Abstract and Keywords

This chapter argues that to understand Latin American Protestant architecture, which is diverse and complex, one must understand the changes and perceptions of the economic, social, cultural, and religious contexts in which it was born and has developed. It traces chronologically the ways in which this architecture has been tied to Protestant communities' understanding of changing social, political, and economic contests throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, drawing on a theoretical understanding of architecture as functioning semiotically to signify specific meanings related to cultural contexts and, in a resignification process occurring over time, to resignify new meanings as those contexts change.

Keywords: signification, social context, Protestantism, Pentecostalism, evangelicalism, politics, economics, social class

Introduction

THIS chapter shows how Protestant communities' conception of their religious buildings has changed according to the contexts in which the building arises. Architecture's capacity as a mediator between the community of believers and God is an important justification for building, but it is not the only one. While churches express the religiousness of the Protestant community, they also embody the social perceptions of the congregation. They are simultaneously sacred and profane. To capture that double relation, the chapter will examine signification and resignification in architecture as a key to understanding the progressive transformations of the Protestant temple. A sign only acquires a meaning within a system; thus, signification is a relationship that depends on the subjective conditions of the context.[1] That is, the building design and meaning depend on the community of believers' conception of the social context. To understand Latin-American Protestant architecture, which is diverse and complex, one must understand the changes and perceptions of the economic, social, cultural, and religious contexts in which it has been born and reborn.

The chapter presents a chronological survey of the principal exponents of Latin-America's Protestant architecture throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, demonstrating that it grew out of specific political, economic, and social contexts. We must keep in mind that there is no single Latin American Protestant identity or typical temples[2] that express it. According to Victor Ramos, the "Latin-American identity is the first and only case of continental supranational identity construction, based in a common history and civilization that, beyond the differences, was nurtured by shared struggles and paradigms."[3] It is, therefore, an identity built on diversity. As we will see, this diversity is evident in the development of Protestant architecture throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in relation to significant economic, social, cultural, (p. 408) and religious transformations. We will also see how new architectonic expressions are emerging and coexisting with the earlier ones.

The Fundamentals of Latin American Protestant Architecture in the Nineteenth Century

Economic, Social, Cultural and Religious Contexts

In 1804, Haiti became independent from France. In 1810, Colombia and Mexico declared their independence from Spain, followed by Paraguay in 1811. But despite the open anticlericalism of the pro-independence leaders, many of whom were freemasons, the Catholic Church maintained its power and ties to the state for many decades, even well into the twentieth century. Despite this, many of the new governments facilitated or promoted the arrival of representatives of the Protestant world from the United States and Europe. Initially, they were educators (like James Thompson), merchants (like Mathias Arnhold Höevel), businessmen (like Joshua Waddington, Henry Hill, and William Wheelwright), politicians (like Joel Roberts Poinsett), and many others. Then, fleeing a Europe that was in crisis, millions sailed to America. The first Waldensian families in Argentina and Uruguay, arrived from the Italian Piedmont between 1856 and 1858, and the first Anglican families arrived in Mexico from the United States after the establishment of the Republic in 1823. In 1856, with the arrival of American missionary Henry B. Pratt, Presbyterian families began to arrive in Colombia, establishing confessional schools that were supported by the liberal elites because they included science and languages in their curricula. The first German Lutheran and Reformed families arrived in Chile with the promulgation of the "Law of Vacant Lands" or the "Law of Selective Immigration" of 1845, which aimed to attract professionals and artisans to colonize the southern regions.[4] During these years, North American and European (mainly British) missionary societies, as well as the British and Foreign Bible Society, also landed in Latin America.

Protestantism during these years served as more than simply a religious option; it was seen as a "political and moral choice, supporter of freedom of conscience, of free examination, of secular education and tolerance, while the evangelical faithful are considered industrious people, productive, eager to advance for the work impulse."[5] As the first

Protestant Architecture in Latin America

Protestant missionaries pursued their religious work, they established good relationships with the governments and liberal parties of the time and compromised in social and political situations. They worked with British, French, and American officials and professionals hired by some governments.[6] They did not belong to the richest and most powerful groups, but they were freethinking intellectuals, who did not confess the Catholic faith or share the ideas of conservative parties and social classes. By 1900, (p. 409) Latin America had sixty-five million inhabitants, of which around fifty thousand were Protestant.[7]
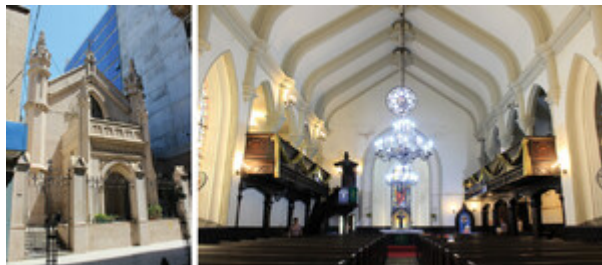

Figure 25.1 German Evangelical Congregation Temple, Buenos Aires, 1853.

