



## REGIONAL REPORT

# Religious change in Latin America Present, past and future

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of Marina Silva's candidacy for the Brazilian presidential elections has highlighted the importance of Evangelicals in the political sphere of some Latin American countries. Surveys indicate that Silva gained votes for channeling protest votes against PT's government and Evangelical vote. As a supporter of the Socialist Party, which advocates for secularism principles, Marina's religious beliefs have always been present during the campaign: she publicly expressed her rejection of homosexual marriage as well as any kind of abortion. The votes cast for her skyrocketed since she obtained the "progressive" and the Evangelical votes: the conducted surveys showed that Dilma won the Catholic votes (38% to 30%). Marina obtained a more significant advantage among non-Pentecostal Evangelical churches (44% to 29%) and Pentecostals (41% to 31%). Votes clearly have a religious component even though the key factor is charisma given that Evangelical pastor Everaldo (Christian Social Party, PSC) always obtained 1% to 3% of the votes when Marina was the favorite candidate among Evangelicals (43%).

Few months earlier, in May, the Citizens' Action Party (Partido Acción Cívica) (PAC) in Costa Rica, which had won the presidency in the April elections, tried to build alliances with other political forces in order to obtain enough votes to be able to choose the authorities of the executive power. To that end, this Social Democratic party reached an agreement with the left-wing party Broad Front (Frente Amplio) and with the Costa Rican Renovation Party (Renovación Costarricense) (RC), which has two representatives and embodies the values and aspirations of the Costa Rican Evangelical Christians. At first, PAC accepted to postpone the legislation promoting the rights of gay people in exchange for RC's political support. Although the agreement finally failed due to the pressures and criticism of the gay community, who had previously supported PAC and its candidate to presidency, Luis Guillermo Solís, this facts showed perfectly the extent of not only the social and religious influence but also the political influence that Evangelical Christians have, which enabled them to create new parties represented in Parliament that play a key role in the political arena.

Brazil and Costa Rica represent a further example of how Latin America has lived a true "silent revolution" ever since the 1950's. During this more than half century, the economic and development model has changed (from import substitution industrialization to the current models of primary goods exports), the social structure has undergone significant transformations (there has been a shift from a polarized society to a society in which the broad and heterogeneous middle classes and urban communities are becoming more and more relevant), the prevailing political model has

**“The proportion of Latin Americans claiming to be Catholic increased from 75% in the mid-1990s to roughly 67% in 2014”**

also evolved (from dictatorships and authoritarian governments to the prevalence of democratic systems) and also, many profound cultural changes have taken place due to the rapid urbanization, the increase of literacy rates and the progressive integration of women into the labour market.

Among these changes, the most significant one is the religious diversification as a result of the rise of many Protestant, Evangelical and Pentecostal churches thanks to which the Latin American religious panorama has become more complex, especially in countries such as Guatemala, Honduras, Brazil or Chile, where between one third and forty percent of the population, previously Catholic, has now converted to any of these Evangelical churches.

Thus, the traditional and historical Latin American religious homogeneity linked to Catholicism (as a result of the Portuguese and Spanish conquest and colonization) has been broken in the last fifty years due to the explosive growth of the different branches of the Evangelic movement (Pentecostals first and Neo-Pentecostals later on).

Interestingly, the political modernization (democratization), the social modernization (urbanization and rise of middle classes) as well as the economic modernization (globalization) has not led to secularization (as it did in other parts of the world). Latin America is still a region where religion (either Catholic or Protestant) plays a crucial role for the majority of the population of

all countries except for Uruguay. There is a broad consensus among scholars about the extent of this change, but no agreement was reached regarding the reasons for this. Marcos Villamán, a Dominican expert in history and the current situation of religion, points out that “it is an undeniable fact that the current social and religious landscape is quite different from the one we had few years ago: the obvious dominance of the Roman Catholic trend accompanied by a slight presence of historical Protestantism and some other Evangelical branches has been currently replaced by a massive emergence of Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches.”

The proportion of Latin Americans claiming to be Catholic increased from 75% in the mid-1990s to roughly 67% in 2014, as shown by the regional survey of public opinion Latinobarómetro. According to the survey’s director Marta Lagos, this shows that “the (Catholic) Church is no longer omnipotent and entirely dominant”. Cristian Parker Gumucio, from the Dominican Center for Research of Costa Rica, highlights in the same vein that “the Catholicism growth rates have been constantly increasing” and the definition of it as “a Catholic continent” is now outdated, since “we are witnessing a clear pluralism in the Latin American religious sphere”. In this analysis, Parker claims that the new religious panorama in Latin America shows a decline of Catholicism and Catholic Church: “this continent has neither been secularized nor converted to Protestantism: we are living a reality subject to a slightly but constantly

**“A distinction must be made between historical Protestantism, which was a consequence of emigration in the 19th century, and the one that explosively emerged at various stages during the 20th century”**

growing religious pluralism against the Catholic Church, although it is still prevalent”.

The particularities of the Evangelical movement in Latin America, as well as its heterogeneity regarding the level of development in different countries, its main characteristics, the way they are, how many they are, what they believe and the political role the different branches play (Protestant, Pentecostals, neo-Pentecostals...) will be explained below.

## 2. A DIFFERENT AND HETEROGENEOUS PHENOMENON

“There is no need to explain that the word ‘Pentecostalism’ designates a broad religious movement that includes a wide range of groups with many different practices”. This statement made by scholar Heinrich Schäfer (Doctor of Theology and Sociology) fairly reflects the meaning of these new religious Protestant movements that arrived to Latin America in successive waves culminating its great expansion from the 1970’s onwards.

Indeed, we should first underscore that we are witnessing a very heterogeneous (Evangelical) religious phenomenon and, even though “Evangelicals” is the most widely used term, it also hides a broad range of situations. In popular language and even in mass media, “the word ‘Evangelical’ refers to any Christian that is not Catholic”. Nevertheless, a distinction must be made between historical Protestantism (Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist...), which was

a result of the emigration in the 19th century, and the one that explosively emerged at various stages during the 20th century, especially during the last third.

The first Protestantism, the historical and traditional Protestantism of the 19th century, started to develop after the independence of Latin American countries and then following the success of the parties and liberal forces in the second half of the 19th century, thanks to a more lax legislation with regard to non-Catholic religions. This Protestantism was formed by two different churches of missional origin:

- European, mainly Lutherans (Germans), Presbyterians (Scottish), Anglicans (English), Waldenses (French and Italians), Reformed (Dutch and Swiss), Baptists (Welsh) and Mennonites (Dutch and Swiss).
- North American, such as Lutherans, Episcopalians (Anglicans of American origin), Presbyterians, Quakers, Methodists and Baptists.

Then, during the 20th century, three religious waves linked to Pentecostalism arrived to Latin America. Such religious reform movement emerged inside of Evangelism, born in the United States in 1904:

- The first Evangelical wave was developed around the 1910 promoted mainly by the Evangelical Assembly of God Church but also by the Church of God, the Church of Prophecy or

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The Prince of Peace Pentecostal Church in Guatemala.

- The second movement, the first Pentecostalism, started during the 1950's, with many churches such as the Church of the Foursquare Gospel - National Evangelization Crusade (1953), Pentecostal Church “Brazil for Christ” (1956), New Life Church (1960), “God is Love” Pentecostal Church (1961), House of Blessing Church (1964), Wesleyan Methodist Church (1967).

According to American anthropologist David Stoll, this second wave of Evangelism was very successful since the proportion of Latin American Pentecostals increased from two thirds of the Latin American Protestants in the 1960's up to three quarters in the 1980's. In 1984, 9.9 million out of the 12.9 million existing “members and supporters” outside the United States were in Latin America and more than six million lived in Brazil, mainly because Pentecostalism reached a strong presence in the urban popular sectors in that period.

- Finally, the third movement, which is currently the most successful one, is neo-Pentecostalism, originated from the Pentecostal movements and the charismatic renewal movements that took place in the 50's and 60's. In this particular segment the following churches stand out: Household of Faith (1975), Universal Church of the

Kingdom of God (1977) and International Church of God's Grace (1980). The greatest increase took place in Central America from the 70's onwards, especially in Guatemala (Verb and Elim Churches), Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador.

