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Popular Religion and Festivals

The introduction of Roman Catholicism to the New World was part of the colonizing policy of both the Spanish and the Portuguese, but on Latin American soil Christian beliefs and practices came into contact with those of the native Amerindian peoples, and later with those brought by enslaved Africans and their descendants. Latin American Catholicism has consequently absorbed elements of pre-Columbian religious beliefs and practices, giving rise to what is known as “popular” or “folk” Catholicism. Popular Catholicism has blended elements of different religions, yet it is still a recognizable mutation of traditional Roman Catholicism. In Mexico, for example, Catholic saints are matched up with pre-Columbian deities, as are Christian festivals with indigenous ones. Similarly, popular religion in the Andean countries must be understood in its historical and cultural context, since it is heavily influenced by the experience of conquest and the persistence of indigenous beliefs under a Christian guise.

In recent years, Catholicism in Latin America has also become synonymous with Liberation Theology, with its commitment to social change and improvement of the lot of marginal sectors. This radical theology was announced at Medellín, Colombia, in 1968 with a formal declaration of the Church’s identification with the poor. The doctrine’s complexity and diversity make it difficult to define, but the influence of Marxism is apparent, along with that of pioneering social reformers and educators such as the Brazilian Paulo Freire. Liberation Theology’s most famous advocate is the Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutiérrez, whose humble origins sharpened his awareness of social problems. Gutiérrez was responsible for setting up the Bartolomé de las Casas center for theological research, named after another famous reforming churchman and situated in one of Lima’s poorest districts. Liberation Theology essentially holds that salvation can occur in this life, and that it is not God’s will that people suffer while awaiting redemption in the hereafter.

More recently Latin America has been marked by the growth of New Protestantism. Among the theories attempting to explain why Latin Americans are willing to abandon their traditional Catholicism (not just

official Roman Catholicism, but more often popular Catholicism) in favor of evangelical churches is the notion that Protestantism and indigenous religions are similar. For example, both Protestantism, particularly Pentecostalism, and indigenous Mesoamerican religions allow for the possibility of direct communion with God and/or “possession” by spirits—in contrast to the more mediated versions of communion advocated by the Catholic Church.

The religious and mythological landscape of Latin America is undeniably rich. In Brazil and Cuba, African slaves forced to worship the Christian God and the saints preserved their own belief systems by drawing direct associations between Catholic icons and their own deities. This practice gave rise to *Candomblé* in Brazil and *Santería* in Cuba, both of which are sometimes referred to as syncretic religions. Religious faiths such as *Bahá'í*, and *Santo Daime* and *Umbanda* in Brazil, today continue to appeal to large numbers of people, who are drawn to the alternative approach and perspectives on life that they offer. Alongside organized religions, both within and outside the mainstream, many of the region's poorer inhabitants also maintain strong beliefs in pagan rituals, particularly those linked to healing. All strata of society unite annually to celebrate local and national festivals, such as Carnival in the run-up to Lent—particularly important in Brazil—and the Day of the Dead in Mexico.

—*Lisa Shaw and Thea Pitman*

Popular Catholicism

Mexico and Central America

A number of factors have affected the emergence of popular Catholicism in Mex-

ico and Central America over the five centuries since the Conquest. These include, on the one hand, a substantial number of similarities between the pre-Columbian religions of Mesoamerica and Catholicism (similar symbols and concepts, parallels between gods and saints, and the existence of similar social structures based on hierarchy and wealth redistribution), and the willingness of the early missionaries to accept the use of such “metaphors” from the old religions to help indigenous peoples assimilate Catholic doctrine. On the other hand, a tradition of accepting the gods of conquering civilizations already existed in pre-Columbian society, along with a willingness to accept conversion to Christianity in exchange for some protection by the Church from the states that governed indigenous groups, and some respect for the latter's traditional self-image. The syncretic nature of the religious practices of these new converts did not go unnoticed or unpunished by the guardians of the faith, but by then the existence of popular Catholicism was a *fait accompli*.

In more recent times, it has become evident that popular Catholicism is also the preserve of women, both indigenous and white. Whereas the Catholic Church itself is very much a male-dominated institution, Mexican and Central American women have taken an active role in the more private world of popular Catholicism—in the imparting of beliefs and practices from one generation to the next, and in the veneration of saints on altars in their own homes, for example. Mexican women in particular have also found strength and identity in the role model that is the Virgin of Guadalupe, the *mestiza* (brown or mixed-race) virgin who is a popular Mexican adaptation of the Virgin Mary.

Contemporary popular Catholicism is most easily identified by a number of practices: dependency on a complex network of social support known as *compadrazgo* (kinship relations defined by the choice of godparents for different events in a person's life), the veneration of often uncanonized *santos* (saints) with a consequent lessening of emphasis on God, and the expression of such veneration in many annual *fiestas* (processions and dramatizations of biblical stories and historical events), in the construction of altars in private homes and on street corners, and in the painting of *retablos* (votive offerings) to thank saints for their help in times of need. To outsiders, the practices of popular Catholicism seem colorful and entertaining, and they constitute a substantial tourist attraction across the region. In recent years, the pre-Columbian elements of popular Catholic practices have been emphasized to lend weight to the reevaluation of the pre-Columbian contribution to Mexican and Central American cultures. This shift in emphasis is also highly attractive to tourists.

—*Thea Pitman*

See also: *Cultural Icons: Religious and Mythical Figures* (Virgin of Guadalupe); *Popular Religion and Festivals: Indigenous Religious and Cultural Practices* (Guatemala; Mexico); *New Protestantism* (Mexico and Central America); *Popular Festivals* (Mexico); *Popular Medicine and Healing* (Mexico and Central America); *Visual Arts and Architecture: Art* (Religious Folk Art)

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The Andean Countries

The relationship between the Church and the lower classes in the Andean countries has always been contradictory, if not paradoxical—the result of a Spanish tradition of anticlericalism apparent even among the devout. Even as early as the sixteenth century, faith in God and contempt for ecclesiastical authorities were not mutually exclusive. Moreover, as Jeffrey Klaiber has shown in the Peruvian context, cleric support for despotic regimes has not always precluded popular support for the Church, even at times of popular rebellion. It is almost inconceivable that even the most extremist rebellion should include the kind of violent anticlerical retribution seen, for example, in the Spanish Civil War. Klaiber sees the Catholic faith as the only element shared by all social classes and ethnic groups in the Andes. An explanation for this unifying role can be found in the transcultural nature of Andean religiosity and in the reconciliatory movements within liberal sectors of the Church.

The expression of the integration of Christianity into indigenous belief systems can be clearly seen in colonial churches throughout the Andes and elsewhere in

Latin America, decorated largely by indigenous hands and according to native aesthetics. The Catholic Church during the colonial era learned the pragmatic value of tolerance and the incorporation of potentially troublesome popular movements. This sort of pragmatism is visible also in the absorption of native festivals into the Christian calendar, and more recently in the acceptance of unofficial saints, elevated to this status by popular belief. An example of this phenomenon is Sarita Colonia, a girl from the Andean town of Huaráz who migrated to Lima, where she died in 1926. Several miracles are attributed to Sarita, who is believed to be the patron saint of the urban migrants. Saints can also be created to placate marginal social sectors: this was arguably the case with another Peruvian, the black saint Martín de Porras, who was canonized in 1962 with the title Patron of Interracial and Social Justice. Other important figures in popular Andean religiosity are the Virgins that have appeared throughout the region, such as the Virgen del Agua Santa (Virgin of the Holy Waters) in Baños, Ecuador. One of many reputedly miraculous Christian apparitions in pre-Columbian sacred sites, the Virgin is credited with having saved many lives, is the object of pilgrimage, and is habitually showered with gifts.

—Keith Richards

See also: *Popular Religion and Festivals:*

Indigenous Religious and Cultural Practices (The Andean Countries); Popular Medicine and Healing (The Andean Countries)

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Venezuela

Popular Catholicism in Venezuela is intrinsically linked to Liberation Theology, a doctrine that conceives of action vital to the promotion of social justice and sees the everyday experience of the people as a source of valid religious values. In Venezuela, from the late 1950s onward, a growing interest developed within the official Catholic Church in working with popular sectors of society. Small, independent groups of clergy and activists set up a number of initiatives directed at the poor.

Though these movements had only limited impact in Venezuela, they paved the way for important pastoral work and offered free schooling or training, among other activities. By the late 1960s, as Levine notes, some religious congregations began to articulate a “liberationist position,” and members went to “live with the people,” got involved in barrio or community organizations, and came face-to-face with poverty and inequality.

