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THESIS

**THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND POLITICS IN
COLOMBIA: A SHIFTING FOUNDATION**

by

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March 2016

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**THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND POLITICS IN COLOMBIA: A SHIFTING
FOUNDATION**

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ABSTRACT

Recent research reveals a precipitous decrease in Catholic adherents across Latin America. Since 1970, numerous Latin Americans have professed a shift to Protestantism. Scholars have analyzed this trend within certain countries and as a regional tendency, but have not comprehensively addressed the Colombian case.

Colombia is often considered the most Catholic of Latin American countries, with the Church historically much enmeshed in national politics. This thesis evaluates shifts in identified Colombian Catholics, the emergence of Protestantism, and other religious phenomena during three key historical epochs since 1930. Given Catholicism's historical bond with politics and society, these trends are meaningful for the future of Colombian politics.

While this thesis reaches some conclusions regarding future Colombian religious-political dynamics, its major contribution is its synthesis of the history and literature covering the chief religious-political themes in Colombian history since 1930 and revealing patterns of religious-political interaction, where such an endeavor has not been accomplished elsewhere. Aiming to integrate sufficiently detailed historical accounts and statistics with diverse published academic analyses, this thesis lays the groundwork for more detailed prognostic studies on the future of the Colombian political system as it relates to a changing, yet in some respects incongruously stationary religious environment.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
A.	IMPORTANCE OF THE QUESTIONS	3
B.	TYPOGRAPHIC CONVENTIONS.....	3
C.	REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	4
	1. Historical Framework	5
	2. Unreliable Measures of Religiosity.....	6
	3. La Violencia.....	7
	4. Protestant Growth and Post-La Violencia Dynamics.....	8
	5. The Frente Nacional and Popular Engagement.....	9
	6. The Constituent Assembly and Thereafter.....	9
D.	POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES	11
E.	DESIGN OF THE ANALYSIS	13
II.	A CONCISE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.....	15
A.	COLOMBIA’S DEMOCRACY AND THE CHURCH.....	15
B.	THE CHURCH’S POLITICAL NATURE	18
C.	1930: LIBERALS TAKE POWER	20
III.	1930–1960: LA VIOLENCIA.....	23
A.	SUMMARY	23
B.	PRECURSORS AND CAUSES.....	23
	1. Gaitán: The Catalyst.....	25
	2. El Bogotazo	26
C.	GENERAL CHARACTER OF LA VIOLENCIA.....	26
D.	POLITICAL UNDERCURRENTS.....	28
E.	THE CHURCH’S RELATIONSHIP TO VIOLENCE	30
F.	PROTESTANTS REPRESSED.....	33
G.	PROTESTANT RESILIENCE.....	35
H.	CATHOLIC REFLECTIONS	36
I.	ANALYSIS	37
	1. Shifting Paradigms.....	38
	2. On Catholicism’s Moral Authority	39
	3. Criticism of Adherent Statistics.....	40
	4. Optimistic Perspectives on Catholic Roles	42
	5. Evolving Nature of the Conflict: Emerging Guerrillas	43
J.	CONCLUSION	44

IV.	1960–1990: THE FRENTE NACIONAL AND VATICAN II	45
A.	SUMMARY	45
B.	SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATIONS.....	46
	1. Vatican II.....	46
	2. Camilo Torres.....	47
	3. Catholic Action.....	48
	4. Priest-Government Clashes.....	49
	5. Urbanization’s Effects on Catholic Unity	49
	6. Medellín 1968: Latin American Bishops’ Conference.....	50
	7. CEBs.....	52
	8. Liberation Theology.....	52
	9. Puebla.....	54
C.	SUMMARY OF CATHOLIC CHALLENGES	55
D.	ANALYSIS	56
	1. Trends Toward (and Away from) Popular Linkages	56
	2. Decreasing and Questionable Adherence	60
	3. Urbanization and Changing Social Norms	61
E.	CONCLUSION	62
V.	1990–PRESENT: CONSTITUTIONAL OPENING	65
A.	SUMMARY	65
B.	PRECURSORS TO THE 1990 CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY	65
C.	THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY AND ITS RESULTS.....	69
	1. Fiscal Policy	69
	2. Political Pluralism, Civil Rights, and Human Rights	70
	3. Source of Sovereignty	71
	4. Education	71
	5. Freedom of Religion.....	72
	6. Cultural Protections At Odds With Religious Liberty	73
D.	AFTERMATH: THE LEGAL VERSUS THE REAL COUNTRY	76
	1. Protestantism’s Rise: Political?	79
	2. Possible Explanations for Secularization’s Emergence.....	79
E.	CATHOLICISM’S STRUGGLE AGAINST SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND POLITICAL MODERNIZATION	82
F.	CATHOLICISM’S STRENGTHS	84
	1. Catholic Charismatics	84
	2. Creating Linkages That Secularism Cannot	84
G.	THE CONTINUING INSURGENT CONFLICT’S LIMITED RELEVANCE	85

H.	CONCLUSION	87
VI.	DISSECTING PROTESTANT GROWTH.....	89
A.	SUMMARY	89
B.	GENDER FACTORS	89
C.	A NORTH AMERICAN-DRIVEN MOVEMENT?	91
D.	PENTECOSTALISM: A MOVEMENT VERSUS AN INSTITUTION.....	91
E.	REPRESSION'S ROLE	92
F.	GOVERNMENT REGULATION OR INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATION... OR BOTH?	93
G.	OTHER CATHOLIC-PROTESTANT DISTINCTIONS.....	94
H.	THE STATISTICAL BOTTOM LINE	95
VII.	CONCLUSION	97
A.	SUMMARY AND COMPARISON OF THE PERIODS EVALUATED	97
B.	HYPOTHESES ASSESSED	99
C.	FINAL COMMENTS	101
	LIST OF REFERENCES	103
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	113

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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Share of Catholics Decreasing in Latin America; Protestants and Religiously Unaffiliated Increasing (% of Total Population Belonging to Each Religious Group).....	1
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LIST OF TABLES

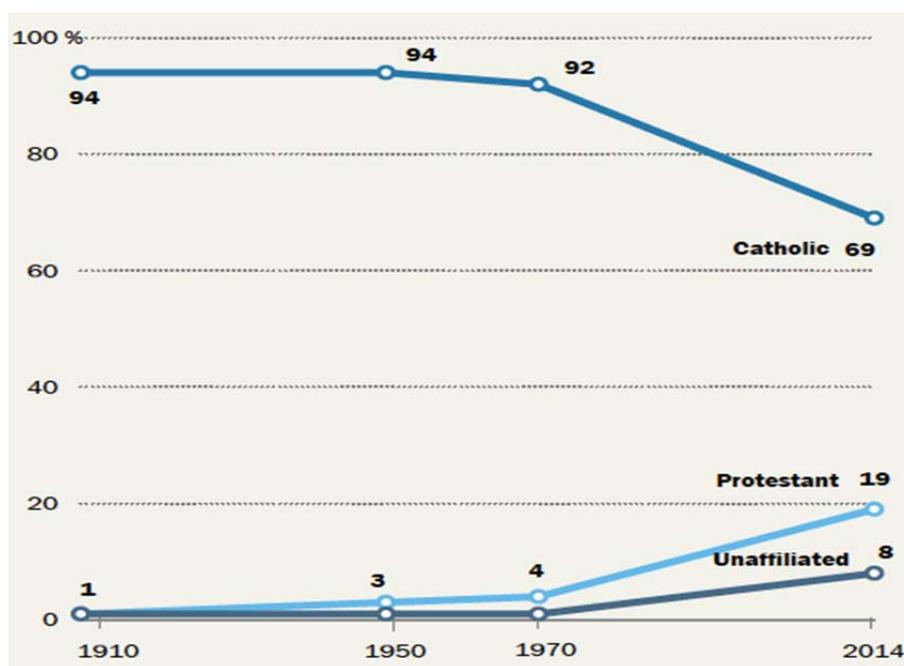
Table 1.	Catholic Affiliation in Colombia (% of Population).....	2
Table 2.	La Violencia Deaths By Year	28
Table 3.	Total Population and Protestant Population Estimates: Colombia, 1905–2005.....	89

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I. INTRODUCTION

Recent research headlined by a comprehensive 2014 Pew Research Center study reveals a precipitous decrease in Catholic adherents across Latin America.¹ Prior to 1970, most Latin American countries were greater than 90% Catholic. Figure 1 reveals a trend of Latin Americans professing shifts to Protestantism or away from religion entirely since 1970.

Figure 1. Share of Catholics Decreasing in Latin America; Protestants and Religiously Unaffiliated Increasing (% of Total Population Belonging to Each Religious Group)



Source: “Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region,” Pew Research Center, November 13, 2014, 26, <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/13/religion-in-latin-america/>.

Scholars have analyzed these trends within certain countries, especially Brazil, and as a broader regional tendency, but current scholarship has not comprehensively addressed the Colombian case.

¹ “Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region” (Pew Research Center, November 13, 2014), <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/13/religion-in-latin-america/>.

Colombia is often considered the most Catholic of Latin American countries.² This is for various reasons, but to generalize, the Catholic Church in Colombia historically has so deeply invaded (and been invaded by) government and politics that its resultant social position has been little short of supreme. Nevertheless, that dominance has gone in waves throughout Colombia’s history, all while Catholic adherence as a social construct has remained paramount. Colombian Catholicism joined the broader regional down trend post-1970, opening the door to a political–religious environment that has not been seen before in that country. Colombian Catholicism’s decline, however, has been slower and less pronounced than in most of its neighbors. Table 1 reveals Colombia’s 2014 Catholic adherent percentage as 10% above the Latin American average presented previously in Figure 1 (observe the table footnote for an explanation of the low 1910 statistic).

Table 1. Catholic Affiliation in Colombia (% of Population)³

1910	1950	1970	2014	1910-1970 Diff.	1970-2014 Diff.
80	91	95	79	+15	-16

Adapted from: “Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region,” Pew Research Center, November 13, 2014, 27, <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/13/religion-in-latin-america/>.

² James E. Goff, “The Persecution of Protestant Christians in Colombia, 1948–1958, With an Investigation of Its Background and Causes” (master’s thesis, San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1965), 1/1; Justo L. González and Ondina E. González, *Christianity in Latin America: A History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 171; Ivan Vallier, *Catholicism, Social Control and Modernization in Latin America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1970), 34; Elizabeth E. Brusco, *The Reformation of Machismo: Evangelical Conversion and Gender in Colombia* (University of Texas Press, 2011), 23.

³ The Pew study states that 80% of Colombians were Catholic in 1910, a statistic that allegedly increased to 91% by 1950. Initially, this thesis intended to analyze this early 20th century increase as an anomaly to the rest of Latin America, for which the 1910 numbers roughly mirror the 1950 ones. It appears, however, that this statistic is a mistake. A footnote from Benjamin Haddox’s 1961 dissertation is revealing. He does his own math, excluding the populations of two departments whose census did not record religious affiliation (11.5% of total population). Benjamin E. Haddox, “A Sociological Study of the Institution of Religion in Colombia” (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1962), 37. Were this unspecified portion of the population included as Catholics, the 1910 number would fall within 0.5% of the 1950 result in the Pew study. The 1951 Colombian census did not ask for religious affiliation, meaning the Pew researchers must have pulled that year’s data from other sources (Haddox, “A Sociological Study of the Institution of Religion in Colombia,” 37). While this explanation for the relatively low 1910 Catholic adherent level is not watertight, it is sufficient for this thesis to justify focusing in more depth on recent periods.

This thesis evaluates and compares changes in identified Colombian Catholics during three key historical epochs since 1930. This evaluation includes some analysis of other notable religious phenomena, especially the rise of Protestantism and secularism. There are two major questions to answer: What has driven these shifts, and how will these religious changes affect religion's relationship with Colombian politics in the future?

A. IMPORTANCE OF THE QUESTIONS

Catholic influence is ubiquitous in Latin American political history. This is especially true in Colombia, which as recently as 1991 removed constitutional mandates of Catholicism as the state religion. Political patterns and historical institutions of ecclesiastical influence⁴ remain relatively fresh. Nevertheless, in spite of the Catholic Church's official persistence and moves toward engaging burgeoning civil society as it arose during the most recent half-century, it has also seen a steady exodus of adherents—a trend scholarship has only recently emphasized (note the previously cited Pew study).

If past Catholic institutions are politically and thus socially intertwined, these trends should mean something for the future of Colombian politics. It will prove useful to discover how past religious dynamics affected the Colombian political environment in order to anticipate how modern shifts in religious dynamics may affect future political outcomes, including the resolution (or not) of the socio-political conflicts that have plagued the country for decades.

B. TYPOGRAPHIC CONVENTIONS

Certain terms are used often and should be clarified: *Catholic* and *Church* (capital "C") refer to the Roman Catholic Church. *Protestant* represents Christians who are not Catholic. The term *Evangelical* is not used except where directly quoted, since not all Protestants consider themselves Evangelical. The purpose of this thesis is not to delineate the differences among Christian denominations. Although terminological nuances and doctrinal distinctions exist, this thesis uses a single term for simplicity and clarity; it

⁴ The word *influence*, as this thesis uses it, means an ability to affect the sentiments or actions of a person, group, or entity.

therefore refers to all non-Catholic Christians as Protestant. For consistency, the word *church* (lowercase “c”) refers to non-Catholic church entities.

C. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature on the Catholic Church in Colombia is existent but sporadic. Much of the research available is spotted within works that form a broader body on Latin America as a whole. Few authors have focused specifically on Colombia, and among them, many have published untranslated Spanish editions that present challenges both for acquisition and translation. This thesis references Spanish-language literature when feasible, since it often represents the perspectives of those closest to the issues, while recognizing that an English speaker’s distance from the issues may improve objectivity. That presumption notwithstanding, non-Colombians have their own biases as well.

Objectivity of the literature is an unavoidable challenge. Russell Ramsey, for example, observed in 1973 that academic discourse on the political, religious, and social conflict that was *La Violencia* (a period of intense political and social violence that ravaged Colombia from the late 1940s through the 1950s) constitutes an “emotional and politically supercharged atmosphere.” He claimed that the then-existent literature was, as a rule, biased (domestic authors) or misguided (international authors).⁵ In general, it seems that the more recent the scholarship, the more objective the perspective. Much of the scholarship on Catholic history in Colombia is, however, dated, and is in some cases used for its factual evidence more than its argumentative leanings or conclusions. The conclusions herein favor the preponderance of evidence, observing general trends and using examples to elaborate. Naturally, there are exceptions to every generalization, which this thesis aims to represent where possible.

The literature can be sliced in a number of ways: Those that study Catholicism within the broader Latin American context and those that focus specifically on Colombia, or those interested in specific themes like gender roles or social organization versus those who treat the Colombian religious situation broadly. Within those categories, some

⁵ Russell W. Ramsey, “Critical Bibliography on La Violencia in Colombia,” *Latin American Research Review* 8, no. 1 (April 1, 1973): 3, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2502694>.

analyze the last century in its entirety while others focus on specific eras of history. The literature that covers history more broadly tends to repeat itself from author to author, providing mutual corroboration but limited depth. This study finds the fidelity necessary for valuable conclusions through a synergy of the broad with the specific.

1. Historical Framework

In covering three historical epochs (1930–1960: La Violencia era, 1960–1990: *Frente Nacional*⁶ and Vatican II, and 1990–present: new Colombian constitution and no official state religion), the content that follows aims to balance between making analysis unmanageably broad and ignoring history altogether. A certain amount of pre-1930 Catholic political history in Colombia is helpful for framing the body of analysis to come.

Patricia Londoño-Vega offers a detailed view of the Colombian Church's influence and power structure in politics and society between 1850–1930, providing an historical backdrop for the time periods treated in detail here.⁷ Cornelia Butler Flora adds depth to this backdrop with her demographic history of Colombia that recognizes geography as a significant player in post-colonial ethnic segregation, which we will find is one notable dynamic for this study.⁸

Among modern scholars who have written comprehensive works on Catholicism in Latin America, John Frederick Schwaller is at the fore. He covers in systematic-historical order the history of Latin American Catholicism “from conquest to revolution and beyond.”⁹ His book's usefulness for this study is limited, however, as only one small section speaks specifically to Colombia, focusing on La Violencia. A more dated, but prolific scholar on Latin American Catholicism is Daniel H. Levine. A political scientist,

⁶ The Frente Nacional was a political power-sharing regime ostensibly aimed at decreasing partisan violence.

⁷ Patricia Londoño-Vega, *Religion, Culture, and Society in Colombia: Medellín and Antioquia, 1850–1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

⁸ Cornelia Butler Flora, *Pentecostalism in Colombia: Baptism by Fire and Spirit* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976), 68–69.

⁹ John Frederick Schwaller, *The History of the Catholic Church in Latin America: From Conquest to Revolution and Beyond* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), quotation is the book's subtitle.

Levine has written some Colombia-specific literature.¹⁰ He analyzes the relationships between politics and religion, but also evaluates social dynamics, a puzzle piece that any discussion of politics and religion is incomplete without. Even his work on broader Latin America offers parcels of wisdom on these dynamics in Colombia.¹¹ Levine's scholarship provides a solid foundation on which to build more detailed analysis throughout the periods in question.

Levine's more recent work, along with Satya Pattnayak, and Bushnell and Hudson bring historical background into focus on contemporary dynamics. Their arguments focus around the impacts of increased popular organization and community-based strength over hierarchical norms.¹²

2. Unreliable Measures of Religiosity

In 1962, Benjamin Haddox produced a then-comprehensive dissertation on the sociology of religion through Colombia's history. He emphasizes the power of Catholic traditionalism, especially in rural environments, with respect to issues like violence and social continuity.¹³ Local heritage, rather than issues, historically drove political party

¹⁰ Daniel H. Levine, "Colombia: The Institutional Church and the Popular," in *Religion and Political Conflict in Latin America*, ed. Daniel H. Levine (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 187–217; Daniel H. Levine, *Religion and Politics in Latin America: The Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

¹¹ Daniel H. Levine, ed., *Churches and Politics in Latin America* (Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications, Inc, 1980); Daniel H. Levine, ed., *Religion and Political Conflict in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); Daniel H. Levine, *Popular Voices in Latin American Catholicism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); Daniel H. Levine, *Politics, Religion and Society in Latin America* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012); Daniel H. Levine, "Religion and Politics, Politics and Religion: An Introduction," in *Churches and Politics in Latin America*, ed. Daniel H. Levine (Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications, Inc, 1980), 16–40.

¹² Daniel H. Levine, "The Future of Christianity in Latin America: Working Paper #340" (Kellogg Institute, August 2007), 28, <http://kellogg.nd.edu/publications/workingpapers/religion.shtml>; Satya R. Pattnayak, "Social Change, Political Competition, and Religious Innovation in Latin America: An Introduction," in *Organized Religion in the Political Transformation of Latin America*, ed. Satya R. Pattnayak (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995), 7; David Bushnell and Rex A. Hudson, "The Society and Its Environment," in *Colombia: A Country Study*, ed. Rex A. Hudson, 5th ed., Area Handbook Series (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 2010), 125.

¹³ Haddox, "Sociological Study," Chapter VI of Haddox's dissertation centers on these and similar issues.

alignment in Colombia, adds Robert H. Dix.¹⁴ Nevertheless, Haddox specifically does allow for catalysts of change, a point that Flora advances in her 1984 work on Pentecostalism, a prominent Protestant denomination. She observes various signals of decreased religiosity among Colombian Catholics during the second epoch studied in this thesis.¹⁵ Marco Palacios elaborates on the various aspects of the Catholic institution that counterintuitively fed such decreased religiosity and worked against the Church's unity and supremacy in Colombia.¹⁶

3. La Violencia

Numerous authors approach the question of the Church-State relationship during La Violencia. Carlos A. Leon touches on the psychological aspects of religion's use in justifying political violence, and elaborates on how such a "coexistence of religious norms with attitudes of rejection and antagonism to these norms" was possible in Colombia.¹⁷ Dix contends that this coexistence and its resultant moral inefficacy caused the Church to miss an opportunity to strengthen itself by unifying the nation.¹⁸

Focusing specifically on Protestant persecution during La Violencia, James E. Goff argues for Conservative Catholic political affiliation as the primary cause for Protestant persecution.¹⁹ He also claims that high statistical Catholicism in Colombia is a façade preserved by Catholic social power.²⁰ Rodolfo Ramón de Roux is not so certain, showcasing Catholic arguments against alleged Protestant ties to subversion. Roux's

¹⁴ Robert H. Dix, *Colombia: The Political Dimensions of Change*, 1st edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 222.

¹⁵ Cornelia Butler Flora, "Religiosity among Working Class Catholic Colombians," in *The Catholic Church and Religions in Latin America*, ed. Thomas C. Bruneau, Chester E. Gabriel, and Mary Mooney (Montreal: McGill University Centre for Developing-Area Studies, 1984), 67–87.

¹⁶ Marco Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence: A History of Colombia, 1875–2002*, trans. Richard Stoller (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2006).

¹⁷ Carlos A. Leon, "Unusual Patterns of Crime During La Violencia in Colombia," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 125, no. 11 (May 1, 1969): 1573, doi:10.1176/ajp.125.11.1564.

¹⁸ Dix, *Colombia: The Political Dimensions of Change*, 310–11.

¹⁹ Goff, "The Persecution of Protestant Christians in Colombia, 1948–1958, With an Investigation of Its Background and Causes," 2/1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2/17–19, 2/28, 2/55, 11/3–4.

evidence is mostly anecdotal, however, and centered on Catholic sources.²¹ Vernon Lee Fluharty examines vertical disparities in both the Colombian Church and in the country's politics—he argues that what happened at the bottom was not necessarily the will of the top, and vice-versa.²² Finally, Palacios examines the urban-rural dimension, noting that as violence drove urban migration, radical guerrilla groups in the countryside gained strength and conflict shifted away from traditional political poles.²³ These dynamics were the beginning of contemporary socio-political conflicts in Colombia.

4. Protestant Growth and Post-La Violencia Dynamics

Respecting increased Protestantism in Colombia, Elizabeth Brusco and David Stoll argue that Catholic political monopoly may have galvanized Protestant growth by forcing it to operate at a grassroots, movement level.²⁴ Virginia Garrard-Burnett agrees, specifically claiming the positive impacts of decreased machismo in such grassroots environments.²⁵ William K. Kay and Cornelia Butler Flora both contribute thorough analyses of Pentecostalism, a dominant Protestant denomination.²⁶ While Kay's work offers limited Colombia-specific insight, Flora's does, focusing on geographic, class, and gender-based power dynamics, emphasizing social dislocation as the key driver of religious shifts. A contrasting perspective comes from Anthony Gill, who presents a

²¹ Rodolfo Ramón de Roux, *Una Iglesia en Estado de Alerta: Funciones Sociales y Funcionamiento del Catolicismo Colombiano, 1930–1980* (Bogotá: Servicio Colombiano de Comunicación Social, 1983).

²² Vernon Lee Fluharty, *Dance of the Millions: Military Rule and the Social Revolution in Colombia, 1930–1956* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1957).