These movements were born and developed while Latin American societies were undergoing a process of transformation, according to Jean Pierre Bastian, researcher of the Centre of sociology of religion and social ethic (Strasbourg): “this ignored movement, despised even by the historical Protestantism until the 1960's, underwent an expansion during the 20's that, in fact, has changed the current balance of powers in the Latin American religious sphere. This dissemination and expansion were accelerated during the 1950's since Latin American populations and societies went through dramatic changes thereafter, with massive migrations of peasants to the future large metropolis within the different countries in the region.”

Neo-Pentecostalism (the Evangelical growth since the 1970's is mainly due to the neo-Pentecostals) is characteristic for having introduced some doctrinal changes (particularly regarding the role of the Holy Spirit) in the liturgy, where they emphasize on “the emotional fervor”, on emotions and spontaneity. Whereas Pentecostalism tried to grow within the popular sectors, neo-Pentecostalism flourished in the middle and upper classes. These new churches are related to urban movements, linked with the emergence of a mass society and

**“The new churches provide spiritual services but also access to health”**

totally rooted in this globalized world, as they expand, among other things, thanks to the professional use of mass media (their message is spread through radio, television and Internet). Likewise, they manage their churches in an entrepreneurial way of production and distribution of religious goods.

They show a charismatic leadership and they have a horizontal structure, which has contributed to spread their influence towards large countries such as Brazil or countries having strong cultural and ethnic contrasts like Guatemala. They are similarly known for their organization through local churches and independent or semiautonomous groups (aside from the Episcopalian denominations) where the key figure is the pastor). Yet, the internal structure of each church is strongly pyramidal but they are also capable, flexible and autonomous enough to adapt to the specific circumstances of each region or country.

Mainly neo-Pentecostalism but also Pentecostalism, appeal to the irrational, sentimental and experimental part of every individual, use the indigenous languages fluently (hence its successful introduction in the indigenous rural areas) as well as the common language to create a closer relationship with their followers. Their strategies are based on marketing, particularly in healing, usage of music in ceremonies and the emphasis on the oral tradition as well as in the traditional popular practices.

Their sermons are particularly popular within minority groups such as women, indigenous groups and poor people. Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals “are widely present geographically speaking, in favelas, in the countryside and in the outskirts of the cities. They have a very fluent communication with the social base and that is why the different political forces try to be close to them”, says Roberto Romano, author of “Brazil: Church against State” and professor of ethics and philosophy in the State University of Campinas. He also adds that “it has been very well received by women given their interest for a restoration of the household and family unit attracting female interest as it implies rejection of domestic violence and sexism”.

Evolution in recent times has led to a process of institutionalization and bureaucratization, social pluralism and even transnationalization of the Evangelical churches caused by the usage of mass media. These churches initially attracted the most vulnerable sectors of society (internal migrants, unemployed people and low-income sectors). Yet, from the 1980’s onwards, mainly the neo-Pentecostals have specialized socially and aim at middle class sectors, university students, professionals and business owners. The new churches provide spiritual services but also access to healthcare. They also help their members fight against alcoholism and drug addiction and they offer refuge against the crisis of the values of the traditional family. They are grouped around



**“The most successful Christian organizations have their headquarters in other countries and have become international companies”**

charismatic leaders (such as Cash Luna in Guatemala, René Peñalba, Tomás Barahona and Misael Argeñal in Honduras) who run their churches as if they were companies and one of their hallmarks is the construction of large temples (Cash Luna inaugurated in 2013 the new headquarters of the House of God Church, with the capacity to seat eleven thousand people) as well as schools and universities.

Given their adaptability they have been able to rapidly get used to the new communication systems developed during the 90's: websites, radiostations, TV channels, together with an extensive infrastructure in schools, libraries, cafeterias and recording studios. There is a musical worship that appeals to emotions, physical healings and economic prosperity. The most

successful Christian organizations have their headquarters in other countries and have become international companies. According to the Guatemalan sociologist and Protestant pastor Vitalino Similox “Pentecostal churches have become companies which develop strategies of marketing and multilateral distribution of symbolic and religious goods. (This hybridization translates into) “a juxtaposition of different levels of borrowing that include all beliefs and ways of transmission.”

### 3. HOW MANY EVANGELICALS ARE THERE?

As scholar David Martin points out, the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal movements have undergone a significant and rapid growth. Unlike the modest increase of the old reform movements such as Protestant during the 19th century or Evangelical until the 1950's, neo-Pentecostal churches have nowadays “by far exceeded (Protestantism) given the growth of Pentecostalism, mainly the Assemblies of God. These Assemblies of God represent 25% of the current Evangelical force in Latin America.”

As the Table 1 shows, in just half a century, Protestantism has grown from 7 million in Latin America to 107 million in the 21st century, with particular attention to the progression registered in countries counting more than 40% such as Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and in Mexico or Chile, where it represents more than a fifth of the total population.

TABLE 1

COUNTRY	1960	1990	2010	2013-2014
Latin America	7,700,00	37,000,000	107,000,000	107,000,000
Brazil	4,000,000	19,600,000(13%)	42,300,000 (22%)	42,300,000 (22%)
Mexico	897,000	4,675,000 (5.5%)	8,000,000 (10%)	8,000,000 (10%)
Chile	834,000	1,200,000 (12%)	2,000,000 (16.6%)	2,000,000 (16.6%)
Argentina	414,000	1,360,000 (4%)	4,000,000 (9%)	4,000,000 (9%)
Dominican Republic	327,000	700,000 (10%)	1,800,000 (18%)	1,800,000 (18%)
Cuba	264,000	No data	1,000,000 (10%)	1,000,000 (10%)
Guatemala	149,000	3,325,000 (35%)	5,500,000 (40%)	5,500,000 (40%)
Peru	94,000	1,680,000 (8%)	2,610,000 (12.5%)	2,610,000 (12.5%)
Colombia	92,000	2,400,000 (8%)	5,000,000 (16%)	5,000,000 (16%)
Panama	57,600	360,000 (10%)	600,000 (16%)	600,000 (16%)
Bolivia	46,600	525,000 (7.5%)	3,000,000 (16%)	3,000,000 (16%)
El Salvador	41,778	1,155,000 (21%)	2,000,000 (38%)	2,000,000 (38%)
Uruguay	42,600	45,000 (1.5%)	55,000 (8%)	55,000 (8%)
Honduras	37,666	255,000 (5%)	2,000,000 (41%)	2,000,000 (41%)
Paraguay	36,560	308,000 (7%)	500,000 (8%)	500,000 (8%)
Venezuela	26,000	800,000 (20%)	1,300,000 (13%)	1,300,000 (13%)
Nicaragua	34,600	525,000 (7.5%)	1,800,000 (30%)	1,800,000 (30%)
Costa Rica	22,000	275,000 (8.9%)	1,000,000 (21%)	1,000,000 (21%)
Ecuador	40,000	300,000 (3%)	1,700,000 (13%)	1,700,000 (13%)

Source: Own elaboration based on Latinobarómetro 2014

**“Nowadays, 20% of the 600 million population in Latin America and Caribbean are Evangelicals”**

With more than 560 million believers (105 million of whom live in Latin America and in the Caribbean area), Evangelicals represent 25% of the total number of Christians worldwide, according to the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) data. The number of Evangelical churches is increasing in Latin America: while in 1990 there were just around 50 thousand Protestants in Latin America, in 1930 the figure skyrocketed to one million. Later on, this figure doubled with each decade: 5 million in 1950, 10 million in 1960, 20 million in 1970 and 50 million in 1980. It is estimated that in 2000, there were around 100 million Protestants/Evangelicals. Nowadays, 20% of the 600 million population in Latin America and Caribbean are Evangelicals, the majority of whom live in Brazil (42 million members), although Guatemala, where Evangelicals represent more than 40%, has the largest proportion in relation to its total population.

