A Latin American Perspective on Mission in Europe

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1. Introduction:

The question which goes to the heart of the problem of mission in Europe is the one posed by Lesslie Newbigin back in 1987: "Can the West be converted?" Or is a remorseless decline in Christian faith to the point of extinction inevitable? Newbigin dedicated the latter years of his life to exploring what an effective missionary encounter with European culture would mean. "Here", he said, "without possibility of question, is the most challenging missionary frontier of our time". [1]

Newbigin's approach was to look for a new basis for a 'proper confidence' in the truth of the gospel. [2] It was essentially a philosophical approach, exposing the roots of modernity and tracing how they had undermined a Christian theistic worldview based on Scripture. This process had involved several strands: the dismantling of the Christian 'plausibility structure' (Berger), the Enlightenment separation of facts and values, the domination of the modern scientific worldview, and the creation of a pluralistic society. [3]

The gradual decomposition of Christian values by the so-called 'acids of modernity' has taken some three centuries, and that experience has been something unique to European history. So that, in itself, makes Europe an 'exceptional case'. As well as the sociological changes that modernity has brought in its wake, there have been, and continue to be, profound philosophical changes, shifting the tectonic plates of the theological ground beneath our feet. Newbigin taught us therefore that any missionary encounter...
with European culture will, at least, involve an engagement with its radical pluralism and relativism and its corresponding challenge to Christian theism. So Newbigin systematically deconstructed the myths that modernity had exalted, and this job has been made easier by a postmodernism which has become cynical of the optimism and certainties of modernity. It refuses to accept the object-subject dichotomy, it looks more to experience and style than to reason and logic, and it opens the way for a resurgence of ‘spirituality’ - or rather spiritualities - fragmented visions of what is possible beyond the confines of a closed universe, gropings for truth which usually have little to do with the Christian theistic framework the culture has long since left behind. Christendom has all but gone. In the postmodern world everything is up for grabs. In her recent book Grace Davie gives us two important starting points: that there is no simple alignment between modernity, secularisation, and the decline of religious sensibility; and that Postmodernism makes it impossible for us to make any generalisations about these changes.[4] But this complexity leaves us with a problem: how we analyse where we are, and how we compare ourselves with where others are, seems to be all but impossible. But that does not mean that we should not try, or that any comparative analysis is futile. At least we can work out, as Davie does, what Europe is not in comparison with, say, Latin America. So the question then becomes: what can we learn positively from the Latin American experience? How is it that religious faith there grows exponentially in the face of profound philosophical and cultural changes? And what can we say for the future? Is this phenomenal growth in LA sustainable? Or is it a castle built on sand, built on the shifting values of experiences and health and wealth promises which owe as much to rebranded and repackaged spiritualities as they do to a Christian theism based on scripture? Should Europeans attempt to emulate the Latin American experience, even if they could? There are those who try - they fly in the gurus of Argentinian revival in the hope that we will 'catch the fire' of their spirit-filled vision. But can their brand of Pentecostalism ever take root here, beyond the enthusiasm of a few?

So these are some of the questions that lie behind this paper. My approach to them will be to explore the relationships between the relevant major players:
Pentecostalism, The Roman Catholic Church, Latin America, Europe, and Postmodernism itself, all of which I am aware involve huge generalisations. But this is a relational rather than a propositional approach, and hopefully it will lead us to what we might learn from Latin American Pentecostalism about contextualisation, which I take to be the sine qua non of any missionary engagement.

2. Exploring Relationships

2.1 Europe and Latin America

It is well known that this relationship has been ambiguous in the extreme ever since Columbus first planted the Spanish flag alongside the cross into the soil of these lands in 1492. From one perspective this has led to 500 years of colonial oppression and despoliation, with the more recent neo-colonial liberal capitalism maintaining Latin American subservience to western interests. In this process the Roman Catholic Church has often been an accomplice, hand in glove with the hierarchies that have controlled the region and imposing a profoundly Catholic identity on its culture. [5] From another perspective the region has received much from this relationship, especially in countries like Argentina where many people appreciate and celebrate European culture, and feel at home with French or English literature, art and films. In fact some Latin Americans can feel closer to Europeans than to their own people elsewhere in the continent.[6] Others find that when they go to Spain or Portugal there is a big historical and cultural gulfto cross, in spite of a common language.

