New Centers of Global Evangelicalism in Latin America and Africa

This book shows that new centers of Christianity have taken root in the Global South. Although these communities were previously poor and marginalized, Stephen Offutt illustrates that they are now socioeconomically diverse, internationally well connected, and socially engaged. Offutt argues that local and global religious social forces, as opposed to other social, economic, or political forces, are primarily responsible for these changes.

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To Amy,

Addy, Emily, & Gabi
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Preface and Acknowledgments

The blisters on my hand were open, and sweat was running freely down my face. It was the aftershock, though, that caused us all to pause. I leaned on my shovel and glanced warily first up the hillside and then across the valley, at the San Salvador volcano.

The date was January 12, 2001. An earthquake had ripped through El Salvador the previous day, creating landslides and destroying houses across much of the small, mountainous country. In Santa Tecla, the town in which I lived, a landslide covered almost the entire neighborhood of Las Colinas. The hundreds of ensuing aftershocks caused the volcano to bellow ominous plumes of dust.

I came to El Salvador as part of a socially conscious tech startup company. One of our Salvadoran colleagues, who I will call Juan, lived in Las Colinas. He was out running errands when the earthquake hit. His wife, two small children, and a niece visiting from Guatemala were at home.

Juan was a member of a small evangelical church. I joined his fellow congregants as they climbed up onto the landslide with shovels in hand. We began to dig down into his house; we were one of several gaggles of people gathered over buried houses in the neighborhood. We had collectively suspended our belief in the new reality that the landslide had brought. But hope was fading as we pressed on in the glaring sun, and what our shovels found after hours of digging forced us to confront and accept our worst fears. Juan’s family added four to the tally of more than 550 landslide victims in Las Colinas that day.

The scene in Las Colinas recalls and transforms the image Roger Lancaster (1988) painted of Central American religion in his remarkable prologue to Thanks to God and the Revolution. Lancaster imagines large, moving statues of Marx and Jesus on opposite ends of the square in Managua, Nicaragua. As they oppose each other, the crowd in the square comes to embody the synthesis of ideology and religion. Lancaster uses the rest of the book to show the ways this works for different Central American faith communities.
By the dawn of the twenty-first century, the region’s guerrilla movements had been incorporated into the political process, and the region’s religious movements were in rapid flux. Las Colinas served as a different kind of public square and a different locus of activity. A local congregation was a first responder to a natural disaster. Full of pragmatism, fear, fortitude, and personal loss, congregants arrived well before the massive international aid machine got on the ground; they even arrived ahead of the national government’s plodding response. The local congregation would later become part of a global faith-based disaster response, showing that it too had international ties. But in those first moments, it was simply a group of people responding to physical and emotional pain in very practical ways—ways that hinted at subtle religious changes that would become more amplified over the next decade and a half.

Two and a half years after the earthquake, I left El Salvador and returned to graduate school to learn more about the changes occurring to evangelicalism, not just in Latin America but also in Africa, where I previously lived, and quite possibly in other parts of the world. This book is the result of that journey.

I have had immeasurable help along the way. Four people deserve special mention for their intellectual influence on this project and on me. During the dissertation phase at Boston University, Nancy Ammerman advised my work and grounded my view of religious communities in sound theoretical principles. Peter Berger served on my committee; he became an invaluable conversation partner about how to interpret global evangelical and Pentecostal movements. Robert Wuthnow also provided guidance and insights into how to think about and investigate religion and transnationalism. He was extremely gracious in the time that he gave me, both when I worked for him and after. Finally, Grace Goodell served as a mentor at the Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), where I earned my master’s degree. She has provided intellectual depth, friendship, and wise council from the beginning of this project to the end.

Institutions matter when one undertakes intellectual inquiry, and I have had the privilege of being associated with some of the world’s best places to study religion and globalization. At Boston University, the Center for Religion and World Affairs (CURA) and the Center for Global Christianity & Mission were important places of discourse. At SAIS, the Social Change & Development Seminar transformed all of the students who participated. I found a home at Princeton University’s Religion and Public Life Seminar for several years, and I benefited from the experience I had at the University of Notre Dame’s Center for Religion and Society. Finally, Wheaton College’s Human Needs and Global Resources program and the E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission and Evangelism at Asbury Theological Seminary have both provided conversation partners from all over the world. Were it not for the opportunity I have had to participate in these communities, this study would not have been possible.

