

**Protestant Problems?  
What Protestant Problems?:  
The Coming Golden Age of  
Latin American Catholicism**

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A Very Rough Draft

## Author's Note:

When I was initially contacted to do this presentation by Frances Hagopian, I was told that it could be a loose collection of thoughts around the designated theme. In particular, the communiqué read, “We envision six substantive working sessions, each of which will be anchored by one brief, thought paper (it can be as short as five to ten pages) that I hope will pull together the state of our knowledge on the subject, and point to some of the most exciting questions that will be salient in the years ahead.” I agreed to do this since it sounded fun and I’ve never been to Notre Dame. One of my life goals is to get a picture of me by Touchdown Jesus. With this in mind, the readers of this paper should realize that this is a very rough “thought paper.” Some may even think it is thoughtless. My goal here is to pull together several strands of research that I and others have worked on in the past and toss them into the arena of Latin America. Some of the ideas are pulled from research that isn’t necessarily focused on Latin America, but that I think has some relevance. I will try to cite my references where appropriate, though much of this will be working from memory.

The tenor of the paper may be a bit “irreverent” and seemingly “unintellectual.” This is largely because I am writing the paper in a short period of time and the best way for me to do that is to have a conversation with myself as I type. Also, I hope to make it an enjoyable read for whoever happens to stumble across it. I like to be playful with ideas, and here I am in all my playful glory. In time, should my ideas be deemed worthy for something greater (e.g., edited volume), I will polish the work and make it more professional. On the other hand, maybe this will result in a lifetime ban to South Bend. I hope not.

Finally, many of you know that I’m the token “rational choice guy” in the subfield of Latin American religious studies. While I think this is a misnomer to some extent,<sup>1</sup> I can live with that. You need not remind me that the use of rational choice theory is inappropriate for the study of religion. I’ve heard that a million times, but I stubbornly persist. Here’s a deal. I will try to keep the rational choice-y jargon to a minimum, if you agree to move beyond the standard critique that rational choice is useless. Okay, now let’s get playful with some ideas.

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<sup>1</sup> I actually won an award once for doing a paper on culture. I think it was a signal for me to keep doing papers on culture and jettison the economics. I probably will do more work on culture. I do think culture is important. Seriously. I really do.

## Introduction

The Roman Catholic Church is in crisis. So what's new? Isn't the Catholic Church always in crisis? Throughout its 2,000 year history,<sup>2</sup> the RCC has faced an ongoing series of trials and tribulations that would have destroyed seemingly stronger organizations.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the history of the RCC may well be the second greatest story ever told.<sup>4</sup> The earliest members of this church survived persecution and hungry lions for three centuries before being officially accepted by Constantine. Even after getting the official Roman stamp of approval, Church leaders had to battle the constant threat of heresy and internal division. Sometimes the RCC lost these battles, most notably the early break with Byzantium and then Luther and his band of Protestants a millennium or so later. The Church even survived French attempts to make their own pope in Avignon. But for the most part, the RCC maintained a consistent hierarchical structure even as feudal empires and nation-states came and went. Put this in perspective. The Soviet Union, with a vast bureaucratic structure and developed ideology barely made it past its 90th birthday, roughly 1,900 years fewer than the Catholic Church. This is all the more remarkable when one considers that the Church kept a large-scale theological and organizational movement alive throughout periods where communication and travel were extremely inefficient and costly. Even when infrastructure conditions did improve, the RCC struggled with the constant emergence of new challenges, including hostile states and political ideologies that sought its virtual elimination. Wow!

Now as we approach the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Latin American Bishops Conference (CELAM), the RCC faces a new series of threats and challenges, namely globalization, secularization and the rise of new religious movements. The tenor of the pope and his

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<sup>2</sup> The 2,000 year statement has been contested by some. I am thinking here that the RCC is an outgrowth of the Christian Church which was a Jewish sect to start out with. I'm stating here that without the Twelve Apostles continuing the evangelizing work of Jesus, there would not have been a Catholic Church. Surviving those early years is very important for a religious/social movement.

