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'God Even Blessed Me with Less Money': Disappointment, Pentecostalism and the Middle Classes in Brazil

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Abstract. Through shedding light on traditional Pentecostalism in Brazil this article reveals how middle-class people in São Paulo, Brazil, manage disappointment relating to current socio-economic conditions. Ethnographic research on Brazil's oldest Pentecostal church, which preserves an anachronistic style of practice, shows how people embrace a marginal identity and thereby critique social conditions in the country. In stark contrast to newer forms of Pentecostalism, people featured in this paper respond to an 'anti-prosperity gospel', in which failures and setbacks are construed as signs of spiritual purity and development. In a country where a 'new middle class' is supposedly finding prosperity, this study shows a religiously-oriented way in which people confront the disappointing gap between the promises of neoliberalism and the realities of jobless growth.

Keywords: Brazil, Pentecostalism, anthropology, new middle class

Introduction

> The kinds of people who come to us feel cheated or frustrated with the worlds they came from … the *Congregação* is not full of the hypocrisies and contradictions that they found elsewhere.
> (Marco, CCB church Elder and administrator)

Since the 1980s Pentecostalism has transformed the religious landscape in Brazil and throughout Latin America, becoming the faith of choice for tens of millions of converts from Catholicism. In the late twentieth century, churches with a so-called 'neo-Pentecostal' style – emphasising prosperity,

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spiritual warfare and assertive evangelism – became the most visible and appealed to many people in precarious socio-economic situations. Pentecostalism has thus become known as a faith for the poor, with churches promoting a religious style attuned to modernity by employing media technology and a discourse geared to overcoming personal struggles, and sacralising the pursuit of wealth.

In the simultaneous explosion of literature on Pentecostalism in Brazil, it is often mentioned that the faith arrived in Brazil and other parts of the region over a century ago. But the religious style that the early movements promoted is assumed to have died out or lost relevance, replaced by the cutting-edge ingenuity and audacity of the neo-Pentecostal movement. In this paper, however, I turn the focus on Brazil's oldest Pentecostal church, the Congregação Cristã no Brasil (Christian Congregation of Brazil, CCB), which has quietly thrived alongside newer forms of the faith. This research shines a light on a large yet little-studied side of Pentecostalism in Brazil, and reveals an important way middle-class people manage disappointment relating to the current socio-economic conditions in the country.

The popular idea that education, hard work and integrity are the keys to success in a liberalised economy rings hollow for many people amid the conditions they face in their daily lives in Brazil. The emotional challenge to reconcile and live with disappointment arising from this dissonance can be an important part of middle-class experience. Among a wide array of middle-class people I knew in the city of São Paulo, things such as the cluttered and chaotic urban panorama, news and rumours of political corruption, repeated episodes of economic stagnation, crime and daily physical insecurity served as bleak reminders of the sad state of the country in comparison to what it could or should have been. They feel that they have invested in education and played by the rules, and yet they critically lack confidence in the functioning of the worlds of employment and the institutions which should serve the public.

While since the summer of 2013 recurring street protests have been seen as a barometer for measuring middle-class critiques, fears and hopes in Brazil, in my research I found that many people who share the class backgrounds and feelings expressed by protesters actually channel their negative feelings about the country's prospects in other ways. In a parallel way to political activism, Pentecostal congregations constitute a form of association that projects a more idealistic set of values and behaviours than those that are seen to rule the status quo. While the Pentecostals I studied fulfilled their basic citizenship duties, religious discourse helped cultivate emotional distance and disaffection from the politics of social change.

The case of the CCB shows that the construal of true progress as a spiritual endeavour, separate from and higher than either material aspiration or political transformation, remains a more significant part of the story of Pentecostalism in Brazil than is often recognised. Because it is considered 'behind the times',

researchers have largely passed over the CCB, even though it remains among the largest Pentecostal organisations anywhere in Latin America.[1] But it is specifically the aspects of the church that appear anachronistic from the outside that, when looked at from an ethnographic perspective, hold the key to understanding why it speaks to hundreds of thousands in South America's largest city.