So we must beware of a superficial analysis of history - there is much shared blood and shared experience. The liberal values of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution inspired the young Republican ideals of Simon Bolivar and the liberators of the Wars of Independence in the 19C. This opened up a period of great European influence, as railways were built, companies invested in the region, and in turn many Latins went to Europe to study. Liberation Theology owes more to European Liberal Protestantism than
perhaps it is prepared to admit. Even so some have asked whether Europeans ever really understood Latin Americans, and it has often felt ignored and isolated in world affairs. How often do we hear anything of Latin America on the news?

It can however be argued that large sections of Latin American society remained untouched by the European Enlightenment. The search for a basis for truth claims based on reason alone never seemed very relevant in the struggle to survive the daily battle with grinding poverty. European philosophical movements have only affected an elite minority who have access to technology, higher education and the economic resources to travel. Also the political structures of Latin America have never matured to the establishing of modern states able to guarantee the Enlightenment ideals of social justice and personal freedom.

So the popular Latin American worldview remained essentially dominated by the reality of the spirits and a popular religious feeling about the 'enchantment' of the whole of life (to borrow a word from Don Quixote). This carries through into the tradition of 'magical realism' in the novels of Vargas Llosa and Garcia Marquez. In Latin America there is no need to create spirituality, or search for it, it is breathed in the air. There has been no loss of the numinous as there has been in Europe. Terry Philpott, writing in the Guardian newspaper in Feb 2003, draws the comparison well. [7]

"The Aztecs and the Spanish had a sense of the numinous; they knew that they were not sufficient unto themselves. This is something that, in the nominally Christian west at least, is in danger of dissolving. Even if there is some inkling of it amongst some people, it has, today, no practical meaning...we have cast off Dietrich Bonhoeffer's formulation that God is the ground of our being, that we may rely on our own practical and philosophical devices. . It is not long ago that a sense of otherness was assumed, known, a given. It was once called a sense of the sacred, a denial of ourselves as just a collection of cells or the products of society".

So history has left Latin Americans with a crisis of identity, deriving much benefit from Europe and yet realising at a more profound level that they need to rediscover their non-European past and incorporate it again into a distinctive self-definition.[8]. In becoming President of Peru Alejandro Toledo
made much of his indigenous roots, and they loved him for it. Indigenous peoples are reasserting themselves and often finding a way of doing that through the freedom which evangelicalism offers them from their historical love-hate relationship with Catholicism. There is now a significant autochthonous Pentecostal movement which owes nothing directly to western influence. We will return to these themes later.

2.2. Latin America and Postmodernism

If Latin America was only superficially influenced by the modernism of the Enlightenment, how much of an impact is Postmodernism having? Here the influence is likely to be more pervasive since Postmodernism has numerous ways of promoting itself in today's globalised world.

Many commentators, including Davie herself,[9] have noted the rapid transition in Latin America from the pre-modern to the post-modern, with barely any seriously modernist phase. In a short space of time Latin America has found itself locked into global economic and cultural forces which have given it a post-industrial economy and access to the Internet. Where there is economic growth it is hi-tech and information based, with a large service sector and a burgeoning 'informal economy'.

This jump however should not be overstated. There was a period in the 1950's and 60's in which development theory was driven by the ideology of modernisation accompanied by a concerted effort to industrialise Latin America. For a significant period, this process was strong, and accelerated the development of the big cities. The problem for Latin America is that the changes have taken place over a much shorter time span than in Europe. Social development and values did not keep pace with a model that was dedicated to economic growth but paid little attention to social factors. Latin America has not had time to assimilate the changes, which they feel have been imposed on them from outside. In fact it can be argued that everything has been imposed on them for the past 500 years!