Photographs by Rodrigo Vidal Rojas, 2020.

Protestant Architecture

From 1825, English and German-speaking immigrants rented civic places in which to congregate. The Lutheran community of São Leopoldo in Brazil met in an old hemp warehouse in Feitoria, donated by the colony (Beling 2017, 297). Beginning in 1845, the Presbyterians in Chile held services in the printing office of the *El Mercurio de Valparaíso* newspaper.[8] The Methodist Episcopalians in southern Mexico acquired the abandoned chapel of San Andrés for their services in 1873. An Anglican church was founded in Montevideo in 1845.[9] First Baptist Church of San Andrés, in Colombia, followed in 1847. Valparaíso saw the creation of the Union Church for various English-speaking congregations in 1856, and in Callao, Peru, Methodists erected a prefabricated wooden church in 1864.[10]

These churches imported an architecture, a piece of Europe or the United States in Latin America, that had little or nothing to do with the local cultural or architectonic environment. Its purpose was to serve the foreign arrivals, recalling their homelands. During this period of Protestant building, three main trends dominated. First, an eclectic, European-influenced *neogothic* vocabulary was favored, like that seen in the church of the Congregación Evangélica Alemana (German Evangelical Congregation), in Buenos Aires, dedicated in 1853 (Figure 25.1). The front balconies constitute a feature that will be repeated in diverse Latin American Lutheran temples.

The second trend is that of Gothic Revival architecture, popular throughout America, exemplified by the Presbyterian church at the corner of Rengo and Rozas in Concepción, Chile. This church, dated from the late nineteenth century, was (p. 410) conceived as a

simple, longitudinal structure with high, pointed arch windows and a corner tower built in exposed masonry. The exterior design creates an interesting change in scale: the tower and the narrower facade entry define a first level, and the lateral facade has double-height openings indicating the higher level of the nave, which is dominated by a large ogival window.[11] This building belongs to the same typological family as the 1859 Broadway Tabernacle Church, in New York City,[12] and the Methodist El Mesías Balderas, in Cuauthémoc, Mexico City.[13] A similar tower with diverse compositional variants is seen in the Iglesia Metodista Trinidad, in Chihuahua, Mexico, dedicated in 1892.

In other cases, Protestants did not build buildings but acquired and adapted existing ones. A remarkable case is the Methodist Episcopal Church's 1873 acquisition of the old main cloister of the sixteenth-century Antiquo Convento de San Francisco in Mexico City (now Iglesia Metodista de la Santísima Trinidad).

Architectonic Meaning of the Temple in Its Context

Within the social context of the period, Protestants competed with Catholics to give the new independent nations an alternative religiosity to that imposed by the Spanish and Portuguese colonizers. Thus strong support came from Protestants in the United States and Britain, as well as from other European Protestant countries, including Germany, Sweden, and Holland. The individuals, families, and missionary teams that arrived in South America needed places of worship in which to meet and to receive important non-Catholic national visitors. Liberals, freemasons, and radicals also needed meeting space. The Protestant architecture of that period was designed for the middle classes: the business, politic, merchant, and technical elites. Yet, within this framework, the churches remained exclusive and separate from the rest of society. The Protestant movement ignored the most disadvantaged classes. The Catholic Church professed concern for the rural and poor urban populations, but in practice, these groups were not attended to by anyone— not even by the state. Distancing themselves from the world, the Protestants turn *inward* in an exclusive search for God's kingdom. Their elegant but austere temples, circumscribed to specific middle- and upper-middle-class foreign communities, were kept closed except during services.

These temples respect the first fundamental principle of Protestant architecture: the pulpit's visual and acoustic centrality, which emphasizes the preeminence of the Word. The pulpit organizes the interior architecture, whether it is a simple desk located on a platform that holds the Bible or a Protestant reinterpretation of the Catholic presbytery and an altar. These buildings also included the second Protestant architectonic principle: the perimeter gallery. Whether only on the sides, in the back, or on all sides of the enclosure, the gallery allows visual and gestural communication between participants and the full and active participation of individuals.[14]

(p. 411) Protestant Architecture in Latin America, 1900–1960

Economic, Social, Cultural and Religious Contexts

The United States expanded its influence in the region through the early twentieth century. With the Spanish-American War of 1898, it acquired Puerto Rico and temporarily gained control of Cuba. The Panamanian revolution against Columbia provided the United States with the opportunity to build a canal across the isthmus. In addition, the United States carried out military incursions into Central America and the Caribbean, mostly in defense of commercial interests. The central milestones of the period, however, were the Mexican Revolution led by Porfirio Díaz (1910) and the beginning of the Cuban Revolution, led by Fidel Castro (1959). The latter had its origin in the erosion of the presidential oligarchic model and the state's subsequent abandonment of the popular classes. Starting in Mexico, this process would be repeated elsewhere in Latin America, causing the gradual appearance of a new *mesocracy*, or middle class, that created new political parties and social organizations. In the birth and consolidation of this mesocracy, European immigrants who had escaped the First World War and settled in Latin America played an important role, contributing innovative social ideas like trade unionism and socialism, motivating the transformation of the oligarchic democracy, and laying the foundations of social democracy. From 1929, the Great Depression deeply affected the financial interests of the ruling oligarchies, provoking government instabilities, the reappearance of the military in politics, and different forms of *caudillismo*. At the same time, the agro-export development model was plunged into crisis, and banks and enterprises went bankrupt.

