather than the symbolic rituals of mass. As true prophetic movements, Evangelical churches adhere to higher moral standards than the surrounding society, and they expect their members to distance themselves from so-called worldly practices, such as drinking, smoking, dancing and promiscuous behavior. Evangelicals deny the religious authority of the Catholic Church and its clergy and they renounce the public Catholic celebrations and *fiestas*, which they refuse to take part in. Instead they claim to be the true communicators of the divine message and demonstrate great

missionary effort to proclaim eternal salvation for those who convert, and eternal damnation for those who remain ignorant and unrepentant Catholics (Martin 1990; Cleary 1992; Chesnut 1997). Evangelical preachers accuse Catholic priests of being worldly, half-hearted, unconverted religious custodians of an outdated, corrupt and idolatrous church, and Catholic priests, on the other hand, regard Protestant preachers as being fanatic zealots, who are financed by North American capitalist interests (Smith 1998). The attitude of Evangelical churches and the Catholic Church has therefore been one of antagonism. Over the years, the Evangelical churches have organized countless mission campaigns, attacking Catholic doctrine and attempting to convert Catholics to the Evangelical faith. The attitude of the Catholic Church towards Evangelicals, on the other hand, has been shifting over the years. One can identify three phases, ignorance, refutation and competition, which have obviously been overlapping: When Protestants still constituted a tiny minority, the Catholic Church could allow itself to largely ignore the new religious player. When Protestants became more numerous in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, Catholic priests and theologians began to publish books and pamphlets that would point out the doctrinal error of Evangelical teaching and refute Evangelical accusations against the Catholic Church, e.g. of being idolatrous when revering the saints. One of the things that can explain why the Catholic Church did not apply a strong public discourse of excommunication and eternal damnation towards the missionary Evangelicals, who were in constant poaching among the Catholic masses, was that the global Catholic Church had adopted a decisive ecumenical line at the Second Vatican Council. Unlike the historical and more liberal Protestant denominations, most Pentecostals rejected ecumenical initiatives, and hence the dialogue died before it began. Catholics who entered into missionary competition with the Evangelicals began to call them 'sects' and reserved the term 'separate brethren' for the numerically insignificant old traditional Protestant denominations (Chesnut 2003:84). In the last phase, from the 1990s and until today, the Catholic Church has attempted to curb the growth of Evangelical churches by adapting many of the Protestant expressions and mission strategies, while giving them an explicit Catholic appearance: Catholic lay missionaries carry out door-to-door missions, godparents and soon-to-weds are obliged to take courses before being admitted to the sacraments. The bishops increasingly speak of the need for Catholics to have a 'personal encounter with Jesus' and look down on customary religion

and folk Catholicism (CELAM DA: verse 12, verse 226). Catholic prayer groups sway to the same *alabanzas* as Pentecostals. The CCR embodies this development and we shall return to it below. First, we need to take a closer look at the third religious stream in Latin America: Magic religion and the magico-religious experts.

Magic religion in Latin America is here understood as the vast hotchpotch of popular religion, superstition, witchcraft, pre-Columbian and Afro-Caribbean practices, that have been living semi-clandestinely right below the surface of the public sphere. Wise women, *curanderos*, witches performing 'black' and 'white' magic are the religious experts within this popular religious stream, which offer their services to all social layers of Latin American societies. Until the rise of Evangelical Christianity, magic religion could live a tacit life as long as it kept itself out of the limelight (Chesnut 2003:19). The Catholic Church, which held the official religious monopoly, would obviously despise its practices and wrinkle its nose at such 'primitive' religious *do ut des*-practices. But since this religious stream did not compete with the Church or challenge its authority, and since the practices of popular Catholicism (e.g. *ex-votos* to the saints) would overlap and coincide with the magico-religious stream, the Church and its priestly agents mostly adopted a paternal forbearing attitude towards what was perceived as naïve and un-enlightened popular religion.