In short, the roots of Pentecostalism continue to matter to the way the faith is practised now, even in a dense, fast-moving urban setting such as São Paulo. Over a century ago the faith arrived offering an alternative system of values and ideological priorities to people who were fully tied to the vagaries of a growing capitalist system. The people who joined the CCB in the early twentieth century were hard-working and industrious, and overall the CCB membership continues to be so. Since the early 1900s, the Pentecostal message has never encouraged people to opt out of the search for a productive and even profitable existence, and this remains the case for the CCB. But all along the faith has encouraged believers to disassociate themselves from the forms of approval that are conferred by people seen to hold worldly power.

The appeal of the CCB to the middle class resides in its contrast with the neo-Pentecostal prosperity gospel, in which worldly success and material abundance serve as signs of blessing by God. Instead, the CCB encourages people to view a lack of success in 'the world' as a sign of the choice to elevate purity and faith over false or superficial forms of approval. This message resonates among people who feel that they have done things 'right' – studied, applied themselves, tried to be diligent in the workplace – yet they continue to be let down by a system which denies them stability and security.

Background

Disappointment, Marginality and the Middle Class

Currently in Brazil the middle class is a hotly debated category, and is gaining traction as an important focus of research. An ideological and empirical rift has arisen between confident declarations of the rise of a Brazilian 'new middle

[1] According to 2000 census data from the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (Brazilian Geographical and Statistical Institute, IBGE), of Brazil's 17.7 million Pentecostals around 2.5 million belonged to the CCB, or just over 14% (Leonildo Silveira Campos, 'As origens norte-americanas do pentecostalismo brasileiro: observações sobre uma relação ainda pouco avaliada', *Revista USP* 67: 100–15 (2005), p.113). The subsequent 2010 IBGE census showed a decrease in CCB membership from 2,489,079 in 2000 to 2,289,634 in 2010. However, the 2010 data still show the CCB as the second largest Pentecostal church in Brazil (accounting for 10% of Brazil's Pentecostals), with several hundred thousand members more than the third largest, the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God). In my research church Elders told me that CCB's own records showed between 3 and 4 million members, and that government statistics understate the number because CCB members are usually discreet about their affiliation.

class' (NMC), and fierce criticisms.[2] An alphabetical class nomenclature has become common in Brazil,[3] in which people designated as 'C class' (*classe C*) – those formerly labelled as 'working class' – are re-categorised as having the purchasing power to consume their way to a middle-class lifestyle. Thus, some economists either directly affiliated with the (now ousted) Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party, PT), or others who favourably judge Lula da Silva's and Dilma Rousseff's redistributive economic policies,[4] re-branded the *Classe C* as the 'new middle class'.[5]

Other anthropologists and sociologists argued in response that class in Brazil should be relatively, not absolutely, defined, and has always been based on exclusivity, not economic inclusiveness. Instead of regarding class membership as the result of household income, consumption choices and acquisition of signs of cultural capital, members of Brazil's middle classes are known to fiercely 'police the boundaries' of social belonging.[6] Finally, critics ask if we can consider people with new disposable income but unstable future prospects as middle class, especially as the idea of the middle class has historically come to refer to people who have attained sustainable means to reproduce their lifestyle.[7]

The inclusion of millions of Brazilians into the ranks of new consumers was enabled, on one hand, through new consumer credit extended by banks and large retail outlets.[8] On the other hand, more than a decade of direct government cash transfers – the hallmark of the PT's *Bolsa Família* policy – were often channelled toward aspirational consumption by people formerly labelled

[2] See Manoel Bartelt (ed.), *A 'nova classe média' no Brasil como conceito e projeto político* (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Heinrich Böll, 2013).

[3] The alphabetical class nomenclature is derived from the Critério de Classificação Econômica Brasil (Brazilian Economic Classification Criterion, CCEB), a statistical report produced by the Associação Brasileira de Empresas de Pesquisa (Brazilian Association of Research Bodies, ABEP). This categorisation uses as indices household characteristics – principally the presence and quantity of domestic luxury items – in order to differentiate the market into economic classes. A correspondence is made between household purchasing power and economic strata, defined as (highest to lowest) A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, D, E.

