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Evangelical Protestantism and Democratization in Contemporary Latin America and Asia

PAUL FRESTON

This article examines the new mass Protestantism of Latin America and Asia, which is largely a pentecostalized evangelicalism. Looking at case-studies from Asia (South Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Burma, India and China) and from Latin America (Brazil, Guatemala, Peru and Nicaragua), the article stresses the importance of locating evangelical politics within the national religious and political fields. Evangelicalism is highly fragmented and its political effects cannot be read off from its religious doctrines. Fragmentation means that its direct political impact is always smaller than might be hoped or feared and therefore no evangelical neo-Christendom potentially dangerous to democracy is feasible. In addition, it does not seem that Third-World evangelicalism will line up with the First-World Christian right on many issues. But the results for democracy are paradoxical. Totalitarian regimes or movements are firmly resisted, as are non-Christian religious nationalisms, but authoritarian regimes which do not impinge on evangelical religion may not always be. The evangelical world is too fissured and independent to provide a firm basis for nation-wide movements advocating major political change. It is thus less 'use' during democratic transitions than during periods of democratic consolidation.

Key words: democratization; evangelicalism; Latin America; Asia; pentecostalism

Protestantism and Democracy

Of the major religions, Protestantism has the longest historical link with democratization. Witte speaks of three waves of Christian democratizing impulses, of which the first was Protestant, in the northern Europe and North America of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹ This was largely an unintended result of the fractured religious field, rather than of most Protestant leaders' convictions regarding democracy. Nevertheless, 'principled pluralism' was adopted relatively early as a basic Protestant position on relations with the state. This position, which first achieved political

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importance in the 1640s, supplied the theological basis which allowed sectarian theology (intended for voluntary communities) to overflow into democratic politics by rejecting any division of the political world between the godly and the ungodly. In consequence, today's Protestants, wherever they are, do not have to allay fears regarding their religion's ultimate ability to co-exist with democracy. This is not just a question of links with the West (which may not exist), but is also a product of theological reflection and historical experience.

In reality, however, there have always been *Protestantisms* in the plural, not all of them uniformly favourable to democracy. This plurality was likely to be amplified once Protestantism achieved a significant presence beyond its historic homelands. By the late twentieth century, Protestantism had become a global religion involved in politics in myriad settings. Here we shall examine two areas: Latin America and Asia (taking the latter as an arc from India to Korea).

Evangelical Protestantism in Latin America and Asia

Our focus is *evangelical* Protestantism, and most Protestants in Asia and Latin America would come under this rubric. 'Third-World' Protestantism is considerably more evangelical than its Western counterpart, and today it is also overwhelmingly nationally-run, institutionally divided and over-represented amongst the poor. 'Evangelicalism' refers to a sub-set of Protestantism, distinguished by doctrinal and practical characteristics but not by denominational affiliation. Many recent studies have borrowed a working definition from Bebbington, consisting of four emphases: conversionism (change of life), activism (evangelistic and missionary efforts), biblicism (a special importance to the Bible) and crucicentrism (centrality of Christ's sacrifice on the cross).²

Evangelicalism cannot be subsumed under the category of 'fundamentalism' as suggested by many studies of religion in global politics. While some evangelicals can be considered fundamentalists, evangelicalism is an older and broader tendency within Protestantism. The *Fundamentalism Project* defines fundamentalism as 'movements of religiously inspired reaction to aspects of global processes of modernisation and secularisation... the struggle to assert or reassert the norms and beliefs of "traditional religion" in the public order'.³ But evangelicalism is not traditional in most of the Third World. Generally spreading by conversion, its interests are the opposite of those of a reactive fundamentalism. For evangelicalism, pluralism and cultural diffuseness are advantageous.

In most of Latin America and Asia, Protestantism is overwhelmingly an indigenous movement rather than one funded and run from the West, and is rapidly expanding but also fissiparous. It is not a state religion, and rarely

has an unofficial privileged relationship to governments. Usually, it does not have strong institutions; being composed disproportionately of the poor (excepting South Korea), its cultural and educational resources are limited. It often has no international contacts, cutting it off from the history of Christian reflection on politics. It may represent an *arriviste* minority inexperienced in the public sphere and lacking political legitimacy, but nevertheless confident (even excessively so) about its future.

Protestantism is usually more socially embedded and politically legitimate in Latin America than in Asia. In some Asian countries, Christianity may even be considered anti-national. Only the Philippines (and perhaps East Timor) can be compared to Latin America in having a Christian (Catholic) majority and a growing evangelical minority, though in South Korea Protestantism has entered the national mainstream. In many other countries, it is lodged primarily in a politically and/or economically marginalized ethnic or caste group (Dalits and tribals in India, Chinese and indigenous minorities in Malaysia and Indonesia, tribals in Burma). This leads to a different type of politics from most of Latin America, with the 'ethnic' nature of much Christianity introducing different questions. Evangelicalism has become a dominant religion amongst several Asian ethnic groups which have failed to become nations, so it often questions the existing nation-state. It is also fairly strong amongst diaspora Chinese. The ethnic and religious policies of ethnically diverse post-colonial states largely determine the space for conversion and Christian politics.