Similar groups sprang up around the country. Not all of these groups survived, but two important initiatives from this period have not only lasted, but have played a major role in popular religion in Venezuela. The first of these is the Centro Gumilla, a Jesuit center for research and social action that was founded in 1969; it has two bases,

one in Caracas, the other in Barquisimeto. The center produces a wide range of publications directed at the working class and rural poor, including a pamphlet series that has essays on such topics as educational reform, agriculture, Liberation Theology, and contemporary reworkings of Bible stories. These publications reveal a profound respect for popular culture and link religion with the experiences of real social groups.

The second initiative, CESAP (Centro al Servicio de la Acción Popular or Center for Popular Action), was founded in 1974 and offers courses to popular organizations. Each of its three regional centers runs courses, operates a lending library service, and runs a series of outreach programs on topics such as nutrition and literacy. Again, this center produces numerous pamphlets for group discussion and grassroots participation, and its stated goal is replacing capitalism with a just, participatory, and classless society.

Alongside these two important centers are a variety of popular religious organizations throughout Venezuela. There are differences among the forms of popular Catholicism in Venezuela, but there are common features as well, such as the emphasis on Bible study in which the local people are seen as active interpreters of biblical texts, and the importance of collective action. In this way, these and similar religious groups within Venezuela can be defined as “popular Catholicism” in that they attempt to return the Church to the people and to start out from the beliefs and experiences of the masses.

—*Claire Taylor*

See also: *Popular Religion and Festivals:*
New Protestantism (Venezuela)

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Brazil

Within popular Catholicism in Brazil, homegrown saints are particularly important. The country has also witnessed the emergence of many millenarian cults, the most famous of which was that led by the ragged lay preacher Antônio Conselheiro (“the Counselor”), who settled thousands of his followers on an abandoned ranch called Canudos in 1893. Having refused to recognize the rule of the new Republican government established in 1889, the community was eventually brutally wiped out by the federal army. More recently, popular Catholicism has become closely interwoven with Liberation Theology (as is popular Catholicism in Venezuela and other parts of the subcontinent). In Brazil this radical doctrine became closely identified with the Franciscan Leonardo Boff, and Dom Paulo Evaristo Arns, the bishop of São Paulo archdiocese during the violent years of the military dictatorship established in 1964. Their evangelical concept was to allow people to liberate themselves from the socioeconomic injustices at the root of Brazilian society as part of a general liberation from sin.

In the state of Bahia the people show their devotion to the patron saint of the state, Nosso Senhor do Bonfim (Our Lord

of the Good End), a manifestation of Jesus. The basilica that takes his name is situated on a hill overlooking the city of Salvador and facing the sea. People flock there from miles around to seek cures for their ills. Street vendors outside sell wristbands, narrow colored ribbons that bear the saint's name, as talismans to bring good luck. It is believed that he will grant three wishes during the three-time knotting of the ribbon, provided that the person making the wishes wears it until it drops off. A ritual cleansing of the church's steps takes place every year, a popular Catholic festival that is traditionally held on the Thursday before the third Sunday in January. This popular religious outpouring is given the tacit acquiescence of the Catholic Church, whose resident priest schedules a nine-day series of masses (*novenas*) during this period. Followers of *Candomblé* and *Umbanda* also participate in this street festival.

The national shrine of Nossa Senhora da Aparecida (Our Lady of Aparecida) is located two hours away by bus from the city of São Paulo. The construction of the present-day shrine, on the site of an earlier chapel, was begun in 1940 and only finished in 1990. According to legend, in the eighteenth century a group of fishermen, about to return home with only a few fish after an unsuccessful trip, found a wooden statue in the image of the *senhora* in their nets, whereupon they obtained a more abundant catch than ever before. With the permission of the Church they then built a small chapel to enshrine this statue of Our Lady of Aparecida. The fact that the image is black suggests that the poor were appropriating in their own way the devotion to the Immaculate Conception then being promoted in the Iberian Peninsula. An estimated six million Brazilians visit this shrine every year.

In the arid and poor northeast, several major religious figures have emerged on the margins of the Catholic Church, such as Padre (Father) Cícero, who opposed the transition of Brazil from monarchy to republic at the end of the nineteenth century. He remains the focus of pilgrimage even today, as depicted in Walter Salles's award-winning movie, *Central Station* (1998). Padre Cícero's image can still be seen in many of the homes of the poor in the northeast.

Liberation theologians introduced a system of "base community" pastoral work into the Catholic Church in the 1960s, for example in the shantytowns (*favelas*) of Brazil's big cities. In the heyday of these base communities, at the end of the 1970s, it appeared as if a new Church were being born, with an emphasis on lay leadership and consciousness-raising. In São Paulo, for example, the base communities were part of the so-called Operation Periphery. This program, launched by Archbishop Arns and his collaborators, sent people and resources to the poor outskirts of the city where new neighborhoods were being erected. Priests and nuns helped these communities with practical issues and encouraged them to make their own decisions, including interpretations of the Bible based on their own life experiences.

The progressive Catholic Church in Brazil in the 1980s showed considerable courage in defending the lives and cultures of indigenous communities and the rural and urban poor against both the state and powerful groups who were prepared to use extreme violence to protect their vested interests.

But Church leaders in Rome, and even in some parts of Brazil, watched the Liberation Theology movement with growing alarm. For them it represented a trend



T-shirts featuring an image of Padre Cícero are sold in Juazeiro do Norte, the town that the priest founded in the 1920s. (Stephanie Maze/Corbis)

away from Church orthodoxy toward a materiality considered inappropriate. As bishops have retired or left the Church in Brazil and in other Latin American countries, Pope John Paul II, in office since 1978, has replaced them with orthodox clergy who do not espouse the ideals of social reform or Marxist economic analysis. Although the movement was thus brought to a halt, it did not fail. Hundreds of people who were schooled in its ideologies have gone on to advocate a range of socially just causes.

—Lisa Shaw

See also: *Popular Social Movements and Politics:* Base Communities in Brazil; *Popular Cinema:* The Brazilian Film Industry (Box-Office Successes and Contemporary Film in Brazil); *Popular Religion and Festivals:* Candomblé; New Protestantism (Brazil); Popular Catholicism (Venezuela); Popular Medicine and Healing (Brazil); *Umbanda;* *Visual Arts and Architecture:* Architecture and Landscape Design (*Favelas*)

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Santería

One of many religions of the African diaspora in Latin America brought across the Atlantic with the slave trade, all of which combine elements of African worship with the Catholic faith. *Santería*, although best known in its Cuban manifestation, also exists under the same name in Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and Mexico. A similar phenomenon in Haiti and the southern United States is the unjustly demonized vaudun, or voodoo. Brazil has its *Candomblé*, Uruguay its *Candombe*, and Trinidad its *orisha*. The common feature of all these religions is their preservation of beliefs deriving mostly from the Central West African Yoruba culture that continues to exist in present-day Nigeria, Congo, and Benin.

When they were brought to the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the New World, slaves were transported in groups that generally remained more or less intact after arrival, a policy that permitted them to retain elements of the African cultures they left behind. In contrast, the British colonies separated slaves who might have language or customs in common, thus systematically erasing cultural roots in order to better acculturate and control them. The result of the Iberian approach is a visible continuation of African cultural and religious practices in Latin America, a phenomenon rarely seen in North America or the British Caribbean.

Santería was not brought to Cuba in a single demographic wave; the first consignments of slaves arrived in the mid-sixteenth century, and the height of the slave trade occurred more than two centuries later, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This continual wave of forced migration from Africa allowed Afro-Cuban

cultural practices to maintain a relationship to the mother continent while evolving into something specific to the island.

In *Santería* and similar religions, African and European elements coexist, originating in the religious instruction with which colonial masters were supposed to “repay” those they had displaced and dispossessed. However, Africans, like indigenous peoples in the Americas, were wary of discarding their religious heritage and unreservedly adopting Christianity. They needed to preserve their own spiritual traditions and appease their ancestral gods as well as the Christian deity, while maintaining the appearance of obedience to their masters. They fulfilled this need through dual worship: the African pantheon, multiple and multifaceted, was paralleled with the Christian system of saints. Thus each Yoruba deity, known as an *orisha*, would be “paired” with the saint who most closely resembled his or her physical attributes, spheres of influence, or preoccupations. This phenomenon is often described with the contentious term “syncretism” but can also be seen as a simultaneous and parallel observance of discrete cultural codes.