<sup>3</sup> I have had several colleagues bug me about studying something so seemingly trivial as religion. I have to remind them that the Catholic Church currently holds the current record for the longest-surviving hierarchical organization and that it counts upon the loyalty of more people than most nation-states. The Soviet Union, seemingly impervious to decay prior to 1989, only lasted about 84 years, roughly 1,919 years short of the Catholic Church's current batting streak. That's pretty incredible when you think about it. And one wonders why political scientists don't consider the Catholic Church to be an interesting institution.

<sup>4</sup> If you need to know which one is the greatest story, I suggest a CCD refresher course.

bishops when talking of these crises has been dire. Nonetheless, it is my contention that although these phenomena (no matter how poorly conceptualized they are) do pose challenges, they also create an environment wherein the Catholic Church can strengthen itself institutionally. In fact, it is my normative contention here that these challenges are good for the Church and that, as history reminds us, the RCC will emerge from these crises stronger than ever. While it is unlikely that any of these “crises” will be resolved to the full satisfaction of Church leaders, I believe (based largely upon theoretical and empirical research on the economics of religion and my own empirical observations) that the Latin American Catholic Church is entering a “golden age.” I foresee an increasing connection between the clergy and laity as well as the Church playing a vital role in the bolstering of civil society in the region. I will build my case primarily by looking at the opportunities (yes, I said “opportunities,” not challenges) arising from the expansion of Protestantism in the region. However, I will dip into the topics of globalization and secularization as there is some overlap (and I just can’t resist).

#### GLOBALIZATION AND SECULARIZATION

While the issues of globalization and secularization will be discussed by others elsewhere, I would like to add my two cents because these concepts have some linkage to my primary topic at hand – Protestant conversions. Globalization is sometimes thought of as being a “cause” (or perhaps a catalyst) of evangelical Protestant growth. And the mere fact that evangelical Protestantism is on the rise in Latin America provides ample evidence that secularization is not the problem that many make it out to be. The biggest problem with globalization and secularization rests with how scholars conceptualize these terms. They are horribly conceptualized, with definitions (meanings) shifting faster than the score of a Notre Dame – Marquette basketball game. Globalization encompasses anything and everything from international financial flows to foreign direct investment to labor migration to MTV and Levis. Many of the processes encompassed by the broad term of “globalization” are contradictory – FDI and portfolio investment can sometimes be at odds with one another, as can FDI and labor migration patterns. Unless this term is specifically conceptualized and a scholar carefully hypothesizes about the causal linkages

between a specific component of globalization and some effect, the term loses all usefulness.

Secularization has the same problem. While your everyday undergraduate student would define “secularization” as the loss of religious belief and activity in society, scholars have been a bit more slippery with the term. Some refer to it as a loss of personal piety, while others focus on the decline of religion in the public sphere. There have even been attempts to explain religiosity in the U.S. – a place where a remarkable 40 – 45% of the population attend services regularly – as a form of secularization; US churchiness really isn’t religious, it is some sort of secular expression. Interestingly, where religion is tightly regulated and sanctioned by the state (which would seem to put it firmly in the public sphere), people don’t seem to go to church all that much, nor do they believe in God a whole lot. As you might guess, I’m talking here about Europe. But where government takes a more hostile stand to religion, and tries to exclude it from the public sphere, it seems to flourish. You guessed it – the U.S. is the prime example here.

What is more mind boggling than the various definitions of “secularization” are the attempts to explain it. By far and away, “modernization” – another ill-defined concept – is the culprit. Supposedly, as science and technology march forth in society, people begin to shed the silly superstitions known as “religion.” But wait! Scholars have been noting an upsurge in religious fundamentalism across the globe, particularly in the Islamic world although it is not uncommon throughout the developing (and sometimes developed) world. So what is causing this trend? Modernization, of course! Somehow modernization – usually in the form of Britney Spears on MTV – dislocates people from their traditional moorings and forces them into fundamentalist sects via the creation of loads of “social anomie.” The problem here is that there is such poor conceptualizing and theorizing that the whole enterprise of explaining secularization and fundamentalism becomes tautologous. That’s great if you want to appear really smart before a bunch of undergraduates or be quoted in the local newspaper, but it is really bad social science. Modernization causes fundamentalism in places where people can’t handle modernization all that well, and creates secularization in places where they are all set to embrace modernization. How we know which environment we are in depends on the

outcome – i.e., whether people are whipping up fundamentalist fervor or tuning in football (American or metric) on Sunday morning.