The result has been huge under-investment in rural economies, massive migration to the cities, overwhelming urbanization and poverty, and increasing
disparity between rich and poor, all of which has left millions in a pre-modern condition. Migration itself is a complex phenomenon, sometimes precipitated by internal war and violence. So there is a chaotic and complex mix of the medieval, modern and Postmodernism.[10]

"LA's live in 'tiempos mixtos - mixed times - in that the pre-modern, modern and post-modern exist side by side, with many people moving in and out of this complex on a daily basis….it is the image of a poor man, with his donkey and cart, collecting aluminium cans to take to a recycling centre in order to make a little money".

The ambiguities and paradoxes are stark. Witness the campesino woman standing on a street corner in La Paz with her small stall of fruit as she reaches into the numerous folds of her overflowing and colourful traditional dress to pull out a mobile phone. Or witness the street child in Bogota who collects enough pesos to go into an internet café and log on so that he can chat to other street children in other parts of the world. He has no home, but he has an internet address.

It could be said that Latin America was 'postmodern' before the word was even invented, since there has always existed a patchwork of syncretistic practices and cultural ambiguity:[11]

"The ethnic and cultural mix of the continent has produced a riotous syncretism of mix-and-match, or perhaps more accurately, of hide-and-seek symbolism".

So Latin America is already predisposed to welcoming Postmodernism. Its volatility, continuous change and uncertainty already give it a resonance with, and openness to, the Postmodern style, in which we can live a day at a time in a fragmented world and stay 'cool':[12]

"Rising expectations, easy mobility, unprecedented affluence and the communications fiesta of Postmodern society so easily turn everything to flux and fluidity".

But there is no translation for 'cool' in Spanish; young people will use the English word! Their experience of Postmodernism is quite different from ours. Some feel that Postmodernism is a contradiction for a culture that more or less bypassed the modern. Some see Postmodernism as the specific form in
which modernity is experienced; not something that follows on, as in *post-
modern*, but simply an attenuated collage of cultures and experiences. Some
are suspicious that Postmodernism represents yet another form of cultural
imperialism. Some see it as an attractive critique of neoliberalism and a way
of reasserting contextual identity over against globalisation. The current
reaction against global capitalism spearheaded by President Lula in Brazil
finds an ally in Postmodernism. It affirms Latin Americas need to speak for
itself and rediscover its uniqueness.[13]
But some barely recognise it at all. In an updated edition of a book on
contemporary Latin America there is not one reference to
Postmodernism![14]What does that say? That it is still largely peripheral for
the vast majority of people, a preoccupation of an elite who have access to
the Internet and enjoy the club culture? Or is it that Postmodernism is
experienced in its more insidious forms, through for example drugs and
sexual freedom, which flourish in a global economy where goods and services
circulate freely? Is Postmodernism, in promoting globalisation, contributing to
poverty and marginalisation, generating an increasing polarity between rich
and poor, losers and winners, and a collapse in family values? It seems that
Postmodernism is experienced in Latin America largely through its
manifestations and styles, through technology, banking, access to
information, the music culture, fashions and styles, whilst very few understand
or discuss its philosophical character. It is another way for people, especially
the young, to experience and identify with a western lifestyle that they envy.
They will take what they want from it, without necessarily endorsing all its
values.
One thing is sure: the rate of change is bewildering:[15]

"What is new stems from the swift transition from pre-to postmodern
life, from mass mobility, from the endemic disorder of the ghettos of
the megacities and the disruption of the old rural social system, not
least by political violence and selective migration".

It is into this chaos that Pentecostalism comes with its message of hope and
security, and the ground is fertile. Indeed Bernice Martin proposes a direct
causal relationship between the fast transition to Postmodernism and the dramatic growth of Protestantism.

2.3. Postmodernism and Pentecostalism

Martin's thesis is that Latin American Protestantism is part and parcel of its experience of Postmodernism:[16]

"...the mass movement of Latin American Protestantism has been an integral part of a dramatic transformation of the continent in a postmodern direction".