The *Santería* system, also known in Cuba as *La Regla de Ocha* or Rule of Ocha, is not merely a duplicitous practice aimed at hoodwinking religious authority. Nor is it simply a product of the trauma or cultural crisis created by the experience of slavery. The identification of *orishas* with saints does reveal certain similarities between African and European worship, since the *Santería* figures have spheres of influence similar to the Christian ones. For Fernando Ortiz, the original scholar of Afro-Cuban culture, the complexity and richness of Yoruba mythology are comparable to those of ancient Greece. Ortiz



A Cuban worshipper weeps over the icon of St. Lazarus, who is both a Catholic saint and an important deity in the Afro-Cuban religion *Santería*. (Reuters/Corbis)

coined the crucial term “transculturation” to describe the interaction and reciprocal influence between cultures, irrespective of political and social power. *Santería* is a prime example of this phenomenon.

The Yoruba creator god Olodumare is the almighty in the *Santería* pantheon, from whom *aché* or cosmic energy originates. The *orishas* are his emissaries, and their exploits, strengths, and frailties parallel the human world, as did those of the Greek gods. Moreover, the divine and mortal worlds are linked by the figure of Elegguá, the messenger and intermediary who opens paths, and the prankster who teaches moral lessons with levity. Identi-

fied with St. Anthony as his Catholic manifestation, Elegguá is the figure evoked first in all ceremonies, as he alone permits communication. Yemayá, the archetypal maternal figure who controls the sea and the moon, is the figure most closely identified with women’s lives and exclusively female concerns. Like all the *orishas*, she is an ambivalent figure with moods just like those of human beings: she nurtures but can also be implacable and merciless when riled. She is paired with Our Lady of Regla, patron saint of the port of Havana. Several of the *orishas* are of indeterminate gender and may change sex according to circumstance. Changó, one of the fundamental *or-*

ishas, is identified with a female saint (Barbara) despite his association with traditionally masculine roles as a warrior, drinker, womanizer, and daredevil. His brother Oggún (St. Peter), still worshipped widely in West Africa, represents telluric energy and governs all activities involving the use of iron. Another androgynous god, Obbatalá (Our Lady of Mercy), represents truth, peace, and justice. The severe female god Oyá (St. Teresa) reigns over death, wind, and lightning, and cares for the dead. She is closely associated with Changó, who occasionally disguises himself as Oyá. Ochún (Our Lady of Charity) is the counterpart of Changó, displaying all the characteristics considered essentially feminine.

There are now some thirty *orishas* in Cuban *Santería*, pared down from the original Yoruba pantheon, which numbered hundreds of deities. Others have arisen from non-Yoruba sources, including Bantu culture and Catholicism. All are considered ancestors who have become divine, indicating the fundamental role of family and lineage in *Santería*.

Music and dance are crucial elements of *Santería* worship, facilitating the evocation of *orishas* and their possession of worshippers. Drumming sessions, known as *bembe* in the Lucumi language, are held to evoke an *orisha* with his or her own particular rhythms. The possessed are familiar with the deity's habits and are able involuntarily to reproduce them. The sacred *batá* drum, brought out only in sunlight, is indispensable to these rituals. The other musical element is singing, particularly by the *akpwon*, who knows the prayers for all the *orishas* and is able to lead a session of followers. There is a close link among musicians, dancers, and the lead singer, who are conceived of as a

whole and whose contributions combine as one single expression.

Another important part of *Santería* practice is divination, performed either with *obi* (coconuts split into four parts), by means of seashells in a system known as *diloggún*, or using a complex set of configurations called the *Tablero de Ifá*. The *babalaos* or *santeros*, high priests who originally introduced these systems, are the prominent figures in the divination process. Central figures in the *Santería* hierarchy, they oversee all other ceremonies and initiations. Sacrifice or propitiation (*ebó*) is also essential, and each *orisha* has preferred foods or animal sacrifices. There are also colors associated with each one, seen in the necklaces or *elekes* worn by followers.

The fact that it has survived discrimination and occasional persecution throughout Cuban history is a testament to its persuasive force. Today *Santería* has been accepted, though in diluted forms, even among the nation's white population. It is also evident in some of the mainstream culture emanating from the island: in the 1992 novel *Dreaming in Cuban* by the Cuban-American writer Cristina García, numerous white characters are influenced by a *santero's* advice and predictions. An example in music is the jazz pianist Omar Sosa's 2001 album *Sentir (Feeling)*, and in film, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Guantanamo* (1994). *Santería* is still practiced by new generations of Cubans. Although the original Yoruba elements are fading, the survival of this Afro-Cuban religion, and the music associated with it, appears assured.

—Keith Richards

See also: *Introduction; Popular Cinema: The Film Industry and Box-Office Successes in*

Cuba; *Popular Religion and Festivals: Candomblé*

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Candomblé

An Afro-Brazilian religion that originated among the slaves taken from the Dahomey and Yoruba regions of what is today southwest Nigeria, *Candomblé* first emerged as a religious practice in around 1830. Today it is practiced mainly in the city of Salvador in the state of Bahia. Its most important deity or god, known as an *orixá*, is Oxalá. This religion shares its origins with *Santería*, the Afro-Cuban religion.

Candomblé began as an expression of resistance to slavery. The African slaves brought to Brazil belonged to a variety of different religious belief systems, but their Portuguese masters forced them to convert to Christianity upon arrival in the colony. In order to preserve their beliefs, the slaves made associations between their own religious figures and icons and the Catholic God and saints that they were obliged to worship—or to seem to worship. This system of associations gave rise to what is often referred to polemically as a syncretic belief system that combines elements of Catholicism and African religious practices. Oxalá, for example, is considered to be the equivalent of the Christian God, and the sea goddess, Ie-



A statue of Iemanjá, the *Candomblé* and *Umbanda* deity who combines elements of both the Virgin Mary and a mermaid. (Courtesy of Alex Nield)

manjá (sometimes written Yemanjá), is directly associated with the Virgin Mary. The iconography of *Candomblé* today directly reflects this idea of syncretism or at least parallel association. The *orixá* Oxossi, for example, is associated with St. George and is depicted as a hunter connected with the forest. Iemanjá is depicted with both the face of the Virgin Mary and the body of a mermaid. Iansã (or Yansan) is syncretized with St. Barbara and associated with the color red.

Each *orixá* has his or her own special day (equivalent to the saints' days of Catholicism), on which he or she is honored and appeased. Each is associated with a particular color, symbol, song, dance, and type of food, all of which fea-

ture in the ceremony held on that day. Oxossi's preferred foods are boiled yellow corn mixed with coconut, yams, and black beans, and his color is turquoise blue. Iansã's favorite food is a fried cake of ground black-eyed peas (*acarajé*) and cooked okra cut into circles (*caruru*). Each follower of *Candomblé* has his or her own personal *orixá* who appears to him or her every week and to whom he or she must pay tribute on a weekly basis. Exú is the messenger of the *orixás*, the means of making contact with them. It is believed that he sometimes makes mischief and so must be appeased before the deities will come to earth. His favorite food is *farofa* (roast manioc flour) and a glass of water or *cachaça* (a kind of rum made from sugarcane).

The place of worship is called a *terreiro*, and the religious leaders are known as *pais-de-santo* or *mães-de-santo* (literally fathers or mothers of the saints). It is the *mães-de-santo* or priestesses who hold the positions of greater power and prestige. They are ordained in a ceremony that involves shaving their heads and smearing them with the blood of hens or goats. Chicken feathers are then stuck to their foreheads. This ceremony is accompanied by the beating of *atabaque* drums and chanting in African languages. The priestesses dance frenetically until the new *mãe-de-santo* falls into a trance. Spirit possession or a trancelike state is the crucial mechanism of *Candomblé*. In the public ceremonies, called *toques*, animals are often sacrificed (Iansã's preferred sacrifices, for example, are nanny goat, hen, and guinea fowl). Songs are sung in Nagô, the Yoruban language, from which terms are taken to describe the different hierarchical positions within this

religion. As each *orixá* or deity is honored in a ceremony, his followers (known as *filhas-* or *filhos-de-santo*, literally daughters or sons of the saints) fall into a trance as their particular *orixá* enters their body. When the followers are possessed by the spirit of the *orixá*, they retire, returning to the central area of the *terreiro* wearing the clothes and adornments associated with their deity.

Candomblé provides a closed, alternative society with its own hierarchy, and thus appeals to the marginalized poor, largely of mixed race. The priestesses preserve the oral history of the Afro-Brazilian community by reciting the names of their ancestors and those of other worshippers, and describing how their forebears were transported to Brazil in slave ships. This information is passed on to newly ordained priestesses to ensure that cultural memory is preserved.

—Lisa Shaw

See also: *Sport and Leisure: Food* (Brazilian Food); *Language: Brazilian Portuguese*; *Popular Religion and Festivals: Santería*

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Umbanda

A Brazilian religion that combines elements of European Spiritism (founded by Allan Kardec, 1804–1869) and Catholicism, together with Afro-Brazilian and Amerindian religious beliefs. It is sometimes referred to as *macumba*. Today people practice *Umbanda* to cure illnesses and solve personal problems. For this reason it has been called a form of psychotherapy for the poor. *Umbanda* emerged in the early twentieth century in urban Brazil and is often called the only truly Brazilian religion.