The zealous prophetic Protestants did not take the same permissive attitude, when they entered the religious field. On the contrary, they attacked popular religion for being Satanic and in complete contrast to the pure Evangelical faith. But whereas the Catholic Church would dismiss popular belief in witchcraft and the like as a false naïve consciousness, Evangelicals would confirm the enchanted worldview, which lay behind. Within that worldview they would condemn the Spirits as demons and emphasize Christ and his Spirit as the only legitimate spiritual entity a Christian could adhere to. In rituals of liberation and exorcisms, Pentecostal preachers would drive out the demons that had come to possess victims of witchcraft or previous followers of afro-Caribbean religions and practitioners of witchcraft. While Catholic liberation theologians like Gustavo Gutiérrez and Leonardo Boff wanted to liberate and enlighten people from the belief in spiritual entities, Pentecostals confirmed their existence and powerful influence, while they at the same time equipped their followers with the spiritual tools to combat them (Cox 2006:17; Lehmann 1996).<sup>7</sup>

One could argue that the strength of the Evangelical Pentecostal churches has been their combination of offering a prophetic alternative community, while offering solutions to everyday problems within the magic realm as well (Chesnut 2003:129; Smith 1998:21; Parker 1996:141). This leads us to the CCR, the latest grand Catholic lay movement, which – like the Protestant churches – has grown immensely within a couple of generations.

## **VI. THE CCR AS A CATHOLIC EXPANSION INTO MAGIC AND PROPHECY**

Both the work of Vázquez and Chesnut demonstrates how the CCR represents a revitalization of an enchanted worldview; a world inhabited by angels and demons, where God and Satan struggle for the souls of humans (Vázquez 2007; Chesnut 2003). While such a worldview also was and remains a part of popular Catholicism, it disappeared from modern Catholic theology in the twentieth century and especially from the preaching and pastoral practice inspired by liberation theology, creating a gap between the popular religious views of the world and the one proclaimed from the pulpit. The CCR came to fill this gap, by addressing the daily problems of the common people within a worldview that includes an ample realm of supernatural beings and struggles. These are problems that pious followers of folk Catholicism in earlier times would have sought solution for by vows to saints or by performing pilgrimages or prayers, and which less Church-oriented people continue to seek remedy for by engaging with specialists of magic and witchcraft.

Doña Concha, the lay healer briefly introduced above, led one of the Charismatic prayer groups in Guatemala City, in which I conducted field work in 2009. In that group people from far beyond the barrio would arrive with specific problems for which they needed remedy: alcoholism, physical illnesses (everything from aching hips to cancer), bad family relations, hopeless financial problems and deep psychological traumas. Often people would identify an underlying spiritual problem of having been victims of spells or witchcraft by enemies or jealous relatives, and often Doña Concha and her team of helpers would inquire into the spiritual whereabouts of the person seeking help. Having been in contact with people practicing the occult was often identified as a source of demonic possession. Part of the healing ritual was the liberation from evil spirits and handing over of the person to the spiritual domain of Jesus. All the healings performed by Doña Concha and her group, and all its activities taken together, were understood as a part of an ongoing spiritual battle between God

and Satan and their respective helpers (both human and spiritual). Participants in these healing rituals would witness the drama of the battle, when those receiving healing would be slain to the ground, where they would squirm and often spit and vomit as the demons were driven out. Describing just these rituals in a Catholic Charismatic parish in Yucatán, where they are performed by ordained priests, and comparing these rituals and the role of the priestly healers to descriptions and definitions by Weber, Bronislaw Malinowski and Claude Lévi-Strauss, leads Vázquez to conclude that the Charismatic Renewal is a new way of practicing magic religion, where Catholic pastoral agents adopt the practices and expressions of both Pentecostal pastors and traditional folk religious healers and magicians (2002:69, 77). An argument against labeling Catholic Charismatism as 'magic religion' is that it is unfolded within a well-defined systematic dogmatic understanding of the faith and within a coherent worldview, which characterizes both priestly and prophetic religion. Vázquez describes how priests dedicated to the movement emphasize the ethical and theological side of the movement's practices, but how common followers in the parishes he studies were only interested in the magic aspect, i.e. the solution of concrete immediate personal problems through magic manipulation (2002:80). My fieldwork indicates that although lay people become engaged in the Renewal in order to solve concrete personal problems, they also search for a "systematic message capable of giving a unitary meaning to life" (Bourdieu 2006:124) and become deeply committed to spreading the message. Many common members also identify with the self-understanding of the movement: to become a Catholic elite and counter-culture, with a clear outwardly directed mission against intrusive Pentecostals, inactive Catholics and against the wider 'hedonist' society. There is much more than magic in the CCR (Cleary 2011:241).