A direct correspondence between Protestant growth and the influence of Postmodernism is difficult to establish, since the fact that the two movements occur concurrently does not necessarily mean a causal relationship exists. It seems clear, as Davie herself notes,[17] that the new Protestantism in its Pentecostal form has taken full advantage of the fragmentation and growing poverty that has characterised the uncertainties, contradictions and excesses of the globalised Postmodern world. The old power structures have crumbled, leaving displaced people struggling to fend for themselves on the margins of the big cities. It is here that the Pentecostal message has found powerful resonance:[18]

"It offers an anchor in the face of dizzying new possibilities; to many more it offers hope and lived solutions to problems arising out of structural conditions which it is beyond the power of individuals to alter".

It is not just that the message is one of hope for the future; people can see that lives are transformed here and now:[19]

"The poor, caught up in the maelstrom of the transition to global capitalism and Postmodernism respond with more enthusiasm to the Pentecostal option because they see with their own eyes its capacity to transform lives, here and now, for the immediate better".

Pentecostalism addresses people's real problems with the modern world in a way that the Catholic Church never did. It empowers people to do something to change their situation, it restores a sense of moral order and puts families
together again, it gives people a new dignity and self-importance. Conversion will often result in improvements to their standard of living: families eat better, the father takes more responsibility for the family, and the children go to school. This means that second and third generation Pentecostals are more widely distributed across the social spectrum, contradicting any superficial analysis of Pent as a church of the poor.

All this is largely in reaction to the rapid transition to Postmodernism. However, Pentecostalism also trades off Postmodernism in a positive, mutually beneficial way. It emphasises and empowers the individual, at the same time as Postmodernism is undermining religious and cultural monopolies and promoting pluralistic individualism and voluntarism. It links its members to a worldwide movement in which health and prosperity abound, and helps them to identify with the successful players in the global game, at the same time as Postmodernism is providing direct connections between the local and the global. It repackages folk religion and ancient spirituality with its focus on spirit possession, healing and exorcism, at the same time as Postmodernism encourages us to take fragments of the past and transform them for our own use.

So, whether consciously or unconsciously, Pentecostalism finds in Postmodernism both an enemy and an ally. It adapts Postmodernism for its own purposes and helps people to fulfil Liberation Theology's dream of the poor taking control of their own destiny. \[20\] This critical yet creative reappropriation is noted by Davie with reference to Gole. \[21\] The paradoxes inherent in this ambiguous relationship are easily accommodated by the Postmodern mentality. But they seem to be equally acceptable within Pentecostalism. It contains elements equally at home in the pre-modern, the modern and the post-modern: \[22\]

"It is able to repackage premodern religious sensibilities and to transform familiar elements of ethnic, familial and other habits of collective solidarity within a movement which also inaugurates new experiences of PM individualism, autonomy, mobility and self-determination".
But there is another important factor in the growth of Pentecostalism - the fragmentation of the Roman Catholic monopoly, so that is the next relationship we need to consider.

2.4 Pentecostalism and Roman Catholicism

At the same time as Pentecostalism has benefited from its relationship with Postmodernism, the Roman Catholic Church has suffered. Postmodernism deconstructs all pretensions to hegemony which powerful institutions like the Roman Catholic Church have lived on for generations. The old 'sacred canopies' identified by Berger have been cracking up, and in the words of David Martin the Protestants are creating their own "autonomous spiritual space over against comprehensive systems".[23] Postmodernism has brought with it the possibility of choice, alternatives to the one-dimensional dominance of the Church. It has done away with the oppressive sense of duty which the Church relied upon to keep people coming, and it has suggested that it is OK to have spirituality without formalised religion.[24] In recent years Roman Catholicism has belatedly attempted to stem the tide, though reactionary forces have put the brakes on the radical new directions signalled at Medellin and Puebla., while the Pope does his best to make sure that conservative bishops are there in places of influence. Positively, there has been re-evangelisation, charismatic renewal, bible studies, and new youth movements established, much of it based on Protestant models. But the disillusion with the Roman Catholic Church continues. Sometimes it is specific to certain contexts. For example, in Colombia the Roman Catholic Church supported the status quo in the 1970's, backing right wing governments as a way of protecting its own position. It was even involved in rounding up radicals, and it denounced its own radical priests. But in so doing it created a lot of resentment amongst ordinary people. So people left the Church and found themselves in a spiritual no-man's land, ripe for the picking. Pentecostalism offered itself as a way of meeting their emotional, experiential and spiritual needs.
The relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and political alignments has always been strong. Conservatives have often been supported by the Church. In other places the radical wing of the Church has earned respect by its opposition to oppressive dictatorships, as for example in Chile. It could be that the Church is more influential when secular political power is locked into autocratic mode since it can easily rally support for social justice issues; but in more democratic ‘normal’ political conditions the Church shifts to moral concerns and loses a social cutting edge:[25]