In contrast, the context of Latin American Protestantism is relatively uniform, dominated by Catholic Christianity. Its presence (initiated in the post-colonial period) for long remained as insignificant as in Latin Europe. But from the 1950s in Brazil and Chile and the 1980s elsewhere, it achieved considerable growth. The traditional Catholic claim to be essential to Latin American identity has lost plausibility as pluralism has increased and Protestantism become deeply rooted. This has produced an 'adversarial' Protestantism, in which the political operationalizing of Protestant (rather than generically Christian) identity is more pronounced than in Asia. In some countries there is still discrimination at certain social levels against Protestants, as well as mild legal discrimination against their churches. 'Religious freedom' (in the fuller sense of equal treatment in the public sphere) has been a rallying cry for some Protestants in politics in recent years.

Protestants are now ten per cent of the Latin American population, two-thirds of them Pentecostals. Pentecostalism arose in the early twentieth century as a movement within Protestantism which stressed the contemporary nature of phenomena from the New Testament such as 'speaking in tongues', prophecy, divine healing and expulsion of demons. This enthusiastic and highly supernaturalistic version of Protestantism has been adopted only by a

minority of Protestants in the developed West, but in the Third World it has often become the predominant form, with Martin estimating that perhaps four per cent of the world's population may now be Protestant Pentecostals.⁴ In Latin America, Pentecostalism is associated disproportionately with the poor, less educated and darker-skinned, and its entry into formal politics has provided political mobility for some marginalized sectors. If Latin America used to mirror Latin Europe (traditional Catholic dominance and weak Protestant presence), it has now moved somewhat towards the religious voluntarism typical of the United States. But that does not mean its politics can necessarily be compared to that of the American Christian right. In addition, time and place are all-important when analysing a fast-growing religious community: for example, there are three times as many evangelicals in Brazil today as there were in 1980. This means a qualitative transformation in the religious community, with shifts in social composition and the rise of completely new institutional actors.

Problematizing Third World Evangelicalism and Democracy

Like evangelicalism, democracy has expanded in Latin America and Asia in recent decades. Discussions have become more nuanced over the years, not only regarding different degrees of democracy and the differences between 'transition' and 'consolidation', but also with regard to 'halfway houses' implemented by canny autocrats or defended as alternatives to 'Western-style' democracy. In the resulting terminological jungle, most qualified 'democracies' and hyphenated halfway-houses between democracy and authoritarianism are located in the Third World. Beyond saying that democracy refers to more than a multiparty electoral system, there is little consensus regarding definitions and typologies. Here we shall refer only to the nuanced typology which Diamond had devised by 2002, in recognition of the hybrid forms being developed to reconcile democracy's ideological hegemony with the desire of regimes to retain authoritarian elements under a democratic mask. According to his sixfold typology 73 countries qualify as 'liberal democracies', 31 as merely 'electoral democracies', 17 are 'ambiguous', 21 are 'competitive authoritarian', 25 are 'hegemonic electoral authoritarian', and 25 are 'politically closed authoritarian'.⁵ Except for Cuba, all Latin American countries come into the first three categories: Venezuela, Paraguay and Colombia are 'ambiguous', while the rest are liberal or electoral democracies. Asia, however, includes all six categories.

One thing this typology highlights is the importance of democratic consolidation, by which democracy acquires deep and widespread legitimacy among all major elite groups and the citizenry at large and becomes 'the only game in town'. While a successful transition from authoritarianism is

important, consolidation is also vital if reversals are to be avoided. Consolidation is a distinct phase requiring distinct virtues from actors in political society and civil society. These virtues may not be distributed equally amongst religious groups; in fact, characteristics of a particular church (e.g. hierarchical structure and international links) may be advantageous for opposing a dictatorship but irrelevant or even disadvantageous for democratic consolidation. Yet the arena of civil society is the one where religious groups may have a particular role to play.

Generally defined as the realm of autonomous voluntary organizations which act in the public sphere as intermediaries between the state and private life, there remained ambiguities in how the phenomenon was understood. A strong civil society does not necessarily mean better chances for democracy. Civil society can also be uncivil; maybe institutions do not promote pluralism and tolerance if they do not actually seek to do so.⁶

On the whole, civil society is weaker in Asia than in Latin America, perhaps because of the latter's earlier decolonization, relative lack of ethnic and religious schisms and higher indices of industrialization and urbanization. Nonetheless, Diamond and Plattner point to the key role of civil society (including the Catholic Church) in the transitions in the Philippines and South Korea; they add, however, that the intensely oppositional character of such movements was not well suited to the more complex functions of democratic consolidation.

Discussions of civil society are often linked with the notion of 'social capital', defined by Coleman as 'features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action'.⁷ But the exact mechanisms by which religions create social capital are disputed. Putnam's distinction between 'bonding capital' and 'bridging capital' seems relevant,⁸ especially to many evangelical churches whose intense community involvement may create much of the former but a negative charge of the latter. There is considerable evidence of a 'spillover' effect from religious militancy to political militancy. In addition, 'minorities' tend to be well represented in Third-World evangelicalism, which can open up new channels to political participation. A recent poll in Rio de Janeiro showed that Pentecostal women were more interested in voting than were women of other religions or none. For some authors, evangelicalism's voluntarism and fissiparousness, and its tendency to create a free social space in which democratic virtues are fostered, mean it will be positive for democracy. But others feel the repressive internal organization and corporatist interests of many churches make them a danger to democracy.

Between religious doctrine and political practice there are many intervening factors. Size, social and ethnic composition, position relative to other confessions, internal church structures and conflicts, the sociological

'type' of each group, the degree of legitimacy in relation to national myths, the presence or absence (and nature) of international connections – all these constrain political possibilities and affect behaviour. Evangelical organization and its location within the local religious and political fields are often as or more important for understanding its politics than is evangelical theology. But just as it is not possible to decide on the basis of evangelical doctrine whether the religion will be favourable or not to democracy, it is also not possible to foreclose the discussion on the basis of evangelical organization. Third-World Protestantism, like other religious traditions, should not be essentialized. Different religions are carriers of different historical heritages, varied organizational traditions and diverse theological resources, all of which constrain their capacity to act in each new situation.

