

Latin America: The Dynamics of the Religious Field

Heinrich Schäfer

The Bertelsmann Stiftung's Religion Monitor includes two Latin American countries, Guatemala and Brazil, which are of particular importance to the religious transformation underway in this region of the globe. Indeed, the dynamics of the religious field in both countries reflect those in Latin America more generally. This chapter thus draws on data provided by the Religion Monitor to examine Guatemala and Brazil individually. First, actors in the religious field are introduced and the strength of their religious beliefs assessed. This is followed by an analysis of these actors' strategies, both in the specific context of the religious field and in the wider context of the public sphere.

Guatemala and Brazil differ dramatically in terms of their societal profiles. Guatemala is a small Central American country with a population of 12 million showing strong polarization along ethnic and social lines, whereas Brazil, with its population of 188 million, is the ethnic and social melting pot of Latin America. In Guatemala, military dictatorships ruled almost continuously from 1954 to 1986, repeatedly crushing social unrest in the country while exacerbating economic inequality and the ethnic and social marginalization of indigenous Guatemalans, who make up 40 percent of the overall population. As we shall see, this severe polarization of society, coupled with the compulsory homogenization of public opinion, has shaped the religious practices of respondents in Guatemala in several different ways. In Brazil, there has been an ambitious program of industrialization underway since the first half of the 20th century that has been coupled with an ideology of modernization and "morenidade" (ethnic intermixture). Although this ideology has not succeeded in overcoming latent racism entirely, it has facilitated remarkable cultural creativity. Despite military rule from 1964 to 1985, Brazil has been shaped by ethnic pluralism much more strongly than Guatemala. Even though economic polarization is strong, the scope of individual advancement remains broad. This state of affairs also plays a role in shaping the specific form of the religious field.

In terms of religion's overall development in both countries, Guatemala has been the first, indeed throughout Latin America, to experience the growth of Protestantism. Protestant missionaries from the United States first arrived in Guatemala in 1882. They have traditionally worked in cooperation with the countries' liberals. Pentecostalism is more recent, having arrived in the 1930s. When the Catholic Church, which has traditionally wielded significant influence, embarked upon a program of social activism during the 1970s and 1980s, it drew the wrath of the ruling parties, which led to the violent deaths of several of the church's rural activists and the loss of political influence. The Catholic Church has also been socially active in Brazil through Basic Ecclesiastical Communities (BECs) and the landless movement. However, the church hierarchy is at the same time working to restore the church's influence and its conservative fringe is increasingly convening in liturgical groups. The Catholic Church is no doubt pursuing this line of action to counter the powerful growth of Pentecostalism and its increasing political influence. This revivalist movement has increasingly shaped Brazilian Protestantism since 1910/11 (Congregação Cristã/Assembléias de Deus) and today plays a clearly dominant role (see chapter on Pentecostalism).

One means of theorizing the development of the religious field in Latin America entails drawing upon the typology of religious actors defined by Max Weber and interpreted by Pierre Bourdieu in relation to competition within the religious field (Weber 1985: 259 ff., 268 ff., Bourdieu 2000). There are three ideal-type actors—the “priest,” the “prophet” and the “magician”—competing (and at the same time fighting) for the favor of the laity by producing “goods of salvation” oriented toward the laity's needs. The lay-oriented production of religious goods and other strategies—like political alliances—serve the actor's interest in manipulating power relationships within the religious field to their own advantage.

The ideal-type religious institution (the “priest”) maintains a monopoly over the religious field—or at least lays claim to such a monopoly—and is not only bound to tradition but in league with political rulers. In contrast, the religious opposition group (the “prophet”)—often comprising lesser sectarian clergy and intellectual petty bourgeois—articulates an oppositional religiosity and often represents social positions fighting for ascendancy within the social order. The “prophet” must carefully attend to the organization and discipline of his followers in order to be effective from his subordinate position. This also means that he must, in the words of Luther (also a prophet), “keep an eye on the ordinary people's mouth” (*dem Volk auf's Maul zu schauen*). The “magician” is a free

religious agent. He does not have any particular interest in the mobilization of followers, but offers his magical incantations—often for money—to all who seek him out, regardless of whether they are allied with one of the other positions. In so doing, the magician clearly throws a wrench into the system of power games for followers and influence.

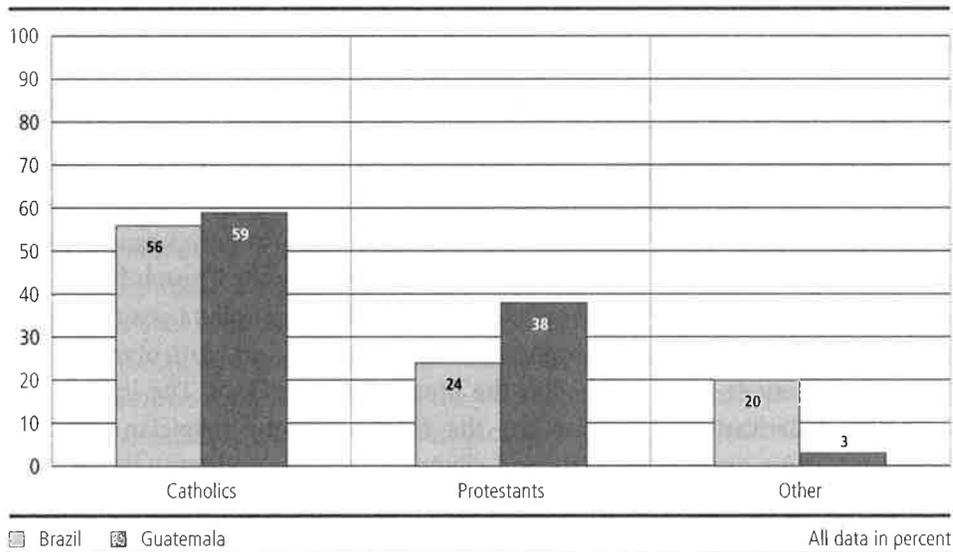
Obviously, no model can correspond precisely to a real situation, but the model of the religious field provides a theoretical conceptual framework through which the religious transformations and conflicts in Latin America can be better understood. Clearly, the established and hierarchical Catholic Church fulfills the role of the priest, while the sector of liberation theology occupies a position more along the lines of a moderate prophet. It is Protestantism, in particular the Pentecostal movement, which embodies the prophet *par excellence*. The indigenous and Afro-American religions assume the function of the magician—*mutates mutandis*. There are several shifts and changes currently underway in the contours of Latin American Christianity that are variously reflected in the Religion Monitor's data.

Actors in the religious field

Christianity is indisputably the dominant religion in Latin America. The roots of Christianity's—and especially the Catholic Church's—powerful influence lie in the continent's historical subjugation to the Spanish and Portuguese monarchies. The region is unique in its religious homogeneity: 80 percent of the Brazilian population and 98 percent of the Guatemalan population are Christians. The percentage of both non-Christians and nonreligious among the total population is marginal. Added to this is the fact that only theistic variants are represented in Latin America, even among the non-Christian religions.