"...amid growing secularisation and pluralism (the Roman Catholic Church’s) authority and influence are weaker and in connection with which its authorities are unwilling to push more forcefully for fear of further alienating dissident clergy and laity".

There is little doubt that the Roman Catholic Church is losing its hold on cultural identity, though in some countries, such as Peru, it is still possible to find the widespread conviction that to be Peruvian is to be Catholic. But many Latin Americans would concur with the Mexican bible translator who said: "We have been held back by Catholicism for too long".[26] Once again, however, as with Postmodernism we find that Pentecostalism has a paradoxical relationship with Catholicism. On the one hand it represents a conscious alternative, sometimes in vehement opposition to its perceived idolatry and corruption. For many evangelicals the Roman Catholic Church is doing the work of the devil. On the other hand it is ironic that Pentecostals adopts a number of Roman Catholic characteristics and makes them its own. The authority of the priest is transferred to the authority of the pastor, who offers a new priesthood, and can often be seen to be operating in an equally authoritarian manner. The rites and symbols of worship are transferred to new symbols in banners and the adapted rituals of indigenous religion. The Holy Spirit takes over from the Virgin as the source of succour and healing. Pentecostal churches can be as equally legalistic as the duty-bound Roman Catholic Church. These transferences are probably unconscious. But in moving over to Pentecostalism, it looks as if Latin Americans are finding a way of holding on to their folk religious sensibility, and the spirituality which runs deep and wide through their psyche, while at the same time finding a
new freedom to express it. Here there is real liberation: an affirmation of personal gifting, the dignity of responsibility and contribution, the possibility of leadership, a new dynamic of spiritual power, and the excitement of branching out to something new when new congregations are planted. Women are given fresh recognition, men are given a new morality, the poor are offered prosperity, the sick are healed, the oppressed are delivered… and the Roman Catholic Church looks on in dismay.

Pentecostalism has many advantages over Roman Catholicism. Many Pentecostal churches are small and independent and have no large bureaucratic structures to maintain. Their chapels and temples are humble buildings, easy and flexible to maintain. They are more in touch with their communities and can respond to local needs more directly. They do not insist that pastors pass through years of theological training before they can exercise leadership. They teach their members to live and speak their faith in the realities of everyday life in a way that is infectious.

Pentecostalism also offers an access to spiritual power unheard of in Catholicism. It trades on the deep-seated belief in the reality of demonic possession and the fear of evil spirits, offering exorcism from every kind of oppression. Through the influence of the Charismatic movement, these things are not entirely absent within the Roman Catholic Church. But spiritual warfare is one of the most consistent characteristics of the large neo-Pentecostal churches of today.[27] Pentecostalism also offers an access to spiritual power unheard of in Catholicism. It trades on the deep-seated belief in the reality of demonic possession and the fear of evil spirits, offering exorcism from every kind of oppression. Through the influence of the Charismatic movement, these things are not entirely absent within the Roman Catholic Church. But spiritual warfare is one of the most consistent characteristics of the large neo-Pentecostal churches of today.

However, even Pentecostalism is not uniformly successful in every cultural context. The example of Uruguay lends support to the secularisation theorists. In this more secular context, Roman Catholicism has always been weaker, with 50% allegiance but only 1.2% of the population attending Mass. Pentecostalism finds it correspondingly more difficult, though there is growth.
Brazilian spiritism has made a big impact with up to a million adherents, many of them members of the Catholic Church.[28] We must be careful not to 'write off' the Roman Catholic Church. In many places it has responded positively to social and political realities and has been a strong influence for social change. In Colombia for example, the role of the Roman Catholic Church in the peace process has been pivotal, and it has forged a more engaged relationship with the State than in the past. If they can find a way of maintaining their independence, they have a vital role to play in bringing social justice and making democracy work.

