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Abstract

The “modern” period of Protestant missions parallels the capitalist expansion of the West during the 19th century. That expansion aided Northern hemisphere churches in extending their mission work south. In some regions, missions followed a sponsored model, with the church being part of the larger transplanted colonial social order. In others, missions operated in an open religious market, where churches vied for a share of converts. This paper compares the work of two American Protestant denominations in 19th-Century Brazil looking for the conditions that could facilitate their propagation. It finds that differences in faith and timing of arrival help explain their degree of success in their host society.

Nineteenth Century Protestant missions were exported to the Southern hemisphere along with the rest of the cultural world that was transplanted by Western nations during an increased period of trade in the second half of the 19th Century. Capitalist expansion brought economic, political, and social consequences to Southern nations (Wallerstein, 1979), but they also presented them with new forms of religious expression (Lenski, 1965). Increased trade led Europeans and North-Americans to migrate to the Southern hemisphere, while encouraging the rise of new local groups and social classes there. Those developments only aided the expansion of religious work.

It is no coincidence that what is considered the modern period of Protestant missions parallels the capitalist expansion of the 19th century. Increased trade brought greater opportunity for religious expansion. In colonial areas, Protestant churches took advantage of colonial ties to launch their most widespread missionary effort (Case, 1999; History of American Mission to the Heathen, 1840; Ion, 1992; Warneck, 1901). In non-colonial areas, the presence of Northern immigrants opened up new possibilities for mission work among locals (Dawsey and Dawsey, 1998; Dunn, 1866; Goldman, 1972; Luebke, 1987; Weaver, 1952; Willems, 1940). In areas under colonial rule missions followed a sponsored model of religious expansion, while in other areas, they operated in open religious markets.

With notable exceptions, most European missions followed a sponsored religious model. Colonies had what Troeltsch (1960) would consider an established “church.” Religion was just another aspect of the larger social order exported by the colonizing nation. African and Asian countries under European colonial rule received Protestant churches as the official religious expression of the colonizing power. Missionaries used the available colonial infrastructure – reliable transportation and communication systems, law enforcement protection – to expand their work in more or less monopolistic ways, spreading churches, schools and hospitals in the region (Atteridge, 1885; Conseil Protestant du Congo, 1958; Copley, 1997; Crane, 1998; Gael, 1995; Haines, 1962; Hempelmann, 1997; Hudson, 2000; Ince, 1984; Richter, 1922 and 1931; Weitbrecht, 1844).

American missions, on the other hand, operated in open religious markets. American churches were what Troeltsch (1960) would consider a “sect,” or more accurately, what Richard Niebuhr (1929) defined as a “denomination.” The constitutional separation of church and state in America led the churches to reinvent themselves as denominations, as religious organizations without any official governmental sanction or support. Denominations competed in a relatively open religious market, with multiple groups vying for “shares” of the country’s faithful (Finke and Stark, 2000). As they established foreign mission programs, those denominations tended to reproduce in host countries a similar market to the one found at home.

The main difference between the two models is the amount of cultural support received by a mission from other social institutions in the host country. In countries under colonial rule, official churches were part of a cultural lattice, existing within a mutually reinforcing structure where other institutions (government, the economy, education, health care) affirmed their work. The overall social order provided the mission churches with a larger cultural frame of reference for their message. In independent countries missions operated as cultural novelties, without a reinforcing network of social

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1 Mission historians consider the period in question as the “modern period of Protestant missions.” This paper simply follows their classification.

2 Which is not to say that colonial governments and mission churches worked hand in hand. There is plenty of evidence that the relationship was not always one of full cooperation.
institutions (Cauthen, et al., 1970; Kindred, 1998; Pathak, 1967; Pruitt, 1998; Ryu, 1998; Singh, 2000). Such is the case of American Protestant missions in Latin America, where missionaries benefited from the commercial ties between the United States and local countries, but received very little support from the existing local culture. In fact, the alien institutional arrangements countries only increased the costs of missionary work.

In an open religious market the survival of the mission is not assured by the colonial tie. Each mission has to develop an effective recruitment program to reach a viable segment of the population, if it is to survive. Missionaries have to convince local populations that their doctrine and practices are the true and right faith. For American Protestant missionaries that task was complicated by the fact that the faith being exported had no supporting cultural or social references in local societies (Alves, 1970; Frase, 1981). The Iberian culture prevalent in Latin America organized life in a system of social and spiritual relations that were diametrically opposed to the rational Protestantism of 19th Century America.

Furthermore, Latin America in the 19th Century had a sponsored model of religion. It was a Roman Catholic region. There, the Catholic faith was organized in a pre-Reformation hierarchical fashion, with strict boundaries between clergy and laity and a centralized form of church governance based on the episcopate (Ajero, 1962; Barbosa, 1945). Protestants introduced the religious world of the Reformation in the region, along with the rational promises of the Enlightenment. If in Asian and African countries the church was compatible with other transplanted social institutions (Dennison, 1871), in Latin America one found a clear dissonance between the exported faith and the local culture (Alves, 1970; Torres, 1968; Wedeman, 1977; Willems, 1967, 1972).

Assessing the Efficacy of Protestant Mission Work in Open Religious Markets

Students of missions operating in open religious markets face the issue of how cultural compatibility might hinder or facilitate the success of mission work. In some cases local groups desirous of a clear rupture with the religious status quo may seek religious alternatives that are indeed culturally different. But is that the main reason for the religious switch? What other variables might increase the chances of success for an exported faith in a foreign religious market? Are there characteristics in its practice that make it more acceptable to locals? Are there local conditions that increase its acceptance? Are there parts of the faith that are more likely to be fully accepted by locals, and others that prove too alien to be locally adopted?

One way to better understand this question is to compare the record of two successful missions, while controlling for country of origin and host country. The idea here is to examine two programs sharing a similar tradition (in this case Protestantism), whose theology and church structure vary enough to help account for the differences in their outcome. It helps if both groups have had a long history in a given country, one that can yield plenty of data for such comparison. Comparing the two missions would allow us to see how the operationalization of an exported faith fares in an open market, given the alien social and cultural forces that might hinder each mission’s efforts.

