

# Tongues of Fire

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The Explosion of  
Protestantism in  
Latin America

David Martin

*with a Foreword by Peter Berger*



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*Oxford UK & Cambridge MA*

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First published 1990  
Reprinted 1991  
First published in paperback 1993

Blackwell Publishers  
108 Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1JF, UK

238 Main Street,  
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142, USA

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data*

Martin, David, 1929—

Tongues of fire: the explosion of Protestantism in Latin America/David Martin; with a foreword by  
Peter Berger.

p. cm.

Originally published in 1990.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBNs 0-631-17186-X (hbk.); 0-631-18914-9 (pbk.)

1. Protestant churches — Latin America. 2. Evangelicalism—Latin America. 3. Pentecostal churches—  
Latin America. 4. Latin America—Church history. I. Title.

[BX4832.5.M37 1993]

306.6'804'098 - dc20

93-15412  
CIP

Typeset in 11 on 12pt Ehrhardt by  
Hope Services (Abingdon) Ltd  
Printed in Great Britain by  
T.J. Press Ltd., Padstow, Cornwall

# Protestantism and Economic Culture: Evidence Reviewed

There is a general, indeed notorious, supposition in sociological and anthropological studies that Protestantism is associated with economic success. This supposition derives in a loose way from Max Weber and the endless debate about how the Protestant Ethic influenced, and was influenced by, the Spirit of Capitalism. But that debate has been mainly focused on the first wave of Calvinist Protestantism in the sixteenth, the seventeenth and (marginally) the eighteenth century. The debate has been less concerned with the second wave of Methodist Protestantism; and so far as the third and Pentecostal wave is concerned, the evidence we have is recent and rather fragmentary. When it comes to the second and third waves of Protestantism, they have been discussed more in terms of their contribution to democracy, to individualism and to the avoidance of violent revolution than in terms of their capacity to promote economic success. The *locus classicus* of debates over Methodism is not so much Weber as Halévy.<sup>1</sup> If Weber is invoked, it is on account of his essay on 'The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism' rather than 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism'.<sup>2</sup>

That essay is a useful starting point because Weber stresses the way in which membership in a church, especially after a period of probation, provides a guarantee of moral qualification and, therefore, of credit. Doctrine he regards as comparatively unimportant so long as the moral qualifications required enshrine the Puritan virtues. Weber also notes, as did de Tocqueville earlier, the fantastic variety of associations to which Americans belong. They include, for

example, masonic lodges as well as churches. These associations provide a means of contact, a source of mutual assistance and information, and a form of insurance. As a result, the USA is not a formless sandheap of individuals, but rather a buzzing complex of voluntary organizations. It is the transfer of that buzzing complex to Latin America (and South Korea) which is currently under way. Time and again in the studies here reviewed the emphasis falls on the importance of the fraternal network.

Of course, we are not, in fact, dealing just with small so-called sects, even though many of the groups concerned only have a few thousand adherents. As we have seen, the phenomenon of contemporary Pentecostalism has a wider provenance than ever Calvinism had in the past, and certainly more than Calvinism has today. The scale is 'small' only in the sense that the people who become Pentecostals are small people and their 'capitalism' is at the moment mostly 'penny capitalism'.

There have been a reasonable number of localized investigations concerned with the effect of contemporary evangelical religion, in particular Pentecostalism, on economic behaviour, or at least touching on that issue as a major concern. There are, however, some problems about obtaining really firm evidence and these need to be set out. Once this is done it will become clear that we are dealing only with cumulative indications and with more or less sensitive observations about likely outcomes. We cannot expect to find more than plausible likelihoods. But, at least, it is not necessary to rehearse that part of the classic debate concerned with whether Protestantism or capitalism came first. *What we do need to probe are the complicated feedbacks whereby people perceive the possibility of change and so grasp and are grasped by religious ideas which can accelerate that change and/or help them to cope with it.*

A question which has arisen crucially in the original debate, and now arises once more, is the contingent nature of the connection between evangelical religion and economic advance. It is clear that capitalism in the past *could* occur without Protestantism and vice versa. Scholars have asked themselves complicated questions, for example, about pious Calvinist communities in certain parts of Holland and also in Scotland which did not appear to bring forth the fruits of the capitalist spirit. Then, and again now, there is no necessary connection. The posited linkages and plausible likelihoods have to be couched in terms of frequent concurrence and mutual reinforcements. Evangelical religion and economic advancement do *often* go together, and when they do so appear mutually to support and *reinforce* one another.

## Economic Advance by Non-evangelicals: 'Strangers'; Mormons

The capacity shown by people of religious persuasions other than evangelical to advance themselves needs some further discussion. To take the example of the Lebanese (or 'Syrians'), their ability to make good in the Caribbean, in Brazil, in the Ivory Coast and in North America presumably derives from a long historical experience of commerce in the Levant, and from the way many minorities – though not all – are in a position to exploit a particular corner of trade. A group of ethnic 'strangers' willing to assist one another and to act cohesively can build up economic resources rather in the manner of the sects described by Max Weber. This they are well able to do even if they arrived, as most Syrians did, with only the resources of a hawker or a pedlar. The Chinese, too, are notoriously capable of forming a cohesive community of prosperous minor entrepreneurs, without the extra assistance from evangelical religion. Examples can be multiplied, for example the achievements of Asians in Kenya and, after their expulsion from Kenya, again in Britain.

This phenomenon is, however, easily understood and familiar, and it need not erode any propositions we may tentatively put forward specifically about evangelicals and the improvement of material fortunes. Evangelicals are not usually migrant members of historic trading communities, though, of course, they *can* be. The Huguenots who went to England, Holland, South Africa and North America after 1685 were precisely such, though they can only broadly be classified as 'evangelicals'.

Less easily disposed of are instances of groups arising in a similar manner to evangelical Protestants and in similar environments whose members achieve comparable advances without being 'Protestant'. The main groups in question are the Witnesses, the Mormons and the Adventists. They need briefly to be considered.

With regard to the Witnesses there is a lack of material so far at least as concerns Latin America, though evidence gathered elsewhere suggests the same kind of capacity for economic and social improvement as found amongst evangelicals. James Beckford's fine study of Witnesses in England documents their capacity in a general and impressionistic way.<sup>3</sup> Norman Long has provided further supporting documentation with regard to Witnesses in Zambia.<sup>4</sup>

There are general grounds for supposing that Adventists also improve their positions somewhat, though the evidence directly derived from Latin America is fragmentary. Certainly material cited

later from studies by Lewellen and Birdwell-Pheasant suggests that Adventism assists social mobility.<sup>5</sup> In the America (North, Central and South), the Adventists build hospitals and provide schools, as well as encouraging certain practices with regard to health and diet. They constitute a kind of small-scale welfare system which can hardly fail to help forward their community.

The Mormons are an interesting case. In the first place, Rodney Stark has maintained that they are a *new* religion rather than a semi-Christian sect.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, he argues, they make their maximum impact where modernization has advanced sufficiently to create a religious vacuum. This means, presumably, that they are expanding on the whole in environments already prosperous, for example Uruguay.