In reaction for this instability, different types of political regimes arose. For instance, periodic electoral democracies arose in Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, and Costa Rica, some of them promoted by *popular fronts*. Government-controlled democracies that restricted competition arose in Mexico, Venezuela, and Colombia; militarism, in Central America, Caribbean, Paraguay, and Bolivia; and populist governments, in Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile. From 1945, with the creation of the United Nations (UN), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Bank and the consolidation of the United States and Britain as the main powers of the Western world, what is now known as the New Economic World Order (NEWO) was launched—an effort to create global political and institutional agreements aimed at bringing about the recovery of international capitalism, based on an affirmation of world peace. The NEWO supported the strengthening of the state as a guarantor of the economic system and the social welfare of the people through a regulated capitalism that controlled markets and a welfare state that aimed to guarantee social protection and satisfy basic needs: job, health, education, households, and pensions.

(p. 412) Around 1950, processes of state-directed industrialization or import substitution industrialization (ISI) began. Promoted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the ISI model aimed to reduce the vulnerability of countries in the international market by generating manufactured products within

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them.[15] Along with the rise of a new working class, industrialization encouraged migration from the countryside to the city by young people and families seeking employment in the nascent industry. At the same time, women were achieving greater participation in economic and civic life, having obtained the right to vote in nineteen countries by 1961.[16] In addition, the general literacy rate increased from just over 60 percent in 1910 to close to 90 percent in 1960 for men, and from 35 percent in 1910 to 80 percent in 1960 for women.

In this period, a millenarian theology oriented toward evangelization for the salvation of souls developed, based on the conviction to preach the gospel "unto the uttermost part of the Earth" (Acts 1:8). In architecture, this mission was expressed in the construction of buildings to host community service activities (diakonia) and in an architecture that was increasingly remote from historical precedents. Self-described as apolitical, this wave of evangelization facilitated cordial relationships between many churches and their governments. Lastly, during this period, a Pentecostal revival swept through Latin America, manifesting itself in Valparaiso, Chile (1902); Sonora, Mexico, and Concepcion, Chile (1907); Santiago, Chile, and Belem, Brazil (1909); and Sao Paulo, Brazil (1910).[17] Today, the Pentecostal movement has become the most popular form of Protestantism in Latin America.

Protestant Architecture after 1900

With the advent of the twentieth century, new Protestant temples emerged, built by missionaries whose central objective was the evangelization of the local population. They came mainly from the United States and represented many denominations and missionary societies: Episcopalians, Baptists, Methodists, Assemblies of God, and Wesleyans. Seeking affordable land on which to build, many acquired narrow lots far from the city center. In Chile, the Presbyterian Church of Valparaíso (today Iglesia Misionera de Pentecostés) was built in 1909 on sloping land between existing buildings. The simplified neo-Gothic facade housed a two-storey rectangular room, with a balcony running along the two longitudinal sides and the entry side opposite the pulpit. It was prototypical Protestant architecture: double height and balconies, great simplicity, and organized around the pulpit.

Many buildings incorporated an eclectic mix of classical, neocolonial Latin American, and Romanesque elements. For example, the Episcopal Cathedral of San Lucas in Panama City, built between 1922 and 1923, by Hobart Upjohn, and consecrated in 1924, featured a modest ground-level entrance, surmounted by a broad, symmetrical, upper-level (p. 413) classical colonnade, neocolonial Latin American elements in the proportions, broad eaves, and a stylized tower and, in the interior, an open round-arch rood screen. This eclecticism is also observed in the Evangelical Baptist Church Radio Norte, Uruguay (1949); the First Baptist Church of El Prado, in La Paz, Bolivia; the First Methodist Church of Lima, Peru (1932); and the First Episcopal Methodist Church of Santiago de Chile (1925), among many others.