²³ Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence*, 161.

²⁴ Brusco, *Evangelical Conversion*, 143; David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?: The Politics of Evangelical Growth*, First Edition edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 318.

²⁵ Elizabeth Brusco, “The Reformation of Machismo: Asceticism and Masculinity among Colombian Evangelicals,” in *Rethinking Protestantism in Latin America*, ed. Virginia Garrard-Burnett and David Stoll (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 143–58. Cited in Virginia Garrard-Burnett, “Conclusion: Is This Latin America's Reformation?,” in *Rethinking Protestantism in Latin America*, ed. Virginia Garrard-Burnett and David Stoll (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 205.

²⁶ William K. Kay, *Pentecostalism* (London: SCM Press, 2009); Flora, *Pentecostalism in Colombia*.

supply and demand theory—that decreased government influence on religion increases its diversity, supply, and consumption.²⁷

5. The Frente Nacional and Popular Engagement

As the post-La Violencia political and social environment re-stabilized under the Frente Nacional, the Church faced an adaptation crisis. Robert H. Dix examines the political nature of how the Colombian Church hierarchy responded to the new Catholic environment under Vatican II and the new Colombian environment in general, which was urbanizing, modernizing, and demanding greater social inclusion.²⁸ That adaptation proved challenging: Flora observes that generally, Colombian Catholic leadership discouraged movements toward lay leadership and the social engagement common in neighboring countries.²⁹ Thomas C. Bruneau and W. E. Hewitt build upon this point, exploring the ways that the Latin American sociocultural environment has limited the Catholic Church's options for innovation in the face of changing social structures and pressures.³⁰ David E. Mutchler, Roux, and Levine all offer arguments for Catholicism's incipient decline in the decades following La Violencia, rooted in the disconnect between the new Colombian social reality and the strength of Catholic institutionalism in the Colombian Church.³¹

6. The Constituent Assembly and Thereafter

By the 1990 constituent assembly, concludes Gene Burns, the Church had not given up on its political role, but had resigned itself to a subordinate, nonpartisan

²⁷ Anthony Gill, "Government Regulation, Social Anomie and Protestant Growth in Latin America a Cross-National Analysis," *Rationality and Society* 11, no. 3 (August 1, 1999): 287–316, doi:10.1177/104346399011003002.

²⁸ Dix, *Colombia: The Political Dimensions of Change*.

²⁹ Flora, "Religiosity among Working Class Catholic Colombians," 83.

³⁰ Thomas C. Bruneau and W. E. Hewitt, "Catholicism and Political Action in Brazil: Limitations and Prospects," in *Conflict and Competition: The Latin American Church in a Changing Environment*, ed. Edward L. Cleary and Hannah W. Stewart-Gambino (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992), 45.

³¹ David E. Mutchler, *The Church as a Political Factor in Latin America: With Particular Reference to Colombia and Chile* (New York: Praeger, 1971); Roux, *Estado de Alerta*; Levine, "Institutional Church."

appearance even while continuing to pursue influence behind the scenes.³² Ten years after the 1991 constitution and the new religious freedom it provided, Paul Freston observed that Protestant political participation remained active but of minor impact; he postulated continued preeminence for the two traditional Colombian parties.³³ But Peter L. Berger deepens Freston's analysis, distinguishing between the democratic outcomes of collective religious mobilization and individual conviction.³⁴ The combined actions of individuals may prove of greater weight on the system than do institutionalized religious endeavors. That question notwithstanding, we must ask what impelled this drive for constitutional religious freedom.

Although secularization theory itself is beyond this thesis' scope, the discussion surrounding it is of use since we are examining significant statistical religious shifts. Authors examining secularization include Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, who relate levels of religious adherence with poverty, and Ekrem Karakoç and Birol Başkan, who make a contrasting connection between religion and inequality.³⁵ Anthony Gill and Erik Lundsgaarde claim that welfare programs are the prime correlate.³⁶

Frances Hagopian proposes a new framework to explain the decisions of religious power-holders that can be applied in Colombia's modern pluralistic religious environment. She argues that civil societies hold the key to such policies; where the Church is strongly linked to civil society, it tends to engage on that level, whereas when civil society linkages are weak, the Church seeks a voice within and protection through

³² Gene Burns, *The Frontiers of Catholicism: The Politics of Ideology in a Liberal World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 165.

³³ Paul Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America* (West Nyack, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 227–8, 235–6, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/alltitles/docDetail.action?docID=10130412>.

³⁴ Peter L. Berger, *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999).

³⁵ Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Ekrem Karakoç and Birol Başkan, "Religion in Politics: How Does Inequality Affect Public Secularization?," *Comparative Political Studies* 45, no. 12 (December 1, 2012): 1510–41, doi:10.1177/0010414012453027.

³⁶ Anthony Gill and Erik Lundsgaarde, "State Welfare Spending and Religiosity A Cross-National Analysis," *Rationality and Society* 16, no. 4 (November 1, 2004): 399–436, doi:10.1177/1043463104046694.

political alliances.³⁷ While it does not specifically analyze Colombia, Hagopian's argument is a logical place to conclude this review of the literature. It summarizes cursorily the Catholic Church's roles, actions, and confusion during the time periods evaluated here. What it does not do is apply nicely to Protestant political roles in the new pluralistic environment. For that, this thesis offers some hypotheses.

D. POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Some argue that a decline in Catholic adherents in Latin America is little more than a reality-check, as those who professed the faith out of compulsion or socio-political pressure in the past are finding new freedoms to simply be honest. Common sense certainly testifies to the compelling nature of such a claim. Nevertheless, in Colombia the faith was something other than what it was in the rest of Latin America. It was ingrained so deeply in the national psyche that its tenets could be used to endorse all manner of political ends, from conquest to cleansing, benevolence to torture—after all of which the Church remained official *and* ostensibly embraced by a statistically unanimous population.³⁸

This hypothesis continues to argue that the beginnings of statistical Catholic decline coincided with decreased Catholic control in social and political spheres and diminished threats to life and property associated with dissent. The argument claims that Church dominance was a matter of its elite status, driven by elites rather than actual faith among (at least a portion of) its adherents. The delay in the statistical Catholic exodus in Colombia until some years after the harshest persecution of non-Catholics supports this argument.

An alternative explanation for the current decline is that time and experience revealed a dark side of Catholicism that when exposed, began to drive adherents away and toward alternatives: many to Protestantism, others to renounce religion entirely.

³⁷ Frances Hagopian, "Latin American Catholicism in an Age of Religious and Political Pluralism: A Framework for Analysis" (working paper #332, Kellogg Institute, December 2006), 2.

³⁸ Regarding Catholicism's pervasive role in Colombian life: Vallier, *Catholicism, Social Control and Modernization*, 34; Roux, *Estado de Alerta*, 74; Goff, "The Persecution of Protestant Christians in Colombia, 1948–1958, With an Investigation of Its Background and Causes," 2/11; Data regarding Catholic adherents: "Religion in Latin America," 27.

Some of the Pew study results that reveal the most common reasons former Catholics cite for leaving the Church support this argument. Those reasons mostly have to do with things that their experience in Catholicism lacked: such as “personal connection with God,” “morality,” “worship style,” “outreach,” and benevolence for members.³⁹

A third argument is that external influences drove this shift. This hypothesis in part refers to the role of foreign missionaries of non-Catholic faiths (principally Protestant Christians) arriving in Colombia and converting Catholics. It also refers, however, to the role of state actors (principally the United States) in promulgating their own initiatives using aid or research funds as carrots for participation. Finally, the Catholic hierarchy itself comprises an external influence structure.⁴⁰ All three of the above hypotheses are likely correct to some degree, but regardless of the reason for the shift, the second (and more important) goal of this thesis is to compare the effects of religion on politics under differing circumstances across time with an aim toward anticipating future political–religious interplay.

As Protestantism increases (alongside agnostics and other unaffiliateds) and the historically dominant role of the institutional Catholic Church declines, two potential outcomes are apparent. First, that as the historically pacific and heterogeneous Protestant movement encourages greater political freedom, those who believe in the God of the Bible no longer feel the need to side with a specific church or party affiliation. This argument also claims an increase in peaceful political discourse since in its ideal case, political affiliation is (at least theoretically) no longer tied to elite power structures, religious or political.

The second alternative is simply that Catholic *believers* have remained basically unchanged in demographic proportion, and that the only reason for the changes in *adherents* observed in the Pew study is earlier social and political pressure that drove many to identify with Catholicism while in fact their hearts were not truly engaged. The outcome of this argument is that the Colombian Catholic Church remains essentially

³⁹ “Religion in Latin America,” 5.

⁴⁰ Regarding U.S. and Catholic hierarchy influence (detailed in Chapter IV): Mutchler, *The Church as a Political Factor in Latin America*.

where it was a little over one century ago. Were this true, we might expect a mixed bag of religious political plays by the Catholic Church in the decades to come, most of which would be reactive, judging from history—the difference being Protestant and non-affiliated minorities that are increasingly involved in the process.

E. DESIGN OF THE ANALYSIS

The chapters that follow divide the late 20th century (1930–present) in Colombia into three principal epochs respecting the Catholic Church and politics. Their divisions are not black and white; some overlap between periods is inevitable. 1930–1960 constitutes the La Violencia era; 1960–1990, when the National Front political regime tempered political unrest while re-establishing elite political dominance and Vatican II transformed the methods of Catholicism; and 1990–present, which represents Colombia under its new constitution and without Catholicism as the state religion.

This thesis evaluates each epoch respecting Church influence in politics and vice-versa. As previously noted, such analysis demands a corresponding examination of the social sphere, as religion and politics could not exist without it. The analysis considers the methods and modes of political and religious change evident from Catholicism’s hand in the varying social and political environments represented by the three epochs. Protestantism as a competing religious system is examined as applicable.

Finally, the conclusions from these comparisons offer insights into how the Catholic Church and the transforming religious environment in Colombia will bear on politics in the future.

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II. A CONCISE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A. COLOMBIA'S DEMOCRACY AND THE CHURCH

Any attempt to dissect a modern topic requires an understanding of history and its connections with the present issue. A cursory review of pre-1930 Catholic political history in Colombia proves beneficial for this thesis' analysis.

Colombia boasts the longest-running democracy in Latin America, but as Ana María Bejarano and Eduardo Pizarro observe, it “has always been a democracy with adjectives.”⁴¹ Identifying the crucial distinction between “democratization of culture and ordinary life [and democracy] at the level of institutions,” Levine explains that in Colombia, “‘democracy’ has meant civilian rule, party competition, and limited mobilization. Prevailing norms have not furthered the extension of democratic ideals to social relations or associational life generally. To the contrary, hierarchy has been the order of the day in Colombia, with little legitimate place provided either for popular mobilization or for the construction of democratic patterns of governance within organizations”⁴² The Church historically played heavily in that hierarchical order.

According to Ivan Vallier, the Colombian Church is often deemed the most “authentic” and “traditional” in Latin America, and historically was extensively involved in non-clerical decision making and action.⁴³ It is recognized among Latin American Churches as historically one of the most intertwined with public institutions. This privileged position traditionally gave the Church considerable leverage and support for its politics.⁴⁴ Indeed, from colonization through the La Violencia period, the Church was politically privileged and institutionally fortified by law and custom.⁴⁵ As the official

⁴¹ Ana María Bejarano and Eduardo Pizarro, “From ‘Restricted’ to ‘Besieged’: The Changing Nature of the Limits to Democracy in Colombia,” in *The Third Wave of Democratization in Latin America: Advances and Setbacks*, ed. Frances Hagopian and Scott P. Mainwaring (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 235.

⁴² Levine, *Popular Voices*, 91.

⁴³ Vallier, *Catholicism, Social Control and Modernization*, 123.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴⁵ Brusco, *Evangelical Conversion*, 23.

religion of most Latin American countries, Colombia included, Catholicism was preeminent throughout life and statehood. From colonization through the mid-twentieth century, the Church faced little viable competition and relied on its elite position rather than market forces to subsist. Levine calls it a “lazy monopolist.”⁴⁶ The Colombian Church and State were as one: a “model of the traditional ideal of Christendom”—it administrated society through birth, education, marriage, and death.⁴⁷ Levine observes that Colombian Church leadership historically took for given their authority’s tentacled relationships with various aspects of Colombian life; indeed such relationships were central to Church unity and legitimacy.⁴⁸ This institutional and hierarchical nature meant that even if the Church sought to extract itself from politics, it would not be able entirely to do so. Social, economic, and political issues such as land rights, for example, gave rise to conflict between various levels of society and government, all of which the Church was integrated in. Priestly actions were unavoidably political.⁴⁹

In contrast to some other Latin American countries, where the capital is the center of culture and administration, Colombia’s geographically separated administrative departments also represented variant cultural divisions. This design fit well with the Church’s historical organization, which emphasized territory-based power and influence through localized, paternalistic relations with the laity.⁵⁰ The Church operated with little accountability. In some far-flung regions, a priest was not only a religious figure, but also the center of socio-political authority and the community’s gateway to the rest of the world.⁵¹ Such absolute authority led one mid-nineteenth century missionary in New Granada (now Colombia) to observe, “the church fostered ‘mere ceremonies irrespective

⁴⁶ Levine, *Politics, Religion, and Society*, 21.

⁴⁷ Levine, *Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia*, 70.

⁴⁸ Levine, “Institutional Church,” 193.

⁴⁹ Levine, *Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia*, 195.

⁵⁰ Everett Einar Hagen, *On the Theory of Social Change: How Economic Growth Begins* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1962), 353–84; Thomas Lynn Smith, *Colombia: Social Structure and the Process of Development* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1967); both consulted in Vallier, *Catholicism, Social Control and Modernization*, 123.

⁵¹ Vallier, *Catholicism, Social Control and Modernization*, 33.

of any exercises of the heart.”⁵² Vallier posits that such politicization of religion is socially destructive:

If a religious system, as represented by its spokesmen and elites, becomes identified with a particular political group and finds that its survival is bound up with the survival of that group, it loses an autonomous position of leverage to build and create a generalized system of meanings. Instead of functioning as a carrier and refurbisher of common values and social consensus, it becomes an ideology for a special interest group or a political power structure. Instead of the religion providing a higher order of meanings and value standards, it drops into an identifiable position in the stratification system. Its activities and pronouncements are viewed by the nonprivileged groups as part of the dominant power system. If this happens, the distinction between the political and religious spheres collapses. Competition and social conflict emerge as naked struggles of force and power, rather than as processes of give and take that can be muted and sustained by a set of common beliefs of a more general nature.⁵³

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, historians began decreasing their emphasis on the Church’s influence on politics, focusing more on class conflict and capitalism.⁵⁴ That shift reflected some emergent realities: The prosperity of predominantly Protestant countries in part motivated liberal elites to push for concepts like individualism, global integration, and popular education in an effort to chase the successes of Protestant countries in Europe and North America.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Colombian parties are historically vertical rather than horizontal and, outside elite circles, this changing socio-political tide struggled to reach most Colombians. Political identity in Colombia was akin to a genetic trait: “people are ‘born liberal or conservative,’” and parties are more a part of culture than prescriptions for government policy.⁵⁶

⁵² Isaac F. Holton, *New Granada: Twenty Months in the Andes* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1857); Monica I. Orozco, “Not to Be Called Christian,” in *Religion and Society in Latin America: Interpretive Essays from Conquest to Present*, ed. Lee M. Penyak and Walter J. Petry (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 178.

⁵³ Vallier, *Catholicism, Social Control and Modernization*, 44–45.

⁵⁴ Charles Bergquist, “Introduction: Colombian Violence in Historical Perspective,” in *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective*, ed. Charles W. Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez G (Wilmington, DE: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1992), 6–7.

⁵⁵ Orozco, “Not to Be Called Christian,” 186.

⁵⁶ Gonzalo Sánchez and Peter Bakewell, “La Violencia in Colombia: New Research, New Questions,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 65, no. 4 (November 1, 1985): 796, doi:10.2307/2514896.

B. THE CHURCH'S POLITICAL NATURE

Prior to 1958, modern Colombian politics (post-1861) comprised a two party system dominated by one party or the other for long periods at a time. From the end of the 19th century through 1930, Conservatives monopolized control of government.⁵⁷ The Church associated itself with Conservative politics because, argues Levine, “the institutional Church in Colombia sees a threat in the popular because its leaders see the stress on class, solidarity, and shared authority as a challenge to the structure of power within the ecclesiastical institution and, hence, to the very survival of the church as they know it.”⁵⁸ To wit, the *Encyclopedia of Christianity* identifies Colombia’s Church as “most conservative ... in Latin America.”⁵⁹

Catholic animosity toward political Liberals was fervent and widespread. The 1886 Colombian Constitution, which originated the present-day Republic, fueled the Church’s political fervor, citing Catholicism as “the religion of the nation.”⁶⁰ After the onset of the Republic, the Colombian state recognized the Catholic Church as “watchdog of the social order and the ideological overseer,”⁶¹ and the Church enjoyed full authority as the state religion as a result.⁶² As early as 1863 and through the 1940s, the Church resolutely “advised that ‘Liberalism was sin.’”⁶³ In 1913, it correlated liberalism with “seductions of the unpious,” and in a 1930 letter, the Church called liberalism a threat, encouraging *campesinos*—poor, agrarian, rural-dwelling Colombians—not to urbanize, but to remain in their priest-monitored and controlled rural lives.⁶⁴ Haddox argues that

⁵⁷ Rex A. Hudson, *Colombia: A Country Study*, 5th ed., Area Handbook Series (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 2010), 368.

⁵⁸ Levine, *Popular Voices*, 91.

⁵⁹ Geoffrey William Bromiley et al., eds., “Colombia,” *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Cambridge: Brill-Eerdmans, 1998), 606.

⁶⁰ Levine, *Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia*, 65.

⁶¹ Bromiley et al., “Colombia,” 606.

⁶² González and González, *Christianity in Latin America*, 170.

⁶³ Malcom Deas, “Algunas Notas Sobre El Caciquismo En Colombia,” *Revista de Occidente*, 1973, 130; cited in Paul H. Oquist, *Violence, Conflict, and Politics in Colombia* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), 68.

⁶⁴ Levine, *Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia*, 83–84.

since Colombia's founding, Catholic leaders have maintained campesinos in a subservient position, and campesinos in return have accepted that position as the will of God and diligently complied with the powers that be.⁶⁵ Even for individuals who are progressive in other areas, a rejection of the Catholic faith "would indicate a rejection of the national culture."⁶⁶ Colombian politics have historically operated hierarchically, in parallel with the Church.

Robert H. Dix observed in 1967, "the parties have served largely as instruments of control from above rather than as the means of effective political expression for a broad strata of the population. They have been inhibitors rather than promoters of democracy."⁶⁷ He acknowledges that Colombian parties are vertically integrated, but identification is tied to heritage rather than interest representation. This system "prevented the emergence of a class- or policy-based politics in Colombia."⁶⁸

Dix supports the idea that pre-urbanization and secularization, the Church was able to engage and maintain ideological control at various political levels while maintaining its institutional power. One aspect of that power, argues Dix, was that historically aristocratic families would contribute a son to the priesthood. Those family ties helped to drive the elite interests of the Church.⁶⁹ Another aspect of that power is the Church's ritual authority that transcends class and party, requiring adherents to submit to its monopoly on moral judgment as "the earthly representative of a Deity who in the eyes of the campesino controls life, health, and the bountifulness of his fields." Such a perspective "reinforces attitudes of fatalism and passivity which are at the same time a quite natural reflection of the campesinos' position in society."⁷⁰

But Catholic supremacy did face some systemic challenges in Colombia, observes Marco Palacios: Catholic organization reflected the distinction between national and local

⁶⁵ Benjamin E. Haddox, *Sociedad Y Religión En Colombia* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1965), 167.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁶⁷ Dix, *Colombia: The Political Dimensions of Change*, 222.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 311.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 312.

politics, diocesan priests deferred to the bishop while congregational priests honored their orders first,⁷¹ the Catholic monopoly on education angered liberals who argued that the Church used its educational favor to indoctrinate rather than educate,⁷² and the Church's institutionalization of education structures exacerbated the divide between rich and poor.⁷³ Education was a primary tenet of Church influence in Colombia, and doctrinal differences between the various orders responsible for school administration, as well as conflict with governmental actors over the limits to the Church's educational role further undermined that power.⁷⁴ Such was the environment as the country approached the La Violencia era.

Levine observes that although Catholicism's privilege allowed it to dictate social design historically, changes in "traditions and organizational commitments" would enfranchise "new models of social and political action."⁷⁵ In 1930, traditional socio-political arrangements began to show signs of stress.

C. 1930: LIBERALS TAKE POWER

In the preamble to the 1930 Colombian elections, the global economic depression exacerbated national issues and increasingly divided Conservatives, the Church included. Two Conservative candidates divided party votes and the Liberal contender won for the first time in nearly fifty years.⁷⁶ Liberals initially attempted to form a coalition government, but some hard-liners with vendettas incited violence against Conservatives. Providentially, the violence faded quickly in light of a common border conflict with Peru that united the Colombians.⁷⁷ Although some cite more-distant antecedents, like the

⁷¹ Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence*, 72.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 75.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 77–8.

⁷⁵ Levine, "Religion and Politics, Politics and Religion," 16.

⁷⁶ David Bushnell, "Historical Setting," in *Colombia: A Country Study*, ed. Rex A. Hudson, 5th ed., Area Handbook Series (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 2010), 40.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

seldom-referenced political violence during the 1922 elections,⁷⁸ the 1930 violence that followed such a dramatic shift in political power was a mirror-like precursor to what would happen sixteen years later. Ultimately, the 1930 ouster of the long-dominant Conservative party led to decreased Church influence in public life as Liberal leaders endeavored to separate the two. Church leaders naturally aligned themselves with the Conservative party in response.⁷⁹ Liberal efforts to separate Church and state and the relative peace of the 1930s would not last for long.

To set the stage for the conflict to come, we must observe that Church involvement in political and physical battles in Colombia is not without historical precedent. In the 1870s, Conservatives who had grown weary of a decade and a half of Liberal rule, and clergy weary of the associated Church-state separation, engaged in a clergy-led war characterized by religious zeal. Oquist notes: “in 1876, the Church was the recruiting office of the Conservative insurrectional armies.”⁸⁰ While the Church remained aligned with Conservative politics, in the conflict to come its role was not insurrectional but establishmentarian.

⁷⁸ Oquist, *Violence, Conflict, and Politics*, 1.

⁷⁹ González and González, *Christianity in Latin America*, 170.

⁸⁰ Oquist, *Violence, Conflict, and Politics*, 68.

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III. 1930–1960: LA VIOLENCIA

A. SUMMARY

La Violencia was a late 1940s-mid 1960s period of extreme violence that began to transform Catholicism's long-privileged position in Colombian society and politics. Catholicism was joined with politics and society in Colombia, and its efforts to maintain that power and privilege during La Violencia were self-defeating: these efforts catalyzed public disenchantment with the Church and galvanized support for nascent Protestant missions in the country. These dynamics set the footings for the impending wane in Catholic influence. This chapter makes observations about La Violencia and its effects on the Catholic establishment, its social and political position, and the emerging Protestant wave.