However, when considering indigenous or Afro-American religions—the position of the magician—one should bear in mind that the brutality of Christianization and the slave trade under the Catholic colonial powers did drive the non-Catholic or non-“Western”—that is, indigenous—religions underground. They have, however, left their mark on the contours of society. Among the Afro-American and indigenous populations, and increasingly among mestizos and whites in Brazil, drawing upon several religions or confessions simultaneously is a widespread practice. (The term “dual membership” is misleading, since it suggests a too strict delimitation of actors' loyalties within the religious field.) In fact, those who are nominally Catholic or Protestant may also practice an indige-

Figure 1: Religious affiliation



nous or Afro-American religion. David Barrett thus points to the importance of dual affiliation (2001), which is estimated at 14 percent and even 32 percent of the religiously active population in Guatemala and Brazil respectively.

The following example is thus in no way unusual. A key female informant participating in a research project on “religion on the periphery” in São Paulo attends at least three different religious events each week: a church service at the *Assembléias de Deus* (where she also serves in an official capacity); a gathering at a *terreiro* of Afro-American *Candomblé*; and a Catholic mass. The unifying religious symbol across all three religions is Jesus, who is worshipped in aspects of *Candomblé* and in *Umbanda* (as well as in the Cuban *Santería*) as the deity *Oxalá*. As for the informant, not even her position at the *Assembléias* prevents her from continuing with multi-religious praxis.

For those with weaker ties to a specific religion, attending multiple services to meet more immediate needs is more common. As religion in Latin America diversifies, indigenous and Afro-American religions have greater opportunities for profiling themselves institutionally and gaining social status. Indigenous religious circles are now found among Guatemala’s intellectual middle class, and in Brazil, groups such as the *Umbanda Nova Era* are attracting increasing numbers from the modernizing upwardly mobile classes in search of healing and wellness.

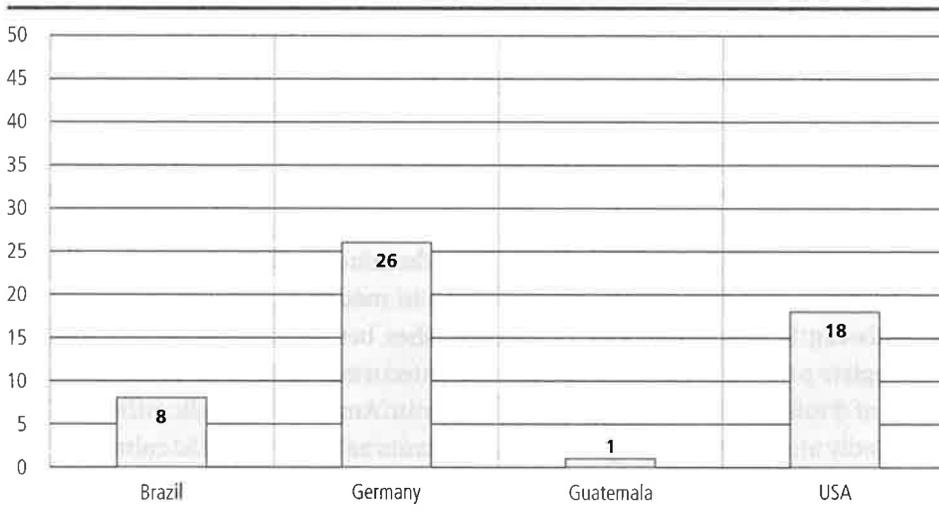
Given the diversity and fluidity of religious praxis, great caution must be exercised in interpreting strictly mathematical statistics. In general, religious praxis

in the so-called Third World has *very little* in common with the administratively organized and legalistically delimited churchliness found especially in European countries such as Germany. This has far-reaching consequences for theory and methodology that, however, go beyond the scope of this discussion.

In contrast to the United States and Germany, the percentage of non-religious citizens in Brazil (Religion Monitor: 8 %, Barrett: 3 %) and Guatemala (Religion Monitor: 1 %; Barrett: 2 %) is surprisingly low (Figure 2). In the case of Guatemala, one could attribute these low numbers to the slow process of societal modernization. However, this would misconstrue the situation by assuming that modernization and secularization are inextricably linked. Brazil, for example, presents a very different case in which modernization and religion are equally dynamic.

The form of modernity found in Latin America is clearly different from that in Europe. Similar to the United States, modernity in Latin America is not built upon the ashes of religious battles gone cold. The opposite may have appeared to have been the case when, in the 19th century, secular liberal elites, in cooperation with Freemasons, mobilized against an alliance of conservatives and the Catholic Church in several Latin American countries. Yet, in this context, historical Protestantism from the United States provided Latin American liberals a religious counterweight to the Catholic Church. The liberals viewed an alliance

Figure 2: Non-religious



All data in percent.

with Protestantism as an opportunity to increase their power and influence, above all in their struggle over the educational system. From the beginning of its missionary activity, Protestantism has generally presented itself as a partner in advocating liberal interests in Latin America. Processes of transformation toward modernity in Latin America, such as those advanced by Simon Bolívar and Jose Martí, have run in parallel with an internal restructuring of the religious field, and less so with general secularization. Protestantism—more recently Pentecostalism in particular—is the force behind societal modernization in Latin America and the key manager of its contradictions (see chapter on Pentecostalism).¹

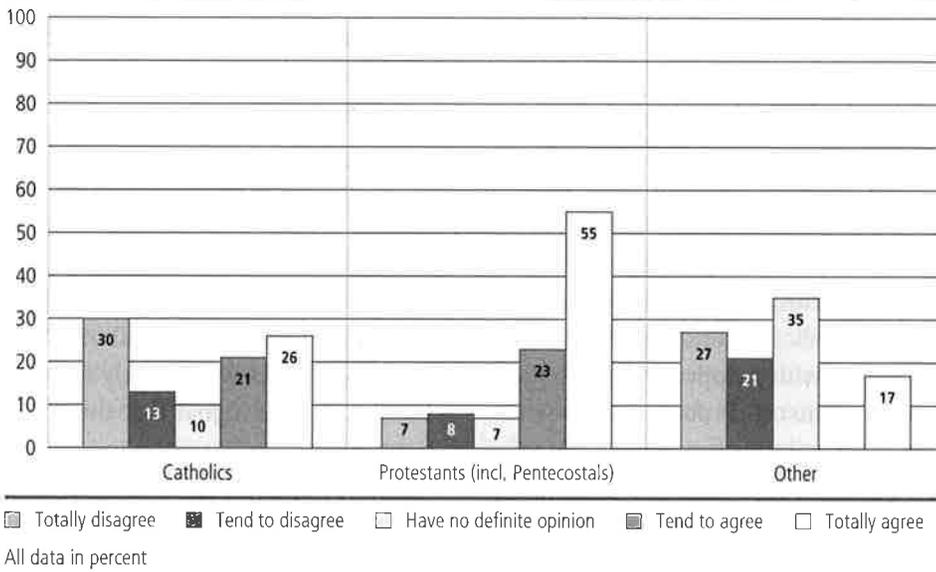
Unsurprisingly, Protestantism has been growing rapidly since the mid-20th century. It is not, however, the European form of Protestantism that is being mobilized within the framework of twentieth century social transformations, but the “Free Church” offshoots that took root in the United States such as Pentecostalism, and the Holiness, Methodist, Baptist or Presbyterian churches. The mission and growth of these churches is reflected in the Religion Monitor by the relatively high percentage of Protestants among the total population. Compared with the last official censuses (1999 in Guatemala and 2000 in Brazil), the Religion Monitor shows a significantly higher percentage of Protestants in Guatemala (38 % vs. 29 %) as well as Brazil (24 % vs. 16 %).

