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POPULAR GROUPS, POPULAR CULTURE, AND POPULAR RELIGION

Daniel H. Levine

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Daniel H. Levine is Professor of Political Science at the University of Michigan. He is author of *Conflict and Political Change in Venezuela* (Princeton University Press 1973) and *Religion and Politics in Latin America: The Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia* (Princeton University Press, 1981), as well as editor of *Churches and Politics in Latin America* (SAGE, 1980) and *Religion and Political Conflict in Latin America* (University of North Carolina Press, 1986). He is currently finishing a book entitled *Popular Voices in Latin American Catholicism*. In spring 1988 he was a residential fellow at the Kellogg Institute.

ABSTRACT

Much of the concern about changes in the character and status of popular religious groups in Latin America stems from their potential role in creating a *popular subject*: a set of confident, articulate and capable men and women from hitherto silent, unorganized, and dispirited populations. In practice, not all groups fit this model. Instead, they range in emphasis from highly pietistic and devotional to socially activist, in structure from authoritarian to democratic, and in status from autonomous to utterly reliant on guidance from external elites and dominant institutions. This paper explores variations in the origins, character, and evolution of CEBs (comunidades eclesiales de base) as a means to understand the conditions under which new forms of participation, associational life, and community solidarity emerge and endure. Comparison of peasant and urban groups in Venezuela and Colombia points up the complex relations among institutional programs, popular needs, and Bible study and changes in popular religiosity—including attitudes to church and clergy, prayer, and pilgrimages, and attitudes to the saints, to Jesus, and to life after death. At issue is not the abandonment of religion for social or political activism, but rather a reunderstanding of religion's content and ordinary practice, and of the ties that bind popular groups to institutions like the churches. Democratization and participation within groups undergirds the changes in popular culture that make for greater personal confidence and sustained capacity for collective action.

RESUMEN

Gran parte de la preocupación sobre los cambios en el carácter y la importancia de los grupos religiosos populares en Latinoamérica se deriva de su posible papel en la creación de un actor popular: un grupo de hombres y mujeres seguros de sí, elocuentes y capaces, de entre poblaciones antes desalentadas, desorganizadas y silenciosas. En materia práctica, no todos los grupos encajan en este modelo. Los grupos abarcan en su actitud, desde los altamente pietistas y devotos hasta los socialmente activistas, en su estructura desde los autoritarios hasta los democráticos y en su estatus desde los autónomos hasta los que dependen totalmente para orientarse de élites externas e instituciones dominantes. Este trabajo explora las variaciones en los orígenes, el carácter y la evolución de las comunidades eclesiales de base (CEB) para entender las condiciones bajo las cuales nuevas formas de participación, de acción social, y de solidaridad de comunidad emergen y perduran. Una comparación de grupos urbanos y campesinos en Venezuela y Colombia señala la compleja relación entre los programas institucionales, las necesidades populares, el estudio de la Biblia y los cambios en la religiosidad popular, incluyendo las actitudes hacia los Santos, hacia Jesús y hacia la vida después de la muerte. Lo que se pone a discusión no es el abandono de la religión por el activismo social o político, sino más bien el reentendimiento del contenido y la práctica de la religión y de los lazos que unen a los grupos populares a instituciones como las iglesias. La democratización y la participación dentro de estos grupos fortalece los cambios en la cultura popular que contribuyen a una mayor confianza y seguridad personal y a una capacidad para sostener la acción colectiva.

This paper examines the emergence and character of popular religious groups and considers their implications for long-term cultural change in Latin America. Particular attention is given to the link between religious change and the creation of a *popular subject*, a set of confident, articulate and capable men and women, from hitherto silent, unorganized, and dispirited populations. I argue here that creation of such a popular subject is nurtured by transformations in key expressions of popular religion, by the way these take form in new patterns of community organization and group solidarity, and by efforts to rework the ties that bind popular groups to dominant institutions.

Popular religious groups have attracted considerable interest and have been the focus of much conflict in Latin America lately. It is worth asking why. Surely it is not for the numbers they attract; at best these groups are an active and perhaps a strategic minority. Most accounts agree that membership figures (unreliable in any case) are small and vary enormously from case to case. Supposed "politicization of religion" or accelerated social mobilization through the groups also fails to make adequate sense of the energies concentrated on them. After all, the past provides ample precedent for clashes between church and state, as for religious/political mobilization generally. Elsewhere I argue that the very definition of a "popular group" is subject to bitter dispute in churches and political groups alike (Levine 1986, 1988, Levine & Mainwaring). The matter warrants a closer look.

The meaning and value given to things "popular" in Latin America (popular groups, popular religion, popular art, and *lo popular* in general) has shifted substantially over the past few decades. (Levine, 1986b, Mainwaring & Wilde). Not long ago, reference to *lo popular* called up images of ignorance, magic and superstition. Popular religion was taken to mean saints, feast days, shrines, pilgrimages, or processions. Older views took popular groups as occasional agglomerations of the poor and humble, mostly logical extensions of major institutions (confraternities that "keep the saints," parish groups) or simply arms of the church like Catholic Action. From this vantage point, popular culture and action are subordinate to and ultimately derived from institutions and elites. But the same reference now commonly evokes class identity (the popular as "the people"-specifically peasants, proletarians, etc), comes wrapped in claims to autonomy and collective self governance by such people, and is identified in ordinary discourse with values like authenticity, sharing, solidarity, and sacrifice. When popular groups are defined in terms of class and common circumstances, then legitimate group orientations can emerge from ordinary experience and shared needs, not only from elite direction (cf. Davis).

Reflecting the new status of popular groups (no longer just sheep to be led in a "flock"), verbs like "accompany" have entered the Catholic lexicon, replacing earlier stress on direction, instruction, and purification. These trends have been powerfully reinforced by the development of theologies (e.g. liberation theology) and related institutional programs dedicated to empowering popular groups and giving them a legitimate place in religion, society, and politics (Adriance, Levine 1988, Levine & Mainwaring, Mainwaring and Wilde). There is clearly both shadow and substance here. Much of what is presented as popular self-governance turns out on closer inspection to be little more than the old paternalism renamed. But as we shall see, given half a chance, democratization can become self-sustaining in popular groups, with important implications for reworking general cultural norms about authority, leadership, and action.

In *Democracy in America*, De Tocqueville pointed out the importance of religion to the culture and practice of American democracy in terms that are relevant here. In his view, the separation of religion from state power enhanced the vitality of associational life that he found to be characteristic of American life. Religion, he wrote,

> which never intervenes directly in the government of American society, should therefore be considered as the first of their political institutions, for although it did not give them the taste for liberty, it singularly facilitates their use thereof. The religious atmosphere of the country was the first thing that struck me on arrival in the United States. The longer I stayed in the country, the more conscious I became of the important political consequences resulting from this novel situation (vol. 1, pp. 292, 295).

De Tocqueville argued that American religion fit into a broad pattern of "mores" (manners, styles of social interaction, family patterns, prevailing norms about hierarchy, equality, and authority, and reinforcing links between civil and political associations) that gave American democracy its special character and strength. He gave particular stress to associations, which in his view undergirded American democracy by making habits of expression and association legitimate and possible in all walks of life. This provided citizens with everyday practice in equality and liberty, and as a result,

> In democratic countries the science of association is the mother of science; the progress of all the rest depends on the progress it has made… When citizens can only meet in public for certain purposes, they regard such meetings as a strange proceeding of rare occurrence, and they rarely think at all about it. When they are allowed to meet freely for all purposes, they ultimately look on public association as the universal, or in a manner, the sole means which men can employ to accomplish the different purposes they may have in view. Every new want constantly revives the notion. The art of association then becomes, as I have said before, the mother of action, studied and applied by all (vol. 1, pp. 138, 140).

Applying De Tocqueville's insights to the matter of religious change, popular culture and politics in contemporary Latin America calls for a focus on several related issues. The first involves

the character and influence of new religious organizations. Are they more democratic in practice as well as in theory? Do they have discernable impact beyond the boundaries of religion, narrowly defined? The second issue concerns the origins and character of the new groups. How and why do groups get started in the first place? Do differences in origin make for variations in the nature of the group? What is their characteristic link to larger institutions (e.g. church and state) and what difference do such links make to the culture and practice of groups on a day to day basis? The last directs our attention to changes in religion itself that may arise as part of these developments. Is involvement in different kinds of groups associated with distinct patterns of spirituality, belief, and practice? Limitations of space make complete answers impossible here.[2]   The analysis that follows is an attempt to specify how such organizational and cultural changes get started, work, and last (if they do) and to develop guidelines for understanding their possible long-term impact.

In theoretical terms, I root cultural change in evolving links among ideas, group structure and practice, class, and institutions. I give particular attention to the convergence of religious experience and associational life in the development of a new vocabulary and structural basis for independent moral judgement and group solidarity. Empirical analysis rests on field studies in peasant and urban communities, and requires us to listen at length to popular voices as they reflect on and make sense of their faith, their lives, and their vision of what the future holds. These popular voices find expression in a context shaped by institutions and their agents, and by the needs and understandings (derived from class, economic circumstance, gender, politics, and community tradition) that popular groups bring to their encounter with institutions. As we shall see, church relations with other institutions, most notably the state, give a specific tone and character to this encounter, for example by providing models of behavior, leadership, and organization that can encourage hierarchy or equality, activism or passivity, along with starkly contrasting notions of what religious faith requires in terms of equity, justice, and solidarity with others.

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[2] For further details, see Levine, forthcoming.

CEBs in the Latin American Context

Recent discussion of these issues in Latin America has focused on the theory and practice of base communities or CEBs (*comunidades eclesiales de base*), popular religious groups that have garnered considerable (if uneven) attention in recent years. The churches have made CEBs a key theme in regional and national documents, in pastoral plans, and have pointed to them repeatedly as models of desired change, albeit, as we shall see, with very different goals in mind. In practical terms, CEBs have also been an effective strategy for the churches, allowing them to operate with scarce personnel in ways that appealed to an important new clientele.

Most accounts (e.g. Azevedo, Bruneau 1982 and 1986, Hewitt 1986 and 1987, Levine 1986b, Mainwaring) agree on a few points. First, CEBs began springing up throughout Latin America in the mid-1960s, with rapid expansion starting a decade later. In all likelihood there was no *first* CEB, but rather a process of simultaneous invention. Groups are small, gathering fifteen to twenty-five members on a regular basis (weekly or biweekly). They are also comprised mostly of poor people: peasants, rural wage workers, and urban slum and squatter settlement dwellers. The everyday life of groups turns on reading and discussion of the Bible, prayer, reflection on common needs, and some kind of cooperative action. Unlike the conventional parish, CEBs work with and reinforce existing friendship and community ties, putting religion in a familiar and accessible context. This list of traits does not exhaust the reality of CEBs. Indeed, considerable variation exists, along with sharp competition among alternatives at the institutional and grass roots level. Before getting into the particulars of this variation, it is important to clarify how CEBs fit into the pattern of recent Latin American history. The conventional wisdom locates religious change in delayed regional reaction to the Second Vatican Council. In this view, when they met at Medellín in 1968, the region's Catholic bishops initiated broad ranging efforts to adapt general changes in Catholicism to the particular societies in which they lived. As is well known, this effort involved both changing the churches and seeing society in new, more critical ways.