Protestant Architecture in Latin America

Abandoning the Gothic, Romanesque, colonial, and baroque architectures, many churches of this period adopted variants of art deco. An example is the Vedado University Methodist Church in Havana, Cuba (Figure 25.2), designed by Ricardo Franklin and dedicated in 1950, which received a National Council of Architects Gold Medal for its originality, beauty, and practical utility. This building features a strong vertical element, with a tripartite entry and large center tower crowned with a cross announcing and celebrating the entrance. Concrete pillars, columns, and piers linking the lower and upper levels emphasize the verticality. The worship hall surprises one with a proportion and shape that differs from the exterior. This rectangular space features a ceiling composed of curved concrete frames with a lowered semicircle. These ceiling arches constitute a continuous frame with pillars in raised relief on the side walls that descend to the foundation. In its central longitudinal section, the curved ceiling is raised to allow for clerestory windows that flood the room with natural light and enhance the centrality of the pulpit. The building shows the clear influence of Auguste and Gustave Perret's Notre-Dame du Raincy, in Paris (1923). It is also similar to the contemporary Art Deco temple Cristo Rey Church, in Tlalpan, Mexico, by Antonio Muñoz García and Miguel Rebolledo (1952). Cuba's Templo Butista Nazaret de Cienfuegos (1936), recipient of the National Award of Conservation of Cultural Heritage, is another fine example of Art Deco.

Figure 25.2 Vedado University Methodist Church Temple, La Havana, Cuba, 1950, by Ricardo Franklin.

Photographs by Rodrigo Vidal Rojas, 2014.

(p. 414) Architectonic Meaning of the Temple in Its Context

Some buildings from this period retain elements from revival styles, but others adopt a more utilitarian architecture, either owing to austerity, materials, the influence of new architectural trends, or the desire to differentiate themselves from Catholic architecture. These buildings are unadorned, devoid of religious images outside and in. The interiors feature a simple quadrangular plan focused on the pulpit and, in many cases, a perimeter gallery, thus "configuring a single space, a single room of worship where everyone was unanimous together."[18]As such, they display a formal and spatial simplicity similar to the meetinghouses of New England.[19] With these buildings Protestant architecture was seeking its own identity.

Pentecostal architecture of this period has two distinct stages. The first is an *underground stage*, which continued through the late 1930s. In a context of Catholic persecution and little recognition by the historic Protestant churches, the anonymous, veiled

places of Pentecostal worship went unnoticed, located in areas where the most disadvantaged live. Initially meeting in houses, warehouses, and other commercial buildings or borrowed churches, Pentecostals eventually began to build their own churches. These austere buildings with simple shapes, similar to large houses or auditoriums, nevertheless served as a refuge for believers. A second, or *latent stage*, replaced the underground one and lasted until the early 1960s. During this period, as nation-states began to distance themselves from the Catholic Church and the historical Protestant churches began to stagnate, Pentecostal churches were beginning to be accepted and tolerated. The temples of this period were still discreet, but they no longer hid from society. In fact, some groups acquired the former church buildings of historic Protestant congregations.

Throughout this process exists a strong tension between the divine and the human in the creation of architecture, as I have noted elsewhere, "between the conviction of embracing the mystic presence of God and the need of adaptation to the concrete conditions of the social reality." On the one hand, "God's presence is manifested in the conviction of embracing all those religious, institutional, traditional or the mystic experience aspects, that had been considered as incontestable by the Christian tradition," not just by Pentecostals. On the other hand, "Concrete reality is expressed in decisions that try to satisfy the economic, legal, property, material, structural, among another needs, so the building can exist." This tension creates an "ambivalent integration that makes their temples being unique, unrepeatable and complex to understand in all its richness buildings."[20] In the Proceedings of the Panama Congress, Reverend Tolbert F. Reavis, of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions (Buenos Aires, Argentina) stated: "We Christians must give more attention to our church buildings. Down in Buenos Aires, a man who had been associated with the evangelical church, left it, though continuing his support. When asked why he had left, he said: 'I cannot worship in such a henhouse as that.' This artistic sense is not superficial; it is a mark of superiority; we should respect it."[21] With those words he expressed the feeling of many missionaries at the time about the need for architectural quality in temples, even the simplest.

(p. 415) Protestant Architecture in Latin America, 1960–1990

Economic, Social, Cultural, and Religious Context

During the sixth special session of the United Nations General Assembly 1974, the expression New International Economic Order (NIEO) emerged. The NIEO replaced earlier ideas about aiding developing countries with a proposal for a new economic order based on interdependence among countries. Margaret Thatcher, from 1979, and Ronald Reagan, from 1981, advocated the transforming of the existing international economic system into a new system termed *neoliberalism*: "An economic paradigm and a political project that revolves around privatization, deregulation of markets, the weakening of unions and the strengthening of the power of capital, the reduction of the economic role

of the state, the emergence of private capital markets and globalization."[22] In Latin America, the first and best student of neoliberalism was Chile, where a military dictatorship imposed the neoliberal economic model beginning in 1976. Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Argentina, and others Latin American nations succumbed to neoliberalism as well.[23] As a result, according to Reyes, between 1960s and 1970s, Latin America moved from a position of relative economic stability and began generating significant foreign debt.[24] Then, during the 1980s, the social crisis worsened with the application of structural-adjustment programs. In the 1980s, with the beginning of the adoption of the neoliberal model, there was progressive decline in national industries, a boom in exports of raw materials and imports of manufactured goods, fueling a process that came to be known as the second stage of globalization, whose gestation began in the 1960s.[25] Finally, during the 1990s, the region began to experience an increase in production, but macroeconomic adjustment policies continue to be applied.

