Leandro L. B. Fontana / Markus Luber (Eds.)

# POLITICAL PENTECOSTALISM

## Four Synoptic Surveys from Asia, Africa, and Latin America

WELTKIRCHE UND MISSION 17

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Markus Luber

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# Preface

With volume 17 the series Weltkirche und Mission takes up again the topic of Pentecostal religiosity which made the start in the research projects conducted at the Institute for Global Church and Mission since 2010. The renewed engagement is motivated by the focus on the perception of an increasingly political and public activity of actors with Pentecostal background. Since 2016 there has been a project position "Pentecostalism" at the Institute that underlines the importance of scholarly discussion about the phenomenon. This is not only about the attention for eccentric and exotic forms of Christianity and accompanying massive transformations of religious landscapes, but refers also to the missiological mandate to take into account the plurality of potential Christian realizations and to integrate them into theological reflection. In the same time the religio-phenomenological interest meets with an appeal to the theological discussion regarding the holistic humanizing responsibility of Christian engagement. Wherever action is called for in the name of Christ, and even more so when the radius of action extends to social and political commitment, the question of normative consequences arises and must be answered. In this context, the two approaches do not just stand side by side. An open academic engagement that reflects its own positionality and comprehensive knowledge of the subject matter are the prerequisites for any normative evaluation. The critical claim of theology requires not only vigilance against the legitimation of new religious practices that are not in line with the gospel message, but also attention to ethnocentric cultural attitudes that tend to ignore the inspiring provocations evoked by new religious practices. Exactly an awareness ad intra and ad extra is authoritative for a post-vatican missiological research design. Hence, I am grateful that the pursuit of a study of this kind regarding the phenomenon of political Pentecostalism was made possible by a grant from the German Bishops' Conference Commission on International Church Affairs which in the past decades has repeatedly initiated and funded academic projects on Pentecostal churches and made the results available through international conferences and publications. Therefore, I would like to thank Dr. Heike Rumbach-Thome from the German Bishops' Conference's Secretariat for her support of the project. Special thanks also go to Marion Waidlein and Santiago Valencia López for all their editing and formatting efforts. Finally, I thank Dr. Rudolf Zwank from the publisher Pustet Regensburg for his efforts to make the volume available online at short notice.

Frankfurt am Main, July 11, 2021 *Markus Luber*

# Introduction

Leandro L. B. Fontana

This volume presents the results of a still ongoing research project that ventures quite an audacious undertaking, as it sets out to examine in greater detail the vexed relationship between religion and politics in the context of a globalized post-secular age – whereby post-secular, in this case, amounts to a heuristic framework, rather than to the ascertainment of a given, homogeneous state of affairs. This presupposes in its turn the emergence of new actors on the political scene. These protagonists, religious and political alike, have been mostly associated with Pentecostal and Evangelical Christians, and it is beyond doubt that they have evinced in the last decades an increased political and social engagement.[1]

To be sure, there is in the meantime a wide array of research works, mostly drawing on ethnographic case studies, that demonstrate and account for this development taking place in a large number of countries around the globe.[2] However, there seems to be, as of yet, no sufficient evidence to substantiate the

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1 Considering the large amount of studies published in that respect, especially in the last decade, we confine ourselves to mentioning a few pioneering works: Gifford: New Dimensions in African Christianity (1992); Garrard/Stoll: Rethinking Protestantism in Latin America (1993); Martin: Tongues of Fire (1993); Cleary/Stewart-Gambino: Power, Politics, and Pentecostals in Latin America (1997); Freston: Evangelicals and Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America (2001); Gifford: Ghana's New Christianity (2004).

2 For Latin America, see exemplary Freston: Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Latin America (2008); Levine: Politics, Religion, & Society in Latin America (2012); Pérez Guadalupe/Grundberger: Evangélicos y Poder en América Latina (2018); for the African continent, see Afolayan/Yacob-Haliso/Falola: Pentecostalism and Politics in Africa (2018); Lindhardt: Pentecostalism in Africa (2014); as for Asia, there are so far hardly studies which take account of the Pentecostal political engagement at a continental level. To a limited extent, see Chong: Pentecostal Megachurches in Southeast Asia (2018); otherwise, see Le: Vietnamese Evangelicals and Pentecostalism (2019) for Vietnam and Maltese: Pentekostalismus, Politik und Gesellschaft in den Philippinen (2017) for the Philippines. As far as the Global North is concerned, it is safe to say that the Pentecostal involvement and visibility on the political scene is far from having the stature it has in the Global South, the USA clearly constituting an exception. Even the available literature on this topic is not as voluminous as that focusing on the Global South. To be sure, it would be very instructive to have taken account of this context as well, but for the reasons mentioned, especially as this study was conceived of as a literature survey, we opted for concentrating on the Global South.

argument that there are significant correspondences or even commonalities between apparently similar phenomena occurring at different spots worldwide, especially with regard to theological patterns of argumentation and performance.[3] A fundamental question therefore arises: can any meaningful, discernible nexus connecting various nodes of Pentecostal engagement in the political realm be identified, with particular attention being paid to the developments taking place in the Global South?

The studies published in this volume constitute the first step toward that goal. By furnishing the research project with the state of their respective contexts regarding the posited question, they lay the solid foundation for responding to this concern. In a sense, precisely because of their particular contextual nature, these results, considered from a theoretical vantage point, do not seem to differ much from other equally up-to-date ethnographic investigations, at least at first glance. However, given that all studies presented in this volume, albeit having drawn on context-based literature, were designed and carried out on the basis of a set of common foundational queries raised at the inception of our research project, they do represent a distinguished groundwork on which the remaining comparative-systematic analysis can be based.[4]

Thus, rather than starting to engage with the topic in question, the following lines will primarily concentrate on laying bare those foundational questions mentioned above, addressing a few methodological issues, and embedding these findings in the wider framework of this project, thereby supplying the reader with the indispensable keys for reading the texts contained herein.

## The Predicament

Notwithstanding the topicality of the subject in question, especially considering its direct or indirect impact on many contemporary societies, this study presents a number of challenges. The first one concerns the object of investigation itself, as the particular manifestations of the phenomenon are manifold – hence ambivalent – and the terminology used analytically lacks the expected and required preciseness. Jayeel Cornelio, for instance, refers in his text to a few challenges when defining Pentecostalism, given that many churches or Christians who are in the literature analytically classified as Pentecostals on the basis of their worship, tenets, practices, etc. do not explicitly identify with this category on several accounts. Accordingly, many Pentecostals in the Philippines designate

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3 To our knowledge, the only study that ventured a similar cross-continental comparison was the pioneering study by Freston: Evangelicals and Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America (2001).

4 For more details, see the section 'Method' below.

themselves as full gospel or born-again Christians, in addition to Evangelical. This identity issue or difficulty of categorization is even more discernible in the political sphere, as the line between Pentecostals and Evangelicals is not as clear-cut as one might assume. This state of affairs has in turn implications for the adoption of the nomenclature under which these actors operate in the public domain. Along these lines, José Luis Pérez Guadalupe and Brenda Carranza point out, in their study, that the Latin American Pentecostal political class generally prefers operating with the term Evangelical to being identified as Pentecostal, a term which carries, in many contexts, negative and even pejorative connotations. This has its own historical and contextual reasons and is perfectly understandable. The point is, however, that this renders intercontextual comparisons and parallels such as the one envisioned here difficult.

Next, one could ponder on the way this topic nowadays reverberates in the media. On the one hand, one hardly finds in dominant media ecosystems normatively neutral reporting or analyses on Pentecostal political engagement. Such "norm-constrained" journalism,[5] which functions most effectively in "propaganda feedback loops", tends to lump Pentecostal and Evangelical actors together, characterizing them, for the most part, as fundamentalists – possibly, in an attempt to discredit their political performance. On the other hand, Pentecostal megachurches have built up "media empires", as they are generally referred to in those ecosystems, and have made a determined effort, as it seems, to create parallel information worlds. Such media presence ranges from radio and TV stations, internet portals, newspapers, news agencies, to their own publishing houses. Obviously, neither of these developments is conducive to a reasoned public debate on crucial public issues. As a result, the public perception of political Pentecostal engagement appears to be marked, for the most part, by an attitude of skepticism.

Thirdly, Pentecostal political engagement depends ultimately on the given conditions of each particular context. As will be clearly seen throughout this book, if the basic conditions for political engagement are not given, such participation in a given country's political life is possible only to a limited extent. This is the case in several states and countries around the globe, particularly in Asia. A contrasting example to that, however, is Latin America. As Pérez Guadalupe and Carranza propound, the successful performance of Pentecostals and Evangelicals in the field of politics pivots largely on the "windows of opportunity" made possible by the legislation and political environment of each country. Accordingly, some political landscapes foster such participation, others inhibit it, and yet others do not permit it at all. As a consequence, by comparing the particular cases presented throughout this book, one might deem it

5 A term by Benkler/Faris/Roberts: Network Propaganda (2018), 15.

problematic, if not inappropriate, for instance, to compare Brazilian politically engaged Pentecostals, in whose country a number of such windows of opportunities are provided, with Chinese Pentecostals, for whom similar political conditions are simply not given. In this light, directing attention to this factor is one of the chief merits of the present approach. For only from such a macro-level perspective can one become aware of such peculiarities. At the same time, it should be pointed out that these contingent elements transcend the political realm. In this regard, particular notice should be taken of non-explicitly political factors such as the competition with other religious groups for societal influence, as will be seen in the case of Nigeria with regard to Islam – and, for that matter, the relationship between Pentecostalism and Catholicism in Latin America –, the presence of certain minorities, the cultural mindset of a given region or the way in which the power relations between secular and religious actors are established. These ingredients must be considered because, alongside the political setting, they play a key role in either fostering or hampering political engagement, as well as determining Pentecostal agendas.

Despite these challenges, one cannot at the same time fail to observe the formation of transnational networks of churches which, in addition to enabling a mutual exchange of resources, both human and material, have reshaped the religious and political landscapes worldwide. This new course has been termed as "Network Christianity"[6] and, as Andreas Heuser shows in his study herein, this reorganization of Christianity is embedded in the conceptual framework of the so-called Dominion Theology. In this light, one of the conjectures underlying this project is that this transnational transfer of various resources has had a profound impact on the very self-understanding of Pentecostals worldwide. Indeed, technical know-how, new forms of authentication of religious authority, effective channels of communication and distribution of contents, allied with the rearrangement of hierarchy and dependency structures and the reshaping of the visibility of Christianity in the public sphere, have had significant repercussions on the evolvement of the Pentecostal movement worldwide. These developments are definitely worth examining more closely, and are clearly indicated throughout this volume.

## The Approach

This project's title, "Political Pentecostalism", may arouse diverse reactions, especially as its polemical undertone can be hardly overlooked. For one thing, the use of the singular form to represent a vast array of expressions of this new

6 Christerson/Flory: The Rise of Network Christianity (2017).

religious movement appears, at first glance, not to do justice to the plurality inherent to it. For another thing, the adjective 'political' might well convey the impression that Pentecostalism is to be reduced here to its political dimension, thereby distorting it in its entirety. This legitimate objection can be met by referring to the centrality of *the political*[7] in contemporary forms of Pentecostalism. One could even go so far as to regard *the political* as being constitutive of contemporary Pentecostal self-understanding. In effect, recent efforts in grasping this phenomenon define it in terms of a *public religion*,[8] the key idea being that present-day expressions of Pentecostalism, as contrasted to its 'classical' forms or to other religions, negotiate identity features at the table of public debates, as it were, rather than on the basis of theological reflection or dogmatic definitions. Consequently, one could say pointedly, Pentecostal identity can hardly be defined or formed as dissociated from *the political* (discourse).

It should be noted, however, that this striving for identity (markers) seems to generate an intrinsic tension. On the one hand, this *modus operandi* expands the spectrum of Pentecostal identity so as to accommodate a wide range of disparate churches and groups. On the other, it reduces identity markers to minimum common denominators, which are mostly non-religious. Along these lines, it is therefore often assumed that Pentecostal and Evangelical (political) constituencies are primarily united under general banners such as being pro-life, against same-sex marriage etc., and nothing more substantial beyond it. Whether that is the case, still remains undecided. Nevertheless, apart from the changes that this phenomenon brings about on the societal level, a further question to be probed into is whether or not, or to which extent, such public engagement or religious exposure has an impact on the self-understanding of Pentecostal Christians themselves.

As a consequence, the present project sets out to explore the phenomenon in question precisely at this intersection between political engagement and religious self-understanding. Instead of attempting to get to the self-understanding of recent forms of Pentecostalism by delving into it from an ethnographic or specifically theological/religious vantage point, as it has been the case for the most part, our approach aims to infer the new contours of this religious movement from the fashion in which Pentecostal actors *enact* their roles in the public sphere, whether as politicians or as apostles, prophets, ministers, etc. For performance, as well as play, undoubtedly occupies a crucial role in Pentecostalism and may definitely serve as a means of analysis and exploration.[9] Therefore,

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7 Afolayan/Yacob-Haliso/Falola: Introduction (2018), 3.

8 Cf. Burity: A cena da religião pública (2015); Montero: "Religiões Públicas" ou religiões na Esfera Pública? (2016); Carranza: Evangélicos (2020).

9 See Vondey: Beyond Pentecostalism (2010); Wariboko: The Pentecostal Principle (2012).

public acts such as the anointing of authorities, revelations, prophecies, exorcisms or warfare prayers in public places etc. take center stage in this approach. If that is the case, these new actors, political and religious, do allow us to access this phenomenon from a distinct perspective and get a better grasp of what Pentecostalism is about. Yet, while this approach does have a bearing on responding to our question, it begs, at the same time, the question whether established methods and tools such as discourse analysis, which have been widely employed to decode public acts like the ones just cited, are indeed adequate to properly interpret events of that nature.

## The Method

Considering the plurality of (political) contexts and the multifaceted expressions and manifestations of 'political Pentecostalism', the project has largely relied on the expertise of five scholars from different academic disciplines and from the three continents mentioned earlier, namely Africa, Asia, and Latin America, so as to ensure that justice may be done to the intricacies of the phenomenon in question. In addition, considering the dimensions that Pentecostal political engagement has acquired in certain contexts, three specific countries of those continents have been examined in greater detail, viz. Nigeria, Brazil, and the Philippines. The purpose of this choice is twofold. For one thing, it aims to find out whether those countries represent more of a tendency within their respective continents or an exception. For another thing, it is based on the assumption that only by paying heed to this meso level of particular countries can sociopolitical, cultural, economic, structural, and administrative factors be made transparent, as already pointed out earlier. These aspects would otherwise hardly be discernible either at the global or at the grassroots level.

The major contribution of these experts consisted, thus, in a comprehensive bibliographical review covering the latest available publications on this topic in their respective contexts. Not less important, though, is their expertise and assessment of the scholarly debate, which becomes visible in their writings. Nevertheless, to make sure that all studies would be embedded in a common project, and would not digress much from this line of research, they were provided with, and are based, to different extents, on the following guiding questions.

The first bunch was mainly related to political issues: What developments can be currently observed in your particular context in terms of social and/or political engagement of Pentecostal or Neo-charismatic churches? What are the goals of such groups, who are their protagonists, and what methods have been employed to increment their political capital? How representative (also in quantitative terms) are such developments in the Pentecostal movement both in your

country and globally? What changes can you observe regarding the new intersection of religion and politics in your country and/or continent?

The second set of queries primarily concerned theological aspects: Can the social, political, parliamentary, and ideological engagement of prominent Evangelical and Pentecostal leaders be dissociated from the Pentecostal religious tradition or is it rather a development that springs from the faith, conviction, and self-understanding of Pentecostal Christians? How is the social and political engagement of Pentecostals theologically underpinned and to what extent the theological foundations of these churches turned out to guide the action of these protagonists (ministers, believers, politicians, etc.)?

Needless to say, these questions served merely the purpose of orientation, and the authors came up with other significant features and yet other queries. In fact, by choosing the appropriate format and structure for their text to convey their ideas, by laying emphasis on new features, and by providing extensive background information relative to their contexts, they even expanded the scope of the project. With the publication of the studies contained in this volume, the first phase of the project is now concluded, and these results lay the groundwork for the next step, which consists of a systematic analysis of the phenomenon on a macro level, thereby venturing to draw a few significant intercontinental parallels. The composition of this further study will basically draw upon three sources: first, on the present bibliographical review in an attempt to identify such parallels; second, it will be complemented by a broad range of contributions proceeding from an international conference, be it in the form of lectures delivered by other experts in this area, be it in the form of discussions unfolding throughout; lastly, it will build on the research being conducted at the Institut für Weltkirche und Mission. The latter relies upon both the research work at the institute and the support and expertise of a steering committee constituted by Prof. Margit Eckholt, Prof. Andreas Heuser, and Prof. Klaus Vellguth. The research project will be concluded with the publication of the complementary contributions of the conference alongside the systematic analysis mentioned above.

## The Background

This project was funded by the German Bishops' Conference and is embedded in a broader context of research. The German Bishops' Conference's Research Group on International Church Affairs has been concerned with Pentecostalism since the 1990s as part of its efforts to explore what was then considered 'new religious movements'. Over the past three decades, empirical and context-based surveys have been conducted, with special attention being paid to Africa,

Asia, Europe, and Latin America. These culminated, in 2013, in an international conference in which the results of such studies were debated by scholars and church representatives from twenty countries. The focus was then especially on the differing perceptions of this phenomenon and on the possible reasons for the appeal of the Pentecostal movement worldwide. It is important to underline that this event became the starting point for more detailed reflections on the relevance of such studies for the Catholic Church and her pastoral ministry in those continents.

Further context-based conferences were held in 2016 in the Nigerian capital Abuja and in 2018 in Guatemala City. As a result of such studies and discussions, a couple of scholarly publications were produced.[10] On several occasions during these conferences, the participants, in addition to appreciating the commitment of the German church in that regard, expressed their desire that these studies might be continued in view of the constant changes brought about by the Pentecostal movement in the global religious landscape. One of the concerns brought forward was "that also theological questions be discussed in greater depth in the future", alongside sociological and religious elements, as had been the main focus in the previous surveys.[11] The present project is to be situated in this line of (theological) reflection, and thanks to the hard work and extensive expertise of the scholars who collaborated with us in this enterprise, we can now offer this important contribution to the public debate over the issues dealt with in this volume.

## The Content

The book opens with the African context. Two studies make up this part: the first and the last chapters, written by Ebenezer Obadare and Andreas Heuser respectively. The reasons why both were not kept in sequence will become clear as this explanation unfolds. Nevertheless, they belong together and complement each other, inasmuch as the former examines the phenomenon at a meso level, along the lines of what was said above, and the latter puts his interpretation of African Christianity into a global context, while focusing on theological aspects. Accordingly, whereas Obadare primarily scrutinizes his homeland Nigeria, Heuser accounts for the reshaping of world Christianity ushered in by the Pentecostal movement, in light of African developments.

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[10] Müller/Gabriel: Evangelicals, Pentecostal Churches, Charismatics (2015); Madu/Moerschbacher/Asogwa: The Catholic Church and Pentecostalism (2016); Eckholt/Valenzuela: Las iglesias pentecostales y los movimientos carismáticos (2019).

[11] Eckholt: Der Pentekostalismus und die katholische Kirche in Guatemala (2019), 11.

In his synoptic essay, Obadare reconstructs the formation of the Nigerian Fourth Republic (1999- ) and points to the coincidence between the unfolding of a new democratic process and the emergence of Pentecostalism, especially on the political scene. In referring to the Fourth Republic as Pentecostal Republic[12], he ascribes Pentecostals the role of protagonists in that process. For in the aftermath of the failure of postcolonial African states in fulfilling the promises of sovereignty and development,[13] Christianity in general and Pentecostalism in particular produced a new narrative and overthrew not only the northern Islamic ruling class, but also secular forces. To open the book with this meso-level analysis primarily serves the purpose of directing the reader's attention to the contingent elements of this phenomenon, as well as pointing out that protagonism is never a one-way process. It is worth pointing out that in Obadare's critical appraisal of this development the concept of "theocratic class", coined by him, occupies a central place and makes an important distinction as to the profile of Pentecostal political actors in Nigeria.

The concept of theocratic class finds an equivalence in the term "pastoral and parliamentary elites", employed by Pérez Guadalupe and Carranza to refer to Latin American Pentecostal/Evangelical protagonists on the political scene. Also, the idea of a Pentecostal elite seems to find an echo in Heuser's chapter as well, particularly against the backdrop of the role played by megachurches in the African political sphere. These analytical endeavors to identify, describe, and classify these actors testify to the taxonomic varieties, as well as challenges, in this field. When it comes to the so-called megachurches, however, this problem becomes even more acute, considering the range of societal fields in which they have been actively operating. For the "Megachurch Movement"[14] brought about, besides political engagement, an active involvement in civic welfare, a strong visibility in the architecture of megacities, a massive presence in the digital world, a liturgical turn, and an increased influence in the fields of religion, culture, economics, and politics. Against this backdrop, one could rightly ask: are not these modes of exerting societal influence as important as exercising political power? In this vein, the Asian context provides an instructive example. Whereas, on the one hand, political participation on the administrative and decision-making level (e.g. parliament, government, etc.) in countries like China is, for Pentecostals, practicably unfeasible, one can observe, on the other hand, the emergence of a Christian business class[15] assuming the role of new actors in those environments, inasmuch as they attempt to expand their social,

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12 Obadare: Pentecostal Republic (2018) and in this volume as well.

13 See also Afolayan/Yacob-Haliso/Falola: Introduction (2018), 8.

14 Hunt: Handbook of Megachurches (2019).

15 See, for example, Cao: Constructing China's Jerusalem (2010).

economic, and political capital to extend their influence on Chinese culture, society, and even government. As will be seen in Cornelio's study, not having political power by no means amounts to not being influent players in the region. More importantly, even if this phenomenon does not have the same visibility in the political sphere as in other regions, it is possible to perceive in Asian Pentecostals, as compared with their counterparts elsewhere, equivalent changes in their self-understanding, similar patterns of behavior and argumentation, and analogous strategies of action.

Consequently, despite the variety of modes of engagement and multiple taxonomies, it is important to note that the issue of Pentecostal *actorhood* clearly occupies center stage in the whole debate and deserves, therefore, closer attention.[16] By bringing into play this concept, we intend to devote attention not only to matters such as the role, status, and strategies of megachurch leaders and Pentecostal elites, but also to the interaction between human (capability of) agency, human actions as performed in accordance with an assumed role (*actorhood*), and the function of institutions in constructing and transmitting such roles through different media, be they religious, social, institutional, etc.

José Luis Pérez Guadalupe's and Brenda Carranza's study, i.e., the second chapter, is structured in three main parts whereby they account for as much conceptual and theological aspects as historical, sociological, and political factors, constantly navigating between the wider landscape of Latin America and the particular context of Brazil. By doing so, they provide a comprehensive elucidation of both Pentecostalism's exponential growth in Latin American soil and its emergence as a political actor. Their detailed account of the most varied forms and manifestations of political Pentecostalism across their continent reiterates the point emphasized above as to the contingent elements of this development. Not less important is their equally comprehensive description of the strategies adopted by them in the last decades to climb the political ladder – with successes and failures as well.

Furthermore, this chapter sheds light on another linking motif that occupies center stage in this study, that is, the so-called "moral agenda". This element is related to the aforementioned characterization of Pentecostalism in terms of a public religion, but this study, as well as Cornelio's, adds another aspect to it: it functions as a means of providing legitimation for being politically active and serves, in the end, electoral purposes. This presupposes, in turn, features such as the gift and authority of prophecy to speak in the name of God, the motif of a Christian nation, techniques such as spiritual warfare etc., which are essential

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16 Being employed mostly in institutional theory, the concept of actorhood appears to be the most appropriate for our analysis. Conversely, other equivalent terms such as actorness and actorship are used rather in international affairs or international relations contexts.

components of the Dominion Theology, dealt with in greater detail in the last chapter. Along these lines, Cornelio calls attention to the salience of this element in different Asian contexts, to which he refers as "public morality". By means of advocacy, Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians reshape the public discourse of their countries. It is important to note that these elements, for their part, direct the attention from contingent, particular settings to transnational networks, global tendencies, and strategic alliances, including non-religious actors such as the so-called New Right, as Pérez Guadalupe und Carranza point out, thereby making evident once more the interplay between the micro, the meso, and the macro levels of analysis.

Additionally, the "moral agenda" is closely connected to an ingredient that could be put in terms of "propaganda feedback loops"[17], or "pressure groups" (Pérez Guadalupe and Carranza, in this volume), or "advocacy" (Cornelio, in this volume) and concerns, after all, structures of communication. In addition to enabling an increased visibility in the public sphere, this feature is of particular significance, too, as it functions at the intersection between churches (institutions) and individuals (actors). By means of effective communication, individuals are informed in regard to the roles they identify with, and their own perceptions, judgments, self-understanding, and behavior are thereby constantly redefined.

In the third chapter, Jayeel Cornelio devotes the three main parts of his study to examining three major transformations unfolding in his continent, namely the demographic change (particularly in terms of religion), new patterns of social and political engagement, and the identification of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians as key protagonists in those developments. Not without good reason, Cornelio expands, thus, the scope of our project, in that he takes account of their involvement in civic welfare as well. In this vein, a keen observation of his to engage with our topic is that social commitment may serve as a means to exert "soft power" in determined environments, at times complementary to, at times instead of political influence. In doing so, Cornelio points to Pentecostalism's great potential for variation while pursuing political power or social influence. This feature brings in its train topics like development, social transformation, societal recognition, and even the notion of "progressive Pentecostalism"[18]. Cornelio takes up the latter as a point of departure for his reflection and advances the debate over the concept of "progressive Pentecostalism" by arguing, instead, for the idea of "engaged Pentecostalism", which, in his view, would offer a better conceptual framework to get to grips with this phenomenon. These ideas of development and progressive Pentecostalism suggest,

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17 Benkler/Faris/Roberts: Network Propaganda (2018), 15.

18 Miller/Yamamori: Global Pentecostalism (2007).

in their turn, an important linkage to these forms of involvement as found in Africa and Latin America, and can, in part, even be regarded as belonging to the tenets of Dominion Theology, as expounded in the last chapter. Along these lines, Cornelio attempts a response to whether these developments could be appropriately characterized as a new wave in his continent, which he replies in the affirmative.

The book closes with a detailed study by Andreas Heuser on the conceptual and operational framework of Dominion Theology, in an effort to make sense of the new interactions between Pentecostalism, politics, societal influence, and public sphere in Africa and worldwide. As such, it certainly is a groundbreaking work in this field of studies, owing not so much to the novelty of the subject, since it has been widely studied, as to its depth of analysis and wealth of detail. The text is structured into two main parts. In the first one, Heuser starts by identifying the key protagonists of this theology, namely the megachurches, and tracing the origins and developments of this move, particularly in the course of the New Apostolic Reformation and paying heed to its repercussions and unfolding in African contexts, while focusing on Ghana. Next, he spells out its core tenets and describes the main theological shifts taken place in this development, the most significant having been the eschatological turn inherent to Dominion Theology. The second part is devoted to the implementation of this theology, especially in the way in which it is lived, performed, and reproduced by megachurch leaders by means of warfare prayer, anointing, prophecy, etc.

In addition to making a substantial contribution to the study of Dominion Theology, one of the merits of this chapter is placing the focus of investigation on a central question pervading our project, viz. what does this phenomenon of Pentecostal political engagement mean theologically? For it is apparent that the involvement of Pentecostals in politics was accompanied by important shifts in theological thinking. In this light, one could certainly advance the argument that there is a mutual correspondence between particular societal phenomena and groundbreaking theological approaches. Both are mutually dependent on and determined by each other.

Conversely, it is not yet sufficiently clear how conventional theologies, i.e., Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Reformed, etc., will engage with Pentecostal theologies. This matter entails two questions. The first concerns the theoretical framework of modern theology. In view of the epistemological claims of Pentecostal theologies,[19] a critical debate appears to be imperative, with particular attention to be paid to theological categories, methods, and claims. The second question is related to the preconditions for such debate, as it addresses the problem of (epistemological) asymmetry against the backdrop of Western cultural –

[19] See, for example, Wariboko: Nigerian Pentecostalism (2014), 45.

and epistemological – hegemony. Overcoming Eurocentric approaches, worldviews, mindsets, and attitudes remains a serious challenge, and ushering in a truly postcolonial era is still a strong aspiration. However, such fundamental paradigm shifts are heavily dependent, inter alia, on political actors and the manner in which they lead public debates that can foster such changes. Pentecostals appear to be contributing to this process, albeit in ambivalent ways, as will be seen.

Bearing this in mind, this project hopes to substantially contribute to this ongoing debate. We sincerely thank the scholars involved in this project for their valuable research work, which takes on now the form of this volume, and wish you a pleasant reading.

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# Pentecostalism and Politics in Nigeria: A Synoptic Essay

Ebenezer Obadare

## Introduction: A Lesson in Pastoral Power

Judging by the robustness with which the Nigerian public has criticized the Muhammadu Buhari administration (2015–), the remarks by Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye, General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), on October 3, 2020, at an event co-sponsored by the RCCG and the Nehemiah Leadership Institute to commemorate the 60th independence anniversary of Nigeria, were relatively tame, and really should have been met by nothing more than an official shrug of the shoulders.

Concurrent with the dominant sentiment among a section of the political elite and media for some time, the renowned cleric had called for a "restructuring" of the country "as soon as possible" in order to avert its imminent breakup. Arguing for "a system of government that is one hundred percent Nigerian, unique to us," he canvassed a "United States of Nigeria" in which a President and a Prime Minister share responsibilities 'so that one is not an appendage to the other. For example, if the President controls the Army and the Prime Minister controls the Police. If the President controls resources like oil and mining and the Prime Minister controls finance and inland revenue, taxes, customs, etc. You just divide responsibilities between the two.'[1] Finally, Pastor Adeboye had called for the House of Chiefs, a fixture of the Nigerian political system during the First Republic (1960–1966) to be restored, arguing, that "one of our major problems is that we have pushed the traditional rulers to the background and I believe that is a grave error."[2]

All 'told, Pastor Adeboye's intervention was, on balance, innocuous. Yet, it was considered serious enough to merit an official rebuttal by the Buhari administration, which, in a signed statement by its Senior Special Assistant on Media and Publicity, Garba Shehu, put the cleric's comments in the category of "recurring threats to the corporate existence of the country with factions giving

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1 See Soniyi: Adeboye: We Must Restructure Nigeria Now or Risk Break-up (2020).

2 Ibid.

specific timelines for the president to do one thing or another or else…" The statement by the presidency also included a warning that "such unpatriotic outbursts are unhelpful and unwarranted as this government will not succumb to threats and take any decision out of pressure at a time when the nation's full attention is needed to deal with the security challenges facing it…"[3]

Why did the Buhari administration, one that had previously ignored more truculent and far more cogent criticism of its policies feel obliged to respond to a perfunctory – and, truth be told, muddled – appraisal of the state of affairs in the country? One plausible answer is that the man behind the appraisal, Pastor Adeboye, is not just an ordinary commentator, never mind an ordinary pastor, but arguably the most influential Pentecostal pastor in contemporary Africa. His stature as a globally respected 'Man of God,' the General Overseer of a church with branches in more than 186 countries, and a man widely regarded as beyond censure by millions of Nigerians – including a cross section of the Nigerian political elite – seems to be the reason why the Buhari administration could not ignore his comments. Nor was the government the only entity deeming Pastor Adeboye's comments important enough to warrant a riposte; various personalities and organizations across civil and political society weighed in with most, unsurprisingly perhaps, coming to the defense of the pastor against the Buhari administration.

While incidents like this no doubt underscore the emergence of the figure of the Pentecostal pastor as an influential political actor, the pastor's newfangled position itself begs the broader question of why the Christian denomination, i.e. Pentecostalism, that he represents, has emerged as the dominant tree in the Christian – some might contend religious – forest, not just in Nigeria, but across Africa and other parts of the Global South, and increasingly in Europe and North America. What explains the attraction to Pentecostalism, and why has it become such a formidable political (and also cultural and socio-economic) force in a growing number of countries and regions? How has it ruffled the political matter, and what broader patterns in the resilience of religious affiliation amid the ostensible consolidation of secularism are signaled by its ascendance? In this synoptic essay, I propose answers to these questions within a primarily Nigerian context. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate how the rise of Pentecostalism is bound up with the political history of Nigeria, how the explosion of Pentecostalism is tied up with the evolution of the Nigerian Fourth Republic (1999– ), and how the tensions and contradictions within Pentecostalism are ultimately explicable with specific reference to, even as they are simultaneously illuminative of, broader tensions and contradictions within the Nigerian state and society. The broader sociopolitical context for my analysis, and

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3 See Adejumo: Buhari not moved by restructuring agitation- Presidency (2020).

the all-important factor absent which no account of the constantly shifting interaction between religion and politics in Nigeria can be complete, is the perennial Christian-Muslim jousting for power. Accordingly, I address it first.

## 1. An Interfaith Political Struggle

Because Nigeria is a complex multiethnic, multilingual and multi-religious society, it is difficult, if not outright impossible, to capture its fluid dynamics *solely* through the lens of a single analytic category, even one as uniquely insight-yielding as religion and religio-political contestation. Therefore, and for all the illumination that a focus on religion seems guaranteed to provide, it is important to emphasize at the outset that the politics of religion in Nigeria is best approached as one element in a constellation of interlocking variables, and more fruitfully so in its unstable interaction with ethnicity, regionalism, class, and elite bargaining.

It is not uncommon to characterize religious division in Nigeria in simple ethno-regional terms. According to this representation, the essential feature – and bane – of the Nigerian political system, dating back to the country's independence in 1960, is its North-South Muslim-Christian split, one that guarantees not only that every political program must pass the acid test of religious neutrality, but that agents purporting to mobilize in the name of religious identity are accorded special treatment and acquire undue advantage in relation to other actors in the political field. This picture is not so much wrong as incomplete. No doubt, the framework of North-South religious rivalry can illuminate epochal events in Nigerian political history; yet, too much reliance on – or an uncritical scrutiny of – that framework can lead to a neglect of the underlying diversity that often makes the interaction of religion and politics in Nigeria elusive. For example, the ethno-religious struggle between the Muslim core North and the Christian Middle Belt is as much a vital and recurrent element in Nigerian history as the broader North-South contestation. At the same time, intra-ethnic Muslim-Christian rivalry in southwestern Yorubaland, unfolding within a shared cultural framework vividly marked by indigenous Orisha religion, can be as competitive, if not more intensely so, than North-South contention. The point is not to deny the basic and continued salience of the North-South religious divide, but to affirm the equal significance of tensions that have always developed *pari passu* within the regions.

Given that the whole idea of secularism is to function as a structural mechanism to reconcile citizens otherwise sworn to conflicting religious traditions, disputes over the country's secular status are an apt illustration of the

persistence of interreligious rancor. On the one hand, the southern political elite champions secularism as a necessarily imperfect solution to the problem of religious rivalry in a multiethnic state and defends it at every turn. On the other hand, the northern political class is dubious that secularism is an extension of a Christian-marked Western state tradition, "an extension of the church based concept of government" that has always had it in for Muslims, whether in Nigeria, or globally. Accordingly, while the former tends to celebrate both the separation of church and state and privatization of piety, two cornerstone principles of secularism, the latter is convinced that they are the very antithesis of the Islamic fusion of the religious and the political. This sentiment is captured in the following statement by Aliyu Dawuda, an Islamic scholar and activist:

> Any attempt to impose secularism on Nigeria or any other country having a predominantly Muslim population is nothing short of injustice. This is because it is a Christian dogma, a Christian concept and a Christian worldview, which is parochial in nature that is being superimposed on them. The principle of secularism, where it is practiced, is nothing short of the practicalization of the Biblical statement which says: 'Give unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's`; … Therefore right from the onset (sic), secularism is not religiously neutral, it is a Christian concept, a Biblical dogma, reflecting the parochial nature of the Christian worldview. The principle and practice of secularism, in other words, is Islamically obnoxious, seriously revolting, and totally unacceptable because it is fundamentally based on what our Creator and Lord, Allah (may he be glorified) considers as the greatest crime which He never forgives once a person dies committing it.[4]

The observed contrast between Christian and Muslim readings of secularism informs the southern political elite's suspicion of the political design of its northern counterparts, and northern Muslim attitude towards the Western world respectively. One example of each will suffice. One of the most momentous interfaith showdowns in the political history of Nigeria took place in 1986 after military ruler Ibrahim Babangida registered Nigeria as a member of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). The government delegation to the organization's meeting in Morocco, led by then petroleum minister Rilwanu Lukman, had been put together without the authorization of the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC), the military-controlled highest decision-making body

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[4] Cited in Kane: Muslim modernity in postcolonial Nigeria (2003), 186. Suffice to add that the severity implied by Dawuda's statement is not fully captured across the diversity of Islamic discourses and practices across northern Nigeria. Paden: Islam and democratic federalism in Nigeria (2002), 1–10 identifies seven cross-cutting tendencies within Islam in the region: traditional non-sectarian mainstream Muslim groups; Sufi brotherhoods; anti-innovation legalists, especially the Izala; intellectual reformers; anti-establishment syncretists; Shi'ites; and unemployed urban youth and Qur'anic student movements.

in the country at the time. When news of the delegation's presence at the meeting and the country's apparent full membership of the organization broke in the media, it was roundly condemned by the southern elite and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the umbrella body of Nigerian Christians, who were quick to point to it as validation of their long-held suspicion of northern ambition to Islamize the country. For their part, northern Islamic traditional leaders, led by the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammadu Maccido, not only saw nothing wrong with Nigeria's full membership of the OIC; they demanded that the president attend its future meetings. In subsequent years, insistent calls for the country to leave or remain in the organization defined continued polarization of religious opinion on the secular status of the Nigerian state.

An illustration of the northern public's skepticism toward the West (of a piece, I claim, with its dubiousness about secularism) is what took place in July 2003 after the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (SCIA), the umbrella body of Nigerian Muslims, claiming to have gathered from some internet sites that the oral polio vaccine being promoted by the World Health Organization (WHO) had been deliberately contaminated with carcinogenic, anti-fertility and HIV-inducing agents, embarked on a campaign to stop the WHO immunization exercise across northern Nigeria. Suspicion of WHO's intention continued even after a committee set up by the Federal Government (it may not have helped that Olusegun Obasanjo, a self-avowed Pentecostal Christian, was then at the helm) declared the vaccine safe, and not until a parallel committee set up by the Jama'atul Nasril Islam (JNI) under the leadership of the Sultan of Sokoto, the spiritual leader of Nigerian Muslims, cleared the vaccine was there a shift in the northern public attitude.

While the foregoing examples bring home the southern political elite's suspicion of the political ambition of its northern counterpart and northern Muslims' suspicion of the West respectively, they also reveal the important role that the elite in both regions play in channeling and mobilizing religious grievance, which is utilized to bolster their power base. Given this situation, one might reasonably infer that religious politics is as much about religion tout court, as it is about political horse-trading and influence mongering between members of contending elites. Of the many examples that appear to lend credence to this deduction, the struggle over the implementation of the sharia by a cross section of northern states during the Olusegun Obasanjo presidency (1999–2007), and the Boko Haram insurgency, which has become increasingly lethal since the group's first armed attacks against civilians and state targets in December 2003, seem particularly instructive. At any rate – and the character of the specific religious grievance notwithstanding – inter-elite accusation that religion is a choreography staged to get one over on the political competition is recurrent. From one angle, secularism, especially contention over its symbolism and affordances,

instigates perennial ethnoreligious tension in Nigeria; from another angle, it is the ballast that makes possible the uneasy stability of the political system.

## 2. The Ascent of Political Christianity

Prior to the election of Obasanjo as the inaugural president of the Fourth Republic in 1999, the broad consensus in the south was that political power, symbolized by the presidency, had been hoarded by the northern elite. In support of this claim, it was pointed out, that, with the exception of General Aguiyi Ironsi (January-July 1966) and Ernest Shonekan (August- November 1993), both of whom presided over short-lived military and provisional civilian administrations respectively, northerners – granted, one of them, Yakubu Gowon (1966–1975) was a Christian – had held the reins of power since the country's independence in 1960. To redress the perceived imbalance, southerners agitated for a 'power shift;' geographically from the north to south, but more crucially from Islam to Christianity.

Increased agitation for a 'power shift' corresponded to a shift in Christian attitude towards power. Up until the mid-1980s, general Christian mobilization appears to have focused on holding Nigeria to its founding conceit as a secular state, and to the extent that Christians felt marginalized by their northern Muslim counterparts in the struggle for power, the solution did not include making the state 'Christian,' a process of symbolic hijack that Muslims had been widely accused of. As recently as 1986, relative Christian reticence (something that Muslims, perhaps not unfairly, interpreted as acquiescence in a Western apparatus of governance already steeped in Christian symbolism) could be seen in the following observation by Henry Bienen: "So far, the impact of Christianity in Nigeria has been less directly consequential for the struggle for political legitimacy and control of authoritative roles at central and state levels than has been the impact of Islam."[5]

The mid-1980s marked a turning point in the transformation of Christian attitudes, coinciding with deeper changes on the global level. Globally, there was "an increase in concern on the part of ostensibly religious collectivities with governmental issues" and "an inflation of interest among those with declared religious commitments in coordinating the latter with secular-ideological perspectives and programmes." In Africa, "the rather sudden and radical political changes… in the 1990s encouraged the irruption of spiritual movements into political space as people sought alternative sources of authority and at the same

5 See Bienen: Religion, Legitimacy, and Conflict in Nigeria (1986), 60.

time were freed from institutional constraints previously imposed by single party governments."[6]

Nigerian Christians' embrace of a "theology of engagement" took place within this changing global and regional milieu, and was defined by two important elements. The first was the shift from the former insistence on the secular (i.e. non-religiously marked) character of the Nigerian state to an apparent determination to Christianize it. Prior to the shift, and as already mentioned, Christians had been willing to defend secularism as the freedom to practice one's religion sans state interference, and, in Lamin Sanneh's view, had tended to defend it, i.e. secularism, on "pragmatic grounds of equality under the law, national stability and participation in public life, rather than for theological reasons."[7]

A second element of the emergent "theology of engagement" was the abandonment of the former position on the Christian's involvement in public life. The question of whether Christians should be involved in politics, on what terms, and under what directive principles has long been a sticking point among Nigerian Christians. At the heart of the question was, first, a real ethical and theological conflict over whether to "moralize the state" or "moralize society," as Terence Ranger once described it; and second, anxiety over the imagined corrosive effect that the world of realpolitik might have on the religious conviction of those who step into public life. That these were serious issues about which there was real moral conflict is obvious from the following statement by CAN, one that indicated a change of strategy, if not direction, by the association:

> Truly politics may be a dirty game – but who will make it clean? If Christians distance themselves from politics that leads to leadership, then demons will have a field day as had been the case with Nigeria up till today. If demons govern and rule us and burn our churches and marginalize and treat us like second class citizens in our country of posting, then why should the Christian complain?… When will the righteous be in authority? Is it only when Christ comes? We do not think so…
>
> The righteous cannot rule if he is taught not to be interested in governance. Christians ought to be interested in politics which is the vehicle used in reaching the position of leadership in this country. Genuine, properly born-again Christians, filled with the Holy Spirit should come and context elections.[8]

It seems fitting that CAN was the organizational embodiment and spearhead of the shift in Christian strategy. Established in 1976 to defend and pursue the

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6 See Ellis/Haar: Worlds of power (2004), 100.

7 Sanneh: Shari'ah Sanctions as Secular Grace? (2003), 241.

8 Quoted in Adogame: Politicization of religion and religionization of politics in Nigeria (2005), 131. Emphases added.

interests of Nigerian Christians, CAN had initially taken a conservative approach to its mandate. While the formation in 1977 of the Christian Students' Movement of Nigeria and the establishment of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) a decade on in 1986 definitely upped the ante on Christian agitation, paradoxically it was the abrogation of the June 12, 1993 presidential election (won by Muslim businessman Moshood Abiola) and the ensuing protracted national crisis that cleared the path to Christian radicalism and sealed CAN's nascent identity as a major player in the country's politics.

In essence, and in the deepest irony, the power struggle with Muslims gradually saw Christians virtually adopt the competition's attitude towards the state. If, previously, Christians had been willing to go bend over backwards to defend the secular idea of separation of church and state, following the June 12 debacle, interpreted with some merit, as proof of northern determination to cling to power at any cost, it became clear that a new approach to religious politics, and crucially the relation between both, was required.

## 3. June 12 and Christian Radicalism

When millionaire businessman Moshood Abiola picked Maiduguri-born Baba Gana Kingibe as his running mate on the presidential ticket of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) for the June 12, 1993 presidential election, most experts concluded that he had sealed his fate. A Muslim-Muslim ticket, unprecedented at that level in the country's history, was seen as a kiss of death to his candidacy, and earlier on, CAN was one of the many organizations to express concern at Abiola's apparent insensitivity to one of the unwritten rules of Nigerian politics. Yet, as time went on, and as initial reservations fell away, the Abiola-Kingibe ticket looked increasingly plausible, and, by the day of the election, doubt had given way to amazement as Abiola pulled together one of the broadest political coalitions in Nigerian history. The sudden decision by the military junta headed by Ibrahim Babangida to annul the vote, adjudged by local and international observers as the freest and fairest in Nigerian history, triggered a political crisis that continued to haunt the country until the election of Obasanjo as president of the Fourth Republic in 1999.

With the annulment, Christians, the majority of whom had voted for Abiola, rallied in his defense against the military brass, thought to be acting out a script authored by the northern Muslim political class. In the event, the annulment opened up channels for several Christian clerics, notably Bishop Alaba Job, Archbishop Anthony Olubunmi Okogie, Archbishop Sunday Mbang, Right Reverend Emmanuel Gbonigi, and Reverend Ayo Ladigbolu, to have a greater

say in political matters. As an ecumenical cohort, they viewed the annulment as a symptom of the rotten ethical foundation of the Nigerian polity, and, in a virtual Christianization of the pro-democracy struggle, used the pulpit as a platform to promote socio-political intervention focused on resistance to military tyranny. As time went on, and as both CAN and PFN gained in visibility, Christianity became a religious, cultural, and political vehicle in the ethnic, regional and national struggle for power and primacy in the country.

## 4. From Political Christianity to Pentecostalism

But even as Christian attitudes towards power and politics changed, Christianity itself was undergoing its own transformation with the growing popularity of Pentecostalism, denominated by its emphases on unmediated contact between the believer and God, miracles and speaking in tongues, and also by a new stylistics – loud, performative, ebullient – in worship. From its first fragile shoots on university campuses in the 1970s, the 'Charismatic revolution' gradually spread into the larger Nigerian society, over time becoming a cultural phenomenon that transcends the 'narrow' remit of religion. Hence, throughout the 1990s, and as Christians mobilized and prayed for a power shift in the political realm following the June 12 impasse, Pentecostalism was steadily muscling its way to the front of the line as the supreme form of Christianity.

Obasanjo's ascent to the Nigerian presidency in 1999, unprecedented in its immersion in Pentecostal symbolism, was the perfect representation of its, i.e. Pentecostalism's, growing influence and proof that in the preceding decade, it had steadily become the dominant expression of Christianity in the country. For Christians, Obasanjo's 'second coming' (he was military head of state from 1976–1979) was a powerful spiritual metaphor and a fulfilment of God's promise to liberate his children (especially southern Christians) from the yoke of northern (i.e. Muslim) leadership; accordingly, he, Obasanjo, was hailed as a "messiah." It was pointed out that, because he was, with the exception of Shonekan's doomed 84-day reign as head of the Interim National Government (ING), the first Christian in twenty years to occupy the country's highest office, his 'second coming' was part of a 'divine plan' to put power in the hands of longsuffering Christians.

Obasanjo's Christian credentials, boosted by his personal travails, fitted the emergent Christian narrative like a glove. Tried and jailed in 1995 on bogus charges of plotting to overthrow the Sani Abacha regime (1993 – 1998), he had spent a little over three years in prison before his release shortly after Abacha's sudden death in June 1998. Prior to his ordeal, Obasanjo had been a nominal

Christian. However, he emerged from jail a 'born-again' Christian, a new identity he proudly wore on his sleeves and celebrated with a succession of books, including *This Animal Called Man* (1998), which he described, somewhat grandly, as "an attempt to examine man's existence on earth and the purpose and ways to achieving that purpose in this world and in the world to come." Obasanjo had an unshakeable conviction that his stint in prison was part of God's plan to humble him and rekindle his faith. As he told the congregation during a thanksgiving service following his release,

> Much water has passed under the bridge over the past months and years. For some, not much has changed, but for me, something significant has changed. The officer-in-charge of one of the prisons in which I stayed remarked that prison is next to hell on earth. That is his perception and attitude. But for me, *God made the prison next to heaven because He used the hardship, deprivation, and the tribulation to draw me closer to Him in faith, obedience, worship, prayers, fasting, study of the Word of God, praises, and thanksgiving.* For me, it was all a humbling and chastening experience with God in charge and in control. He granted me His peace and joy out of His love and grace. He gave me satisfaction and contentment and kept my spirit high, my conscience free and clear, and my hands clean.[9]

For many Christians, especially Pentecostals, Obasanjo's survival of the terrible conditions in Nigeria's jails – including, as Obasanjo himself later narrated in his autobiography, Abacha's plot to have him poisoned – indicated that God had preserved his life in order for him to 'accomplish great things' for himself and for his country. The following statement by Oby Ezekwezili, Minister of Solid Minerals (later Minister of Education) under Obasanjo, testifies to this belief:

> And so God took that person, took him away into jail and the enemies thought they were the ones doing it: they took him into jail and when he was there, he had an encounter. *The President had an encounter; he had an encounter all in the agenda of God to resurrect the nation.* He brought him out after the encounter and then orchestrated a lot of things. God himself orchestrated a lot of things and took a person, who now had understood what total submission to the Almighty is: that no matter your height or position, there is none greater than the Almighty God. At that place of revelation, he could use him. *He now set up events and got him back into the covenant of the nation. What do you think it was about? It was for the re-building to start.*[10]

If, in general, Christians saw Obasanjo as the answer to their prayer for a 'power shift,' Pentecostals saw him as one of theirs, the one whom God had specifically fired in the furnace of spiritual tribulation in order to prepare him for the great

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9 See Obasanjo: My watch: Early Life and Military (2014), 462.

10 See *The Guardian on Sunday* (Lagos), 1 January (2006).

assignment – the take-over of political power – that He had prepared him for. Hence, he is, in my book, and, more important, in many Pentecostals', the first Pentecostal president in Nigerian history, one who, albeit within the parameters of the Nigerian political system and his Yoruba cultural pragmatism, nonetheless governed like someone who understood the spiritual symbolism.

## 5. Pentecostal Presidency

Long before he apparently succumbed to pressure to run for the presidency after his release from prison, not a few Christians had seen the value of Obasanjo to their platform, and their courtship of him had begun while he was in jail and his future remained uncertain. Following his victory in the February 27, 1999 presidential election, they quickly adopted him "as a symbol of the Christian control of the political sphere, believing that he was an answer to prayers about the ending of oppression and misgovernance and the ending of a Muslim political dominance."[11] In addition, such was their elation at his victory that they converged in Abuja on the eve of his inauguration on May 29, 1999 for an all-night prayer session to usher in what they saw as a new spiritual dispensation.

Obasanjo did not disappoint, starting his inauguration address with "praise and honour to God for this fay" and acknowledging that the "very thing created by God has its destiny and it is the destiny of all of us to see this day." He went on to describe himself as "a man who had walked through the valley of the shadow of death" and attributed his election to "what God Almighty had ordained for me and for my beloved country Nigeria and its people."[12]

A mixture of denominational, ethnic and other calculations combined to make Obasanjo the object of affection of leading Christian figures, and once he was installed in power, this new power nexus openly indulged in the deployment and manipulation of religious symbols, in particular the performance of religious rituals in public offices, institutions and functions; the use of religious (Christian) criteria as a basis for appointment to public office; a particularly grating mode of moral triumphalism that seemed to draw its oxygen from the demonization of Islam and traditional forms of belief; and, lastly, the inundation of public debate with Christian rhetoric. Both faith-based recruitment of public officials and demonization of Islam should be viewed against the backdrop of Christians' longstanding grouse that, when the Muslim northern elite wielded

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11 Ojo: Pentecostalism, Public Accountability and Governance in Nigeria (2004), 2.

12 BBC Monitoring: Excerpts of President Obasanjo's speech (1999).

power, the distribution of social largesse tended to be based on the singular criterion of religion.[13]

With this in mind, Christians saw Obasanjo's residency in Aso Rock as an opportunity to 'retaliate' as well as recover lost ground. Which makes it all the more interesting that one of the first things that the new president did in Aso Villa was to organize regular Christian prayer sessions. This was soon followed by the conversion of the squash court in the villa into a chapel, and the appointment of a Baptist chaplain, Reverend Aliyu Yusuf Obaje. For Christians, having a Christian chapel within the physical space of power was gratifying, and as soon as it was in place, many key government officials regularly turned up for the daily morning service. Following decades of perceived northern Islamic domination, liberating (in more than one sense) and reconstructing the presidential villa as a Christian bastion against both 'satanic' and invading 'jihadist' (caliphate) forces became a spiritual imperative. Oby Ezekwesili (cited above) captures this thinking eloquently:

> So, every day at the Villa, it was like, the two-edged swords being in my hands: one to work, doing my policy thing and everything: the other one, to pray. It has to be a blend of both because *Satan had been sitting pretty before. Now, God has dislodged Satan but we needed to clear all the debris that Satan had put in what was his former territory.*[14]

In light of this thinking, it is hardly surprising that, especially in some high profile cases, individuals' denominational affiliation seemed to have been a factor in their appointment to public office. Oby Ezekwezili again:

> Look at somebody like the Minister of Finance. She is a sister. She is a member of the Everlasting-Arm Parish of the Redeemed Christian Church of God. The parish my husband pastors. She is a sister in Zion. She understands that without God she cannot do anything. She knows that… You think people don't know? They know that what we are it is God that using the President. The president is a powerful instrument in the hand of God. *If it were not for Olusegun Obasanjo, you think the likes of me and… the rest of us… of this world would come anywhere near this government?*[15]

Evident from the foregoing is a vision of a presidency established by God in order to execute a divine agenda. In this vision, government appointees and

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[13] Other issues on which Christians have sparred with Nigerian Muslims include the siting of a mosques within the premises of Aso Rock, the seat of presidential power; the presence of Arabic inscriptions on the Nigerian currency, the Naira, and on the Nigerian Army's crest; the dome of the National Assembly complex in Abuja, seen by many Christians as 'Islamic;' and the political status of Abuja, the federal capital, in particular the perception by Christians that the portfolio of Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) seems permanently reserved for northern Muslims.

[14] *The Guardian on Sunday* (Lagos), 1 January (2006).

[15] Ibid.

their close network of friends, relatives, husbands, wives, and sundry spiritual supervisors were, pace Ezekwezili, more divine 'missionaries' than secular office holders. Pentecostal pastors, courted assiduously by Obasanjo, were critical to the sustenance of this vision.

## 6. Courting the Theocratic Class

The alliance between religious elites and holders of state power can be mutually beneficial for both sides. On the one hand, "being a de facto member of the state framework gives senior religious leaders opportunity to amass personal wealth, in just the same way as other leaders of important societal groups … may do."[16] On the other hand, "politicians try to associate themselves with charismatic religious leaders, in the hope that spiritual power will be reflected on themselves."[17] This is a useful template for understanding the close relationship between Obasanjo and members of the theocratic class. Over the course of his presidency, Obasanjo entertained several leading Christian figures in Aso Villa multiple times. He also had a direct line to the most influential Pentecostal pastors, including Chris Oyakhilome of Christ Embassy, Matthews Ashimolowo of Kingsway International Christian Centre, Mike Okonkwo of the Redeemed Evangelical Mission, David Oyedepo of the Living Faith Ministries (aka Winners Chapel), and Taiwo Odukoya of the Fountain of Life Church.

Their relationship had two decisive features. First, members of the theocratic class, acting as public defenders of the Obasanjo presidency, generally assisted in "dusting off the image of the government as God-fearing and righteous." Second, and because of their self-assurance that Obasanjo was installed to break the 'Islamic yoke' under which (the southern part of) the country had chafed for so long, they saw it as their spiritual responsibility to defend the regime against the perceived antics of northern politicians. For instance, when the Jamaat Nasril al-Islam (Group for the Victory of Islam), an umbrella group for the Nigerian Muslim community, spoke out against a perceived tilt in federal appointments against Muslims, Christian leaders under the aegis of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) were quick to dismiss the group's claims as unfounded.

Obasanjo did not fail to reciprocate their support, often turning personal milestones involving some of them into occasions for celebration by the government. To take just one example: when David Oyedepo of the Living Faith

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16 Haynes: Popular Religion and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa (1995), 99.