For exactly such a purpose, this paper compares two American Protestant missions (Presbyterian and Southern Baptist) in 19th-Century Brazil. Both are the product of 19th Century America, both encounter the same foreign culture, and both are limited by their theology and church structure as they negotiate their place in the Brazilian religious market. Presbyterians and Southern Baptists are chosen in this case because both faiths have been in Brazil for more than a hundred years, providing us with plenty of empirical data (Cavalcanti, 1995, 2000). Brazil is chosen on the basis of being one of if not the oldest

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3 While there is ample debate in the United States about the “Protestant” nature of the Baptist faith, given its radical origins in the Reformation, in Latin America both Presbyterians and Baptists are viewed by local cultures as Protestants (Evangélicos) and therefore they are treated as such in this case study.
mission field for both groups (Bear 1961; Bell, 1965). Similarity in country of origin and host country, and the fact that both missions arrived in Brazil during the same time period allows us to examine the interaction between the exported faiths and the local culture in a highly controlled fashion.

While the operationalization of faith is an important variable in the study of missions operating in an open market, the other important variable is the market’s historical context. Missions do not operate in a vacuum. They are deeply affected by the historical conditions of the open religious markets. Relations between country of origin and host country are important. So is time of their arrival in host country. Some countries may be more open to an exported faith at a later stage of their own development. The historical context can be critical for the success of an exported faith.

The fact that the mission work took place during the 19th Century is specially helpful in this analysis, because of the degree of dissonance between 19th Century Protestantism and the Latin American markets. Protestant missionaries were exporting a faith that was almost jingoistic in its acceptance of America as the beacon of the Enlightenment, and the New Jerusalem. American exceptionalism was the driving impetus for much of 19th Century mission work. Missionaries attributed America’s success to their version of Protestantism. It served as the foundation for the country’s political liberties, and for the surge in America’s voluntary associations and civic service. To them, the United States’ strength was based on the rational, enlightened form of Protestantism the nation practiced (Bagby, 1889; Cauthen, 1970; Crabtree, 1953; Léonard, 1963; Pierson, 1971; Wedeman, 1977).

American missionaries arriving in the Southern hemisphere with such vision faced, according to their own perception, a daunting task – that of “civilizing” local populations and of transforming local societies. They felt compelled to instill in the local population the faith and values that made their home country great. In Latin America, that compulsion is going to lead them to blame the Iberian/Catholic heritage for the region’s impoverished and undeveloped condition. They saw Catholicism as a failure, and worked to redeem their new nations both socially and spiritually through their American faith and values (Bagby, 1889; Dunn, 1866; Gammon, 1910; Harrison, 1954; Mullins, 1896; Taylor, n.d.).

In that sense, American missionaries arrived in Latin America as cultural agents, as part of an invasive cultural force (bankers, financiers, exporters, shipping managers) brought by increased trade. Their presence destabilized the local religious model, presenting an alternative “product” that questioned the status quo (Alves, 1970; Lenski, 1965; Willems, 1967; 1972). Their pressure to break the sponsored model found in the region inevitably generated resistance and conflict (Gammon, 1910; Léonard, 1963; Wedeman, 1977). It is hard to imagine, to the extent that they succeeded, how they succeeded at all. In a mature open religious market, a certain degree of cultural compatibility seems crucial for the success of all faiths involved. In an emerging one, such as the Latin American case, the American wholesale damnation of the host culture and religious heritage had to make mission work hard going. Local resistance had to create many challenges to the expansion of the faith.

For starters, conversions placed a great cost on local groups. New converts were asked to sacrifice much for the new faith. They were expected to renounce their own culture, in many cases to shun the company of relatives, friends, and associates; and to adopt a life style that in the eyes of their society was quite foreign. Not surprisingly, when missionaries found local groups willing to undertake such transformation, those groups were always a minority, one that was somehow attracted by the promises of another culture.

While the content of the exported faith (its theological outlook and church structure) is important to explaining its success in a foreign market, the context of the market in host country is also crucial. The timing of arrival for the mission as well as the local historical conditions are key to explain any amount of success. One has to wonder about what conditions in a host country make it more open to new faiths. Similarly, under what conditions will the mission work elicit indifference or rejection in a local population? Moreover, what accommodations must be made to the foreign faith for it to find acceptance in a new culture?
Our case study examines the efforts two 19th Century American Protestant missions to Brazil (Presbyterian and Southern Baptist) made to reproduce their denominational differences in their host country’s religious market. Despite their common Protestant heritage, the two missions were quite different theologically and organizationally. And they experienced different degrees of success in the Brazilian market. The variation in success can be partly explained by their internal differences and by the historical conditions present in Brazil at the time of their arrival. We proceed to sort out those differences.

Internal Faith Differences

Presbyterian work was theologically based on a confessional faith. Spiritual well being was dispensed upon individual church members as part of a larger covenant, through the rationally mediated offices of the church’s governing bodies (Patton, 1875; Presbyterian Publication Committee, 184u). Southern Baptist work, on the other hand, was based on a voluntaristic faith; one where individual salvation is cornerstone of religious practice; and religious experience, not confessional tradition, defines the path for new converts (Barnes, 1954; Parker, 1988; Tribble, 1936). While in the confessional faith spirituality was a learning process, theology was based on doctrine (worked out over centuries), and churches were organized in representative but hierarchical fashion, in the voluntaristic faith, spirituality was based on individual conversion, theology centered around a strong proselytizing program, and churches shared an autonomous congregational form of government.

Organizationally the missions were quite different also. Christian denominations have been classified in three broad models according to their church structure. There is the “episcopal” model, exemplified by the Roman Catholic Church or the Anglican Church, where power is centralized in a clerical hierarchy; the “presbyterian” model, exemplified by the Presbyterian Church and similar denominations, where power is distributed between clergy and laity and organized around different regional instances with distinct jurisdictions (local congregation, presbytery, synod, and general assembly); and the “congregational” model, represented by Baptists and similar denominations, where each local congregation is autonomous in matters of faith and policy (McGuire, 1997:98). By the sheer act of exporting their faith to Brazil, Presbyterians and Southern Baptists helped enlarge the local religious market, introducing a broader spectrum in the choice of church models.