[4] Bartelt (ed.), *A 'nova classe média' no Brasil*.

[5] Marcelo Neri, *A nova classe média: o lado brilhante da base da pirâmide* (São Paulo: Saraiva, 2012).

[6] Teresa Caldeira, *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation and Citizenship in São Paulo* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

[7] Marcio Pochmann, *Nova classe média? O trabalho na base da pirâmide social brasileira* (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2012); Hilaine Yaccoub, 'A chamada "nova classe média": cultura material, inclusão e distinção social', *Horizontes antropológicos*, 17: 36 (2011), pp. 197–231; Jesse Souza, *Os batalhadores brasileiros. Nova classe média ou nova classe trabalhadora?* (Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2010).

[8] On the significant role of the Casas Bahia department store chain in facilitating consumer credit, see Yaccoub, 'A chamada "nova classe média"', pp. 224–8.

as poor.[9] For those who employ more qualitative forms of analysis, it is unwise at best, and disingenuous at worst, to label as middle class people who only appear on the economic radar as consumers.

For proponents of the NMC category, middle class-ness is closely linked with how people plan for and invest in future improvement. In order to come up with a statistical profile of the NMC, economists used evidence that increasing numbers of people are enrolling in formal education and training as an index for an increase in middle-class-style aspiration. The economist Marcelo Neri concluded,[10] following Thomas Friedman,[11] that people who remove their attention from immediate day-to-day concerns and invest in the delayed long term are displaying progress out from a mind-set of poverty. However, critics point out that such reasoning ignores the distressing state of many educational institutions in Brazil to which NMC people entrust their futures. If the quality of degrees or training do not actually improve prospects, aspirational dispositions alone count for little.

On the other side of the divide, the so-called 'traditional middle class' (TMC) continues to offer the lifestyle model toward which the poor and NMC aim their aspirations. People in this category in Brazil are loosely defined as the inheritors of economic and social capital gained during the 'miracle years' of the 1964–85 dictatorship. Beset by increasing economic precarity brought on by repeated economic crises since the 1980s, the TMC struggle to maintain signs of privileged distinctiveness has been the object of historical and ethnographic study.[12] Among other things, research has shown defensive attitudes among the TMC toward increasing violence and crime on Brazilian streets,[13] but also the influence of guilt and disappointment about the way that the class system shuts less fortunate people out of the advantages that they themselves were born into.[14]

Tendencies of self-blame combined with national stereotyping predominate in existing scholarship on TMC life in São Paulo. Maureen O'Dougherty writes that in the last two decades of the twentieth century the TMC abandoned faith in Brazil's potential to fix problems from within, and instead

[9] *Bolsa família* (family grant) was part of a network of federal assistance programmes set up by the PT government. It provided financial aid directly to poor Brazilian families.

[10] Neri, *A nova classe média*.

[11] Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat: The Globalized World in the Twenty-first Century* (London: Penguin, 2006).

[12] Maureen O'Dougherty, *Consumption Intensified: The Politics of Middle-class Daily Life in Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Brian Owensby, *Intimate Ironies: Modernity and the Making of Middle-class Lives in Brazil* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

[13] Caldeira, *City of Walls*; 'The Paradox of Police Violence in Democratic Brazil', *Ethnography*, 3: 3 (2002), pp. 235–63.

[14] Angela Torresan, 'A Middle Class Besieged: Brazilians' Motives to Migrate', *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, 17: 1 (2012), pp. 110–30.

looked to the global neoliberal order to introduce higher standards of integrity in business and politics.[15] Teresa Caldeira wrote about the TMC's simultaneous retreat away from associating with their fellow citizens who belonged to the 'popular classes', and into fortified enclaves.[16]