Due in part to evangelicalism's success at proselytization, debates on its public role in the Third World are sometimes affected by *a priori* likes or dislikes. Rather than asking merely whether it favours democratization or authoritarianism, we should ask what sort of evangelicalism might favour (or hinder, or be indifferent to) what aspect of democratization and in which (religious and political) circumstances. Levels of analysis should include not only direct involvement in politics, but also indirect involvement (e.g. in organs of civil society, through the creation of social capital, or through changes in gender relations). And not only intended but unintended consequences of evangelical actions, since even an internally undemocratic church with a theocratic project may, through the interplay of forces, end up strengthening democracy in spite of itself. And we should look not only at church leaders but also ordinary members. This is especially important when transition gives way to consolidation, as this usually implies a relative shift in focus from the leaders to the people.

Third-World evangelicalism's nature as a conversionist religion has implications for the tendency of some scholars to regard the religious expansionist impulse as inherently politically dangerous. Tooth-and-nail religious competition is not necessarily incompatible with democracy. It is not impossible for people to disagree strongly about things they regard as of supreme importance (such as the need to convert others) and still be good democrats. In fact, they may regard democracy as an aid to genuine conversion, since it avoids the tendency to hypocrisy created by alliances between religion and political power.

Evangelicals and Democracy: Asian Cases

In *South Korea*,⁹ rapid growth from the 1960s to 1980s saw the Protestant community rise to around 20 per cent of the population, though it has now stabilized numerically. Protestantism arrived as Japanese pressure was

increasing and, freed of colonialist associations, it fed into emerging modern nationalism. Direct Japanese rule from 1910 reinforced this; 16 of the 33 signers of the 1919 Declaration of Independence were Christians, even though Christians then only accounted for 1 per cent of the population. After 1945, Christianity enjoyed prestige not only as an opponent of Japanese colonialism but as the religion of the American liberators. Christianity had been largely northern before division, and refugees assisted the post-war Christian take-off in South Korea. The first president was a Methodist layman, Syngman Rhee. He won the 1948 elections with American support and later built dictatorial powers. In 1960, rigged elections were greeted with protests, leading to Rhee's overthrow.

From 1961, the military regime promoted rapid industrialization with little social protection. The key role of church-based opposition movements from the 1970s onwards (Catholic and progressive Protestant, led by the Korean National Council of Churches) is widely recognized; but such initiatives enjoyed little support in the Protestant community – in 1982, only five per cent of Protestants favoured church initiatives against social wrongs.¹⁰ However, by the beginning of the transition in 1987 there was somewhat broader Protestant support, even from conservative denominations such as the Haptong Presbyterians and the Holiness Church. This was partly due to the 'Lausanne movement' in worldwide evangelicalism (a trend to greater social concern), but also to the fact that in South Korea Protestantism had become disproportionately middle class.

After the transition evangelicals initially gained a high profile through the election of one of their members to the post of first civilian president. Elected in 1992, Kim Young-Sam was a Haptong Presbyterian elder and had been a leading opposition figure under the dictatorship. His inauguration was regarded as heralding the return of full democracy, and early policies (corruption probes, measures to restrict the power of the military) justified that. But from 1994 his policies gave way to a more accommodating attitude to the new hegemonic power in the state, the *chaebol* (the large conglomerates). Soon, figures close to Kim were mired in scandal and his popularity rating dropped to four per cent, and it has been suggested that Kim's top-down style of government did not help the institutionalization of democratic procedures. Of course, his government is not the only recent Korean administration to suffer corruption scandals and to have difficulty governing through the existing party system; but neither can it be credited with improving the new democracy's record in these respects.

Presidents Rhee and Kim point to the disproportionate political influence of Protestantism in the democratic system; but the fact that one was removed from power after rigged elections and the other barely finished his mandate suggests Protestant influence is not uniformly positive. In 2000, 40 per cent

of members of parliament were Protestant. Unlike in Latin America, Protestant political presence in Korea is greater than its numerical size in the population, in part because of the middle-class composition of Korean churches. But thus far the evidence is ambiguous. Korea is one of the most successful 'third wave' countries and a 'liberal democracy' on Diamond's scale. But can Christianity help overcome the chronic regionalism manifested in extremely skewed voting patterns and increasingly uneven development? That is doubtful, since major denominations still have strong regional bases.

Protestantism has been in Korea just over 100 years. For the first 50 it was under the shadow of the Japanese, and for the second 50 under the shadow of the Cold War. The first period gave it national legitimacy and the second bequeathed it headlong growth. Only now is Korea emerging into a third phase, as a developed democracy with a secure place in the world. Simultaneously, the churches have entered a post-growth phase which will change their sociological nature (more birth members) and perhaps create a demand for more social awareness. The political passivity (and sometimes covert support) of the military period, and the naïve expectations of 'reform under a Christian president' of Kim Young-Sam's mandate, will not necessarily determine its future role. This large and prosperous community with increasingly solid institutions is finding its footing in civil society. In Hong's view, this is where evangelicals are making their greatest contribution. As the radical social movements of the 1970s and 1980s were eroded by redemocratization (which deprived them of their obvious enemy), evangelical-inspired civic non-governmental organizations (NGOs) arose to fill the gap.