This position gets at only part of the truth; a closer inspection of the record reveals more than external stimuli at work here. Indeed, change pops up all across the region, more or less simultaneously with Vatican II and Medellín. Thus, "pastoral weeks" were common in the early 1960s, dedicated to rethinking the church's mission, devising new strategies for action, and implementing them in efforts to reach grass roots clienteles more effectively (Berryman, Bruneau, Carney, Mainwaring, C. Romero). At first, many of these initiatives aimed simply at overcoming scarcities of clergy by creating groups that could run themselves. Emphasis was also placed on training pastoral agents (e.g. catechists, community organizers, and a different style of priest or sister) to mediate between ecclesiastical structures and ordinary people. These innovations also

responded to the challenge posed by a clientele on the move, and no longer likely to be reached and held by traditional strategies founded on priest, parish, procession, and pilgrimage. All these strivings were clearly not created at Medellín, but rather brought together and given focus and continental projection. These were soon further extended by the liberation theology, which emerges as such just a few years after Medellín.

CEBs can be understood as the latest in a series of organizational mediations that have become central to the discourse and practice of Latin American Catholicism. The general decline of Catholic Action and the failed promise of Christian Democracy opened the door to other visions of group structure, and other norms for the proper link between popular groups and the institutions of the church. As Table 1 shows, each favored organizational form (with CEBs the latest) responds to perceived threats and issues, and is shaped decisively by the images of church, society and politics that prevail at any given moment.

The dynamic force of recent Latin American experience lies in the way changes in the church cut across other transformations. Just as the churches reach to a new clientele, a new clientele was thrust upon them by socioeconomic change, violence, and political decay. The past few decades have brought exceptionally hard times for most Latin Americans. Despite scattered early macroeconomic growth, increasing inequality and impoverishment were the norm, and the late 1970s saw a general slide to debt and depression. A number of related structural changes also altered the meaning of poverty in ordinary life. Agrarian concentration, large-scale migration (migrant agrarian workers along with moves to the city), improved transport and expanded literacy and access to media combined to undermine long-standing ties between elites and masses. Popular sectors were thus made available for new kinds of organization and experience. At the same time, escalating violence and political closure (repression, military rule) spurred group life: closing traditional national structures and driving activists to the grass roots, worsening life conditions for ordinary people and making them seek help, and giving new meaning to Biblical passages about justice, suffering, and perhaps a "promised land" (Pearce, Walzer) to be reached after organization and struggle.

The preceding pattern is by no means universal, nor does it come about automatically. Authoritarian rule has been a growth medium for popular groups only where (as in Brazil, with Archbishop Romero of El Salvador, or with groups in Nicaragua)

prior changes in ideology and leadership led churches to invest in groups and empower them in significant ways, backing leaders and giving them tools for action (Adriance, Berryman 1984, Bruneau 1974, Dodson, Mainwaring 1876a). Argentina is perhaps the best counter instance: enormous repression and a church firmly allied with the military (Mignone). The rise and impact of Christian Democracy reinforces the general point. Where these parties were strong (Chile or Venezuela) activist energies remained closely tied to elites through party structures, focused on elections and partisan struggle, and kept away from diffuse grass roots work. CEBs took off in Chile only after the 1973 coup. Where they were weak from the outset, activism moved directly to grass roots work or became instead a central point of conflict, with powerful opposition from top church leaders. Peru is a good instance of the former case, Colombia of the latter (C. Romero, Levine and Wilde, Levine and Mainwaring).

These conjunctures provide a necessary but not a sufficient basis for understanding. As a rule, exclusive focus on conjuncture is misleading, for it suggests that the different elements in the package come together in some automatic way. This will not do; human agency needs to be built into the process in systematic ways. Transformations within religion (ideas, structures and practice) need to be set in the context of the changes that made them resonate and ring true to ordinary people, and gave average men and women a chance to shape the course and content of change on their own. In this light, the central question changes from understanding the impact of conjuncture to explaining why popular groups turn to religion in the first place and what they find there (Levine, 1986c). As Segundo points out,

> One of the primary ambiguities of this popular church and its base ecclesial communities is that the whole world is busy counting them, yet no one has any interest in knowing what makes them so appealing. There is an interest in taking advantage of them, no matter what the motivation or consequent praxis (1985, 140).

CEBs derive their impact from the combined appeal of religions' messages and structures. For ordinary group members the message comes mediated through the Bible and discussions of it. With rare exceptions, they neither read theological texts nor debate general ideological concepts like class, exploitation, or power in any explicit way. The ideas are worked out indirectly, through conversation, reflection on local experience, and discussion of familiar (Biblical) metaphors (cf. Scott). Such issues also reach the tiny stage most groups occupy through their effect in shifting the overall weight of church programs, for example by spurring large numbers of clergy, sisters, and pastoral agents to "go to the people," and in general enhancing the dignity of ordinary people and the value of their experience (Adriance, Levine 1988 and forthcoming, Levine & Mainwaring).

New messages are not enough. For enduring social and cultural change to begin and take hold, ideas need carriers, and must be embedded in organizational structures and patterns of

ordinary group life that makes them make sense to average men and women. In this regard, variation in the character and structure of CEBs is decisive. An example may drive the point home. It is not uncommon to find leaders imposing egalitarian and democratic ideals on "their" groups in authoritarian ways: creating issues, imposing programs, making contacts all in the interests of the membership, who are rarely involved in the process other than as spectators. Indeed, images of radical priests or sisters and their "flocks" are the stuff of local folklore all over Latin America (Pásara 1986, 1989). Members go along out of traditional deference to superiors, or because they are simply too polite to object in public. Whatever the reason, the difficulties for long-term change are obvious. If and when the "good" father or sister leaves, the group has little to fall back on: no home grown leaders, no experience at setting goals, no independent contacts with others.

The example is cautionary but not universal. As we shall see, new patterns of belief and practice (Bible study, prayer, understandings of sainthood, of the proper role of clergy, indeed the very meaning of "being church") gain strength and take hold within a process whereby men and women come to see themselves as equal, valued, and capable people. Groups that are more democratic, autonomous, and participatory work best in this regard, for they combine major religious changes with heightened opportunities for leadership and self expression. Groups of this kind are more viable, and able to survive alone. Personal and structural aspects of change thus reflect and reinforce one another. Where they remain dependent on tightly controlled and hierarchical links to institutions, change is more constrained, and groups wither quickly. New ideas make sense in new contexts, just as altered settings may elicit opinions (including discussion of shared needs) and uncover interests and skills hitherto veiled or simply latent and never brought to the surface in ordinary discourse.

These observations suggest the outlines of a typology of CEBs that highlights the dynamic relations among church structures, institutional ties, and the beliefs, self image, and routine practice that prevail among popular groups. Table 2 distinguishes between a Radical Ideal, a vision of group life centered on Sociocultural Transformation, and a Conservative Ideal. The first two share a stress on autonomy, democracy and change, but diverge with respect to the salience of class and confrontation in their discourse and the scope of commitment and action their proponents desire. The Conservative Ideal is little more than the old clericalism repackaged: these small groups remain utterly dependent on clergy for agendas, initiatives, and contacts with larger

issues and institutions. Of course, clergy, sisters, and pastoral agents retain an important role in all three CEB types. At issue in this typology (as in reality) is less their presence and role per se, than the way it is conceived and carried out, and its consequent implications for the developing character of personal, group, and community life. I explore these matters further below. (See also Levine & Mainwaring and Levine, forthcoming.)

Nations, Churches and Dioceses

It is time now to look closely at cases, and to set the general patterns outlined thus far against the experience of specific nations, churches, communities, and individuals. The data that follow are drawn from research I conducted between 1981 and 1983 in Venezuela and Colombia. After preliminary work in national church organizations, I selected dioceses and communities that vary widely in context and orientation: rural and urban, devotional and socially activist, autonomous and controlled, progressive and conservative. Research at community and group level combined structured interviews with members and activists, the collection of life histories, and the observation of meetings. This comparative and multi-level structure allows for a more thorough exploration of the origins and pathways of change than would be possible with a focus on any single case or dimension of the process. Figure 1 specifies the research sites, and outlines the relations among levels. Further methodological details are provided in the Appendix.

In earlier work (Levine 1981) I underscored the importance of national differences in setting the character of religious change in these two nations. These distinctions in economic structure, population (mobility and location), and political history for the most part remain, although attenuated to some extent by rapid urbanization and steady industrial growth over the last decade in Colombia. In Latin America as a whole, despite current waves of violence and political decay in Colombia and growing economic problems in Venezuela that pose questions about the long-term future, the two countries continue to stand out for the relative openness and democratic character of their institutions (Americas Watch, Amnesty International, Bagley, Berry, Hartlyn, Lang, Levine 1973, 1981, 1986a, and forthcoming, Malavé Mata, Urrutia).

In religious terms, the long-standing power of the Colombian church is reinforced by tight links to other dominant institutions and by the hierarchical assumptions that unify elites across the board in fear and suspicion of popular initiatives. Elsewhere I have described Colombian Catholicism as "the leading edge of the old wave" (Levine & Mainwaring). For years Colombian church   leaders   have   provided   the   dominant   regional

voice for traditional church positions, defending hierarchical authority and institutional unity from supposed "popular" threats. This position is often associated with immobility, but nothing could be further from the truth. The Colombian church has long been a vigorous innovator, sponsoring unions, creating effective bureaucracies and social agencies, and most recently promoting actively the creation of the "right kind" of popular groups—those tightly linked to hierarchical direction and control. The overwhelming power of the institutional church in Colombia has also marginalized and radicalized independent popular groups that do get off the ground. Their typical combination of radical rhetoric and organizational weakness leaves such groups especially vulnerable to counter measures (Levine, forthcoming). For all these reasons, analysis of Colombia provides particularly valuable insights into the way institutional constraints affect popular groups and shape their character.

In contrast to Colombia, the Venezuelan church is weak, with no effective national or even diocesan programs for group promotion. Here, the convergence of institutional weakness with broad social and political tolerance of mass mobilization has provided spaces where autonomous popular groups could emerge along with allies and a sense of legitimacy not available to most of their Colombian counterparts. I found (and studied) striking instances of successful organizational growth and far-reaching sociocultural transformation. People in these communities are much like their Colombian counterparts in economic conditions, life experience, and religiosity. But they differ notably in the prevailing structure and image of group life, and hence on its links to broader cultural transformation. As we shall see, these differences rest above all on the distinctive way popular-institutional links are organized in the two countries.

At the local level, my work in Colombia centered on peasant towns and hamlets in the diocese of Facatativá and slum neighborhoods in the archdiocese of Cali. Brief comments on these settings will help frame the discussion that follows. Within the Colombian church, Facatativá has a reputation for progressive leadership, and was chosen in the late 1960s as one of several pilots dioceses for CEB development. Analysis of Facatativá thus reveals what "official" CEBs can look like in practice, and shows their implications for popular culture. The diocese is almost entirely rural, and lies in rough and varied topography to the west of the capital city of Bogotá. Peasant agriculture in this region is generally unproductive, marked by low technology, poor transport and communications, and harassment by armed forces and insurgents. These conditions make it hard for ordinary people to get by, and limit their organizational choices severely. In practical terms, the church is often the only available forum for organized group life on the local level. High traditional religiosity and respect for clergy also give church efforts easy entry into most communities.

To reach and hold a popular clientele, the diocese has put together an elaborate program with the following characteristics: use of highly traditional groups (*cursillos de cristiandad*) as

entries to CEB formation; lots of resources (funded by a long-term contract with CRS, Catholic Relief Services); concentration of money and personnel in pilot parishes and communities; and concern to keep local groups tied to the church. The latter is accomplished by devoting personnel (usually sisters) to promote and monitor group life, and also through a complex net of "leadership schools," which meet on a monthly basis in parishes and communities. These schools provide the institutional church with means for identifying, selecting and training potential leaders, while keeping tabs on the groups. As we shall see, this control mutes the transformative aspects of religious change, above all by inhibiting self-expression and group independence. Only where groups fall through the cracks in some way does change and self-confidence flower.

