

### *Editor's Note*

*This essay was probably delivered as a talk or lecture, perhaps at Philinda's church (Christ Lutheran Church, Bethesda, Maryland).*

*The typescript and a carbon copy were found with the family collection of letters, together with other essays written by Philinda in the 1950s. Because of the context in which it was found, it was initially cataloged as a 1950s document. Upon closer reading, it became obvious that it must have been written in the early 1970s. Reference is made in the first paragraph on page 9 to Laurence (LJK) "studying linguistics for a hoped-for PhD". Those studies took place between September, 1970, and August, 1980. The essay was probably written in the early 1970s because as the decade progressed, Philinda's health deteriorated, whereas this essay reads as the successful effort of a healthy woman.*

*For practical reasons, the catalog identifier 5-68 was retained despite the essay's actual date two decades later.*

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## A LOOK AT LATIN AMERICA

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Philinda Krieg

Did you ever read an adventure story that you found fascinating but decidedly unrealistic? Where the hero fought off impossibly vast numbers of enemies in impossibly difficult circumstances? Depending on how much you like adventure stories, you either laughed and went on enjoying the fun, or put the book down in exasperation.

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The stories of the Spanish Conquest of the Americas are exactly like those adventure tales. They are unbelievable but true, incredible but well documented history. This conquest was surely one of the most heroic series of events in human history, which I think we know too little about here in the United States. We're really missing something exciting if this is the case, so may I suggest to those of you who haven't read it, that you start with that beautifully written classic of Prescott, The Conquest of Mexico. There are many far more recent accounts, but none more excellent in style and non more readable.

There is a good deal of sentiment these days in and out of Latin America that says the Spaniards should have left the Indians to their own quaint old religions and customs. As far as the religion part goes, this sentiment is pseudo-nostalgic nonsense. The Aztec gods, for example, were certainly among mankind's more nightmarish imaginations. Their demands for human blood made Moloch seem compassionate. Toward the end the Aztecs were sacrificing some 20,000 people annually on their altars, and the flesh of the sacrifices was sold in the food markets regularly, thus making up for a lack of protein in the diet of the survivors in the Mexican capital.

The sun-worship of the Incas in South America's west coast was considerably less bloody than the superstitions of the Aztecs,

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but it was merely a matter of degree. The rest of South and Central America produced nothing better, either. The Christianity of the old padres who risked their lives to convert the Indians was immeasurably ~~better~~ superior to any religion the converts had ever known before. The efforts of many Mexican intellectuals to glamorize the old Aztec gods appear to me to be absolutely ridiculous.

I should warn you right now that everything I've said and am going to say is strictly from my own point of view. Perhaps I should have called my little lecture "One Woman's View of Latin America". You may have reason to disagree with me on some or all points, but not being the Man From Mars I am constrained to say what things look like to me as an American, a Christian, and a woman.

While I'm still talking about the Conquest period, I'd like to say a word about what Spanish historians call "The Black Legend". This is the idea current outside the Iberian peninsula that the Spaniards were invariably very cruel to the Indians and massacred them indiscriminately. It is certainly true that there was a great deal of cruelty, because the 16th century was an unusually callous and brutal age, and wartime conditions prevailed almost everywhere in the Western hemisphere. Salvador de Madariaga, the modern Spanish historian, points out that the French and English were just as cruel as the Spaniards, but they had a much better "press", as we say nowadays.

The Black Legend came into being because of the life-long work of a Dominican friar named Bartolomé de las Casas, who was himself among the earliest of the conquistadores in Santo Domingo and Cuba. He was there when Diego Columbus was governor. As a result of a sort of conversion experience, he became passionately interested in the

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fate of the native peoples of the Americas, and was known as the Apostle to the Indians. He spent the rest of his ninety years of life publicising the wrongs of the natives. He has been accused of recommending the importation of Africans to relieve the labors of the Indians, but this is false. Las Casas was one of the earliest opponents of any form of slavery in the world. Despite the fact that the exploitation of Indian labor was the basis of much of the wealth of the Spanish Crown, the kings of Spain listened to the old friar, allowed his books to be published, and adopted many of his recommendations. After Las Casas efforts, the laws governing the Spanish Indies were made far more humane. But of course the Indies were a long way from Spain and the enforcement of the new laws was often difficult if not impossible. Nevertheless, the Spanish Crown should be given great credit for making a serious effort to protect the Indians from the kings' own subjects.