Looking at both missions’ organization, one would expect that American Presbyterians would hold a greater appeal for Brazilians who were more familiar with a similar structure in their faith of origin. The 19th Century Presbyterian model seemed similar to the Roman Catholic found in Latin America. Its reliance on confession (i.e. tradition), on a centralized form of church governance, and the status awarded to its clergy should have made the mission far more attractive to converts who were used to that form of church governance. The Baptist model, on the other hand, was a clear rupture with the religious status quo. Its emphasis on individual salvation, on congregational autonomy, and on a radical egalitarian form of church governance were very alien to 19th-Century Brazilians. They represented, in fact, a brand new way of being church.

The Brazilian Context

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4 Brazil is one of the foreign fields in which both the Southern and the Northern branches of the then divided American Presbyterianism cooperated in a united front.
All historical Protestant missions\(^5\) arrived in Brazil during Pedro II’s reign. The Methodists were the first, in 1836, arriving fourteen years after the country’s independence from Portugal and five years after Pedro I’s abdication. Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, and Lutherans arrived in mid-century, at the peak of his son’s rule (Léonard, 1963; Mullins, 1896; Wedeman, 1977; Willems, 1940). Southern Baptists arrived in 1881, only eight years before the proclamation of the Republic (Bell, 1965; Crabtree e Mesquita 1937-40). Altogether, 22 years separated the arrival of Presbyterians and Southern Baptists in their host country. The period was marked by intense change in Brazil. Three important historical processes may have contributed to their varying degrees of success: the country’s modernization under Pedro II’s rule, the relationship of the monarchy and the Roman Catholic Church, and the surge in North Atlantic immigration.

**Modernization in 19th-Century Brazil**

The needs of an export economy (centered around sugar first, then coffee) and the vagaries of a foreign war (the Paraguayan War, 1865-1870) provided the impetus for much of the modernization that took place during the second half of the 19th Century. The process was supported by a political system tailored after the French monarchy, where despite conservative strands, Pedro II’s regime offered its subjects greater political freedoms than the first Republican government that replaced it in 1889 (Barman, 1999; Graham, 1990). In that sense, modernization reflected both political and economic interests (Barman, 1988; Simmons, 1966; Williams, 1937). Urbanization and economic growth, especially in the Southern provinces, made the country even more amenable to outside influences, mostly European, but to some extent North-American also (Barman, 1988; Graham, 1990).

By mid-century the country was pressed for faster and more reliable transportation and communication systems and for greater industrial production (Bello, 1966; Poppino, 1968). The foundations for change were laid in the 1840s and 50s, with the adoption of pro-business legislation (the Alves Branco tariff law of 1844, the permission to import machinery duty-free in 1846), the creation of new financial institutions (the law of commercial incorporation in 1849, the commercial code in 1850, and the creation of the Bank of Brazil in 1851) and levying of higher import taxes (Burns, 1980; Poppino, 1968; Viotti da Costa, 1989). The results were quite remarkable,

By 1874, there were approximately 800 miles of tracks... After 1875, construction increased rapidly: in 1875-1879, 1,023 miles of track were laid; in 1880-1884, 2,200; in 1885-1889, 2,500. In 1889, then, trackage totaled approximately 6,000 miles. Fourteen of the twenty provinces had at least some rail service, although most of the trackage was concentrated in the Southeast (Burns, 1980:201).

The boost in communications was equally impressive. The Brazilian Post Office handled fifty million letters in 1880. Ten years later it was handling more than two hundred million (Bello, 1966). In 1874 Brazil was connected to Europe by trans-oceanic cable. Six months after the telegraph’s arrival all Southern provinces had been linked by its lines. By 1896 telegraph lines reached as far as the Amazon in the North and Mato Grosso in the West. From 10 stations in 1861, with 40 miles of lines transmitting 233 messages, Brazil jumped to 171 stations in 1896, with 6,560 miles of lines processing over 600,000 messages (Burns, 1980:199). In the 1880s phone services became available in at least four major cities: São Paulo, Salvador, Rio de Janeiro, and Campinas (Viotti da Costa, 1989:166-167).

Industrial production also grew exponentially. The number of factories increased from 175 in 1875 to more than 600 in 1890. By 1890 Brazil had more than 50,000 registered industrial workers

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\(^5\) 19th Century missions sent by Protestant churches from the Northern hemisphere.
Southern exports increased Brazil's participation into the world market. When the Civil War created a shortage of American cotton in the world market, Brazil quickly stepped in to supply it. Rubber, cocoa and erva mate became important staples to European and North American industries. And coffee became the leading factor in the export drive. By 1910, Brazil was already responsible for approximately 77 percent of world coffee production (Burns, 1980; Wagley, 1963).

Southern exports brought a new urban face to the country. Ports and coastal cities benefitted the most. By the end of the century Brazilian urban dwellers could count on improved water, sewage, and gas services, paved streets and the street car (Viotti da Costa, 1989). The growing urban centers offered middle and working-classes in Brazil anonymity, social mobility, and cultural opportunities unlike any experienced by their counterparts in previous generations (Bello, 1966). “Journals and newspapers, artistic and cultural associations, inns, theatres, cafes and shops mushroomed, and the big cities acquired a more cosmopolitan atmosphere.” (Viotti da Costa, 1989:166). As prosperity spread, consumers turned to Europe and North America for information, tips on life style, and political ideas.

In the last half of the century, the elites sharpened their awareness of the material progress being made on the continent. Many of them had mastered French, the second language of the Brazilian elites, and some had knowledge of English and German, so that they had direct access to the information and literature of the nations whose progress impressed them. The newspapers carried accounts of what was happening in the leading nations of the Western world, and the programs of the learned societies featured discussions of the technical advances of the industrializing nations. Many members of the elites traveled abroad, thereby exposing themselves first hand to the innovations. They returned to Brazil with a nostalgia for Europe, particularly Paris, and the irrepressible desire to copy everything they saw there (Burns, 1980:208).