Likewise, this group has a constant progression and growth, as recently noted the census conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). An almost 10 percentage point drop was registered in the number of Catholics between 2000 and 2010: the percentage fell from 74% to 64.6% of the population during that period. A researcher of IBGE, Claudio Crespo, highlights that “in the 1970’s, 92% of the Brazilian population were Catholic and now this figure represents only 64%. That means, there has been a 28 percentage point drop in 40 years. Compared to the 1970’s,

one out of four Catholics are no longer Catholic. In 2000, Brazilian Catholics numbered 125 million and represented 73.6% of the population, while in 2010 they were only 123.3 million and represented 64.6% of the population. During the same period, Evangelicals gained nearly 20 million followers and grew from 26.5 million (15.4% of the population) to 42.3 million (22.2%). Similarly, in Guatemala, in 1935, they represented 2.8% of the population. This figure was stable until 1950, then it increased each decade: In 1960, 3.2%, in 1970, 5.8%, in 1980, 13.8%, in 1990, 18.0%, in 2000, 29.8% and in 2010, 31.7%. In 2014, the proportions registered are 47% of Catholics and 40% of Evangelicals, according to the last report of the Latinobarómetro.

In this regard, researcher David Stoll notes that “what makes these Evangelical achievements so significant is not the simple growth in absolute terms. After all, the high birthrates in Latin America could double the number of Protestants every twenty years without changing the ratio to the total population. What is striking is the increasing percentage of Evangelicals. Ever since 1960, Evangelicals have nearly doubled their proportion to the population in Chile, Paraguay and Venezuela, as well as in some Caribbean countries such as Panama and Haiti. According to the same source, since 1960, Evangelicals have tripled their proportion to the population in Argentina, Nicaragua and Dominican Republic. In Brazil and Puerto Rico, the proportion of Evangelicals shows a fourfold increase since 1960. In two



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Central American countries, El Salvador and Costa Rica, as well as in two Andean countries, Peru and Bolivia, the ratio of Evangelists has increased fivefold during the same period of time. In some other Andean countries such as Ecuador and Colombia and also in Honduras, it is thought that this proportion has even jumped sixfold. And in Guatemala, the Evangelical proportion to the population from 1960 to 1985 has increased sevenfold.”

What is the reason for which Evangelical churches, both Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals, have enjoyed such level of expansion ever since the 1970's?

Many theories have tried to answer this question:

- Starting with the conspiracy theories based on the Rockefeller report written in 1969, the rise of Evangelical churches is the result of a United States and CIA's counterinsurgency strategy which aimed to stop the rise of the Theology of the Liberation. This led to this conspiracy theory which has taken root among the society and among important figures such as the Mexican cardinal Juan Sandoval Iñiguez, who even claimed that “they (Protestants) are here due to a United States' initiative, as the Rockefeller report states.”
- The hypotheses that began developing from the late nineties are more serious and better considered by the academic and intellectual

world. These theories are more focused on endogenous causes which emphasize on the socioeconomic modernization and urbanization processes undergone by Latin American countries. Such processes caused, on the one hand, a clear secularization context but, on the other hand, a diversification of religious practices within increasingly more plural societies that have experienced a cultural change including religious regrowth. Unlike other areas of the world, this modernization has not led to a generalized secularization. Agnostics and non-believers have increased elsewhere but the number of believers in Latin America, both Catholics and all kinds of Protestants, has persisted. As Villamán points out, “religion, in this context, would be one of the favorite answers since it builds certainties and brings sense to individual and social actions. This is one of its recognized social roles”.

Yet the truth is that the Evangelical rise is due to many causes, as Emile Willems, Lalive d'Epinay, David Martin or Jean Pierre Bastian's works have shown in the last decades. They all stress that Evangelical churches arise in Latin America between the 50's and 70's amidst a context of numerous changes that explain why their emergence was particularly favorable:

- **Crisis in the Catholic Church:** The Evangelical expansion cannot be understood without taking into account the crisis

“Since the mid-twentieth century, population growth and the shift from a rural society to an urban one generated a situation for which the Catholic Church was not prepared”

the Catholic Church went through during the 1960's and 1970's. The Catholic Church was very divided back then, had no internal coherence, and was radicalized and politicized by the most traditional sectors (some of the members of the episcopacy elite) and by sectors related to Marxism, from which the Theology of Liberation arose. Vitalino Similox, Presbyterian pastor, theologian and sociologist, explains that “in the 1970's, some upper-middle-class Catholics who felt betrayed when a sector of the Catholic hierarchy started to express preference for the poor, discovered in the Prosperity Theology, the professionally organized shows ran by preachers and prayer meetings held in luxury hotels, a new explanation for their privileged position in society from a Christian point of view. Prosperity Theology also offered an attractive option to many poor or middle class people wishing to strengthen low personal discipline and increase their self-esteem.”

Furthermore, since the mid-twentieth century, population growth and the shift from a rural society to an urban one generated a situation for which the Catholic Church was not prepared due to the lack of necessary human resources to look after the crowds who started to populate the peri-urban areas. Internal migrations and the population explosion exacerbated the so-called “priestly vocation crisis”.

- **The new Pentecostals boost:** The Catholic Church also suffered from the counterinsurgent states' repression during the 60's and 70's and thus the gap was filled by some Protestant churches not so closely linked with politics. At the same time, new Protestant missions from the United States, both Evangelical and Pentecostal, were planned. They preached a new way of being closer to God based on conversion, religious ecstasy, personal experience and miracles. The arrival of these Evangelical missions offered an alternative for those who could not find refuge in the Catholic Church, which did not fulfill people's religious necessities and could not cover the whole territory.

In addition, Evangelical churches, firstly developed by American missionaries, gained some autonomy and gradually dissociated themselves from the United States. In the 1970's, the local pastors started to transform the message preached by Evangelical missionaries and adapted it to the Latin American necessities and culture. This generated hybrid forms of religiosity combining Latin American popular Catholicism with imported Protestantism.

As David Martin said “one thing is clear: contemporary Latin American Evangelical religion is entirely local. Evangelical Faith is currently

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society”

just one of the many ways in which Latin America expresses its faith. Criticism made by North American Christians about Evangelical religion in Latin America is based on this religion not adapting to the North American liberal rules. For instance, it has been described as a recreation of paternal and personal relations extrapolated to the conditions of a contemporary megacity. The reason is quite straightforward: Evangelical religion is a genuine part of the Latin American society.”

- **Adaptability and diversity:** Over the same period, Evangelical churches proved that in addition to being flexible, they also had greater adaptability and acculturation, according Jean Pierre Bastian’s, who highlights that “we could say that the adaptation to the Latin American market and the creation of hybrid original products offered by Pentecostals throughout the region is based on this ‘blend’.” This is especially noteworthy with regards to music production for hymns, which, in fact, had an Anglo-Saxon origin and, since that moment, all songs were directly inspired by endogenous popular musical traditions. Nowadays, these movements called “Praise Ministries” are seen everywhere and they are based on the local music, particularly samba and other tropical styles like salsa, etc. This new musical expressions have been called “salsa-gospel” or “zamba-gospel”. However,

the most important thing is that Pentecostals were built upon popular cultures and have now become Latin American popular religions as opposed to the previous historical Pentecostals, which were limited to radical liberal actors and to middle and upper-classes, but not to working classes.”

Furthermore, they managed to solve in a better way the crises affecting the countries in the region: they offered support for those most in need during the economic crises such as the crisis of the 80’s, they also created support networks in cases such as the Managua earthquake in 1974 or the Guatemala earthquake in 1976. At the same time, they gradually gained autonomy from the headquarters in the United States given that they filled the gap left by the State. That is why their members had special benefits for joining them (schools, legal advice, health posts...). They were also very skilled in marketing techniques since they took advantage of the technological innovations such as radio, television, satellites and now the Internet. Thus, they used the mass media strategically in order to reach a wider audience.