17 Ellis/Haar: Worlds of power (2004), 101.

Church Worldwide, aka Winners' Chapel, marked his 50th birthday in 2004, part of the president's congratulatory message read:

> …you have touched millions educationally, you have crowned it with the establishment of Covenant University, economically, you have provided jobs, morally God has used you to recreate moral integrity among millions. Physically, the grace of God has enable you to provide infrastructure for a ministry related environment (sic). In all these and many more, we give thanks to God for your life.[18]

Obasanjo then implored Oyedepo to:

> Continue to pray for religious tolerance and avoidance of any religious conflicts which might contribute to the delay or derailment of our effort to build a greater Nigeria. Continue to pray for all three arms of government for divine wisdom to continue to work together as a team towards Nigeria's greatness.[19]

While Obasanjo was generally close to the Pentecostal elite, his relationship with Pastor Adeboye (see the opening anecdote) deserves special mention for two reasons. The first is that, inasmuch as the return to democracy in Nigeria in 1999 also coincided with the inception of a nascent Christian muscle-flexing in politics and public policy, it was due in large part to the rise of the RCCG under his leadership. Sociologically speaking, there was a happy coincidence in that, just as Nigeria became a more open society in a democratic era, the Redeemed Church, borne on the wings of a trinity of 'driven leadership, loose global oversight and staggering cash flow, was on the cusp of a phenomenal transformation that has seen it become inarguably Nigeria's most economically and politically important religious institution. To the extent that Pentecostalism has become the dominant mode of Christian praxis in the country, Adeboye's RCCG has become the Pentecostal church par excellence. Second, in leveraging his rising social profile and special relationship with Obasanjo and political leaders across the country, Adeboye has arguably done more than any other individual to 'sacralize' Nigerian politics. For the Obasanjo presidency, Adeboye was an early stabilizing influence and source of socio-political stability. When Obasanjo sought to rally the country in the bitter aftermath of a disputed election, Adeboye's early support was absolutely crucial. It was no less vital as the 2003 election loomed with Obasanjo's public approval at a nadir. In order to win the hearts of Adeboye's large congregation, Obasanjo did what has since become de rigueur for an increasing number of aspiring and serving office holders in the country, Christian and Muslim alike: he made a political pilgrimage to the Redemption Camp headquarters of the Redeemed Church on the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway.

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18 Quoted in Obasanjo: From OBJ to Bishop Oyedepo (2004), 26.

19 Ibid.

Obasanjo's alliance with the theocratic class was good for most of his presidency, only stuttering at the tail end when, to the consternation of the Nigerian public, not least his Christian supporters, he schemed to stand for an unconstitutional third term of office. Instructively, the scheme collapsed in no small measure because Obasanjo found it difficult to rally the support of the Pentecostal pastorate.

The Obasanjo presidency set the tone for the gradual pentecostalization of Nigerian politics, a process that was unforeseeable a decade before his presidency, but one that has intensified over the course of the Fourth Republic. Before examining the process further, it seems necessary to pose the question as to why Pentecostalism quickly rose to become such a powerful and pervasive force, dramatically reconfiguring not just the religious landscape, but effectively the entire cultural milieu.

## 7. Accounting for the Pentecostal Surge

In Nigeria, Pentecostal ascendance is easily noticeable: in the explosion in the number of Pentecostal churches; the boom in tertiary institutions founded by Pentecostal churches; the increasing popularity of the Pentecostal elite; the steady infusion of Pentecostal habits into the fabric of everyday life; the growing popularity of religious spectacles; the transformation of Pentecostal pastors into secular sages with license to pronounce on love, law and economics; and last but not least, the injection of Pentecostalist forms into the popular culture, for instance popular music and Nollywood videos. At the same time, Nigeria is arguably the epicenter of the Pentecostal revolution in Africa, the source from which many of the doctrines, forms and rituals largely associated with African Pentecostalism appear to have originated, and without doubt the place where they have found their most muscular expression. In the following brief discussion, I advance a set of explanations that combines elements from Nigeria's specific socio-political milieu, and Pentecostalism's internal doctrinal assurances and ritualistic techniques.

One possible explanation for Pentecostalism's success is its simplification and reduction of complex social, economic and political situations and struggles to a one-on-one relationship between the worshipper and God. This reduction is enabled in part by what appears to be Pentecostalism's generally conservative view of, and attitude towards, politics and political activism. For all the divisions among its leading lights regarding politics (more on which later), it is safe to say that Nigerian Pentecostalism is, in sum, pro-state by inclination. The symbolism of Pentecostal leaders' influence on and unfettered access to the state cannot

be overemphasized in a country where the religious and political stakes are ever so high. In a February 2011 interview with the Cable News Network (CNN) Pastor Enoch Adeboye, the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and easily the most sought after Pentecostal leader provided an interesting insight into the Pentecostal political imagination. Responding to a question about whether or not the 'new generation' churches were making congregants politically docile, he argued that it is better for people to come to church than take to the streets where they'd most likely be shot. Underpinning that statement is the idea of the (Pentecostal) church as a place of protection from the danger and anarchy of politics and the streets.

A second reason why Pentecostalism has had such a great impact on the Nigerian public is that it apparently 'works,' meaning that the proof of its social guarantee that those who accept 'the good news' and surrender their life unto Christ will shed their rags for untold riches (spiritual as well as material) is in the pudding of real-live examples of people who apparently 'received their anointing' and became wealthy literally overnight; or whose personal circumstances otherwise manifestly, if unexpectedly, changed. Among Nigerian Pentecostals, stories of the 'next door neighbor' who found riches mingle with testimonies from people whose bank accounts were apparently miraculously credited without having engaged in any business transaction. As a respondent once told me: "It's like mathematics."

Scholars like Birgit Meyer (2015) and Ruth Marshall (2009) have urged serious consideration of the extent to which (African) Pentecostalism is a religion of the senses. For Meyer, "one of the most salient features of Pentecostal/charismatic churches is their sensational appeal; they often operate via music and powerful oratory, through which born-again Christians are enabled to sense the presence of the Holy Spirit with and in their bodies, wherever they are, and to act on such feelings. Sensational may well be understood as both appealing to the senses and the spectacular." Pentecostalism's sensuousness, its appeal to the senses (via music, dance and other kinds of bodily animation); is definitely a point of attraction for many young people for whom the mainline churches can be too stodgy, staid and conservative. Gospel music especially deserves more than a casual mention, but must in fact be seen, pace Vicki Brennan (2018), as "a central part of how Pentecostal Christianity has 'gone public' in Nigeria."

Finally, part of the attraction of Pentecostalism is the opportunity it provides for individual social agents to acquire a new social identity, at times complete with a new name. As part of this process, believers either modify old names or take up completely new ones in an attempt to distance themselves from the 'old' 'demonic' cultural order and assume a new identity. For the 'born-again,' a new name is a totem of a new individuality, though within the framework of a new community; an emblem of the power of a fresh anointing, and for the

sociologist, to review a sample of such names is to open a window into a specific social consciousness. From an ever growing list: Miracle, Laughter, Pray, Praise, Praise the Lord, Prayer, Success, Testimony, Living Testimony, Prosper, Prosperity, Yuletide, Independence, Worship, Answer, Favor, Jesus Is Coming, Light, Pillar, Rhapsody, Hallelujah, Good News, Divine, Ministry, Rapture, and last but definitely not least, Pentecostal.

## 8. Pentecostal Republic

If the Obasanjo presidency inaugurated the pentecostalization of politics during the Fourth Republic, subsequently, Pentecostalism's hold on the political process has only deepened. As a matter of fact, such is the way in which Pentecostalism has shaped the political process and political outcomes during this period that the Fourth Republic is, as I have argued elsewhere, more appropriately described as a Pentecostal Republic. The Fourth Republic may be called a Pentecostal Republic because, as I have maintained, its inception coincided with the period in Nigeria's political history when Christians, formally organized under the aegis of CAN, appeared to gain a decisive political advantage over their Muslim counterparts.

Moreover, the Fourth Republic is a Pentecostal Republic because of the way in which the arc of its development neatly maps onto the evolutionary arc of the social visibility and political influence of a Pentecostal 'theocratic class,' meaning the core of Pentecostal leaders who have burst into prominence over the past 25 years, and whose social visibility has increased during the same period. Led by a cohort of wealthy Pentecostal pastors, the theocratic class has taken it upon itself to provide a narrative about the Nigerian Fourth Republic, if not Nigerian democracy, effectively redrawing the boundary between the pulpit and state power even as it prioritizes its self-preservation as a class. Over the course of the Fourth Republic, various members of this class have played a prominent role in the most decisive political events and moments.

One example is Pastor Tunde Bakare, founder and Serving Overseer of the Lagos-based The Citadel Global Community Church (formerly The Latter Rain Assembly), who, together with Pastors Adeboye and Oyedepo (mentioned earlier) belong in the upper crust of the theocratic class. Bakare first came to the limelight early in 1999 when he swam against the current of Christian elation at the prospects of Obasanjo's leadership. By the close of the decade, Bakare had risen to prominence as one of the most visible Pentecostal pastors in the country and, in 2010, led the Save Nigeria Group (SNG), a self-described "coalition of pro-democracy and human rights organizations and patriotic Nigerians" in

its successful campaign to pressure an ill President Umaru Yar'Adua (2007–2010) to transmit the instruments of office to his deputy, Goodluck Jonathan. In 2011, he, unsuccessfully this time, attempted to cash in on his newfangled popularity when he ran as the running mate of Muhammadu Buhari on the ticket of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC).

## 9. Pentecostalism and Politics: the Goodluck Jonathan Era

Following the demise of President Yar'Adua in May 2010, Christian leaders, reminiscent of their characterization of the Obasanjo regime, were quick to drape the administration of his successor, Goodluck Jonathan, in religious symbolism. In return, President Jonathan wore his supposed Christian-Pentecostalist bona fides on his sleeves, enthusiastically embracing clerical and popular narrative of the mode of his ascension to the presidency as a supernatural one. Furthermore, Jonathan worked hard to cultivate the leading lights of the theocratic class and would eventually develop a close relationship with many of them. Pastor Oritsejafor, who became CAN president in July 2010 shortly after Umaru Yar'Adua's passing, and just as Jonathan was gradually finding his bearing as his successor, was gradually drawn into the new president's orbit of friends and confidants.

The courtship of Jonathan and the Pentecostal elite was mutually pragmatic. With Jonathan's ascendance, Pentecostal leaders could claim that the divine masterplan which unfolded with Obasanjo in 1999 was now being resurrected after a Muslim interregnum. At the same time, individually and corporately, it gave them the opportunity to pull the kind of social leverage that perceived proximity to power has always afforded. For Jonathan, simple political survival dictated that he remain in the good books of the Pentecostal elite, and early on, especially as he sought to extend his political base outside his Ijaw- South-South geopolitical region, he must have felt a need to keep on his side the leading lights of an elite that boasted large congregations and deeper pockets.

With Obasanjo, the fact that he had served time in jail, had 'miraculously' managed to outlive a military dictator who, from all accounts, was intent on murdering him, and, improbably, had ended up in Aso Rock as the Fourth Republic's inaugural president, was, as discussed earlier, readymade material for a prison-to-president providential narrative. Unlike Obasanjo, however, Jonathan had had no acquaintance with prison, and had seen none of the political adversities with which the former appeared to have been inundated. However, whatever Jonathan lacked in political adversity, he would more than compensate for with his first name, Goodluck, his middle name, Ebele ('God's wish'), his wife's

first name, Patience, and other details of his personal biography and political career.

Below, I show how Jonathan went to extraordinary lengths in order to ingratiate himself with the Pentecostal elite and live up to his classification as the 'Chosen One'. Primarily, this involved the staging of political performances intended to keep the powerful pastors and their millions of congregants in a permanent state of seduction. However, since performances always have their limitations, and given the imperatives of the country's geo-politics, Jonathan's efforts at keeping his Pentecostal base happy always had to be balanced with finding a proper response to the well-founded misgivings of the northern power elite.

## 10. Between North and South

Right from the beginning, Jonathan was torn between, one the one side, keeping the Pentecostal elite and their large constituencies happy, and, on the other side, pacifying a northern elite understandably feeling politically bereft by the passing of Umaru Yar'Adua. The ensuing tension being the constant backdrop to the entire Jonathan presidency, it seems proper to discuss it briefly.

When Yar'Adua took over from Obasanjo in 2007, the tacit understanding at the apex of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), if not in fact among the Nigerian power elite, was that he would, as a 'candidate of the north,' complete two terms of office. However, having unexpectedly taken ill and eventually passed on in May 2010, Yar'Adua had failed to complete the first term of office. Because he, Yar'Adua, had taken up the north's slot, his passing was a political disaster (for the north that is), and in retrospect northern perplexity at the region's immediate political prospects most probably explains northern leaders' initial desperation to keep Yar'Adua in power, despite credible media reports suggesting that he was permanently incapacitated. In any case, Jonathan had his work as regards putting the north's political luminaries at ease cut out for him. More than anything else, he needed to convince them that, other than seeing out Yar'Adua's first term, he had no desire to consolidate himself in power, a move that would not only effectively kill the north's desire for a quick return to power in 2011, but also upend the fragile elite consensus on power rotation.

Perhaps driven more by a desire to win their political backing and less by the merits of their reasoning, Jonathan entered into a secret gentleman's agreement with some northern governors just before the 2011 presidential election. The essence of that agreement was that he would serve just one term of four years (2011–2015), and would refrain from seeking a second term in 2015. Early

in 2013, as indications increasingly pointed to the possibility of Jonathan running for a second term of office, Mu'azu Babangida Aliyu, Governor of Niger State at the time and Chairman of the Northern States Governors Forum, came out to remind Jonathan of his pledge and warn him against reneging on it. Although the president promptly denied having entered into any agreement with the northern governors, he would later own up to it, however justifying his decision to back out with the argument that 'You can make a political promise and change your mind, so long as it is within the law.'

Ultimately, and his most desperate efforts notwithstanding, Jonathan failed to recapture the trust of the northern power bloc when he needed it most. But that was only at the end. In the early stages, across the religious and political spectra, he had managed to win many hearts with his performances as a pious, politically unambitious man of humble origins.

## 11. Bio-Politics

When Jonathan took the oath of office on May 6, 2010, to complete the rest of Yar'Adua's tenure, he completed an improbable journey that took him from the relative obscurity of the deputy governorship of the oil-producing south-eastern state of Bayelsa to the highest office in Nigeria. On his dramatic ascent to the presidency, he had profited from the impeachment of Governor Diepreye Alamieyeseigha in December 2005, and then assumed the reins as Yar'Adua succumbed to illness. Because of this series of fortunate (fortunate for Jonathan, that is) events, it was common to read Jonathan's path to power, if not in fact the totality of his personal biography, as proof of divine intervention. In short order, a political mythology would coalesce around the idea of him as an innocent political outsider who was extremely reluctant to accept the responsibility of being president, who in fact had done his utmost to disavow the burden, but who had the presidency thrown in his lap nonetheless. Unsurprisingly, both Jonathan and his immediate circle of advisers avidly embraced and propped up this mythology. Accordingly, much of Jonathan's self-presentation as president was, it might be argued, aimed at *impersonating* this biographical construction. Here he is, for example, on September 18 2010, while declaring his candidacy for the presidential primaries of the People's Democratic Party (PDP):

> I was not born rich, and in my youth, I never imagined that I would be where I am today, but not once did I ever give up. Not once did I imagine that a child from Otuoke, a small village in the Niger Delta, will one day rise to the position of

> President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. I was raised by my mother and father with just enough money to meet our daily needs. In my early days in school, I had no shoes, no school bags. I carried my books in my hands but never despaired; no car to take me to school but I never despaired. There were days I had only one meal but I never despaired. I walked miles and crossed rivers to school every day but I never despaired. Didn't have power, didn't have generators, studied with lanterns but I never despaired. In spite of these, I finished secondary school, attended the University of Port Harcourt, and now hold a doctorate degree. Fellow Nigerians, if I could make it, you too can make it.[20]

In the foregoing, and as on numerous other occasions throughout his presidency), Jonathan was giving credence to (and at the same time seeking to extract political capital from), the mythology of his humble origins. Which, as it happens, meshes with the ethos of the prevailing prosperity gospel which prizes the heroic achievement of the individual. Jonathan, in a line that will not look out of place in any conventional prosperity gospel literature, challenges his audience that "if I could make it, you too can make it."[21] With this singular flourish, he, Jonathan, celebrates the miracle of the heroic all-conquering self-possessing individual, one who, against all odds, wins. Pentecostals might say of such an individual that they prevailed because they found 'divine favor'.

Bowdlerized or not, Jonathan's biography provided a standing endorsement of the principles of the prosperity gospel, and for that reason, he was a firm favorite of the country's leading Pentecostal pastors. For his part, and as indicated above, Jonathan courted them aggressively, giving them symbolic gratification with his constant displays of open piety and, when push came to shove, seeking to induce them with raw cash.

## 12. Performing Piety

In order to remain in the good books of the leading Pentecostal pastors while at the same time reaching out to their large congregations, President Jonathan, as demonstrated above, sought to bolster popular narrative of him as an especially lucky man whose good fortune was made possible by 'divine favor'. Of a piece with this, and pursuant to the same objective, was his self-presentation as a humble and pious man. In his typically ostentatious performances of piety, Jonathan routinely exceeded Obasanjo. For Jonathan, being *seen* to be pious and

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20 From Goodluck Ebele: Speech by President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan Declaring His Candidacy for the PDP Presidential Primaries (2010).

21 Ibid.

humble was integral to his overall identity as president, and his presidency was punctuated by several telling moments.

For instance: preparing to take charge of his first Federal Executive Council (FEC) meeting as the country's substantive president after Yar'Adua's passing, Jonathan, no doubt conscious of the symbolism of the moment and the intense gaze of the press cameras, removed his trademark fedora hat, clasped his hands, and closed his eyes in prayer. This was a calculated performance of piety and humility, an overture to the Pentecostal constituency signaling that he, as 'one of them,' was 'in charge' (behind him, strategically positioned, was the crest of the Federal Republic of Nigeria). At the same time, it was a gesture of ostentatious humility choreographed for the consumption of the generality of Nigerians.

Now and again, Jonathan would retread this pose of gratuitous modesty and pornographic piety. For example, as president, Jonathan visited several times with the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and the symbolic godfather of the theocratic elite, Pastor Enoch Adeboye. On at least two of such occasions in December 2012 and February 2015 respectively (the latter as part of a desperate appeal for votes in the then approaching presidential election of March 2015), he knelt down before Adeboye, who then went ahead to pray for him, his family, and the country Jonathan's words to Adeboye were: 'I am your sitting president, pray for me so that I will not deviate from the fear of God.'[22]

Another demonstration of Jonathan's desire to be seen as humble and pious took place in October 2013 when Jonathan became the first Nigerian head of state to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In his entourage were Information Minister Labaran Maku; Special Adviser on Media and Publicity, Reuben Abati; State Governors Gabriel Suswam (Benue), Theodore Orji (Abia), Peter Obi (Anambra), Godswill Akpabio (Akwa Ibom); Executive Secretary of the Nigeria Christian Pilgrims Board Kennedy Okpara; and then President of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor. At the Wailing Wall, Jonathan knelt down for prayers before Pastor Oritsejafor and other members of the presidential entourage. The special moment was captured by his press corps for distribution to journalists around the country.

The power of moments like these as well-timed demonstrations of Jonathan's humility, piety and, no less important, willingness to submit, cannot be overemphasized. As previously argued, such performances were directly correlated to his political ambition. Nevertheless, there is a larger logic that must be grasped, to wit: integral to Jonathan's performances is a kind of calculated self-abjection, whereby a certain political actor confesses to his 'ignorance' in

22 Again, Jonathan storms Redemption Camp, kneels for prayers. (2015).

matters of governance and humbly asks for God's 'wisdom.' This willful repudiation of the very basis of his authority (an admission of incapacity, in fact), can be a project of avoidance, the staging of a ruse that subtly extends the ideology of the state, disguises its impunities, and hence furthers its legitimation.

## 13. Queer Politics

In addition to symbolic gestures like openly kowtowing to powerful pastors, President Jonathan pursued legislations and enacted policies that could be easily construed as driven by a desire to retain the goodwill of the Pentecostal elite and their congregations. One such move was the signing into law in January 2014 of the Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act of 2013 which criminalizes marriage or civil union between persons of the same sex and prescribes lengthy jail terms for anyone who, either, directly violates the law, or facilitates the union of two people of the same sex. The latter is defined broadly to include 'a person or group of persons who administers, witnesses, abets or aids the solemnization of a same sex marriage of civil union, or supports the registration, operation and sustenance of gay clubs, societies, organizations, processions or meetings in Nigeria'.

There are good grounds for supposing that the enactment of the legislation was politically motivated. One is the timing. Although Jonathan did not officially declare his intention to run for second term until November 2014, there were already clear signals at the beginning of the year that he definitely would. As a result, with opposition preparations already in full throttle, and with national elections just over a year away, it seemed like the perfect opportunity for Jonathan to claim the moral high ground, particularly regarding an issue on which public moral revulsion could not be more palpable. Furthermore, by January 2014, Jonathan and the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) were facing intense pressure as a result of perceived lack of progress on the economic front. By signing the Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act into law, hence stirring up intense debate across local and transnational civil society, Jonathan may have hoped to create temporary diversion from his regime's struggles on the economic front.

If Jonathan's aim was to extract political capital from public revulsion, he could not have chosen a better subject, for in Nigeria's recent history, it is rare to find an issue around which, all told, a most unlikely alliance of religious leaders, the political elite, and the print media, has coalesced. I say all told because some qualification is warranted. For instance, it is true that there is variance between elite and public perceptions and discourses of homosexuality in

Nigeria. For ordinary people, homosexuality is a route to power and its rewards, and is, in this respect what 'those in high positions – the cream of the military establishment, the political elite and wealthy businessmen – do. The fact that politicians invoke it from time to time as a way of damaging an opponent's reputation is proof that they are conscious of this discourse.

The genius of aiming to kill two political birds with one stone by uniting northern conservative Islamic leaders and southern Pentecostals around a single cause cannot be doubted, and although the Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act did not achieve its short-term political goal for President Jonathan, who would eventually fall short in his bid to secure a second term as president, it is a reminder of the combined power of religious leaders (Christian-Pentecostal as well as Islamic) and a narrative woven around the visceral power of religious symbolism.

## 14. Pentecostalism and Politics in Nigeria: Tentative Conclusions

Perhaps the most profound impact of Pentecostalism on Nigerian politics over the past two decades – and yet another reason why the Fourth Republic is a Pentecostal Republic properly called – is the rise and consolidation of what I call the Pentecostal imaginary. By Pentecostal imaginary, I refer, obviously with Charles Taylor in mind, to Pentecostal understanding of society, culture, and historicity in Nigeria, and the values and normative commitments ensuing from such. In the foregoing, I have tried to account for the rise of this imaginary, focusing, inter alia, on its rise, the reasons for its success, the rise of the Pentecostal elite, its effect on specific political regimes, its battles and compromises with the Islamic competition, and overall, the way in which it has shaped political culture in the Fourth Republic.

None of this makes the future trajectory of Pentecostal politics any more predictable. For one thing, and as we saw most recently with the 2015 presidential election, there is no such thing as a single Pentecostal coalition, and members of the theocratic elite are as divided, if in fact not more so, than the vast congregations which they lead. There is definitely a Pentecostal class; whether it is homogeneous is a different thing altogether. Furthermore, while Pentecostalism is clearly the idea fixe of the Fourth Republic, it should be remembered that its apparent political triumph is by no means irreversible, and it is not inconceivable that its alliance with the state could spell the beginning of its political doom. Lastly, internal doctrinal changes could well force a shift in Pentecostalism's political strategy.

No matter what, Nigerian politics and Pentecostalism look destined to be joined at the hip for the foreseeable future.

## Bibliography and Suggested Readings

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# The Diversity of Political Pentecostalism in Latin America

José Luis Pérez Guadalupe

Brenda Carranza

## Introduction

We would like to begin this study of Latin America by posing the following question: Has the region become more religious, or is religion in Latin America simply becoming more and more political? The novelty of the phenomenon that inspires such a question assumes not only a higher degree of religious consciousness among political actors (albeit for utilitarian purposes) but also, first and foremost, a new kind of political consciousness among religious actors (especially Pentecostal Evangelicals) throughout Latin America (with "actors" being understood broadly here as including institutions, entire denominations, leading ministers, members of congregations, etc.). For this reason, our analysis will mainly focus on the ways and means in which the Evangelical community in Latin America has been transforming its vision regarding the "church-world" relationship during the past 20 years or so, eschewing the long-held position of "flight from the world" and coming to embrace a stance of "conquering the world" – not only spiritually, but also within the political sphere (i.e., within the very corridors of power). This sea change has primarily been driven by Christian Pentecostals (or "neo"-Pentecostals).

Later, we will see how Evangelicals have been positioning themselves within the context of Latin American politics, with a special emphasis on Brazil as an exemplary case. In fact, no Latin American politician today can afford to ignore the issue of religion, or the moral values of their potential voters. Neither Biden nor Trump did so in the 2020 US presidential elections. This increasingly preponderant role of religion among the region's politicians could be seen, for example, during the coronavirus pandemic, which witnessed not only religious defenders of the political decisions of certain presidents (especially the "deniers"), but also heads of government and other politicians calling on the Christian Lord to save their nations from death and devastation. Was this nothing more than political opportunism in dire circumstances? Or were we seeing

political leaders give authentic expression to their faith by imploring God to heal their people? Or were both of these factors in play?

These phenomena lead us back to the age-old debate regarding the dynamic and controversial relationship between religion and politics in Latin America, and raise the question as to whether this new political and religious reality constitutes a new chapter of a historical and well-known co-opting of religious sentiments for political purposes, or if instead it represents a novel political utilization for political ends. The issue could be succinctly framed as follows: Is politics using the crutch of religion, or has religion taken politics unto its bosom – but to such an extent that it threatens to suffocate it in the process?

In considering this question, it is important to bear in mind that the new political party involvement of the "Christian" segment of Latin America is occurring within a broader context of profound changes that have had a direct impact on the construction of the democratic projects in individual nations within the region. These changes also affect the different Christian churches in their conception of society; in their theological and ethical perspective of the responsibility for intervening directly in the "world", and in the forms of articulating this intervention. For these reasons, it is fundamentally important in this study to formulate – albeit in an artificial way – this contextualization (especially with reference to the past ten years). Doing this will allow us to buttress the arguments presented throughout this text.

Let's consider the international scenario of the past several years. The emergence of Donald Trump in 2016 reinforced a rightward shift in US politics among a vast sector of the electorate. We see this shift as an attempt to take refuge in a kind of lost paradise among people who see the important cultural and behavioral changes in the US as an encroaching darkness. This segment of the electorate also consolidated its influence among Latin American Evangelical groups during recent years, especially in Brazil. It is for this reason that, even though we have no intention of including a comprehensive ethnographic analysis in this study, we will throughout this text draw special attention to the case of Brazil. This is because we think that, in addition to the prominence of Evangelicals within the Brazilian polity (a tendency that has been especially marked during the past 20 years), the political and corporative dynamics of (neo-)Pentecostal churches in that country could end up serving as an inspirational model for such churches in other Latin American nations.

In observing world events, we see that this rightward and populist shift is not limited to the United States, but extends to the entire world in a way that typically includes a strong nationalist component. According to Laclau, this phenomenon is the result of a renewed conception of conservatism as a political and tactical strategy of resistance to change, and advocacy of the *status quo*. Such resistance may be in response to a political strategy aimed at weakening the role

of institutions, and/or at establishing a direct link between the leader and the people governed.[1] On an international scale, one need look no further than the case of Poland's prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki (2017), whose Law and Justice party commanded an absolute majority in the *Sejm* (Polish parliament). There is also the example of Viktor Orbán in Hungary (2010). In addition, we have seen Sebastian Kurz elected twice as Chancellor of Austria (first in 2017 and then again in 2020), first in coalition with the Freedom Party (a formation which had included nationalist and pro-Nazi groups) and subsequently in coalition with the Green Party. There is also the Italian Interior Minister (2018–2019) and member of the Northern League party, Matteo Salvini, famous for his xenophobic and anti-minority stances. Turkey's president, Tayyip Erdogan began expressing his commitment to social polarization as a form of governing when he was elected president in 2014. Turning to Asia, Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte (2016) promised an end to drugs, and has governed as a dictator with what he calls "a strong arm" approach. For the purposes of the present study, it is beyond question that Donald Trump (2016) and Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2018) are the most important and influential right-wing leaders within the Latin American context. But this brief geopolitical survey also affords us the opportunity to observe the potential impact of religious groups on political decisions, and to identify the organic and ideological connections between the former groups and the latter decisions.

On the other hand, it can also be said that Latin American democracies and their governments have often underperformed. Thus, it is by no means uncommon that disenchantment on the part of the nation's citizens sooner or later leads to a crisis in representation, with an accompanying decrease of the legitimacy of and confidence in democratic institutions. It is this context of loss of confidence, according to Marta Lagos,[2] Director of Latinobarómetro, that creates the conditions that can lead to the possible rise of regimes that constitute a break with democracy – with such regimes sometimes enjoying a considerable degree of popular support. In this connection, it should be pointed out that the current disenchantment with democracy in the region is different from that which prevailed during the 1960s and 1970s, when the break with democracy was imposed *de facto* from outside the political system via military coups that were then followed by long periods of dictatorship.

For the nations of Latin America, available data reveal not only a decline in democracy, with a concomitant adverse impact on the survival of democracies, but also a widespread political discontent on the part of the nations' populations. A commonly shared view is that the concentration of wealth and social

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1 Laclau: La razón populista (2006), 36–38.

2 Lagos: El fin de la tercera ola de las democracias (2018).

inequality continue to be present, and that recent years have witnessed a dramatic economic recession. This setback is due in part to the consequences of the financial crisis of neoliberalism (2008), which imposed austerity measures on all countries in order to combat the recession. This development in turn resulted in an economic crisis that, in the opinion of Farid Kahhat, constitutes the main cause of the rise of conservatism in the contemporary world as a whole, and in Latin America in particular.[3] The political scientists Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt contend that popular political and economic discontent is reflected in election results, creating a gap that allows democratic systems to die from within (e.g., within the selfsame structures appropriated by individual presidents[4]).

However, there is certainly nothing new about economic and political crises, and therefore there is not sufficient evidence to argue that these alone can explain the rise of conservatism on either a regional or global scale. For Kahhat, this shift is rather a reflection of widely shared feelings of economic and social vulnerability among large sectors of the population. These feelings are in turn exploited politically by conservative religious leaders and groups.[5] In other words, such leaders and groups attempt to foster among their citizens a sense of loss in the form of non-negotiable values, mobilize feelings of threat, incite "moral panic," and encourage high levels of national pride. Along these lines, Biroli, Machado, and Vaggione argue that the democratic opening witnessed in Latin America during the past 30 years has also unleashed a synergy that has allowed the demands of systematically excluded collectives (e.g., women, indigenous persons, those of African descent, LGBTQ+ communities) to be brought into the legal and public policy realm.[6] For this reason, it is important for us to highlight in this paper that these two political synergies could gradually end up on a collision course, mobilizing diverse actors and social sectors (mainly religious groups) in defense of their proposals and worldviews.[7]

Taking this geopolitical context as a starting point, it is possible to establish interconnections between Evangelical political activism and the international scenario that will help in discerning the weight of each of these analytical categories. For these reasons, we will in this paper be setting forth the historical standards and general trends of this new religious-political relationship. Our focus will be less on the formal "Church-State" relationships that characterized the five centuries of the Catholic religious monopoly in Latin America, but rather on the new and dynamic relationships in which the main players on the

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3 Kahhat: El eterno retorno (2019), 60.

4 Levitsky/Ziblatt: Como as democracias morrem (2018), 13–21.

5 Kahhat: El eterno retorno (2019).

6 Biroli/Machado/Vaggione: Gênero, neoconservadorismos e democracias (2020).

7 Ibid.

religious side are Pentecostal Evangelicals. Yet it is important to point out that it will be very difficult to encompass the entire Latin American phenomenon and all of the specific circumstances of each case. This limitation is owing to several factors: the limited length of this study, the high degree of national diversity in the region and, most of all, the tremendous phenomenological, organizational, and theological diversity of the Evangelical world.

Finally, we would like to point out that the structure of the present study reflects a descriptive and analytical logic that takes into account the historical development of categories that serve as an aid in understanding the complex relationship between religion and politics, churches and States, election processes, party politics, and the dynamics of religious representation and their impact on individual adherents. The present text thus comprises three sections: the first of these focuses on *Conceptual and Theological Factors* of the great Latin American religious phenomenon that we are analyzing. The second section addresses *Historical and Sociological Factors,* while the third focuses on *Political and Party Factors.* In each of these three sections, Brazil is given special attention. This is because, as we've previously indicated, this country could well serve as a model for the rest of the region, given the effectiveness of the political strategies that have promoted both the political and religious agendas of Brazilian Evangelicals (and, most especially, Pentecostals). Finally, in our *Conclusions,* we emphasize the theoretical proposals contained in this text, and include some analytical nuances that are discernable in the current sociopolitical and religious scenario. We conclude this paper with a number of reflections, while pointing to the current challenges facing both the churches and the democratic systems of Latin America.

## 1. Conceptual and Theological Issues

In the first part of our paper, we will be addressing the conceptual and theological aspects of the vast Evangelical movement in Latin America. In doing so, we will see that this movement does not easily lend itself to categorical formulations. It is important to underline the fact that religious actors have their own categories by which they characterize themselves, and this is something that leads to terminology discrepancies among the different churches, congregations, and denominations. In addition, we will be reviewing the theological and ethical transformations within the Evangelical movement throughout the course of its history in order to explain its influence on the worldview of believers, and thus on their political participation. We will dwell on the particular characteristics of the (neo-)Pentecostals who are at the heart of our study, with

special emphasis on the pillars of their theology. Finally, we will show how the term "Evangelical" has been understood in different ways, and we will suggest that its current appropriation by communications media is part of a political strategy. At the same time, we will identify some of the slogans of the different Evangelical movements within the United States in order to better understand how these are related to the activities of Latin American (neo-)Pentecostals in general and Brazilians in particular in the political arena.

## 1.1 Typologies, and theological and ethical transformations

It is beyond question that classifications and taxonomies are discretionary in nature, and can be proposed on the basis of differing points of view (e.g., from the standpoint of churches themselves, of other churches, on the basis of how believers define themselves, on the basis of academic analysis, etc.). For this reason, we have referred to a number of different authors and points of view in an effort to reach some consensus, while remaining aware that categories are necessarily provisional, given that the religious and political reality that we are analyzing is in constant dynamic flux.

Bearing this in mind, we will begin by making three terminological distinctions in order to define for pedagogical purposes the categories that classify the Evangelical-Pentecostal religious phenomenon in the region. In addition, we note at the outset three distinct challenges that present themselves in our undertaking. The first of these, at the conceptual level within a Latin American context, has to do with differentiating between "Protestants" and "Evangelicals." It is by no means easy to determine when or to what extent we can speak of "Protestants" and when (or from what starting point) we can begin to speak of "Evangelicals." The second terminological challenge involves differentiating between "Evangelicals" and "Pentecostals" (i.e., beyond clarifying the current understanding of "gifts of the spirit.") This second challenge is made all the more difficult by the fact the liturgy in Evangelical churches has become more and more "Pentecostalized." The third and last challenge facing us as regards terminology is that of distinguishing "Pentecostals" from "neo-Pentecostals," given that, while these two groups certainly have different theologies, their liturgies closely resemble one another. It is also important to point out that typologies and classifications are the product of currents of interpretation formulated by both intellectual believers (i.e., emic writers) and academics (i.e., theoretical writers). At a time when both kinds of production are increasingly circulating outside those communities, we have also seen how the communications media have appropriated the terms, often disregarding both their proper use and their analytical validity. For these reasons, we will for the purposes of this study be

synthesizing these classifications, beginning with a schematic approach, and afterward focusing on the theological and political perspective of the terms. We will then conclude with a general description of the political use that some factions seek to make of the term "Evangelical."

Based upon an emic perspective, Samuel Escobar, taking as his point of departure the proposals of the Puerto Rican missiologist Orlando Costas, identified three main currents within what Escobar terms "Latin American Protestantism": 1) historical or transplanted churches; 2.) Evangelical churches; and 3.) Pentecostal churches.[8] For Escobar, a Baptist minister, the *mainstream churches* constitute a minority, and are characterized by a Protestant theological tradition (a legacy of the 16th century Reform). The mainstream churches comprise the oldest churches of Lutheran, Anglican, and Episcopal denomination. These churches were heavily represented in the waves of immigration of European settlers, who maintained the customs, language, and religion of these traditions. Yet these settlers never sought to extend their religious conceptualizations to indigenous populations, much less to engage in evangelizing. Having arrived in the Americas in the nineteenth century, the main concern of these "migrant churches" was to maintain the migrant communities more than to expand their flocks among each country's nationals.

According to Escobar, the *Evangelical Churches* are the direct result of foreign missionary activity in Latin America during two distinct historical periods. The first of these periods corresponds to the missionary work that took place at the end of the nineteenth century, characterized by a more progressive approach owing to its vision of the realities of this world. The goal of missionary activity during this first period was the formation of more traditional and stable Evangelical denominations, such as the Presbyterians, the Baptists, and the Methodists. The second period corresponds to the emergence of the religious work conducted by the so-called "faith missions" (of US origin) during the early and mid-twentieth century. This second missionary movement tends to define itself as "Evangelical fundamentalism",[9] because it accords fundamental importance to the concept of Biblical inerrancy;[10] is implacably hostile toward modern

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8 Escobar: La fe evángelica y las teologías de la liberación (1987), 224.

9 The reference here is the emic perspective of the term "fundamentalism" (i.e., Christian and Biblical), understood basically as a radicalization of the conservative Evangelical sector which, in the United States, was ideologically opposed during the nineteenth century to the "Social Gospel" current of Christianity. As a stance within Protestant Christianity, fundamentalism takes its name from the 12-volume work titled *The Fundamentals: A testimony to the truth*. This work, published between 1910 and 1915 by the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, consists of 90 essays written by 64 different authors who represented the most prominent Evangelical denominations within the United States at that time.

10 Arens: «¿Entiendes lo que lees?» (Hch 8, 30) (2008), 12-27.

theology, its methods, results, and the implications of Biblical criticism; and is completely secure in its belief that those who do not share their views are not really Christians.[11] It is this point of view that became prevalent in Christian churches in Latin America, thus establishing an Evangelical fundamentalist world view in the region. In English, adherents of this particular current are called "Evangelicals," whom we will be discussing later in this paper. The third current, according to emic writers, unites *Pentecostal churches* as a vast movement of the Holy Spirit that gives rise to later forms of Latin American Pentecostalism, beginning with processes of acculturation to local popular culture, also known as "Creole Pentecostalism".

From an academic perspective, Paul Freston incorporates the descriptive characteristics of the foregoing classification, highlighting the sociocultural penetration of the Protestant world in Latin America, and with a particular emphasis on its impact on politics.[12] Freston's taxonomy adds a sub-division of this world, which he terms "Neo-Pentecostalism" in order to make explicit the turning points that occurred within Pentecostalism beginning in the 1980s. This decade began to witness a high degree of Evangelical participation in politics and communications media, and an expression of a Christian worldview of prosperity, spiritual warfare, and dominion theology. Freston's timeline utilizes the image of "four waves" that are distinguished for didactic purposes as follows: the Protestantism of migration and/or mainstream churches, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and neo-Pentecostals.

In his discussion of "the Protestantism of migration," Freston stresses the absence of any missionary motive upon the movement's establishment in Latin America, an attitude that led to this migratory current growing at the same pace as the population of its adherents, without possibilities of further expansion. As regards Evangelical influence on Protestant and Pentecostal churches, Freston makes an important internal distinction within "Missionary Evangelicalism," with Evangelical churches of fundamentalist stripe aligned with conservative political views in the US, and ecumenical Evangelicalism being expressed in liberal or leftist political activity that is also characterized by robust debate and individual political participation. In Freston's view, reducing the Evangelical movement to fundamentalism would mean ignoring the varied conservative theological traditions that the movement embraces, and which are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

This latter point helps us understand that Evangelicalism may accept biblical authority, even though not all Evangelicals are in agreement regarding biblical inerrancy (i.e., as understood in historical and scientific terms). Similarly,

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11 Sung: Fundamentalismo económico (n.d.).

12 Freston: Protestantismo e politica no Brasil (1993).

Evangelicals may agree with the liberal premises of Biblical hermeneutics while at the same time sharing fundamentalists' views regarding the pressing need for conversion and evangelization in Latin America. It was this latter missionizing activity on the part of the Evangelical movement that came to be characterized among the masses as "Evangelical", a term that began to be utilized in the 1950s and 1960s to characterize a rather diverse and nuanced Protestant religious spectrum. It is important to note here that the term "Evangelical" is understood differently in the United States. This is because, according to Sutton, "Evangelical" came to be considered as synonymous with Billy Graham (the famous television preacher who rose to prominence in the 1950s), who used the term in order to distance himself from any association with fundamentalism (which was stigmatized), and also to distinguish his own ministry from mainstream Protestantism, Black churches, and Pentecostalism.[13] We will return to this point in our later discussion of the popular nomenclature in Latin America generally and Brazil in particular.

On the other hand, the German theologian and specialist in Latin America Heinrich Schäfer constructed a typology characterized by the three previously described sectors (i.e., mainstream Protestantism, Evangelical Protestantism, and the Pentecostal movement) as well as a fourth category that he used for the purposes of explaining the world of Latin American Protestantism: the "neo-Pentecostal or charismatic movement".[14] According to Schäfer, 'two different movements can be further distinguished within this latter movement: one emerged from the classic Pentecostal movement and is organized in independent churches, while the other developed within both mainstream Protestant churches and the Catholic church. The first of these currents is normally called "neo-Pentecostal," and the second, "charismatic," the latter also being used as a collective term.'[15]

For our purposes, we will be using the term "neo-Pentecostal" in this paper in order to describe this generalized phenomenon of the Latin American charismatic movement, while at the same time acknowledging the fact that our use of this term encompasses not only the church models that have arisen within Protestantism, but also rejuvenated sectors within the mainstream churches, the para-ecclesiastical bodies known in Latin America as "ministries," and the new independent and non-denominational churches that identify with a new

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13 Sutton: American Apocalypse (2017).

14 We will be referencing Schäfer's typology here as set forth in his book Schäfer: Protestantismo y crisis social en América Central (1992). As regards conceptualization of both the charismatic movement and the neo-Pentecostal movement, see the following works by the same author: Schäfer: Las "sectas" protestantes y el espíritu del (anti-)imperialismo (2020) and Schäfer: ¡Oh Señor de los cielos, danos poder en la tierra!" (1997).

15 Schäfer: Protestantismo y crisis social en América Central (1992), 58.

theological (or eschatological) world view, which we will identify and discuss later on.

Schäfer was without a doubt one of the first to differentiate this fourth category in a typology of Latin American Protestantism or Evangelism, thus contributing to distinguishing a new theological rationality that has had a religious manifestation and a political history all its own within the development of the relationship between the "Evangelical movement" and politics in Latin America. This distinction was helpful in avoiding the indiscriminate and unfair use of the term "Pentecostal" to describe the new bases of the political activities of "neo-Pentecostal" leaders within the region, especially since the 1990s.

In order to understand the social repercussions of the theological doctrines associated with these transformations within Protestantism, and their impact on political behavior in Latin America, we will describe the essential elements identified by Schäfer. We begin with the theological conception within *mainstream Protestantism* which holds that the mediation of grace is highly objective in nature, and which embraces missionary activity and education as ways of exercising influence in society. The social and political ethics of mainstream Protestantism is oriented toward "the common good," and its Christian ethics are differentiated from secular ethics. These features have been conducive to Christian participation in social initiatives. As previously indicated, "implanted" or "migratory" churches had a certain prominence in the Latin American Evangelical movement, and could be characterized more as "maintenance" churches than "mission" churches. It is for this reason that they did not have much impact on the religious life of our countries (except for some areas of the Southern Cone) or much political influence. This was due not only to the fact that they never aspired to such impact or influence, but also because those mainstream churches did not have many members.[16]

In contrast, it was the theological dimension of missions (i.e., efforts at promoting conversion) that was of fundamental importance in *Evangelical Protestantism*. Such efforts aimed at the quantitative growth of the church, with social ethics assuming secondary importance within missions. In this regard, Evangelical Protestantism's concept of social ethics is one of charitable dedication as a means of evangelization, thus replacing the "common good" of mainstream Protestantism with mass conversions as a primary objective. Evangelical political ethics shuns institutional activity in favor of individual activity. In Latin America, Evangelicals directed their activities toward the middle and lower socioeconomic sectors. In this regard, the most influential current was "Evangelical Fundamentalism," which was politically conservative in nature (in reference to both traditional values and social structures), highly sympathetic toward the

16 Pérez Guadalupe/Grundberger: Evangélicos y poder en América Latina (2019), 67–71.

prevailing capitalist system, and strongly averse to any reform of that system.[17] Conversely, "Ecumenical Evangelism" held that the so-called "social question" could not be separated from its Evangelical vision."

According to the *Pentecostal movement*, the Protestant world (i.e., in both its mainstream and Evangelical variants) lacked the gifts of the Spirit necessary to live a fully Christian life. This theological (pneumatological) dimension would complement, according to them, the conversion mission that they all held in common. Its social ethics, which is strongly pre-millenarian in character and secondary to its missionary activity, only allows for individual charity. For this reason, the movement rejects both social engagement and – especially – political involvement. Its individualistic morality acts more as a criterion of differentiation between the church and the world than as a spur to action.

We need to remember that, in Latin America, Pentecostalism mainly took root in the lower socioeconomic sectors, both urban and rural, preaching a premillenarian doctrine that held that this wicked world was going to disappear, as would adherents' worldly suffering, with the imminent coming of Christ. In this regard, a social ethics focusing on transformation and improvement of the world was not only doomed to failure, but was actually seen as a viewpoint that would hinder the coming of the Savior. Thus, as regards the world, hope consists in ceasing activity. For this reason, traditional Pentecostal believers severed all relations with the world and did not participate in public organizations, cooperatives, unions, or community activities – and certainly not in political endeavors.

This radical vision of early Pentecostalism began to gradually change during the 1980s for reasons that we will explore later. Chief among them was the influence of the perspective of the *neo-Pentecostal movement,* in which the concept of mission and the conversion of the greatest possible number of persons had a prominent place, and included the idea of converting and exercising influence among the three prior groups: mainstream Protestants, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals. Its social ethics took the form of political ethics, while the charitable ethics of Evangelical Protestantism took a back seat. The members of neo-Pentecostal churches are exhorted to participate in social and political processes, and their political stance is in accordance with their personal interests which, in turn, are tied to the dominant interests of a neoliberal political system. Like Evangelicals, neo-Pentecostals understand the "common good" as a consequence of the mass conversion of individuals and as a useful effect of particular interests for the collective. In this way, divine grace is brought into the world through the personal interests of the majority of neo-Pentecostal believers.

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[17] Freston: History, current reality and Prospects of Pentecostalism in Latin America (2016), 430–432.

In Latin America, the neo-Pentecostal movement has made inroads primarily among the middle and upper socioeconomic classes. Indeed, it is the only force within the wider Evangelical movement (which has historically focused on the lower and middle classes) that has presented a viable alternative for the well-to-do and influential sectors of society. Its large centers of worship, which are for the most part located in residential areas, accommodate far more congregants than the stereotypical "garage churches" of traditional Pentecostalism, and have managed to adapt Pentecostal spirituality to the dominant socioeconomic classes. It is for this reason that neo-Pentecostalism has radically transformed the traditional discourse of Latin American Evangelical conservatism as regards the world and politics, with neo-Pentecostals enthusiastically advocating participation in both as part of a functional strategy for promoting its Evangelical mission. In this regard, the neo-Pentecostal movement can be said to be an important political actor, given its prominence among the middle and upper classes. This prominence has given the movement direct political influence and a high degree of economic power. In addition, while neo-Pentecostalism does not yet constitute the dominant force within the wider Evangelical movement, it is currently experiencing robust growth. In addition, neo-Pentecostalism's hybrid character as both a "movement" and a "denomination" have allowed it to penetrate both traditional Pentecostal and Evangelical groups – much as traditional Pentecostalism had done earlier with Evangelicals and mainstream Protestant churches.

Nevertheless, while it is appropriate to differentiate four different currents within Latin American Evangelism (i.e., Protestants, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and neo-Pentecostals) in theological, historical, and sociological terms – just as Schäfer and Freston have done in terms of politics –, this categorization cannot be verified with a high degree of clarity. One reason for this blurring of distinctions is that we currently see that neo-Pentecostals are closer in their outlook to neo-Pentecostals than they are to Evangelicals. Specifically, there is not much difference in the political opinions of Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals – whatever the differences in their theologies and their churches. Moreover, recent years have witnessed that, when it comes to politics, the voting behavior of Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and neo-Pentecostals is very similar – though certainly not identical. There is also a segment of traditional Catholicism that displays voting patterns similar to those three groups. The more traditional Evangelicals are more reluctant to join this new "voting coalition," and the smaller "mainstream" denominations are even more wary of doing so. In other words, when it comes to certain issues and certain elections – by no means all of them – a religious sector can be identified that we could characterize as an "Evangelical-Pentecostal bloc." Such a group does not necessarily imply a formally organized coalition, or support for a single candidate or "religious political party".

Nevertheless, the loose electoral grouping that does exist attempts to champion the voting preferences of the larger Evangelical community.[18] At this particular historical moment, it is the neo-Pentecostals who tend to be more politically active than Evangelicals, who in turn are typically more active than mainstream Protestants (who rarely engage politically on the basis of their religious affiliation).[19]

Thus, within the new political scenario, theological and spiritual differences can temporarily be set aside in favor of emphasizing the common ground of a shared pro-life and pro-family moral agenda (e.g., joining forces against supposed enemies such as those advocating "gender ideology.)"[20] But, as we have previously indicated more than once, each nation has its own developmental logic and its own outcomes. Brazil, for example, has developed along lines that are uniquely its own on the basis of its model of corporate representation (based on official candidacies), and on its "denominational vote" (i.e., rather than "confessional vote") that has been more successful in terms of election results than other Latin American countries. It is definitely not possible to generalize.

Along these same lines of updating the classic analyses and typologies of political action in Latin America, it was once again Heinrich Schäfer (2020) who proposed a new taxonomy in which he distinguished the following groups of politically relevant actors in the United States and Latin America:[21]

1. Those who trust in salvation in an afterlife and who are not politically active. These persons for the most part come from the classic Pentecostal

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18 We could continue to subdivide Evangelical political trends. In this regard, we could even impose ideological criteria, and thus differentiate between left-wing and right-wing Christians (and Catholics). It is in fact possible to find Evangelicals of all political leanings and affiliations. However, it remains true that a majority of Evangelicals vote for right-of-center parties, while the majority of Catholics vote for left-wing parties.

19 It should be noted that such attempts to lump together "the Evangelical vote" are not necessarily successful. We will later see that there is a big difference between, on the one hand, Evangelical candidates and political parties led by Evangelicals and, on the other, the affirmation that something exists that can be called "the Evangelical confessional vote."

20 During the 1960s and 1970s, the "ideological agenda" of Evangelicals – anti-Communism and anti-Catholicism -managed to bring together the vast majority of Evangelical churches. Currently, on the other hand, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, it hardly makes sense any more to refer to anti-Communism as a unifying factor, while anti-Catholicism has been suppressed, given a common opposition to "gender ideology." Nevertheless, the presidential campaign of Jair Bolsonaro (2018) saw an explicit revival of anti-Communism, but in specific reference to the Brazilian Workers' Party of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Venezuelan *chavismo* as the primary ideological enemies that needed to be opposed. In addition, Communism was associated with all manner of social ills (e.g., corruption, hyperinflation, and "gender ideology"). Such views constituted the ingredients of a supposed ideological, political, ethical, and conservative struggle that proved to be a potent cocktail during Bolsonaro's election campaign.

21 Schäfer: Las "sectas" protestantes y el espíritu del (anti-)imperialismo (2020), 22–23.

movement and from Evangelical groups. Socioeconomically, they for the most part belong to the working class, and work within the informal economy. (HOPE IN THE AFTERLIFE)

2. Those who seek to promote the values of the kingdom of God in the world through social ministry. These persons for the most part belong to mainstream Protestant churches, to the Evangelical movement, and to indigenous churches. In socioeconomic terms, they are in the middle and working class. (KINGDOM OF GOD VALUES).
3. Those who seek to make divine law the law of the land. These persons also belong to either the Evangelical or Pentecostal movement, and are often socioeconomically part of the downwardly mobile lower or lower-middle classes. (DIVINE LAW).
4. Those motivated by the ideals of prosperity and management, and who seek to control the political system. This group for the most part comes from neo-Pentecostalism, and to a lesser extent from classic Pentecostalism. Socioeconomically, they belong to the (upwardly mobile) upper-middle class, and even the upper class. (MANAGEMENT).

As Schäfer notes regarding this classification into four groups, the last third and fourth categories now generally constitute the religious right, and the second, the religious left. This polarization constitutes an extremely important factor in the current political situation.

## 1.2 The theological tripods of neo-Pentecostalism.

We are faced with the challenge of differentiating Pentecostals from "neo"-Pentecostals. As we will demonstrate, this latter group came to constitute a new group of religious and political actors beginning in the 1980s. Those years saw, in both the United States and Latin America, a reformulation of certain assumptions within some of the classic Pentecostal churches. This development constituted a renovation, and in some cases led the founding of new neo-Pentecostal churches (a broad category that includes different varieties of neo-Pentecostalism).

In general terms, there are a good many differences between classic Pentecostalism, on the one hand, and the neo-Pentecostal or charismatic movement on the other. Broadly speaking, these differences can be categorized along four dimensions:

1. Theological: For classic Pentecostals, the biblical account of Pentecost (Acts 2:42) is the basis of the sanctification of daily life, while for neo-

Pentecostals, it is the gifts of the Holy Spirit as an expression of God's saving presence which constitute that basis.

2. Sociological: Pentecostals reside in rural areas and in the outlying areas of cities, while neo-Pentecostals are part of the middle and upper classes – although they do not ignore the poor as potential recruits in their pastoral activities.
3. Missionary Activities: While Pentecostals concentrate on the theology of the cross and eschatological guilt, neo-Pentecostals transcend those dimensions, shifting to visions of covenant, prosperity, and blessings in order to make their discourse more acceptable to those in the middle socioeconomic sectors.
4. Eschatological: The relationship between Pentecostalism and the world is one of rejection, given that Pentecostals see the world as corrupting their customs. For this reason, they shun politics. Conversely, the neo-Pentecostal view of the world transcends the criticism of the world, and sees it as a place to be redeemed and conquered.[22]

In the present study, we will primarily be focusing on the distinctive theological characteristics of neo-Pentecostalism that lead to social and political behavior that is different from those associated with its Pentecostal and Evangelical forebears. In this regard, the "theology of prosperity," "the theology of spiritual warfare," and "dominion theology" (or, "the reconstructionist vision of the world") are the three most marked characteristics of neo-Pentecostalism (and also the characteristics that most clearly differentiate it from classic Pentecostal thought). Those are also the characteristics that have the greatest influence on their political behavior.

The so-called *theology of prosperity* is one of the primary items on the agenda of a neo-Pentecostal movement that began to take a leading role within the larger Evangelical movement in Latin America in the 1990s, and whose boom has coincided with the hegemonic expansion of globalized neoconservative political thought. As heir of the assumptions of both the charismatic movement and of neo-Pentecostal theology, the "theology of prosperity" proposes involvement with the realities of this world – not for the purposes of promoting transformation of the existing social order, but rather as proper use of those resources that are present in the world. This view reflects their belief that Christians are "children of the King," who have the right to enjoy the bounty of creation. In the words of Jesús García-Ruiz and Patrick Michel:

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22 Amat/Pérez: Carisma y política (2004), 121; Pérez Guadalupe: Entre Dios y el César (2017).

> In the view of conservative neo-Protestantism in the United States, the theology of prosperity prefers the individual – and not the community – as the locus of privileged action, pointing to poverty as a sign of failure to submit to God, and eventually making salvation impossible. In effect, if the things of this world belong to the Father, then it is the children of God who have preferential rights to said goods. In accordance with this logic, divine election enables the faithful to have access to the goods of this world.[23]

For many writers, the theological formulation of neo-Pentecostalism is closely linked with Evangelical political groups in the US that have ties with the most right-wing sectors of the Republican Party – known since the 1980s as the "Moral Majority." At the beginning of the twenty-first century, these groups became closely associated with the Tea Party Movement and the Alt-Right.[24] These latter two groups constituted the base of support for Donald Trump's presidential campaign in 2016. One undeniable point of contact between the "theology of prosperity" with this political project is reflected in the way that various sectors of the neo-Pentecostal movement have – within the Latin American context – imported to the region the political-religious discourse of radical movements in the US. In sum:

> The "theology of prosperity" holds that God created his children to be prosperous, and to obtain complete happiness in this world. In other words, God wants to distribute wealth, health, and happiness to those who fear Him. The guarantee of earthly prosperity, however, depends on faith, which in turn translates into actions, donations, and financial offerings, and there is even a relationship between the extent of one's faith and the magnitude of one's offerings.[25]

However, we cannot in any way say that the "theology of prosperity" constitutes a new "Protestant work ethic," given that the two concepts are based on diametrically opposed interpretations of the Bible. While the classic Protestant work ethic focuses on work and austere living, and sees economic growth as the fruit of a life devoted to God, the theology of prosperity sees economic success, the enjoyment thereof, and upward social mobility as signs of divine

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23 García-Ruiz/Michel: Neopentecostalismo y globalización (2014), 4.

24 Amat and Pérez clearly explain the initial formation of these associations: "… in 1979, Jerry Falwell founded the group Moral Majority. […] Subsequently, a number of groups and organizations led by well-known preachers and televangelists, together with Falwell's Moral Majority, aligned among themselves and began to become actively involved in American politics, forming an alliance with those sectors of society that were most closely associated with "the New Right," and which advocated the expansion of the free market system of modernization and prosperity. These groups also came to assume the role of staunch defenders of the political and economic system promoted by the United States" (Amat/Pérez: Carisma y política [2004], 123).

25 Oro/Tadvald: Consideraciones sobre el campo evangélico brasileño (2019), 57.

blessing – not as a product of effort or austerity, but rather as the fulfillment of God's supposed promise, or of a "covenant with God." As opposed to a virtuous and ascetic Protestant life, we have instead the neo-Pentecostal life of sumptuous excess and ostentation (most prominent among its ministers), that is lacking any modicum of Christian modesty or social commitment to those who are most in need. In other words, "prosperity" has become the new eschatological watchword and sign of salvation. Or rather: these movements create a new unmediated eschatology that replaces eternal salvation with earthly prosperity.

