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Publication Date

2008

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

As for Me and My House:
Reproductive Management and Christianity in Latin America

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Master of Arts

in

Anthropology

by

William Christopher Dawley

Committee in Charge:

Professor Joel Robbins, Chair
Professor Suzanne Brenner
Professor Nancy Postero

2008

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2008

EPIGRAPH

Religion is basically concerned with problems of meaning and problems of power.

Raymond Firth

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge Joel Robbins for his weekly meetings, multiple readings and, most of all, his thoughtful consideration of the problem I chose to address. I was lucky to have his wisdom and direction in analyzing Christianity-as-culture, a cultural matter too “close to home” for many anthropologists to analyze as incisively as he has managed to do.

I would also like to acknowledge Professor Suzanne Brenner for her scholarly guidance in thinking about the relationship between “modern” religions and “modern” social forms, especially the nuclear family and its gender relationships. Professors Robbins and Brenner, their analytical lenses shaped respectively by their intimate knowledge of those quintessentially anthropological sites Papua New Guinea and Java, were invaluable aides in my analysis of non-indigenous Latin America, modern biomedical reproductive management, and Christianity, none of which are classic objects of the anthropological gaze.

I would also like to thank Professor Nancy Postero, who helped me consider the peculiarities of contemporary Latin America when considering reproductive management, especially its variant discourses on reproduction, gender, and political futures.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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by

William Christopher Dawley

Master of Arts in Anthropology
University of California, San Diego, 2008
Professor Joel Robbins, Chair

Latin Americans practice reproductive management at rates comparable with Western Europe and North America, a counterintuitive finding given the region's staunchly Catholic past. This paper examines the discourses on Christianity and modernity which, together, shape much of Latin Americans' views on the issue of reproductive management. I propose that Latin Americans are prone to viewing hormonal birth control, permitted by evangelicals but not the Catholic Church, as modern, while abortion is not viewed in terms of modernity.

I argue that thought about issues on which Catholicism and evangelicalism diverge is often structured by Latin Americans as the homology Catholic:evangelical:: traditional:modern, and that this homology shapes reproductive management more broadly by affecting ideas about agency, piety, gender, sexuality, and the family. I argue that, where Protestant and Catholic doctrine converge, such as in the case of reproductive

management through induced abortion, Christian notions of modernity or tradition do not apply; other cultural relationships must be theorized. Finally, I explore the idea that religion, for contemporary individuals in general and for Latin American Christians in particular, better conceptualized as a generator of images, themes and stories than of doctrine.

INTRODUCTION

Almost any discussion with contemporary Latin Americans about the ways in which individuals manage reproduction—primarily through contraception and abortion—will eventually wind around to two widely cited considerations: the extent to which such planning and management are “modern” issues, and the Catholic Church’s vocal opposition to most means of managing reproduction.

The first consideration encourages many Latin Americans to actively manage their reproduction. In Latin America as in much of the world, “modern” economic conditions seem to demand smaller families and greater investment in each child’s future. The outcome of this strategy, the “modern” lifestyle, is highly valued by most Latin Americans. (A review of Latin America’s current political discourse confirms this: from Chávez and Castro on the left to Uribe and Calderón on the right, the path to and meaning of this modernity, and not modernity itself, constitute much of the region’s political debate.) Of all the forms of reproductive management available, hormonal birth control appears to be the most unproblematically “modern” solution.

The second consideration seems to demand that most Latin Americans, being at least nominally Catholic, forego this aspect of modernity altogether. Yet while abortion seemed to have stabilized and even begun to drop off in Latin America (Sedgh et al 2007), the use of contraception continues to rise¹ and have a greater impact on birth rates than abortion (cf. Singh and Sedgh 1997).²

¹ Plenty of ethnographic and sociological data exist which confirm that medical contraception is a phenomenon whose prevalence and incidence are still growing. See Ali and Cleland 2005: 1183; Gutmann

What can explain this phenomenon? Have circumstances or values that Latin Americans might speak of as “modern”³ trumped religious doctrine or identity in determining strategies for managing reproduction? Do the doctrines and themes of a rapidly expanding evangelical Christianity articulate with reproductive management and modernity in ways that Catholicism cannot? How are religious identities managed when individuals decide to manage their reproduction by taking contraception (in violation of highly explicit and verbalized Catholic doctrine) or undergo induced abortion (in violation of both Catholic and evangelical doctrines)?

This paper reviews the gap between religious doctrines with regard to managing reproduction and the behavior of Latin Americans, nearly all of whom adhere to some religious tradition. I argue that religious doctrine is sometimes ignored in favor of other considerations which seem more compelling. In particular, individuals may contracept or abort a pregnancy when caring for a(nother) child seems highly undesirable or impossible, especially when notions of the “modern” lifestyle—fewer and better provided-for children, sexual activity somewhat divorced from its reproductive functions—shape his/her expectations.

1996: 133, 251; Santiso-Galvez and Bertrand 2004; Thein 1975: 89-90, 114-115, 163-164; Sharma, Gribble, and Menotti 2005; Singh and Sedgh 1997; U.S. Census Bureau 2007; Viveros 2003: 45-47

² This trend mirrors the trajectory of reproductive management in most of the world, particularly in urban areas. Moreover, the rise in contraceptive use does appear, in some sites, to have a statistical, causal relationship with the global decrease in abortion (Singh and Sedgh 1997).

³ Ideas of modernity, though highly localized, have been found salient the globe over (cf. Donham 1999; Gaonkar 2001). Much has been written, particularly, about the importance of ideas of modernity in negotiating gender and family structure in Latin American (cf. Gutmann 1996, 2003, 2007; Schmukler 1998). For a case which exemplifies the ways in which religious identity, the idea of modernity, and gender rework one another, see also Deeb (2006), who explores this interplay in contemporary Lebanon.

I argue that this strategy is more probable among Catholics because of (a) a particularly Latin American *habitus*⁴ which separates Catholicism from most daily decision-making, based in part on the historical distance between official Catholicism (first its ritual and, consequently, its doctrines) and the everyday lives of Latin Americans⁵; (b) a general “imaginative” quality of Catholic identity formation which subordinates Catholic doctrine to participation Catholic rites and symbolic expression (Greeley 1977; 1981; 2000; Dillon 1999); (c) a perception that the Catholic hierarchy sometimes ignores the realities facing everyday Catholics and is ill-equipped to deal with its own sexual dilemmas and scandals, much less those of its adherents.⁶

I argue that evangelical Christianity holds a special attraction for those Latin Americans who aspire to a Christian modernity—replete with “modern” notions of agency, families and family decision-making, gender, sexuality, piety, and identity—but who find Catholicism too irredeemably non-modern. I do not argue that evangelicals in Latin America are drawn away from Catholicism and towards evangelical Christianity because of reproductive issues; these issues are rarely raised in conversion stories. However, as Smilde (2007), Brusco (1995), and others argue, the ability of evangelical Christianity to effect change in an individual’s life (specifically by activating an “modern” individual agency) does play an important role in winning converts.

⁴ I am using a particular sense of Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* as historically developed “dispositions...constituted in practice” which, in turn, mediate ones approach to social structures (1990[1980]: 52). Thus “*habitus*, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices—more history—in accordance with the schemes generated by history”; these schemes predict individuals’ orientation to long-standing social structures like the Catholic Church “more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms,” including Church doctrine.

