

A Preferential Option for the Spirit:
The Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Latin America's New Religious Economy*

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While Base Christian Communities (CEBs) struggle to maintain a presence throughout Latin America, a contemporaneous Catholic movement easily fills soccer stadiums in the major cities of the region with tens of thousands of fervent believers. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) stands as the largest and most dynamic movement in the Latin American church. Even leaders of the liberationist wing of the Catholic church, who often view Charismatics as alienated middle-class reactionaries, admit that no other ecclesial movement has the CCR's power to congregate and mobilize the faithful. In Brazil the CCR's popular appeal is not limited to the realm of the sacred. In 1999 the latest CD of samba-inspired religious music sung by the young star of the Brazilian CCR, Padre Marcelo Rossi, sold more copies than any other recording artist, including So Pra Contrariar (an immensely popular *pagode* band), in Latin America's largest country.¹

At this point many readers with some acquaintance with the Latin American religious landscape must be wondering why the region's most vibrant Catholic lay movement has received precious little academic attention. If the CCR's popular appeal has yet to register among students of Latin American religion, it is because Liberation Theology and CEBs have captured the hearts and minds of many North and Latin American social scientists during the past quarter century. Adopting a "preferential option for the poor" and attempting to build the Kingdom of Heaven on Latin American soil through radical political and social transformation proved far more appealing to many scholars than a socially disengaged movement dedicated to transforming individual lives through conversion to Jesus. Moreover, as Brazilian sociologist Maria das Dores Machado has pointed out, many scholars of Latin American religion have ties to the progressive sectors of the Catholic church and/or ecumenical movements in the region and are less interested in religious groups that tend to be sectarian and politically conservative.

Academic sympathies aside, however, the Charismatic Renewal demands scholarly attention due to its extraordinary appeal among Catholic laity and its unanimous approval by national episcopacies. If the perennial shortage of priests has eased somewhat in the last two decades and if the Catholic church is finally employing mass media, especially television, as a tool for evangelization, it is due to the Charismatics, whose missionary zeal rivals their chief competitors in the religious marketplace, the Pentecostals. Thus this article will focus on analyzing the reasons for the Renewal's rapid growth in Ibero-America among Catholic laity and its approval and promotion among the episcopacy. In attempting to explicate the CCR's success, the major historical trends during the movement's three-decade existence will also be examined.

Pentecostal Catholics

Although the CCR manifests diverse local and national characteristics, it is a Catholic lay movement that seeks to revitalize the church through the power of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. That both U.S. and Latin American Charismatics initially called themselves Pentecostal Catholics is revealing. Catholic Charismatics share the same ecstatic spirituality with Protestant Pentecostals. Like Pentecostals, Catholic Charismatics are pneumatics. That is, the Holy Spirit occupies center stage in the religious praxis of believers. Through baptism in the Holy Spirit individual Charismatics are endowed with gifts of the Spirit such as glossolalia and faith healing. For Charismatics and Pentecostals alike these charismata are powerful and palpable proof of the presence of the Spirit in their lives. In addition to pneumacentrism, Charismatics tend to share, though to a lesser degree, the biblical fundamentalism and asceticism of their Pentecostal progenitors. Of course what most distinguishes Charismatics from other Catholics is their special emphasis on the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. And separating Charismatics from

Pentecostals, particularly in Latin America, are the formers' continued fealty to the pontiff and Virgin Mary. As the CCR has expanded in Latin America, the Virgin has moved from an initially peripheral position in the movement to the center where she now, more than any other element, constitutes the dividing line that separates Charismatics from Pentecostals. During the past decade the CCR has become not only the largest and most vibrant Catholic lay movement in Latin America but also is thriving in parts of Asia and Africa, unsurprisingly in the same regions where Pentecostalism has grown rapidly since the 1950s.

The most recent figures from the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services (ICCRS), the CCR's international headquarters at the Vatican, estimate that some 70 million Catholics belong to the movement in almost two hundred countries (www.iccrs.org/CCR%20worldwide.htm). Latin American Charismatics probably number between 22 and 25 million, accounting for approximately one third of the global total (Comunicado Mensal 4/97). With a charismatic community of between 8 and 10 million, Brazil constitutes the center of gravity of the Latin American CCR. Since less than 10 percent of Brazil's 122 million self-proclaimed Catholics actively participate in church life, it is very likely that at least half of all active Catholics in Brazil are Charismatics. Data for other Latin American countries are lacking, but the CCR is the largest and most active Catholic lay movement in most nations.

Made in the USA

Like Pentecostalism, its Protestant forbear, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is an imported religious product from the United States. In the late 1960s, the same charismatic spirituality that had given birth to Pentecostalism in the first decade of the twentieth century and led to the formation of charismatic communities among mainline Protestants, such as Episcopalians and Presbyterians, in the 1950s and 1960s finally penetrated the U.S. Catholic church. The CCR specifically traces its genesis to the "Duquesne Weekend" in early 1967. During the weekend of February 17 some twenty-five students at Duquesne University (which appropriately was founded by members of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost) in Pittsburgh gathered for a spiritual retreat with two professors who had already experienced baptism in the Holy Spirit under the direction of Presbyterian charismatics. In a weekend of intense prayer and fellowship many of the students were baptized by the Holy Spirit and received charismata, marking the first event in which a group of Catholics experienced Pentecostal spirituality.

From Duquesne the nascent movement spread rapidly to other college campuses, foremost of which were Notre Dame and Michigan State University. During the next decade the Renewal grew rapidly spawning charismatic prayer groups and "covenant communities" in which members sought to develop their spiritual lives in a communal setting. By the mid-1970s the CCR had expanded to the point where it could pack stadiums on its native soil with thousands of Charismatics. In 1974 approximately twenty-five thousand believers attended a CCR international conference at Notre Dame. Three years later in Kansas City some fifty thousand Protestant and Catholic charismatics participated in an ecumenical assembly, which drew extensive press coverage (Soneira 474).

These two events are not only significant for their size but also for two major themes which were underscored at the assemblies. At the Notre Dame convention a mass healing ritual led by Dominican priest, Francis MacNutt propelled the spiritual gift of faith healing to the center of Charismatic religious praxis. Father MacNutt, who already was a pioneer in exporting the CCR to Ibero-America, consolidated his position as a leading proponent of faith healing in the

movement with the publication of his book called *Healing* in 1974 (Bord and Faulkner 93). At the Kansas City gathering it was the ecumenism of the assembly that took center stage. From its inception, the CCR in the U.S. had been strongly ecumenical, particularly with mainline Protestant charismatics (known as Neopentecostals in the U.S.). Many CCR prayer groups included Protestants and even some covenant communities counted “separated brethren” among their ranks.ⁱⁱ Although many, if not most, of the original CCR groups in Latin America were founded by ecumenical pastoral teams, faith healing has proven to be a much more attractive feature than ecumenism south of the Rio Grande.

Mirroring the pattern of Pentecostal expansion to Latin America more than a half-century prior, the CCR was brought to the region by evangelists only a few years after its birth in the city of steel. In this case, Catholic priests, mainly Dominican and Jesuit, exported the CCR to major cities throughout Latin America in the early 1970s. The same Dominican priest, Francis MacNutt, who emerged as a pioneer in faith healing, played a pivotal role in establishing the CCR in several Latin American nations, including Mexico, Colombia, Peru, and Chile, among others. True to the movement’s ecumenism in the U.S., MacNutt’s pastoral team often included North American Protestant ministers (Cleary 215).

Typical of the CCR’s pattern of expansion to Latin America is Guatemala where the movement was invited to demonstrate its novel form of spirituality by Cardinal Casariego. After an aborted attempt by two U.S. religious to introduce the CCR to Guatemala in 1972, Fernando Mancilla, a prominent Guatemalan layman who had been active in the Cursillo and who had adhered to the CCR in Honduras, requested permission to start a Charismatic prayer group in Guatemala City.ⁱⁱⁱ The archdiocese instructed Mancilla to wait and then seized the initiative from lay hands at the end of 1973 when Cardinal Casariego invited Jesuit priest, Harold Cohen of New Orleans to lead a Charismatic retreat in December for a select group of thirty priests. A few months later Monseñor Ricardo Hamm, the head of apostolic movements in the archdiocese, led a similar retreat for religious and laity. In 1974 Father Rodolfo Mendoza founded the first Charismatic prayer group in the country in his parish of La Asuncion in Guatemala City (Delgado 233-240 and Estrada). Already by mid-1974 the archdiocese had created a pastoral service team to supervise the CCR. It was originally headed by auxiliary bishop, Monseñor Jose Pellecer (Estrada).

According to Father Hugo Estrada, the CCR’s current national advisor, the first prayer groups in Guatemala began among the same sectors in the church as in other Latin American countries. Reflecting the CCR’s rarefied birthplace, a U.S. university, the first Catholics to join the movement in Guatemala, Mexico, Brazil and many other Latin American countries tended to be middle and upper middle class believers. Moreover, many of the original lay leaders had been active in the Cursillo movement (Estrada). As in most other Latin American countries, the CCR in Guatemala initially embraced the ecumenism that formed an integral part of the U.S. movement but within a few years it became clear that fraternal relations with Protestant charismatics would not become a salient characteristic of the Renewal in the region.

Whereas in many Latin American nations, such as Mexico and Guatemala, leading bishops took the initiative to invite North American Charismatic priests to introduce the movement to their countries, the CCR was imported to Brazil without official episcopal invitation. Jesuit priest, Edward Dougherty (also from New Orleans) and compatriot Father Harold Rahm were to serve as agents of the Renewal’s expansion to Brazil. Having been baptized in the Holy Spirit at a Charismatic retreat at Michigan State University in early 1969, Father Dougherty felt moved to share the fruits of the CCR in Brazil where he had already served as a missionary. In May he returned to the city of Campinas in the state of Sao Paulo and communicated his newfound

spirituality to his Jesuit confrere, Father Rahm. Conversations with Dougherty, reinforced by the book *Aglow with the Spirit*, impelled Rahm to embrace charismatic spirituality, and within months he was organizing retreats for Catholics in Campinas which he called Prayer Meetings in the Holy Spirit (*Encontros de Oração no Espírito Santo*).

After finishing a degree in theology in Toronto, Father Dougherty returned permanently to Brazil in 1972 and almost immediately with the blessing of a free travel pass on Varig airlines, began flying throughout the vast country to spread the CCR to all corners of the nation. Dougherty's typical course of action in arriving to a new city was to invite a select group of priests and religious to a retreat in which the fundamentals of the new movement were explained. Fervent prayer and fellowship created an intense spiritual climate in which some participants received baptism in the Holy Spirit. Once Dougherty had flown on to another city, the clerics and sisters who had adhered to the Renewal were to become the agents of its expansion in their respective parishes. In the beginning the usual pattern of expansion was for Charismatic priests and religious to invite select lay persons to participate in retreats and prayer groups. As was the case in most other Ibero-American countries, the first Brazilian lay participants tended to be active middle-class Catholics, many having been members of the Cursillo (Dougherty).