The position with regard to the Mormons is complicated further, and in a way highly relevant to our overall problem, by certain aspects of their proselytizing style. They have emphasized their US character and origin, and this has made them attractive to persons already well-disposed to the US way of life and even, maybe, seeking connections in the USA. These persons clearly form a distinctive subgroup. As Mark Grover in his study of Mormonism in Brazil puts it, 'The number of cars that have recently become prominent at Mormon chapels provides extra visual evidence of the success of members in following the American-influenced middle class dream.'<sup>7</sup> Mormons are urged to follow the original US model as closely as possible. A curious outcrop from the stress that Mormons place on their US character is that blacks were not a target population for conversion up to quite recently, and this has meant that many of those who belonged to the poorest sections of society did not, and could not, become Mormons. Indeed, in the early stages of Mormon activity in Brazil, the missionaries concentrated on the German community, which was unequivocally white, and moreover already equipped with the skills necessary to become better-off.

Another aspect of Mormon missions which helps their converts to assimilate the norms of middle-class America is the teaching of English, which may in turn facilitate visits to the USA, and lead to attendance at Brigham Young University. Salt Lake City is a kind of Mecca for Mormons, even though they are no longer expected to migrate to Utah. Those who make the trip rapidly acquire new horizons as to what prosperity can offer, and ideas about how prosperity is to be achieved. To such pilgrims the USA has appeared attractive, superior, powerful and modern. The approved style among Mormons for presenting oneself in public has been based on the US businessman, and no doubt the outer style proclaimed and moulded

the inner attitude. Indeed, at one time in Brazil missionaries were identified by the fact that they wore hats.

Those who became converted also had to live according to the Mormon code of health, which included abstention from coffee and tea, as well as from alcohol and tobacco. In general, the fruits of faith were seen as cleanliness, home improvements and decent diet. When women met in what was known as the Relief Society they were taught the skills of motherhood, of arts and crafts, and of social relations. The Relief Society also encouraged home industries and communal gardening. Clearly, these characteristics of Mormonism simultaneously hindered and helped the promotion of faith. It requires great fortitude and persistence to reject your background in favour of a religious group which absorbs nearly all your time and cuts you off from almost all outside connections. Again, while some people are attracted to the image of Americanism, others are repelled. But for those who *did* make the transition to the Mormon religion, the resocialization was very extensive, and it involved an orientation to the USA and to US ways and styles. This inevitably raises the question as to whether perhaps we are really talking as much about religious vehicles for making Latins into North Americans as about the effect of a specific Mormon ethos.

A study carried out by David Clawson in Mexico largely confirms on a small scale what Mark Grover suggests for Mormonism in the whole of Brazil.<sup>8</sup> Clawson remarks, in a preliminary way, that insofar as Catholics in the USA have been shown to be socially and educationally on a level with Protestants, this is a reflection of the way North American Catholics have become assimilated to the dominant Protestant ethos of pristine America. The study which he then presents is of a Nealtican community in central Mexico.

Clawson describes how converts to Mormonism were first made in the inter-war period. Then in 1948 a Mormon became municipal President. This led many Catholics to fear reprisals for previous persecution, but in fact it simply opened a free space for Mormon activity which non-resident-Catholic priests could do little to counteract. About 8 per cent of the community became converted to Mormonism (nearly 600 people), while a few became converted to the Pentecostal Church of God.

Clawson's conclusions confirm all the conventional expectations of differences between Catholics and 'Protestants' (so-called). He took a stratified random sample of farmers from each religious group and found major differences with regard to literacy, leadership, readiness to participate in cooperative economic ventures, attitudes towards outsiders – and wealth. 'Protestants' placed great emphasis on

reading, initially the Bible, but eventually magazines. Of the seventeen youths in post-elementary education thirteen were Protestant. Protestant women were trained in how to save their domestic money. So far as outside contacts went, they had strong ties with US missionaries. They became increasingly open to visits from health and development personnel, and – as mentioned above – they gained experience and acquired new aspirations by excursions to Salt Lake City. Clawson concludes that similar changes might follow the introduction of Catholic base communities, but success would depend there on the availability of priests, whereas for Protestants success was quite independent of any clerical presence.

Of course, one cannot generalize on the basis of one study, however much it reinforces prior expectations. It does suggest, nevertheless, that Mormons, soaked in the Protestant ambience of their historic and geographical origins, do act as carriers for the Protestant Ethic equally with those who are 'proper' Protestants. Witnesses and Mormons, though theologically at the margins of Christianity, carry forward the general tendencies of the Protestant sectarian backgrounds from which they emerged. These tendencies are fused more broadly with the spirit of America. As to the Adventists, it is likely that the same is true of them, but in their case one is inclined to include them within the scope of evangelical Protestant Christianity.

Clawson, in his comments, raises a question relevant to most of the studies now to be reviewed as well as to his own. It may well be that those who choose a new religion are already the more active members of a given community. Their predisposition to try something new, should it become available, makes them opt for the moulding which their new faith provides. They will not usually be knowledgeable enough to distinguish between varieties of Protestantism and movements which are only marginally Christian. Rather, they will, amongst other things, perceive the presence of a novelty which for them carries the aura of modernity including (maybe) technical opportunity and welfare provision. In short, they enter a wider world through the narrow door of sectarian membership, discipline and mobility.

The study by Clawson, even though mainly of Mormons, provides the classic outline of the effects attributed to Protestantism. The four studies now to be looked at were all made in Mexico and bring out different aspects of the varied situations in which Protestantism makes an impression. In discussing them, I omit inessential elements and concentrate on such novel features as the studies may present.



## Case Studies: Mexico

A study by Mary O'Connor of Mayos compares the impact of evangelical Protestantism with the impact of a nativistic millenarian movement.<sup>9</sup> At the time of the study in the mid-seventies the Mayos numbered some 20,000 and were much better-off than most other Mexican Indians because they lived in an agriculturally developed area. They were also more integrated into Mexican society. Most spoke both Spanish and Mayo, and had acquired modern consumer goods and clothing. Those Mayos who became Protestant, which effectively means Pentecostal, initiated a major change of life, notably by gaining freedom from the *fiesta* system and from the obligation of *fiesteros* to give away huge quantities of food. To reject the obligations of the *fiesta* helped them get together more money for consumer goods and the education of their children. They also saved money by their rejection of all entertainment, especially drinking. Yet the rejection of waste and indulgence was not a rejection of wealth. Pastors encouraged their congregations to work hard, educate their children and improve their material conditions. It was not accounted a reproach to own a tape recorder or a car. Mary O'Connor claims: 'Rationality in general is encouraged, a beliefs in witchcraft, ghosts, buried treasure and folk curing, common among the general population, are ridiculed.'<sup>10</sup>

The nativistic millenarian movement among the Mayos has some points in common with Pentecostal. The participants are an elect to be saved when God destroys the world; and they refuse drink and secular entertainment. However, the nativistic movement aims to regain economic and political control for Mayos and rejects all aspects of the mestizo world as evil. O'Connor identifies those who take part as having few opportunities for economic and social progress. The Protestants, on the other hand, see a chance of advancement for themselves and their families. Indeed, they already have an adequate economic base. They can become Protestant without losing their Mayo identity, which means that they can make the best of both the mestizo and Mayo worlds. O'Connor adds that traditional folk-Catholicism will probably remain the faith of the majority, though the *fiestas* will become increasingly secular. She also mentions that those who cease to be Protestant often do not revert to Catholicism. (That is an important point noted in some other studies and bears on the relationship of Protestantism to secularization.)