The argument of this article is that the CCR equally represents an internal Catholic embrace of prophetic religion. Catholic Charismatics, in general, and Charismatic leaders, in particular, are mostly lay people and they acquire their religious identity through a personal experience of the Holy Spirit in the so-called Spirit Baptism. Although ordained clergy sometimes form part of the movement, such as in the parish described by Vázquez, the CCR is characterized by being a lay movement. The authority of its preachers and healers is thus not connected to a church-institutional education and ordination, but is built on a God-given charisma, which is recognized as such by

fellow Charismatics. They expose many of the characteristics of what Bourdieu terms prophetic discourse, i.e. the proclamation of a (re)new(ed) doctrine, a new set of moral standards, a new prophetic fellowship that constitutes a counter-cultural stream to that of the surrounding society and a critique of the worldliness of fellow non-Charismatic Catholics (Bourdieu 2006:127). On the other hand, one could rightly object, that the CCR lacks the most central characteristic in order to be classified as prophetic in the Weberian sense, namely a prophet, who leads a community in a radical break with the given religious tradition. Jesus was a prophet, and Muhammad was, but Martin Luther was not according to Weber (Weber 1976:334). Nevertheless, I will argue that it makes sense to speak of the CCR as a prophetic movement, since it *nolens volens* constitutes a break with the priestly religion of Roman Catholicism with its emphasis on direct personal empowerment through Spirit Baptism, a personal knowledge and experience of God, and a new radical ethic and missionary engagement towards the surrounding world that – taken together – has severely challenged the priestly authority and monopoly of the clergy.

The first and obvious question is why the Catholic hierarchy has permitted (and lately even endorsed) the rise of internal 'prophetism', which could potentially challenge the authority of the ordained holders of priestly office. According to Bourdieu's rule of thumb, a priestly institution will show unconditional hostility towards prophets, who it will condemn and expel as heretics (2006:131). In the early history of the Charismatic movement in Latin America in the 1970s, many bishops and priests actually tried to oppose the Charismatic Renewal; conservative bishops because they saw an erosion of priestly authority, and liberation-oriented bishops because they saw the Charismatic focus on the spiritual as a neo-conservative mumbo-jumbo aimed at distracting the Church from its newfound and hard-fought attention to this-worldly justice and human development (Chesnut 2003:72; Cleary 2007:165). The opposition of the hierarchy and the exclusivist self-understanding of some Charismatic lay people led to many splits within the Church in the first decade of the Renewal, where prayer groups and so-called covenant communities split away from the Church and formed independent Charismatic and Pentecostal congregations. For several reasons this situation was precarious, both for the CCR and for the bishops. The majority of CCR-members had no desire at all to break with their Church and the bishops, who were confronted with a decimation of the Catholic membership due to rapidly growing and heavily missionary

Pentecostal churches, and could not afford to lose the active and engaged Charismatic parishioners. Probably inspired by Pope John Paul II's embrace of the CCR and his strategic appointment of the Virgin Mary as the movement's patron saint, Latin American bishops' conferences one by one officially approved the movement throughout the 1980s. These approvals were always explicitly linked to the condition of Charismatic loyalty and obedience to the hierarchy (Chesnut 2003; CEG 1986). The strategy worked, and today the prophetic Charismatic stream flows alongside the institutional Catholic Church, carefully directing its urgent and insisting call for conversion and renewal to everyone except the priests and bishops of the Church. Charismatics have their own preaching ministries, music services, healing rallies and media activities in a quasi-parallel ecclesiastical structure, but they are generally careful not to interfere with regular parish structures and worship. On the contrary, Charismatics are eager participants at mass and are even more eager to contribute economically to the notoriously underfinanced parishes and dioceses in Latin America than their non-Charismatic brethren (Cleary 2011:264).

The reason why this *modus vivendi* is possible, is that it is beneficial to both the Church and the Renewal movement. The bishops create a buffer between the Catholic Church and the Pentecostal proselytizers, a Catholic Pentecostal movement that offers the same religious product, and hence allows people to experience and practice the same Spirit-centered and ecstatic form of Christianity as the Evangelicals, without having to leave the Catholic Church. The CCR leans on the theological and ecclesiastical authority of the Church, and can hence with confidence reach out to many Catholics, who for various reasons would never even consider leaving the Roman Catholic Church. The tacit compromise between the CCR and the Church hierarchy, between prophetic movement and priestly caste, is one of the possible outcomes of a situation of rivalry sketched by Weber (1976:279), and the most probable reason for a compromise in this situation is that both parties have by far more to gain by endorsing it. But the mutual embrace of movement and institution has not been without consequences for any of them, which we shall address below.