Las Casas' polemic works were soon translated in<sup>to</sup> French, German and English, so that before fifty years were out, everybody in Europe was convinced that the Spaniards were the cruelest people in the world. Nobody arose in France or England like Las Casas, to denounce the treatment of the natives by their own nationals. So it was one of the original Spanish Conquistadores who himself started the Black Legend, and I think this is a point for the Spaniards.

The 17th and 18th centuries in Latin America were on the whole peaceful and productive. Life was better, more prosperous in this New World, and the Spanish government of its far-flung colonies was remarkably good despite the enormous difficulties in communication. Perhaps the most serious flaw in the system was the fact that the

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kings of Spain tried to do too much detailed legislating from a distance, without first-hand knowledge of conditions, and without using the abilities of the creoles themselves- that is, the people of Spanish blood who were born in Spanish America. This fact is counted as one of the main causes of the wars of independence which began around 1810, lasted till 1825, and devastated the continent's prosperity for a hundred years.

All wars are horrible, but these near-fratricidal campaigns reached a new peak of horror. The cost in terms of lives, fortunes, fields laid waste and general misery is of course incalculable. But the memory of the heroes of these wars is still vivid today. Simón Bolívar, the Liberator of northern South America, remains enshrined in the hearts of Venezuelans and Colombians especially. Southern South America venerates the memory of Argentina's liberator, San Martín, while Chile still honors its great hero, Bernardo O'Higgins. (By the way, isn't that an improbable-sounding name? There are many such peculiar combinations in Chile, which early became a kind of European melting pot.)

It is nearly impossible to exaggerate the pitiable state of most of South America (excluding Brazil, which was more fortunate,) after these long wars were finally finished. Many of the best men were dead. Those who tried to take over the reins of government were inexperienced and generally speaking uneducated "caudillos" who literally fought their way to the top. Democracy was quite unworkable in lands where only a very small proportion of the population could read and write. Money for schools and trained teachers had gone to pay for the weapons of war, and it took many decades to get agriculture and min-

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ing back to the levels of production in colonial times. The Spanish bureaucracy which had administered quite fairly and relatively efficiently was gone for ever, with no trained replacements. Chaos and anarchy reigned amidst almost universal misery. It's important to bear this historical fact in mind when we attempt to analyze the situation in Latin America today. The prosperity of vast areas was wiped out in fifteen years, and three centuries of growth and development ceased abruptly. Recovery has been slow. The habits, customs and thought-patterns <sup>more than</sup> of fifty years of "caudillismo"- the rule of petty strong -men- have become ingrained and rooted in many of these lands.

Another factor making recovery difficult was the fragmentation of the old Spanish Empire. Simón Bolívar wanted to form a nation composed of present-day Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. Francisco Morazán wanted to unite all of Central America into one republic. But it was too late, even in 1825. The racial differences between the various areas were too great. Mountainous terrain created physical barriers to unity in many cases. Each section was jealous of each other, each "caudillo" wanted to be cock of his own roost. This narrow sectionalism made for plenty of economic trouble in the 20th century. Some of the smaller nations are simply too small for a viable economy. Some of the larger ones suffer from having only one or two products capable of earning money to support necessary governmental functions.

Governments without a steady source of income are weak governments. They are subject to pressure groups, such as the Church, the large landowners, the students, their budding industrialists, their

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leftists and rightists, and perhaps above all their military establishment. In spite of democratic and idealistic constitutions, many governments simply lack the money to exert their authority, and become the prey of these pressure groups.