Paul Turner's study 'Religious Conversion and Community Development' has to do with some remarkable mass conversions

among Tzeltal Indians in the municipality of Oxchuc, Chiapas, in southern Mexico.<sup>11</sup> The study is additionally interesting because it offers a sympathetic account of the work of the Wycliffe Bible Translators which needs to be put in the balance when considering the recent criticisms of the translators by anthropologists. The missionary work here described was passive and low-key. Indeed, the initial converts responded after hearing the new religion explained on records.

Prior to these conversions the Oxchuc municipality was considered the most backward. Afterwards, however, it came to exceed all other Indian communities in education and acceptance of scientific medicine. The Tzeltals now buy washbasins and soap. Previously they resisted education. But now they read bilingual materials written in their own language and in Spanish: primers, story-books, health booklets, a dictionary – and the New Testament. Adult literacy classes are eagerly sought out.

In his analysis of these changes Turner lays stress on the tensions which had existed through high and growing population, the expropriation of land by Ladinos, and consequent pressure to borrow land. The tensions manifested themselves in excessive drinking and accusations of witchcraft, and the religion of the Tzeltals was not capable of coping with them. Rather it emphasized the maintenance of past traditions and of cosmic harmony with gods and shamans. Catholicism reinforced this with an other-worldly concern and by passively accepting the linkage between social, political and religious hierarchies. By contrast, Protestantism emphasized direct access to the God and the possibility of change.

Being freed from fears of evil spirits and from drink, the converts adopted a sober style of life which included hard work, punctuality, fulfilment of promises, honesty and thrift. 'The exercise of these minor virtues,' says Turner, 'led to wealth accumulation and a rising standard of living.'<sup>12</sup> The Protestant clinic even became something of a medical shrine for the Tzeltals. Not only did they seek out scientific medicine, but they looked increasingly to the future and to personal improvement. Tzeltals became more responsive to governmental development programmes and, therefore, came to receive a disproportionate amount of federal aid. (Turner adds that a counter-reformation which was initiated by some young Catholic priests produced similar, if not superior, fruits of the 'Protestant' ethos. In Turner's view this is because they had absorbed and incorporated the Protestant challenge.)

The next study of change was made among the 90,000 Chols of northern Chiapas and it also concerns the Wycliffe Bible translators.

The general situation is described by Henry Wilbur Aulie in a study done for Fuller Theological Seminary.<sup>13</sup> Initially a couple of missionaries arrived in Chol country and converted a few mestizos, who in turn influenced a few Indians. These Indians formed a group of lay evangelists who travelled from village to village. Their work was accelerated by the arrival of Wycliffe translators who provided the Bible in the local language. The overall result was an increase in ethnic self-respect, linguistic vitality and economic independence. Aulie goes on to discuss later breakaway Protestant movements, notably of Pentecostals, and to note the emergence of a local Roman Catholic counter-reformation.

As in the case of the Indians studied by Turner, the Chols have experienced rising population and hunger for land. Aulie makes several points pertinent to social and economic advancement. He stresses the beneficent effect of learning to read and preparing to preach. Both these slipways of Protestantism threaten the authority of the father and may in the long run take the son out of the ambit of his family. He also stresses the growing feeling that the communal obligation to sustain the fiestas is wasteful. Clearly, the Chol people, like many other 'Indian' groups, were in a state of partial disintegration which manifested itself in alcoholism. They were also fearful of shamans and spirits. It seems that Protestantism, when it arrived, restored a sense of power, and this might manifest itself in dispersing spirits, or in improved production and learning to keep bees and cattle, or in cleanliness and temperance. (When the conversions took place, they normally did so by segments and whole families.)

Yet the sense of power could begin to tail off with the second generation. And the local language might once again go into a decline, particularly as people took to singing hymns in Spanish and continued to pursue advancement by hankering after the culture of the mestizo. Pastors in particular may come to have a strong sense of their own personal dignity and seek a house in a mestizo town as well as mestizo schools for their children. Presbyterian forms of organization assist this separation of pastor from people. Aulie expresses the classic dilemma of success lamented by John Wesley. Those who pull themselves up by their bootstraps feel they 'are not as other men are'. 'No longer spending their money on intoxicating liquor,' says Aulie, 'the Christians now use their income to buy clothing, medicine, mules, radios, and trips to the outside world.'<sup>14</sup>

Two interesting and connected developments discussed by Aulie are the dramatic changes in the music used, and the arrival of the Pentecostals in what had hitherto been designated Presbyterian territory. Initially, hymns in the local language were very popular, but

now there is great increase in the use of Spanish choruses. These are accompanied by the guitar and follow the rhythms of radio and mariachi groups. When the Pentecostals arrived many of those in favour of the new participatory styles left the Presbyterians to join the new denomination. Some of the divisions between Presbyterians and Pentecostals followed the fault-lines of local political rivalries, between villages and inside them.

These issues cannot be followed up here, since they lead away from the issue of economic advancement. Nevertheless, a relevant question does arise because of the relationship between social or geographical mobility and the status of being mestizo and speaking Spanish. The arrival of missionaries was initially part of the opening up of the whole area, but as the opening up accelerated, it pulled the Chols and their native culture not only upwards but also outwards, away from the little chapels and the Chol community. And although the Protestant emphasis on literacy and on the native tongue renewed the sense of Chol culture, the new faith also helped break up the community into rival groups comprising the Christo-pagans, the secularized, the Catholics – and the various evangelical rivals.

A fourth study, significantly also among Maya, throws a different sidelight on the role of Protestantism in development. In general, the number of Protestant believers has increased thirteen times in the period of Mexico's economic take-off between 1940 and 1980. Jean-Pierre Bastian describes how Protestantism bifurcates into a written urban culture and an oral rural culture.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, economic development in Mexico has stimulated the formation of a rural bourgeoisie whose members try to monopolize commerce and who exploit their workers. Rural Protestantism finds itself ranged against this rural bourgeoisie. Clearly, this bears more directly on the political than the economic aspect of Protestantism, but it helps underline the complexity of the economic situation and the difficulty of locating the relationship of Protestantism to economic change and advance. Patricia Fortuny, in her work on rural Protestantism in the Yucatan, shows that Protestants are concentrated in the least developed part of the countryside, while Catholicism is strongest in the area of capitalist agriculture.<sup>16</sup> This simply means that where the current of Protestantism seeps into the political and economic divisions of the countryside, it may become concentrated in out-groups trapped in economic backwardness and fighting for survival. That fact need not in itself alter the general tendency of Protestantism to promote some economic advance, though this is not an issue on which Fortuny comments.