*The Philippines*¹¹ are also a 'third-wave' democracy and important centre of Protestantism. There is a striking similarity with Latin America: Spanish colonial heritage, Catholic majority, poverty, American influence, and dictatorship until the mid-1980s. While the 'People's Power' revolt of 1986 which overthrew the Marcos dictatorship owed much to encouragement from the Catholic hierarchy, evangelicals were divided. As Lim explains, Protestantism had two large organizations: the National Council of Churches (NCCP) and the Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC). The former was more 'mainline' (which does not mean some individual members were not evangelical). In 1973, it became the first ecclesiastical body to speak against martial law. The PCEC and its evangelical constituency, however, were spread out on the political spectrum. During the dictatorship, its institutional stance was critical of protests. In 1986, it adapted cautiously to reality, always following rather than leading events. On the other hand, sectors of the PCEC constituency had taken their own course, supporting the revolt in the streets.¹² The head of the PCEC, Jun Vencer, later became head of the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF). It is also claimed that in 1993 he was appointed by President Fidel Ramos as head of intelligence for

the armed forces. This is denied by Vencer himself, though some leading Filipino evangelicals think he may have been recruited into the intelligence network. In a 1999 article, Vencer himself affirms the importance of Christian participation in politics, but eschews the endorsement of candidates by churches. He rejects the idea of a state religion or the imposition of values in a pluralistic society, and affirms the value of democracy.¹³

Fidel Ramos, the president elected in 1992, was a Methodist who had been the commander of the Constabulary during the dictatorship. Roman Catholic Cardinal Sin instructed voters to repudiate candidates identified with Marcos and those 'who will oppose Catholic principles in their public acts'. Ramos claimed to have been quietly opposed to the dictatorship, and to have made amends by leading the mutiny that opened the way for People's Power demonstrations. Sin replied that supposed silent opposition only betrayed a 'deadening absence of moral convictions'. Ramos overcame the Cardinal's opposition and won the election, but his government came into conflict with the Catholic hierarchy over birth control.

Evangelicals were mostly sceptical about Ramos' successor Joseph Estrada, even though they were again 'slow and mixed in responding' to the second round of People's Power which led to his downfall in 2001. They were, however, unanimously in favour of the third round of People's Power in April 2001 against the Estrada camp's protest at his arrest on corruption charges, and Lim concludes that the three People's Power incidents have witnessed a growing political maturity among evangelicals.¹⁴ After a very mixed record under the authoritarian regime of Marcos, evangelicals have made a gradually growing contribution to the maintenance and deepening of the Philippines' precarious democracy since 1986, especially through increasing participation in People's Power incidents and in their well publicized criticism of the levels of corruption in the country.

The experience of *Indonesia* raises some of the more typical issues faced by evangelicals in Asia: non-Christian religious nationalism, precarious Christian legitimacy and ethnic or regional separatist movements. In these conditions, evangelical contributions to democracy are often connected to ethnic contestation of the existing nation-state and/or to religious contestation of undemocratic formulations of national identity. Indonesia has a Protestant community of around six per cent, disproportionately located amongst the Chinese and many small ethnic groups. Except where separatism is an option, Protestant politics are dominated by its relationship to Indonesia's 'civil religion'. While Muslims constitute 87 per cent of the population, Islam is not the basis of the state. But movement toward Islamisation has grown and the possibility of an Islamic state is an ever-present factor in Christian politics. For the time being, Indonesia still lives under *Pancasila*, the Five Principles, the first of which requires belief in one Supreme Being,

referred to as Tuhan (Lord) rather than Allah. Indonesia is thus neither an Islamic state nor a secular one. A requirement of citizenship is adhering to one of the five state-authorized religions: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism or Hinduism.

This was an ideology of nationhood that gave more room to Christians than did the main competitors in the nation's early decades, communism and militant Islam. The most influential Christians in politics have been Catholics, but some have also come from the ethnically divided but nationally associated Reformed churches. However, ongoing conversion processes have made Protestantism more grass-roots. Protestant growth was strongest after the failed coup of 1965, when half a million were killed on suspicion of communist sympathies by a military-Muslim crackdown. Most converts were from the rural population and often went into regional churches, but though numerous these demonstrated little enthusiasm for political involvement under the socially demobilizing Suharto regime.

The downfall of Suharto in 1998 resulted in a degree of 'ambiguous' democratization but, simultaneously, the violence suffered (and at times perpetrated) by Christians increased abruptly. Scores of churches were closed or destroyed as radical Islamists sought to achieve an Islamic state. Religious hostility in the context of greater democracy has accelerated evangelical political involvement, leading many church leaders to discover a new vocabulary of pluralism and human rights. The virtues of *Pancasila*'s pluralist framework are appreciated anew. Although *Pancasila* is not strictly secular, something approaching secularity appears in this and many Third-World contexts as the guarantee of Christians' political legitimacy, and indeed sometimes of religious freedom and of believers' physical integrity itself.

