The Future as Seen From Aparecida[*]

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When Latin America's Catholic bishops met in Aparecida, Brazil (May 13-31 2007) their   goal was to preserve, enrich and extend the Catholic faith of the region's peoples, a long tradition acknowledged to be "a fundamental source of the identity, originality and unity of Latin America and the Caribbean" (8), "among its greatest riches" (7).   The gift of this rich tradition of faith sets the context for developing the bishops' overall theme of the meetings, which was the identity of the church and faithful as *missionary disciples*, a theme echoed by the Pope in his opening speech and underscored throughout the documents.[1] To be a missionary disciple in Latin America today means striving to bring the good news   (the original meaning of Gospel or Evangelios) and to do so joyfully and with hope but also in a way that resonates with the realities of daily life in the region. How the church, through its leaders gathered at Aparecida, understands itself and the situation of faith in the social, economic, cultural and political world of Latin America, is the central factor that structures the way in which the message is presented and carried forward. Is it joyful, optimistic and open to change---a genuine *Kairos* or   propitious moment of grace in which commitments and solidarities can be reaffirmed, or is this instead a defensive moment, concerned to preserve, protect and

[1] Citations from the documents use two formats. The document is organized into sequential, numbered paragraphs from 1 to 554. For specific citations, I refer to paragraph numbers. References to general areas of discussion refer either to specific chapters or to sub headings, for example Ch 8 (*Reino de Dios y Promoción de la Dignidad Humana*, Kingdom of God and Promotion of Human Dignity) or section 8.6 "Rostros Sufrientes que nos duelen (Suffering Faces that make us Grieve"   . All translations from the Spanish are mine.

reinforce what exists? [2]

There are many ways to read the documents of Aparecida and the process and debates surrounding them. They may be seen in terms of continuities with a line of significant   conferences of the region's Catholic bishops (Medellín in 1968, Puebla in 1979, Santo Domingo 1992) that set an agenda for   Latin American Catholicism, and provided a new moral vocabulary with which activists and believers could understand the world. (Cf Gutiérrez, 2007, Tovar, 2007) One need only remember the impact of such phrases as "institutionalized violence" (Medellín) or "preferential option for the poor" (Puebla) to grasp the salience and potential impact of such meetings. Aparecida can also be understood as an effort by Pope Benedict XVI to continue the policies of his predecessor John Paul II, while placing his own mark on them and becoming acquainted with and open to what is, after all, the major Catholic region of the world.

This chapter tackles the matter from a different angle. I look at Aparecida in terms of the vision of the future embedded in the documents, debates and "between the lines" and set that against an understanding what the present is like, how it got that way, and of likely and possible futures both for the church and for society as a whole. If we ask how the future looks as seen from Aparecida, a short answer is <u>dangerous and filled with threat and peril</u>. There are dangers from cultural inroads to Catholic ideas of a proper moral sphere (concern about the decay of traditional gender roles is prominent) and to the role of the church in ordering that moral sphere. There   is the related peril of dissolution of a world view once united around the Catholic faith and guided by its

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[2] The concept of *Kairos* denotes to a right or opportune moment, a historical crisis which is also an opportunity for change, a n appointed time in which a document can resonate. In South Africa, the 1985 *Kairos* document identified just such a moment, and called the churches to be present in the struggles that brought an end to apartheid.

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official leaders. There is the threat from competition by other church (above all, "sects" meaning neo Pentecostal churches) along with the danger posed by indifference, apathy and a tendency of many to see themselves as *católico a mi manera*, (Catholic in my own way*),* disengaged from church supervision and discipline. (Cf. Parker, 2005) All these perils are exacerbated by a context of accelerated social dissolution brought about by poverty, violence, and drugs.