## Case Studies: Guatemala

The four studies just surveyed have indicated the diverse ways in which Protestantism may infiltrate different groups. All the groups discussed are Indian, mostly Maya, and that reflects the relatively greater expansion of Protestantism among the Indian peoples of Chiapas, Tabasco, and the Yucatan in southern Mexico, as well perhaps as the distribution of missionary investigators and anthropologists. The two studies which follow now offer analyses of groups in Guatemala which are almost continuous ethnically with the peoples of southern Mexico. One of them, by Schwartz and Reina, I discuss in more detail in the chapter on conversion because it is really a study of microprocesses rather than an enquiry into economic aspects of Protestantism.<sup>17</sup> (Indeed, I use the study there to indicate in a much more precise way the persistent relationship of new Protestant groups to struggles between local factions.)

The study by Schwartz and Reina begins by drawing on a point made over two decades ago by Emilio Willems. It is that Protestants are found not only among migrants to the new rural frontiers or among those otherwise isolated in the city, but among people who own middle-sized plots of land. These constitute a kind of frugal land-working peasantry who farm for subsistence and are fairly independent of markets. What makes the difference in such instances is relative freedom from ecclesiastical and social authority combined with adequate means for sustaining an independent existence. Schwartz and Reina approached three communities in El Petén, northern Guatemala, equipped with an interest in such semi-independent middle groups. Does their susceptibility to conversion vary in some way in relation to their independence, their tendency to migrate, and their openness to change in general?

Schwartz and Reina comment on the weakness of the Roman Catholic Church in El Petén up to 1954. People still distinguish sharply between the religion of the clergy and the social identity of being Catholic. The three communities they studied are in an isolated frontier area which was spared any traumatic conquest and was never subject to patron-client relationships or to the hacienda system. The area ought theoretically to be ripe for conversion, but in fact this is mediated and canalized by the precise nature of the different social systems. In the town of Flores, which is the main local centre, there is a system of marked social stratification which prevents some potential converts opting for innovation. Those who do become converted are middle-class, but less secure and less able to compete with the elite

than are the 'new' Catholics nurtured by the priests. The main arena of conflict is between the old and the new Catholics, who respectively comprise the elite and the counter-elite. In the community of San Andrés, by contrast, the system of stratification is less marked and people are more willing to work out their frustrations. 'There is consequently more religious activity in San Andrés than in Flores and proportionately more people opt for innovation. There is, moreover, a base in the community culture for innovative agents'.<sup>18</sup> This brief sketch and the sentences just quoted do at least show how difficult it is to do statistical comparisons between Protestants and Catholics. Who is available for economic and/or religious innovation depends on the shape of the social structure.

Nevertheless, an empirical study has been attempted by James Sexton of two towns in Guatemala called Panajachel and San Juan.<sup>19</sup> Panajachel is 58 per cent Indian and San Juan 96 per cent. Protestant church membership in both towns is almost entirely Indian. Since Catholic cargos were organized by the confraternities, participation in them was utilized in the study as one measure of traditional behaviour. 'Modern' behaviour was defined as it related to changes in clothing, houses, furniture, child-spacing and migration, as well as to job aspirations and degree of fatalism.

Sexton's interests were focused on the direction of causation. He states that he does not see religious values having a major impact on socio-economic behaviour, as the starting motor. He argues rather than in Panajachel, at least, relatively well-off Indians acquire certain Ladino cultural traits such as the wearing of Western clothing and living in more modern houses. They then become more exposed to the outside world and, *at this juncture*, become converted to Protestantism. There is a feed back in changes which are linked one to another. In Panajachel, and to some extent in San Juan, the Protestants are better-off, more literate, live in more modern houses, work more often in non-agricultural occupations, are more inclined to sobriety, and are in their attitudes less fatalistic. Thus, all the main elements of 'achievement' motivation are present and Protestantism cooperates with other elements in a complicated dance of mutual reinforcement helping along modernization. He mentions in passing, as do other sources, that the highland Maya have long been noted for industriousness and self-denial. They are 'penny capitalists'. What Protestantism does is to harness these qualities and reinforce them in the context of a more forward-looking and active world-view. It is part of the process of opening out. That process makes Protestantism possible and is, in turn, helped forward by Protestantism.

This, perhaps, is the point at which to insert a small but interesting

item of evidence drawn from Belize, adjacent to Guatemala. Donna Birdwell-Pheasant studied an area originally settled by refugees from the Caste Wars in the Yucatan, mostly mestizo interspersed with some Maya Indians.<sup>20</sup> The local religion was based on fiestas and novenas, the latter being mostly under the control of the sugar ranchers and bosses. In the 1920s the sugar ranchers collapsed; and at the same time the religious culture disintegrated under the impact of Adventism. By the late 1920s the religious scene comprised a small group of traditional Catholics concerned with syncretic practices, some lay Catholic brothers, a religiously disillusioned group, some Adventists and some newly established Pentecostals. The traditional Catholics comprise a faction opposed to the group controlling the village council, and are linked politically to a Senator in the north who has preached socialism, and who also has some commitment to a modest revival of Maya culture. The 'brothers' by contrast are linked to the Catholic Church as an institution and, therefore, to the urban centres of Belize, where the political and commercial elites are mostly Catholic. The nominal Catholics are by definition without a religious power base, but are relatively well-off and powerful within the village council. The Adventists also have links with the council and are all possessed of above average economic means. They are relatively self-sufficient and their main ties outside the village are political. The Pentecostal group is distinctive, comprising people from outside or from broken families or otherwise of low status. Pentecostalism acts as a substitute for the family rather than as a form of political alliance or even a means of upward mobility. What this example offers is, once again, a glimpse of the detailed way in which the varied religious groups are linked up to the economic and political divisions of the village.

This kind of evidence drawn from rural and largely Indian contexts can be complemented by an older study carried out by B. R. Roberts in a neighbourhood of Guatemala City.<sup>21</sup> Roberts lays his stress on the usefulness of belonging to a tight-knit religious network when trying to survive in the city. He argues that 'It is the social relationships and social organization made available in one of these groups that explains their effects on an individual's economic position and public behavior.'<sup>22</sup> These effects are both negative and positive from an economic point of view. As regards the negative effects, Protestants were too few and too poor (in the mid-sixties, that is) for their network to give them serious advantages. Their churches were so recently founded that they absorbed a great deal of the time and money of their members. Furthermore, some of the better-off among Protestants tended to become less active in their faith. Of course, this

tendency has always made it difficult to measure how far 'sectarian' Protestantism provides a social escalator, since success may mean that people step off the escalator. At any rate, the evidence Roberts cites does not show Protestants at that period more advanced than their Catholic neighbours in economic or educational standing. He also points out that most low-income workers in Guatemala City are strongly motivated to improve their position. The problem is that the means to do so are pitifully lacking. (It is worth remarking that several of the studies reviewed here mention the existence of strong motivation in the general population toward improving one's economic position as well as the importance of networks for Roman Catholics).