This was a time when Brazil was open to new ideas. By the last quarter of the century, European ideologies (the values of the Enlightenment, Darwinism, and Positivism) had become powerful influences among Brazilian urban circles. They inspired the new middle classes into activism and social reform. Intellectuals, professionals, military officers and other urban groups created voluntary associations to

6 The coffee export alone re-fashioned Brazil's economy in decisive ways: “Economic decision-making increasingly centered in the port cities. Coffee factors and other merchants, bankers, fledgling industrialists, managers of insurance companies, agents of shipping lines and bureaucrats high and low, along the accompanying shopkeepers, hoteliers, laywers, doctors and teachers, filled the ranks of the urban upper and middle classes. Their employees or slaves – stevedores, maids, construction workers, water carriers, seamstresses, salesmen, accountants, and clerks – further extended the urban complex.” (Graham, 1989:135).

7 “The surge of new ideas resulted to a large extent from the emergence of a new element in society, the urban middle groups, sizable enough for the first time to exert influence, flexible enough to welcome innovations, and strong enough to challenge the traditional powers of the rural aristocracy. To the merchants, commercial agents, exporters, artisans, government bureaucrats, lawyers, doctors, priests, teachers, bankers, and military officers who made up the core of the urban middle groups were added in large numbers during the last third of the century a salaried labor force of stevedores, mechanics, factory workers, and shop clerks. In short, in the last half of the nineteenth century it was possible to talk unmistakably in terms of a middle segment of the population, never cohesive – many times interrelated with the planter class – but increasingly vocal and influential.” (Burns, 1980:240).
promote liberal causes such as abolitionism, mass European immigration, federalism, separation of church and state, campaign reform, and a republican form of government (Burns, 1980; de Azevedo, 1950; Lustosa, 1991; Viotti da Costa, 1989).

So, in a sense, American missionaries arrived in Brazil at a time when the country was wide open to innovations, even in the religious arena. Brazil boasted of growing urban centers, easily accessible by rail, and filled with more educated rising middle classes who were susceptible to the spread of the printed media. Relations between the U.S. and Brazil guaranteed a regular contact with the mission headquarters for the missionaries, and a steady support system. However, receptivity to outside religious ideas increased as the century unfolded. Missionaries arriving around the middle of the century might have a harder time preaching the promises of modernity than those who were late at the scene. As the century closed, there was plenty of evidence to support the foreign message. And to the missionaries the reforms Brazil was undergoing were a signal that the country was ripe for the message.

The Monarchy and the Roman Catholic Church

Catholicism had been Brazil’s established religion for more than 350 years by the time the American missionaries in our case study arrived in the country. The king of Portugal was the defender of the faith during the country’s colonial days. After independence, Brazil’s king negotiated a similar patronage of the church (Regalism) with the Vatican. As the defender of the faith, he was expected to manage the Church’s affairs as a branch of his own government (Barbosa, 1945; Dornas Filho, 1938).

Among the positions to be filled through political patronage were those of the Church... Although the Church could summon loyalties in its own right, it meshed with other institutions through the structure of patronage. The State collected and kept the tithe and paid only modest salaries to churchmen. Other ordained clergy sought employment as chaplains on fazendas or for wealthy lay brotherhoods in the cities. Patrons, whether private or public, expected deference from the clergy as from their other clients. Whereas in earlier times churchmen actively engaged in rebellions, by the middle of the century they preached order and obedience to constituted authority (Graham, 1989:143).

That system of political patronage contributed to the erosion of the Catholic faith during Pedro II’s rule. Dependent on the government for the appointment and training of its clergy and lacking the proper funds to maintain parish work, the church found itself internally depleted by the end of the century, with an inadequately clergy and a weak catechetical work (Bello, 1966; Carneiro, 1950; de Holanda, 1969; Wedeman, 1977). By the time the Baptists arrived in 1881, the Church was only a shadow of its former self. Here too, late arrival seemed to be advantageous. The church was in a much better position to oppose the Presbyterians around mid-century than it was to react against Southern Baptists at the century’s end.

The missionaries, in turn, showed no mercy toward the Catholic Church. They constantly deplored its clergy’s moral and intellectual mediocrity and the superstitious and quasi-pagan church practices of its laity. To them, Brazilians were not Catholic by conviction but simply by heritage. There were, of course, ample reasons for their critical assessment,

The Catholicism of the greater part of the ruling classes was like that of the Emperor: a sincere deism, a listless and formal observance, a permanent dread of being taken to be papal supremacists or upholders of the Syllabus of Pius IX. In private family life, religious worship had a poetic and traditional form that was in many ways like the Roman worship of household gods. Among the masses, largely slaves and descendants of slaves, religious worship was naturally tinged with vivid reminiscences of African
fetishism.

In such social surroundings, discipline and customs readily became lax. Cohabitation by priests, especially in country districts, was readily condoned. Some members of the clergy, among them those who led great political battles or were feared as political bosses, unconcernedly flaunted their illegitimate offspring. Not only Statesmen but Catholic priests as well were Freemasons in a state with an official religion that proscribed Freemasonry. (Bello, 1966:5).

To make matters worse, by the end of the century the church’s conservative political stand weakened it further vis a vis the ruling regime and in the eyes of the country’s growing urban population. The 1870 theological battle (a “questão religiosa”) with the monarchy further eroded the church’s access to secular resources (Thornton, 1948), while its loyalty to a monarchical system left it open to liberal attacks by pro-republican forces. Its opposition to liberal trade policies and its support of the king’s right to rule signaled its commitment to a by-gone era. To pro-republican groups, convinced that only modern institutions could push the country forward, the Church represented an undesirable past (Lustosa, 1991; Torres, 1968). One of the first decrees of the new Republic was the separation of church and state, ending the king’s patronage. Ironically, by then, even the Vatican approved the action, since it provided the Brazilian Catholic Church with greater autonomy (Ajero, 1962; Dornas Filho, 1938).

The weakening of the Catholic Church for much of the second half of the century provided room for the spread of Protestantism in Brazil. Missionaries found a growing audience amidst urban middle and working classes who were most disaffected and longing for religious alternatives. Urban sprawl provided missionaries with the means to plant new congregations throughout Brazilian cities, reaching local areas until then untouched by Catholic service. The converts used their newly found Protestant identities to break off all contact with their former religion, and to attack the church for its catechetical weaknesses.

