

CATHOLIC CHARISMATIC RENEWAL IN GUATEMALA

R. Andrew Chesnut has provided the following analysis of the CCR in Guatemala:

Though faced with the stiffest Pentecostal competition in Latin America, the Guatemalan episcopacy extended ecclesiastical recognition somewhat reluctantly to the CCR. The Guatemalan pastoral instruction on the Renewal merits some exploration because it neatly captures the ambivalence with which many episcopacies have given the green light to the CCR. During the 1980s and even today most Latin American bishops are not Charismatics and many have little affinity for its pneumatic spirituality. Nevertheless, despite reports of groups of Renewal members defecting to Pentecostal churches, most national bishops' conferences in the region have come to view the CCR not as a bridge to the Assembly of God, for example, but as a barrier to further losses of the Catholic flock. In welcoming the CCR into the ecclesial fold, the bishops can offer the same pneumatic product as their Protestant rivals. Catholics no longer have to forsake the Virgin and pope in their quest for more spirited religion.

Perhaps the ambivalence of the **Guatemalan bishops** is best captured by the amount of ink devoted to the “fruits” of the CCR, on one hand, and the “risks” on the other. Though enumerated first, the positive points total half as many as the potential dangers, eleven to twenty-one. The episcopal instruction recognizes the CCR's evangelistic work and focus on the Holy Spirit and Jesus as the movement's ripest fruits. Salient among the twenty-one potentially rotten fruits are risks relating to two major and often interrelated themes, faith healing and Episcopal authority. Nearly half of the potential dangers relate directly to faith healing. Risk number eighteen captures the interrelation between the two main episcopal concerns and reveals the threat that faith healing poses to the bishops' charismatic authority. “In Charismatic Renewal groups massive assemblies are often organized at which the sick are prayed for in a special way. These assemblies must be under the responsibility of a priest, authorized for such an event by the bishop, so that everything develops according to the spirit of our Catholic tradition for the greater glory of God and for the good of the infirm who with faith come to receive the healing power of Jesus in his Church” (CEG 415). The principal pastoral recommendations are aimed at increasing ecclesiastical control over the CCR. Priests and religious are urged to become involved in the movement to prevent it from straying and creating “parallel structures” (CEG 417).

The Virgin at the Vanguard

Further evidence of the bishops' ambivalence about approving a Pentecostal type of ecclesial movement is their emphasis on the Virgin as defender of the faith and guardian of Catholic orthodoxy. For a movement rooted in Pentecostal spirituality, which has historically in Latin America been radically anti-Catholic, what better way to preserve the Catholicness of the Renewal than through emphasis on the element that most distinguishes the church from its Protestant competitors. Thus the Virgin in her myriad national and local incarnations has over the past decade and a half come to constitute the dividing line that separates Catholic Charismatics from Pentecostals. Episcopal emphasis on the importance of the Virgin of Guadalupe or Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, among others, is a clear example of the marginal differentiation of a standardized religious product. That is, in

the figure of the Virgin, the church's chief religious producers offer an appealing variant of the pneumatic spirituality shared by both Catholic Charismatics and Pentecostals. Without the Mother of God to differentiate their brand of charismatic spirituality from that of their Protestant rivals only the pontiff is left to guard the bridge leading to Pentecostalism.

Thus in their episcopal recognition of the Guatemalan CCR, the bishops attempt to place the Virgin at the center of the movement. Even before mentioning the positive and negative aspects of the Renewal, the episcopacy devotes an entire section of the instruction to the Virgin's role in the movement. In their opening statement, the bishops remind Charismatics that Pope John Paul II wants Mary to be at the heart of the Renewal since she is the one best equipped to guide and direct the movement (CEG 410). This point is then reiterated in the section on pastoral recommendations in which the Virgin is presented as the "guarantee of orthodoxy...in face of the danger of the certain influence of non-Catholic currents..." (CEG 418-419). Finally, the bishops conclude their pastoral instruction on the Renewal by imploring the Mother of God to ensure faithfulness to the Holy Spirit and the church. "And may Mary, full of grace, help us all to be truly faithful to the Holy Spirit and to support her inspiration for a renewal of our church" (CEG 420).

"A Preferential Option for the Spirit: The Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Latin America's New Religious Economy," a paper delivered at the 2000 meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, Hyatt Regency Miami, March 16-18, 2000.

"A Preferential Option for the Spirit: The Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Latin America's New Religious Economy" by R. Andrew Chesnut. *Latin American Politics and Society*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Spring, 2003), pp. 55-85. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/pss/3177063>

Competitive Spirits: Latin America's New Religious Economy (Paperback)

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Reviews

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effectively to explain a range of phenomena in a unified and consistent way."-- Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion

"This is a bold, meticulous, and highly provocative study of Latin America's free-market religious economy. In identifying a high level of 'consumer demand for spirit-centered religion,' Chesnut has employed a dynamic and controversial model for understanding the reasons behind the rapid growth of Pentecostalism, Catholic Charismatic Renewal, and the religions of the African diaspora in Latin America during recent decades. This is rich, engaging, and important study that should provide grist for scholarly debate for some time to come."--Virginia Garrard-Burnett, Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies, University of Texas, Austin

"Andrew Chesnut has written the must-read book on Latin American religion. The theoretical insights and empirical depth of this work are simply astounding. While specifically concerned with Brazil, Mexico and Guatemala, Chesnut's conclusions about the dynamism of charismatic religious movements extend well beyond these geographical confines. Indeed, anyone interested in contemporary religious movements will find this book indispensable."--Anthony Gill, author of *Rendering Unto Caesar: The Catholic Church and the State in Latin America*

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"Chesnut's work comprises a fine analysis of the contemporary Latin American religious scene that should be read by anybody interested in this topic."--Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies

Product Description

For over four centuries the Catholic Church enjoyed a religious monopoly in Latin America in which potential rivals were repressed or outlawed. Latin Americans were born Catholic and the only real choice they had was whether to actively practice the faith. Taking advantage of the legal disestablishment of the Catholic Church between the late 1800s and the early 1900s, Pentecostals almost single-handedly built a new pluralist religious economy. By the 1950s, many Latin Americans were free to choose from among the hundreds of available religious "products," a dizzying array of religious options that range from the African-Brazilian religion of Umbanda to the New Age group known as the Vegetable Union. R. Andrew Chesnut shows how the development of religious pluralism over the past half-century has radically transformed the "spiritual economy" of Latin America. In order to thrive in this new religious economy, says Chesnut, Latin American spiritual "firms" must develop an attractive product and know how to market it to popular consumers. Three religious groups, he demonstrates, have proven to be the most skilled competitors in the new unregulated religious economy. Protestant Pentecostalism, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, and African diaspora religions such as Brazilian Candomble

and Haitian Vodou have emerged as the most profitable religious producers. Chesnut explores the general effects of a free market, such as introduction of consumer taste and product specialization, and shows how they have played out in the Latin American context. He notes, for example, that women make up the majority of the religious consumer market, and explores how the three groups have developed to satisfy women's tastes and preferences. Moving beyond the Pentecostal boom and the rise and fall of liberation theology, Chesnut provides a fascinating portrait of the Latin American religious landscape.

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Competitive-Spirits-Americas-Religious-Economy/dp/0195314867>