Yellow Caution Light from the Bishops

During the Renewal's formative years in the early and mid-1970s the most common position adopted by the Latin American episcopacies was one of critical tolerance. Most individual bishops who took a public stand on the movement followed their U.S. counterparts and the pope who had both given the Renewal a yellow light to proceed with caution. Meeting in 1969, U.S. bishops had concluded the CCR should be permitted to develop but with proper episcopal and sacerdotal supervision (McDonnel Vol. I, 210). Pope Paul VI reaffirmed the U.S. church's stance when in 1975 he received a delegation of Charismatics in Rome during the celebration of the CCR's first international congress (Soneira 473).

The Panamanian episcopal conference's collective letter, drafted in 1975, on the CCR typifies the most prevalent attitude toward the CCR among the few national bishops' conferences that had considered the matter at the time. The Panamanian bishops call on Charismatics to accept clerical and episcopal authority, participate in sacramental life, and to embrace the Virgin and saints. After their call for obedience to ecclesiastical authorities, the leaders of the Panamanian church conclude on a positive note hoping that the "the CCR may be an efficacious means to make us more involved in the evangelization of our people" (McDonnel Vol. II, 103).

Influencing the predominant "proceed with caution" attitude among Latin American bishops were not only the positions of the U.S. episcopacy and the Vatican but also the dynamics of the region's new religious economy and concern with potential threats to their own spiritual authority. On the first score, the CCR arrived in Latin America at a time when the Catholic church was in crisis. Though the Latin American church had suffered a perennial shortage of priests since the colonial era and extremely low rates of church attendance, this did not develop into an institutional crisis until significant religious competition emerged in the 1950s in the form of Pentecostalism. Until Pentecostal churches began reaping a bonanza harvest of nominal Catholic souls at mid-century, the Latin American church, enjoying a monopoly on religious production, could afford to ignore the paucity of clergy and masses of disengaged laity. Prior to the new religious product offered by pastors of the Assembly of God and Foursquare Gospel Church, among others, poor Latin Americans, who constituted the majority of the population in most countries, had no other culturally appropriate Christian alternatives in which they could satisfy

their religious needs.^{iv} Thus it was only when the Catholic church faced serious religious competition for the first time in its four and a half centuries in Latin America that perennial institutional debilities reached the point of crisis.

During the CCR's first decade of development in Latin America, it was common knowledge among the national episcopal conferences that Pentecostalism was expanding at meteoric rates. Growing concern with the "sects" and the CCR's potential role in combating them was a major theme at the Second Meeting of the General Secretaries of the Latin American Episcopal Conferences, held in Rio de Janeiro in mid-January of 1976. In establishing a working group on masonry and "sects," the bishops called for a general study of religion in Latin America that would illuminate the "phenomenon of the sects." Eschewing a "bellicose attitude" toward their new competitors, the episcopal leaders called for positive forms of evangelization and emphasized the importance of "dynamic communities" (*comunidades vivas*) and the facilitation of "authentic expressions of religiosity." After indicating Jehovah Witnesses, Spiritists, and the Assembly of God (Pentecostals) as "sects" of particular concern, the Latin American bishops identified the Charismatic Renewal as a movement that could stanch the flow of Catholics into Pentecostal churches. "In relation to the latter [Assembly of God], we think that a correct and just appreciation of the charismatic groups can establish a point of attraction which offers an alternative to the disquietude of our times" (Comunicado Mensal 1/76). In Curacao priests alarmed by the exodus of Catholics to Pentecostal churches put the bishops' ideas into practice by founding the first charismatic prayer groups in the mid-1970s as a way to withstand Protestant competition (Boudewijnse 179).

Just a month after the Rio meeting church representatives, gathering at the Meeting of Delegates of Ecumenism of the Latin American Episcopal Conferences in Bogota, also concluded that scientific and pastoral studies were needed of what they termed "free religious movements." Such studies, they urged, should specifically focus on the proselytism of Pentecostals, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah Witness and Mormons (Comunicado Mensal 2/76). Similarly, at the first general Latin American bishops' conference since the genesis of the CCR in the region, the episcopate, meeting in Puebla in 1979, underscored the threat of the "sects" while making pastoral recommendations that converged perfectly with the action and mission of the CCR. In addition to mentioning the "invasion of the sects" as one of the important problems facing the Latin American church (Conferencia Episcopal Latinoamericana 1979, 140), the bishops urged diligent study of the reasons for the rapid growth of "free religious movements." The aim of such study was to develop a pastoral plan of action that would respond to the needs of believers, which Pentecostals seemed to be addressing successfully. The needs identified by the bishops at Puebla, animated liturgy, a sense of fraternity and active missionary participation, fit the CCR like a glove (Conferencia Episcopal Latinoamericana 1979, 310). The fulfillment of such religious needs constituted the very *raison d'être* of the Charismatic Renewal. In accord with the caution light strategy, however, ecclesiastical leaders at Puebla found it necessary to reiterate the need for pastoral discernment and guidance to prevent "dangerous deviations" (Conferencia Episcopal Latinoamericana 1979, 76).

Despite the Renewal's potential for revitalizing the Latin American church in the face of fierce Pentecostal competition, the movement's pneumacentrism compelled the great majority of bishops who made early pronouncements on the subject to urge great caution in the CCR's development. Chief among several major episcopal concerns during the Renewal's first decade was the movement's potential threat to the ecclesiastical authority of church fathers. Many bishops and priests feared that with direct access to the Holy Spirit, Charismatics would no longer feel the need for sacerdotal mediation. Why confess one's sins to an ecclesiastical agent of the

Spirit when a direct channel to the Holy Ghost is offered through the Renewal? Thus, practically every episcopal statement, no matter how positive its content, demanded obedience and fealty to church authorities. For example, Mexican bishops, in one of the region's first episcopal statements on the CCR in 1975, clearly state that judgement about the authenticity and applications of charismata belongs to themselves. In claiming the omnipotent spiritual gift of discernment for themselves, the Mexican episcopacy positioned itself as the CCR's final arbiter (McDonnel Vol. I, 100). Invested with the spiritual power to discern the direction of the movement, the bishops thus placed themselves in a position to prevent the CCR from becoming a parallel movement that would challenge institutional authority and operate on the periphery of church life.

While proceed with caution was the predominant episcopal dictum in the 1970s, a small minority of bishops opted either to embrace and promote the CCR or to proscribe it from their dioceses. Mexican bishop Carlos Talavera and his Colombian confrere Monseñor Diego Jaramillo were among the first of the Latin American episcopacy to adhere to the Renewal. Both bishops attended the first meeting of Latin American Catholic Charismatics (ECCLA I) held in Bogota in February of 1973 (Cleary 217). Under the direction of the Charismatic trailblazer, Father McNutt, twenty-three priests from Colombia, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic and the U.S. assembled to discuss ways of propagating the CCR throughout the region (Jaramillo 29-30). Since ECCLA I, Bishop Jaramillo has published four books on various aspects of the Renewal, including the role of glossolalia and papal relations with the movement, and was appointed to the executive council of the ICCRS in 1987 (Soneira 476). Writing just six years after the CCR's import to Colombia, Jaramillo already perceived the new movement's importance to the Latin American church. "The Charismatic Renewal has become one of the most serious pastoral efforts of the church to attract the multitudes to the faith and conversion through the action of the Holy Spirit..." (Jaramillo 124).

In diametrical opposition to his Colombian coreligionist, the conservative Mexican bishop, Miguel Garcia of Mazatlan saw not the action of the Holy Spirit in the CCR but the "smoke of Satan that has infiltrated the church" (Blancarte 359). Monseñor Garcia for obvious reasons banned the Renewal from his diocese. Fellow conservative, Bishop Antonio Lopez of Durango became one of the first Latin American church leaders to effectively ban the CCR in his diocese in 1977. Charging the CCR with elitism, fundamentalism, Protestant contamination, "charismania" (excessive emphasis on spiritual gifts), paraclericalism, and authoritarianism, the bishop ordered reforms that eviscerated the movement. His first commandment called for the CCR in Durango to change its name from the Movement of Christian Renewal in the Holy Spirit to the Prayer Group Movement. The bishop's prohibition of the fundamentals of charismatic praxis, clapping, "rhythmic movement," baptism in the Spirit, and all charismata would steal the soul of the movement (DIC 12/8/77, 681-687.)

One of the most vociferous opponents among the Mexican episcopacy of the "invasion of the sects," Monseñor Lopez belonged to a minority episcopal current which viewed the CCR, due to its Pentecostal origins and influence, not as an effective pastoral response but as a dangerous gateway for even greater conversions of Catholics to Protestantism. In a major international document on the relation between the CCR and ecumenism, one of the movement's leading intellectuals, Kilian McDonnel, writing in 1978, responded to such critics of the Renewal by underscoring the fact that the Pentecostal boom was well underway at the time of the CCR's arrival in Latin America (McDonnel Vol. III, 235). Nevertheless, bishops such as Lopez could point to instances in which Catholic Charismatics had opted to continue practicing their pneumatic brand of Christianity in Pentecostal churches. Scholar Barbara Boudewijnse reports in her 1985 study of the CCR in Curacao that a local prayer group leader who was removed from her position

because of her denigration of the Virgin left the church along with some one hundred fellow Charismatics and founded her own Pentecostal church (Boudewijnse footnote 9, 194). Sociologist Silvia Fernandes recounts a similar incident in Bairro Mare on the urban periphery of Rio de Janeiro. After three years of tension with the local priest over issues of CCR autonomy, the local lay leader left the church for a neoPentecostal congregation in which he quickly became a pastor (S. Fernandes 111).

That to date, no national episcopal conference in Ibero-America has proscribed the CCR is strong evidence of the relatively weak institutional position of those who would expel the movement from the region. Thus, among the great majority of bishops who either individually or collectively drafted positions on the CCR at the diocesan and national levels, “proceed with caution” was the watchword during the CCR’s initial decade of operation. And among the majority of the Latin American episcopacy who took no public position on the Renewal in their diocese, tacit approval and indifference are the most common attitudes, positions that allowed Charismatic prayer groups to operate, if not multiply.

The CCR from Bottom to Top

Rarely facing active episcopal resistance the CCR continued to expand and consolidate throughout the 1970s. At the structural base of the movement, Charismatic prayer groups introduced hundreds of thousands of Latin American Catholics to a new and dynamic way of practicing their faith while at the top, CCR leaders formed executive committees from the diocesan to international levels. The sine qua non of the CCR, prayer groups are relatively small assemblies of Charismatics that meet on a weekly basis to deepen and renew their spiritual life through prayer and fellowship. The *grupos de oración* (their name in Spanish) range in size from ten to three hundred, but most probably average between twenty-five and thirty-five. Adding to their distinct identity are the colorful names, such as Light and Love and Come Lord Jesus, adopted by many groups. Others simply take the name of their local parish.

Meeting at their parish church, a CCR center, or a member’s home for two to three hours, believers are led by lay leaders in diverse forms of prayer, including contemplative praise, silent petitions, spontaneous glossolalia, and hymns.^v Of course what distinguishes CCR prayer groups from traditional prayer and reflection groups is the formers’ emphasis on pneumatic praise. Prayer in which the believer feels the transformative power of the Holy Spirit is the essence of such groups. Spirited songs, speaking in tongues, faith healing and testimonies of conversion provide Catholics with a novel way of practicing their faith. Those seeking a more experiential and animated type of faith no longer have to seek out Pentecostal churches, such as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD), for worship that includes both body and soul.