North Atlantic Immigration

Finally, another factor that increased Brazilian receptivity to the Protestant message was the massive immigration that took place during the last quarter of the 19th Century. The abolition of slavery and the growth in the export trade heightened the need for more skilled labor. The government worked hard to attract immigrants – hiring recruiting agents in Europe and America, paying for traveling expenses, and providing quick naturalization. During the last twenty-five years of the 19th century about 4.5 to 5 million Europeans and Americans migrated to Brazil, the majority settling in the Southern provinces (Burns, 1980; Carneiro, 1950). While most immigrants were European and Catholic, a small Protestant minority managed to re-settle in the country. Many were American in origin, typically disaffected Southerners who left during Reconstruction (Carneiro, 1950; Dunn, 1866; Luebke, 1987; Willems, 1940, 1972).

The American immigrants helped the spread of Protestantism in two ways. First, they brought new technologies and life style to Brazil, giving Brazilians the impression that all things European or American were more developed, including the faith (Goldman, 1972; Weaver, 1952; Williams, 1972). American settlers are credited with introducing the first trollies, plows and wagons into Brazilian agriculture. They also brought other modern amenities such as brick houses, stoves, kitchen utensils, the coffee pounder, the kerosene lamp, the sewing machine, the buckboard, new land-surveying techniques and four new crops – upland cotton, rattlesnake watermelons, grapes, and pecans (Dawsey and Dawsey, 1998; Dunn, 1866; Mendonça, 1990a; Weaver, 1952).

Second, Protestant settlers pushed for greater religious freedom. With the emperor’s permission, they sent for missionary help back home. As more Protestants settled in the Southern provinces, government relaxed its control over religious practice. The more relaxed the control, the easier it became
to spread the new faith. By 1879, taking advantage of the “changing social attitudes,” E. H. Quillin, challenged “some entire Baptist church, including pastor, deacons and clerk,” to “emigrate and settle on these favored lands, and establish a large Baptist community.” As more Protestants migrated to the country, they created further opportunities for missionary work throughout the empire.

Evaluating Success in the Brazilian Open Market

If the context of the Brazilian religious market created favorable conditions for the spread of Protestantism in Brazil, timing of arrival was critical for the degree of acceptance experienced by the missions. At the time Presbyterians arrived in 1859 much of the urban growth was still decades away, the Catholic Church was still enjoying the good favors of the emperor, and the number of immigrants was so small as to be almost invisible (only 2,072 in 1850, for instance – Burns, 1980:264). By the time Southern Baptists arrived, most of the country’s modern infrastructure was in place, the Catholic Church was at its weakest point, and immigration was reaching its peak. In 1888 alone Brazil received 133,253 immigrants (Burns, 1980:264). In 1881 there were at least five American colonies in different regions of the country (Dawsey and Dawsey, 1998). Conditions were quite different for the two missions.

The Presbyterian Mission

Presbyterians brought to Brazil a church structure that had been very influential in the political formation of their own country, with power was distributed among different bodies with distinct jurisdictions (local, regional, national). Representatives were elected to all those instances be they the local congregation’s board of elders, the Church’s presbyteries, synods or general assembly, with clergy and laity sharing that power. Ideologically they aligned with the broad values of the American culture. They valued religious freedom, the marketplace, education, and scientific progress. Their moral code emphasized a modicum of orthodoxy and asceticism. The faithful were expected to follow the right doctrines while avoiding entanglement in “worldly”activities. Modern virtues were a necessary requirement to fight human depravity – one was expected to honor one’s parents, be faithful to one’s spouse, be honest in all business dealings, and value hard work as a sign of character and decency (Alves, 1970, 1984; Ferreira, 1959; Frase, 1981; Pierson, 1971).

Work began in Rio de Janeiro in 1859, with the Rev. Ashbel Green Simonton. The first congregation came four years later, on May 15, 1863 (Bear, 1961; Leonard, 1963). Mission work was supported by both the Northern and Southern branches of American Presbyterianism. Northern

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8 “Thousands of European immigrants to Brazil and Chile were Protestants – something that would have been inconceivable in colonial Brazil or Chile. Nor would Protestant clergymen and missionaries have been admitted by the colonial authorities whose zeal in excluding heretics seems comparable only to the watchfulness that port authorities exhibit toward carriers of contagious diseases. Thus the arrival of the first Anglican, Congregational, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist missionaries, the profuse distribution of Bibles and religious tracts by colporters, the preaching of the Gospel in public, and the founding of the first Protestant congregations composed of converts from Catholicism – these and similar events were possible only in a climate of changing social attitudes characterized by uncertainties and restlessness, by the weakening of social controls that for three centuries had effectively prevented the forces of the Protestant Reformation from penetrating the monolithic societies of Latin America.” (Willems, 1967:57-58).

9 Letter from Santa Bárbara, dated of Oct. 18, 1879, Records Center of the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.
missionaries created Brazil’s first Presbytery in Rio de Janeiro, in 1865, while the Presbyteries of Campinas and Minas were organized by Southern missionaries in 1886. The Presbytery of Recife, organized in 1888, had the cooperation of both groups, along with the help of the emerging local clergy (Bear, 1961; Ferreira, 1959).

With the creation of the first Synod in 1888, uniting all the Presbyteries, the church (Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil) gained national status. The Synod reorganized the Presbytery of Rio de Janeiro, dividing it in two (São Paulo gained its own jurisdiction); and created the first national seminary to train Brazilian clergy. In 1890, thirty-one years after Simonton’s arrival, the IPB boasted of twenty missionaries in the field, twelve ordained Brazilians, and fifty-nine congregations across the national territory, with a membership roll of 3,199 adults and 1,461 children (Ferreira, 1959).

The Presbyterian message, with its intellectual defense of the modern world, managed to attract mostly the Brazilian elites, while the Southern Baptists and the Pentecostal Church found greater receptivity amidst the working classes of the large urban centers (Conde, 1960; Mesquita, 1940). Presbyterian clergy underwent a longer and more rigorous process of theological training than the Baptist clergy at the time, and saw itself as a highly educated professional workforce, naturally seeking to minister to those similarly educated.