B. PRECURSORS AND CAUSES

Catholic anti-Protestantism was potent prior to La Violencia. To Catholic leaders, religious unity meant national unity and was critical to retaining their privilege. Levine cites a 1944 Church letter that reflects that idea, referring to the Church as Colombia's "mother ... most precious possession, superior to all others."⁸¹ To Catholic leaders' chagrin, the 1930–1946 Liberal regime did not hinder, and even supported numerous Protestant missionary groups that arrived during that time.⁸² In a 1943 article, Colombian priests lamented the government's open door policy toward foreign missionaries as an "erroneous interpretation of 'tolerance.'" Simultaneously, Protestant organizations diverted funds to Latin America from war-torn East Asia, which, according to the same article, "lightened the misery of [the] people at the price of its conscience and of the country's religious unity."⁸³

⁸¹ Levine, *Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia*, 87.

⁸² Bromiley et al., "Colombia," 606.

⁸³ Eugenio Restrepo Uribe and Juan Alvarez, S. J., "Diez Años de Protestantismo En Colombia (1930-1943)," *Revista Javeriana*, November 1943, 243; cited in Roux, *Estado de Alerta*, 65. Translations mine.

Another 1944 Church letter, addressed to the U.S. Ambassador, bemoaned the influx of North American Protestant missionaries that, in the Monseñor author's words, "treat us as if we were a country of savages in need of civilization. They are doing us no good ... whose nation's principal unifying link is the Catholic faith that we all profess." The Monseñor called upon President Roosevelt to "impede missionaries of impiety and division from traveling to Colombia ... who work to destroy the national unity and to thrust the country into serious conflict."⁸⁴ The Ambassador's reply called for tolerance of legal activities, arguing that "certainly in Colombia such activities are specifically protected under law."⁸⁵

Anti-Protestant publicity promulgated by Catholic leaders was rife. In November of 1944, the *Revista Javeriana* published an article suggesting that Communists were using Protestantism to infiltrate and dominate Colombia.⁸⁶ Other Catholic leaders characterized Protestants as a "danger" promulgating "sinister foreign propaganda."⁸⁷

One leader, Eugenio Restrepo Uribe, argued that the sheer quantity of Protestant missionaries overshadowed the Church's resources to evangelize in areas under-educated in Catholicism. He called for the State to defend Catholicism against "the Protestant virus that destroys national unity and produces ever-more provocative acts." Restrepo argued that a national anti-Protestant committee to support a "unified, methodical, systematic, and organized [campaign] across the entirety of Colombia should be an absolute priority."⁸⁸ His words eerily foreshadowed the terror to come.

⁸⁴ From a letter from Monseñor José Eusebio Ricaurte to the United States Ambassador in Bogotá, December 8, 1943; reproduced in "Protestantismo En Colombia," *Revista Javeriana*, February-March 1944, 38, 40; cited in Roux, *Estado de Alerta*, 66. Translation mine.

⁸⁵ Letter from Arthur Bliss Lane to Monseñor José Eusebio Ricaurte, December 16, 1943; reproduced in "Protestantismo En Colombia," 42; cited in Roux, *Estado de Alerta*, 66. Translation mine.

⁸⁶ P. Juan Alvarez, S. J., "La Nueva Estrategia Comunista En América Latina," *Revista Javeriana*, November 1944; cited in Roux, *Estado de Alerta*, 67.

⁸⁷ Eugenio Restrepo Uribe, "El Protestantismo En Colombia" (Editorial Lumen Christi, Bogotá, 1944); cited in Roux, *Estado de Alerta*, 67. Translation mine.

⁸⁸ Restrepo Uribe, "El Protestantismo En Colombia"; cited in Roux, *Estado de Alerta*, 68. Translation mine.

1. Gaitán: The Catalyst

A new radical Liberal leader, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, emerged in the lead-up to the 1946 elections. Gaitán's focus on the strength of the general population stood at odds with the two-party elitist system that survived in Colombia after fading in neighboring countries.⁸⁹ He divided Liberal support between the working class and those of higher status. Gaitán ran for president against a Conservative candidate and an establishment Liberal, and with Liberal votes divided, Conservatives re-took power that year.⁹⁰

The 1946 transition of power mirrored the events of 1930 discussed in the preceding chapter. Knowing that Liberals outnumbered them,⁹¹ newly empowered Conservatives tried to form a coalition government, but many could not resist the lure of returning vengeance to Liberals for their 1930 aggression. Such violence increased as early as 1946.⁹²

Emerging from 16 years of Liberal governments curtailing its privileged status, and aligned with the newly risen Conservative regime, the Church entered headlong into the fray. Levine recognizes, however, that a significant faction realized that politicizing the Church would disillusion the half of Colombians who identified with the Liberal perspective.⁹³ Indeed, dissenting Catholics argued that love, the basis of Christianity, was undermined by partisan odiousness, but although some Catholic leaders attempted neutrality,⁹⁴ Rodolfo Ramón de Roux calls the political-religious situation in Colombia a Gordian Knot, where there was no apparent way to untie the two.⁹⁵ By the time La Violencia surged in 1948, the Church had so aligned itself with conservative politics that

⁸⁹ Levine, *Popular Voices*, 56.

⁹⁰ Bushnell, "Historical Setting," 42–43.

⁹¹ Flora, *Pentecostalism in Colombia*, 36; see also Roux, *Estado de Alerta*, 93–94.

⁹² Bushnell, "Historical Setting," 43.

⁹³ Levine, *Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia*, 65.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 63–65. One such case cited by Levine was of Monseñor Ismael Perdomo, who "forbade clerical support of one party over another, or even mention of party in sermons." Perdomo's reasoning, however, was that "the immense majority of Conservatives and Liberals [. . . feel] equal veneration for the spiritual jurisdiction of the Catholic religion." This, of course, begs the question of what the Monseñor have said about those who did not venerate the Catholic Church.

⁹⁵ Roux, *Estado de Alerta*, 74.

it viewed anything liberal as anti-Church. Many Catholic leaders incited their followers to organize against the Liberals.⁹⁶

2. El Bogotazo

The 1946 partisan violence was strong, but fiercer carnage was to come. Gaitán was assassinated in 1948, igniting an anti-Conservative maelstrom in Bogotá that came to be called *El Bogotazo*.⁹⁷ It was an unconscionably violent, chaotic, “uncontainable human tide.”⁹⁸ In response, Conservatives rained gunfire from Church towers (whether government forces or priests were firing is unknown); Liberals below, equating the Church with the Conservative State, ravaged Church properties.⁹⁹ Conservatives used government assets in retaliation, powerfully oppressing Liberals (or those perceived to be so-aligned).¹⁰⁰ Three thousand Colombians died within a 36-hour period.¹⁰¹ Both parties actively organized violence against each other, and Conservatives held power for twelve years of horror.

C. GENERAL CHARACTER OF LA VIOLENCIA

As El Bogotazo quickly spread to the countryside, Catholic leaders encouraged the poor to retain dignity by diligently continuing their under-compensated toils, insinuating that “poverty was less a product of the social structure ... than a result of the faulty habits of the poor.”¹⁰² But author Eduardo Galeano asks what many in Colombia at the time may have asked: “Is it right to confuse the prosperity of one class with the well-being of a country?”¹⁰³

⁹⁶ Levine, *Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia*, 64.

⁹⁷ Bushnell, “Historical Setting,” 43.

⁹⁸ Eduardo H. Galeano, *Las venas abiertas de América Latina*, 72nd ed. (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2000), 164. Translation mine.

⁹⁹ Roux, *Estado de Alerta*, 109–10, 112.

¹⁰⁰ Levine, *Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia*, 62–63.

¹⁰¹ Roux, *Estado de Alerta*, 104.

¹⁰² Levine, *Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia*, 85.

¹⁰³ Galeano, *Venas Abiertas*, 164. Translation mine.

The conflict enveloped all strata of the population. Galeano continues: “The war reached the extremes of unbelievable cruelty, spurred by an eagerness of vengeance that grew as the war spread.”¹⁰⁴ Banditry—executed by *bandoleros*—was the custom; its activity found pleasure in the suffering of others and even involved children in its diabolic desensitization, turning live human bodies into objects of violent child’s play.¹⁰⁵ Norman Bailey’s description of the situation is heart-rending:

Certain techniques of death and torture became so common and widespread that they were given names, such as “*picar para tamal*,” which consisted of cutting up the body of the living victim into small pieces, bit by bit. Or “*bocachiquiar*,” a process which involved making hundreds of small body punctures from which the victim slowly bled to death. Ingenious forms of quartering and beheading were invented.... Crucifixions and hangings were commonplace, political “prisoners” were thrown from airplanes in flight, infants were bayoneted, schoolchildren, some as young as eight years old, were raped en masse, unborn infants were removed by crude Caesarian section and replaced by roosters, ears were cut off, scalps removed, and so on.¹⁰⁶

The expense of this fratricide was immense. Estimates of its cost in life vary greatly, but one estimate claims up to 280,000 Colombians killed between 1948–58 alone.¹⁰⁷ Table 2 presents a more conservative year-by-year estimate starting in 1948, and is useful to correlate events with violence along a timeline.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 165. Translation mine.

¹⁰⁵ Leon, “Unusual Patterns of Crime,” 1568–9.

¹⁰⁶ Norman A. Bailey, “La Violencia in Colombia,” *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 9, no. 4 (October 1, 1967): 562–3, doi:10.2307/164860.

¹⁰⁷ Bromiley et al., “Colombia,” 605.

Table 2. La Violencia Deaths By Year

Year	Deaths
1948	43,557
1949	18,519
1950	50,253
1951	10,319
1952	13,250
1953	8,650
1954	900
1955	1,013
1956	11,136
1957	2,877
1958	3,796
1959	2,550
1960	2,557
Total	169,377

Adapted from: Paul H. Oquist, *Violence, Conflict, and Politics in Colombia* (New York: Academic Press), 1980, 6–7. Oquist cites Dr. Carlos Lemoine of the *Compañía Colombiano [sic] de Datos* as his data source.

D. POLITICAL UNDERCURRENTS

The two Colombian parties endeavored earnestly for the loyalty of campesinos, who comprised election-deciding power in Colombia’s pre-industrial, highly rural society. Conservatives aimed to blur the distinction between religion and politics, attempting to draw the Catholic faithful to its political cause.¹⁰⁸

Conservative Laureano Gómez came to power in an uncontested 1949 election, with his non-democratic rise favored by Catholic leadership.¹⁰⁹ President from 1950–1953, Gómez “personified the clerical-authoritarian tradition of Spain. He voiced the kind of Hispanicism and Catholicism to which a considerable part of the Colombian people were attached. He restricted civil liberties, and began systematically to hunt down Liberal leaders.”¹¹⁰ Gómez was a catalyst for violence and was unflinchingly devoted to

¹⁰⁸ Bailey, “Violencia in Colombia,” 572.

¹⁰⁹ Fluharty, *Dance of the Millions*, 116; Scott P. Mainwaring and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, “Latin American Democratization Since 1978: Democratic Transitions, Breakdowns, and Erosions,” in *The Third Wave of Democratization in Latin America: Advances and Setbacks*, ed. Frances Hagopian and Scott P. Mainwaring (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 39–40.

¹¹⁰ J. Lloyd Mecham, *Church and State in Latin America: A History of Politicoecclesiastical Relations*, Rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 134.

the Catholic establishment;¹¹¹ he was considered “more Catholic than the Pope.”¹¹² Palacios observes that although the Church enjoyed support in the early 1950s from the Gómez regime, its apparent health was deceptive as the rise of media, alternative educational opportunities, and an urban middle class all increased.¹¹³

According to Robert Dix, “amid the political and moral degeneration of Colombian life [Gómez] saw himself in the role of purifying knight,”¹¹⁴ but even many Conservatives were wary of the constitutional changes he proposed. Therefore, all partisan groups except those closest to Gómez supported a 1953 military coup that installed General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla as president.¹¹⁵ Political violence tempered, but it was quickly apparent that the motivations behind the violence had shifted from primarily political to economic: a hodgepodge of social and criminal motivations that continued even in a semi-stable political environment.¹¹⁶ Party leaders were powerless to stop the “continuing bloodletting in the countryside.”¹¹⁷

In 1953 the State entrusted the Church with sweeping authority over civil affairs in over 60% of the territory, an area labeled “mission territories.”¹¹⁸ Rojas also shared Gómez’s attitude toward Protestants, linking them with Communism.¹¹⁹ Parallel with Rojas’ rise to power and complementary to his disdain for Protestants, a Vatican concordat in 1953 gave Catholicism “exclusive rights to evangelization and education in missionary areas.”¹²⁰

¹¹¹ González and González, *Christianity in Latin America*, 170–71.

¹¹² Lars Schoultz, “Reform and Reaction in the Colombian Catholic Church,” *The Americas* 30, no. 2 (October 1, 1973): 235, doi:10.2307/980558.

¹¹³ Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence*, 146–8.

¹¹⁴ Dix, *Colombia: The Political Dimensions of Change*, 109.

¹¹⁵ Harvey F. Kline, “The National Front: Historical Perspective and Overview,” in *Politics of Compromise: Coalition Government in Colombia*, ed. R. Albert Berry, Ronald G Hellman, and Mauricio Solaún (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Incorporated, 1980), 70.

¹¹⁶ Bushnell, “Historical Setting,” 44.

¹¹⁷ Kline, “The National Front: Historical Perspective and Overview,” 70.

¹¹⁸ Levine, *Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia*, 71.

¹¹⁹ Hudson, *Colombia: A Country Study*, 369; Mecham, *Church and State in Latin America*, 135.

¹²⁰ Bromiley et al., “Colombia,” 607.

In spite of Rojas' Conservative leanings, he was progressive in his own right; he introduced television to Colombia, instituted welfare programs, and drove the success of women's suffrage.¹²¹ Although Rojas was ostensibly Conservative, Catholic leaders could not stay on his side in the face of liberal reforms that threatened Church interests and authority; the Church supported Rojas' overthrow.¹²² Whether the Church ultimately endorsed them or not, J. Lloyd Mecham contends that "there is little doubt that the Colombian governments of Laureano Gómez and Rojas Pinilla encouraged and abetted the persecution of the Protestants."¹²³

A 1957 countercoup returned the country to (procedural) democracy in 1958 under the Frente Nacional, a power-sharing agreement between Conservatives and Liberals that gradually reduced the political violence.¹²⁴ The engine behind La Violencia's perpetuation was mutual fear of extermination between Liberals and Conservatives; the Frente Nacional largely defused that fear.¹²⁵ The Church broadly supported the Frente Nacional and sought to separate itself from partisan politics (although not from politics in general), recognizing the animosity that its polarizing Conservative alignment had caused within the national culture.¹²⁶

E. THE CHURCH'S RELATIONSHIP TO VIOLENCE

Following the Church's marginalization under the 1930–1946 Liberal regimes, Catholic leadership was prepared for retribitional war. Gonzalo Sánchez elaborates on political-religious collusion: "the Church put all of its institutional weight on the side of governmental power. It simultaneously anathematized the opposition and offered the Kingdom of God to the government's terrorist bands. It not only legitimated the plans of

¹²¹ Bushnell, "Historical Setting," 46–47.

¹²² Dix, *Colombia: The Political Dimensions of Change*, 119–20; Bushnell, "Historical Setting," 47.

¹²³ Mecham, *Church and State in Latin America*, 135.

¹²⁴ Bushnell, "Historical Setting," 45–46; Levine, *Popular Voices*, 55; continuing economically driven and criminal violence is elaborated in Oquist, *Violence, Conflict, and Politics*.

¹²⁵ Levine, *Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia*, 63.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

the government, but it also helped to realize them.”¹²⁷ Even after the Frente Nacional came into effect, reports of power-hungry clergy fomenting violence remained. Paul Oquist cites a 1962 police report, in which “the activity of the clergy [was] considered notably counterproductive in many [municipalities].”¹²⁸ Elaborating, he observes that “there were pistol-carrying priests who directly led their own cliques in battles against opposing groups after inspiring Sunday masses.”¹²⁹

Although the party line was the rule among Catholics, some clergy opposed the Conservative establishment. One example was Fidel Blandon Berrío, who “sided with the persecuted [Liberal peasantry] at a time when the Church hierarchy held that the only path for a Christian was to embrace the government’s cause.”¹³⁰ Mecham also notes some higher Catholic leadership’s concern about ecclesiastical connections to violence, citing a letter that encouraged priests to avoid political polarization. Nevertheless, he continues, “many of the fanatical clergy paid no attention to the warning... but fed the hate for Liberals.”¹³¹ Antonio García’s sentiments as quoted by Vernon Lee Fluharty remain overarching:

The villages burned, the children mutilated in their schools, the jails filled to overflowing with prisoners denied a trial or a judge, the men castrated in cold blood, those tortured in police dungeons, the women killed after being subjected to ignominy, the gagged press, the dwellings leveled by some functionary under arms, these ... brought moral ruin and the most abject complicity.... These hundreds of thousands of dead, of exiled, of fugitives, killed or shriveled the souls of everyone. But especially they left their stain on the only spiritual and political power that might have been able to disarm the government and the parties. In place of religious and human reasons, the Church preferred ‘Political Reason.’¹³²

¹²⁷ Gonzalo Sánchez, “The Violence: An Interpretative Synthesis,” in *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective*, ed. Charles W. Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez (Wilmington, DE: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1992), 87.

¹²⁸ “Criminalidad En 1962” (República de Colombia, Policía Nacional, F-2, n.d.), 140; quoted in Oquist, *Violence, Conflict, and Politics*, 219.

¹²⁹ Oquist, *Violence, Conflict, and Politics*, 220.

¹³⁰ Sánchez and Bakewell, “New Research, New Questions,” 795.

¹³¹ Mecham, *Church and State in Latin America*, 134.

¹³² Antonio García, *Gaitán y el Problema de la Revolucion Colombiana* (Bogotá: Artes Graficas, 1955), 334–5; quoted in Fluharty, *Dance of the Millions*, 121.

Elizabeth Brusco quotes one person's account exhibiting that argument: "I heard the priest say from the pulpit that by the mere fact of being a Liberal you were already body and soul in hell, and [by] the fact of being a Conservative you were already body and soul in heaven."¹³³

While church leaders mixed religion and politics, bandits, known as *bandoleros*, mixed religion and violence. Carlos A. Leon notes that they were paradoxically often quite religious: one leader was known to lead his bandit group in prayer together, another surgically embedded a crucifix under his skin, still another claimed God-given invincibility (he was eventually shot and killed).¹³⁴ Bandoleros exhibited a "coexistence of religious norms with attitudes of rejection and antagonism to these norms ... for example, when a bandit prays for good luck in killing, he implicitly breaks the command 'thou shalt not kill.' Prayers, religious images, crucifixes, and scapularies are used as magical instruments (amulets) to protect the selfish interest of the subject in the performance of criminal and cruel acts."¹³⁵ Such venal use of Catholicism at the personal level reflected the example set in Colombia by the institution itself.

One mid-nineteenth century missionary in New Granada (now Colombia) "claimed that the Church fostered 'mere ceremonies irrespective of any exercises of the heart.'"¹³⁶ From a psychiatric perspective, Leon observes that being forced to practice religious rites without believing in them develops internal rebellion against them that can manifest once the controlling forces are removed.¹³⁷ Leon also observes that despotic father figures were common among what would become bandoleros.¹³⁸ This parallels the general roles of governmental and Catholic authorities in the lives of Colombian campesinos before La Violencia. They were rebelling against what they saw as a despot.

¹³³ Brusco, *Evangelical Conversion*, 45.

¹³⁴ Leon, "Unusual Patterns of Crime," 1570.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1573.

¹³⁶ Holton, *New Granada*, 181; cited in Orozco, "Not to Be Called Christian," 178.

¹³⁷ Leon, "Unusual Patterns of Crime," 1573.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1571.

We must note that bandoleros of both parties roamed with destruction in their wake. Fluharty quotes *Time* correspondent Philip Payne describing the arrival of a Liberal band to a Conservative town. As young as 14 with a leader of 25, the Liberals terrorized the town and executed Conservative leaders. In spite of its violence, however, this narrative contrasts with common accounts of Conservative atrocities; killing in this case was mostly focused on Conservative leaders and absent was the mutilation and torture most often associated with Conservative banditry. The leader prohibited sexual abuse of women (although perhaps solely because his female crony forbade it) and he protected the church and school from vandalism.¹³⁹ For the purposes of this thesis we must ask how Conservative-perpetrated atrocities affected Protestants and whether they engaged in the same violence observed of these Liberal bandoleros.

F. PROTESTANTS REPRESSED

When the Liberals were ousted in 1946 after 16 years in power, much of the freedom that Protestants had enjoyed disappeared; the new Conservative government argued that most such rights were extra-constitutional.¹⁴⁰ After the major outbreak of violence that began in 1948, Protestants were broadly repressed. The *Encyclopedia of Christianity* records the killing of “thousands” and destruction or closure of 270 schools and 60 churches associated with Protestants.¹⁴¹ Conservatives saw Protestantism as a “divisive and antipatriotic” threat to national security that “opened the way for foreign schemes that with time would destroy the nation.”¹⁴² For example, Fluharty recounts the Gómez regime’s policy of extermination under which there would be no due process for its Protestant enemies. But he continues, contending that the Church hierarchy was not to blame for such cruelty.¹⁴³ Quoting Félix Restrepo, Fluharty argues that “the violence has been carried out in the name of religion, against the will of the Catholic Church, to which

¹³⁹ Philip Payne, “The Hemisphere: Ordeal of a Village,” *Time*, August 6, 1951, 30–31; quoted in Fluharty, *Dance of the Millions*, 121–3.

¹⁴⁰ Roux, *Estado de Alerta*, 69.

¹⁴¹ Bromiley et al., “Colombia,” 606.

¹⁴² Roux, *Estado de Alerta*, 69–70. Translations mine.

¹⁴³ Fluharty, *Dance of the Millions*, 118–20.

the fanatical clergy paid no attention.”¹⁴⁴ Mecham echoes that sentiment, holding that “the persecution of Protestant missionaries [was] unrelated to the Conservative-Liberal conflict, [but] a byproduct of the general spirit of lawlessness and religious fanaticism.”¹⁴⁵ His claim, however, belies the situation he proceeds to describe. There was persistent presidential and high-level Catholic strategizing against Protestantism: “departmental governors were instructed to take all steps to terminate religious activities of non-Catholic groups.”¹⁴⁶

The Church availed itself of the opportunity to justify violence against its detractors. Cornelia Butler Flora tells of priests giving homilies condemning Protestants as Liberal subversives and often directly inflaming followers toward “elimination of Protestants.”¹⁴⁷ She also cites numerous accounts of terror against Pentecostals by Conservative bandits and officials. In one case, a pastor and his congregants were knifed in church by a band led by the local police inspector.¹⁴⁸ Conservatives severely oppressed the country’s small, budding Protestant base. Since most Protestants were politically liberal, observes Brusco, they were “doubly damned during a time when Liberal Party affiliation alone was sufficient for getting oneself killed.”¹⁴⁹ Protestants in Colombia “suffered stoning, beatings, and the constant threat of death.”¹⁵⁰ While, as previously noted, Conservative records reveal similar violence against their own at the hand of Liberals in general,¹⁵¹ accounts of Protestants responding in violence are absent.