A simple listing of threats, perils, dangers and decay of course does not exhaust the agenda of Aparecida: these are balanced by nuanced recognition of progress in politics (with democracy), education, ecological concerns, rights, and recognition and dignification of excluded groups especially indigenous communities and those of African descent. But the predominant note is fear, above all fear of loss. The collection of fears scattered through the documents rests on a particular understanding of change in contemporary Latin America that warrants a closer look. What is the motive force of this change, who are its agents and what does it mean for the church as an institution and collection of faithful? The answer given at Aparecida) is that change is impelled by global forces (economic and cultural) that together undermine cultural unity, reorder social roles and undercut important values and authority. Facing a situation that is perceived as challenging in these ways, an institution like the Catholic church has several options: it can simply adapt and go with the flow; it can engage as a participant in the process with its own message and enthusiasm; or it can resist by consolidating its forces and rebuilding around a common purpose and leadership. The position taken at Aparecida lies somewhere between the second and third option, with the weight on the latter. As we shall see, final revisions put in place by the Vatican heightened salience of

fear and the insistence on control. Whether or not this vision of the world will work, and what specific policies it may produce, will depend on how accurate the underlying analysis of reality turns out to be. The next section outlines the main parameters of the current situation and identifies the forces and trends which have made it the way it is.

The Present State of Religion, Society, and Culture and How it Got This Way[3]

In the run up to Aparecida, the world that Catholic leaders saw around them was like night and day compared to the one in which most had been born and raised. The unquestioned monopoly of the Catholic church as the church had eroded, replaced by a plurality of churches and a new presence of religious competition (for members, space, public sanction and goods) throughout the region. Statistical reports (including national census data and a series of surveys and studies) confirmed what they could see every day. The numbers of the numbers of men and women identifying themselves as "Catholic" was in steady decline, while those declaring affiliation to Protestant (especially Pentecostal and neo Pentecostal churches) had grown, along with a smaller, but still notable segment that affirmed no connection to any church or religion.[4] Surveys also regularly report a substantial sector that declares itself *católico en mi manera*, (or as Mallimaci and Villa put it, *cuenta propista*, on ones own) picking and choosing the kinds of issues on which they adhere, or even listen to "official teachings." (Mallimaci and Villa)

The erosion of monopoly is not limited to statistics of membership or church

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[3] This section draws freely on my *The Future of Christianity in Latin America*, University of Notre Dame, Kellogg Institute Working Paper 340, August 2007.

[4] Because the focus of this chapter is on the Catholic Church, and specifically on Aparecida, I do not go into detail here on the nature or growth pattern of Protestantism in general or Pentecostal and neo Pentecostal churches in particular. For details, see Chesnut, Freston, Hagopian, Levine 2007, 2008, Steigenga, Stoll.

attendance. The Catholic church no longer monopolizes the moral sphere in the name of religion: its leaders and official voices must share the airwaves, TV screens, public platforms, and arenas of power with representatives of these other churches. Even within the admittedly broad net that the Catholic church casts, there is growing diversity of opinion visible in publications, schools, and group positions, leading Catalina Romero (2008) to speak of the development of public space and civil society *within the church*. She writes that "Through these different form of association and the construction of new spaces for encounter and interaction, the church has renovated itself and infused religious meaning in everyday life problems. In the last decade, this space has begun to close once again due to the intervention of a number of bishops who are trying to take back control of public space in the church itself and in the way the church expresses itself and is represented in civil society, political society, and the state." (2008, 22) The trend that Romero identifies for Peru is visible throughout the region: groups proliferate while many prelates, fearing division and loss of control have tried to rein them in by cutting funds to dissident groups and striving for greater control over schools, universities and publications. (Drogus and Stewart-Gambino)

The decay of Catholic monopoly and the growing pluralism of religious expression and organization are accompanied by processes that have moved religious groups, issues and leaders off center stage of public debate, contestation, coalition formation, and political discussion. This is an inevitable consequence of important currents of pluralism that have come with the democratization of civil society and politics of the last two decades. There are many more options and vehicles for expression now than in the past; Church leaders can no longer monopolize the public expression of

religious comment, nor can they count on being king makers or critical veto players. The effort is bound to run into multiple figures working the territory. There is simply a lot of competition out there.

The convergence of these multiple pluralisms means that simple references to church and state, much less exclusive attention to the institutional Catholic church (or to the statements of its official leaders and spokespersons) no longer suffices as a guide to understanding religion, or its place in society and politics in Latin America today.