While these increases might be attributed in part to the use of different measuring methods, they nonetheless underscore the undeniable fact that Protestantism is attracting increasingly more followers in Latin American society. The Brazilian results point to the growing role of non-Christian religious orientations, whether other religions (20 %, Figure 1) or no religion (8 %, Figure 2). One should bear in mind, however, that Protestantism—a relatively new option in Latin America—has been quite dynamic in profiling itself in society.

How do we account for this first general impression? It has in part to do with the important role played by religion in Latin America’s process of modernization. Also important is the fact that the emergence of Protestantism in the mid-twentieth century in a socially relevant form became itself a subject of conflict in the religious field over the role religion plays in modernization.

This can be seen quite clearly in the clashes between the BECs of liberation theologians and Protestant—particularly Pentecostal—churches. Since the early years of Protestant missionary activity in Latin America, Catholic officials have repeatedly and polemically spoken of Protestants as agents of U.S. culture, imperialism and, sometimes, of the CIA. It is especially significant to note that in the course of such polemics, actors in the religious field are fashioned into representatives of entire continental paradigms of culture and modernity. Religious iden-

Figure 3: "I try to convert as many people to my religion as possible."—Guatemala



tities become strategic elements in the political and cultural field, and, conversely, cultural and political strategies adopt religious elements. Catholicism has deployed its own defensive arguments against the neo-Pentecostal movement, which for its part claims the mantle as the true representative of "real,"—meaning U.S. American—modernity in the struggle against Rome's legacy of inefficiency and corruption. This state of affairs provokes religious commitment within the respective Catholic and Protestant camps, polarizes the religious field and invests its dynamics with political meaning.

However, the high percentage of strongly committed Protestants cannot be explained only by the fact that the religious field is polarized. After all, Protestantism itself has contributed to this state of affairs. One important reason has to do with the fact that Protestant churches, in particular Pentecostal churches, have recruited many converts in the last few decades. Thus, many Protestants are only first- or second-generation members of their faith. Recently acquired, their religious convictions can best be consolidated and protected by propagation against a Catholic public somewhat inimical to Protestant beliefs. This is an integral aspect of habitualizing their beliefs and developing a clear Protestant identity.

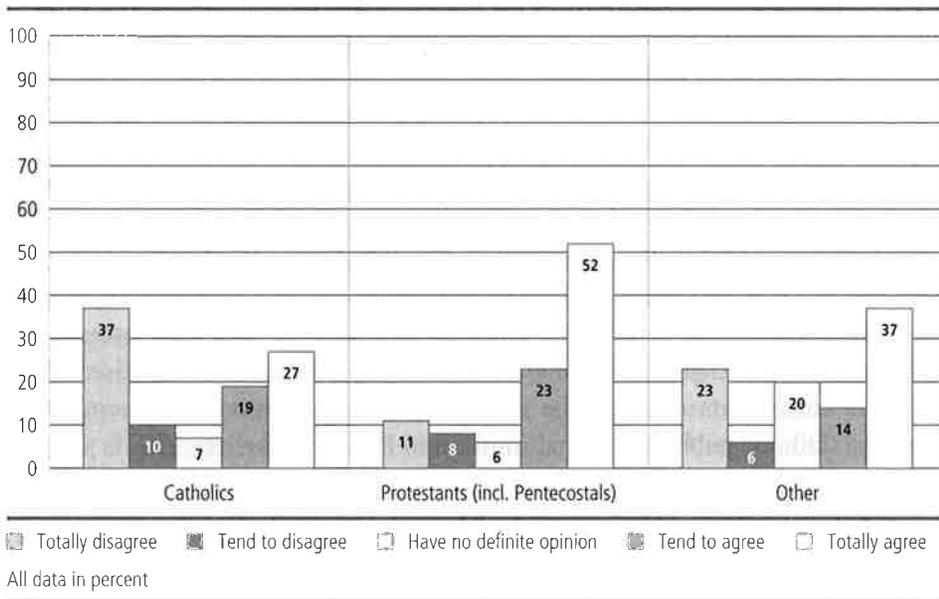
This process of identity consolidation renders Protestantism in general, and Pentecostalism in particular, much more dynamic than Catholicism in the reli-

religious field. This is reflected in the responses given to the question regarding the desire to convert as many people as possible (Figures 3 and 4). In both Guatemala and Brazil, there is a marked contrast between Catholics (Guatemala: $M = 3.03$, Brazil: $M = 3.10$) and Protestants (Guatemala: $M = 1.91$, Brazil: $M = 2.05$)—though both countries show broad scatter here.

Protestants are significantly more prepared (margin of error $p \leq .000$) to actively recruit others to their faith. This trend is clearly recognizable on the streets and in the media, as well as in the number of public events and door-to-door visits. The Catholic Church is reacting with its own evangelical programs and supporting a charismatic Catholic movement monitored by Episcopal officials. Catholic respondents, however, were divided in their opinions about missionary activities; approximately equal numbers of Catholics were clearly in favor of and against it. Protestants, however, are sending a clear signal that they support active missionary work in the religious field.

A second reason for the increasing numbers of Protestants in Latin America lies in the fact that Protestantism has accompanied processes of rapid social change in the region. Protestantism's religious and social praxis meets the religious needs of those who have been particularly affected by these changes. Guatemala's first missionary arrived in 1882 from the United States with the explicit

Figure 4: "I try to convert as many people to my religion as possible."—Brazil



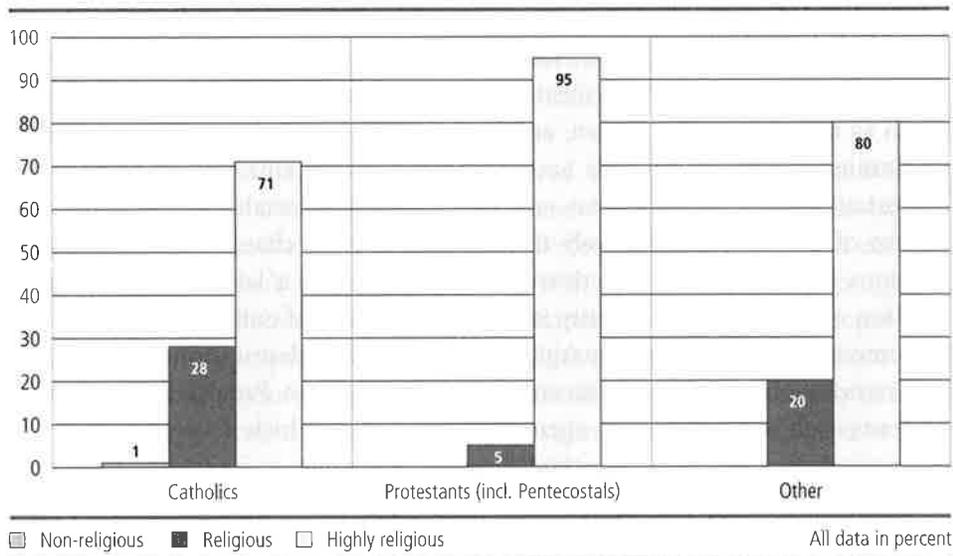
goal of supporting the revolutionary liberal dictator Justo Rufino Barrios by promoting a cultural agenda that combated the Catholic conservatism of the colonial regime. The first adherents to Protestantism were thus members of the liberal middle class. In the 1940s, Protestantism spread swiftly in the big cities of the south as industrialization began; and in the 1950s its growth in the agricultural economies of Central America accompanied the mechanization of agriculture. Protestantism in Latin America—and especially Pentecostalism—has thus been a form of processing collectively the crises of societal change. As a result, the religious beliefs of Latin American Protestants deal to a large degree with the creation of meaning and identity in social conditions of cultural and social displacement, social or ethnic marginalization, relative deprivation or frustrated expectations of collective advancement. Latin American Protestantism thereby presents itself as a constitutive agent of social change, which it also does through its missionary activities. In contrast, Catholicism, which in its totality elides differences between traditional Catholicism, indigenous religions and liberation theology (which in turn reproduce to some degree within the Catholic Church the roles of the “priest,” “magician” and “prophet”), stands for the preservation of societal continuity that reaches across the caesura and conflicts brought about by the inequalities associated with modernization. In terms of religious beliefs and the form of religious praxis, as well as their effect on social action, Protestantism is the more dynamic of the two Christian faiths in Latin America.