Although this chapter focuses on a period characterized by violence, other means of anti-Protestant repression existed as well. One nonviolent way the Catholic enterprise emphasized its authority was through prohibiting individual ownership of Bibles and

¹⁴⁴ Félix Restrepo, *Colombia en la Encrucijada* (Bogotá: Editorial Pax, 1951), 37; quoted in Fluharty, *Dance of the Millions*, 120.

¹⁴⁵ Mecham, *Church and State in Latin America*, 134–5.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Flora, *Pentecostalism in Colombia*, 39.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 39–40.

¹⁴⁹ Brusco, *Evangelical Conversion*, 38.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

literature. Patrols roaming the country to confiscate weapons also confiscated Bibles, which the military establishment viewed as “equally as dangerous as arms.”¹⁵² Conservatives burned confiscated books, saying “that smoke smells like Protestants.”¹⁵³ One Colombian Protestant recalled getting caught with a Bible by a priest, who told him, “don’t you know that it’s prohibited, that you don’t understand it? Don’t you know that you shouldn’t be doing that?”¹⁵⁴ Free thought outside the Catholic hierarchy’s control threatened its power and legitimacy.

Responding to Protestant cries for justice, Catholic officials did not deny that atrocities occurred, but argued that it was not an “organized persecution.” The Church claimed that individuals were to blame for such acts, and that it emphatically “opposed violence and religious hate.”¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, the Church argued that Catholics were also victims of violence and that it cannot be assumed that Protestant victims were killed because of their faith; most Protestants were Liberals, after all. Protestants remained adamant that Conservatives, Catholics included, exercised vendettas against them during La Violencia.¹⁵⁶

G. PROTESTANT RESILIENCE

Although the Catholic hierarchy was hostile toward any non-Church-sanctioned form of organization, Protestants in Colombia consider La Violencia “the Period of Awakening.”¹⁵⁷ Brusco juxtaposes the pervasive attitude of Protestants against that of Catholics at the time: a Protestant pastor she quotes said, “when you really understand what God is saying, he isn’t ordering you to hate and detest anyone”; predominant Catholic doctrine, on the other hand, asserted that heaven was to be gained by opposing, even killing Liberals.¹⁵⁸ Given the persecution converts underwent, becoming a

¹⁵² Flora, *Pentecostalism in Colombia*, 45.

¹⁵³ Brusco, *Evangelical Conversion*, 43.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁵⁵ Roux, *Estado de Alerta*, 73. Translations mine.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 73–74.

¹⁵⁷ Brusco, *Evangelical Conversion*, 13.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 41, 45.

Protestant required deep commitment.¹⁵⁹ Closed churches divided into homes, bringing them closer to “the Colombian reality”¹⁶⁰ and into areas the Catholic authority had long controlled, like marriage and education.¹⁶¹ When persecution waned and such house-churches reunified, the increase in size from the original church was exponential.¹⁶² When persecution against them was strongest, Protestants multiplied.

Despite widespread insecurity, Protestant church membership increased 50% in the first five years of the conflict, from 8,000 in 1948 to 12,000 in 1953.¹⁶³ According to Benjamín Haddox, Protestants grew from 0.18% of the population in 1937 to 1.17% in 1960.¹⁶⁴ Table 3 (in Chapter VI) exhibits Protestant growth during the century 1905–2005 from an additional source. Statistics vary significantly during this era, and different sources include or exclude various sects, but one thing is certain: the Protestant community was putting in roots. The formation of the Evangelical Missionary Council between 1937–1942 and the Evangelical Union of the Churches of Colombia in 1950 fostered growth by unifying the manifold Protestant groups in the country.¹⁶⁵ Brusco makes a critical observation: “the ‘explosion’ coincided with the period of least foreign missionary involvement.”¹⁶⁶ Although foreign missionaries laid the early groundwork, they were not primarily responsible for the exceptional Protestant growth. While Catholicism was fragmenting, Protestants unified. Colombians were evangelizing themselves.

H. CATHOLIC REFLECTIONS

Initially, Catholic leaders perceived their role during La Violencia as defenders of a moral social order that was under Liberal assault, but as violence degenerated into

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 47.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 13.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 47.

¹⁶² Ibid., 39.

¹⁶³ Bromiley et al., “Colombia,” 606.

¹⁶⁴ Haddox, *Sociedad Y Religión En Colombia*, 44–45; cited in Roux, *Estado de Alerta*, 65.

¹⁶⁵ Bromiley et al., “Colombia,” 607.

¹⁶⁶ Brusco, *Evangelical Conversion*, 13.

savagery, the Church gradually shifted its perspective. Catholic leaders acknowledged that what they previously assumed was a unanimously Catholic populace was a facade: “In a word, we must admit that in many cases, unfortunately, Catholicism is on the lips, but not in the depths of heart and spirit.”¹⁶⁷

In retrospect, Colombian Catholic officials consistently cite the carnage of La Violencia as cause for the Church to remain separated from politics, recognizing that past political linkages, whether nominal or radical, led to violence that threatened the Church itself.¹⁶⁸ From the hierarchy’s perspective, La Violencia redefined Colombia as a mission field: a broken people confused by a broken and inconsistent Church.¹⁶⁹ A new definition of the Church itself was required. Levine contrasts the two options: the first, an ecclesiastical hierarchy from which flows unified doctrine and authority, and the second, which stresses *the church* as a concept of community and common experience, unifying a non-hierarchical body. In the second case, “institutional unity [depends] on social unity.”¹⁷⁰ This new conceptualization reversed earlier doctrine that the institutional Church *is* what unified the nation. The Church’s political and social privilege was threatened, and the new paradigm required the Church to conform rather than dictate—a pill not easily swallowed.

I. ANALYSIS

Some topics surrounding the foregoing narrative warrant further examination. First, we consider how Colombia’s shifting social and political paradigms forced the Church to change its own methods. We ask how the Church’s connections with La Violencia’s atrocities affected its moral authority, as well as whether any evidence exists that might in any way vindicate the Church. Furthermore, given Catholicism’s cultural nature and the intense coercive forces at work in Colombia’s La Violencia era society, we

¹⁶⁷ “Conferencias Episcopales de Colombia,” vol. 1, 1908–53 (Conferencia Episcopal de Colombia, Bogotá: Editorial El Catolicismo, 1956), 502–3; cited in Levine, *Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia*, 85–86.

¹⁶⁸ Levine, *Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia*, 191, 193.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁷⁰ Levine, “Institutional Church,” 188–9.

evaluate whether statistics showing near-complete Catholic adherence among Colombians can be trusted. Finally, we briefly discuss how La Violencia contributed to the genesis of today's guerrilla conflict.

1. Shifting Paradigms

One way the Catholic Church attempted to modernize its methods was through the concept of *Catholic Action*, its incipient stab at popular engagement policy. From the 1930s through the 1960s, the Church supported and engaged in advisorship over social organizations including agricultural and labor groups. By the end of La Violencia, however, those groups—especially labor—clamored for autonomy from Church oversight, even while the Church restructured itself to more effectively maintain control.¹⁷¹ This thesis further discusses Catholic Action's metamorphosis after La Violencia in Chapter IV. Levine explains that as traditional concepts of authority shift, “new patterns of legitimation, organization, and action emerge to reshape the way Church leaders see the popular and build links to it.” A similar reciprocal process occurs as popular organization reflects changes in social dynamics and available options.¹⁷²

Protestantism was leading among those available options. Its diffuse presence endeavored to meet people where they were and was generally unencumbered by hierarchies and power plays. Brusco cites David Stoll, corroborated with her own research, to confirm that most Protestants were not politically radical. Many Protestants, being non-hierarchical, eschew politics altogether as unimportant in the face of eternity.¹⁷³ Protestantism challenged the traditions of Catholicism with a “geographically smaller and metaphysically larger” community of brothers and sisters rather than fathers and mothers.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 197.

¹⁷² Ibid., 188.

¹⁷³ Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?*; cited in Brusco, *Evangelical Conversion*, 39, 171.

¹⁷⁴ Virginia Garrard-Burnett, “Like a Mighty Rushing Wind,” in *Religion and Society in Latin America: Interpretive Essays from Conquest to Present*, ed. Lee M. Penyak and Walter J. Petry (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 201.

After the 1959 Cuban Revolution, North American missionaries began to present “Protestantism as a ‘spiritual alternative to Communism.’”¹⁷⁵ This contrasted with the Catholic perspective. Oquist cites a series of accounts of Catholic leaders opining against Liberalism and exhorting Catholics that no true believer can in good conscience vote for anyone other than a Conservative.¹⁷⁶ In equating Protestantism with Liberals (generally accurate), Catholics also equated Protestantism with Communism (generally erroneous) and thus, ironically, “the [Colombian leftist ideal] to overthrow the cross, crush Christ, [and] eliminate Religion.”¹⁷⁷ The oddness in these claims is that atheistic Communism is diametrically opposed to the Protestant gospel. Herein a broadly applicable problem of intertwining religion and politics becomes apparent. Spurious associations become not only accepted, but also embraced.

2. On Catholicism’s Moral Authority

There is some consensus that Catholic involvement in violence and repression rendered its moral authority hollow. Robert H. Dix contends that regardless of whether the Church was officially political or not, it was impotent to fulfill “its potential role as pacifier in the years when Colombia cried out for someone to save the nation from the mounting wave of political violence. The Church was quite frequently identified, through word or deed, with acts of violence on the Conservative side.”¹⁷⁸ Citing Antonio García, Dix argues that the Church favored politics over faith and humanity.¹⁷⁹ Some victims of that Catholic political priority were Protestant believers.

James E. Goff’s 1965 study on Protestant persecution during La Violencia comprises the first comprehensive study of this specific aspect of such a widely examined

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 195.

¹⁷⁶ José María Nieto Rojas, *La batalla contra el comunismo en Colombia: capítulos de historia patria, que deben ser faro y brújula para las futuras generaciones de Colombia* (Bogotá: Empresa Nacional de Publicaciones, 1956); cited in Oquist, *Violence, Conflict, and Politics*, 171–3.

¹⁷⁷ Oquist, *Violence, Conflict, and Politics*, 173.

¹⁷⁸ Dix, *Colombia: The Political Dimensions of Change*, 310–11.

¹⁷⁹ García, *Gaitán y el Problema*, 335; Cited in Dix, *Colombia: The Political Dimensions of Change*, 311.

time period.¹⁸⁰ His team investigated the issue through direct contact with witnesses in all of Colombia's departments.¹⁸¹ He describes La Violencia as "a medieval type of ecclesiastical pressure for religious uniformity [that] conflicted with modern concepts of constitutional democracy."¹⁸² While professing that his research is centered on an ambition to increase tolerance in Colombia, and seeks "benefit to the Roman Catholic Church,"¹⁸³ Goff affirms that the co-identification between the Catholic Church and the Conservative Party enabled, and even encouraged Protestant persecution.¹⁸⁴

Goff addresses the opposite end of the issue that this thesis is concerned with: He examines the causes of Protestant persecution, but not necessarily the effects of it. Nevertheless, his study corroborates claims about anti-Protestant violence during La Violencia and links the persecution to politics. Goff confirms that it was "the political situation which made the persecution possible,"¹⁸⁵ but takes care to differentiate between political and religious violence in his analysis.¹⁸⁶

3. Criticism of Adherent Statistics

The analysis Goff provides goes beyond politics, however, and touches on matters of Church ritual as it relates with individuals. He describes Colombian Catholic devotion as "mechanical," quoting Orlando Fals-Borda: "Religion means principally to meet the requirements of the Church and to follow the dictates of the priests—a devotion to the Church as an institution rather than to Christianity as a way of life."¹⁸⁷ And institutional it was. The 1887 concordat described the Catholic Church as "the religion of the nation,"

¹⁸⁰ Goff, "The Persecution of Protestant Christians in Colombia, 1948–1958, With an Investigation of Its Background and Causes," 0.2, Presentation.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 1/11.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 1/1.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 0.3, Preface.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 2/1.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1/8.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 1/13–15.

¹⁸⁷ Orlando Fals-Borda, *Peasant Society in the Colombian Andes: A Sociological Study of Saucio* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1955), 227; cited in Goff, "The Persecution of Protestant Christians in Colombia, 1948–1958, With an Investigation of Its Background and Causes," 2/7.

and ““an essential element of the social order,’ [implying] that it is a political duty of the State to protect and respect the Church.”¹⁸⁸ The concordat further charged the Church with the legal administration of birth, marriage, and death, as well as control over “all levels” of education.¹⁸⁹ After a 1973 renovation, the new concordat text, although officially “without prejudice to the legitimate freedom of other religious faiths and their respective members,” continued to declare a similar ethos as its predecessor: “the State, observing the traditional Catholic ethos within the Colombian nation, considers the Catholic Religion, the Apostolic and Roman Church as the fundamental element for the public good and for the integral development of the nation’s community.”¹⁹⁰ But official as the Church was, and delimited as adherents were by its control, we must ask what portion of the population truly held Catholicism in their hearts.

Another helpful component of Goff’s dissertation is his analysis of religious statistics. He argues briefly but convincingly against the veracity of statistics showing the Catholic population of Colombia in the upper 90% range.¹⁹¹ Goff argues that the social proof provided by La Violencia’s atrocities reveals an acute absence of the Christian ethos supposed to be a harbinger of true Catholicism.¹⁹² His perspective in this respect supports the hypothesis that if Colombians felt security in speaking their minds, fewer would profess Catholicism than the statistics reveal.

The preceding point is critical to understanding the persecution of Protestants, argues Goff. Upholding a distorted view of Colombia as near-unanimously Catholic gave increased leverage to Church and government policies aimed at suppressing competitors: “The religious intolerance of the Conservative Party and the Catholic Church’s determination to stop Protestant growth produced the religious persecution which began

¹⁸⁸ Goff, “The Persecution of Protestant Christians in Colombia, 1948–1958, With an Investigation of Its Background and Causes,” 2/11.

¹⁸⁹ Harvey F. Kline, *Colombia: Democracy Under Assault*, 2nd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 88.

¹⁹⁰ “Concordat (1973): Text,” *Concordat Watch*, accessed February 25, 2016, <http://www.concordatwatch.eu/topic-38331.834#>.

¹⁹¹ Goff, “The Persecution of Protestant Christians in Colombia, 1948–1958, With an Investigation of Its Background and Causes,” 2/17–19.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 2/28.

in serious form in 1948.”¹⁹³ One principal means that the Catholic Church used to that end was its monopoly on public education, Goff contends.¹⁹⁴ Such a powerful and pervasive avenue through which the Church pursued “social cleansing” might be usefully contrasted with the level of present-day religious influence in Colombian education as one measure of the current political implications of religious shifts.

4. Optimistic Perspectives on Catholic Roles

Goff’s research synthesizes well with Roux’s work to provide a fairly balanced image of players and motivations during La Violencia. When he wrote in 1983, Roux argued that the Catholic Church remained “hegemonic” in Colombia.¹⁹⁵ Where Goff rejects outright the idea that Catholic influence in Colombian politics could be rooted in a unanimously Catholic population, Roux allows for the possibility.¹⁹⁶ He echoes Goff’s assessment that religion and politics were inextricably intertwined in Colombia, likening the situation to a “Gordian Knot.”¹⁹⁷ Nevertheless, Roux emphasizes much more the pervasive Catholic argument that any persecution that did occur was related to the subversive nature of Protestant groups rather than their religious doctrine. Where Goff refutes such claims with evidence, however, Roux emphasizes more the prolific nature of such claims by Catholic leaders without as much examination of those claims’ validity. The title of his book, “A Church in a State of Alert,” on its own reveals the focus of his discussion: how the Catholic Church felt toward Protestants and what it did about those sentiments. Although Roux explains that the post-La Violencia government, the Frente Nacional, bolstered Catholic institutionalization at the “hub of national unification,”¹⁹⁸ he cites a 1976 Catholic pastoral letter insinuating changes afoot, but belying its own claims. The letter claimed that the Catholic Church does not consist in nor differentiate between

¹⁹³ Ibid., 2/17, 2/55.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 11/3–4.

¹⁹⁵ Roux, *Estado de Alerta*, 179.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 181.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 74.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 158, translation mine.

political parties, cultures, or ideologies—but also condemned groups vying for radical socio-political transformation in Colombia.¹⁹⁹

Vernon Lee Fluharty expands upon that apparent contradiction, observing that “when basic issues threaten, neither Church matters nor party labels differentiate the Conservative and Liberal upper levels.”²⁰⁰ He contends that the Church hierarchy was not to blame for the “barbarity” of La Violencia because just as politics remained vertically disparate, so did the Church.²⁰¹ Quoting Félix Restrepo, he argues that “the violence has been carried out in the name of religion, against the will of the Catholic Church, to which the fanatical clergy paid no attention, as happened in Spain.”²⁰² Accounts exist to evidence that there were clergy who opposed Gómez’s policies.²⁰³ But in spite of Fluharty’s attempt to at least partially exonerate the Church, he echoes Antonio García, recognizing that during La Violencia, the Church favored political power over moral integrity, a position that tainted the metaphysical authority it could have used to temper the violence.²⁰⁴

5. Evolving Nature of the Conflict: Emerging Guerrillas

As Palacios argues, however, partisan conflict cannot be blindly blamed for La Violencia’s atrocities. He notes that different guerrilla groups identified with and protected different societal groups ranging from Protestants in one region to Communists in another (and certainly Catholics in many), and argues that the traditional Liberal versus Conservative narrative quickly grew irrelevant, especially in the countryside.²⁰⁵ Palacios recognizes that the danger that—initially—political persecution wrought on life in *el campo* drove “many prominent Liberals from small towns to the relative safety of the

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 153.

²⁰⁰ Fluharty, *Dance of the Millions*, 49.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 120.

²⁰² Restrepo, *Colombia en la Encrucijada*, 37. Cited in Fluharty, *Dance of the Millions*, 120.

²⁰³ Fluharty, *Dance of the Millions*, 120.

²⁰⁴ García, *Gaitán y el Problema*, 334–5. Cited in Fluharty, *Dance of the Millions*, 121.

²⁰⁵ Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence*, 161.

cities,” leaving remnant guerrillas behind. Free from the influence of traditional political ideology, such remnant groups more easily turned radical.²⁰⁶

J. CONCLUSION

Mid-twentieth century events in Colombia set the footings for social and political transformation. As it concerned the Catholic Church, La Violencia was a time of confusion, inconsistency, and division. Such a vertically oriented institution could not maintain its traditional privilege in the face of horizontally integrated competition. The Church’s reactionary and elitist nature precluded its leadership from unifying adherents under a common vision, something that came more naturally to the Protestant movement.

It was not Protestantism’s growth, however, that caused Catholicism to falter. The Church’s own reactive and parochial policies that emphasized its elite political—and thereby social—positions rendered it ill prepared to take on the coming era of civil society growth. Ondina and Justo González describe the period from 1930–1960 as a time of confused Catholic identity from which the Church emerged subservient rather than authoritative.²⁰⁷ Although statistics reveal that a sustained decrease in Catholic adherents did not happen until after 1970,²⁰⁸ the political, social, and religious dynamics described herein comprise the groundwork for that impending change.

The Colombian Catholic Church’s historical privilege rendered it too political to be a guardian of moral substance. Inasmuch, the Church felt threatened by even the minute Protestant presence that entered the scene shortly before La Violencia. Whereas in some Latin American countries the Church adapted more positively, in Colombia, the Catholic response to the Protestant threat was destructive rather than preservative. It alienated adherents and catalyzed converts, but more importantly, it opened the eyes of a public in the birthing throes of a new era of social arrangements and participation. It exposed the dark in an institution that was supposed to house the Light, and paved the way for the decline in Catholic prominence to come.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ González and González, *Christianity in Latin America*, 182.

²⁰⁸ “Religion in Latin America,” 27.

IV. 1960–1990: THE FRENTE NACIONAL AND VATICAN II

A. SUMMARY

Although the Frente Nacional placated mainstream political squabbles and successfully diminished violence, by the 1960s new matters to resolve arose in the social arena. Under the Frente Nacional, battles between Liberals and Conservatives for political posts essentially ceased, but Colombian politics remained oligarchic even while superficially democratic norms predominated. This political arrangement coincided with big changes in Catholicism.

After La Violencia, the Church's traditional goal of keeping Colombia 100% Catholic²⁰⁹ continued to drive its power-based strategies, even as global Catholicism evolved toward new social realities. Catholic Action, Vatican II, and the 1968 Medellín bishops' conference all endeavored to advance social engagement by the Church, but Colombian Catholic leaders remained divided between retaining privilege and redefining purpose. This internal division increased the momentum away from Catholic unity and authority that La Violencia had precipitated. By the late 1960s a number of Catholics including some priests were speaking out against the hierarchy and its power-centric, class-based ideologies,²¹⁰ but Cold War pressures and a violence-weary public prevented these apparently (and in some cases, genuinely) revolutionary movements from capturing a greater following. Simultaneously, the reshaping of traditional social structures by forces like urbanization and industrialization undermined traditional Catholic authority spheres. The newly socialized public began to seek meaning in new places as Catholic strategy consistently remained one step behind. The Church publicly shied away from overt political influence at the elite level, but remained informally committed to retaining its privilege in the political sphere. This divided mentality prevented the Church from excelling as either an oligarchical player or a class-neutral humanitarian.

²⁰⁹ Bromiley et al., "Colombia," 606.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

B. SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATIONS

A number of transformations took place in the Church and in Colombian society during this time period. Catholic doctrine and policies (both global and local), Church-state relations, and societal trends are among these shifts, as the following sections illustrate.

1. Vatican II

In 1959, Pope John XXIII convened the second Vatican Council to “better prepare [the church] to deal with the changing world.”²¹¹ Between 1962–1965, the Council shifted Catholic norms, emphasizing the role of the laity in leadership, deconstructing such institutional traditions as the Latin mass, encouraging local leaders to innovate, and shifting ministry focus from hierarchy-shaped to socially minded, base-level endeavors like poverty eradication rather than simply teaching hope in eternal spiritual riches—all while re-affirming Papal inerrancy in conjunction with Biblical truth.²¹² Thus, while the Catholic Church was transforming in ways previously unthinkable, it remained patently institutional. In Colombia, the most conservatively Catholic country in Latin America, Pope John XXIII’s initiative toward social justice met with conflict among the Church hierarchy, while other neighboring countries, especially Brazil, more readily embraced the new doctrine.²¹³ Especially in Colombia, social change outpaced Catholic innovation, and competing ideologies espoused by radical political groups and Protestant missions caught the hearts and minds of many. Even some who remained within Catholicism began to rise against the Colombian Catholic establishment.

²¹¹ Schwaller, *History of the Catholic Church*, 228.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 228–9.

²¹³ Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence*, 180–1.