Detailed examination of the   organizations and   vehicles of mobilization that the church presumably "controls" and could use to further its agenda (Hagopian), reveals that the bishops' capacity to manage groups and members is much weaker than they would like or that they often imagine. Many of the "resources" that prelates commonly list or rely upon turn out on closer inspection to be hollow shells, groups that exist more on paper than in reality. Even where groups as such do survive, members prove much less malleable than the evidence of formal ties and documents might indicate. In any case, the   effort to ensure loyalty by insisting on separate groups with built in clerical supervision runs into the problem of control in a world where citizens have to many skills, connections and possibilities to engage to be treated as sheep by a shepherd, or to be controlled or moved <u>en bloc</u> in traditional ways. In this world, loyalty is more likely to be secured through provision of spaces and engagement, not by demarcation of boundaries. [5] For their part, explicitly religious ties to political parties, be   they Catholic for Christian Democrats or specifically Protestant parties or candidacies have weakened

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[5] Romero (2008) argues that the public space emerging within the church is a space of liberty where believers encounter others (both believers and non believers) in voluntary associations, social movements, personal development courses, as well as arts, music, expressive mobilizations, the internet and mass media.

substantially. (Freston) There have also been notable cuts in church sponsorship of social movements (Drogus and Stewart-Gambino, Ottmann) along with a return to more traditional lobbying on a core group of conventional issues surrounding subsidies, education, sexuality and reproductive issues, and public morality   and thus away from the social justice issues that dominated public debates in the 1980s and 1990s.

Taken together, these changes have altered the public face of religion and transformed the ways in which religion is present in the public sphere. The past was marked in many countries by multiple images and symbols of religious-civic fusion such as Te Deums with the presence of political and ecclesiastical "authorities" at the highest level, or the repeated joint presence of politicians, clergy and military officers at the inauguration of public works, the opening of stores or factories, and a wide range of events. This omnipresent triad offered a public affirmation of the identification of "the church" (only one was recognized) with political and economic power and social hierarchy. The public face of religion now is quite another matter: street preachers abound, men (mostly men) working public spaces with a Bible, a loudspeaker and something to stand on. New churches proliferate, and new voices jostle for space and attention. Where there was monopoly there is now pluralism, where a limited number of spaces were once officially reserved for religious practice (with a limited number of authorized practitioners), there is now a rich profusion of churches, chapels, and mass media programming, not to mention campaigns and crusades that carry the message to hitherto "profane" spaces like streets and squares to beaches, sports stadiums, jails, bars and nightclubs.

This new landscape challenges the traditional role of the Catholic church as the

church—officially acknowledged wielder of moral and social authority within the boundaries of a defined national territory. In Casanova's terms, the church is no longer *church*—a religious institution with an official or semiofficial monopoly in a given territory—but rather one actor among many in an open civil society. Casanova argues that only when religions abandon the status of "church" and the privileges that come with it can be they be fully compatible with a modern society. "The conception of modern public religion that is consistent with liberal freedoms and modern structural and cultural differentiations," he writes, "is one that builds on notions of civil society" (Casanova, 1994, 217).But making this change work is no easy task, and learning to live in a world that no longer can be defined by one church in mutual alliance with one state can be unsettling. Institutions long accustomed to public support may find competition and cultural openness to be less opportunities for growth than signs of decay and disintegration. Although the rhetoric has cooled in recent years, and one hears less often about the 'invasion of the sects" who are described as "rapacious wolves" preying on the (Catholic) flock, caution, fear and suspicion remain central themes when the Catholic hierarchy faces Pentecostal and neo Pentecostal Churches. [6]

If the last half century has witnessed dynamic and far reaching transformations in what religion means in Latin America, these changes were all the more startling coming from Latin America itself, a part of the globe where for so long the monopoly of the Catholic church seemed secure, if never wholly unchallenged. Change arising from within religion (any religion) was in any event a surprise to most social scientists, who remained firmly in the grip of theories of secularization (and related ideas about of

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[6] Cleary quotes one Protestant observer of the meetings to the effect that "the traffic light of official ecumenism is an intermittent yellow light." (Cleary, 2007, p 15)

modernization) according to which the progressive spread of science, education, industrialization and urban life would cut the ground out from under religion. In this view, religion would simply fade away, disengaging from state institutions, fading from public life and becoming a matter of scattered, and declining, personal devotions or ritualized markers of the passage of life stages. [7]

Such theories provided the underpinning for enduring academic fashions that pushed enterprising researchers to topics other than religion in search of a meaningful research pay off and an effective career boost. The power of academic fashion and intellectual blinders cannot be denied, but there are also *facts* that break through our concepts, inconvenient facts that force themselves on us and make us re consider the foundations of our approaches. What are the facts that have broken through in Latin America to remind us of the   power of religion, not just to sustain itself but also to change itself as part of a changing world? A brief list, in no particular order, makes the point.