According to scholar David Martin “Evangelical groups are building a social space for themselves which they fully control and where common people have equal value, can be leaders and try to outdo themselves. They might be contributing to make real the standard component of stable democracies: a “respectable”

**“Women find a second partner within the community who will neither beat her nor leave her the weight of the burden of family care or spend their low incomes on alcohol or on another woman”**

working class with modest but realistic economic and educational ambitions and strongly concerned about a stable social and moral order. They are practical and pragmatic, rather than theoretical people and they aim to reform the society by changing the cultural traditions. Of course, such reforms have limits and in any case the Evangelicals are a just a minority, but in many places of the contemporary Latin America it may appear that the field of politics is not as promising. The religious field might be at the moment the one offering more chances to achieve an active reform of practices and an ethos mutation. After all, in Latin America, religion is the most attainable and widespread language to obtain comfort and encouragement.”

Therefore, one of the keys to the success of congregational and Pentecostal Protestantism is related to its adaptability to (or compatibility with) Latin American cultures. That is the case of the indigenous areas in Mexico and Central America that are closer to native traditions than Catholicism and historical Protestantism. Carlos Garma, social researcher, claims that “Pentecostalism is attractive for the indigenous communities since it is somehow similar to their native traditions of spiritual healing and Pentecostal worships fit in well with the syncretism of the indigenous popular religiosity.

As David Martin explains, Pentecostal churches have not only developed a moving and participatory pietistic liturgy providing an alternative to traditional churches but also managed to reach out and attract

a “population historically silenced, particularly indigenous communities and women and to create a religious institutional space where the poor can speak out, practice solidarity and find important emotional and social satisfactions.” Evangelicals in Latin America have managed to get the attention of women, not only emphasizing in domestic, familiar and home matters but also trying to fight the sexism and the culture of violence against women, which has led to a feminization of style and language: “Women find a second partner within the community who will neither beat her nor leave her the weight of the burden of family care or spend their low incomes on alcohol or on another woman.”

#### 4. HOW ARE THE EVANGELICALS

Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal evangelism is taking root in the current juncture, especially within the urban middle classes, young people and indigenous people living in the rural areas. As regards gender, the general trend shows that the female population is slightly higher than the male population and, in terms of age, the majority sector ranges from 35 to 45 years old.

As to the social situation of the parishioners, it is quite heterogeneous. Whereas some churches such as the Foursquare Church and the Christian Mission Church represent the poorest sectors, the middle class is more present in the Church of Christ and the Church of God. Baptists and the Church of Christ represent the

**“Politically speaking, the Evangelical environment is also very heterogeneous although the most conservative sectors are the ones prevailing, particularly in terms of values”**

upper classes. Regarding the level of educational attainment, the largest sector is, in the first place, the one formed by parishioners who have not completed their primary education and, in the second place, those who have not completed their secondary education. Only a small minority have not completed any education whatsoever but all of them can read. As for university degrees, 70% of those who obtained a university degree are Baptists. On the other hand, not many of the members of the Foursquare Church have completed either their secondary education or a university degree, which shows that the average level of education within this church is lower. Baptists and members of the Church of Christ belong to higher classes and their political involvement is greater than the Pentecostals' involvement.

Politically speaking, the Evangelical environment is also very heterogeneous although the most conservative sectors are the ones prevailing, particularly in terms of values. Thus, in Colombia there is a long tradition of Evangelical presence in the political arena since the first Evangelicals took part in the legislative power in the early 90's. Currently there is a party called Independent Movement of Absolute Renovation (MIRA) which obtained 326,946 votes in the Senate in 2014 and could not make it by ten thousand votes. They managed to keep their legal personality thanks to the 412 thousand votes obtained in the Chamber, which gave them three seats.

In Peru, at present, the strongest party is National Restoration

(RN) led by Humberto Lay Sun. Evangelicals supported engineer Alberto Fujimori in 1990 and one of his pastors, Carlos García, as second Vice-President of the Republic. After the coup d'état in 1992, 'fujimorism' and Evangelicalism ended up being politically separated. In Chile there are around 200 Evangelical candidates including majors and councilors, concentrated in some indigenous regions such as Biobío and Araucanía and more specifically in places like Lota, Curanilahue, Arauco, Lebu and Los Álamos. Amongst them there are militants of Christian Democracy (DC), National Renovation (RN), Independent Democratic Union (UDI), Party for Democracy (PPD), Radical Social Democratic Party (PRSD), Socialist Party (PS) to a lesser extent, and the Regionalist Independent Party (PRI). In the case of Brazil, the members of Evangelical churches have managed to be present in 16 different political groupings and have created three different parties: the Brazilian Republican Party (PRB), the Social Christian Party (PSC) and the Republic's Party (PR). There is even an Evangelical party in Mexico, the Social Encounter Party (PES).

## 5. BRAZIL, THE COUNTRY WITH THE LARGEST NUMBER OF EVANGELICALS

Brazil is the country with the largest number of Evangelicals in absolute terms (while Guatemala remains at the top in relative terms) since it is estimated that they add up to over 42 million worshippers, having grown exponentially since 2000, as 60% of the new Evangelical worshippers adopted the movement

less than a decade ago. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) they accounted for 15.4% of the total population in 2000 (26.2 million) and already comprised 22.2% in 2010 (42.3 million). This development amounts to 16 million people within 10 years, which approximately equals to the total population of Chile.

Among the most important Evangelical churches of Brazil a few stand out. Assembly of God, under the leadership of Manoel

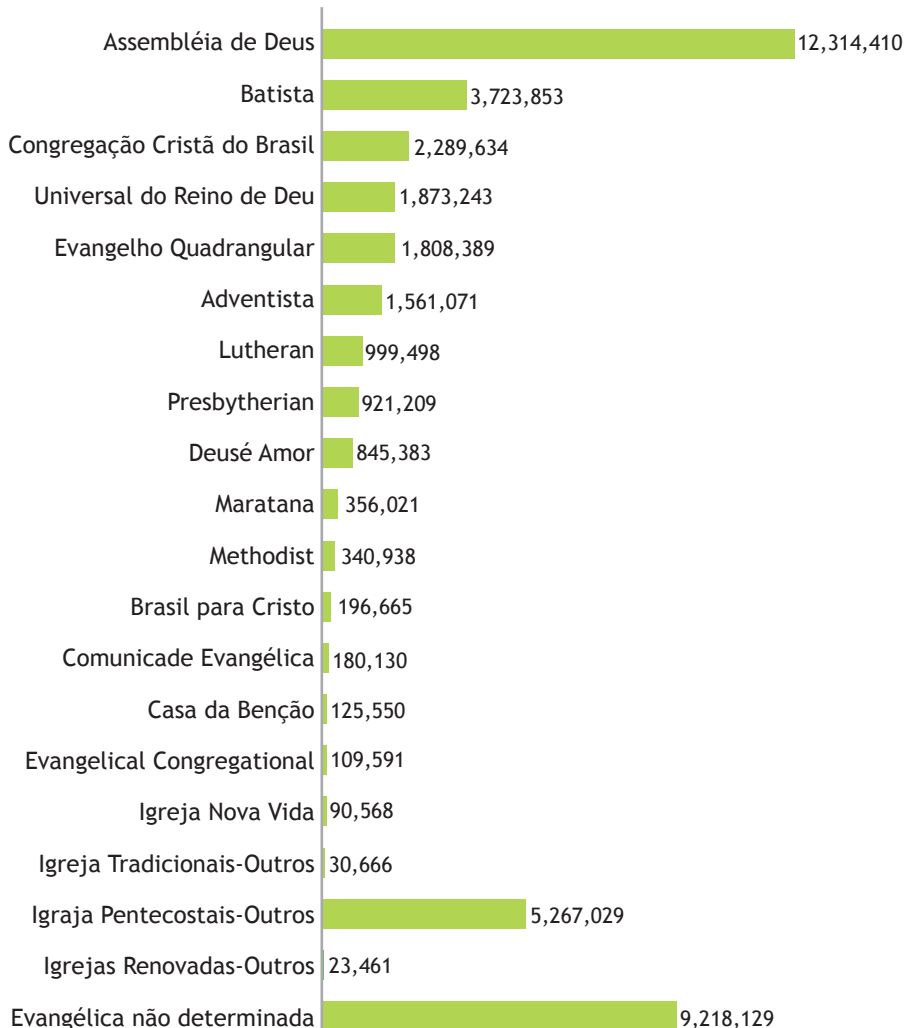
Ferreira, represents 12 million believers, Iglesia de la Gracia, headed by Romildo Ribeiro Soares, is quite influential as well, Iglesia Universal del Reino de Dios, led by Bishop Edir Macedo, has 1.8 million followers, Iglesia Mundial del Poder de Dios, whose most significant head is Valdomiro Santiago, adds up to 400,000 worshippers and Iglesia de la Victoria en Cristo, which counts with 40,000 members among its ranks and is led by Silas Malafaia, a strong abortion and same-sex marriage opponent, who achieved the election of his brother by the PSD (Social Democratic Party of Brazil).