Still another factor inhibiting the growth and prosperity of many parts of Latin America is the old-fashioned economic theories held consciously or unconsciously by many latins. One of their basic premises is what I should like to ~~xxx~~ label the Custard Pie Syndrome. That is, that the economy of their country is exactly like a custard pie, so that if one man takes a big slice every one else necessarily gets a correspondingly small<sup>ax</sup> piece of the pie. To give an example of this kind of thinking: if a man invents a better mouse trap, starts manufacturing his better mouse trap, and gets rich on the centavos of mouse-hating housewives, according to the Custard Pie theory of economics his becoming rich has automatically made everyone else in the country a little poorer. The fact that his mouse-trap factory gives employment to hundreds of men and brings prosperity to his home town is ignored by the tenacious holders of the Custard Pie Syndrome. People who get rich by industry tend to be highly suspect. This may be due to the traditional Spanish mentality, which has always held that the only respectable ways to wealth are through landholding, military careers, or career in the more genteel professions. The profit motive of shop-keepers and the like is, from this point of view, merely a disguised form of robbery. I don't say they all think this way, but I do say that this kind of thinking has been a drag on the economy for many years. A slightly different aspect of the Custard Pie Syndrome is the latin attitude toward mining and petroleum extraction. Since none of these countries

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has been able to afford prospecting for oil, drilling and processing, they have had to call in North American and European capital in order to exploit their petroleum resources. The same thing is true of most branches of mining. Unfortunately, foreign capitalists set up their expensive drilling and mining operations with the idea of eventually making a profit. Profits equal robbery, therefore the foreign companies are robbing the country. The fact that without the capital and technique from abroad their oil or their metals would still be lying uselessly underground is never, never referred to in political speeches, nor is the fact that large royalties are paid into the government coffers annually and many men have well-paid jobs. The companies, so the politicians say, have committed the basic sin of making a profit out of their country's mineral wealth. So as soon as they possibly can, and sometimes sooner, they nationalize and expropriate. Almost invariably the industry suffers gravely from inefficient management and insufficient technology thereafter, and income is sharply reduced for government and workers. But national pride is appeased, even if they have to suffer for it economically. The big exception to this rule <sup>has been</sup> ~~is~~ Venezuela, a country that has tolerated foreign companies and become fabulously rich from their contributions.

The last factor I'm going to mention is the Spanish reluctance to any kind of work involving the use of the hands. Manual labor is considered undignified and degrading. For example, until very recently it was against the law to carry any package through the Plaza Bolivar in Caracas, since carrying things is a menial task unsuited to the dignity of Simón Bolivar's park. No real gentleman wants to become an engineer and possibly get his hands dirty. Do-it-yourself work around the house is taboo for both the señor and the señora, in



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case the neighbors might see and scorn you henceforth. One of the hardest adjustments which latins who come to this country have to face is the adjustment to the idea of mowing their own lawns. Traditional Spanish dignity can be said to account for some of the lag in their econmy. Certainly we in the United States should attribute a great deal of our prosperity to the Calvinistic idea that any kind of work is both good and good for you.

So much for history and economics. Now about the people themselves. The first thing to say is that their national characteristics are widely different due to racial and geographical variances, so that it's not possible to guess how an Argentine will react because you've known a lot of Mexicans or Peruvians. And of course the Brazilians, with their Portuguese heritage, have a different language and differing traditions yet again. Generally speaking, the further south you go on the continent, the higher percentage of European blood you find. Around the Caribbean there is a high percentage of African blood, while Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia and Paraguay have large groups of people with Inadan blood. In the case of Paraguay, we have the only successful example of the development of a fairly homogeneous new race, for early in its history the Spanish and the Guaranf Indians managed to get together to produce a very good-looking strain of people.

The problem everywhere that there are large groups of full-blooded Indians is to get those Indians asimilated into the main stream of the nation's life. Often they don't speak Spanish or Portuguese at all and are overwhelmingly illiterate, so that attempts to improve their standard of living are as the labors of Hercules.