The explosion of multiple churches and religious spaces is a prime fact. It is not that Latin America is "becoming Protestant" to cite the title of David Stoll's important early book. (Stoll 1990) It is, rather, becoming pluralist for the first time in its entire 500 year history. (Levine, 2008) In social and political terms, although the orientations and connections of the churches range across the ideological spectrum and up and down the social hierarchy, a fact that presses itself on our attention is that with rare exceptions all the churches now support some form of political democracy and open civil society.

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[7] All that remained of religion would be perhaps some lovely buildings, music, and works of art. As Tocqueville once wrote, "Eighteenth century philosophers had a very simple explanation for the general weakening of beliefs. Religious zeal, they said, was bound to die down as enlightenment and freedom spread. It is tiresome that the facts do not fit this theory at all."

This is a cultural shift of prime significance, with roots in debates within the churches as well as in the end of the global cold war which loosened once immutable religio-political alliances. The relation of churches to civil society (both the idea and the reality of independent groups) is a third fact. Catholic and later Protestant churches played a key role in sponsoring and protecting a wide range of social movements—land leagues, housing coalitions, neighborhood groups, or human rights organizations to name a few. This sponsorship entailed serving as a conduit for resources and information, training leaders, bringing church inspired activists together with grass roots groups and providing legal defense if needed. With the restoration of democracy and the declining status of many of these movements, churches continue to shape civil society through less mobilizational civic networks along with institutions such as schools, new media outlets, cooperatives and health centers.

Much as I dislike stratigraphic metaphors, it is worth noting that these new facts and the eye catching change in religion's public faces are under girded by "deeper" long term social, cultural, and political transformations that provide the raw materials and the dynamic of the process. A brief list, once again in no particular order, suggests the dimensions of the process. These fifty years have seen *significant migration*, mostly rural to urban but also intra rural, accelerated in cases like Peru or Central America by extremes of civil war and violence but present everywhere. Cities have grown and bigger cities have everywhere grown faster than smaller cities. [8] I have already pointed to the important political fact of democratization which has brought with it an end to civil wars and massive political violence. Two related facts are expanded literacy and access to

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[8]The importance of city life and the need for an urban pastoral strategy get detailed attention in the Aparecida documents (10.4)

mass   media along with   drastically reduced barriers to organization and public participation. Together with the growth of cities, these facts set the scene for competition among churches and between churches and other groups, and provide both means and targets for those seeking to gain or hold members, acquire resources, and get a public hearing. The preceding lays out what are, in my view, the bare bones that define the situation of religion in Latin America today. These "facts" that together broke through the intellectual blinders of   ideas about secularization also provide the context for the reflections undertaken at Aparecida, and for the kind of planning and actions that flow from them.

The View From Aparecida

All church documents are the creation of many hands, and undergo much editing and many revisions before a final version is approved and made public. The meeting at Aparecida was preceded by a lengthy preparatory process throughout the region that produced consultations and pre documents, all put together into working documents for conference discussion. After a   "final" version was passed at the conferenc and submitted to the Vatican for approval, a series of changes—some of considerable moment—were made before a definitive text was released. (anonymous, de la Serna)   I go through this well known process to underscore the point that although the document, like the conference, has a unifying theme (*Discípulos Misioneros*, or missionary disciples, Matthew 28:18-20) the text itself incorporates multiple views and like any collective document, responds to different constituencies all at once. So although I will cite passages in support of my interpretations, I acknowledge that citations with varying if not opposed emphasis can easily be found.

As noted earlier, from the vantage point of Aparecida, the present and future of the Church in Latin America embody notable values (including a rich and vital tradition of Catholic values and practice) but there is also significant danger and numerous threats which are present and likely to grow in the future. There is the threat of inroads to Catholic ideas of a proper moral sphere and of the church's unique orienting role in that sphere. There is the threat of losing members and social position as a result of competition from other churches (above all, "sects" meaning Pentecostal and neo Pentecostal churches). The peril arising from competition is compounded by the decay of discipline and loyalty within the church. In a world where secularization is seen to erode the hold that religion, any religion, has on cultural norms in the traditional European heartland, the perception that Latin America is a Catholic reserve for the whole world heightens the sense of potential loss. (Jenkins) All these threats gain a sharper edge given fears of cultural disintegration (brought by globalization of cultural imagery that undermines norms in critical areas such as gender) along with the danger of social disintegration flowing from continued and heightened poverty, violence, and exposure to drugs.