Strength of religious beliefs

The distinctive religious dynamics of Protestant actors suggest that they have stronger religious beliefs. This leads to the supposition that religious beliefs and positions in the religious field are related inversely to one another: The closer actors are to the “prophet” position, the oppositional figure in the religious field, the stronger their religious beliefs and the more meaningful role of religion for them; the closer actors are to the position of the priest, which exercises a monopoly in the religious field, the weaker the influence of religion on the actors. This raises the question of which differences can be observed among the respondents regarding the importance of religion and the strength of their beliefs.

The aforementioned positive views among Protestants toward propagating their own faith accords with the fact that Protestants, more than any other group of respondents, can be described as “highly religious.” The Religion Monitor’s instrument for measuring the centrality of religion sheds light on how important

Figure 5: Centrality of religiosity—Brazil

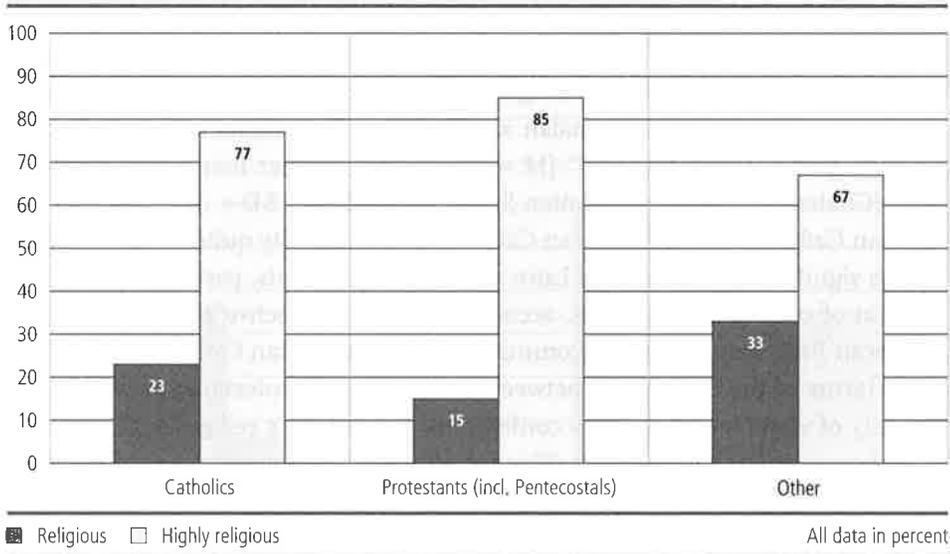


religious practices are to the lives of the respondents. For the purposes of comparison, let us look at the case of Germany. In Germany, Catholics number high among the highly religious—that is, people who identify strongly with their religion. Catholics make up 53 percent of this category while Protestants make up 38 percent. Among the moderately religious, the proportions are reversed: Protestants are the largest group with 51 percent and Catholics the second largest with 43 percent. In short, Catholics tend to be more serious about issues pertaining to religion. This is perhaps best explained by the fact that the Catholic Church places greater emphasis on members' active participation, such as attending Mass and going to confession, than do Protestant churches.

In Latin America, Protestants are more engaged in religious matters than Catholics (Figure 5). In Brazil, Protestants are almost entirely “highly religious” (95 %); only 5 percent described themselves as moderately religious. Only 28 percent of Catholics consider themselves moderately religious and 71 percent highly religious—a finding that is also much higher than its correlate in Germany.

These observations can be explained in part by the fact that in Latin America, the course of modernization has been only loosely associated with secularization and primarily so among a small segment of intellectuals from culturally dynamic ascendant nations such as Brazil, Argentina, Chile or Mexico. Moreover, the combination of societal transformation and religious mobilization has brought the prophet—in this case the Protestants—into strong action.

Figure 6: Centrality of religiosity—Guatemala



It may be of particular significance that corporatist Catholic clericalism, which harkens back to the historical collaboration of the Church with the elites in power, provides a less persuasive alternative for religious action in the context of increasing industrialization and individualization than does Protestantism, which in general—from the historical churches to the Pentecostal movement—encourages individual commitment and above all cooperation in different measures. In the Protestant churches, members with a profound appreciation for religious praxis and strong religious commitment find a wide variety of opportunities for engagement and advancement.

For their part, Catholic BECs provide their followers with a way to confront the rapidly and precariously changing circumstances of their lives. In this sense, the Catholic Church functions as an effective counter-strategy against Protestant inroads into the religious field, which has been shown by an evaluation of the regional spread of Protestantism in Central America (Schäfer 1992: 139 ff.). Wherever Catholic BECs are strong, Protestant churches are slow to grow, since the religious needs of the population are being met in large part by the Catholic community. Wherever the grassroots movement is suppressed by the Catholic hierarchy, the outlook for Protestant churches improves. Only the charismatic Catholic movement has slowed this trend in recent years.

Question 1.6 in the Religion Monitor seeks to ascertain the significance of religiousness for the respondents, allowing a closer look at their subjective assess-

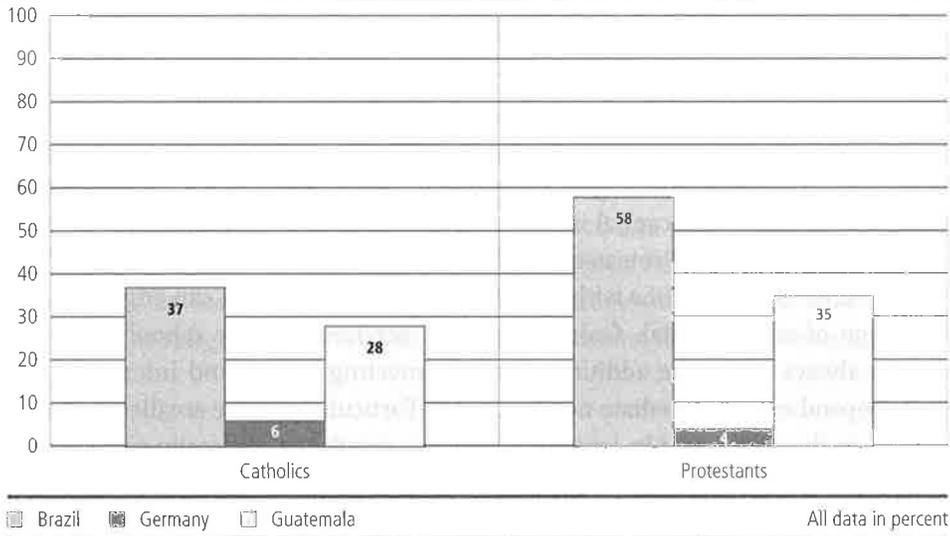
ment of religiosity. For Latin Americans, who rated religiosity between “somewhat important” and “very important,” religiosity is more relevant than it is for Germans (average, “M” for Guatemalan Catholics = 4.67; for Germany = 3.26). In Latin America, however, there are significant differences between Protestants and Catholics on this issue. Guatemalan and Brazilian Protestants both equally consider religiosity “very important” ($M = 4.74$) and are rather homogenous on this issue (Guatemala: standard deviation $SD \approx .58$ and Brazil: $SD \approx .72$). Compared to German Catholics, Latin American Catholics rate religiosity quite high, but nonetheless significantly less so than Latin American Protestants, particularly in Brazil (margin of error $p \leq .000$). Thus, according to their subjective perceptions, Latin American Protestants are more committed to their faith than Catholics.