As shown in table 3, the great growth starts during the eighties, which took place under a variety of circumstances: the financial crisis of the late seventies and eighties, the explosive urban growth which entailed the proliferation of favelas (slums) which is usually characterized by the lack of Catholic and State presence and where both physical (thefts, assaults, gang harassment) and economic insecurity is constant.

**In the 2014 election, alliances with the Evangelical parties will be key.**

According to the 2010 census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), Evangelicals amount to 42.3 million worshippers, 22.2% of the total population, an increasingly interesting voting group in the Brazilian political arena. Evangelism is the fastest growing religion in Brazil, which contrasts with the permanent

**TABLE 2:  
EVANGELICAL POPULATION IN BRAZIL**



Source: <http://www.evangelizacao.blog.br/quem-sao-os-evangelicos-quantos-sao-e-onde-estao-no-brasil.aspx>



**“The recovery took place in 2010 with the renewal of the political structure. Nowadays, the representatives of the Assembly of God are the most numerous”**

decline of Catholicism in the country. Catholicism equaled to 73.6% of the population in 2000, but only accounted for 64.6% 10 years later. If this trend remains unchanged, a third of the Brazilian population might become Protestant in the next ten years.

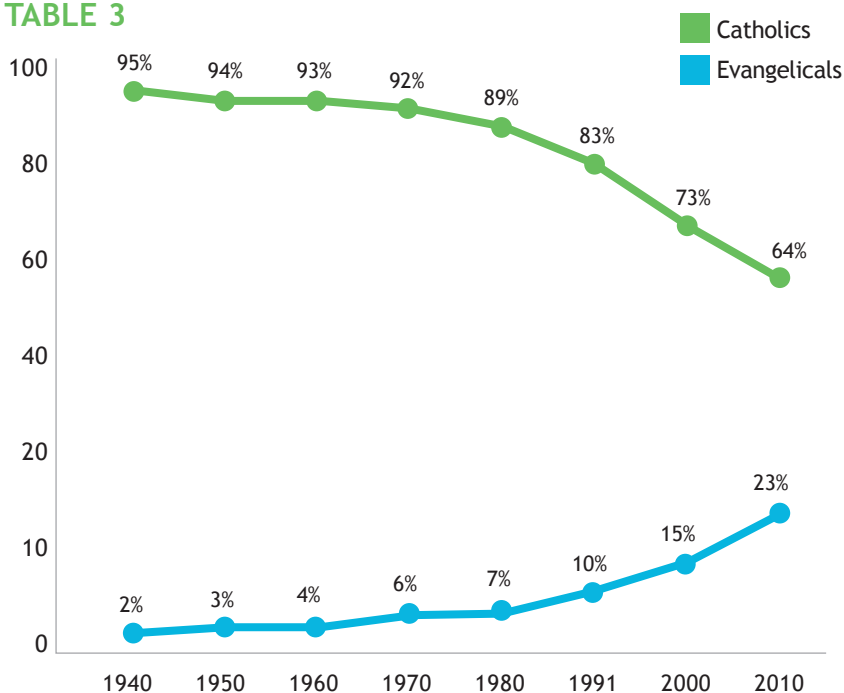
The Evangelical Parliamentary Front (Frente Parlamentario Evangélico) was established in 2003. According to an article of the magazine *Veja*, three years later, the Congress was hit by a scandal that exposed the corruption of Evangelical politicians. This is known as the *Mafia de las Sanguijuelas* (The leeches’ Mafia), in which 23 Evangelical politicians took part by embezzling funds in order to fill their pockets and those of businessmen. Out of these 23 politicians, 10 were members of the *Iglesia Universal del Reino de Dios*

and nine came from the Assembly of God, which ensued the loss of representation of the Evangelical parties in the 2006 election. The recovery took place in 2010 with the renewal of the political structure. Nowadays, the representatives of the Assembly of God, which has multiple branches, and contrary to the *Iglesia Universal*, lacks a sole leader, are the most numerous.

Apart from the members of Congress, four senators form the Evangelical group in Congress. Most of the 77 representatives are in line with Dilma Rousseff’s ideology. But, since certain proposals regarding abortion and same-sex marriage are not a priority in the political agendas of the opposition parties, the Evangelicals fulfill two functions: on one hand, they support the Government in economic and social assistance affairs and on the other, they express their disagreement when the Government tries, for example, to discuss issues such as abortion or extending the rights of homosexuals.

Under these circumstances, it was essential for Dilma Rousseff’s 2014 reelection campaign to reestablish links with the Evangelical community, whose relationship with the Government is one of confrontation, as could be seen in the 2010 electoral battle, when the religious parties held a controversial debate about abortion. It is no coincidence that the nine parties of Rousseff’s coalition decided to create a specific committee to gain their sympathy. Rousseff also founded the Campaign Evangelical Committee for thematic discussions.

TABLE 3



Source: Revista Semana

**“Evangelical vote has grown greatly in the last 20 years in Brazil, especially with the establishment of Neo-Pentecostalism”**

In this year’s presidential election, Dilma Rousseff is not the only candidate trying to get the Evangelical vote. PSDB member Aécio Neves met with bishop José Wellington Bezerra da Costa, President of the Convención General de las Asambleas de Dios en Brasil, in order to fortify his position in relation to the Evangelical parties. Candidate Marina Silva, even though Evangelical, considers religion should not be mixed with politics. Therefore, she keeps a distance from these issues, as she opposes merging religion and political matters. But socialists agree on holding political dialogues with important Evangelical groups, such as the Assembly of God. This approach was made by the Articulation and Mobilization Commission, led by a representative of PSB and one of la Rede.

Other Evangelical leaders support candidate and Bishop Dias Ferreira de Cary, member of PSC. Dias Ferreira openly stated his opposition against the legalization of abortion and same-sex civil union and strongly supports reducing the legal age for adulthood from a criminal point of view. Even though the polls indicate that a mere 3% or 4% of all electors intend to vote for him, Everaldo legally deserves the same amount of time in the news and political debates of Globo TV as Dilma, Aécio and Marina Silva.

With a strong position in matters such as age of criminal responsibility,

same-sex marriage and abortion opposition, Everaldo will probably make ease the campaign for Aécio and Silva, since it will contribute to the Evangelical vote dispersion, which could precipitate the second round of election. It should also disseminate the guidelines of Neo-Pentecostal leaders which are fighting to win Congressional seats. Congressman and former President of the Human Rights Commission Marcos Feliciano (PSC-SP), known for his contempt for minorities, can be counted among his supporters. The party leadership believes that Feliciano will triple the votes obtained in the past election. They received 211,000 votes in 2010. The PSC have also put their faith on the popularity of plastic surgeon Roberto Miguel Rey Júnior; Dr. Reality King, in order to obtain votes from their federal representative candidates in Sao Paulo.

The reality is that the Evangelical vote has grown greatly in the last 20 years in Brazil, especially with the establishment of Neo-Pentecostalism, which still works in a more private way, therefore turning them into an important actor in the Brazilian political context. But while Evangelical vote guarantees an important base for the elections, it limits the scope of the mandate. After being elected, the representatives of these groups have to work for their voters. This means defending conservative initiatives, including the criminalization of abortion and non-legalization of drugs. These measures satisfy specific groups, but upset others, therefore impairing the politician.