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By the way, the Wycliffe Society, a missionary group of linguists, is doing very valuable work in Peru and Brazil by studying and writing down for the first time some of the many minor Indian languages, then translating the New Testament for the people to learn to read in their own language. The governments of both these countries are behind the Wycliffe Society a hundred percent, despite the fact that they are a Protestant group, because these governments are aware of the necessity for getting these backwoods Indians into the picture of national life by any means available. My son Laurence, who is studying linguistics for a hoped-for PhD, is very interested in joining the Wycliffe Society for a few years. He and his wife are very idealistic young people, and both are fascinated by minor Indian languages, ~~since they both have studied linguistics for several years.~~

In spite of the many differences between Latin Americans, a fairly consistent set of moral standards is found, almost entirely derived from the Iberian peninsula and the Roman Catholic Church. These standards are quite different from our own in the United States, and it would take a lifetime of study to figure out their intricacies. Latins generally tend to think our Protestant standards are abysmally low, and sometimes I have been tempted to think that theirs are very low indeed, so you see it's a question of the point of view. Their valuation of family life is much higher or stronger than ours. Their families stick together down to the last maiden aunt and second cousin twice removed. This is a very positive aspect of Latin American life, one which I find almost wholly admirable. I say almost wholly because it does lead to a great degree of nepotism in government and business. As soon as a man is in elected office his brothers, sisters, brothers-in-law, nephews and uncles

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are likely to be appointed to the best government posts available, as a matter of course. Nevertheless, this love and loyalty for family is often a really beautiful thing- one we could use more of in the United States.

On the other hand, the standard of sexual morals for men is really very low indeed. On this point there cannot be ~~two~~ opinions. I believe ~~the~~ one of the causes of this is the overweening latin yearning for "machismo"- maleness. If a man is rich enough to afford a mistress and doesn't have one, there must be something wrong with him, he just isn't "macho" enough. He's likely to get nervous and wonder if his friends are talking about him behind his back. Adultery for men is therefore an accepted thing, almost a norm. So much so that the Chilean Air Force has the very humane ruling that if an officer dies, not only his widow and legal family get a pension, but also his mistress and the illegitimate children. This humanitarianism can run into money as far as the government is concerned, and indeed I've often thought that "machismo" is one of Latin America's most expensive luxuries!

There is an idea current among male latins that their women are used to their adulteries and don't really mind them. I can testify from many cases I've witnessed that this is simply not true. Latin women are certainly better prepared for their husbands' infidelities- much better prepared than any American woman is- but there results a great deal of heartbreak nonetheless.

Our southern neighbors consider divorce a much greater sin than any amount of adultery, which is a point of difference between us, and leads to our both thinking each other very immoral.

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Attitudes toward birth control have been changing very rapidly in Latin America. It is certainly badly needed, as was proved by the fact that some of the social gains made by the Alliance for Progress were canceled by the high birth rate. In spite of the vast area of Central and South America, there is simply not enough good arable land available for increasing food production enough to meet the constantly multiplying demands. The unfortunate attitude of the Pope, and the political hay being made by leftist propagandists to the effect that all this talk about the necessity for population control is just a wicked Yankee imperialist plot, have had some effect in limiting the work of those interested in seeing that the following generations aren't so huge as to face famine. But I was surprised to hear lately that in Colombia, the staunchest bastion of Roman Catholicism in the Americas, there are more birth control clinics per capita than in the United States. There is obviously a dichotomy in Catholic thinking on the subject.