In terms of the differences between Catholics and Protestants as well as the diversity of views within the two confessions, Guatemala’s religious landscape is more homogenous than Brazil’s. This fact illustrates the significance of religious praxis for the different social contexts found in Brazil and Guatemala. Normative social influence is considerably stronger in Guatemala than it is in Brazil. This has in part to do with the country’s small size and the relative strength of mechanisms of social control, but it is also a consequence of a long history of violent dictatorships, racist intolerance and the habitus they yield. The strong similarity between Catholic and Protestant views in Guatemala does not, however, necessarily point to a harmonious relationship between the two confessions. The weight of immense external pressure can transform minor differences into notable conflicts. For Protestants, as the smaller of the two religious actors, securing God’s intervention on their behalf is all the more important.

Compared to Catholics in Guatemala and Brazil, Protestants in both countries show greater religious commitment and have a stronger sense that God intervenes directly in their lives, or that He reveals things to them (questions 10b and 10c, margin of error $p \leq .000$). In Brazil, 58 percent of polled Protestants and 37 percent of polled Catholics consider very frequent divine intervention probable. At 35 percent and 28 percent for Protestants and Catholics respectively, results on this issue are somewhat lower in Guatemala, but still significantly higher than in Germany.

Interpreting the difference here between Brazil and Guatemala is not easy. It may, in part, be attributed to widespread Afro-American traditions in Brazil that are open to the idea of supernatural intervention. Indeed, this is supported by the fact that 39 percent of those belonging to non-Christian denominations, as well as the percentage of those not belonging to a specific religious community, believe that God (or a deity) intervenes frequently in their lives. In the overall

Figure 7: "God intervenes quite frequently and directly in my life."



context of Latin American religious practice—and especially in comparison with Germany—the belief in the direct intervention of God in one’s life constitutes a means of overcoming a prevalent lack of security (which, in Germany, is alleviated to no small degree by the social welfare system). To put it bluntly: In a context in which idleness guarantees abject poverty, one may not believe in an idle God distant from everyday events.

Religious commitment can be measured in many ways, including the frequency with which one attends religious services. Here too, results for Latin America and Germany differ significantly. In the two Latin American countries, Protestants, on average, attend religious services more frequently than Catholics—more than once a week (question 7, $M = 1.70$ in Brazil and Guatemala). In addition to Sunday services, they attend Bible school and prayer services on different days during the week. Catholics in Guatemala (“once a week,” which corresponds to $M = 2.18$) are Sunday churchgoers and attend church more regularly than Catholics in Brazil (“one to three times a month,” corresponding to $M = 3.04$). In addition, not all Catholics are equally frequent in attending services (Brazil: $SD \approx 1.50$). This indicates that, among Catholics, the percentage of nominal and less-committed members is much higher than that among Protestants. (A similar division is reflected in the responses to the question regarding personal prayers. Whereas only 42 percent of Brazil’s Catholics pray several times a day, 68 percent of the country’s Protestants do so.)

Attendance at worship services also indicates how mobilized the respective religious actors are, and also suggests indirectly how strongly they present themselves as competing providers in the religious field. Moreover, worship services offer believers an opportunity to reaffirm their religious beliefs. Worship services also allow members of the laity (deacons, presbyters, prayer leaders, readers, musicians and ushers, as well as trance assistants, exorcists, etc.) to perform their specific functions and gain recognition. They can then use this symbolic capital to acquire social capital in the form of useful social relations.

In Latin America, Protestant, and especially Pentecostal, worship services provide their congregations with a central location in which all can engage in the exchange of social capital. Going to church services, Sunday school or prayer fasting always offers the additional perk of meeting people and interacting socially beyond one's immediate neighborhood. Particularly in the smaller churches located in the slums and in lower-middle-class areas, newcomers to services will find themselves being approached directly; this is not the case in the so-called megachurches. Furthermore, regular congregation attendees maintain strong communicative ties. Liturgical elements, such as testifying and the presentation of newborn children to the congregation, require people to personally participate in the social context of the church. Congregation members encounter one another on the basis of a trust that emerges from belonging to a relatively small community. These kinds of gatherings provide people in the community a forum in which they can share their situation with others, which often opens up opportunities to improve their situation through job offers or other helpful information.

Protestant worship services are critical sites of the social network—and the experience of social stabilization through religious community strengthens the belief that God intervenes directly in their lives. Catholic worship services achieve this kind of communicative density only in congregations that function in a manner similar to basic ecclesiastical communities, or in the smaller circle of parochial core members.

Collective identities are shaped by the communication processes that take place in the actualization of religious beliefs through a congregation's social practices. These identities strengthen and distinguish religious communities for competition in the religious field. But they do not exhaust themselves in the process. The collective identities and strategies of religious communities result from the orientation of actors toward a collectively shared concept of a transcendent entity that affirms their lives. These practiced and habitualized beliefs, and their interplay with social conditions and religious demands, are the decisive

operational conditions in which religious movements develop their strategies and their potency as actors in the religious field.

In the non-European world, the number of religious movements is increasing, and the number of religious institutions is decreasing. If we are to examine the positions and dynamics of the religious field in Latin America, we cannot ignore the specific relationships between social conditions, the religious field and habitus. The specific dynamics of Latin American Protestantism, and especially of Pentecostalism, are most readily understood as a religious movement that combines the position of the “prophet” in the religious field with the highest commitment of its members. As we turn to the strategies deployed by these movements in the religious field, we will see how exclusivist these movements are.

Strategies in the religious field

Whoever holds the monopoly in the religious field—the priest—can demonstrate greater openness and willingness to cooperate than a marginal actor whose aim is to expand his influence within the field. Prophets mobilize their followers by teaching that their variant of religion is the only true faith. Instead of being open to diversity, they espouse the exclusivity of their own religious offerings. In this context, Religion Monitor data identify Latin American Protestants in the position of the prophet and Catholics in the position of the priest.

Openness to other religions or confessions is a telling indicator of strategies in the religious field. Among other things, this openness suggests a propensity for tolerance. Openness toward other religions can be achieved by considering religious issues from various perspectives (question 13i, a rather soft criterion). The initial hypothesis suggested that Protestants would perform poorly in this regard. However, against expectations, Protestants performed demonstratively better than Catholics (Brazil: $p \leq .000$, Guatemala: only $p \leq .185$). According to the Religion Monitor data, Protestants in Brazil and Guatemala tend to consider multiple perspectives “fairly important” (Brazil: $M = 3.97$, Guatemala $M = 3.74$). In fact, 41 percent of Protestants in Brazil—contrasted with only 28 percent of Catholics—consider it “very important” to remain open to other religions.