2. Camilo Torres

A Catholic priest, Camilo Torres was a Liberation Theologian just slightly ahead of his time.²¹⁴ His prominence as a descendant of one of Colombia's founding fathers by the same name, and his position as National University of Bogotá chaplain gave him a peculiarly potent voice.²¹⁵ He argued that there could be no "Christian solution" to social ills without political action.²¹⁶ Torres argued publicly for a revolution—peaceful if elite response permitted—of the Colombian society, economy, and government to plug people of all social classes into the system.²¹⁷ When his defamations of the Frente Nacional as a non-socially minded ploy of the oligarchy did not result in the reforms he sought, Torres formed the United Front and turned Marxist guerrilla. Although he aimed to unify progressives in Colombia, Torres was killed in action less than a year after founding the movement.²¹⁸

Vatican II's sweeping doctrinal liberalization became official after Torres' radicalization, but before his death.²¹⁹ Paul E. Sigmund observes that Torres' story strengthened conservative Catholics' aversions to leftist movements in general, but some left-aligned Catholics sympathized with him.²²⁰ One year after Torres' 1966 death, Pope Paul VI published an encyclical that "the *Wall Street Journal* called [...] 'warmed-over Marxism.'"²²¹ The pontiff broke ranks with Papal history by emphasizing challenges in the developing world, although Berryman surmises that the Pope assumed such

²¹⁴ Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology: The Essential Facts About the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America and Beyond*, Trade Paperback Edition (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 17.

²¹⁵ Paul E. Sigmund, "The Transformation of Catholic Social Thought in Latin America: Christian Democracy, Liberation Theology, and the New Catholic Right," in *Organized Religion in the Political Transformation of Latin America*, ed. Satya R. Pattnayak (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995), 49–50.

²¹⁶ Levine, "Religion and Politics, Politics and Religion," 26.

²¹⁷ Berryman, *Liberation Theology: The Essential Facts*, 17–18.

²¹⁸ Paul E. Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads: Democracy or Revolution?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 25; Levine, "Religion and Politics, Politics and Religion," 26.

²¹⁹ Berryman, *Liberation Theology: The Essential Facts*, 17.

²²⁰ Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*, 25.

²²¹ Cited in Berryman, *Liberation Theology: The Essential Facts*, 20.

challenges would be approached “through consensus rather than struggle.”²²² Pope Paul VI’s publication fueled efforts by minority clergy groups in various Latin American countries, including Colombia, to question traditional Church norms like social privilege for clergy, church property ownership, doctrine emphasizing endurance in poverty over positive social change for the marginalized, and even the Pope’s aversion to violence by referencing cycles of violence that the existing socio-political and economic systems precipitated.²²³

Camilo Torres was the quintessential example of the transition from La Violencia to revolutionary trends under the Frente Nacional in Colombia. But although Catholic radicals came to view violence as perhaps necessary to preserve (their conception of) the Church, Levine reminds us: “few other nations can offer so stark an example of so much violence and bloodshed producing so little social transformation and revolutionary change.”²²⁴

3. Catholic Action

The Church needed a new approach. Levine sets the ironic context: “as national political conflicts ceased to provide a central axis of conflict for the Church, politics moved within, leading the hierarchy to focus its fears and energies on [countering] the threat posed by autonomous popular movements, especially those claiming to act out of religious motives or affiliations.”²²⁵ Therefore, as La Violencia tapered, the Church instituted social programs, seeking to link campesino needs with the central tenets of the Church. This countering of popular social mobilization with Church-supervised social movements was generally known as Catholic Action.

Schwaller credits Pius XI (Pope from 1922–1939) as originally promulgating the Catholic Action movement, aimed to bring Church elites together with the laity to

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid., 21.

²²⁴ Levine, *Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia*, 192.

²²⁵ Levine, *Popular Voices*, 91.

broaden support for the Church's strategic aims in society and politics.²²⁶ In the second half of the 20th century, however, Latin American Catholic Action was generally a manifestation of official Church opposition to radical leftist ideologies such as Marxism. Catholic laypeople joined into groups purposed to “address social ills in a manner consistent with the teachings of the Church, and which was sanctioned and supervised by the Church hierarchy in order to counter the leftist movements.”²²⁷ In most cases, states Schwaller, such groups retained traditional Catholic conservatism and even bordered on xenophobic.²²⁸ In 1970, Vallier observed that Catholic Action had failed to create the synergy it intended; he did not observe notable impacts on campesino values nor on their commitment to Catholicism.²²⁹

4. Priest-Government Clashes

Nevertheless, some priests' embrace of sectors of the Church's new social focus aggravated authorities to the point of arrest. One such priest was arrested for showing solidarity with a campesino land rights claim.²³⁰ Ironically, Catholic leadership at this point was “profoundly troubled that forces exist in Colombia which attempt to gag evangelical freedom with tactics ranging from the subtle labeling as ‘subversive’ or ‘rebel’ of every priest committed to a social apostolate, all the way to having them put in jail.”²³¹ Apparently, prior Catholic opposition to Protestantism on similar terms was not primarily doctrinal; it was the fruit of the Church's coveted status as a political elite—a response to a broader fear of losing its grasp on power.

5. Urbanization's Effects on Catholic Unity

Another trend that weakened Church efforts at unifying the country during and after La Violencia was urban migration, which shifted the power structures that rural

²²⁶ Schwaller, *History of the Catholic Church*, 209.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 216.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 221.

²²⁹ Vallier, *Catholicism, Social Control and Modernization*, 124.

²³⁰ Levine, *Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia*, 195–6.

²³¹ *El Tiempo*, August 10, 1972; cited in Levine, *Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia*, 195.

populations formerly supported.²³² In the cities, the Catholic-progressive minority advocated against traditional hierarchies, emphasizing outreach, transparency, and avoidance of politics.²³³ As in the countryside, this effort aimed to recover from earlier political losses due to violence by realigning Church power structures with social trends. So-called “Christian revolutionaries,” however, diverted attention from the urban progressives’ endeavors. The revolutionaries’ anti-establishment emphasis and openness to violence as a legitimate recourse—in the face of a public still freshly terrorized by La Violencia—prevented what could have been “a rather widespread movement of progressive pressure within the Church”; Colombian Catholicism largely strove to maintain its traditionalist, politically authoritative role toward a sea of “loyal and passive laymen.”²³⁴

6. Medellín 1968: Latin American Bishops’ Conference

Outwardly traditional but inwardly divided, Colombia hosted the 1968 Council of Latin American Bishops (CELAM; *Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano*) conference. Catholic leaders from across Latin America met in Medellín to examine how Vatican II should be executed in the region.²³⁵ Notable was that the conference’s agenda did not start with doctrine followed by recommendations for application as was the Church’s tradition, but rather with observations about society followed by “theological reflections” on those conditions.²³⁶ This represented a systemic shift in how Catholic leaders related to the status quo.

After years of trivializing the import of class structures, the conference represented a movement across Latin America toward encouraging those in lower classes to unite in a drive for improved social conditions.²³⁷ At the conference, Pope Paul

²³² Levine, *Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia*, 63.

²³³ Vallier, *Catholicism, Social Control and Modernization*, 124.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 124–5.

²³⁵ Berryman, *Liberation Theology: The Essential Facts*, 22.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 22–3.

²³⁷ Martin C Needler, *The Problem of Democracy in Latin America* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1987), 67.

promulgated a new understanding of poverty based on those ideas, but coupled this with a clear thesis on violence, defining it as a counter-gospel.²³⁸ Previously, Colombian Catholic leaders had encouraged the poor to retain dignity by continuing their under-compensated toils, insinuating that “poverty was less a product of the social structure ... than a result of the faulty habits of the poor.”²³⁹ But the Pope differed: No longer were the poor viewed as individually deficient, but rather as victims of structural deficiencies. To that point, Robert G. Wesson observed as late as 1982 that “Colombia has always been and remains...an extremely unequal society.” Despite the principal political parties’ significant differences, Conservatives and Liberals remained committed to the country’s elitist oligarchic order.²⁴⁰

To reform that structure, revolution became a justifiable option to some;²⁴¹ certain Colombian bishops argued that violence goes beyond individual acts, and can comprise institutional phenomena—which must be responded to in kind.²⁴² This was in contrast to the conference’s collective stance that decried the use of violence, although favoring revolutionary concepts over those based in tradition or status quo.²⁴³ Of the three main social perspectives discussed—“‘traditionalist,’ ‘developmentalist,’ and ‘revolutionary’”—the conference favored the revolutionary angle in an effort to support the popular voice and avoid the “economistic” focus of developmentalism.²⁴⁴

In the end, although the Council forged a new path for the broader Latin American Church following shifts in the social context toward popular Church unity, Colombian leaders were among the least responsive to its results, remaining staunchly on

²³⁸ Levine, “Religion and Politics, Politics and Religion,” 23–24.

²³⁹ Levine, *Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia*, 85.

²⁴⁰ Robert G. Wesson, *Democracy in Latin America: Promise and Problems* (New York: Praeger, 1982), 35.

²⁴¹ Levine, “Religion and Politics, Politics and Religion,” 24–25.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁴³ Berryman, *Liberation Theology: The Essential Facts*, 23.

²⁴⁴ Sigmund, “Transformation of Catholic Social Thought,” 50.

the periphery of this new social-revolutionary mentality in spite of hosting the conference on their own turf.²⁴⁵

7. CEBs

It was also in Medellín that the Church endorsed CEBs (*comunidades eclesiales de base*; base ecclesiastical communities) as an effort toward such social and economic liberation.²⁴⁶ The Church's emphasis on CEBs after the Medellín bishops' conference evidenced a general mentality toward de-institutionalizing the day-to-day practice of Catholicism. While CEBs proliferated around Latin America (Sigmund noted that by 1990 CEB participants in Brazil, for example, had increased to four million),²⁴⁷ their proliferation was not so pronounced in Colombia; Church leaders remained divided between the positive social aspects of progressive movements and preservation of order and traditional Church institutionalism.²⁴⁸ Berryman notes that "many clergy resisted," but even in the reticent Colombian Church there was some support: one of two priests who traveled full time around Latin America proliferating CEBs was Colombian.²⁴⁹ Liberation Theology was at the root of the CEB movement and other Church initiatives toward social justice and liberalization of Catholic practice.

8. Liberation Theology

The concept of Liberation Theology is traceable to writings by Gustavo Gutierrez, an ordained priest who had studied in Europe and lived in the slums of Lima, leading him to conclude that "poverty was a destructive thing, something to be fought against and destroyed ... that poverty was not accidental ... but the result of a structure ... [and] that poor people were a social class. It became crystal clear that in order to serve the poor, one had to move into political action."²⁵⁰ The Medellín conference propelled Gutierrez's

²⁴⁵ Bromiley et al., "Colombia," 606.

²⁴⁶ Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*, 30.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 24–5.

²⁴⁸ Flora, "Religiosity among Working Class Catholic Colombians," 83.

²⁴⁹ Berryman, *Liberation Theology: The Essential Facts*, 67.

²⁵⁰ Quoted in Robert McAfee Brown, *Gustavo Gutierrez* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), 23; cited in Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*, 32.

ideas into the Catholic mainstream.²⁵¹ Most notable, contends Sigmund, is that the Medellín conclusions emphasized the concepts of “dependence”—and “liberation” from it—for the first time in Latin American Catholicism.²⁵² Dependence, referring to the conclusion that Latin America was in essence owned and operated—and sustained—from abroad, both at the institutional and individual levels. The Medellín Conference observed: “whole populations lacking basic necessities live in such a dependence that it impedes all initiative and responsibility, as well as the possibility of cultural promotion and participation in social and political life.”²⁵³

By the late 1960s, as social activism melded with political engagement, theologians began to distinguish the theology of wealthy hemispheres from that of the developing world. While the Word of God remained constant, its application to fundamentally different socio-economic environments needed to be considered.²⁵⁴ “While the Church hierarchy might be allied with conservative political forces,” says Schwaller, “a new group of laypersons and clergy emerged for whom issues of social equity were part and parcel of the Gospel message. For them the traditional support given to the Church hierarchy and its emphasis on structure rather than change did not coincide with what they found in the social teachings of the Gospel.”²⁵⁵

Liberation theology was not as potent in Colombia as in much of Latin America. Schwaller argues that between 1960–2000 Liberation Theology rose amid the tumult felt in many of the region’s countries as civilian and military regimes traded places with inordinate frequency and volatility.²⁵⁶ Although Colombia did experience a brief military government interlude in the 1950s under Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, the country’s overall political stability during the latter half of the 20th century, driven mainly by the Frente

²⁵¹ Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*, 28–9.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁵³ Medellín Conference, “Conclusions,” quoted in Sergio Torres and John Eagleson, eds., *Theology in the Americas* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), 222–224; cited in Sigmund, “Transformation of Catholic Social Thought,” 50.

²⁵⁴ Berryman, *Liberation Theology: The Essential Facts*, 25–6.

²⁵⁵ Schwaller, *History of the Catholic Church*, 220.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 232.

Nacional political coalition, stands apart from the hemisphere's broader experience of unstable and repressive government. Sigmund observes that in the mid-1970s, the only Latin American countries with "relatively free governments" were Venezuela, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Colombia.²⁵⁷ Berryman takes a slightly less optimistic view, describing these four as formally democratic but still "capable of utilizing harsh repression."²⁵⁸ This thesis contends that Liberation Theology's relatively weak run in Colombia was likely less due to the country's semi-stable democracy, however, and more due to the particularly institutionalized nature of Colombian Catholicism.

Liberation Theology began to fall out of vogue in upper Catholic echelons in the 1980s. Schwaller cites two main reasons: first, that in practice, Liberation Theology tended toward radicalism, and second, that the Pope (John Paul II) was wary of advocating "political, social, and economic transformation," and that such action-minded ministry could undermine the theological basis of Catholic doctrine.²⁵⁹ For reasons already discussed, these moves impacted Church affairs in Colombia much less than in other Latin American countries.

9. Puebla

A decade after the Medellín conference, the Church held a follow-up conference in Puebla, Mexico. While CELAM leadership envisioned the conference refocusing Catholic priorities around Latin American transformation and development rather than "liberation from oppression," the fruit of the conference was less conclusive.²⁶⁰ Condemning Marxism and violence, emphasizing Church hierarchy, but simultaneously promulgating the "preferential option for the poor" concept, regional Catholic tendencies had become mostly centrist: desirous of unity in a divided clerical field.²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*, 52.

²⁵⁸ Berryman, *Liberation Theology: The Essential Facts*, 97.

²⁵⁹ Schwaller, *History of the Catholic Church*, 258–9.

²⁶⁰ Berryman, *Liberation Theology: The Essential Facts*, 103–4.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 104.

C. SUMMARY OF CATHOLIC CHALLENGES

By the mid-20th century, argues Schwaller, the Catholic institution's political influence was deteriorating throughout Latin America. This trend continued through the epoch this chapter evaluates. Catholic Action's emphasis on social change over institutional structure, coupled with more vocal political dissent within the clergy—of which Marxism was a primary motivator—placed the Church on a precipice of strategy.²⁶² Its challenges included: deciding whether to continue engaging in political alliances, which risk loss of Church prestige when such alliances leave the church on the wrong side of political change; a precipitous decline in clergy, both indigenous and foreign, driven by improved social and economic opportunities outside the traditional ecclesiastical honor sanctum; Cold War challenges, in which Marxism and its affiliates spoke to a growing popular yen for social justice that the traditional Church, even under Catholic Action, could not effectively answer; and an influx of Protestant missions with their proliferating “priesthood of all believers” ideals.²⁶³

While both Communism and Protestantism challenged Catholic norms by espousing nontraditional egalitarian principles, Protestantism retained the spiritual-emotional aspect of faith experience that many Catholics were familiar with.²⁶⁴ The Protestant movement thus had a psychological and spiritual edge on Communism in overcoming traditional ideologies. Meanwhile, Colombian Catholicism remained among the least progressive in the region.

The Church's past, present, and future, says Vallier, “become mixed and intertwined with each other, creating internal tensions, giving rise to ambiguous public actions, and holding effects for many extrareligious events and processes.”²⁶⁵ Among the five countries he compared in 1970—Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico—Colombia emerged weakest in his four “comparative dimensions” of progressive Church

²⁶² Schwaller, *History of the Catholic Church*, 220.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 220–3.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 223.

²⁶⁵ Vallier, *Catholicism, Social Control and Modernization*, 22.

evolution.²⁶⁶ Of particular note is his evaluation that the Colombian Church made zero progress in the “development of the priest’s role as pastoral leader and colleague”—that is to say, the “bringing [of] religious activities into closer correspondence with the sociological bases of the local area”²⁶⁷ that the aforementioned progressives desired to further was thwarted by those left in the past (traditionalists), and revolutionaries stuck in a short-sighted, violence-willing mentality. In its division, Levine concludes that the Church was unable to unify its cause, solidify legitimacy, and connect with a growing population that was moving in new directions.²⁶⁸

D. ANALYSIS

Respecting the foregoing narrative, a number of areas warrant more detailed examination. The following sections consider the Colombian Church’s moves respecting budding popular organization, the reliability of adherence statistics, and the effects of urbanization and related social trends during the epoch this chapter evaluates.

1. Trends Toward (and Away from) Popular Linkages

Although the Frente Nacional protected Catholic social and educational authority, and the Church began to reorient its positions toward politically neutral and socially equitable policies,²⁶⁹ Dix maintains that such moves were confined to “change within the established order.”²⁷⁰ Nevertheless, he contends that the Church might guarantee its “permanent political influence” were it able to birth a new “political movement [...] which effectively promotes the application of Catholic doctrine to contemporary problems.”²⁷¹ Such a change appeared on the horizon under Vatican II,²⁷² but as we have seen, its applications in Colombia proved somewhat problematic. Cornelia Butler Flora

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 137–41.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 138–9.

²⁶⁸ Levine, *Politics, Religion, and Society*, 21.

²⁶⁹ Dix, *Colombia: The Political Dimensions of Change*, 315–16.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 318.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 320.

²⁷² Ibid., 409.

observes that Colombian Catholic leadership “discouraged Catholics from becoming involved in base communities” and that in Colombia, such communities were generally very limited, urban, and “highly political.”²⁷³

Commenting on the unique condition of Colombian Catholicism during and after the Medellín conference of 1968, David E. Mutchler observes that the stand that Colombian bishops took against the progressive, solidarity-driven Medellín documents, and the subsequent CELAM rebuff of the Colombian challenge, was a watershed moment for what he calls Latin American Catholicism’s fragmentation. His thesis, however, is that that fragmentation has its roots in “externally imposed bureaucratization.”²⁷⁴ Mutchler blames externally driven ecclesiastical staff structures, and cites Camilo Torres’ United Front as the key temporal node for intra-church conflict in Colombia. Colombian Church leaders had to choose which side they were on, and that choice had local and transnational implications. USAID funds, for example, were at stake; external influences certainly played a role in ecclesiastical and governmental decision-making in Colombia during this period.²⁷⁵ But more than just funds hung in the balance: some such USAID funding would aim to research the inner workings of Colombian Catholic decision making, with an aim to influence the Church’s stance on controversial issues like birth control.²⁷⁶

The foregoing notwithstanding, Mutchler umbrellas his whole argument under “the organizational conflict in Colombia [...] that significant sectors of the Church are quite prepared to construct bases of power that include only tangential linkages to traditional hierarchies.” The former sanctions used by the Church to chide independent tendencies in priests ceased to hold their historic power.²⁷⁷ Age, argues Mutchler, correlated strongly with these conflicts: older bishops clashed with decades-younger and

²⁷³ Flora, “Religiosity among Working Class Catholic Colombians,” 83.

²⁷⁴ Mutchler, *The Church as a Political Factor in Latin America*, 139–40.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 140–2.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 203–4.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 398.

more cosmopolitan staff members.²⁷⁸ Such distinctions, he contends, refocused power from class-based to organization-based nodes: “it is no longer sufficient to examine [the Catholic] status system nor its formal hierarchies. Much more salient are the direct and indirect linkages that bind Catholic ‘sub-units’ to international sources of logistic and financial support and to local political parties, armies, student movements, or other elementary power systems.”²⁷⁹

Mutchler ultimately argues that the implementation of externally mandated staff structures in the Colombian Church was “a clear response, or reaction, to Marxist and Protestant organizing activities.”²⁸⁰ He concludes that the dysfunction in the Church was not primarily associated with perceived threats of Marxism or Protestantism, “but with the internal hemorrhaging of the Catholic system” as “the masses were awakening to new aspirations of a nonreligious quality, and urbanization and industrialization were transforming the peasant societies that had, since the Spanish conquest, provided the bishops with a mass base.”²⁸¹ The staff system intended to modernize Catholic capacity to maintain unofficial control backfired as it revealed weak central control structures and fragmented Church objectives and resources.

Mutchler advised in the 1970s that Catholic purposes should center around “real poverty and political abstention” if the Church wanted hope of recovery, but acknowledged that urbanization and secularization would prove a formidable challenge to redeveloping a “mass base.”²⁸² Roux’s analysis follows, concluding that external influences such as Vatican II and CELAM pressed Colombian Catholic leaders toward tolerance and apoliticalism, while internal forces made it more challenging than in neighboring countries for the Catholic institution to disentangle itself from the Colombian political system.²⁸³ Roux argues that the *popular church* movement faced

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 401.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 406–7.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 413.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 415.

²⁸² Ibid., 417.

²⁸³ Roux, *Estado de Alerta*, 171–2.

some specific challenges in Colombia: with such an institutionalized Catholic tradition, other popular organization groups were unsure whether they should embrace such popular Catholicism groups or be afraid of them as arms of the central Church. Contrarily, the institutional church maintained that the popular church was contrary to its universal mandate.²⁸⁴

Elaborating on the distinction and relationship between these institutional and popular veins of Catholicism, Levine argues that two competing definitions of *the church* exist: the first, an ecclesiastical hierarchy from which flows unified doctrine and authority, and the second, which stresses *the church* as a concept of community and common experience, thus unifying a non-hierarchical body. In the second case, “institutional unity [depends] on social unity.”²⁸⁵ He argues that Colombian Church leadership historically took for given their authority’s tentacled relationships with various aspects of Colombian life; indeed such relationships were central to Church unity and legitimacy.²⁸⁶ The first indication that the Colombian Church was beginning to honestly face the prospect of changing societal perspectives on its authority did not come until its 1969 publication, “*La iglesia ante el cambio*” (“The Church confronting change”), but even then, systemic reformation did not materialize.²⁸⁷

While base communities flourished in Brazil and other Latin American countries, Colombia remained a relative bastion of institutional Catholicism, deeply ingrained in its social and political structures.²⁸⁸ “Hostility to autonomous popular initiatives by both church and government” was so strong, states Levine, that even researching the nature of popular organization in Colombia is difficult.²⁸⁹ He continues: “Control is stressed so heavily that innovation is choked off.”²⁹⁰ But innovation is not always new, as Levine

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 173–4.

²⁸⁵ Levine, “Institutional Church,” 188–9.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 193.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 193–4.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 190–1.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 201.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 202.

concludes. Innovation can surge from ancient truths that overcome modern religiosity: one CEB member said that the group found diocesan initiatives “difficult and boring” but that instead, they “search in the gospels where Jesus tells his disciples to do this and that, and there [they] find ideas.”²⁹¹ Catholic leaders feared such independence found within popular structures.