Reproducing the Presbyterian faith in Brazil, however, was not as simple as the missionaries had expected. By the time of the first Synod, the IPB was already riddled with internal divisions and external pressures that slowly would transform the original Anglo-Saxon faith. The first clash was between the missionaries’ rational faith and the mysticism of Brazilian adepts. While the missionaries defined the sacred along disciplined lines, following an ascetic, pragmatic and rational faith, their Brazilian adepts longed for a more immediate, emotional, and pre-modern experience of the divine. That longing resulted in the church’s first splinter, when a group led by Dr. Miguel Vieira Ferreira left the IPB to create the Evangelical Church of Brazil (Igreja Evangélica Brasileira). American Protestantism had started its acculturation (Ferreira, 1959; Pierson, 1971).

The second clash was over control of the church. The local clergy, by the time of the 1903 Synod, wanted to nationalize the church. The creation of the Republic boosted Brazilian nationalism and that spilled into the Protestant communities. During the Synod’s annual meeting the local clergy closed ranks on two issues – they wished to excommunicate Free Masons from church membership (most missionaries were Free Masons), and wanted national control of church affairs, including control of the seminary in Rio de Janeiro and of all Presbyterian schools in national territory. The clash created the Independent Presbyterian Church of Brazil (Igreja Presbiteriana Independente) (Bear, 1961; Pierson, 1971).

Heightened nationalism also brought external pressures to bear upon missionaries and converts. Their loyalty to the country and culture was constantly being questioned.

Nor was it a novelty to call Protestant missionaries from the United States, and to a lesser degree, from England, agents of political, social, and commercial penetration, as Braga

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10 The IPB was quite successful amidst Brazil’s upper and middle classes. Among its members one could find a Marquis (Paraná) a Baron (Antonina), relatives of the Portuguese imperial family, the families of leading industrialists (the Fernandes Braga and da Silva Oliveira), of an engineer (Dr. Miguel Vieira Ferreira), and of two leading Brazilian politicians (Leonard, 1963). Among the military Presbyterians counted the navy admiral (Sebastião Caetano dos Santos) a second lieutenant (Cícero Barbosa) who eventually became a minister, and an army general (Abreu e Lima) (Ferreira, 1959). Some of its early ministers, Trajano, Miguel Torres, and Vicente Themudo Lessa, were businessmen. Other professionals attracted to the Church were the poet A. J. dos Santos Neves, the writer Júlio César Ribeiro Vaughan, and Dr. Vital Brasil, a leading physician and political figure in the São Paulo congregation. The list also includes several attorneys, doctors, professors and teachers (Ferreira, 1959, Leonard, 1963).
noted in 1916. What was new was the intensity of the charges, the fact that they were made openly by prelates, and their widespread generalization throughout the nation. It was affirmed that since Brazil was completely Catholic, the missionaries obviously were not there to save souls. They were there with rivers of money furnished by Uncle Sam at their disposal, to denationalize Brazil. This would be the first step in making the nation into a province of the United States. Brazilian Protestants were called ‘children who had turned against their own mother,’ and priests who had become Evangelicals were called even worse names. (Pierson, 1971:281).

Broad suspicions strongly circumscribed Presbyterian work. Presbyterians were forbidden to bury their dead in local cemeteries, their sanctuaries could not have with any semblance of a religious temple, converts were detained by police for attending non-Catholic services, and Presbyterian sanctuaries were stoned by local populations. During the first republican period alone more than 80 instances of religious persecution were documented (Ferreira, 1959; Leonard, 1963; Pierson, 1971).

The church’s internal divisions and external pressures severely limited its growth, and set a pattern of religious instability that would repeat itself over and over. Through much of the 20th Century the IPB lost leadership and congregations to internal divisions. As dissenters left, the remnant became more entrenched, more defensive, and more dogmatic, until the democratic and representative Presbyterian system transplanted from the United States was reduced to a highly centralized, dictatorial and theological isolated body of believers (Alves, 1984; de Araújo, 1982; Cavalcanti, 1992, 1995).

The Southern Baptist Mission

Southern Baptists brought to Brazil a diametrically different form of Protestantism. The denomination was a coalition of free, autonomous local churches, united by a theology of individual salvation. Baptist faith was based on individual responsibility. As individuals experienced a saving encounter with God, they were “born again” and called to live out their new status congregating with likewise faithful at local churches (Parker, 1988). Individual responsibility was the cornerstone of church doctrine. Individuals were responsible for their choices and collectively responsible for the choices of their congregations. The denomination could not mandate religion. Local churches were solely responsible for their own ecclesiastical life and needs (Parker, 1988; Yance, 1978).

Congregations could create local, state, or national associations, but these existed for the purpose of promoting cooperative work that was too large to be carried out by a single congregation. They had no hierarchical control over the supporting congregations. They oversaw and coordinated large-scale work such as missions, education, theological training or religious publishing (Spain, 1967; Yance, 1978). The Southern Baptist Convention, the faith’s national association, could not enforce doctrinal policy or speak on behalf of local churches. Historically, the convention existed mainly as a coordinating body, developing and promoting what was desired by local churches (Barnes, 1954; Parker, 1988; Tribble, 1936).

Work in Brazil began in 1881, when two ministers were sent by the Southern Baptist Convention to work with Southern immigrants in São Paulo state (Bell, 1965). The missionaries had a clear agenda. Evangelical in doctrine and conservative in morals, their work was driven by conversion-based expansion and autonomous church growth. From the beginning success was defined by the number of individual

11 “In no respect was the organization of Southern Baptists hierarchical. Each church and each individual member retained a high degree of freedom in beliefs and practices... voluntary co-operation remained the key to denominational strength. Baptists were justified in insisting that they were not a ‘church’ but merely a denomination” (Spain, 1967:9-10).
conversions and churches organized (Harrison, 1954; Mesquita, 1940; Taylor, n.d.). Unlike their Presbyterian counterparts, who struggled for four years to organize their first congregation, Southern Baptist missionaries had their first church founded in Salvador, Bahia, in one year after their arrival – on October 15, 1882 (Crabtree, 1953).

The first converts were common folk – a former priest and his wife, the missionaries’ house servants, and a tinner. A year later there were twenty converts and six “preaching points” (places around the city where the missionaries held revival meetings) (Harrison, 1954; Reis Pereira, 1982). The work was hard and unrewarding (Taylor, n.d.), but easier to spread since Baptist converts could be ordained without theological education and locals soon found themselves in charge of their own congregations (Reis Pereira, 1982). The simpler theological approach also made it possible for the Baptist faith to be more easily adapted to the needs of the local population. There was less to dissent from in Baptist doctrine.