## VII. LOSS OF PRIESTLY AUTHORITY

Just as the rise of prophetic Evangelism and competition for religious legitimacy has broken the Catholic "monopoly of the legitimate exercise of the power to modify, in a deep and lasting

fashion, the practice and world-view of lay people” in Latin America (Bourdieu 2006:126), so has the internal rise and flourishing of the CCR with its many local leaders, gifted preachers and locally reputed healers seriously challenged the priestly monopoly *within* the Church. The Catholic Church has become increasingly polyphonic: Catholic Charismatic lay ministries, communities and media announce their messages as frankly and outspokenly as their Evangelical counterparts. They organize healing rallies in soccer stadiums, *alabanza* concerts, and retreats without necessarily involving the institutional Church; they invite priests and bishops and are honored by their presence, but Charismatics occupy the spaces that have been granted them in the church life with an utmost degree of independence. There is not one, but a whole range of Catholic voices in Latin America today, and the times of episcopal monopoly are over.

Although the Charismatic Catholic voices do not contradict those of the official Church, they emphasize certain aspects of the faith more than in traditional Catholicism: the urgent need of personal conversion and moral restoration, the experience of a personal encounter with Jesus and the turn-away from the sinfulness of the world and mundane culture. It is a specific religious and confessional message directed at Catholics. Whereas the Catholic bishops always direct their public addresses at the whole of society (expressed in the term 'to all people of good will') and attempt to speak to all for all, emphasizing the interconnectedness between Latin American cultures and Catholicism, the Charismatic sector stresses the difference between the faithful and the surrounding society. A good example of this could be provided by comparing two different ways of manifesting the Catholic faith in public. In traditional Latin American Catholicism, processions and *posadas* are a typical way of extending the Church into the surrounding society: A specific saint, a Christ-figure or the monstrance with consecrated host is taken out of the church room and is carried through the streets of the parish, whereby the connection between church and the surrounding culture is emphasized. Charismatics, on the other hand, stage street missions, where a preacher and an *alabanza*-band go out into a public square to preach a message of conversion to the passers-by. From this perspective the world outside the church-door is viewed as a missionary field rather than a prolongation of the Church. The procession is an example of priestly religion, the open-air street mission is an example of the prophetic.

The question is: How does the introduction of new prophetic Catholic voices and magic-like practices result in what is here termed the 'loss of priestly authority' of the Catholic Church? In two ways, I would suggest. First, the polyphony of Catholic voices has broken the monopoly of priests and bishops to represent the Church to the general public, which has created a more heterogeneous picture of the Catholic faith. Second, and more important, after forty years of Charismatic Renewal within the Church and a Pentecostal boom outside the Church, the bishops are becoming increasingly influenced by a Charismatic theology and practice. One example: In May 2007 the Latin American Bishops (CELAM) held their 5th general conference in Aparecida (Brazil), where they issued a final document, which attempts to give an analysis of the cultural, political and economic situation of Latin America, an analysis of the state of the Church and to lay out a pastoral strategy for the coming decade. The bishops' descriptions of an increasingly pluralist and secular Latin America express a strong tendency towards cultural pessimism, and the strong bonds between Church and society, which earlier CELAM conferences had praised, is downplayed (CELAM DA 2007: verse 44). To counter the cultural tendencies towards secularization and relativism, the bishops launch a 'Great Continental Mission' and the Aparecida Document (DA) declares the Church to be 'in permanent mission' (CELAM DA: "Message"). The aim is to transform all baptized Catholics into "disciples and missionaries" through a "personal encounter with Jesus Christ", which is explained as "a profound and intense religious experience, [...] that leads to a personal conversion and to a thorough change of life" (CELAM DA: verse 226). The bishops express the need for a new Pentecost, and state that "with the fire of the Spirit we will inflame our Continent" (CELAM DA: "Message").

The language applied by the bishops in Aparecida tends towards being what Bourdieu terms a 'prophetic discourse', which is significantly different from the priestly paternal tone, which the Catholic Church normally uses. By applying it, the bishops want to awaken their flock, to create new enthusiasm and to draw a clear line between those who are within the Church and those who are outside. This might be a sign of the shift in the role of the CCR in the Church in Latin America: While the bishops' acceptance of the movement in the 1980s was governed by a strategic and pragmatic effort to keep the unfamiliar movement inside the walls of the Roman church, today's bishops are influenced by the same CCR and are beginning to adopt

Charismatic language and priorities (Chesnut 2003:97; Thorsen 2012:192).