But it is impossible to fully understand this "theology of prosperity" without referring to the *theology of spiritual warfare*, since both of these concepts emerged simultaneously during the 1970s and 1980s in American Evangelical circles as part of the new theological visions of neo-Pentecostalism. In addition, the early formulation of the second of these concepts can be credited to the missionary Peter Wagner,[26] who based it on the assumptions of the Church Growth Movement which emerged at the Fuller Theological Seminary. In sum:

> The "theology of spiritual warfare" contends that the world is a battlefield where the forces of good clash with the forces of evil. It is believed that the forces of evil have taken possession of the faithful, and are the source of all problems and misfortunes. This necessitates, on the part of religious leaders, acts of exorcism and liberation – in other words, the casting out of demons. In addition, this theology contends that it is the demons that are standing in the way of the prosperity of the faithful. For this reason, the "liberation of demons" has become an indispensable condition for healing and prosperity. In other words, the access to divine blessings depends on conquering demonic forces.[27]

In other words, one cannot obtain divine favor and attain economic prosperity without first freeing oneself from the evil forces that are source of all of the physical and mental evils assailing the faithful. 'In this way, demons cease to be a metaphor and instead become an incarnate spiritual force that threatens health, prosperity, and wellbeing, and this state of affairs gives rise to a conception of the religious experience and of liturgy in which the casting out of particular demons takes center stage.'[28]

This *theology of spiritual warfare* thus takes as its point of departure the Pentecostal doctrine of the demonization of individuals, which holds that persons can be exposed to evil spiritual forces that exist in the world, and that end up establishing relations of influence, oppression, or demonic possession. But, on the basis of these assumptions, neo-Pentecostals have added the principle of

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26 Wagner: Oración de guerra (1993).

27 Oro/Tadvald: Consideraciones sobre el campo evangélico brasileño (2019), 57.

28 Semán: ¿Quiénes son? ¿Por qué crecen? ¿En qué creen? (2019), 32.

"demonization of the public sphere," a teaching which asserts that the presence of evil can also manifest itself in the public sphere – a contention that constitutes the basis for what now goes under the name of "spiritual warfare."

On the other hand, "spiritual warfare" has served as a wedge between the customary shunning of politics and the world of traditional Pentecostal theology, on the one hand, and the new emphasis of neo-Pentecostals on political participation, on the other. Thus, the concept of spiritual warfare is considered the critical arm of the neo-Pentecostal world view, as part of what we might term a reformulation of the theology reflecting the traditional worldview of Evangelicals. The other arm of the neo-Pentecostals would be the "theology of prosperity" which, contrary to spiritual warfare (although closely complementing this latter concept) reflects the positive side of mastery of the world by Christian groups.

We could say that the basis of "spiritual warfare" is a critique of the world that focuses on the social and political structures influenced by structural evil that is incarnated in one level of the Satanic hierarchy (i.e., earthly spirits) against whom it is necessary to do battle. From this standpoint, "prayer warriors" (i.e., leaders specially trained to engage in spiritual warfare) have gone from the traditional defensive position of resistance and rejection of the world to a neo-Pentecostal offense that focuses on a realm of "demonic possession" that transcends individual persons, and that invades the public sphere. Thus, the classic act of individual exorcism has given way to a structural battle against "earth-bound" spirits that have supposedly taken possession of the public arenas of business and politics – and even against the very "spiritualities" that need to be confronted by this new generation of "spiritual warriors." In conclusion, the so-called "theology of prosperity" and "spiritual warfare" constitute parts of a process of reformulating the neo-Pentecostal worldview *vis-à-vis* the world, and have resulted in a "reconstructionist" vision of the world and of politics that we will soon explore.

Finally, *dominion theology,* also known as *reconstructionism* is a trend within the Latin American Evangelical movement whose roots are primarily in the US Evangelical movement of the 1970s. These trends advocate entry into the political arena in order to incorporate citizen demands into its religious agenda, with a view to attaining political power. Both of those trends represent political theology, especially within neo-Pentecostalism, and advocate a reconstructionist theocracy within current society. Some writers see this as the political face of the so-called "theology of prosperity," which preaches that Christians are predestined to occupy positions of power in this world. Those espousing reconstructionism have a particular understanding of the Bible, which they see as

endorsing the construction of political power on the basis of religious dominion within the various spheres of society.[29]

The truth is that reconstructionism is not an entirely new idea, but rather one that has its theological roots in ultraconservative Calvinist circles, and was later taken up by charismatic and neo-Pentecostal politicians who sought legitimate theological grounds for seeking power on the basis of a supposed Evangelical moral superiority, and the subordination of the State legal system to biblical laws.[30] Reconstructionism and dominion theology not only endorse neoliberalism as an economic and political system, but also offer a supposedly religious basis and Christian worldview that serves to legitimize the assumption of power by religious and Evangelical leaders.

> In its pure form, Christian Reconstructionism is a radical movement that has never enjoyed wide support. The movement was founded by Rousas J. Rushdoony, an ultraconservative Presbyterian minister. Reconstructionism, Theonomy, or Dominion Theology – the three terms are used interchangeably – advocates an ultraconservative economic theory and calls for a theocracy that would include the re-establishment of the civil laws of the Old Testament.[31]

For practical purposes, we can assert that a large majority of Evangelicals who currently espouse the "theology of prosperity" (or the "ideology of prosperity"), "spiritual warfare," and Christian reconstructionism come from recently founded neo-Pentecostal megachurches, and do not belong to any Evangelical denomination or Protestant tradition. In other words, their churches are "independent", and thus lacking any Christian institutional legacy. The founders of such churches are in reality the owners of their religious enterprises – some of which have taken on the character of religious-political businesses. It is the founders – and only the founders – who conduct all of the religious, economic, and political activities of these successful family companies. These "ministers" are the ones who exercise absolute control over these "churches." Even when such churches participate in elections, it is the founders and their close relatives who stand front and center, a phenomenon that constitutes evidence of their intention to create some kind of "spiritual dynasty." As expressed in a text of the Election Monitoring Mission of Colombia:

> The political activities of Pentecostals feature a few prominent surnames. The Moreno Piraquive family controls MIRA. The Castellanos run the International Charismatic Mission. The Chamorros are in charge of the Student and Business

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29 Pérez: Las apropiaciones religiosas de lo público (2017).

30 For further information regarding this subject, see Maldonado: Política y religión en la derecha cristiana de los Estados Unidos de América (2013), as well as the interesting and suggestive article of Spadaro/Figueroa: Fundamentalismo evangélico e integrismo católico (2017).

31 Marsden: Fundamentalism and American culture (2006), 248.

> Crusade of Colombia. These families preach their participation in electoral politics as part of a religious mission that God has charged them with, and they claim to their followers that their participation in politics is part of a religious commitment to "save" Colombian society.[32]

These ministers and their families are the very *raison d'être* of these 'companies that provide magical-religious services,' as William Beltrán calls them.[33] 'In this way, the "entrepreneurs" of these religions begin to enter the political arena in order to propose a reading of market democracy consistent with their interpretation of society, something that has naturally facilitated ties between them and the neoliberal and radicalized ultra-right'.[34]

These owners of "churches" who call themselves ministers – and sometimes even "apostles" – have often previously left other Evangelical denominations (nearly always those within the Pentecostal or charismatic tradition) in order to establish, on the basis of supposed divine inspiration, their own church projects of a strongly conservative bent. It is precisely because they know that they do not belong to any Christian tradition or institution that stands behind them that they seek refuge in some "apostle" willing to offer them "spiritual cover" – obviously following a down payment – and subsequent agreed monthly payments – for their "spiritual services."

Exceptions aside, one might say that these neo-Pentecostal ministers do not belong to a church, but rather that the "church" belongs to them and that, furthermore, they do not have believers in their centers of worship, but rather customers. These ministers now seek not only the tithes of their members, but also their votes. As far as the members themselves go, although there certainly are honest and sincere members of megachurches, many attendees come more in search of a miracle than of God; seek healing rather than conversion; and desire prosperity more than spirituality.

On the other hand, their constant readiness to boast of their material success stems from the logic of the supposed divine blessing of their faith. The more faith that believers have, the more material goods they will obtain from God (the "theology of prosperity"). According to this logic, poor people are poor because they lack faith. This is the reason that, while Pentecostal ministers (and Evangelical ministers in general) were staid and austere men, the so-called ministers and apostles of neo-Pentecostalism are pretentious and conceited, and

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32 Misión de observación electoral: Religión y política (2019), 77.

33 Beltrán thus defines the Universal Church of God's Kingdom, for example, as "a multinational company that provides large-scale magical services, and that does not seek to promote community cohesion. The faithful who seek out these services […] are treated as a mass of customers who have come together in recognition of a need for a miracle" (Beltrán: Del monopolio católico a la explosión pentecostal [2013], 266).

34 Kourliandsky: Democracia, evangelismo y reacción conservadora (2019), 144.

believe that their example of prosperity will win over devotees who seek a better life. This is also the reason why they recruit new members from the middle and upper classes, who connect with their commercial vision of Christianity, even if only in terms of their aspirations.

It is these same neo-Pentecostal ministers who, in broadening their monetary vision – thanks to the tithes of their followers – engage in new business ventures through the purchase of radio and TV stations, extensive real estate, etc. In recent years, some have even formed their own political parties. They then proceed to compete with an unfair advantage, given that the financing of their political adventures is guaranteed through "church finances" that only they are privy to, and that no one controls. In addition, all church property is in the name of front corporations of which their family members are the only shareholders. These ministers are the best examples of what can be called "political Evangelicals," as opposed to "Evangelical politicians." We will be exploring this distinction shortly.[35]

## 1.3 The Latin American Evangelical: Neither Catholic nor Protestant

As we discovered earlier, Escobar's emic classification is useful for understanding the most important milestones in the historical and theological development of Latin American Protestantism. For his part, José Miguez Bonino, an internationally famous member of the ecumenical movement, has proposed the three "faces of Latin American Protestantism"[36] along the same historical lines as those of Escobar, but with an emphasis on church realities *vis-à-vis* international context and events. According to Miguez, the realities of the Christian mission are not defined solely in terms of church interests, and not even in terms of the doctrinal formulation of their intellectual theologians. Instead, it is necessary to seriously consider "church-world" relations from the standpoint of the church's mission.

In this regard, Bonino's "faces" can be translated into focal points, worldviews, or systems of representation of the historical identities that are a constant thread that run through in the activities of Evangelical Protestantism in Latin America. Bonino's "three faces" are: a.) *the liberal face,* which is connected with the beginnings of Protestant faith in the region as part of the struggle to implement a process of liberal modernity (i.e., including democracy, participation, citizenship, human rights, etc.). This led to the construction of a

35 Pérez Guadalupe: Entre Dios y el César (2017), 221.

36 Míguez Bonino: La fe en busca de eficacia (1995).

Protestant culture built on liberal foundations, inspired by the values of the "social gospel" – values which permeated the character of the Evangelical movement during the initial phase of Protestantism in the region; b.) *the Evangelical face,* which resulted from the convergence of two separate currents: the first being European and Anglo-Saxon Evangelical Protestantism (of a Pietist and Wesleyan stripe), missionary and ecumenical in nature, and interested in evangelizing and engaging in social works in the region, while defending freedoms and championing civil rights. The second current was the subsequent arrival of a US-based "Evangelicalism," which considered any investment not related to the verbal spreading of the Gospel a waste of time. There is no question that the "Latin American Evangelical face" drew upon both of these traditions, although it was the latter which proved to have greater influence on the Latin American Evangelical worldview; c.) *the Pentecostal face,* which took root in Latin American culture as a popular religion whose theology dovetailed with the sociocultural characteristics of the most impoverished sectors of the region (and sometimes seen as "the sect of the poor"), and which obtained high levels of support from the peoples of Latin America.

Furthermore, Miguez Bonino contends that there was a meeting – and also a clash – between Pentecostal and Evangelical thought, describing this development as follows: 'Latin American Protestantism would not notice what was happening until Pentecostal congregations began to proliferate in their neighborhoods. For "Evangelical" Protestantism, these new churches represented both a challenge and a temptation. They could see in Pentecostals a reflection of their own theology, ethical views, and Evangelical zeal. But the way in which these were expressed struck them as odd, and their growth scared them, while at the same time attracting them.'[37] In the later institutional evolution of the Pentecostal movement, there was a development of churches that was more acceptable and respectable in the eyes of the Evangelical movement, and which assumed some of the older movement's practices and values. Later on, beginning in the late 1980s, the Pentecostal movement faced its own identity crisis with the emergence of a "neo-Pentecostal movement" (which Escobar does not discuss) that presented challenges to the later development of Pentecostalism, as we will see in due course.

Within this initial historical context, we can say that, in the present study, we will be using the term "Evangelicals" in a broad sense to include all Christian groups in Latin America of Protestant roots which, to a greater or lesser extent, focus their church activities on the work of evangelizing and missionizing. Over and apart from the doctrinal or denominational differences that such groups might have with their Protestant forebears, Evangelical churches are primarily

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[37] Ibid., 60.

mission churches comprising voluntary members, and are both Christ-centered and Bible-centered. Such churches historically have comprised more traditional denominations such as Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists, as well as Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and independent churches. We will later revisit the term "Evangelical" in order to examine another of its facets that we consider strategically important: its appropriation in popular culture and by the media.

What this shows is that it is not easy to define, categorize, or draw distinctions within the complex phenomenon of the Evangelical movement. Nevertheless, the words written a half century ago by the Swiss Calvinist theologian and sociologist Christian Lalive D'Epinay in *The Haven of the Masses* are still true: In accordance with Latin American custom, we understand by the term "Evangelicals" all members of religious movements of the "extended Protestant family," whether Pentecostals, Methodists, Baptists, etc."[38] What should be clear is that we cannot speak of a single Evangelical church analogous to the Catholic church, but must instead speak of Evangelical *churches* in the plural. Similarly, we have to refer to "Pentecostalisms" in the plural. We also need to point out that "Evangelicals" does not always have the same religious significance in Latin America as it does in the United States or Europe (e.g., in reference to the "Evangelical Lutheran Church.")

Thus, being Evangelical in Latin America marks a clear distinction not only from Catholics, but also from the Protestant European predecessors of Evangelicals. In this regard, the term "Protestant" would have to include, in the broadest sense, the movements, churches, and communities that embrace the basic assumptions of the Lutheran reform in its distinct theological variations. It is in this sense that the churches that typically identify as Protestant in Latin America are the oldest and most traditional, having been established in the region in the early nineteenth century. Among the terms applied to them are "mainline churches," "transplanted churches," and "liberal Protestantism." Initially, their religious services were provided for foreign workers who resided in Latin American countries. Over the course of time, these churches gradually incorporated nationals of the countries where they operated. For this reason, such churches do not constitute a numerical majority. However, the degree of presence and influence of mainline Protestantism in the public sphere was reflected in the contributions of its leaders in different areas of civil society, and in the public debate over the social issues of the day. As part of their church activities, Protestants engaged in community service, while understanding evangelization in terms that transcended efforts at proselytizing, and at the same time maintained high-level ecumenical dialogue with the Catholic Church.

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[38] Lalive D´Epinay: El refugio de las masas (1968). There are more recent editions, but we have preferred to reference this first Spanish edition, which was published in 1968.

As we have seen, the term "Evangelical" itself has been used in a broad sense to refer, in a Latin American context, to members of non-Catholic Christian churches (i.e., those with their roots in Protestantism) and their descendants. In contrast to the term "Protestant" (which, initially, was the term coined by Martin Luther's adversaries), the term "Evangelical" is a term that heirs of the Reform have applied to themselves since the beginning of the twentieth century, especially under the influence of North American missionary expansion.

As is widely known, following the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh (1910) which ruled out Latin America as "missionary grounds" (i.e., because of the presence of the Catholic Church), a Christian Works Congress was held in Panama in 1916 which, in opposition to the conclusions of the Edinburgh gathering, consolidated the foreign missions in Latin America, given that it did not recognize Catholicism as a Christian denomination, and did not recognize Catholics as Christian. Afterward, the signatories of the First Latin American Evangelical Conference (known by its Spanish acronym as "CELA I"), held in Buenos Aires in 1949, established the following:

> Given that the Gospel is what unites us and distinguishes us within the Latin American context, and given that the term "Evangelical" has been established by virtue of time-honored use, we recommend that this term be used and, further, that our work in Latin America be referred to as "Evangelical Christianity." In referring to the churches specifically, we recommend that the qualifier "Evangelical" always precede the name of each respective denomination.[39]

This same affirmative stance regarding the concept of "Evangelical" was ratified in 1961 at the Second Latin American Evangelical Conference ("CELA II") suggesting, 'for use among church organizations, that the national Evangelical Councils and Confederations…append the terms EVANGELICAL CHURCH prior to the name of the denomination such that these terms be common to all of the denominations.'[40]

But while the term "Evangelical" caught on throughout Latin America, it was not very helpful in establishing a firm sense of unity and homogeneity among the different Evangelicals in the region. Thus, the meaning of "Evangelical" came to acquire a variety of distinct connotations throughout its history. This means that it is possible to speak of different ways of "being Evangelical" in Latin America that have coexisted, and that have been in conflict with one another in the struggle to acquire a certain degree of hegemony within the Evangelical religious camp itself.

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39 CELA I: Documentos de la Primera Conferencia Evangélica Latinoamericana (1949), 30.

40 CELA II: Documentos de la Segunda Conferencia Evangélica Latinoamericana (1962).

In spite of these internal differences, we can include within the definition of "Evangelical Christianity" in Latin America the following common characteristics:[41] a) *the missionary dimension,* which has endured during the various stages of development of Evangelical missiology, ranging from evangelization in the sense of human betterment and the quest for personal and social development, to a more proselytizing notion of evangelization based on an ecclesiastical logic of business administration, and focusing on numerical growth; b.) *the conceptualization of "the church,"* which combines a sense of efficacy and flexibility in differentiating the Universal Church from the local church, thus allowing each church to feel that it is a part of the same invisible and Universal Church (but not one that is institutional, like Roman Catholicism), while at the same time competing for members with other local churches; c.) the ruling *eschatology,* which, since the beginning of the twentieth century, has been pre-millenarianism, a view that denied that things in the temporal world had any real value. Evangelical missionaries arrived in Latin America expressing an apocalyptic pessimism as regards historical realities, and placing great emphasis on the imminent "second coming of Christ"; d.) *the way in which the Bible is interpreted* is clearly "literal," thus leading to an "Evangelical Biblicism" that idealizes the doctrines or teachings of a particular Evangelical group, characterizing such teachings as the "sound doctrine" of the church that must be preserved and defended against any attempt at revision or modification; e.) a fundamental characteristic of Evangelicals is that of seeing themselves as *a movement of ongoing revival and innovation vis-à-vis* a prior tradition from which it differentiates itself and begins to break away from. Following a period of institutionalization, it begins this process all over again, thus eventually leading to another schism. We have termed this phenomenon an institutional "fissiparous vocation" and "natural tendency to fragment."[42]

The last trait of Evangelical Christianity (according to Jean-Pierre Bastian) is its anti-Catholicism, which is a fundamental component of the Evangelical world in Latin America, given that 'a common characteristic of all [Evangelicals]

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41 Pérez Guadalupe: Entre Dios y el César (2017), 234ff.

42 We also suggest the following practical or sociological characteristic of Evangelicals in order to differentiate them from other Protestants in Latin America: The Protestant Church that evangelizes is Evangelical; an Evangelical church that no longer evangelizes becomes Protestant. This functional distinction is based on the primary characteristic of Evangelical churches in Latin America: *evangelizing.* If churches take on an institutional character and limit themselves to pastoral services of a "maintenance" nature to their worshippers (as has happened in many denominations that have their roots in mainstream Protestantism), they thereby lose what is the essential component of being Evangelical, namely evangelizing. To paraphrase the Latin motto *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda est*, we could say that "the Evangelical church is always evangelizing"; if not, it ceases to be Evangelical in order to act like just another institutional (Protestant) church, even if its theology has not essentially changed.

is that they are groups that dissent from Catholicism, to which they are opposed either covertly or overtly.'[43] While this is a historical reality, we will see in the present study how this tendency has gradually become blunted, especially within the political sphere.

## 1.4 The category "Evangelical" as a dialogue strategy in new contexts

As we have already noted, throughout Latin America, the term "Evangelical" precedes "Pentecostal." This is because, historically, the first missionaries of the mid-nineteenth century were for the most part traditional Europeans, and then, at the end of that same century, other missionaries of an Evangelical stripe began to arrive, mainly from the United States. As previously indicated, Evangelicals can be subdivided along both political (e.g., conservative, liberal) and theological (e.g., Pietist, literalist) lines. Throughout the course of the twentieth century, as the Pentecostal wave swelled and crested with new religious expressions, Pentecostals were identified by society (and, sometimes, by Evangelicals themselves) as Christian "sects."

In general, the first Pentecostals were marginalized not only religiously, but also socially, given that they were numerical minorities of an impoverished social class bereft of any demographic, social, economic, or political influence. Because of this socio-religious status, this Christian group became the target of stigmatizing prejudice. For this reason, it is understandable why Pentecostals never embraced the term "Protestant." Instead, they gradually entered the large and diverse "Evangelical community" while retaining their own distinct Pentecostal identity. Such are the ironies of history that later decades have witnessed what might be termed a "Pentecostalization" of the Evangelical churches, thus leading to the two terms often being used interchangeably.

One case that serves as an excellent example of the different meanings these terms have taken on in Latin America can be found within the specific context of Brazil. Thus, while Pentecostals in that country did not internally use the term "Evangelical" to describe themselves, the nation's communications media immediately made that association, and popularized the term "Pentecostal" as a synonym of the term "Evangelical." The past 40 years have even seen part of the Brazilian Pentecostal movement publicly embracing the term "Evangelical," and using it for strategic purposes. As Burity points out, Brazilian Pentecostals began using the term "Evangelical" during the 1980s as both a political and

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[43] Bastian: La mutación religiosa de América Latina (1997), 19.

identitarian tactic.[44] Doing so served as an *entrée* both into mainstream Protestantism and into sociopolitical circles – given that self-identification as "Pentecostals" carried with it the baggage of class, identity, and demographic prejudice. Thus, using the category "Evangelical" in Brazil enabled Pentecostals to be seen as more ecumenical, and emboldened them to emerge as political representatives of the Protestant world. In addition to this strategy of political visibility that aimed at attaining social acceptance, embracing the term "Evangelical" in some ways helped Pentecostalism draw closer to mainstream Protestantism, while at the same time facilitating a congenial rapprochement between reconstructionist-oriented US Evangelicalism and (neo-) Pentecostalism.[45]

These interrelationships can be clearly seen in recent years with the ascent of the Christian Right in the US, and its influence in Latin America. In Brazil especially, that impact was felt with greater force with the Evangelical participation in politics that began with the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff (2016).

Amat and Pérez explains the beginnings of these ties with the US Religious Right:

> … in 1979, the Baptist preacher Jerry Falwell founded the group known as Moral Majority […]. Together with this Evangelical presence in American politics, a number of groups and organizations headed by well-known preachers and televangelists also entered the American political arena, and alliances were formed with the sectors who had the closest ties to the New Right, which was advocating the expansion of the free-market system as a key to modernization and prosperity. In addition, these groups indirectly constituted the bulwarks of the political and economic system that the United States was promoting.[46]

This helps us understand the organized reaction of the Christian Right in encouraging the formation of religiously based collectives that resonated among certain churches, ministers, Evangelical universities, Christian politicians, and televangelists for the purpose of spreading their ideals throughout all of Latin America.[47] In addition, the Christian Right tenaciously combatted the cultural movements of the 1960s, during which American society experienced significant changes during the height of the Cold War. These changes were caused by, among other factors, laws that allowed abortion; the prohibition of Bible reading and prayer in schools; the introduction of sex education in schools; the feminist movement's vindication of reproductive rights; public demonstrations

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44 Burity: El pueblo evangélico (2021).

45 Burity: ¿Ola conservadora y surgimiento de la nueva derecha cristiana brasileña? (2020).

46 Amat/Pérez: Carisma y política (2004), 123.

47 Córdova: Velhas e novas direitas religiosas na América Latina (2014).

of sexual liberation; the secular humanism that flourished in American universities, etc. In the face of such a scenario, the greatest concern of the Right was the preservation of the values of the "American family" which it saw as under threat as a result of the increasing rate of divorce, the fragility of the institution of marriage, and the decline in religious observance. Generally speaking, the Christian Right emerged due to fear of the consequences of cultural changes, political uncertainty, and the threats posed to moral convictions.[48]

Within this context, the theological formulations of the Moral Majority were in consonance with the views of Evangelical political sectors in the US that had ties with the extreme right wing of the Republican Party.[49] This consonance assumed new forms in the early twenty-first century with the emergence of the Tea Party (Alternative Right) and Christian Right, that constituted the base of support for Donald Trump's run for the presidency in 2016. The Tea Party sought to renovate the Republican Party by restoring conservative values, including the right to bear arms and freedom of expression – irrespective of the real or symbolic violence of the expression.[50] In terms of ideology, the goal of this new tendency was to shift the Republican Party toward the extreme right.

In Brazil, an analogous phenomenon can be seen in the militarism, anti-Communism, anti-Feminism, homophobia, and hate-mongering characteristic of the presidential campaign of Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2018), who enjoyed the firm backing of conservative Evangelical sectors.[51]

From the perspective of these Christian conservatives, the social movements that fought for policies of inclusion for the LGBTQ+ community and the recognition of social, ethnic, and racial minorities are responsible for the decline in the social mores and values of "their nation" – a nation that they consider "a Christian nation."[52] According to Julio Villazón, the importance of this political-religious US base resides in the direct influence that it exerts upon the organization of the Evangelical and neo-Pentecostal sectors in Latin

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48 Finguerut: Formação, crescimento e apogeu da direita cristã nos Estados Unidos (2009), 112–14.

49 Ibid.; Flores: A Construção de uma 'Nação Cristã' na América Latina (2020); Mariano: Religião e política no Brasil (2015).

50 The Tea Party takes its name from the "Boston Tea Party," which refers to a protest on December 16, 1773 by English settlers in America against the British Empire. As a reactionary movement, the Tea Party gathered momentum in the United States when local communities and groups joined forces via social networks. The group gained notoriety in 2009 when its members organized mass demonstrations against the healthcare reform proposed by President Barack Obama.

51 Lacerda: Jair Bolsonaro (2020); Carranza: Evangélicos (2020); Vital da Cunha: Retórica da perda e os Aliados dos Evangélicos na política brasileira (2020).

52 Vaggione/Machado: Religious Patterns of Neoconservatism in Latin America (2020); Machado: A vertente evangélica do neoconservadorismo brasileiro (2020).

America.[53] This is all the more the case because these groups were part of the foundation of what the communications media tend to call "the conservative wave" (or "neo-conservative wave") which have set off a general alarm in reaction to the discourses and leading figures of the emerging authoritarianism. For Ricardo Mariano, this phenomenon reflects a 'historical irony [because] Protestantism, which had previously been seen as promoting cultural modernity, splintered into distinct groups advocating diversity, pluralism, and human rights.'[54] At the same time, the Christian Right came to assume a leading role among both Evangelical and (neo-)Pentecostal sectors, while also expanding its influence to certain Catholic sectors, as we will see at the conclusion of the present study.

## 2. Historical and Sociological Factors

Having considered the efforts of academics and emic intellectuals to understand the various waves of "Evangelical Christianity" over the course of its 200-year presence in Latin America in terms of its conceptual and theological (typological) aspects, we will in the second part of our study be analyzing the impact that this phenomenon has had on the society and politics of the region. The goal of this analysis is to understand how it is that Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches have assumed a prominent role, established relationships with Catholic conservatives, and formed *ad hoc* political alliances in order to attain their political and partisan objectives. We will begin by presenting a socio-demographic profile of Pentecostalism, showing how its growth has been accompanied by a need for identitarian visibility. Afterward, we will delineate how theological changes have interfered in the conceptualization of political participation. We will then proceed to analyze the political, media, theological, and *geopolitical factors* that have shaped the multi-causality of political Evangelical conscience. We will conclude this part by identifying the theological rupture that has come to define neo-Pentecostalism, including its sumptuous architectural manifestations, leading to new political expressions on both a national and international level, and in the end consolidating a new political theology.

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53 Córdova: Velhas e novas direitas religiosas na América Latina (2014).

54 Mariano/Gerardi: Eleições presidenciais na América Latina em 2018 e ativismo político de evangélicos conservadores (2019).

## 2.1 The New Christians: Evangelical growth in Latin America

Leaving aside the percentages of each individual country (i.e., in terms of census figures and surveys), statistics reveal a steady decrease over the past fifty years in adherence to Roman Catholicism in Latin America, along with a concomitant increase in Evangelicalism that is almost the direct inverse of the Catholic decline. In this connection, it should be borne in mind that Latin Americans with no religious affiliation represent the group experiencing the second highest growth rate. For this reason, currently only one out of every two persons in Uruguay, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Puerto Rico is Catholic. However, within the region as a whole, Catholicism continues to be the majority religion (though no longer the dominant one, with 67% of the population, far below the 92% that it could claim in 1970 (i.e., a drop of 25% in less than 50 years). Conversely, Evangelicals have sustained an increase of 20%, while the numbers of the unaffiliated have grown 10%. And there are individual countries where the numbers of Evangelicals nearly equal the number of Catholics: Honduras – 41% Evangelicals vs. 47% Catholics; Guatemala – 40% Evangelicals vs. 47% Catholics; Nicaragua – 37% Evangelicals vs. 47% Catholics, etc. In addition, Brazil, the country with the highest number of Catholics in the world, has seen its Catholic population decline 15% over the course of 18 years (1995–2013), while the numbers of Evangelicals increased by 15% during that same period. Paraguay and Ecuador are the only Latin American nations that have a Catholic population in excess of 80% while, in other countries, the growth of the "non-affiliated" exceeds that of Evangelicals (e.g., Uruguay, with 38% reporting no religious affiliation; 13% Evangelicals, and 41% Catholics).[55] With these data and projections, continuing to refer to Latin America as the most Catholic region of the world or "the continent of hope" could within a few years become unsustainable claims.

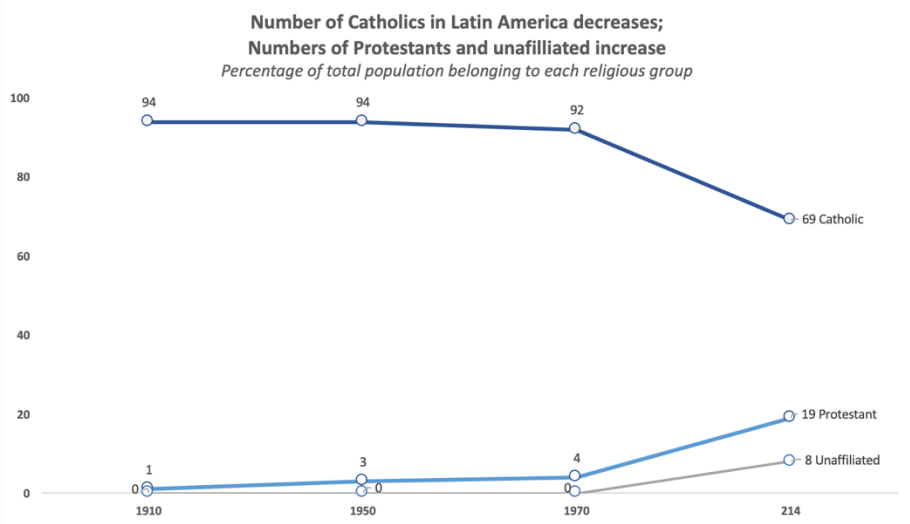
On the other hand, it can also be shown that religious migration in Latin America during the past twenty years is primarily due to "Catholic emigration." In other words, the adherents lost by Catholicism have swelled the ranks of the Evangelicals – especially those of a Pentecostal stripe. The group growing at the second highest rate – the unaffiliated – are persons with no institutional commitment to any church. These persons are not necessarily atheists. Instead, they do not participate in any religious institution, whether Catholic or Evangelical. To Evangelicals and the non-affiliated we can add a third group experiencing growth: "unchurched Catholics." These are Catholics whose Catholic identity is a matter of culture, devotion, culture, sociology, etc., and who self-

[55] Latinobarómetro: Las religiones en tiempos del Papa Francisco (2014); Latinobarómetro: Encuesta Latinobarómetro 2017 (2017).

identify as Catholics (and are classified by such in surveys) but who, in practical terms, do not participate in any church activities.

In this regard, it is important to note that the level of commitment of worshippers to their church – whether Catholic or Evangelical – varies greatly, thus showing that active involvement in one's church is something very different from merely belonging. For this reason, it is important to separately define the religious activities of actively involved adherents, given that Evangelicals are usual much more actively involved and committed than those who self-identify as Catholics. In other words, the Evangelical percentage cannot be compared solely in quantitative terms (i.e., in terms of belonging) with the Catholic percentage given that those who self-identify as Evangelicals are typically much more involved with their churches than those who self-identify as Catholics.[56]

In the following graph of the Pew Research Center[57] we can see the general trends with respect to religious changes in the region over the course of the past century:




The figures for years prior to 2014 are from the World Religion Database, and census data from Brazil and Mexico. The figures for 2014 are based on a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center. For more information regarding how population figures were determined, see the Methodology section of this report.
The percentages for each year reported may not total 100% because of rounding, as well as the small numbers of religious groups not represented in this table. The figures are drawn from 18 countries and the US territory of Puerto Rico. © PEW RESEARCH CENTER

56 This observation can be corroborated in Pew Research Center: Religion in Latin America (2014).
57 Ibid.

*Figure 1*. Religious change in Latin America during the past century

As Figure 1 shows, in 1910, some 94% of Latin Americans were Catholics, while 1% were Protestants, and there was no migration between the two different religious affiliations. We can also see that during the first half of the twentieth century (i.e., between 1910 and 1950), Catholicism maintained a percentage of 94%, the numbers of Evangelical adherents increased 2%, and those reporting no religious affiliation did not appear in the statistics. In other words, after four and a half centuries of Catholicism, there had been little change in the religiosity of Latin America. During the subsequent 20-year period from 1950 to 1970, Catholicism decreased by two percentage points and Evangelicalism increased a single percentage point. In other words, there was hardly any change. The big changes only began to occur in 1970. From 1970 until 2014, we can see that Catholicism decreased 23%, the Evangelical movement grew 15%, and the numbers of unaffiliated have reached the current figure of 8%. In sum, during the past 50 years, there has been more religious change than in the nearly five hundred previous years. This represents the real transformation of the religious situation in Latin America.[58]

These statistics not only confirm the long-term Evangelical growth trend at the expense of Catholic decline over the course of the last half century, but also identify the year 1970 as a watershed year in terms of the religious stability of Latin America. Similarly, while the important numerical growth of Evangelicals occurred during the 1970s, their involvement in party politics only began in the 1980s. In other words, immediately after experiencing an initial growth spurt, Evangelicals began to engage in party politics in every country. Thus, only 10 years of significant numerical growth were needed before Evangelicals were able to make the leap into the world of politics. They had hardly established

[58] A comparative analysis of figures broken down by country reveals that, until 1970, the only countries with significant diminishing Catholicism were Chile (probably as a result of Pentecostalism having taken root there early on) and Puerto Rico, with net losses of 20% and 13% respectively. As regards countries with large Evangelical populations now, such as the Central American nations, there were not significant diminishing numbers, with none of these countries displaying a net loss of more than 8% (in the case of Guatemala, followed by Costa Rica [6%], El Salvador [5%], and Nicaragua [4%]). Brazil experienced only a 3% net loss in Catholicism during the 60-year period from 1910 to 1970, this despite the fact that Pentecostalism had also been established there at an early date. However, contrary to what had happened during that relatively stable period, the period from 1970 to 2014 witnessed a marked decrease in Catholicism in all countries in the region, ranging from 5% in Paraguay to 47% in Honduras. Apart from Central America, the most populous nations of the region also experienced significant losses of Catholic adherents (e.g., Brazil, 31%; Mexico, 15%). Medium-sized Latin American nations also showed significant losses during this later period: Argentina – 20%, Venezuela – 20%, Peru – 19%, and Colombia – 16%.

themselves as social actors and were already emerging as new political actors. But the great leap into politics was not due solely to their numerical growth. Other factors that we will later examine were also in play.

Of course, in discussing the growth of Evangelical groups, we are referring not only to the number or percentage of their members, but also to the social importance that they acquired during those years, after having left behind the public invisibility and "minority complex" that had previously characterized them. We are in addition referring to the importance Evangelicals assumed in surveys of public opinion and social research, and to their entry into the middle and upper socioeconomic sectors of society, as well as to their moving out of their "garage churches" into megachurches that were constructed in suburban areas; their winning over of opinion leaders and influential groups; their incursions into social media, and their unexpected entry into the world of party politics. It is thus evident that Evangelicals are currently not seeking merely to put an end to the Catholic religious *monopoly* in Latin America (something that they have already achieved) but also to consign Catholic religious and political *hegemony* to the past.

Brazil is very much a part of this general trend in Latin America. Indeed, Brazil is on the very cutting edge of this tendency, being the country where the migration from Catholicism to Protestantism has been most pronounced in recent years. In fact, it is on pace to soon attain the levels of the Central American nations where more than 40% of the population are Evangelicals (i.e., Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala), and to subsequently surpass the Catholic population in fairly short order. The most recent national census in Brazil, conducted in 2010, revealed that 65% of Brazilians identified as Catholic, while 22% identified as Evangelicals. It is estimated that between 30% and 33% of the current population is Evangelical. However, if current trends continue, and all other things being equal, it will not be too long before Brazilian Evangelicals can lay claim to being the majority religion in the nation. In this regard, José Eustáquio Diniz Alves ventured a prediction in 2018[59] that by the year 2032, Evangelicals would surpass Catholics in numbers. He based this prediction on the fact that, since the year 1990, the nation's Catholic population has been decreasing at an average rate of one percentage point per year, while the Evangelical population has been rapidly growing during that same period (and especially during the past 20 years) albeit at a somewhat lower rate than that of the corresponding Catholic decline.

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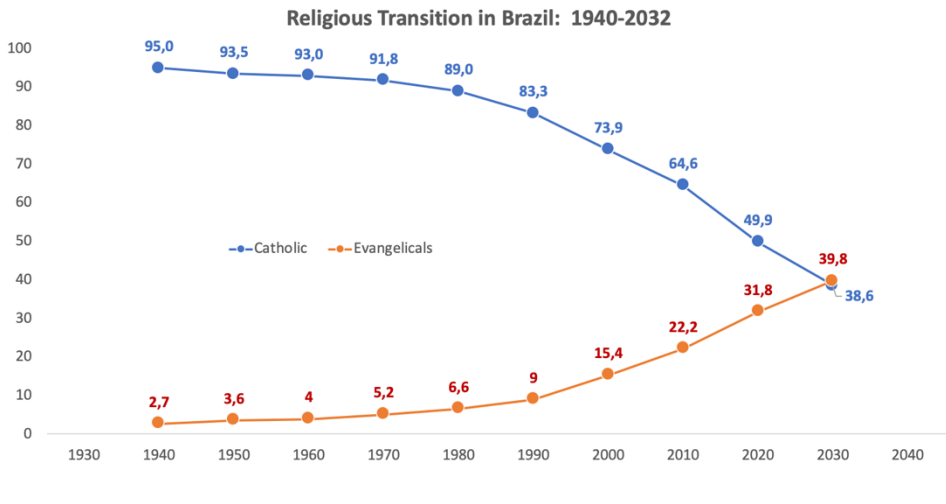
[59] Diniz: Transição Religiosa (2018).

*Projected Catholic and Evangelical population trends in Brazil*

*Figure 2.* Religious Transition in Brazil: 1940–2032. Source: Brazilian census (IGBE) data from




1940 through 2010, and projections for the period 2022-2032. (Diniz: Transição Religiosa, 2018).

In other words, the Catholic loss is not in direct proportion to the Evangelical gain. Instead, many who leave the Catholic Church immediately become part of the group identified as having no religious affiliation. A similar phenomenon has been observed in Chile, where the Catholic population has steadily declined, but where Evangelical growth has ceased. In this regard, if these projections come to fruition, referring to Brazil as the nation with the highest Catholic population in the world may at some point no longer be sustainable.

It is obvious that the demographic growth of Pentecostalism in Brazil implies a giant leap forward from visibility of numbers to visibility of an identity. Thus, Pentecostals have left behind their previous political anonymity and are now going through a process of "minoritization," which can be understood as a political empowerment that can allow them – as a religious minority – to carve out a place for themselves within the Brazilian national identity and claim rights to political representation. According to Burity, the concept of minoritization allows us to capture the dynamic of Pentecostal mobilization in democratic regimes that encourage the institutional integration of social minorities in a nation's politics.[60]

60 "Minoritarization" is an anthropological neologism that reflects the power of Evangelical's social and political identity. See Burity: El pueblo evangélico (2021).

## 2.2 The multicausality of the Evangelicals' newfound political conscience

Just as the watchword some 500 years ago was *cuius regio, eius religio* (the religion of the kingdom – or rather, of the king – determines the religion of the subjects), we can affirm that, historically, the political response of the Evangelicals is dictated by prevailing theology of their communities. In this regard, Latin American Evangelicalism has been highly diverse as regards its political preferences, given that different forms of Evangelicals' participation in public life stem from their responses to a fundamental question regarding their "relationship with the world." For this reason, we would like to focus on analyzing how these responses to the wider world have taken the form of a political response on the part of Latin American Evangelicals. However, to the extent that high levels of political and political party participation on the part of Evangelicals is something that has emerged only in recent decades, we will be referring to the most recent analyses of this phenomenon.

A pioneering study of Evangelicals and their relationship with politics in Latin America was Christian Lalive D'Epinay's *The Haven of the Masses* (1968).[61] D'Epinay, a Swiss Calvinist theologian and sociologist, wrote about the Chilean Pentecostalism of the mid-1960s. He later broadened his research to include Argentina, and attempted to offer an explanatory model for Latin American Protestantism as a whole. D'Epinay's research, along with the studies conducted by Emilio Willems[62] on Pentecostalism in Brazil and Chile, which applied the theses of Max Weber, are the first works that provide a perspective different from the missionary ethnographies and apologetics that had previously been offered.

The objective of D'Epinay's research was to 'understand Protestant religious systems within the context of a dialectic that, on multiple levels, binds them to Chilean society,' focusing primarily on the Chilean Pentecostal movement. His working hypothesis was that 'Pentecostalism presents itself as a community-based religious response to the abandonment of vast segments of the population – an abandonment resulting from the *anomie* of a society that was in transition.'[63] The fact that they felt like "citizens of a different realm" led Chilean Pentecostals to separate themselves from the world – in effect, to marginalize

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61 Lalive D'Epinay: El refugio de las masas (1968). Published in Spanish in 1968, the earlier French edition was based on field work sponsored by the World Council of Churches that was conducted in Chile in 1965-66. There are more recent editions of this work, but we have preferred to use the first Spanish edition of 1968 as a reference.

62 Willems: Followers of the New Faith Culture Change the Rise of Protestantism in Brazil and Chile (1967).

63 Lalive D'Epinay: El refugio de las masas (1968), 47.

a world that had previously marginalized them – and finally to remain in their communities, which they conceived as "havens of the masses." This view implied two dichotomies: between the spiritual and the material, and between the church and the world.

Thus, the complex of the religious values and ideas comprising the social ethics of their creed were the foundation of their non-involvement in sociopolitical matters. This non-involvement reflected their view that the Gospel had nothing whatsoever to do with politics, and that the only way of addressing the problems of the country was through preaching and prayer for "the salvation of souls." This posture, which was based on Evangelicals' social and religious experience, led them, within the public sphere, to a "social boycott" or "political boycott" that consisted essentially of the persistent distancing from and rejection of any sphere of activity outside of the church, and of prohibiting the participation of worshippers in the cultural and political life of the country. It is for this reason that Lalive D'Epinay at times defines such a position in sociological terms as "sectarian." Undoubtedly, this "apolitical force" led Evangelicals to support the *status quo,* rather than to advocate for social change.[64]

The other contribution that is relevant for our analysis is that of Heinrich Schäfer, whom we mentioned in Part I of this study. Schäfer studied the various currents of Protestantism and their political influence in Latin America. His work was in fact one of the first analyses of this particular topic, and incorporated theological, historical, sociological, and political considerations. What is especially interesting for our purposes is his "bi-dimensional model" of interpretation, which utilizes a "theological" and "sociological" dimension: the former understood as a subjective-objective continuum of the mediation of divine grace, and the latter determined by the forms of the institutional organization of the church, with the continuum comprising the different degrees of tension between church and society. What is noteworthy about this approach is that

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64 After the work of Lalive D'Epinay, there were a number of Protestant and Evangelical authors who also offered observations regarding the political commitments of Evangelicals in Latin America from the 1980s onward. These include the following: Míguez Bonino: La fe en busca de eficacia (1977); Deiros: Los evangélicos y el poder político en América Latina (1986); Bastian: Protestantismos y modernidad latinoamericana (1994); Bastian: La mutación religiosa de América Latina (1997); Freston: Protestantismo e politica no Brasil (1993); Freston: Un compromiso político en función de las iglesias (1995); Freston: Protestant political parties (2004); Freston: Religião e política, sim igreja e estado, não (2006); Freston: Evangelical Christianity and democracy in Latin America (2008); López Rodríguez: La seducción del poder (2004); López Rodríguez/Arroyo: Tejiendo un nuevo rostro público (2008). In this same regard, two meetings held by the Latin American Theological Fraternity are also worthy of mention. The first of these was the so-called "Jarabacoa Consultation" of 1983 in the Dominican Republic, and the second took place in Buenos Aires in 1987. In addition, see the volume edited by Padilla: De la marginación al compromiso (1991).

Schäfer utilizes a strictly theological point of departure for the purposes of determining social behavior (along the same lines as Lalive D'Epinay). In other words, for Schäfer, the theological criteria of these churches determined their social and political reactions in the wider world.[65]

However, in order to understand the most recent changes within the Latin American Evangelical community, we need to answer two important questions. First, what is it that led to the massive incursion of certain Evangelical leaders into the arena of party politics? Secondly, what is the true scope of this new political conscience? In other words, why did Evangelicals changed their view of society and decide to participate in worldly affairs?

We believe that this change resulted from sociological, political, media-related, and theological factors.[66] We will now proceed to discuss each of these factors in turn.

For the purposes of our discussion, it is the last of these that is the most important. But in order to be able to properly contextualize these keys to understanding, it is important to bear in mind two additional points. First, this change occurred in the 1980s, when the region was emerging from dictatorships and civil wars, and returning to democratic government, including the drafting of new constitutions, a process that opened up a wide range of possibilities of political participation for new social actors. At the same time, Evangelical churches were proliferating in urban areas, and among the middle and professional classes. This latter dynamic afforded Evangelicals a certain degree of social (not merely religious) leadership within their communities. In addition, we need to consider what was occurring among dominations within the United States, which had a clear influence on the political decisions of their Latin American counterparts.

We can see that the *sociological factor* reflects the maturity of Latin American Evangelical churches. As we have previously discussed, statistics show a clear growth trend for Evangelicals in the region. But this growth, which accelerated in the 1970s, has its roots in more than a century of history and experience. Currently, members of Evangelical churches are not only converts from Catholicism, but also second, third, and fourth generation Evangelicals who can lay claim to an Evangelical tradition that they have been able to develop both in their centers of worship and in the wider world.[67] All this leads us to conclude that, in spite of the changes and the minor differences, the Evangelical movement in Latin America has come of age. It was therefore only natural that it

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65 Schäfer: Protestantismo y crisis social en América Central (1992), 91ff.

66 Pérez Guadalupe: Entre Dios y el César (2017) and Pérez Guadalupe: Evangelicals and Political Power in Latin America (2019).

67 Thorsen: Prácticas carismáticas y parroquias católicas en Guatemala (2019), 29.

would seek to have a greater role in the life of the nations where it was thriving, not merely for the purpose of staking its claim to rightful place in society (i.e., based on the numerical representation that Evangelicals had attained), but rather to serve as a guiding light, by means of their Christian message, for the actual development of their nations. In other words, Evangelicals not only wanted to participate as believers, but also as citizens.

For the purposes of describing the *political factor,* we need to cite the fall of Communism as an event that laid bare a crisis of ideology. The year 1989 represented the culmination of a long and complex process of which the fall of the Berlin Wall was a powerful symbolic expression. In Latin America, this crisis of ideologies and traditional political parties resulted in both power vacuums and pockets of power that lacked viable political representation. The fall of Communism brought with it the fall of any Manichean vision among Evangelical conservatives based on anti-Communism and the demonization of atheist Marxism. There were no longer ideological enemies to sustain the theory of a leftist conspiracy within the church. Concomitantly, the view that had spurned the world, and that saw politics as a dangerous arena, also disappeared. In the absence of either ideological enemies or reasons to withdraw from the world, Evangelical conservatives saw a golden opportunity to become engaged in politics, not because they were interested in political participation *per se,* but rather (at least at first) exclusively as a means to "evangelize." For Evangelical believers – and especially for neo-Pentecostals – their Christian faith no longer prevented them from working in the world and for the world. Ministers did not insist that their worshippers withdraw from everything not connected with the church. This attitude led to a figurative opening of the gates – the gates of heaven and of earth – for the supposed purpose of spreading the Gospel to the largest possible numbers of persons through the wide gate of political participation. In addition, those who have an impact and influence on society are also accorded higher status. Thus, Evangelicals began to become comfortably ensconced among the middle and upper classes.

To the demographic growth of the 1970s and the minoritization leap of the 1990s, we can add the *media factor,* which reflects Evangelicals' efforts to attain greater political presence and a higher profile on mass communication media in Latin America in the 1970s. Hugo Assmann has noted in the 1980s that the rebroadcast of programs featuring American televangelists such as Jerry Falwell, Paul Crouch, and Jim Baker (all connected to the Moral Majority in which Ralph Reed and Gary Bauer served in the political lobby as operators of the interests of conservative evangelical sectors) became extremely popular in the region.[68] Programs like *In Touch* (Charles Stanley), *The Old Time Gospel Hour* (Jerry

[68] Assmann: La iglesia electrónica y su impacto en América Latina (1987), 48–57.

Falwell), *The 700 Club* (Pat Robertson), and *The PTL Club* (Jim Bakker), or the Puerto Rican televangelists of Panamericana Television, which had a wide reach in Latin countries, Yiye Avila (*Escuadrón Relámpago Cristo Viene*) and Paul Finkenbinder, also known as *Hermano Pablo*, among others.

Pentecostals also had a highly prominent presence on the radio, dating all the way back to Aimee Semple McPherson (founder of the Four-Square Church) and S. Parkes Cadman in the 1930s. Later, in the 1970s, Evangelical sermons were broadcast by Family Radio (Oakland, California) and *Voz de la Amistad*. In Latin America, there was HCJB, "The Voice of the Andes", based in Quito, Ecuador, which offered programing in indigenous languages during time frames that were strategically conceived to maximize the numbers of working-class listeners. The presence of US-based Christian media outlets, such as the *Trinity Broadcasting Network* and GOD TV, served as models in Latin America, with their distinctive format of programming, soliciting contributions, ways of involving the faithful in sustaining the media enterprises, securing sponsors, and complementary operations such as publishing, the sale of religious products, etc.[69] Hugo Assmann coined the term "electronic churches" to describe this burgeoning mass media presence of Pentecostal evangelizing, which had its native practitioners in Latin America, televangelists who copied the models of their more famous US counterparts, such as Oral Roberts, Rex Humbard, Jimmy Swaggart, etc.[70]

This proliferation of projects and initiatives constituted the beginnings of the religious media presence in the region. In Brazil, this development was accompanied by the consolidation of a religious market that included gospel music, videos, television programs, live events, books, websites, etc., even extending to online influencers. Brazilian religious media succeeded in segmenting their target listeners according to socioeconomic class (e.g., programs aimed at working class audiences) and gender (e.g., programs aimed at women). The two most high-profile Brazilian churches are the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD), with its own television station, (the second largest in terms of national coverage) and Born Again in Christ, also with its own television station (Rede Gospel). Both of these media outlets feature bishops and ministers who are also members of the Brazilian Senate or Chamber of Deputies, and who have strongly influenced the commissions who make decisions regarding the licensing of communications media, basing their claims on religious freedom.[71] These same kinds of alliances can be found in Mexico where, according to R.C. De la Torre, COFRATERNICE (the Mexican National Brotherhood of

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69 Carranza: Catolicismo midiático (2011).

70 Assmann: La iglesia electrónica y su impacto en América Latina (1987).

71 Bandeira: Mídia, religião e política (2018).

Evangelical Christian Churches) agreed to support Andrés Manuel López Obrador's 2018 presidential run in Exchange for the concession of radio stations and television programming.[72]

We stress the fact neo-Pentecostals' interest in political representation in Brazil is of vital importance. This is because it is the activities of its representatives that serve to guarantee access to the rights for radio transmission and other communication outlets, as well as access to economic resources earmarked for companies that have demonstrated that they serve the public interest. It is no less true that a strong media presence serves another purpose: as a political platform for launching the campaigns of candidates endorsed by churches, thus maximizing their public exposure. It is for this reason that political parties do not underestimate their influence on elections.[73] We will now turn to the fourth factor in our multi-causal model that is responsible for Latin American neo-Pentecostals' newfound political conscience: the *theological factor*.

## 2.3 A new political theology: from pre-millenarianism to post-millenarianism

The theological factor – the transition from pre-millenarian to post-millenarian eschatology, is in our opinion the one that weighs most heavily in the new political conscience of Evangelicals. This is because this theological factor reflects a renewed theological vision with respect to the relationship between the church and the world, and because this relationship has important ethical consequences. What is most noteworthy in this regard is that this new vision takes as its point of departure a matter of theology – and specifically of eschatology – for the purpose of explaining political behavior, along the same lines as Lalive D'Epinay and Heinrich Schäfer. In other words, to the extent that the Evangelical churches embrace theological changes, their attitudes and behavior regarding the world and politics also are transformed. And there was indeed an important change in Evangelical eschatology that took place in the 1980s.

Within the Latin American Evangelical community, it was stressed over the course of many decades that the second coming (or *parousia*) of Christ was imminent. This belief engendered an attitude of living in this world as if it were a "waiting room." If Evangelicals expected to be taken up in rapture at the moment of Christ's sudden second coming, why should they concern themselves with improving the world, or with trying to make it a more just and livable place? This was the reason that Evangelicals did not participate in "worldly"

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72 De la Torre: Genealogía de los movimientos religiosos conservadores y la política en México (2020).

73 Carranza: Evangélicos (2020).

affairs – and especially not in politics. Not only because their ministers had anathematized such activities, but because it did not make sense to expend energy on such matters if Christ was about to come at any moment. Moreover, the worse things were in this world, the more reason there would be for God to hasten his coming and the restoration of his kingdom on earth – just as he had promised.[74]

This was the way that Latin American Evangelicals had been taught to face the future: do not pay too much attention to what is going on in history, given that the realities that are truly important have to do with matters that are not of this world. This theological system is known as *pre-millenarianism,* which is an Evangelical theological current that was widespread in Latin America, and which for many years constituted a fundamental tenet of the dominant strain of Evangelical thinking. The aspect of this doctrine that was most strongly emphasized was the imminence of the second coming. Thus, there was a tremendous pressure in Evangelical communities to forsake the things of this world, and dedicate oneself entirely to evangelizing, given that the Savior's second coming could occur at any moment, and only those who had "converted" would be taken up in "rapture."

However, in the 1990s, a new way of dealing with the subject of the future, and a new attitude toward the world, began to emerge in the Evangelical theology and thinking: *post-millenarianism.*

> In post-millenarianism, the millennium represents a golden age, a time of spiritual prosperity that will be confirmed during the present time of the Church, in a kind of grand revival that will involve the mass conversion of gentiles and Jews; in the fulfillment of the Pauline vision of Romans 11:25-27. Within the time of the Church, the deceiver will always appear in the world (2Thessalonians 2:11ff.) and Christ's second coming will occur only at the end. Satan will be vanquished, the dead will be resurrected, and there will be a new heaven, and a new earth.[75]

In other words, there was a transition from pre-millenarianism to post-millenarianism. This marked far more than a change in a prefix, because it transformed pre-millennial pessimism into post-millennial optimism with respect to the future of humanity. This involved an unprecedented change in the attitude

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[74] During that time, as a result of both "Evangelical" influence in the US and that of homegrown Pentecostalism, an uncompromising Manichean doctrine regarding the Church-World relationship came to be established, with the heavenly being opposed to the earthly, the spiritual to the material, believers to non-believers, and Christians (i.e, Evangelical Christians) to Pagans (i.e., Catholics). In addition, this "God-Devil" dichotomy was extended to ideological categories such as American capitalism (God) versus atheist Communism (Devil), even going so far as to reject any and all forms of "the political" or – especially – "politics."

[75] Roldán: Escatología (2002), 106.

of believers toward the world, which went from pre-millenarian fright to one of greater openness and accommodation toward the secular world, on the basis of post-millennial eschatological doctrine. 'Society is no longer a filthy thing, as had been preached earlier, but instead a little heaven and a millenarian oasis to be enjoyed. Thus, talk of heaven came to be reserved for funerals, hell went out of fashion, and the devil became a metaphor. Pentecostals refer to "the End-Time Harvest."'[76] This theological change transformed the rules of political participation for Evangelicals, as well as their attitude toward the world, and was fundamentally important to the formulation of a new way for Evangelicals to engage in politics. Thus, they suddenly appeared in the public sphere in the 1990s within a neo-Pentecostal context.