The city of Cali is a very different environment. Cali sits at the head the rich Valle del Cauca; its economy turns on agricultural processing and transport, augmented lately by major industrial growth. In the post-war period, the city's population has grown explosively, fueled by migrants seeking economic opportunity, who were at the same time fleeing the rural violence endemic to those years. The Archdiocese has been hard pressed to keep pace. Unlike Facatativá, Cali displays no clear program other than a desperate effort to keep up, especially in the popular barrios that spread out like a fan to the south of the city's downtown. I focused on these areas, with special concern for two cases: Barrio El Rodeo, known city-wide for radicalism; and Barrio Meléndez, where groups have been spurred by activist sisters, as part of a general effort at changing popular culture.

All the communities I studied in Venezuela lie within the Archdiocese of Barquisimeto, which has long been home to the *Centro Gumilla*, a Jesuit research and social action organization. Venezuela's Jesuits have made Barquisimeto one of their major national centers since the late 1960s and, like their colleagues elsewhere, have been active in organizing cooperatives, working with barrio groups, and promoting research and publication on regional and national issues. Their rural efforts center on the parish of Villanueva, and I begin here. The relevant organizational history of Villanueva starts with efforts by an Australian priest, Vincent Arthur (known widely as *Padre Vicente*) to establish units of the Legion of Mary. In his view, the Legion was a perfect combination of intense spirituality, stress on community responsibility, and a simple structure that could easily be run by groups on their own. He was correct; the Legion spread rapidly, and within a few years produced a corps of capable leaders able to command local loyalties, develop projects, and act together on a regular basis.

Most members are small-scale coffee growers, long subject to usury, abuse, and extortion by jobbers, middlemen, money lenders, and local merchants. As time passed, discussions in the Legion turned to material needs, and in response Padre Vicente called on the Centro Gumilla for help. Working with existing units of the Legion of Mary, Jesuit advisers helped establish cooperatives that in short order grew from small and limited savings and local operations to include

production, warehousing, marketing, and credit activities on a broad regional scale. Groups have remained closely linked to the Legion from the beginning, for example by common leadership and a widely shared belief that religious values are the indispensable foundation for trust and group solidarity.

The city of Barquisimeto itself is much like Cali: a large, rapidly growing regional metropolis with an economy geared to commerce, transport and agricultural processing. I studied two barrios in Barquisimeto: *Brisas del Aeropuerto* (an older barrio, situated as its name suggests, next to the city airport) and *La Carucieña*, established a few years earlier by the invasion of an unfinished public housing project. Jesuits have their residence (and educate their novices) in Brisas del Aeropuerto where they concentrate on promoting CEBs. In La Carucieña, they work closely with two groups of nuns: four North American Medical Mission Sisters who run a mobile clinic and work with health committees throughout the city; and another group of four sisters (from the Congregation of San José de Tarbes) who had recently left their order's elite girls' school to live and work with the poor, with a stress on general education and neighborhood organization.

Tables 3-6 provide a general statistical overview of the nations, churches, and dioceses. Table 7 summarizes the central traits of these cases, setting each against key questions about the origins, nature and implications of CEBs. Subsequent sections of this paper provide the details required to give recognizable human shape and voice to these preliminary and all too general indications. I begin with a look at what they all have in common.

Common Threads

Looking across countries, dioceses, and communities, several striking parallels and differences come immediately to the surface. Poverty is what all group members have in common although, as we shall see, being poor can have very different mean-   ings and needs associated with it. With rare exceptions CEB membership is not drawn from the very poorest sectors of the population.   Rural   groups   are   comprised   mostly   of

small-holding peasant families; migrant laborers and hired hands are rare. Members may supplement their income occasionally with other work (especially so for younger men) but all have some relatively secure (if poor) base. In the cities, small-scale artisans, venders and keepers of tiny shops are the norm, along with public employees like bus drivers or policemen.

Few are recent migrants; fewer still are permanently unemployed or in the so called "informal sector." The vast majority of those I interviewed came to the city (Cali or Barquisimeto) some time ago. Their barrios are already integral parts of the urban scene; recent invasion barrios are generally considered hard to organize and work with. There is too much movement and too little permanence of housing or income for groups to get much of a foundation there.

Poverty has different meanings for men and women, and presents each sex with characteristic dilemmas and lost opportunities. Women everywhere have a narrower range of occupations and more limited access to schooling than men. Those who are not full-time homemakers typically work in food service or as venders of some kind. I also found a number of single mothers, not widows but women who had either been abandoned by their husbands or had kicked unreliable or philandering husbands out and gone on to make a life alone with their children.[3]

As these comments suggest, poverty makes for highly specific and immediate needs. Members express particular needs for education, health services, security (in housing, land, and in safety from violence) and for companionship. This partial listing suggests that groups mediate access to goods and services, while at the same time providing elements of friendship and mutual support that are highly prized. Such companionship and solidarity helps members cope with the fragmentation of city life and gives rural people a way to get beyond the narrow horizons of isolated hamlets or kinship groups. Indeed, such groups often provide the only available organized social life in rural areas. The peasant families I met in Facatativá knew about unions and political parties, but rarely had direct experience with them.

When society is regarded "from the bottom up," major economic and cultural institutions appear as distant powers that set the conditions of local life in ways beyond the control of ordinary people: fixing the price of crops, setting the terms of credit, controlling access to schools, determining the condition of roads or other services, etc. Vulnerability and violence are permanent conditions, and violence is particularly associated with politics and the state. Violence has come to rural communities for the most part in connection with guerrilla activity, past and present: Villanueva was a key guerrilla zone in the 1960s; much of Facatativá still is. Peasants in Facatativá worry about the guerrillas, but reserve special fear and resentment for the army, which has kept a substantial force in the area for decades. Movement is controlled and groups are

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[3] To date there has been relatively little work on the social composition of CEBs, but see Bruneau 1982 and 1986, and Hewitt, 1986 and 1987 for similar analyses.

regularly harassed and intimidated. Men and women in the towns I visited (especially Caparrapí and San Pedro) commonly report abuses by both sides, display a range of nervous tics, and speak freely of their fears and nightmares.

Violence in the cities comes in the invasions that establish many barrios, and also in repeated clashes between residents and police or army units over access to urban services, especially transport and water. Cali's Barrio El Rodeo was consolidated only after a long and exceptionally violent confrontations involving both army and air units. Barrio Meléndez is located close to a major army barracks; this makes for added fear, tension and clashes. As a general matter, recent years have seen a growing number of very sharp clashes in Cali's barrios among soldiers, police, residents, and guerrilla militants (America's Watch, Amnesty International).

A final similarity concerns the scale and ordinary routine of groups.   All the groups I studied are small (at most 20 members) and gather on a weekly or biweekly basis depending on weather and transport. Meetings follow a common agenda: prayer, Bible reading, discussion of the text, and some effort (organized in different ways according to the setting) to link texts to personal and community issues. Most groups also engage in some kind of community work, ranging from visits to the sick, cooperatives, charity to those poorer than themselves, building water lines, schools or bridges, and the like.

The most critical difference among groups lies in the extent and power of links to the institutional church. These are particularly dense and strong in Facatativá. The arrangements noted earlier are reinforced in this case by a mobile team the diocese has organized (with money from CRS) that brings a catechist, an accountant, a cooperative specialist, an extension agent, and a varied group of educators to bear as a group on local level projects. These complex and overlapping linkages give the diocese a direct and permanent role in group life, manifest not only in operations, but also the very origins of groups and the reasons people join.   Sometimes pastoral agents ("a flock of nuns" in one man's phrase) direct a mission to the area. Two examples follow:

> I really don't know. Some missionaries [nuns] came to the school about four years ago. Before that, we didn't know anything about it. They stayed a night and later a sister came, Sister Sara came and told us a base community was going to be set up, people were needed and who would volunteer? So she showed us how to organize the meetings and [now] we do it (S 16).

> How? Because they told us to [*porque mandaron*]. When Sister Sara and Father Mario came and told us, at first I said no. They never asked me to a meeting, because I would not go. I don't harm anyone, I don't steal, I am not bad. But I went anyway and I liked it (S 61).

Groups established in this way require constant care and attention; dependence is built into the process from the beginning. Agendas come from the outside (the diocese through Sister Sara) and groups stick closely to them: there is little autonomy in selecting issues for discussion

or initiatives for action. For the most part such groups are locally bounded, with all external contacts mediated through the church.   Independent links to non-church groups are discouraged, autonomy is viewed with concern. In any event, social issues are less salient here than personal piety and individual spirituality. One young woman states groups let people "seek a little learning, talk with God, be with God, and discuss religion with others, with songs and prayer"(S 25).

This kind of focus on conventional religiosity and things of the church is reinforced by utter dependence on clergy and pastoral agents for starting groups, finding leaders, and putting agendas together. Susan Eckstein's comments on "the irony of organization" (1979, ch. 4) are relevant here. Eckstein notes that organization can be as much a problem as a solution. When poor people are organized into groups that fit in a subordinate way within a dense net of hierarchical ties, the groups become weaker and more dependent on the institution, show little capacity for action, and lack viability over the long haul. Groups with authoritarian origins ("*porque mandaron…*") are likely to drop quickest of all. I found this in Caparrapí, where the diocese had put the bulk of its resources, along with its most charismatic organizer, P. Roman Cortes, who died suddenly of cancer in 1981. It appears that the closer links are to the institutional church, the swifter the decline once external support or supervision is reduced.

Where links were weaker from the outset, groups appeared more capable of independent initiative and of bringing personal and community experience to the center of attention. They get used to setting their own agendas, both for specific meetings and over the long term for the group as a whole. Leadership selection becomes more open, as leaders are chosen by and from within the group (not appointed). I found this to be the case in Agua Fría, where groups were formed by local residents who returned, inspired, from motivational meetings sponsored by the churches. Groups in Cali and Venezuela are also much more independent in organization and action. This does not mean no pastoral agents are involved. As we have seen, Jesuits and independent groups of clergy and sisters play a critical role. But official links to the institutional church are much attenuated, leading to reduced emphasis on hierarchical authority and top-down directives.

The preceding comments point to a second general dimension of difference: the quality of group life. Meetings can be open or closed, freewheeling or constrained. I have attended numerous sessions where participation was both encouraged and unhindered. Here men and women haltingly read texts and spur one another to comment and join in. But I have also sat through interminable meetings that in the last analysis are little more than charades. The priest or pastoral agent (typically sitting in front of the group) asks for comments, stating that "it is up to you, the people must decide." Silence follows: people are shy, not used to speaking in large groups, and in any event reluctant to take the first step. Experience has taught them what is about to

happen. After a few moments of quiet, the priest lays out a detailed plan, which is adopted without dissent and usually without comment. In this way, shared reflection and arrangements for common action becomes not occasions for change, but simply added practice in passivity and subordination.

Groups also vary in terms of the concentration of resources and the degree of spillover from religion to other roles and interests. One new element in church work with popular groups is the stress on team effort and coordination. The isolated priest working alone in a parish is a declining type. Groups are now the norm: three priests in a parish, four sisters in a village or neighborhood, a mix of lay activists and clerics. The fact of such concentration in an overall context of resource scarcity helps explain the scattered quality of experience; one tends to find clusters of groups rather than an even spread over a given territory. Concentration of resources also points up the role of external financing. Facatativá has relied on CRS and on the limited national help it gets as a pilot diocese. In Venezuela, Jesuit connections and expertise have done the job. Individuals or independent groups of priests or sisters also typically get help from their congregations or home countries. This was the case in both of the Cali barrios I studied.