It remains dubious that CEBs in Colombia will flourish, argued Levine in 1986; the hierarchy uses them in name to promote pre-existent organizations under a socially positive label, all while constraining their potential.²⁹² W. Philip Thornton confirmed the impact of such policies in his 1984 work on socialization’s role in Protestant conversions from Catholicism. He observed the irony that the religiousness of a Colombian who had been Catholic from birth actually worked against overprotective Catholic norms and tradition, as the faithful began to “search [for] more.”²⁹³ Furthermore, Palacios contends that with a political divide among Colombian priests, Protestant missions met the poor with greater comfort and stronger organization.²⁹⁴

2. Decreasing and Questionable Adherence

Individual adherence to traditional Catholic norms was waning. Cornelia Butler Flora observed in 1984 that although the dashboards of many buses and taxis still sported the requisite Virgin shrine, drivers were gradually transitioning to soccer team paraphernalia instead—for her, a sign of decreasing religiosity.²⁹⁵ She noted decreased political influence among older priests, who maintained an illusion of their authority from bygone days,²⁹⁶ and decreased desire for political influence among younger priests, who, being more progressive, ironically were isolated from their communities because they were viewed to “impede the progress of the community” by countering social vices rather

²⁹¹ Ibid., 207.

²⁹² Ibid., 211–12.

²⁹³ W. Philip Thornton, “Resocialization: Roman Catholics Becoming Protestants in Colombia, South America,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (January 1, 1984): 28, doi:10.2307/3317295.

²⁹⁴ Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence*, 180–1.

²⁹⁵ Flora, “Religiosity among Working Class Catholic Colombians,” 75.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 72.

than simply fulfilling traditional priestly rituals.²⁹⁷ But in contrast to this apparent desire for ritualistic participation, Flora observes that 10% of Catholics in her sample never attend church, and 20% only attend on rare occasions.²⁹⁸ This lack of participation is evidenced in that many Colombians prove ignorant of basic Catholic knowledge. Flora references Benjamin E. Haddox (among others) who argues that “many Colombians doubtless follow the exterior rituals with little or no understanding of the rituals’ significance,” and that “numerous [professing] Catholics cannot identify Jesus or the Holy Trinity.”²⁹⁹

3. Urbanization and Changing Social Norms

Another component of Vatican II’s challenges in Colombia originated when La Violencia drove rapid urbanization, changing the flavor of social dynamics and exposing previously hopeless campesinos to new opportunities and knowledge. Thomas C. Bruneau and W. E. Hewitt build upon this point, exploring the ways that the Latin American sociocultural environment has limited the Catholic Church’s options for innovation in the face of changing social structures and pressures.³⁰⁰ While they specifically analyze Brazil, their arguments that Catholic decline cannot be blamed solely on Church policy, but must be tied to the conditions surrounding that policy, can be modified to the Colombian narrative. At the onset of the twentieth century’s final decade, Colombian democracy opened and religious freedom expanded via the new constitution. Where in other countries the Church had to adjust to operations in a non-authoritarian political environment, in Colombia, the Church faced a shift away from the elite-controlled democratic environment of the past. Just as the political environment opened to competition, so did the religious.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 73–4.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 79.

²⁹⁹ Haddox, *Sociedad Y Religión En Colombia*, 123. Translations mine. Cited in Flora, “Religiosity among Working Class Catholic Colombians,” 75.

³⁰⁰ Bruneau and Hewitt, “Catholicism and Political Action,” 45.

E. CONCLUSION

Gene Burns' 1992 work on Catholicism throughout Latin America makes a few observations about the Colombian Church at the end of the second major epoch this thesis considers. First, he comments that the institutional church has learned to avoid party-alignment, and if the Church were ever supreme in Colombian politics, it is no longer. As the "junior partner in the church-state alliance," Burns suggests that the Colombian Church would be well served to oppose any claims of Church affiliation by any political group, especially subversives, to avoid losing what remains of its political clout. Nevertheless, he perceives that the Church likely still aims for control in politics, but from a distance, and with plausible deniability that comes from "following the state's lead, rather than [innovating]" on the front lines of political conflict.³⁰¹ Schwaller observes that although the Catholic hierarchy came to see Church-State enmeshment as detrimental to the Church's goals,³⁰² this perspective took only limited hold in Colombia, where the constitution (and national norms) retained Catholicism as the state religion until 1991.

Big changes were afoot for a Catholic Church whose historic aims to shape society and politics could no longer be considered a unified organizational objective. La Violencia had illuminated the Colombian Catholic hierarchy's power-centric ambitions, giving way to a divided clergy and an increasingly liberated public. While some of the laity and even clergy pursued revolutionary ends, the hierarchy eschewed these activities, lumping them together with militant Communism. Although Marxist rebel groups were a prominent feature in the Colombian landscape through the Cold War and beyond, the literature does not demonstrate significant linkages between the Church and such revolutionary groups. The Church did, however, endeavor to engage at the popular level through Catholic Action, Vatican II, and Medellín conference initiatives, but failed to meet the public where it was; rather, the hierarchy's objectives and fears continued to shape its policies in Colombia. As such, the Church failed to inspire a fresh era of Catholic commitment among Colombians during this period.

³⁰¹ Burns, *The Frontiers of Catholicism*, 165.

³⁰² Schwaller, *History of the Catholic Church*, 209.

As the urbanization that began during La Violencia continued, new social structures emerged that the Church was unprepared to connect with. These structures challenged Colombian Catholicism's historical monopoly on moral authority and social control. The concept of the individual and the effects of social systems on individual outcomes began to emerge as issues to contend with. While in Rome and in Colombia's neighbors, these issues took shape via Vatican II and its implementation, such liberal doctrine infiltrated the Colombian Church with difficulty. The geographically displaced and socially empowered populace had begun to search for answers outside Catholicism and the Church's political position deteriorated.

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V. 1990–PRESENT: CONSTITUTIONAL OPENING

A. SUMMARY

As political violence tempered under the Frente Nacional, fierce religious political alignment also tapered. “Protestants were no longer mishandled for either political or religious reasons,” says David Bushnell, “and the various restrictions that had been imposed on Protestant activities were lifted.”³⁰³ In spite of the general “spread of a genuine tolerance between Catholics and Protestants,”³⁰⁴ Catholic ethos continued to run deep among Colombians at large, and moves toward more liberal doctrine were not matched with wholesale exodus of Catholic elites from the political power structure.

The elite-dominated political system alienated much of the populace and eventually led to renewed violence. To remedy these problems once and for all, a constitutional assembly of representatives as diverse as the country’s population convened to write a new constitution. The new document reflected already-growing trends toward secularization and pluralism.

In spite of the new constitution’s array of measures aimed at unifying disparate cultural, social, and political groups under a single, equitable system, the new legalities found themselves at odds with deep-seated Catholic norms and traditions.

B. PRECURSORS TO THE 1990 CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

Under the Frente Nacional, the Church had remained an integral component of the Colombian system. Garcia-Guadilla and Hurtado confirm: “The [Frente Nacional] recognized Catholicism as the official religion, and the Roman Catholic Church as a fundamental element for the social order.”³⁰⁵ The Church’s partisan nature was ostensibly shifting, however. In fact, the increased executive powers and technocratic

³⁰³ David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Univ. of California Press, 1993), 227.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ Maria Pilar Garcia-Guadilla and Mónica Hurtado, “Participation and Constitution Making in Colombia and Venezuela: Enlarging the Scope of Democracy?” (Latin American Studies Association, March 2000), 8, <http://lasa.international.pitt.edu/Lasa2000/Garcia-Guadilla-Hurtado.PDF>.

tendencies of the Frente Nacional began to shift the bipolar nature of Colombian politics entirely.³⁰⁶ Dix argues that the Church “eschewed its historic partisanship and instead reached a de facto accommodation with the Liberals that made the Church a major prop of the new bipartisan National Front.”³⁰⁷ The National Front government fancied itself a protector of the Church and its roles in defining the country’s social arrangements, making the Church, in turn, “a supporter of the political system and of the democratic order regardless of which traditional party holds the presidency.”³⁰⁸ In essence, claims Dix, “the Church has served as one more support for Colombia’s elite-dominated version of quasi democracy and (modest) reform from above.”³⁰⁹

One example of this political arrangement happened in 1985. The Church joined the establishment parties in condemnation of a planned labor strike.³¹⁰ This action evidences the Church’s continued political role leading up to the 1990 constituent assembly, but notably, does not represent party alignment as much as alignment with the political status quo. Indeed, “a small, informal elite composed of business, political, religious, and some military leaders . . . effectively usurped power from Congress and the president by making the decisions—sometimes at informal meetings held in private homes—about what policies or laws should be implemented prior to final action by the legislature.”³¹¹ To that point, in 1977, President Alfonso López Michelsen stated: “Today we have class struggle more than party struggle. The division is between those who wish to end the system and those who wish to preserve it. Thus, the theme of how to make peace between Liberals and Conservatives is no longer topical; rather the debate is between friends of the ‘status quo’ and those who aspire to a different order.”³¹²

³⁰⁶ Robert H. Dix, *The Politics of Colombia*, Politics in Latin America (Praeger, 1987), 45.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 142.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 143.

³¹⁰ Jonathan Hartlyn, *The Politics of Coalition Rule in Colombia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 206.

³¹¹ Dennis M. Hanratty and Sandra W. Meditz, “Colombia: A Country Study,” in *Colombia: Current Issues and Historical Background*, ed. Nina M Serafino (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2003), 231–2.

³¹² “Interview with President Alfonso López Michelsen,” *Revista Causa Común*, April-May 1977, 19; cited in Hartlyn, *The Politics of Coalition Rule in Colombia*, 197.

Glimpses of that “different order” began to emerge as economic growth gave rise to political plurality even before the new constitution came to be. As Colombia’s economy grew through the latter quarter of the twentieth century, often at rates outpacing the rest of Latin America,³¹³ traditional economic power holders found their influence diluted in a diverse new environment. “The economy had grown to the point where no one vested interest could be said to control it, and the Colombian state, though hardly autonomous from the wielders of economic power, was too big and too amorphous to be a fully reliable servant of anyone,” argues Bushnell.³¹⁴ While the consociational structure of the Frente Nacional decreased both social and political conflict, it also resulted in decreased popular participation and faith in the electoral process.³¹⁵

Along with this economic diffusion came a “decline of confidence in all national institutions,” and “not even the Church was immune to this general phenomenon.”³¹⁶ Although the Church continued to be more trusted by the public than government institutions, evidence of popular doctrinal adherence was declining; priests commented that decreasing numbers attend personal confession, and the Church’s stance on contraception came to be broadly disregarded.³¹⁷ Annual population growth decreased from about 3.2% in the 1960s to near 2% by 1980, a reflection of an urbanizing, industrializing society, as well as liberalizing social perspectives toward traditional Catholic anti-contraception doctrine.³¹⁸

Divorce followed a similar trend: re-legalized in 1976, but not for Catholic marriages, popular workarounds to clerical restraints on divorce proliferated rapidly.³¹⁹ By 1990, the social consensus on divorce was clear, as “the Conservative Party, once the

³¹³ *Statistical Abstract of Latin America*, vol. 28, 1990, 1023, 1042; *Colombia Today*, vol. 8, 25, 1991; both cited in Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia*, 269.

³¹⁴ Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia*, 278.

³¹⁵ Dix, *The Politics of Colombia*, 44–5.

³¹⁶ Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia*, 278.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 239.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 279.

archdefender of Catholic values, nominated a divorced man who was remarried to a previously divorced woman.”³²⁰

The year 1990 began in political turmoil. The bipartisan political machine remained thoroughly entrenched and three non-establishment presidential candidates were assassinated during their campaigns.³²¹ The violence extended beyond politicians: “Between 1987 and 1992 there were 77 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, by far the highest rate in the world.”³²² The list of victims was diverse, representing the government and legal arenas, media, guerrilla, political activism, and labor groups.³²³

In 1990, then-President Barco ordered the election commission to ask each voter whether, “in order to strengthen participatory democracy, do you vote for the convocation of a constitutional assembly representative of all social, political, and regional forces of the Nation, democratically and popularly elected to reform Colombia’s Political Constitution?”³²⁴ Although many abstained, of those who voted, 88% answered yes to that question.³²⁵

The 1990 constituent assembly was a response to general consensus that Colombia’s crime-ridden public order and security situation required renovation, and that the power-sharing arrangements of the Frente Nacional had blurred lines of political responsibility, decreasing the public’s willingness to both engage with and trust the

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Gabriel Marcella and Donald Schulz, *Colombia’s Three Wars: U.S. Strategy at the Crossroads* (Strategic Studies Institute, 1999), 8.

³²² Ibid., 9.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ “Decreto 927 De 1990” (Departamento Administrativo de la Presidencia de la Republica, May 3, 1990), ftp://ftp.camara.gov.co/camara/basedoc/decreto/1990/decreto_0927_1990.html; cited and translated in William C. Banks and Edgar Alvarez, “The New Colombian Constitution: Democratic Victory or Popular Surrender?,” *The University of Miami Inter-American Law Review* 23, no. 1 (1991): 56, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40176260>.

³²⁵ “Sentencia Numero 138” (Corte Suprema de Justicia (de Colombia), October 9, 1990), ftp://ftp.camara.gov.co/camara/basedoc/csj_nf/sp/1990/csj_sp_s138_0910_1990.html; cited in Banks and Alvarez, “New Colombian Constitution,” 57.

political system.³²⁶ The assembly members represented all elements of society, including Protestants and natives.³²⁷

C. THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY AND ITS RESULTS

The motivations behind, and changes in the 1991 constitution are many and varied. Numerous authors address this topic with specificity.³²⁸ This thesis aims only to note the changes most significant to religion's relationship with the political. These include questions of fiscal policy, cultural and political pluralism, sovereignty, education, and religious freedom.

1. Fiscal Policy

Regarding fiscal policy, Cardenas et al. observe that prior to the new constitution, interest groups called *gremios* played heavily into the policymaking process. The President traditionally included various governmental and private sector figures, including Church representatives, in his decision-making. Post-new constitution, congress is more active in fiscal policy-making, and the *gremios*, though not absent, have lost the bulk of their former clout.³²⁹ Especially since the new constitution curtails the formerly dominant executive powers, rebalancing them with the judicial and legislative.³³⁰

³²⁶ Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia*, 250, 252.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 251.

³²⁸ See (among others): Banks and Alvarez, "New Colombian Constitution"; Mauricio Cardenas, Roberto Junguito, and Mónica Pachón, "Political Institutions and Policy Outcomes in Colombia: The Effects of the 1991 Constitution," SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, February 1, 2006), <http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=1814757>; Donald Fox and Anne Stetson, "The 1991 Constitutional Reform: Prospects for Democracy and the Rule of Law in Colombia," *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 24, no. 2 (January 1, 1992): 139, <http://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/jil/vol24/iss2/1>; Garcia-Guadilla and Hurtado, "Participation and Constitution Making"; Viviane A. Morales Hoyos, "Religious Liberty and Cultural and Ethnic Pluralism in the Colombian Constitution of 1991," *BYU Law Review* 1999, no. 2 (January 8, 2001): 561–80, <http://digitalcommons.law.byu.edu/lawreview/vol1999/iss2/4>.

³²⁹ Cardenas, Junguito, and Pachón, "Political Institutions and Policy Outcomes," 28.

³³⁰ Fox and Stetson, "The 1991 Constitutional Reform," 139.

2. Political Pluralism, Civil Rights, and Human Rights

Another such area is political diversity. The new constitution was designed to enhance the “range of political parties,” and assure “citizens from the full spectrum of Colombian society [...] the right to vote freely for a wider range of officials.”³³¹ Whereas its 1886 predecessor declares the state’s mandate to protect “lives, honor, and property,”³³² the 1991 constitution adds “beliefs, and rights and freedoms” to that list,³³³ thus emphasizing civil liberties *and* human rights. These provisions opened the door to new parties representing diverse ideologies, theoretically diluting the weight of amalgamated Catholic-Conservative politics. New parties began to emerge in the shifted political balance, including some reflecting Protestant interests, but the two-party, elite-dominated Liberal-Conservative system present in most early Latin American democracies survived longer in Colombia than elsewhere; In spite of the 1990–91 institutional renewal project, the legacy power structure to some extent endured, at least in spirit.³³⁴

Nevertheless, an array of new parties emerged in the 1990s, including Protestant ones, but those that did were “little more than vehicles for the political ambitions of leaders of charismatic mega-churches,” says Paul Freston.³³⁵ They did not represent a broader, unified Protestant agenda to employ its weight upon the Colombian political sphere.³³⁶ Freston ultimately argues that “although [Evangelical parties reflect] a broadening of democracy, their practices contribute little to this process.”³³⁷ Although Protestant leaders certainly used the 1990 constituent assembly as an opportunity to shift the tide away from Catholic-centric politics, this effort was focused primarily on gaining

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² “1886 Constitution of Colombia,” 1886, Article 16; cited in Fox and Stetson, “The 1991 Constitutional Reform,” 156.

³³³ “1991 Constitution of Colombia,” 1991, Article 2; cited in Fox and Stetson, “The 1991 Constitutional Reform,” 157.

³³⁴ Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America*, 227–8.

³³⁵ Paul Freston, “Evangelicals and Politics: A Comparison Between Africa and Latin America,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 13, no. 1 (January 1, 1998): 40, doi:10.1080/13537909808580820.

³³⁶ Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America*, 235–6.

³³⁷ Ibid., 236.

civil rights equal to the Catholic Church, not ostensibly on seizing political power for its own sake.³³⁸

3. Source of Sovereignty

The constitutional assembly grappled extensively with the question of sovereignty. The 1886 Constitution had named God as the “Supreme Source of all Authority,” but the 1990 assembly was pluralistic in nature and commission; it would not ultimately decide to inscribe God’s sovereignty into the new constitution.³³⁹ But sovereignty had to reside somewhere. The remaining options were the nation or the people. The nation was problematic, since the nation as sovereign fails to recognize the political responsibility of individuals—a problem all too familiar in Colombian history. Colombian societal diversity made sovereignty of the people challenging—whose ideologies or perspectives would rule the day? Ultimately, the new constitution designated the people as a collective—*el pueblo*—as the source of sovereignty. This concept embodied the pluralistic nature of Colombia’s population while recognizing a unity imperative to a coherent political system.³⁴⁰ To do so, the 1991 constitution removed Catholicism as the official national religion, and fully legalized divorce by classifying all marriages under civil jurisdiction.³⁴¹ Paradoxically, however, the new constitution held to certain Catholic mores, exemplified by its reinstatement of Bogotá’s traditional prefix: “*Santa Fe de*” (Bogotá). Furthermore, it broadly rejected appeals to legalize abortion.³⁴²

4. Education

In the latter half of the 20th century, one of the key strongholds of the Colombian Catholic Church was education. Dix reports that even through the 1970s, Church-

³³⁸ Freston, “Evangelicals and Politics,” 40.

³³⁹ Diana Bocarejo, “Reconfiguring the Political Landscape After the Multicultural Turn: Law, Politics, and the Spatialization of Difference in Colombia” (diss., University of Chicago, 2008), 54–5.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 50–55.

³⁴¹ Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia*, 279.

³⁴² *Ibid.*

controlled institutions accounted for 85% of preschool, 20% of primary, 50% of secondary, and 40% of university students in the country.³⁴³ The 1991 constitution began to unravel the Church's education dominion. For example, Article 68 protects ethnic groups' rights "to schooling that respects and develops their own cultural identity."³⁴⁴ The constitution as a whole protects public school students from compulsory religious education.³⁴⁵ In spite of the new constitution's emphasis on religious equality, however, the Colombian government does allow the Catholic Church to operate tax-exempt schools in remote regions where no public schools are available; other religious groups complain that their schools are not given similar tax-exempt benefits.³⁴⁶ Furthermore, some complain that a Ministry of Education directive to teach public school students about religion led to many rural schools teaching only about Catholicism, evidence of the power that heritage has over legal renovations.³⁴⁷

5. Freedom of Religion

Despite these notable vestiges of Colombia's patently Catholic heritage, religious liberty was a key aspect of the new constitution's emphasis on unified pluralism. A battery of court decisions established various aspects of that religious liberty during the years following the constitution's institution. Viviane A. Morales Hoyos cites some examples:

- Decision C-088/94: Defined religious liberty as "indispensable, and that, under no circumstances, can it be ignored by public entities since it projects itself to all dimensions of relations."³⁴⁸
- Decision C-027/93: Evaluated the Concordat with the Vatican in light of the new constitution; determined unconstitutional various aspects of the

³⁴³ Howard I. Blutstein, et al., *Area Handbook for Colombia* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977), 139; cited in Dix, *The Politics of Colombia*, 141.

³⁴⁴ "1991 Constitution of Colombia," Article 68; cited in Morales Hoyos, "Religious Liberty," 569.

³⁴⁵ U.S. Department of State, "International Religious Freedom Report 2009: Colombia," Report (Department Of State. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, October 26, 2009), <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2009/127384.htm>.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁸ Morales Hoyos, "Religious Liberty," 566.

Concordat because they failed “to recognize the ideological, cultural, political, and religious pluralism existing in Colombia.”³⁴⁹ These areas included religious freedom, marriage, dissemination of beliefs, indigenous autonomy, military religious support, and education.³⁵⁰

- Decision C-350/94: Rendered invalid the 1927 dedication (and 1952 ratification thereof) of the Republic to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which had been politically represented through the President, exacerbating the Colombian political sphere’s singular religious nature.³⁵¹
- Decision C-511/94: Limited religious liberty by declaring conscientious objection to obligatory military service as generally not protected. The court essentially argued that perpetuation of a broader liberty requires impingement on such religiously specific liberties.³⁵²

6. Cultural Protections At Odds With Religious Liberty

The 1991 constitution codifies protections for both religious liberty and ethno-cultural identity. Protecting both religion and culture, however, inherently begets conflict. Since these principles are not synonymous, one must ultimately supersede the other. Morales-Hoyos concludes that since 1991, “more protection has been given to ethnic and cultural diversity. Religious liberty has prevailed only when it has been in harmony with the cultural values of the indigenous community and has respected the integrity of social, political, and cultural forms.”³⁵³ Indeed, prior to the 1991 Constitution, the Catholic Church held special rights to administration and evangelization in areas labeled as mission territories. A concordat with the Vatican established these privileges in 1887, with some modifications in 1973.³⁵⁴ In a dramatic reversal, under the new constitution, the courts have decided repeatedly in favor of indigenous cultural value over religious freedoms enshrined in the 1991 document, including the right to disseminate one’s faith freely.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 566–7.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 567–8.

³⁵² Ibid., 568.

³⁵³ Ibid., 580.

³⁵⁴ Levine, *Catholic Church in Venezuela and Colombia*, 70–96; cited in Kline, *Colombia*, 88.