The general theme of missionary disciples of course comes from the text in Matthew widely known as the Great Commission, to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations". [9] At Aparecida this provides a charter for evangelization in and through existing institutions, for re emphasizing the role Catholic groups can play as sources of clergy and sisters, for insisting on close ties between any Catholic group and the

[9] Mt, 28:18-20 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the Age."

institutional   church (bishops, clergy, parishes) and for working for closer control of church educational institutions (especially secondary schools and universities).[10] Given the dangers facing the church and its missionary disciples, several steps are evidently required: understand the situation; reinforce existing Catholic institutions and groups, strengthen their ties with core leadership (through appropriate supervision); rejuvenate educational and other institutions;   reach into new areas including mass media; and move carefully but with a clear bias in favor of democracy in the newly consolidating plural environment of the region.

To understand the situation, the documents affirm the value of the *see-judge-act* method, legitimized in previous conferences of the region's bishops. The use of this method has often been linked   with a turn to the social sciences for analytical tools, and to the position that the commitments of the institutional church must begin with understanding and participating in reality: drawing from the world, not only applying derived principles to it. As Gutiérrez puts it, this is the place where theology is made, out of experience illuminated by faith. [11] This method is endorsed at Aparecida (19-35) but emphasis is placed throughout on the need to bind the use of this methodology   to

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[10] Limitations of time and space preclude a complete review of the documents. My concern with perceptions of danger and threat in the Church's present and future situation in Latin America means that I will draw   primarily from three chapters (2 *La Mirada de los Discípulos sobre la realidad*, (Disciples Look at Reality), *5 La Comunión de los Discípulos Misioneros en la Iglesia* (The Communion of Missionary Disciples within the Church) and 8 *Reino de Dios y Promoción de la Dignidad Humana*, (The Kingdom of God and the Promotion of Human Dignity). I also draw some material from Chapter 6, on Formation, in particular concerning the role of schools, seminaries and universities.

[11]   Gutiérrez, 2007, 12 finds in Aparecida a continued commitment to understanding that "the site of theology is at the same time an ecclesial and social site, from which a discourse on faith can be elaborated. The firm foundation of this is the biblical fact of the presence of God in history. "

authorized expressions of Catholic Social Doctrine and practice, and thus to clerical supervision. Using this methodology, what do the documents see, what strikes them about today's Latin America? A predominant note in the texts is growing cultural upset and confusion (*desconcierto*, 10) that undermine the unifying legacy of the faith and the normative guidelines it provides. Such confusion is nowhere more evident than in an "ideology of gender" (40) brought to the region and diffused by global cultural forces, which undermine family, community   solidarity,   and unleash an uncontrolled individualism (36, 47, 51, 503).

Gender images and gender roles are of course highly sensitive issues in all religions, given the role of the family as primary social unit. (Htun, 2003) In the specific case of Latin America, the erosion of proper gender images, and by extension of the family, is attributed to a situation in which the church and Christians have become the objects of culture, and no longer its producers. (509) This "lamentable situation" is exacerbated by the multiplication of new sources and new cultural arbiters (the Greek term *areópagos* or judges is used in the text) and points of decision" in cultural life. (10.4) and by the absence of firmly and explicitly Catholic figures in prominent public positions which is repeatedly noted as regrettable.

The peril of cultural disintegration gets extensive attention in Chapter 10 which is entitled "Our Peoples and Culture". Despite the region's rich Catholic heritage and the inculturation of the faith in norms and institutions, hostile cultural forces are present, deriving strength from the power of globalizing media. Individuals, families and communities are left to orient themselves alone, given "the dissolution of a single unified image of the world that gave orientation to daily life." (479) This kind of lament over

loss of unity, a unity rooted in common religious identity, is of course not unique to Catholic leaders. It appears regularly in the most varied faiths and social contexts, often linked with concerns about secularization or sometimes simply with the loss of a single standard presumed to have existed in a past golden age which is itself identified with *culture*. (Cf. Bellah) The notion that cultural norms could be changing, or perhaps be diverse within an overall framework of unity, is excluded from this view. The extent to which this sense of disintegration and lack of order hinges on issues of gender (as opposed, for example, to hierarchy) will vary among traditions but there is no denying the importance of gender in Catholic discourse and debates, and its salience at Aparecida.