⁵ Long having considered Latin America solidly Catholic, the Vatican has often focused its human resources on other areas. Cf. Freston 2001: 192-193; Smith 1998: 3, 7.

⁶ The lack of faith in the Catholic hierarchy’s sexual norms is quite old indeed. See Willems (1967: 41) for an example of the popular belief that even the priests themselves did not hold to the Catholic Church’s strict sexual norms.

Catholicism, in contrast, may appear hopelessly out-of-touch by not only cultivating a “premodern” sort of individual agency but appearing to neglect many “modern” needs, among them a reformulation of the sex-reproduction relationship and the need to limit family size.

Following the arguments of Greeley and Dillon, I argue that Latin Americans look to religion to generate experience and imaginative capacities. For individuals content to compartmentalize religion’s influence, maintaining a traditional Catholic identity and imagination may not prove difficult to reconcile with “modern” notions. For those strongly attached both to Christianity and to a “modern” notion of the individual (whose life is unified by a single belief system), more complex negotiations are necessary, among them the adoption of evangelical Christianity as a more “modern” alternative to Catholicism.⁷

This paper first looks at contemporary sexual and reproductive behavior in Latin America, taking note of which aspects are popularly evaluated as “modern.” We raise the issue of modernity in light of the two most prominent religions in Latin America: Catholicism, which is traditional to the region, and the somewhat more “modern” evangelicalism. Then, in order to reveal how evangelicalism seems to better accommodate “modernity” than Catholicism, we explore the themes of agency, gender, piety, sexuality, and the family. The difference in accommodation is due in part to the Latin American context, in which Catholicism and evangelicalism are opposing terms. We develop this opposition’s relationship to modernity making use of the homology

⁷ Many other possibilities exist, including abandoning religion or taking up a “pro-change” Catholic position (which Dillon [1999] explores). However, this paper limits itself to looking at the ways in which Catholicism and evangelical Christianity are popularly understood to relate to modernity and tradition.

Catholic:evangelical::traditional:modern. Next, we show the metaphor to dealing with all forms of reproductive management, demonstrating why abortion appears as neither Catholic nor evangelical, neither traditional nor modern. Finally, based on the arguments summarized above we hypothesize about the conditions in which religion might be more and less salient in managing “modern” reproduction and sexuality.

FROM ON-HIGH TO ON-THE-GROUND: Contemporary Sexual/Reproductive Behavior

Before addressing reproductive management in Latin America, we must first ask, what are the contours of the contemporary Latin American sexual and reproductive experience? Despite a well-meaning anxiety over essentialization, Latin Americanists discern both a “traditional” attitude toward sexuality and a direction in which that sexuality is moving. A panel at the 1998 Latin American Studies Association concluded that

Despite our efforts to accentuate historical particularism...it was not just in the popular imagination that Latin America was seen as constituting...a coherent area of historical and cultural commonalities with respect to certain aspects of gender and sexuality (Gutmann 2003: 16)

Urbanization and the cultural influences from around the globe (but most particularly the United States and Western Europe) are the two most powerful forces remaking Latin America’s sexuality. As economic pressures to shrink one’s family grow, so do influences which encourage Latin Americans to think of sexuality as increasingly individualized and non-gender specific, as increasingly divorced from social ties (be they reproductive, emotional or marital), and as increasingly linked to issues of health. These global messages are encountered in an urban landscape where physical and social proximity with extramarital sexual partners has increased alongside the average age of marriage.

The extramarital sexual opportunities exposed across this shifting social landscape are exploited differentially by the two sexes, entrenching gender principles that

Latin Americans view as “traditional.” Well over twice as many Latin American males report being sexually active than do females between the ages of 15 and 24 (Ali and Cleland 2005: 1181-1182). Even in Costa Rica, where Western influence is particularly high, almost 40% of unmarried males compared to only 15% of unmarried females between the ages of 15 and 19 report being sexually active (Singh, Wulf, Samara and Cuca 2000). Reflection about extramarital sex is also highly gendered: whereas Latin American men and women fret at comparable rates about unintended pregnancies, women express more anxiety over intimacy, emotional vulnerability, and other psychological outcomes of sex (Sikos 2000).

A report on the behavioral details of this Latin American situation sheds some light onto this differential sexual development: Rani, Figueroa and Ainsle (2003) find that young boys in Latin America are often encouraged and pressured by friends and relatives and friends to experiment sexually; sometimes, male relatives even bring young boys to places of prostitution to “become men.”⁸ Slim majorities of boys report perceived encouragement to engage in premarital sex from almost all relatives; their mothers are the sole exception, and almost a third of young boys also report perceiving encouragement from them (Rani, Figueroa and Ainsle 2003: Tables 2 and 3). Girls rarely experience open discussion about sex from any family member. When asked about *perceived* pressures from family members, anywhere from 75% to over 90% of girls report perceiving discouragement to engage in sexual activity from all family members.

⁸ Necchi, Schufer and Méndez (2000) confirm that, among minors studied in Buenos Aires, almost two-fifths of all sexually experienced males had their first sexual experiences with a prostitute. Only a quarter had theirs with a girlfriend.

Nonetheless, women's sexual experiences are changing significantly. Examining data from single women in eight Latin American countries at the turn of the millennium, Ali and Cleland (2005) confirm that while premarital sex is growing quickly for both sexes, the change in behavior is most dramatic among women.

This increase in extramarital sex, combined with the desire to limit family size, has encouraged women to adopt medical methods of reproductive management. Despite the Catholic Church's vocal opposition, contraceptive use in Latin America has risen steadily for over a generation (cf. Ali and Cleland 2005:1183). Almost three-quarters of all women aged 15-49 were currently using contraception in the year 2000; ten years prior, only three in five were using contraception (UNPD 2001). Contraception is more readily available in Latin America than in developing countries in any other region of the world (Ross et al 2002).

Much like abortion (which we later deal with extensively), contraception in Latin America is mostly sought by married women with several children (cf. Lopez 2000; Ross et al 2002). Many social planners worry that sexually active females aged 15-19 are still drastically underserved in this regard. Ali and Cleland (2005:1183) point to a persistent "fear of social disapproval [which] may act as a barrier to protective action" for Latin American women.

As a result, confidentiality and convenience continue to play important roles in determining whether many unmarried females will obtain birth control, especially those residing in more rural and more conservative areas (cf. Ali and Cleland 2005). Yet even in Buenos Aires, teenage girls' fear of disappointing family or community members often prevents them from seeking birth control and condoms to protect themselves from STIs

(Geldstein, Infesta and Delpino 2000). Thus, a young female population increasingly willing to manage their reproduction and sexual health may find the tools for doing so too inaccessible. Exposure to unwanted pregnancy and health consequences may win out over exposure to social consequences (Sharma, Gribble and Menotti 2005; Santiso-Galvez and Bertrand 2004).

Latin American men also seem to be adopting new attitudes towards contraception. Latin America, like most known societies, continues to grant men more sexual license than women; but the growing sense that contraception is no longer merely a woman's concern favors both contraceptive use and its association with "modern," gender-symmetric social forms. In contemporary Latin America, "the stereotype that...fatherhood is tantamount to insemination and producing (especially male) progeny...is sometimes deployed...as a way to poke fun at men regarded as hopelessly antiquated in their thinking and behavior" (Gutmann 2003: 15). Thus contraception becomes linked not only to modernity in general, but, as we shall demonstrate, to companionate marriage and "modern" notions of parenthood.