As Joaquín Algranti rightly points out in reference to Argentina, this recalibration of millenarian eschatology, which was associated with the second coming of Christ, is what led certain Christians to actively work for the restoration of the kingdom of God on earth, and constitutes an essential characteristic of the neo-Pentecostal groups that have thrust themselves into the world of politics:

> The "Theology of the Present Kingdom" is one of the distinctive features of Neo-Pentecostalism that differentiates it from Pentecostal groups. It is a triumphalist eschatology that makes believers the true heirs of power, authority, and the divine right to conquer nations in the name of God. Thus, the Kingdom of Jesus Christ no longer refers to a promise of future blessings, but instead to the *now time* of the believer and their church."[77]

In reference to Colombia, William Betrán tells us that, until the early 1990s, the dynamic defined by the imminence of "the end times" kept Pentecostalism from organizing itself as a political movement:

> On the contrary, it led [Pentecostalism] to assume an ethics of quietism and resignation, accompanied by an apathy regarding the workings of political participation. Because of this, Pentecostals took themselves out of the arena of "electoral politics." While they trusted in God, they were suspicious of politics.[78]

In effect, "the initial development of Pentecostalism in Latin America included a denunciation of what Pentecostals called "the world." Therefore, the politics

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76 Mansilla/Orellana: Itinerarios del pentecostalismo chileno 1909-2017 (2019), 113.

77 Algranti: Política y religión en los márgenes (2010), 21.

78 Beltrán: Del monopolio católico a la explosión pentecostal (2013), 304. According to Beltrán Cely, the historical lack of interest in political participation on the part of Pentecostal groups is due to three factors: 1.) the predominance of social withdrawal within Pentecostalism; 2.) the anti-Communism of Colombian Pentecostalism; and 3.) the lack of formal education of most Pentecostals.

that were part of this world needed to be repudiated."[79] For this reason, Pentecostal leaders thought of politics as something worldly and sinful, and advised that it be avoided."[80]

As a result of these changes in theological doctrine, Pentecostalism emerged as a new political force in the late 1980s. This was to a large extent due to its growth in urban areas, especially among the middle class and professionals, a development that gave Pentecostals more social clout. 'This new attitude on the part of Pentecostals can be expressed as a transition from "social boycott" to a "theology of prosperity.'"[81]. According to Beltrán, this development coincided with the consolidation of megachurches, which are able to act as disciplined electoral forces under the direction of a charismatic leader.[82] Among the megachurches that were built at the same time that Latin American cities were becoming modernized, two spectacular examples stand out: The Temple of Solomon (Brazil) and the House of God (Guatemala).[83]

While the growth of Pentecostalism was accompanied by the urban growth and modernization of Latin America that occurred during the second half of the twentieth century, neo-Pentecostalism reflects the instrumental rationality of the consumer culture, and the need for recognition of its adherents' religious identity in the twenty-first century.[84] For this reason, the megachurches

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79 Semán: ¿Quiénes son? ¿Por qué crecen? ¿En qué creen? (2019), 39.

80 Oro/Tadvald: Consideraciones sobre el campo evangélico brasileño (2019), 61.

81 Beltrán: Del monopolio católico a la explosión pentecostal (2013), 306.

82 The first instance of this kind in Colombia was the International Charismatic Mission, the largest Pentecostal congregation in the country, founded by the husband-and-wife team of César and Claudia Castellanos in 1983. The Castellanos were the first to appreciate the political capital represented by the mass religious organization that they headed. This led them to found the National Christian Party in 1989, under whose banner Claudia Castellanos ran for president of Colombia in 1990 (receiving hardly any voter support).

83 The first of these megachurches, opened in 2014 by the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, is located in the Brás neighborhood of São Paulo, Brazil. It consists of 100,000 square meters of construction, is 52 meters tall, 105 meters wide, and 121 meters long. The complex was designed to serve as a pilgrimage center for more than 10,000 well-to-do worshippers, and was modeled on US theme parks. Bishop Edir Macedo, founder of the IURD, claims that he imported 40,000 meters of stone from Israel, along with 12 olive trees and sacred relics that evoke the Biblical history of the ancient Hebrews. The total cost of construction was $300 million (https://www.universal.org/templo-de-salomao/a-inauguracao). A complex of similar dimensions, and with a capacity for accommodating the same number of worshippers, is the neo-Pentecostal church *Casa de Dios*, which represents a realization in steel of the dream of its founders, Cash Luna and Sonia Luna, who see its construction as a divine feat: "Construction began in 2008, in the midst of the country's worst economic crisis […]. Its solid structure comprising 8000 tons of steel surpasses the Eifel Tower […]. The Statue of Liberty could fit into its auditorium." (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3eN_gaXfow).

84 Carranza: Christliche Pfingstkirchen (2014).

constitute an expression, more than anything else, of a world of financial and real estate entrepreneurship, and the sanctification of an ostentatious style of architecture that seeks to symbolically reflect the power of the theology of prosperity. In this way, these megachurches forge a link between the logic of the consumption flows of shopping centers and divine grace which, according to doctrine, is obtained when the congregant contributes to the work of the church by tithing, as well as through other economic contributions.

Yet it is also necessary to stress the fact that the changes occurring in US churches have had a simultaneous impact on all of the nations of Latin America. In other words, this was not necessarily a matter of one country's influence over another country, but rather of a simultaneous influence of the northern part of the American continent upon the southern part. This influence can be seen in the fact that, historically, Latin American Evangelical church models have been influenced by the missions and denominations of the north. In this connection, it is our opinion that an important milestone in this change in the political thinking of Latin American Evangelicals was the preceding incursion into politics in the United States on the part of several well-known ministers whose influence extended beyond their local churches as a result of their media presence. These were the so-called "televangelists" of the "electronic churches" that we discussed previously.[85] The most famous case was that of Pat Robertson, an American televangelist who in 1986 announced his candidacy for the Republican presidential nomination. While he was unsuccessful, his run generated high expectations among Evangelicals in the United States, and gave rise to the publication of a vast quantity of "theological" writings that attempted to provide a foundation of this new biblical view of the world, of the government of nations, and of the political participation of Evangelicals. Such works would come to constitute the initial theological corpus of "dominion theology" or "reconstructionism."

We can find an updated version of this "ideological corpus" in the visit by representatives of Capitol Ministries to President Bolsonaro in August of 2019 for the purpose of launching an official bible study program in the Brazilian Congress, putting into practice the slogan "first the firsts." In other words, the idea was to access high-profile persons capable of changing the nation counting on the support of Evangelical members of the Brazilian Congress.[86] Capitol Ministries is an Evangelical ministry founded by Ralph Drollinger for the purpose of converting politicians and public servants to a Christian point of view,

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85 Assmann: La iglesia electrónica y su impacto en América Latina (1987). Assmann's book discusses the most prominent televangelists of the 1970s and 1980s, such as Oral Roberts, Rex Humbard, Jimmy Swaggart, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Jim Bakker, Robert Schuller, Paul Crouch, Robert Tilton, Bill Bright, etc.

86 Dip/Viana: Os pastores de Trump chegam a Brasília (2019).

because "without this pre-political guidance, it is much more difficult to arrive at policies that are both pleasing to God and beneficial to the advancement of the nation."[87] Drollinger's activities extend to other countries such as Mexico, Honduras, Paraguay, Costa Rica, and Uruguay, where Capitol Ministries has established local offices.[88]

If we consider these four factors (i.e., sociological, political, media-related, and theological factors) in proper perspective, we can conclude that there was no one single causal reason that led to the sudden change in the political perspective of Latin American Evangelical churches. We could assign greater weight to one or another of the four factors. However, in the end, it was a multicausal process that occurred at more or less the same time in the majority of Latin American countries. And it was during that very same time that the large majority of Latin American countries were returning to democracy, ending their internal wars, and drafting new constitutions. It was at precisely this moment that Evangelicals suddenly burst onto the scene as new political actors.

This transformation marked a watershed between the former classic Evangelical apolitical attitude and the beginning of their participation in electoral – and especially legislative – politics during the 1980s. Afterward, the Pentecostal megachurches and "moral agenda" became empowered and, as a consequence, changed the political agenda. So their political enemies are no longer Communism (which died on its own)[89] nor Catholicism (which has sometimes served as a strategic ally), but rather "gender ideology." Their political expectations have also changed. Thus, they no longer limit themselves to defending their own fiefdoms, but also look to influence governments and shape public policies along reconstructionist – and especially neo-Pentecostal – lines.

There is no question that these theological changes are fundamentally important for understanding the political involvement of Pentecostal Evangelicals, who have gone from being apolitical to actively seeking power, with reconstructionism as their guide. In addition to the theses of Schäfer and D'Épinay, for whom the theological criterion is of decisive importance in determining social behavior, William Connolly maintains that the theological, economic, and corporate interests of evangelicals come into play in the political arena in a way that is not only pragmatic, but also affective. For the author, this affective factor is what moves, motivates and drives religious action in politics, while at times also

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87 Capitol Ministries: What the Bible Says About Our Illegal Immigration Problem (2019).

88 Dip/Viana: Os pastores de Trump chegam a Brasília (2019).

89 As we previously mentioned, the most politically conservative wing of Latin American Evangelicalism has in recent years attempted to resurrect the "specter of Communism" as a hostile ideological force that needs to be combatted. The clearest instance of this was seen during Jair Bolsonaro's election campaign. But the same talking points can be heard from both "political Evangelicals" and certain "political Catholics" in other Latin American countries.

helping to shape the sensibility (in terms of topics and agendas) of the groups of their political adversaries. For these reasons, energy proceeding from different sources will sometimes synchronize at certain times. Connolly terms this process "the resonance machine" because, just as sounds circulate and reverberate at random, in a music box, in politics, affinities are contingent, negotiable, and disposable.[90] In other words, political decisions adapt to the circumstances and interests of the moment in a way that involves no moral judgment, but rather pure political strategy.[91] This image of a "resonance machine" helps us understand how the theological principles of Pentecostals are always negotiable within the political game – and also within the Evangelical churches themselves. Thus, sometimes religious representatives are representing their corporate interests while, at other times, they bring into play certain principles in order to gain political positions that strengthen themselves and, on still other occasions, their theological priorities are determined on the basis of their political usefulness.

## 3. Political and Party Issues

Until now, we have explored the diverse terminology that shows the theological richness and diversity of the Evangelical corpus. We have discussed the statistical evidence demonstrating their upward socioeconomic mobility, analyzed the multicausal factors that account for their newfound political participation based on their Evangelical identity, and we have identified the political theology that serves to legitimize neo-Pentecostal efforts to attain access to the levers of political power. In this section of the paper, we will attempt to demonstrate how these varied dimensions assumed concrete forms within the game of representative politics. Toward this end, we will begin by distinguishing the motivations that lead both individuals and groups get involved in political life. We will then examine the forms of party politics that religious actors get involved in, and proceed to suggest interpretive models of Evangelical representation and organization within various Latin American contexts. Finally, we conclude with a reflection on the reliability of the vote of Evangelical worshippers, and on whether the Brazilian model could possibly be replicated in other contexts.

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90 Connolly: Capitalism and Christianity, American style (2008).

91 Connolly: The Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine (2005).

## 3.1 "Political Evangelicals" or "Evangelical Politicians"

As we have continually stated by way of contextualization, the existence of presidents such as Jair Messias Bolsonaro of Brazil and Donald Trump of the United States who openly and directly utilize religious discourses in order to ingratiate themselves with the "Christian" (i.e., Evangelical and Catholic) vote, and do so with a fair measure of success, is not something that has been commonly seen in Latin America. The fact that an Evangelical deputy won the first round of the presidential elections in Costa Rica in 2018, and that there was an Evangelical president in Bolivia in 2019 (the aforementioned countries being the least Evangelical in Central and South America respectively) are examples of the religious changes that are taking place in the politics of the region. In addition, we increasingly see how Evangelical leaders are becoming actively involved in political parties – whether these parties are explicitly religious or not – and trying to imbue public policy with their own religious convictions.

As we have been emphasizing from the very outset of the present study, it is not a good idea to generalize statements to all "Evangelicals" or to all Latin American countries. It is for this reason that, throughout this paper, we have indicated a number of basic differences that have helped us to distinguish among the different forms that this new religious-political phenomenon has taken. In this regard, we can say first and foremost that there is a big difference between those Evangelicals who are actively involved in established political parties, and who enter politics as standard bearers of their Christian principles – persons whom we have called "Evangelical politicians" (in the same way that there can be Catholic politicians, Marxist politicians, liberal politicians, etc.), and, on the other, those leaders new to politics who are only looking for cash in on their religious leadership within the arena of electoral politics, whom we call "political Evangelicals."[92] The difference between the two resides in two factors: a) "Evangelical politicians" act as citizens, whereas "political Evangelicals" act as worshippers or believers; and b) the former primarily pursue "the public interest" within the parameters allowed by democratic fair play, while the latter first and foremost seek to advance the interests of their religious group (i.e., they behave just as any other Latin American interest group does). To put it otherwise, the former pursue "making politics", while the latter seek to "confessionalize it" by way of confessionalizing public policies, and eventually, returning to a "confessional state".

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92 Pérez Guadalupe: Entre Dios y el César (2017), Pérez Guadalupe: ¿Políticos Evangélicos o Evangélicos Políticos? (2019), Pérez Guadalupe: Evangelicals and Political Power in Latin America (2019).

A clear example of the fact that "political Evangelicals" are capable of behavior as "interest groups" is the case of Brazil's Evangelical Parliamentary Front (commonly referred to by its Portuguese acronym "FPE"), which represents a variety of parties and denominations, and in effect acts as an *ad hoc* group of Evangelical Congress members who caucus regarding religious, moral, legal, and public policy matters of common concern.[93] The FPE brings together parliamentarians who identify as Evangelicals (or with the Evangelical agenda) and who act as a united front regarding matters of common concern that are to be voted on in the Brazilian Congress. In other words, the members of FPE caucus regarding matters of interest to them, but otherwise identify mainly in terms of their religious and party affiliation. It should be noted that there is a smaller group within the FPE who identify as Evangelicals that is called "Evangelical Bench." The media tends to confuse the FPE with this smaller group, yet it is the latter which is responsible for advancing the proposals of the FPE, establishing alliances, and presenting bills. Along with the Evangelical group, there is an agro-industrial group (nicknamed "Beef"), as well as a group that seeks to reduce restrictions on firearms (nicknamed "Bullet"). These three groups (known collectively as the BBB group for "Bible, Beef, and Bullets") act together as an Evangelical, agricultural, and gun advocacy group representing a third of the members of Brazil's Congress.[94] In a word, the "political Evangelicals" end up merging with the very "traditional politicians" whom they often criticize, and that they entered politics in order to combat – supposedly for the purpose of "moralizing" and "cleaning up" politics.

An analysis of the brief history of the political party involvement of Evangelicals in Latin America reveals the presence of both "Evangelical politicians" (who entered politics first) and "political Evangelicals" (who have recently taken center stage). Initially, the political itinerary of Evangelicals (during the 60s, 70s, and 80s) manifested itself through active participation in the traditional political parties (especially left-wing parties), often without the support of their own congregations, and with the main goal of pursuing their commitment to construct "the Kingdom of God" in this world (i.e., they were "Evangelical politicians"). Afterward (i.e., from the 1990s until the present time) the new Evangelicals distanced themselves from their precursors, and sought to use politics as a political tool for their religious institutions (these were "political Evangelicals"). The political activities of the latter are generally supported by the churches (or megachurches) themselves, and the majority of participants are

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93 The FPE represents 16% of members of Brazil's Chamber of Deputies, in comparison with Bolsonaro's PL party which, like the Brazilian Workers Party, only has 10%.

94 Carranza: Evangélicos (2020); Lacerda/Brasiliense: Brasil (2019).

either ministers or church leaders with little or no political experience or civic involvement.[95]

Of course, when we write about "Evangelical politicians" and "political Evangelicals," we are referring to ideal types for the purpose of describing the main traits of each of these types of Evangelical political participation in Latin America. However, real-life cases do not necessarily display each and every characteristic of the model. Thus, we can find particular cases that go beyond the pure typologies. For this reason, we can currently see some "political Evangelicals" who are acquiring training in public administration and political science, as well as experienced politicians who are beginning to hold up their Christian convictions as a guide to action (and, for example, placing the Bible before the Constitution when making decisions regarding their party).[96]

## 3.2 Different forms of evangelical party activity

It is important to remember that Evangelicals only entered party politics in earnest in every Latin American country in the 1980s. Analyzing the phenomenon in general terms, we can see that, during their short history, there have been three different forms of participation: party, front, and faction.

The first form of Latin American party politics was through the forming of the so-called "Evangelical parties" or "confessional parties," which consisted solely of "Evangelical brothers" who, acting in accordance with a supposed "religious mandate," sought to take the reins of government in their countries in order to improve their evangelizing work. However, many of these parties remained nothing more than "political movements," because they never officially established themselves as parties. Their political objectives were merely instrumental and strategic, given that their real intention was to attain power in order to govern religiously – some would say theocratically. Attempts to form religious movements or confessional parties occurred in nearly all Latin American Countries, beginning in the 1980s. And such attempts failed in every country, since these parties could not even win the support of their brothers in faith – let alone that of non-Evangelical voters. As we will later see, it is one thing for confessional parties to exist (i.e., supply). It is another thing altogether for a "confessional vote" to exist (i.e., demand). And therein lies the reason for the

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95 Pérez Guadalupe: Evangelicals and Political Power in Latin America (2019).

96 The key to appreciating the scope, limits, and applications of this ideal classification is understanding that it is not so much a matter of "what" (i.e., specific beliefs) as of how (i.e., the manner of propagating beliefs). In other words, "Evangelical politicians" and "Political Evangelicals" may share the same religious and even moral beliefs, but the two groups do not have the same way of expressing (or imposing) their beliefs on the world.

failure of these "Evangelical parties": to wit, the non-existence of a "confessional vote" in Latin America, given that members of Evangelical churches did not necessarily vote for Evangelical candidates.

The second form of political participation was through "Evangelical fronts," which were political alliances or fronts whose leaders were Evangelical members (i.e., "brothers") of different denominations, but which were also open to other actors who shared the same political ideals – even if they did not share all of the Evangelicals' religious views. This "Evangelical front" arose in the face of the impracticality of attaining power through a confessional Evangelical party in which only Evangelical church members were accepted as members. For this reason, a compromise solution was arrived at whereby non-Evangelicals were eligible for inclusion, just as long as members of Evangelical churches were in positions of leadership. Under this form of political participation, Evangelicals supported non-Evangelical candidates, given their awareness that they themselves were sometimes unknown outside of their own congregations.

The third form of political participation was through "Evangelical factions," which means via the participation of Evangelical leaders in electoral processes within (non-confessional) established political parties or movements, on the basis of electoral coalitions, but without the ability to lead the movement or party in question. Given the failure of the "Evangelical party," as well as the lack of any immediate prospect of forming an "Evangelical front," a decision was made to participate in this mutually beneficial relationship between an Evangelical believer (who was not necessarily representing their church) and a political party. Evangelicals were happy to participate in this way in established political parties that would supposedly afford them a higher degree of visibility and better chances of winning, while the parties that they joined were happy to have representatives of the Evangelical movement within their ranks, thinking that their presence would help attract a supposed "Evangelical vote." In sum, this third form of political participation is the one that has thus far functioned the best, and which has led to the best results for Evangelicals.[97]

It is possible to see that the political participation of Evangelicals followed a path from the unprecedented enthusiasm of the 1980s that led them to form confessional parties – "Evangelical parties" – in the naïve hope that they would easily capture the presidencies of their countries. After they were quickly disabused of this notion, they instead chose to form strategic alliances with other movements or parties in order to create an "Evangelical front" that would be capable of bringing them to power – even if it were as part of an alliance with a non-Evangelical candidate. Finally, they complemented these two options

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97 Pérez Guadalupe: Entre Dios y el César (2017) and Pérez Guadalupe: Evangelicals and Political Power in Latin America (2019).

with a third strategy, in which the focus was not a short-term goal to attain the presidencies of their countries (because they had come to realize that doing so was not as easy as they had previously thought) but rather the securing of the highest number of congressional seats possible, in order to exercise political influence from the legislative bodies. What can be said is that they have achieved only limited success, given that they have not obtained levels of political representation equivalent to their percentage of the population as a whole (as we will see shortly), nor in having greater influence on the enactment of laws. What they have been more successful in accomplishing is the blocking of certain laws that were contrary to their pro-life and family values.

It should be pointed out that, in the historical development of these three forms of political participation, there are countries where more than one of the models has operated simultaneously. While in all Latin American countries, the most common model is currently that of the "Evangelical faction," the other two models – the "Evangelical party" and "Evangelical front" model – have not necessarily been cast aside. This is because the Evangelical community does not constitute a religious, organizational, or political monolith, but instead represents a vast number of denominations and congregations that have different preferences when it comes to choosing different political models or alternatives. In addition, the most vigorous segment of Evangelicals has refused to give up the hope of a "confessional party" inspired by God, who will lead them to institute a "biblical theocracy" in this world.

On the other hand, working with reference to these three categories, conceived as ideal models of the political behavior of Evangelicals, we can discern a number of variations in certain countries. As usual, Brazil constitutes a very special case because of its huge size and high degree of diversity. We have seen in Brazil, for the past 15 years or so, the simultaneous and active presence of all three of the previously discussed models: party, front, and faction. Thus, in Brazil, there are parties dominated by Evangelical representatives and by the corporate interests of the large churches, such as the Brazilian Republican Party (PRB), which "belongs" to the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD). All candidates who are members of this neo-Pentecostal church run for office under the PRB banner. There is also the Social Christian Party (PSC), which represents an important segment of Assemblies of God, even though not all politicians affiliated with this latter denomination run for office as PSC candidates. It should also be noted that the Assemblies of God is the most numerous Evangelical denomination in Brazil, and that it has the most deputies in both the Senate and Chamber of Deputies.

Currently, however, the immediate objective of these Evangelical parties (a term we can use to refer to them generally) – or "denominational parties" – is no longer to capture the presidency of Brazil, but rather to elect the highest

possible number of deputies, and in this way guarantee their influence in the government. After the spectacular failure of the minister Everaldo Dias Pereira, who ran for president of Brazil in 2014 as a candidate of the PSC, and obtained only 0.75% of the vote (at a time when Evangelicals constituted more than 25% of the population) Evangelicals are now more aware of their real potential. This is why, in 2018, they concentrated their vote on Brazil's legislative chambers, and on support for the presidential candidacy of Bolsonaro in the second round – while Marina Silva (an Evangelical candidate who had attracted high voter support in 2010 and 2014) only obtained 1% of the vote.

One variant of the "Evangelical front" model was manifest in Brazil in 2018 with the victory of Jair Messias Bolsonaro. While it is true that voting for representatives of the legislative chambers continues to be "denominational" and divided among a number of different political parties, in practice, an "Evangelical front" was formed that supported Bolsonaro who, in spite of the fact that he does not fully identify as Evangelical (although his wife does) came to represent the conservative thinking of the majority of Evangelicals – and of some Catholics – in terms of issues touching upon values. For this reason, in the second round of the presidential election, he received the vocal support of the largest denominations. As compensation, he named a Pentecostal pastor Minister of Women, Family, and Human Rights as part of his first ministerial cabinet. In addition, immediately upon taking office, he toed a highly conservative line as regards value-based issues.

The third model – that of "Evangelical factions" – represents the most common way in which Evangelicals run for office in Brazil. In this modality, they have succeeded in securing numerous seats while running as candidates for a number of different political parties (including "Evangelical parties.") These Evangelicals finally joined forces on an *ad hoc* basis to form the so-called "Evangelical group" within the FPE. In addition, in strategic terms, the "corporative model of political participation practiced in Brazil has been the most successful, and has succeeded in electing the highest number of deputies.

There is no question that the three classic models of political participation (i.e., party, front, and faction) can be found in Brazil. Moreover, Brazilian Evangelicals have a propaganda strategy and voting focus that are highly effective. They are able to achieve this through the model of corporate representation, which focuses on the candidacies of "official candidates."[98] This model was introduced in the 1980s by the Assemblies of God and the IURD. Afterward,

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[98] Freston: Protestantismo e politica no Brasil (1993); Mariano: Religião e política no Brasil (2015); Lacerda: Evangelicals, Pentecostals and Political Representation in Brazilian Legislative Elections 1998-2010 (2017); Lacerda/Brasiliense: Brasil (2019); Tuñon: Evangélicos y política en Brasil (2019).

other Pentecostal denominations replicated this model. Logically, those candidates who are elected are faithful representatives of the churches that made their election possible. As we previously indicated, they act corporately, and often under the auspices of media conglomerates and megachurches. Yet at the same time, in the legislative chambers, Evangelical parliamentarians employ their political strategy of the "resonance machine" in order to adapt their interests and agenda to the political situation of the moment.

This kind of religious representation is highly effective in elections, because it is able to elect the highest possible percentage of Evangelical candidates, and avoids division of the Evangelical vote, which is the worst enemy of any voting bloc. In this way, Evangelicals are able to consolidate a kind of "denominational party electoral strategy." In addition, this strategy maximizes Evangelical impact in the long term, constructing the idea of a "Christian nation" ruled by Evangelicals.[99] For this reason, it seems to us that this strategy is the key element in the originality of the political activism of Brazilian Evangelicals, and of the potential of the corporate representation model, which could be adopted in other Latin American countries.

Yet the truth is that these "official candidates" that are elected are not really representatives of their states, regions, or political parties, but rather of their churches. They are not "Evangelical politicians" who are acting as citizens and thinking about the common good, but instead "political Evangelicals who are acting as believers, and who only seek to advance the interests of their "church." Afterward, they join forces with other elected Evangelicals that comprise the "Evangelical group" in specific projects of common interest, while also associating with other "interest groups," such as the agricultural group or the gun rights group, as we have previously mentioned. However, it should be pointed out that, in the mayoral elections of 2020 in some 5000 Brazilian municipalities, the Evangelicals conducted election campaigns that did not have institutional ties to any denomination or church, but that simply invoked God and Christian principles, and that called for the consolidation of a "Christian nation."[100]

After having explained the development of the three forms political party participation of Latin American Evangelicals, it would seem fitting to ask what levels of representation the Evangelical community has managed to attain. This question could be formulated as follows: Have these Evangelical parties, fronts, and factions succeeded in securing political representation for all Evangelical worshippers in every country?

It can be said in this connection that, in the electoral processes of Latin America, no direct correlation has been noted between the percentage of the

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99 Burity: ¿Ola conservadora y surgimiento de la nueva derecha cristiana brasileña? (2020).

100 Reis: Do voto evangélico ao cristão (2020).

Evangelical population and the percentage of votes obtained by Evangelical candidates. It is also not easy to prove the value of their political endorsements. The political inclinations of Evangelicals are not necessarily a faithful representation of their religious convictions. For this reason, we could say that the Evangelical community is still underrepresented politically. This might be due to the fact that, until now, Evangelicals have accorded greater weight to their individual political preferences – or to their apolitical attitude – than to their religious denomination. Yet it can generally be said that what has predominated in Latin America among Evangelicals is a markedly conservative political tendency. As Kourliandsky rightly points out, 'alliances between progressives or left-wing parties and Pentecostal groups are very much the exception. The feelings of the majority do not lean that way. The majority of Pentecostals vote for the right, and not for the left.'[101]

When we affirm that there is "political underrepresentation" of Evangelicals in Latin America, what we are really saying is that the political or election results (whether for the Legislature, Executive, or local offices) obtained by Evangelical parties or candidates are not necessarily a reflection of their electoral potential, which would be their believing or politically active population, given that 'the Christian vote in reality is not something that can be signed over to a designated candidate […]. In other words, the individual Evangelical ends up voting for the person they consider to be the better candidate, regardless of what their minister says.'[102] 'Even the leaders of the Assemblies of God are aware that they have not efficiently realized the electoral potential that is represented by its 12 million adherents [in Brazil].'[103]

If we analyze the numbers of Evangelical members of Congress in Latin American countries, we can see that, historically, they have been far below the percentage of the Evangelical population. In other words, a high Evangelical population does not guarantee a high degree of political representation in legislative bodies – much less in the executive branch. For example, although Evangelicals comprise 15.6% of Peru's population, there are only 3% of Evangelicals in the Peruvian Congress. Colombian Evangelicals account for 20% of that nation's population, and yet there are only 4% of Evangelicals in the Colombian legislature. The corresponding figures for Chile are 17% and 2%. For El Salvador, they are 40.7% and 6%. In Brazil, 32% of the population is Evangelical, and yet the Evangelical representation in Brazil's Chamber of Deputies is only

101 Kourliandsky: Democracia, evangelismo y reacción conservadora (2019), 141.
102 Cosoy: Votos y devotos (2018), 109.
103 Tuñon: Evangélicos y política en Brasil (2019), 34.

16%. And the list goes on. This same pattern of low levels of political participation among Evangelicals is seen in other Latin American nations.[104]

It should be pointed out that the only country that has succeeded in achieving parity in terms of the political representation of its Evangelical population is Costa Rica. This nation is an exception to the rule, owing to the peculiar circumstances of its 2018 elections, which represented a break with the previous model of ordinary representation. Thus, although parity was achieved in the 2018 elections for Evangelicals in terms of elected deputies (who represent 25% of the nation's population), this result was very different from that which had been obtained in previous years. In the immediately preceding elections (2014), Evangelicals obtained only 7% representation. The numbers for 2010, 2006 and 2002 were 4%, 2%, and 2% respectively. The peculiar nature of the unexpected results of the 2018 elections resides in the fact that Fabricio Alvarado's National Restoration Party, which had been in sixth place a few weeks prior to election day, was able to win the first round of the elections, and thus win 14 of the 57 seats in Costa Rica's Congress. The majority of these new members of Congress were persons whose identity was entirely religious, and who had no political experience. Alvarado's party was able to achieve such a result because of his radical opposition to the consultative opinion of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which was announced in the middle of the election campaign, and which required Costa Rica to accept gay marriage. Yet it should also be pointed out that, six months later – and true to the Evangelical tendency to fragment its vote – this group of Evangelical members of Congress splintered into two separate groups, each with seven members. We must await future elections to see if Costa Rica's Evangelicals can maintain the parity of representation attained in 2018, or if they will return to their historic levels of underrepresentation, like the other Latin American nations.

We of course do not believe that the percentage of representation in a legislature constitutes the only way to measure the political impact of Evangelicals in the region. Political alliances within legislative bodies are also important, even if their actual parliamentary representation is rather small. Also important are the new political strategies of "citizen collectives" and "cross-sectional agendas." Brazil is a clear example of this, given that Brazilian Evangelicals – who are more experienced than their co-religionists in other Latin American countries – have not limited themselves to securing seats in the Senate and Chamber of Deputies, which only represent half of the nation's Evangelical population, but have also been able to utilize other means of political action, such as "pressure groups," lobbies, the "Evangelical group," and the communications media. All of these efforts have created a "political synergy" that has had a major social

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104 Pérez Guadalupe: El hermano no vota al hermano (2020).

impact. In addition, within a political context lacking an official or functional two-party system, and with a highly fragmented Congress, as we have previously indicated, the "Evangelical group" has negotiated with other small political groupings in order to advance its own interests (i.e., "Bible, Beef, and Bullets"), and to obtain better results without having to attain a parliamentary majority.

If we consider Brazil's history, we can see that during most of the twentieth century Evangelicals had a modest presence in party politics.[105] Until the 1986 elections, the majority of Protestant candidates elected to Brazil's Chamber of Deputies came from mainstream churches. There were hardly any representatives who were members of the Pentecostal churches. In 1982, only 12 Evangelicals were elected to the Chamber of Deputies, seven of whom were Baptists and one of whom was affiliated with the Assemblies of God. This scenario changed radically in the elections for the Constituent Congress in 1986, when 32 Evangelical representatives were elected. In 1986, despite the presence of ten Baptist deputies, as well as representatives of the other mainstream churches, 13 of the parliamentarians elected were from the Assemblies of God, in addition to two from the Church of the Four Square Gospel, and one from the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. Thus, it was only after the 1986 elections that the growth of the Evangelical population began to be reflected in political representation. In fact, since 2000, the Evangelical vote in Brazil has become important in presidential elections, given that, by that time, its sustained growth had become indisputable. However, Evangelicals continue to be underrepresented in the Chamber of Deputies, in spite of the fact that they have progressed from having only one federal deputy in 1945 to having 82 in 2018. That year Jair Bolsonaro won the presidency of the Republic with the support of six out of ten evangelicals.[106]

## 3.3 Models of political participation

Just as there are differences among the Latin American nations, there are also sub-regional similarities that we can categorize geographically as three "ideal types" – understood as theoretical constructs grouping the characteristics of each region – of political participation in Latin America: the Central American, South American, and Brazilian models, with the last of these being of special importance. These three models, considered together with the three historic forms previously proposed (i.e., Evangelical party, front, and faction) allow us to avoid the facile and uninformed generalizations of some authors regarding

105 Lacerda/Brasiliense: Brasil (2019).

106 Balloussier: Metade dos evangélicos vota em Bolsonaro, diz Datafolha (2018).

this Latin American phenomenon, and allow for a more complete and nuanced analysis with regard to the widespread and diverse political expression of Evangelicals in the region.[107]

In the Central American model, in comparison to the other countries of the continent, the Central Americans are closer to constituting an *ad hoc* electoral unity around a particular proposal, candidacy, or party. In fact, it is the only sub-region of Latin America that has actually had avowedly Evangelical presidents (Guatemala, on three occasions: 1982, 1991, 2016) as well as a candidate who won the first round, and very nearly won the second with a discourse that was predominantly religious (Costa Rica, in 2018). However, this does not necessarily imply the existence of a "confessional vote."[108] This phenomenological distinctiveness of Central America is due in large part to the high percentage of Evangelicals in the region, although this is not the only reason. In four countries (Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala) Evangelicals constitute more than 40% of the population. These are the highest percentages in all of Latin America. In Costa Rica and Panama, Evangelicals constitute more than 20% of the population. For this reason, it would hardly be surprising for Evangelicals in this sub-region to soon constitute a religious majority: in other words, for Catholicism to go from having a religious monopoly over the course of five centuries to becoming the primary religious minority.

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that it is not only the Evangelicals in these countries who display greater levels of religious commitment, but also the Catholics, many of whom are involved in the charismatic current of that faith (a current that is very similar to Pentecostalism). This has facilitated a situation in these countries – more so than in other countries – in which Evangelicals and Catholics are able to join forces in advocating a political agenda regarding pro-life and pro-family moral issues. Yet the most visible leaders of such efforts in the media are Evangelicals. This is because, thus far, the "political Evangelicals" have been able to best channel – in terms of elections – these preferences than Catholics. While it is true that it is not possible to foresee an emergence of Evangelical candidates attaining power in all Central American countries, there is a higher likelihood of such an event happening there than in other sub-regions of Latin America because of – among other reasons – the numbers of Evangelicals there.

El Salvador is a unique case given that, while a high percentage of its population is Evangelical (nearly equal to that of Catholics), there has not yet been evidence of this potential Evangelical electoral force. This is perhaps due to the existence of a longstanding functional two-party system. Costa Rica, where

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107 Pérez Guadalupe: Evangelicals and Political Power in Latin America (2019).

108 Dary: Guatemala (2019).

Catholicism is the official religion, and which is a democratically stable country with a low percentage of Evangelicals, surprised the world when it nominated an Evangelical for president in 2018. In Panama, the least Evangelical nation in Central America, Evangelicals emerged on the scene in 2016 as new political actors to oppose the Sex Education in Schools Act. It appears that there is a greater likelihood of an Evangelical being elected in Central America within the next few years – more than anything else, as an expression of rejection of the so-called "gender ideology," a rejection that has brought together Evangelicals (of most denominations) and conservative Catholics.

In the South American model, it has not yet proven possible for religiously-based parties to successfully emerge in South America. In fact, all such parties have failed in their objective of attaining power. Indeed, many of them could be said to have been stillborn, with no Evangelical candidate even coming close to winning a presidential election. For this reason, given that South American Evangelicals saw that they did not have a sufficient number of voters (as is the case in Central America), and having realized that there is no "confessional vote," South American "political Evangelicals" preferred to participate in a number of different strong political parties in order to be able to at least elect several representatives to parliament – although they still long to have their own "confessional party." In fact, Evangelicals there who are elected to Congress are not always elected solely by the Evangelical vote, but rather on the coattails of the winning parties. We should remember that, under the modality of the "Evangelical faction" model, there are Evangelical candidates in practically all parties represented in elections. For this reason, the winning parties will necessarily have Evangelicals within their ranks. And while these Evangelicals have an added value in elections by virtue of being Evangelicals, this is not sufficient for them to be elected to Congress solely on the basis of Evangelical support. One case in point is Colombia where, after the election law of 1991 that changed the minimum number of votes needed to form a political party, a number of candidates from megachurches were elected to Parliament. But Evangelicals never came close to winning a presidential election in Colombia.

On the other hand, in the majority of South American countries, Evangelical movements (often joining forces with Catholics) have formed "collectives" and political "pressure groups" to defend Christian values, and to oppose what they call "gender ideology." Yet this defense and this opposition has not attained the status of a major issue in election campaigns in South America. In other words, in contrast to the Central American model, in South America it is less likely that a religiously based value issue (e.g., the "moral agenda") will emerge as a priority among voters, and become a decisive factor in a presidential election. In Argentina and Chile, where laws approving abortion under certain conditions have been passed, we see that the issues of the "moral agenda" have a political impact

different from that seen in Central America. It should be pointed out that Mexico, while geographically a "North American" country that borders Central America, more closely resembles the "South American model." This is especially true following the support of a Mexican Evangelical party (the PES) for Andrés Manuel López Obrador in 2018. This similarity is due to, among other factors, Mexico's longstanding official secularism and small Evangelical population in comparison with its Central American neighbors.[109]

In the Brazilian model, as we have seen, the Evangelical churches actively participate in Brazilian politics, have "official candidates" and political groups along the lines of "confessional parties" (such as the Brazilian Republican Party, which "belongs" to the IURD), and has popularized the slogan *A brother votes for a brother*. However, we do not think that these Brazilian parties are truly "confessional parties," but rather "denominational parties," given the fact that voting is more along denominational than religious lines. In other words, such parties do not represent all Evangelicals, and do not even aspire to do so. Instead, they represent the members of a specific denomination or megachurch, given that they have enough votes to elect their "official candidates" to the two chambers of the Brazilian Congress.

In this regard, we can say that in Brazil, as in all Latin American nations, there is a fragmentation of Evangelical denominations and "denominational parties" that allows us to conclude that there is no "confessional vote" but instead, at best, perhaps a vote limited to a single church or denomination – owing to the persistent "fragmentary nature" of Evangelicals. In fact, if all Brazilian Evangelicals were to join forces both religiously and politically, and if all Evangelical members of the nation's Congress were to do the same, Evangelicals would constitute the primary political force in Congress. What exists instead is the Evangelical Parliamentary Front (FPE).

In this regard, it is not possible to speak in any way of a unified vote or strategic plan that permanently unifies all Evangelical members of the Brazilian Congress. What this means is that the "Evangelical group" and the FPE are, more than anything else, a pragmatic means of achieving immediate results and reaching political agreements determined by its interests. This sometimes includes joining forces with Catholic members of Congress in order to expand its sphere of action within that legislative body. Within the FPE, connections are formed through pragmatic negotiations of theological principles and party alliances, through the "resonance machine" strategy that we described earlier.

It is important to emphasize the importance here of the "moral agenda," a subject that, in the Brazilian Evangelical movement in general, constitutes a

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[109] De la Torre: Genealogía de los movimientos religiosos conservadores y la política en México (2020).

focal point of religious and social thinking, political action, and cohesion. This "moral agenda," while not carrying the same weight as it does in Central America, does have a higher importance in Brazil than in most other South American nations. In the case of the election of Bolsonaro as president, for example, there is no question that the "moral agenda" played an important part in the decision of Evangelicals in the second round of voting. Thus, while the main topics of debate between the candidates during the campaign were the economic crisis, citizen safety, and the fight against corruption, there is no doubt that two other topics lurked in the background: the high degree of negative sentiment against the Brazilian Workers Party (PT) and the "moral agenda." In our opinion, these latter two issues proved to be more decisive that the rational and public topics of the political debate.[110]

On the other hand, while Brazil is not the Latin American country where Evangelicals have been seen the greatest "religious success" (this title would belong to the Central American countries) it is the one where they have seen the greatest "political success". However, we need to be cautious in determining the true scope of that "success." As we have previously indicated, there is an underrepresentation of Evangelicals throughout Latin America (despite the fact that, if they were to unite, they would constitute a formidable force in any election process). Things improved for Brazilian Evangelicals in the 2018 elections as compared to 2014.[111] Even so, the percentages attained were not notably high, taking into account the fact that Evangelicals constituted nearly one third of the nation's population. Thus, constituting 32% of the population in 2018, Evangelicals were elected to "only" 82 seats of the Chamber of Deputies (representing 16% of its members) and 9 seats in the Senate (out of 81). But, as we have previously indicated, the percentage of representatives in legislative bodies is not the only criterion by which to gauge the political impact of Evangelicals in a country.[112]

In fact, these figures reflect a good performance compared to previous campaigns, but not necessarily a smashing success in line with Evangelicals' own expectations. In addition, the phenomenon of organizational fragmentation – which becomes manifest when Evangelicals enter the political arena, and which is typical of Latin American Evangelicals, is also seen in Brazil. Thus, the FPE

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110 Lacerda: Jair Bolsonaro (2020).

111 It was in the 2014 elections that Evangelicals obtained their best results to date, winning 67 seats in the (federal) Brazilian Chamber of Deputies (out of 513 total; 13%) and 75 sets in the (state) Legislative Assemblies (out of 1059; 7%). In addition, they had three senators (out of 81 total; 4%) and zero governors in Brazil's 27 states. In other words, in spite of constituting some 24% of the nation's population in 2014, Evangelicals' federal, state, and Senate representation was 13%, 7%, and 4% respectively.

112 Damé: Em crescimento, bancada evangélica terá 91 parlamentares no Congresso (2018).

comprises members of Congress representing 26 different Evangelical denominations belonging to 22 different political parties. This represents an extremely high degree of denominational and political fragmentation. It should be noted that the four denominations with the highest levels of representation are the Assemblies of God, the Baptist Church, the IURD, and the Presbyterian Church.

We can thus conclude that in Brazil, the nation with the most Roman Catholics in the world, and with the most Evangelicals in all of Latin America; a nation where the slogan *A brother votes for a brother* is heard everywhere; where there are "confessional parties" (or, rather, "denominational parties"); where there supposedly is a "confessional vote"; a nation where Evangelicals have obtained the highest degree of "political success" in Latin America; the actual results achieved do not yet reflect the tremendous social and political potential of Evangelicals, much less any religious unity or the existence of a voting bloc.

In analyzing the three models we have proposed, we can definitely see that, while they all reflect the same Latin American religious-political phenomenon, we can discern certain distinctive sub-regional characteristics. We can also find distinct features within sub-regions. The *Central American model* is characterized by its high percentage of Evangelical population, which will surpass the Catholic population within a few years. In Central America, we see higher levels of religious observance and commitment on the part of both Evangelicals and Catholics. It is for this reason that we believe that the "moral agenda" may constitute a trigger of the "values vote" which tilts the balance in elections – as in the first round of the Costa Rican presidential elections in 2019. The *South American model* includes more plural countries, with only half the percentage of Evangelical population of Central American nations, and where the religious discourse, while an important element of presidential elections, has not proven to be a decisive element. The *Brazilian model* is the most complex of the three. The percentage of Evangelicals in Brazil's population falls midway between that of Central America and South America, although it has a degree of political influence not seen elsewhere in Latin America. The critical difference in Brazil is the explicit participation of Evangelical churches in politics, with official or unofficial parties and candidates that represent those churches in electoral contests.

There is no doubt that Brazil is the nation with the greatest religious impact on party politics, whether it be via votes, number of representatives, the effectiveness of the "Evangelical group", or as a result of its ability to prevent the passage of laws or determine public policy concerning education, health, and the family. In fact, Brazil is the country where Evangelicals have the highest levels of political participation and political experience, with results that have proven more consistent over the long term than those of other countries in the

region. It is for this reason that we believe that the new "Brazilian model" – which has reached an initial stage of consolidation with the election of Bolsonaro – may come to have an influence on the other countries of Latin America. It is thus necessary to observe the degree of that potential impact. Of course, the political influence of Evangelicals did not begin with Bolsonaro, and it will certainly not end with him. Yet his election does represent a significant milestone in this planned progress that is being very closely observed by the other nations in region.

## 3.4 From the "vote of Evangelicals" to the "Evangelical vote"

We would like to conclude this third part of our study by addressing a current subject of debate: the reliability of the vote of Evangelical worshipers.[113] There has been a great deal of speculation in this regard, and some authors have gone so far as to propose a unifying category encompassing a supposed "Evangelical vote." But such an assertion would have to presuppose the existence of a "confessional vote" for which the empirical results attained thus far provide no evidence.

In this connection, we need to ask if there is actually an audience of believers willing to vote for Evangelical candidates or parties just because these latter are Evangelicals. In other words: Can it be said that the confessional Evangelical parties (or Evangelical candidates) have a "captive audience" that will vote for them unconditionally for religious reasons? In our opinion, an Evangelical "confessional vote" does not currently exist in Latin America – not even in Brazil, where what we see above all is a "denominational vote." In other words, not even in Brazil does "a brother vote for a brother" (which would be a "confessional vote"). Instead, in that country, "a Pentecostal votes for a Pentecostal"; "a 'Universal' [i.e. a member of the UCKG] votes for a 'Universal'; and "a Baptist votes for a Baptist" (a "denominational vote"). We thus agree with Natalio Cosoy that "the idea that Evangelicals vote as a bloc, and that all Evangelical leaders work together, is false. On the contrary, they fight over political spaces and over forming alliances with candidates of the established parties."[114] Thus, "it is impossible to contend that there is a confessional vote in the case of Evangelicals."[115] This could be seen in the local elections in Colombia in late 2019:

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113 Pérez Guadalupe: El hermano no vota al hermano (2020).

114 Cosoy: Votos y devotos (2018), 131.

115 Semán: ¿Quiénes son? ¿Por qué crecen? ¿En qué creen? (2019), 42.

> The electoral rivalry among Evangelical churches (most of which are of neo-Pentecostal orientation); the difference in strategies when it comes to granting endorsements; the disparity in the way they choose their political allies; and the limited effectiveness of Evangelical parties in elections all lead to the conclusion that there is no Christian electoral force in Colombia. In other words, there is no captive electorate that votes solely on the basis of being a part of a particular faith community, or because the minister of its congregation informs it of its preferred candidate.[116]

Similarly, we can also say that there is no "negative confessional vote" against non-Evangelical candidates, given the fact that empirical studies demonstrate that the vote of Latin American Evangelicals has not been all that different from the vote of the other citizens of each individual country. A particularly striking example of the non-existence – until now – of a "negative confessional vote" in Latin America is El Salvador. As we have previously indicated, 40% of El Salvador's population are Evangelical Christians, and there is a similar percentage of practicing and highly involved Catholics. Despite this, Salvadorans had no problem in electing a president of Muslim descent, Nayib Bukele, in 2019.

As regards the possible existence of a "confessional vote" in Latin America, Taylor Boas has provided an excellent analysis of the diverse electoral representation of Evangelicals, emphasizing three issues that are in play: motivation, windows of opportunity, and the ability to secure electoral support.[117] These three factors take the following concrete forms: a.) *politicization:* this refers to the factors that explain the motivation of Evangelicals for entering politics and politicizing their Evangelical identity, such as a new theology, the influence of foreign believers, the fight for religious freedom, value-based issues, etc.; b.) *electoral and party systems:* this refers to the role of election rules and their changes as constituting a great opportunity for emerging groups such as Evangelicals to attain some kind of representation and access to power; and c.) *voter behavior:* this refers to the influence that an Evangelical candidate can exercise on the voting of Evangelical worshippers, and that candidate's ability to secure their votes in the end.

We feel that it is important to take these three factors into account. In a given country, certain factors will be more important than others. But, irrespective of the factors that triggered the entry of Evangelicals into party politics in recent years, and irrespective of the election rules of each country (which, in the end, are the same for all for all of the candidates and parties), it is our opinion that the third factor is the most important and decisive. Thus, without the

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116 Velasco/Pedraza/Rojas: Del culto a las urnas (2020), 342.

117 Boast: Expanding the Public Square (2020); Boast: The Electoral Representation of Evangelicals in Latin America (2021).

support that Evangelical candidates receive from their co-religionists, we would not be able to speak of a "confessional vote." The other two factors could to a lesser or greater degree affect the importance of the vote, but if there is no voter adhesion based on religious reasons, we cannot speak of an "Evangelical vote." It is obvious that every individual has many different group identities and political inclinations that can influence their electoral preferences. However, in order to speak of a "confessional vote," it is necessary to define those circumstances in which religious affiliation does not merely *influence* (which is obvious) but *determines* a voter's behavior, over and above the other "influential" factors. In this regard, it is highly likely – though by no means guaranteed – that an Evangelical candidate will succeed in attaining a higher percentage of the vote among Evangelical voters.

Another important datum regarding the supposed "confessional vote": it is one thing to vote for the president of the republic, and another to vote for legislators, whether state or federal, and for mayors or local authorities. In Latin America, Evangelicals take into account a variety of criteria and factors – beyond those of religion – in casting their vote for president. As regards the election of deputies or members of congress, we can find certain local preferences regarding particular Evangelical candidates who are known, or some Evangelical communities that might venture to officially or unofficially support a candidate, without this constituting a "confessional vote" (but rather a "denominational vote." It is thus clear, in our opinion, that two criteria need to be fulfilled in order to be able to speak of the existence of a "confessional vote": a.) the decisive factor that determines the vote of Evangelicals is the religious factor (over and above other factors or identities); in other words, the vote cast is a "captive vote" for religious reasons; and b.) Evangelicals vote for an Evangelical candidate merely because the candidate is Evangelical, meaning that they do not personally know the candidate or belong to the same congregation as the candidate.

In this respect Brazil and, to a lesser extent, Colombia, constitute good examples. In Colombia, we find "denominational political parties" (usually established by the owners of megachurches, such as the Moreno Piraquive, Castellanos, and Chamorro families, among others). But these parties do not have a decisive political impact on the national level. In Brazil, we see official and active support on the part of certain (neo-)Pentecostal churches for candidates who belong to their faith communities. In contrast to the rest of Latin America, the large churches in Brazil have formally participated in party politics since 1986. They have "official candidates," political parties that we can classify as "confessional" (e.g., PRB, PSC) and even parliamentary groups. Brazilian Evangelicals constitute an important segment of the electorate, given that more than 30% of Brazilians are Evangelicals.

In addition, we can see that, on special occasions, it is possible to attain a certain consensus among Evangelicals regarding a presidential candidate. This happened with Bolsonaro in 2018 when he secured the vote of Evangelicals in the second round of the elections to a much greater degree than the votes of non-Evangelical Brazilians. It is interesting to note that a very well-known Evangelical candidate from the ranks of Pentecostalism also took part in the 2018 presidential elections in Brazil. This was Marina Silva, who obtained only 1% of the vote. But it was Bolsonaro who succeeded in attracting the votes of Evangelicals. Bolsonaro was able to achieve something that no Evangelical candidate had ever done in Brazil: unite the vote of Evangelicals in order to be elected president. Bolsonaro cultivated a constructive religious ambiguity. He was baptized in the Jordan River in Israel, and became Evangelical without renouncing his Catholicism. This was one of the reasons why his campaign first attracted the votes of large numbers of Christians, and then later the support of the leaders of the large Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches. His ambiguous, authoritarian, and conservative discourse heightened the religious expectations of the large majority of Evangelicals, as well as those of a good number of Catholics.[118] At the same time, it should also be pointed out that a constellation of factors were in play in the 2018 Brazilian presidential elections; if not, one could mistakenly conclude that being rebaptized in the Jordan River, being vague about one's religious affiliation, and invoking the "moral agenda" would suffice to win a presidential election in Brazil or elsewhere in Latin America.

Another interesting case that merits analysis is that of Guatemala, given that it is not only the one country in Latin America where an Evangelical has been democratically elected president, but also because it has had three Evangelical presidents: the dictator Ríos Montt in 1982, Serrano Elías in 1991, and Jimmy Morales in 2016 (all three faced serious accusations of corruption or violation of human rights and the rupture of constitutional order). Yet, even in Guatemala, which many might point to as evidence of the existence of a confessional vote in Latin America, it is by no means certain that the three men were really elected president just because they were Evangelicals, or instead simply as an expression of the preference of the nation's population as a whole, without having enjoyed any special preference among Evangelical and non-Evangelical voters. In this regard, Claudia Dary writes that "[Guatemalan] Evangelicals follow the national political trends: They do not support specific candidates or vote differently from the rest of the population, whether Catholic or the adherents of other religions."[119] Furthermore, there is no evidence in the Guatemalan parliament of an "Evangelical group," and there is no desire among

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118 Oualalou: Los evangélicos y el hermano Bolsonaro (2019).

119 Dary: Guatemala (2019), 317.

Evangelicals to risk their religious prestige by embarking on political adventures – not after the disastrous experiences that they had with previous "Evangelical presidents." We thus concur with Dary: "There is no confessional vote in Guatemala […], the voting patterns of Evangelicals mirror national voting patterns. We can go further still and say that, until now, the "Evangelical vote" in Guatemala is a myth."[120]

Another example commonly cited to demonstrate the existence of a confessional vote is that of Peru, with the election of Alberto Fujimori in 1990. But in a previous paper, we have shown that the political party *Cambio 90*, under whose banner Fujimori won the presidency, did not win the general elections *with* the Evangelical vote, much less *as a result* of the Evangelical vote.[121] In an interesting article that breaks down the Evangelical vote in the Peruvian presidential elections of 1990, Darío López shows that the Evangelicals who voted for Fujimori constituted less than one-fifth of the potential vote of the Peruvian Evangelical movement. He further shows that, of the votes obtained by *Cambio 90* candidates, only 8.3% were for Evangelical senators and 12.2% for Evangelical deputies.[122] While it is true that the participation of some Evangelical leaders was crucially important at the outset of Fujimori's campaign, we cannot say that he won the elections as a result of this support, or because of the Evangelical vote.

It is also useful to examine the reasons that led to the failure of religiously-based political initiatives in other Latin American countries.[123] Thus, Argentine Evangelicals had plans to establish a confessional political party led by (neo-)Pentecostals, which led to the creation of the Independent Christian Movement in 1991. This project was a notorious failure. Thus, Evangelicals abandoned the messianic idea of establishing a confessional party in favor of the more viable and realistic alternative of diversified individual candidacies within the various existing political parties, under the model that we have called the "Evangelical faction." As Joaquín Algranti rightly points out, "When it came to voting, being a *peronista* counted for a lot more than being Evangelical and the lower socioeconomic classes, while identifying as Christians, voted for candidates of the *justicialismo* movement founded by Perón. […] The formula of a Christian political party was an unmitigated failure."[124] Hilario Wynarczyk contends that Evangelicals betray a sociological naivety in their belief that their votes constitute epiphenomena of their religion.[125] García Bossio concludes

120 Ibid., 344.
121 Pérez Guadalupe: Entre Dios y el César (2017), 128ff.
122 López Rodríguez: La seducción del poder (2004).
123 For More Information Regarding These Cases, See Pérez Guadalupe: El hermano no vota al hermano (2020).
124 Algranti: Política y religión en los márgenes (2010), 244.
125 Wynarczyk: Ciudadanos de dos mundos (2009), 199.

that "there is no direct relationship between religious belonging and political preference. The dynamics of Argentine democracy does not appear to establish a direct link between beliefs on the moral-spiritual-religious plane and voting preferences."[126]

Similar initiatives in Chile aimed at winning the presidency via confessional parties or candidacies suffered the same fate. Thus, in 2017, there were attempts to establish three different confessional parties: Christian Citizens Party, United in Faith Party, and New Time Party. All of these efforts failed. Guillermo Sandoval provides an excellent explanation for the failure: "Chilean Evangelicals for the most part vote for non-Evangelicals. […] In this scenario, it is not possible to speak of a confessional Evangelical vote – or at least it is not important."[127] In Panama, the analyst Claire Nevache asserted that "the non-existence of an Evangelical vote is confirmed. In the last elections, they voted in a way that was very similar to the rest of the population."[128] In reference to Mexico, Cecilia Delgado-Molina wrote that "it is not particularly plausible to think that the representation claimed by Evangelical religious leaders translates into the existence of an "Evangelical vote."[129] Taking into account all of these failed initiatives, Cosoy concludes: "It is difficult to speak of a kind of Evangelical electorate when the reality is precisely one of a highly fragmented social space in which there is a 'rivalry among leaders regarding religious and political matters' because they not only fight over members, but also over the translating the masses of these members into votes."[130]

Evangelical attempts to win the presidencies of their countries, the failure of confessional Evangelical parties, and the realization that not all Evangelicals necessarily vote for Evangelical candidates are phenomena that have occurred in the majority of Latin American countries since the 1980s. Among the many examples are the following: Godofredo Marín in Venezuela (1987); Iris Machado in the primaries of Brazil's Democratic Movement Party (1989); Claudia Castellanos in Colombia (1990); and failed efforts in Ecuador and Nicaragua in 1996.[131] Afterward, there was an avalanche of Evangelical parties and candidates in all of the Latin American countries that achieved varying results. What they have in common is that none of them have achieved the results they aspired to – neither as political groups nor as presidential candidates. What they clearly have achieved – apart from the election of several members of congress or deputies in subsequent electoral processes – sometimes as members of confessional

126 García Bossio: Pentecostalismo y política en Argentina (2019), 86.
127 Sandoval: Chile (2019), 218.
128 Nevache: Panamá (2019), 389.
129 Delgado-Molina: La «irrupción evangélica» en México (2019), 100.
130 Cosoy: Votos y devotos (2018), 108.
131 Bastian: La mutación religiosa de América Latina (1997), 155ff.

parties and sometimes not – is an awareness of participation in elections, and the casting aside of the longstanding apolitical behavior of the Latin American Evangelical community.