The concern with loss expressed at Aparecida has several very specific referents: a growth rate (of members and especially clergy) that lags behind population increase (100); inadequate numbers of clergy and sisters; the direct defection of Catholics either to other faiths (notably Pentecostal or neo-Pentecostal Protestant) or to indifference; and the loss of status as unique arbiter of morality in the public sphere. Why do growing numbers loosen their ties with the church or simply leave? The bishops' answer falls in the line already noted of the impacts of a hostile or indifferent culture exacerbated by inadequate attention to the faithful. Hence the need for more clergy. The relevant text was changed by late Vatican editing to underscore the perils to the faithful. The text approved at Aparecida stated that " the truth is that many of those who pass to other religious groups are not so much looking to leave our Church, as they are sincerely searching for God (241) . The final version is less sympathetic and more wary: " They hope to find responses to their concerns. They search, not without incurring serious dangers, to find responses to some hopes that have not been provided (as they should

have been) in the Church." (225) In this vein a complex distinction is drawn between ecumenism, in principle good, and competition between religions, which is dangerous. (232)

Looking to   solutions or means with which to counter these trends, the document examines various organizations and possibilities. Considerable attention is paid to reinforcing the parishes and schools, and also to Catholic movements including the base ecclesial communities (*comunidades eclesiales de base)* or CEBs which have had so prominent a role in discussion of the church in Latin America. In line with the general trend of Vatican and local church policy in recent years, it is no surprise to find that such communities are praised but that praise comes along with stress on the need to be closely tied to parishes and to the authority of the bishops (178). Base communities are admonished that their validity depends always on "Keeping themselves in full communion with their bishop and in the context of the pastoral plan of the diocese." (179)[12] Later in the text, considerable emphasis is given to these communities and other movements, along with schools and universities   not as valid expressions per se, but rather as potential sources of clergy and persons choosing a consecrated life. (309, 311)

On the other side of what one might visualize as a ledger of issues, the persistence of grinding poverty and inequality, attention to ecology and biodiversity (2.1.4, *Biodiversidad, ecología, Amazonía y Antárda)* the limited opportunities for ethnic minorities, women, and migrants, prisoners and the ravages of drugs are all duly noted and put in the context of the "faces" of the faith, faces that underscore a commitment that is central to the faith. This places Aparecida squarely in the tradition of

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[12] This is consonant with general trends throughout the region. One recent, thorough empirical study is Mallimaci and Villa.

Medellín and Puebla. The continuing force of these and other inequalities and injustices underscores the re affirmation of the preferential option for the poor, which reaffirmed here as central to a christological faith. Jesus made himself poor and was friend to the poor, and this model is present not just in policies that do things for others but also in commitment and closeness. ("the closeness that makes us friends"*, la cercania que nos hace amigos,* 398) and to work for social and economic policies of integral promotion to change the situation.

The documents are positive about the emergence and spread of democratic rule in the region but the endorsement of democracy in the final text is notably cautious. The text approved at the meetings spoke openly of acknowledging the strengthening of democracy as a good thing. "We note as a positive fact the strengthening of democratic regimes in many countries of Latin America and the Caribbean as shown by the most recent electoral processes. Nonetheless, we are concerned to see... (74). The original goes on to express concerns about corruption and neo populism. But the final text is much drier and limits itself to "We note a certain democratic process revealed in various electoral processes." *(74)* Politics is in any case not the proper mission for the church, whose role is to serve as an ethical model and provide general orienting norms along with acts of mercy and solidarity and denunciations of injustice when appropriate. Subsidiarity, that is, yielding primary place and role to public officials and lay groups, is enjoined (385)[13]