Organizational scope and spillover vary greatly from case to case. As a rule, groups in Facatativá have remained confined to local cooperatives and community stores, without regional organization or contact with organizations not affiliated to the church, such as rural unions or credit agencies. Contacts are mediated through the diocese wherever possible, thereby restricting local initiative, constraining the development of independent leadership, and reinforcing clerical control at all points. In contrast, Venezuelan experience shows what can happen when clerics deliberately work themselves out of a directive role. Of course, the Jesuits operated apart from mainline ecclesiastical structures in any case, and thus felt free to start things up and then let them run. The result is great and growing independence. Leaders who cut their teeth in the Legion of Mary have moved laterally to the cooperatives, using their organizational skills to build alliances with other groups. In little time, they overcame initial constraints of politeness and deference to clergy and moved clerical advisers out of the day-to-day management of group affairs altogether.

Now that the general contours of groups and programs are clear, it is time to consider how things appear from the bottom up. The following section presents ordinary men and women talking about their ideas and experiences. To be sure, it is always possible to find evocative quotations, and use them in ways that mask or misrepresent reality. But I hope by now to have provided sufficient background and context to clarify the meaning and significance of what people say about themselves, their faith, and their church and community. Most people are sufficiently eloquent that the task is less one of search than elimination. The discussion that follows is organized under three headings: needs; religious experience and reading the Bible (both

specific texts and the act of reading itself); and changes in what is conventionally termed "popular religion."

Popular Voices

Needs

Popular discussion of needs reflects less a sense of being exploited or oppressed (i.e. of class opposition, on which more below) than of having been crippled from the outset in the struggle to make a good life for self and family. Such crippling is located above all in deficient health and education. Despite recent advances in the availability of formal schooling in both countries, access remains limited, especially in the countryside. Older people have bitter memories of education truncated by closed schools, absent teachers, or the needs of the household economy. Women in particular have everywhere been deprived of schooling by cultural norms that downplay education in favor of service in the home and early marriage. Medical care is also lacking and diets are often weak in essential protein. Medications are costly, routine preventive care (apart from anti-malarial spraying) is nonexistent, access to hospitals is difficult when not totally impossible. The result is endemic gastrointestinal problems, childhood diarrhea, and hepatitis; arthritis is common and poor teeth are the norm. Many families have lost at least one child to disease.

Speaking of his town, one Venezuelan peasant stated simply that "Life is critical there. Everyone works but no one has anything. People suffer a lot in these communities" (V 104). A Colombian echoed this view, noting that obstacles had filled his life: "Not having been able to study. I would be better, more intelligent. Illness too, I have always been sick. Problems have never been lacking" (A 12). Two women describe their frustrating brush with formal schooling in the following words:

> I only got through the fifth grade, because the idea then was that men should study, but women would later marry and have children, so why bother, they said. We had to respect that, and so I was left with wishes for more study (CA 160-61).

> The biggest problem here is that people don't value studies. My sister Gladys and I wanted to go on studying but they don't see it.… Men say why go to school if women are meant to marry and have babies, and men to handle a plow? (RF 62, 112).

The desire for education explains much of the appeal groups have to women. Meetings provide a chance to learn reading and writing (through the Bible) along with exposure to courses ranging from first aid, sewing, and cooking to theology or history. Meetings also get them out of the house and out from under the thumb of husbands, parents and in-laws (cf. Drogus). Many of the women I interviewed had married young in order to escape oppressive family life, only to find

themselves now equally subordinate to husbands. For example, this Cali woman eloped, thinking that "in marrying I would free myself, be a different person, that marrying would be a solution. But things went bad for me, like for dogs at mass. I left that man years ago" (CR 186).

Economic needs combine specifics like wages, credit, housing, land or education with a general sense of powerlessness and vulnerability. A Colombian peasant put the high cost of living in context this way:

> Of course it affects us because we are poor. Everything is controlled at the national level and we get screwed. Our products are worth nothing, what we purchase costs the sky. You've got to accept the price buyers impose; no bargaining is possible for what we need to buy (A 67).

Vulnerability and powerlessness also underlie expressed needs for security. Insecurity is manifest above all in fear of police and army and general resentment of the way rich and powerful people treat the poor. One peasant man from a town under permanent military garrison (San Pedro) summed things up by telling me that "from what I have seen, the rule is kick the guy who's down [*al caido caerle*]" (C 71).

The church was not exempt from criticisms of this kind. Questions about what it could or should do elicited a sense that even this most trusted of institutions was not living up to its stated ideals. The shepherd was not a good pastor, his flock was left adrift and alone. The first speaker is a Colombian peasant; the second, a woman from Barrio Meléndez.

> The priest, right? They could help us more, but they just give advice. Actually helping a poor man—the first case hasn't been seen. A diocese or a priest, they have money, and they could say: here, I have this and I can help you build a house or buy food. Not just advice (A 59).

> For me an ideal priest would be open to dialogue, simple, easy to trust, an ordinary man, not aloof and uninterested. More conscious of his duty, the real duty of a priest, that isn't just staying on your knees to pray. No! It is to see and know your neighbor, especially the poor, to be closer to those in need. That's what a real priest is like (CA 256).

Being Religious, Reading the Bible, and Becoming Church

For many members, joining a grass roots religious group is something like a conversion experience. One repeatedly hears that "we were bad and became good, we went from darkness to light, from vice to virtue, from isolation to community. Now we know what it really means to be religious." This sense of conversion and exposure to valued new insights spurs groups in their tendency to be religious reformers. One man described how he and his companions felt:

> We started thinking, we were very different. You're like two people, you go out old and return all new—new spiritually and new materially. And we began to realize the bad things we had been doing. So all this is a change in our way of living, each one in the community (A 34).

CEBs often have a markedly Protestant-like quality, not only in the stress on Bible study and participation, but also in the pervasive concern members express for religious authenticity. They regularly contrast earlier concern with processions and pilgrimages with current focus on Bible and Eucharist. The former now appears superfluous: why go to a shrine when God is everywhere? why pray to a saint when Jesus is central? why worry about one or another particular Virgin when we know that Mary is everywhere the same, just called by different names?

The frequency and regularity of meetings is much prized by ordinary people. The pattern of small group religious meetings is new in Latin America, particularly among popular sectors. Such small and intimate settings make religious experience more accessible and familiar, thus undercutting the isolation and suspicion of rural life and helping to repair the fragmentation common to many barrios. Members also stress that by working together in groups, each teaches the other. As a result, all learn more and more thoroughly than would otherwise be the case. This peasant man recalls that as a youth "You had to record questions and answers in your memory [lit: tape them]. But later I learned that Catholicism isn't learning prayers by rote, but rather that we have to incarnate prayers in ourselves and live them in our actions" (A 12). A woman from Barrio Meléndez goes further, stating that without the groups she and her neighbors would still be sunk in ignorance.

> We would just be the same. And really we even committed idolatries, kneeling before Christ and thinking he was the true God, that praying to him all our problems could be over. Now we know better, we see God in our brother, God is reflected in our brothers, in the poor. Now we understand, you see, that you've got to stand with the poor, with those who suffer because, well, doing good to your brother is doing good to God, and if you hurt your brother you hurt God too. That's what we understand (CA 275, 76).

In many communities, the mere fact of organization and regular meetings is new. For example, around Villanueva there was little or no regular organized activity before the Legion of Mary. The Legion spread new habits and routines (e.g. punctuality, record keeping, joint effort in long-term projects) that have elicited a corps of leaders who see themselves as new men and women, spiritually regenerated and socially capable. One man comments:

> Well yes, I think that most of the people you now see working in the cooperative, before, most of them were people with no…most of them were full of vices—lazy, drinking, no commitment whatsoever. They led bad lives. But now you see them active in the cooperative and the Legion. There has been a change in them as people. And it is precisely the area of getting together for religion [*en lo católico*] that has made the difference. Before the only meeting we ever had in El Cauro was for celebrations, *fiestas*, Christmas, Easter, the annual mass… Those were the only meetings. But now in the community, in every community, not a month passes without meetings, meetings where people participate. Now people are used to getting together, and they make new opportunities to join with one another (V 93).

The most valued experience members cite when discussing the groups is reading the Bible. The Bible is read individually (on getting up or retiring), in family groups, and in regular CEB

sessions. Text and process are both important: reading the Bible is prized for the messages it brings and for the sense of personal responsibility, involvement, and self-improvement the act of reading creates. It is important to be clear about how the Bible is seen. These are not fundamentalists. In their eyes, the Bible offers not an inerrant text to be followed to the letter, but rather accessible values, ideals and role models. The way the Bible is discussed is indicative. Passages are rarely studied in a formal analytical way. Instead, participants jump right in to discuss how what is spoken of in a particular text is happening here and how, to people like themselves. The promised coming of the Kingdom of God is thus taken not as an injunction to prepare for personal salvation (to "get right with God" in the style of North American televangelism) but rather part of working with others, now. Echoing Luke 17:20-21 ("the Kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed…the kingdom of God is in the midst of you"), members see building community and bettering social, family, and spiritual life as integral to that Kingdom. This woman put the matter in terms of responsibility:

> I tell everyone that we must be real christians walking towards our faith, walking to truth, not the kind of christians who sit every day with rosary in hand, who wait every day for manna to fall from heaven. Because the manna is all used up, that's what I say (CA 198).

Reading and talking about the Bible on a regular basis gives ordinary people a chance to work together as equals, and reinforces confidence in each person's ability to reason, evaluate and act. The experience can help overcome the sense of crippling and powerlessness that we have seen is often associated with poverty or lack of schooling. As one Venezuelan woman states, "Before we had no idea; you went to mass and that was it. But now we take ourselves into account, we have shared responsibility" (B 99). Understanding gained in this way is regarded as particularly authentic, and more long-lasting than that produced by earlier rote learning. It is also independent of clergy.

> Yes, yes, let's say that no priest is available for a mass. Well then we can come anyway, no? Participate, join in the church. Reading Scripture and talking about it is what's important anyway. So we go on because religion is really for us. As they say, God is in the people (CA 120).

The development of confidence and a capacity to judge and act independent of guidance from elites (civil or ecclesiastical) adds a new dimension to popular life. The process recalls early Puritan accounts of the Bible, which as Zaret shows, encouraged independence and a willingness to rely on one's own unaided reason. Learning about religion through shared reflection on the Bible is very much one's own creation. As one rural leader told me, getting together regularly meant that "between us we can be a greater light, help others and see things more clearly" (S 69). When I asked one woman from Meléndez what meetings were like, she replied as follows:

Well it's like this, we develop it this way. We all work to understand better, even me, because you know there are so many things a person doesn't know. Right? The Bible. We read the Gospels and we study every little bit. And here we have people who have never known anything. They read it there [in church], the priest reads the Gospel and that's that. Because he says a world of things people pay no attention to. But here we try to explain things ourselves. We don't have them explained to us, but ourselves we draw it out, we discover what we think… There's more getting together, more dialogue. Not just the priest in the pulpit telling you not to sin, not to do this or that, to repent. Because you know a person hears that stuff and then goes home and forgets it all (CA 40, 46).