There are dozens of different sects of *Umbanda*, and each is independent within this religion. Followers meet in centers, each known as a *centro* (center), *tenda* (tent), *cabana* (hut), or *terreiro* (yard). Each center is associated with a particular saint, such as Caboclo (an Amerindian spirit) or Pai or Vovó (literally, father or granny, the spirits of African slaves). Caboclo is worshipped with candles, Pai likes cigars, and Vovó smokes a pipe (or at least the mediums who make contact with them do). The possession of mediums by the spirits is the central mechanism of *Umbanda*. The mediums use alcohol and tobacco to aid spirit possession. Followers believe in reincarnation and seek separation of the spirit from the body. *Umbanda* shares some of its terminology (although not always with the same meanings) and icons with *Candomblé*, such as Iemanjá, an amalgam of the Virgin Mary and a mermaid, and Oxalá. The good spirits are known as *orixás* and the evil spirits are called *exús*.

In the 1930s the processes of urbanization and industrialization were beginning to take hold in Brazil under the presidency of Getúlio Vargas (1930–1945). It was a

time of great social upheaval, particularly for former Afro-Brazilian slaves and their descendants, who after the abolition of slavery in 1888 moved en masse to the cities, particularly the then federal capital, Rio de Janeiro, in search of work. Finding a belief system of their own became very important for the marginalized and displaced Afro-Brazilians.

In the 1920s and 1930s, *Umbanda* was persecuted by the state, which feared gatherings of disenchanting Afro-Brazilians. It was only given official status in the 1940s, principally to attenuate any threat it posed for inciting racial tensions. The first *Umbanda* congress took place in 1941, and it is said that the religion took its name from the sacred Sanskrit word *Aum-Bandha*, meaning “the divine principle” or “the limit of the unlimited.”

—Lisa Shaw

See also: *Popular Religion and Festivals: Candomblé*

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Indigenous Religious and Cultural Practices

The Andean Countries

As in most areas of Latin America with a deeply rooted native culture and dense population, the Spanish colonizers were able to make only limited inroads into indigenous religion in the Andes. The

strength of belief in autochthonous deities was severely tested by the ravages of Conquest and disease in the early sixteenth century, but there followed in 1564 a movement known as *Taki Onqoy*, or “Dance of Sickness.” It invoked regional deities or *wakas* in challenging both the spiritual and political authority of the Europeans. *Taki Onqoy* aimed to end Spanish rule through a combination of ritual and direct action, by invoking the old gods and mobilizing them against the invader. Its eventual suppression was followed by the first campaigns to wipe out idolatry: these had only limited success but required the Spaniards to understand certain characteristics of the Andean religion they sought to replace.

The result of this shared experience, in which Andeans and Spaniards not only engaged in confrontation but were ultimately obliged to reach some consensus, is the kind of ritual in which both belief systems are honored simultaneously. Various seen as syncretic, transcultural, or hybrid, such rituals often take place in sites held sacred by indigenous tradition. The Catholic Church traditionally reports an apparition, at or near an indigenous holy site, of a Christian saint, the Virgin, or Christ himself, thus allowing the Church to influence, though by no means transform, the preexisting indigenous event held there.

A prime example of this phenomenon is *Qoyllur Rit'i* (“snow star” in Quechua), held annually at Sinakara in the Ocongate region of southern Peru near Cuzco. The site, some 4,700 meters above sea level and even now difficult to reach, is below the snowcapped peak of Ausangate, an *Apu* or object of ancestral worship. It is believed that, in the late eighteenth century, the infant Christ appeared to an indigenous boy and eventually left behind an image on a

stone. A church built to house this image is visited only during the festival, in early June. As Michael Sallnow has shown, the appearance of these “miraculous shrines” constituted a phase of consolidation in the imposition of Christianity and served to link the native worship of natural phenomena with the introduced Christian features and sacred elements. It is also likely that, as often occurred, the “miracle” came at an opportune moment. The great Andean rebellions of the 1780s (Tupac Amaru II in southern Peru and Tupac Katari in the La Paz region) had barely ended, the repression of indigenous culture had been institutionalized, and the reconciliation of the two religious systems might have been seen as politically expedient. The original nature and function of *Qoyllur Rit'i* is, however, still visible. It coincides with the rise of the Pleiades in the southern skies, a fine moment to propitiate deities able to influence harvests.

Visually, however, *Qoyllur Rit'i* is unmistakably an indigenous Andean festival: pilgrims arrive from villages in traditional dress as well as in guises assumed for the event itself, such as *chunchos* (Amazonian peoples) and *ukukus* (bears). The *ukukus*, always personified by young men, have a variety of roles. They police the event, mocking any miscreants in a Quechua delivered in falsetto. They also spend the night on the snowcap, in the morning bringing down the ice. This ice, which is considered sacred, is taken into Cuzco and shared amongst the faithful there. *Qoyllur Rit'i* is today a massive pilgrimage, constantly changing in nature according to the circumstances, and is adopted by white Peruvians as well as natives and those of mixed race, not to mention the increasing number of tourists. It

is a prime example of syncretic religious practices in the Andes.

—Keith Richards

See also: *Introduction; Language:* Indigenous Languages; *Popular Religion and Festivals:* Popular Catholicism (The Andean Countries); Popular Medicine and Healing (The Andean Countries)

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Mexico

The cultural and religious practices of the ancient civilizations of Mexico, in particular the Mexica (or Aztecs) and the Maya, are well documented. It is common knowledge, for example, that these peoples undertook vast civil engineering projects to construct ceremonial centers, some still visible today in the form of pyramids; that they had ideographic writing systems and recorded their own history; and that they had advanced knowledge of astronomy and mathematics (the Maya are credited with the invention of the concept of zero, or rather the "place-value" numerical system we use today). They were polytheistic (worshipped many gods); they believed in preprogrammed cyclical transformation

and renewal on a social and individual level, and hence viewed death as less of an end than a new beginning; they believed that all things, including rocks, were animate beings that had souls; and most, as has been widely reported, conducted sacrificial rituals that included the offering up of anything from corncocks to small children.

In the five centuries since the Conquest, despite decimation by war and disease, forced conversions to Christianity and Western cultural values, and the gradual process of *mestizaje* (racial mixing between Spaniards and indigenous peoples), there are still millions of indigenous people living in Mexico, divided into over thirty different ethnic groups defined by factors such as territory, culture, and language. Many indigenous people still do not speak Spanish fluently and many still continue religious practices that predate the Conquest. Nevertheless, almost all indigenous groups have, by now, been influenced by Catholicism, and indigenous cultural and religious practices are best perceived through the prism of the colonizers' culture and religion. In some Catholic churches, such as that in San Juan Chamula, Chiapas, all the pews have been removed, and the local Tzotziles kneel on pine needles strewn on the floor, light candles and incense, pray to their *santos*, sleep, eat, and drink. Today, they even use Coca-Cola to burp out evil spirits. Catholic priests are used only to provide the odd service; otherwise, the practices of these Tzotziles are almost entirely pre-Columbian in nature. The rituals and beliefs of faith healers (*curanderos*) are also infused with elements of Catholic iconography, but those forms of faith healing that aim to cure spiritual rather than physical ailments are perhaps where indigenous religion is at its purest.

Curanderos also tend to respect the traditional calendrical systems of the ancient civilizations and organize rituals to coincide with them.

Despite the gradual merging of cultures, many indigenous groups are making a concerted effort to preserve their cultural identity by recording their beliefs, their oral history, and their traditional ways of working (agricultural methods or patterns of weaving, for example). By working with institutions such as the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (National Indigenist Institute) they protect their right to be different; in extreme cases, such as the Zapatistas in Chiapas, they rise up in arms. A few groups have had less contact than others with Spanish culture (often because of the difficult access to their territories) and continue to live and work as their ancestors did. Such is the case of the Lacandón group in southern Chiapas. This very small group of people has never been Christianized and continues to practice essentially the religion of the ancient Maya.