A more startling example of evangelicalism's link to oppressed ethnic minorities in rebellion comes from *Burma*. Baptist Christianity plays an overwhelmingly important role in politics in some areas inhabited by ethnic minorities, and this is counterposed to the military regime's desires for an 'ethnocratic state' based on Burman ethnicity and Buddhist religion.¹⁵ The Kachin and the Karen have been the most persistent in their dream of independence, and evangelicalism has been central in both cases. The largest church, the Baptist Convention, has autonomous linguistic sub-conventions, which contributes to the church's difficulty in aiding national integration but also its facility in promoting ethnic separatism. The Kachin Baptist Convention is the main social organization within Kachin state. It was instrumental in the ceasefire between the government and the Kachin Independence Army in 1996, ending the rebellion initiated in 1961 by the Kachin Independence Organization and led for many years by the headmaster of the Baptist High School. Although only about a quarter of the Karen are Christian, they have been unified by church and school. In 1881, Christians founded the Karen

National Association, forerunner of the Karen National Union (KNU) which heads the current rebellion. The KNU elite is still largely Baptist and Adventist. Should the democratic opposition, led by Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, succeed in toppling the military regime, it seems likely that the highly evangelical ethnic minorities will be important in any democratic transition.

In *India*, the world's largest 'electoral' democracy, the rise of Hindu nationalism poses the major challenge in the context of Protestantism's social base. India was established on a secular basis, but this is increasingly challenged by religious nationalism. However, from the viewpoint of Christians (some three per cent), the secular tradition was always flawed because of its discrimination against Christians of low social origin with the Dalits ('untouchables') comprising two-thirds of Christians.¹⁶ Since 1950 affirmative action has benefited Dalits in the civil service and education, but this does not apply to Dalit Christians or Muslims. Nevertheless, Christians have usually supported the Congress Party as the carrier of India's secular tradition and defender of the lower castes. Now, militant Hindu organizations seek to redefine India in religious terms, and their rise has been accompanied by a rise in anti-Christian violence.

India's secular state is thus by no means a religious 'equal opportunity' one. Dalit Christian attempts in 1990 to obtain affirmative action rights were met with the deputy prime minister's retort that 'the Christians should go back to Europe and America where they came from'. Since the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), anti-conversion laws have been introduced in some states, inhibiting the proselytism which is overwhelmingly carried out by Christian South Indians of low-caste origin. However, Christian growth in the predominantly tribal states has not been affected, since tribal Christians are not ineligible for benefits. India's tribals are largely non-Hinduized. In the north-eastern states of Nagaland and Mizoram, Christian tribals (largely Baptist or Presbyterian) form a large majority of the population. Christianity is a vital part of ethnic identity, distinguishing them from the Hindus of the plains. It infuses all political expressions: separatist guerrilla movements (which include attempts to fuse evangelical Christianity and Marxism), integrationist parties and peace initiatives. The churches are often called to intervene in politics, and have been active in peacemaking.

Yet it seems Christianity created or preserved ethnic identities but had little to say subsequently about political conflicts and the methods employed. Fernandes concludes that the churches are unable to overcome the fragmentation of politics and the tribal animosities, or to quell the violent insurgencies. Too often, denominations correspond to ethnicities, reinforcing divisions rather than bridging them. Thus, the churches may not be able to promote a cohesive civil society unless they consciously address themselves more to

questions of justice and human rights.¹⁷ In another study exploring tribals in the Dangs district of Gujarat, Aaron notes that, enslaved by debt and alcoholism, these tribals suffer increasing encroachment by the wider society. But for 30 years South Indian Christians have maintained evangelistic and social projects among them, and a third of the Dangis are now Christian. Aaron detects many democratizing effects of this process: the dismantling of demeaning stereotypes; deliverance from alcoholism; increasing literacy (for both sexes); the creation of a work ethic; cultural recovery through Bible translation and preaching in the native tongues; community organizing activities; and advocacy work, giving the tribals a resource against financial and legal trickery.¹⁸ All this upsets moneylenders and merchants, as well as the Hindu nationalist organizations, leading the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteers' Corps, RSS) to promote attacks on the churches. Meanwhile, the BJP government seeks to redefine the issue by generating a national debate on the propriety of conversion. Consequently 'Hindu nationalism is set to collide with evangelicalism, given the increasing penetration of the RSS into rural areas'. Hindu nationalism's efforts to extend into rural India 'will compete with evangelicalism for subaltern loyalty'.

Thus, in India, the social base of Christianity among Dalits and tribals, and the current mix of religiously skewed affirmative action and pressure for anti-conversion laws, mean that evangelical Christians generally tend to promote a deepening of Indian democracy, both in terms of individual freedoms and of promotion of the political voice of those at the bottom of the social ladder.

The relationship with ethnic minorities is not absent even in *China*, though recent growth ('Christianity fever', as officialdom calls it) is not limited to them. China now has probably the third largest community of practising Protestants in the world.¹⁹

Protestantism is divided between the official Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and the illegal 'house-churches'. When the Communist Party became nervous about religious involvement following Tiananmen, the TSPM's journal said it was necessary to guard against bourgeois liberalization as seriously as against Aids. But the official church is not totally subservient. Chan tells of one instance of non-compliance in Jiangxi where the Party wanted an unpopular servile pastor to be elected, but the church refused. After shutting the Bible school for a while, the government finally gave in. Chan sees this as an example of how the church can push gently at the margins of the system, in the direction of democratic representation and more responsive governance.