Conclusion: The Future as Peril and as Opportunity

The present in Latin America cannot be captured in one phrase, or understood on

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[13] Individual hierarchies continue to take important public stands, for example on issue of poverty or land issues (Brazil) or corruption (Mexico) but in terms of partisan choice, with rare exceptions the norm has been to stay away from this area.

one dimension alone. There   are significant grounds for both optimism and pessimism: political openness is present along with aggravated inequality; political violence has declined but the violence of daily life is if anything worse. All aspects of culture are changing so quickly that one sometimes feels like a kid riding on the handle bars of a bicycle careering down hill. The exhilaration of speed comes along with the danger of crashing. I have made fear a central theme of Aparecida, and perhaps this is unfair or exaggerated. But I underscore the sense of threat and fear about the future   in order to make a point. The point is that how the future is viewed conditions how the present will be engaged. This present reality of change and competition can be engaged openly and with confidence or defensively and with fear of loss.

At the heart of the fears and concerns that run through the Aparecida documents are fears of loss, decline and decay: loss of the Church's role as sole moral arbiter of the public sphere; potential loss in competition with others; decline of unity around the institutional leadership of the church (bishops and clergy) and ultimately, loss of a Catholic reserve for the world. Let us consider these fears a little more closely. As a social scientist with enormous respect for the power of religious faith and commitment I have long been surprised by the fear many church leaders have of competition. This fear is partly compounded of an older tradition that error has no place alongside truth, but more is at issue. There appears to be a conviction that faith and commitment are shallow and that therefore in an open competition will lose unless buttressed and supported by continued official support and extensive clerical advice and supervision. Loss of control seems to be equated with loss.

One way to ensure control might be to build a wall and mount a defense,

controlling entry to the community and access to its people and resources. Walls can be physical or metaphorical, actual barriers of brick, wood,   stone, cement or steel with doors and checkpoints, or simply a statement of closure. Let us consider this metaphor of the wall for a moment. In several important books on religion, society and politics in the United States, the legal scholar Stephen L Carter has argued that religion is trivialized in American public discourse and confined to a marginal role in institutional arrangements. (Carter, 1993, 2006) To assert religious ideas or beliefs as a justification for public policy runs into the "wall of separation between church and state" and the religious element is   reduced to insignificance. In more recent work, Carter adduces Roger Williams' metaphor of the garden and the wilderness to capture the relation of religion and faith with the world at large. For Williams, he writes,

> The garden was the domain of the church, the gentle fragile region where the people of God would congregate and try to build lives around the Divine Word. The wilderness was the world lying beyond the garden wall, uncivilized and potentially quite threatening to the garden. The wall separated the two and the reason for the wall was not that the wilderness needed protection from the garden- the wall was there to protect the garden from the wilderness. (Carter, 2006, 75)

The metaphor evokes a garden that is ordered and tranquil, a secure space in which "the people who joined in community within it would be free to come to their understanding of God's will safe from the coercions of a society that might disagree. (Carter, 2006, 76) Carter develops this garcen/wall/wilderness metaphor at some length, and argues that "the survival of a religion rests on its ability to avoid being overwhelmed by the secularity of the wilderness" (76) Protected by the garden wall, religions can freely do what he argues is their work of cultural formation and cultural dissent. But walls are fragile, and "The culture will find a way in, no matter how far away a religionist may

burrow. And when the breach occurs, as Williams argued, the religionist must leave the garden and go out into the wilderness prepared once more to do battle. (Carter, 2006, 117)

This extended metaphor of garden/wall/wilderness as articulated by Carter evokes many of the fears visible at Aparecida and shares the sense of danger stemming from uncontrolled change. But although the fear is real, the metaphor of gardens and walls does not quite capture the situation. The effort to build a wall, or retreat into a protected garden runs up against some defining characteristics of Catholicism itself, and does not in any case square well with the particular realities of Latin America. McBrien reminds us that if anything characterizes Catholic tradition over two millenia, it is its very *catholicity*, its breadth and persistence over time, "characterized by a *both/and* rather than an *either/or* approach to nature and grace, reason and faith, law and Gospel scripture and tradition, faith and works, authority and freedom, past and present, stability and change, unity and diversity" (McBrien 1981, p 1184) In the experience of Latin America, elements of Catholicism surely straddle all sides of any such barrier, if indeed it ever existed, and the Catholic community has itself been enriched by interchange of models and forms of action across the porous line that marks the religious community off from the community as a whole.