**“Currently, Guatemala is the Latin American country with the largest number of Evangelicals in relation to its total population”**

## 6. THE SITUATION IN GUATEMALA

Apart from Brazil, Guatemala is one of the countries in which the appearance and growth of Evangelism is most noteworthy. Guatemala has experienced a deep religious transformation since the seventies. Even though it is true that there is no religious affiliation official census, it is estimated that between 65% and 70% of the total population is Catholic, and 35% to 40% is Protestant.

Guatemala is one of the countries where Evangelism has been most adopted. The lines of development have been parallel to those observed in other countries: in the 19th century Protestantism grows thanks to the liberal governments opening up, but the number of worshippers remained meager. From 1882 to 1940 Evangelical population was insignificant, since it only accounted for 2% of the population. The growth of Protestantism begins in the 19th century, especially since 1871, with the arrival of Methodists, Presbyterians, Nazarenes, Episcopalists, Baptistists and Lutherans. After WWII the Pentecostals appeared on scene (Assembly of God, Foursquare Gospel and Church of God) and in the seventies, the Neo-Pentecostals with churches such as Elim, The Verb and Christian Fraternity. By 1978 the Evangelical presence amounted to 17.98% of the population and in 2001 it was already over 30%.

Currently Guatemala is the Latin American country with the largest number of Evangelicals in relation

to its total population. Even though numbers are not exact, it is estimated that around 40% of the population of almost 13 million people are members of one of the many different Protestant churches of the country. The difference between Catholics and Protestants was reduced by 22% in 18 years, from 1996 to 2013, according to the study “Las religiones en tiempos del Papa Francisco” (“Religions in times of Pope Francis”) carried out by the Latinobarómetro Corporation in Chile. According to the survey, 54% of the population were Catholic in 1996, while 25% were Evangelical. But, in 2013, only 47% stated they were Catholic, a mere 7% more than Protestants (40%).

Christian Fraternity represents a good example of the success of Evangelism seeking to play a bigger role in the society of Guatemala, as it owns the largest religious building in Guatemala and Central America, a huge concert hall with 12,200 seats. In reality, it is a facilities complex, which includes a school, nurseries and a parking area. These are known as megatemples, where Bishops like Cash Luna of the House of God Church carry out their work. That is the path that these churches have taken, including Cash Luna’s one, which has over 25 radio stations throughout the country.

In addition, the political visibility of Evangelism in Guatemala has been quite noteworthy, since, in at least in two occasions, the President of the country was Evangelist: in 1982 after the coup d’état by which Efraín Ríos Montt rose to the power and in 1991, when Jorge Serrano Elías won the elections. More

**“In 2013 the Catholicism has dropped to 47% while Evangelism has risen to 41%”**

recently, Harold Caballeros was a candidate to the presidency of the country in the 2011 elections.

### 7. THE SITUATION IN HONDURAS, NICARAGUA AND EL SALVADOR

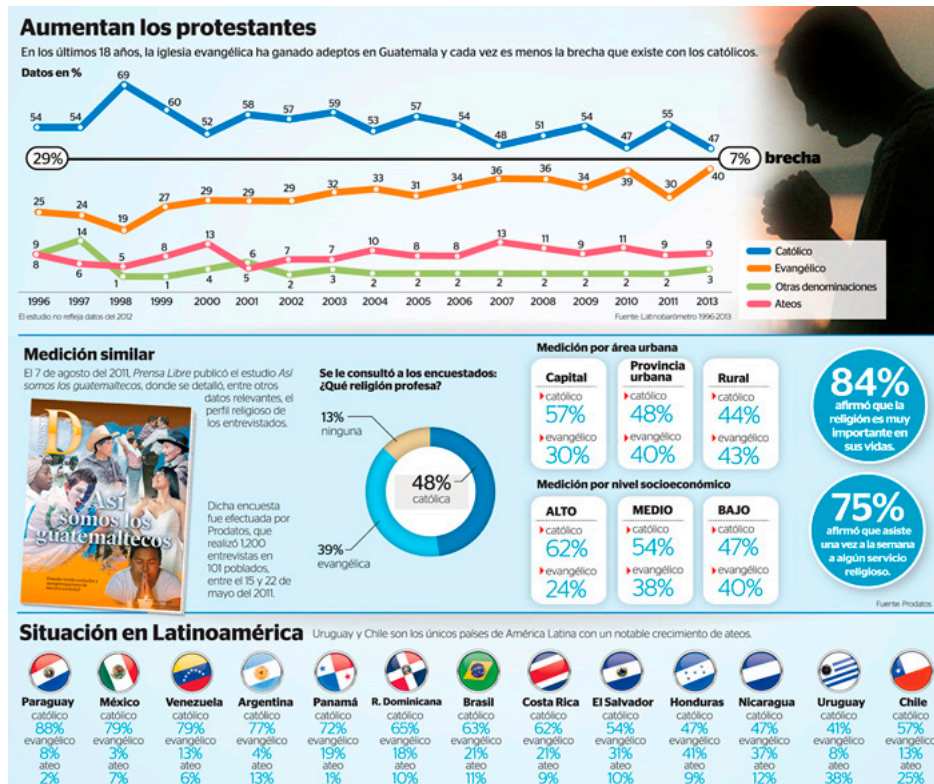
Along with Guatemala the most important growth case of Evangelism in Central America took place in Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua. The Honduran case is especially remarkable, as the country has been in the midst of a political crisis since 2009 and a social crisis due to the high levels of poverty, inequality and insecurity. In this context, the number of

Evangelical churches, and more concretely, Neo-Pentecostal churches, has been growing.

Catholicism has lost 29% of its worshippers during the past 17 years in Honduras, according to the aforementioned survey (“Las religiones en tiempos del Papa Francisco”) carried out by the Latinobarómetro between 1995 and 2014. This situation can also be appreciated in other countries, although not with the same strength as in Honduras: Nicaragua (-30% Catholics), Costa Rica (-19%) and to a lesser extent Panama (-17%), El Salvador (-13%) and Guatemala (-7%). According to the survey “Honduras is the most representative case of the change in religious beliefs of the last 17 years” since Catholicism has lost “an advantage equal to 58 percentage points over Evangelism and a total of 29 percentage points of Catholic worshippers”. In 1996 Honduras religious beliefs were split as follows: 76% Catholics and 12% Evangelicals. In 2013 the Catholicism has dropped to 47% while Evangelism has risen to 41%. Not only did Honduran Catholicism ceased to be dominant, but it now possesses the same power as Evangelism. This is the fastest and most important change in the Latin American religious sphere since 1996.

The number of Evangelical churches in El Salvador has grown greatly as well. In 1996, 67% of the population was Catholic, in 2013 this number fell to 54%, a loss of 13 percentage points. Evangelicals, 15% in 1996, have doubled in 2013, reaching 31% of the population. Surveys carried out

TABLE 4



Source: Prensa Libre



**“In the rest of Central America Evangelical churches have a lesser relevance when compared to the Northern Triangle and Nicaragua”**

by M&R Consultores reflect that in Nicaragua, a country with an estimated population of 5.8 million people and Catholic majority, this number is decreasing. The Catholic group has been on decline since 1991, last time when it reached the 90% mark. From there on, the 1995 Census showed that Catholics only accounted for 72.9% of the Nicaraguan population and this figure dropped to 58.5% in the 2005 Census. More recent surveys by M&R reflect the negative trend of Catholicism in Nicaragua: in April 2013, only 53.4% were Catholic, 30% Evangelical and 14.1% people stated being believers, but did not worship any particular religion.

To sum up, the growth of Evangelical churches in Central America is due to many causes: intern conflicts (civil wars) that took place in Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua between the seventies and eighties destabilizing the countries, divisions and confrontations in the core of the Catholic Church which hindered any efforts to cope with the changing social context (rural-urban migration), while Evangelical churches were more flexible to respond to the new social groups that arose as a result of it. Apart from what has already been explained, the natural disasters that caused hundreds of thousands of deaths and injuries cannot be ignored either. Both State and Church did not know how to respond to these events appropriately. And that gap was filled by the Evangelical churches (Guatemala earthquake in 1976, Hurricane Mitch in Honduras in 1998...).