As part of this globalization, the Alliance for Progress was created. Between 1961 and 1970, this program projected US investments of about twenty billion dollars in financial, political, and social aid to Latin America. At the same time, the United States was leading the world war in the fight against communism. With the support of the dominant oligarchy in each country, the United States intervened militarily to quash every socialist and communist outbreak in Latin America, provoking in various countries the emergence of military dictatorships. The supposed goals of the new Latin American militaries were to defend democracy from the communist risk seen in Cuba, create new societies, defend the local oligarchies, and modernize the countries. In this context, Latin American countries' domestic efforts to democratize based on system of a large civic participation had little success. Efforts to build socialist governments were crushed, and military dictatorships emerged in Brazil (1964), Argentina (1966), Bolivia (1971), Chile (1973), Uruguay (1976), and Argentina again (1976).[26]

(p. 416) Protestant Architecture

In this context of new freedoms, revolution, and tolerance, some churches openly supported the military dictatorships while others were strongly committed to the defense of human rights. In both cases, their temples emerge from their relative anonymity and show a stronger public presence, some becoming "stars" in public space. Thus, a third stage of Pentecostal Architecture emerged: a period of *evident architecture*. This is what happened with the Evangelical Methodist Pentecostal Cathedral (Catedral Evangelica de Chile Jotabeche), in Santiago, Chile, for instance (Figure 25.3).

Located on the city's principal avenue of, it was the first evangelical temple built in the vicinity of the Chilean Cathedral (1967–1974). With its monumental size giving it great visibility in the evangelical world and creating a new point of urban tension, it was conceived as a significant participant in the cityscape. The massive building has facades on three different streets and twelve access doors. It features a simplified neo-Gothic architectural vocabulary, with three towers in front, pointed arches, distinctive verticality emphasized by half columns, and inside, a massive open sanctuary and the largest pulpit

platform of the Chilean evangelical movement. At the time, it contained the largest seating capacity among all the Chilean evangelical temples, accommodating over six thousand people. The building was declared a National Monument in 2013.

In contrast, during the second half of the twentieth century, Baptist temples on the continent show a progressive distancing from neo-Gothic, neo-Romanesque, neoclassical, and neocolonial influences. Example include several temples that were erected on the sites of earlier ones. For instance, the initial Baptist church in Concepción, Chile, at the corner of Salas and Rozas, was a late neo-Romanesque building, erected in 1933. It was demolished after the 1960 earthquake and replaced in 1964 with a new temple in a modernist architectural style.[27] Another example is the first Baptist temple of Ciudad de Mexico, at the corner of Mina and Héroes Colonia Guerrero. The congregation's original building, designed by Dr. O. C. Pope and completed in 1887, featured a neoclassical style with a corner bell tower. It was replaced in 1957 with a new, Bauhaus-influenced modernist building designed by Alberto Borocio Barrios, who also served as the president of the National Baptist Convention of Mexico.[28] A more extreme case is that of the two temples of the First Baptist Church of Guadalajara, Mexico. The first one, inaugurated in 1921, was a very eclectic corner building featuring round and square arches, pediments, columns, and balusters on top of the facades. The building that replaced it, in 1974, is an example of simplified brutalism; it is a reinforced concrete box with a chamfered corner, and relief drawings along the entire facade.[29]

Rationalist or modernist architecture (*la arquitectura racionalista*), with its simplicity of form, intensive use of concrete, absence of ornamentation, and incorporation of natural light, allowed Protestant architecture to distance itself from the earlier historicist approach and to return to the foundational principles established during the Reformation defining the temple as a place of communion rather than hierarchical distinction, illumination not darkness, revelation not mystery, simplicity not lavishness, (p. 417) and of the people rather than God. The Protestant position is that the temple should be an easy, simple, open, unified space centered around the pulpit.[30] For example, in the temple of the Waldensian Church in Montevideo, the spatial configuration creates a dialogue between the solidity of the concrete and its austerity, the careful proportions, the transparency of glass, the vertical louvers creating a sunscreen, and the resulting play of (p. 418) light. This building represents a common type of Latin American Protestant temple in the mid-twentieth century.[31]

Figure 25.3 Pentecostal Methodist Evangelical Cathedral in Santiago de Chile, 1967–1974, by Rubén Vieyra.

Photographs by Rodrigo Vidal Rojas, 2013.

Architectonic Meaning of the Temple in Its Context

Protestant churches in Latin America encompass diverse theological postures on social issues that result in and validate relationships with a variety of interlocutors, including governments—even the military dictatorships—for institutional recognition; the World Council of Churches, to consolidate the ecumenical approach to the Catholic Church; and different intermediate organizations of society, to declare the speech of the need of a new society. In some places this included friendly collaboration with the Communist Party to affirm the need for a new society, leading more progressive Protestant groups to affirm Catholic Liberation Theology as individuals and groups sought new freedoms, driven by revolutionary yearnings and political persecution. After the military dictatorships ended, the renewed but fragile democratic transitions were fertile ground for the search for new expressions of freedom.