The biggest mistake of the "confessional candidacies" was undoubtedly believing in the existence of an "Evangelical vote", and also believing that the complacent attitude of Evangelical worshippers in church would translate to the political arena. This led to the formation of political movements and even political parties with the idea of assuring the vote of their congregants – just as they could be assured of their tithes. In this regard, William Beltrán states matters very clearly: "There is no simple correlation between the loyalty of Pentecostals to a charismatic religious leader and the support for that leader at the polls […]. For this reason, one cannot look upon Evangelicals as 'useful idiots' who passively follow the political guidance of their leaders."[132]

In addition, we can see that the "vote of Evangelicals" does not reflect a consensus, much less political unity, as is often believed. Instead, just as in the case of Evangelical churches, what we see is a high degree of division and fragmentation. But this political fragmentation, within the model of "Evangelical faction," is not peculiar to Brazil. In the 2017 elections in Chile, for example, Evangelicals participated in 16 different political parties. In Colombia, 15 movements or parties have participated in elections in recent years. In the 2006 Peruvian elections, despite the fact that there was an Evangelical candidate for president (the minister Humberto Lay), Evangelicals participated in 13 different political groups. This high degree of diversity of Evangelical candidacies (for presidencies and for congressional seats) soars to yet greater heights when it comes to local elections, even leading to party struggles over religious unity, as can be seen in the most recent local elections in Colombia, which is a clear example of what occurs in the majority of Latin American countries:

> The fact of belonging to an Evangelical church does not mean that there will be unified and massive support for one specific candidacy. In reality, the general rule was that there was more competition and rivalry among the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal megachurches than acts of electoral cooperation and convergence. […]
>
> In spite of belonging to Christian communities of faith, the Evangelical churches did not act in a coordinated and unified manner in the selection and support of candidates for provincial governments, mayor, provincial councils, and local assemblies. In fact, what was most prevalent was electoral rivalry and competition of a corporate character among Evangelical parties and fronts. In other words, they acted more like adversaries than like brothers.[133]

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132 Beltrán: Del monopolio católico a la explosión pentecostal (2013), 367.

133 Velasco/Pedraza/Rojas: Del culto a las urnas (2020), 338, 342.

Thus, if Evangelicals cannot even agree on their interpretation of the Bible, one can hardly expect anything different when it comes to interpreting the signs of the times or with reference to civic affairs – areas in which they do not have much experience. Beltrán puts it well: "The Pentecostal movement reproduces in the political arena its chronic fragmentation, which keeps it from constituting a unified political front."[134] Thus since, as we have seen, there is no "Evangelical confessional vote," it does not make sense to form an Evangelical confessional party. The voting preference of Evangelicals is the product of a number of different social factors, including the religious factor (as is the case with Catholics). In addition, those citizens who are more involved with their churches (whether Evangelical or Catholic) will accord greater weight to matters related to values or religion, while those who prioritize ideological matters will give preference to party concerns. However, a *caveat* is in order. There is currently one subject that does indeed have the potential to unite the "values vote" of the majority of Evangelicals for a particular electoral choice: the so called pro-life and pro-family "moral agenda. This is what happened in 2018 in both Costa Rica and Brazil. But this factor will not prove sufficient to resolve the voting preferences of Evangelicals, given that only "to the extent that claims arise that transcend the Evangelical movement will there be a greater capacity of mobilization and politicizing of their electoral preferences."[135] In this regard, what is happening in Brazil (and in several other countries) makes sense as a first step: a number of Evangelical candidates are running for office now under the generic term "Christian" (no longer as "Evangelicals") in order to attract voters who identify as Christians (including Catholicism and all of the Protestant, Evangelical, and Pentecostal branches). This is what Bolsonaro did in 2018. The idea here is to reinforce the image of a "Christian nation" (under the command of Evangelicals, of course) as a majority religious bloc in Latin America. This strategy would focus first and foremost on conservative Catholics and on Evangelicals.[136]

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134 Beltrán: Del monopolio católico a la explosión pentecostal (2013), 26.
135 Ortega: Los partidos políticos evangélicos en América Latina (2019), 8.
136 Carranza: Erosão das democracias latino-americanas (2020).

## Conclusions

We began our study by asking if Latin American politics had become more religious, or if Latin American religion had become more political. There is no question that those who took the first step in this rapprochement were Evangelical leaders, and not political leaders. This is because it was the Evangelical leaders who reinterpreted the Holy Bible and God's promises, especially the Old Testament promise to the Children of Israel: And the Lord shall make thee plenteous in goods…. The Lord shall open unto thee his good treasure…. And the Lord shall make thee the head, and not the tail" (Deuteronomy 28: 11–13).

For several decades, Latin American Evangelicals had stayed out of politics, and had rejected any possibility of involvement in politics, even going so far as to see it as something dirty. For this reason, a "saved Christian" or "renewed Catholic" could not afford to become contaminated by that arena. For their part, the political parties had never viewed these apolitical Christian groups (some of which had certain "cult-like" characteristics) as groups of potential electoral interest. So what happened? These small Evangelical groups simply began to grow rapidly (beginning in 1970) and began to see politics as a viable way of (supposedly) advancing God's Plan for all of humanity (beginning in 1980).

Everything would seem to indicate that both new and renewed Evangelicals – now with a clear neo-Pentecostal spirit and with airs of the "theology of prosperity" (or "ideology of prosperity"); the theology of spiritual warfare; reconstructionist aspirations; and increasingly moving into the middle and upper classes, have become new social and political actors in Latin America. It seemed that the initial liberal political visions of the nineteenth century, as well as the deeply rooted apolitical attitude and anti-Catholicism of the mid-twentieth century had all been left behind. It also seemed that they had forsaken their stereotypical "garage churches" and "havens for the masses" in order to increasingly grow in power in huge temples filled with prosperous worshippers – but without losing their strong base of support among the working class. It is evident that Evangelicals are here to stay, that they have grown, and that through their growth they have sought to conquer. But this conquest is not limited to the religious sphere. It has extended to the social and political sphere as well.

As we have seen throughout the course of this study, the classification of the Pentecostal Evangelical phenomenon among organic ("emic") academics and intellectuals is in accordance with identity-based, demographic, and theological criteria. This phenomenon has geopolitical implications, as well as implications for social control (i.e., due to the imposition of moral agendas). This phenomenon also has implications for the construction of media empires, and for political representation within political parties. In this regard, we can say

that, in historical terms, in Latin America, the *corpus protestante* has not only undergone radical changes in its internal composition (i.e., from mission-based Christianity to native/locally based Christianity) but has also experienced theological transformations (i.e., from pre-millenarianism to post-millenarianism) which gave rise to new ways of viewing the world and of participating in the world. We have thus been able to see how (neo-)Pentecostal sectors have adopted political positions that have gone from an apolitical attitude to the conquest of power, and which have included a strong US-style evangelical element.

In this religious phenomenon, we also have seen the emergence of a number of terms that have become part of the rich nomenclature of Latin America. We stress the fact that, for us, the terms used to classify these religious actors reflect a complex socio-political and theological dynamic that also involves strategies for political involvement. It is for this reason that we embarked upon this historical and ideological journey, beginning with the category of "Protestant" in reference to the segment of the original mainstream churches stemming from the Reform, and which assumed political positions (liberal and conservative) that were more discreet and less public in Latin America. Afterward, we described the internal turning point experienced by those churches with the emergence of the Evangelical movement, which refers to a radical theological vision, given that some of its variants advocate reconstructionism (or dominion theology), and promote positions aimed at attaining political power. And in some places, such as Brazil, the term "Evangelical" was co-opted strategically by Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals in the 1980s in order to project a certain element of traditional Protestantism, and also in order to establish firm roots in the larger Evangelical world.

On the other hand, Evangelicals for a long time constituted one of the "social minorities" for a variety of different reasons: demographic (although they have grown exponentially in recent decades, they are still a minority compared to Catholics); sociological (because they were associated with poor and marginalized classes, with Blacks, with the indigenous); anthropological (because of a stigmatized religious identity due to their isolation and their rejection of the world). This explains their identity as a "religious minority. But their political activism and their minoritization allowed them to emerge from their apoliticism (*fuga mundi)* isolationism and to engage in the pursuit of power. For all of the theological reasons that we have discussed in this study, Evangelicals' participation in the public sphere has allowed a political refinement of their identity-based transformation. This is because, by virtue of engaging in political action, Evangelicals now have a higher public profile, claiming, along with other minorities, the right to participate in a secular State. This change must be interpreted as having historic importance, because the conditions resulting from the

democratic opening of Latin America favor Evangelicals' legal and legitimate participation, and because their political activism will prove successful.

Internally, this led to not only a change in positions taken by religious leaders, but also these leaders being viewed with a new sense of legitimacy by their congregations, and a renewed social visibility, as a new political force on the rise. Most recently, we have seen how Latin American (neo-)Pentecostal leaders (especially those in Brazil) have tended to apply to themselves the label of "Christians" in order to be seen as more ecumenical, and to attract conservative Catholic sectors.

In considering these strategic efforts, we need to take into account the fact that Evangelicals have become increasingly aware that the numbers of their worshippers is not sufficient to determine the outcome of elections (especially when they know that not all Evangelicals are going to vote for their "representatives," even if they are supported by their church leaders). For this reason, they are now looking to reach persons who are not necessarily affiliated with a religion via the "values vote." In other words, over and beyond religious affiliation, they are looking for common grounds that could be attractive to voters. At the same time, they strategically sound out certain candidates that could be attractive to both Evangelical and non-Evangelical voters. In this regard, we can say that these new initiatives, which are being spurred for the most part by neo-Pentecostals, have in practice been trans-denominational in nature. In other words, these religious-political approaches are highly attractive and succeed in drawing many Evangelical voters, irrespective of the denomination to which they belong.

For this same reason, while neo-Pentecostal communities do not constitute the majority in terms of numbers, in many Latin American nations, they have succeeded ideologically and electorally in reaching a much larger number of their congregants. In addition, in transcending their own particular churches, they have succeeded in attracting many Catholics who have no interest in attending Evangelical services, but who are inclined to vote for candidates who share their moral convictions within the political arena. We have seen this happen in some places. In this regard, we can ask if, instead of speaking of a "confessional vote" or a "denominational vote," it might make more sense to speak of a "values vote" that transcends denominations, churches, and particular religious beliefs. If such were the case, we would be moving from "confessional parties" to "values-based movements" that are committed to the "moral agenda" as a common guideline, not only for Evangelicals and Catholics, but also for conservative sectors of society, whether or not they are religious.

Thus, the most important novelty in recent years with respect to Latin American Evangelicals' political participation would be that the classic tri-partite phenomenology (Evangelical party, front, and faction) which focuses on

electoral processes, formal parties, and official candidates, now shares space with new forms of organization, such as "pressure groups," which focuses on cross-sectional issues that are transformed into "political agendas." In other words, irrespective of whether their leaders are Evangelicals or Catholics, the new center of the ideological-religious union would be the moral, pro-life, and pro-family agenda (e.g., the movements that supported Trump or Bolsonaro). But for many with a Christian moral bias, such an approach leads to a failure to attract either all Evangelicals or all Catholics.

In fact, at present, the pro-life and pro-family moral agenda that is predominant in Latin America is the primary Evangelical political agenda capable of temporally and electorally bringing together the majority of Latin American Evangelicals and Catholics. It has been said that this agenda is a carbon copy of the pro-life and pro-family movements in the United States that have been active in recent decades. This would in part explain the diminished presence of "anti-Catholicism" within Pentecostal communities.

Thus, the moral agenda has become the primary proposal of these new neo-Pentecostal-driven movements. This moral agenda is intended to serve as an ideological platform, and to justify the participation of Evangelicals in politics. The main objective is to influence public policy in individual countries in at least three different ways: a.) through legislative proposals that penalize or classify as crimes improper moral conduct that offends Christian sensibilities; b.) by repealing regulations and blocking legislative proposals the Evangelical sectors consider offensive to Christian morality through the implementation of a policy restricting the so-called "expansion of rights"; c.) by steering the course of public policies on the basis of "Christian values," especially within the areas of education, health, and human rights, based upon the argument that Christians (both Evangelicals and Catholics) constitute the vast majority of the citizens of each country, and that they thus have the right to assert their "moral majority" and form the new Christian right, which has made its presence felt in the anti-gender campaigns throughout Latin America.

As we indicated at the outset of this paper, the political activities of today's Evangelicals are occurring within a climate of change in Latin America's democratic governments, which have been subject to the constant onslaught of a "neoliberal agenda" which exerts pressure on the assertion of workers' rights, social security, and accessing public health care, among other rights that had previously been attained. By means of its alignment with the Christian right in the United States and their political activism, Latin American Evangelicals are able to adapt to the current neo-conservative dynamics.

In this sense, the prefix "neo-" might serve as a bridge between the democratic processes that are currently underway and the possibility of identifying how the various political alliances give expression a patriarchal social order and

a neoliberal economics. We consider these to be neoconservative narratives that emphasize the morality of the real and everyday insecurities experienced by ordinary people. These constitute the connection between the neoliberal agenda and the social and political activism of the religious actors of the (neo-)Pentecostal churches. They condense the reactive expression of an otherness that is fundamentally negative ("anti-") in nature, and through their activities contribute to the erosion of democracy in Latin America.

While the political movement of the Christian Right in the United States was reactionary in the face of the cultural changes of the 1960s and 1970s, the current values agenda has shifted from being culturally reactive to an opposition to the democratic advances achieved as regards equal rights for a number of social minorities, including sexual, racial, and ethnic minorities. We thus see that Evangelicals (both Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals) have formed part of the first wave of cultural reaction as well as the current second wave, in which they are confronting democratic advances – while at the same time clearly benefiting from those selfsame advances.

It is this self-affirmation of religious identity that constitutes one of the fundamental elements that allows Evangelicals to construct their political self-representation, forming the basis of their confessional participation in politics. However, in spite of this religious identity, which allows "political Evangelicals" to have access to power, it is other political affinities (and not religious identities) that are what pragmatically allow for the formation of coalitions among parties, election processes, and strategic alliances along the lines of a "resonance machine" (a metaphor suggested by Connolly). In this way, on the basis of their religious identity, and through political action, Evangelicals constitute themselves as political subjects in the aggregate and representative sense.

This subjectivity is probably constructed by Evangelicals on three different levels. The first of these levels consists of interaction between the churches and the State, collaborating with the latter in social actions and/or becoming involved in its structure through electoral means. The second level constitutes the battleground where the clash is played out between Evangelicals and their opponents in the secular minority who are opposed to Evangelical morality. The third level consists of the religious narratives that explicitly set forth the society that Evangelicals aspire to – namely, a "Christian nation." We think it fitting to mention that it is on the basis of these three levels that we can understand how the political subject that is called "Evangelical" (which looks to be slowly metamorphosing into "Christian") was constituted. It is on the basis of this subjective foundation that the new Evangelical political subject will have the wherewithal to construct a project of political and religious power. This is a project which, in the Brazilian context, and according to analysts, began to take shape with the 2018 elections.

In this project, the idea of a "Christian nation" erupted into the public space, with its representatives of particular Christian representatives. This occurred despite the fact that, as we have repeatedly stressed, Evangelicals are not internally united because of a heterogeneous character which makes it impossible for them to forge such a unified identity. Similarly, their proposal is to present themselves as the "Evangelical people" fit to lead the way to instituting a "Christian nation," and that is imbued with a certain religious power that is activated when Evangelicals seek to inspire the people, through values and customs, in order to transform them into "Christian nations."

It is precisely this idea of "Christian nation," which was formulated by the pastoral and parliamentary elite of Evangelicals, that appears to stand at the center of the Evangelical project of seeking political and religious power. The reference is not necessarily to political power along the lines of a theocratic regime, as is often believed, but rather to the expression of a religious supremacy that relegates other forms of expression to inferior status. Thus, in the name of a supposed religious majority, a government relationship is established, in Foucault's sense, that judicially and legitimately defines, controls, and punishes all citizens, irrespective of their religious affiliation or whether or not they are religious believers. In other words, they intend to go from being a "discriminated minority" in history, to a "discriminating majority" at present by means of concepts such as "moral majority" or "Christian nation" (which seek to strategically include Catholics, who constitute a demographic majority); therefore, to achieve this, they seek to reach political power.

There are of course numerous obstacles that stand in the way of achieving this aspiration of several of the Evangelical factions (particularly neo-Pentecostals). One such obstacle is the existence of secular States with legal regulations that place limits on the Church-State relationship. Another is secular democratic forces that do not share the aspiration of placing a Christian stamp on a plural and multi-religious environment (that also includes non-Christian religions). Yet another obstacle is the plural character of the Evangelical camp itself, which resists hegemonic dictates. And there are still other obstacles. The resistance exerted by groups and movements of civil society in the face of the progress of this agenda can in some ways be seen in churches themselves. There are even a fair number of initiatives that promote a Christian activism that is ecumenical, and that promotes interfaith harmony.

There is no question that confessional political representation, promoted by political-religious activism, and which has become strengthened with each electoral process, has reinforced the church structures that nominated their candidates and "representatives." However, this representation is complicated, because within the churches and denominations themselves, it is not possible to speak in the name of "the Evangelicals" as if they were a monolith. This brings

us back to the following question: Who can represent the Evangelical people and speak in their name? The aspirations of the pastoral and parliamentary elites to hegemonize political representation within the Evangelical camp clearly do not enjoy widespread support. Moreover, the internal struggle for power among these elites may end up undermining the very structures responsible for their current status. We believe that, in the long term, this fragility may have an impact on the supposed "official representation" of Evangelicals in the struggles for political power.

Finally, given the reality of a democratic and plural society that includes progressive sectors as well as Evangelical churches and the Catholic church, there remain a number of questions regarding the real political-religious power of Evangelicals. What are the democratic mechanisms capable of resisting the different offensives of a Christian right that, in the very name of democracy and religious freedom, seeks to impose a religious majority on the decisions of sitting governments? What relationships will political Evangelicals and political Catholics establish in order to lead the battle for religious supremacy? What form of Catholic theology will be activated to make such a proposal viable? What mechanisms will be activated within Christian churches in order to reinforce religious pluralism as a desirable principle that promotes peaceful coexistence among citizens, whether or not they are religious believers? What are the paths forward for engaging in an ecumenical and interfaith dialogue capable of recovering the theological and spiritual roots of politics as a service and exercise in pursuit of the common good? What are the common features of a political theology that inspires dialogue, respect, and inclusion of all – and especially of the poorest and most marginalized? How can the principles of the encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti* that Pope Francis bequeathed on humanity in 2020 be implemented in economic policy? Such questions obviously are beyond the scope of the present study, but they constitute food for future thought regarding political theology.

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# Engaged Pentecostalism in Asia:

## Civic Welfare, Public Morality, and Political Participation

Jayeel Cornelio

## Introduction

This chapter presents the scholarly landscape of the social and political engagements of Pentecostal churches in Asia. Drawing on the extensive literature on Pentecostalism in its various regions, the aim of this essay is to characterize these engagements. Three forms of social and political engagements are salient. The first is *civic welfare*, referring to the delivery of development and humanitarian assistance by Pentecostal churches to address the needs of local communities. These needs include educational assistance, healthcare, and basic nutrition. The second concerns *public morality*. In different countries, Pentecostal churches have resisted policies that they consider inimical to social progress for violating divine principles. These issues tend to revolve around same-sex marriage and gender equality. In this way, Pentecostals are defending what they consider to be God's mandate for the nations by resisting what they believe are godless policies. The third form is direct engagement in *politics*. Scholars have documented the growing presence of Pentecostal churches in electoral politics. In some cases they have even formed political parties to endorse or field their own candidates.

After explaining these salient characteristics, the essay then turns to conceptualizing the social and political work of Pentecostalism in Asia. Nuancing earlier writings about the rise of progressive Pentecostalism in the Global South, a more appropriate way of referring to the Asian experience is "engaged Pentecostalism".[1] The concept refers to the movement within Pentecostal and Charismatic groups, driven by a desire to be relevant and to correct what they consider social and political evils, to be involved in the affairs of the present. It recognizes the diverse expressions of Pentecostal involvements in society and the religious and political worldviews that underpin them. In effect, "engaged Pentecostalism" not only contests the

1 Miller: Progressive Pentecostalism (2009); Miller/Yamamori: Global Pentecostalism (2007).

misconceptions about Pentecostals being preoccupied with conversion or the eschatology. It also recognizes the implications of Pentecostal work on politics and society, inspired by an array of convictions including social justice, moral conservatism, and religious nationalism.

A note is called for on terminology. In this essay, Pentecostal Christianity is deployed to refer broadly to both Pentecostalism, the Charismatic renewal, and the Signs and Wonders Movement that emerged in the course of the 20th century, whose influence remains evident around the world.[2] While many churches are clearly part of older Pentecostal denominations, many are decidedly independent and might even consider themselves evangelical, full gospel, or born again Christians to differentiate themselves from Catholics or members of other denominations. The ethnographic work of Maltese and Eßel on Pentecostalism in the Philippines is instructive in this regard.[3] In spite of their strong Charismatic or Pentecostal practices, local congregations in the community did not want to be referred to as Pentecostals. To them it was almost a derogatory term associated with non-Trinitarian groups. Their intriguing ethnographic observation though is that even the latter – often called "Oneness" churches – distance themselves from the term as well (possibly because of its cult-like connotations). And although "charismatic" was reserved for Filipino Catholics influenced by the religious movement, the term also carried a negative connotation. Indeed, in Philippine media, the authors observe that "charismatics" are characterized as "as a crowd of insecure people who lack proper self-consciousness and do everything their money-grubbing demagogues command them".[4] Bauman makes similar observations based on his extensive research in India.[5] There are Evangelicals, for example, who speak in tongues, but do not consider themselves Pentecostal. Referring to these groups as Pentecostal or Charismatic is thus a call made by scholars and observers. But doing so demands reflexivity on the part of observers, if only "to signal that global Pentecostalism's very defiance of definitions may be among the very few things that consistently define it".[6] The important lesson here is that local groups' attempts to disassociate from the Pentecostal or Charismatic identity must be an othering mechanism brought about not only by theological differences but also contexts of violence and discrimination.

Moreover, while some independent congregations are small, many have gone on to become megachurches associated with the emerging middle class in

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2 Kay/Dyer: Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies (2004); Cornelio: The Philippines (2020).

3 Maltese/Eißel: The Demise of Pentecostalism in the Philippines (2015).

4 Ibid., 257.

5 Bauman: Pentecostals and Interreligious Conflict in India (2017).

6 Ibid., 11.

Asia.[7] To these should be added to lay Charismatic groups found in Roman Catholic and Anglican communities and other Protestant denominations. Clearly, Pentecostalism or Charismatic Christianity is an internally diverse religious movement. This is why in the literature, what ought to be considered Pentecostal or Charismatic is debated. Variations and nuances are discernible in such areas as healing, prosperity, eschatology, and religious authority.[8] In the experience of many Asian Pentecostal groups, however, some commonalities are discernible. Apart from the ecstatic encounters with the Holy Spirit, most adherents also subscribe to an Evangelical theology that adopts a literalistic view of the Bible, the belief in personal salvation, and commitment to personal evangelism.[9] Concerning Scriptural reading, other scholars such as John Prior propose that Asian Pentecostals are not so much fundamentalist as they are intuitive about the Bible. For him, this orientation "leads them to take a special interest in the supernatural elements of scripture such as miracles, visions and healings and a belief in the continuing power of prophecy".[10] Whenever variations need to be emphasized for the sake of clarity, this essay will highlight them. It is essential to cover the wide breadth of Pentecostalism in order to have a grasp of the variations in their social and political engagements. Prior is thus correct in asserting that in Asia, "we are dealing with Pentecostalisms rather than Pentecostalism."[11] By the same token, this essay recognizes too the danger of referring to Pentecostalism on the continent as "Asian". Doing so disregards the historical origins and fortunes of the movement (and Christianity at large) in its different regions and countries.[12] The diversity of Pentecostalism as it engages with local cultures and specific modes of religious governance is a necessary backdrop in discussing the different ways in which churches have engaged politics and society. To the extent possible, the specific local contexts are explained in detail throughout this chapter.

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7 Chong/ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute: Pentecostal megachurches in Southeast Asia (2018).

8 Yong: A Typology of Prosperity Theology (2012); Cornelio: The Philippines (2020).

9 Anderson: Asian and Pentecostal (2005).

10 Prior: The Challenge of the Pentecostals in Asia Part One (2007), 12.

11 Prior: How Does the Catholic Church Deal with the New Religious Movements in a Constructive Way? (Focus on Asia) (2015), 236.

12 Chong/Goh: Asian Pentecostalism (2015).

## 1. Pentecostalism in Asia: A Demographic and Historical Overview

The chapter begins with an outline of the state of Pentecostalism in Asia. This section first provides a demographic overview that sets in context impressions about Pentecostalism's spectacular success on the continent. The succeeding parts will present the historical context and sociological factors that account for the growth of Pentecostalism in certain regions of Asia.

### 1.1 Demographic

As a whole, Christianity remains a minority religion in Asia. Recognizing this point tempers triumphalist claims made by commentators and religious leaders.[13] In 2020, Christians constituted only 8.19% of the total population. The proportion translates to 378.7 million Christians out of 4.62 billion Asians. Islam (27.44%), Hinduism (22.70%), and Buddhism (11.60%) remain dominant. Even in 2050, Christianity will still trail behind these three religions.[14]

This, of course, is not to deny the spectacular success of Christianity – and Pentecostalism, in particular – in different parts of the continent. As a news report puts it, "in Asia, the Pentecostals are on the march"[15]. Indeed, relative to their total Christian populations, several Asian countries are in the global top 20 for having the greatest proportion of Pentecostals:

- North Korea (90.91%)
- Cambodia (77.50%)
- Nepal (70.03%)
- Bhutan (57.95%)
- South Korea (52.96%)
- Iran (49.41%)

And in terms of magnitude, the following Asian countries appear in the top 20 of Pentecostal populations in the world:

- The Philippines (38 million)
- China (37 million)
- India (21 million)
- Indonesia (11 million)
- South Korea (9.15 million)

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13 Bautista/Lim: Introduction (2009).
14 Johnson/Zurlo: World Christian Database (2020).
15 Speciale: In Asia, the Pentecostals are on the march (2013).

Pentecostal growth rode the tide of Christian expansion on the continent. Indeed, Pew Research claims that while still "a relatively small fraction of the population, the number of Christians in Asia has grown significantly in the 20th century, outpacing Asia's rapid population growth."[16] Figures from the World Christian Encyclopedia are useful.[17] At the turn of the century, there were almost 280 million Christians. The figure grew to 378.7 million by 2020. Disaggregating these figures according to region is even more helpful in appreciating the growth of Christianity and Pentecostalism on the continent.

- In *East and Southeast Asia*, Christian population grew from 62 million to 282 million from 1970 to 2020. Compared to other Christian movements, Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity is the fastest-growing in the region. Its adherents constitute 91 million (32% of the total Christian population). In fact, Pentecostals even represent more than 30% of the Christian population in different countries: Cambodia (78%), South Korea (53%), Philippines (38%), and Indonesia (33%).
- In *South Asia*, there were 23.36 million Christians in 1970. By 2020, there were 76.14 million. With 1.38 billion citizens, India has the biggest population. 21 million (or 31.18% of Christians) are Pentecostals. In Pakistan, there are over 4 million Christians, 900,000 (22.21%) of whom are Pentecostals. Bangladesh has a higher proportion of Pentecostals. They constitute 35.98% of the total number of Christians in the country (903,000).
- In *West Asia*, the number of Christians rose from 6.34 million in 1970 to 15.09 million by 2020. Georgia (3.89 million), Armenia (2.77 million), and Lebanon (2.11 million) have the biggest Christian populations. But their Pentecostal adherents are not as many: Georgia (.95%), Armenia (4.33%), and Lebanon (3.08%).
- In *Central Asia*, Christianity grew from having 3.86 million adherents in 1970 to 5.60 million in 2020. In the region, Kazakhstan has the biggest number of Christians (4.8 million). About 110,000 (2.27%) of them are Pentecostals. Uzbekistan, which has the biggest population in the region, has 345,100 Christians, 85,000 of whom are Pentecostals (24.63%).

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16 Overview: Pentecostalism in Asia (2006).

17 Johnson/Zurlo: World Christian Database (2020); Zurlo: A Demographic Profile of Christianity in East and Southeast Asia (2020).

## 1.2 Historical origins

The growth of Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity in Asia needs to be understood in historical context as well. Too often, accounts of Pentecostalism on the continent recount them along the three waves that took place in the 20th century in the US.[18] For example, Pentecostal groups such as True Jesus Church and the Jesus Family in China and the Pyongyang Revival in Korea all emerged in East Asia in the early 20th century. Around this time, Pentecostal missionaries came to the Philippines. The first missionaries were from the Church of God in 1918, followed by the Assemblies of God in 1926.[19] They became the Pentecostal denominations that exist to this day in the country and around Asia. The Charismatic renewal movement emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. It revitalized existing congregations in Myanmar, Singapore, and Indonesia, influencing even Catholic and Anglican parishes. Indeed, the 1980s was a particularly pivotal moment for the Philippine Charismatic movement as many lay groups were born in that decade, some of which are now the most influential megachurches and Charismatic fellowships in the country.[20] Throughout the 20th century, more Pentecostal denominations from the West also planted their own churches around Asia. Thus the Assemblies of God and Foursquare, among others, are to be found in many parts of the continent.[21]

But to historicize the growth of Pentecostalism in Asia in relation to the North American narrative misses out on its origins and fortunes on the continent. It is for this reason that Allan Anderson turns his attention to the histories of Pentecostalism beyond the US: "Despite the significance of the Azusa Street revival as a centre of Pentecostalism that profoundly affected its nature, when this is assumed to be the 'Jerusalem' from which the 'full gospel' reaches out to the nations of earth, the truth is distorted and smacks of cultural imperialism."[22] Following the same line of thinking, Asian scholars like Wonsuk Ma trace the trajectory of Pentecostal Christianity on the continent based on different phases including pre-Azusa revivals, the arrival of Azusa missionaries, the rise of new Pentecostal churches, and other trends.[23]

Worth highlighting are the pre-Azusa developments in Asia. The earliest Chinese revival, for example, took place in late 19th century. Pastor Xi Shengmo, who was ordained by the China Inland Mission in 1886, acted independently

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18 Anderson: Writing the Pentecostal History (2004).
19 Suico: Pentecostalism and Social Change (2005).
20 Cornelio: The Philippines (2020).
21 Yung: Pentecostalism and the Asian Church (2005).
22 Anderson: Writing the Pentecostal History (2004), 142.
23 Ma: Asian Pentecostalism (2004).

and practiced exorcism and divine healing.[24] Similarly, the Korean Pentecost of 1903 predated the Azusa revival through the healing ministry of Ik Du Kim, a Presbyterian pastor. The event inspired other revival occurrences in China, which eventually led to the spread of indigenous churches there. The Korean Pentecost is also recognized as the root of the Charismatic renewal that continues to transpire among Presbyterian and Methodist congregations in East Asia. In 1907, Pentecostalism emerged too in Hong Kong. Mok Lai Chi, a Chinese preacher, saw the conversion of many to Christianity. The newspaper Pentecostal Truths was established for these converts, who were largely illiterate.[25]

Independent revival movements took place in other parts of Asia. Some of them were even earlier than those that occurred in China. In India, for example, the origins of Pentecostalism go way back to 1860–1865 through the work of evangelist John Arulappan in Tamil Nadu. He became an independent preacher in the 1840s. By the 1860s, he built several Christian communities, all of which became the heart of a charismatic revival.[26] In 1905, predating once again the Azusa Street revival, young women in Pune saw visions and fell into trance. Local scholars referred to it as the work of the Holy Spirit to bring about Indian Christianity. Indigenization thus accounts for the rapid spread of Pentecostalism among the peoples of Asia.

In the course of the 20th century, missionaries moved around Asia to plant churches. Again, these initiatives were independent of classical Pentecostalism that originated in the US. For example, while Singapore already had Christian groups in the 1830s, it was not until the early 20th century when a Pentecostal congregation catered to Cantonese-speaking and another one to English-speaking locals was established.[27] Moreover, the spread of Christianity among the Chinese in East and Southeast Asia owes much to the work of John Sung, described by Yung as "probably the greatest evangelist and revivalist of 20th century China."[28] He was known for miracles and his healing ministry. According to an eyewitness account, Sung's healing revival attracted so many people in Penang in what was then the British Malaya in the 1930s. Sung is known as well for the prophecy that a revival would occur in China after missionaries had left.

Also in the 20th century, two waves of revivals took shape on the continent.[29] Nationalistic in character, the first emerged in between the two world wars. In the 1920s, the Ceylon Pentecostal Mission (CPM) was established in Sri Lanka.

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24 Chong/Goh: Asian Pentecostalism (2015).
25 Au: Elitism and Poverty (2017).
26 Chong/Goh: Asian Pentecostalism (2015).
27 Kay: Empirical and Historical Perspectives on the Growth of Pentecostal-Style Churches (2013).
28 Yung: Pentecostalism and the Asian Church (2005), 46.
29 Chong/Goh: Asian Pentecostalism (2015).

The strict movement encouraged celibacy and pushed for communal living, thus rejecting the colonial modernity being shaped for them by the British Empire. KE Abraham in Kerala joined CPM but eventually broke away to establish the Indian Pentecostal Church of God, which also rejected Western missionaries. The second wave took place from the latter half of the 20th century. The Charismatic revival around this time emphasized evangelism. Mui Yee, a former Hong Kong actress, converted to Pentecostalism and led revivals in Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Later on she established the New Testament Church and formed a commune in southern Taiwan, which she proclaimed as the new Mount Zion. In Korea, David Yonggi Cho became a pastor in the 1950s and then carried on to build the biggest megachurch in the world. Around this time, nationalistic fervor also influenced the work of Pentecostal churches. In Indonesia, congregations (including the Pentecostal Church of Indonesia) separated from Dutch American missionaries and pushed for indigenous leadership. The same can be said about the rise of Jesus is Lord (JIL) Church in the Philippines under the leadership of Brother Eddie Villanueva. Born in 1978, JIL is an example of indigenized megachurch Christianity that addressed the needs of the poor.[30] JIL is arguably among the first Charismatic Protestant churches established by Filipinos.[31] To these developments could be added the rise of new Pentecostal churches in socialist or communist countries including Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Nepal.[32] In these places, Pentecostalism continues to attract young people on university campuses where Christianity, because of indigenization, is no longer associated with the West.

## 1.3 Success

Today, as the figures above show, Pentecostalism has made strides in the various regions of Asia. So, what accounts for its success now? The literature spells out very important reasons that account for its global reach. Some of them are experiential, including egalitarianism, personal transformation, spiritual encounters, and the empowerment it offers marginalized groups. Moreover, speaking in tongues, the quintessential marker of baptism in the Spirit, "responds to one of the most glaring features of the spiritual crisis in our era, what one writer has called 'the ecstasy deficit'".[33] At the same time, even if Pentecostalism may have begun as a movement among the poor that "shunned

30 Cornelio: The indigenization of megachurch Christianity (2018).
31 Kessler/Rüland: Responses to Rapid Social Change (2006).
32 Ma: Asian Pentecostalism (2004).
33 Cox: Fire from Heaven (2001).

lavish living", its affinity with prosperity is now undeniable.[34] Making it far more attractive are the success stories of their preachers. The prosperity theology that accompanies Pentecostalism around the world "reinforces and even promotes the existing global capitalist order".[35] Taken together, these factors account for the global appeal of Pentecostalism especially among disenfranchised communities.[36]

But in Asia, several local factors matter as well. This is an important point to recognize in understanding the success of Pentecostalism on the continent. Universal narratives about the success of Pentecostalism are challenged when one consider local contexts. For example, in contrast to the experience of Latin America, the rise of Charismatic Christianity did not make a significant dent on the population of Catholics in the Philippines. This is because the Catholic hierarchy, after a season of suspicion, eventually decided to accommodate the Charismatic movement that was fast growing in the country.[37] Brother Mike Velarde's El Shaddai is a compelling example.[38] At the same time, the experience of the Philippines shows too that Charismatic Christianity is not unique to the urban poor only. It cuts across classes. The important work of Kessler and Rüland (2006, 83, 2008) more than a decade ago reveals precisely that "different Charismatic communities tend to cater to specific socioeconomic groups, but Charismatic religiosity is restricted to neither the poor and lower-middle-class constituency of El Shaddai nor the elite members of the Brotherhood of Christian Businessmen and Professionals."[39] The local contexts in themselves are worth investigating in relation to the success of Pentecostalism.

Other factors are also at play. Drawing on Julie Ma's work on East and Southeast Asia, several factors have been instrumental to the success of Pentecostal and Charismatic groups in the region.[40] These factors seem to be the common denominator among different groups even if they were established in different periods. The pursuit of transnational missions is one. Enabling this expansion is Pentecostalism's global orientation as a movement over which the Holy Spirit takes the lead.[41] This is very much evident in the embodied rituals of Charismatic worship, chief of which is speaking in tongues that breaks down

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34 Lee: Prosperity theology: T.D. Jakes and the gospel of the almighty Dollar (2007), 227.
35 Chestnut: Prosperous Prosperity: (2012), 215.
36 Martin: Pentecostalism (2001).
37 Kessler/Rüland: Responses to Rapid Social Change (2006).
38 Wiegele: Investing in Miracles (2005).
39 Kessler/Rüland: Responses to Rapid Social Change (2006), 83; Kessler/Rüland: Give Jesus a hand! charismatic Christians (2008).
40 Ma: Pentecostals and Charismatics (2020).
41 Lindhardt: Introduction (2011).

cultural barriers.[42] Driven by a revivalist ethos, Pentecostal groups were involved in church-planting not just in their respective countries but also around Asia.[43] Hope Church in Bangkok made strides in Thailand, a predominantly Buddhist country, by establishing 430 churches nationwide, with a view to building 120 more around the world. Because of the same fervor, local congregations of True Jesus Church and the Hong Kong-based Taipei Truth Church are to be found among Chinese communities in East and Southeast Asia. The same can be said about Yoido Full Gospel, a well-known megachurch based in Seoul. Awash with finances, the megachurch supports many local congregations around Asia. In the 1970s and 1980s, Yoido's Dr David Yonggi Cho conducted healing and evangelistic rallies in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. Local denominations like The Brethren were threatened by the charismatic practices. But none of the resistance stemmed the outflow of members into the new charismatic congregations such as the Full Gospel Assembly in KL in the early 1980s. Dr Cho's presence inspires a new ambition among these Christians to build megachurches in Malaysia and Singapore.[44]

Crucial to the success of these transnational missions is the establishment of local training centers especially in mainland Southeast Asia.[45] In 1994, the Assemblies of God Missionary Fellowship set up the Cambodia Bible Institute with the help of American and Filipino missionaries. Four years later, the Institute for Church Planting Cambodia was established. Its programs were run in partnership with churches in Malaysia including Sungei-Way-Subang Methodist Church and The New Covenant Church.

In the course of time, migration accelerated these transnational missions. The experience of many other churches, especially those from developing countries, points to the power of migration.[46] Jesus is Lord Church, a Charismatic megachurch that originated in the Philippines in the 1980s, is globally present, having followed Overseas Filipino Workers. In Asia, they have strong congregations in Singapore, Hong Kong, Bahrain, and Israel, countries where there are many Filipino migrant workers.[47] The same narrative works for Indian migrant workers in Kuwait. The Ahmadi Indian Pentecostal Church grew very influential to the extent that it has been able to support its local churches back in Northern India.[48] The reality of diaspora churches, many of

42 Coleman: The globalisation of charismatic Christianity (2000).
43 Ma: Pentecostals and Charismatics (2020).
44 De Bernardi: Christians circulations (2020).
45 Clements/Huff/Nyotxay: Asia Pacific Pentecostalism (2019).
46 Asis: Migration (2020).
47 Cornelio: The indigenization of megachurch Christianity (2018).
48 John: Transnational religious organization and practice (2018).

which comprise precarious laborers, is a significant marker of the state of world Christianity.

To the transnational narrative should be added the global linkages in which Charismatic churches and fellowships are now embedded. The foreign crusades led by Morris Cerullo and Reinhard Bonke attracted interdenominational crowds in Africa, a phenomenon replicated in Asia as well. Prominent pastors from Seoul, Singapore, Taiwan, Indonesia, and the Philippines are part of a transnational circuit.[49] By inviting each other to their events, they are able to widen their reach and replicate their messages and songs. The circulation even goes beyond Asia. Singapore's City Harvest Church and New Creation Church are linked to a network of Charismatic megachurches in the US and Australia.[50] In Mongolia, Hope Church was established in the early 1990s as a result of the missionary work of the International Christian Assembly (based in Hong Kong). Apart from publishing the Bible and selling thousands of copies, Hope Church has also translated into Mongolian worship songs by Hillsong Australia.[51]

The appeal of Pentecostalism in Asia is also explained by its affinity with the prosperity theology, the religious persuasion that material and physical blessings are divine favors accorded to believers. But how exactly this takes shape around Asia demands familiarity with local contexts. After all, prosperity-oriented preachings are not monolithic, as the work of theologian Amos Yong demonstrates.[52] Around the world, prosperity theology involves different permutations related to tithing and confessing and also varies depending on its emphasis on physical well-being. In Asia, this diversity is evident, which attests to the way Christianity is contextualizing among its peoples. For Yong,

> … the center of gravity of Christianity is shifting from the West to Latin America, Africa, and Asia, in part because people have experienced God as savior not only in their bodies but also in the concrete circumstances of their lives…Thus the masses see God's salvation as addressing the particularities of their physical, material, and economic needs. Christian redemption thus is not abstract but concrete, resulting in the overall prosperity and well-being of those who walk in the way of Christ and his Spirit.[53]

This is a bold claim about the success of Pentecostalism – and the prosperity gospel – in Asia and the rest of the global South. In fact, the idea that it is contextualized in this manner is partly derived from the conviction by local Christians that prosperity cannot benefit only those who are in the global

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49 Cornelio: The Philippines (2020).
50 Yip/Ainsworth: "Whatever Works" (2016).
51 Ma: Pentecostals and Charismatics (2020).
52 Yong: A Typology of Prosperity Theology (2012).
53 Ibid., 23.

North. Indeed, the theme of contextualization may also be related to how the prosperity gospel has evolved in different contexts in Asia. In the Philippines, for example, El Shaddai, a lay Catholic charismatic group led by Brother Mike Velarde, appeals to the urban poor's desire for personal and economic transformation.[54] To surrender one's life involves believing that God, through the seed-faith principle in which one invests money in the work of the group, will return the blessings beyond measure. Such conviction reflects the work of El Shaddai in transforming personal fortunes in the here and now, a point also reflected in the narratives of conversion among members of Jesus is Lord Church, arguably the biggest Pentecostal/Evangelical group in the Philippines.[55]

Moreover, the growth of Pentecostalism and the prosperity gospel in Asia can be attributed to its rising middle class. Economic growth, after all, is the narrative of many parts of the continent. In China, developed coastal regions have witnessed the rise of Pentecostal churches. In the coastal city of Wenzhou in Zhejiang Province, this form of Christianity has attracted the affluent for they associated business success with God's blessings. They then used their resources to invest in property for church buildings.[56] In Southeast Asia, the same pattern is evident among Pentecostal megachurches, whose success is directly linked to the rise of the middle class. This much is true in such places as Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines. In these places, the most influential Pentecostal congregations are megachurches that directly relate to the needs and concerns of the aspirational middle class.[57]

This section ends by offering sociological insights on the success of megachurches. After all, megachurches, for being the most visible congregations, define the Pentecostal experience of many Asian Christians. In many parts of Asia, megachurches flourish in urban centers, central business districts, and commercial areas. Of all the megachurches outside the US, 40% are found in Asia. They embody "megafaith for the megacity".[58] These religious geographies are indicative of their place in society.

First, megachurches, as institutions, reflect affluence and materialism, values embraced by capitalism and economic growth. Indeed, megachurches often operate like businesses with a specific market in mind. Sociologist of religion Tong refers to this phenomenon as the McDonaldization of religious

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54 Wiegele: The Prosperity Gospel among Filipino Catholic Charismatics (2012).

55 Aguilar Jr.: Experiencing Transcendence (2006).

56 Cao: Urban Property as Spiritual Resource (2012).

57 Chong: Megachurches in Singapore (2015); Chong/ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute: Pentecostal megachurches in Southeast Asia (2018); Tejedo: Pentecostal-Charismatic Megachurches in the Philippines (2018).

58 Thumma/Bird: Megafaith for the Megacity (2015), 2351.

experience.[59] This is why City Harvest Church in Singapore, one of the most prominent megachurches in the country and the region, targets professionals and reorients them to reimagine the marketplace as a mission field. In a concrete manner, this religious ethos mirrors the very entrepreneurial spirit of Singapore's economy.[60] In the same manner, megachurches in Indonesia invoke self-empowerment, modernization, and business interests to construct an identity that appeals to the country's emerging middle class.[61] This is a strategic move in a country that is predominantly Muslim.

Second, being located in urban centers entails, too, a physical performance for Pentecostal megachurches. Often their buildings are grand architectural projects. They are geographic acts that assert their own economic power and the central role of the countries they are in (and Asia as a whole) in shaping contemporary Christianity. Cornelio refers to these acts as religious worlding.[62] El Shaddai in the Philippines, for example, holds its weekly services in their International House of Prayer, touted to be the biggest of place of worship in Asia. This observation is true too in Korea, where megachurches such as Yoido Full Gospel Church, Myungsung Church, and Ju-an Church are attractive to the population because they are big. The economic explanation adds another layer to cultural ones that see the affinity of Pentecostalism with Shamanism and Confucianism.[63]

Finally, Pentecostal megachurches are spaces of socialization as well. They shape moral subjectivities as to what it means to be Christian (or even citizen). In Southeast Asia, megachurches are primarily attractive to the aspirational middle class, many of them highly educated young professionals or students in universities.[64] Indeed, megachurches are most effective in shaping moral subjects that embrace capitalist dispositions. In Indonesia, Charismatic groups are most effective in bringing together professionals and businessmen. Apart from valuing prosperity and networks, these groups undergo religious socialization in the form of discipleship activities, prayer meetings, and Bible studies.[65] The formation of the neoliberal moral subject is also the interest of new scholarship on Pentecostalism in the Philippines. At the turn of the century, a new form of prosperity gospel seems to have emerged in the country that relates to its growing middle class. Lay preachers like Bo Sanchez and

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59 Tong: Religious Experience of a Young Meagachurch Congregation in Singapore (2011), 159–74.

60 Yip/Ainsworth: "Whatever Works" (2016).

61 Yip/Hoon: 'To Build a Generation of Stars' (2016).

62 Cornelio: Religious Worlding (2017).

63 Chong/Goh: Asian Pentecostalism (2015).

64 Chong/ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute: Pentecostal megachurches in Southeast Asia (2018).

65 Koning/Njoto-Feillard/Koning: Beyond the Prosperity Gospel (2017).

Chinkee Tan, Catholic and Evangelical respectively, are known for marrying self-help skills and financial literacy with the basic tenets of the prosperity gospel. Cornelio and Medina refer to their message as the rise of the prosperity ethic.[66] Their preaching, books, and other publications, consumed by the aspirational middle class, sacralize hard work and relate it to the will of God to bless believers.

## 2. Social and Political Engagements

Pentecostalism's historical origins in Asia validate observations elsewhere that the movement is mainly attractive to the socially disenfranchise.[67] Prior even claims that it "has set its stoutest roots among Asian ethnic minorities and social classes which lack political or ideological power."[68] But as the overview above has shown, this is no longer an adequate depiction of the state of Pentecostalism on the continent. With the rise of the middle class that rode the waves of economic growth, Pentecostalism also transformed congregations into the religious powerhouse that are today's megachurches. As far as Asia is concerned, Pentecostalism has thus localized in ways that pay attention to local cultures but also economic conditions.[69]

At the same time, much of the literature about Pentecostalism in Asia maintains a limited view of indigenization.[70] By and large, it approaches indigenization in terms of beliefs in the supernatural and the administration of signs and wonders. All these are related to local cultures revolving around spirits and spiritual warfare that are common among its peoples. Moreover, having interfaced with evangelicalism, Pentecostals, according to these writings, tend to focus on personal renewal, limiting their capacity for sociopolitical engagements. Indeed, the dilemma comes from the tension between engagement in the social world and evangelism as a spiritual calling.[71] Reinforcing the dilemma is the eschatological view that "current political events" are "negative signs" that confirms the approaching second coming of the Lord.[72] Pentecostals have thus

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66 Cornelio/Medina: Prosperity Ethic (2021).

67 Martin: Pentecostalism (2001).

68 Prior: How Does the Catholic Church Deal with the New Religious Movements in a Constructive Way? (Focus on Asia) (2015), 235.

69 Attanasi: The plurality of prosperity theologies and Pentecostalisms (2012); Yong: A Typology of Prosperity Theology (2012).

70 Yung: Pentecostalism and the Asian Church (2005).

71 Anderson: Pentecostalism and social, political, and economic development (2020), 123.

72 Ibid., 125.

been criticized for being out of touch with reality by placing primacy on spirituality rather than on matters of social justice. Thus, when Pentecostals engage social issues, they tend to frame them as spiritual or individual matters. David Yonggi Cho, for example, viewed widespread poverty (after the Korean War) as a demonic curse to which the answer is a three-fold blessing in the form of spiritual well-being, general well-being, and physical health.[73] The same logic is inherent to the prosperity theology that finds its roots in Pentecostalism as well.[74] Affluence is the heritage of a believer's access to spiritual power. This renders poverty and marginalization as a spiritual matter instead of a structural condition that affects many.[75]

But recent developments suggest that Pentecostal thought in Asia "is maturing rapidly and has begun to mount serious challenges to more traditional theologies, both in Asia and elsewhere".[76] One area is the recognition among Pentecostals of holistic mission. It rejects the theological dichotomy between evangelization and the pursuit of social justice. Around the world, many Pentecostal Christians are already involved in both evangelism and social ministry at the same time; they are called "Progressive Pentecostals".[77] Their work is a deliberate attempt to engage Christian faith with concrete social programs for the wider community. Driven by this intention to serve people outside their congregation, Pentecostal churches are behind "some of the most innovative social programs in the world".[78] To them, evangelism and social engagement are not mutually exclusive. In fact, their spiritual experience – in the form of salvation, personal renewal, and gifts of the Spirit – inspires them to contribute to society. Living out the holistic mission, progressive Pentecostals do not separate the spiritual from the physical, "but integrate them holistically, leading to involvement in social issues and politics".[79]

In what follows, three areas of engagement are identified. They demonstrate the social and political engagements that showcase the holistic mission of Pentecostals in Asia: *civic welfare*, *public morality*, and *political participation*. Consistent with the general tone of this chapter, these engagements are not uniform across Asia. Specific contexts especially with regard to religious governance need to be considered in appreciating the extent and impact of progressive Pentecostal work in different regions and countries.[80]

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73 Kim: The Word and the Spirit (2008).
74 Bowler/Reagan: Bigger, Better, Louder (2014).
75 Cornelio/Medina: Prosperity Ethic (2021).
76 Yung: Mission and evangelism (2008), 264.
77 Miller/Yamamori: Global Pentecostalism (2007), 2.
78 Ibid., 5.
79 Anderson: Pentecostalism and social, political, and economic development (2020), 124.
80 Chong/Goh: Asian Pentecostalism (2015).

## 1.1 Civic welfare

The first area of engagement for Pentecostal churches in Asia is civic welfare. Given the political conditions that inhibit direct political involvement by churches, civic engagement is arguably the biggest (and most strategic) form of social involvement among Pentecostals. In the literature, civic engagements refer to the work of civil society actors in addressing the gaps left by the market and the state. In this light, religious organizations are civil society actors that rely on voluntary work for the sake of the common good[81] Thus civic work embraces a wide array of activities including social work, relief operations, humanitarian action, and development interventions.[82] To recognize this wide array of civic engagements is essential for a better comprehension of the dynamic state of religious work in an "age of development", which, for Feener and Fountain, continues to challenge what scholars and practitioners mean by human flourishing.[83] Indeed, inasmuch as Asia has become an economic powerhouse for the world, many of its peoples remain impoverished because of racial conflicts, economic exploitation, and ecological disaster.[84] This situations provide extensive opportunities for religious organizations to initiate development interventions.

As the work of Clemens, Huff, and Nyotxay in mainland Southeast Asia shows, "community development" beyond church planting is an "important way that Pentecostal churches are contributing" to society.[85] In 1999, American missionaries founded Foursquare-Children of Promise, which inaugurated the work of over a hundred churches to also serve as orphan homes in Cambodia. In the same year, missionaries with the Assemblies of God also founded the Cambodia Global Action, which began as a health program in Kompong Speu Province. Decades later, the NGO now runs a school, an orphanage, and a microfinance intervention. Apart from education and healthcare, other Pentecostal initiatives in Cambodia and Laos are devoted to agriculture, HIV, and gender. Myanmar, a neighboring country, has seen too the impressive work of Pentecostal groups. The issues they address are similar hence the establishment of orphanages and schools. But worth highlighting is their extensive health intervention. In partnership with Fida International, an NGO overseen by Finnish Pentecostal Churches, local congregations led preventive health education,

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81 Smidt a.: Pews, prayers, and participation (2008).
82 Cornelio: Religion and Civic Engagement (2017).
83 Feener/Fountain: Religion in the Age of Development (2018).
84 Ma: Asian Pentecostalism (2004).
85 Clements/Huff/Nyotxay: Asia Pacific Pentecostalism (2019), 142.

set up fly-proof toilets, and dug tube wells to provide access to clean water among communities around Yangon.[86]

Pentecostal churches from advanced countries in Asia are involved in development work as well. In East Asia, one very successful Korean Pentecostal group is the Onnuri Community Church which has taken upon itself a mission "led by the Holy Spirit, with actively mobilized laity, with a deep sense of calling".[87] Onnuri has satellite churches in Ho Chi Minh, Abu Dhabi, Tokyo, Sydney, and California. Better World, its NGO, is involved in such social ministries as education and healthcare for children, housing support, refugee assistance, and disaster relief.[88] Another important church in South Korea is the Yoido Full Gospel Church led by David Yonggi Cho. It has been very active in promoting social activities that benefit not only South Koreans but also other nationalities. Their efforts include relief work, assistance to the poor, medical help, and other social support that addresses the concerns of marginalized sectors such as the very young and the very old.[89]

The situation in the Middle East is different, where civic engagements have tackled religious divisions. Due to religious restrictions and demographic factors, Christian population – including Pentecostal presence – in the region remains a minority. Except for Lebanon, where Christians have been able to amass considerable influence, other countries have seen no significant population of Christians. Only the Greek Orthodox Church and Roman Catholic Church are still present. The experience of Arab Christians and Eastern Christians in predominantly Muslim societies is instructive.[90] Arab Christians have tried to engage the Muslim majority and avoid estrangement with them. They are driven by the desire to unite Christians while holding on to an Arab identity, which is favorable for those who pursue Arab unification.[91]

Civic engagements will continue to characterize the work of Pentecostal churches in Asia. This is a promising prospect insofar as development work, humanitarian action, and community outreach are concerned. As indicated above, civic engagements are arguably the biggest form of sociopolitical participation by churches. And as Anderson puts it in a recent article, "Pentecostal efforts in development are an example of the need to take religious

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86 Oo: Social Concern and the Assemblies of God in Myanmar (2019).

87 Ma: Asian Pentecostalism in Context (2014), 155.

88 Jennings: "Better World" (2018).

89 Kim: Missionaries of a Korean Model of Development (2018).

90 Sabra: Two Ways of Being a Christian in the Muslim Context of the Middle East (2006).

91 The experience of Eastern Christians has been different, by contrast. Generally, their aim has been to distinguish themselves from non-Christians, even if that might mean fighting for their identity, integrity, and freedom as worshippers.

groups seriously and for secular development agencies to engage with them in their mutual desire to improve human wellbeing."[92]

What accounts for their success? The following factors suggest that civic engagements are not solely about proselytization even if it might be an inescapable ethos for many Pentecostal churches.

Overall, the civic engagement of Pentecostal groups in mainland Southeast Asia reveals the preferential option for the poor discernible in Pentecostal theology. David Yonggi Cho's "social theology" encapsulates this point: the love of God "fills the life of Christians through the Holy Spirit, and enables them to share this love with others. Thereby Christians meet Jesus in daily life through serving poor and disadvantaged people in the immediate society as well as in other countries."[93] And so the impact of Pentecostalism on people's life chances goes beyond the spiritual dimension. Development work and humanitarian assistance are aimed at improving quality of life. Therefore, the "appeal to emotion and the personal experiences of the faithful, and the provision of opportunities for public recognition, are modern religious practices which do indeed deeply differ from their inherited religion of Buddhism in many parts of Southeast Asia."[94] A pastor of the Assemblies of God in Myanmar validates exactly this point: "The church is not only the pillar of the Gospel, but also the shelter of the poor…We are involved in these social ministries not to gain membership but just to fulfill the social responsibility of the church."[95]

There are theological factors as well, which concern the very message of Pentecostalism in contexts of suffering. But this one needs scholarly updating. For Wonsuk Ma, that Pentecostalism in Asia first emerged among its suffering people goes a long way towards explaining the growth of the movement.[96] The historical suffering brought about by the atrocities of conflict around East and Southeast Asia (such as World War II), the racial conflicts in East Timor, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Myanmar, and the economic exclusion experienced in many countries all point to the collective suffering of Asian peoples. Ma thus argues that there is a need to "develop a Pentecostal theological reflection on suffering. Although the western triumphalistic 'wealth and health gospel' has contributed greatly to the 'upward mobility', Asia continues to live with suffering as a reality of life."[97] One promising development in this regard is the appropriation of Pentecostalism into *minjung* theology. In this reading, the Holy

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92 Anderson: Pentecostalism and social, political, and economic development (2020), 133.
93 Ibid., 132.
94 Clements/Huff/Nyotxay: Asia Pacific Pentecostalism (2019), 201.
95 Oo: Social Concern and the Assemblies of God in Myanmar (2019), 184.
96 Ma: Asian Pentecostalism (2004).
97 Ibid., 198–99.