Male's primary modern contraception, the condom, is increasingly common in Latin America, particularly as fears of AIDS and other STDs spread throughout many Latin American countries. Givaudan, Pick and Fuertes (2000) and Viveros (1999) detail the concern that Mexican and Colombian men have begun to demonstrate over reproductive management in general, including vasectomies. Matthew Gutmann has written extensively on this contemporary male concern. In Mexico City, many of his informants self-consciously figure themselves as "modern" when they take an interest in such matters (1996). In Oaxaca, too, he finds that men consciously refigure gender when

taking part in reproductive responsibilities; they speak of “sharing [in] women’s suffering,” subverting a traditional image of the dutiful, feminine suffering (Gutmann 2007: 143-149).⁹

However, beyond frighteningly permanent vasectomies and the somewhat unreliable and unpleasant condom, men in Latin America as elsewhere must communicate with and persuade women in order to take part in most reproductive management decisions. Condom use, their foremost contribution, is still culturally associated (and statistically correlated) with noncommittal sexuality more than with married or committed sexuality as a form of reproductive management (see especially Ali and Cleland 2005; but also Gutmann 2007: ch. 5 and Viveros 1999). This association buttresses a traditional, non-monogamous male sexuality even as many Latin American men more actively engage in reproductive decisions and communication with their partners.

Thus, while reproductive management remains a highly gendered phenomenon and one very much in flux in Latin America, certain trends are popularly identified with (a sort of) modernization. Contraception (particularly hormonal methods) is viewed as the most modern means of dealing with a modern necessity. By its vocal opposition to both contraception *and* many of the pressures to adopt it,¹⁰ the Catholic Church posits itself as a defender of tradition, and especially traditional sexuality.

⁹ *La mujer abnegada*, the self-denying, long-suffering woman, is an archetype of virtuous womanhood in Latin America culture, and is popularly understood to find meaning in Catholic images of Mary. This pervasive association of tradition with Catholicism, especially where gender is concerned, will continue to be important to this paper.

¹⁰ In one of many examples, the Archbishop of Costa Rica, Monseñor Roman Arrieta Villalobos argued that the “true reasons” for reproductive management were “none but to give free rein to [the] passions...The other reasons are pretexts” (Seiler 2007: 127).

As early as the 1960s (when reproductive management had begun to reach Latin American societies), contraception was conceptualized as part of the shift towards urbanity and modernity: “‘Before, nobody planned anything...and what happened, happened.’... [Reproduction was left] in the hands of God” in the traditional rural economy, when Costa Ricans traditionally quipped that “each son brings a loaf of bread under his arm” (i.e., provided sustenance for himself *and* his family) (Thein 1975: 57, 90). Contraception continues to be perceived as premeditative and agentic, the type of planning for the future carried out by modern, forward-looking individuals. The most effective reproductive management, moreover, requires a modern-looking, companionate relationship, one in which communication crosses (and may even erode) gender boundaries and in which the interest the partners coincide.

These understandings of modernity and contraception contribute to a popular understanding that Catholicism demonstrates its own lack of modernity in its views on reproduction, sexuality and gender.¹¹ The evangelical attitude toward reproductive management seems modern and reformist by contrast. While maintaining a positive evaluation of family and reproduction, evangelicalism highlights its modernity and (especially in Latin America) its essential difference from traditional Catholicism with respect to contraception in particular and various general themes implicated in the issue of reproductive management. It is to these themes that we now turn.

¹¹ The Vatican has adopted, since 1968, a view of sexuality as “unitive” rather than merely procreative (cf. Paul VI 1968). Nonetheless, most Latin Americans continue to view Catholicism as supportive of traditional arrangements, including a highly gendered household and a marital sexuality for exclusively reproductive purposes (Kalbian 2005: 31-44; Thein 1975: 141-142; Viveros 2002: 80, 2003: 38).

CATHOLIC:EVANGELICAL::TRADITIONAL:MODERN

Protestantism has long been associated with modernity in Latin America. Although Pentecostal and charismatic elements dominate contemporary Latin American Protestantism, Martin (1990), Stoll (1990), and other Latin Americanists have argued that local understandings of *evangelicalismo* are heavily inflected by the mainline denominations which preceded it. Nineteenth century Liberalism articulated a discourse of modernity which linked Protestantism and North American pluralism and democracy, while Conservatism from that era promoted a connection between Latin American tradition and Catholicism (cf. Freston 2001: part 4). Though those political discourses cast long shadows over Latin American political terrain, I am not making the claim that *evangelicalismo* is “modern” solely because Liberals in the nineteenth century were convinced that Protestantism was. The precise genealogy of these associations is, for our purposes, less important than the acknowledgment that Catholicism has been associated with tradition and Protestantism with modernity since the nineteenth century in Latin America.

This association has important consequences for the way that Latin Americans view the Catholic Church’s vocal campaign against contraception. Ethnographic evidence from around Latin America suggests that contraception is popularly viewed as a modern phenomenon with modernizing implications (Thein 1975: 57; Viveros 2003: 46-47; Gutmann 1996: 144-145; Guttman 2007), confounding the Vatican’s campaign to paint it as backwards.

Here I seek to establish that for Latin Americans the structuralist homology Catholic:Protestant:: traditional:modern possesses explanatory power for Latin Americans' understanding of contraception. Furthermore, I argue that the homology is used by many Latin Americans to think through the themes that structure thought about reproductive management: agency, gender, piety, sexuality, and family.

More broadly, I argue that religions are not simply the means by which specific opinions are manipulated from above (though they may partly be just that). Religions are also (and perhaps act more commonly as) systems of metaphors and themes that individuals use to make sense of their world. If this conceptualization resembles reality, Latin Americans would consider what Catholicism has to say about the ideal family structure more consequential than what a particular pope has to say about the means of planning that family structure. Thus, a Latin American's disagreement with a particular Pope might be less important to her identification as a Catholic than what the Catholic Church says to her about family in general. Evangelical Christianity does demand a certain continuous attention to scripture¹² that Catholicism does not, but I emphatically disagree that this diminishes the importance of and attention to metaphors and themes. Rather, scripture becomes a field for religious practice, in which important evangelical themes and metaphors are worked out. With this conception of religion in mind, the rest of this section is dedicated to explaining how agency, gender, piety, sexuality, and family are explained by Catholicism and Protestantism as they exist in Latin America today.

¹² Nonetheless, Smilde (1996: 346) does argue that, "predominantly Pentecostal in form, Latin American evangelicals are ... less fundamentalist than North American evangelicals."

AGENCY - Catholic:evangelical:: traditional:modern

While conception may not be the intended consequence of a sex act, numerous steps in the process of conceiving, birthing, and raising a child involve different agents. Each ideology or system of power, religious or otherwise, decides which agents are legitimate with respect to the management of any decision, reproduction included.¹³

While many authors have traced the growth of “modern” themes of subjectivity (“personalism,” versus a focus on acts: see Kalbian 2005) and intentions (versus ends: cf. Hastings 1991a, 1991b; Hebblethwaite 1991: 52-53) in Catholic moral theology, Catholic moral theology retains a non-modern worldview by the reckoning of scholars who maintain that moderns focus on the individual human agent and his/her search for guidance (cf. Keane 2007: especially 2-5).