Yet the Protestant network of mutual assistance which he describes clearly has considerable potential, and we know that these networks are today very much more extensive in Guatemala City and, for that matter, in most of the other mega-cities of Central and Southern America. It was, of course, the mutual assistance provided by reliable and credit-worthy fellow Christians which Weber stressed in his remarks about the American Baptists. Roberts describes how

Funds attached to the central headquarters of these groups pay for funeral expenses when a family member or a believer dies. When a Protestant in one of the neighborhoods is sick, members of his congregation join together to provide money for the affected family and frequently visit the sick person. Should a Protestant in one of the neighborhoods need help to improve or repair his house, install drainage, or obtain a loan, other members of his congregation join together to give help. If a Protestant is out of a job or wants to change his work, other members of his congregation help him find work.<sup>23</sup>

The Protestant networks, then, provide an intensive and extensive information service and offer a kind of insurance as well as the emotional support of stable relationships. Beyond that they inculcate North American norms of behaviour and educate members in such matters as household budgeting, social compartment and table manners. To this one would add the way in which membership in Protestant groups provides a marriage and sexual discipline and along with that some break in the cycle of endemic corruption. It is also amazing that today so many Protestant churches can provide a clinic and some access to skilled medical help. As in Hong Kong the Protestant churches offer a significant part of a welfare system. What does not, however, arise from membership of the Protestant – or rather of the Pentecostal – churches is active leadership in projects



for community improvement. This sphere is one where Catholics, with their more organic traditions of broad communitarian concern, are much more conspicuous.

Some more general comments on the evidence in Guatemala are found in the work of Virginia Garrard Burnett, and these are particularly useful because they touch on a much later state in the development of Protestantism than does Roberts. Virginia Burnett emphasizes, in particular, the rapid growth of Protestantism since the earthquake in 1976. Burnett uses evidence from several anthropological studies which I do not attempt to specify individually. In summarizing what she has to say I shall try to keep the focus on economic advancement, although it is significant that such a focus very easily broadens out into diffuse considerations about conversion and the wider appeal of Protestantism.<sup>24</sup>

Protestantism attracts converts because it combines material and spiritual improvement, as indeed it has done since Presbyterian 'ragged schools' were established in the late nineteenth century. Discussing the superior wealth and industry of Protestants compared to Catholics in San Antonio Aguascalientes, Virginia Burnett quotes the local Protestant view of the link between conversion and material improvement: 'del suelo al cielo' – from the dirt floor to the sky. The prospect of such improvements naturally appeals particularly to the marginalized and the poor.

Burnett adds that during the period of acute social distress following the earthquake of 1976, the poor saw that 'the austere moral and economic rules of the Protestant churches offered an enticing – and well-defined – route for upward mobility.'<sup>25</sup> This was a time of increasingly concentrated land tenure, civil violence, inflation and rising population; and the indigenous communities in particular were forced out of their isolation. The old *milpa* technologists were replaced by dispossessed peasants and petty capitalists, many of them receptive to fresh religious motivations.

From 1976 on, these frustrations were by no means confined to marginalized people. The Guatemalan middle class also found itself cut off from access to the political arena and experienced acute status inconsistency. For the first time, substantial numbers in the Guatemalan middle class became converted to Protestantism (though some also began to entertain a more intense and meditative attachment to Catholicism). A church like Verbo, for example, has a strong middle-class component in its membership. Its facilities and style are reminiscent of North America, and it offers educational facilities. In fact, the organization associated with Verbo resembles many large churches in the USA. It provides a complete protective and

insulated environment: an orphanage, a school, medical and dental clinics, sports facilities, family entertainment and recreation, not to mention a women's magazine called 'Ester' designed 'to help women fulfil their God-given feminine destinies'.<sup>26</sup> There is considerable emphasis on restoring the integrity of the family.

The material assistance and training provided by Verbo is apparently not restricted to members, and whatever may be said about the politics of Verbo, it seems difficult to deny the extent of the social first-aid work in which its members and leaders are engaged. One does not have data on how this kind of integrated and familial environment assists personal and economic advancement, but on general grounds it seems likely to do so. And one must underline the way in which Latin American cities are beginning to abound in organizations of this kind. Many of them are independent initiatives even when they have North American connections and draw on North American support. A non-denominational (?) organization like Shekinah run by Dr Charlotte Lindgren, and known to the author, would provide another example from among many in Guatemala City. Dr Lindgren is responsible for the El Refugio home for abandoned and needy children.

## Case Studies: Ecuador and Colombia

It is now useful to turn to the evidence to be found in South America, though that is perhaps even more fragmentary than the evidence found in Mexico and Guatemala. Nevertheless, it provides pointers. We begin with studies undertaken in the adjacent Andean countries of Ecuador and Colombia.

Ecuador has not provided a very fertile soil for Protestantism. In any case, Protestant missions were late arriving. Most of their converts lived on the coast, where there was a large number of small or medium-sized farms. By 1979 there were in Portillo, for example, some eighteen congregations. Kent Maynard, in his study, says that evangelicals often belong to secular organizations. 'Artisans are particularly likely to be members of their professional cooperative, while other evangelicals have been involved in savings and loan cooperatives, and housing cooperatives.'<sup>27</sup> This participation in wider organizations provides a channel of social and economic mobility for them, and is simultaneously an expression of their responsibility as artisans. What is worth taking from this small study is that the attitudes of evangelicals to secular memberships vary according to the country, the social context and, of course, denominational emphasis.

Whereas in Guatemala the attitude may be inturnd, in Ecuador it may be more outgoing. In Ecuador the secular memberships are a means whereby some evangelicals make their way in the wider society. Of course, they observe the same rules of abstinence which define evangelicals everywhere and give them additional capacity for economic advancement.

In Colombia, as in many other Latin American countries, the initial relationship of Protestantism to economic and social advancement was mediated through prestigious schools, especially those run by Presbyterians. These, of course, belong to the early phase of missions promoted by the historic denominations. Elizabeth Brusco, in her study of El Cocuy, a town in northern Boyaca (discussed in more detail elsewhere in relation to Protestantism and the role of women) mentions that the personality promoted by Protestantism is regarded as the antithesis of the Colombian personality, which is seen as undisciplined, vicious and lacking in respect for others.<sup>28</sup>

In El Cocuy, Protestants were divided between the 'historic' denomination of the Lutherans – and the Pentecostals. What Elizabeth Brusco provides is an intimate picture of precisely those psychological and social changes, especially the taming of machismo, which might give Protestants some assistance in a quest for social advancement. Machismo is a major drawback because the more women a man 'conquers' the less he can provide. In her view, the effect of Protestantism is to reduce drinking and fighting and to increase concern for the home and the family. Whereas Catholics aimed to acquire a radio, the first priority of Protestants was a domestic table. Their concern, she says, was with wholesomeness, with learning, and with being productive. Evangelical households ate better and exemplified new priorities in consumption. In addition, the Lutherans provided music, pianos, and games and sport, by way of family recreation.

Dr Brusco comments: 'The early missionaries were also involved in what might be viewed as small-scale development work, and their interest in "progress" was a main selling point of the new doctrine that continues to characterize evangelical activities in Colombia.'<sup>29</sup> She goes on to add, which of course is more generally true: 'Modernization for its own sake, as well as class mobility and status achievement, are not the goals of these evangelical community activists.'<sup>30</sup> What her study shows more clearly than most is the way mutations at the level of the personality and the culture of the family are capable of altering the 'tone' of a society. The possibility of advancement follows as a byproduct, which is not to say that believers are indifferent to the material blessings associated with their new faith.