In some Protestant communities, this freedom promoted the desire to conceive of a more open church, one more sensitive to the human person and not so anchored to the divine. But most Latin American churches had a politically and socially conservative bias, expressed, for example, by the exclusive use of a vast majority of temples for the liturgy of worship and communion. These two different responses to the yearnings for freedom point to a distancing between two Protestant groups—the institutionalists and the progressives—despite their shared ecclesiastical denomination. Institutionalists churches that were linked to political power, emphasized religious activity without social critique, seeking to reach an urban following through their buildings and media, primarily television and radio. They celebrated a cult of representation and power, a liturgy-spectacle,

enhancing the meaning of the building as a magnificent temple, as God's room. On the other side, progressive churches raised a strong social critique grounded in theology and eschewed power, connecting instead with local communities and embracing ecumenism. In their architecture, they tried to recover the idea of the building as a temple-home, a meeting place of equals.

Protestant Architecture in Latin America from 1990

Economic, Social, Cultural, and Religious Contexts

After the advent of the neoliberal model, with minor exceptions, Latin America entered a period of economic decline.[32] According to Solimano, in the first quarter of (p. 419) the twenty-first century, four negative impacts of neoliberalism and globalization, have been strongly felt, which he describes as "high concentration of income and wealth in the richest segment of the population … heterogeneity of entrepreneurship … growing internal differentiation within the middle class … fragmentation and marginalization of the traditional working class."[33] The financial, economic, political, and, especially, social crises that accompanied these impacts have raised doubts about the sustainability of the neoliberal model over time.

Since the early 1990s, many of the countries that were military dictatorships began to face the difficult reconstruction of democracy. With the recovery of freedoms (political, press, opinion, action) in these new democracies, especially in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, a new less religious, less Catholic, and more secular morality emerged. Literacy was now possible for the majority of children and youth, although with a new, dual system of free public education of low quality and private, paid education of high quality, the quality of education was uneven. The arrival of international media via satellite, the internet, and optical fiber technologies transformed social life. These transformations have contributed to a decrease in the population living in poverty due to greater opportunities to enter the labor market in many Latin American countries. But there is no expansion of the richest population, which results in a growth of the middle stratum of the population. According to a 2012 World Bank report, with the concentration of wealth in the richest 5% of the population and the reduction of extreme poverty, Latin America today has a large and diverse middle class. The report goes on to say that between 58 percent and 66 percent of the Latin American population belongs to the middle class.[34] Solimano distinguishes a medium-low class and an upper-middle class: the former is vulnerable to falling into poverty during periods of financial or economic crisis, whereas the latter has the potential, under auspicious economic conditions, to advance to the upper class, in a process of upward social mobility.[35] Protestants interpret such mobility as a *divine blessing*, and a familial narrative of upward mobility has become popular: the grandfather was a worker; the father was a technician or salesman; and the son is a professional or an entrepreneur. The story is underscored by the reminder that fifty years ago, the bikes and wagons of the

religious brothers and sisters sat outside the temple during worship hours, but today, the entire block is lined with beautiful cars.

Protestant Architecture from 1990

New nondenominational Protestant groups—known as Christian communities, free churches, or neo-Pentecostals—arrived in Latin America in the 1970s. At first, they met in rented venues, such as hotels, sport arenas, or multipurpose halls. By the early 2000s, some of these groups had groups experienced considerable growth in membership and started to build their own buildings. Known as *mega temples*, these large-scale buildings include the Más Vida, in Mexico City; Casa de Dios de Cash Luna, El Shaddai, and Fraternidad Cristiana, in Guatemala (Figure 25.4); the Ministerio Internacional La (p. 420) Cosecha, in Honduras; the Comunidad Hosanna, Nicaragua; the Comunidad Apostólica Hosanna, in Panama City; Centro Mundial del Avivamiento, Misión Carismática Mundial, and Lugar de su Presencia, in Bogota, Colombia; Iglesia Universal del Reino de Dios, in Sao Paulo, Brazil; and the Catedral del Espíritu Santo, in Santiago, Chile.
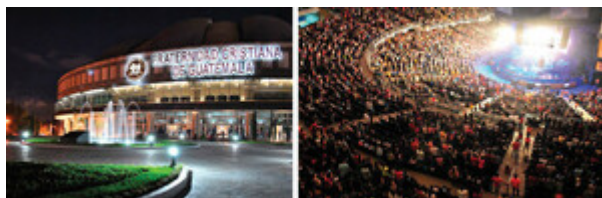

Figure 25.4. Mega temple of the Christian Fraternity, in Guatemala City, 2007, by Julio Pérez and Gabriel Barahona.