Speaking of Catholicism, as you know almost everyone down there is at least nominally Catholic. Among the women there is often a good deal of religious fervor, but among the men there is usually very little, with the sad result that most latins think of religion as a matter for priests and women. However, in most countries there is a small but well organized Catholic group, working usually toward fairly conservative political ends. At least this has been the case in the past. Recently some Catholics have become strongly leftist and "Third World" in their thinking. These Church parties are often among the pressure groups I mentioned before. Since the vast majority of influential men have little or no idea of what Christianity is all about, they tend to be completely secular-minded. And since

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they have no vision of hope from religion, the idealists among them turn to thoughts of <sup>materialistic</sup> ~~mundane~~ utopias, with a strong bias toward the Marxist variety.

do instead

Protestant missionaries find that much remains to be done down there. As in St. Paul's day, few of their converts are rich or prosperous. Where they do make a few zealous converts is among the poor and dispossessed, who sometimes welcome the Good News as if they had never heard it before. This is especially true of the more dramatic sects such as the Pentacostals. These little groups of "evangelicals" such as the Pentacostals. These little groups of "evangelicals" are seldom called Protestants, since that is considered a dirty word. I think one of the big appeals of the evangelical churches is the hymn-singing, which gives a chance for everyone to participate in the service. The evangelicals are looked upon with suspicion by many ordinary latins, who think they are the same as communists, plotting subversion. On the other hand, evangelicals are sought after as workmen and craftsmen because of their sobriety and industry. In Guatemala, for instance, evangelicals are frequently the only sober men in many villages on a feast day, and they take upon themselves the charitable work of carrying home the drunks at the end of the festivities. The same is true in Chile, where red wine is so cheap that even a poor man can afford to get drunk on national holidays. I might mention in passing that in Aztec, Maya and Inca lands before Columbus, ritual drunkenness on holidays was a long-established tradition, so don't blame that on the Spaniards. Just congratulate the evangelical pastors for partially eliminating a hide-bound old custom among their followers!

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Much remains to be done  
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Seriously, however, I think there is a crying need for Christianity in any of its varied forms in Latin America today. Nowhere is

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there any thought that Christianity is a valid intellectual possibility, among the younger leaders of the nations. There are people who believe in a Church party, but few who firmly believe that following Christ's steps can be a way of life today, in these times. There are no persuasive and popular writers like C.S. Lewis to make Christianity a possibility to Latin Americans. There are no Reinhold Niebuhrs, no Paul Tillichs to present Christianity to the intellectuals who are the main leaders of Latin American thought. For all practical purposes, I'd say Christianity is a dead issue except where it is a political issue and the Church party is strong enough to make its weight felt. ~~But a Church party is apt to be more of a pressure group than a manifestation of Christian principles.~~

There is a vast reservoir of anti-American feeling in almost all of Latin America today, but it is usually called anti-imperialism nowadays. While it is not a new phenomenon, it has become much more virulent in the past twenty years or so. It strikes newcomers from the United States like a blow in the face, and gives old Latin American hands a queasy feeling, the feeling that they are in the middle of a bad dream. Newspapers, books, political speeches are filled with such bitter denunciations of everything the United States represents that the objective observer is apt to diagnose a hemisphere-wide case of paranoia.

The origins of this paranoid attitude are in the last century, beginning about the time that the United States began to be a prosperous and influential nation. Our ideals and techniques were so radically different from theirs that we couldn't help alienating the latins, and they looked with jealous eyes at our increasing

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wealth and success. Our aggressive self-confidence, amounting often to arrogance, irked a people possessing a full measure of Spanish pride. Our many rather hap-hazzard and ill-conceived interventions in the Big Stick era finished the job of cutting us off from them. They developed acute inferiority complexes, lost hope for self-improvement and confidence. Significantly, the great Liberator himself, Simón Bolivar, said on his death bed that there was no hope for South America, and that the best thing an ambitious man could do would be to emigrate somewhere else.

Their intellectuals, in reaction to North American success, began countering that while our material progress was great, our spiritual and cultural life was dead. The classic of this ego-bolstering school of literature is a little book by the Uruguayan writer Rodó called Ariel, in which he warns the youth of the spiritually superior Latin world not to imitate the souless and sordid utilitarianism of the United States, which he compares to the brutish Caliban of the myth. This book appeared back in the year 1900, and was a godsend to Latin intellectuals who had always known they didn't like North America but had never had such an eloquent spokesman before. It is still re-published almost annually, and the conclusions Rodó reached seventy years ago are still an article of <sup>to many</sup> faith throughout Latin America. Artists and musicians continue to denounce the cultural wasteland that is the U.S.A., although since many of them find it impossible to earn a living by their art in their homelands, they often save their pennies for a one-way air fare to the only country where they can make a decent living as artists or musicians: the Cultural Wasteland we live in.