The 'house-churches' or 'autonomous Christian communities' live under sufferance. A Party document of 1982 comments: 'as for Protestants gathering in homes for worship services, in principle this should not be allowed, yet this prohibition should not be too rigidly enforced'. However, by 1992 the state-

run press was warning that to avoid a repeat of the churches' role in eastern Europe it would have to 'strangle the baby in the manger'. Since then, hundreds of house-churches have been closed. Despite this the elections introduced at local level since the mid 1990s have seen cases of political participation by Christians and even leadership in village affairs amongst non-Han ethnic minorities as in Fugong, a predominantly Christian county, which elected a church elder as county governor. This and other cases amongst minorities have been tolerated by the government, but are unlikely to be replicated in Han areas for now. Chan sees possibilities for the churches to push further in areas of legitimate dissent; he also sees evangelical 'fever' as a strong force for democracy, but in an almost invisible and localized manner.²⁰

Evangelicals and Democracy: Latin American Cases

Large-scale evangelical growth and political involvement has occurred in the context of Latin America's general transition from authoritarianism to formal democracy. Traditionally Protestants had tended to vote for anti-clerical parties providing the latter were not also anti-religious. In recent decades, with numerical growth, penetration of new social levels and improved legal and social position (and changes in Catholicism since Vatican II), the need to support anti-clerical parties has diminished. This has encouraged various forms of political mobilization, including attempts at creating evangelical political parties. The political implications of Protestantism have been appraised in starkly varying ways. Some authors emphasize the repressive and corporatist nature of pentecostal churches and see them as reproducing traditional authoritarian political culture.²¹ Others stress Protestantism's democratizing potential: the churches offer a free social space, experience of solidarity and a new personal identity, as well as responsible participation in a community and, for some, the development of leadership gifts.²²

Brazil is now 17 per cent Protestant; growth is mostly among the poor and due to popular initiative. Pentecostals constitute two-thirds of Protestants, but Brazil was the only Latin American country in which historical Protestantism had reasonable success.²³ Until recently, Protestants in congress were almost exclusively 'historicals' (Presbyterians, Baptists). None had official endorsement from any church; politically, they ranged from the non-Marxist left to defenders of the 1964–1985 military regime. The 1986 election of a congress-cum-constituent assembly brought a significant numerical increase in Protestant representation. Pentecostals now predominated and the great majority were official candidates of major denominations. Their social origin tended to be lower than that of their peers in congress.

The 'corporatism' represented by these official candidates sought largely to tap resources for religious expansion and dispute spaces in civil religion.

Party nomadism, vote-selling and, at times, straightforward corruption have characterized Protestant politics since 1986. This is clearly prejudicial to democracy: it has undermined a more universalist and ethical politics, weakened the fragile party system and bypassed individual consciousness-raising of church members. Protestant congressional behaviour has been characterized by an emphasis on the family and the media (protecting Protestant ownership of stations). On economic issues, Pentecostals could not initially be classified as especially right wing, but that tendency increased in the early 1990s. Surveys of evangelical voters showed a tendency (even after accounting for social and demographic factors) to be more unfavourable to left-wing candidates than the general population.

Currently there are over 60 evangelical members of congress, of whom two-thirds were official candidates of one of three Pentecostal denominations: the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), the Assemblies of God and the Church of the Four-Square Gospel. The UCKG has most successfully mobilized its electorate, obtaining perhaps 70 per cent of the vote of its members. However, the corporate vote is never automatic, depending on a relationship which has to be constructed and maintained with difficulty. The UCKG caucus is divided between the main parties of the centre and right (usually with little influence in them) and a couple of smaller parties which it effectively dominates. Up to 1995 the UCKG was extremely anti-left, calling the leader of the Workers Party, Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, a 'demon'. However, after 1995 it began to court left-wing leaders. This may have been a strategy for goading the centrist government into a closer relationship, or it may have stemmed (as the church claimed) from the new exposure to social reality triggered by the expansion of the church and its social work. By 1999, its leading politicians were making a nationalistic critique of globalization, the International Monetary Fund and indiscriminate privatization. They were also apologizing for their past characterization of Lula as demonic. This raises the possibility that the UCKG – whose unique combination of mass popular membership plus institutional power (hierarchical organization, political representation, financial wealth and media empire) is the secret of its strength, allied to its growing social work which it says makes it aware of the need for change – might become a leading promoter of centre-left politics. While its corporate interests (especially in the media) are still its political 'bottom line', when these are not at stake the church seems capable of a type of centre-left populism. In 2002, the Liberal Party which it dominates allied with Lula's Workers Party.

In 2002, the first serious evangelical candidate for president appeared: Anthony Garotinho, the Presbyterian governor of Rio de Janeiro. He used his evangelical connections as a springboard to national prominence, with frequent trips to preach in churches all over the country. Opponents portrayed

this as an illegitimate reuniting of spheres which modernity had separated. Garotinho insisted he was in favour of a secular state but also, rather confusingly, that he did not 'mix religion and politics'. In fact, his model is of a secular state with religious politics, a perfectly defensible position in comparative political terms. In the presidential election, he got 18 per cent of the vote and nearly reached the run-off. Evangelicals voted for him much more than the national average (37 per cent), but still far short of the 70 per cent his campaign hoped for. Interestingly, Garotinho was a candidate for the Socialist Party and in the campaign tried to portray himself as to the left of Lula. Indeed, Brazil is unique in Latin America in having a considerable evangelical left wing. This was strengthened through the 1990s as the two major anti-left arguments (the association with militant atheism and the alleged radicalization of the Catholic Church) lost force.

This turn should not be exaggerated: it mirrors changes in Brazilian society as a whole which led to Lula's victory in 2002, and part of it may be just corporatist 'opportunism' adjusting to a new reality. Garotinho is often criticized for his populist style hostile to genuine participation; and the UCKG makes no bones about not allowing church members to participate in its selection of candidates. But there is an ongoing process of leftist militants converting to evangelical churches and retaining their militancy (amongst such people were two ministers in Lula's government in 2003). Thus, whatever political profile evangelicalism may have had in the past, its continuing attraction as a religion of personal salvation brings in new types of people who end up changing that profile.