In one 1994 case, a group of 32 natives were being persecuted by their native community for converting to Protestant Christianity from the native religion. The group sought legal protections for their practice and for their pastor's free travel in and out of the indigenous territory. The court, while not restricting the native converts' freedoms to believe what they choose, limited their practice to outside the indigenous community, arguing that the rights of the indigenous community to protect its cultural and religious heritage trumps the right to free exercise and dissemination of other faiths within the group's territory.³⁵⁵ In another 1994 example, natives brought a case against a Protestant missionary organization that had set up a permanent settlement in their territory that provided various social services to the native community. The plaintiffs contended that such a settlement undermined their community's traditionally itinerant nature and damaged the ecosystem by overusing a single area.³⁵⁶ They further argued that methods the Protestants used to propagate their faith undermined the natives' cultural coherence.³⁵⁷ The court found that the missionary organization threatened the "fundamental rights of the Nukak-Maku to liberty, free development of personality, liberty of conscience and cults, and, principally, their cultural rights."³⁵⁸ The court bolstered its argument by citing constitutional mandates to conserve natural resources; the decision likened the tribe as a type of natural resource to be conserved.³⁵⁹ These examples reveal the tendencies of the courts to favor cultural value over religious value in the years following the new constitution's institution.

Diana Bocarejo's research revealed Protestants in native communities who authorities accused of being affiliated with "groups outside the law."³⁶⁰ Such ill-evidenced presumptions harken to memories from La Violencia. These Protestants feared not only for their religious freedoms, but also for their personal security; in one case,

³⁵⁵ Morales Hoyos, "Religious Liberty," 571–3.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 575–6.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 576–7.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 578.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 577.

³⁶⁰ Bocarejo, "Reconfiguring the Political Landscape," 199–200.

bombs destroyed a Protestant church.³⁶¹ Indigenous Protestants are not only at-risk physically and religiously ostracized, but also politically minimized. Bocarejo quotes indigenous leaders, saying “evangelical Christians ‘are not important’ in the community because what is important is ‘what is ours, so that they have no weight even though the number of *evangélicos* has grown.”³⁶² She concludes that natives see Protestantism as rigid and exclusive; its adherents claim that they cannot be both Protestant and adhere to certain native traditions, while Catholicism was not as much of a problem for their tribal authority and unity since its adherents more readily syncretized Catholic tenets with native traditions.³⁶³

Herein we find two important keys. First, evidence for our claim that many who asserted themselves as Catholic in the years prior to the 1970 downtrend did so not out of full conviction but due to socio-cultural norms or pressures. While Protestants see any mixing of their doctrine with native practices as hypocritical, indigenous Catholics have not been as rigid, argues Bocarejo.³⁶⁴ Second, we observe an intriguing intolerance among traditional indigenous groups for any members who choose to follow a different religious tradition *to the exclusion* of their previous native religious identity.³⁶⁵ This intolerance arose from natives who were beneficiaries of contrasting tolerance under the 1991 constitution. Prior to 1991, they had been subject, as had other minority religious groups, to the constitutionally and concordat-mandated supremacy of the Catholic Church.

The new pluralistic environment began to reveal new challenges. Not all religious groups were content to tolerate the others, but remarkably, the courts favored the natives’ intolerance, as long as it was contained to native territories. The 1991 constitution protects both freedom of religion and cultural pluralism. The constitutional assembly fortified two separate principles that are sometimes at odds with each other. The direction

³⁶¹ Ibid., 197, 200.

³⁶² Ibid., 214.

³⁶³ Ibid., 215–16.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 218.

³⁶⁵ For confirmation of this observation, see: U.S. Department of State, “International Religious Freedom Report 2009: Colombia.”

the courts have leaned on these conflicts instructs our assessment of religion's relationship with politics after the new constitution's institution and into the future. Secularization seems to be a prominent thread in this unfolding narrative. But beneath the surface, we find that secularization may not be as pervasive as it first appears.

D. AFTERMATH: THE LEGAL VERSUS THE REAL COUNTRY

In time for the 1994 presidential elections—the first after the new constitution—religious tensions mounted. Rumors surfaced that the Liberal, Ernesto Samper, if elected, had promised the Education Minister post to a Protestant. In response, a prominent Colombian Archbishop advised Liberal Catholics in a national broadcast to vote blank ballots rather than supporting Samper and his alleged Protestant political appointee, stating that voting for Samper “would damage the religious unity of the republic.”³⁶⁶ At stake were not only “religious unity,” but also Church influence. According to the *New York Times*, the most recent concordat was ruled unconstitutional in 1992 (the U.S. State Department in 2009 stated that the concordat persists, but that the 1991 Constitution rendered aspects of it unenforceable);³⁶⁷ regardless, the new president would be in a position to redefine many Church-state dynamics: the status of independent Catholic courts, “monopoly on religious education in public schools,” and taxation of Church assets.³⁶⁸

But the legal framework for religious plurality under the new constitution did not necessarily mean institutional sentiments changed, especially within Catholicism. This is an instance of the Latin American legacy that Carlos Fuentes described as “a dizzying contradiction between law and practice [...] a divorce between the *real* country and the *legal* country.”³⁶⁹ Philip Jenkins asserts more than two decades after the new constitution that while much of Latin America trends toward the secular, Colombia remains

³⁶⁶ James Brooke, “Religious Issue Roils Colombia On Eve of Vote,” *The New York Times*, June 19, 1994, sec. World, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/06/19/world/religious-issue-roils-colombia-on-eve-of-vote.html>.

³⁶⁷ U.S. Department of State, “International Religious Freedom Report 2009: Colombia.”

³⁶⁸ Brooke, “Religious Issue Roils Colombia On Eve of Vote.”

³⁶⁹ Carlos Fuentes, *Latin America: At War With the Past* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press Limited, 2001), 28–9.

“staunchly conservative.”³⁷⁰ As of 2009, the U.S. State Department maintained that “the Roman Catholic Church retains a de facto privileged status.”³⁷¹

This “privileged status” manifests in various ways. One example is a 1997 “law agreement,” accession to which is required for non-Catholic “organizations to minister to their adherents in public institutions” like hospitals, prisons, and schools.³⁷² The State uses a series of criteria to determine approval for a group’s accession to the law, and as of 2009, only 13 groups had been granted approval.³⁷³ Furthermore, the State only recognizes marriages performed by those 13 groups (with some exceptions); members of other groups must accomplish a civil ceremony to receive recognition.³⁷⁴ Regardless of a group’s status respecting the 1997 “law agreement,” some local-level authorities fail to honor the privileges given these groups by national law.³⁷⁵ But in spite of these cultural holdovers, the Catholic dominance of the past *has* changed in some respects.

Some of the apparent indicators of secularization that Jenkins notes *are* present in Colombia. One such measure is birth rate. Due to traditional conservative religious views against contraception, he argues that low birth rates can be indicative of secularization, and in opposition to Jenkins’ assertion of Colombia’s conservativeness, Colombia’s birth rate in 2015 was lower than all of its immediate neighbors save Brazil.³⁷⁶ Although data on contraceptive use is more sporadic, a similar trend appears to hold there as well.³⁷⁷ Additionally, the rate of women in the workforce is on par with the United States,

³⁷⁰ Philip Jenkins, “A Secular Latin America?,” *The Christian Century*, March 12, 2013, <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2013-02/secular-latin-america>.

³⁷¹ U.S. Department of State, “International Religious Freedom Report 2009: Colombia.”

³⁷² *Ibid.*

³⁷³ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁶ “The World Factbook: Country Comparison: Birth Rate,” *CIA World Factbook*, n.d., ca 2015, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2054rank.html#co>.

³⁷⁷ “The World Factbook: Field Listing: Contraceptive Prevalance Rate,” *CIA World Factbook*, n.d., ca 2015, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2258.html#28>.

Germany, and the United Kingdom.³⁷⁸ We must distinguish, however, between measures of individual versus state-level secularization.

The preceding examples indicate a trend toward secularization at the individual level, but Mark Chaves argues compellingly that we should not view secularization as “declining religion, but as the declining scope of religious authority.”³⁷⁹ This distinction makes much sense of broader secularization theory that struggles to find corroborating decreases in overall religious adherents. The church, it would seem, is separating from the political world, and even while individuals adjust their behavior, faith among adherents remains relatively strong, even if shifting in nature or object.

In corroboration, Peter L. Berger also argues that “secularization on the societal level is not necessarily linked to secularization on the level of individual consciousness. Certain religious institutions have lost power and influence in many societies, but both old and new religious practices have nevertheless continued in the lives of individuals, sometimes taking new institutional forms and sometimes leading to great explosions of religious fervor.”³⁸⁰ Berger contests the “secularization theory” rooted in enlightenment thought and promulgated in the mid to late 20th century: that “modernization necessarily leads to a decline of religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals.”³⁸¹ Rather, claims Berger, secularization has “provoked powerful movements of counter-secularization.”³⁸² This implies that as secularism rose in Colombian society (and Catholicism), the fresh non-secular answers that Protestants offered proved attractive. The Pew study data on reasons for leaving Catholicism confirms such a hypothesis.³⁸³

³⁷⁸ “Labor Force Participation Rate, Female (% of Female Population Ages 15+) (Modeled ILO Estimate),” *The World Bank*, 2016, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS>.

³⁷⁹ Mark Chaves, “Secularization as Declining Religious Authority,” *Social Forces* 72, no. 3 (March 1994): 749, <http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=9406224419&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

³⁸⁰ Berger, *The Desecularization of the World*, 3.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁸³ “Religion in Latin America,” 5.

1. Protestantism's Rise: Political?

In the wake of Colombian Catholicism's political de-alignment and social engagement phase (approximately 1960–1990), the Religion's resultant dilution opened “windows,” through which more liberalism entered than had been anticipated.³⁸⁴ Protestantism backfilled the resultant metaphysical vacancy, but what political goals Protestant leaders may envision are not guaranteed to play out in the democratic field. Berger emphasizes two cases that illustrate this point: Chile and Colombia, where “the institutional interests of the denominational leaderships are by no means always a guide to the way believers vote. Protestants insert themselves where they can acquire a voice,” he contends.³⁸⁵ Nevertheless, Gill points out that in at least one Colombian case, Protestants proved instrumental in a presidential election (Ernesto Samper),³⁸⁶ and Freston observes that Chile (which joins Brazil in boasting the “oldest mass Protestantism in Latin America”)³⁸⁷ has had fewer Protestant congressmen than Colombia, home to “one of the [historically] weakest Protestantisms in Latin America.”³⁸⁸ Colombian secularization appears to represent a trend away from Catholicism more than a trend away from religion entirely. Regardless, although secularization theory proper is beyond the scope of this thesis, we must step back and ask, what caused the secularization that led to these ends?

2. Possible Explanations for Secularization's Emergence

Whereas others argue for social displacement as a key factor in secularization and shifting demand from old toward new religious movements, Anthony Gill promotes a supply-side theory.³⁸⁹ His study of 20 Latin American countries claims that the degree of government regulation correlates with the level of religious diversity, implying that

³⁸⁴ Berger, *The Desecularization of the World*, 5.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 43–45.

³⁸⁶ David Stoll, “Introduction: Rethinking Protestantism in Latin America,” in *Rethinking Protestantism in Latin America*, ed. Virginia Garrard-Burnett and David Stoll (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 13. Cited in Gill, “Government Regulation,” 288.

³⁸⁷ Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America*, 212.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 227.

³⁸⁹ Gill, “Government Regulation,” 287.

growth of new religious movements depends on political liberalization.³⁹⁰ Colombia, as a latecomer to public religious freedom *and* to decreased Catholic adherents, corroborates this argument, but other theories bear consideration as well.

Mainstream secularization theory is inadequate, agree Ekrem Karakoç and Birol Başkan, but they oppose Gill's conclusions that the level of government regulation explains religiosity. Their "findings suggest that state regulation has a weak effect on people's attitudes toward religion in the public sphere," and instead argue that inequality offers a better gauge toward public secularization.³⁹¹ The more unequal the society, the more likely the public is to support religious influence on politics, say Karakoç and Başkan.³⁹² Colombia's economy is indeed unequal: in 2010, 13% of Colombian society accounted for 85% of its capital.³⁹³ Colombia's inequality initially rose after political liberalization in 1991, and after reaching a peak just over 60 in 2006, we see a year-by-year GINI improvement with a 2013 estimate near 53, just above its 1991 starting point near 51.³⁹⁴ Despite these modest improvements, in 2012 the World Bank reported Colombia as "the seventh most unequal country in the world."³⁹⁵ Applied alongside this data and what we know of religious political involvement since 1991, Karakoç and Başkan's claim is underwhelming. We would expect broad public support for religion to leverage its weight over politics in the seventh-most unequal country in the world, but that expectation simply does not appear to pan out. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Karakoç and Başkan, "Inequality," 1534.

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Evita Lune, "When Talent Is Not Enough: Being a Woman in Colombia," *Pedersen & Partners Executive Search*, 2013, <https://www.pedersenandpartners.com/articles/when-talent-not-enough-being-woman-colombia>.

³⁹⁴ "World DataBank: World Development Indicators--GINI Index (World Bank Estimate)," *The World Bank*, 2016, <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=2&country=COL&series=&period=>.

³⁹⁵ Lars Christian Moller, "Breaking With History: Why Colombia Needs a More Progressive Tax System," *World Bank*, December 17, 2012, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2012/12/17/why-colombia-needs-a-more-progressive-tax-system>.

challenge Karakoç and Başkan,³⁹⁶ concluding that poverty, rather than inequality, is a more salient independent variable.

Norris and Inglehart's contrasting claim is that secularization theory was correct in its demand-side claims—that modernization would decrease demand for religion—but they propose a new supply-side hypothesis: that people continue (or return) to pursue religion inasmuch as they feel existentially insecure.³⁹⁷ In essence, the greater a person's relative poverty (or security, it may follow), the more likely they are to be religious. This theory's ties to the Colombian reality are also quite loose; public insecurity (measured by homicide rate) rose precipitously through the 1970s and 1980s,³⁹⁸ just the time period when Catholic adherents were beginning to decrease.³⁹⁹ However, Protestantism was on the rise simultaneously. It follows that Norris and Inglehart's argument is valid, only in Colombia their principles manifested in Catholic adherents converting to religious alternatives that offered a more “personal connection with God” and “greater emphasis on morality.”⁴⁰⁰

Although high fidelity statistics on religiously unaffiliated individuals is exceedingly difficult to find, Norris and Inglehart's theory implies that as security has increased and poverty has decreased since the turn of the century,⁴⁰¹ the rate of religiously unaffiliated growth in Colombia should have increased. Indeed, the unaffiliated population in Colombia has grown to about 6%, but Protestants have

³⁹⁶ Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ F. Sanchez, A.M. Diaz, and M. Formisano, “Conflicto, Violencia Y Actividad Criminal En Colombia: Un Análisis Espacial (Working Paper)” (CEDE-Universidad de Los Andes, Colombia, 2003) based on data from the National Police and DANE; cited in Rony Pshisva and Gustavo A. Suarez, “‘Captive Markets’: The Impact of Kidnappings on Corporate Investment in Colombia” (Federal Reserve Board, February 2006), 37, <http://www.federalreserve.gov/pubs/feds/2006/200618/200618pap.pdf>.

³⁹⁹ “Religion in Latin America,” 27, among other data this thesis cites.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 38.

⁴⁰¹ “World DataBank: World Development Indicators--Intentional Homicides (Per 100,000 People),” *The World Bank*, 2016, <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=2&country=COL&series=&period=>; “World DataBank: World Development Indicators--Poverty Headcount Ratio at \$3.10 a Day (2011 PPP) (% of Population),” *The World Bank*, 2016, <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=2&country=COL&series=&period=>; David Gagne, “Insight Crime 2014 Homicide Round-Up,” *Insight Crime*, January 12, 2015, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/insight-crime-2014-homicide-round-up>.

simultaneously increased to 13%;⁴⁰² available data does not make possible a definitive assessment on whether more former Catholics continue turning to Protestantism or instead, to nothing at all.

One final perspective on secularization and religiosity comes from Anthony Gill and Erik Lundsgaarde, who argue for welfare as the key factor—that as governments provide more of the social aid that religious organizations once provided, people pragmatically fade away from religion.⁴⁰³ This theory takes a low view of the depth of adherents’ faith, regardless of which religious creed they observe. Colombia has indeed seen significant increases in public spending, from “1.3 percent of GDP in 1990–91 to almost 6 percent in 2003.”⁴⁰⁴ This trend correlates with increases in unaffiliateds, lending support for Gill and Lundsgaarde’s theory, although this thesis finds causality challenging to confirm.

To conclude our brief discussion on secularization in modern Colombia, we are able to loosely conclude two main points. First, that mainstream secularization theory does not apply neatly to the Colombian reality; modernization, urbanization, and socialization of the masses has not led to wholesale exodus from organized religion. Second, that numerous innovative secularization theories offer a mixed bag of correlations, but largely fail to confirm causal factors for religious-political change in Colombia. The most verifiable argument is Gill’s supply-side theory—that as political regulation decreases (a la 1991 Colombian Constitution), religious diversity increases. Note that this does not necessarily imply that new diverse religious entities will enter the political playing field in force.

E. CATHOLICISM’S STRUGGLE AGAINST SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND POLITICAL MODERNIZATION

Alongside these secularization trends, Catholicism throughout Latin America has faced other challenges. As early as 1995, Jean Daudelin and W.E. Hewitt observed that

⁴⁰² “Religion in Latin America,” 14.

⁴⁰³ Gill and Lundsgaarde, “State Welfare Spending.”

⁴⁰⁴ Bushnell and Hudson, “Society and Its Environment,” 115.

much of the academic and Catholic community's initial optimism respecting its grassroots social and political programs in Latin America was unfounded: "The size, the effective mobilization capacity and the influence of the 'popular' Church appear not only to have been almost universally exaggerated and but also to be everywhere declining."⁴⁰⁵ Not only did these social engagement efforts prove underwhelming for Catholic religious dominance, but in the decade leading up to Daudelin and Hewitt's analysis, even the Vatican seemed to be backtracking from previous political ambitions, appointing bishops who were less inclined toward political associations than past Church leaders.⁴⁰⁶ So it seemed. And perhaps was even so, from the Vatican standpoint. But Latin American Church leaders continued emphasizing the threatening "growth of the Pentecostals among the poor," countervailing their progressive initiatives against Vatican policy out of "fear of being relegated to a secondary position."⁴⁰⁷ Other Latin American church leaders believe attempts to engage the poor are resource saps and that renewed Catholic influence might be gained through engagement with elites only.⁴⁰⁸ But although the methods differ, the desired outcome is the same: a halt to degeneration of Catholic supremacy in the socio-political sphere. It seems that either way, however, the Catholic model is losing ground. Its attempts to maintain "social and cultural prominence" and mass followership remain based in an antiquated, hierarchical structure that is too cumbersome to compete with new organically led rivals like Pentecostals.⁴⁰⁹ Catholic exercise requires physically present priests, who are in low supply,⁴¹⁰ and who are more tightly bound by the curses of bureaucracy than are Protestant leaders.

⁴⁰⁵ Jean Daudelin and W.E. Hewitt, "Latin American Politics: Exit the Catholic Church?," in *Organized Religion in the Political Transformation of Latin America*, ed. Satya R. Pattanayak (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995), 177.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 177–8.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 180–1.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

F. CATHOLICISM'S STRENGTHS

1. Catholic Charismatics

We must acknowledge some strengths within Colombian Catholicism that run alongside—or more accurately—in spite of the institution's struggles. One example is the rise of Charismatic Catholic groups. These are groups that dispense with many of institutional Catholicism's trappings and represent a "Catholic counterpart" to Pentecostalism.⁴¹¹ By 2000, fully 28% of Colombian Catholics considered themselves charismatic; but simultaneously only 3% of Colombian priests were charismatic.⁴¹² The lay-driven nature of this movement in Colombia has led to a Catholic charismatic population exceeding that of Mexico, although Mexico is home to more than double the number of Catholics than is Colombia.⁴¹³ It also, however, creates a division between institutional and individual Catholicism. Some argue, however, that the Catholic establishment does still succeed in linking individuals with broader societal institutions.

2. Creating Linkages That Secularism Cannot

Organized religion, especially institutional Catholicism, in spite of its ostensibly negative designs on control and influence, makes beneficial connections "between people and the larger social structures," says Satya R. Pattnayak; "Political parties, labor unions, and lobbying groups have not been quite able to comprehend the spiritual needs of the individual."⁴¹⁴ Assumptions about human motivation that emerge from advanced economies cannot be universally applied in areas where much of the economy is still developing—or as yet undeveloped entirely. Self-driven motives common to the developed world are less common among the poor. Here, argues Pattnayak, the Church

⁴¹¹ Edward L. Cleary, *The Rise of Charismatic Catholicism in Latin America* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), ix, <https://muse.jhu.edu/books/9780813048031>.

⁴¹² David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, eds., "The Catholic Charismatic Renewal 1959–2025," in *World Christian Trends, AD 30-AD 2200: Interpreting the Annual Christian Megacensus* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2001), 117–25; cited in Cleary, *Rise of Charismatic Catholicism*, 75.

⁴¹³ Barrett and Johnson, "The Catholic Charismatic Renewal 1959–2025," 117–25; cited in Cleary, *Rise of Charismatic Catholicism*, 75.

⁴¹⁴ Satya R. Pattnayak, "The Embeddedness of Religion and Politics: An Epilogue," in *Organized Religion in the Political Transformation of Latin America*, ed. Pattnayak, Satya R. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995), 200.

provides a necessary connection between the heart and body of the developing world individual and the institutional governmental and economic machine.⁴¹⁵ But is this why Catholicism has remained culturally salient as it has in Colombia?

This thesis argues that indeed, there is truth in Pattnayak's assessment that institutional religious structures link the otherwise-disconnected poor to the broader social sphere, and that religious organizations provide for a personal need that secular ones leave unfulfilled. Nevertheless, in Colombia, Catholic cultural mores appear to pervade not only the disconnected countryside, but also the urban elite. Connections indeed materialize, but more to the Church institution itself than to any other aspect of the modernizing Colombian reality. This may be why progressively greater numbers of Catholics have sought something more spiritually fulfilling, either through Charismatic Catholicism or Protestantism.

G. THE CONTINUING INSURGENT CONFLICT'S LIMITED RELEVANCE

This thesis avoids extensive discussion of the persistent civil conflicts between the Colombian government and various insurgent groups. Other works evaluate these conflicts extensively, and despite the insurgency's defining nature for modern Colombian politics and society, these conflicts are generally acknowledged as nonreligious. Jorge Restrepo et al. confirm: "There are no ethnic, regional or religious cleavages defining the conflict, allowing us to focus purely on its economic, political and military features."⁴¹⁶ Indeed, the U.S. State Department reports that while accounts exist of guerrilla groups harassing or attacking religiously affiliated individuals and groups (including Catholics, Protestants, and native religions), such attacks appear not to be religiously motivated, but primarily economic or political in nature; Guerrillas terrorize those who oppose their insurgent methods and agenda.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ Jorge Restrepo, Michael Spagat, and Juan F. Vargas, "The Dynamics of the Colombian Civil Conflict: A New Data Set," *Homo Oeconomicus* 21, no. 2 (2004): 398, <http://www.homoeconomicus.org/lib/getfile.php?articleID=131>.

