

subjects. Raheb reminds his readers of the Herodian Mountain near Bethlehem, built and created on the backs of exploited and colonized native subjects between 23 and 15 BCE. Similarly today, the separation wall and the Israeli settlements on Palestinian land are often built in part by Palestinians who have no other means of employment. And yet Raheb continues to have hope despite his context and despite the overwhelming dominion of empire. And he finds this hope rooted in the wager that if empire can be built by the colonized subject, it can also be dismantled by those same subjects. He believes this is the faith that can move mountains. Having faith in one's community to be able to stand against empire is a faith of resistance.

Raheb exposes readers to the systemic violence of empire that is being experienced in Palestine. Sadly though, in many ways what is happening in Palestine is not unique but has already been experienced throughout history. Indigenous peoples throughout the world know the violence of empire, and many have had to endure—and continue to endure—similar forms of settler colonialism rooted in and justified by Christianity. Exploring these connections would strengthen Raheb's argument and would help us strengthen our struggle against empire wherever we find ourselves.

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**Todd Hartch, *The Rebirth of Latin American Christianity*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2014. 278 pp. \$24.95. ISBN: 9780199843138.**

While Christianity declines in Europe and North America, it experiences remarkable growth in the global South. That growth is undoubtedly present in Latin America, a region that is “neither newly Christian nor truly ‘non-Western’” (2). Hartch's monograph studies the multifaceted revitalization of Christianity in Latin America, a revitalization that cannot easily be subsumed under the headings of liberation theology or Pentecostalism. Having spent a portion of my life relating to the church in Latin America, I find a lot of useful history here.

One of the most obvious changes in Latin American Christianity over the past century is the arrival of Protestants. Hartch, himself a Roman Catholic, argues that Protestantism forced the Catholic church to revitalize its own efforts at mission: “Although Protestant evangelism had made Latin America more Protestant . . . it also, in a sense, made Latin America more Catholic” (55). Hartch repeatedly points out that Catholic efforts at evangelism and catechesis often introduced a faith that differed from indigenous religion or folk Catholicism as much as Protestantism. Protestantism cracked open the door to new religious options that could just as well include orthodox doctrinal Catholicism, in which converts remained

“Catholic.”

I previously lived in Honduras where Pentecostal and Charismatic expressions were so powerful that they profoundly influenced the Mennonite churches I knew. Even though the Mennonite church in Quito, Ecuador, is not charismatic, some of our members come from this background. Hartch challenges us to take the growth of Pentecostalism and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal seriously.

Hartch claims that Pentecostalism brought Gabriel García Márquez’s<sup>5</sup> “magical realism” into the everyday lives of believers (208–9), rapidly growing in newly formed shantytowns outside Latin American cities. Yet in terms of numbers, there are even more Charismatic Catholics than Pentecostals. Though Hartch might have examined the Catholic Charismatic Renewal even more, he made clear this was “the most successful Latin American Catholic movement of the twentieth century” (126).

Although Pentecostal and Charismatic churches are often criticized for having little social engagement, Hartch argues that these movements represent a major religious change for many people and thus have inevitable impact for Latin American culture and politics (111–12). Granting that, the theological question to follow will be how these social impacts extend (or not) the kingdom of God.

Hartch also outlines the emergence of liberation theology, the importance of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, and the bishops’ conferences of Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979). Even with sharp disagreement between progressives and conservatives, the Catholic church came to an irrevocable commitment to stand with the poor and promote social justice. The period of military dictatorships and human rights abuses challenged Christians to answer the questions: “Were Christians serious? Did they really believe what they said they believed?” (89).

The Base Ecclesial Communities (CEBs) became the most well-known outgrowths of liberation theology’s commitment to the marginalized. At their best, CEBs “acted as both spiritual communities and activist groups, with Bible study and liturgy inspiring and reinforcing commitment to concrete actions for their locales” (78). Hartch shows that CEBs often played major activist roles, while prayer and Bible study remained important forms of lay empowerment. Yet in many cases, CEBs gravitated more toward traditional religiosity than proponents had hoped.

Hartch also rightly brings to our attention less familiar stories of New Ecclesial Movements, associated more with the middle and upper classes. The Focolare movement, for example, was about community, wealth-sharing, and entrepreneurship. CEBs and New Ecclesial Movements together provided multiple religious

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<sup>5</sup> Gabriel García Márquez (1927–2014) was a Colombian novelist, short-story writer, screenwriter, and journalist.

options from within Catholicism.

Hartch's portrait suggests that oppressed and under-resourced Latin Americans are often more interested in vibrant religious experience than in political involvement. While I certainly have seen a desire for vibrant spiritual experience in the communities where I have lived in Latin America, in my own context working with Colombian refugees, it is clear that a denouncement of injustice is needed. Justice is understood as an integral aspect of Christian proclamation of the kingdom of God.

Perhaps the most important concept of Hartch's volume is "universal Christianity"—that is, Christianity that is translatable to any cultural context, as opposed to faith traditions that are tied to local geography and social order. For Hartch, many indigenous religious traditions are "local" in this sense. Meanwhile, the spread of devotion to the Our Lady of Guadalupe, which Hartch surprisingly declares more influential than liberation theology (196), shows that even *guadalupismo* can be universalized.

It is exciting to see that Latin America has moved from being a region that receives missionaries to a region that sends them. Latin America's exports are not all equally encouraging. One of the most successful is the Brazilian neo-pentecostal *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*. Its lack of concern for cultural sensitivity did not impede explosive growth among the poor in 136 countries, because of its confident proclamation of prosperity and freedom from spirits.

It is evident that Hartch is an advocate for "universal Christianity"—no more at home in one culture than another: "Clearly some forms of universalism could devalue the local and the particular, but in the Christian case the logic of sin, incarnation, and redemption and the practice of translation tended to revalorize formerly despised cultures" (170).

Hartch repeatedly highlights negative aspects of traditional religion in his stories. Those who see indigenous religion as an integral part of indigenous culture and identity (and even a potential gift and challenge to Christianity) may push back. Other readers may resonate with Hartch's description of "universal Christianity," a faith that is able to deeply embed itself within local cultures. Drawing on Lamin Sanneh's work, Hartch emphasizes that Christian faith must be practiced in the group's mother tongue, with no assumed priority of the Christianity of either gringos or mestizos.

Anabaptists can affirm and learn from Hartch's case for translation. But this is not new. Mennonite mission in the Argentine Chaco has carefully considered how to accompany indigenous communities as they discover the gospel from the logic of

their worldview(s).<sup>6</sup> The Mennonite Church in Ecuador has emphasized the need to squarely face the social and cultural reality of our context, while maintaining an Anabaptist identity. We also must ask how Anabaptism intersects with the spiritual needs of Latin American communities.

Hartch's volume presents a balanced picture of the multifaceted renewal of Latin American Christianity. This is recommended reading for those who want to ponder what forms of mission allow the gospel to be rooted in new cultural contexts, and how Roman Catholics and Protestants can work together. It would be helpful to read Hartch alongside differing perspectives on the intersection between local religious traditions and "universal Christianity." Latin America deserves attention as it potentially becomes "a theological and philosophical leader for both the global South and the developed world" (18).

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6 See Willis Horst, Ute Mueller-Eckhardt, and Frank Paul, *Misión sin conquista: Acompañamiento de comunidades indígenas autóctonas como práctica misionera alternativa* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairós, 2009).