During the Renewal’s first decade in Latin America prayer groups constituted the principal port of entry into the movement. The predominant pattern of recruitment involved members inviting family and friends to experience a new way of being Catholic in the prayer groups. Since the first adherents to the CCR were disproportionately middle- class practicing Catholic women, those who joined during the 1970s and well into the 1980s tended to share the commonalties of class, gender and the active practice of their faith. Though the CCR is now expanding among the Latin American popular classes, the movement during most of its short history has been solidly middle class. In one of the first studies conducted on the CCR in Latin America, researcher Pedro Oliveira in the early 1970s found the majority of Brazilian Catholic Charismatics to be middle and upper middle class. More than half of Charismatics surveyed had at least a secondary education, and only one percent were illiterate (Oliveira et al. 24). Even twenty years later Brazilians

averaged only five years of primary school education. In Mexico, the Catholic order, the Holy Ghost Missionaries, who took charge of introducing the CCR in Mexico City had historically directed their pastoral activities toward the middle and upper classes. Indeed Santa Cruz, their principal parish, is located in the Pedregal, one of the city's most exclusive residential districts (Diaz de la Serna 30).

After social class, gender was and continues to be one of the salient demographic characteristics of the Charismatic community in Latin America. Precise figures do not exist, but since the CCR's arrival in the region, women have comprised approximately two-thirds of the movement in Ibero-America. The Oliveira study of Brazilian Charismatics in the mid-1970s reported women accounting for 71 percent of CCR membership (Oliveira et al. 24). A 1994 Brazilian survey found the gender ratio had remained constant at 70 percent female. Interestingly, the same poll found that while women also predominated in Base Christian Communities in Brazil they did so at a significantly lower rate of 57 percent (Prandi 16). In Mexico, the archdiocesan coordinator of the Renewal in Latin America's largest city, layman Miguel Ramirez, estimated that the country's female Charismatics outnumber their male brothers in faith by a ratio of two to one. The predominance of women in the movement has greatly influenced Charismatic religious practice, but the CCR is no different from the region's other major religious traditions in which females represent the majority of active practitioners.

The third major commonality among Charismatics in the CCR's first decade is their prior status as active Catholics. In other words, the majority of those joining the Renewal in the 1970s were already active practitioners of their Catholic faith. Not only did the aforementioned study find the great majority of Brazilian Charismatics to have been active Catholics before joining the Renewal, but also that 80 percent had participated in other church lay groups, particularly the Cursillo (Oliveira et al. 27). Boudewijnse discovered the same pattern of expansion in Curacao where the CCR attracted its first followers among the ranks of practicing Catholics (Boudewijnse 179), and CCR lay leaders in Guatemala and Mexico reported the same recruitment strategy in those two countries (de Gongora and Ramirez). Thus, in its initial phase the CCR was rarely attracting nominal Catholics, and much less those who had converted to Pentecostalism. Rather, Pentecostal Catholicism drew among the ranks of active middle class practitioners, predominantly female, who were seeking to renew and deepen their spiritual life.

While prayer groups expanded at the base of the CCR, executive committees created in the 1970s from the parish to international levels gave the movement a well defined organizational structure and increasing legitimacy among the Latin American episcopacy. Within the first few years of its arrival to the region, many Latin American bishops moved quickly to integrate the CCR into the national ecclesiastical bureaucracy through the creation of national service commissions or teams. By mid-1974 episcopal leaders in Brazil, Mexico and Guatemala had established such commissions. The latter case provides a clear example of how bishops in some countries acted with uncharacteristic haste to attempt to seize control of the movement from lay hands.

Having been baptized in the Holy Spirit at an CCR encounter in Honduras, prominent Guatemalan lay leader Fernando Mancilla in February of 1973 met with Bishop Ricardo Hamm, the head of apostolic movements in the archdiocese of Guatemala City, to discuss his desire of introducing the Renewal to the country. Monseñor Hamm told Mancilla to wait for episcopal instruction before taking any action, and by the end of the year the Guatemalan church's supreme leader, Cardinal Mario Casariego had seized the initiative from Mancilla's lay hands by inviting the North American Charismatic priest, Harold Cohen, to conduct a retreat for a select group of his Guatemalan sacerdotal brethren. Shortly after the Cohen retreat, Bishop Pellecer held a similar

one for religious and laity in early 1974. The first Charismatic prayer group in Guatemala was founded not by a lay leader, but by a priest who had adhered to the Renewal at the Cohen retreat. Father Rodolfo Mendoza, who had been baptized by the Holy Spirit at the Cohen retreat, started the pioneering prayer group in his parish located in Zone Two of the national capital. Greatly accelerating the wheels of the ecclesiastical bureaucracy, Cardinal Casariego in June of 1974 established a national Pastoral Service Team, headed by Monseñor Pellecer, to supervise the CCR. While lay leaders comprised the majority of the Pastoral Service Team members, ultimate authority lay with Bishops Pellecer and Casariego (Delgado 234-240 and Estrada).

In Brazil it was not bishops but rather priests who took the initiative at establishing a national level executive committee. With approval from the local archbishop in May of 1973, CCR founding fathers Edward Dougherty and Harold Rahm created the National Service Commission in Campinas (Comunicado Mensal 9/73). A mixed group of twenty lay leaders, priests and religious formed the original national team (Comunicado Mensal 5/75). Currently headquartered in Itajuba, in the state of Minas Gerais, the national commission, like others in Latin America, is charged with developing and coordinating countrywide events and activities and defining and evaluating CCR goals and projects.

Concurrent with the establishment of national commissions, CCR sacerdotal and episcopal leaders in early 1973 founded a regional commission, the Latin American Catholic Charismatic Council (CONCCLAT), at the first ECCLA conference in Bogota (Jaramillo 29-30). CONCCLAT, currently headquartered in Bogota, exercises at the international level the same function as the national commissions. One of the council's most visible achievements is the organization of biennial ECCLA conferences, which assemble not only Latin American CCR leaders but also their hispanophone coreligionists from Spain and the United States (Soneira 476). After international and national executive commissions were created in the early part of the decade, similar coordinating councils were established at diocesan and parochial levels as the movement expanded through the 1970s. Thus by the end of the CCR's first ten years in Ibero-America the movement had already begun to experience the institutionalization of charisma.

Separating from Protestant Brethren

As part of the institutionalization process and the intensification of religious competition, the CCR by the end the 1970s had jettisoned its initial ecumenism. At the beginning of the 1980s an ecumenical Catholic Charismatic would have been hard pressed to find the type of early CCR prayer groups that united Protestants and Catholics in worship. However, that the Latin American movement's ecumenism was so short lived should be of little surprise given the rapidly shifting dynamics of the region's emerging religious marketplace. The CCR's ecumenism developed in the U.S. where Catholicism is a minority church, which, while it had to compete with Protestantism for North American souls, did not have to contend with a religious monopolist. In almost diametrical opposition, the Latin American church was a religious hegemon whose monopoly was rapidly crumbling as a result of the "invasion of the sects," i.e., Pentecostalism. The ecumenical agenda emerging from Vatican II made little sense in Latin America where Pentecostalism was rapidly expanding at the expense of the Catholic church.^{vi} To extend a fraternal embrace to the very same "separated brethren" who were raiding the Catholic flock could have only accelerated the exodus of Catholics to Pentecostal churches. Hence from the outset the ecumenism introduced to the region by North American Charismatic priests was destined to become an inviable import.

Early episcopal pronouncements on the CCR are replete with admonishments on the

dangers of “false ecumenism.” The Mexican bishop of Ciudad Juarez, for example, in his 1976 pastoral instruction on the CCR, wrote, “In fact there have been Catholics who have lost the faith or left the Catholic church after entering into contact with these ecumenical groups of reflection in the Holy Spirit” (DIC 1976). Three years later, Monseñor Ezequiel Perea, bishop of San Luis Potosi, prohibited CCR prayer groups from allowing Protestants to participate. Like his confrere on the Texas border, the bishop worried that ecumenical groups could lead to further Catholic losses. “So the separated brothers and sisters, upon exchanging their reflections with those of Catholics, even without intending to, cause confusion among the faithful. They insinuate a false liberation from the Magisterium of the Church, they devalue those Catholic truths that they don’t admit and promote a loss of Catholic identity, which tends to sacrifice the truth in the name of ecumenical unity. And, in fact, there have been some Catholics who have followed this path away from the Church, or who have become indifferent, believing themselves free from submission to the Magisterium of the Church because of the doctrinal confusion caused by incautious contact with separated brothers and sisters” (DIC 7/5/79, 452).

On the opposite end of Latin America, a theological team convoked by the Argentine episcopacy to study the CCR instructed priests to guard Catholic tradition during the course of ecumenical exchanges and advised them that diocesan authorities must be informed of any interconfessional “paraliturgies” (McDonnel Vol. II, 348). Interestingly while many Latin American bishops were warning the CCR about the potential perils of ecumenism, one of the international movement’s chief proponents, Belgian cardinal, Leon Joseph Suenens drafted a document in 1978 on the role of ecumenism in the CCR in which he presented the Renewal as a “special grace” for interconfessional relations (McDonnel Vol. III, 82-174).^{vii} Hence episcopal pressure to restrict contact with religious competitors and reinforce the Catholic identity of the movement forced the CCR to abandon its initial ecumenism. It is also probably the case that as leadership of the Renewal passed from U.S. to Latin American hands, the latter were simply much less interested in the cause of Christian unity, particularly with those who were often perceived as obnoxiously aggressive proselytizers. As the CCR entered the 1980s it was in the midst of a radical metamorphosis from a movement on the vanguard of ecumenical relations with Latin American Protestants to one that would position itself on the front lines of the ecclesial battle to repel the “invasion of the sects.”

A Popular Renewal

As the Renewal continued to expand in the 1980s, three main trends would emerge during the movement’s second decade of operation in Latin America. Most notably, the CCR experienced rapid growth and began to descend the social pyramid by recruiting among the region’s popular classes. Second, the CCR won greater episcopal approval in the context of rapidly increasing ecclesiastical alarm, and even panic in some cases, over the explosive growth of Pentecostalism and other neoChristian denominations such as Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons. More bishops came to realize that in offering the same type of ecstatic spirituality as Pentecostal churches, the CCR functions more as a barrier than a bridge to further defections from the church. Interrelated to widening episcopal approval is the Renewal’s development into the Latin American church’s most dynamic force for evangelization. Mirroring their Pentecostal competition, Charismatics by the end of the 1980s had moved to the vanguard of the church’s battle to not only stanch the flow of nominal Catholics to Pentecostalism but also to “rescue” those who were baptized in the church but do not actively practice their faith.^{viii}

While Pentecostal churches captured a greater share of Latin American Christians

attracted to pneumatic spirituality in the 1980s, the CCR also greatly benefited from the Pentecostalization of Christianity in the region. Such was consumer demand for pneumatic spirituality that if religious specialists did not produce it their churches faced stagnation and even decline. That in less than a century in Latin America Pentecostalism was able to claim approximately 75 percent of the region's Protestant population is dramatic evidence of the mass appeal of pneumatic spirituality from Tierra del Fuego to Matamoros. Mainline Protestants, such as Methodists and Presbyterians, who have traditionally relegated the Spirit to the margins in their more cerebral form of religious practice, simply cannot compete with the more appealing Pentecostal product. And until the arrival of its own charismatic import from the U.S., the region's religious hegemon also struggled to contend with the rapid advance of God Is Love and the Assemblies of God, among other Pentecostal denominations.