Left photo, courtesy of Iván San Martín. Right photo, Rodrigo Vidal Rojas personal archive.

In the United States, Kilde explains "the amphitheatre plan of megachurches caters to the same physical needs and desires in the late twentieth century as it did in the late nineteenth. Hearing and seeing in a comfortable setting remain paramount."[36] Similarly, in Latin America, the spatial and formal configuration of the architecture of these new temples aims to provide spectators with comfortable acoustic and visual access to the stage. The new buildings, however, are not designed for the communion among congregants the Protestant architecture has sought since the Reformation. Instead, this is an architecture for spectacle, and spectators replace the congregants. The spectators are anonymous people who try to communicate with God through the artists on stage. Some of those artists pray; others sing and dance; still others cry, and the chosen one delivers the message. The spectators do not know one another. They go to enjoy the program offered to them from the stage because we live immersed in a civilization of the spectacle—in politics, sexuality, and religion. As Mario Vargas Llosa claims, the civilization of the spectacle is "that of a world where the first place in the current table of values is occupied by entertainment, and where having fun, escaping from boredom, is universal passion." He adds, "Consequently, popularity and success are conquered not so much by intelligence

and probity as by demagoguery and histrionic talent." But it is not just about the profane world. "It's not surprising that in the pantomime civilization, religion approaches the circus and is sometimes confused with it."[37]

Large-capacity churches that can accommodate more than a thousand people are starting to appear in in small cities, holding services during the week and on Sundays. One example is the Centro Bíblico El Rodadero, in Santa Marta, Colombia. Just as with the earlier Pentecostal buildings, the goal of attracting a large number of people to services is paramount. The architectural forms are simple, and the construction basic to keep costs low. Unlike the mega temples, these smaller churches have uniform artificial illumination so that congregants can see not only the pulpit but the whole room, (p. 421) allowing them to see and interact with one another. Thus, in this contemporary trend we see that a new principle is present: a liberation from earlier strictures of form and space that offers emancipation from previous styles and allows worship in a more informal and less solemn manner.

Architectonic Meaning of the Temple in Its Context

Many young Latin American Protestants, having experienced significant social mobility because of their professional achievements, have demanded greater quality in the form of the Protestant temple. In some cases, this has promoted the construction of new temples that are different from the old ones, because the temple of the peasant grandfather or the merchant father does not seem to have enough dignity for today's time. For some, the renovation of historic churches has provided space in which to congregate. Others have joined megachurches. But many have abandoned community religious practice and retreated into a private and personal faith observed at home or in small discussion groups.[38] This privatization of the faith process and quantitative expansion of the new neo-Pentecostal Christian communities has been strengthened by the growing secularity and agnosticism of some Latin American countries, including Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay. In Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, El Salvador, Brazil, and especially Guatemala, however, the retreat of Catholicism and a certain evangelizing apathy among the historic Protestant and traditional Pentecostal churches, along with the assault on political power,[39] has promoted a strong adherence to the new evangelical churches, fueling the construction of mega temples. Consequently, the changes in the architecture during this period also express a reformulation of the role the churches play in the face of new situations and the demands of contemporary society. This reformulation has resulted in the expression of theology revisited from new perspectives: feminist, culturalist, social, among others. As these new conceptions of religious life destabilize institutionalized religion, they also raise questions about the role and conception of temples.

This is the fourth stage of Pentecostal architecture: *diversification.* In a redemocratization context characterized by increased agnosticism, a sharp decline of historic Catholic and Protestant religious practice, social and cultural claims of all kinds, institutions in crisis, and the strong penetration of information and communication technologies (ICTs), Pentecostal churches have diversified, differentiating themselves, become present for the first

time in the high economic strata. Their temples are visible, offered as an alternative answer to the contemporary crisis.

Conclusions

As demonstrated here, a direct relationship exists between the Protestant built architectures and the contexts in which they arise. Formal and spatial transformations of the Protestant building embody communities' responses to that context. In the face of (p. 422) adversity, they withdraw inward. Faced with apathy and indifference, they take advantage of placing themselves in previously forbidden places. Faced with the crisis within institutions, they vie for urban visibility. In the face of social and economic uncertainty, they boldly show themselves in the landscape to offer an alternative of prosperity to human suffering. In the design and construction practice, this ongoing resignification of church buildings is expressed through new materials, spatial forms and organization, colors, and new approaches to light and sound.

But today it is also worth asking if we already have started a fifth stage, characterized by the growing virtualization of human relationships. After all, the relationship with God is a virtual one through faith, a relationship with a very real but nonmaterial being that only makes Himself evident inside us and through our relationship with others. If the Protestant architecture depends on the contextual characteristics from which it arises, and if those characteristics condition the meaning given to the building, one must ask whether in the growing electronic or "virtual" context, Protestants need to keep building temples. As Segura affirms, "God's intention has always been of living among His people, and His people have tried over and over again [to] imprison Him in a building."[40] Church is not synonymous with a building. And while Paul affirms in Ephesians 2:19–22 that Church is itself the temple of God, Christians have spent centuries building buildings and not building the Church.