The expressed needs, focus on Bible study and authenticity, and concern for participation are common to all groups, but are expressed and combined in different ways according to the degree of independence and democratization each particular group displays. For example, the more group life centers on participatory Bible reading, the more exclusive attention to personal spirituality or prayer appears as a lesser form of religion, something properly left behind. Authenticity is then found in direct links between faith and common action to help others. The Venezuelan groups clustered around Villanueva constitute perhaps the clearest example of these links. Here, members combine intense piety and religious devotion with a consistent stress on solidarity and social action that reach beyond the local community. These are seen not as alternatives to religion, but rather as essential components of it. Cases like Agua Fría or the barrios of Cali occupy a middle ground, in which growing independence and self-worth are constrained, in the first case by continued ties to the institutional church, and in the second by general marginalization and scarce resources. Rural Colombian groups centered on Caparrapí, Quebradanegra, and San Isidro remain the most controlled and least changed of all. Here the ideal member continues to be deferential to superiors, and focused above all on personal spirituality (*beato* to use the local parlance). Groups in Agua Fría have been more activist, but here focused on the development of what might be called mini-clergy—permanent deacons or lay ministers. Groups thus remain subordinate to the institutional church's agenda; local initiatives leading to new commitments and styles of action are not legitimized in this case, as they are, for example, in Villanueva or Cali. (for more details, see Levine, forthcoming). Table 8 sums up the differences.

When changes in religious expression and organizational life do get underway, they draw strength from an emerging popular Christology that downplays Christ's mild meekness and resignation for stress on how both his life and his death point to the centrality of practical love for others. "We are like Jesus," one Venezuelan peasant commented in a meeting of the cooperative:

Jesus Christ was the first, he joined with people to see how they could get out from under. You can't separate the two things. Jesus came and celebrated, he got involved with people's problems. So with us, a day's work always ends with a

celebration. The two things. So Jesus is here with us, doing the same work (V 76).

He and his companions believe they are "like Jesus" because they too trust in God and work together to help each other and the community.[4] In a further discussion sparked by a passage (Luke 13) where Christ compares the Kingdom successively to a fig tree (that must be planted   and   nurtured   before   it   bears   fruit),   to   a   grain   of   mustard   seed

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[4] Cf. Father Divine's comment that "I would not give five cents for a God who could not help me here on the earth, for such a God is not a God at hand. He is only an imagination. It is a false delusion—trying to make you think you had just as well go ahead and suffer and be enslaved and be lynched and everything else here, and after a while you are going to Heaven someplace. If God cannot prepare Heaven here for you, you are not going anywhere (in Weisbrot, p. 186).

(that becomes a mighty tree), and to the yeast that makes bread rise, one member said this reminded him of when the cooperative began in his town:

> When we organized in El Cauro, at first there was no priest to help us. People told us no, priests don't get into that, those are not the church's things. But we know priests are involved in all the problems people have, to see how they can get out from under. They aren't just for praying (V 75).

Choice of texts warrants separate comment. The Bible has many messages, but interviews and observation of numbers of group meetings reveals a clear preference for some passages over others. One rarely hears discussions of Romans 13, where subordination to authority is enjoined. Traditional injunctions to wives to be silent and obey are also for the most part absent. Instead, there is considerable stress everywhere on texts that highlight God's desire for justice, and Jesus' stress on love interpreted as sharing and equality.[5] Exodus is popular, along with prophets like Amos, Jeremiah, Micah or Isaiah, who denounce injustice in terms that are familiar to ordinary people. They talk about oppression, demand freedom for prisoners, and condemn those who, in the words of Isaiah 5:8, "add house to house and field to field until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land." The prophets reserved particular scorn for religious hypocrites who were content with empty ritual, sacraments, music and the like but remained blind to injustice. One woman cited Isaiah as she lashed into the bishops:

> They issue statements about not getting involved in politics, but politics means that they speak about hunger and that they let the people speak about injustice, poverty and all that. They say we shouldn't slide over into other areas, but what are they really doing? They are denying the Gospels. Because if you read the Gospels—I tell you I am a Christian and I have a Bible. But I hardly know any of those Biblical citations, I only know one which is Isaiah 58, which talks about the offerings He wants, and it is to loosen the chains and break the yoke (CR 173).

I heard a related use of the New Testament at a cooperative meeting in the crossroads community of Rio Bravo, outside Villanueva. Here, members had built an impressive store and warehouse serving the surrounding area, and were also deeply involved in the promotion of farm gardens (to improve diets) and in natural medicine. Discussion at this meeting turned on a passage from John (15:12-13): "this is my commandment, that you love one another as I have

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[5] This discussion recalls Raboteau's critique of accounts of slave religion that underscore its supposedly otherworldly character. "It does not always follow," he writes, that belief in a future state of happiness leads to acceptance of suffering in this world. It does not follow necessarily that a hope in a future when all wrongs will be righted leads to acquiescence to injustice in the present…the slaves believed that God had acted, was acting, and would continue to act within human history and within their own particular history as a peculiar people just as long ago he had acted on behalf of another chosen people, Biblical Israel. Moreover, slave religion had a this-worldly impact, not only in leading some slaves to acts of external rebellion, but also in helping slaves to assert and maintain a sense of personal value—even of ultimate worth… By obeying the commands of God even when they contradicted the commands of men, slaves developed and treasured a sense of moral superiority and actual moral authority over their masters" (1978: 317-18).

loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." To one member, this meant that "Jesus seeks us now through the family gardens, through the health committees. It is just like when God made the first man, he made a garden then." In his view, texts like this affirm that their group is properly both spiritual and social. At issue was not prayer alone, but rather "praying and lending a hand [*rezando y la mano dando*]" (V 242).

Beginning meetings with the Bible and making reference to it throughout gives activism and participation a sense of rightness it might not otherwise enjoy. One of the Jesuit organizers in Villanueva comments:

> At first we had some problems. There were a few groups who thought that all this went beyond the proper bounds of religion. Some even said it was bad, that it meant using the Legion for things for which it was not intended. I told them no, and used Gospel passages like the multiplication of loaves and fishes. I said, "do you know why five thousand were able to eat? Because one person put his food in common. If that person had kept his bread and fish in his own pocket, Christ would not have made the miracle. Yes, and Christ is willing to work miracles here too. But someone has to contribute his loaf, his fish, someone has to lend his hoe, lend his jeep, put something in common so that Christ can perform the miracle. And so we got started (V 194).

A similar use of the Bible is found in Barrio Meléndez. Here groups gather every week in the evening, rotating among members' houses. Each session begins with a Bible passage, and time is explicitly set aside for related comment on personal, group, and national issues. One man comments:

> People come here with such and such a problem and we start from there. This is where one can really feel the work of the group, because you know in the life of poor people there is so much pressure, so many economic problems… On the one hand patience is needed to stay in the fight. On the other hand, well, you have to learn to stand up and ask for help. Not to remain closed off but to communicate, to tell your problems to your neighbors, to the group. This is the base of our activities, that all [of us] develop a critical consciousness. Because in isolation nothing gets done, nothing can be accomplished, not for oneself, not for others (CA 106).

The concept of authentic love provides a common thread in meetings and conversations with group members. Indeed, the Biblical citation I had repeated most often to me was 1 John, 4:20-21: "If anyone says I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar, for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also." Commentary on this text undergirds an evolving view of society, of class relations, and of what it means to "be church." The first two are portrayed in terms that downplay conflict and rancor. From this perspective, at issue between the classes is less structural change or revolution than mutual understanding.

Equity and justice involve greater sharing and genuine reconciliation more than sustained confrontation.[6]

Working from texts like this, "the church" no longer appears as the priest or the building down the street, but is now commonly visualized as the members who work and live together: the people of God building community. The views of one Venezuelan peasant follow:

> I believe we are nothing, not church, nothing if we cannot feel for our brother. How can we [then] feel for other things? Look, the church tells us that if you love the God you cannot see and you do not love the brother you do see, then you are a faker. So I believe that if we cannot feel for our brother, who is right here beside us, and we cannot give him a helping hand, then we can't do anything, we lose everything. To me, this is how to cooperate as a church. Because you are church and I am church. Doing your work you are making the church. This is the church we make as we work. You go about working not only for yourself but also for the community. What is the use of all this information? To learn about what is happening in the world, to get it moving. You are sent because someone sends you, there is one who moves you. If not, you can't see where you are. He is here with us both, guiding us and who knows where? So this is God's house and this is the church. For me, this is what it is (V 123).

In the discourse of Latin American Catholicism, intellectual circles, publications, official statements and everyday speech are filled with references to this notion of "being church." "Being church" is also a matter for lively discussion among popular groups, where one often hears that "we are all church [*todos somos iglesia*]." Popular groups distinguish clearly between the church as an institution and "being church" as a community of faithful, the most obvious sense in which "we are all church." Contrary to what both critics and proponents of a "popular church" occasionally pretend, the distinction between these meanings carries no sense of class or group struggle within the church. Members easily combine expectations of help from the church with affirmations that "we are all church." With growing independence and confidence in personal and collective abilities comes willingness to criticize the church itself, and to insist that the institution live up to its own norms. In a formulation we shall hear again later (that life is hell), one Cali woman suggests that unless this happens, the church will disappear:

> and it should disappear, because what good is that kind of church, what use is it for the poor? Just to tell us we are going to hell. We live through hell every day we face floods, scarcities, and all those needs. What more hell is there than that?… I was raised with the idea of a God above the rooftops, that you couldn't see. But tell someone they serve God in a person, because God is there; that you are church because the church is there, not in that pile of cement. Things change, we learn, and people need to see this (CR 182, 183).

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[6] Marjorie Becker's analysis of elite and peasant ideology in Mexico is apposite here. She shows how Mexican campesinos rejected elite views that focused exclusively on class in favor of a more nuanced portrait of social relations. In her evocative phrase, the former came black and white only, the latter in color. Cf. Portes on popular economic rationality, Hochschild on the complexities of common notions about distributive justice, and Thompson, for a historical perspective on the relevance of class discourse.

The notion of "being church" provides the underpinnings for a practical ethic of group life. It serves as shorthand for common notions of good behavior, what a christian person should do. Values of trust, sharing, solidarity, and honesty are prominent here. It also compresses understandings of the particularities of belonging, of arrangements for membership in the institutional church. Among these are the way groups are founded, leaders selected, trained, and validated, programs approved and set in motion. Finally, as noted, the repeated assertion that "we are all church" advances personal and collective claims to take the measure of the institutional church, evaluating programs and judging the adequacy of priests, sisters, and pastoral agents. Popular willingness to do this is reinforced by a decline in long standing distances between clergy and ordinary people, manifest for example in speech, dress, or life style. Men and women raised to regard priests or sisters as holy and semi-mystical figures, approachable only with exaggerated deference, now encounter individuals they call by first names, who live close at hand, who dress alike, shop in the same stores, and often go to work every day just like everyone else (Levine, forthcoming). The following comment from Barrio Meléndez suggests that current critiques differ from the anticlericalism of the past. The words express sympathy, and even a little pity.

> One thing I would like is for nuns and priests to do things that get them into poor barrios, and make them feel the problems there. I say that seeing all those things they would be more conscious of what is going on. Because sometimes I think they aren't responsible for their mentality. From the moment they start to study they are shut up in convents, right? And there it is just brainwashing, brainwashing, so that when they finally get out, it's like getting out of jail. They come out different from every-thing that goes on around them. *They know absolutely nothing* (CA 176/77).