At the level of civil society, Brazilian Pentecostalism has come to be regarded by many scholars as a leading actor, especially in desperate contexts such as the shantytowns. A study of Greater Rio de Janeiro, one of the few reliable studies of evangelical attitudes in the Third World, showed that, in contrast to Catholicism and Umbanda, 41 per cent had taken part in elections for their spiritual leaders, and 50 per cent in recent administrative meetings of the church. Evangelical conversion 'involves a profound break with cultural patterns in relationship between the sexes', an important dimension of democratization. As for civic participation, low involvement parallels society in general. But in frequency of communication with elected politicians, evangelicals are way above average. Church activity is positively correlated with some forms of social participation, such as unionism and neighbourhood associations.²⁴ Thus, while recent evangelical politics reveals strong tendencies which weaken democracy (corporatist electoral organization, involvement in corruption, indifference to the strengthening of parties), it is also a channel for the participation of marginalized popular sectors, is increasingly diverse ideologically, is developing a more universalist discourse of 'social justice', and has notable effects at the level of civil society.

Guatemala is the most Protestant country in Latin America (over 20 per cent) and has had two charismatic evangelical presidents.²⁵ Charismatic churches have penetrated the elite. The first ones arrived from the United States, such as the Church of the Word, which soon recruited future president Ríos Montt, but indigenous churches quickly emerged, including El Shaddai, from which sprang president Jorge Serrano. Both Ríos Montt and Serrano were politicians before conversion. In Guatemala it was evangelicalism's rise in the class scale that brought it into politics. But the questions Stoll asked in the early 1990s (is self-reform afoot in the ruling class? can charismatic-led top-down reform substantially change political reality?) are answered negatively in a later work: the social capital generated is wasted in costly experimentation at taking over power rather than altering the basic landscape of politics by encouraging the spread of trust.²⁶

General Ríos Montt has been the central figure of Guatemalan politics since 1982. That year, after a military coup in which he denies involvement, he was invited to take power. He governed for just over a year before being deposed. He had few evangelical ministers, but gave weekly televised sermons exhorting civil servants to honesty. American televangelists launched an aid programme, though its impact was minimal. At the same time, human rights worsened in the countryside, as part of the anti-guerrilla campaign. Even so, Ríos was favourite for two presidential campaigns (1990 and 1995) in which he was impeded from running (as a former coup participant). In 2003, he was finally allowed to run for president, but managed only third place.

Jorge Serrano was a businessman who became a Protestant in 1977 and held a post under Ríos Montt. With the return to democracy, he stood for president in 1985 and eventually won in 1990. In the election, Serrano's rival emphasized his Catholic credentials. This backfired, since Catholics voted for Serrano in the same proportion as Protestants did. Serrano's years in power were marked by the beginnings of civilian control over the military and by the initiation of peace talks with the guerrillas. But he failed to deepen democracy through accountability, and in congress (where he had a minority) he continued vote buying. In 1993, when stories came out about corruption on his own behalf, Serrano carried out a 'self-coup', suspending the constitution. But a broad opposition coalition developed and Serrano, with little military support, was ousted within a week. A few churches, the evangelical student organization and ecumenical groups emitted statements condemning the self-coup. But the Evangelical Alliance did not, and it seems most of the leadership was in favour. Most evangelicals remember Serrano with shame more for his moral lapses rather than for his coup against the democratic process.

Of course, Guatemalan evangelical politics cannot be reduced to the story of these two presidents. Samson nuances the picture by examining

other evangelical candidates for president and vice-president in 1999 (the vice-presidential candidate of the left was a Presbyterian of Mayan Indian origin); by looking at the variety of evangelical positions expressed regarding the heated debate over a new Children and Youth Code; and by revealing the more localized concerns of evangelical Mayan mayors. This results in considerable ambiguity regarding evangelicals and democracy, but reinforces the stress on plurality: there is no evangelical consensus even on the political implications of child-rearing. This has implications for fears that Catholic-Protestant conflict might harm democracy in Latin America. Guatemala would be the place for such conflict, yet it does not seem to happen.²⁷

Peru is characterized by the massive entry of evangelicals into congress through the solicitation of a secular party.²⁸ In 1990 they played a prominent role in the election to the presidency of the political outsider Alberto Fujimori. Fujimori's interest was access to the indigenous vote. With their presence in areas where state, parties and Catholic priests are largely absent, Protestants provided an alternative route to mass politics. Nineteen Protestants reached Congress, all but one with Fujimori's party. The head of the National Evangelical Council was elected second vice-president. The fact that a pastor with no political experience could become second vice-president testifies to the disintegration of public life in Peru. His subsequent complete marginalization by Fujimori, with no significant reaction, shows how dependent on outside forces was this politicization of Peruvian Protestantism.