According to Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, agency is rightly shared between both members of a couple. Husband and wife are both rightful (though not autonomous) agents who create life “through that mutual gift of themselves” through a “union of two persons in which they perfect one another” (II.8). Nonetheless, husband and wife “are not free to act as they choose” but must make room for the agency of that third partner in “the marriage act”: God (II.10, 13). Furthermore, the Magisterium does not leave these agents to seek God’s will themselves. His will is inherent to the “objective moral order which was established by God” (II.10), the “natural,” unitive sex act. As the author of life, He ultimately decides whether to create life through unobstructed sexual

¹³ Foucault (1990[1978]) argues managing reproduction is a vital aspect of “power” in the modern age.

intercourse. For this reason, Pope Paul VI compares the use of contraception to spousal rape: it is a violation of the will of a rightful agent (God) in a sexual act (II.13).

Since the 1968 publication of *Humanae Vitae* and especially during the era of Pope John Paul VI, the Vatican has made every effort to inform all Catholics that birth control is forbidden because it usurps the Divine Will (or agency, for our purposes). It has done this in part because during the 1960s the Catholic position was unclear; anthropologists found that in some places, Catholic priests promoted the responsible use of birth control while in others they condemned it.¹⁴

Since 1968, the Catholic Church's modern condemnation of spousal rape and support for the equal distribution of rightful agency and responsibility within marriage¹⁵ have received far less media coverage and recognition than its seemingly fatalist, anti-modern stance on procreation. To Latin Americans, this latter portrait of the Catholic Church is particularly compelling, since the Catholic Church has historically represented tradition and resistance to modernity (Martin 1990, Stoll 1990, Freston 2001: part 4). For this reason, ethnographers have noted the tendency of Latin Americans to associate Catholicism with traditional social forms, including the unplanned family (cf. Thein 1975: 57) and the overtly patriarchal family (Henao 1994, cited in Viveros 2002: 80; Riesebrodt 1993, cited in Smilde 1997: 347; Thein 1975:141-142; Viveros 2003: 34-39).

¹⁴ For instance, compare Thein 1975: 76 with Thein 1975: 168 to see how Costa Ricans in different regions were being offered different messages about hormonal contraceptions depending on their parish; in a rural parish, local pharmacists were derided as "pill-pushers" and their clients refused absolution by local priests, while in the an urban parish, couples were required to learn about modern contraception as part of a Catholic marriage class before marrying and the priests had formed an alliance with the national family planning bureau.

¹⁵ Many of these messages are in *Humanae Vitae*; others lie at the heart of what the Vatican's opposition to health initiatives which promote contraception (cf. John Paul II 1995).

Likewise, we must look beyond “official” Protestant theology on contraception and family structure and focus more broadly on how *evangélicos* in Latin America understand agency within couples and construe the agency of God.

Many anthropologists of Latin America have argued that evangelical Christianity, and especially Pentecostalism, promotes a view of decision-making within families that (a) allows greater influence for women while not overtly challenging the male’s traditional, masculine prerogative and (b) encourages mutual involvement in family decision-making (Brusco 1995, Flora 1976, Mariz and Machado 1997; Martin 1990: 181-184; Robbins 2004:132-133, Smilde 1994, 1997, 2007; Wilcox 2004). One sociologist, David Smilde (1997: 349), offers an ethnographic example and analysis of how family decision-making works and is justified the households of *evangélicos*.

I had the following conversation with Elena, a pastor’s wife.

“In the Christian family, who has the authority?” I asked.

“In part, the husband has the authority as head of the family, as the Bible says... There is a Venezuelan saying that says: ‘The man wears the pants in the family.’ But as the People of God we say that we all have the pants on because while the husband makes the decision, the wife also has to be in agreement... So both are the authorities in the home, over the children, over each other because the Bible says ‘they are no longer two but are of one flesh.’”

Thus in the idea of Christian patriarchy we can see what Judith Stacey has called *patriarchy in the last instance*... a model of authority that is patriarchal in theory, consensual in practice.

In this instance as in the many in the literature, the position of Latin American *evangélicos* assigns agency to both husband and wife in many decisions.

On the issue of contraception and planning one’s family, *evangelicalismo* largely delegates agency within human consciences, which must individually seek out God’s particular will. Unlike the Catholic position, the God of the *evangélicos* does not appear

to issue a universal fiat on the use of contraception or demand that all sexual activity between couples include a procreative possibility. Instead, *evangelicalismo* promotes individual choice and responsibility, “a rationalization of the conscience” (Mariz and Machado 1997: 44). In this faith, one chooses to accept God’s presence in one’s life and then, *as an individual project*, seeks to understand his Will directly, which is *unique for each individual*.

Compare this to the Catholic position on contraception and procreation. Catholic moral theology on this issue rests on the notion of an unchanging, universal *natural law* which expresses God’s Will, His eternal plan *for all humanity*. This “natural law” is “inscribed in the very being of man and woman” and forbids the separation of “the two [divinely intended] meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning” (Paul VI 1968: II.12). These meanings have been deciphered by the Magisterium for all believers; like the *evangélico*, the individual Catholic chooses to accept God’s presence in his life, but to do this is to choose to accept *the Magisterium’s exclusive right to interpret His Will* (cf. Paul VI 1968: I).

Different notions of what an individual’s claim to agency entails are exemplified in purification rituals associated with Latin American Catholicism and Protestantism. Protestant churches are filled every morning with calls for people to make the choice to be washed of one’s sins, by individually asking God to come into their hearts. *Evnagélicos* may even perform this asking for forgiveness in private, in direct communication with God. In either case, the believer emphasizes the opportunity for a new beginning in which s/he alone must make the first step. Catholic absolution smacks of traditional Latin American *paternalismo*: the repentant Catholic must enlist the priest

as an agent, who will dictate the form expiation must take. Usually, this includes the performance of a well-known ritual which is in no way a break from the past. Moreover, in opposition to the rupture and free will emphasized in the Protestant rituals of purification, the confession emphasizes both continuity and compulsion: the penitent is generally to begin by noting when he last confessed and is expected to confess and expiate before communing with God through the Eucharist.

These rituals emphasize very different notions of agency among Latin American Catholics and *evangélicos*. As Pope Paul VI makes clear in *Humanae Vitae*, individuals “are not free to act as they choose” (II.10). They *must* yield to God’s agency, which is spread throughout all the accoutrements and materiality of the world: man’s very body is inscribed with the natural law which bespeaks His will, while the rosary, the votive candles, the holy water, even the Eucharist which the cleansed sinner will ingest are bled through with God’s agency, so that the sinner is hemmed in on all sides by it, his agency closely circumscribed by material reality.

Evangélicos often describe the freedom they find in God (cf. Mariz and Machado 1997), the extent to which their agency breaks free from their pasts, from the physical world and the power of others over them. Like Keane’s account of Calvinists in colonial Dutch Indonesia, the *evangélico*, who must explicitly reject Catholic hierarchy, mediation and materiality, is “driven by the question ‘What sort of beings have agency?’” (Keane 2007: 4-5). The answer is, his brothers assure him, none but men and God; and men must seek out God’s will individually.