Many are familiar with the first and last lines of line of Robert Frost's celebrated poem, *Mending a Wall*. "Something there is that does not love a wall" and "Good fences make good neighbors" have entered into our common vocabulary. [14] But fewer may recall a later stanza where the poet expresses his doubts: "Before I built a wall I'd ask to know/

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[14] In the poem, "good fences make good neighbors" is a quote from Frost's neighbor, a view the poet clearly questions.

What I was walling in or walling out/And to whom I was likely to give offense. Something there is that doesn't love a wall/That wants it down!" Indeed there is something there is that does not love a wall. Nothing flourishes for too long behind a wall, however strong or imposing it may be. Walls also need constant attention and repair, absorbing energies that might be used in other ways. Also, as Frost reminds us, walls exclude as much as they protect. One wants to know what is being kept out, who might be offended and what might be lost by building a wall and staying behind it.

Walls and related barriers are means and metaphors of control, keeping things and people out or in, controlling access or exit and monitoring traffic. They are all about control. But why should there be such concern with control, and why should loss of control be taken as loss in the first place? Control is essential to continuity only if control is built into the very definition of what is being continued, in this case "the church" and the Catholic community conceived in hierarchically dependent terms. To be sure, much of Catholic tradition is indeed built around hierarchy, and a top down concept of authority, with power and knowledge descending across a large number of levels in complex social settings. But this is not the only Catholic model available on which to build. Romero states it forcefully: "Understanding persons as friends of God is quite different than looking upon them as serfs, in the same way that inviting them to follow God's project is different than ordering them to follow the law. (2007, 41) The seemingly sudden shift to openness and open competition seems to preoccupy the bishops, but it is also a source of potential energy and commitment in as yet unknown forms. In Latin America today, religion is a buzzing, blooming confusion of possibilities, full of innovation and charged with social and cultural energies. [15]

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[15] The success of innovations like the Catholic Charismatic Movement is a case in point.

Although fear is clearly a key element in the tone of the Aparecida documents, there are also contrary tendencies, tendencies that respond to other traditions and to a sympathetic understanding of the realities of the region. The ultimate result is therefore mixed, if pessimistic in its overall thrust. To use Berryman's comment on the 1979 Puebla Conference, one might say that at Aparecida the visiting team managed a tie. That is, those committed to the ecclesial and social vision articulated at Medellin and Puebla, (preferential option for the poor along with a concern for seeing the church in the faces of the excluded) and to a kind of theology that rather than seeking separation in a garden draws strength and inspiration from the world of which it is an integral part.

In more general terms, although interchurch competition remains intense, the diffusion of evangelicals and their institutions throughout the society has also dampened the hard edge of hostility and difference between Catholics and Protestants, particularly in large urban areas where most Latin Americans live. Most of the empirical work of which I am aware affirms that evangelicals (the preferred umbrella term for Protestants in Latin America) are much like their Catholic neighbors in everything but churchgoing—they participate in organizations in similar ways, they live in the same neighborhoods, and they consume in comparable patterns. These are concrete changes that lay a basis for cooperation in meeting the ordinary needs of community life.

What will the future look like in Latin America? What will its religious life and identity be like? It seems clear that despite a growing edge of secularization and disconnect from the churches visible in many countries (eg. Parker, 2005) Christianity will remain dominant but the Christianity in question will clearly be very different from

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Cf Chesnut, chapter 4.

the past. There will be continuity, not least in the continued presence of the Catholic Church which remains everywhere the single largest and most powerfully institutionalized religion. But the pluralization of religious options, the spreading Pentecostalization of religious experience[16] the prominent role of mass media, and intensifying competition among religious groups for legitimate access to public space suggest a dynamic and open future. Latin America is not so much "turning Pentecostal" or even "turning Protestant" as it is "turning pluralist" for the first time in modern history. Expectations of a thoroughgoing transformation of Latin American societies stemming from religion—something like a new Reformation—may be premature, but the reality of change is there to be embraced and worked with.

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[16] Steigenga (2001. 44-48) speaks of a general pentecostalization of religious experience and practice as elements once limited to Pentecostal churches (direct experience of the Holy Spirit, divine healing speaking in tongues etc) have diffused more widely.

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