⁴¹⁷ U.S. Department of State, "International Religious Freedom Report 2009: Colombia."

One dynamic worth noting, however, is the difference between Catholic and Protestant perspectives toward and relationships with insurgency. Recall the syncretistic ways Catholicism was tied in with violent causes during La Violencia while few, if any, examples exist of violence exercised under Protestant precepts. Indeed, Leslie J. Thompson contends that even in the modern era, “the Roman Catholic Church—although generally very involved in the politics of the land—has been powerless as an advocate of peace simply because a number of prominent Catholic leaders have favored the revolutionary cause.”⁴¹⁸ Although both Catholicism and Protestantism center around a similar heritage, the former is somehow able to coexist with things opposed to its supposed fundamental doctrines.

We can make many speculations as to why this is so in Colombia: heritage of conquest, colonial evangelism tainted by extractive motives, coerced native conversions, syncretism permitted, Catholicism’s political foundations (the Pope is the leader of a globally recognized state, after all). Protestants, on the other hand, answer to no political authority,⁴¹⁹ and adherents tend to understand their faith less culturally and more spiritually. Put another way, “external symbols” and ritual play a large role in Catholicism, especially respecting the Virgin Mary; many of these rites do not originate in the Bible, therefore Protestants eschew them.⁴²⁰ Says Thompson: “Protestants’ emphases on inward rather than outward religion make the external symbols of Catholicism unnecessary.”⁴²¹

Thompson argues that a principal reason Catholic leadership has historically pursued political influence has been to control religious freedom laws and curtail Protestant growth.⁴²² To revisit Hagopian, civil societies hold the key to explaining religious power-holders’ decisions in modern pluralistic religious environments. Where

⁴¹⁸ Leslie J. Thompson, “Establishment and Growth of Protestantism in Colombia” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wales, 2005), 69.

⁴¹⁹ Some protestant denominations do have apolitical—in the international relations sense—leadership structures.

⁴²⁰ Thompson, “Establishment and Growth,” 94.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² Ibid.

the Church is strongly linked to civil society, it tends to engage on that level, whereas when civil society linkages are weak, the Church seeks a voice within and protection through political alliances.⁴²³ We have seen both extremes in Colombian Catholic history, but what about competing groups' political roles in the new pluralistic environment?

In the modern era, it seems the Catholic hierarchy has retreated from overt political aims, but nevertheless continues to see Protestantism as a threat: Pope John Paul II referred in 2001 to growing Protestant groups in Latin America as a “serious problem” requiring “resolute pastoral action.”⁴²⁴ Religious freedom, however, largely prevents this dynamic from playing out overtly in the political sphere.

H. CONCLUSION

The 1991 Constitution fundamentally changed the way Colombian law views religion and politics. This legal opening enabled manifold non-Catholic religious groups, most-notably Protestants, to proliferate during the 1990s. Many of these groups predated the new Constitution, but flourished in the new political environment. Many new political parties emerged as well, some of which aligned with non-Catholic religious movements.

Although the 1991 Constitution changed the essence of Colombian law, it did not change wholesale the way Colombian individuals view religion. Catholicism remains predominant in the population even 25 years after the country's legal renovation—evidence of the Church's cultural moorings—but variations to that historical pattern are gaining momentum. While institutional Catholicism faces the emerging competition of growing Protestant denominations and religion-less factions, some of its own members have resorted to renewing how Catholicism itself looks and acts via the Catholic Charismatic movement. Secularization has separated the institutional and individual realms of Catholicism—and religion in general—and these two spheres have emerged as quite distinct from each other.

⁴²³ Hagopian, “Religious and Political Pluralism,” 2.

⁴²⁴ Religion News Service, “Pope Urges New Effort To Curb ‘Sects’ in Latin America,” *ChristianityToday.com*, April 1, 2001, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/aprilweb-only/4-16-56.0.html>.

Political participation has improved under the 1991 liberal (not referring to the party) mandate, but while the Catholic Church retains the (unofficial) national soul and Protestant groups have grown in number and tested their political sway from time to time, both are of late more socially than politically aligned. Nevertheless, Catholic undercurrents continue to run through Colombia's veins behind the scenes. What then, does all of this mean for the future? Let us take a closer look at the Pew study data, and then proceed to develop some conclusions.

VI. DISSECTING PROTESTANT GROWTH

A. SUMMARY

To complement the foregoing history and analysis, we now more closely examine the data surrounding Protestantism's advance in Colombia and juxtapose it with some prominent theories respecting Catholic to Protestant conversion there. Table 3 exhibits Protestant growth from 1905 through 2005.

Table 3. Total Population and Protestant Population Estimates: Colombia, 1905–2005

DATE	TOTAL POPULATION ESTIMATE	PROTESTANT POPULATION ESTIMATE	PERCENT PROTESTANT ESTIMATE
1905	4,143,632	--	--
1912	5,072,604	150	.003
1918	5,855,000	2,000	.03
1928	7,851,000	3,000	.04
1938	8,701,816	6,000	.07
1951	11,548,172	35,000	.3
1964	17,484,508	150,000	.9
1973	22,915,229	300,000	1.3
1985	30,062,200	850,000	2.8
1990	32,978,170	1,056,250	3.2
1995	36,181,860	1,575,000	4.4
2000	39,397,200	2,106,853	5.3
2005	42,556,040	2,531,250	6.0

Adapted from: Clifton L. Holland, "Protestant Growth in Colombia," PROLADES, 2000, <http://www.prolades.com/cra/regions/sam/col/colombia.pdf>.

B. GENDER FACTORS

Regarding Protestant growth in Colombia, a number of authors weigh in. Cornelia Butler Flora argues that Catholicism's restrictive view on women's roles led many to look elsewhere for social fulfillment.⁴²⁵ Some found the Protestant concept of the *priesthood of all believers* liberating for women, at least at the individual levels of church

⁴²⁵ Flora, *Pentecostalism in Colombia*, 187–203.

and home.⁴²⁶ This contrasted with the traditional male-dominated instruments of power both in the Church and in politics.

In a parallel argument, Elizabeth Brusco claims that persistent historical efforts by the Catholic Church to maintain control of national politics relegated budding Protestant movements to local level influence. Such “schismatic” status, argues Brusco, prevented “male political interest” from capturing Protestantism as a medium for its own ends.⁴²⁷ Free from the temptation of national political power, the Protestant movement actually may have found expansion easier using horizontal integration over vertical engagement.

Numbers from the Pew study may support such a conclusion even in the present-day environment. In Colombia, only 11% of Catholics say they share their faith at least once per week, less than Catholics in ten other Latin American countries. In contrast, fully 38% of Colombian Protestants say the same; the only Latin American countries to boast greater Protestant evangelization are Brazil, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Similarly, the disparity between Colombian Catholics and Protestants in terms of actively sharing their faith is greater than in all but three other Latin American countries (Peru, Brazil, and Venezuela).⁴²⁸

David Stoll echoes Brusco’s sentiment, citing the success of small-scale groups such as house churches and Bible studies as evidence of “the household as the key to Evangelical expansion.” As proof, he cites Brusco’s research that shows the ineffectiveness of traditionally male-dominated, large-scale evangelistic techniques such as crusades for inspiring lasting conversions.⁴²⁹ Also citing Brusco, Virginia Garrard-Burnett continues her logic: as machismo is diminished among Protestant men, their husband-wife power relations become more balanced and the family as a whole is

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 202–203.

⁴²⁷ Brusco, *Evangelical Conversion*, 143.

⁴²⁸ “Religion in Latin America,” 6.

⁴²⁹ Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?*, 318.

strengthened. At that level, Protestantism's community-based local responsiveness gives it a strength not found in the rigidity of traditional Catholic structure.⁴³⁰

C. A NORTH AMERICAN-DRIVEN MOVEMENT?

Brusco and Stoll stand against a vein of scholarship claiming the power of North American influence in Protestantism's Latin American rise. They argue that "blaming evangelical growth on the United States suggests a deep distrust of the poor, an unwillingness to accept the possibility that they could turn an imported religion to their own purposes."⁴³¹ One example that points toward this hypothesis is the distinction between Protestant prayer styles in the United States and Colombia. The Colombian style is more boisterous and participatory, and remains relatively constant across Colombian Protestantism's various denominations.⁴³²

D. PENTECOSTALISM: A MOVEMENT VERSUS AN INSTITUTION

Pentecostalism, a Protestant denomination, is doctrinally unique to the main body of Protestants and is especially significant to the study of modern religion in Colombia because of its high market share. William K. Kay noted in 2009—and the 2014 Pew study corroborates—that Pentecostals comprise approximately 50% of Colombian Protestants.⁴³³ In 1976, Cornelia Butler Flora noted certain distinctions between Colombian Catholics' experience and the methods of Pentecostals: "when [Pentecostal] believers got together, they read their Bibles and discussed doctrine, allowing the group rather than an individual to be guardian of the teachings," also, she cited Pentecostal Pioneer William Drost as an example of how Pentecostals treated the Colombians as "brethren" rather than as subservient proselytes, granting leadership roles to locals and avoiding power politics.⁴³⁴

⁴³⁰ Brusco, "Asceticism and Masculinity." Cited in Garrard-Burnett, "Conclusion: Is This Latin America's Reformation?," 205.

⁴³¹ Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?*, xvi. Cited in Brusco, *Evangelical Conversion*, 4.

⁴³² Brusco, *Evangelical Conversion*, 169.

⁴³³ Kay, *Pentecostalism*, 125. This information is no longer accessible at the Internet source Kay cites. Kay's data is corroborated by: "Religion in Latin America," 62.

⁴³⁴ Flora, *Pentecostalism in Colombia*, 39.

Flora's research ultimately centers on the role of lower-class solidarity movements. Colombian political polarization was dissimilar to other Latin American cases in that it was based regionally on the leanings of *caudillos*⁴³⁵ rather than existing solely in an urban versus rural dichotomy.⁴³⁶ This means that under conditions of extensive social dislocation, "new institutions, which have generally been imposed from the top, only partially absorb the new societal pressures."⁴³⁷ Form and function matter; horizontally oriented designs produce movements rather than constrained rigid systems.

The ideology inherent in solidarity movements, concludes Flora, is not the primary catalyst of social change. Contrary to prominent scholarship that ties Protestantism to structural shifts toward capitalism,⁴³⁸ she found that at the individual level, Pentecostals and Catholics did not differ in their societal impacts. Rather, "the existence of the movement, rather than the individual adherents . . . is the meaningful unit of social change." She argued that "the major impact of lower-class solidarity movements comes about as other systems react to them," and by that means, "it is possible for class-based religious movements to progress to fulfill more overt instrumental functions."⁴³⁹ In sum, Flora claims that the impact of the Pentecostal movement was not in its ideological difference from Catholicism, but in its cooperative movement architecture. This thesis contends, however, that such architecture is in many respects a derivative of differing doctrine, especially that governing ecclesiastical authority.

E. REPRESSION'S ROLE

Flora further contradicts common views, stating that repression is not the root cause of religious and economic solidarity movement formation. She contends that while repression does bring about political opposition, it is a combination of high social

⁴³⁵ Caudillos are strongmen who exert political and social authority, typically within defined territorial areas, usually through a fearsome reputation and repressive tactics.

⁴³⁶ Flora, *Pentecostalism in Colombia*, 78.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴³⁸ Flora references Weber (1958), Lenski (1963), and Eisenstadt (1968) as proponents of such a perspective. *Ibid.*, 230.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*

dislocation and low external control that most-supported Pentecostal movement growth.⁴⁴⁰ Of course, violence and repression is what drove most of that dislocation, so social dislocation may be better viewed as an intervening variable than an independent variable.

The Pew study data gives clues regarding Flora's perspective on social dislocation. Present-day Catholics were only 4% less likely than Protestants to "have relocated at some point in their lives."⁴⁴¹ While the study data does not offer insight into social dislocation's impact on religious switching in the era of rapid urbanization during and following La Violencia, it does reveal a surprisingly weak correlation between dislocation and switching from Catholicism to Protestantism.

F. GOVERNMENT REGULATION OR INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATION... OR BOTH?

Anthony Gill counters the view that when individuals become geographically and culturally displaced, they become "more susceptible to the appeals of new religious movements."⁴⁴² He instead argues that the degree of government regulation on religious communities determines the degree and diversity of religious "supply" and lower regulation incentivizes its consumption.⁴⁴³ He rates Colombia lowest in the region in religious pluralism growth between 1970–1980, which may explain why Protestant growth has been slower to take hold in Colombia than in countries like Brazil (Gill's highest pluralism score), but his theory on its own evidently leaves some of the story untold. Some countries with relatively low government regulation scores also saw relatively low increases in pluralism, and vice-versa (Ecuador and Argentina, for example).⁴⁴⁴ The Pew study offers some fidelity.

We juxtapose Gill's analysis with Pew's conclusions on top reasons Colombians who have converted to Protestantism "stopped being Catholic." When asked which of

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 232–3.

⁴⁴¹ "Religion in Latin America," 36.

⁴⁴² Gill, "Government Regulation," 287.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 300.

eight options were important reasons they left Catholicism, the overwhelmingly most common reason cited—by 87% of respondents—was “wanted personal connection with God,” followed by “enjoyed worship style at new church,” “wanted greater emphasis on morality,” “found church that helps members more,” and “outreach by church member,” all cited by more than 50% of respondents. The less-important options (all cited by fewer than 20% of respondents) were “personal problems,” “wanted better financial future,” and “married non-Catholic.”⁴⁴⁵ Unfortunately, the Pew study did not reveal how the weight of heritage and institutional pressure affected conversions. We can conclude from Gill’s analysis that low government regulation may be one causal factor to increased religious pluralism, but at the personal level, Catholics-turned-Protestant were seeking to fill an empty metaphysical space that they felt as Catholics.

Respecting personal motives for conversion, the Pew study contradicts any attempt to link Protestant conversion to the so-called “prosperity gospel,” that is, “God will grant wealth and good health to believers who have enough faith.” Not only are converts who say they switched in pursuit of improved finances conspicuously minimal, but also the numbers of Colombian Catholics and Protestants who believe such a doctrine are high and similar (80%–82%).⁴⁴⁶

G. OTHER CATHOLIC-PROTESTANT DISTINCTIONS

Another revelation from the Pew study respects the priorities of Protestants versus Catholics. In Latin America as a whole, the study found that Catholics favored “charity work for the poor” (50%) over “[bringing] the poor and needy to Christ” (24%) as the “most important way Christians can help the poor.” Protestants contrasted, favoring bringing the poor to Christ over charity work on their behalf, 47% to 37%.⁴⁴⁷ However, saying and doing are different matters. The Pew study discovered that in all countries but El Salvador, Protestants were more likely to actually engage in work to assist the needy.

⁴⁴⁵ “Religion in Latin America,” 38.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

In Colombia, the difference was 18%: 43% of Catholics said that they had participated in charity work in the last year, compared to 61% of Protestants.⁴⁴⁸

H. THE STATISTICAL BOTTOM LINE

According to the Pew study, by 2014, Colombia's Catholic adherents had decreased 16% from a 1970 peak: 95% to 79%. Nevertheless, the decrease in Colombia lags behind the majority of Latin America. Only three countries in the region remain as or more Catholic than Colombia by percentage—Ecuador, Mexico, and Paraguay—and only five have seen an equal or lesser percentage decrease in Catholicism between 1970 and 2014: Bolivia and Chile (-12%), Ecuador (-16%), Mexico (-15%), and Paraguay (-5%).⁴⁴⁹ Colombia remains culturally Catholic, socially divergent, and legally neutral.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 27.

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VII. CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters evaluate numerous events, entities, and conditions that contribute to Colombia's religious-political environment. As has been shown, these dynamics shifted drastically across the 85-year timespan evaluated here, all while maintaining a certain foundational constancy centered on Catholicism. Some conclusions from this analysis are apparent, but a comprehensive conclusion on religion's role in Colombian politics in the decades to come will require additional work.

This thesis' major contribution is synthesis of the major religious-political themes in modern Colombian history, and as many related nuances as scope permits, where such an endeavor has not been accomplished elsewhere. Aiming to integrate sufficiently detailed historical accounts and statistics with diverse published academic theories, this thesis has laid the groundwork for more detailed prognostic studies on the future of the Colombian political system as it relates to a changing, yet in some respects incongruously stationary religious environment. Nevertheless, we can make some deductions based on the preceding narrative and analysis.

A. SUMMARY AND COMPARISON OF THE PERIODS EVALUATED

Prior to La Violencia, the Colombian Catholic Church as an organization was part and parcel of Conservative politics. Simultaneously, its rituals and tenets formed into prevalent cultural patterns that to some extent persist today. This cultural aspect of Colombian Catholicism exhibits two defining traits: it was not confined by political affiliation, and it was highly syncretistic.

As La Violencia crescendoed, the dominant political alignment of Catholic leaders was Conservative. This alignment turned the political conflict into a sometimes-religious one as well. This thesis presented much evidence of Catholic leaders and adherents' participation in the era's atrocities. The continuing conflict spread across the then-highly rural country, shifting in nature from principally political to principally social. Concurrently, Church leaders, while remaining mainly Conservative-aligned, began distancing themselves from and speaking against the violence. In spite of

these humanitarian shifts, much of the damage had already been done.

Vallier offers an apt synopsis of what effects La Violencia and its antecedent Catholic-Conservative alliance had on the Church in Colombia (this quotation is cited in its entirety in Chapter II):

If a religious system, as represented by its spokesmen and elites, becomes identified with a particular political group and finds that its survival is bound up with the survival of that group, it loses an autonomous position of leverage to build and create a generalized system of meanings. . . . If this happens, the distinction between the political and religious spheres collapses. Competition and social conflict emerge as naked struggles of force and power, rather than as processes of give and take that can be muted and sustained by a set of common beliefs of a more general nature.⁴⁵⁰

A number of pivotal observations are present in this quote: Adherents did not define the Catholic religious system; elites did. In spite of cultural adherence regardless of political affiliation, the coupling of Catholic elites with Conservative politics drove the corporate Church's generally Conservative character. Therefore, during La Violencia, the Church was in no position to promote a common set of meanings that could have tempered the conflict. Rather, Catholicism's political nature fueled the carnage (see Chapter III for examples).

Indeed, as Vallier posits, Catholicism's position of power had grown dependent on Conservative dominance. As La Violencia ended and the Frente Nacional government formed, the Church, already of questionable moral authority and diminished political clout, needed a new strategy if it were to continue leading the Colombian religious field. During this time, the Church realigned as a (officially) non-partisan member of the elite. This attempt led to increased social engagement and efforts to impose Catholic authority over nongovernmental areas of power like labor and social welfare. But not all Catholic leaders ascribed to this progressive agenda; those who did were confronted with leftist radicals on one side and conservative stalwarts on the other. Levine concludes that this

⁴⁵⁰ Vallier, *Catholicism, Social Control and Modernization*, 44–5.

division precluded the Church from unifying its cause, regaining legitimacy, and connecting with a growing population that was moving in new directions.⁴⁵¹

As increasing social mobilization faced the National Front's exclusive elite-controlled democracy and related violence increased in the late 1980s, Colombia sensed its need for an inclusive political system if it were to maintain political peace. The resultant new constitution opened the door for an emerging spectrum of political parties, and also de-instated the Church from its long-held position as the official national religion. But while Catholicism lost its legal hold on social status and political power in Colombia, it retained an unofficial elite position with respect to the law (see Chapter V) and a continuing ritual effect among the populace.

We can broadly summarize the Church's nature during these three periods as follows:

- 1930–1960: Conservative political, powerful.
- 1960–1990: Nonpartisan political with divergent factions, weakening.
- 1990–present: Officially apolitical, culturally persistent, statistically declining.

B. HYPOTHESES ASSESSED

This thesis makes numerous observations throughout that cannot all be reviewed in detail here. Nevertheless, a brief review of the two principal questions and series of possible answers presented in Chapter I is warranted. The first question (what has driven the decrease in Colombian Catholic adherents since 1970?) stimulates three principal hypotheses:

- Colombia was never 90+% Catholic, but appeared to be as many who professed the faith did so out of compulsion or socio-political pressure. The statistical decline began as Catholicism's power in social and political spheres lessened and individuals became more willing to express dissent as threats to life and property diminished.

⁴⁵¹ Levine, *Politics, Religion, and Society*, 21.

- Time and experience revealed a dark side of Catholicism that when exposed, began to drive adherents away and toward alternatives: many to Protestantism, others to renounce religion entirely.
- External influences such as foreign missionaries, international political actors (principally the United States), and Vatican hierarchy, drove this shift.

Based on evidence and analysis exhibited throughout this thesis, the first two hypotheses are most compelling. While certainly contributory, the third hypothesis suffers from limited evidence and questionable causality.

The second question this thesis asks (how will these religious changes affect Colombian politics in the future?) generates two main possibilities:

- As the diverse and largely apolitical Protestant movement encourages greater personal political freedom, believers are no longer compelled to side with a specific church or party affiliation. Peaceful political discourse increases since political affiliation is (at least theoretically) no longer tied to elite power structures, religious or political.
- Catholic *believers* have remained basically unchanged in demographic proportion. Changes in *adherents* observed in the Pew study are due to earlier social and political pressures that drove many to superficially identify with Catholicism. The Colombian Catholic Church remains essentially where it was a little over one century ago (minus constitutionally mandated supremacy) and will continue to exhibit a mixed bag of reactive religious political plays that reflect its currently perceived threats.

Both of these hypotheses are compelling, based on the evidence and analysis presented herein. This thesis contends that at the personal level, political positions will continue to diverge from and remain largely separate from religious affiliation. Political engagement by religious groups will be primarily issue-based rather than power-based. At the organizational level, however, Catholic leadership will be divided between humble benevolence and continuing attempts to engage as a political elite, even as Colombia's strongly consolidating democracy progressively diminishes the significance of eliteness. These conclusions cohere with Chaves' contention that secularization comprises more "a

declining scope of religious authority” than a decline in personal religious engagement.⁴⁵²

Secularism threatens to overrun much of Colombia’s historical religiosity in the coming decades, and indeed already has. Nevertheless, as Berger argues, “religious institutions have lost power and influence in many societies, but both old and new religious practices have nevertheless continued in the lives of individuals, sometimes taking new institutional forms and sometimes leading to great explosions of religious fervor.”⁴⁵³ In some respects, this principle can be seen at work in statistical shifts from Catholicism to Protestantism in Colombia. This conversion in religious adherence weakens overall Catholic political clout and generally does not translate into new Protestant political aims.

C. FINAL COMMENTS

While this thesis has reached some conclusions regarding past and future Colombian religious-political dynamics, its primary contribution is its synthesis of history and literature covering a long period of time, revealing patterns of religious-political interaction in Colombia. Further research could springboard off of the trends evaluated here to make more detailed predictions regarding future religious influence in Colombian politics, and could apply that understanding to anticipate the significance of religious groups for future political outcomes such as negotiations with insurgent groups or implementation of controversial social initiatives.

⁴⁵² Chaves, “Secularization as Declining Religious Authority,” 749.

⁴⁵³ Berger, *The Desecularization of the World*, 3.

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