People fill institutions and provide them with meaning. I had the privilege of interacting in these venues with Dana Robert, Emily Barman, Laurel Smith-Doerr,
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John Stone, Roman Williams, Mia Diaz, Judy Dean, Marc Chernick, Riordan Roett, Gretchen Ansorge, Nicole Behnam, Joe Boesch, Paul Giacomini, Elinor Haider, Michelle Hecker, Ron Johnson, Dano Jukanovich, Janet Kilian, Kathy Latek, Alice Lin, Patricia MacWilliams, Eileen Pennington, Meredith Vostrejs, Kurt Sanger, Jen Seltzer, Susan Starnes, Nick Szechynyi, Justin Tyson, Omri Elisha, Jim Gibbon, Becky Hsu, Conrad Hackett, Michael Lindsay, Rebekah Massengill, Christina Mora, LiErin Probasco, Larry Stratton, Christian Smith, Kraig Beyerlein, Bob Brenneman, Cole Carnesceca, Mike and Ines Jindra, David Sikkink, Brandon Vaidyanathan, Mark Amstutz, Sandra and Paul Joireman, Paul Robinson, Ryan Juskus, George Hunter, Kima Pachua, Eunice Erwin, Gregg Okesson, Russell West, Steve Ybarrola, Art McPhee, Jay Moon, and David and Lisa Swartz. There were many others who intersected with my life and work in these places; I have tried and inevitably failed to list those who I meaningfully intersected with on topics related to this book.

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Most importantly, I wish to thank my family. My grandparents have shown a keen interest in my work and have been a source of encouragement. My parents have been tireless supporters of everything I have done, and this project is no different. They were involved in some of the early efforts to organize the data. My three daughters – Addy, Emily, and Gabi – have come along at different stages of this project and have kept its overall importance in perspective. My wife, Amy, has been my most important intellectual partner. She shared in the field visits, tirelessly listened to different iterations of the book’s argument, sharpened my ideas, and helped refine their presentation. For all of these things and so much more, I say thank you.
Abbreviations

AE  African Enterprise
AFM  Apostolic Faith Mission
AG  Assemblies of God
AIC  African Independent Churches
AIDS  Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ANC  African National Congress
ARENA  The National Republic Alliance
BGA  Billy Graham Association
CAFTA  Central American Free Trade Agreement
CAM  Central American Mission
CCC  Campus Crusade for Christ
CCI  International Christian Center
CCMN  Cell Church Missions Network
CELAM  Conference of Latin American Bishops
CIA  International Center of Praise
Comisal  Committee for Salvadoran Missions
CONESAL  Salvadoran Evangelical Association
COSATU  Congress of South African Trade Unions
DGACE  General Directorate of Attention to the Community Living Abroad
EFSA  Evangelical Fellowship of South Africa
ES  El Salvador
FMLN  Faribundo Marti National Liberation Front
GDOP  Global Day of Prayer
GDP  Gross Domestic Product
HIV  Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IFCC  International Federation of Christian Churches
IFP  Inkatha Freedom Party
MDG  Millennium Development Goals
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>NCE</td>
<td>New Center of Evangelicalism</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Nongovernmental Organization</td>
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<td>NUPSA</td>
<td>Network of United Prayer in South Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAC</td>
<td>Pan Africanist Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>PCN</td>
<td>Party of National Conciliation</td>
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<tr>
<td>PDC</td>
<td>Christian Democratic Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>SABC</td>
<td>South African Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>SACC</td>
<td>South African Council of Churches</td>
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<tr>
<td>SACLA</td>
<td>South African Christian Leadership Assembly</td>
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<tr>
<td>SACP</td>
<td>South African Communist Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAMS</td>
<td>Southern African Missiological Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWAPO</td>
<td>South West Africa People’s Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>TBN</td>
<td>Trinity Broadcasting Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>TEASA</td>
<td>The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>WCD</td>
<td>World Christian Database</td>
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<td>WCE</td>
<td>Western Center of Evangelicalism</td>
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<tr>
<td>WEA</td>
<td>World Evangelical Alliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>WV</td>
<td>World Vision</td>
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