The other three studies of Protestantism in Colombia are focused respectively on Medellín, Bogota and Palmira. Thornton's study of Medellín suggests that people seek out Protestant churches because of loneliness and a desire to belong, and because many priests do not make themselves sufficiently available to help with such problems as sickness, marital breakup and difficult teenagers.<sup>31</sup> Catholicism seemed too vast and impersonal and tied in to the social, educational and economic system. So the individual had little opportunity to exercise his own spiritual gifts, or to read, or to help create a warm, concerned, participatory and friendly community. Thornton also comments that in Colombia prestige is the basis of association and some lower-class Protestants are glad to acquire prestige by making genuinely cross-class contacts at a Protestant church in a middle-class neighbourhood.

Clearly, these attractions of Protestantism are at least such as to assist survival in the economic conditions of the modern Colombian city. Thornton goes on to discuss economic advancement.<sup>32</sup> He says that no Protestant he interviewed ever mentioned economic security or material gain as a motive for conversion, and some mentioned their acceptance of economic costs or even loss of a job. At the same time, they said they could be sure of assistance in time of need or unemployment. Here we observe, once again, the help provided by a network.

Most Protestants felt assured that God provided them with 'material blessings' not experienced before their conversion. These blessings came the more easily from their commitment to a strict code and their vocational attitude to work. When a piece of repair work needs to be done Protestants recommend a member of their own fraternity. Thornton also mention the 'blessings' found among Adventists, in particular through an emphasis on diet, and through the provision of health and educational services.<sup>33</sup>

Karl W. Westmeier, in his study of Bogota, notes the early association of Protestantism with liberal politics in Colombia, as in so many other Latin American countries.<sup>34</sup> He also suggests that Pentecostal ecstasy takes over from older experiences of trance and that Pentecostal healers draw from more ancient traditions of healing. He views ecstasy as providing a form of integration for people dealing with new experiences in mega-cities like Bogota. The Protestant communities of Bogota provide solutions for those held in bondage by vices and by household squabbles. One solution, of course, is for the husband to restrict himself to one woman, which, as mentioned above, restricts his outings.

Frequent meetings in the church provide Protestants with an all-

absorbing life-style which holds meaninglessness and anomie at bay. When Colombian *creyentes* speak about 'power' they mean the experience of moral victory. They also gain a rather different sense of power when they participate in a mass meeting. The severity of their dress and behaviour serves to mark them off and to put behind them the old style of life. *Creyentes* feel that in every respect they have become different. Their new mystical identity parallels the acquisition of a new identity for dealing with the difficulties of urban life. It seems that this new identity does not lead to the kind of withdrawal from politics found among many evangelicals in some other countries.

Westmeier's summary of evidence about economic advancement begins by suggesting that when Colombian Protestants save they do so not to 'prove their election' but in order to have time to labour for the Lord.

Betterment of external physical conditions (their house, some additional furniture) happens incidentally. Although Protestantism has been Colombia for more than a hundred years, the truly indigenous and enthusiastic breakthrough has occurred very recently. At this developmental stage, it is not yet clear whether and/or to what extent processes of embourgeoisement can be distinguished. On the other hand, enthusiastic Protestantism is making successful evangelistic inroads into the Bogotá middle class.<sup>35</sup>

The incursion into the middle class bears out evidence already cited for Guatemala City.

The study carried out by Cornelia Butler Flora in Valle del Cauca offers mildly negative conclusions about the economic opportunities opened up by Pentecostalism. She comments that the Pentecostals she encountered did not perceive any likely connection between conversion and improved personal circumstances.<sup>36</sup> Their belief in the efficacy of their personal efforts was not more marked than among Catholics, nor did they have an increased sense of the power of their own personal voice. On the other hand, they were not, as some have suggested, any *less* aware of what was going on in the world around them.

At the same time, Flora does point to certain distinctive aspects of Pentecostalism. In common with Elizabeth Brusco she stresses new consumption patterns and a sense of family solidarity. It common with Rolim (to be discussed later) and with Roberts, she finds Pentecostals strongly represented among the self-employed, or else located in small enterprises. And this finding can be regarded as showing them outside the truly modern (large-scale), sections of society. The data

presented by Cornelia Butler Flora lead to the kind of conclusion found in Roberts, which emphasizes the central importance of the network. What the network offers is a safety net and – quite often – some work. In Latin American conditions the advantages of such a system of mutual support may take a generation or two to be realized.

### Contrasting Case Studies: ‘Indians’ in Peru and Bolivia

Before considering material which has to do with the major population centres in South America, it is worth looking at a couple of contrasting studies of Andean ‘Indian’ communities. These run parallel to the work on the Maya discussed earlier. There are, in fact, many studies of ‘Indian’ communities. These range from the kind of work done by Elmer Miller on the Argentinian Toba, which focuses on the way evangelical religion reduces stress and restores harmony, to analyses which accuse missionaries of propagating ‘maladaptive’ responses, undermining the practices which sustain group viability and identity, encouraging social division, and acting as agents of US culture.<sup>37</sup> This is not the place to enter into that debate, which tips one way or the other according to varied conditions in different areas and often owes something to the predilections of the author.

Of course, the focus of analysis in these studies is on terms like ‘adaptation’ and ‘development’, and economic advancement is just one aspect of development. The work of Ted Lewellen deals with the relationship of ‘deviant religion and cultural evolution’, and the vocabulary he uses reminds us how saturated with theory are the concepts deployed in any study of this kind, even those expressly dedicated to the ‘facts’.<sup>38</sup>

In his discussion of the Aymara of Peru, Lewellen refers to the one circumstance affecting the vast majority of such groups: the shift from subsistence agriculture to a money economy. Increasing population, as elsewhere, has outrun the availability of land and many of the Aymara have had to leave their ancestral locality high in the mountains by Lake Titicaca and engage in wage labour on the coast. Lewellen comments: ‘Exactly coincident with this sudden and severe economic change was the emergence of a small group of Seventh Day Adventists as the power elite in the community.’<sup>39</sup> Though making up only 18 per cent of the population, the Adventists have come to hold most of the top political offices. They are better educated, take out more bank loans, engage in more profitable jobs during time spent on the coast and have greater possessions. These differences do not arise in any important measure because the Adventists have withdrawn

from the fiesta system, which is anyway not all that expensive, but as a consequence of their more favourable evaluation of education. Adventists have always valued education (as well as health) and already by 1950 there were 166 Adventist schools in the southern Peruvian highlands. Such education was not relevant while the old social system remained intact, but once it collapsed local government was reorganized on a national model with direct links to district, department and national agencies. It was also secularized and thereby opened up to non-Catholics. Only the Adventists were educationally ready for these changes, and they soon became the elite in their community and acted as the mediators of modernity. Lewellen describes them as 'preadaptive', that is, ready and apt for change.