Substitute “globalization” for “modernization” in the sentence above and you are basically at where we are today in terms of our thinking on this stuff. Benjamin Barber (1995) talks about jihad as a response to McWorld, the epitome of globalization/modernization. Others follow suit.

Personally, I don’t think secularization is a big problem in Latin America. Why? Well, lots of people are signing up with evangelical Protestants. There is even some evidence that more Catholics are starting to attend Mass on a semi-regular basis. And the number of priests relative to the population also seems to be improving, indicating that the RCC is attracting folks to work for it. And as for globalization or rapid modernization causing an increase in Protestant fundamentalism in the region, I’m rather skeptical. If modernization is causing people to lose their traditional moorings and hence seek out a traditional anchor, why not go back to the RCC? Why bother joining some Pentecostal church tucked in a warehouse?

The answer to the riddle of Protestant conversion in Latin America and insight into its solution is the same thing that would help cure some of this sloppy theorizing being done with modernization and secularization – a focus on microlevel motivations of individual parishioners and priests as well as how various institutional arrangements shape individual incentives. Using insights gleaned from the “economics of religion” perspective, which takes microlevel incentives as a starting point of analysis, I will make the argument that the rise of evangelical Protestantism in Latin America is not a crisis, but actually a blessing for both the Catholic Church and society at large. Protestant competition provides Catholic leaders with a signal as to failed efforts to reach important segments of Latin American society and further creates the proper incentives needed for what the Latin American Bishops Conference has called “a new evangelization.” Based on this analysis, I will then make three policy-based claims for the RCC: 1) the RCC should promote religious freedom; 2) the RCC should disengage from seeking public assistance from state governments; 3) the RCC should learn from its competitors while maintaining its own theological identity; and 3) CELAM should focus on raising the professional stature of the clergy.

## PROTESTANT CONVERSIONS: ORIGINS OF A (NONEXISTENT) PROBLEM.

Despite efforts to view the rise of evangelical Protestantism as a response to some macrosociological changes in Latin America, primarily modernization and industrialization (cf. Golden and Metz, 1991; Sexton 1978; Lalive d'Épinay 1969), the origins of can be traced to simple matters of supply and demand: Latin Americans – like many people around the world – have a thirst for spirituality. In economic jargon, demand for religion is pretty high.<sup>5</sup> For centuries, the RCC undersupplied spiritual services to vast swatches of Latin American society, primarily those at the lower economic strata (cf. Hurtado 1992 [1941]; Poblete 1965). When Protestants gained entrance to this undersupplied market, they made rapid progress. The logic of this progress is fairly straightforward.

Monopoly churches – like monopoly firms – are typically bad at customer service as their clientele are generally trapped. Adam Smith noted this about the Church of England in *The Wealth of Nations*. Albert Hirschman followed up on that thought some 200 years later when he noted that when customers have no exit, they also have little voice – i.e., customer complaints generally are ignored by the firm and quality inevitably declines. Also, with a captured clientele, the LARCC had little incentive to field a sufficient number of priests to serve everyone wanting religious services. Reports were (and still are in some parts) common that rural villages would not see a priest for six months or a year.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the effects of the priest shortage were disproportionately borne by the

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<sup>5</sup> This is likely where I will get into an argument with Tim Steigenga over whether demand is constant or whether it fluctuates. Suffice it to say that I will agree with Tim that it does fluctuate. However, also suffice it to say that some of this demand fluctuation is due to supply conditions – suppliers can create demand. Procter & Gamble would call this “advertising.” George Whitfield would call it “circuit riding.” My contention here is not that the rise of evangelical Protestantism was not due solely to a demand shift (as those who rely on modernization as an explanatory variable would have it). My contention here is that demand for a religious provider (e.g., a priest) was significantly higher than the supply for most, if not all, of Latin America’s history. Yes, demand probably fluctuated a bit, but not enough to account fully for the rise in Protestantism. Indeed, if one believes that a demand shift is totally (or principally) responsible for the growth of Protestantism, one would have to ask why the cross-national variation in growth rates has been so uneven. Why did Chile witness such a rapid expansion of Protestantism dating back to the 1930s when Argentina – a country with relatively similar demographics and economic experiences – did not see such growth until recently? Hopefully, this “great compromise” will satisfy Prof. Steigenga. ☺