For *evangélicos*, the Catholic conception of God-in-things represents “a carnal and crass conception of God” (John Calvin, cited in Keane 2007: 61, citing Benedict

2002: 86). Keane (2007) views this demystification of material reality, or “purification,” as *essential* to both modernity and Protestantism.¹⁶ Latin American *evangélicos* wholeheartedly accept the notion, lumping Catholicism together with witchcraft. Many Latin Americans who self-identify as Catholic implicitly agree with Keane’s claim about modernity: on issues such as contraception, they see their religion as somewhat pre-modern.

The good news of modernity is that sometimes a pill is just a pill; individual human beings and their rightful agency are what are important. The good news, the *evangelio*, is not only that Jesus Christ saves men’s souls, but that he frees them from the tyranny of mistaking other men and material things for Him and His Will, thereby allowing them to recognize and exercise Free Will (cf. Keane 2007; Smilde 2007).

In Latin America as elsewhere, hormonal contraception is popularly understood to be the most responsible, modern means of reducing unplanned pregnancies. That the Vatican condemns both abortion and the “modern” means of reducing them only concretizes the view held by many Latin Americans that the Catholic Church is at best “traditional” (and at worst anachronistic). In the subsections which follow, I will demonstrate how this association of Catholicism with tradition (and *evangelicalismo* with modernity) penetrates other aspects of Latin American culture.

¹⁶ A central argument of Keane’s (2007) monograph is that Protestantism and modernity share a common genealogy and “semiotic ideology”; their shared features are no coincidence.

PIETY AND GENDER - Catholic:evangelical::traditional:modern

They think that because I stopped drinking that I'm a Protestant or I'm an Evangelist, etc. You know?... 'You've become an hermano' or 'repentant drunk.'

In the passage above, Stanley Brandes (2003: 158) cites an informant from an Alcoholics anonymous group whose friends accuse him of becoming an *evangélico* (or *hermano*, as they are sometimes derided) because he gave up drink. Social drinking is, in Mexico City as in much of Latin America, “an inherent part of the male role”; abstention from drink requires males “to question their own gender identity” (Brandes 2003: 153).

Evangélicos forbid drink because of its close association with many sins closely associated with masculinity: adultery, gambling, wasteful spending (especially as associated with the previous two vices and with public drinking itself), ostentatious displays and violent aggression.¹⁷

Many of the authors that Robbins reviews note that, by and large, these sins are far more common to men than women (2004: 132). The behavioral asceticism (glossed here as “piety”) that *evangelicalismo* requires is much more restrictive for men than women; the latter were already ascetics with regard to most of these sins (Mariz and Machado 1997: 50). For this reason, Brusco (1995) sees *evangelicalismo* in Colombia as the “reformation of machismo,” a movement by which men are encouraged to cease drinking, adultery, gambling, wasteful spending, and violence in order to find a more secure anchor for their masculinity.

¹⁷ For a review of the literature on Latin American evangelicals' opposition to the “male prestige sphere of drink,” see Robbins 2004:128-129.

While all of these “sins” have a certain appeal, men feel intense pressure to indulge in many of them by their peers. In this sense, *evangelicalismo* acts just as the Alcoholics Anonymous groups that Brandes (2002, 2003) studies: it offers them a new group of male peers and a new pious conception of masculinity that can replace the more destructive ones that they were compelled to engage, both by their own desires and at the urging of their friends (see also Brusco 1995, Smilde 2007).¹⁸

Thus, *evangelicalismo* is a reformation of the entire gender system and the traditional association of piety with women alone. Piety has many implications, some of which will be covered in later subsections dealing with sexuality and the familial authority, but its most obvious association is with religiosity. *Machismo*, “traditional” masculinity, was neither especially religious or pious. Although the term has been burdened with many meanings (Gutmann 1996), among the least “revisionist” of them in contemporary Latin America are a “complex” of “hypersexuality, *cuatismo* (male camaraderie), violence, risk taking, courage or stoicism, authoritarianism, independence” (Brusco 1995: 78). Only courage or stoicism could be associated with Christian piety, but the sort of *courage* male social roles require can hardly be defined as Christian in any sense. *Stoicism*, meanwhile, is probably the only term in the complex which is also associated with *machismo*’s “mirror image”: *marianismo* (Brusco 1995: 79).

The very term *marianismo* (which, like *machismo*, is largely an invention of social scientists interested in Latin America) typifies the piety expected of women.

¹⁸ Brandes (2002, 2003) has noted that social drinking is so deeply associated with male camaraderie and one’s *cuates* (“twins,” or drinking buddies) that alternative male friends require new terms and new constructions of masculinity. If alternative, non-drinking friends are members of a support group such as Alcoholics Anonymous, they are referred to as *compañeros* (companions); if evangelicals, they are *hermanos* (brothers).

Women, like Mary, are expected to be pious, self-abnegating and self-sacrificing, and obedient (cf. Stevens 1973). Although many studies of traditional gendering in Latin America have focused on male dominance and female subordination, *marianismo* is explicitly more associated with one's behavior as mother than as wife, more with obedience to God (at least in the last instance) than to husband. The qualities of *marianismo* are clearly pious ones; those of *machismo* are clearly not.

Evangelicalismo moves toward dissolving this gendering of public and private, pious and impious. In addition to offering women an ideology through which they can articulate and promote the asceticism and religiosity already typical to their gender, *evangelicalismo* provides a broad social support network to publicly enforce and reinforce those norms (cf. Brusco 1995, Mariz and Machado 1997, Smilde 1997). Under the watchful eye of an extended "family of God," they gain more freedom of movement outside the strictly "private" realm of the household into the multiple hybrid public/private spaces where church activities take place (cf. Cucchiari 1990).

Though increased female mobility is generally threatening to Latin American men—who frequently and publicly express anxiety over being cuckolded (cf. Fonseca 2003; Gutmann 1996)—many ethnographers note that the men are attracted to these women precisely due to their religious beliefs and practices (cf. Brusco 1995). In Brazil, Burdick (1993:137-139) notes that the pastor of an Assemblies of God church often teases young men that perhaps their real motives for joining the church have to do with finding a pious wife. One young convert recounted his initial, profound respect for girls who "don't run around half-naked." Another added that "the women in the Assembly

understand marriage [and] take it seriously. They are not going to go running off and sleep with other men.”

Meanwhile, *evangelicalismo* offers something to men by appealing to their sense of patriarchy. As Norma Fuller (1997) notes, in Peru as in much of Latin America, masculinity engages many different realms and values which often conflict with each other. The public/private hybridity which proliferates under *evangelicalismo* buttresses male authority: traditionally “public” spaces such as the church and the homes of believers are populated by the “family of God” (and thus made safe) and traditionally “private” spaces such as the home are publicly scrutinized. Male *evangélicos* often find that their wives demonstrate a new respect for them when they, as godly patriarchs, enact a kind of temperance and piety at odds with traditional masculinity. This kind of respectful treatment reduces the allure of the street, since men do not have to leave the home for homosocial contexts in which to earn respect. These contexts may have, in many ways, been dangerous and unpleasant anyway; many social scientists have noted that for some men, the violence, sexual competition and ostentation of the street may have been distasteful anyway; becoming an *evangélico* allows many men an “alternative masculinity” which does not require these acts of bravado (Burdick 1993, Smilde 2007).