Although statistics on CCR growth are nonexistent for many Latin American countries, those that are available point to extremely accelerated expansion during the movement's second decade. In Chile the CCR's national office reported that prayer groups mushroomed from approximately eighty in 1975 to four hundred twenty-six in 1992; though researcher Carmen Galilea estimates the latter figure to be closer to six hundred (Galilea 34). In Brazil the CCR expanded from no more than ten thousand members in 1976 (Carranza 32) to some 6 million in 1994 largely on the basis of exponential growth during the 1980s (Prandi 15).^{ix} In neighboring Argentina, sociologist Jorge Soneira reports "explosive growth" during the decade in question but unfortunately does not offer any figures (Soneira 485). At the opposite end of the region, both Mexican and Guatemalan CCR national leaders stated that rapid growth began in their countries in the early 1980s (Ramirez, de Gongora and Estrada). On the regional level, an estimated total of 12 million Latin American Catholics had joined the CCR by 1992 (Hebrard 1992 in Carranza 24).

As an integral part of the larger process of the Pentecostalization of Latin American Christianity, the CCR multiplied exponentially for similar reasons that ignited the Pentecostal boom. It is now common knowledge that Pentecostal churches have mushroomed in a field of poverty. More specifically as Latin America in the 1980s sank into its worst economic depression in fifty years and lost a decade of growth, the Pentecostal message of divine healing of earthly afflictions resonated throughout the region but especially in the slums and shantytowns of the urban periphery. There in the *favelas* and *ciudades perdidas* where the lost decade often meant slipping into extreme poverty, the Pentecostal proposal of healing individuals of the pathogens of poverty, such as illness, alcoholism, and marital strife proved exceptionally appealing (Chesnut).

Liberation of a Different Kind

A slight modification of the same dialectic between faith healing and poverty-related affliction that propelled the Pentecostal boom illuminates the mass appeal of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. While the thesis of affliction or illness is the same for both the Renewal and Pentecostalism, the higher social class position of the former translates into a less direct relationship between misfortune and poverty. In other words, the afflictions that impel middle class Latin Americans to join the CCR are less directly the result of material deprivation and more often arise from psychological problems such as early childhood traumas. It follows then that the distinct origins of the Pentecostal and Charismatic dialectical thesis lead to different manifestations of the same antithesis of faith healing. Whereas the *cura divina* practiced in Pentecostal churches tends to focus on the healing of the physical illnesses that plague the Latin American poor, the *sanación* offered at Charismatic masses and assemblies in the 1980s more

often involved the “inner healing” (*sanación interior*) of painful memories and past psychological traumas.

The centrality of inner healing in the CCR impressed me at a Charismatic prayer group meeting in downtown Rio de Janeiro in early August of 1998. About half way through the two-hour meeting, two lay leaders positioned themselves at the front of the packed assembly hall and began to “reveal” the afflictions of several of the some two hundred believers present. Taking the microphone from her male brother in faith, the diminutive middle-aged woman in a surprisingly booming voice shouted, “I see that someone has a difficult court case.” A well-dressed young woman quickly raised her hand. The lay leader continued. “I see that someone lost their personal documents.” Another hand shot up. Her male partner then took the microphone and continued for another five minutes “revealing” similar middle- class problems. After a brief interlude in which a priest belonging to the Order of St. Vincent called on those present to practice charity and not to reject the poor “because Jesus is among them,” the healing session resumed with several of those whose problems had been divulged walking to the front of the room to give testimony of their healing. The lost documents had been found, the court case resolved and vertigo no longer kept another believer from reaching to new heights.

Inner healing has been the predominant form of *sanación* practiced in the CCR, but there are two other types that complement the Charismatic typology of illness and healing. According to Charismatic etiology, illness has three causal types: emotional, physical and spiritual. Physical illness arises from disease and accidents while spiritual malaise results most often from personal sin and less frequently from demonic oppression. Corresponding methods of healing are straightforward for emotional and physical illnesses. Prayers for inner healing are directed toward the first while petitions for physical curing are made for the second. Since spiritual afflictions have two distinct origins, personal sin and satanic oppression, there are two different methods of treatment. Those spiritual problems diagnosed as originating in personal sin require prayers of repentance. In contrast, affliction caused by the Devil or his minions demands much stronger medicine – exorcism.

Since the late 1980s, competition with Pentecostalism has led to the formation of a cadre of priests who specialize in “liberation” or exorcism ministries. Such is current consumer demand for release from demonic possession that some priests, such as Brazilian Charismatic superstar Father Marcelo Rossi, even celebrate “liberation masses” (*missas de libertação*) on a weekly basis (CARAS 12/4/98).^x Acknowledging his pastoral debt to Pentecostal leader, Bishop Edir Macedo, whose Universal Church of the Kingdom of God brought exorcism to the fore of pneumatic Christianity in Latin America, Padre Marcelo stated in a recent interview that “it was Bishop Edir Macedo who woke us up. He got us up” (Lima and Oyama 3).

Behind closed doors, CCR lay leaders also practice unofficial exorcism on believers manifesting symptoms of satanic influence. Many bishops feel such unsanctioned exorcisms are a threat to their ecclesiastical authority and have issued statements denouncing the practice. In its official statement of approval of the CCR in 1986, the Guatemalan Episcopal Conference referred to “irregularities” with exorcisms and reminded Charismatics that the rite can only be performed by priests with proper episcopal consent (CEG 415). The same year, the bishop of the Mexican industrial city of Toluca also informed the CCR of the need for episcopal authorization of any exorcism taking place in his diocese (DIC 10/16/86, 667). In one of the most extreme reactions to the practice of unauthorized exorcism, Archbishop Juan Sandoval of Guadalajara excommunicated several members of the Nueva Alianza (New Alliance) CCR covenant community for expelling demons without his approval and also on account of their “Protestant

tendency,” which led them, according to the bishop, to ignore the role of the Virgin. (DIC 4/21/97, 287).^{xi}

In accord with the class basis of religious expression, as the CCR began to penetrate the Latin American popular classes and descend the social pyramid, demand for physical healing and exorcism became much greater than in the past. Impoverished urban Catholics, like their Pentecostal counterparts, seek divine resolution of their poverty-related afflictions. Thus, popular Charismatics typically implore the Holy Spirit to empower them to overcome such afflictions as alcoholism, unemployment, physical illness, domestic strife and demonic oppression, the latter of which in Brazil and much of the Caribbean often takes the form of possession by the *exús*, or liminal trickster spirits of Candomble, Umbanda and other African-Latin religions. In her comparative study of Pentecostals, Catholic Charismatics and members of Catholic Base Christian Communities, Brazilian sociologist Cecilia Mariz observed no demonic possession or exorcism among middle class Charismatics and few references to the Devil (Mariz 35). In contrast, popular Charismatics, many of whom had attended Pentecostal churches before joining the CCR, were very focused on the role of the Devil and, like Pentecostals, saw his hand in such “vices” as soap operas and drinking (Mariz 30). Exorcism in the CCR, however, has not developed to the point that it has in the IURD and other NeoPentecostal denominations where the demons (in the form of Umbanda or Candomble spirits) are actually invoked to then be expelled in dramatic fashion by combative pastors. As the CCR proceeds with its descent of the Latin American class scale, both exorcism and physical healing will continue their trajectory from the margins of Charismatic practice to the center.

The scant research that has been conducted on the CCR in Latin America confirms the centrality of *sanación* in its various forms in attracting new members and retaining veterans. In Curacao, the two most important charismata among Renewal members are reported to be healing and “freedom from the powers of evil,” which, of course, is exorcism, one of the three types of faith healing (Lampe 430). More specifically, 80 percent of Charismatics surveyed on the island in the mid-1980s reported serious personal problems at the time of affiliation with the movement. Ill health was the leading affliction, followed by marital strife (Boudewijnse 183). Brazilian sociologist Reginaldo Prandi found a similar pattern among the CCR in his country. In his recent study of the Renewal he found healing, along with glossolalia, to be the salient gift of the Spirit (Prandi 45). For Mexican *carismaticos*, there are two main entryways into the movement “existential crisis” and the need for healing (Munoz 108). In her recent thesis on the CCR in the state of Chihuahua, anthropologist Alma Munoz punctuates the role of faith healing in the Latin American CCR with an extensive bibliography of titles on the topic written by leading Charismatic healers, such as Robert De Grandis, Emiliano Tardiff and Bishop Alfonso Uribe. Mexican CCR lay leader, Miguel Ramirez confirmed Munoz’s findings and added that glossolalia is the second most popular charism (Ramirez). Ramirez’s Guatemalan counterpart, Sheny de Gongora, also affirmed that healing is the salient spiritual gift in the Central American nation (de Gongora).

Research conducted on the CCR outside of the region indicates that the centrality of faith healing is not peculiar to the Latin American movement. One of the main studies of the Renewal in its native land, the U.S., discovered that 71 percent of North American Charismatics surveyed said they or someone close to them had been healed (Bord and Faulkner 93). And in Africa where poverty-related illness finds fertile soil, faith healing is, unsurprisingly, the Renewal’s premier charism (Hebrard 85). Returning to Latin America, consumer demand for divine healing in its various forms increased sharply in the 1980s among both the middle and popular classes as the region sunk into deep economic depression.

Mass Appeal

In addition to proliferating on the basis of *sanación* in its second decade, the CCR by the end of the 1980s was transforming itself from a middle class to a multiclass movement. In contrast to its Protestant competitor, which was conceived among the Latin American poor and began to work its way up the social scale, the CCR started to descend from its rarified origins into the hotly contested religious marketplace of the popular classes. The Renewal's emphasis on divine healing during a decade of severe economic depression gave it great possibilities for expansion among the swelling ranks of the disprivileged, but it was only through pastoral outreach and evangelization efforts that the CCR was able to realize its potential of becoming a mass movement. The CCR's entry into the popular religious market occurred simultaneously on two fronts. On the first, at the base, Charismatic lay leaders and priests began to organize prayer groups in the very same working class districts, including the slums and shantytowns, where Pentecostal pastors were founding an average of one new church per day in such megalopolises as Rio de Janeiro (R. Fernandes 19). These pastoral agents at the vanguard of the CCR's expansion along the urban periphery hailed from the ranks of the middle class, but as the movement enters its fourth decade a new generation of lay leaders is emerging from among the prayer groups of the popular classes.

On the second front of expansion, the Renewal climbed down the social pyramid by borrowing from the playbook of their Pentecostal competition. By the mid-1980s mass rallies, revivals and healing marathons in which thousands of believers gathered in soccer stadiums and gymnasiums to receive the power of the Holy Spirit were no longer peculiar to Pentecostalism. Annual national CCR assemblies known as cenacles (*cenáculos*) filled soccer stadiums throughout the region.^{xiii} The Mexican CCR packed the Estadio Azteca with some 70,000 Charismatics several times in the middle and late 1980s (Hebrard 27) while the Brazilian Renewal attracted 150,000 at Pentecost in 1987 and then again in May of 1991 (Benedetti 243). Renowned international CCR leaders, especially those who specialize in healing ministries, such as North American priest Robert DeGrandis and his recently deceased Canadian compere, Emiliano Tardiff, attract thousands of impoverished believers to rallies that are propelled by faith healing sessions and much upbeat music, which usually conforms to popular tastes.