Of course, one should not equate Protestants’ willingness to consider multiple perspectives with religious tolerance. The fact that one reflects upon religious issues from different perspectives suggests that one confronts, to some degree openly, the teachings of his or her own faith in comparison with those of other possible faiths. If one operates from a marginal position within a given field of

praxis, as do Protestants in Latin America's religious field, one's perspectives are in a way limited by the need to be familiar with the activities, identity and strategy of the ruling actor. For Protestants in Latin America, this willingness to consider different perspectives is also meaningful in a biographical sense. Having themselves undergone conversion, most Protestants, especially within the Pentecostal movement, know from their own experience what a change in perspective means, and are often occupied with processing this change. The willingness to consider multiple perspectives does not mean that those other points of view are considered desirable or appropriate.

The question of whether one relies on the teachings of various religious traditions is a more stringent criterion for openness (question 16f). This question helps situate the previous impressions by allowing us to ascertain the degree to which Catholic and Protestant actors are prepared to engage in religious forms of praxis that differ from their own. In other words, this allows us to explore how open they are to religious hybridization, or, in Levi-Strauss' terms, bricolage. The results in both countries vary considerably.

Guatemala is considerably more homogenous on this issue than Brazil. Catholics and Protestants show similar views, especially in terms of their moderate degree of willingness to accept religious bricolage (Figure 8). The prevalence of

Figure 8: "I rely on teachings from several different religious traditions."—Guatemala

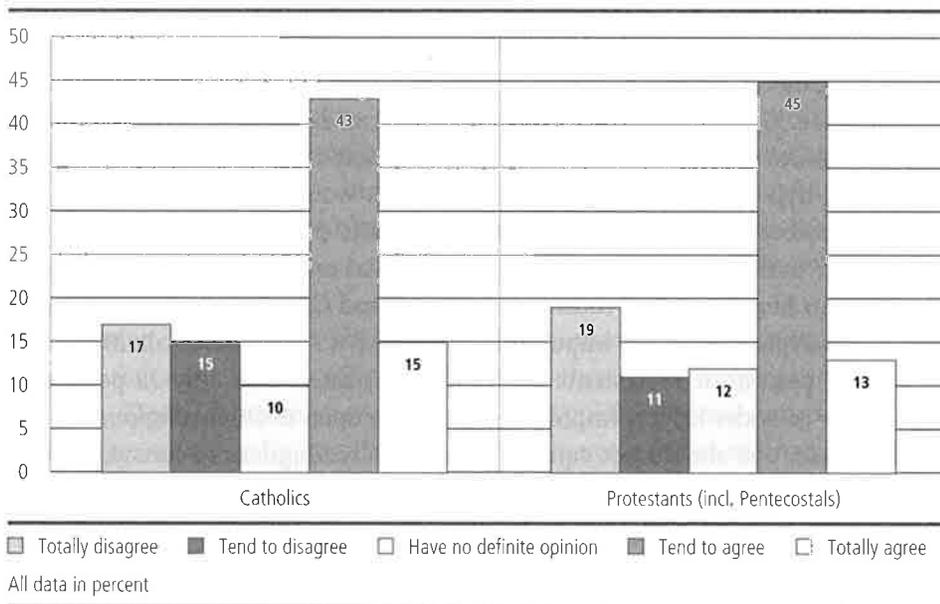
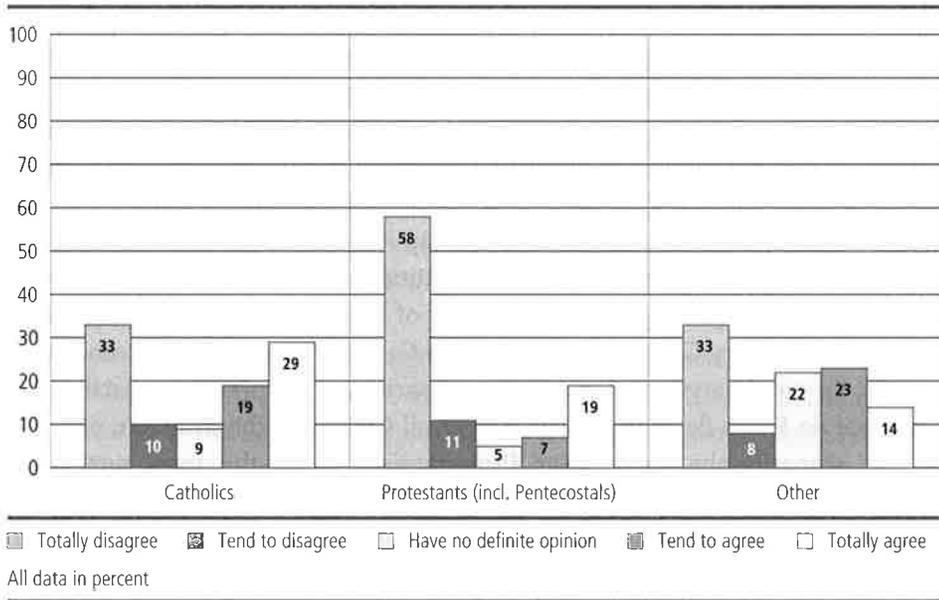


Figure 9: "I rely on teachings from several different religious traditions."—Brazil

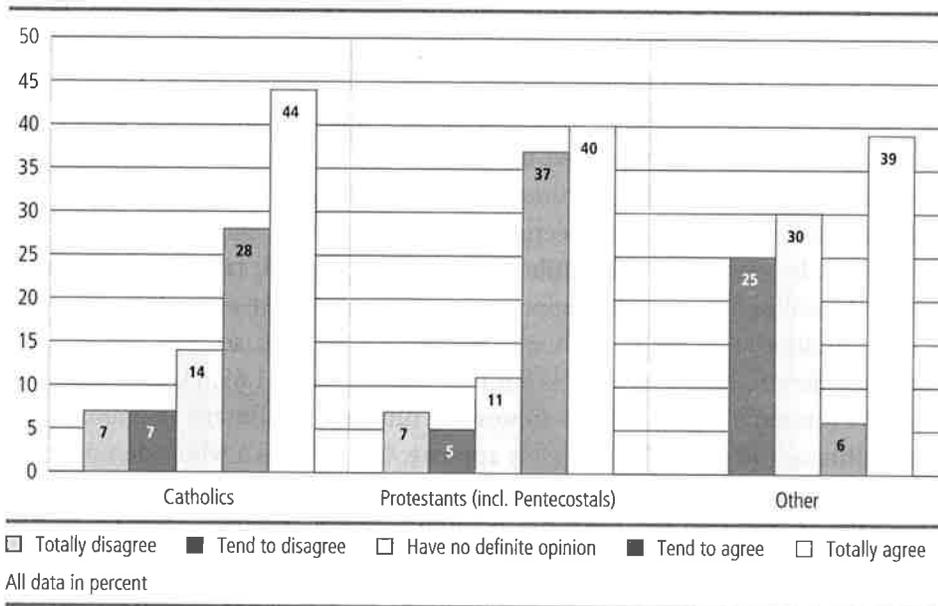


irresoluteness and normative social influence can only in part account for this somewhat surprising result. Guatemala has a very large indigenous population that was hard hit by a bloody counter-insurgency campaign in the 1980s. However, the indigenous population took crisis as an opportunity and has since succeeded in shaping public discourse. Furthermore, both the Catholic Church, via its indigenous pastoral programs, and the Protestant church—excepting the neo-Pentecostals—have succeeded in thematizing the issue of ethnicity in society. It is therefore possible that these developments have nurtured openness to other traditions, similar to that seen in Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. However, this should not be confused with aimless bricolage; it should, rather, be seen as a deliberate willingness to reflect upon autochthonous culture and religion.