Modern Protestantism tends to downplay the built temple while adapting to contemporary culture. In light of this, three trends can be observed in contemporary Latin America. (1) In the face of virtualization, groups do not build churches but congregate in provisional places in order to cultivate the individual "interior temple" and consolidate community through new technologies. (2) Small faith groups build simple, austere, sustainable buildings, following the example of the first century because Christ, it is understood, will soon return, rendering inadvisable investment in buildings that will soon perish. (3) Large middle-class congregations build big architectonic structures, worthy of the Living God and reflective of an empowered Protestantism. This diversity is the actual dilemma of Latin American Protestant Architecture.

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Notes:

(1.) On signification and the architectural sign, see Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Intenciones en Arquitectura* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1979), 39; Nikolaos-Ion Terzoglou, "Architecture as Meaningful Language: Space, Place and Narrativity," *Linguistics and Literature Studies* 6, no. 3 (2018); Patricia Cordella, "¿Qué es semiosis?," *Revista Gaceta de Psiquiatría Universitaria* 10, no. 4 (2014): 390; Charles Morris, *Fundamentos de la teoría de los signos* (Barcelona: Paidós, 1985); Morris, *Signos, lenguaje y conducta* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1962), 29; Enrique Paniagua, "La arquitectura y su significación pragmática y tectónica," *Revista Signa* 22 (2013): 19; Juhani Pallasmaa, *Los ojos de la piel: La arquitectura y los sentidos* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 2006), 72; Rodrigo Vidal Rojas, "Arquitectura y Homeostasis: Elementos para un diseño más humano," *Revista Arte Oficio* 3 (2004): 19–24; Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Arquitectura occidental*, 3rd ed., GG Reprints (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1999), 222–223.

(2.) The Spanish word *templo* is commonly used in Latin America for Protestant churches. It is translated throughout this chapter as "temple." Rodrigo Vidal Rojas, *Entender el templo pentecostal: Elementos, fundamentos, significados* (Concepción, Chile: CEEP, 2012), 99–105.

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(6.) Servando A. Álvarez Villaverde, "América latina: Economía, Estado y Sociedad en el siglo XXI," Historia Actual Online 16, 2008, 69. https://www.historia-actual.org/Publicaciones/index.php/hao/article/view/251

(7.) Fletcher and Ropero, *Historia general del cristianismo*, 386.

(8.) Vidal Rojas, *Entender el templo pentecostal*, 416.

(9.) The original temple of the Holy Trinity Church in Montevideo, located near the Cubo del Sur on Santa Teresa Street, was built by Antonio Paulliere in 1845. It was demolished to make way for another project in 1924, but a replica of it, without the two back towers, was erected two years later on a nearby lot. A photograph of the temple in its original location, in 1926, can be found online at: Montevideo Antiguo (November 27, 2016), *Templo Inglés*. https://montevideoantiguo.net/index.php/presentes/templo-ingles.html. For the current replica of the old temple, see Municipio Montevideo (June 1, 2018), *Templo Inglés*. https://municipiob.montevideo.gub.uy/node/218.

(10.) Methodist Mission Bicentennial, *Inicios del metodismo en Perú*. https://methodistmission200.org/inicios-del-metodismo-en-el-peru/.

(11.) Vidal Rojas, Entender el templo pentecostal, 427–428. Because of the damage caused by the 1939 earthquake, the temple was torn down.

(12.) Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 57.

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(17.) Vidal Rojas, *Entender el templo pentecostal*, 13–67.

(18.) Vidal Rojas, "La domus ecclesiae evangélica latinoamericana," 75.

(19.) Rodrigo Vidal Rojas, "El templo evangélico, entre contexto endógeno e influencia exógena: El caso del templo metodista pentecostal de Cerro Larraín, en Valparaíso," *Revista AUS* 16 (2014): 28, doi:10.4206/aus.2014.n16-05.

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(23.) Víctor Bulmer-Thomas, *La historia económica de América Latina desde la Independencia* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2017).

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(26.) For a detailed analysis, see Jaime Ornelas Delgado and Liza Aceves López, "La izquierda latinoamericana en el siglo XX y la utopía recuperada," *Bajo el Volcán* 11, no. 17 (2011): 273–295.

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(29.) Photographs of the two buildings of the First Baptist Church of Guadalajara, in Mexico can be found online. The first, in 1921: Archive: First Temple of 1921. https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archivo:Primer_Templo_de_1921.jpg. The second, in 1974: First Baptist Church of Guadalajara, A.R. https://www.facebook.com/568586233200819/photos/a.568630293196413/568630296529746/

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(31.) Ibid., 73–75.

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(40.) Osías Segura, *Riquezas, templos, apóstoles y superapóstoles* (Barcelona: Clie, 2012), 143.

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