The Continental Mission is currently being implemented in different countries. In Guatemala for instance, many parishes are carrying out door-to-door missions. This strategy is not without risk: By knocking on doors and urging the need of personal conversion, the Church runs the risk of alienating common Church members who are reluctant to adopt the missionary expression of the faith. When talking to non-Charismatic and occasionally practicing Catholics during my fieldwork, I often encountered statements such as: *Mucho aleluya ya en la iglesia* (“[Too] much hallelujah now in the Church”) (Thorsen 2012:129). The backside of the coin of the missionary efforts by the Church might be dissociation by baptized Catholics, who cannot identify themselves with the agenda of religious awakening. Along with secularization, it could be a contributing reason for the rise in the number of Latin Americans who identify themselves as having ‘no religion’ or as being ‘Catholic – [who] Doesn’t Follow Rules’.<sup>8</sup> Applying the language of Bourdieu, one could say that the Catholic attempt at putting a curb on external prophetic and magic pressures on the priestly institution by permitting an internal rise of both prophetic and magico-religious discourse and practices is a double-edged sword: It prevents some from drifting into the arms of the Pentecostal churches, while it alienates those Catholics who are strangers to the language of mission and revival.

The CCR started as a grass root phenomenon frowned upon among bishops and theologians. When challenged by Evangelical Pentecostalism, Catholic bishops reluctantly and strategically accepted the movement as a response, which one generation later has become so extensive that it influences the pastoral priorities of today’s bishops. By adopting both the prophetic discourse and the magic practices of the CCR into main stream church life, the Catholic Church is beginning to give up its elevated status as a predominantly priestly religion and the civic religious guarantor of society. This status might be eroding already as a result of increased secularization, and hence the pastoral strategy of the Church, as the one expressed in Aparecida, might be a tactically wise step in order to secure the Church for the future. But by applying a prophetic discourse, the Church also risks alienating those who are unwilling to embrace the radical prophetic preaching and those who feel estranged by ecstatic practices. Right now, the Church appears to be balancing between a priestly and a prophetic self-understanding, but the mere fact that the

CCR plays such a significant role in contemporary church life, indicates that the times when Catholicism was a common cultural-religious frame are over, and that Catholicism will increasingly be one denomination among others in the religiously pluralist Latin American societies.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Original title: *Los Sacerdotes del Movimiento de Renovación Carismática en el Espíritu Santo. ¿Brujos, Magos o Hechiceros Profesionales?* (Vázquez, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> A more detailed historical account of the introduction of the movement to the individual Latin American countries has been given by Cleary (2007), Chesnut (2003: Chapter 4) and Henri Gooren (2010) and shall not be repeated here.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion about the number of Charismatics in Latin America and of the different ways to categorize Charismatic Catholics, see Thorsen (2012: chapter 2).

<sup>4</sup> O'Neill (2010). O'Neill addresses the quasi-erotic language of a neo-Pentecostal youth group in Guatemala City. I find direct parallels to the language used in some of the Charismatic groups I studied.

<sup>5</sup> Apart from Bourdieu's own articles on religion, I rely on Terry Rey's introduction "Bourdieu on Religion" (Rey, 2007) and on an article about Bourdieu's concept of the religious field by Lene Kühle (2009).

<sup>6</sup> A person's habitus is best described as a system of constant and changeable dispositions that function as a general frame for the individual's way of experience, thinking and acting. The habitus both describes the person's position in a given social field and his/her individual mental position. The habitus will shape the individuals' lifestyle. What, where and how (s)he eats, which sports (s)he engages in and how (s)he lives his/her religious life. It decides what is perceived as 'good taste' and what is 'vulgar' or 'kitsch'. The habitus is shared by the social group to which the individual belongs, it therefore serves as a marker of social distinction (Bourdieu 1998:18-22).

<sup>7</sup> In his classic *Liberation Theology*, Gustavo Gutiérrez claims that the project of liberation theology is among other things, always one of demythologization and secularization of the world, since this allows humans to face the problems of an 'adult world' (2008:42).

<sup>8</sup> More than a quarter of Salvadorans identify with the category "Catholic – Doesn't follow the Rules" (Hagopian 2009:58, note 22). In the metropolitan area of Santiago de Chile, the same category is adhered to by 29.2 per cent of the population, while 13.9 per cent describe themselves as "Believers without religion" (Parker 2009:143).

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