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New U.S. policies such as that of the Good Neighbor and the Alliance for Progress thus came a good deal too late to save our national reputation. Added to this tardiness is the fact that very few people in and out of our government were sufficiently familiar with latin psychology to predict their reactions to our well-meant attempts to help. I think many business men just starting out in the area tended to think that conditions of doing business down there would be "just like home". Too, we have often taken too much on ourselves rather than letting them do it their way. Also, the attitude of the U.S. Congress toward funds for development changes so rapidly from year to year that it is well-nigh impossible to do much long-range planning. Important and valuable projects that necessitate more than one year's work are all too likely to have their money cut off before they are completed, leaving everybody involved in a state of frustration.

It has ~~often~~ been observed that the fact that the United States backs a certain policy in Latin America is often the kiss of death to perfectly good ideas; the fact that financial aid is necessarily humiliating to the recipients no matter how much they may clamor for it; the fact that mutual trade and commerce builds self-confidence more than does direct aid: all these facts make present-day experts in the field ~~think~~ think that from now on the United States should strive to keep a "low profile" in Latin America and work through multi-national organizations as much as possible. As the leftist tendencies now emerging down there develop, there is bound to be lessened U.S. influence. In any case, this influence has been much exaggerated- there has never been very much direct influence. Although the latins delight in making us the scapegoat for all their



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miseries, these miseries are actually <sup>most often</sup> ~~all~~ inherent in their own national situation and background. The almost constant charges that Yanqui imperialist machinations cause all their problems is a wonderful way for national leaders to get out from under the responsibility of finding solutions for those problems on their own. If you read the daily papers in South America you will hear that there are CIA agents under every bed and hiding in every closet from the Mexican border to Cape Horn. Most thinking latins realize that this theory is ridiculous, but all politicians find it highly convenient whenever something goes unusually wrong in their national life.

We in this country are too ready to think that abundance of good will make up for deficiencies of knowledge. As an example, take the National Council of Churches in its dealing in Latin America. It seems to me that their representatives believe every single word they are told against American policies and American businesses down there, swallowing the bait like eager fishes, and then wallowing helplessly in acute national guilt-feelings. I think this is excessive. Granted that every human being is an individual and national sinner and bumbler; granted that we have ignored our neighbors to the south for too long, and then rushed in without sufficient preparation. Nevertheless there is a great deal of good will and sincere desire for improvement in relations here in the United States. This fact is not appreciated or known in Latin America except in a few isolated cases, and it will never get any publicity if the current state of journalistic opinion there persists.

However, it must be noted that despite the well-organized and financed anti-American campaign, people of all classes are generally friendly to their North American visitors; when people are looking for

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a good job, they seek out American businesses because they pay better and working conditions are superior; latin girls all dream of marrying an American because they are convinced that they make better husbands than the local boys do; and both working-class and professional men are emigrating to the U.S. in record numbers. As in so many different kinds of relationships, there is a good deal of the love-hate ambiguity here.

Let us hope that as a nation and as individuals we learn from our mistakes and acquire greater humility in the future. Let us also hope that as those other nations develop self-confidence and psychological maturity, we will all be able to live together in greater harmony.

Philinda C. Krieg

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The following text is visible on the carbon copy of page 12, covered by a revision in Copy 1 of the typescript:

. Protestants have had very little success as missionaries down there. As in Paul's day, very few of their converts are rich or prosperous. Where they do make a few zealous converts is among the poor and dispossessed. This is especially true of the more dramatic sects such as the Pentacostals. These little groups of "evangelicals" are seldom called Protestants, since that is considered a dirty word. I think one of the big appeals of the evangelical