Religion and Religious Experience


What gives life meaning?
- Family matters, but family can cause problems. What then holds it together?
- Community ties are crucial, but what gives community strength?
- All of this is especially important for the poor

Timeline
- 1891: Pope Leo XIII advocates protecting poor and promoting social justice as part of Church doctrine; still not the primary focus of Church teachings
- Cuba (1959)
- 1962: Vatican II
- 1963: Pope John XXIII dies
- 1965: Vatican II ends
- Rise of Christian Democracy (1960s)
- Camilo Torres (1966)
- Medellín 1968: Conference of Latin American bishops (CELAM) meets to apply Vatican II; endorses preferential option for the poor
- *En el lago* (1977) by Ernesto Cardenal, later a Minister in the Sandinista regime
- Cardinal Wojtyla becomes Pope John Paul II (1978)
- People’s Church in Nicaragua (1979)
- Assassination of Oscar Romero (1980)
- Priests ordered to leave Nicaraguan government (1981)
- Preoccupation with unity
• JP II visits Central America
• Countereformation in 1984; Leonardo Boff (Brazilian leftist theologian) silenced
• Extraordinary Synod of 1985

Discuss changes in the Church and their implications for politics

No single Catholic position
• Competing and contesting positions
• Blending of pre-Hispanic or African practices
• Indians used to this
  o Toltec gods in Mayas
  o Aztec gods imposed on conquered peoples
  o New deities accepted into pantheon
  o Not willing to give up old gods
  o Old deities go underground
• Layering of religious beliefs
  o Juan Diego, Virgin of Guadalupe, and mother goddess Tonanzin in 1531
  o San Cristobal and Zinacantan, Maypole in Bluefields, Day of Dead
  o [Questions: Does this mean it’s any less “pure” a form of religion? Answer: No, look at Christianity in Europe]
• Same thing with slave communities
  o Orixás (or spirits, West African deities) become identified with saints

Protestantism making inroads
• There were always some
  o Miskito Indians, who had not been conquered were converted by mainline denominations
  o German Moravian Missionaries
  o But only 12.5% are now mainline denominations
  o Rest are Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists (7.5%)
  o Pentacostals and evangelicos (80%)
• Some figures
  o 10-14% of total population
  o Guatemala 30%
  o Chile 21-22%
  o Brazil 16-20% (1/2 of all Latin American protestants)
• Jerry Falwell, Assemblies of God
• Pentacostals
  o Direct experience of individuals with Holy Spirit
  o Prophecies
  o Faith healings and exorcism
  o Speaking in tongues
  o No mixing, problems caused by evil spirits (use West African dieties’names in exorcism); can’t go to Catholic mass occasionally
  o Less discrimination based on race
  o Higher clergy to believer ratio
  o More popular base
  o Why successful? (1) religiously under-served communities, (2) money from abroad, (3) immediate conversion, (4) very clear payoff with self-help and talk of community problems, (5) good message of self-reliance and individualism amidst strong community
Afro-Brazilian spiritism

- Umbanda (1930s); Kardac is a French movement imported to Brazil
  - Light
  - Spirits don’t enter the body of the faithful, but rather than of the medium
  - More mixed race
  - Les voodoo, more incorporation of national folk heroes
  - Nationalization of deities
  - No sacrifices, no blood
- Condomblé
  - Heavy
  - Direct possession of audience
  - More black
  - Sacrifices and blood
- No exclusive adherence of religious faith, flexible
- Santeria (Cuba and Puerto Rico)

Questions for class discussion

- Give overview of Salvadoran civil war, so they can read the stuff
- What happens at Vatican II and Medellín?
- What is the “preferential option for the poor”?
- What is “liberation theology”?
- Describe Sandinista People’s Church
- What is a CEB? What happens there?
- What does pre-Vatican II service look like?
- What does a modern Catholic service look like?
- What does a CEB look like?
- What does an Assembly of God service look like?
- Difference between Pentacostals and Evangelicals?
- What does Umbanda look like?
- Difference between Candomblé and Umbanda
- Tolerance of mingling among Catholics and Protestants?