The findings for Brazil, with its open and pluralistic societal context, are entirely different. Public opinion is strongly divided ($SD \approx 1.65$, Figure 6): 58 percent of Protestants absolutely disapprove of turning to different religious traditions, although 19 percent completely approve. Catholics as a whole demonstrate a more moderate view on the issue, but are also polarized: 33 percent adamantly refuse the idea and 29 percent agree totally (Figure 9). This polarization continues throughout all “other” groups, and for the most part irrespective of whether one belongs to a religious community or not.

Brazil's conflictive and irregular integration into economic and cultural globalization is reflected to some extent in the findings by the variety of strategies used to deal with localized and specific demands. On the one hand, one can opt for strategies of bricolage and the construction of a new social and religious identity that by definition will remain relatively open to modification and change. In Brazil, the modern variants of Umbanda or Spiritism tend to follow this pattern. On the other hand, one can respond by constructing a closed identity. This can be done either by focusing on ancestral group identities or by drawing upon an existing bricolage to create new closed identities that have already been hybridized through the process. The first variant of this closed construction is to be found in reactionary Catholic groups such as *Canção Nova* or among some evangelicals; an exemplary model of the second variant is the neo-Pentecostal *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (IURD, Universal Church of the Kingdom of God). In this scenario, the data shows Protestantism to be the most powerfully opposed to cultural and religious bricolage. This suggests that Protestant is the strongest protagonist in terms of pursuing strategies of religious integrism. Integrist strategies in a religion serve to exclude others from salvation and the truth as they promote a given religion's exclusivity in terms of its truth and salvation. Once again, Guatemala and Brazil differ significantly here.

Figure 10: "In questions of religion, my own religion is right, while other religions tend to be wrong."—Guatemala



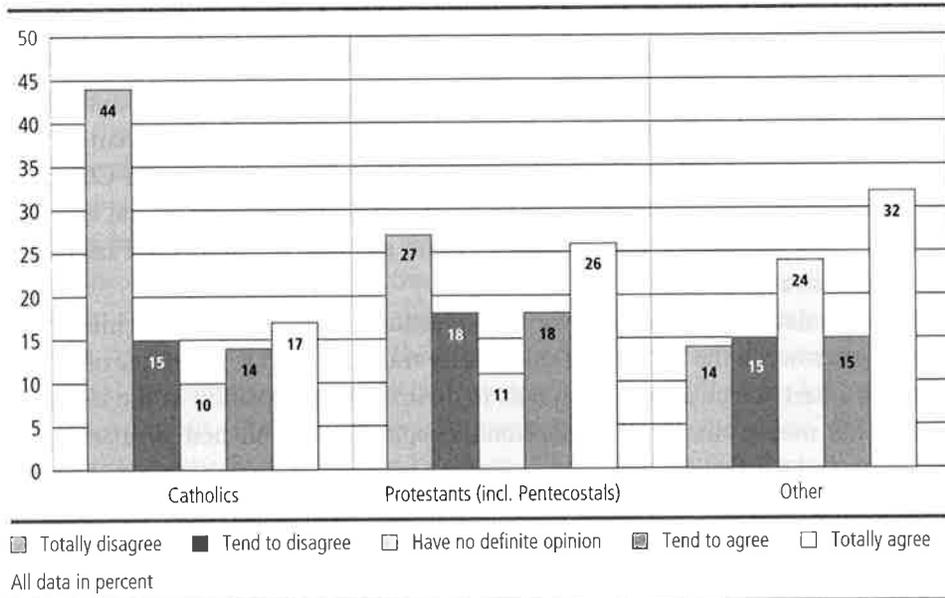
In Guatemala, Catholics and Protestants show similar attitudes. Regarding the exclusive truth of one's faith, both Catholics and Protestants, on average, agree somewhat (question 16k; Catholics $M = 2.08$; Protestants $M = 2.01$). Roughly 42 percent of both, however, totally agree with the statement (Figure 10). With their affirmative answer to these questions, Catholics are demonstrating their agreement with a traditional and *mutatis mutandis* attitude of the Roman Catholic Church about itself in comparison with other Christian and non-Christian religions. In the religious field, this position—in addition to the actual exercise of a monopoly—extends beyond religious and symbolic consolidation into anti-Protestant strategies.

Guatemalan Protestants answer this question affirmatively, conforming in a similar manner to the aggressive missionary tradition of U.S. churches of which they are a part, which also corresponds to their marginal position in the religious field. This means that both confessions, despite the established similarities in religious and theological questions, continue to consider one another as irreconcilably different and doctrinaire. The normative social influence exercised by Guatemalan society is perpetuated in both confessions as the pressure to integrate and set clear boundaries.

The situation is completely different in Brazil. In Brazil, there are considerable differences between Catholics and Protestants in their responses to this issue. As was the case with the issue of bricolage, there is considerable polarization on the issue of whether one's own religion alone is right on religious questions (question 16k, Figure 11). Protestants are divided on this; 26 percent agree, whereas 27 percent reject a stance of exclusivist salvation. Also divided, Catholics nonetheless are clearly more tolerant on this issue with 44 percent in agreement and 17 percent in disagreement. The tolerant majority of Catholics seem to be comprised of a mix of people who practice Catholicism to varying degrees of intensity. There is no compelling reason to assume that tolerance is closely related to limited church attendance (as an indicator of secularization). This may have much more to do with everyday Christians who focus on the practical use of religious participation for their earthly lives. In Brazil, where religious pragmatism is widespread, such Christians occasionally resort to the services provided by Umbanda or Candomblé.

Catholics who insist on the exclusive truth of their position, however, will belong to ostensibly more conservative circles that fear further expansion of Protestantism and the waning social influence of the Catholic Church in Brazil. Protestants expressing tolerant views are most likely members of the historical churches (such as the Lutheran Church in Brazil), while Protestants expressing intolerance are almost surely evangelicals and Pentecostals.

Figure 11: "In questions of religion, my own religion is right, while other religions tend to be wrong."—Brazil



Similar to the question regarding reliance upon teachings from several different religions (question 16f), there is, in contrast to Guatemala, a wide range of attitudes toward the absolute veracity of one's own religious position in Brazil, which may be attributed to the social and religious diversity found there. In Brazil, there is greater opportunity for religious understanding and a pragmatic praxis of religious diversity in a person's life. This religious practice clearly corresponds to the rather heterogeneous structure of the public sphere.