However, there is no doubt that the rise of Pentecostalism in Latin America owes much to the demise of the Roman Catholic Church and that there are specific historical and contextual reasons for its rapid growth. How dependent is Pentecostalism on these conditions and what does this say about its prospects for the future?

3. The future for Pentecostalism in LA

It is easy to generalise about Pentecostalism in Latin America, when in reality it manifests itself in very diverse ways, from the 'classical' to the 'neo-Pentecostal', with a multitude of variations, some of which are considered by some evangelicals to be beyond orthodoxy. We must constantly beware of stereotypes and generalisations.[29]

One of the problems which Postmodernism brings with it for Pentecostals is plurality and its attendant pluralism. As well as plurality within Pentecostalism, there is burgeoning growth in all kinds of spiritual alternatives and non-christian faiths, and this means increasing competition in the spiritual marketplace. Mosques are being built, Hindu communities are growing, spiritist movements abound, Afro-Brazilian cults such as 'Umbanda' are popular, and within evangelicalism denominational alternatives proliferate. This trend can only increase:[30]

"...the religious environment of Latin America is likely to become more pluralized in the future. With such rapid and profound changes taking places...our understanding of religion in the region requires continual reconsideration and updating".
Pluralism, as distinct from plurality, operates at the philosophical level. It creates a level playing field for truth claims. The alternatives of the New Age have equal validity as the revelation of God in Christ. These ideas are gradually increasing in Latin America. Protestantism needs to be aware that it cannot simply repeat the classical evangelical certitudes as if they are self-evident. It will need to develop a theological maturity which has answers to the new challenges. Evangelical theologian Rene Padilla sounds the warning:[31]

"There are two shortcomings which pose a threat to the Christian integrity of the whole (evangelical) movement. The first shortcoming is in the area of theological reflection. A church which lacks theological reflection is threatened by the danger of heresy or of worldliness. It is therefore not surprising that in our church scene, characterised as it is by profound biblical illiteracy, the so-called gospel of prosperity and the love of power flourish. The second shortcoming is in the area of spirituality. A church which fails to give due consideration to its spirituality is threatened by the danger of activism, that is, action without a sense of direction, or action aimed at achieving objectives that may not be in harmony with the purpose of God for human life and the whole of creation".

Pentecostalism is developing a biblical hermeneutic which (perhaps unwittingly) resonates more with the creativity, subjective experience and contextualism of Postmodernism than with the systematic, propositional approach of classical evangelicalism. This however does not become biblical relativism since it retains a respect for the authority of Scripture. This could point the way for evangelical theology towards a new way of reading Scripture which breaks down the objective/subjective divide characteristic of traditional evangelicalism.[32]  
The one social fact that is set to continue for some time is grinding poverty. That is the seedbed for many political and religious movements, but we have seen that it provides Protestantism with its largest constituency. The Pentecostal churches need to develop a holistic approach to their mission which does not perpetuate other-worldly, super-spiritualised detachment from the world, nor which simply provides for individuals, but which rather engages with the social justice dimension. This could give it a stronger foundation in the concrete realities of life and help it to develop a mature political response
to current problems. Attempts at involvement in politics have been fraught and largely negative experiences for evangelicals, but as their number and influence grows their voting power becomes significant, and it will be important for Protestant politicians to channel that potential, not as a cynical ploy to gain influence for their own denominations, but as a way of demonstrating that the Kingdom they preach has important political implications.[33]

Obviously much will depend on how successfully the Roman Catholic Church can get its act together to prevent the haemorrhaging. It is fighting a battle on a number of fronts: losing its religious monopoly, finding it less easy to gain political favours, coping with its own internal divisions. And yet it is still in the majority by some margin in most countries of Latin America, at least nominally. The vicariousness discussed by Davie still works for the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America,[34]and many still 'believe' in a catholic sense, though without belonging. A lot will depend on how successful the Roman Catholic Church is in pulling their nominal support back into the Church. Does Postmodernism count against them in that task? Is there a creeping de-christianisation associated with Postmodernism which will make it increasingly difficult for everyone? It is possible to speculate that as a new generation of educated and more sophisticated young people grow up, more connected with global trends and more influenced by Postmodern thinking, they will interpret both Pentecostal and Roman Catholic spiritualities as superstitious and primitive. They will want to solve their problems without dependence on God or recourse to the Church in any institutional form.