Currently, no Charismatic luminary can fill Latin American soccer stadiums to capacity like Brazilian CCR superstar, Padre Marcelo. The former aerobic instructor's charisma, movie star looks and song and dance routine to a samba and fado (the folkloric music of Portugal) beat, send Brazilian Charismatics, especially young women and girls, into a frenzied state. In November of 1997, the then thirty-year-old priest drew 70,000 to a "megamass" which he officiated at Sao Paulo's Morumbi Stadium (Lima and Oyama 4). In congregating thousands of believers in very public arenas, the CCR not only demonstrates its ability to branch out from its middle class roots but also displays its strength as a movement of mass appeal to both ecclesiastical authorities and secular society. Since 1998 Padre Marcelo has appeared as a regular guest on the Faustão show, a very popular Sunday television program on the Rede Globo network that combines the talk show format with musical entertainment and contests. And in 1998 Father Marcelo joined the Brazilian pantheon of celebrities by gracing the cover of VEJA, the equivalent of Time or Newsweek, with a circulation of more than a million.

Invasion of the "Sects"

As the CCR multiplied and became a mass movement during Latin America's lost decade, the bishops of the region, both collectively and individually, began to grant official approval to a

the lay movement that many increasingly viewed as the church's most appealing product in the surging competition with Pentecostalism for consumers of the divine. While episcopal concern with the growth of Protestantism in Ibero-America had been evident since mid-century, the Pentecostal boom of the 1980s caused panic among wide sectors of the Latin American episcopacy by the middle of the decade. Throughout the region from the diocesan to regional levels bishops denounced the "invasion of the sects" and formed ecclesiastical committees and commissions to study the Pentecostal interlopers in order to formulate an effective pastoral response to stem the exodus of millions of their flock toward the Protestant competition.

On the regional level, the Latin American Episcopal Conference's (CELAM) alarm in the late 1970s over the rapid spread of the Pentecostal contagion developed into a sense of panic by the mid-1980s. A 1978 study sponsored by the CELAM Mission Department entitled "Latin American Missionary Panorama" warned that each day two thousand Latin American Catholics were leaving the church for the "sects." Pointing out that in many cities and dioceses there are dozens of Protestant houses of worship for each Catholic church, the authors of the study expressed their fear about the future of the Latin American ecclesia. "Some episcopacies asks themselves if the majority of the population in their countries will identify themselves as Catholic in twenty years from now. The impact of the sects constitutes a new missionary situation which we cannot minimize" (Comunicado Mensal 8/78). The document concludes that if urgent pastoral action is not taken the "popular masses," particularly in the cities, will be lost to the "sects." In the fourth edition of *Las Sectas en America Latina* (Sects in Latin America) co-published by CELAM in 1986, the president of the Bogota-based conference, Monseñor Antonio Quarracino stresses the gravity of the Pentecostal boom. "This problem of the sects is undoubtedly one of the deepest concerns of the Latin American bishops" (Santagada 5).

Episcopal consternation over their dynamic competitors reached the point that by the middle of the decade CELAM's office on ecumenism was not focusing primarily on the cause of Christian unity but the battle against the "sects." Meeting in Brasilia in late January of 1985, CELAM representatives devoted their attention to the "great concern and alarm" caused by what they referred to as "free religious movements." Pentecostalism, of course, was the focus of attention because of its extraordinary growth. The three pastoral recommendations made for revitalizing the church in the face of aggressive Pentecostal proselytism were a prescription for remedial action led by the Charismatic Renewal. The first recommendation called for "revalorizing the sense of action of the Holy Spirit in all church life." More explicitly, point two recommended actively accompanying the CCR so that it would serve as testament to the value of the Spirit in the church and also as an "ecumenical bridge." The third prescriptive urged greater pastoral attention to the most vulnerable sectors (the urban poor, youth, migrants, and women) of the church through CEBs, renewed liturgy, embracing popular traditions and social and health pastorals (Comunicado Mensal 1-2/85). The CCR, of course, at the time of the CELAM meeting was at the ecclesial vanguard in liturgical innovation and its very *raison d'être* revolved around healing.

At the national level episcopal preoccupation with mushrooming Pentecostalism tended to be even more intense. In some countries the struggle to preserve Catholic hegemony was even conceived of as a holy war. No where was this more the case than in Guatemala where Latin America's first Pentecostal head of state, General Efraim Rios Montt, viewed his murderous offensive against the leftist guerrillas as a holy war against communist evil. In the midst of Rios Montt's abbreviated reign of terror in 1982 and 1983, the Guatemalan episcopacy drafted a collective pastoral letter entitled "Confirmed in Faith," which denounced governmental violence, human rights abuses and actions against the church. In addressing the state of the Guatemalan

church in the second section of the epistle the bishops write on the “grave danger” that the “aggressive escalate of numerous Protestant sects” presents to Guatemalan national unity. The episcopacy warns, “But we cannot accept that often for non-religious reasons our faithful are pressured to abandon their native religion and under the pretext of religious liberty, our communities are divided and confront each other in a struggle that could easily lead to a religious war of incalculable consequences” (CEG 337). Alarmed by Pentecostalism’s extraordinary success in Central America’s most populous nation, Pope John Paul II encouraged the bishops to embrace television and radio as effective media for “resisting the pernicious influence of proselytizing activities of groups that have very little authentically religious content and sow so much confusion among Catholics” (CEG 867). Two years later in 1985 Guatemalan bishops repeated their charge against the Pentecostal competition in a statement on the return to civilian rule after three decades of military dictatorship. Under the section labeled “corruption,” the episcopacy denounces its religious rival for assaulting national cultural identity. “...We cannot help but point to the enormous damage that the innumerable fundamentalist sects do in deprecating the cultural elements of our indigenous peoples” (CEG 391).

To the north in Mexico even though Pentecostal growth rates were not nearly as high, the episcopacy expressed similar alarm over their dynamic competitors. The episcopacy’s biennial plan for pastoral action from 1983 to 1985 called for concrete pastoral programs “as an answer to the alarming invasion of sects that make an attempt against Christian life and the cultural values of our peoples” (DIC 4/11-15/83). Like their Guatemalan counterparts, the Mexican bishops perceive Catholicism as an integral part of national identity. Thus the Pentecostal boom threatens not only the church but also the very soul of Latin American national identities.

By the end of the decade the Mexican episcopacy had become so disturbed by the proliferation of the “sects” that in 1987 they appointed the national church’s most vociferous opponent of Protestantism, Padre Flaviano Amatulli to head the newly created Department of Faith in the Face of Sectarian Proselytism. The author of such books as *Las Sectas Un Problema Pastoral* (Sects A Pastoral Problem), *La Iglesia y Las Sectas, Pesadilla o Reto?* (The Church and Sects, Nightmare or Challenge?), and *Cuidado Con Las Sectas* (Careful With The Sects), the Italian priest realized the magnitude of the Pentecostal problem during his missionary work among Oaxacan Indians in the 1970s. As executive secretary of the new department within the Episcopal Commission for the Doctrine of the Faith, Father Amatulli organized summer courses throughout the nation on “evangelization in regard to the invasion of the sects.” Mexican clergy and laity alike could actually earn diplomas in “Protestantism.” Borrowing from the playbook of his Protestant opponents, Amatulli has emphasized the importance of home visits in administering a “general vaccination against the sectarian virus” (Amatulli 86, 4). That Amatulli’s students as well as Chilean Charismatics (Galilea 26) were often mistaken for Protestants during their pastoral visits to Catholic homes reveals the novelty of such mission work in the Latin American church. And as in Chile, it has been the CCR that has blazed pastoral trails in evangelizing among nominal Catholics through home visits.

Returning to Mexico, consternation over the threat to Catholic religious hegemony reached an unprecedented level when in 1988 the main theme of the Mexican Episcopal Conference’s annual meeting was “the church with regard to the new religious groups.” The bishop of Nezahualcoyotl, a sprawling working class district in Mexico City, introduced the theme of the conference in Orwellian fashion by portraying his church as a victim of Protestant “persecution.” “The active presence and proselytism of so many religious groups constitutes a form of persecution against the unity of the church and its doctrinal integrity” (DIC 4/28/88, 315). The Mexican bishops’ pastoral recommendations for responding to the Pentecostal contagion are

essentially a prescription for the CCR. Among the salient pastoral recommendations are to intensify, streamline and personalize evangelization (understood as conversion); revitalize liturgy; and cultivate small ecclesial communities that offer a feeling of shared closeness and fraternity. One of the underlying objectives of such mission work, according the bishops, should be greater emphasis on mysticism and asceticism, key elements that the CCR imported from Pentecostalism.

At the other end of the Americas in Brazil the national episcopacy after a decade of studies of “autonomous religious groups,” also made pastoral recommendations that pointed to the pivotal role of the CCR in shoring up the besieged ecclesiastical fortress. Following the lead of their Mexican homologues, the Brazilian bishops in 1989 established a permanent working group on “the grave problems of the sects” within the department of ecumenism. The group’s main function is to offer practical advice to clergy on strategies for countering the religious competition (Comunicado Mensal 11/89). The following year Latin America’s largest episcopacy demonstrated the same consternation over the proliferation of Pentecostalism as their Mexican counterparts. The main theme at the annual episcopal assembly of 1990 was “autonomous religious groups.” After engaging in a round of self-criticism in which they cited their church’s excessive rationalism and lack of spontaneity, opportunities for a more personal religious experience, and a well defined behavioral ethic, the ecclesiastical heads recommended pastoral action that dovetails perfectly with the CCR’s mission. The bishops called for pastoral work that emphasizes rediscovery of the spiritual experience, the value of subjective and personal religious experiences, and the importance of an immediate experience of God and the Holy Spirit. While the CNBB (Brazilian Bishops’ Conference) did not specifically mention the Renewal, it cited “middle class movements,” as well as Base Christian Communities, for their “good work” (Comunicado Mensal 4/90). Since the CCR was the largest and most dynamic middle class movement within the church at the time, the CNBB obviously had the Renewal in mind in its laudatory comments.