Spirit is at work in healing and transforming the "wounded minjung".[98] For Miller and Yamamori, all these social engagements point to the rise of progressive Pentecostalism, which is also evident in other parts of the global South.[99] Their humanitarian action, interventions in personal crisis, and community development measures are underpinned by a "holistic gospel" that preaches personal transformation and pursues social ministries at the same time.[100]

From the point of view of sociology, one can argue that civic engagements are in themselves theological acts of being one with the suffering peoples of Asia.[101] To emphasize them in scholarship, preaching, and ministry at large is one way of contesting the dominant discourse that is the prosperity gospel. Indeed, development interventions by Pentecostal churches simply fulfill the original mandate of humanitarian work when it originated among Christian missionaries in the 18th and 19th centuries. For those missionaries, to emphasize the humanity of Christ was about alleviating human suffering.[102] But at the same time, civic engagements are theological acts that are consequential on people's virtues and behavior. Civic engagements, especially in the form of long-term development work, transforms the very habitus of people they intend to serve. They reinforce the spiritual work of Pentecostalism in allowing the poor to "achieve symbolic social advancement through maintenance of strict moral norms, including such common features as abstinence from alcohol and cigarettes, leading an exemplary family life, an emphasis on honesty, and a Weberian-esque privileging of hard work".[103]

To be sure, civic engagement and civil society are concepts often associated with liberal democracy. Political regimes in Asia vary and yet, in spite of many legal restrictions on religion, religious organizations are discovering strategic inroads via development work. In some contexts such as Cambodia and Laos, development work by Pentecostals has been successful because the government facilitates unrestricted movement on the ground.[104] Regardless of the political regimes, it is important to consider the potential role of Pentecostal civic engagements on social and political behavior where democracy is either absent or fragile. How much of these engagements can make an impact on citizenship and democratic consciousness? Some scholars are convinced that this might be the case (at least as far as the US experience is concerned). Indeed, this is one

98 Chong/Goh: Asian Pentecostalism (2015), 414.
99 Miller/Yamamori: Global Pentecostalism (2007).
100 Ibid., 22.
101 Cornelio: Religion and Civic Engagement (2017).
102 Feener/Scheer: Development's Missions (2018).
103 Kim: Missionaries of a Korean Model of Development (2018), 201.
104 Clements/Huff/Nyotxay: Asia Pacific Pentecostalism (2019).

idea worth thinking through in the years to come. For Smidt et al, the claim that the civic and public participation of religion is ultimately dangerous to democracy is mistaken: "When religion takes a public role, it often fosters precisely the kinds of norms and behaviors that make democracy thrive."[105]

This section ends on a critical note. The civic engagements of Pentecostal churches in Asia can also be read in the light of geopolitics. Scholarship on other religious groups points in this direction. The rise of philanthropy among new religious movements in Buddhism in East Asia is not just about the power of its middle class but also soft power.[106] The region, after all, is fraught with competing rising powers. The disaster response by Soka Gakkai and Tzu Chi are strategic for the interests of Japan and Taiwan, respectively.[107] By the same token, the growth of Korean missionaries in East and Southeast Asia "is part of a broader foreign policy aimed at mobilizing Korean political, economic, and cultural resources…South Korea plays on ASEAN its fear of the political dominance of [Japan and China] to propose more balanced development partnerships".[108] This is arguably the case for Pentecostal churches coming from more affluent countries in Asia. Implicitly or otherwise, that they are involved in international development work is an assertion of soft power in the region and around the world.

## 2.2 Public morality

The second area in which Pentecostals in Asia are proving to be influential as well is public morality, which concerns moral policies that affect citizens in pluralistic societies. Religious groups engage in public morality as a way of legislating for society their convictions about private morality. Put differently, Pentecostal churches are involved in shaping public opinion and policy on matters that they consider to be against the values and principles upheld by their faith. To them, doing so is essential as society is a constant battleground between good and evil. In the literature, to shape public opinion and policy based on what is morally acceptable or not relates to morality politics.[109] Morality politics involves statements and protests against behaviors, beliefs, and even groups they consider morally unacceptable. The ethos derives much from the propositions of communitarian political theory that argue the contributions

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105 Smidt et al.: Pews, prayers, and participation (2008), 39.

106 Kuah-Pearce/Cornelio: Introduction (2015).

107 Lau/Cornelio: Tzu Chi and the Philanthropy of Filipino Volunteers (2015); Laliberté: The Growth of a Taiwanese Buddhist Association in China (2013).

108 Kim: Missionaries of a Korean Model of Development (2018), 198.

109 Meier: Drugs, Sex, Rock, and Roll (1999).

of religion, given its values, to moral identity and "the formation of a strong moral community".[110]

But engaging in public morality can be a messy work for religious groups. As moral entrepreneurs, Pentecostal churches, like other religious groups are involved in the defense of a particular set of principles. As a result, morality politics discursively creates a division between an acceptable in-group and a deplorable out-group. Recent works on morality politics involve the work of religious groups in relation to drug policies, same-sex marriage, gender equality around the world.[111] That Pentecostals are now involved in shaping public morality is a remarkable development in light of their earlier struggles as a minority religion in Asia. Writing in the mid-2000s, Ma and Ma observed that Pentecostals' attitude toward their cultures "is also similarly antagonistic or at least negative. It is because culture and religion in Asia are integrally linked.[112] Also, Pentecostalism in Asia still maintains a strong Western – thus, 'foreign' – look. These have made Asian Pentecostals stay away from any constructive engagement with Asian religions and their traditional culture."

One area where Pentecostals are shaping public morality is gender equality. Around Asia, whether a country is developing or developed does not seem to matter because women's greater participation in the economy and politics arouses moral panic in society. Female factory workers in Sri Lanka, for working outside the home, raise suspicions about promiscuity. Young women in Japan are blamed for their "selfish consumerism" as it which delays marriage and endangers the country's fertility rate. Regardless of a country's level of development, women who participate in the globalizing economy carry the stigma of not fulfilling traditional roles in the context of marriage and child-rearing. Their economic decisions or career choices raise concerns "about their appropriate supervision and moral management".[113] Moral panic is evident in local narratives, journalistic accounts, and even statements made by public officials. It is in the same spirit that Pentecostal churches act as vanguards of conservative morality that upholds traditional expectations of women, masculinity, and the family. These are virtues that coincide with the heteronormative and patriarchal structures in Asia, which also accounts for the slow progress of LGBTQ+ movements on the continent. Even in settings where Pentecostalism has empowered women to pursue personal transformation and even leadership positions, they are still relegated to their traditional roles in the household. For Kelly Chong, that women find emotional

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110 Peach: Legislating morality (2002), 5.

111 Cornelio/Lasco: Morality politics (2020); Miceli: Morality Politics vs. Identity Politics (2005).

112 Ma/Ma: Jesus Christ in Asia (2005), 504.

113 Mills: Gendered Morality Tales (2017), 321.

healing in cell groups or Bible fellowships accounts for their greater participation and zeal in Pentecostalism in South Korea.[114] And yet in these spaces, women are also taught to endure their difficulties, manage their anger, and release their forgiveness especially in contexts of marital conflicts. They are taught to "die every day". In the words of a cell leader, "One of the things we have to do is to 'kill' (*juk-i-da*) ourselves every day. We keep coming back alive but that's not good. Every day we must die with Christ."[115] The virtuous and transformed woman, in effect, is obedient and forbearing for the sake of harmony in the family.

Beyond their congregations, Pentecostal churches engage in shaping public morality by influencing policy. Doing so is most feasible in democratic societies like the Philippines. The country is considered to be among the top in the world where the gap between sexes is narrow.[116] It is also known to be an LGBTQ-friendly society. In fact, it has been listed among Asia's top travel spots for gays. Furthermore, the recent survey of Pew Research Center shows that for 73% of Filipinos, society should accept homosexuality.[117] But the picture is not entirely clear. Years ago, Magda Mis asked, "Is the Philippines really Asia's most gay-friendly country?" In her view, such a claim is questionable because homosexuality, for Filipinos, remains morally unacceptable. Drawing on another Pew survey at that time, Mis finds that only 25% of Filipinos do not have any moral issue with homosexuality. Her conclusion: "It meant that a majority of Filipinos thought the society should be tolerant, but it didn't necessarily mean that tolerance existed."[118] In recent years moves have been made to push for greater recognition of LGBTQ+ rights in the Philippines. Two in particular made the headlines: same-sex marriage and the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity or Expression (SOGIE) Bill. In 2015, openly gay lawyer Jesus Falcis III filed a petition before the Supreme Court to legalize same-sex marriage.[119] Falcis's move was to challenge the definition of marriage in the Family Code as a union between a man and a woman (a definition that was not in the Philippine Constitution). Although Falcis adopted litigation as a strategy that succeeded elsewhere like the US, it did not turn out in his favor. The Supreme Court, while admitting the discrimination faced by the LGBTQ+ community, decided that Falcis did not "raise an actual, justiciable

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114 Chong: Healing and Redomestication (2011).

115 Ibid., 117.

116 Nagumo: Singapore rises in gender equality ranking as Philippines slips (2019).

117 PEW Research Center: Overview. Pentecostalism in Asia (2006).

118 Mis: Is the Philippines really Asia's most gay-friendly country? (2014).

119 Catholic News Agency: Supreme Court of the Philippines rejects petition to legalize same-sex marriage (2020).

controversy".[120] The Supreme Court suggested as well that following the legislative route might be a wiser move since that is where "democratic deliberation" can take place. As the battle for same-sex marriage recognition was being waged in the Supreme Court, lawmakers were deliberating the fate of the SOGIE Equality Bill, meant to address gender-based discrimination especially in employment, education, and social services. Apart from promoting programs for non-discrimination, it would also penalize acts of gender-based discrimination in the workplace. Different sectors expressed their support for the Bill during the legislative deliberations, including psychologists, educators, and ministers.[121] After being passed in the Lower House in 2017, the Bill eventually reached the Philippine Senate, where long interpellation delayed it until the end of session of 17th Congress in June 2019. By default it was not passed and now has to be refiled in the new Congress, which will entail another round of deliberations. At the adjournment of the 17th Congress, Senator Risa Hontiveros, the Bill's sponsor, expressed confidence that it will be passed in the next round as she believes the advocacy has gained new allies.[122]

The move for same-sex marriage and gender equality in the Philippines may have garnered wider support, but there are no indications that conservative religious groups will back down.[123] Alongside other churches, Pentecostal groups expressed their resistance. Many churches have rallied against these advocacies.[124] Within these circles, same-sex marriage and the SOGIE Equality Bill were conflated even if the latter had no provisions legalizing the former. But far more worth highlighting is the influential work of Charismatic lawmakers themselves. As in elsewhere in the world, the religious sector in the Philippines has been active in politics not only by endorsing their politicians during the elections but also fielding their own. These acts manifest the dominion theology inherent to the militant ethos of Christian churches to define national identity.[125] Brother Eddie Villanueva, founder of Jesus is Lord Church, was elected in 2019 as a congressman for the party Citizens' Battle Against Corruption (CIBAC). During his privilege speech before other legislators, Villanueva claimed that the SOGIE Bill would restrict freedom of speech and religion: "What happens to a Christian like me, and to the majority of the people in this chamber, if we are to be threatened by punishment every time we share our Bible-based beliefs on matters of transgenders and

120 Ibid.
121 Rosero: What You Should Know About The SOGIE Equality Bill (2019).
122 Casayuran: Hontiveros confident SOGIE bill will pass next Congress (2019).
123 Cornelio/Dagle: Weaponising Religious Freedom (2019).
124 Elemia: Christian groups troop to Senate vs landmark SOGIE bill (2018).
125 Cornelio: The Philippines (2020); Cornelio: Claiming the Nation (2020).

homosexuals".[126] His son, Senator Joel Villanueva, echoes this point with an undeniable Christian overtone. Speaking during a press conference while a prayer rally of 50,000 was being staged outside the Senate to protest the SOGIE Bill, Senator Villanueva made the following remark in Filipino and English: "I speak as a pastor's son who grew up in church…Many of you witnessed it in the previous Congress when we asked the question if a pastor quoted the Bible inside his church, will it be considered promoting stigma against the LGBT sector? The answer was yes. That can't be. Where is equality there?".[127] The last, and perhaps most influential Charismatic lawmaker today is Senator Manny Pacquiao, known around the world as a professional boxer. Raised as a Catholic, Pacquiao became a born again Christian and even built his own church called The Word for Everyone in his hometown, General Santos City. As a senator, Pacquiao has made many provocative statements against the LGBTQ+ community. In an earlier interpellation on the SOGIE Bill, Pacquiao asserted that "there are only two types of persons – a man and a woman".[128] Invoking the Bible throughout the proceedings in the Senate, Pacquiao questioned Senator Hontiveros how men could be allowed to wear women's clothes.

The vocal resistance of these Pentecostal figures does not deny that efforts have been introduced by progressive churches to welcome sexual diversity in their respective congregations. Providing spaces of support and concrete avenues for dialogue are concrete ways in which inclusiveness has taken place.[129] But consistent with the overall state that characterizes the general attitudes towards homosexuality in the country, these efforts constitute only the minority. Pentecostals, alongside Evangelicals and other conservative religious groups, will continue to harbor homonegative attitudes. What might account for it? An important work by Filipino psychologists reveals that among religious behaviors, reading religious texts tends to be more influential in resisting same-sex marriage.[130] Interestingly, Pentecostals, Evangelicals, and other emerging churches in the Philippines are known to be Bible-reading religious groups. These circles have an essentialist view of marriage and gender roles based on a conservating reading of the Bible. With Scriptural authority, these groups and their religious lawmakers are at the forefront of resisting moves for same-sex marriage and gender equality.

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126 Cepeda: Eddie Villanueva claims SOGIE bill "threatens" freedoms of non-LGBTQ+ (2019).

127 Senate of the Philippines: Press briefing of Senate President Sotto and Sen. Joel Villanueva on the SOGIE bill (2019).

128 Avendaño: Pacquiao, Hontiveros trade Bible quotes over cross-dressing (2017).

129 Goh/Meneses/Messer: An Ecclesiological Praxis of Inclusivity toward Sexual Diversity and HIV (2019).

130 Ochoa et al.: A Bond Between Man and Woman: (o. J.).

Other cases around Asia demonstrate the power of Pentecostals in engaging civil society, but not without raising suspicion among outsiders and public officials. A controversial case took place in Singapore in 2009 when a group of Christian women surprisingly took over the leadership of a women's rights group, the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE).[131] Many of the women were associated with the Church of Our Savior (COOS), a Charismatic congregation within the Anglican Diocese of Singapore. During its general assembly in March of that year, a big turnout of new members managed to elect to AWARE's executive committee nine from among themselves to occupy twelve open slots. It turns out that they harbored anti-homosexual and anti-abortion views, which did not coincide with the advocacy of AWARE in previous years. AWARE had been conducting sex education programs in partnership with the Singapore's Ministry of Education. The organization had also organized a Mothers' Day event in 2006 that welcomed lesbians. The takeover attracted national attention in the city-state. The new board's press conferences captivated journalists and the public as the unfolding story felt like a television drama among outsiders, as members of the old board barged in to protest. Blogs and online campaigns were also set up to protest the takeover. But kindred spirits in the Charismatic community backed it up. Dr Thio Su Mien, the highly respected and former dean of the Faculty of Law of the National University of Singapore, threw her support behind the women and even proclaimed that she was their "feminist mentor". Also a member of COOS, Thio argued before reporters that AWARE "had shifted its focus from gender equality to the promotion of homosexuality and lesbianism".[132] Calling on Christian women, Derek Hong, COOS pastor, chimed in as well: "It's not a crusade against the people [homosexuals], but there's a line that God has drawn for us, and we do not want our nation crossing that line".[133] The saga ended in May 2009 when another general assembly was convened. With 3000 members in attendance, the event made it clear that the new board did not have the confidence of the majority. The turn of events exemplified how high-profile political Pentecostalism can be, sparking public discussions "ranging from the place of religion in civil society, gay rights, the process of citizenry mobilisation, the activist role of the media and the undeniable liberal voice in Singapore".[134] Writing about the event a decade later, Nair reflects that the AWARE saga has only fortified moral and political conservatism in the country.[135] Homosexual acts remain criminalized and deep suspicion about the political voice of

131 Chong: Introduction (2011).
132 Ibid., 2.
133 Nair: The AWARE Saga: Ten Years Later, What's Changed? (2019).
134 Chong: The AWARE Saga (2011), 6.
135 Nair: The AWARE Saga: Ten Years Later, What's Changed? (2019).

religious groups remains ingrained. As a civil society organization, AWARE may have been at the forefront of liberal advocacy for gender equality, but it was a threat to the long-cherished public morality concerning "marriage, sexual activity and pregnancy…within a moral universe of the family".[136] For some Charismatics in Singapore, the only way to resist AWARE was to take over it.

Why do Pentecostal churches involve themselves in shaping public morality? One reason is the very nature of church-state relations in many countries in Asia, where secularism is not about the eradication of religion from the public sphere. Religious pluralism demands different modes of religious governance that privilege the state as the "arbiter of civic-religious exchange and debate, always deemed to be neutral and objective".[137] How religious governance plays out differs but the important point is that religion, in many places, is not completely evicted from social and even political life. There are discursive openings, therefore, for religious groups, especially influential Pentecostal megachurches, to express their concern or views about society and where it was headed. Singapore is an example that could be placed on one end of this spectrum. Religious freedom is carefully weighed against the communitarian interests of the state. This principle is one of foundations of the Maintenance of Religious Harmon Act, passed in 1990. The primary concern for the Singapore state is the placation of religious conflict given its history of ethnic violence.[138] At the same time, religious organizations are considered potential civil society partners for the welfare of people. This is a space Pentecostal groups have taken advantage of to argue for their brand of public morality. But it continues to be a negotiated space since statements made especially by prominent Pentecostal groups can offend the religious sensibilities of other groups or be interpreted as being political already.[139] On the other end of the spectrum is arguably the Philippines, which has no comprehensive law related to religious governance. In contrast to the Singapore state's approach, the Philippine Supreme Court's view of religious freedom gives preference to individual freedom of belief and practice as long as it does not pose a threat to the state.[140] The separation of church and state lies in the autonomy of these two institutions, barring their respective leaders from taking over each other's roles. At the same time, the Philippine state does not, by default, consider religion a threat to itself. It has adopted what the Supreme Court calls benevolent neutrality, privileging the role and presence of religion in public

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136 Chua: Making Singapore's Liberal Base Visible (2011), 21.

137 Chong/Goh: Asian Pentecostalism (2015), 414.

138 Thio: Courting religion (2009); Thio: The Cooperation of Religion and State in Singapore. (2009).

139 Neo: Regulating Pluralism (2020).

140 Cornelio: Religious Freedom in the Philippines (2013).

space. This legal environment finds its roots in the pervasiveness of religion in cultural and social life. Pentecostal churches, alongside other religious groups, have taken advantage of this environment to influence policy and politics.[141] Their work might even reflect "pentecostal nationalism", the conviction that the nation is meant to be Christian.[142]

The other explanation concerns changing gender roles and the persistence of gender expectations in many parts of Asia.[143] Although attitudinal shifts are taking shape around Asia, the most recent gender equality rankings reveal that its societies have much to catch up on when it comes to the role of women. The rankings are based on the Global Gender Gap Index, which relies on different variables including economic participation, educational attainment, health conditions, and political empowerment.[144] Out of 150 countries, only the Philippines is in the top 20. Bangladesh ranks 50, Thailand 75, and Vietnam 87. The most advanced societies in Asia lag further behind. While Singapore has improved to 54, Malaysia (104), China (106), South Korea (108), India (112), and Japan (121) are very far behind.

The state of the LGBTQ+ community is another contested area when it comes to gender equality in Asia. All over the world, acceptance of homosexuality is improving but in Asia the situation is only beginning to change. Based on the global survey administered by Pew Research Center, majority of Filipinos (73%) and the Japanese (68%) believe that homosexuality should be accepted by society. But only 44% concur in South Korea, 37% in India, 13% in Lebanon, and 9% in Indonesia.[145] Based on the World Values Survey, other indicators reveal the same pattern. In Southeast Asia, the situation is varied as well. Majority of people in Indonesia (66%) and Malaysia (59%) reject as neighbors gay men and lesbians as opposed to their counterparts in neighboring countries.[146] What accounts for the greater openness in some societies? According to Pew Research Center, acceptance might be informed by sex and educational attainment. Women and the more educated tend to be more accepting of homosexuality. Another observation is that people who consider religion to be less important in their lives tend to accept homosexuality more. This is certainly the case in South Korea where 51% of those who say that religion is not very important are more open to homosexuality than are those who say that religion is very important (13%).[147]

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141 Cornelio: The Philippines (2020).
142 Yong: In the days of Caesar (2010), 9.
143 Chong/Goh: Asian Pentecostalism (2015).
144 Nagumo: Singapore rises in gender equality ranking as Philippines slips (2019).
145 PEW Research Center: Overview: Pentecostalism in Asia (2006).
146 Manalastas et al.: Homonegativity in Southeast Asia (2017).
147 PEW Research Center: Overview: Pentecostalism in Asia (2006).

## 2.3 Political participation

The third area of engagement is politics. In this regard, Chong and Goh observe that the Asian experience, compared to the Latin American and African, "is more varied with different levels of state opposition and societal opposition to Christianity and its believers."[148] This is an important point to make in assessing the different fortunes of Pentecostalism in Asia with respect to political engagements. Typically, political engagements are framed in terms of political parties, electoral politics, and candidates who come from Pentecostal backgrounds. But in this section, political engagement will refer to the work of Pentecostal churches and entities with respect to the state, governance, and public policy. In some cases, this might refer to participation in elections, but in others it is about advocacy. The overlap with the previous section on public morality is evident insofar as moral issues are concerned. (Above, the role of Pentecostal churches has been highlighted on matters concerning gender equality, for example.) But in this section the emphasis is placed on Pentecostal relationships with the state. A crucial point this section makes is that contextual considerations matter as the ability of Pentecostal churches to engage local and national politics around Asia is necessarily dependent on political and democratic regimes. Two contexts need to be considered: church-state relations and religious restriction.

The first context is church-state relations, which involve the different ways in which religious diversity is managed by the state.

- On the one hand, many states in East and Southeast Asia echo principles of neo-Confucianism: "for the sake of societal harmony, there is a strong centralised state, and religions are expected to be subservient to it".[149] China, for example, grants religious freedom to the extent that Christians do not proselytize, collaborate with foreign organizations without permission, or interfere with government action and policies. As mentioned above, Singapore, with its Management of Religious Harmony Act, is another example. The state asserts its power over religious groups to placate conflict, counter extremism, and even initiate reconciliation between competing groups.[150]
- On the other hand, in places like South Korea and the Philippines, religious diversity is less heavily managed and religious freedom highly valued by the state. Thus Christian churches played important roles in democratization.

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148 Chong/Goh: Asian Pentecostalism (2015), 412.
149 Kim: Social and Political Context (2020), 388.
150 Neo: Regulating Pluralism (2020).

Challenging their respective authoritarian regimes, they were behind the development of minjung theology in Korea and many forms of community organizing in the Philippines.[151]

The second context is religious restriction.

- In many states in Asia, religious restrictions are typically promulgated in favor of the majority religion. Indeed, the expansion of Charismatic Christianity in Malaysia remains a challenging feat. Postcolonial Malaysia adopted Islam as its official religion, leaving non-Malays and Christians with no social and political advantages. Because of the restrictions on the construction of non-Muslim religious buildings in the country, the Charismatic Church of Penang for two decades since the 1980s was "unable to grow beyond being a house church".[152]
- At the same time, that a majority religion like Islam or Hinduism is privileged by the state affects the civil and political rights of minority Christians, Pentecostals included. The experience of Myanmar, for example, shows that in spite of its democratization, laws were passed to restrict freedom on interreligious marriage. Buddhist activists succeeded in making this happen.[153] In Kazakhstan, there are reports about the presence of Pentecostal churches or missions. They indicate that no harassment against the Pentecostal community has taken place. However, while religious diversity and human rights are allowed by the Kazakh constitution, controversial policies on religion have targeted individuals based on their religious beliefs rather than illegal activities.[154]
- As a result, violence becomes inevitable. This is the case, for example, in Kazakhstan's other neighboring countries in Central Asia such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Around the region, the place of religious minorities is in question as well. Recent developments show that security has been used to persecute Protestant groups and even other Muslim groups (that contest state control over Islam).[155] In India, Pentecostals constitute a very small but visible minority among Christians. Since the 1990s, Pentecostals, many of whom belong to indigenous communities and the lower castes, have witnessed the rise of violence perpetuated by Hindi nationalists. And as Sahoo explains, even among Catholics and Protestants, Pentecostals are

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151 Kim: Social and Political Context (2020); Lim: Church and State in the Philippines, 1900–1988 (1989); Lim: Consolidating Democracy (2009).

152 De Bernardi: Christians circulations (2020), 327.

153 Frydenlund: Religious Liberty for Whom? (2017).

154 Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada: Kasachstan (2002).

155 Olcott/Rappe: Can Covenantal Pluralism Grow in Central Asian Soil? (2020).

blamed for the general rise of anti-Christian violence in India.[156] Pentecostals are thus implicated in the violence spurred by a vision of Hindu nationalism that rejects Christian conversion, the politicization of identity, and the development state led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is committed to Hindu nationalism.

- To be sure, political activism among minority Christians can still exist even in restrictive societies, but not without threat. In Pakistan, Catholics and Protestants protested the authoritarian tendencies of President Bhutto in the 1970s and later on the repressive regime of General Zia who declared martial law over the country. In the 1990s, Catholic bishop John Joseph resisted Zia's blasphemy laws and committed suicide later on to protest the execution of a Christian man based on blasphemy charges. Whether activism is present among contemporary Pentecostals, whose communities are growing around the country, is in question. Influential Charismatic leaders like Pastor Anwar Fazal may be close to Christians in politics, but "abstains from political activism himself".[157]

Recognizing these contexts matters in order to highlight not only the challenges confronting Pentecostal churches but also the different ways in which they navigate them politically. Heuristically, the political engagements of Pentecostals can be placed on a spectrum. At one end is capitulation to the state. At the other end is active resistance to state forces. In between are the many forms of political engagements among Pentecostals in Asia. For example, elsewhere on the continent, they challenge many stereotypes that they avoid politics and efforts at social justice by only "proclaiming a gospel that either spiritualizes or individualizes social problems".[158] Some of them are involved in electoral politics while others assert their biblical worldview on policy making, exemplifying what Yong refers to as political Pentecostalism.[159] Note: The spectrum is not entirely based on political ideology. As discussed above and as the following cases from China, South Korea, the Philippines, and Singapore illustrate, where Pentecostalism stands in relation to the state is necessarily informed by various concerns and contextual considerations including surveillance, minority status, access to power, and moral convictions.

The state of Christianity in China is instructive because religious life is carefully monitored by the state. Contemporary Christianity in the country is characterized by the rise of indigenous Christians, usually without strong

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156 Sahoo: Pentecostalism and politics of conversion in India (2018).
157 Brasher: Pride and Abstention (2020), 92.
158 Anderson: Pentecostalism and social, political, and economic development (2020), 123.
159 Yong: In the days of Caesar (2010).

influence from foreign missionaries.[160] As recounted at the onset of this chapter, the emergence of Christianity, which developed after the Cultural Revolution, gave way to the development of Pentecostalism in China, in the form of such churches as *The Jesus' Family* and the *Born-Again Movement* (Word of Life Church). Presently, Christian communities in China, which mostly have Pentecostal roots, are still monitored by the authoritarian control of the government while "fighting for space and importance"[161] Pentecostal churches in China are under religious regulation and are thus limited to small house-churches.[162] In fact, so strict is the regulation that churches catered to expatriates (such as the International Church of Shanghai, ICS) do not allow the entry of local Chinese. For the expatriate members of ICS, a Charismatic congregation, they do so because "the most important thing for us is to protect the church".[163]

Interestingly, Christian churches in China are able to negotiate with the government using the latter's own political and legal framework which have resulted in their acknowledgement as "new groups" that have "equal status" with other groups in the community.[164] For unrecognized Pentecostal churches, some recognition is achieved through acts of patriotism. Through prayer and worship services and charitable programs, small churches are able to demonstrate that they do not intend to challenge the authority of the state. At the same time, their patriotic gestures contribute towards improving their reputation in Chinese society.[165]

The situation is different in several democratic contexts in Asia, where Pentecostal Christianity tends to be politically assertive and even aggressive. They play an unmistakable political role in at least two areas: a.) endorsement of candidates during the elections and b.) defense of conservative policies.

The first case is South Korea, where Christianity, even if a minority religion, is politically influential. Lee Myung-bak, who was president from 2008–2013, was also an elder of Somang Presbyterian Church. As a presidential candidate in 2007, Lee's ascendancy was celebrated by many Christians who believed that another revival was going to take place in Korea a century since the Great Pyongyang Revival of 1907. Lee, who was mayor of Seoul from 2002–2006, had no qualms about his religious fervor in political life. At an event organized by the Holy City Movement, a morality program inspired by C. Peter Wagner's teachings on spiritual warfare, Lee made a prophetic declaration: "I declare that

160 Ma: Asian Pentecostalism in Context (2014).
161 Chan: The Christian Community in China (2009), 79.
162 Miller: Progressive Pentecostalism (2009).
163 Lau: Overseas Chinese Christians in Contemporary China (2020), 1.
164 Chan: The Christian Community in China (2009), 80.
165 Koesel: China's Patriotic Pentecostals (2014).

the City of Seoul is a holy place governed by God; the citizens in Seoul are God's people; the churches and Christians in Seoul are spiritual guards that protect the city…I now dedicate Seoul to the Lord."[166] Lee might be Presbyterian but the declaration is clearly inspired by Pentecostalism and dominion theology. Julie Ma[167] thus rightly identifies that one common criticism from other Christian groups about Pentecostalism in Asia is its "tendency to downplay the 'theology of the cross' by focusing on a theology of triumphalism." Christians thus wielded their influence not only to field their own political candidates but also, in a manner that echoes their engagements in public morality, to campaign against homosexuality and abortion. Moreover, megachurch leaders have used their influence as well to defend President Park Geun-Hye (2013–2018) when public protests were lodged against her for the use of illegal surveillance. Megachurch leaders called these protesters "unpatriotic and pro-North Korea".[168] As a result, the public associated these religious groups, including many Pentecostal churches, with authoritarianism.

But like their counterparts in South Korea, they have also campaigned for, if not fielded their own candidates. This much is true in the Philippines, where El Shaddai is one of the most prominent and active Charismatic groups within the Catholic Church.[169] Led by Brother Mike Velarde, the group has around three to eight million members worldwide. In different countries, most of their members are Overseas Filipino Workers. In the Philippines, the group's weekly fellowship at the International House of Prayer in the south of Metro Manila attracts mostly urban poor adherents.[170] El Shaddai is known for its prosperity-oriented messages, chief of which is seed-faith theology, the conviction that God returns (even more) what one has donated out of faith. But El Shaddai's influence reaches beyond the religious sphere. Every election cycle, Brother Mike is expected to host different national candidates. Without formally endorsing any specific candidate, these events indicate his preferences and members are expected to follow suit. But more importantly, El Shaddai has its own political party called *Buhay* (Life), which pushes for conservative policies especially concerning family and abortion in the Philippine Congress.[171]

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166 Han: Urban megachurches and contentious religious politics in Seoul (2015), 135.

167 Ma: Pentecostals and Charismatics (2020), 346.

168 Han: Urban Megachurches and Contentious Religious Politics in Seoul (2015), 136.

169 Wiegele: Reframing Suffering and Success (2005); Kessler/Rüland: Give Jesus a hand! charismatic Christians (2008).

170 Cornelio: Religious Worlding (2017).

171 The presence of religious parties in the Philippine House of Representatives is made possible by the Party List Law, which was enacted in 1995 (Bueza: LOOKBACK [2020]). In contrast to the traditional representatives who are elected by their geographic constituents, party-list groups represent social sectors such as teachers, nurses, and youth. But over time, many groups participated in the process, some of them are backed by religious congregations. In

Political work is evident too among Charismatic Evangelicals in the Philippines. Mentioned in the previous sections, Jesus is Lord Church (JIL) has Citizens' Battle Against Corruption (CIBAC), also a party-list group. Its current representative in the Philippine Congress is no less than Brother Eddie Villanueva, the very founder of JIL in 1978.[172] Previously, that position was held by his son, Joel Villanueva who is now a Philippine senator. Much of the work of CIBAC and the patriotic preachings at JIL is derived from the political work of Brother Eddie when he was still a student activist at a state university in Manila. Upon converting to Evangelical Christianity, he did not abandon a big part of his advocacies for social justice which could be fought, according to Brother Eddie, in the political sphere. Thus in the 2000s he ran twice for Philippine President and once for senator. He lost on all three occasions even though he had the backing of parachurch organizations and many Evangelical and Charismatic circles, disproving the claim that born again Christians constituted a voting bloc. Nevertheless, CIBAC and Brother Eddie's political connections were engaged in exposing corruption by no less than President Gloria Arroyo. Brother Eddie has also criticized President Duterte's remark that God is stupid and his anti-illegal drugs campaign that has left many children fatherless. All these examples show that in spite of CIBAC's and Brother Eddie's moral conservatism (as explained in the previous section), both have been powerful critiques of corruption in the country.[173] Convinced that Christians are called to serve "God and nation" (*Diyos at Bayan*), they have used their political influence to this end. What is particularly notable about the presence of these religiously inspired party-list groups is that they have overlapping interests in conservative morality. Being Catholic or otherwise is less important. Together with Pentecostal politicians such as Senator Manny Pacquiao, they have, for example, resisted legislative moves for gender equality and divorce.[174]

The final case is from Singapore where many influential politicians are in fact Christian, belonging to Evangelical and Charismatic churches.[175] But their influence is limited. As explained in the previous section, prominent Pentecostal

principle they are not religious parties but their links to religious groups and their religiously inspired political positions are undeniable. In total they constitute 20% of seats in Congress. This political environment that has engendered the participation of religious groups as legitimate parties might be a uniqueness of Philippine politics. But whether this has been beneficial to the overall state of democracy is in question since these parties are in the end represented by traditional politicians (Tigno: The party-list system in the Philippines [2019]).

172 Cornelio: The indigenization of megachurch Christianity (2018).

173 Anderson: Pentecostalism and social, political, and economic development (2020).

174 Cornelio: Claiming the Nation (2020); Cornelio: The Philippines (2020).

175 Chang: Singapore's Cultural Experimentation (2012).

churches have been behind conservative policies related to gender in Singapore.[176] While Singapore society is known for being socially and politically conservative, several policies in recent years suggest that its leaders, most of whom belong to the People's Action Party (PAP), are becoming liberal. These issues include the recognition of the gay community, stem cell research, and the gaming industry. But the PAP-led government has been open to these developments. In the past decades, the state has begun hiring openly gay civil servants, backing businesses catered for the LGBT community, supporting stem cell research, and facilitating the entry of the gambling industry. Debating these matters in the parliament has been fierce especially for Christian politicians, who resisted them. But in the end the parliament has concluded that these developments are good for Singapore to keep the economy competitive. The utilitarian agenda has been a useful strategy to resist the opposition among conservative Christian politicians.

## 3. Engaged Pentecostalism in Asia

To recapitulate, Pentecostals in Asia are involved in civic welfare, public morality, and national politics. The diverse cases above demonstrate at least two important lessons that challenge impressions that Pentecostals in Asia are only preoccupied with conversion or the return of Christ.[177] The first is that Pentecostals are in fact involved in social and political engagements. In the face of many challenges including religious conflict and state-imposed restrictions, they are able to make their presence felt in their respective communities and countries. The second is that there is no one form of social and political involvement. They are in education, healthcare, and humanitarian work. But they are also in politics, driven by a wide array of motivations involving concern for moral decay, the pursuit of justice, or even dominion theology. Clearly, the diversity of their engagements betrays ideological categories that could be applied to the Asian experience as a whole. While the civic engagements of many Pentecostal congregations might reflect progressive principles, their political mobilization in the name of authoritarian regimes or conservative

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176 In Singapore, there are the "Big Four" churches – City Harvest Church, New Creation Church, Lighthouse Evangelism, and Faith Community Baptist Church – whose rise is attributed to the gap left by the more socially active and liberal churches in the past decades (Chong and Goh 2015). Recently, City Harvest Church Pastor Kong Hee, who was involved in a multi-million-dollar legal case, has made it clear that he and his church were never involved in the Singapore's People's Action Party (Yang: Singapore GE2020 [2020]).

177 Miller: Progressive Pentecostalism (2009).

morality can hardly be considered progressive. Recognizing the diversity of their social and political engagements widens what scholars have earlier claimed about their concern for social needs as "a new development within the fastest growing religious movement in the world".[178] In this light, "engaged Pentecostalism" as a way of referring to the different ways in which they have participated in politics and society might be more comprehensive than "progressive Pentecostalism". A definition could be offered here. Engaged Pentecostalism refers to the broad movement taking shape among Pentecostal and Charismatic groups, driven by a desire to be relevant and to correct what they consider social and political evils, to be involved in the affairs of the present. Engaged Pentecostalism is thus a useful concept to cover not only progressive Pentecostalism's work for social justice but also political Pentecostalism's involvement in elections and policy making.[179]

Collectively, these engagements challenge the common depiction that on the continent, Pentecostals "believe that social change is only possible through personal con-version and incorporation into the community of faith. Structural change is not usually part of their social agenda".[180] How influential they are relative to the other activities of Pentecostal churches and whether to make a distinction is necessary are questions for scholars and observers. Be that as it may, the cases above do suggest that at the very least, Asian Pentecostals, in a manner that complicates the otherworldliness often associated with them, are involved in "creating an alternative world" in which their churches can anchor its purpose and assert their relevance.[181] This point becomes more glaring when one considers engaged Pentecostalism as a Christian response to crisis, whether in the form of a natural catastrophe, a moral issue, or a political upheaval. This comes as unsurprising in view of Pentecostalism's birth in contexts of social unrest whether in China, India, Korea, or the Philippines. Julie Ma's claim about Asia thus rings true: "As the birthplace of all the world's major religions, Asia provided a context in which religions played a crucial role in providing solutions

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178 Ibid., 279.

179 Yong: In the days of Caesar (2010).

180 See also Prior: The Challenge of the Pentecostals in Asia Part One (2007), 26. Indeed, this might be the case for many churches both big and small alike, especially those committed to Evangelical theologies. Their emphasis on conversion shapes their political worldviews and even their involvements with the state. Recent work on Christianity and the war on drugs in the Philippines points to the limited appreciation for social justice as a structural matter among Evangelical and Charismatic churches (Cornelio/Medina: Christianity and Duterte's War on Drugs in the Philippines [2019]; Cornelio/Marañon: A 'Righteous Intervention' [2019]). The concern for inequality is addressed by sacralizing aspirations for social mobility in the form of the prosperity gospel (Cornelio/Medina: Prosperity Ethic [2021]).

181 Ma: Asian Pentecostalism in Context (2014), 161.

to life's diverse challenges."[182] As Pentecostalism continues to expand around Asia, many needs present themselves as opportunities for a Pentecostal response. By responding to these needs, they are creating alternative worlds where suffering is alleviated, the place of their biblical worldview in public morality is asserted, and the future of the nation through politics is shaped.[183]

What theological worldviews might underpin these engagements? Some of these ideas have been explained above but they are worth reiterating here to synthesize the religious convictions that drive engaged Pentecostalism in Asia. To begin, some inputs may be derived from empirical assessments of progressive Pentecostalism.[184] Two theological principles underpin their holistic mission. The first is the view that everyone is created after God's image. That everyone has equal intrinsic worth may have important social and political implications. In this view, to uphold human rights is to criticize injustices that devalue human lives. By assuming equality before God's righteousness, Pentecostals treat individuals with potential to do good and great things for the Kingdom. The second is the Pentecostal believer's calling to "oppose unjust structures within the church".[185] These activities, guided by the Spirit, are political in terms of challenging power relations within their own churches. Ultimately, this conviction is connected to discipleship. They are redefining ministry by challenging "existing power structures and hierarchies, seeking to elevate the lowly and raise up the oppressed".[186] As mentioned above, these theological ideas are discernible in the social theology embraced by megachurch pastors such as David Yonggi Cho and Pentecostal reflections on suffering.[187] In other words, inasmuch as Pentecostalism have engendered social and political apathy among many congregations, it has also fostered spaces for public involvement in others. This means that the prosperity gospel too often associated with small congregations and megachurches around Asia is not the only theological narrative that responds to economic precarity.[188] The reality of suffering and economic precarity engenders theological reflections that inform social and political action.

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182 Ma: Pentecostals and Charismatics (2020), 335.

183 In a way, these observations validate earlier ruminations by Kessler and Rüland (Responses to Rapid Social Change, 2006, 94) about the social and political impact of a populist religion like Pentecostalism in the Philippines: "Populist religion in the Philippines has a pro-democratic potential in as much as it fosters an ethic of honesty and accountability grounded in Christian values."

184 Miller/Yamamori: Global Pentecostalism (2007).

185 Stone: Pentecostal Power (2018), 24.

186 Ibid., 26.

187 Anderson: Pentecostalism and social, political, and economic development (2020).

188 Cornelio/Medina: Prosperity Ethic (2021).

To these two could be added recent reflections on the theological justifications that underpin the political work of Pentecostals in the Philippines and around the world.[189] Cornelio refers to the use of Scripture or religious reasoning to justify the discursive claim to the nation as theological nationalism.[190] Its most evident manifestation is the claim that a country is Christian. This much is the case in Philippines, often (and mistakenly) described as the only Christian nation in Asia. Religious groups, including the Charismatic churches mentioned above, invoke this as the reason why the Philippines has a special calling for the evangelization of Asia.[191] It is also the justification for their participation in electoral politics.[192]Arguably, the same can be said about the political Pentecostalism evident in places like Singapore and South Korea, which, mainly because of their megachurches, are strategic centers of global Charismatic Christianity. This explains why Pentecostals may not always address sociopolitical realities by criticizing social structures or government policies. They are part of the regimes in place, some of which could be authoritarian or illiberal.[193] At the same time, claiming the nation is also claiming the soul of society, which thus accounts for the moral battles they have waged in public over gender-related issues, for example. Upon their biblical worldviews hangs the future of their society, one that is not only economically advanced but also shaped according to what they believe is holy and godly. It is in this sense that they are building an "alternative social reality", one that raises questions about the place of pluralism in Asian.[194] Clearly, these three theological principles are not unique to Pentecostalism. But that they are driving Pentecostals now calls for new ways of characterizing their work in politics and society.

This section ends by highlighting how else Pentecostalism might engage society and politics, but this time through citizenship formation. Thinking along these lines is inspired by theological reflections on discipleship as a form of social and political engagement in itself. In the cases cited throughout this paper, the social and political engagement by Pentecostal churches have been mainly with respect to institutions, whether in the form of public offices, political organizations, or civil society at large. But for Selina Stone , "formation in the Pentecostal tradition is not simply a theological process but a deeply

189 Yong: In the days of Caesar (2010).
190 Cornelio: Claiming the Nation (2020).
191 Cornelio: The Philippines (2020).
192 Cornelio: The indigenization of megachurch Christianity (2018).
193 Chong: Introduction (2011); Cornelio/Marañon: A 'Righteous Intervention' (2019); Han: Urban Megachurches and Contentious Religious Politics in Seoul (2015).
194 Miller/Yamamori: Global Pentecostalism (2007), 4.

political one."[195] That Pentecostalism began with marginalized groups was a political moment in itself. But even in contemporary Pentecostal churches, there is so much political formation available in biblical narratives about justice and persecution, which can become far more real for those who live in proximity with inequality and conflict. Thus, "it is evident from the outpourings of the Spirit in India, Korea and the UK as well as beyond, that notions of ethnic or cultural supremacy are incompatible with the work of the Spirit".[196]

The moral convictions embraced by Pentecostalism also shapes political consciousness, but through other creative and unexpected pathways. This is a significant point to make in considering how else Pentecostals might be involved in the pursuit of societal transformation or the creation of "an alternative world". Recent scholarship on Pentecostalism in China is very instructive. Around China, Christians demonstrate their ability to reimagine mission given the state control imposed on religious life especially in the workplace. "By examining this kind of activities as social engagement in everyday Christianity," as Francis Lim argues, "we are able to better understand how Christianity can continue to experience a rapid growth in China, in the context of the deepening political authoritarianism, curtailment of an emerging civil society, and a tighter surveillance and control of Christianity by the Chinese authorities."[197] For these Christians, the workplace becomes a place where such values as equality and transparency are exercised in a manner that challenges favoritism and other unfair practices. It is also where "China's moral crisis manifests in stark terms, and where they feel motivated to act in ways that might bring about a moral transformation, little by little, relying on religious values to guide their behavior".[198] To be Christian, in other words, is to be involved in social change even in little ways.

Other scholars make the same observation but approach it in terms of citizenship formation. The ethnographic work of Sin Wen Lau on expatriate Christians in China points to the power of Charismatic Christianity in shaping their consciousness as "citizens".[199] While the state may not have granted these expatriate Christians with formal citizenship, it expects them to fulfill

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195 Stone: Pentecostal Power (2018), 25.

196 See also Ibid., 36. Of course, these claims are to be validated with empirical evidence. A survey done among Christian students in Pakistan reveals that even if they are the religious minority in the country, they have a strong connection to Pakistani identity. Interestingly, however, the Pentecostals among them (who also come from poorer backgrounds) have less political engagements and are more inclined to support military rule (Brasher: Pride and Abstention [2020]).

197 Lim: "Serving the Lord" (2019), 3–4.

198 Ibid., 11.

199 Lau: Overseas Chinese Christians in Contemporary China (2020).

citizenship duties such as respecting the law. In the course of her fieldwork in Shanghai, Lau encountered high-ranking expatriates who felt that China, because of its increasing income gap and ageing population, will one day lead to the demise of marriage and the family. Her faith and long exposure to Chinese society, to which she feels she belongs, convince her that its only hope is to be found in Christianity.[200] She frames this sense of belonging as religious citizenship: "Grounded in Christian aspirations for China's future, this feeling of being a part of the country extended beyond a citizenship regime that endorsed legal membership of the overseas Chinese as economic participants and towards a religious understanding of what it means to be a part of China." Inspired by their religious and professional socialization in China, they are led to mark their place in Chinese society as Christian citizens who would exercise honesty and reveal their identities as Christians.

## Conclusion: A New Wave?

This chapter has been concerned with the social and political engagements of Pentecostalism around Asia. Based on the literature, three areas are salient: civic welfare, public morality, and political participation. Taken together, these involvements point to the rise of engaged Pentecostalism as a contemporary wave that informs the public presence of Christianity. By proposing engaged Pentecostalism as a concept to refer to these involvements, this chapter advances previous work on progressive Pentecostalism as the "new face of Christian social engagement".[201] It also presents Pentecostal Christianity as an innerworldly religious movement that embraces a holistic gospel in which the conversion of souls and the gifts of Spirit are married to the pursuit of social and political renewal.

The rise of engaged Pentecostalism might be a useful way of conceptualizing one of the many transformations that are taking shape within Christianity in Asia. Given the history of Pentecostalism in Asia, this development could be characterized as a new wave. This is an analytical corrective to many misconceptions about Pentecostalism on the continent, including its preoccupation with personal salvation and thus apathy towards local and national concerns. Also, scholars have been largely preoccupied with Pentecostalism's most spectacular achievements in the 21st century namely, the megachurches in urban centers one finds in East and Southeast Asia (a point

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200 Ibid., 100.

201 Miller/Yamamori: Global Pentecostalism (2007).

raised in the historical overview above). To be sure, the rise of engaged Pentecostalism is not unique to Asia. Other contributors to this volume might reveal the same pattern in Latin America and Africa. Nor is engaged Pentecostalism unique to Christianity, as the experience of engaged Buddhism on the continent shows.[202] At the very least, engaged Pentecostalism demonstrates the receptivity of Pentecostal and charismatic churches to local and national concerns. As argued above, Pentecostalism's ongoing transformation is consistent with the movement's rootedness in crisis.

At least two analytical caveats need to be reiterated based on what has been discussed in this chapter. One, even if its presence is tangible because of its public presence, Pentecostalism remains a minority movement (alongside Christianity as a whole) on the continent. At the onset, this chapter has provided a demographic overview of where Pentecostalism might be expanding. But that Christianity remains a minority located in challenging social and political contexts means that the long-term impact of its public involvements is precarious. This area needs not only theological or scholarly assessments, but also critical support from faith-based civil society actors. Second, scholars need to continue interrogating the impact of engaged Pentecostalism on social and political order. Sometimes, engaged Pentecostalism threatens the status quo embraced by the majority religion, political regime, or the public in general. This is one way of approaching Wonsuk Ma's claim that the outlook of Asian Pentecostalism is "extremely bright with its continuing growth…Perhaps a right stewardship of the Spirit's leading will be the main spiritual task for Asian Pentecostal leaders. After all, Asians have lived with many spirits, and this is the time that the Spirit is going to make Asia play a leading role for the exciting future of world Pentecostalism."[203]

Finally, it needs to be mentioned that the cases of social and political engagements covered in this chapter have been mainly institutional. They highlight the decisive role of Pentecostal organizations. This overview thus raises questions about the social and political involvements of Pentecostals operating as individuals or as informal solidarities. Too often they do not attract scholarly or journalistic attention in the region. One promising work is the recent project on external giving among Christians in Hong Kong. For these Christians, to give to the needs of others and the wider community is not only an obligation. It is tied to Christian identity and a moral economy in which both giver and recipient are equal as children of God. The acts raises questions about

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202 King: Being Benevolence (2005); Lau/Cornelio: Tzu Chi and the Philanthropy of Filipino Volunteers (2015); Kuah-Pearce/Cornelio: Introduction (2015).

203 Ma: Asian Pentecostalism (2004), 203.

the sacralization of secular life and society.[204] Other studies push for the expansion of the concept of social engagement itself. For Francis Lim, that Christians are inspired to introduce moral transformation in their workplaces is how they are addressing the needs of Chinese society: "Their perception and experience of moral decline in society motivates them to seek moral and social transformation, not by open advocacy through civil society activism, but through influencing their colleagues and workplace culture."[205]

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204 Cheung/Kuah: Being Christian through External Giving (2019).

205 Lim: "Serving the Lord" (2019), 14.

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# Outlines of a Pentecostal Dominion Theology

Andreas Heuser

## Introduction

In the weeks leading up to the 2020 U.S. presidential elections, there is an increasing number of reports about African megachurches leaders coming out in favor of President Trump's re-election. This may come as a surprise, considering that Trump polarized the African world as recently as 2018, when he used drastic language to disparage Africa as a lost continent. Nevertheless, in 2020, various megachurch protagonists are emerging as his staunchest African supporters. Chris Oyakhilome, founder of the Lagos-based Christ Embassy International, uses the vast reach of his media empire to urge his global audiences: "Pray for him [Trump] because when God places any of his children in a position, hell sometimes would do everything to destroy that individual." He denies the legitimacy of all critical voices about Trump, claiming that their motivation is in fact anti-Christian: "They are angry at Trump for supporting Christians, you better know it. So the real ones that they hate are you who are Christians." Others go even further and speak of Trump's divine election, drawing parallels to the end of the Babylonian exile. They equate Trump with King Cyrus, the Persian ruler, who was chosen by God to conquer Babylon and release the people of Israel from exile to Jerusalem. Archdeacon Emeka Ezeji of Missionary Christ Anglican Church, an Anglican megachurch in southeastern Nigeria, puts it as follows: "Trump is the modern-day Cyrus. God is saying […] he's my servant who will do my will." Others, like Juliet Eyimofe Binitie, who is based in Lagos, favor Trump precisely because of his ambivalent character as a fighter and see it as a sign that he has been chosen to implement Christian policies. She claims that Trump's election is backed by prophecy, and that God himself gave her this message before the 2016 presidential elections: "He told me he was looking for a bulldog, a man of audacity, because there are certain assignments nice people cannot carry out."[1]

This use of a biblical motif like the 'King Cyrus anointing' as a theological legitimation of a presidency brings into play a characteristic of so-called

1 Cf. Olewe: US elections (2020). In 2018, Trump referred to African countries as "shitholes."

Dominion Theology. Dominion Theology emerges as a prophetically condensed formula to justify the Christianization of a society. It is a personalized understanding of both social transformation and political intervention. Another striking characteristic is that the most prominent actors in this process often are megachurch leaders who imagine themselves to be God's instruments. As chosen individuals blessed with the gift of visions, they feel compelled to comment on current events in political life and thus to claim political authority. Remarkably, their perspective increasingly extends to contemporary political history beyond the immediate horizon of their respective nations. Their visions are helping to establish a transatlantic framework between West Africa and North America. The statements cited above also give evidence of a reservoir of political interpretation that is forming across megachurch milieus of all denominations. These characteristics – a political intervention led by visionaries, authenticated by purported analogies to biblical narratives, and received and globally disseminated in the transnational resonance space of megachurches – form the basic concept of a political theology that is grounded in the tenets of Dominion Theology.

This article is the first to provide a detailed outline of Pentecostal Dominion Theology.[2] It addresses one of the most radical changes in the theological self-understanding of Pentecostalism. The momentum driving this paradigmatic shift from formerly reclusive, world-eschewing Pentecostal churches to contemporary churches actively participating in socio-political debates is generated in Pentecostal megachurches. In this article, I will trace the genesis of Dominion Theology from its origins in North American theological milieus and then outline some forms of its political implementation on the example of West African case studies. This process leads me to suggest two propositions. First, I argue that the discourse surrounding Dominion Theology brings forth certain key codes that are circulated in transnational networks; these core theological statements form something like a general grammar of Dominion Theology. At the same time, however, I will address how the texture of Dominion Theology is 'translated' to the level of local politics and thus acquires a contextual flavor. However, it is worth noting that despite its international reception, including these local adaptations, the theological framework of Dominion Theology is structurally stable.

In the following passages, I will discuss the theological key points and characteristic adaptations of Dominion Theology in the Ghanaian context. While Nigeria may be considered a wellspring of the global Pentecostal movement,

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2 Asamoah-Gyadu: Symbolising Charismatic Influence (2017) references Dominion Theology in Ghanaian Christianity by pointing to some changes in the symbolic repertoires without presenting a theological analysis.

not least because of its population density (cf. the contribution by E. Obadare), it is no coincidence that Ghanaian megachurches have produced several important African pioneers of Dominion Theology. Unlike Nigeria, where Pentecostalism and state politics have been closely interlocked since about 1990, the impact of the Ghanaian Pentecostal movement is best described as focused on civil society. While the Nigerian Pentecostal movement joins a coalition of forces seeking to counterbalance the political dominance of Islam, the Ghanaian Pentecostal movement is characterized by a vital political culture of postcolonial memory. According to Obadare, the anti-Islamic impulse is fostering the gradual emergence of a Pentecostal 'theology of engagement' focused on forming a 'theocratic class' and thereby shaping the presidential constitutional republic 'from above.' At the same time, Obadare notes that the Nigerian Pentecostal movement is increasingly complementing its elitist approach to politics with greater social visibility. This is noticeable in popular culture as well as in business, the financial sector or even legislation. Adjusting for contextual theological emphasis, it is quite safe to say that the basic patterns of Dominion Theology presented here can also be applied to the Nigerian "Pentecostal Republic" (Obadare). Obadare's observations exactly correspond to the strategic and analytical precepts of Dominion Theology, which is currently emerging as the leading branch of theology especially among megachurches (not only in Africa).

In the following passages, the framework of Dominion Theology is presented on the example of Ghana and Ghanaian megachurches. While the use of case studies means that its characteristics are unfolded in a particular context, the script of Dominion Theology could just as well be investigated elsewhere.[3] If we want to look at how Pentecostal churches get involved in African politics, Ghana provides an interesting example not least because the former Gold Coast was the first sub-Saharan state to gain independence from Britain in 1957, triggering a surge of anti-colonial activity. Currently, Ghana – unlike Nigeria, for example – is considered a stable parliamentary democracy with considerable potential for prosperity and a culture of interreligious tolerance. Following the playbook of Dominion Theology, megachurches in Ghana position themselves as pillars of civil society. One tangible political output of Pentecostal agency is that megachurches in Ghana (and elsewhere) strive to elevate themselves to the position of potential key players in democratic elections. It may be one of the most important results of this case study that Pentecostal megachurches contribute to the stabilization of democratic conditions by denying the legitimacy of so-called 'prophetic interventions' from their own Pentecostal camp.

Finally, this evidence of a political-theological ambition rooted in Dominion Theology prompts a re-reading of the existing analyses of megachurches as they

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3 Regarding Zambia, cf. most recently Kaunda: The Nation That Fears God Prospers (2019).

contain a remarkable theological gap in this respect. Therefore, my focus is on interpreting the theological foundations of the political practice of Pentecostal megachurches. This theological foundation, to reiterate, is found in a so-called Dominion Theology, or a dominionist pattern, that can be implemented in different ways, depending on the context. If we take into account the enormous membership potential of megachurches, their huge media presence and multilayered networking quality, the urgency to pursue such obviously vital dominionist discourses in postcolonial African political culture becomes clear.

## Part I: Foundations of Dominion Theology and Its Localization

### 1. Megachurches and Dominion Theology

The socio-political profile of the Pentecostal movement, that is the thesis of this contribution, is primarily generated in the space of megachurches. Thus, the megachurch scene is shifting signposts that previously, in descriptions of the classical Pentecostal movement, had been the subject of a general consensus. Pentecostalism used to represent a variant of contemporary Christianity aimed at personal spiritual renewal with a marked tendency to disengage from worldly affairs. These ciphers of a Pentecostal movement leaning towards a largely apolitical worldview are incompatible with the self-image of megachurches. Megachurches, which in a global perspective have been originating from the classical Pentecostal movement since the last third of the 20th century, are increasingly making their mark in the political sphere. They see themselves as agile political actors pushing for initiatives in the public sphere. Their involvement in political processes is diametrically opposed to a quietist eschewal of worldly things.