<sup>6</sup> One of the interesting consequences of this was a high illegitimacy rate, often blamed on the “machismo” culture. While there is some validity to the machismo claim, it is also probably true that the inability to consecrate a marriage created an incentive for men to abandon their fatherly roles. After all, if you give birth out of wedlock, which is frowned upon by Catholicism, you already are in deep trouble so why bother sticking around?

poor. Given a limited number of clergy, the RCC typically assigned priests to middle or upper class parishes. This is not to say there was a malevolent favoring of the rich over the poor; this skewed distribution of resources is perfectly understandable. Given that the RCC relied upon financial contributions to stay solvent and to fund charities that helped the poor, it made sense to provide services to those who would most likely be contributors.<sup>7</sup> Allocating priests to these neighborhoods was also a function of seminarian recruitment. Since being a priest required a basic education, and since this was normally available only to the wealthier segments of society, the priestly class tended to draw from wealthier families. These people were not likely to sign on knowing that their assignments would be in conditions substantially worse than what they were used to.

Despite the fact that there was a general lack of priests, people were still interested in spirituality. Individuals often had to rely upon themselves or small groups of lay people to satisfy their spiritual needs. “Folk Catholicism”<sup>8</sup> was the natural outgrowth of this. Nonetheless, such services were generally a poor substitute for the presence of a professional cleric. A professional cleric – or one who devoted a substantial portion of his time to studying and preaching religion – offers a greater degree of legitimacy and simplifies the costs of providing religion. Although universally true, most people tend to prefer religious services to be organized for them. Call this a division of labor thing, something else Adam Smith wrote about. Historically, organized religion tends to win out over unorganized religion. Being part of a church with an authority figure and lots of other people tends to reduce much of the uncertainty that is inherent in religious goods. As religion is best understood as a “credence good”<sup>9</sup> (or bundle of credence goods with some tangible benefits), the credibility issue of the message is best dealt with by providing a learned authority who is trustworthy and by having some economy of scale – i.e., nine hundred million Catholics can’t be wrong, can they?

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<sup>7</sup> If this is still hard to understand, think about why wealthy alumni get good seats at Notre Dame football games.

<sup>8</sup> I guess this goes by the name “popular religiosity” or something now.

<sup>9</sup> A credence good is a good wherein the quality of the product cannot be determined immediately. Since many religions (including Christianity broadly conceived) promise salvation and offer other philosophic answers to life’s great mysteries, religion tends to be the ultimate credence good. It is true that religions provide other tangible goods like fellowship, marriage contracting, etc., but the one area religions tend to have a comparative advantage relative to alternative secular suppliers is in the salvation and philosophic answer business (with all due respect to the philosophers reading this paper).



Now this is where the Protestants come in. Literally. Once Protestants made their way into various nations in Latin America and began focusing on converting members of the lower classes, they grew pretty fast. This was all the more true if the movement was indigenized – i.e., the leadership and/or preachers were of the same nationality as the pool of converts. The indigenization helped to alleviate some of the credibility issues with converting people to a relatively new credence good – i.e., Protestantism. Early attempts by Protestants to make headway in the region were focused on the elite and tended not to go anywhere. However, once more Protestant preachers started to focus on the lower classes, where there weren't any priests, they took off.