Latin America is much more influenced culturally by the USA than it is by Europe, though the relationship with the north is also full of ambiguities. Their influence on the neo-Pentecostals through tele-evangelism and the ministry of megastars such as Benny Hinn and Peter Wagner cannot be underestimated. Their churches are taught by Americans to 'think big', and some of them are very big. We have seen how the competitive spirit of the religious supermarket has already become a characteristic of the Latin American reality, making 'rational choice theory' more relevant to Latin America than the European notion of secularisation.[35] That may mean that pluralism generates religious
vitality in Latin America, though that cannot be assumed to work in favour of Christian churches. The point is that perhaps we should look to the American experience of Postmodernism as a pointer to what will happen in Latin America, rather than expecting it to follow a European direction.

Predicting the future in Latin America is a risky business. Life is so unpredictable that many Latin Americans take a day at a time and find it difficult to plan ahead. The current exponential growth took everyone by surprise, and I expect there are more surprises to come. One candidate for surprise would be a genuine revival of the Roman Catholic Church, and there is evidence that it is learning a lot from the Pentecostals. Some see a role for the historic churches such as the Anglicans in a situation in which people become disillusioned with Pentecostalism, but do not want to go back into Catholicism. Something similar has happened in Nigeria, resulting in considerable growth there for the Anglican churches that have embraced Pentecostalism and charismatic styles. One of the conclusions of the CLADE IV Consultation in Quito, Equador, in 2000 concerned the potential for a dynamic combination of Word and Spirit in which biblical and theological foundations provide the stability which enables the life and freedom of the Spirit to be experienced without superficiality or extremes. [36] Anglican churches have the potential for providing that combination.

Some Pentecostal Churches are already a ‘revolving door’ with as many people leaving as there are joining. Extravagant promises that are unfulfilled, superficial preaching that lacks substance, experiences that disappoint, failure to provide adequate pastoral support, immature, authoritarian and power-hungry leaders…many factors combine in creating disillusion. Could the movement implode? Or could it disintegrate into a plethora of heretical movements and cults? Nothing can be ruled out, and the current situation is so volatile that it is too risky to predict which way it is going to go.

4. What can be said about Europe?

We have already warned of the difficulties of meaningful comparison between Latin America and Europe, and Davie is well aware of this. The conditions that
have given rise to massive Pentecostal growth in Latin America will not be found elsewhere in such unique combination, and certainly not in a European context. Even where the Roman Catholic Church is in decline, as especially so in Spain, the very different reasons for this generate different challenges. In Spain people have not just done with the Church, they have done with religion. They want to identify with European secularisation and materialism, they do not cherish their past, they want to be free from it. In France and Italy the Roman Catholic Church is also losing its grip on the culture, but Protestant groups are seen as too sectarian in a much more strongly pluralistic context than Latin America.

Why does the Latin American brand of Pentecostalism find it difficult to get a foothold in Europe? Clearly there are cultural resonances which are not present in Europe, while Europe has historical and philosophical baggage that Latin America does not have to contend with. I suggest three main reasons. In the first place, centuries of religious history in Europe has generated much residual respect for traditional religion that is not easily disposed of. The English still make a link between religion and 'respectability'.[37] The English middle class does not enjoy a Pentecostal spirituality that is informal, unpredictable, overt and spontaneous, and tends to regard it as superficial and 'downmarket'. Where there is religious feeling it tends to be conservative. This may be even more true of countries such as Spain, France and Italy.

Secondly, we have seen how Pentecostalism took advantage of a deep and expressive religious sensibility in Latin America with its origins in indigenous spirituality that pervades the whole of life. Where there are new spiritualities in Europe, they have no such roots, except perhaps in Buddhism. In Europe, dechristianisation has had three centuries to unravel. Where there is religious feeling it is held privately, defensively and individualistically.