A recent analysis of evangelicals detects a hiatus between formal politics and civil society initiatives: while in formal politics evangelicals appear as a mainstay of the undemocratic regime (since the only congressmen elected during Fujimori's 'electoral authoritarian' period following his 'self-coup' in 1992 were pro-government), in civil society evangelical actors made contributions to democratic resistance. This is true of evangelical involvement in organizations such as the Popular Canteens and Glass of Milk Committees, and also in the Peasant Patrols in the emergency zones. Where others fled or submitted to the Maoist Shining Path guerrillas, the evangelicals filled the Peasant Patrols. They saw themselves as fighting against the anti-Christ. 'When Shining Path tried to control the personal and collective life of the peasants, including their religious practices, it came up against a rival power which told it they could not "serve two masters".' If evangelicals are not usually good at promoting democratic transitions in the Third World (though they may support such transitions), they are good at resisting regimes or insurgents which make totalitarian (rather than simply authoritarian) claims.²⁹

The National Evangelical Council (Conep) made some contribution to civil society by forming a Peace and Hope Commission in the 1980s to defend evangelicals against human rights abuses from the military in the emergency zones. This represents the most significant defence of human

rights by a strictly evangelical (as opposed to more liberal ecumenical) group in Latin America. In 2000, Conep was also active in opposing Fujimori's constitutionally dubious attempt at a second re-election. Conep called on Christians to prevent his re-election, invoking a 'moral obligation to disobey governments when they lack legitimacy'. This was not just for legal reasons; Fujimori's rule was characterized by the absence of values such as truthfulness, justice and solidarity. The state of law had been eroded, poverty and unemployment were up, corruption was rife. 'The time has come to say No to the silence of complicity'.

Nicaragua illustrates a theme common to several Latin American countries: the formation of Protestant parties.³⁰ The Marxist-inspired Sandinista regime (1979–1990) created the conditions for these parties, by offering unprecedented equality and importance to Protestants and because the churches grew enormously under Sandinismo. When pro-Catholic post-Sandinista governments once again marginalized Protestants, this lack of access was combined with a new awareness of numerical size and political potential. As the two main parties were strongly Catholic and Marxist, many Pentecostals approved the idea of a Protestant party. Not just any Protestant party, however. The first created had links with US televangelist Pat Robertson, who tried to infuse it with the agenda of the religious right; but in 1996 it polled a mere 0.3 per cent. But another party, founded by a Pentecostal caudillo claiming a divine mandate to govern, came third in the presidential race with 4.1 per cent. That still meant no more than 30 per cent of Protestants had voted for him, but it did mean that his party reached congress. But expectations of change in political culture were soon dashed. The party became well-known for selling its favours to government. As Zub says, Pentecostal disillusionment with traditional parties did not lead so much to the desire for a party which would be better at the art of politics, but one which would by-pass politics and represent direct divine intervention. As a result, there is no room for any concept of political apprenticeship or internal party democracy.³¹ Protestant parties usually begin (out of naïveté or cynicism) from the idea of a Protestant bloc vote, of which they are the proprietors. Neither of these assumptions are ever correct. Institutionally divided, theologically and socially diverse, the Protestant community is further divided electorally by the strength of non-religious appeals and traditional party loyalties.

Conclusion

Evangelicalism is being put to a variety of political uses across the globe. That is not surprising; evangelical religion means different things to different people, and holds different positions in the social and religious fields of

each country, besides varying from one denomination to another. This is accentuated by 'local subversion', in which contextual factors overwhelm the universal heritage of the church; a danger all the greater in churches with local autonomy. The fragmentation of evangelicalism means its direct political impact is always smaller than might be hoped or feared. No evangelical neo-Christendom potentially dangerous to democracy is feasible. Just as modern democracy was helped more by the effects of the Reformation than by the politics of the reformers, Third-World democracy may end up owing more to evangelicalism than to evangelical churchmen and politicians. In any case, almost no evangelicals have political projects similar to those of militant Islamists. Even in Zambia, where charismatic evangelicalism has led to the nation being declared 'Christian', there is no established church, no religious limitation on who can occupy top positions in the state, no legal discrimination against non-Christians in public life, no limitation on religious freedom, no Christian equivalent of *sharia*. Also, it does not seem that Third-World evangelicalism will line up with the First World Christian right on many issues; while it may do so on abortion and homosexuality, it is far more fractured on questions of gender and economics, and distant from the Christian right on geopolitical issues.

The 'fierce spirit of independence and free agency' which characterizes evangelicalism results in opting out of social 'sacred canopies' and the creation of autonomous social spaces.³² The results for democracy are paradoxical. Totalitarian regimes or movements are firmly resisted, as are non-Christian religious nationalisms, but authoritarian regimes which do not impinge on evangelical religion may not always be. The evangelical world is too fissured and independent to provide a firm basis for any national-level movement advocating major political change of any sort. Evangelicalism is thus less 'use' during phases of democratic transition than during the more extended periods of democratic consolidation. Indeed, the evangelical concept of voluntarism and the right and duty to propagate the faith, to convince and to publicize, bears more than a resemblance to Habermas's concept of the public sphere and communicative action. The massive daily practice of *convincing*, at the grass-roots level, even by evangelical groups which are not internally democratic, may be vital for the quality of democracy that is possible in the public sphere. At the same time, it is institutionally vulnerable to manipulation by opportunist political leaders.

It is thus much easier to make negative than positive predictions regarding Third World evangelicals and democracy. Within the broad middle ground (between helping processes of democratic deepening and supporting existing authoritarianisms), the prevailing tendencies have to be constantly re-assessed. While circumscribed by certain broad parameters, actual evangelical politics is very hard to predict, not only because evangelicalism is decentralized, but also

because it is now present in such a variety of contexts across the globe. In Latin America, the fading heritage of a monolithic Catholic model may modify evangelical aspirations somewhat; but the more pluralist present will almost certainly keep it broadly within the democratic and non-confessional track. In Asia, it is unlikely that evangelicals will be influenced by communist or non-Christian religious nationalist models rather than secular ones. Facing Asian religious nationalisms, evangelicalism generally represents a democratizing force.

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