SEXUALITY AND THE FAMILY - Catholic:evangelical::traditional:modern

Male *evangélicos* do not merely reenter the home. They seize a new kind of patriarchal authority there, based not on their role as sole breadwinner (which late capitalism makes increasingly difficult to fulfill; cf. Smilde 2007), or on the threat of

physical violence (cf. Carrillo 2003, Escobar 2003, Fuller 2003, Gutmann 1996, Olivarría 2003); but on an intimate, *moral* authority not emphasized in traditional Catholicism.

Arguing that “universal subordination of women” was due to certain perseverant structures in human societies, Michelle Rosaldo (1974: 26-27) illustrated how fathers’ physical and social distance from the home could promote an authority based on that distance. Esteem from public, ritual, or other male-only activities is symbolically deployed at home: “by avoiding certain sorts of intimacy and unmediated involvement, they can develop an image and mantle of integrity and worth” (Rosaldo 1974: 27).

Notice how this image of man conflates with the Catholic image of God,¹⁹ a Creator who involves himself with His children through mediation of non-procreative priests (who, like women, are supposed to practice a sexual asceticism which is traditionally female) and physical currency (rosaries, votive candles, holy water, the Eucharist).

The evangelical man, meanwhile, reaches out to his family in the very different image of his God, touching their lives personally. Like the God of the *evangélicos*, he is glorified as his family thrives and seeks out his presence. Brusco (1995) argues that Pentecostal men realign their value systems such that status is achieved through the home, by their families. By identifying themselves and their statuses with the family, Latin American *evangélicos* adopt a “feminine ethos” (Brusco 1995: 129-134); the difference between this ethos and public-oriented *machista* ethos has been noted not only

¹⁹ On traditional fathers: “the image of the traditional father has existed precisely because of the discourse promoted by mothers and priests. The traditional father has been ‘an unreachable being, one who disappears in everyday events’ (Viveros 2003: 38, citing Henao 1997).

within Latin America (Mariz and Machado 1997; Burdick 1993: ch. 4; Smilde 1997), but in other “Latin”/Mediterranean cultures (Cucchiari 1990).

This new domestic orientation manifests itself in consumption patterns. Twenty years before Brusco argued that Pentecostalism in Colombia was the “reformation of machismo,” Cornelia Butler Flora (1976) noted that Colombian Catholics’ first purchase was a radio, while Colombian Pentecostals’ first nonessential purchase was a dining room table. She argues that this is significant because in traditional, Catholic Latin America, individuals eat in solitude and men orient themselves toward the outside world, while Pentecostal families seek one another’s company around the dining table, promoting family solidarity and, for women, an “increase in status through inclusion” in the act of eating with her husband and children (1976: 221).

The newly elevated *evangélica* is, in turn, less likely to threaten a man’s authority in the home, a strategy frequently employed in more “traditional” homes (cf. Smilde 1997, 2007: 89-94). The perception that one’s masculinity is threatened is at the root of many *machista* displays (Bastos 1999; Bourgois 1995, 2001; Brusco 1995; Ferrándiz 2003; Fonseca 2003; Gutmann 1996; Smilde 2007; Viveros 2003: 34). Although men are drawn into the home, traditionally an arena where women are the only authority (Brusco 1995: 79), *evangélicismo* explicitly names men as the head of the household,²⁰ making entry into the home “safe” for a man’s masculinity in the way that some social scientists have argued that it is not for non-Pentecostals (Fuller 2003: 138). As mentioned above, his newfound authority rests on terms which are quite different from traditional

²⁰ Not surprisingly, some anthropologists find that some women resent the growing tide of men claiming authority in the home. Cf. Gutmann 1996: 102.

patriarchy, terms akin to those which anchor the mother's authority: a kind of selfless piety.²¹ This piety may be seen as even more impressive than the mother's since a great many of the father's peers are known to enjoy "sins" which would be socially inappropriate for any women, Pentecostal or not (cf. Brandes 2003: 154-155).

Furthermore, the father's piety translates into substantial increases in the household budget, so that a patriarchy based on the role of provider is also reinforced. In some ways, then, Pentecostalism represents for men the unifying of a life that social scientists have described as fractured or compartmentalized (cf. Bastos 1999; Brusco 1995; Fuller 1997). Masculinity becomes commensurable with family life.

But what of male sexuality? Although drinking is considered an essential part of male camaraderie, male sexuality is cited, as Gutmann (1996; 2007) notes, as essential to what a man is by the popular and professional classes alike. In Latin America as in much of the world, men are popularly conceived to be governed by uncontrollable urges; at the very least, they "cannot help themselves when sexual opportunity presents itself" (Gutmann 1996: 130).

Pentecostal men view these extramarital temptations as satanic. Sexual impulses, however, can and must be consciously channeled; like most evangelicals the world over, they view the marital bed as the appropriate outlet for sexual urges. Certainly the Catholic Church has never overtly disagreed, but its deep history in Latin America means that most still associate Catholicism with its older insistence on the solely procreative function of marital sexuality. Traditionally, in turn, expressing strong sexual desire within

²¹ "Nolasco argues [in *O Mito da Masculinidade*] that the image of the [traditional] father in Brazil is constructed around the notion of complicity, pleasure, and gratification more than around a divine and moral image" (Viveros 2003: 38).

a marriage was seen to compromise a wife's chaste image. Seeking extramarital sexuality has traditionally been viewed as an acceptable practice that *protected* the wife's chaste image. Women, too, understood marital sex as purely procreative and often described experiencing and seeking little sexual pleasure from their marital relations (Londoño 1982; Gould et al 2002).

Brusco (1995) describes a more measured approach by Latin American *evangélicos*. Critical of Catholicism for its complicity in exempting men from God's law, they stress Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, which barely mentions the reproductive aspects of sex, focusing instead on the marital bed as a divine refuge from satanic temptations. Married people's bodies belong to one another, and they should not refuse one another's sexual desires except during short, mutually agreed-upon abstinences for the purpose of prayer, after which are commanded to resume relations (1 Cor. 7: 1-5).

Many social scientists have noted the extent to which *evangélicos* depend on Paul's letters for guidance in everyday matters. Some have noted that Paul's emphasis on mutual love and respect between marital partners is responsible for the particularly "modern" flavor of Pentecostal discourse on marriage (cf. Smilde 1997, 2007). Whatever the reason, Pentecostal discourse on marriage emphasizes mutual pleasure and joy in marriage. Even if the Vatican has begun to emphasize what it calls "the unitive" aspect of marital sexuality as equally important (see Hastings 1991b: 63 for a review of this shift), most Latin American Catholics continue to associate Catholicism with the traditional standard of marital sex—sex for procreation and nothing besides.

This last fact binds Pentecostal men more firmly to the house and to the “modern” family. Where Latin American men generally have to go to the public, male-dominated sphere for respect and for pleasure, *evangélicos* find these at home.

ABORTION – Limits to the Homology

Before analyzing the (in)applicability of the homology Catholic:evangelical:: traditional:modern to abortion, a review of the magnitude of abortion in Latin America is in order, so that the reader understand that (a) I have not made a mountain out of a molehill—our detour into this form of reproductive management is factually worthwhile, given the magnitude of this phenomenon and its essential difference from the practice in “the West,” and (b) abortion and contraception are related in ways not limited to our analysis.