With the great exception of the Brazilians, the majority of those episcopacies who have made official pronouncements of ecclesiastical approval of the CCR did so between the late 1970s and mid-1980s, just as panic over the Pentecostal “invasion” was reaching fever pitch. And it is no coincidence that the national episcopacies which extended official recognition during the period in question are those that were facing the most intense competition from Pentecostals for the loyalty of popular religious consumers. Beginning with the Panamanian bishops in 1975, the episcopacies of Chile, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, Honduras, and Guatemala extended ecclesiastical recognition to the CCR over the period of a decade.^{xiii} In addition to Brazil, the aforementioned countries have led the region in Pentecostal growth rates.^{xiv}

While all the national episcopacies have embraced the CCR as a strategy to compete with surging Pentecostalism, nowhere is the link as explicit as in the document drafted by the Costa Rican Bishops’ Conference in 1979. The episcopal letter is a two-part document that simultaneously addresses both the CCR and the Pentecostal boom. The first part endorses the Renewal with what are subsequently to become standard caveats, such as caution with charismata and instruction not to de-emphasize the Eucharist. Most importantly, the bishops warn of the danger incorporating elements from “separated churches,” or Protestantism (McDonnell Vol. II, 505). The second part, called “Protestant Proselytizing,” makes a series of pastoral recommendations “in face of the extraordinary intensification of Protestant recruitment, especially by sects who are fanatic, proselytizing and aggressive toward the Catholic church” (McDonnell Vol. II, 505). The pastoral recommendations converge perfectly with the mission of the CCR. Bible courses, more attractive and participatory liturgy, better use of mass media for evangelization efforts and greater catechism are the major pastoral directives. The Costa Rican

bishops also naively insist that their “separated brothers cease all aggressive and proselytizing activities” (McDonnel Vol. II, 506).

Though faced with the stiffest Pentecostal competition in Latin America, the Guatemalan episcopacy extended ecclesiastical recognition somewhat reluctantly to the CCR. The Guatemalan pastoral instruction on the Renewal merits some exploration because it neatly captures the ambivalence with which many episcopacies have given the green light to the CCR. During the 1980s and even today most Latin American bishops are not Charismatics and many have little affinity for its pneumatic spirituality. Nevertheless, despite reports of groups of Renewal members defecting to Pentecostal churches, most national bishops' conferences in the region have come to view the CCR not as a bridge to the Assembly of God, for example, but as a barrier to further losses of the Catholic flock. In welcoming the CCR into the ecclesial fold, the bishops can offer the same pneumatic product as their Protestant rivals. Catholics no longer have to forsake the Virgin and pope in their quest for more spirited religion.

Perhaps the ambivalence of the Guatemalan bishops is best captured by the amount of ink devoted to the “fruits” of the CCR, on one hand, and the “risks” on the other. Though enumerated first, the positive points total half as many as the potential dangers, eleven to twenty-one. The episcopal instruction recognizes the CCR's evangelistic work and focus on the Holy Spirit and Jesus as the movement's ripest fruits. Salient among the twenty-one potentially rotten fruits are risks relating to two major and often interrelated themes, faith healing and episcopal authority. Nearly half of the potential dangers relate directly to faith healing. Risk number eighteen captures the interrelation between the two main episcopal concerns and reveals the threat that faith healing poses to the bishops' charismatic authority. “In Charismatic Renewal groups massive assemblies are often organized at which the sick are prayed for in a special way. These assemblies must be under the responsibility of a priest, authorized for such an event by the bishop, so that everything develops according to the spirit of our Catholic tradition for the greater glory of God and for the good of the infirm who with faith come to receive the healing power of Jesus in his Church” (CEG 415). The principal pastoral recommendations are aimed at increasing ecclesiastical control over the CCR. Priests and religious are urged to become involved in the movement to prevent it from straying and creating “parallel structures” (CEG 417).

The Virgin at the Vanguard

Further evidence of the bishops' ambivalence about approving a Pentecostal type of ecclesial movement is their emphasis on the Virgin as defender of the faith and guardian of Catholic orthodoxy. For a movement rooted in Pentecostal spirituality, which has historically in Latin America been radically anti-Catholic, what better way to preserve the Catholicness of the Renewal than through emphasis on the element that most distinguishes the church from its Protestant competitors. Thus the Virgin in her myriad national and local incarnations has over the past decade and a half come to constitute the dividing line that separates Catholic Charismatics from Pentecostals. Episcopal emphasis on the importance of the Virgin of Guadalupe or Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, among others, is a clear example of the marginal differentiation of a standardized religious product.^{xv} That is, in the figure of the Virgin, the church's chief religious producers offer an appealing variant of the pneumatic spirituality shared by both Catholic Charismatics and Pentecostals. Without the Mother of God to differentiate their brand of charismatic spirituality from that of their Protestant rivals only the pontiff is left to guard the bridge leading to Pentecostalism.

Thus in their episcopal recognition of the Guatemalan CCR, the bishops attempt to place

the Virgin at the center of the movement. Even before mentioning the positive and negative aspects of the Renewal, the episcopacy devotes an entire section of the instruction to the Virgin's role in the movement. In their opening statement, the bishops remind Charismatics that Pope John Paul II wants Mary to be at the heart of the Renewal since she is the one best equipped to guide and direct the movement (CEG 410). This point is then reiterated in the section on pastoral recommendations in which the Virgin is presented as the "guarantee of orthodoxy...in face of the danger of the certain influence of non-Catholic currents..." (CEG 418-419). Finally, the bishops conclude their pastoral instruction on the Renewal by imploring the Mother of God to ensure faithfulness to the Holy Spirit and the church. "And may Mary, full of grace, help us all to be truly faithful to the Holy Spirit and to support her inspiration for a renewal of our church" (CEG 420). Even more explicitly than their Guatemalan homologues, the Honduran bishops in their approval of the CCR state, "devotion to the Virgin and the saints should be an element that distinguishes the CCR from Protestants and that gives a certain guarantee of orthodoxy to the simple faithful" (CEH 20).

If both national episcopacies and individual bishops frequently exhort the Renewal in Latin America to embrace the Virgin it is also because during its first decade and a half, roughly until the mid-1980s, the CCR kept Mary at the margins of the movement. *Jesus Vive e é o Senhor* (Jesus Lives and Is Lord), one of the two main monthly journals of the Brazilian CCR, reflects the Virgin's early peripheral role. From the journal's founding by Father Cipriano Chagas in May of 1977 until 1983 there are no major articles on the Mother of Jesus. Rather, the journal's primary focus during its first six years is faith healing, conversion testimonials and the role of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives. However, starting in 1984 Mary begins to command more attention and within a couple years major articles on her role in the CCR have become a regular feature of *Jesus Vive e é o Senhor*. And the Virgin currently has her own regular section called "Our Mother" (*Nossa Mãe*) in the other major Charismatic journal in Brazil, *Brasil Cristão* (Christian Brazil), which was launched in 1997 by one of the two North American fathers of the Brazilian CCR, Padre Edward Dougherty.

The Virgin's migration from the sidelines of the Renewal to center stage is clearly the result of episcopal pressure to ensure the Catholicness of a movement that inherited its pneumacentrism from Pentecostalism. Mary played only a bit part during the first half of the Renewal's three decades in Ibero-America because of Protestant influences in the movement. But as the CCR rapidly expanded and sought episcopal approval, it increasingly became necessary to bolster the Catholic identity of the movement. And of course the Virgin, particularly Guadalupe (the "Queen of Mexico"), is the most potent and visible symbol of Catholic identity in Latin America. Thus by embracing her the Renewal has fortified its Catholicness in the eyes of incredulous bishops and developed a differentiated religious product that clearly distinguishes itself among spiritual consumers from its Pentecostal competitors. Latin American Christians seeking a more pneumatic type of faith can now choose between virgophilic and virgophobic brands of the same charismatic religious product.

No single incident more clearly illustrates the pivotal role of the Virgin in differentiating the Charismatic product from the Pentecostal than the infamous "kicking of the saint" incident in which on Brazilian national television on October 12, 1995, (the holy day of the Virgin of Aparecida) a Universal Church of the Kingdom of God bishop, Sergio von Helde, kicked and punched a statue of Our Lady of the Apparition, the country's patron saint. Pastor von Helde's desecration of the Brazilian patroness, as offensive as it was to millions of Catholics, was more than a violent and irrational act of iconoclasm. Rather, his desecration of Aparecida was a strategic attack on the main element that differentiates the Charismatic product from the

Pentecostal. Bishop von Helde and many of his Pentecostal brethren correctly perceive much stiffer Catholic competition in the form of the CCR. Pentecostal leaders must now contend with a Catholic church that offers the same spiritual power of the Holy Spirit that is found in their own temples. Therefore in the context of an unregulated religious marketplace that offers a standardized product (pneumatic spirituality), successful spiritual entrepreneurs can be expected to attempt to attract new consumers of the divine through attacks on the features that differentiate a rival brand's product from their own. Put simply, many Latin American Pentecostal leaders understand that it is above all the Virgin Mary who keeps millions of Catholics, especially Charismatics, from abandoning their native faith. They logically worry that the Virgin's more central role in the CCR could reduce the flow of Catholic converts to Pentecostalism.

Thus having embraced the Virgin and won widespread episcopal approval, the CCR began its third decade in Latin America as the largest and most vital Catholic lay movement in the region. Even in Brazil where Base Christian Communities had found more fertile soil than in any other nation, CEB members in the early 1990s found themselves outnumbered by their Charismatic coreligionists at a ratio of two to one (Prandi 14). Given the continuing expansion of the CCR and the declining stock of CEBs, the former probably claims four times as many members as the latter at the beginning of the new century.

Waging War on the Wolves

In addition to continued rapid expansion during the 1990s, the most important pattern of development during the decade has been the completion of the CCR's transformation from a loosely structured, ecumenically oriented movement to a bureaucratized ecclesial group at the vanguard of the church's competition with Pentecostalism for larger shares of the popular religious market. Long gone are the early days when Charismatics and Pentecostals worshiped together at ecumenical prayer groups. Today CCR leaders, such as those gathered at the 1997 national congress in Brazil, are more likely to pray "to break the strength of the evangelicals" (Carranza 226). At the same congress, held in Guaratingueta, Sao Paulo, Padre Alberto Gambarini, a specialist in demonology and "sects," exhorted fellow Charismatics to invest in television and radio "in order to vanquish Satan and the enemy sects that are penetrating every home in the country" (Carranza 226).

During the 1990s the panic over the "invasion of the sects" that had erupted in the mid-1980s only intensified. In Brazil, the president of the CNBB, Monseñor Luciano Mendes, in a 1991 speech cited the proselytism of the expanding "sects" as the greatest obstacle to pastoral action (Comunicado Mensal 3/91). Following suit, Mendes's successor, President Lucas Neves, stated in 1995 that the "sects" would be the CNBB's main adversary for the rest of the decade and that the bishops were considering joining forces with mainline Protestant churches in a holy war against "fundamentalist sects" (Oro 93). Alarm over burgeoning Pentecostalism reached the pinnacle of the international church with Pope John Paul II in 1992 at the Fourth General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Santo Domingo denouncing Latin American Protestants as "rapacious wolves" raiding the vulnerable Catholic flock (Hennelly 48).

In direct response to surging Pentecostal competition the pontiff and bishops developed "New Evangelization" as the main theme of the episcopal conference. The New Evangelization essentially seeks to revitalize the Latin American church through pastoral action aimed at members of the Catholic flock deemed most vulnerable to Pentecostal predators. In his opening address at the conference, the pope identified families, youth and the infirm as the easiest prey for the Pentecostal competition (Hennelly 48) while the bishops in their conclusion single out

migrants, people unattended by priests, “religious ignorants,” “simple people,” the poor, and those with family problems as sectors of the Catholic population that are vulnerable to the “advance of the sects” (Hennelly 112). Collectively the episcopal and pontifical definition of vulnerable sectors is so comprehensive that the great majority of Latin Americans would be included in it.