This begs the question as to how the Protestants ended up in some countries (e.g., Brazil, Chile) but not in others (e.g., Argentina, Colombia), at least until recently.<sup>10</sup> My answer to this (Gill 1999a) is religious liberty: Where minority religious organizations are relatively free to organize,<sup>11</sup> they will likely flourish.<sup>12</sup> Many Latin American countries relaxed the stranglehold that Catholicism had over the religious market in the mid-late 1800s when Liberal governments were in power, though minority religions were not granted wide latitude in their movement. Countries like Chile, which were heavily dependent upon trade, tended to liberalize rules on minority religions to facilitate traders from Northern Europe and the United States. There are several other reasons why countries liberalized their religious market and I'm working on a book about that (cf. Gill 2003). If you want more details, you will have to call me out for another talk. In the meantime, let me note that one of the other reasons for the rise of Protestantism in Latin America was due to a supply shift. During the 1940s, when Asia was closed off as a mission field due to a war, several missionaries refocused attention on the Western Hemisphere, a region that had heretofore been considered Christianized. When these missionaries arrived, they were surprised to find out that many people did not have

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<sup>10</sup> Undoubtedly somebody will say that they were in Colombia and they saw a Protestant so I don't know what I'm talking about. My reply would be to put things in context. There are a lot more evangelicals in Brazil and Chile than in Colombia, though I expect that the Protestants in Colombia will soon catch up.

<sup>11</sup> I do know that some Latin American countries also restricted the activities of the majority Catholic religion, namely Mexico until 1994 (Gill 1999b) and Cuba.

<sup>12</sup> While you may be getting sick of my excessive footnoting, I just want to point out that I recently wrote another paper (Gill and Lundsgaarde 2003) explaining cross-national religious activity as a function of governmental welfare spending. It is worth a look-see.

contact with organized religion, largely due to the shortage of Catholic priests. This now brings us to the Catholic reaction.

#### THE CATHOLIC RESPONSE TO THE PROTESTANT “PROBLEM”

While progressive Catholicism (and its subsidiary liberation theology) has become famous for taking a “preferential option for the poor” in the 1960s (and possibly dating back a decade or two earlier),<sup>13</sup> I have claimed elsewhere (Gill 1998) that evangelical Protestants were the first to take a preferential option for the poor in the region. My reasoning was that Protestants, seeking converts and trying to win their trust, did lots of nice things for the poor such as teaching them to read and helping them out with their material conditions (e.g., building irrigation ditches). When Catholic officials saw this, they responded in kind (see Gill 1998, 79-120; Cook 1985). Where competition was most intense, bishops began devoting more attention to the needs of the poor. They recruited priests, often from abroad,<sup>14</sup> to work in these areas and sponsored greater lay involvement (often through Christian base communities that featured many of the same “community help” services offered by earlier Protestant missionaries). But don’t take my word for it. Consult Padre Alberto Hurtado – a priest who is on his way to becoming Chile’s first saint. In his famous book, *¿Es Chile un país católico?*, he devotes a chapter to Protestants and how they are helping to tell Catholics that they haven’t done a good job in ministering to the poor.<sup>15</sup> And during a 1954 conference of Maryknollers in Peru, Father Consodine said,

I have three points here. The first would be lay participation in worship. Catholics who have been won to Protestantism in South America remark that their share now is more that of participants than witnesses. Catholics are not supposed to be mere “witnesses” at Mass but this is how these fallen-away Catholics report. The second is lay co-operation in works of

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<sup>13</sup> I do not want to equate the “preferential option for the poor” exclusively with liberation theology as there were many priests who did not sign on to all that came with liberation theology yet still worked closely with the poor. Moreover, it is very difficult to find a priest or bishop who hates the poor. Even conservative clergy are likely to have a soft spot for the downtrodden in society, though their remedial actions for those individuals may differ from those in the progressive camp.

<sup>14</sup> There was a pretty dramatic uptick in the number of foreign priests working in Latin America beginning in the 1950s. Coincidence? I think not!