The politicization of Pentecostalism occurring in megachurches has a theological basis, and this basis is identified as Dominion Theology here. Admittedly, however, theological criteria hardly ever come in to play in the common definitions of megachurches. It should also be noted, as mentioned before, that not every megachurch sees itself as part of the Pentecostal spectrum.[4] Generally speaking, any individual large congregation is called a megachurch if its weekly

[4] Cf. Cartledge et al.: Megachurches and social engagement (2019). The volume presents case studies of megachurches from the milieu of the Anglican Church and "African Diaspora Pentecostalism" in the UK.

events are attended by about 2,000 participants.[5] Deviating from this conventional definition of megachurches, which is based on relatively arbitrary statistical figures, I will define megachurches as ecclesial places of theological autonomy that have given the Pentecostal movement as a whole a new self-understanding as a part of society. This shift allows us to center our focus on the theological qualification of megachurches. From the perspective of the sociology of religion, their networking culture continues to be a key factor; however, the networking aspect cannot be considered solely in terms of functionality, as even the organizational network character in which megachurches unfold is charged with theological significance. This theological character not only extends to internal network dynamics, but also to their essential external relationships, which more than anything are qualified in terms of Dominion Theology. While the Dominion Theology script was first developed in the North American milieus of the so-called "New Apostolic Reformation" (NAR), it has since transformed into a global success story. It is necessary to shed some light on the original history of entanglement in which the genesis of Pentecostal Dominion Theology has been inscribed. Let us therefore take a brief look at African megachurches, which emerge as driving forces in the further development of Dominion Theology.

The African megachurch scene is a highly publicized, highly interconnected, professionally mediated and increasingly institutionalized network of independent ministries led by individual founding figures who style themselves as 'apostolic' or 'prophetic' and consider themselves the vanguard of a new African Reformation. Let us try to break down this rather dense definition: Since the 1970s, a young generation of church leaders, mostly growing out of the classical Pentecostal movement, have been engaged in founding individual interdenominational churches. They are introducing a church planting concept to the ecclesiastical landscape of many African nations that had long been known in the North American church scene as the megachurch phenomenon. In many cases, the African megachurch founders have gathered direct experience in American megachurches, often as scholarship holders in their theological training schools. Some have adopted this training concept after their return. They build up their own training centers, which serve to rapidly disseminate theologies, concepts and strategies. Therefore, many of their theological lines of argument, metaphors of faith and ritual forms of action are similar. At the same time, these connections contribute to the establishment of transnational networks that are used by the emerging megachurches to coordinate their activities on an international level. At a local level, there is some cooperation between individual

[5] This is still the definition on which the anthology by Hunt: Handbook of Megachurches (2020) is based.

churches, resulting in a kind of temporary intra-Pentecostal ecumenism of emerging megachurches that enables them to gain a foothold in the local church landscape. This goal is also furthered by organizing a multitude of conferences, which, appropriate to church language, are announced as 'crusades,' or large-scale public evangelization events, prayer campaigns, fasts, and so on. Most of these church conferences are hybrid in nature: while some parts are offered to members (usually associated with high participation fees), other events – and mostly those geared towards public and political impact – are freely accessible to the general public. These public events often take place in centers owned by the churches themselves, but also in prestigious places of social life – and in the age of social media, they are made globally accessible via professionally produced live streams. This already hints at another characteristic of megachurches, namely, their high level of media competence. Many megachurch leaders have a permanent media presence, which they also use to stand out among the masses of diverse content offered by churches. Many of them build media empires, engage in 'religious' entrepreneurship and belong to their country's financial elite. In all of these endeavors, the founders make sure to highlight their self-stylization as 'apostolic-prophetic' personalities.

Their socio-political ambitions are not quite as sharply defined. It is striking, however, that when individual 'apostles and prophets' position themselves politically, they mostly use the rhetoric of Dominion Theology. The interpretive scheme employed here works across contexts. At this point, it is sufficient to note a defining characteristic of Dominion Theology, namely, its aim to extend the boundaries of the Pentecostal sphere of influence into society at large. Megachurches seek access to the putatively dominant spheres of social influence. However, they categorically do not seek to merely fit in as 'civilian' actors in pluralistic societies; rather, Dominion Theology enters each of the individual spheres with the aim of establishing hegemony over it. It strives to enforce Pentecostal ideals in the core areas of society. In order to prove its discourse ability, Dominion Theology follows a commonly shared pattern of analysis and fields of action. However, Pentecostal Dominion Theology is not at all elaborated in terms of systematic theology. Instead, Pentecostal Dominion Theology unfolds in individual publications that appear here and there, and which always refer to practical projects and case studies from the respective contexts. The literature of Dominion Theology is widespread and establishes a common conceptual inventory within the global Pentecostal movement, addressing similar thematic fields in different ways and with different intensity, so that we may speak of a dominionist genre. Before we turn to the genesis and theological characteristics of Dominion Theology, we must take a cursory overview of the research on megachurches, noting in the process that their theological profile remains quite underexposed.

## 2. A Theological Gap

For some time now, observers have noted changes in the Pentecostal worldview that are quite obviously linked to the socio-political activities of megachurches. The actual theological foundations of this shift, however, remain diffuse. This is certainly true for the first global inventory of megachurches, which was presented in 2007 by Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori. In this study, megachurches appear as part of the Pentecostal movement, but receive special attention as representatives of what one section labels the 'progressive' wing of Pentecostalism.[6] In the 'progressive' Pentecostal movement, the authors observe the broadest opening processes towards active social participation and note various scopes of action relating to society at large. However, on closer inspection, they primarily include urban megachurches whose participants are mostly members of the social middle classes. According to Miller/Yamamori, these 'progressive' megachurches develop their socio-political competence by discovering charitable projects that are focused on the social needs of their local context as an integral part of their church activities. Probably because of this (in itself very remarkable) Pentecostal opening to the world, Miller/Yamamori ultimately consider urban megachurches the "New Face of Christian Social Engagement". However, this somewhat overly euphoric qualification contradicts their own analysis. At another point in their study, they state that the social competence of the progressive Pentecostal movement is still in an experimental stage and refer to a certain degree of inexperience or "growing pains."[7] Regardless of this, Miller/Yamamori emphasize the mobilizing character of the global Pentecostal movement, especially in the megachurch spectrum, which is now beginning to be translated into social practice. It is also significant that they merely provide outlines of theological justifications.

In contrast, the 2019 volume by Mark Cartledge/Sarah Dunlop/Heather Buckingham and Sophie Bremner on *Megachurches and Social Engagement* in Great Britain does venture into theological fields. The case studies show first and foremost that the megachurches seem to have overcome their "growing pains" by now. In any case, Cartledge et al. present quite clearly defined areas of megachurch social practice, focusing on precisely those fields of action previously outlined by Miller/Yamamori. Megachurch social practices, such as prison chaplaincy or poverty-related neighborhood projects, generally consist of charitable action in the local social sphere. The team of authors qualifies this rather uniform type of social action as "public theology in practice", thereby establishing the important theological frame of reference in which megachurch social

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6 Miller/Yamamori: Global Pentecostalism (2007).

7 Ibid., 128.

practice unfolds. Again, however, it must be noted that the theological foundation is not made all that clear. The "public theology" aspect of megachurch practice remains rather undefined, especially since no attention is paid to how Pentecostal actors participate in socio-political discourses.[8]

In the *Handbook of Megachurches* (2020), recently published by Stephen Hunt, megachurches are attributed a transformative dynamic. But here, too, the political dimension of megachurch practice as well as its theological underpinnings remain vague. In this anthology, the contribution by Andrew Davies most closely approaches this question of a theo-practical complex. Davies sees "some innovative practice" in megachurches, and particularly in African megachurches. The underlying theological motivation he outlines as "varied", but refrains from clarifying such nebulous terms, not to mention suggesting a theological conceptuality underlying all those empirically observable innovations in the field of megachurch social practice.[9]

Adeshina Afolayan, Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso, and Toyin Falola provide an important clue regarding historical contextual references in the formation of Pentecostal political theology. In the introduction to their anthology on Pentecostal Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa, published in 2018, they situate the rise of Pentecostalism within postcolonial African history. Looking at the African continent in particular, the rise of Pentecostalism cannot be separated from the historical dynamics of postcolonial state formation. The spread of Pentecostalism, including the megachurches, thus accompanies a phase of African political development that is often seen as unstable. Afolayan, Yacob-Haliso, and Falola begin by noting that the "protean character of Pentecostalism in Africa"[10] corresponds to the precarious nature of political systems and has unleashed a dynamism in Pentecostal theology: "(T)he peculiar evolution of the nation-state within the African postcolonial context makes for a distinctive reinterpretation of Pentecostal creeds in different parts of Africa."[11] The authors acknowledge that the African Pentecostal movement is interweaved with the postcolonial texture of the political in particular ways. These patterns of intersection mark, as they say, "a unique practice"[12] of Pentecostal theological production. Again, however, their anthology shows the familiar pattern of not confronting the theological correspondences that Pentecostalism opens up in postcolonial Africa. Moreover, their phrasing does not rule out a scheme in which Pentecostalism merely reacts to socio-political framework discourses without providing independent socio-political impulses. So, what does 'unique' theological practice

8 Cartledge et al.: Megachurches and social engagement (2019).

9 Davies: The Evangelisation of the Nation (2020), 222, 234.

10 Afolayan/Olajumoke/Falola: The Pentecostal and the Political in Africa (2018), 9.

11 Ibid., 8.

12 Ibid., 4.

actually mean? The authors leave the answer to this question to a "further interrogation" into "areas of symmetry and asymmetry, confluences and divergences" between Pentecostalism and politics in an Africa that is connoted as postcolonial.[13]

In summary, the current surveys on the socio-political format of megachurches contain a conspicuous theological gap. Remarkably, even if the approaches to megachurch social practice refer to theological foundations, they always fade away into generalities and thus remain indeterminate. Assertions of theological contextualization that claim to relate Pentecostal theological offerings to the African postcolonial context, but fail to elaborate on this point. What is never made visible, in any case, are the connections to Dominion Theology.

Taking the historical contextualization of the African Pentecostal movement one step further, it can be posited more radically that the rise of the Pentecostal movement to a major co-determining factor of public life is linked to the rise of the megachurch scene. This continuously progressing development has been in the making since the late seventies of the 20th century. Since then, the megachurch spectrum has generated processes of political reflection that conceptually converge in the form of Dominion Theology at the beginning of the 21st century. Thus, Dominion Theology is the coalescence of several older theological strands that had enabled African megachurches to set trends in public discourses for some time. These strands are now braided together under the label of Dominion Theology. Apparently, Dominion Theology is conceptually well-suited to express the way that Pentecostalism is woven into the postcolonial context. This is all the more surprising as the original context of Dominion Theology is located in North America.

## 3. Dominion! – On the Genesis of Dominion Theology

Dominion Theology has been the subject of extremely controversial discussions in the recent North American history of theology. Two parallel strands can be distinguished that have been thriving since the 1970s and 1980s – but the version of Dominion Theology discussed here represents a decisive departure from both of these traditions. Efforts to break with these precursors can be found throughout the publications of C. Peter Wagner, the mastermind of the form of Pentecostal Dominion Theology discussed here. In his prolific writings, Wagner has been circling the topic since the beginning of the 21st century. In 2008, he published a foundational document of this version of

[13] Ibid.

Dominion Theology, titled *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World*[14]. Therein, he emphasizes the autonomous, Pentecostal origin of the concept and its prophetic quality. According to Wagner, Dominion Theology is not based on social-scientific theorizing, but must be understood as a visionary blueprint. Wagner lets it be known that this was "revealed" to him as a literal prophetic insight to transform society.[15] The core of his visionary afflatus is found less in any specific analysis of society, but – think of Karl Marx's First Thesis on Feuerbach – in the appellative claim to change the world by means of "Kingdom Action." To reemphasize the distinctiveness of Pentecostal Dominion Theology, Wagner mentions Bill Bright, founder of *Campus Crusade for Christ,* and Loren Cunningham, founder of *Youth with a Mission*.[16] In addition, Wagner refers to his own previous work as well as to publications appearing in his immediate circle and taking a stand on the topic of "how to change the world by Kingdom action." Particular mention should be made of Lance Wallnau, who spread the concept of Dominion Theology in social media at an early stage – and who publicly predicted Donald Trump's US presidency as early as in 2015, one year before the presidential elections.[17]

In 2009, Wallnau popularized the dominionist approach as the *7 Mountain Mandate*[18] of social change. Here, he coins a basic pattern of Dominion Theology by differentiating society into the so-called 'Seven Mountains,' sometimes also referred to as the 'Seven Pillars.' In these metaphors, Dominion Theology identifies key areas of society, also described as social 'spheres,' that are to be dominated by Pentecostal ideals. The identification of these social spheres varies, but they always include the spheres of politics, economy and religion; other spheres concern the areas of education, family and culture. Interestingly, the latter sphere is again subdivided into the spheres of media, entertainment and sports. All these spheres function independently and are governed by their own rules.[19] The intention of "Kingdom Action" is to transform each of the social spheres by striving for a transfer of power. Dominion Theology aims to occupy the '7 Mountains' with individuals who are considered capable of implementing Pentecostal megachurch beliefs in politics. For practical purposes, these

14 Wagner: Dominion! (2008).

15 Ibid., 18.

16 Cf. Ibid., 143.

17 Cf. Wallnau: About (n. d.).

18 Cf. Wallnau: The 7 Mountain Mandate (2009).

19 The concept of spheres does not delineate the individual spheres as sharply as, say, those of social subsystems in systemic functionalism. In American theoretical discourse, the sphere model has been known since the 1980s, especially in the field of communitarian ethics (for example, in the drafts of Michael Walzer, who places himself in opposition to John Rawls' political liberalism). I can only refer to this concept here in passing. Of course, no references of such kind are made in the literature of Dominion Theology.

representatives do not necessarily have to correspond to the role-model of a 'born-again Christian' (just think of the discussion regarding the moral integrity of Donald Trump), but they do have to be open to Pentecostal influence. Dominion Theology thus employs a personalist strategy of social intervention that is not so much concerned with changing structural framework conditions as it is with putting individuals into positions of power.[20]

This is essential, because in this aspect it differs from the original concept of Dominion Theology, which was pervaded by aspirations of theocracy. This theological-historical predecessor of Dominion Theology is found in socio-politically conservative circles of the U.S. Reformed-Protestant tradition. Its mastermind is the Calvinist theologian, philosopher, and historian Rousas John Rushdoony (1916–2001), who dominated the theoretical discourse on Dominion Theology, particularly from the 1970s onwards. He also introduced the model of social 'spheres' that is characteristic of Dominion Theology.[21] Rushdoony called for a 'Christian reconstruction' of society in all of its various 'spheres' such as, above all, family, law and business. As a significant difference to the Pentecostal spheres model of dominion, his concept is rooted in a theory of decline, i.e., he paints an appalling picture of modern society. This society cannot be reformed – it needs a fundamental 'reconstruction' that is strictly aligned with an original divine order. Rushdoony derives the principles of social order from so-called biblical 'laws.' He starts from what he dubs the 'creation mandate' (with reference to Gen 1:26-28), which calls for human responsibility to subdue the earth and 'exercise dominion over it.' Rushdoony interprets this passage in terms of a Christian claim to dominion, (to) "subdue all things and all nations to Christ and His law-word."[22] To restore a fallen society, Rushdoony argues, "dominion men" are required who "take dominion" and "reconstruct" human society according to biblical laws. Rushdoony does not recoil from calling for the death penalty, for example, for all those who oppose the biblical laws.[23] He himself refers to this strict, law-abiding system as 'theonomy'. In the reception of his concept, the term 'Reconstructionism' prevailed over that of 'Dominion Theology.' The approach influenced U.S. politics, especially during the Reagan era – in no small part due to skillful networking and the establishment of several conservative think tanks.[24]

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20 Personalism, the primary interest in acting persons, distinguishes Pentecostal Dominion Theology from differentiated social theories.

21 Cf. Rushdoony: The Institutes of Biblical Law. 3 (1973).

22 Ibid., 13.

23 Ibid., 235. He specifically includes homosexuality and witchcraft among the violations of the law.

24 In the 1960s, Rushdoony himself founded the Chalcedon Institute in California which subsequently spawned several to offshoot institutes scattered throughout the USA.

This classic version of Dominion Theology (which acquired this name later on) insisted on a radically altered political order with priority rights for its Christian citizens. Its implementation necessarily would require an authoritarian agenda with the goal of enforcing the supposed 'biblical laws' in a top-down manner. At its end, Reconstruction envisioned the construction of a society "that is *self-consciously defined as exclusively Christian.*"[25] In the resulting public discussion, the conviction prevailed that Reconstructionism was a concept that undermined democracy. It cast considerable doubt on the separation of church and state in the U.S. and was widely seen as a manifesto of theocratic ideology.[26]

The second strand of Dominion Theology leads into Pentecostal church debates about socio-political participation. Remarkably, while Wagner engages with Rushdoony in his revisiting of Dominion Theology, he fails to mention this Pentecostal precursor. It is associated with Bishop Earl Paulk Jr. (1927–2009), a Pentecostal preacher from Atlanta. In the 1980s, Paulk caused a stir with his call to "Kingdom Now." He claimed to have received a direct inspiration from God summoning all Christians to "exercise a rightful dominion."[27] Also using Genesis 1:26-28 as his point of reference, Paulk bases his Pentecostal political theology on the 'dominion mandate' contained therein. Paulk aligned himself with the 'Latter Rain'[28] tradition by emphasizing the power of the Holy Spirit visible in miracles. He considered 'apostles' and 'prophets' the proper leaders of the church with the goal of restoring Christendom. Above all, Paulk demanded of (Pentecostal) Christians to interfere in politics and, as it were, to bring the kingdom of God into the present. With this appellative claim to stand up for the "Kingdom Now" and to engage in socio-political activities, the Chapel Hill Harvester Church led by Paulk grew from a small suburban congregation into a megachurch.

It is striking that Wagner does not refer to Paulk anywhere, since both approaches to a Pentecostal political theology are similar in diction and even in biblical reference. Wagner, too, justifies the 'dominion mandate' by referring to that same passage in Genesis 1.[29] Paulk's somewhat eschatological call to "Kingdom Now" corresponds to Wagner's call to "Kingdom Action." Both Paulk and Wagner consider the Spirit-inspired action of 'apostles and prophets' the

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25 Barron: Heaven on Earth? (1992), 14 (italics in the original).

26 Ingersoll: Building God's kingdom (2015). In (conservative) German-language theology as late as the 20th century, the construction of society is similarly negotiated under the guiding concept of Schöpfungsordnungen, or 'orders of creation.'

27 On Paulk, see Vicar: "Let them have Dominion!" (2013), 120–45; Barron: Heaven on Earth ? (1992), esp. 71-73.

28 The heyday of the Latter-Rain Revival Movement lasted from 1948-1952, cf. Hutchinson: The Latter Rain Movement and the Phenomenon of Global Return, (2010), 265–83.

29 Cf. Wagner: Dominion! (2008), chapter 3.

vanguard of contemporary Christianity. This also explains Wagner's and Paulk's insistence that the concept of Dominion Theology is based on visionary inspiration. And yet, Wagner never mentions this common theological track. It can be assumed that Paulk's scandal-ridden biography made Wagner wary of associating with him. Paulk incurred the displeasure of the Pentecostal camp due to sex and tax scandals,[30] which cast a long shadow over the Pentecostal Dominion Theology concept advanced by him.

In fact, the resistance against all theological designs revolving around a dominion mandate grew stronger. While the Kingdom Now approach fell into a crisis of acceptance, especially within the Pentecostal movement, due to moral lapses, Rushdoony's exclusionary and exclusive model of society compromised any further public discussion about Dominion Theology. Especially the Calvinist precursor with its theocratic key concepts cast into doubt the legitimacy of any further reference to a theology of dominion. Since the 1990s, its attractiveness in the public eye had waned; even more: the whole semantic field of 'Dominion Theology,' 'dominionist' or 'dominionism' had fallen into disrepute.[31]

Wagner categorically opposes any accusation of continuity. He is concerned with originality, not with a Pentecostal remake. In particular, he vehemently opposes the idea of a theocratic model of dominion. Nevertheless, conceptual borrowings from the theocratic predecessor model cannot be denied. This is especially true for the analytical concept of spheres, which in the Pentecostal view of society are coded as 'pillars' or 'mountains.' Wagner's variety of Dominion Theology is concerned with occupying these 'mountains' in the sense of a personalist model of dominion in order to transform the dominant discourses present in each of them – it is concerned with achieving a hegemony of discourse. In this sense, and in order to recognizably break away from its precursors, Wagner establishes the term of "Dominion Theology" for his new version of a Pentecostal political framework theology. Around 2005, he increasingly spotlights this theme on the stage of Pentecostal theology. The notion of intervening in areas of current politics from a Christian position and contending for a socio-political mandate had not left the world of the broad conservative wing of American Protestantism since the debates over Reconstructionism and Kingdom Now. It primarily gained currency in the tertiary educational institutions founded by some megachurches.[32] The 'apostles and prophets' who were

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30 References in Vicar: "Let them have Dominion!" (2013), 123.

31 Ibid., 127. He puts it drastically: "Shadowy, ill-defined, and apparently nefarious in its designs, by the early 1990s dominion theology (...) leaped, virus-like, (...) to the alternative secular press, where it mutated into something more dangerous and far more insidious.".

32 These include the university founded by Oral Roberts, Pat Robertson's Regent University, and Jerry Falwell's Liberty University. Robertson himself ran for the U.S. presidency in 1988.

among the pioneers of the African megachurch scene and those who aligned themselves with the 'New Apostolic Reformation' around C. Peter Wagner also came out of these educational milieus.

## 4. The New Apostolic Reformation and 'Apostolic' Forms of Networking

The so-called New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) brings together several directions of the Pentecostal movement that self-identify as independently operating renewal movements.[33] The NAR aims at a charismatic renewal through individual 'apostles' who started appearing around 1970/80. They are ascribed special talents, thus holding out the prospect of a restoration of spiritual gifts and actualizing the prophetic visions of the coming Kingdom of God.[34] The individual 'apostles' of the charismatic renewal often draw attention to themselves through forms of spirituality that are considered controversial.[35] The NAR's appearance is significantly shaped by a multitude of individual visionaries of a renewed Christianity who are nonetheless operating within an inherently flexible, expansive and highly dense network. The Latter Rain movement, which had already been central to Paulk and which had once made the authority of individual 'apostles and prophets' socially acceptable and spread it globally, is considered an important historical reference of the NAR. The founding ranks of the African megachurch scene often obtain their theological education in contact with different circles of this scene in the course, not least through scholarship programs. Upon their return to Africa, they translate similar ideas of church and theology into their local contexts.

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Among the media in which Dominion Theology spread was the journal Christianity Today, edited by Billy Graham.

33 Cf. Weaver: The new apostolic reformation (2016).

34 Wagner attempts to establish a typology that I do not follow here. He distinguishes between 'intercessors' specializing in public forms of prayer and emerging in the 1970s, and the 'prophetic' charisma prevailing in the 1980s with the gift of visions of the invisible world. Finally, since the 1990s, he identifies the arrival of the 'apostolic' charisma to facilitate and clarify the translation of the prophetic-visionary message into everyday practice. In other words, Wagner describes 'apostles' as an intellectual elite gifted with rationalization and acting in a strategic manner, cf. Wagner: Dominion! (2008), 26–27.

35 Among the important currents influencing the NAR is the so-called "Toronto Blessing," which made headlines in 1994 for violent emotional outbursts – uncontrollable laughter or crying – in connection with Vineyard prayer meetings. Another important current of the NAR is related to the movement surrounding the so-called Kansas City Prophets, who significantly contributed to on the popularity of the prosperity gospel.

This network structure is what sociologists of religion Brad Christerson and Richard Flory have called 'Network Christianity.' They focus their analysis on the specific organizational form of the NAR, which consists of rather loosely and flexibly composed networks forming outside of established church structures. At the same time, however, newly constellated hierarchies are forming that converge around individual personalities and that prosper due to the communicative relationships forming and consolidating between these individuals. The formation of these networks is thus determined by individuals, not by the interaction of communities or churches. The protagonists of such network consolidation include the founding figures of megachurches. Christerson/Flory refer mainly to the white, North American scene of network Christianity, which they consider to be quite sustainable.[36] Taking a look beyond Christerson/Flory at the transnational network of megachurches, we could assume that this networking between megachurches may help shape the global religious landscape for years to come – it is an integral part of Dominion Theology.

Let us briefly consider the texture of megachurch network formation: Christerson/Flory distinguish between vertical and horizontal networks. Vertical networks form within a megachurch while horizontal networks form between individual megachurch representatives and 'apostolic' groupings. For Peter Wagner, it is these horizontal connections that constitute the 'apostolic and prophetic' vanguard of world Christianity. In this environment of megachurch networks, a real motivational push for the categorical use of Dominion Theology takes place – it emerges, as it were, as a theological marker of the scene. Dominion Theology advances to become a unifying source of reference for expressing Pentecostal political activism. Consequently, this sector of independent megachurches receives special attention in Wagner's own conception of the NAR.[37] He credits the relational interaction between these influential charismatic individuals with transforming society. The horizontal exchange between the main actors of this 'apostolic network formation' not only pools concepts and resources, including at jointly held conferences; in addition, the charismatic megastars mutually legitimize themselves and expand their authority through these network activities. As a result, the apostolic-prophetic authority of all those participating in the network radiates into the public sphere and to its international counterparts.

A major added value of the megachurch network structure is its high flexibility. Horizontal megachurch networks are constantly changing and not very interested in institutional consolidation. The mobility of network assignments is reflected, for example, in the variance of relational lines and changes in

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36 Christerson/Flory: The Rise of Network Christianity (2017), 11.

37 Cf. Wagner: Dominion! (2008), 34–35.

personal constellations. Megachurch 'apostles' use the mobility value of networks to refine their personal brand or to highlight their agendas. Sometimes, they use the network structure to preserve their nimbus as a charismatic personality in times of crisis. For example, if they find themselves at the center of a scandal and are expelled from the inner circle of an 'apostolic' group because of moral misconduct – a relatively common accusation – they can latch onto a different node of the network, realign their profile and strengthen their international aura. This explains the astonishing survival of charismatic 'fallen heroes.'[38]

Beyond providing more flexibility for their actors internally, megachurch networks also radiate into the socio-political sector. Even if the Pentecostal dominionist approach eschews theocratic models, the development of networking structures, which in the megachurch variant of Dominion Theology take on a global scope, helps protagonists to push their claim of an independent, albeit controversial, theology of socio-political change. The astonishing efficacy of this theology was recently described by Ebenezer Obadare, who, with regard to Nigeria, describes the transformation of a democracy towards a so-called "Pentecostal republic."[39] The theoretical approach that emerges in all these current political processes can be traced back to Dominion Theology. Let us now take a look at the theological characteristics of Dominion Theology. Central individual aspects of this approach circulate in networks of the global Pentecostal movement, and they are widely received and contextually adapted in Pentecostal discourses.

## 5. Dominion Eschatology

The Pentecostal version of Dominion Theology undergoes a paradigmatic change in the understanding of Christian hope that forms the basis of the current politicization of the Pentecostal movement. The emergence of a specific eschatology is concisely expressed in a 2011 interview by Peter Wagner with *Charisma*, a popular media platform with a pronounced dominionist bent. The way *Charisma* presents the theological mastermind of Pentecostal Dominion Theology in his multiple leadership roles is illustrative of the broad network

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38 Bishop Michael Reid can serve as an example of the salvaging function of a megachurch network. For many years, starting around the year 2000, Reid had been conducting so-called "crusades" in several African countries. The founder and bishop of Peniel Pentecostal Church based in Sussex, England, left his church after admitting to adultery only to continue his own ministry in Arizona in the orbit of U.S. televangelists, cf. Heuser: Transnational Construction and Local Imagination of "Crusade Christianity" (2009), 68–91.

39 Cf. Obadare: Pentecostal Republic (2018).

character through which the Dominion Theology concept spreads. At the time of the interview, Wagner is President of *Global Harvest Ministries (*globalharvest.org*),* Chancellor of the *Wagner Leadership Institute,* and Presiding Apostle of the *International Coalition of Apostles*. This list of titles provides a glimpse into the institutional context of the so-called apostolic international megachurch networks. In terms of content, Wagner focuses on the above-mentioned eschatological turn as a major impulse of change. In the interview, which took place shortly before his death, he acknowledged that the turn towards Dominion Theology demands a departure from the eschatology of premillenarian escapism espoused by the classical Pentecostal movement:

> I can still remember prophecy teachers who tacked rows of charts and diagrams on the church wall and explained spell-binding details of the past, present and future. I cut my spiritual teeth on the Scofield Bible and devoured Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*. My seminary professors instructed me in pre-tribulationism and premillenialism. I quickly categorized anyone who disagreed as a 'liberal'.[40]

Wagner clearly identifies the shift in eschatology as the theological turning point towards the 'discovery' of Dominion Theology. He describes his changed perspective on the interpretation of the Last Things almost in the diction of a conversion experience. He unapologetically contradicts the Pentecostal conceptions of the end of the world that had been common until then. Against this 'escapist eschatology,' he sets a concept of 'dominion eschatology.' Escapist expectations are entirely governed by the imminent end times and pervaded by a conviction that world history is in decline. Its activist impulse consists in saving individual "souls,"[41] making the implementation of long-term changes to society mostly a non-issue. Dominion eschatology, on the other hand, takes a turn towards the social that also allows for a concern with social or political change. Wagner rejects the interpretation of the 'Great Commission' as a mandate to bring about individual conversions to Christianity, and reinterprets it as a tool "to disciple whole social groups – such as entire nations. This is kingdom theology (…)."[42]

This eschatological turn warrants closer examination. Even in the current history of research on Pentecostalism, its depiction as a depoliticized movement is underpinned precisely by the conventional understanding of its eschatology. This is still evident in the recent overview presented by Heinrich Wilhelm Schäfer on the 'peacemaking potential of free churches in the USA and Latin

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40 Cf. Wagner: Why You Must Take Dominion Over Everything (2012).

41 Anderson: An introduction to Pentecostalism (2004), 219.

42 Cf. Wagner: Why You Must Take Dominion Over Everything (2012). Wagner here hints at the proximity to mission concepts associated with the names of Donald McGavran and Ralph Winter, who thus exerted enormous influence on the Lausanne Movement.

America' (2019). In this comparative study, Schäfer conducts a socio-religious actor mapping which includes various manifestations of Pentecostalism. In addition to confessional taxonomies and descriptions of religious-political contexts, he looks at theological framings that he considers constitutive for gauging the political relevance of Pentecostal churches. Basically, he divides the spectrum of Pentecostalism into a religious right on the one hand and a religious left on the other. For the left camp, Schäfer postulates a kingdom of God theology oriented toward a triad of peace, justice and integrity of creation that is familiar from ecumenical discourse. To this triad alone he ascribes any political effects.[43] The Pentecostal right, on the other hand, he characterizes as strictly oriented to a premillenarian hope for the hereafter: "The world is plunging into the turmoil of the end times, from which the true church will soon be caught up into heaven. It is obvious that this presupposition can legitimize a solidarity of survival in congregations, but not political activism."[44] It is this form of eschatologically determined depoliticization of Pentecostalism that guides Schäfer's configuration of the Pentecostal field. According to Schäfer, there are only scattered and sparsely documented instances of individual actors within the Pentecostal movement breaking away from this scenario of depoliticization.[45]

Without going into too much detail at this point, the thrust of Schäfer's study is obviously to establish a strong schematization of Pentecostalism in practical political terms. Schäfer is concerned with outlining political fields of possible cooperation with Pentecostal church actors, or else with excluding certain issues and ruling out various Pentecostal churches as potential partners in the political processes of civil society. In his view, a Pentecostal political theology can be identified where the hope for the hereafter takes a back seat to or even is abandoned in favor of making Pentecostal theology more ecumenical. An adherence to end-time formats charged with apocalyptic ciphers opposes the rationalization of eschatology he considers necessary, i.e., a refocusing on issues of justice, peace and environmentalism. In other words, for Schäfer, only a demythologized eschatology can result in political operability.

At no point does Schäfer address Dominion Theology, and consequently, he also does not mention the eschatological turn propagated by Wagner. However, dominion eschatology by no means renounces the apocalyptic images of

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43 Schäfer: Friedenspotenzial von Freikirchen in den USA und Lateinamerika (2019), 48. Schäfer's comparative study is strongly guided by Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of habitus.

44 Ibid., 74, translation by MS.

45 In a similar vein, but in the tradition of Max Weber, Paul Gifford does not concede any society-changing potential to the "enchanted" worldview of Pentecostalism. On the contrary, he qualifies it as "dysfunctional" with regard to modernization processes, cf. Gifford: Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa (2015), 67.

the end times, nor does it rationalize its own expectation of the end times. On the contrary: The eschatology of Dominion Theology is not simply de-dramatized; rather, it is charged with 'apostolic-prophetic' significance. Wagner's aim is to establish a Pentecostal worldview that is deconstructed by the apostolic-prophetic, a worldview which also includes assigning the 'born-again' a different place in the world. This shift is necessarily grounded in eschatology.

A helpful categorization of eschatological conceptions has been proposed by the religious scholar Catherine Wessinger. Her voluminous *Oxford Handbook of Millennialism* (2011) maps a variety of end-time imaginings in a cross-cultural perspective. A diverse range of millenarian imagery in religions and religious end-time movements in history and the present come into view. In her introduction, Wessinger offers a distilled typology differentiating mainly between "catastrophic" and "progressive" millenialisms. Wessinger defines millennialism as "the audacious human hope that in the imminent future there will be a transition – either catastrophic or progressive – to a 'collective salvation' […] which will be accomplished by a divine or superhuman agent and/or by humans working in accordance with a divine or superhuman plan."[46] In this scenario, "catastrophic millennialism" assumes that human history or even participating in social development will have increasingly disastrous effects. The prophecy of decline is hardly interested in shaping society. In contrast to this rather destructive variety, "progressive millennialism" assumes the possibility of progress, according to Wessinger.

But once again, it must be noted that dominion eschatology in principle resists any de-eschatologization in order to introduce socio-political practice. Wagner states that in this process of an eschatological reformulation, Pentecostal theology also finds its way to a Pentecostal ethics, which, while still first and foremost focusing on the individual believer, also includes perspectives of a social ethics. In spite of all its purported revisions, dominion eschatology holds on to stylistic devices that derive specifically from the dramaturgy of the end times. This is evident in the fact that the propheticization of eschatology has been prefigured by dispensationalism. In order to understand the dispensationalist approach, we must immerse ourselves in the early history of the Pentecostal movement.

## 6. Dispensationalist Salvation History

From its very beginning, the Pentecostal movement has embraced a specific eschatological script. If we consult the history of Pentecostal theology, we find

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46 Wessinger: Millennialism in Cross-Cultural Perspective (2011), 3.

that the formulation of eschatology must be counted among the most productive Pentecostal theologoumena ever since the formative phase of Pentecostalism at the beginning of the 20th century. In his *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, Allan Anderson highlights the eschatological drive as one of its key distinctive features: "(E)schatological themes (were) probably the most prominent part of early Pentecostal preaching and teaching."[47] The eschatological time signature of living in the 'Last Days' was combined with the proverbial signs and wonders, those secondary evidential signs that pointed to the work of the Holy Spirit. It manifested in a committed practice of faith aligning itself with a salvation history.[48] The concept of this salvation history was based on a dispensationalist hermeneutic that gave Pentecostal eschatology its premillenarian hue. This is what Wagner refers to in his interview.

The dispensationalist hermeneutic was expressed in the *Scofield Reference Bible (King James Version)*, which, since its first edition in 1909, has enjoyed particular popularity in the Anglophone Pentecostal movement and is still widely used among Christians in the Global South. The *Scofield Reference Bible* is based on the dispensationalism formulated by John Nelson Darby (1800–1882), founder of the Plymouth Brethren, which describes a chronology of salvation history. It also assumes a fundamental distinction between Israel and the church, i.e., earthly Israel and its inner-historical promises on the one hand and the heavenly church of the Christian elect on the other. According to Darby, God acts in different ways in a total of seven successive epochs of salvation history (dispensations), each ending in disaster and giving way to the subsequent epoch.[49] The sixth dispensation, the present age of the church, is characterized by the worldwide spread of Christianity (the so-called Great Commission). Only when this dispensation has been implemented can the *parousia* of Christ occur. The Second Coming of Christ ends the age of the church and leads into the fullness of time, namely into the Millennial Kingdom of God, which concludes the chronology of salvation history.

This intersection of dispensations is the locus of the eschatological genre that has kept the Pentecostal movement on its toes ever since. For everything comes down to awaiting the imminent *parousia*. The gravitas of eschatology is reinforced by the dispensationalist approach of deciphering the course of salvation history, that is, decoding the signs of the times in such a way as to foresee the likelihood of imminent end-time events or to relate the portents of "wars and rumors of wars" (Matthew 24:6) to the imminent Second Coming of Christ. Darby outlined a clear sequence of the end of the world, which he embellished

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47 Anderson: An introduction to Pentecostalism (2004), 217.

48 Thus Ibid., 218.

49 For quick access, cf. Shuck: Christian Dispensationalism (2011), 515–28.

with elaborate speculations regarding the exclusive fate of the church even before the advent of the millennium (i.e., in the premillenarian phase). He claimed that the church, which the chosen Pentecostals understood themselves to be now, would be 'raptured' into heaven before the Great Tribulation, during which the Antichrist rages on earth. At the end of this seven-year Tribulation, Christ would appear again and defeat the Antichrist in the Battle of Armageddon, whereupon Christ would establish the Millennial Kingdom of Peace. After the Millennium, Satan would be released and finally defeated in God's Throne Room in the Last Judgment, in which the faithful would be separated from the unfaithful and accordingly would be sent to heaven for eternity – or to hell.

This Christian dispensationalism, whose systematization of end-time events is based above all on the Revelation of John, generated a fantasy about the Last Days that has persisted ever since. Disagreeing with Schäfer's assessment about the socio-political inactivity of premillenarians, Glenn Shuck characterizes the dispensationalist end-times movement (especially in the U.S.) as a protean and highly mutable agent with considerable influence on the formulation of current U.S. policy.[50] It has also long since had an impact – as Wagner emphatically points out – far beyond the Pentecostal movement into popular culture.[51]

To put it more sharply: The intensity of the end-time experience creates potential elbow room for prophetic activity, including the dominionist kind. This means that Dominion Theology, too, is characterized by a faith activism driven by salvation history and prophetic vision. Consequently, the structural shift towards dominion eschatology made by the 'New Apostolic Reformation' cultivates the authoritative office of charismatic prophecy. This represents the actual shift in the dispensationalist understanding of the Last Things. The paramount importance of the prophetic, anchored in the *topos* of eschatology, becomes a primary theological marker of megachurch self-understanding. The worldview of Pentecostal megachurches builds on the prophetic translation of God's direct inspiration. The prophetic becomes *the* evidential criterion of Pentecostal faith practice. The Nigerian philosopher and ethicist Nimi Wariboko hits the mark when he describes the eschatological-visionary faith culture of the Pentecostal movement as hermeneutically characterized by the "spell of the invisible".[52]

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50 Ibid., 525–26. He mentions dispensationalist lobby groups surrounding Presidents Reagan through Bush and into the election campaigns of Obama's time.

51 Here, the bestseller *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970) by Hal Lindsey or the *Left Behind* series of novels co-authored by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, published between 1995 and 2007 and filmed in 2014 warrant particular mention. On the popular cultural influence of African Pentecostalism, see Pype: The Liveliness of Pentecostal (2015), 345–78.

52 Cf. Wariboko: Nigerian Pentecostalism (2014), 40–53.

In summary, dominion eschatology is all about understanding prophetic directives and visions, manifestations of the unseen, as keys to making sense of the world. The act of prophetic vision performed by the 'apostolic' vanguard confers plausibility to megachurch practice.[53] At least this is how I understand Wagner's insistence on a dominion eschatology. He is concerned with bringing about a shift in the way Pentecostalism relates to the world, and this shift is rooted in eschatology. The prophetic, a distinguishing feature of the dispensationalist way of world disclosure, does not necessarily translate into an apolitical stance; it can indeed be constitutive for the practice of Dominion Theology. The "New Apostolic Reformation" proclaimed by Wagner prophetically recasts the otherworldly expectation of the Kingdom of God into a this-worldly eschatology. As we will see later in the debate about 'prophetic voting,' this also involves another change of course, a decision to be guided by constructive/activating prophecy as opposed to catastrophic prophecy. The dominionist notion of prophecy could be understood, as religious historian Michael Ashcraft puts it, as a concept of 'purification' of social spheres, an outlook "that expects society on Earth to become increasingly purified or perfected."[54] This means that phenomena of social crisis are recognized as surmountable obstacles to the fulfillment of prophetic visions to make the world, according to a political slogan that is popular not only in Africa, a better place.[55] It is this authority of prophetic vision that constitutes the appeal of megachurch Dominion Theology. Does this mean that the practical implementation of Dominion Theology even holds out the prospect of a new 'prophetic' paradigm of politics?

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53 Elsewhere, I suggest that Pentecostal theology should be understood in terms of an "ocular" hermeneutics, or as one determined by the visionary, cf. in more detail Heuser: "Visionäres Branding": (2019).

54 See Ashcraft: Progressive Millennialism (2011), 44 Ashcraft refers to Wessinger's category of progressive millenialism.

55 A more detailed exploration of end-time prophecies in the political context discussed here is needed. Wojcik, for example, combines avertive with so-called progressive prophecy by introducing the notion that averting worldly catastrophes foreseen by prophecies opens up a way to social change. He thus identifies transitions toward constructive action based on a corresponding conditionalization of prophecy (Wojcik: Avertive Apocalypticism [2011], 84.).

# Part II: Implementation Aspects of Dominion Theology

## 1. Agonistic Habitus

Dominion Theology as conceived by Wagner postulates an alternative vision of societal development. Wagner's eschatological break with the classical Pentecostal movement is admittedly covered up by continuities. The intensification of the prophetic in the dispensationalist design of salvation history is now accompanied by a dramatization of the end times, which continue to be characterized by the activity of demonic powers. But here, too, the anti-demonic struggle transcends individual self-disciplining and is conceived of as an intervention against the evil in the world. In a brief concluding passage of his interview with *Charisma*, Wagner defines this enduring characteristic as taking up arms against Satan and the powers of the Antichrist:

> I do not plan to give any territory back to Satan or his Antichrist. (…) The battle will be ferocious, and we will suffer some casualties along the way. However, we will continue to push Satan back and disciple whole nations. We are aggressively retaking dominion.[56]

Here, the basic framework of Dominion Theology becomes apparent: in the coalescence of dominion eschatology, dispensationalist salvation history and so-called spiritual warfare, which is understood as a spatial, territorial act. Here, we come across a practice for the successful fight against Satan that is supported by a multitude of rituals. As Wagner's linguistic habitus reveals, this practice does not shrink from a language of prayer that is marked by openly aggressive militancy. According to Ruth Marshall, referring primarily to Nigerian megachurches, this *praxis pietatis* is the basis of the 'political spirituality' of Pentecostalism. This refers to the fundamental belief that the world, the state, and society at large can be changed through spiritual warfare and that sees prayer as a motivating force of political practice. For Marshall, the Pentecostal understanding of faith, conversion, prayer and discipleship is not characterized by acts of confession, but rather by the active engagement of 'prayer warriors' whose goal is to bring about a 'revolution' of everyday life.[57] What defines this Pentecostal self-image, which megachurches in particular use to strategically target initiatives in the public sphere through spiritual warfare and to lead a general

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[56] Wagner: Why You Must Take Dominion Over Everything (2012).

[57] Cf. Wallnau: The 7 Mountain Mandate (2009); Marshall: Political Spiritualities (2009), Marshall describes whole processes of de- and re-subjectification that turn believers into spiritual warriors.

mobilization in God's name against the forces of evil – and thereby put themselves forward as political actors?

### *1.1 Territorial Spiritual Warfare*

The design of spiritual warfare was preconceived in the 1980s in the same circles of U.S. megachurches that today espouse Dominion Theology. To be sure, initial ideas on spiritual warfare can be found as early as the church growth movement of the 1950s, which at first saw it as an evangelistic technique. In the 1970s, these ideas radiated out into the missionary scene of the Pentecostal movement. Spiritual warfare now stood in the context of the so-called 'power encounters' in which Pentecostal missionaries conducted their confrontations with local religious traditions in the global South. Now, spiritual warfare started to consolidate into a similar format regarding the diction, imagery, or even habitus of the apostolic elite. Again, C. Peter Wagner is one of its masterminds.[58] Wagner had worked for years in Bolivia and attempted to establish a systematic theory of spiritual warfare as a lecturer at Fuller Theological Seminary in the 1980s. Wagner himself credits John Wimber as a source of inspiration, the founder of the Vineyard Church movement with whom he taught a course on "signs and wonders" for several years.[59] Within this circle, the methods of spiritual warfare were refined over the next twenty years.

At the same time, the concept took off on a global level, spreading especially through Latin American and African network nodes. A number of internationally prominent authors turned the theme of spiritual warfare into a genre of Pentecostal literature in its own right.[60] By 1990 it had already established itself as a paradigmatic strategic approach spanning denominational boundaries that once had been fiercely contested, not least those between evangelical-charismatic and Pentecostal branches. In the meantime, the Lausanne Movement offered a hinge on which the idea of spiritual warfare was carried forward. Since its founding congress in 1974, the Lausanne Movement had set out to evangelize the so-called 'unreached people groups,' and spiritual warfare offered itself as the strategic pattern for putting this aim into practice. Finally, at a follow-up

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58 Besides C. Peter Wagner, Cindy Jacobs and Chuck Pierce were particularly popular. On the genesis of spiritual warfare cf. Marshall: Spiritual Warfare as Global Praxis (2016).

59 Christerson/Flory elaborate on Wagner's significant contribution to the theological concept of spiritual warfare as well as to the institutional networking aspect resulting from his teaching at Fuller Theological Seminary, cf. Christerson/Flory: The Rise of Network Christianity (2017), 26–32.

60 These include, for example, the Americans Charles Kraft, George Otis or Ted Haggard, as well as the Argentinians Luis Bush and Eduardo Silvoso. The so-called 10/40 window, which inspired the evangelical Lausanne Movement, is a concept coined by Bush.

congress in Manila in 1989, the Lausanne Movement popularized the concept of the so-called 10/40 window. This is a graphic implementation of the concept of spiritual warfare developed by the Argentinian Luis Bush. According to Bush, the majority of 'unreached peoples' live in the geographic region between 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator. Bush states that this region contains most of the predominantly non-Christian countries, the least-Christianized ethnic groups, as well as the bastions of non-Christian religions such as Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. This imaginary map thus marks what he considers the 'strongholds of Satan' in today's world.[61] René Holvast, who provides a detailed genesis of 'spiritual mapping,' speaks of what could be paraphrased as a 'geography of fear.'[62] The Lausanne Movement thus pursued empirical-strategic missionary work, gathered religious statistics and created cartographies to document the progress of evangelization primacy, and also to expand its missionary strategies.[63]

Expanding on spiritual warfare as a missionary strategy, authors such as C. Peter Wagner and Charles Kraft refine the concept by adding various layers of meaning. To contain Satan's spheres of influence, they identify three different levels of spiritual warfare, each with its own forms and prioritizations. While the 'ground level' is about controlling the 'evil forces' that trigger sinful personal behavior, the second, 'occult' level is about challenging other religions or anti-religious environments.

However, the most significant level with respect to Dominion Theology is known as 'strategic-level spiritual warfare.' Here, the boundaries of spiritual warfare towards the political sphere are removed. This is a core theme of Dominion Theology. Strategic spiritual warfare is concerned first and foremost with a 'cosmic' challenge, which refers to systems and discourses as well as the transformation of political landscapes believed to be under the spell of demonic forces.[64] The 'strategic' orientation of spiritual warfare thus refers less to the 'ground-level' aspects of personal faith life than to political scenarios. Its characteristic feature is the employment of controversially debated techniques to identify and mark satanic activity. Associated with this are forms of practice such as territorial 'spiritual mapping.' This refers to individual prominent landmarks and public memorials, specific geographic areas, or even – as in the 10/40 window – entire geopolitical regions. The idea is to scan the history, the cultural memory of a region and entire nations for 'spiritual fetters' and to purge them

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61 For a still-current insight into evangelical missiology, see Brandl: Mission in evangelikaler Perspektive (2003), 178–99.

62 Cf. Holvast: A Geography of Fear (2009).

63 See, for example, the seminal anthology by Winter/Hawthorne: Perspectives on the World Christian Movement (2009).

64 Cf. Kraft: Spiritual Warfare: A Neocharismatic Perspective (2002), 1091–96.

through the activities of specially trained 'prayer warriors,' e.g., by means of strategic prayers.[65]

### *1.2 Agonistic Spirituality*

The basic component of strategic spiritual warfare is an agonistic attitude of faith. It makes up the tenor of Dominion Theology and characterizes above all the Pentecostal movement in the global South. In Africa, agonistic spirituality is intensified against the backdrop of precarious postcolonial political development. The phrase was coined by Nimi Wariboko, who comes from the Nigerian megachurch scene himself. He paradoxically characterizes the Pentecostal attitude of faith as 'grace-filled warfare.' He uses the term to describe an aggressive faith practice "through a special mode and mood of prayers, fasting, speaking in tongues, confession of sin, spiritual mapping, deliverance, and prophetic utterances calculated to initiate the new, usher in freedom and promote human flourishing."[66] In particular, the piety evident in the African Pentecostal movement is permeated by an "agonistic spirituality."[67] This is clearly evident in the Pentecostal movement's politically oriented practice. Thus, Wariboko contextualizes the origin of such agonistic spirituality. According to him, the militant attitude especially of African megachurches is fed by the social misery pervading postcolonial Africa. This is how he accounts for their politically colored basic tenor.[68] According to Wariboko, 'grace-filled warfare' is a response to the existential experiences of poverty, political instability and social hopelessness. For him, agonistic spirituality is a consequent expression of an "unusually intense quest for power via conversion and salvation in which the stakes are so high that they are approached with the dedication of war; hence, the constant language and practices of spiritual warfare."[69]

Following this assessment, we may filter out a kind of Pentecostal warfare theology utilized by the Pentecostal movement to open itself to the world. The

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65 Cf. for example Rankin/Stetzer: Spiritual warfare and missions (2010). Like practically all literature in this field, this book can be bought inexpensively in bookstores with a charismatic-Pentecostal profile, such as the Challenge Bookshops chain, whose importance for the international dissemination of theological discourses is immense (see Mason: God's Challenge in Ghana [2013]). The majority of primary Pentecostal literature by West African and American authors is available there.

66 Wariboko: Nigerian Pentecostalism (2014), 158.

67 Ibid.

68 Similarly, Ogbu Kalu configures the political theology of the African Pentecostal movement in confrontation with "neighborhoods (...) plagued by poverty, unemployment, and disease," Kalu: African Pentecostalism (2008), 212. Kalu foregrounds the theological impulse of hope (Tembisa).

69 Wariboko: Nigerian Pentecostalism (2014), 35.

formerly escapist attitude of the classical Pentecostal movement that was disinterested in political processes is transformed into a strategic attitude of faith that seeks to bring about the redemption of the world by force, as it were. The formula of salvation whereby the former 'salvation *from* the world' is now couched in terms of 'salvation *of* the world,' seems too harmless in view of the emphasis on aggression. Agonistic spirituality starts from a dualistic image of the world and progresses into a spiritual warfare that seeks to expand the power space filled with the might of the Holy Spirit against the subversions of Satan and the demonic powers. The goal of spiritual warfare is to radically transform both individuals and social worlds. There is, in a sense, an urge of conversion that is almost impossible to avoid. Salvation, evangelism, mission and conversion coalesce in the militant role model of the Christian warrior of faith involved in the suppression of demonic powers – and the weapon of agonistic spirituality is prayer.

### *1.3 Destructive Warfare Prayer*

The prayer language of spiritual warfare is aggressive, employing eschatological and agonal metaphors aimed at perceived enemies. Propagators of this conspicuously militant prayer practice include the so-called 'fire' ministries, which mostly emerge from an association surrounding the Nigerian Mountain of Fires and Miracles Ministry (MFMM), founded in 1994. The founder of MFMM, Daniel Olukoya, is the author of a number of publications on spiritual warfare. During a 2013 worship service in London, he qualifies prayer as follows:

> Violent prayer coupled with violent faith gives you uncommon breakthroughs. (…) It is adamant prayer; stubborn prayer; enough-is enough prayer […]. It has just one goal: ELIMINATION OF THE ENEMY.[70]

That sounds alarmingly martial. The obsessive orientation of religious life to 'demonic powers,' the black-and-white image of the world, also shapes the image of God. With reference to Deut. 32:29, Olukoya declares bluntly: 'God is a killer.' One aspect of spiritual warfare is to summon the 'angel of death' (2 Kings 19:35) to settle accounts with clearly identified 'enemies.' These enemies are usually found in one's close social environment, even in one's family. People sometimes literally pray for the death of these specific people. This is especially evident in the use of psalm prayers petitioning God to bring one's 'enemies' to

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[70] Quoted from Marshall: Spiritual Warfare as Global Praxis (2016), 95 (emphasis in the original). Cf., e.g. Olukoya: 101 Weapons of Spiritual Warfare (2013); or the widely published Olukoya: Prayer Rain (1999), which he announced as 'the most powerful and practical Prayer manual ever written'.

judgment.[71] It is no accident that this genre, which sometimes takes reference to the tradition of imprecatory psalms, is one of the recurring ritual constants of spiritual warfare in African megachurches. Imprecating specific individuals and asking for their physical destruction become elements of spiritual warfare prayers. The African Pentecostal movement also includes the notion of ancestral curses, which are blamed for past injustices or present unexplainable misfortunes.[72] The ritual formulation of the warfare prayer has further repercussions: According to Olukona, one of the most effective 'weapons' of prayer is the 'mystery of substitution.' By this he means using warfare prayer to redirect the hatred of 'enemies' back upon themselves, so that the 'enemies' receive the death sentence they intended for me. He acknowledges that this 'prayer weapon' "cannot be understood or used by amateur students in the field of spiritual warfare"[73]. For this reason, regular workshops on spiritual warfare are offered that are increasingly based on Dominion Theology.

### *1.4 Dominion Hour – A Dominionist Reinterpretation of Warfare Prayer*

The form of spiritual warfare prayer discussed above has become popular within the African Pentecostal movement. It is also present in everyday culture and can be found, for example, in the form of a warning 'Return to Sender' bumper sticker to immunize car drivers and passengers against outside harm. One of the West African trendsetters of precisely this form of spiritual warfare is Archbishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams of Ghana, head of Action Chapel International in Accra. Action Chapel International is more thoroughly styled in terms of Dominion Theology than almost any other megachurch. This refers first of all to Duncan-Williams' understanding of his role as "the founder and father of the Charismatic Movement in Ghana and in other parts of West Africa."[74] Indeed, a number of illustrious leaders of West African megachurches trace their careers back to their contact with Duncan-Williams. This nimbus of a megachurch pioneer is reflected in his title of "Presiding Archbishop and General Overseer" of a church that, since its founding in the late 1970s, has grown into a worldwide network of more than 300 local congregations. Just a

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71 Cf. introductory Zenger: Fluchpsalmen (2009), 1335–36. The corpus of cursing psalms, narrow in itself, includes, for example, Ps. 7, 54, 58 or also Ps. 59.

72 Asamoah-Gyadu: Ghanaian Traditional and Christian Perspectives (2008).

73 Quoted from Marshall: Spiritual Warfare as Global Praxis (2016), 96.

74 Thus, for example, on his book covers, cf. Duncan-Williams: Prayer Moves God (2015). However, the beginnings of his theological career can be traced back to the orbit of the Nigerian pioneer of the megachurch scene, Benson Idahosa, who described himself as the "axe of God." Both Idahosa and Duncan-Williams also make reference to T.L. Osborne and Oral Roberts, at whose training schools in the U.S. they were taught for a time.

few years ago, Duncan-Williams adopted another self-appointed title to express a unique selling point. Since 2015, he has borne the exceptional title of "Visioneer", using this neologism to attest to his extraordinary prophetic-visionary gifts.[75] Duncan-Williams presents himself as an energetic visionary whose prophetic gifts are supposed proof of his being chosen and anointed. Based on its church-owned TV station, Dominion Television, Action Chapel has built an extensive media empire that influences popular culture through radio channels, video and music productions. The megachurch operates the entire range of old and new communication technologies, partly supported by income from its own teaching institution, Dominion University.

The claim of Dominion Theology is programmatic, also with regard to worship life. The name of Duncan-Williams' megachurch is programmatic as well: Action Chapel International has repeatedly come out with innovative renewals of the concept and practice of spiritual warfare. The dominionist reinterpretation of spiritual warfare prayers probably also goes back to Duncan-Williams. This is evident in the transformation of the former 'Jericho Hour' to the so-called 'Dominion Hour' around 2015. The warfare format of the famous 'Jericho Hour,' a weekly program offered since the 1990s, is kept almost unchanged. 'Dominion Hour' also uses various types of dynamic prayer choreographies. Divine intervention in everyday life is rehearsed in special ritual contexts; these are actually practice workshops usually extending over three days and requiring a high degree of physical commitment. The event features an arsenal of various forms ranging from deliverance (ritual acts of liberation from demonic oppression, or prayers of renunciation) to staccato salvos of prayer, the proverbial 'machine gun prayers. "Prayer is a guided missile," Duncan-Williams states: "Prayer overrides the enemy and it exposes his agenda."[76] The prayer missiles in this permanent conflict between good and evil unleash a deafening activism. Believers pace the worship space, praying loudly; their energetic body language is uncompromising – confronting, as it were, the demonic activity head-on. Prayers are considered effective when they are bellowed loudly. To bring down the demonic walls, 'Dominion Hour' must adopt a "combative, raw" attitude, according to Duncan-Williams.[77] The highly dynamic prayers literally aim for a 'bombardment from heaven' that, as it is said internally, leaves God no alternative but to respond.