The other study is of 'Social Change and Pentecostalism in an Aymaran Community'. It is by Gilles Rivière and he begins by referring to the 'spectacular growth' of non-Catholic religious groups in Bolivia, and to the fact that by 1986 200 of them were registered with the Bolivian Ministry of External Relations.<sup>40</sup> The study offers an account of how individuals were originally guaranteed integration into the traditional community, and rights to the exploitation of the local means of production, as well as participation in arrangements for the redistribution of surplus accumulation. Festivals and rituals reinforced this egalitarian social system and celebrated the historic identity of the group. But then the old order started to disintegrate as population increased and put pressure on the available land. Part of the community started to operate in a wider commercial network, traded on the black market, migrated for work, bought trucks, and generally secured economic power at the expense of the other *comunarios*. Aymara identity and language lost prestige, and the community became divided into those who had gained from the changes and those who were left behind. The urban model to which the Aymara were attracted was Chilean, since Chile was just across the nearby frontier. And so too was the new faith to which part of the community gravitated. About one in four joined the Evangelical Pentecostal Church of Chile (EPC), and were conspicuous as being the older and the poorer people, those who had no trucks and had not joined in the commercial and black-market activity. These people violently rejected older traditions and set themselves apart, recovering their personal dignity through evangelical consolation and messianic hope. They eschewed all festivities and offices, all profane activities and all contact with secular communication. They took no part in development projects, avoided political commitments, and refused to send their children to school beyond what was needed to read the Bible.

This situation both assists and retards 'development'. It is clearly at one level a protest whereby people endeavour to recover some personal dignity and to create a new social solidarity. At the same time, the Pentecostal Church provides many contacts with examples of middle-class Chilean values, and the local brothers clearly identify admiringly with their white fraternal colleagues in Chile. The 'temple' faces Chile, so breaking with the traditional orientations. Unfortunately, this identification with, and orientation to, a distant and superior culture is also a kind of alienation from whatever can be put in hand by the local Aymara community.

A study of this kind underlines the way in which evangelical religion may trickle into any line of social fault, and (as in the situation analysed by Donna Birdwell-Pheasant discussed above), this may happen to be among groups thrown off balance by socio-economic disruption as well as those exceptionally apt for it. Even so, the crucial element for present concerns may still be located in the way Aymara Pentecostals are now integrated into a wider social system in Chile, offering them urban and middle-class models for emulation.

## Studies in Developed Sectors of South America

Most of the materials to be covered now refer to relatively developed sectors of Brazil, Chile and the Argentine, in particular Brazil.

One has to begin in the case of Brazil by referring back to the role of Protestantism in Brazilian society about a century ago. At that time the missions became linked to the liberal middle classes, partly because people in those classes associated Protestantism with democracy and progress, and partly because, as Ronald Frase puts it, 'The Protestant education institutions offered accessibility to the one resource that promised social mobility – education.'<sup>41</sup> Though these institutions primarily served the middle (and even upper) classes, they often provided aid to promising children of lower-class Protestant parents, and indeed much of the pastorate was recruited in this way. Ronald Frase has pointed out that a whole new network of relationships between patrons and clients was created around a complex organization of churches, schools, seminaries, hospitals, orphanages, publishing houses and retreat centres. At the centre of this organization the pastor performed the critical role of broker, dispensing aid and influence. Thus the open and democratic promise of Protestantism was partly diminished by the pressures and exigencies of the system in which it had to operate. It therefore offered mobility partly in traditional Brazilian terms, but with a fresh



injection through the style and content of Protestant schooling. Clearly, the role of networks in contemporary Protestantism duplicates what happened a century ago but on a much larger scale and on the level of migrant workers.

The question about economic advancement in Brazil has partly to be posed in terms of the effectiveness of networks, as indeed it was posed earlier in relation to Guatemala City. In making some comment about that, I draw on an unpublished paper by Cecilia Mariz comparing the relative effectiveness and varying styles of the rival networks associated with Pentecostalism and with the base communities.<sup>42</sup> She argues that while Pentecostals are quite distinct from the base communities with regard to their individualistic rather than socialistic approach, and also with regard to the inward rather than communal character of their concerns, nevertheless the two groups offer rather similar experiences and opportunities to their members. Both groups require a conscious choice and a conscious rationale from those who join them, which must mean some shift away from passivity and fatalism. They also depend on participation, which implies learning to speak, to organize, and maybe also to read. They assume a connection between belief and action, religion and living, and expect sobriety and discipline from their members. The skills acquired and the life-style adopted, and especially the new sense of personal worth, must confer some advantage and some cutting edge on those who belong to Pentecostal churches or to base communities. (Some commentators even suggest they draw from precisely the same social constituencies, though others, for example Rolim, consider that the base communities contain relatively greater numbers of industrial workers.)

However, Cecilia Mariz comments that self-help is actually quite common among poor Brazilians whether or not they belong to base communities or Pentecostal churches. In her view, Pentecostal churches and base communities offer *alternative networks* parallel to family and neighbourhood networks. Of course, they also reinforce the working of their particular network by adding a national scope and a sacred sanction. They provide not only psychological support 'but also material support such as a place to live, jobs, the payment of children's schooling etc.'<sup>43</sup>

One study relevant to the concerns of this chapter is Rolim's *Pentecostais no Brasil*.<sup>44</sup> Rolim's concern is with the Pentecostalism which has burgeoned since 1930 and especially so since 1960. This is a grassroots and indigenous Christianity now accounting for two-thirds of the Protestant sector, and 12 per cent or more maybe of the whole population.

Rolim has some interesting things to say. Most Pentecostals – over

half – are in work and they are concentrated disproportionately in the spheres of commerce and services, rather than among direct producers. Rolim refers to porters, independent masons, watchmen, mechanics, electricians, tailors, chauffeurs, street vendors, non-commissioned officers, office boys etc. these are mostly occupations involving self-employment or some degree of autonomy or minor responsibility. Pentecostals were mostly of lowly education.

Rolim goes on to say that Pentecostals rarely wanted to gain money. They economized partly to improve their diet and their home, and partly to support the church. They worked for their churches, helped repair them, gave spare time to them, and such donations weighed on their scanty resources. One Pentecostal commented that God gave him the skills of a mason and he in turn gave back the fruits of those skills. The burden of Rolim's evidence would seem to weigh against any extensive socio-economic mobility specifically among Pentecostal Protestants. It suggests by implication that those Protestants who most advance themselves belong to the other older 'historic' denominations. Thus, Pablo Deiros in his comments on Baptists, at least in the Argentine, says that 'they generated an ethic conducive to a disciplined, hard-working life', so that second and third generations of converts were 'mostly integrated in the middle and lower middle class'.<sup>45</sup>

Writing of Protestantism *generally* some twenty years ago, Read (et al.) and Willems held that its followers in Latin America did achieve some economic and social advancement.<sup>46</sup> Willems emphasized the effects of ascetic behaviour, though he also mentioned the asceticism displayed by participants in messianic movements in Brazil prior to any serious Protestant incursions. Read laid stress on the way vigorous integration in a universe of meaning led to a desire for personal improvement. He underlined once more the way self-esteem and sense of purpose make for economic improvement. Read et al. comment that 'the sense of community, purpose, direction, hope for betterment, responsibility and authority' help to make life better for the worker.<sup>47</sup> Of course, as D'Epinaï originally pointed out, the opportunities for advancement in Latin America have been limited and this has restricted what religious mutations at the level of personality and culture can achieve.