—Thea Pitman

See also: *Introduction; Popular Social Movements and Politics: Zapatismo; Language: Indigenous Languages; Popular Religion and Festivals: Indigenous Religious and Cultural Practices (Guatemala); New Protestantism (Mexico and Central America); Popular Catholicism (Mexico and Central America); Popular Festivals (Mexico); Popular Medicine and Healing (Mexico and Central America); Visual Arts and Architecture: Art (Religious Folk Art)*

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Guatemala

Within Guatemala, a country where an estimated 56 percent of the population are *mestizo* (of mixed Amerindian and Spanish origin) and 44 percent are predominantly Amerindian, indigenous religions are widely practiced. Guatemala's Indians are the modern-day descendants of the great Mayan civilizations, and their communities are for the most part concentrated in the western highlands. However, what may be termed Guatemala's "indigenous community" is very diverse. At least twenty different Mayan languages are spoken, and the various communities range in size from some groups with fewer than 5,000 members to others with up to 80,000.

Until the mid-twentieth century many Mayan communities remained outside the scope of the Catholic Church in terms of religion. Instead, a dual system has arisen, whereby a local Catholic church exists alongside a parallel system of "shaman-diviners" outside the Church who help out the people with their concerns over crops, health, and personal problems.

As a whole, Mayan religious and cultural practices are centered on the principle of living in tune with nature and a spiritual connection to the land. A variety of rituals

are performed, the most important of which are those related to the sowing and cultivation of maize, rituals that have existed since the time of the ancient Maya. These rituals involve a night vigil before the day of sowing the seed and a ritual at the moment of harvest to thank the land for providing the crop. Other rituals include that of “house feeding,” a ceremony that takes place when a house has just been built. Friends, relatives, and other villagers are invited to a meal that is presided over by the *pasawink*, or elder of the village.

Interestingly, within these popular practices are frequent syncretic elements that combine indigenous traditions with the symbols of Catholicism. Siebers notes that the cross, for instance, is frequently used in indigenous communities during the ritual of the sowing of the maize, and that this has a dual meaning: on the one hand, the cross refers to the Christian cross and Christ’s death; on the other, it represents the concept of the four corners of the universe within Mayan belief, and also the spirit of the maize. In this way, the indigenous groups integrate different religious elements and practices into their lives and culture.

The percentage of Guatemalans who consider themselves followers of indigenous religion is very low: according to U.S. government statistics, only 1 percent of the population describe themselves as practitioners of traditional Mayan religions, with the majority describing themselves as Roman Catholics. However, many elements of Mayan religion have been incorporated into popular Catholicism within Guatemala. Wilson, who carried out extensive research with Mayas in the province of Alta Verapaz, found that the traditional Mayan rituals of fertility and healing are once again gaining

in popularity. He describes how this ethnic revivalist movement was led by Catholic lay activists, who encouraged a renovation of the “earth cult” in an attempt to create a new ethnic identity. In this way, just as popular indigenous practices contain elements of Christian symbolism, so too has the Catholicism practiced in Guatemala taken on a variety of elements from indigenous beliefs and rituals.

—Claire Taylor

See also: *Language:* Indigenous Languages; *Popular Religion and Festivals:* Popular Catholicism (Mexico and Central America); Popular Medicine and Healing (Mexico and Central America)

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Popular Medicine and Healing

Brazil

In Brazil, *curandeiros* (healers) and *benzedeiras* (blessers) are ritual healers who treat various illnesses and problems such as infertility, poverty, and unemployment. They employ a mixture of Catholic symbols and prayers and a special relationship with the supernatural. This is traditionally

a female domain, since the majority of problems they deal with are related to the family. *Pajés* (medicine men) are local spirit healers that are consulted by people all over Brazil who do not have access to medical services. Such forms of alternative medicine, which are typically offered free of charge, are naturally very attractive to the poor.

Over the last hundred years or so the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church has condemned these practices as pagan traditions and actively sought to suppress them. However, the *benzedadeiras* consider themselves an essential part of popular Catholicism in Brazil, and they use prayers and psalms from the Bible to cure many ailments and predicaments. When a person is "cured," he or she has to give gifts to the healer, and a relationship of dependence and obligation is established. These healers have to be obeyed exactly, and their authority over many of their clients is not unlike that of a shaman, an alternative source of power to the Church that is open only to the initiated in the community. Any person with a special *dom* or gift, Spiritist or Catholic, can become a healer. In many ways these practices offer an alternative religious vocation to women, who are denied access to the priesthood and marginalized by the male-dominated medical profession.

The beliefs of the *pajés* are allegedly based on those of the indigenous tribes of Brazil and center on the spirits of dead Indians. These spirits are believed to work mischief and to introduce objects into a person's body to cause illness. The *pajé* has the power to discover what these objects are and how to remove them. Tobacco smoke is used to induce a trance or is blown on the *pajé's* hands before he

passes them over the sufferer. Massages and baths are also given to remove the influence of the spirits. These rituals are very similar to those used in *Umbanda*. The *pajé* can also traditionally perform harmful actions if a client requests this: for example, an egg buried underneath the hammock of one's enemy will, they believe, cause him or her to go blind.

—Lisa Shaw

See also: *Popular Religion and Festivals:* Popular Catholicism (Brazil); *Umbanda*

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The Andean Countries

The Andean region has a rich and varied tradition in healing. Like most areas of indigenous culture in the Americas, it was repressed by European colonizers quick to associate the unknown with devil-worship. However, since the 1980s official attitudes have changed. In 1984 Bolivia became the first Latin American country to officially accept indigenous medical practices, which in any case are often the only recourse for remote or impoverished communities.

A particularly famous example of Andean medicine is that of the Kallawaya people who live to the north of La Paz. They are renowned herbalists who reputedly treated the Inca nobility and have long been itinerant healers; their practice was institutionalized in 1987. Today they are well enough respected and established to

be the subject of tourist excursions. Other famous communities of healers can be found in Catacaos, near Piura in coastal Peru, Iluman in Ecuador, and among the Kogi of the Colombian Sierra Nevada.

The role of coca in Andean society is controversial due to the leaf's use as a narcotic since the early twentieth century. However, coca use in both diagnosis and healing is an ancestral practice. It is also used in divining, an activity not divorced in the Andean mind from medicine; diagnosis often focuses on the spiritual condition of the patient. Moreover, coca is an important social component that reinforces community relationships and identity. North American and European attempts to suppress coca have contributed to a widespread distrust of Western medicine, giving rise to numerous modern myths no doubt also inspired by rumors of rogue organ transplants and the practice of herbal and gene piracy.

Another widespread Andean practice, if less controversial, involves the use of *cuy*, or guinea pigs, in diagnosis. Here coca is often consumed by the doctor to aid his concentration. Then the animal is rubbed over the patient's body before being opened and its organs examined. A diagnosis of the patient is then made. Such practices must be seen as elements of an overall cosmology and of a complex system of interactions between humanity and the natural environment. Traditional medicine is also crucial in the maintenance of trade and reciprocity between neighboring regions.

—Keith Richards

See also: *Popular Religion and Festivals:* Indigenous Religious and Cultural Practices (The Andean Countries); Popular Catholicism (The Andean Countries)

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Mexico and Central America

Popular medicine in Mesoamerica covers a wide range of practices, some of which deal with the curing of identifiable physical ailments and conditions, such as a broken leg or pregnancy. Others concern culturally specific, often emotional ailments such as *susto* (fright) and *mal de ojo* (the effects of the evil eye), or are of a more spiritual order such as the loss of one's soul, moral dilemmas, or those ailments thought to be caused by the ill effects of sorcery. In all cases the approach is far more holistic than that offered by traditional Western medicine, and almost all cures combine practical solutions (medicinal infusions, etc.) with prayer, ritual, and psychological support. Rituals involve such activities as the sacrifice of chickens and other small animals, the use of incense, blowing or spraying the patient's body with liquids, and passing objects such as eggs and plants over the body.

Practitioners who deal with a wide range of ailments, especially those pertaining to the spirit, are referred to by the overlapping terms of *curanderos/as* (curers, faith healers), *chamanes* (shamans), and/or *brujos/as* (witch doctors). Many other terms used to designate *curanderos* are specific to certain regions and ethnic groups, such as *sukias* in Nicaragua and *h'men* in the Mayan Yucatan. Many of these healers, specifically shamans, invoke the supernatural world via trancelike states (often provoked by the ingestion of hallucinogenic drugs such as *peyote* or magic mushrooms) and then journey into the supernatural realm with the aid of a "spirit helper," who often takes the form of an animal such as a coyote.

Curanderos may be either male or female, although across Mesoamerica there is a tendency for purely spiritual healing to be done by men (with this position go social prestige, civic authority, and even special dress codes and artifacts), and for the forms of physical healing done with medicinal plants and prayers, especially those associated with gynecological issues and childbirth, to be the preserve of women. Most *curanderos* assume their role as a hereditary duty after a long apprenticeship. However, many female *curanderas* begin their healing activities on the death of or abandonment by their husband in order to make a living and have a valued place in their community.