Despite the lack of specificity, the New Evangelization has made a preferential option for nominal Catholics among the popular classes of urban Latin America. Within this preferential populational group those who are sick, adolescents and young adults, and families in crisis receive special attention. Numerous episcopally commissioned studies of the Pentecostal boom have identified these sectors as the most frequent converts to the Protestant competition. Cognizant of the supreme importance of faith healing in the extraordinary success of Pentecostalism in the region, the pope in his opening address called for special pastoral attention to the sick, “bearing in mind the evangelizing power of suffering” (Hennelly 58).

The type of pastoral action called for by the New Evangelization at Santo Domingo is essentially a prescription for the CCR. Although not mentioned by name, the CCR is lauded by the bishops as a movement that has “produced much fruit in our churches” (Hennelly 102). The episcopal leaders had the CCR in mind when they stated “these movements give priority to the word of God and praying together, and they are particularly attentive to the action of the Spirit” (Hennelly 102). More importantly, the specific pastoral action recommended by the pontiff and the heads of the Latin American church represents the same missionary activity the Renewal had been carrying out for more than a decade. The pope’s clamor for evangelization that focuses on a personal relationship with God, active liturgy and lay participation and Marian devotion is an unequivocal endorsement of the mission of the CCR (Hennelly 48). Further endorsement comes from the bishops who state that it is the task of the New Evangelization to “arouse a personal acceptance of Jesus Christ” with the Holy Spirit providing the “creative breath” of the New Evangelization (Hennelly 82). Moreover, the bishops specifically point to pastoral directions that the CCR, more than any other Latin American ecclesial group, had already been following. Besides personal acceptance of Jesus, the episcopal leaders recommend greater lay participation in church life, increased devotion to the Virgin and pope, welcoming the Spirit at moments of crisis, animated and participatory liturgy, and home visits to nominal Catholic families (Hennelly 113).

Although already at the forefront of church missionary activities, the CCR in Latin America responded to the call made at Santo Domingo for New Evangelization by intensifying its proselytizing activities. Of course faith healing in its multiple forms is probably the most effective form of evangelization, but beyond attracting nominal Catholics back to the ecclesial fold through the promise of restored health, the Renewal took specific pastoral measures to win new adherents. At the grassroots level, Charismatics copied the Pentecostal competition by evangelizing through home visits.^{xvi} The “visitation ministry,” as it is called in Brazil, sends lay missionaries, who are mostly Charismatics, to the homes of the target population of vulnerable nominal Catholics to invite them to attend a prayer group or some other church function. Unaccustomed to Catholic missionary agents knocking on their doors, many mistake the visitors for Pentecostals, Mormons or Jehovah Witnesses who pioneered door to door evangelization in Latin America.

CCR vs. IURD on TV

While individual Charismatics evangelize through personal contact, the CCR has also emulated its Pentecostal rivals in embracing mass media, particularly television and radio, as a potent tool for spreading the Charismatic gospel. In fact, such is the Renewal’s dominance of Catholic radio and television in many Latin American countries that there would be precious little

church programming without it. In Brazil, the majority of the programming on the country's one hundred eighty-one Catholic radio stations is produced by CCR members (Isto E 12/24/97, 100), while in Guatemala the Renewal almost single-handedly answered the papal call to the episcopacy in 1983 to take to the airwaves to "counteract the pernicious influence of the proselytizing activities of groups with little authentically religious content that create confusion among Catholics" (CEG 867). Six of the seven Catholic radio stations in Guatemala are run by the CCR (de Gongora and Estrada). Padre Hugo Estrada's Charismatic mass is broadcast on Guatemalan cable television twice a week. And in the strategic area of televangelism, it is the Brazilian CCR that has established the greatest presence on the small screens of Latin America.

The Brazilian Renewal has moved far beyond the simple broadcast of Charismatic masses to the production of religious dramas akin to the country's wildly popular *novelas* or soap operas.^{xvii} It is no coincidence that Charismatic television is strongest in the Latin American nation that has the greatest degree of Pentecostal programming. The Universal Church of Kingdom of God, in fact, runs its own station, Rede Record. More than any other factor it was Pentecostalism's dominance of religious broadcasting that compelled the Brazilian CCR to embrace television as a powerful medium for realizing their evangelical mission. Father Edward Dougherty has made CCR history by not only importing the movement to Brazil but also by pioneering in Catholic TV. In 1983 his Charismatic association, Associação do Senhor Jesus (Association of Lord Jesus) aired the country's first CCR program, We Announce Jesus (Anunciamos Jesus), which is currently the longest running weekly Charismatic program.

That a North American priest, hailing from a nation with the world's most competitive religious and television markets, should be the one to put the Brazilian CCR on TV is unsurprising. Having come of age in a religious landscape thoroughly dominated by their own church, Dougherty's Brazilian coreligionist peers knew next to nothing about competing for spiritual consumers in a free market of faith. Emphasizing the importance of intelligent marketing of the Charismatic product, the North American Jesuit explained in a 1998 interview how market research to determine the tastes and preferences of spiritual consumers allows him to "satisfy the customers." During the past decade Padre Eduardo has expanded his operation to include control of a large television production center, O Centro de Produção Século XXI (Century 21 Production Center). Century 21, located in the small city of Valinhos, Sao Paulo, comprises three large studios, which employ the latest technology in video production and a spacious auditorium for hosting studio audiences. Its programs are shown on national television covering 85 percent of Brazilian territory, and recently Century 21 has started to export its product to other Latin American nations, the U.S. and Europe (Carranza 198 and 201).

Also a skilled fundraiser, Father Dougherty finances his enterprise through a combination of contributions from the seventy thousand members of his Association of Lord Jesus, sales of television programs and religious articles, and occasional donations from wealthy Brazilian, North American and European Charismatics. Salient among the latter is the Breninkmeyer family who owns C&A, the international chain of department stores with a strong presence in Brazil (Carranza 198-99). In contrast to his initial efforts, which were spurned by the CNBB under the influence of progressive bishops, Padre Eduardo over the past decade has won widespread episcopal support for his starring role in bringing the Brazilian church into the homes of millions of TV viewers. Commenting on both Century 21 and the inauguration of Redevida (the church's answer to the IURD-owned Rede Record) Dougherty's local bishop, Monseñor Geraldo Azevedo of Campinas said, "the Catholic church went for a long time without investing in communication... that's why we need an offensive to counterbalance the presence of Pentecostal churches in the mass media" (Carranza 203).

Undoubtedly the church's most potent weapon in the battlefield of television is its newest creation, Redevida (the Life Network). Inaugurated in May of 1995, Redevida is Brazil's first Catholic television station. While the station is not technically an organ of the church, 80 percent of its programming is religious and its creation was a joint project of the Catholic media impresario João Filho and the CNBB, who in 1989 won the concession for the station from the Sarney government. "The Christian family channel," as it is known in the church, is not directly controlled by the CCR, but the fact that Charismatics are its target audience and most of its programs are produced by CCR producers, such as *Seculo XXI* translates into profound Renewal influence. Currently broadcasting eighteen hours a day, Redevida is transmitted throughout the nation via satellite and is financed through the sale of advertising space and donations (Carranza 210). In accord with its mission to the "Christian family," Redevida does not accept advertising of alcohol, tobacco or other products deemed offensive to Catholic family life. The proscription of "sinful" advertising from Redevida largely reflects CCR influence on the station. Charismatics, especially from the popular classes, tend to adopt a Pentecostal-type ascetic code of conduct, which allows them to externalize their conversion to a life in the Spirit. Finally, beyond the world of Catholic television, the CCR has greatly benefited from increasing exposure on secular TV, especially on Latin America's largest network, Rede Globo. As mentioned previously, since 1998 Padre Marcelo has appeared as a regular guest on the *Faustao* show, one of Globo's most popular programs, and his carioca conpère, Father Zeca, a young Charismatic priest idolized by CCR youth in Rio de Janeiro, has also received widespread secular media coverage.

A Tardy Episcopal Embrace

Redevida went on air less than a year after the Brazilian Bishops finally granted official ecclesiastical approval to the CCR. That the CNBB recognized the movement more than a decade later than many of its Latin American counterparts requires an explanation. While the Brazilian church was facing some of the stiffest Pentecostal competition in the region, and many moderate and conservative bishops already viewed the CCR as an attractive product for Catholic consumers, the strength of the progressive wing of the episcopacy delayed ecclesiastical approval. Common among progressive bishops and clergy is the view that the CCR is part of a conservative restorationist project designed to curtail the influence of Liberation Theology and the Base Christian Communities that subscribe to liberationist ideologies. Typical of this viewpoint is the CNBB department of communication, which in 1984 refused Father Dougherty's request for funding of his program *Anunciamos Jesus*. Dominated by progressives, the episcopal department viewed *Anunciamos Jesus* as an obstacle in the ecclesial path toward liberation. In rejecting funding for the program, the department described *Anunciamos Jesus* as following a "line that is incorporeal, Pentecostal, spiritualist, authoritarian, hierarchical and contrary to the pastoral path of the CNBB" (Carranza 185). Such "progressive" views forced Padre Eduardo to go abroad, particularly back to his native U.S., in search of funding. The Brazilian bishops, of course, like their homologues throughout Latin America, were also very concerned about the CCR's potential for developing into a parallel ecclesial movement and the threat to their own authority posed by a group that seemed to claim a direct channel to the Holy Spirit. However, the unparalleled strength of the progressive sector in the CNBB during the 1970s and much of the 1980s meant that Base Christian Communities and not the CCR would receive preferential CNBB support. It is only with the ascendancy of moderates and conservatives and ever-expanding Pentecostalism at the beginning of the 1990s that a critical mass of bishops came to view the CCR as one of the most effective means of revitalizing the church in the face of relentless Protestant competition.

Also contributing to the episcopal green light was a new CCR program designed to promote further growth and take on the Pentecostals head on. Launched in 1993, a year before the episcopacy recognized the Renewal, the “National Offensive” set the ambitious goals of establishing at least one prayer group in every Brazilian parish, expanding at least one percent faster than the general population, augmenting the number of seminarians by 10 percent per year, identical gender participation, and mobilizing at least one million Charismatics for a day of Marian prayer every October 12. Under the slogan, “with renewed missionary ardor,” the National Offensive also put together a more structured national office divided into twelve departments. One of the salient departments is Project Lumen, which coordinates the movement’s evangelization work through mass media (Ofensiva Nacional and Lima and Oyama 7). In seven years the Offensive has already realized several of its goals. Most importantly, the CCR now has prayer groups in all Brazilian parishes. Thus, the launching of the Offensive allowed the CCR to flex its ecclesial muscles and demonstrate to the bishops that more than any other church movement, it had the strength to turn back the tide of nominal Catholics rolling into Pentecostal churches.