The missionaries faced a lot of resistance from the Catholic Church, at a time it was struggling to preserve its authority at the twilight of the empire (Rossi, 1938). They pointed to Catholic doctrinal “errors” as a justification for proselytizing a country considered “Christian” (Bagby, 1889; Wedeman, 1977). To them Brazilian Catholicism was nothing more than a folk religion, built on superstition, syncretism, and medieval practices (Bagby, 1889; Taylor, n.d.). It lacked the “spiritual power” to lead Brazilians to progress (Bell, 1965; Crabtree, 1953; Willems, 1967). Those sentiments were only heightened after missionaries arrived in the field. Observing ceremonies and rituals that seemed quite alien to their own culture, they found in Catholic practices ample evidence to support their biases.

Southern Baptists were convinced that only Protestantism could promote the ideals of democracy, individual liberty, equality, and intellectual freedom in Brazil. They saw Catholicism promoting antidemocratic practices, by depriving individuals of all responsibility “save that of submitting to a superior authority in matters of religion” (Crabtree and Mesquita, 1937-40, vol 1:127-129). This lack of freedom could be seen in Catholic schools and catechetical work. Without a free-thinking and educated citizenry, democracy could not flourish. That was the rationale for creating a Baptist network of schools throughout the country.13

Clashes between Southern Baptist and Catholics were symptomatic of a larger clash – that of the American and Iberian cultures. Missionary communities tended to reproduce their home culture inside local congregations. This deepened the gap between the converts’ way of life and that of the general population (Mendonça, 1990b and 1990c). As a result, “the Protestant had thus to face the frequently

12 “Protestants began missionary activities among Roman Catholics in Brazil on the assumption that Catholicism was a corrupted form of Christianity and that they should offer to Brazilians what Protestants considered to be the “true religion”... Being unable to understand some deep differences between their culture and the local culture, most missionaries depreciated aspects of Brazilian culture and blamed Roman Catholicism for everything that they considered wrong or sinful in the local society. Protestant apologists frequently argued that the Church of Rome had had three centuries to shape a Christian culture in Brazil, and the results of its efforts were the religious ignorance of Brazilians and the backwardness of the country. They then presented Protestantism as an alternative that could bring salvation to Brazilians and development to Brazil.” (Wedeman, 1977:151).

13 “The experience of mission Board attests that the conquests of the gospel in papal lands depend much upon the early culture of the inhabitants. Therefore, the most efficient means that can be instituted to illuminate and cultivate the youthful mind with general intelligence and Bible truth, is evidently the most rational medium through which is to be effected a national reformation. The mission school prepares the way for the march of the church” (Quillin, 1881:3).
repeated charge that their way of life was incompatible with Brazilian traditions, and still worse, that they were mercenaries or dupes of a foreign political ideology. It was left to them to dispel these suspicions and to prove themselves good citizens” (Willems, 1967:61).

A second Southern Baptist mission base was opened in Rio de Janeiro in 1884. The move to the national capital marked the beginning of the mission’s national expansion. Rio de Janeiro provided missionaries with an educated, cosmopolitan, middle-class population from which they could recruit qualified converts to be sent throughout the country. Eight years after the founding of their first congregation, Southern Baptist missionaries had three national newspapers, eight churches (in six different regions of Brazil), and two national ministers. There were 312 converts in Brazil (Wedeman, 1977).

Contrary to the Presbyterian experience, Southern Baptists did not face deep internal divisions. Disagreements were kept at the congregational level, given the decentralized system of the denomination. After the Republican separation of church and state, the mission grew faster, with the formation of regional associations, and the creation of a national convention. In 1894 six churches in Rio de Janeiro formed the first Baptist association. In 1900, the second was created by nine local congregations in the Northeast. In 1904 seven churches organized São Paulo’s association. In 1906 another seven created the Amazonian association. Finally, the Brazilian Baptist Convention was founded in 1907 (Bell, 1965; Crabtree, 1953; Reis Pereira, 1982).

Compared to other 19th Century denominations, the Southern Baptist growth during its first twenty-five years was impressive. In 1900 Southern Baptists had twenty-one missionaries in country, running a denomination with 35 churches and 1,932 members. By the time the national convention was organized, only seven years later, the mission had expanded to eighty-three churches in twenty states and 4,276 adult converts (Bell, 1965; Crabtree and Mesquita, 1937-40). By comparison, twenty-one years after the arrival of their first missionary, Presbyterians had thirty-two churches and 1,729 members.14

Comparing the Missions’ Relative Success

The success of both missions was limited but real. Limited in the sense that neither reached a dramatic number of Brazilians, even after twenty five years of operation in country. By the end of the 19th-Century Brazil was still heavily Catholic. But the success was real in the sense that both developed deep roots in Brazil. The results of their early missionary work was two Protestant denominations that have maintained their slice of the Brazilian religious market throughout the 20th Century.

The first explanations for their success was given by missionaries themselves. One argued that proximity to the United States and Brazilian weariness with the Catholic faith had facilitated the growth of the Protestant faith.15 Proximity to the U.S. guaranteed a steady influx of resources and the erosion of the Catholic faith opened the space for alternative religions. Another thought progress was the real culprit – “science came ahead of us, and prepared the way for us. The railroad, the telegraph, the steamer, machinery, all Protestant inventions, gave respect to the foreigner, from motives educational, commercial or economic”16. While missionary work did start at a time of deep religious dissatisfaction in Brazil (Wedeman, 1977) and of great material progress, that alone could not explain the limited success of the missions.

As this paper documents, there were external and internal factors that helped Protestantism adapt

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to Brazilian culture (and vice versa). Three contextual variables aided the missions: modernization under Pedro II’s rule, the relative weak position of the Catholic Church at the time of missionary arrival, and American immigration. Immigrant presence cannot be underestimated here. Both missions benefitted from the help they received among fellow Americans. Immigrants helped missionaries with language training (their language school in Campinas, São Paulo is still being used today), gave them a better understanding of Brazilian culture (albeit from a biased point of view), and strategic information about the country’s provinces and regional differences. That knowledge was critical for the development of a national network of churches (Bagby, 1889; Bear, 1961; Bell, 1965; Dunn, 1866; Gammon, 1910).

