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## Editorial

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Commissioned to produce this special “Latin America” edition of FIR before becoming co-editor of this journal, it is with great pleasure that I introduce it to you. The five articles which follow have been selected from over twenty submissions from scholars working on a wide variety of aspects relating to religion and Latin America. Elizabeth Olson’s article is written within the discipline of human geography, but very much looks outward to draw upon theoretical and methodological insights from other relevant fields. Treating the Peruvian context, Olson’s piece explores the interface of feminist readings of reflexivity and activism. Drawing upon fieldwork engaging two religious communities (one Catholic, the other Protestant) in the region of Cusco, she reflects upon the implications of the researcher’s identity for her negotiation of the field. Paul Freston’s article treats what is perhaps one of the most hotly debated topics of the contemporary study of religion in the Latin American context—Pentecostalism. Having enjoyed a relatively speedy, if not vertiginous, growth in numbers over the course of the last few decades, Pentecostalism raises a large number of questions both in respect of the social-cultural landscape of Latin America in general and its religious field in particular. Freston draws on statistical data from all over the Latin American continent, but also grounds his analysis with concrete examples drawn principally from Brazil and Chile. In so doing, this article explores both the broad dynamics of contemporary religious change in Latin America and offers detailed scrutiny of the particular issues (e.g. politics and economic development) relating to the growth and possible levelling off of Pentecostalism’s popularity.

Cristina Rocha’s article begins a series of three pieces treating spiritist forms of popular religiosity. It is, perhaps, no exaggeration to say that spiritism in its many guises constitutes one of the most widespread and enduring forms of Latin American

religiosity. Writing in view of recent critiques of traditional insider–outsider distinctions, Rocha reflects upon some of the methodological challenges provoked by her fieldwork on the Brazilian spiritual healer John of God. At the same time, she explores the nature and impact of “global flows” as they relate to her employment, as a female Brazilian researcher, of participant observational methods. Based in Cuba, Diana Espirito Santo’s article engages a form of spiritism influenced by African religious-cultural heritages. Drawing upon a rich ethnography of Afro-Cuban spiritism in the city of Havana, Espirito Santo explores the place of ritual interaction of “the dead” (*los muertos*) as it helps the living to cope with the daily hardships of life. Focusing upon the spirit-orientated activity of *espiritismo cruzado*, Espirito Santo’s piece underlines the fluid and variegated nature of popular spiritism in contemporary Cuba. Bettina Schmidt completes this special edition with an article centred upon the historical development of Puerto Rican spiritism and its contribution to modern-day notions of national identity and belonging (*puertorriqueñidad*). Drawing on archival and qualitative fieldwork, Schmidt further explores the therapeutic practices of spiritism in addition to its contribution to Puerto Rican artistic expression.