A rather different emphasis emerges from the works of Lalive D'Epinaï, again mostly produced nearly two decades ago.<sup>48</sup> In these major studies of Chilean Pentecostalism, Lalive D'Epinaï placed less weight on social mobility and economic advance, precisely because he was concerned with Pentecostals rather than with Protestants as a whole. In common with Willems, Lalive D'Epinaï rejected any

Weberian connection of the classical type between Pentecostalism and the growth of large scale capitalist activity. That, anyway, is not the contemporary issue, since Pentecostals are not within striking distance of the social position that would make such a connection possible. In Lalive D'Épinay's view, moral regeneration takes clear precedence over material advance. The kind of moral regeneration espoused does not necessarily lead even to increased savings.

Lalive D'Épinay draws attention to what he regards as elements of closure in Pentecostalism. While it undoubtedly inculcates participation and offers equality and individual dignity through the gifts of the Spirit, it also echoes the authoritarianism and the patron-client relationships of the society in which it emerges. Lalive D'Épinay sees strong resemblances to the relationships which held on the hacienda: the importance of face to face relationships, the belief that the 'master' will solve and resolve all difficulties. The powers and authority of the master are reproduced in the powers and authority of the pastor. In such circumstances, the mobility of the Pentecostal remains largely on the spiritual plane and is mostly confined to his new spiritual home. Moreover, Pentecostalism remains a faith for the 'habitat' whereas Marxism is a faith for the work-place. The two pass by each other rather than competing. The Pentecostal is on 'social strike' *from* society and the Marxist on strike *against* society.

It is not appropriate at this point in a chapter concerned with economic advancement to pursue the analysis by Lalive D'Épinay further, since it takes us into the political stance of Pentecostalism and raises fundamental questions of meta-interpretation. But clearly the kind of understanding offered by Lalive D'Épinay, which analyses Pentecostalism as a 'haven' strongly resembling the hacienda, does not see it as offering all that much by way of material advance, even in terms of 'penny capitalism'.

### A Korean Aside

In parenthesis it is worth observing that though Protestants have increased dramatically in numbers in Korea as well as in Latin America, there seems to be little evidence of economic advance specifically associated with them. The point will be reiterated in chapter 8 devoted to the phenomenon of Korean Protestantism. Certainly when Protestantism arrived in Korea it was associated with the USA, with the assertion of individuality and with modernity in general. That association remains. Protestantism also came to be associated with the early struggles of Korean nationalists against the

Japanese and with the survival of the Korean language. To that extent there are analogies with the spread of Protestantism among the Maya.

But as to the association of Protestantism in Korea with a work ethic and economic advancement, the consensus of opinion seems to be that the Confucian work ethic provides all the motivation necessary. Yet converts in the early period at the turn of the last century were conspicuously industrious. Perhaps their sense of inner purpose and meaning gave them additional confidence at a time of social dissolution. In more recent times, the rapid growth of Protestantism has run alongside the rapid economic growth of Korea, but it could easily be that Protestantism provides communitarian support and creates an enclave of meaning against the rigours and anxieties of change. Thus, Protestantism switches social roles and provides shelter and some psychic security while the whole society tries to mend its fabric and move simultaneously into an era of rapid technological change.

The preaching of a gospel of success among many conservative Protestants is not in itself evidence that they are noticeably more successful than people of other faiths or none. Commentators seem mostly agreed that a population imbued with the Confucian work ethic needs no further inducements to industry from Protestantism. They are, so to say, Protestants *naturaliter*.

## Summary

If we try now to bring these disparate observations together, it seems clear that the Protestantism which first lodged in South and Central America provided a vehicle of autonomy and advancement for some sections of the middle class, conspicuously so in Brazil, and provided channels for mobility for some who would otherwise have been condemned to poverty. Mortimer Arias has aptly commented that this Protestant seed came with its flowerpot – ‘the world view, the ethos and the ideology of the prospering and the expanding capitalistic countries, the image of democracy, progress, education, freedom, and material development. And it was the flowerpot, not the seed itself, that the liberal politicians, the members of the Masonic lodges, and the young Latin American elite were looking at.’<sup>49</sup> But this foreign packaging prevented the seed taking deep indigenous root. So, too, did the educational ethos which Protestants promoted. The whole Protestant style remained remote from the largely illiterate millions of Latin America. A pastorate imbued with this style, either from birth or inducted into it by clerical training, was incapable of establishing

easy communication with the people. Even when Protestantism acquired something in the nature of its own network of patron and client, this meant only its own subversion by the 'host society' and not the conversion of the indigenous people.

Pentecostalism by contrast became truly indigenous and independent and also lacked the alienating character of educational advance. Being truly indigenous it was also more truly embedded in the local cultures and reflected them even as it altered them. It came close enough to be moulded in the local image as well as to recreate that image.

The clearest instance of the way Pentecostalism takes on local colour is where it creates a protective network and reproduces some of the solidarities and the structures of authority found on the hacienda. Nevertheless, the network offers participation and equality in the gifts of the spirit. It also offers opportunity for developing skills of expression, organization, propagation and leadership. Such skills cannot, in the long run, be irrelevant to survival and modest advancement in the conditions of contemporary Latin America, especially for the pastorate. This is true even if much of the time, money and labour of Pentecostals is expended on sustaining the group. By moulding individuals with some sense of their own selfhood and capacity to choose, it may well be building up a constituency well-disposed to a capitalistic form of development. It is also, as we have seen, often building up a constituency open to American modes and techniques, particularly by reason of the technical means for propagating the message now available, such as television, radio, film and cassette. The speed and scope of modern communications may well be accelerating cultural mutations which previously moved much more slowly.

Of course, the impact of Pentecostal Protestantism varies according to the local channel most receptive to it, and this is true both economically and politically. In certain circumstances the impact may be translated in terms of a dispossessed group in a backward social condition seeking a measure of autonomy and, maybe, redress. At another time the translation may be made in terms of binding up distressed and/or isolated persons, restoring the family or offering new ties of religious kinship. In yet other instances, Protestantism may be aligned with an ethnic identity. It can provide a shelter from the rigours of very rapid social and economic change. According to circumstance, different aspects of the Pentecostal message will be efficacious. In one situation it may console and buttress those who lose from social change; in another situation it may select precisely those who can make the most of chances that change offers to them. The framework within which it acts will normally be a dualistic one and

one derived from American models separating religious organizations from politics as well as from the state. But the personality it nourishes will be one with a new sense of individuality and individual worth and, therefore, possessed of a potential for assessing its own proper activity, in which will be included activity in the economic realm. Experience of the way social mobility has come about elsewhere, as well as common sense, suggest that the capacities built up and stored in the religious group may take two or three generations to come to fruition. Much depends on the balance which Pentecostalism maintains between its ability to expand among the masses, by remaining of the masses, and its ability to advance their condition. If the former remains powerful the latter must operate at the margin.