Religion and the public sphere

From the beginning, Catholicism in Latin America has sought to be a public religion, and through its ties to the state, it has been able to achieve this for quite some time. Since the 19th century, however, this relationship has continually weakened. The Catholic Church's influence on rulers began eroding as Latin American nations successively wielded their independence from the colonial powers and liberal parties gained in power. In the 20th century, the religious field grew increasingly diversified with the growth of Protestantism and the legalization of indigenous and Afro-American religions. The traditional bonds between

the higher ranks of the Catholic Church and the Christian democratic parties have also weakened. The Catholic Church in Latin America is slowly but surely losing its monopoly in the religious field ("ecclesia" in Milton Yingers' terminology). Its once impressive political influence is manifestly weaker as it becomes just another—albeit strong—denomination among others. In public perception, it is the Catholic Church's demand to have the authority to provide guidelines for politics and public morality rather than its religious publicity that draw attention. Protestantism in Latin America is a public religion primarily because it renders itself visible through missionary work (question 16i)—and measurably more so than Catholicism ($p \leq .000$). In increasing numbers, Protestant leaders—above all neo-Pentecostal leaders—are seeking to make their presence felt in political discourse. Since the 1980s and throughout Latin America, Protestants have increasingly participated in social work, founded Protestant ethics commissions, Protestant newspapers, television channels and political parties, articulated political positions in Protestant church councils, and, in a few cases, aided in the election of Protestant heads of state. Historical Protestants as well as the vanguard of the neo-Pentecostal churches are the most active here. With less public influence, the historical Protestants tend to lean toward religious ecumenism and political positions similar to social democratic parties. Neo-Pentecostals, however, represent an authoritarian exclusivity in religion coupled with neo-liberal political ideas that they pursue with powerful media campaigning. In Guatemala, data on voting behavior and political self-assessment reveal that historical Protestants hardly differ from Catholics; neo-Pentecostals, however, are oriented much further to the right (Schäfer 2008).

Neo-Pentecostals in particular rely heavily on various media for their public relations work. Some of their churches, especially those with affluent congregations or profitable business ventures, have the economic means to afford their own television stations. The IURD in Brazil is likely at the forefront of this development. In 2007, the church's "Bishop," Edir Macedo—together with the leftist liberal President Ignacio "Lula" da Silva—launched a 24-hour news channel on the television network Rede Record, which Macedo himself had bought in 1989. According to current estimates, Macedo owns the country's third largest broadcasting imperium after Rede Globo (grossing billions) and Rede Bandeirante.

This does more than shift the balance of power in the religious field. The conservative network Rede Globo is considered to be a supporter of conservative politics and the Catholic Church. In the 1989 elections, Rede Globo drew attention for criticizing leftist-liberal and then-presidential candidate Ignacio "Lula" da Silva. Today, however, the network is generally friendly toward the government.

Macedo's Rede Record will have difficulty in establishing itself as the president's mouthpiece, especially considering the fact that Macedo—in the pursuit of his own interests—supported the conservative Collor de Mello over Lula. Nonetheless, the network continues to play a major role in influencing the political views of the Protestant public and thus capitalizes on the value of religious beliefs in the political field.

The IURD already has a strong history of political influence, manipulation and corruption, including the political placement of its own officials, bribes, etc., and it has long been the subject of studies on Brazilian sociology. It will attempt to assert its power in the media; but given Macedo's generally neoliberal stance, it is in no way a reliable ally of leftist-liberal governments. For Protestantism in general, however, it is true that most of the Pentecostal *Assembléias de Deus* as well as *Candomblé* support President Lula and his policy of a broad social contract.

Despite internal dynamics, such as the religious tension found between the Pentecostal movement and *Candomblé*, the religious and political fields can be considered almost homologous. The independence of these fields is thus highly relative, and there is interesting research to be done on the transformations underway between the fields.

The strength of actors in the religious field and their ability to intervene in political affairs depends not least on how well they can satisfy the religious needs of the laity and win over additional followers. This renders the religious needs of the faithful a topical issue. Which areas of life, according to information provided by the faithful, are of special significance for religious praxis?

The answers to questions 1 and 14 in the Religion Monitor survey clearly refer to everyday life and the private sphere. Believers of both confessions identify the following areas of private life as influenced strongly by religion: childrearing, partnership, free time and dealing with important life events; quite similar to work and occupations. Politics, however, enjoys only a moderate level of importance (average = 3). However, positions regarding politics vary stronger than others ($SD \approx 1.40$). In Brazil, some Protestants (30 %) and Catholics (26 %) do not consider politics important at all. This is similarly true in Guatemala. However, in Brazil and Guatemala respectively, 26 and 18 percent of "others" consider politics very important. What groups those surveyed belong to and where these groups are positioned within societal structures cannot be determined from the data set.

A few educated guesses are possible, however, based on our knowledge of the field of research. Politically oriented Catholics presumably belong either to the traditional upper and upper-middle classes, or to the socially active pro-modern-

izers of the lower middle and working classes. Politically active Protestants are likely to be members of the upwardly mobile neo-Pentecostal IURD, Renascer or other similar organizations, while middle class Pentecostals such as the *Assembléias de Deus* (Assembly of God churches) and the classic Protestant advocates of social reform hail from the lower middle classes.

Overall, one thing is clear: Regardless of whether one speaks of Guatemala, Brazil or any other Latin American country, Catholicism is no longer the predominant religious player influencing the political fate of these countries. The religious and political fields are diversifying, and new powerful actors are emerging. The presence of indigenous and Afro-American religions, as well as ethnic revitalization, is growing and in very different ways. But it is Protestantism, particularly the Pentecostal movement, which is spreading rapidly in Latin America. Whereas the Catholic Church dominated religious, political and cultural praxis in the past, identity politics as well as the religious field are currently diversifying.

I would like to thank Dr. Carsten Gennerich, Jens Köhrsen, Adrian Tovar and Arndt Keßner for their editorial and technical assistance and for important references.

Endnote

- 1 Focusing on a comparison of Catholics and Protestants in general, I have combined the categories of Evangelic, Free Church, Pentecostal and Charismatic under the rubric of "Protestant" in my statistical calculations.

Bibliography

- Barrett, David, ed. *World Christian Encyclopedia*. 2 vols. Oxford, 2001.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. "Eine Interpretation der Religion nach Max Weber." In *Das religiöse Feld*, 11–37. Constance, 2000.
- Schäfer, Heinrich. *Protestantismus in Zentralamerika*. Frankfurt, 1992.
- Schäfer, Heinrich. "Modernisierung und Identitätskonstruktion: Zum Protestantismus in Zentralamerika (1980 bis heute)." In *Zentralamerika heute*, edited by Sabine Kurtenbach et al., 2008. <http://www.whomes.uni-bielefeld.de/hschaefer3/index.html> (accessed June 26, 2008).
- Weber, Max. *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. Tübingen, 1985.

Bertelsmann Stiftung (ed.)

What the World Believes

Analyses and Commentary on the Religion Monitor 2008

| **Verlag BertelsmannStiftung**

Bibliographic information published by Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic information is available online at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

© 2009 Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung, Gütersloh

Editor on behalf of the Bertelsmann Stiftung: Martin Rieger, Ph.D.

Managing editor: Matthias Jäger

Copy editor: Celia Bohannon

Translation: Barbara Serfozo, Ph.D.

Production editor: Sabine Reimann

Cover design: Bertelsmann Stiftung

Cover illustration: © epd/Norbert Neetz

Typesetting and print: Hans Kock Buch- und Offsetdruck GmbH, Bielefeld

ISBN 978-3-89204-989-0

www.religionsmonitor.com

www.bertelsmann-stiftung.org/publications