Changing Popular Religion

Full understanding of popular religious groups requires taking church affiliation, belief and practice seriously. Whatever else the groups examined here may claim to be, whatever other ends they serve, their original and continuing identity is religious. The continuing power of religious belief and commitment enables groups to build meaningful vocabularies of moral concern. For this reason, if for no other, close attention to the content of popular piety and spirituality is required. It is their characteristic transformation, not their abandonment for other ideals, that lies at the root of cultural, social, or political changes such groups may spur or legitimize. The whole effort is then organized and legitimized in characteristically different ways depending on the elements of structure, control, leadership, and democratization examined to this point.

In his recent *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, Gustavo Gutiérrez argues that "it is a serious mistake to reduce what is happening among us today to a social or political problem." To the contrary, a new spirituality is emerging.

> The spirituality now being born in Latin America is the spirituality of the church of the poor…the spirituality of an ecclesial community that is trying to make effective its solidarity with the poorest of the world. It is a collective, ecclesial spirituality that, without losing anything of its universal perspective, is stamped with the religious outlook of an exploited and believing people, trying to make effective its solidarity with the poorest of the world. It is a collective, ecclesial spirituality (1985: 2, 29).

Gutiérrez suggests that it may be too early for precise details. "At present we are in the position of those trying to decide whom a newborn child resembles. Some will say the father, others the mother… Better to photograph the child and decide later on whom it resembles" (1985: 92). To assess this emerging spirituality, I explore issues that are commonly grouped together under the rubric of "popular religiosity": 1) prayer; 2) views of the saints, of pilgrimages, and of the Virgin Mary and Jesus; 3) the use of holy water; and 4) ideas about life after death.[7]

Despite otherwise notable variations in opinions or activism, all group members pray a lot—alone and in family gatherings, in churches and group meetings, and on many other occasions. Prayer is a powerful experience; individual and collective speech, action, and memory are worked together with tremendous force and plasticity. Marcel Mauss comments that prayer is

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[7] These dimensions were selected for further analysis from a number of questions posed to group members about religious upbringing and practice. Along with Bible study and understandings of group practice, attitudes on these dimensions point to the continuing incorporation of traditional religious concepts and practices in the construction of group life. Variations in the specific interpretation and weight given to each emerge from the daily interactions of members and pastoral agents with texts and group circumstances. Together they help provide legitimate underpinnings for group solidarity, and for any common action groups may undertake.

infinitely flexible, and has assumed the most varied expressions, alternatively pleading and demanding, humble and menacing, dry and full of images, immutable and variable, mechanical and mental. It takes on the most diverse roles: here a brutal demand, an order, there a contract, an act of faith, a confession, a plea, a word of praise, a 'hosanna!' (Mauss, 95).

Much prayer remains conventional, devoted to giving thanks, or to requests for specifics like health, economic success, or to physical safety (from storms, accidents, or violence). This dependent and request-focused patter predominates where links to the parish are tight and groups are less focused on Bible study and collective action. Two men from conservative Quebradanegra comment:

Yes, one sends prayers to God and to the Holy Virgin who are, they are the heads that direct us. [And what do you pray for?] Well, prayer is to thank God for a day's work, for passing the night, for making the rain stop, or for whatever favor or miracle God has done. We thank God and also ask for the youth, for families, and for ourselves (Q 123).

So that God will increase our faith, and also to ask for help with the needs of our family and of the whole world. There are many needs and so we must ask God for help. Some people say that you shouldn't ask God for material things, but I always ask God to let me have my own house some day. Father Jorge told me that no, you shouldn't be asking because God already knows everyone's needs. It makes sense that God knows all our needs, but I ask anyway. It is like knocking on the door, to make sure he remembers, that he does not forget (Q 96).

Prayer gives many the strength they need to endure a difficult life, in the words of this man from San Isidro, "always hopefully, with patience, and to suffer patiently what has to be suffered. With patience and with intelligence" (S 68). Prayers for security are especially common in the violence-plagued region around Caparrapí. Thus one man prays "Every night to God and the Virgin. I thank God for all the help he gives me, I offer him my worries, my feelings, and I ask him to help me and my community, so that strangers (*gentes raras*) wont come. I don't want guerrillas here" (C 60).

The focus of prayer starts to shift as groups become more participatory and active. Setting prayer in community contexts in this way makes praying less a matter of asking for favors or even of thanksgiving (though these remain) than of identifying with others, and thus with God. Listen first to a man from Agua Fría, then a woman from Cali.

Yes, I pray continuously to find myself with the Lord, when I get up, when I go to bed, and lately, for a year or so now, I have become aware that when I am with other people, at work, playing, resting, I am praying then too, because I am communicating with my brothers (A 13).

[I pray] to identify myself, identify myself a little with him. Not just to repeat a prayer, but to identify with the model he is, with being christian. Identifying with one another we can help ourselves (CR 222).

A neighbor in the barrio adds a sharp rejection of conventional external markers like tracing a cross on the forehead to mark Ash Wednesday. Authenticity is different, real conversion requires solidarity with others:

> What a farce, to go there and put on a nice face for others when nothing changes inside. To my mind the issue isn't my own conversion to God, it's my conversion to others. I am converted to the extent that I give myself to others. It's not just a matter of converting myself alone. That's too easy, too comforting… The basic thing, what we need to see clearly, is that if we take no heed of others, if there is no love in what we do with others, that will be the final judgement on us (CR 326).

These comments exemplify the flavor of religious reform and conversion that often attaches to CEBs. Members feel that their religious practice is more authentic; false or unnecessary accretions are stripped away exposing the true core. This emerges with particular clarity if we ask to whom people pray. A library of studies has addressed the importance of saints in popular belief and practice. Saints appear as uniquely holy and powerful figures, who can also be influenced or manipulated to intercede in one's favor before God. In this vein, one rural Colombian woman told me that "God gave them the power to help us. We ask and they make God work miracles" (S 32).

In general terms, viewing the saints as agents or lawyers has fallen into disfavor, and appears of dubious orthodoxy to most CEB members. Excessive attention to the saints is also felt to turn one's eyes away from God. As one rural activist told me, "I used to make petitions to the saints, but then I saw that it was only a lever, that it was better to pray directly to Jesus (C 71a). A woman from Meléndez concurred, noting also that "lawyers are very expensive. If you talk with God you don't need to pay" (CA 217).

As prevailing views of the saints begin to change, traditional practices like pilgrimages or making promises (to bind saints to their word) have also lost popularity (cf. Christian, 175-208, Obelkevich, Turner). Concerns for orthodoxy and the greater availability of religious practice remove much of the clientele for such devotions. Why go to a distant shrine, pay for travel, food and lodging, fighting crowds and running the risk of robbery or accident when you can get the same thing at home? Improved access to health services has also reduced the appeal of pilgrimages, which were often undertaken to appeal for health, or for relief from illness. When I asked members who they turned to when health problems arose, without exception they responded by citing health post, hospital, and priest (in that order), depending on the gravity of the situation.

These comments are not meant to suggest that saints have been abandoned or wholly removed from popular discourse. Instead, they have been reconceived, appearing now as role models: good men and women whose example teaches us how to live well. One man from Agua Fría believes that "they cannot be powerful, because they are just apostles, like we can be" (A89). His views are echoed first by a Venezuelan peasant, then a woman from Cali:

So there are saints, saints who were converted through their good works. And that is our goal, every person has a goal and I tell you again, you come for your work to our communities, to our brothers… You work according to your own image, from your community. You are sure that you are following a goal, searching for God. You go with God always, that is how life is, and so God is with you, and that is what the saints were doing too. Many people became saints because of their good works, many (V 129).

I respect them a lot, but there is no one I am particularly devoted to. To me they are people who managed to do something positive in their lives; I can do the same. Everything is according to its period. If they did to me what they did to Saint Teresa, I couldn't endure it. But really they were people like me, they lived in a particular time and place, and perhaps with problems and they were able to succeed. Well, can't I do it too? (CR 329).

From this point of view, sainthood is found in ordinary life; anyone can become a saint. The concept of sainthood is also occasionally stretched well beyond the church's formal canon. In Cali for example, homes and public transport often display decals of the Virgin Mary next to saints and portraits of Che Guevara, Camilo Torres, or perhaps John F. Kennedy. A resident of Barrio El Rodeo takes Mary and the saints as role models in this way:

I don't share the view of Mary as pure, puritanical, no. To me she was a woman who was mother of Christ, and suffered like any mother, like any of our mothers who suffer so much every day. Not that sanctified image. And I think the saints were people who did things, Che could be a saint, Camilo could be a saint, because they gave their lives for others, for the community, for the people's liberation (CR 226).

Popular use of holy water (water blessed by a priest for sacramental and ritual use) is interesting and complex. Water is of course significant in many cultures and religions. It is a common sign of life, and is closely associated with health and healing. Miracles commonly involve the use of water; shrines are often founded on the site of springs or wells. Water also has specific importance in Christian symbology and practices, arising for example from Jesus' well-known invitation: "If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:38). Water also has a visible and legitimate place in Catholic sacraments (baptism for example) and in ordinary church routines.

Popular recourse to holy water draws particular strength from all these sources, and extends well beyond common views of orthodoxy. Indeed, of all the practices ascribed to "popular religion," extensive use of holy water is the most resistant to change, declining only in the most rigorously orthodox and Bible-centered groups. People often bring bottles and jugs of water to be blessed, and then use it in the most varied fashion. Medicines are taken with holy water to make them work better; spouses are kept faithful by sprinkling it on beds in the form of a cross; spills, falls, spirits or witches are warded off by its application to corners, doorposts, and gates of houses. In one case I witnessed, peasants asked the parish priests (in Caparrapí) for holy water to spread on fields as a guard against locusts. The priests were caught between their belief

that God does not violate natural law and a wish to avoid sending these men away empty-handed. A predictable compromise ensued: the priests blessed the water, accompanied with a lecture on its true meaning. As this incident suggests, popular attitudes to holy water raise thorny problems for the church. They also pose questions about dimensions of persistence and change in popular culture. In the last analysis the matter hinges on the difference between faith and magic. Orthodox views stress that the holiness of holy water comes as an affirmation of faith. Its significance and possible efficacy thus lie in affirmation of the power of faith, not in powers inherent in the substance, or magical manipulations achieved by working with them. I return to this issue in the conclusion.

Concepts of death and the hereafter constitute our last indicator of "popular religion." Contrasting attempts to prepare for and make sense of death make for strong differences in how religions are lived. Unremitting emphasis on death's imminence can lead to a stern and gloomy attitude, focused on "getting right with God." Religions can also stress ethical rules, and thus emphasize living well over suffering and inevitable death. Questions about what members expect after death elicit responses ranging from conventional hopes for bodily resurrection in glory to concern for leaving something behind in the community. The former view expects, with this woman "to find myself face to face with Jesus" (C 48). Others cleave to religion from fear of condemnation. Thus, "I guess salvation, what else is there to expect, other than going to hell. That would be bad" (A 89). Less conventional responses address continuing life (for example in the community) more than death. A case in point comes in these comments by a man from Agua Fría. His words recall Archbishop Oscar Romero's famous phrase[8] about living on in the Salvadoran people: "I ask God to have pity on me, on my spirit, and that what I have managed to sow with my witness, that after I die it may live on" (A 14).