<sup>15</sup> I seem to have lost my copy of this fantastic book, hence no direct quotes. If anybody knows where it is, please let me know.

religion and social action. Protestants generally make great use of local laity in direct works of religion and social action as Father Comber points out. The third point is their very strong program of social welfare. Bishop Kiwanuka in Uganda told me how he was harried by the Protestants in Uganda. He threw up his hands and said: “It’s almost as if we had divided the two Great Commandments between us. We Catholics practice the first Great Commandment and the Protestants the second. We put great emphasis on the intense life of worship: ‘Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God.’ And I can’t help but feel that the Protestants have stolen the lead in regard to the second, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.’ Here in this neighborhood the Protestant seems to be the one who is creating neighborliness, going around prompting people to get together, to be kind to one another. These are natural virtues, it is true, but nevertheless they provide a strong foundation for the supernatural and we should make use of them.” (Markyknoll Fathers 1954, 287).<sup>16</sup>

Now granted Consodine is relaying a story from Africa, but he is doing it in the context of Latin America. It is worth noting that this conference occurred in 1954, before Vatican Council II and CELAM’s famous Medellín conference.

The basic point is that competition from Protestants acted as an alarm clock to the Church. It forced many to realize that their efforts among wide sections of the Latin American population had been sub par, and then to refocus their energies to re-evangelize the population. And although Pope John Paul II has referred to evangelicals in Latin America as “rapacious wolves,” the more general response on the part of the RCC has been what the Santo Domingo conference dubbed “A New Evangelization.” That is a good thing. The more energy the RCC devotes to constant evangelization of the Latin American population, the better it is for everyone. First, religious consumers will get better service. Second, given that religious organizations are often the foundation for

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<sup>16</sup> There’s a lot more where that came from. Consult Gill (1998). Also, I will acknowledge that Protestant competition isn’t the only factor provoking a more progressive stance on the part of the LARCC. Other factors such as priests visiting Belgium did matter, but it is interesting to note that where the Church tended to pay more attention to the poor was in the same places where Protestants were pretty numerous.

civil society, such re-evangelization is likely to enhance grassroots democracy.<sup>17</sup> In short, then, Protestant competition is not a problem for the Catholic Church, but it is a blessing.<sup>18</sup> Remember, those “rapacious wolves” are poaching marginal Catholics, people who had little contact with organized religion. Many of these churches are actually helping people sort out their lives and become better people and citizens (Brusco 1995). Without that competition, the Church might not be upping its effort in the region to the extent that it currently is. With that in mind, let me now make a couple “policy prescriptions” for the Catholic Church.

#### POLICY PRESCRIPTIONS FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH<sup>19</sup>

Given that I’ve tried to argue that Protestants are good for the Catholic Church (since they keep the clergy on their toes), and since Protestants have largely benefited from a liberalized religious market, it behooves the Church to promote religious freedom. By religious freedom I refer to governmental policies that reduce the costs that religious organizations and individuals face in their attempt to worship together. While this obviously implies a constitutional guarantee of religious freedom, it also applies to more mundane things. In addition to responding to Protestant competition by fielding more clergy and making use of base communities and other lay organizations, the LARCC – in some places – has been known to seek the help of local and national governments in restricting the movement of religious minorities. For instance, the Mexican Church has tried to get loudspeakers banned outside of Pentecostal churches, arguing that it is a nuisance. In Chile, bishops and their lawyers fought tooth and nail to prevent a law that would guarantee evangelicals equal legal status as the RCC and hence access to the military, hospitals and prisons.

Now of course there should be some minimum level of regulation of religious organizations. We can’t have human sacrifice cults running around society now, can we?

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<sup>17</sup> Okay, this is a big theoretical jump, but just bear with me on it. I have written on this elsewhere – in a paper on religious values that you can find on my website and in a publication coming out soon in the journal *Democratization*.

<sup>18</sup> I do note that some of the religions that go under the heading of “evangelical” or “Protestant” might seem pretty wacky and possibly even harmful. To this extent, I agree that there should be some minimal level of regulation of the religious market. Religions that practice human sacrifice should not be tolerated. However, take a look at the US. There is lots of religious pluralism here and it seems like a pretty healthy thing for spirituality in general.

<sup>19</sup> Admittedly, this section is based on an envy I have for my colleagues who do get to write policy-based papers. No one has ever asked me to do this before, so I take the opportunity here.