## 8. REST OF CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

In the rest of Central America Evangelical churches have a lesser relevance when compared to the Northern Triangle and Nicaragua, but they are still clearly growing. Figures show that already 20.8% of the population in Costa Rica are Evangelical, 16.4% in Panama and 22.3% in the Dominican Republic.

Evangelical churches have had a significant growth in the Dominican Republic and now around 25% of the population are Evangelicals. They have grown around the Christian Congregation of Santiago, headed by Bishop Yasser Rivas, the International Baptist Church, pastored by Miguel Núñez and Catedral de la Fe, led by Fernando Belliard. Likewise, Iglesia Mahanaím, led by Bishop Ezequiel Molina Rosario, Ministerios Elim, pastored by Fernando Ortiz and Iglesia Cristiana Palabras de Vida, led by Raffy Paz, the latter three located in the capital, have played an important role.

In Panama, Evangelism is the second largest religion, as it accounts for 16.4% of the population. According to the estimation of the Contraloría General de la República, over three million people live in Panama. This means that 2.7 million are Catholic while 613,000 are Evangelical. Costa Rica has also experienced a significant change in the religious domain. In 1996, 81% of the population were Catholic and 9% Evangelical. In 2013, 63% were Catholic, while Evangelism already accounted for 21% of the total population. Evangelicals have more than doubled, while Catholicism has fallen 21 percentage points.

**“In Mexico, contrary to the situation in Brazil, the different Evangelical churches are not as extended at a national level, even though its importance cannot be ignored in specific states”**

## 9. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MEXICAN CASE

In Mexico, contrary to the situation in Brazil, the different Evangelical churches are not as extended at a national level, even though its importance cannot be ignored in specific states. Evangelical population has grown in 20 years, while Catholicism has fallen by 4.40% when compared to the situation in 1980. A survey carried out by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática, INEGI) in 1970, showed that 96.2% were Catholic, but by 2000, that percentage declined to 87.8%. In 2012, 83.9% of the Mexican population stated being Catholic, while Evangelical and Protestants accounted for 7.6%, almost two and a half percentage points more than in 2000. Between 2000 and 2010 there was an increase of 3 million worshippers, overcoming the 8 million mark.

Protestantism has expanded all over the country, but has been most successful in the two edges of the national territory: the northern border, characterized by intense migration and urban development in the last decades, and the southeastern part, where most of the indigenous population live and which has been on constant decline and impoverishment. Evangelical churches are present throughout the country, but especially in the southeastern states: Oaxaca, Chiapas, Campeche, Tabasco and Quintana Roo and northern ones: Baja California, Tamaulipas and Chihuahua. The national average shows extremely different values.

In Central Mexico and Bajío Catholicism is close or even over 90%. While 94% of the population is Catholic in Guanajuato, this figure drops to a mere 58% in Chiapas.

Evangelical churches in Mexico have developed in two quite different zones: while the northern territory of Mexico is a developed urban area (most of its population lives in large conurbations and it is defined by low unemployment rates and high indicators of welfare), the southeastern part represents the opposite: a rural, underdeveloped zone. The religious shift has been different for them, as Alberto Hernández points out: “different causes have the same effect (the north is urban and the south rural, but both regions have a high Protestantism rate) and similar causes have different consequences (growth of Protestantism entails intolerance, but only in the southeast territory and not in the northern border). Whatever promotes change in the northern border is irrelevant to the southeastern border and vice versa. But the northern border and the southeast are not absolute opposites, they do share some similarities. Both regions have a few important linking points: the importance of the migratory phenomena and its alienation from the national economic power center, meaning both zones share the status of periphery”.

The profile of the Mexican Evangelical is a city woman, although contrary to popular belief, the great Evangelical growth takes place in rural areas, breeding grounds for Evangelical



**“The first theories considered that the Evangelical growth was related to political exogenous causes”**

and Protestant churches. This does not mean that the urban areas are not suited for religious change. Most of the Mexican Protestants are Pentecostal.

## 10. PENTECOSTALISM IN THE ANDES

Apart from the aforementioned cases (Brazil, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Mexico) the presence of Evangelical churches is lower in the rest of Latin America. Although the figures are quite modest compared to those of Central America and Brazil (they do not exceed 20% of the population), they are growing at a fast pace and quite significantly in the Andean region (Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia).

The Pew Research Center of the U.S. states in its website that Venezuela has 25,890,000 Christians, of which 22,500,000 are Catholic. Evangelicals amount to 5 million people. In Colombia the development has accelerated rapidly in the last years after decades of stagnation or slow growth: with over 43 million population, Evangelicals already account for five million people, while Catholicism has dropped to 82%. Peru and Ecuador are the countries where Evangelical churches have been the least successful. The total population of Peru is 28,220,764 people and, according to the 2007 Census, 81.3% (16,960,443 people) are Catholic. The second most important movement is Evangelism, with over two and a half million worshippers (12.5%). In Ecuador, most of the

population are Catholic, according to a recent survey carried out by the National Statistics and Censuses Institute (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censo, INEC). 91.9% of the population claims to have a religion, of which 80.4% are Catholic, followed by Evangelism, with 13% (over 1.8 million people). Its growth has taken place in the biggest cities of the country, particularly in Quito and Guayaquil, as well as in indigenous areas such as Chimborazo. Indigenous Evangelical churches have grown and awakened political consciousness to such an extent that in 1980 the Ecuadorian Federation of Evangelical Indigenous (Federación Ecuatoriana de Indígenas Evangélicos, FEINE), known as the Council of Evangelical Indigenous Peoples and Organizations of Ecuador, was founded.

## 11. CAUSES OF THE GROWTH OF THE EVANGELICAL MOVEMENT

After analyzing the context in which Evangelical churches have expanded in Latin America the question to be asked is what are the causes for this impressive increase of Pentecostalism?

The first theories considered that the Evangelical growth was related to political exogenous causes, linked to “counterinsurgency” efforts from the United States towards the Latin American region and, more specifically, Central America. The Rockefeller Report of 1969 and the Santa Fe Papers I and II of the eighties are quoted, since the use of these fundamentalist

**“Evangelical churches showed better capacity for adaptation and innovation with the development of sermons and modern proselytism techniques”**

religious groups was suggested in both documents as part of a counterinsurgency strategy of the USA and the CIA in order to stop the emergence of the Liberation Theology. A good example of how these theories have permeated is the text written by Franco Martínez Mont in the newspaper *Prensa Libre de Guatemala* in 2011, in which he stated that “the Neo-Pentecostal churches emerge in the late fifties as a controlling tool for the United States Government (counterinsurgency in Latin America) with the consent of the fascist factions and oligarchies that modified the religious map, altering the status quo of the Catholic Church and “christianizing” subaltern segments of society and influencing politics”.

However, since the sixties, social researchers have been launching a series of new ideas in order to understand the Evangelical boom, focusing on endogenous causes rather than exogenous. Among them, the following protrude:

- **More flexibility and adaptation capability by the Evangelical movement:** Evangelical churches showed better capacity for adaptation and innovation with the development of sermons and modern proselytism techniques (radio and TV), use of improved marketing strategies in which celebrities played an important role (singers, actors and, especially, athletes) and better links with key sectors (focusing on elements related to orality, music and indigenous languages).

Anthropology professor of Universidad de Sevilla, Manuela Cantón Delgado, thinks that “Catholicism has been losing ground with Evangelical churches, which are much more flexible”. According to the expert, these churches are more participatory and the worship centers smaller, which enhances relationships and support between members. On the other hand, the Catholic Church is still a “more vertical (hierarchical) organization”. In the same vein, Monsignor Gregorio Rosa Chávez, Archbishop of San Salvador, states that “the Catholic Church lacks human warmth. People do not know who is sitting next to them. Evangelicals are filling a gap that we created. It poses a real pastoral challenge in which the renewal of the Catholic Church is the only answer to this need of change”.
- **The weakness and internal divisions in the Catholic Church:** The internal factors include the existence, since the sixties, of a politicized Catholic Church; divided, fragmented, segmented and uncoordinated, that clearly lost moral authority among the population and power to reach every corner of the Latin American countries. It was a politically involved Catholic Church, influenced by Marxism, as evidenced by the growth the Liberation Theology among its ranks.