Most respondents distinguish clearly between salvation and condemnation: heaven awaits the saved, hell is for the condemned. But not everyone concurs; a substantial group of dissenters from Cali blurts out that although they are not sure, in no way do they believe in hell. No hell compares with this life. To be sure, such views can make death a release, as with this comment from a woman in Barrio Meléndez: "I hope to rest in peace after all the tragedy this world causes. The heaven I see, that heaven is resting in peace from all these tragedies…hell is here in this world" (CA 222). As a rule, more radical conclusions prevail. Thus,

> I tell you sincerely that I don't think there can be any more hell than this world.
> That's right! What happens is that what you don't do right in this world, after death

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[8] In an interview with the Mexican newspaper *Excelsior* two weeks before his murder, Romero stated that "I have frequently been threatened with death. I must say that, as a Christian, I do not believe in death but in the resurrection. If they kill me, I will rise again in the people of El Salvador… A bishop will die, but the church of God—the people—will never die." Sobrino, pp. 50, 51. For other perspectives on Msgr. Romero's life, see Berryman, Brockman, and Carrigan.

amounts to nothing. I believe two things: that there is no more hell than this world because in this world you live through everything; and that this business of arranging for masses and I don't know what—doing charity in the name of the dead [a noise of scorn]. If they didn't do it in life, much the less in death. So what is the good of all that? I think that what you have to do you have to do it in life. And you do it because it's right. You don't leave it for others to pay your debts. No! (CA 262-263).

This rejection of conventional notions about heaven, hell, and recompense needs to be set in context. Such views differ from ideas that make "this world" a vale of tears to be endured patiently and with resignation until the moment of personal salvation. The commentary is both more bitter and more sociological. These people are saying that day-to-day life in their communities is a living hell. Threats of hell therefore hold few terrors; they prefer to live as well as they can, not to avoid evil ends, but rather as an expression of faith and solidarity with others. Salvation is taken as a promise, not a reward to be gained by appropriate actions or manipulations.

Conclusions

If religion is to change popular culture, religion itself has to change. The linked transformations in belief, practice, organization, and spirituality sketched out here are critical to such developments. The preceding analysis shows that success in the effort turns on the way individuals and communities see themselves in the process, and on the links they build to key institutions. Experience with participatory and egalitarian group life is particularly important. By working together to understand religion and the world and acting together in ways that bridge the two, members assert themselves as capable, articulate, and confident people. Whether the topic is Bible study, cooperatives or prayer, we come back to how people see themselves as autonomous and capable actors, and acquire confidence in the value of their own critical reason. Max Weber's comments on the significance of congregational and ethical religion to broad sociocultural transformations are particularly relevant here.[9]

A congregational religion is what the name implies—a religion organized in small, self-managed groups of believers where all have presumably equal rights and capabilities. As Weber saw it, the viability of congregational forms was strengthened by an emerging religious discourse built around a rationalized, ethical view of the world. Congregational structures gave new weight and dignity to the experiences and views of average members, who were enjoined to fuse religion with daily life through continuous, self-moved ethical practice in all aspects of life. In this context, the term "ethical" does not imply that such beliefs are better or their holders more virtuous than others. Rather, by reference to "ethical religion," Weber pointed to a pattern of belief and practice whereby ordinary men and women were charged with (or more precisely, made themselves

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[9] I comment more fully on Weber's views in Levine, 1985b.

responsible for) following a common set of ethical rules. External interventions have little place here. If all believers have access to truth, all are responsible *on their own* for carrying out the precepts set down in the Bible each person is expected to read. The emergence of such a point of view encourages a sense of independence and responsibility that is at once individual and collective. Each person is expected to order behavior according to God's will. The community (here, the popular groups) offers a medium for discovering that will through shared efforts at edification and the solidarity born of work in common. The mystical and semi-sacred status of clerics is undercut.

Ethical rationalization is manifest in the changing elements of spirituality and "popular religion" noted here. Groups also provide spaces (literally and figuratively) where new religious sensibilities can be worked out. Consider again the examples of prayer, the saints, and life as hell. Refocusing prayer away from request and manipulation and towards community and mutual help pushes the center of religious sensibility from individual gratification to life in common. Seeing the saints as role models rather than intermediaries also throws the burden of action back on the individual, further enhancing the value and significance of one's own actions. Taking life as hell removes fear from the center of spiritual life, and frees members to concentrate on this life, confident that salvation is God's free gift. In the process, magical practices and manipulations of the natural order are set aside. Just as all are equal before God, all are equal in nature. Nature itself is organized along rationally understandable lines. Interfering with these in a capricious or *ad hoc* way is close to sacrilege. Locusts are unlikely to be kept away by holy water.

Weber drew explicit links between religious transformation, intensified spirituality, and a sense of "crisis." At the outset I noted how recent economic, social and political change in Latin America had spurred religious innovation and activism. Do such changes qualify as "crisis" in Weber's terms, and if so, what of it? The word itself is clearly no exaggeration: impoverishment, displacement, pervasive violence, suffering and death have brought crisis home to many. But the religious outcomes differ from what Weber had in mind. In his view, crisis was a likely occasion for charismatic leadership, structural upheaval, or for ideological substitutes in working-class mobilizations. He expected little basic change from Catholicism (too bound up in hierarchy) or from peasants (too dependent on nature to free themselves from magic) whose reputation for piety he regarded as a modern invention of dubious value.

Latin American experience clearly confirms some of Weber's notions but casts serious doubt on others. The current Latin American "crisis" has given only marginal place to charismatic figures, new religious movements, shrines, or miracles (cf. Della Cava, Slater). Despite notable expansion, evangelical Protestantism also remains peripheral; the central axis of religious involvement in the crisis has found expression within the Catholic Church, through new grass

roots structures, along with a host of institutional reforms and theological argument directed at changing religion's place in society, and the place of ordinary people in religion.

The fact that change has arisen within Catholicism and has been centered on groups hitherto believed to be passive and ill-disposed to change suggests the need for another look at the relation between crisis and religious change. To begin with, religious change is clearly more than a matter of ideas alone. Ideas never come in the abstract. The predominant ideas of a culture are closely linked to structures and forms of practice. Ideas also need audiences and mediators, groups of men and women who find the messages meaningful, spread them through time and space, and find the associated forms of practice logical in their own changing circumstances. One of the major impacts group formation can have is to establish traditions of sociability and links of solidarity that make the idea of forming groups (for any purpose) both legitimate and familiar (Kincaid, Putnam, São Paulo, Sklar, Vélez-Ibañez). Bear in mind that most of the communities reviewed in this paper have only limited historical depth. Despite their long history as urban foundations, Cali and Barquisimeto have each grown so spectacularly in the post-war period as to be for all practical purposes new. Massive migration and land invasions have spurred vast expansions of the popular sector in each city, as in Latin America generally. The rural communities examined here are also relatively new. They arose in both countries only with the development of an export market for coffee in the mid to late nineteenth century (Bergquist, Palacios, Roseberry).

For these reasons, it is rare to find much in the way of established patterns of sociability on which to build. Traditional gatherings of the kind reported by Eugen Weber or Maurice Agulhon in their work on change in nineteenth century France are not to be found. One finds no counterpart here to the rural *veillées* discussed by Weber, or to the *chambrées* that according to Agulhon laid a foundation for acceptance of democratic norms coming from the society at large. As Agulhon puts it:

> On the eve of 1848 the *spirit of democracy*, whether immanent or latent, was probably more important than the impact of democratic *ideas* from the *direct* influence of the 'enlightened' minds of the village. But no less fundamental, even if less clearly detected, was the receptiveness that the *chambrées* showed—once again for structural reasons—to bourgeois influences both in the form of ideas and of modes of behaviour (150).

Making friends, sharing experiences, and simply getting together on a regular basis furthers a general growth in sociability. In this light, one of the most enduring contributions democratic and participatory groups make to shaping the general character of politics clearly lies in their role in demystifying authority by giving the tools of association to everyone, making the effort legitimate in religious terms and thus furthering the growth of a truly independent civil society. Successful development of strong associational life and the shift of popular culture from passive resignation, dependence, fatalism and powerlessness to equality, activism and organization would be a cultural and political change of major proportions.

The connection among changing ideas, audiences, and structures is made in ways different from those that some classical formulations suggest. For example, Latin American experience does not confirm Geertz' expectation that declining coherence of a religious world view produces an ideologization of religion. To the contrary, inspection of the record reveals a search for new coherence driven by men and women making themselves into different individuals and communities. Their new stance is no more "ideological" than what went before; what changes is their own sense of self and their capacity to act and to judge. The matter is also not well addressed simply by contrasting elite and popular outlooks, and attributing the gap to diverging class interests. There are differences, to be sure, but these are mediated by connections of ideology and institutional affiliation that underscore synthesis and continued ties rather than simple demarcation.[10]

Ideas and group structures evolve together; neither takes the lead. It is important to realize that more than elective affinities are at issue here. The notion of elective affinity is too passive, and relies overly on conjuncture for its dynamic. But these are active subjects, people out to create a new reality, albeit often on a limited stage. Mannheim's work on ideology and utopia puts the matter of how change can get started and endure in particularly useful terms. In his view, individuals alone cannot turn utopian dreams into reality.

> Only when the utopian conception of the individual seizes upon currents already present in society and gives expression to them, when in this form it flows back into the outlook of the whole group and is translated into action by it, only then can the existing order be challenged by the striving for another order of existence (1936: 207).

In a small and scattered way, this is what is happening in communities and groups across Latin America today. The long-term significance of these experiences lies in how the setting, process, and content of religious change spur ordinary people to draw links between personal life and collective circumstances. Making such connections in an explicit way contributes to the creation of a popular subject by helping people see themselves as independent actors working in and on the world. The transformation of popular images of self and community, and the attendant reworking of core cultural norms about activism, passivity, hierarchy, or equality are an essential first step. This is what lays down a cultural foundation (no matter how tentative at first) for authority or for resistance to its claims. It is here that the human solidarities that make any action endure are built. Changing the theory and practice of ordinary life strengthens the impact ideas and institutions can have, and makes changes in any aspect of life more meaningful, and more likely to last.

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[10] On the contrasting character of elite and popular ideologies and views of one another, see Becker, Levine, forthcoming, Mainwaring, Smith.

Notes on Method

Methodological choices are more than simple matters of technique. They are theory laden, and have important theoretical consequences. To be sure, this formulation is one of the clichés of today's social sciences; specification is therefore in order. This brief appendix outlines the methodological principles that underlie the research reported here. I also provide a few details on the interviews.

I take off from a phenomenological perspective, working insofar as possible with the categories people use in ordinary discourse. As a practical matter, this means taking statements of belief and action at face value. Although I checked statements of facts and descriptions of programs against one another, I resisted the temptation to explain away elements of religious belief or experiences like visions or encounters with spirits.

Working with the categories in people's heads rather than with externally derived issues can be tricky. Some element of distance and externality always remains, and must be accounted for. Care is also needed to avoid taking categories of belief as frozen, once and forever the same. People think about these things, discuss them, and change in overt as well as unstated ways. It is therefore important to know the history of categories, to understand how styles of thought evolve. This can be done by asking directly about change, and also by tracing the institutional rootedness of ideas and the organizational forms through which they diffuse and are maintained.

A related principle concerns the need to place belief and action in meaningful social contexts. Beliefs are not well addressed in abstract terms: they are learned and held by particular people in well defined circumstances. I provided for meaningful contexts by stressing connections among communities, groups, and individuals and building these into the structure of the research. This is the logic of working from the national level to grass roots communities through dense institutional networks that match links maintained through churches (dioceses, religious orders, parishes, etc.) with parallel ties through cooperative groups, state agencies, marketing relations, and the like.