Since the time of the Conquest indigenous *curanderos* have experienced persecution for their beliefs and practices. Even in the twentieth century, state health-care workers across the region were at pains to eradicate *curanderismo* in favor of Western medical science. Nevertheless, *curanderos* are an essential part of the makeup

of most Mesoamerican indigenous communities, closely entwined with popular Catholicism. In rural regions they easily outnumber state health-care workers. Furthermore, the relationship of trust between patient and *curandero* is much greater than that between patient and health-care worker, and this promotes the use of *curanderos* and even their ability to provide effective cures (faith alone can help heal). Even among the urban *mestizo* (mixed-race) populations of the region, *curanderismo* has not been totally supplanted by Western medicine. For example, *limpias* or *barriadas* (ritual cleansings) are still popular, cheap, and easy.

In more recent years, the countries of Central America have attempted to utilize the knowledge of *curanderos* and to license them as practitioners rather than outlaw the practice altogether. Indigenous *parteras* (midwives) have been legalized in El Salvador, and *curanderos* may obtain licenses in Guatemala. Furthermore, health-care workers have been encouraged to cooperate with *parteras* and *curanderos* so that their healing integrates elements of Western medicine and so that, in certain cases, patients can be referred to state health-care workers when their complaints fall beyond the realms of the faith healers.

—Thea Pitman

See also: *Popular Religion and Festivals:*

Indigenous Religious and Cultural Practices (Guatemala; Mexico); Popular Catholicism (Mexico and Central America); Popular Festivals (Mexico)

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Santo Daime

A religious cult founded in the Amazon at the turn of the twentieth century, based on the ritual, communal consumption of an infusion of herbs. *Santo Daime* was made popular from the 1980s onward by the large number of Brazilian celebrities who have adhered to its doctrines.

The inspiration for *Santo Daime* (or the Eclectic Cult of Fluid Universal Light, to give it its formal title) came from Mestre Raimundo Irineu Serra (otherwise known as *Rei* or King Juramidã), a rubber tapper and son of black slaves who learned about the healing properties of Amazonian plants from Peruvian Indians. It is said that on drinking for the first time one particularly potent mixture, *ayahuasca*, a blend of the *jagube* liana (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) and the *rainha* leaf (*Psicotrya viridis*) that supposedly has been around since the days of the Incas, Serra received a visitation from the Virgin Mary. Thereafter, every time he consumed the tea (which he named *Santo Daime*), he would receive prayers that later would form the basis of the cult's worship.

Having started out as little more than a backwoods shaman, Serra would go on to

establish a church and community in the rainforest where followers would live together in harmony with each other and with nature, combining periods of work, silence, and meditation with the drinking of tea on set feast days. These days consist of twelve hours of chanting and dancing to the rhythm of maracas around a six-pointed star, with the express purpose of becoming closer to God and learning about oneself.

The notions of fraternity, community spirit, and love of nature, so dear to the movement, along with the speedy arrival at a state of transcendence afforded by the *Santo Daime* tea itself, drew the attention of Brazilian hippies in the 1970s, who took Serra's teachings, and his drink, to other parts of the country. In the 1980s, government investigations concluded that there was nothing untoward taking place within the Church and that followers of *Santo Daime* were not drug addicts. A number of critics of *Santo Daime* have argued that governments have continued to turn a blind eye to the drug-taking in these communities because they can count on the support of the powerful environmental lobby, of a number of senators representing the northern states, and even of some Catholic bishops.

Several high-profile stars from television and the music industry became involved with the movement in the 1980s, such as the popular composer Peninha, singer-songwriter Ney Matogrosso, actress Maitê Proença, and most significantly, the *telenovela* (soap opera) superstar Lucélia Santos, who temporarily gave up her television and film career to live in one of the Church's remote communities.

The espousal of values such as the protection of vegetation, along with the

Church's charity work to aid the environment, has recently attracted people from all over the world, both New Age ecotourists and people seeking alternative systems of belief, to the headquarters in Céu do Mapiá in Amazonas state. As well as having established a number of churches throughout Brazil (most in rural areas traditionally associated with Brazil's hippie population), *Santo Daime* has traveled to Europe and the United States where, according to the movement's official Website, there are ten churches. With the exception of Spain, where the use of the infusion in recognized religious rituals has recently been made legal, followers abroad are obliged to celebrate in secret, and transporters of *Santo Daime* tea to locations outside Brazil have been given prison sentences for drug trafficking.

—Stephanie Dennison

See also: *Travel and Tourism:* Ecotourism;
Mass Media: Telenovela (Brazil)

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Bahá'í

A faith that was founded in 1844 along universalist principles by the Bahá'u'lláh, the title of the Persian mystic Mirzá Husayn Ali (1817–1892). It first made its mark on Latin America in the late 1930s, in Mexico and Central America, entering most of South America a few years later. Today it is the third most popular organized religion in many Latin American countries after Catholicism and Protestantism. The appeal

of this religion, with its accent on global unity, lies in its rejection of discrimination on grounds of ethnicity, gender, or social background.

Bahá'í, which has neither dogma nor priesthood, proposes a noncentralized faith in which all creeds can converge and share both differences and similarities. The emphasis upon unity is manifested in the faith's temples, which are circular, intimating the deliberate exclusion of any geographical focal point or place of origin such as Mecca or Jerusalem. This philosophy is applied in practical terms in communities with differing faiths: *Bahá'í* meetings begin with prayers from members of all religions represented.

Bahá'í is clearly attractive to those seeking an alternative atmosphere, social as well as spiritual, in societies with entrenched chauvinist attitudes and where discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, or beliefs is all but institutionalized (the advancement of women is a notably high priority in all *Bahá'í* literature). In Bolivia, where a high proportion of followers are from indigenous communities, *Bahá'í* works to implement social benefits, raising funds for projects such as educational facilities, without the apparent self-promotion and paternalism associated with more entrenched religions. The results are apparent both at grassroots and central levels: in remote villages, where the possibility of extending local education into high school has been achieved, and in a city like Santa Cruz, where the influential *Bahá'í*-inspired Nur University runs a program to train teachers to serve the entire Andean region.

Radio has also been a successful tool for *Bahá'í*, raising its profile in Latin America while facilitating communication among

rural communities. The world's first *Bahá'í* radio station, in the Otavalo region of Ecuador, was set up as a means of enabling contact between members but eventually took on a far broader role. The realization of the potential of indigenous communities, within the context of the modern nation, became central to its aims, and the station has enjoyed considerable success. Conserving Andean cultural traditions has been one of its main achievements, though it also promotes numerous social projects.

Bahá'í has formal associations with the United Nations and with many nongovernmental organizations such as UNIDA (*Unidad en Diversidad*, or Unity in Diversity), a group that responds to the political crisis in Argentina via training programs aimed at providing models for participatory development and the fortification of civil society.

Of the estimated 7 million or so *Bahá'í* followers worldwide, there are an estimated 57,000 members in Brazil and 300,000 in Bolivia. Of the seven worldwide *Bahá'í* temples, one is in Latin America (Panama) and a second is currently under construction in Chile.

—Keith Richards

See also: *Mass Media:* Radio (Cuba and the Andes)

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New Protestantism

Mexico and Central America

The Protestant faith, particularly the newer branches (as opposed to traditional Anglicanism or Lutheranism), has witnessed a boom in popularity in Mexico and Central America since the 1970s, both in rural areas and in poor neighborhoods in urban areas, and in particular among the substantial indigenous populations of these countries (i.e., the poorest sectors of society). Statistics show that growth has been particularly large in Honduras and Guatemala since the mid-1980s (7 percent and 6 percent respectively of the populations of these countries converted to Protestantism over the period 1985–1995). Mexico, the most populous country in Central America, has the highest number of Protestants, around 5.5 million in 1995, despite a slower rate of growth of the Protestant community.

Unlike the original split in Europe between the Catholic and Protestant Churches, the split in Mexico and Central America was not based on a clash over doctrine. Much of the “new” Protestantism in the region is evangelical in nature, and hence sets itself up in opposition to all other religions, including other branches of Protestantism.

Community health workers in Chiapas, southern Mexico, have noted that indigenous women prefer a religion that allows them to use contraception, and that in general, women find that the Protestant Church offers them a more active role than that available to them in the male-dominated Catholic Church. It has been argued that indigenous communities also use Protestantism as a way of showing their dissent from the impositions of the

Catholic-oriented nation-states by which they are governed. Other theorists suggest that concerted missionary activity from abroad, the experience of rapid modernization, and/or large-scale demographic change (migration to big cities or to other countries), coupled with the dismemberment of traditional social structures and cultural practices, have created a spiritual gap that Protestantism has filled.