**“Pentecostal groups emerge as solidarity networks and restore community ties”**

Just like any other Protestantism movement, Pentecostalism is dynamic, meaning it possesses great adaptation and change capabilities, which explains the distinctive features and potentialities of Latin American Pentecostalism. However, according to David Martin, Pentecostalism is more flexible than any other Protestant movement, which eases its adaptation to local and indigenous cultures. Even though this possibility allows some of the structures of authority and social organization founded by the hacienda system to be reproduced, also enables the management participation of laity. Moreover, Evangelical churches had the ability to reach out to ethnic minorities (indigenous peoples) and women, not only giving them a bigger role in the liturgy, but also gaining their support by strengthening the family balance, boosting patriarchal values and encouraging women's participation within the public sphere.

- **Socioeconomic changes intensify Evangelical growth:** Evangelical movement was enhanced by important changes and transformations that affected Latin America after WWII: rural-urban migration during the fifties, intensified during the sixties, seventies and eighties and still takes place. The uprooting experienced by a transitional society moving to a new urban culture is still one of the most quoted reasons

for the Neo-Pentecostal boom: “When arriving at strange cities for them, these sister churches gave them a fictitious kinship and served as a reference for them. Aided by a strict moral code and fervent appeals to improve, many poor members and their kids managed to move up in the social structure”, states Stoll.

Lalive D'Epinay, an important theorist and expert in Neo-Pentecostal boom, considers that “urban migration took place in a context of structural poverty and underdevelopment, in which insecurity was accompanied by family breakdowns and loss of social values, which had a traumatic effect in these populations. In this social context, Pentecostal groups emerge as solidarity networks and restore community ties, a dynamic in which Pentecostalism enables continuity between rural social structures and the social organization of excluded urban areas. Thus, it becomes a social alternative to fight off instability, or as our author defines, the exile of people.

## 12. CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing the Evangelical phenomena in Latin America in general, and in particular the Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal movements, we can conclude that:

- **Latin America is no longer a hegemonic Catholic region:** In other words, colonial heritage of

**“All signs suggest that Evangelism will keep growing, as it has been doing until now, where social and economic crisis strike”**

a religiously homogenous Latin American definitely shattered 50 years ago with the rapid increase of different branches of Evangelical churches, which represent between a third and a fourth of most of the countries' population.

- **Catholicism is still predominant:** Without denying the aforementioned growth, Catholicism is still predominant, even in the countries where Evangelism has been adopted by close to 50% of the population (Honduras and Guatemala). As stated by the survey carried out by Latinobarómetro, 60% of the population of ten of the eighteen countries are Catholic. In nine of cases, more than 70% declared being Catholic, in three the figure was close to 60% and in two 50% was Catholic.
- **The causes for this change have been endogenous:** There is no conspiracy during the “Cold War” by the United States behind the growth of Evangelical churches. Evangelical huge growth only responds to internal causes and particular conditions of each of the Latin American countries, not homogeneous circumstances that equally affected all countries. The rise of Evangelism is based on several internal factors that can hardly be generalized.
- **It no longer grows exclusively in urban zones:** During the last decade, the fastest growth of

Protestantism in Latin American is taking place in rural areas and zones with high indigenous populations. While it is true that these rural areas register the highest Protestant expansion rates, Evangelical movements keep growing in urban areas as well. Therefore, Protestantism is currently expanding both in urban and rural zones.

- **The future of Evangelism:** “Taking into account both conversions and desertions, one may wonder whether Evangelism will continue as a small, but vibrant minority or if they will be able to convert enough Latin Americans to transform the Latin American society”. This thought about the progression of Evangelical churches made by priest Edward Louis Clearly (1929-2011) is still valid.

All signs suggest that Evangelism will keep growing, as it has been doing until now, wherever social and economic crisis strike (rapid rural-urban migration, fast urban development, increased insecurity, precarious employment, crisis of values and lack of opportunities). However, as middle classes grow and the number of university-educated people increases, Latin American societies will be secularized or, at least, Neo-Pentecostal churches will lose its mobilization capabilities, in particular fundamentalist or populist movements. This situation might ease the expansion of less radical Pentecostal churches.

Political traumas (wars of the seventies), financial crisis (eighties)

**“Evangelical churches, with their huge adaptability and flexibility will continue playing an important role in the region”**

and major natural disasters, coupled with a time of change and socioeconomic transformation explain the boom of Evangelism since the fifties. But that revolutionary, accelerated urban development, already took place and now we are witnessing a period of consolidation, in which younger, fully urban, generations (they were born in cities) are not product of emigration and uprooting, even though the latter is still present due to the lack of employment prospects and an education system that does not promote equal opportunities for everyone.

In the years to come, it appears that we will witness a slower growth of Evangelical churches, as they have showed great adaptability, but also encountered strong resistances: certain zones with a particularly firm Catholic past or roots (Jalisco in Mexico) or urban, significantly secular areas such as Argentina, and more specifically, Uruguay. An exodus of Evangelicals that return to Catholicism or adopt new movements seems unlikely, even though may happen in small numbers. In general, it is not expected for the Evangelical growth to continue growing at the current pace.

In the next years, it is quite likely that we will experience three important parallel processes:

- A reaction of the Catholic Church itself, following the changes and proposals carried out by the new Pope,

Francis, whose message seeks to provide a new boost to Catholicism, especially in the region in which he was born, Latin America. There is no doubt that the changes he is proposing (which, at the same time, will create internal tensions) seek to bring Church and worshippers together, trying to recover lost ground in Latin America and make Catholicism more dynamic and flexible.

- The Argentine and Uruguayan examples, characterized by high rates of secularism in a middle class, educated, urban society, will be extending throughout the region with increasing strength, although this cannot be extrapolated to Europe, as the weight of tradition and belief is very strong in Latin America and its scope comprises all classes and educational levels.
- Evangelical churches, with their huge adaptability and flexibility will continue playing an important role in the region, assuming new challenges and roles, as demanded by the society and new times. Growth might not be exponential anymore, but it will go hand in hand with social change. In a more educated and urban middle class society, this implies the proliferation of a more moderate Evangelical church, both in substance and form.

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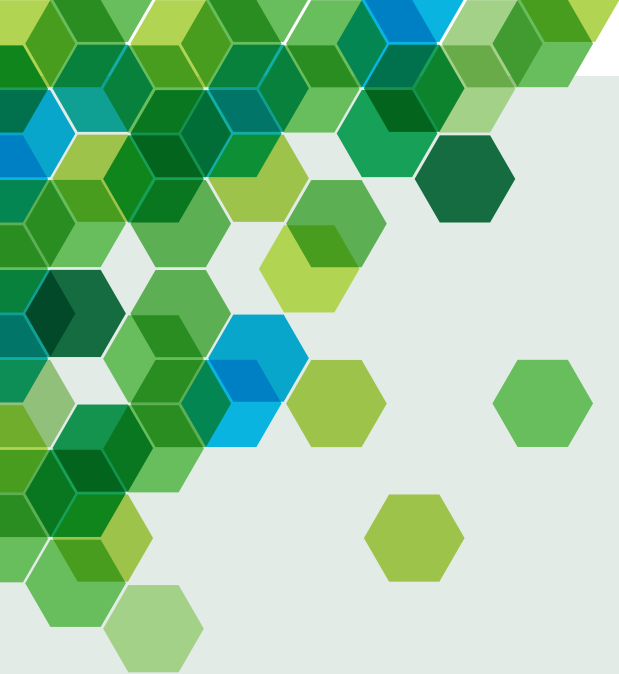
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