Thirdly, much of today's neo-Pentecostalism rides on the back of a 'health and wealth' gospel, which has less attraction for already materialistic and health conscious Europeans than it does for the poor in the slums of the mega cities of Latin America. Europeans don't (yet) need a haven from economic chaos. The major factor that could turn the tide in Europe is the immigration of large numbers of people from the Majority World, many of whom have a calling to
mission. So far they have done little more than set up their own churches. But this 'reverse mission' could be the key to the renewal of religion. Davie concludes that Europe may be different, but its attitudes are continually evolving. As people move into post-materialism, in which well-being and quality of life are emphasised, there is space for a range of religious movements, within which the Christian alternative has to present itself as the one people will want to choose because it offers real answers to the real questions of life.

5. A Brief Conclusion

So what can be learnt from Pentecostalism in Latin America? We have seen how it has a flexibility and informality that is remarkably adaptable, making it easier for it to contextualise its message and style in a way that the Roman Catholic Church with all its institutional structures and traditions cannot match. Those who are speaking of new ways of being church in a European context speak of 'liquid church', cell churches that are light and easily multiplied, and youth churches where denominational allegiance means nothing.[38] Postmodern christians are open to the supernatural in a way that the rationalists of the previous generation were not. When Pentecostalism taps into this potential with an appropriately contextual approach, could 'postmission' really take off in Europe, and the continent find itself being converted, albeit to a new way of being Christian, a new way of reading the Bible, and a new way of being church?[39]

References:

Beardsell, P, *Europe and Latin America: Returning the Gaze* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000) "Argentinians turned to Europe with whom they felt the link in chronology and in the blood, very close to us" (p.18)

Philpott, T, "Bloodthirsty Roads to God", Guardian Newspaper, February 15th 2003

Larrain, J, *Identity and Modernity in Latin America* (Cambridge, Cambridge Polity Press, 2000) "E is LA’s Other, but an Other of which Latin Americans inevitably form a part. So in the end the Latin America is a kind of European who is not the owner of his identity, he is nothing more than the recognition, under European form, of his own non-European being" (p.186)

Davie, G, op.cit, p. 144


Martin, B, op. cit., p.121


Hillman, R S, *Understanding Contemporary Latin America* (2nd Ed) (Colorado, Lynne Rienner, 2001)

Martin, B, op.cit., p.119

Martin, B, op.cit., p.106

Davie, G, op.cit., p.144

Martin, B, op. cit., p.126

Martin, B, op.cit., p.126

Maybe Pentecostalism is giving people what Liberation Theology always wanted to give them, but most people did not understand what Liberation Theology was saying; so in the popular saying "the Church opted for the poor and the poor opted for the Pentecostals"
...modernity is not simply rejected or readopted but critically and creatively re-appropriated by new religious discourse and social practices in non-western contexts" (Davie, G, op. cit., p.159)

[22] Martin, B, op.cit., p.130


[27] For an account of the ministries of two leading exponents in Argentina, Carlos Annacondia and Carlos Friedzon see Smith, C and Prokopy, J, Latin American Religion in Motion (New York and London, Routledge, 1999), pp 155ff


[29] This warning is sounded in a recent paper by Doug Peterson. "It is recognised that an interpretative consensus on the nature of Pentecostalism does not exist even from within the movement" (Peterson, D and Peterson, D Jr, "Changing Paradigms and Challenges for Latin American Evangelical Protestants", Unpublished paper, 2003), p. 2

[30] Smith, C and Prokopy, J, op. cit., p.15


[32] Peterson and Peterson, op. cit., pp 4ff

[33] For an essay on the example of Chile see Smith, C and Prokopy, J, op. cit, pp.187ff which charts the socio-political awakening of Pentecostals in Chile.

[34] See Davie, G, op.cit., p.76


[37] See Davie, G, op. cit., p.47
[38] For an exploration of the issues see mailto:www.postmission.com See also Ward, P, Liquid Church (Carlisle, Paternoster, 2002)