One of the most compelling explanations put forward is that economic change, and in particular the advance of the market economy into parts of the world where people have previously been unaffected by its logic, is the root cause of the surge in popularity of New Protestantism in the region. In traditional, indigenous communities—in the highlands of Guatemala, for example—a “cargo system” is still in place. This system, intimately related to the Catholic calendar, is a way of redistributing wealth for the benefit of the whole community by designating individual community members to be in charge of organizing and financing specific festivals. However, this practice stands in direct opposition to the concept of a market economy where the individual seeks to make and retain profits for the benefit of his/her own family. Protestantism, with its concept of a “work ethic,” provides the religious background to support the logic of the market economy and is hence making dramatic in-roads in parts of the region where the market economy is not yet fully in place. Nevertheless, such widespread conversions to Protestantism have not gone unopposed, and there is substantial disharmony recorded in the indigenous communities of Chiapas, Mexico, for example, between breakaway Protestant groups and those members of the same in-

igenous group who have chosen to remain Catholics.

—Thea Pitman

See also: *Popular Social Movements and Politics: Zapatismo; Popular Religion and Festivals: New Protestantism (Brazil; Venezuela); Popular Catholicism (Mexico and Central America)*

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Venezuela

The evangelical presence in Venezuela's capital city, Caracas, is low-key in comparison with Brazil's main cities, but the systematic promotion of New Protestantism is actively under way. The best-known evangelical phenomenon in Caracas is the independent Las Acacias Pentecostal Church.

In the 1990s, about half of Venezuela's 325,000 Protestants could be found in six churches: Assemblies of God, Light of the World, OVICE (Venezuelan Organization of Evangelical Christian Churches), Peniel, the National Baptist Convention, and the Presbyterian Church. The first two churches are

Pentecostal, and the second two are of the Free Church tradition.

With the exception of the Baptists and the Presbyterians, the mainstream Protestant churches have had relatively little presence in Venezuela. A survey carried out in 1992 found that the 231 Protestant churches in Caracas had a total membership of 31,000 people, which represented just over 1 percent of the 3 million people in the area surveyed. As low as this figure is, it is important to remember that Catholic practice is on the decline. It has been estimated that 6 percent of the inhabitants of Caracas attend mass on any given Sunday and that this percentage falls to just 2 or 3 percent in poorer areas.

The history of Protestantism in Venezuela dates from the early nineteenth century, when itinerant Bible salesmen passed through the country. The first congregations in Caracas were established in the 1870s. For decades, however, missionaries were attracted more to rural areas, and virtually no Protestant congregations were founded in the capital city until the 1940s and 1950s. Many of these first-generation church leaders were still active in the 1990s.

—*Lisa Shaw*

See also: *Popular Religion and Festivals: New Protestantism (Brazil; Mexico and Central America)*

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Brazil

The following Protestant Churches are now represented in many Brazilian cities:

the Baptist Church, the Assemblies of God, the Christian Congregation, the Four-square Gospel Church (which now has more followers in Brazil than in the United States, where it originated), Brazil for Christ, God Is Love, and the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. For many Brazilians, the Universal Church epitomizes the new brand of Pentecostalism, with “services” akin to television shows and a heavy emphasis on financial contributions from the “audience.” Members of other churches worry about the effect of the Universal Church on the image of the Protestant community as a whole. A common misconception holds that the growth of Protestantism is fostered and funded from abroad, but it is the Brazilian churches that are expanding the fastest.

The rapid rise of evangelical Protestantism in Brazil can be explained in part by the failure of Liberation Theology to provide spiritual solace for the impoverished masses. Following the Vatican’s decision, taken in 1989, to carve up the archdiocese of São Paulo arbitrarily, the poor central districts of the city were increasingly neglected by the Catholic Church, allowing the evangelicals to gain a foothold.

Like Brazil for Christ and God Is Love, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, established in 1977, revolves around its founder, Edir Macedo. By 1990 the organization had 700 churches and claimed to have 500,000 members. In that year it bought a television station in São Paulo for 45 million U.S. dollars. Macedo obviously appealed to mass audiences. One morning in September 1990 he drew 150,000 people to a stadium in Rio de Janeiro and then caught a plane to São Paulo, where he addressed a crowd of 50,000. Like soccer fans, many of them carried banners, includ-



Edir Macedo, the infamous founder of Brazil's Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. (Ted Soqui/Corbis Sygma)

ing one that read: "Pele, the king of soccer, has gone, and Jesus, the king of kings, has arrived." There have been reports of bizarre and disturbing events at these gatherings. On one occasion, for example, Macedo promised to cure people's eyesight. Hundreds of pairs of spectacles were handed over to him, which he promptly trampled on.

—Lisa Shaw

See also: *Popular Religion and Festivals:* New Protestantism (Mexico and Central America; Venezuela); Popular Catholicism (Brazil)

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Popular Festivals

Colombia

One of the most important popular festivals within the Andean region of Colombia is the *Aguinaldo Boyacense*, the period of celebration held in the Boyacá region in the last few days before Christmas. The *Carnaval de Barranquilla* (Barranquilla Carnival), which takes place in the city of Barranquilla on the northern coast of Colombia, traces its roots back over several centuries. It has links with the black slave celebrations that took place in nearby Cartagena de Indias in colonial times. While *Semana Santa*, or Holy Week, is important throughout Colombia, the place that is most famous for this celebration is Popayán in the southwestern part of Colombia.

The Aguinaldo Boyacense festival lasts from 16 to 23 December each year. Games for children and a variety of sporting events or competitions, such as tennis, cycling, and chess, are held throughout the day and into the night. The afternoon activities are dominated by the *novena* or religious service; in the early evening the main attractions are the processions, which often include decorated *carrozas* (carnival floats). The *carrozas* are created by a variety of local entities, including schools, churches, local companies, and the police force, and prizes are awarded for the best float. Finally, once the processions are over, a lively, open-air concert is held in the main square, the Plaza Bolívar. Every night at least three bands perform into the small hours, playing salsa, *vallenato*, or even *car-*



Women in costume dance in the street during carnival, Barranquilla, Colombia, 1994. (Jeremy Horner/Corbis)

ranguera, the local folk music of the Boyacá region. The concert usually includes at least one big national name, such as Los Tupamaros, who performed there in 2002.

From the mid- to late nineteenth century the Carnaval de Barranquilla proper started to take shape. Now the carnival takes place over four days, starting on Saturday and ending the day before Ash Wednesday. Over the four days, a variety of events are staged: on the opening Saturday is the *Batalla de flores* (Battle of the Flowers), an event that memorializes the civil war that Colombia endured between 1899 and 1903, the *Guerra de Mil Días* (War of a Thousand Days), and that functions as a tribute to peace. During this event, a large procession makes its way through the city, with carnival queens, dancers, and floats,

all decorated with flowers. Sunday is taken up with the *Gran Parada* (Big Parade), which concentrates on folk, indigenous, and black forms of music and dance, including *cumbia*, *mapalé*, and *son*. On the Monday, the *Festival de Orquestas* (Festival of Bands) takes place, during which national and international bands play salsa and the obligatory *vallenato* to crowds in the Romelio Martínez stadium. The last day of the carnival is dominated by the tradition known as the *Muerte de Joselito* (Death of Joselito). Legend has it that Joselito was a coachman who drank so much that he fell asleep in his coach; to tease him, the carnival-goers decided to put him in a coffin and carry him to the cemetery, amid great wailing and mourning. Every year this prank is reenacted,

with the crowd carrying a coffin and crying over “Joselito” as they process through the streets.

Holy Week in Popayán is marked by solemn processions throughout the week, as well as the *Festival de Música Religiosa* (Festival of Religious Music), which attracts choirs and orchestras from all over the world. The celebrations consist of six processions: one during the day on Palm Sunday to represent Christ’s triumphal arrival in Jerusalem, and five at night, from Tuesday to Thursday, which represent the passion, death, and burial of Christ. The final procession takes place on Saturday to celebrate Christ’s resurrection. During these processions, images carried on platforms are decorated with candles and a different color of flowers each day, leading up to the final celebration on Saturday, in which multicolored flowers symbolize joy at the resurrection.