Over four million medically induced abortions take place each year in Latin America (Sedgh et al. 2007).²² As mentioned above, the women who undergo this procedure are much like those who most frequently seek out contraception: three-quarters of the total are the married mothers of three or more children seeking to limit family size. This pattern is similar to most Asian countries but mirror image of the pattern in the “West” (North America and Western Europe) and sub-Saharan Africa, where

²² In 1995, this *annual rate of abortion* for Latin America as a whole was 36.7 abortions (per 1,000 women aged 15-49). For comparison, the figures are lower in Northern America (22.1) and Western Europe (10.6); higher in Eastern Europe (89.6); and equivalent in Asia (33.3) and Africa (32.7). However, the *annual ratios of abortions* in 1995, the measure of how many pregnancies in 100 end in abortion, were 27.1 in Latin America. Latin America ratio is more similar to North America (25.5) and Asia (25.2); higher than Western Europe (9.2) and Africa (14.8); and lower than Eastern Europe (64.8). Central America, where my research interests lie, has rates and ratios of abortion lower than Latin America as a whole: 30.3 and 20.9, respectively. (World Health Organization 1998).

approximately three-quarters of the total are unmarried, childless women seeking to postpone childrearing (Singh, Henshaw, and Berensten 2003).

In all Latin America, only Cuban law provides liberal access to abortion. Almost all abortions which take place in Latin America take place illegally or extralegally; the lack of regulation and legal protection for women undergoing this procedure (and the procedure's physical distance from a hospital where complications can be quickly addressed) results in exceptionally high levels of maternal mortality due to abortion: one-quarter to one-third of maternal mortality in Latin America is attributed to complications resulting from abortion (Singh, Henshaw, and Berensten 2003; Singh and Wulf 1996). Since these women are, in the majority of cases, mothers of several children, the human costs of non-legal abortion in Latin America are diffuse and difficult to measure.

Finally, though abortion in Latin America is different from the West, contraception appears to bridge some of the difference. Hormonal contraception is more readily available in Latin America than anywhere else in the developing world, at levels comparable to North America and Western Europe (Ross et al 2002). At current levels, three-quarters of women "in union" aged 15-49 use contraception in a given year.²³ Furthermore, statistical analysis of contraception and abortion in urban Latin America suggests that a rise in contraceptive use may actually *cause* a drop in abortion rates; the demonstration of this relationship in North America and Western Europe suggests that abortion and contraception may exist in a "modernization" complex that affects reproduction cross-culturally.

²³ "In union" includes the legally married and those women who have regular economic and sexual relations with a man. For comparison, the contraceptive prevalence of Latin America is higher than sub-Saharan Africa (23%), the Middle East/North Africa (54), South Asia (48), and Eastern Europe (66); comparable to industrialized countries (78); and lower than East Asia and the Pacific (84) (UNDP 2001).

However, the fact that, quite the opposite of their Western counterparts, Latin American users of birth control and induced abortion are married mothers of several children suggests that we must look to the cultural contexts in which reproductive management occurs. To do so, we turn once more to our homology.

In previous sections we saw that working through the homology Catholic: evangelical::traditional:modern allows us to see Latin America *evangelicalismo* as a viable alternative to traditionally-practiced Catholicism for those strongly attracted to combining a Western idea of modernity with a Christian belief system.²⁴ In the West Protestantism may be associated with modernity and Catholicism with tradition since the Reformation (cf. Keane 2007; Weber 2002[1930]); however, as mentioned, the homology was entrenched during the nineteenth-century Liberal-Conservative wars as Latin Americans warred over competing visions of economic, governmental, and religious organization (Freston 2001: part 4; Martin 1990: chs. 1, 2; Stoll 1990: ch. 2; Willems 1967: pt. 1). As Latin America experiences the explosion of home-grown *evangelicalismo*, this homology is drawn upon once again to deal with issues of modernity and religion.

Though the oppositions involved in the homology Catholic:evangelical::traditional:modern seem to apply to contraception, attempts to apply them to abortion result in two conclusions. First, the homology implies that Christianity is neither modern nor traditional—only *types* of Christianity can be understood this way. A very different homology must be employed to understand Christianity as non-modern; and Latin

²⁴ Though this paper does not focus on demographic qualities of these individuals, many authors have written about evangelical Protestantism's special attraction for the popular classes in Latin American, who have traditionally been both intensely religious and disregarded by the Catholic hierarchy. Cf. Willems 1967: 38-45.

American proponents of such an idea (such as hard-line Marxists) have made little headway with most Latin Americans. “Successful” Marxists (in Nicaragua or contemporary Venezuela, for example) have had to abandon their hostility to religion and work with Catholics and evangelicals (cf. Freston 2001: ch. 26; Stoll 1990: ch. 8).

Second, the contemporary evangelical-Catholic consensus in rejecting abortion²⁵ prevents the homology from rendering abortion either modern or traditional. Instead, since both forms of Christianity oppose abortion, many Latin Americans understand the issue of abortion to divide along Christian/non-Christian, God-fearing/Godless, or even religious/secular lines. Considering abortion outside the lens of religion, two additional, related factors rob abortion of the allure of modernity. First, almost all of the 4.2 medically induced abortions in Latin America are conducted secretly in illegal or extralegal conditions. (Efforts being made to liberalize abortion laws mostly occur at very high levels of discourse which do not generally involve most Latin Americans. [See

²⁵ This contemporary consensus among Christians has not always been the case. To portray contemporary stances on abortion or contraception as somehow “obvious” and inherent to the basic doctrines of Protestantism and Catholicism is to commit the academic sins of ahistoricism and essentialism. (See Harding 2007: ch. 7 for an excellent review of the emergence of the contemporary Protestant consensus over abortion in the 1960s and 1970s.)

Quite recently, some Protestants and Catholics are beginning to view contraception as akin to abortion, since in the rare event that hormonal birth control does not prevent ovulation it can prevent uterine implantation of a fertilized egg in the fallopian tubes (cf. Shorto 2006; Tennant 2007).

Historically (and especially prior to the twentieth century), most major Protestant figures have opposed *any* means of preventing pregnancy; like contemporary Catholics, they argued that contraception interferes with God’s design by divorcing sexuality from reproduction. Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley all condemned *coitus interruptus* as violating the “order of nature” (to quote the first), just as the Vatican did (and currently does) (Carr 2004, citing Provan 1989; Paul VI 1968: 14).

Opponents of contemporary Christian views equating abortion with murder point to thirteenth century views, held by Pope Innocent III and Thomas Aquinas, that ensoulment did not take place until “the quickening,” when the mother first felt the fetus move inside her. Supporters of the abortion-is-murder equation point out that, in 680 A.D., the Sixth Ecumenical Council declared that a procurer of abortion should suffer the same punishments for murder. Still others quarrel over the applicability of scripture to the dilemma have erupted, and so on. These theological arguments are only the subject matter of this paper inasmuch as they are cited by ordinary Latin Americans in explaining their adherence to or departure from evangelical and Catholic discourses on abortion and contraception (which is to say, hardly at all).

