

## FOREWORD

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When we as *LARR* associate editors learned of the proposal of Jeffrey Rubin, David Smilde, and Benjamin Junge for this special issue, we were eager to be involved. Representing the journal, we had the great pleasure to attend meetings in Boston in 2011 and 2012 of this important new research initiative, initially titled "Religion, Social Movements, and Progressive Reform in Latin America," where we heard many stimulating papers from a diverse range of scholars working in Latin America and the United States. At each meeting the group of presenters was never the same, which made for much exciting cross-fertilization of thinking in efforts to work through these themes, with stimulating and lively discussions moving from conference venues to restaurants and spilling out later onto the sidewalks of Boston. As our gracious host and the main convener of the meetings, Jeff Rubin skillfully wove together disparate views and approaches, moving toward the common threads that you see highlighted in this volume: zones of crisis, the day-to-day experience of religion, and citizenship. Each of the papers configures these themes in a unique way, demonstrating the undeniable centrality of religion as an inspiration and shaper of subjectivities, personal and public action, and engagement with politics in diverse settings across the Americas.

This collection is salutary in many respects. First, it is an attempt to take religion seriously not as an incidental, peripheral element but as a determinative, significant force in analyses of social and political change. In recent decades alone, post-neoliberal Latin America and the Americas as a whole have witnessed the explosion of Pentecostalist Christianity; the apparent waning of liberation theology concurrent with the ascent of a more mediatized, charismatic, and arguably more conservative institutional Catholic Church; and the growing recognition of indigenous cosmogonies and ontologies as reflecting alternative knowledges that can no longer be ignored. How can we see these phenomena, and other expressions of religion, situated within contexts of environmental threat and worsening social inequalities, drug-related and other forms of violence, the emergence of left-oriented regimes in some parts of South America, new attempts at participatory citizenship, and mass migration across national borders? In other words, how do religious forms mediate everyday experience? How are these mediations particular to the region's history, and how might they be seen as part of other, more encompassing transnational or even global processes or patterns?

Second, this issue attempts to address multiple facets of social change and religion in the Americas in an interdisciplinary framework. Such a task poses many challenges, not least because many researchers have harbored a knee-jerk

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suspicion or otherwise limited view of religion, including Latin Americans trained within the legacy of Jacobinic, Enlightenment mind-sets that are so deeply inscribed in many nationalist imaginaries and discourses. Due to the customary division of labor in the academic world in Latin America and beyond, in which “religion” was understood as an easily separable realm of everyday life that had little impact on politics and social change (at least in ways that mattered), many scholars trained in the social sciences never had to think about religion. And those who did so were dependent in their interpretations or analyses on categories and frameworks that often worked to perpetuate the sequestering of religion from the realm of the everyday—the same realm where politics begins. Taking religion seriously then means having to hone new conceptual tools and vocabularies and treading into theoretical territory that may feel completely unfamiliar and even uncomfortable. One of the goals of this issue’s editors is to show scholars of Latin America how they can incorporate religion in their research without having to become scholars of religion themselves. This contribution alone is a vital one.

Overall, this issue demonstrates that we cannot see religion as limited to readily identifiable institutions or churches, and also that religion is not necessarily a conservative, traditional force, as is often assumed. As several of the essays suggest, and as certain scholars have argued for some time (e.g., Flores Galindo 1986; Lancaster 1988; Costa 1994; Pessar 2004), there is something intrinsically creative about religious imaginaries and practices in ways that reach beyond institutionally controlled religion and often produce unexpected sociopolitical outcomes. Millenarian movements, saint cults, indigenous and liberation theologies all point to a deep well of religious inspiration in evolving popular imaginaries across Latin America that shape understandings of community, fear, insecurity and protection, gender roles, and rights and social justice, and that influence interpersonal relations and relations with the state. Religion, in short, is everywhere—in rural and urban imaginaries, in objects, in political ideologies, in nationalist discourses, and in deeply embodied moral identities. We must thus recognize where religion has always been, including in politics. In addition, recent literature on the idea of the postsecular (e.g., Dalferth 2010; Vries and Sullivan 2006) has led to new inquiry into the constitutive role of religion in reigning concepts of the political. The framework of the postsecular has also pointed to new locations of religion in the context of globalization, where political and religious authority and power are expressed in the public domain in increasingly diffuse, mediatized, and commoditized forms (Vries 2001).

Finally, the issue demonstrates the great promise of interdisciplinary work on themes that have not often been thought of in relation to one another. The framework of citizenship is just one way in which different theoretical perspectives and the disciplines of history, anthropology, sociology, and political science can be fruitfully brought together. We hope that in the future *LARR* will attract more such important interdisciplinary initiatives from across the Americas to illuminate critical social, cultural, and political interactions and transformations.

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