—Claire Taylor

See also: *Popular Music:* Cumbia; Salsa; Vallenato; *Popular Religion and Festivals:* Popular Festivals (Carnival in Brazil; Mexico)

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Mexico

Mexico celebrates a huge variety of *fiestas populares* (popular festivals) that attract visitors from all over the world. Its carnival

is the third biggest in the world, after those of Rio de Janeiro and New Orleans. Many of the festivals are based on the events of the Roman Catholic calendar (saints’ days, *posadas* or pre-Christmas processions, Easter week celebrations, and reenactments of the crucifixion), though some may have been superimposed over older pre-Columbian festival days and ritual practices. Others are purely civic celebrations designed to reaffirm a sense of national pride (for example, *El Grito de Independencia* or Independence Day and *El Día de la Raza* or Mexico Day). Still others, which celebrate the culture or the artifacts of a particular place, have been developed by the Mexican government and the tourist industry as a way of promoting trade and tourism (for example, the Silver Fair in Taxco). The concept of the *fiesta popular* really applies only to the first category of festival mentioned. Nevertheless, in contemporary Mexico many of the traditional, popular *fiestas* based on the Roman Catholic calendar have incorporated elements of the more urban-based civic and commercial festivals. This is part of the process of encroaching national and global (capitalist) culture, studied in detail by Néstor García Canclini.

Undoubtedly the most important and the most idiosyncratic of Mexico’s popular festivals is *El Día de los Muertos* (The Day of the Dead). The festival dates back to colonial times, although some critics see it as a prime example of the blending of indigenous culture with Spanish Catholic culture (the Mexica are known to have venerated their dead in similar ways using similar iconography). This festival has developed spectacularly since the 1960s and is now an essential part of Mexico’s national identity.



Typical skeleton figures used to celebrate Mexico's popular festival the Day of the Dead. (Danny Lehman/Corbis)

The festival of the Day of the Dead stretches over two days, on 1 and 2 November of every year, which correspond to All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day in the Roman Catholic calendar. Traditionally, the departed souls of small children are honored on the first of the two days, and those of adults on the second, and it is usually the second of the two days that is the more exuberant day of the festival. The basic festival consists of several masses. However, *ofrendas* (offerings of food, drink, and other symbolic items for the dead) constructed in people's homes and the candlelit vigil at the graveside of departed relatives on the night of 1 November are the readily identifiable symbols of the festival today. In the run-up to the festival, the *ofrendas* become ubiquitous, more in public places than in private

homes, and a vast amount of merchandise is available in shops and markets to decorate *ofrendas*, the graves themselves, or simply to offer as gifts to friends. These items include *pan de muertos* (loaves of bread decorated with crossed bones, which are also made of bread), *calaveras* (skulls made out of sugar or chocolate and brightly decorated), and all sorts of arts and crafts that play on the theme of death. (In recent years, products associated with Halloween have appeared for sale beside them as the two festivals have begun to merge.) Although the death of relatives is still a cause for great sadness among Mexicans, the humor brought to the fore in this festival is remarkable and helps shape the popular view that Mexicans treat death lightly.

—Thea Pitman



A reveler shows off his Internet costume during the Rio de Janeiro Carnival in 2000. (Antonio Scorza/AFP/Getty Images)

See also: *Popular Religion and Festivals:* Popular Catholicism (Mexico and Central America); Popular Festivals (Carnival in Brazil; Colombia)

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Carnival in Brazil

Some form of pre-Lenten celebration (like Mardi Gras in New Orleans) has existed in Brazil since the mid-sixteenth century, after the arrival of the Portuguese in 1500. Today this annual event, held seven weeks before Easter, is most widely associated with the city of Rio de Janeiro, where the so-called *escolas de samba* ("samba schools"), or neighborhood carnival associations, take part in a lavish parade that is screened by satellite all over the world. *Carnaval* is celebrated all over Brazil for four days, from Saturday to Tuesday. Not every city has a street carnival, however; some prefer well-behaved indoor balls.

The musical accompaniment to the carnival processions in Rio de Janeiro is percussion-based samba, provided by a 300-piece drum section or *bateria* from each "samba school." The *marcha carnavalesca* or carnival march provides an alternative rhythm in Rio, favored for indoor balls and by the *bandas*, groups consisting of brass and drums, that pass through Rio's streets with crowds following behind them.

The official celebrations in Rio are held in the purpose-built *Sambódromo* (Sambadrome). Each *escola's* parade must have a theme or *enredo*, which might be historical or political, or linked to a particular individual. The *carnavalesco*, a kind of art director within each *escola de samba*, chooses the theme, and in June of the previous year the *escola's* composers begin writing sambas on this theme. The best songs are chosen by the directors of the "school," and around September the rehearsals begin in the headquarters of each organization. On a given night, usually at the end of October, the members choose the winning samba. For the parade, the "school" is divided into units called *alas*,

or wings. Each *ala* wears a different costume relating to a specific aspect of the theme. The bigger *escolas* have over sixty *alas*, each containing eighty or so members. Two *alas* are compulsory: one is the *ala das baianas*, older women dressed in the attire of the Afro-Brazilian street vendors of Salvador da Bahia, who wear turbans and long lace dresses (this costume harks back to the Bahian women who first practiced *Candomblé* in Rio, personified by Carmen Miranda in Hollywood); and the *comissão de frente* (literally, front commission), who open the parade by walking or dancing slowly. The main samba dancers are called *passistas*, the most important of whom are the *portabandeira* (the flag-bearer, always a woman, who carries the *escola's* flag) and the *mestre-sala* (master of ceremonies), a man. In between the *alas* come the ornately decorated floats—the *carros alegóricos*—that take around six months to build. On top of the floats stand the *destaques*, men and women wearing either very expensive and elaborate costumes or next to nothing. Another aspect of the city's festivities are the *blocos de empolgação*, great masses of people wearing the same costume that parade in one solid block and dance energetically. The *bloco* called *Cacique de Ramos*, for example, always dress up like Indians, and *Bafo da Onça (Jaguar's Breath)* consists of 6,000 to 7,000 members. They dance to the *samba de bloco* played by the *bateria* at the close of the carnival parade in the Sambadrome.

Today Salvador da Bahia in Brazil's northeast vies with Rio to create the most popular carnival in Brazil. Each year an estimated 2 million people crowd into Salvador's narrow streets to dance, sing,

and party to the music of the *blocos afro* (Afro-Brazilian carnival groups), *afoxés* (carnival groups that perform music and dance based on *Candomblé* rituals), and *trios elétricos* (musicians playing electrified instruments on top of decorated trucks). In the northeastern states of Bahia, Ceará, and Pernambuco, *frevo*, a fast, syncopated version of the *marcha*, is the main carnival music. In Recife, and Fortaleza in Ceará state, the *maracatu*, an Afro-Brazilian processional dance, is performed during Carnival. Participants sing and dance to a heavy, slow, almost trance-inducing rhythm.

Carnival has its roots in pre-Christian festivities held by the ancient Greeks, Romans, and others. In spite of their pagan origins these festivities were assimilated into the traditions of Roman Catholic countries of Europe. The early carnivals in Brazil were based on a popular festival known as *entrudo*, a tradition that originated in the Azores and became popular in Portugal in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Associated with riotous antics and pranks, the *entrudo* was outlawed in Brazil in 1853 and finally died out at the beginning of the 1900s. In the first years of the twentieth century, three separate carnivals were held in Rio de Janeiro: that of the poor, largely Afro-Brazilian population in the central Praça Onze district of the city; that of the middle classes in the Avenida Central (now the Avenida Rio Branco); and that of the wealthy, white elite, which centered on lavish masked balls. By the 1920s the annual event had become associated with two musical rhythms, the carnival march (*marcha* or *marchinha*), of bourgeois origin and inspired by Portuguese marches that were brought to Brazil with music hall (*teatro de revista*), and the samba, believed to have grown out of the

percussion-based *batuques* and *lundus* performed by African slaves on rural plantations.

The first *escola de samba*, named *Deixa Falar* (*Let Them Talk*), was founded in 1928 in the Rio district of Estácio de Sá by a group of Afro-Brazilian samba composers. The term “samba school” is said to have been an ironic reference to the school across the street from where this marginalized group used to meet. A kind of neighborhood club, *Deixa Falar* was dedicated to making music (samba) and parading during Carnival. It was only in 1935, during the presidency of Getúlio Vargas (1930–1945), that the *escolas de samba* were no longer repressed as manifestations of Afro-Brazilian culture, and their carnival parades were officially recognized. Today Rio’s main *escolas de samba* are still associated with particular areas of the city, often one of the hillside shantytowns (*fave-*

las), and include Mangueira, Portela, and Salgueiro.

—Lisa Shaw

See also: *Popular Music:* Samba; *Popular Theater and Performance:* Popular Theater and Music Hall (*Teatro de Revista*); *Cultural Icons:* Latin Americans in Hollywood (Carmen Miranda); *Popular Cinema:* Youth Movies, Cinema, and Music; *Popular Religion and Festivals:* *Candomblé*; Popular Festivals (Colombia; Mexico); *Visual Arts and Architecture:* Architecture and Landscape Design (*Favelas*)

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