Rahman, Katzive and Henshaw 2003; Thein 1975: 112, 162; Sedgh, Henshaw, Singh, Ahman, and Shah 2007]) Second, herbal abortifacents and other traditional methods of abortion have a long and well-known history in much of Latin America, providing an additional hurdle to associating the practice with modernization (cf. Pick et al. 2003).

Applying our homology to abortion thus reveals a limit the homology's application to reproductive management. Synthesizing the conclusions from this application, it appears that most Latin Americans, particularly those who make use of reproductive management which their religion forbids, must approach modernity with a notion of Christianity that does not rest entirely on doctrine. In our final section, we explore how Latin Americans, especially Catholics, might maintain their religious identities in an "imaginative" rather than literalist manner, relying on the historical development of a Latin American religious *habitus*.

UP A SYCAMORE TREE²⁶:

Christianity and Reproductive Management in Latin America

During the summer of 1993, Pope John Paul II traveled Denver, Colorado for the eighth International Youth Day in the summer of 1993. Though his homily “A Celebration of Life” railed against what he called the “culture of death” (including euthanasia, contraception and abortion), the Pope expressed great hope in the hundreds of thousands of youths gathered there: “I am confident that you have grasped the scale of the challenge that lies before you and that you will have the wisdom and courage to meet that challenge” (John Paul II 1993: 3, 2).

Harvey Cox (1995: 306-307) was therefore puzzled when most of the young people interviewed after the event appeared truly ignorant of John Paul II’s teachings, unable to name any of his encyclicals; they simply shrugged and politely disagreed when quizzed about his opposition to contraception. For all the time and energy the Pope had invested in emphasizing basic doctrine, for all the speech’s exhortations to recognize the evil in contravening divine law, the young people there appeared to be excited by something else altogether. That something, Cox argues, is a Durkheimian effervescence emerging out of the familiar yet otherworldly ritual, pageantry and metaphor that the Catholic Church wields masterfully.

Dillon (1999) and Greeley (1977; 1985; 1990; 2004) would agree. Catholicism, they empirically demonstrate, is far more important to its adherents (and indeed, to many of its priests) as a set of practices, rites, and metaphors than as a set of doctrines and

²⁶ Luke 19:1-10.

interpretations handed down by the church hierarchy. For many Catholics, the presence of God in the sacraments, a concern for (and the presence of God in) the poor, and a devotion to maternal image of Mary are twice as important as any belief about abortion, contraception, or even the penalty (cf. Hoge et al. 2001: 201, cited in Greeley 2004:112). Images, materiality, relationships, and the pervasive presence of God trump doctrine, and allow an individual to maintain his/her Catholic identity in spite of their divergence with the hierarchy on certain doctrinal matters.

On the one hand, Catholicism provides believers with a rich collection of metaphors and images which are highly plastic and manipulable with regard to meanings; on the other, Magisterium periodically reinstates its singular prerogative to determine official doctrine (cf. Paul VI 1986: I), to be recognized as the “transmitter of divinely willed meanings” of these images and metaphors (Dillon 1999:10). As I demonstrated above, the Magisterium takes this latter step because the Catholic worldview is not the evangelical one in which the world is lost to Satan. For Catholics, material reality is permeated with divinity and divine agency; “God is hiding everywhere” (Greeley 2004: 108). Papal infallibility and communication through encyclicals are meant to guide the believing Catholic through this world much as the belief in Biblical inerrancy is supposed to guide the evangelical through the minefield of spiritual warfare.

Popular Catholic shrines and artifacts litter the Latin American religious landscape, substantiating the Vatican’s fear that dogma and hierarchical oversight must prevail over this assemblage of metaphors and images. Far more injurious to the Vatican’s authority on sexual and reproductive matters, however, is the inclination of many Catholics to simply, subversively find common ground with the hierarchy—on the

presence of God in the sacraments, Marian devotion, and the divine elevation of and presence in the poor—and disregard the doctrinal elaborations and exhortations that the Rome regularly produces. For those Catholics who do feel guilty over their proscribed use of contraception but find other options unsatisfying, Greeley (2004: chs. 3, 10) finds that the overwhelming majority of American priests are willing to absolve these parishioners anyway, in direct insubordination to the Vatican. While evidence exists that Latin American Catholics are considerably more orthodox than Catholics worldwide (Greeley 2004: ch. 8), this orthodoxy does not seem to translate into orthopraxy with regard to contraception, which is used as prevalently in largely Catholic Latin America as in industrialized countries.

Just how freely are Latin American Catholics deviating from the Vatican’s version of Catholicism? There is no single answer to this, both because Latin American Catholics are hardly a homogenous group and because the question implies no way to measure deviation. Concerned as we are with sexual and reproductive matters, Latin America Catholics appear, like most Catholics worldwide, to be deviating quite a lot. This deviation might combine the global tendency of Catholics to “own” their religious imagination quite independently from Church proclamations (Dillon 1999; Greeley 1977; 1985; 1990; 2004) with a Catholic *habitus*²⁷ particular to Latin Americans: having been historically “underchurched” by the Vatican (cf. Smith 1998: ch.1; Steigenga 2001: ch.1), which considered Latin America “won” for the True Church, most literature on Latin American religiosity suggests that religious imagery has been deployed heavily for personal ends but that oversight from the Church hierarchy was largely absent.

²⁷ See the Introduction and especially footnote 4 for my use of this term.

Cox (1995: 304-305) accepts the interpretation of Danièle Hervieu-Léger, a Durkheimian scholar of religion, who insists that at present individuals across the globe are using religions “not as prepackaged answers to their quests, but as... ‘tool-boxes’ ...depositories from which they can freely draw the symbolic sustenance they need to make sense of their lives.” Greeley (2004: 107) argues that Catholics are precisely this instrumental when they reject the Vatican’s teaching on birth control yet remain strong in (and sometimes, perhaps compensatorily, strengthen) their Catholic identity: “We Catholics grab our metaphors where we can find them and twist them to our use whenever we can.” Dillon (1999: 14) even finds that arguments for doctrinal change are often made using Catholic metaphors and “symbolic resources” to oppose Vatican policy.

More importantly, this struggle over meaning is not unique to Catholicism: Hervieu-Léger was analyzing a black Pentecostal church in the United States when she offered Cox her “tool-box” analysis. Among *evangélicos* in Latin America, most scholars note the growing preponderance of what Cox calls “experientialist,” Pentecostal Christianity (cf. Freston 2001: 194; Martin 1990: 54; Smilde 1997), often accused by more fundamentalist *evangélicos* of being soft on doctrine (cf. Stoll 1990: 49-51). Although sometimes differential emphases on doctrine leads to individuals leaving or switching churches (Burdick 1993: ch. 5), Stoll (1990:49-51) notes that many times, differences in emphasis are glossed over and do not threaten religious identity. Steigenga (2001) empirically demonstrates that as Pentecostalized Christianity finds its footing in parts of Latin America as distinct as Costa Rica and Guatemala, Pentecostal practices permeate the religious lives of Catholics and mainline Protestants alike without threatening religious identities.

Thus, we conclude that religious identities are considerably more flexible than a wholly doctrinal definition of religious identity would suggest. An historically developed religious *habitus* distinct to Latin America may incline believers, especially Catholics, to adopt a particularly flexible relationship with religious doctrine. We await empirical research on the gap between religious doctrine and practice to bear out this conclusion.

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