In terms of internal factors, the missions shared a number of organizational similarities but also had their differences. Among similar organizational factors can be cited their use of modern mass communication, the establishment of a national network of Protestant schools, the creation of national seminaries, and their desire to spread their work to all provinces of the country.\footnote{This is an important factor, since other missions preferred to limit their work to certain regions of Brazil during the 19th Century. Methodists and Congregationalists, for instance, remained circumscribed to the Southeast, while Lutherans concentrated their efforts exclusively in Southern Brazil (Léonard, 1963; Willems, 1940, 1972).}

Both missions brought to Brazil sophisticated printing presses that aided in the spread of the message. Protestant newspapers, tracts, doctrinal books, hymn books, and other materials for religious education quickly reached the country’s population (Bear, 1961; Crabtree e Mesquita, 1937-40; Ferreira, 1959; Taylor, n.d.). The use of mass media allowed the missionaries to bypass the local media, in many instances a sympathizer with the Catholic Church, and to reach unclaimed regions of the country (Harrison, 1954; Taylor, n.d.). In 1900 alone, the Southern Baptist mission had printed 300,000 tracts and leaflets to propagate the Baptist faith (Taylor, n.d.).

The network of Protestant schools was important in helping to create amongst Brazilian elites acceptance and tolerance for the Protestant message. While the schools were successful in recruiting Brazilian children, they did not generate the conversions that the missionaries had expected. Brazilian parents were quick to take advantage of the missionaries’ modern education, but forbade their children to convert. Nevertheless missionary schools were key in the creation of a national leadership that was far more tolerant of the Protestant presence in the country (Crabtree e Mesquita, 1937-40, Ferreira, 1959).

For both missions theological education was fundamental in the creation of a national clergy (although more so for Presbyterians at the time). Both Presbyterians and Southern Baptists eventually created tree national seminaries to attend to the needs of theological training across the Brazilian territory. Presbyterians had seminaries in Rio de Janeiro, Vitória and Recife; Southern Baptists chose Rio de Janeiro, Recife and Belém. The seminaries were responsible for the formation of an ordained Protestant elite who would be influential in the development of a Protestant public profile in the second half of 19th Century (Crabtree, 1953; Ferreira, 1959). It is, in fact, the native clergy who later on saved Protestants from being banned. During the 1937 military coup, the dictator sought to ban Protestantism from Brazil. The national Protestant clergy, under the leadership of Matatias Gomes dos Santos, president of the Brazilian Evangelical Confederation, offered the dictator iron clad guarantees of Protestant loyalty to his regime (Santos, 1938).

Finally, unlike other Protestant denominations, both missions saw themselves as national in scope. Their reach for the entire territory allowed for the creation of regional leadership, which in turn guaranteed greater permanence for the work and greater diversity in denominational composition. It became much harder to eradicate an organization that reached national proportions in a country the size of Brazil. Pressure on a given region did not limit growth in other regions. Furthermore, the national expansion cut down on personality clashes among missionaries and on disagreement over policy and practice. Missionaries who relocated to other regions found themselves with greater autonomy to shape
the growth of the mission in their particular area (Bear, 1961; Bell, 1965).

The internal differences between the two missions also help explain their varying degrees of success. A Brazilian scholar argues that four factors distinguished Southern Baptists from other missions. First, they were aggressive proselytizers and strongly anti-Catholic in their approach. Other denominations were far more diplomatic and accommodating. Second, they employed vigorous direct recruiting. Other groups may have relied more on educational and medical mission work to reach converts. Third, they had a far simpler strategy of church planting. Church business was all run in a grassroots format that required little preparation on the party of the clergy or lay leaders. Other denominations spent a lot more time on indoctrination and training of church leadership. Baptist converts trained “on the job.” Fourth, their rigorous and straightforward ethics required higher levels of commitment on the part of church members. Baptist churches could expel members who did not live up to those ethical standards. That increased the cost of deviance and the amount of internal integration (Mendonça, 1990a:43-44).

One important aspect to consider is the problems that internal divisions create for expansion of market share. Presbyterians lost market shares to their own splinter groups. Losing trained leadership to those schisms also increased the costs of denominational work. Because Baptists kept their struggles at the local level, they managed to maintain greater national solidarity. Greater indoctrination created the possibility for greater disagreement among Presbyterians. The simpler Southern Baptist message and church format proved to be more pragmatic, more geared to expansion, and more attractive to lower-middle and working classes, which gave them greater number. From a market share perspective, those organizational advantages were critical for their success. They presented a more viable form of American Protestantism in 19th-Century Brazil and therefore reaped greater rewards.

How does the experience of American Protestantism in 19th-Century Brazil help us better understand the work of modern missions in open religious markets? To what extent can an alien faith be absorbed by a different culture without the support of other transplanted social institutions? The evidence suggests that it is possible for a small group of locals to respond favorably to the religious innovation. And it takes only a small, dedicated group to give a particular faith a shot at longevity in the host county.

The external and internal factors discussed previously are some of the variables that influence success in an open religious market. When we examine the work of American Protestantism in 19th-Century Brazil it becomes clear that the Southern Baptist faith had far less trouble in translating itself, in being more compatible with the local needs of the population for a number of reasons – the time of arrival for Southern Baptists, the material conditions they found flourishing in the country, the level of modernization experienced by the locals, the presence of American immigrants, and the ease with which the faith and form of church governance could take advantage of local leadership to spread.

Finally, in examining the two American Protestant mission, we find what is possible and what is not when it comes to transplanting religious forms from the Northern to the Southern hemispheres without the support of other social institutions. When Protestant missions compete in the same market, previously marked by the cultural monopoly of a single church (Catholic), the theology and organization of the faith, the way it is operationalized vis a vis the local culture, can greatly influence the degree of success they may experience. In this case, the congregational model seemed to have a greater advantage or greater ability to use the local culture, given the historical context in which both missions were transplanted to Brazil.

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