This format of a warfare-soaked prayer service that literally commands God's intervention has long found imitators throughout the Pentecostal

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75 Cf. Heuser: 'Visioneer Reborn' (2018), 15–40.

76 Duncan-Williams: Prayer Moves God (2015), 15.

77 Personal conversation with N. Duncan-Williams, Action Chapel headquarters, Accra, January 25, 2015, probably also somewhat in response to my rather restrained, astonished attitude during the preceding service.

movement. Significantly, Duncan-Williams and Action Chapel engage in a dominionist politicization of spiritual warfare. The Pentecostal warfare theology of 'Dominion Hour' aims far beyond any individual 'breakthrough' in the lives of believers. For Duncan-Williams, a structural change in spiritual warfare is at hand. Unapologetically, he uses the following lines to introduce his latest magnum opus, *Prayer Moves God* (2015), which revolves around a phenomenology of 'prayer': "Prophetically, I know that God is raising up a new breed of intercessors and prayer warriors that will enforce God's will for many generations." This new generation of spiritual warfare strategists still addresses the personal 'blockades,' including existential ones, that cause frustration in life and prevent individuals from realizing their actual potential. However, Duncan-Williams continues the same passage with a different claim that is resonating with decidedly dominionist appeals: "The destiny of cities, nations, and continents are birthed by the prayers of God's people. (…) The earth is changed and revolutionized."[78]

Duncan-Williams' understanding of prayer is framed in terms of Dominion Theology. The key chapter in *Prayer Moves God* deals explicitly with the "Dominion Mandate." It is about the restoration of the original paradisiacal state. "In the beginning, there was no need for prayer. Man had unrestricted communion and fellowship with God."[79] The prayer of the new prayer warriors strives to emulate this unrestricted fellowship with God. Therefore, it has a prophetic quality: "Prayer allows us to come boldly into the Throne Room of the Father to receive illumination and advanced knowledge to pray, as we ought to."[80] Prophetic prayer creates a contract of faith with God, who is called on to intervene through prayer practice. "God will help us, but He has put the responsibility on us to pray and ask Him to get involved."[81] Thus, prayer is the first responsibility of a Christian, says Duncan-Williams, but it is a responsibility that leads away from self-sufficiency and opens up a perspective to the whole, the regaining of authority over the world and dominion over 'the enemy': "God gave man dominion over the earth and the rules of engagement require that we pray, intercede and use the Word of God to overrule, override and overturn the works of darkness."[82] According to Duncan-Williams, this regaining of the Dominion Mandate through warfare prayer is *the* eschatological event in the current 'dispensation' and represents the dynamic aspect of the contemporary Pentecostal Movement.

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78 Duncan-Williams: Prayer Moves God (2015).
79 Ibid., 11.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid., 21.
82 Ibid., 24.

> Persistent prayer, intercession – is warfare prayer. […] The power to enforce the Dominion Mandate is available to us, the Church in this dispensation. We exercise our dominion through prayer.[83]

Duncan-Williams differentiates strategical prayer in terms of various political levels of action. He distinguishes between "parliamentary prayers," "governmental prayers," and "harvest prayers," which refer to the hoped-for – no: proactively prayed-for – results of political decisions.[84]

In this respect, Duncan-Williams marks "strategic prayer" in the context of spiritual warfare as the core of a Pentecostal warfare theology. In its explicitly dominionist approach, the ritual practice of strategic prayer strives to mark a turning point in social-political life. It demythologizes, at least in part, the warfare against diabolical powers by introducing political taxonomies that owe their existence to the approach of Dominion Theology.

## 2. The Politicization of Anointing

Another central component of the consolidation of Dominion Theology in megachurches is the practice of charismatic anointing, or unction. It serves three main purposes: First, acts of anointing consolidate megachurch networks. Second, they demonstrate the theological autonomy with which megachurch leaders align themselves with a prophetically gifted genealogy. And third, the act of anointing allows the Pentecostal movement to take the leap into the political.

### *2.1 Consolidation of Networks*

The enormous web of the megachurch network, which has long been active on a global level, is woven through acts of anointing. This means that the charismatic personality is formed through mutual reinforcement and by locking into recognized prophetic networks. Megachurch circles reinforce themselves through acts of anointing known as 'apostolic covering,' 'transferable anointing,' or 'impartation.' The ritual serves to pass on the power of the Holy Spirit, to authenticate succession arrangements or to stabilize relationships within the networks – or to find access to such a network in the first place. Anointings indicate relational constellations within a network architecture. Access to network nodes is established through anointing; less well-known 'apostles' and 'prophets' can use it to position themselves close to the recognized megachurch

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83 Ibid., 33.

84 Cf. Heuser: 'Visioneer Reborn' (2018), 15–40.

augurs. Such anointings thus denote status-establishing acts in relation to complex network structures and are often associated with years of demonstrations of loyalty.[85] Beyond such functional network analyses, anointing represents a key theological concept accompanying the work of 'apostles and prophets.' Megachurch sermons, publications, and social media accounts are riddled with statements on 'prophetic anointings.' The key codes are 'catching the anointing,' 'unction,' and 'impartation,' and they allude to the ritual techniques of a transfer or transmission of charismatic gifts. The identification of a 'prophetic anointing' denotes the breakthrough of the 'men of God.'

### *2.2 Prophetic Anointing*

Paul Gifford was the first to observe this elementary shift toward the prophetic in the African Pentecostal movement, which roughly coincided with the resurgence of Dominion Theology in megachurch circles. The trend was so overwhelming that, as he states with reference to Ghana, "by 2000 virtually everything (…) had to be prophetic."[86]

This is accompanied above all by a gain in autonomy for African church leaders. Previously, they emphasized their charismatic authenticity by inserting themselves into the genealogy of international – preferably North American – grandees of the movement; now, with reference to their 'prophetic anointing,' they can crystallize their own preeminent status. As prophetically anointed persons, they act powerfully in their own right. The African 'apostles and prophets' continue to be embedded in the worldwide Pentecostal movement, but are now forming their own strong nodes within the global networks. The founders and leaders of megachurches thus claim a nearly undisputable central position in the life of their church and that of their followers. As prophetically anointed persons, they sacralize themselves – even more: they increase their prestige by representing divine presence in their own person. "Prophetic verdicts are divine verdicts; they are heavenly verdicts. They are God's commands given expression to through mortal lips," David Oyedepo of Winners' Chapel states. "Every time the prophet says, 'Thus saith the Lord,' it is actually the Lord Himself speaking."[87] The prophets are the authoritative bearers of divine power; it is in them that the power of divine intervention in daily life is manifested and through them that believers gain access to divine blessings. Oyedepo continues: "If you must partake of what the prophets carry, you must accept them as being

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85 Depending on a preacher's status in the network, corresponding fees are paid. Cf. also the study on building charismatic authority among young, emerging preachers in urban contexts by Lauterbach: Christianity, Wealth, and Spiritual Power in Ghana (2017).

86 Gifford: Ghana's new Christianity (2004), 90.

87 Quoted in Gifford: Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa (2015), 38.

placed above you." The prophetic thus proves to be the formative element of megachurch religious culture. It first takes shape in prophetic speech, which typically expresses itself in a proclamation. Generally speaking, prophetic speech announces the breakthrough of something new: "Prophetic verdicts will cause your daystar to rise. It will always bring a change of position, as mountains and hopeless situations bow to it."[88] In some megachurches, a separate genre of sermons has developed: the so-called 'prophetic declarations,' issued annually or even weekly during worship services. In the Ghanaian *International Central Gospel Church,* they have the status of creeds, as this is how significant the prophetic interpretations of their leader Mensa Otabil are considered to be. Otabil himself recognizes in them "weapons of spiritual warfare."[89] This already shows that the word cannot do without ritual – in the prophecy-charged megachurch scene, the ritual framework of anointing is needed to complete the prophetic proclamation.[90]

### *2.3 The 'King Cyrus Anointing'*

The concept of anointing facilitates the translation of prophetic practice into politics. When Donald Trump was inaugurated as President of the United States in 2016, evangelical and Pentecostal circles called him 'God's anointed one.' For the first time in U.S. history, they granted that a political leader could exercise his power as the 'chosen one' of God. What seems remarkable here is not even so much the transfer of the religious ritual of anointing to the exercise of political power. In fact, this notion is the inspiration for the Old Testament genesis of anointing, in which the prophet Samuel installs Saul as king of Israel (1 Samuel 9–10). What may be surprising is the fact that with Trump, a political leader is recognized as an instrument of God whose way of life by no means corresponds to the strict catalog of virtues of a god-fearing person. But this incongruence, too, is subjected to a biblically inspired reframing of Trump as a candidate who is chosen by God for his ability to stir up dissent. Lance Wallnau, one of the best-known representatives of Dominion Theology in the USA, popularized a supposedly 'prophetic' profiling of the 'kamikaze candidate.' Wallnau came up with the King Cyrus interpretation, which he says appeared

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88 Oyedepo, cited in Ibid.

89 Note in Asamoah-Gyadu/Lindhardt/Adogame: Sighs and Signs of the Spirit (2015), 81.

90 It should be noted in passing that an entire branch of business, controlled by the megachurches, has sprung up around the 'oil of anointing.' The oil, mostly olive oil, is considered a panacea for daily use. It guarantees prophetic protection against evil forces. There may be a magical understanding at play here, but for believers, it is a ritual expression of Dominion Theology: what matters is that this material impartation of divine blessing establishes dominion over all evil through prophetic action.

to him as a prophetic vision during the 2016 primary season. He claimed that the voice of God referred him to the Baylonian exile of the Israelites under the Persian King Cyrus. When the people of Israel were allowed to return to Jerusalem after 70 years of captivity, it was King Cyrus who caused their liberation. In the biblical tradition, Cyrus, a gentile, is henceforth referred to as the Lord's "anointed" in Isaiah 45:1. For Wallnau, this implies that Trump should be seen as an instrument of God in a comparable way. Even the location of the biblical reference in Isaiah 45 contains prophetic meaning for him, because Trump will go down in U.S. history as the 45th president.[91] Wallnau first coined the catchy "Cyrus anointing" *topos* in an interview broadcast on the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), a platform which is also favored by Trump. From there, it immediately gained widespread publicity.[92] In a remarkably short time and beyond the actual milieus with an affinity for Dominion Theology, the rhetoric of the "anointed one" and of the modern-day Cyrus took root.[93] The "Trump Prophecy" entered popular culture, was taken up in fiction and finally adapted to film and screened in movie theaters.[94] In the course of his presidency, even Trump himself adopts its stylization as God's chosen one.[95] Interestingly, the 'King Cyrus anointing' motif is once again enjoying increased media popularity in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election.[96] The so-called prophetic circles in which the political anointing motif is percolating are spreading out, with some entirely new network nodes forming. Trump's connections to the Pentecostal scene have been known for a while, documented in the appointment of Paula White (New Destiny Christian Center/Florida), one of the leading American figures of the controversial Prosperity Theology, as his personal spiritual advisor.[97] With the 2017 founding of 'POTUS Shield', led by Frank Amedia (Touch of Heaven Ministries/Ohio), a new network stepped on the scene that has been busy augmenting the prophetic repertoires surrounding President

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91 Cf. Wallnau: Is Donald Trump America's Cyrus? (2016). Wallnau published his political visions, which were enthusiastically received in evangelical and Pentecostal media, in book form before the 2016 election; cf. Wallnau: God's Chaos Candidate (2016).

92 Cf. Mitchell: Chaos Candidate: Is Trump a Modern-Day King Cyrus? (2016).

93 According to a poll conducted by political scientist Paul Djupe (Denison University, Ohio), more than half of regular churchgoers across denominations in the U.S. now share the conviction that Trump is God's chosen one, (cf. Stadtlich: Evangelikale in den USA [2020]).

94 In 2018, Steven Schultze released the movie version of The Trump Prophecy; it is based on the eponymous debut novel by Mark Taylor that was published the year before.

95 The occasion is the trade dispute with China, cf. President Trump: "I am the chosen one" (2019). As BBC comments on the video: "Telling reporters he is the first U.S. president to take on China over trade, Donald Trump looks up to the sky and strikes a man-of-destiny tone."

96 Cf. Lee: The King Cyrus anointing of Trump (2019).

97 Trump ein von Jesus auserwählter Präsidenten (2019).

Trump ever since. POTUS Shield sees itself as an intercessory prayer network in support of Trump. As such, it seeks to erect a 'protective spiritual shield' around presidential politics to ensure 'God's victory' in the battle against Satan. It thus considers itself an instrument of spiritual warfare within the framework of a dualistic worldview. Amedia supplies the media not only with conspiracy theories, but also with prophetic neologisms such as the 'breaker anointing,' which he attributes to presidential actionism, or the 'Kingdom shift,' which for him takes place with the 2016 election to break down the 'demonic ramparts' – nationally as well as geopolitically. On the national level, Amedia's prophecies include new appointments to the Supreme Court and the destruction of the liberal social and media system called the 'Deep State,' prophecies that showed up as quasi-directives in Trump's presidency.[98] The network politics activating around Trump's 'Cyrus anointing' finally coalesces into an enormously significant knot, with numerous megachurches joining together in early 2020 to form an alliance for Trump's re-election. The host church in Miami/Florida is El Rey Jesús led by Honduran-born Guillermo Maldonado, the megachurch with the largest membership among Hispanics. Thus, this 'Evangelicals for Trump' initiative expands his voter base into the Spanish-speaking population.[99] In the presence of Donald Trump, Apostle Guillermo Maldonado prays for the president to be the "Cyrus," "to bring reformation, change to this nation and all the nations of the Earth."[100] The networking strategy of the so-called New Apostolic Reformation is working. Wallnau calls it the "Cyrus connection."[101] Its influence is a far-reaching one. The international impact of POTUS Shield's orbit can be seen in Uganda, for example, in the debates over tightening anti-homosexuality legislation.[102] In 2018, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also caused a stir when he praisingly applied the Cyrus paradigm to President Trump for officially recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital.[103] It is evident that the notion of a 'King Cyrus anointing' of Trump has current political relevance.

But let us draw an interim conclusion here: the steep career of a theological representation of President Trump's rule, outlined here in cursory fashion, provides a basic model of what is meant by an occupation of the political sphere in

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98 Berry: Voting in the Kingdom (2020) has been the first to illuminate Amedia's influence in more detail.

99 Shellnut: Influential Hispanic Pastor Welcomes 'Evangelicals for Trump' (2020). According to Christianity Today, more than 70 megachurch leaders belong to this alliance.

100 Cited in Berry: Voting in the Kingdom (2020), 88.

101 Mitchell: Chaos Candidate: Is Trump a Modern-Day King Cyrus? (2016).

102 This refers to the political influence of Lou Engle, a member of POTUS Shield, on Ugandan politics (note in Berry: Voting in the Kingdom [2020], 83).

103 Slow-Carrol: TRUMP THE GREAT. Who is King Cyrus, and why did Netanyahu compare him to Trump? (2018).

Dominion Theology. Discourse entanglements come into view that advance the claim of a prophetic encoding of politics. That is, day-to-day political events become interpretable – beyond any knowledge that is directly derived from the bible – through prophetic ingenuity. To a certain extent, the primacy of the prophetic enables the unexpected, perplexing discovery of a *topos* like that of Trump's 'Cyrus anointing.' Such prophetic, literally 'extra-ordinary' readings of current political contexts are increasingly interlocking with the (evangelical and Pentecostal) milieus receptive to it and are spread through them into the mass media as well as popular culture. The discourse on Trump's prophetic anointing is promoted by a further differentiation of networks that also ensure its global dissemination.

## 3. Postcolonial Co-optations

The 'Cyrus anointing' as a political motif is also disseminated in the circles of African megachurches. Some of their most prominent 'apostles and prophets' were actively involved in the acts of worship on the occasion of Trump's inauguration as the 45th president of the United States on January 20, 2017. Archbishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams of Action Chapel International, Ghana, joined the select ranks of clergy at a prayer service immediately ahead of the official 'Inauguration Day Prayer Service.'[104] This in itself remarkable appearance by a Ghanaian church leader at a civic religious act in the U.S. confirms the enormous stature of what has long been a global network of independent mega-ministries.

It is therefore hardly surprising that Duncan-Williams also prominently features in the representation of national politics. Before the 'Apostle of Strategic Prayer' traveled to Washington/DC in the second half of January 2017, he had rehearsed his role in a highly official act of state at the beginning of the month. On January 7, 2017, he had the honor of representing the country's Christian churches at the inauguration of Ghana's newly elected President, Nana Addo-Dankwa. Archbishop Duncan-Williams appears on a central mission during the prestigious civil-religious inaugural ritual that precedes every presidential inauguration. He appears in the capacity of first intercessor, followed by a

[104] https://citifmonline.com/2017/01/duncan-williams-leads-prayer-at-church-service-for-trumps-inauguration/ (accessed 01.07.2021).

representative of Ghana's Muslim community.[105] It is noteworthy that Duncan-Williams received his mandate for this appearance from the Ghanaian churches.[106]

Since the 1990s, a co-optation strategy within the African ranks of mega-church leaders has been implemented with the aim of directly influencing political officeholders based on a political understanding of strategic prayer. Bishop Charles Agyinasare (formerly Agyin-Asare), founder of *Perez Chapel International* (formerly *Word Miracle Church International*) is among the most prominent representatives of deliverance ministries in West Africa. His bestseller, however, is about prayer and its power. Agyinasare sees prayer as a guide to action to win the "invisible war." Just as for him Christian theology is "battle theology,"[107] he understands prayer as warfare prayer, because "when we pray, we are actually breaking the devil's hold over the lives of people […]."[108] Agyinasare discusses in detail his political motivation to reach the political elites of African states through prayer: "If God gets hold of leadership, then the nation prospers, but if the devil gets hold of leadership, there is trouble. […] In many countries today, […] some of the leaders calling themselves war lords have allowed themselves to be influenced by the devil."[109] Since the late 1990s, Agyinasare has been implementing the strategic goal of getting close to presidents and vice presidents of various states (Ghana, Ivory Coast, Zambia), using warfare prayer as a point of entry.[110] These long-established individual contacts to the elite of political decision-makers now influence public discourse.

An air of elitism also pervades the international 'Prayer Summits' that are convened annually. In keeping with his understanding of 'strategic prayer,' Duncan-Williams uses such prayer meetings to enhance his public status. He identifies them as 'one of the most powerful tools' Christianity can use to gain

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105 Until 2008, the inauguration ceremony for newly elected presidents was also attended by a representative of African religion, an arrangement that had been in place since the country's independence in 1957. The 2008 change was initiated at the request of then incumbent J.E. Atta Mills, who was the first president to openly profess Pentecostalism.

106 The ceremony is documented in pictures in the special editions of the national newspapers Daily Graphic and Daily Guide of January 09, 2017.

107 Agyin-Asare: The Impact of Prayer (2001), 8-9; cf. Robb: Strategic Prayer (2009), 163–69.

108 Agyin-Asare: The Impact of Prayer (2001), 83.

109 Ibid., 82–83. For insight into current deliverance practices in Ghana, without political references, see Onyinah: Pentecostal Exorcism (2012); Asamoah-Gyadu: Ghanaian Traditional and Christian Perspectives (2008).

110 Photographs of such encounters are on display in the lobby of Perez Chapel in Accra. Among them are presidential photos of Laurent Gbagbo, the former president of Côte d'Ivoire, who has been convicted of human rights violations by the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

influence on social discourse.[111] While the 'Visioneer' self-assuredly rubs elbows with powerful political figures, in his 'Prayer Summits,' he styles himself as a theological advisor to social elites in general. These prayer meetings are the most influential events of his church in terms of publicity. They provide a platform for high-profile international speakers, including notable figures from both megachurch and socio-political life, and spark broader discourses. In early September 2017, in that same 'presidential year,' Duncan-Williams launched a new prayer format: for the first time, a Prayer Summit was to be dedicated to themes of continental development policy and economic futures. The first 'Africa Business and Kingdom Leadership Summit' gathered an illustrious gallery of former presidents of African countries, diplomats, businesspeople – including from the African American community and the 'diaspora' – and representatives of non-governmental organizations. Ghana's President Akuffo-Addo delivered the conference's opening address. But the Summit's main speakers also included several megachurch 'giants' whose appearances stood out prominently in the conference activity. Among them was the African American prosperity preacher T.D. Jakes (Potter's House, Texas). While leading U.S. media such as Time Magazine and CNN celebrate Jakes as 'America's Best Preacher,' the conference brochure praises him as a "world renowned pastor, media mogul, and visionary." The summit's dominionist approach is conveyed clearly in the event's public promotional material, claiming to bring together "foremost leaders of Africa's most influential spheres" to discuss economic strategies for the continent.[112] The three-day conference, which carried a fairly high registration fee, culminated in a closing worship service that was held in the capital's Independence Square and open to the public. In his address during the closing service, Duncan-Williams calls to mind former visions of African independence and suggests that their still-unfulfilled promises could be realized through intervention by faith-inspired actors. Alluding to the state emblem, the 'Black Star' towering over Independence Square, he addresses a cheering crowd of 20,000 in the habitus of the political visionary: "Let the star rise!" In the sermon that follows, T.D. Jakes strikes the same note. He preaches about a "transformative faith" that disrupts the Pentecostal preaching patterns, many of which revolve around divine intervention and an individual response of faith. His preaching is infused with a theology of hope that transcends the factual parameters of everyday life. The misery of the African postcolony, so to speak, is overcome by

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111 Excerpt from a sermon by Duncan-Williams, Action Chapel, Accra, January 25, 2015. With this classification of strategic prayer, Duncan-Williams set the church's motto for 2015. Generally speaking, the practice of strategic prayer has been known in the African Pentecostal movement since the early 1990s, cf. Kalu: Poverty and Social Engagement in Contemporary African Christianity (2009), 190.

112 Cf. the conference supplement in the *Daily Graphic*, Aug. 17, 2017.

God leading the way into previously unknown territories, in personal life, but also in social life, in society: "Desire the spectacular in all day life! Transgress the normal! We are all leaders because we do not shy away from the risks of the unknown." He no longer addresses the elites only; every individual is called upon to become an agent of change: "What I preach is a revolution! This is the revolution: stay together, form a single unit of power! God is at work to transform things – the economy, the nation!" The proclamation of a revolution concludes this first Africa Business and Kingdom Leadership Summit.[113]

Again, we come across some strategic keystones of Dominion Theology. The basic concept thrives on visionaries and the visionary itself, and therefore carries a euphoric undertone; the goal is to bring extra-ordinary reality into the locality of both individual and socio-political existence. The local implementation of the spectacular, the organization of the kairological momentum of change, requires the aura of the international, which is easy to come by via the existing megachurch networks. The megachurch-political complex of the Summit is striking – the way megachurch prophets are put in contact with socio-political elites, with obvious mutual gain. The proponents of Dominion Theology bask in the glow of political power and dress themselves in the habitus of visionaries of African independence. In turn, active politicians in particular strategically aim to secure support for their own programs. President Akuffo-Addo, for example, is promoting the 'Ghana Beyond Aid Agenda' proclaimed by his fledgling government, which aims to break away from external state financing by the Bretton Woods institutions (World Bank and International Monetary Fund), strengthen the private sector and implement an economic policy of liberalization.[114] The motivational messages of the summit, which demonstrate the possibilities of transformation through faith in the visionary, reinforce this new political agenda.

### *3.1 "Prophetic Election Intervention"*

The basic political motif of Dominion Theology has an impact on African presidential elections. There is no doubt that political office holders aim to engage Pentecostal constituencies. But they face an obstinacy of the prophetic that thwarts the notion of an all-too-easy political co-optation of megachurch constituencies. As has been observed elsewhere, nearly every Ghanaian parliamentary and presidential election in this century has been subjected to

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[113] For a detailed analysis of this event, cf. Heuser: Megachurches, Dominion Theology and Development (2020), 243–62.

[114] Kopsieker: Ghana – Musterschüler der Demokratie in Afrika? (2018) takes a critical look at this.

prophetic interferences. Prophets of all stripes attempt to directly influence electoral decisions. Apart from posing a problem in terms of democratic theory, these interventions through "prophetic voting"[115] are cause for fierce controversies within the prophetic milieus themselves. In such prophetic confusion, visionaries inspired by Dominion Theology like Duncan-Williams opt for the primacy of constructive prophecy.[116]

In the 2016 election year, Ghanaians were arguing about visionary election forecasts. The atmosphere was controversial; there were contentious debates about 'false prophets' presenting themselves as 'angels' of God. For years, independent 'prophets' operating outside any megachurch or even other ecumenical networks have caused considerable furor. As a result, the legitimacy of the title of prophet is coming under pressure, and the prophetic office itself is falling into disrepute.[117] A National Peace Council (NPC) that was convened specifically to address this issue identifies prophets who speak out on the upcoming elections without a political mandate as a threat to peace in society.[118] A fundamental debate is in the offing as the 'killer visions' of a 'popular Ghanaian seer' become known just days before the December 2016 election. "17 Killer Prophecies – Rev. Owusu-Bempah Goes to Town," the media announce. The prophecies foresee a coup d'état, religious conflicts and terrorist attacks as well as the premature death of "many politicians." These catastrophes can only be averted, Owusu-Bempah claims, through appropriate, lasting intercessory prayer campaigns.[119]

Warning prophecies, which in this or similar ways are always part of the repertoire of visionary political intervention, provoke opposition. The historic churches in Ghana, including the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Christian Council of Ghana, disavow them, denying the credibility of such prophecies and their circular reasoning (which always include the loophole of defining the appropriate measure of prayer practice). Even more interesting in our context is that their plausibility is now being doubted even in megachurch networks. Respected Ghanaian-born Pentecostal theologian Lawrence Tetteh, who heads Worldwide Miracle Outreach International based in London,

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115 Thus Berry: Voting in the Kingdom (2020), 72. While Berry highlights prophetic voting motivation, from which Trump, for example, has benefited greatly, what I find most important here is the dissonance within the "prophetic" camp around "prophetic voting."

116 On the following, also cf. Heuser: "Visionäres Branding": (2019), 100–103.

117 Cf., e.g., Daily Graphic, Nov. 14, 2016.

118 Cf. Daily Graphic, Nov. 23, 2016. According to a categorization by Daniel Wojcik, this is an example of "avertive apocalypticism" or conditional end-time expectation. By this he means warnings of apocalyptic occurrences that can be avoided, provided that the announced conditions are fulfilled. Cf. Wojcik: Avertive Apocalypticism (2011).

119 Daily Guide, Jan. 03, 2017. Owusu-Bempah is director of Glorious Word Power Ministry International.

appeals to the media to simply ignore the election predictions "in the name of prophecies."[120] Others warn of the destabilizing effects of election prophecies and call for democratic self-responsibility.[121] Even 'Visioneer' Duncan-Williams intervenes a little later, warning against falling "victim to demonic predictions." He indicts "false prophets" who "only make things seem worse." Every "true church stands on the revelation of Jesus Christ, not on the statements of such 'prophets.'"[122]

From a Dominion Theology perspective, it should be noted that a distinction is drawn here between an authentic prophetic tradition of vision and an apocalyptic prophecy of doom and decline. It is highly remarkable that the megachurch prophetic camp differentiates itself on the basis of an issue of democratic theory and draws its arguments from there – not from any biblical basis. The debates about prophetic election intervention are not about exegetical subtleties, nor are they about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Basically, they are about the aforementioned distinction between catastrophic vs. constructive/activating prophecy. Presumably, the normative attribution of 'progressive millennialism,' which favors the possibility of progress, is a perfect fit even for neoliberal-leaning prosperity preachers like Duncan-Williams or T.D. Jakes. More generally speaking, I would emphasize the prophetic possibility of participation in the establishment of the kingdom of God. Catastrophic prophecy virtually forfeits the chance of building the kingdom of God on earth. Seen in this light, Dominion Theology only marks as legitimate the kind of prophecy that is borne of eschatological optimism. The credo of Dominion Theology is accelerated by ensuring that people are appointed – elected in parliamentary democracies – who implement the 'laws of God' on a political level. This is why Dominion Theology is committed to the smooth conduct of elections.

Visionary 'true' prophecy invalidates the prophetically 'false' influence on electoral processes, since the latter escapes formal political control. With these verdicts against an eschatological prophecy of doom, the representatives of Dominion Theology reinforce parliamentary democracy in Ghana. This insight should not be underestimated in a postcolonial environment in which the concept of parliamentary democracy is exposed to multiple threats,[123] which are in

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120 Daily Graphic, 03.12.2016. On the illustrious prophetic scene outside the reach of established networks in Ghana, cf. Heuser: Battling Spirits of Prosperity (2015), 149–65.

121 Daily Graphic, Nov. 23-25, 2016.

122 Sermon, Action Chapel, Accra, February 5, 2017. On the discernment of spirits from a Pentecostal theological perspective, cf. Wenk: What is Prophetic about Prophecies (2017).

123 For a mere introduction on this topic, which must be more widely debated, cf. Bongmba: Studying African Christianity (2016); Nyamnjoh: Citizenship (2018); Girma: The Healing of Memories (2018).

turn fueled by the ongoing circulation of popular prophecies of doom.[124] But the debate about visionary election prognostication also reveals that Dominion Theology has not yet achieved discursive primacy in Pentecostal formations, let alone in the broader public. On the contrary: by placing themselves in opposition to killer prophecies of all kinds, the representatives of Dominion Theology try to save the theological legitimacy of the visionary charisma.

## 4. In the "Mantle of Elijah" – Crisis Management, Dominion Theology Style

Finally, I turn to the question of how charismatic-apostolic authority is secured both internally and externally. This aspect is not addressed in the conceptions of Dominion Theology, or else it is glossed over by praising the charismatic ingenuity of megachurch 'apostles.' With regard to internal control, two strategies come into view that have not yet been illuminated as components of Dominion Theology. One strategy refers to the high importance of meticulous imitation, of creating an exact copy of the charismatic role model; the other points to a kind of theology of immunization against accusation. In addition, in the crossfire of public criticism, a strategy of laying low and keeping silent is employed.

### *4.1 Loyalty Through Imitation*

Dominion Theology, especially in the hands of the so-called megachurch apostles and prophets, practices clear principles of internal power control. However, the objective is not to clarify power relations or even to enforce institutional control regarding the exercise of charismatic authority. Rather, it is an absolute loyalty to the church founder that is highlighted above all else. Megachurches in particular tend towards favoring top-down power structures over synodical structures. Postulations of loyalty are oriented toward the undiminished transmission of charismatic authority. The publishing activities of Bishop Dag Heward-Mills, head of Lighthouse Chapel International (Ghana), provide an insight into the high value that megachurches place on shaping a culture of loyalty. Founded in the 1980s, the church boasts a strong international presence. As the renowned founder of *Lighthouse Chapel International,* Heward-Mills has enormous influence in the megachurch scene, especially through his extensive writings. His books are required reading in his church's pastoral ministry training, but they are read across the globe. This is possible because they are

[124] For an overview cf. Hackett: Millennial and Apocalyptic Movements in Africa (2011).

translated almost simultaneously into several languages, discussed in church groups, and circulated in the international church networks in which Lighthouse Chapel is involved. Heward-Mills publishes several series that systematize his writings. The two most important series relate to "Loyalty" and "Church Growth." For him, the two issues are closely interconnected. He identifies the instillation of loyalty as one of the key criteria of successful church growth. "Loyalty is essential for maintaining a network of churches. The churches you will plant will not be in the same location. It is therefore necessary for people to be loyal wherever they are situated."[125] By prioritizing such questions of institutional stability, and by linking them to the network system of megachurches, Heward-Mills also addresses the issue of schisms, a problem confronting megachurches that otherwise tends to receive less attention. The introduction of the highly differentiated "Loyalty Series," which serves to publicize the virtue of loyalty and also includes an empirical case study of disloyalty, is intended to reduce the constant danger of schisms. One characteristic of the loyalty culture that applies both to the rapidly expanding network of newly planted churches and the corresponding megachurch networks is the call to copy the leading role models in terms of theology, facial expressions, body language and ritual practice – and to forget about any notions of plagiarism!

Those who wonder about the strikingly similar formats of Pentecostal megachurch sermons and ritual performances, even the comparable habitus of charismatic 'mega-heroes,' will find their explanation here. I would like to illustrate this briefly with a case study: 'Pure Fire Ministries,' the Nigerian-led megachurch near the national university in Legon, Ghana, regularly offers courses on 'Spiritual Warfare.' In 2017, I attended one such course that spanned three mornings, but found that the church leader was in Nigeria at the time. He was represented by his local pastors. But their rhetoric and gestures, the prayer instructions, indeed the entire ritual setting, exactly mimicked those of the absent leader. The imitation even included subtleties such as voice modulation. The text modules they used corresponded to the explanations of the founding prophet in the church's monthly magazine, which I subsequently got hold of. In short, the pastoral quality in this megachurch is fully oriented to the prototype. The staff is expected to be an exact copy of the original. The physical absence of the founder is compensated for by the imitation principle.

It should be noted in passing that the international success of megachurch founders on social media platforms, where they present themselves professionally, provides ample opportunity to inspire a host of imitators across the globe, e.g., through YouTube videos. Pastoral admirers use such freely available videos

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125 Heward-Mills: Church Growth ... It Is Possible! (2011), 176.

as source material to rehearse the charismatic's habitus and to perfect their own style.

Dominion Theology thus acquires an ambivalence of the extra-ordinary: while to the outside world, the media world, megachurches profess a unique 'apostolic' authority of the charismatic hero, in the internal space of the church, the multiplication of this extra-ordinariness is orchestrated through imitation. The ethos of imitation becomes a constitutive element of dominionist existence. It is supposed to spread in order to partake in the charismatic exceptionality of the founder. Imitation is a sign of prophetical election. Entirely disengaged from any debates of plagiarism, Heward-Mills explicitly extends this principle to literary creation: "One day, I realized I was writing books that were similar in direction and content to those of someone I had been following for years. This, to me, was a sign that I was carrying a certain anointing."[126]

Thus, chapters pertaining to the 'Art of Copying' are among of the key passages in Heward-Mills' publications on church growth. For example, in *Church Growth … It Is Possible!* featuring a foreword by South Korean pioneer of the megachurch scene David Yonggi Cho, he discusses the most efficient ways of pastoral imitation. Heward-Mills recommends them out of an eschatological urgency: "It won't be long and we will be going home. You do not have much time for trial and error. You cannot afford time for experiments. […] You need to get straight to the point. You need the anointing and you need it fast! You need to preach well and you need to preach well now! […] Thoughts of being unique will keep you away from obvious examples in front of them. God wants to raise up more mega church pastors."[127]

The basic eschatological impulse underlying the practice of copying is elevated to the status of a pastoral guiding strategy. This does not pertain so much to the development of church structures as it does to the practice of church leaders aligning their habitus with that of the prophetic role model. Metaphorically speaking, they put on the "mantle of Elijah" like Elisha (cf. 2 Kings 2). Referring to the Old Testament prophet, renowned Nigerian church historian Ogbu Kalu thus describes the process of passing on charismatic gifts to the next generation of church actors. It is about a 'prophetic' relationship, a teacher-disciple relationship, which is illustrated by passing on the 'mantle' to the next generation. The orientation of this process is entirely and comprehensively personalist. According to Kalu, passing on the mantle of Elijah becomes the 'dominant imagery' in the self-understanding of African 'apostles and prophets' in the course of the explosive spread of the African Pentecostal movement since the 1990s. It is a way of bypassing lengthy processes of theological formation,

126 Heward-Mills: Steps to the Anointing (2008), 146.
127 Heward-Mills: Church Growth ... It Is Possible! (2011), 227.

and it explains the evangelistic zeal of the younger generation and their search for new theological models, visions and leadership styles.[128] Wearing the 'mantle of Elijah,' i.e., assuming the trailblazer's habitus through imitation, is a comprehensive act. Video recordings of the church founder's worship services serve as illustrative material for the adept to copy the body language. The imitation extends from the preaching style to the selection of sermon topics and even to the structure of a sermon. The professional utilization of social media culture by the internationally operating megachurches has its roots here. In this respect, the orientation on the successful role model is also transferred to church management processes. Learning by copying also means to capture the management expertise of the charismatic founder, his daring to push boundaries and venture into new territory. The role model is so strong that we may even speak of an obligation to imitate, an obligation that is even applied as a template for one's own conduct of life.[129]

### *4.2 Theology of Immunization Against Accusation*

The virtue of loyalty to the founder of the church, which translates into the practice of imitation, is supplemented with a theological criterion to protect the charismatic habitus. This criterion may be called the theology of immunization against accusation. It denotes a theological pattern of argumentation that not only limits internal criticism of prominent representatives of African Pentecostalism, but indeed categorizes it as blasphemous. For the sake of preserving the compactness of my remarks on Dominion Theology in the African Pentecostal space, I will continue to take the theology of Dag Heward-Mills as my point of reference. The writings of Heward-Mills contain the elementary cipher of a theology of immunization against accusation, and it can be found in a standard work that serves as a textbook of the church's internal training. It is his *Basic Theology*, published in 2012. Here, we find the theological considerations prohibiting criticism of charismatic leadership in the extensive Chapter Four on "The Doctrine of Holiness." In keeping with its Pentecostal origins in the 19th century Holiness Movement, this is a theological linchpin that pertains to maintaining the state of being 'born again.' As Ogbu Kalu puts it succinctly: Pentecostal self-understanding is driven by the concern to prevent, at all costs, a 'born-again' individual from relapsing into the state of being 'burnt again.'[130]

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128 Cf. Kalu: African Pentecostalism (2008), 123. According to Gifford, the symbolic use of Elijah's cloak goes back to David Oyedepo, founder of the Nigerian megachurch Living Faith Church Worldwide, also known as Winners' Chapel, cf. Gifford: Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa (2015), 41.

129 See, for example, Heward-Mills: Church Growth ... It Is Possible! (2011), 223–36.

130 Cf. Kalu: Pentecostal and Charismatic Reshaping (2003), 102.

Therefore, Heward-Mills unfolds his doctrine of holiness in a defensive stance rather than, say, in the sense of an empowerment by the Holy Spirit. The pertinent chapter could just as well be conceived as a doctrine of sin – in the Pentecostal understanding – and indeed it starts with extensive subchapters on the "Sin of Immorality", the "Sins of the Tongue" and the "Sin of Accusation." Later on, the "Sin of Hypocrisy" and that of "Unforgiveness" are expounded. Throughout the chapter, Heward-Mills discusses sin essentially as individual moral wrongdoing. The "sin of accusation" receives special attention. The theme of accusation forms the core of the overall chapter and is divided into several subchapters. Heward-Mills first marks accusation as a sin; he refers to the "power" of accusation and is interested in the circles of support from which accusations are launched. His solution to defend against this power play of accusation is to offer mechanisms to utterly expose such criticisms and, finally, to "silence" them.[131]

This section, which is fundamental from a Pentecostal perspective, deals with blasphemy. In keeping with classical theological systematics, Heward-Mills addresses the issue of blasphemy in the larger subchapter on "sins of the tongue." However, he introduces a decisive twist: the thrust of blasphemous speech no longer finds its point of reference in God; it is now redirected to inadmissible criticism of the charismatic leadership figure. "Blasphemy," as Heward-Mills defines it, "is unauthorized interference with God-ordained authority."[132] In a move that is logically consistent with the protective principles described above, he combines the warning against blasphemous criticism of charismatic authority with an urgent appeal for loyalty: "Every Christian must be very careful about the comments he makes about God's servants. You didn't appoint them, God did. (…) Why should you try to dismiss and destroy God's appointed servants through publications, broadcasts and poisonous words?"[133] He fortifies the protective cloak of charismatic authority by exhorting church members to exercise self-discipline: "Be careful what you say about men of God."[134]

This urgent appeal for ecclesial cohesion prepares readers for the following subchapter. Here, Heward-Mills devotes himself to the *topos* of "accusation" – and he considers this section to be "the most important section of this textbook."[135] Accusation, he claims, is one of the "greatest problems" in the leadership of a Pentecostal church, because it is Satan's special weapon for

131 Cf. Heward-Mills: Basic Theology (2012). At just over 100 pages of text, Chapter Four can be considered the centerpiece of Basic Theology.

132 Ibid., 150.

133 Ibid.

134 Ibid., 151.

135 Ibid., 162.

undermining the "mighty giants of God"[136]: "Accusation is Satan's topmost strategy for dealing with an unconquerable enemy."[137] Whoever intends to undermine a charismatically justified authority from within becomes Satan's accomplice. Heward-Mills goes so far as to say that "accusations are anointed from Hell": "They are tiny arrows loaded with satanic poison."[138] The insidious thing about accusation, he says, is that it comes disguised as a "spiritual weapon." Heward-Mills identifies a long list of eloquent "accusers" – including journalists, assistant pastors and church elders – who can turn out to be potential threats to a church leader anointed by God. The satanic arrows are fired even from his closest entourage: "Every close person is a potential future accuser. Friends, close associates, personal assistants, husbands, wives, children are all at risk of becoming accusers. Actually, almost all accusers come from this list."[139] All those who belong to the circle of "accusers" are "used by the devil to intimidate you."[140]

To briefly summarize: The *topos* of "accusation" receives privileged attention in the Dominion Theology of megachurches. It refers to an act of disloyalty to the charismatic authority of the "giants of God." Such an act, in turn, constitutes a dramatic attack on the "authority instituted by God," and as such is categorized as blasphemous in the Pentecostal theology of accusation. In this respect, Pentecostal African theology radically redefines the "sin of the tongue" of blasphemy; it denotes, as it were, an anthropological turn of blasphemous speech: the blasphemy charge is redirected from blasphemous speech against God to blasphemous speech against charismatic authority.

But in this new grammar, blasphemous speech does not merely mutate into a blasphemous indictment of charismatic authority; rather, the illegitimacy of such an indictment is further intensified by the insidious manner of its linguistic camouflage. The sin of the tongue, directed against God in the classical sense, clothes its illegitimate criticism of the church leader in language that feigns spiritual credibility. In short, blasphemous accusation is part of the devil's strategic inventory to undermine the dawn of God's kingdom. In this respect, it actually is a part of demonology (which plays an important role in Pentecostal theology as a whole) and joins the action-related arsenal of so-called spiritual warfare, which is concerned with expanding the divine sphere at the expense of the devil's sphere. Therefore, the theology of accusation attunes believers to uncritical solidarity, even and especially in the close social orbit (family, church) of

136 Ibid., 161.
137 Ibid., 159.
138 Ibid., 161.
139 Ibid., 165.
140 Ibid., 160.

the megachurch founders and leaders. It offers itself as an immunization strategy against any internal authority criticism of the "mighty giants of God."

Remarkably, this *topos* of a theology of immunization against accusation has remained entirely underexposed in previous studies of Pentecostalism. More importantly in our context, it is designed as a defensive or protective theology shielding a charismatic authority from such criticism, which is now discredited as blasphemous. I speak of a theology of immunization against accusation in the proper sense, for its execution drastically limits the possibilities of expressing criticism of Pentecostal church leaders or challenging their claim to power. Thus, the theology of accusation represents a supporting pillar in the overall structure of Pentecostal Dominion Theology. This central position is explained by a 'democratization of charisma', i.e., the experience of the immediate effects of the Holy Spirit granted to all 'born-again' believers. It delegitimizes any doubt about the charismatically gifted 'giants of God' and exposes their possible critics to the danger of relegating themselves to the Pentecostal sidelines due to blasphemy accusations. The theological inoculation seems to work for the most part. This new theological approach accompanies the rise of the internationally expanding mega-ministries, whose overall design is specifically tailored to the respective leadership figure. The practice of stamping any criticism of authority with the blasphemy label is to be understood against this organizational-institutional background. Because the megachurch leader is the defining factor of the church's organization, its communication culture and expansion strategy, and even its financial structure, the strategy of immunization against internal church criticism is narrowed down to these 'giants of God.' It becomes a fundamental theological building block of megachurch cohesion. Even scandal-ridden cases of corruption, divorce and love affairs, which usually would cause lively debates about moral misconduct, hardly ever bring down the 'giants of God.'[141] Admittedly, however, the scope of the Pentecostal theology of immunization against criticism of authority is generally limited to internal processes within the respective churches.

### *4.3 The Strategy of Public Silence*

This begs the question: how do proponents of Dominion Theology deal with public criticism? What are the consequences if the claims of Dominion Theology to control social spheres through prophetic inspirations fail to materialize?

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[141] There are numerous examples of this. One of them is Heward-Mills' theological mentor, Archbishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams: his church leadership office survived his widely publicized divorce unscathed. In 2008, he married his second wife Rosa Whitaker, an African-American entrepreneur; cf. Duncan-Williams Outdoors new wife (2008).

This already was a hot topic at the time of the 'Africa Summit' described above, which was organized by Archbishop Duncan-Williams. The protagonist is Mensa Otabil, the highly respected leader of International Central Gospel Church (ICGC), Accra. Much like Duncan-Williams, Otabil is the author of best-selling books espousing and popularizing Dominion Theology. His most important work in this regard is *The Dominion Mandate*, published in 2013.[142] Here, Otabil takes the dominion mandate in Genesis 1, typical of the genre as a whole, and translates it into a series of case studies of idolized heroes of the faith in church history. The claim to exert political influence in all matters of the country's social development is asserted throughout the entire volume.

In the summer of 2017, a banking scandal of enormous proportions is taking place. Several banks collapse, including Capital Bank, whose chairman of the board is Mensa Otabil. The empirical fact of this collapse of a bank that is very close to the ICGC diminished Otabil's reputation, but it did not threaten to completely erode his nimbus as a 'teacher of the nation.' He escapes the debate partly by appearing at major international events, especially in other regions of Africa, and partly by keeping silent on the banking fiasco for over a year. It is not until the summer of 2018 that he speaks out on the issue to the Ghanaian public: he denies having been involved in the day-to-day operations of the bank, maintains that his status as a theological teacher in his church is unbroken, and points out that he is still in demand as a keynote speaker at important financial and economic conferences. Indeed, his quasi-visionary capital finds its way into the gazettes and ends up dominating current debates: Otabil makes a splash with a speech at the most important conference of Ghana's business world, the 'Night with Great Minds.' In August 2018, he tells the business magnates about the need to create "our own success stories" in the long-term and entertains the possibility of 20% short-term growth rates in Ghana, a patently unrealistic outlook. However, it is the final sentence of his speech that will occupy the media world for some time to come: "The mindset remains the continent's major development challenge. […] When are we going to have our own Apple?"[143] Far beyond any doubt or suspicion, Mensa Otabil towers over the ruins of the Capital Bank he once founded as the great visionary of the African renaissance. It is worth noting that in the media debates, dominionist key terms are used that call for the prophetic orientation of business and politics. A number of church leaders from the second and third ranks, i.e., the vertical networks of megachurches, are speaking out. They are mostly church founders of a younger generation whose ministries are still in the process of consolidating and hardly

142 Otabil: The Dominion Mandate (2013).
143 Daily Graphic, Aug. 20, 2018.

extend beyond a local significance.[144] By siding with an established megachurch representative, they hope to gain prestige and media exposure. Some of them can be assumed to come from the theological orbit surrounding Otabil himself. In any case, the public echo of Dominion Theology is multiplied. They lament, for example, the misconduct of a 'perverted generation' of critics 'with shameless disrespect for the voice of a prophet.' Others emphasize the need for an 'economic prophet,' or more generally, for 'the prophetic office' to guide society through crises. A quintessentially dominionist mentality governs the statement that the 'right people should be brought into positions of responsibility'; through them, a 'germination process of the word of God (laws)' should begin.[145] Unmistakably, the script of Dominion Theology has taken root across the various levels of the Pentecostal movement, even beyond the megachurch elite.

In Otabil's case, four strategies of Dominion Theology for dealing with visionary and prophetic failure can be identified: First, Otabil employs a strategy of silence or avoidance of national publicity; second, he drives an international strategy of evasion that allows him to safekeep his charisma in the megachurch networks until it is socially acceptable for him to re-emerge on the national scene once the storm has passed; third, he falls back on an apparently undiminished inner-church loyalty that shields him from outside criticism; fourth, his 'economic prophecy' abruptly explodes onto the media scene after a period of dormancy. The euphoria-soaked tenor of Dominion Theology resounds loudly and clearly. Otabil breaks free with a grand vision, pushing open the gate to the media world, where Dominion Theology is negotiated as a solution to overcoming social crises. Once again, Dominion Theology offers itself as a framework of orientation, as a source of impulses for the African renaissance.

## III. Outlook

Dominion Theology, as both the investigation of its theological-historical genesis and some insights into its contextual implementation have shown, is firmly anchored in the global discourse of megachurches as a theological-political framework concept. In the course of a few years, it has grown into an influential political theology that demonstrates the Pentecostal claim to dominion to its

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144 Lauterbach: Christianity, Wealth, and Spiritual Power in Ghana (2017) examines the constitutive processes of emerging ministries in the metropolitan region around Kumasi, Ghana.

145 On the discourse surrounding the bank collapse, cf. Heuser: Megachurches, Dominion Theology and Development (2020), 252–58.

internal actors, to its followers, and to the public at large. And yet, it continues to be an amorphous structure. Dominionist theology formation is strongly differentiated. This is evident not so much in its terminology in which the dominionist grammar is formed, but in the forms of practices that transcend the performance of religious acts related to the sanctification of individual lives. Catchy *theologoumena*, which are often received in a cliché-like manner and revolve around 'winning a nation for Christ,' are applied in associated ritual forms of action, such as territorial spiritual warfare or the formation of militant forms of prayer. On the one hand, Dominion Theology promises an alternative model of society that is supposed to be shaped according to 'Christian', 'biblical', 'prophetic-visionary' or even 'divine' principles, however they are defined. Often, such formulas are conceptual abstractions, categorical labels of a political consciousness that ideologically unites a sprawling spectrum of megachurches. But on the other hand, Dominion Theology is also devoted to a concrete politicization of rituals that are sometimes intensified or refined in individual megachurches and at the same time are disseminated through the multi-media channels of megachurch networks, from where they reach the broader public. This fusion of basic dominionist concepts and ritual forms of practice that are often innovative enables Dominion Theology to explode the normative categories of the Pentecostal movement, which were formerly conceived as apolitical, with a sustainable impact.

The socio-political motivation of Dominion Theology to influence diverse 'spheres' seems to be a given. The practice of Dominion Theology can certainly have a stabilizing effect in the postcolonial context of African states that has been considered here. Unlike its Calvinist-influenced precursor, which was rejected as a danger to a pluralist and democratically constituted society, African Dominion Theology comes into view as a constructive force – precisely due to its eschatological core. At the very least, megachurch milieus arguing in the vein of Dominion Theology are becoming aware of the ambivalence of visionary-based politics and delegitimize prophetic claims to power that undermine parliamentary decision-making processes. Nevertheless, the protagonists of Dominion Theology by no means are opting for a separation of church and state. On the contrary, they are favoring models of co-optation and are finding strategies to anchor their socio-political agenda permanently in public debate. The disavowal of a theocratic model of dominion is accompanied by an interesting move in terms of democratic theory to make Pentecostal megachurches a constant component of civil society.

Nevertheless, the potentially disruptive consequences of an implementation of Dominion Theology cannot be overlooked. The empirical catastrophe in the sphere of finance exemplified by the collapse of a bank in Ghana founded by a dominionist theologian raises questions about the political claims of Dominion

Theology. Likewise, the sharp militancy of ritual practice such as the practice of warfare prayer, which is seen as part of spiritual warfare, also poses theological challenges. The aggressive, physically demanding prayer practice, and even more so the choice of prayer topics, often diametrically contradict the faith in a reconciling God. Even more so, formulations of prayers that call for the death of specific individuals counteract a spirituality that wants to testify to the God of love. The idea of manipulating God's sovereignty through visionary prayer requests, as well as by increasing the intensity of prayer, amounts to a contractarian understanding of faith.

However, the reception of the imprecatory psalms, or enemy psalms, practiced in African megachurches points to an urgent theological debate that includes the postcolonial context indicated by Wariboko. The so-called imprecatory psalms belong to the corpus of lament psalms, which in turn represent the starting point of recent outlines of a postcolonial African theology. For example, the postcolonial approach proposed by Emmanuel Katongole, a Catholic theologian from Uganda, puts forward psalms of lament as a means of expressing experiences of violence that would otherwise elude verbalization. Katongole draws on case studies that deal with postcolonial experiences of genocide, civil war, and rape that are difficult to process. He speaks succinctly of the "waste of African lives" as one of the enduring basic experiences of many people in the African postcolony – especially in the post-1990 phase. At the very least, the tradition of the psalms of communal lament as interpreted by Katongole is to be understood as a cry for help against the overwhelming power of the disastrous, or even as an expression of solidarity with victims of violence through prayer.[146] It is about actualizing the greater 'power' of God in the lives of believers, about overcoming life-threatening forces through direct participation in the 'word of God' – the literal citation of the Bible.[147] The interpretation of lament traditions that Katongole envisions for the elaboration of a postcolonial African theology is also about warding off the demons of violence, of the destruction of life, of the paralysis of life. In this respect, the practices of faith of Dominion Theology and the theology of lament overlap. However, the theology of lament lacks those conspicuously martial elements that have accompanied the recent rise of some megachurches since about 1990.

At present, the consequences of a mobilization of Dominion Theology for the future of postcolonial state formation cannot be conclusively assessed.

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[146] Comparing the approaches of postcolonial theology and those of Pentecostal spiritual warfare would be stimulating; cf. an initial theological interpretation of postcolonial approaches in Heuser: Afropolitanität und Theologie der Klage: Perspektiven postkolonialer Theorie im Gespräch mit Achille Mbembe und Emmanuel Katongole (2020).

[147] Thus states Kahl: Jesus als Lebensretter (2007) in his exegetical attempt to interpret African Pentecostal theology as a whole.

Especially the prescriptive dimension of Dominion Theology has been disregarded in this contribution, as it has been limited to its basic theological pattern. Issues not taken into account include the controversies that clash with the understanding of human rights, minority rights, or, for example, the safeguarding of religious freedoms in a plural society. By supporting the politics of someone like Donald Trump, to whom Dominion Theology attributes the status of a chosen one of God by way of the 'King Cyrus anointing', megachurches sacralize a neoliberal, conservative political agenda. But it does not necessarily have to be that way. Ruth Marshall once aptly summarized the fundamentally associative character of Pentecostal theology formation as follows:

> Rather than a specific doctrine or doctrines, one finds a *bricolage*, a living, moving corpus of ideas, scriptural interpretations, images, discourses, and techniques developed and circulating across a range of personal, institutional and virtual networks and engendering an elastic, undisciplined and pragmatic process of inspired creations, borrowings, combinations and adaptations.[148]

Pentecostal Dominion Theology still offers commonly shared interpretive categories. However, these are incoherent regarding the formulation of goals and can no longer be clearly classified as conservative in their implementation. The Pentecostal megachurch scene in African countries is now branching out with an enormous range.[149] One could use this phenomenon to define the limits of Dominion Theology, whose socio-political vision of action is fraying and beginning to dissolve. But one could also, it seems to me, suggest that the political discourse in the orbit of Dominion Theology is entering another round. One of the characteristics of the African postcolonial constructions of a renegotiated Dominion Theology is that they will puncture the epistemological profile imprinted on it by North American discourses.

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148 Marshall: Spiritual Warfare as Global Praxis (2016), 97 (italics in the original).

149 Cf. Burgess: Nigerian Pentecostalism and Development (2020). Burgess also presents the political proposals of a "left-wing" faction of Nigerian megachurches, which speaks out on issues such as peace and religious politics, as well as national development policy.

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# Notes on the Authors

*Brenda Carranza*
Professor in the Department of Social Anthropology at the State University of Campinas, Brazil, and Coordinator of the Laboratory of Anthropology of Religion (UNICAMP). She obtained her PhD in Social Sciences from the UNICAMP.

*Jayeel Cornelio*
Associate Professor and the Director of the Development Studies Program at the Ateneo de Manila University, and Honorary Research Associate at the Divinity School of Chung Chi College at The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

*Andreas Heuser*
Theologian and political scientist. He is Professor for Non-European Christianity at the University of Basel and President of the German Society for Mission Studies (DGMW).

*Ebenezer Obadare*
Professor of sociology at the University of Kansas and Fellow at the Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa. He obtained his PhD from the London School of Economics.

*José Luis Pérez Guadalupe*
PhD in Sociology, canonical licentiate in Theology, Masters in Anthropology and Criminology. He is presently research professor at the Universidad del Pacífico's Graduate School and the Vice President of the Institute of Christian Social Studies (IESC).

*Leandro Luis Bedin Fontana*
Doctor of Theology and research fellow at the Institute for Global Church and Mission in Frankfurt.

The last decade has witnessed fundamental shifts in the relationship between religion and politics. In this light, religious symbols, motifs, justifications, and practices are increasingly noticeable in political discourses, as well as agendas, particularly in the Global South, with Pentecostal Christians standing out as salient actors. Performative practices enacted in political contexts such as the anointing of state authorities, prophecies, warfare prayers, etc. have drawn the attention of numerous scholars worldwide. The four surveys contained in this volume account for these developments in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and synoptically engage with the following question: Can any meaningful nexus connecting multiple and apparently isolated nodes of Pentecostal engagement in the political sphere around the globe be identified? In addition, they do the groundwork for drawing parallels on a global level, on the basis of which new light can be shed on fundamental changes in Pentecostal actorhood and self-understanding. Thus, local developments and ethnographic studies are for the first time reflected upon from a global perspective.

Leandro L. B. Fontana,
Dr. theol., born 1979, is research assistant at the Institute of Global Church and Mission, Frankfurt a. M.

Markus Luber SJ,
Dr. theol., born 1970, acting director at the Institute of Global Church and Mission, Frankfurt a. M.

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