Using some common sense we can restrict the excesses that a religious free-for-all would bring (usually by looking at a case-by-case basis). The result of greater religious freedom will be greater religious diversity, which (as people like Rod Stark and Larry Iannaccone have shown) leads to a more vibrant religious economy – one that benefits all involved.

Second, and related to the first, the LARCC should swear off governmental assistance for its mission. It has been noted by the bishops that these new evangelical churches have a significant advantage in that they have low overhead costs (CELAM 1984). Throughout its history the LARCC has relied upon subsidies from the state to help with maintenance costs and other expenses. However, the more dependent the RCC becomes on government for its funding, the more likely it is to cow tow to the powers that be. This means, among other things, that there will be less focus on pleasing parishioners who furnish the donation base of the Church and more focus on keeping politicians happy. Also, it implies that the position of the RCC as a moral watchdog for society may be compromised. Having to go to parishioners for funds will also serve to energize the Church in its “New Evangelization” as the most likely donors are parishioners who are well cared for.<sup>20</sup>

Third, the Catholic Church should learn from evangelical Protestants without compromising their own identity. To an extent, as I’ve argued above, the LARCC has done this. The focus on the poor and increasing community services to parishioners is, in part, a response to Protestants efforts to do this. The recent movement of “charismatic Catholicism” is also a direct response to Protestant challenges. Keeping one’s eyes open to new avenues of evangelization can be very useful. The most remarkable thing about the RCC, and something that I don’t fully understand quite yet, is that it is a remarkably diverse religious organization yet still hangs together quite well. The Protestant Reformation aside, the RCC has been able to absorb a variety of different worship styles and disagreement about various aspects of theology – not core components of theology – but various interpretations at the margin. Being open to new methods of evangelization not only is ecumenical, but it is a good survival strategy for the Church in the coming centuries. Of course, the RCC must always remember that it is the RCC and not put its core identity up to the whims of public opinion, but beyond this there is always room for

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<sup>20</sup> Remember those Notre Dame football ticket holders.

some adjustment. The presence of Protestants is a good source for reflection on the LARCC's evangelizing mission.

Finally, elevating the status of priests would be a good thing for the RCC. This is actually one policy prescription that I've changed my mind on. Work by Rod Stark and Roger Finke (2000, 169-92) has shown that seminarians are easier to recruit to the extent that the rewards of serving in the clergy are high. (Also, work by Larry Iannaccone has shown that a certain level of strictness for members and clergy can increase the level of collective participation by making the club goods offered by religious groups more valuable.) One of the things that Vatican II did, as a way of democratizing the Church, was to make clergy more like everybody else. Prior to Vatican II, one of the benefits of being a priest was that people held you in high esteem. The problem with this is that certain costs – namely celibacy and reduced income over one's life – stayed the same.<sup>21</sup> Stark and Finke have observed that following Vatican II, the number of seminarians and nuns joining the RCC plummeted. Only in seminaries or orders that maintained rather strict and traditional standards did the number of clergy and sisters hold their ground. As John Paul II has tried to return to a more traditional view of the clergy, the number of people entering the priesthood has been going up (including in Latin America). The priesthood is a noble calling and keeping it that way is one way to guarantee the Church will remain strong in an environment of increasing religious pluralism. (During the actual presentation at Notre Dame, I actually showed some evidence of this.)

#### Conclusion

Despite the fact that the LARCC may feel that it is losing ground to evangelical Protestants, the fact of the matter is that Protestants are doing a great favor to the LARCC by reminding its leaders, clergy and laity that spiritual evangelization is an ongoing process. The main mission of the Catholic Church is to bring people closer to God. Social factors that come in the form of difficult challenges will only strengthen the resolve of the Church and push it towards becoming an even greater institution in the centuries to come. As the LARCC has declared a "New Evangelization," the energy and

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<sup>21</sup> A similar problem exists with academics. Our university is trying to make the professors out to be more "student friendly" by having the students see us as real people. The administration has argued that students too often hold us in awe or fear us. Unfortunately, by stripping this awe and fear away, I think we are losing some of our authority in the classroom.

effort it puts in to serving its parishioners will lead it, in my opinion, to a golden age of Catholicism in the region.

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