Drawing these overlapping connections with care clarifies a few key points. First, *lo popular* must be addressed in terms of ongoing links between popular sectors and institutions of power and meaning. Popular religion (and popular culture generally) is no "natural" product, springing untainted and full blown from the spontaneous acts of the people. Rather, popular groups find focus and meaning in a continually renegotiated set of ties to structures of domination. These connections provide critical organizational and symbolic ladders on which issues and resources move across social levels. Their persistence indicates that elites and masses both prize the connection. It also suggests that more than class alone is at issue in popular actions. Class shapes needs, expectations, and forms of expression, but the link

between class and action is mediated by institutional connections, organizational strategies, and cross-cutting loyalties. A close look at the legitimation of commitment and action (e.g. with reference to loving the brother you can see) suggests that class is not enough.

These considerations point to the need to bring together what analysis often holds apart: elites and masses, institutions and expressions of popular culture. In practical terms, this makes for reliance on an eclectic but structured bag of tricks. Thus I did not rely on narrative history or documents alone, although these helped set the stage. Instead, I devoted intensive effort to reconstructing local and personal histories through depth interviewing along with considerable archival and documentary research. Instead of a general survey, I combined elite and informational interviewing (at national and diocesan levels) with two standard questionnaires: one for members and leaders of groups; another for priests and sisters. I also collected life histories of members and pastoral agents, including priests, and sisters.

The geographical and organizational relation of research sites to one another is given in Figure 1. Citations from interviews are identified according to a code that denotes the site and specifies a page in the volume of transcript that contains interviews from that site. For example, CR 186 denotes an interview from Cali Rodeo and a passage found on page 186 of that volume. Interview transcript amounts to over 2,300 pages. The following codes are used:

G = General interviews for Venezuela and Colombia.
For rural Colombia: F = Facatativá, C = Caparrapí, Q = Quebradanegra and La Magdalena,
S = San Isidro, A = Agua Fría, T = Tabio, R = Rio Frío.
For urban Colombia: CR = Cali in general and Barrio El Rodeo,
    CA = Barrio Meléndez.
For rural Venezuela: V = Villanueva and surrounding hamlets.
For urban Venezuela: B = barrios in Barquisimeto.

In all, approximately 250 interviews were carried out over a three year period. This number includes many informational interviews and reinterviews. I also did extensive observation of group meetings in all the sites. The formal questionnaire was conducted only after such extensive preliminary work, and often involved reinterviews. The questionnaire was given to a total of 69 lay people (53 Colombians, 16 Venezuelans, 38 men and 31 women) and 13 clerics (6 Colombians and 7 Venezuelans, 5 priests and 8 sisters).

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TABLE 4

VENEZUELA AND COLOMBIA, SELECTED INDICES, INTO THE 1980s

_____

	Venezuela	Colombia
Surface Area (kms^2)	898,805	1,138,338
Population (1986)	17,914,000	29,058,000
Urban (1986)	81.3%	66.6%
Life Expectancy at Birth	69.0 (1985)	62.1 (1981)
Infant Mortality per 1000	26.1 (1985)	60.9 (1981)
Annual Population Growth Rate (1970-85)	2.9%	1.6%
Literate	85.95% (1984)	81% (1981)
Annual Growth Rate GDP		
Cumulative Variation (1981-85)	-9.6%	11.2%
1985 Growth Rate	-1.2%	2.6%
Inflation Rate		
(1960-70)	1.0%	11.2%
(1970-80)	8.4%	21.1%
(1980-84)	11.4%	24.0%

_____

Source: See sources for Table 3.

TABLE 1

CHANGE AND CONFLICT IN LATIN AMERICAN CATHOLICISM, PERIODS

	Pope	Key Political Events	Key Church Events	Church Ideology (Key Issue)	Ideal Church Organization	Image of The Popular	Model Latin American Case
Post-War - 1958	Pius 12	Cold War		Christendom (Defense)	Catholic Action Christian Democrats	Massive Phenomena Ignorance (Popular "Piety")	Chile Brazil (Leme)
1958 - 1968	John 23 Paul 6	Cuban Revolution Democratic Alternatives	Vatican II Medellín	Neo-Christendom Modernization Flirtations with Marxism (Reform)	Decline of Catholic Action Rise of Christian Democracy	Massive Phenomena Ignorance (Popular "Piety")	Chile/ Colombia
1968 - 1979	Paul 6	Rise of Authoritarianism Civil War in Central America	Medellín Puebla Shift in CELAM	Emergence of Liberation Theology Splits (Politics)	Decentralized Groups CEBs	Popular as the *Class* of Poor	Brazil/ Colombia
1979 - ?	John Paul I John Paul 2	Central American Crisis Redemocratization	Puebla Papal Visits	Splits (Popular)	CEBs of Poor	Popular as the *Class* Colombia	El Salvador Brazil

Trends: 1. Rise and Decline of Christian Democracy as a Model.
2. Succession of Key Issues for Church: Marxism, Politics, Violence, Human Rights, "Popular," Unity.
3. Succession of Preferred Organizational Vehicles: Catholic Action, Christian Democracy, Popular/CEBs.

TABLE 2

A TYPOLOGY OF CEBs

_____

	Radical Ideal	Sociocultural Transformation	Conservative Ideal
Origins	Early 1970s	Early - Mid 1970s	Late 1970s
Exemplars	El Salvador 1970s Chile 1970s	Peru Brazil	Colombia
Prevailing Ecclesiology	People of God (Liberationist)	People of God (Liberationist)	Institution Christendom
Prevailing Image of "Popular Religion"	Religion of the Oppressed	Religion/Culture of the Poor	Religion of the Ignorant
Key Values	Authenticity Solidarity	Authenticity Solidarity	Loyalty Unity
Local Autonomy	Yes	Yes	No
Agenda Source	Bible and "Reality Testing"	Bible and "Reality Testing"	Bible and Official Guides
Scope of Action	Local/National	Mostly Local	All Local
Politics	Confrontational	Local/Within Group	"None" (?)
Links to Church	Strong/Backing to Popular	Coordination	Strong, Vertical Control

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TABLE 8   **KEY QUESTIONS ON CEBs**

	Facatativá		Cali	Rural Venezuela
	Agua Fría	**Caparrapí Quebradanegra San Isidro**	**Meléndez**	**Villanueva**
How Founded	Cursillo Graduates	Priests/ Sisters	Priests/ Local Residents	Legion of Mary Members
When Founded	1970-1972	1970-1972	1977	1970-1972 (Cooperative Later)
Meetings/Size	Weekly 15-20	Weekly 12-20	Weekly 10-15	Biweekly 15-20
Agenda Source	Diocese (Adapted)	Diocese Pastoral Agents	Bible Study Discussion Alternative Guides	Legion Guides Bible Study Cooperative
Leader Selection	Elected	Selected	Elected	Elected
Presence of Diocese	None	Through Sisters	None	None
Relation to Priests and Sisters	Occasional	Strong	Localized Contacts with Jesuits	Through Cooperative
"Spillover"	Localized	No	Localized	Strong
Ideal Group	Spiritual/ Social	Devotional/ Activist	Spiritual/ Activist	Spiritual/ Activist
Ideal Member	Mini-Clergy	"Beato"	Activist	Activist

TABLE 7

FIELD RESEARCH SITES: SELECTED TRAITS

_____

	COLOMBIA		VENEZUELA Barquisimeto	
	Facatativá	**Cali**	**Rural**	**Urban**
Main Program Line	Official Bishops Pilot (CRS-ties)	Independent	Jesuit	Jesuit
Social Context	Peasant/ Homogeneous	Urban Invasion Barrios Heterogeneous	Peasant/ Homogeneous	Urban Invasion Barrios Heterogeneous
Traditional Religiosity	High	Low	High	Low
Key Religious Group	Cursillos	CEB	Legion of Mary	Various
Key Social Group	Cooperative Community Stores	"Social Action" Sporadic Organizations	Cooperative, Health Committees	Cooperative, Health Committees
Hierarchical Control	Yes	No	No	No
Concentration of Religious Personnel	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Pastoral Agent Goal	Evanzelization and Material Aid	Cultural Change	Evangelization and Material Aid	Material Aid then Evangelization
Groups Explicitly Christian	Yes	Mixed	No	No
"Spillover"	Confined to Locality	Limited	Yes	Limited

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TABLE 3

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INDICATORS FOR VENEZUELA AND COLOMBIA, SELECTED YEARS

	Total Population	% School Enrollment Ages 6-11	% Labor Force in Agri	Ind	Serv	Agriculture as Share Total GDP	Inflation Rate
Venezuela							
1950	5,034,838	--	42.9	21.4	35.8	--	--
1960	7,523,999	69	33.4	22.5	44.2	7.9	1.0 (1960-70)
1970	10,721,822	78 (*1975)	26.0	24.8	49.3	7.5	8.4 (1970-80)
1980	15,024,000	83	16.1	28.4	55.6	6.5	11.0 (1980-84)
Colombia							
1950	11,548,172	--	57.2	17.9	24.9	--	--
1960	17,484,508	48	50.2	19.5	30.4	32.7	11.2 (1960-70)
1970	21,070,115	64 (*1975)	39.3	23.3	37.4	28.6	21.1 (1970-80)
1980	24,933,000	70	34.3	23.5	42.3	25.8	21.9 (1980-84)

Source: Adapted from data in the following: Inter-American Development Bank, *Economic and Social Progress in Latin America, 1986. Special Section: Agricultural Development*; Inter-American Development Bank, *Economic and Social Progress in Latin America, 1987. Special Section: Labor Force in Employment*; Sheahan, *Patterns of Development in Latin America;* Grindle*, State and Countryside*.

TABLE 5

SELECTED INDICES ON THE CHURCH IN VENEZUELA AND COLOMBIA, 1950-1980

		Parishes		Priests		Sisters	
	Dioceses	Number	Persons Per	Number	Persons Per	Number	Persons Per
Venezuela							
pre 1900	6	--	--	--	--	--	--
1950	13	465	10,828	786	6,406	--	--
1960	20	582	12,928	1,218	6,177	2,919	2,578
1970	26	1,232	13,710	1,976	5,426	4,032	2,659
1980	28	1,459	10,297	1,995	7,531	4,345	3,458
Colombia							
pre 1900	7	--	--	--	--	--	--
1950	33	1,127	10,249	3,003	3,774	8,865	1,303
1960	48	1,433	10,472	4,094	3,765	15,329	1,141
1970	56	1,850	11,389	4,864	4,358	17,699	1,193
1980	59	2,212	13,814	5,330	5,733	17,654	1,534

Source: Adapted from data in the following: Levine, *Religion and Politics in Latin America*, p. 73; Levine, "Continuities in Colombia," p. 307; *Statistical Abstract for Latin America*, Vol. 23; *Catholic Almanac*, selected years; *Statistical Yearbook of the Church*, selected years.

TABLE 6

FACATATIVA, CALI, AND BARQUISIMETO, SELECTED YEARS

	Area (kms^2)	Population	Parishes	Priests	Sisters	Ed. Institutions
Facatativá						
1962	8,000	233,000	32	20	--	--
1970	8,000	350,000	34	65	191	17
1975	6,788	374,000	32	65	196	28
1980	6,788	483,000	32	61	230	12
1985	6,788	550,000	28	55	220	14
Cali						
1960	6,555	906,891	55	189	682	44
1970	2,712	980,000	57	190	1,000	59
1975	2,712	1,250,000	68	231	1,172	53 (*1976)
1980	2,712	1,296,000	74	181	859	90
1985	2,712	1,633,699	81	185	976	113
Barquisimeto						
1960	26,906	502,820	52	82	80	21
1970	19,800	550,000	67	136	200	25
1975	19,800	733,635	72	144	227	37
1980	19,800	836,700	79	148	255	40
1985	19,800	1,115,000	88	186	232	64

Source: *Annuario Pontificio*, selected years.