The Politics of Charisma

The religious market is not the only place where the CCR competes with its Pentecostal rivals. After spending its first two decades on the political sidelines in most countries, the CCR, particularly in Brazil, has taken a page from the Pentecostal playbook and has sent some of its own players to the arena of electoral politics. In Brazil, the CCR’s first step into the political arena occurred in the late 1970s with the election of its national president, Osmar Pereira, to the office of federal deputy representing the state of Minas Gerais (Carranza 122). A decade later at the local level, Father Dougherty mobilized Charismatics in Campinas to elect one of their own, Salvador Filho, as alderman on the city council in 1988 and again in 1994 (Carranza 122). Reflecting its increasing interest in politics, the Brazilian CCR at its 1995 national congress created an additional department, Matias, which coordinates the movement’s political strategy (Carranza 123). Not to be outdone by the Protestant *bancada evangelica*, a bloc of evangelical (predominantly Pentecostal), national legislators elected in the late 1980s, CCR members founded their own political party, the National Solidarity Party (PSN), which seeks to elect Charismatics to political office at all levels. In the late 1990s, the Brazilian CCR could claim two federal deputies, two state deputies, in Sao Paulo and Minas Gerais, and some five hundred mayors and city council members throughout the country (Carranza 125).

While CCR political activity in Brazil tends to confirm the suspicions of Catholic liberationists that the movement is a conservative force, other experiences in Latin America demonstrate that the Renewal is capable of engaging in a range of political behavior. At the federal level in Brazil, Charismatic legislators have adhered to a political agenda that very much resembles that of their Evangelical counterparts. Not only have they opposed legislation to recognize same sex unions and abortion, but also Deputy Filho headed a petition with twenty thousand signatures demanding that the proposal to legalize same sex unions not even be brought to the legislative floor. He denounced the proposal as nefarious and abominable, which made him enemy number one of the Brazilian Association of Gays, Lesbians and Transvestites (Carranza 128). Filho also led the National Campaign against the legalization of abortion, which was launched on the Charismatic television program “Let’s Praise the Lord” (Louvemos ao Senhor) on the Redevida channel in August of 1997. In accord with Catholic doctrine, Filho opposes abortion even in the cases of rape and risk of mortality to the mother (Carranza 128).

Confirming the conservative political orientation of the Brazilian CCR, a poll of electoral patterns found Charismatics voting for conservative presidential candidate, Fernando Henrique Cardoso at a higher rate than any other religion surveyed, including Pentecostals. 46 percent of Charismatics surveyed voted for the current president, Cardoso, while only 22 percent cast their ballot for the leftist candidate of the Workers' Party (PT) Lula da Silva. Charismatics, in fact, rejected Lula at a rate that was second only to Pentecostals. Perhaps even more notable, however, is the fact that Base Christian Community members, much to the chagrin of their liberationist leaders, preferred Cardoso over Lula, who has been the political darling of the progressive church. Cardoso won 40 percent of the CEB vote while Lula garnered only 31 percent (Prandi 176). In contrast to the Brazilian CCR, Charismatics in a popular district of Curacao joined a progressive political movement in support of agrarian reform in 1987 (Lampe 434). While studies of Charismatic political activity in Latin America are lacking, it is probably the case that the Brazilian experience is quite typical. There are those who would predict that as the movement continues its expansion among the popular classes, the potential for progressive political action will grow. However, the predominantly conservative orientation of Pentecostal political action in the region should dispel the myth that the popular classes have any natural affinity for progressive politics. That more Brazilian CEB members voted for President Cardoso than Lula is dramatic evidence of the lack of such an affinity. One would expect that a candidate such as Lula, a former factory worker without a high school degree whose party claims to represent the interests of the Brazilian popular classes, would be the natural candidate of Catholics belonging to ecclesial communities that are conceived as the pastoral expression of liberation theology's "preferential option for the poor." Yet an astonishingly high proportion, more than two-thirds, of CEB members did not vote for Lula in the 1994 presidential contest (Prandi 176). The most likely scenario is for the CCR to continue following a moderately conservative political agenda as it expands on the urban peripheries of Latin America.

Free Market Salvation

Thus in the space of just three decades the Charismatic Renewal has developed into the largest and most animated Catholic lay movement in Latin America. Base Christian Community members watch from the sidelines as the RCC fills soccer stadiums throughout the region with spirited believers and dominates Catholic broadcasting with its own message of liberation, which calls not for freedom from political and economic oppression but rather for deliverance from demonic oppression. That the type of liberation promised by the Charismatic Renewal has proved far more appealing to popular religious consumers than the kind offered by many CEBs is powerful proof of the vitality of Latin America's new religious marketplace in which consumer demand (or lack thereof) determines the fate of spiritual enterprises.

Over the past four decades popular religious consumers in Latin America have exhibited a strong preference for pneumatic spirituality in both its Christian and non-Christian forms. It is no coincidence that the most successful religious organizations in the region are those that revolve around direct contact with or even possession by the Spirit and spirits. Charismatic Catholicism, Pentecostalism and the African-Latin religions, such as Brazilian Candomble, as different as they may be in other aspects, all share the common element of pneumacentrism. And as this article has demonstrated, one of the primary functions of the Spirit, and indeed the spirits, is to heal individual believers of their earthly afflictions. In his study of the RCC in Curacao, Armando Lampe makes the crucial point that religions of possession are also ones of healing; the two moments are inextricably intertwined (Lampe 434). Thus, charismatic Christianity and African-

Latin groups have prospered in the unregulated market of faith because their religious specialists produce the standardized products, faith healing and pneumatic spirituality, that popular consumers demand. In contrast, organizations, such as the CEBs, which offer neither supernatural healing nor direct contact with the Holy Spirit or spirits, have failed to thrive in the popular religious marketplace.

If the dynamics of Latin America's new religious economy have facilitated the RCC's success in recruiting millions of Catholics to the movement, it is also the free market which has impelled the bishops to endorse the Charismatic product. Strong consumer preference for pneumatic spirituality has meant that in the context of an unregulated religious market if the bishops did not offer a product that facilitated direct contact with the Holy Spirit their church would continue to lose members to the denominations that focus on the Third Person of the Trinity. Though many bishops themselves have no taste for charismatic Christianity, and some actually perceive it as threatening and/or heretical, the meteoric rise of the Pentecostal competition has impelled them to accept, if not promote, a Catholic brand of Pentecostalism. In the face of surging Pentecostalism, which recruits primarily in the vast field of nominal Catholics, episcopacies, regardless of their own spiritual preferences, in the interest of their own ecclesiastical institution have had to offer a religious product that can effectively compete with their Evangelical rivals. An episcopal red light given to the RCC in all likelihood would have resulted in even greater Catholic attrition, as those seeking ecstatic spirituality continued to flock to the Assembly of God and Church of the Word, among others.

Thus facing up to the stark reality of the logic of a free-market religious economy, the bishops not only incorporated the Charismatic product into their ecclesial firm but also intelligently insisted on differentiating it from that of their main competitors. To avoid confusion with the standardized pneumatic product of the Pentecostal competition, the chief Catholic producers have developed a Virgophilic brand of charismatic Christianity. This most potent of all symbols of Latin American Catholic identity joins the Holy Spirit in making the RCC the church's most appealing product in the new religious marketplace. Ironically, it is the competition of the free-market religious economy, which the church so steadfastly resisted until recently, that has led to the current Catholic renewal in Latin America.

*References available upon request

ⁱ Pagode is an infectiously saccharine variant of samba popular among the urban popular classes.

ⁱⁱ When not derisively referring to them as "sects," Latin American bishops also employ the term "separated brethren" for Pentecostals and other Protestants.

ⁱⁱⁱ The *cursillo* (little course) movement was founded in 1949 in Spain by Monseñor Juan Hervás. In Latin America it sought to organize and train middle class laity with the overarching goal of Catholicizing the workplace and society in general.

^{iv} Of course historic Protestant churches and fundamentalist faith missions had been operating in the region for over half a century, but as Virginia Garrard-Burnett demonstrates in her study of Protestantism in Guatemala they were never able to successfully adapt their religious product to Latin American tastes and preferences.

^v Though not an uncommon sight, priests are not present at most prayer group meetings.

^{vi} Despite frequent assertions to the contrary, numerous studies have proved that the great majority of Pentecostal converts are recruited from the Catholic population, especially those whose faith is nominal. The largest study of Latin American Protestantism of its kind, the 1996 analysis of Rio de Janeiro's Evangelical population, conducted by ISER (Institute of Religious Studies), found that 61 percent of Protestant converts were ex-Catholics. In contrast only 16 percent of converts described themselves as former practitioners of the African-Brazilian religions of Umbanda and Candomblé (ISER 18).

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- vii Entitled “Ecumenism and Charismatic Renewal: Theological and Pastoral Orientations: Malines Document II, the document stands as one of the most important on the role of ecumenism in the CCR.
- viii The Chilean CCR conceives its labor of evangelizing nominal Catholics as a “rescue mission” (un trabajo de rescate) (Galilea 31).
- ix Sociologist Brenda Carranza reports two hundred CCR prayer groups operating in Brazil in the mid-1970s. Conservatively estimating the average size of prayer groups at thirty members translates to a CCR community of approximately six thousand during the period.
- x The exorcism mass is not the only type of religious service that Charismatic priests have imported from Pentecostalism. While waiting for an interview in July of 1998 with Padre Zeca, one of the young Brazilian stars of the RCC, I noticed that the Church of the Resurrection, the parish church of Rio de Janeiro’s famous beach district, Copacabana, was holding “*missas dos dizimistas*” or tithers’ masses on the second Saturday of every month. Masses aimed at recruiting and rewarding faithful tithers are a direct import from the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, which pioneered in offering weekly “*cultos dos dizimistas*” or tithers’ services.
- xi Known as *comunidades de alianza* (*aliança* in Portuguese), covenant communities are RCC groups that live communally and often take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Members are predominantly middle class, and some communities have been instrumental in creating Charismatic foundations and associations, many of which are heavily involved in mass media work (Carranza 49).
- xii Cenacles are named after the locale in which the Holy Spirit descended among the Apostles “in tongues of fire” on the day of Pentecost (fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus) causing them to preach in unknown languages.
- xiii In 1976 the Cardinal of Santiago and an episcopal compatriot drafted a pastoral letter of endorsement of the CCR (Chordas 144). National episcopacies gave a green light to the Renewal in the following order: Puerto Rico (1977), Costa Rica (1979), Honduras (1984) and Guatemala (1986).
- xiv The CNBB’s rather tardy approval of the Brazilian Renewal in 1994 will be explored in a subsequent section.
- xv Sociologist of religion, Peter Berger posits standardization and marginal differentiation as two major effects of consumer influence on religious production in unregulated religious markets. Berger points out that the similar religious “needs” of believers belonging to the same social strata will result in a standardized religious product, such as pneumatic spirituality in the Latin American case. Marginal differentiation arises from the need for religious producers to distinguish their standardized product from that of their competitors (Berger 148-149).
- xvi Numerous church studies of the “sectarian invasion” conducted in the 1980s, such as the one commissioned by Central America bishops in 1988 found that the greatest evangelizing activity of the Protestant competition was home visits (SEDAC 1995).
- xvii Among Padre Eduardo’s “*novelas*” are Irmã Catarina (Sister Catherine, running 24 chapters), O Amor do Pai (Love of the Father), A vinda do Messias (The Coming of the Messiah), A Última Semana (The Last Week), Ele Vive (He Lives), A verdadeira história do Papai Noel (The True Story of Santa Claus) and Antônio dos Milagres (Anthony of Miracles) (Carranza 201).