There is less understanding – and more speculation – regarding the motivations and strategies of the so-called NMC in response to contemporary economic challenges. Both those who celebrate the creation of the NMC and critics who doubt the utility of the category have claimed that recent social unrest in Brazil confirms their respective positions. Disappointment with the administration of Brazilian society came dramatically to a head in June 2013 in the form of protests triggered by a rise in urban public transport fares, but linked to wider frustration with the unequal distribution of state resources to infrastructure projects for staged international events (the 2013 Football Confederations Cup, the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics). Then in 2014, following years of speculation, credible press revelations of large-scale, high-level corruption at Brazil's state-owned oil company, Petrobras, led to a spate of street protests that morphed into a media-led clamour for the impeachment of President Dilma Roussef. Most recently, unfolding controversies relating to prominent pro-impeachment members of Michel Temer's interim government have brought huge numbers of counter-protesters to Brazil's streets to denounce Dilma's impeachment as a premeditated coup. Thus, conflict-ridden public assemblies throughout major Brazilian cities have emerged and continued as an outlet for expressing dissatisfaction with the country's political leadership.

Opinions vary about who has taken part in recent civil disobedience. Supporters of the ousted PT government characterised 2013–14 protests as a healthy sign of the newly-enfranchised NMC seeking more democratic engagement. But right-wing critics of the PT denied any participation by the new middle class, instead dismissing pro-PT activists as privileged, TMC students/dilettantes afraid of losing their inherited social advantages. A third perspective takes at face value the protestors' dissatisfaction, concluding that all middle-class Brazilians are thoroughly disappointed in the ineffectiveness of public services, the runaway cost of living and the future of economic insecurity that awaits young people.[17]

While in this paper I emphasise the influence of disappointment among people labelled as middle class, signs of hope for positive political transformation have been evident among both TMC and NMC Brazilians. Wide popular support for the PT in successive election victories showed that people throughout Brazil's socio-economic hierarchy invested their hopes in

[15] O'Dougherty, *Consumption Intensified*.
[16] Caldeira, *City of Walls*.
[17] Bartelt (ed.), *A 'nova classe média' no Brasil*.

optimistic forms of political action. Lula's middle-class supporters revealed a willingness to redistribute resources in order to raise the living standard of the very poorest. James Holston's work in São Paulo's urban periphery areas documents optimism about political inclusion among many in the working classes who could now be categorised as part of the NMC.[18]

Evidence of hope in the possibility of new governance is the flip side of cynical resignation about the 'lost cause' of Brazil's political and economic future. But since 2013, key PT support has unravelled, and disappointment returned in the fierce, combative form of street protests calling for Dilma's impeachment. However, since her removal, many critics of PT corruption have become revolted by alleged collusion between the interim government and Brazil's most powerful media empire, *Globo*. With such a mixture of signs, I do not propose that disappointment is the *leitmotiv* of Brazilian middle-class life, but rather a widespread condition, which exists alongside other forms of emotional engagement. But my point here is that while people need to make a living and desire to improve their situations, not all will either 'buy into' consumerism or struggle politically to change the structural options available to them. This paper will show that traditional Pentecostalism offers people an alternative way to express an ideological critique of the socio-economic system, while articulating a compelling reason for remaining diligent and productive.

Since there are problems with using 'middle class' as a solid, objective category, as outlined above, it is not my goal here to try to come up with a statistical measurement of how many people in the CCB qualify as middle class. Additionally, as a methodological approach, ethnography can sacrifice numerical data in order to gain a more intimate picture of how individuals understand their own lives. Setting aside quantitative measurement, I want to show that the religious approach of the CCB engages with a type of malaise that is felt by people who are labelled as middle class in the country. Rather than being a declaration that the CCB is *the* Pentecostal church of Brazil's middle classes, this is a qualitative study of the relation between the middle class, emotional experience and Pentecostalism.

In my research, virtually every member of the CCB I knew in São Paulo could be classified within either the TMC or the NMC, with the former often born into families with several generations in the CCB and the latter often being more recent converts. In this paper I specifically offer ethnographic data on people who would fall under the NMC classification, as their stories epitomise the unstable balance between hope and disappointment that many Brazilians experience. Also, the accounts of people at the more precarious end

[18] James Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

of the middle classes show clearly how the CCB anti-prosperity gospel resonates with contemporary insecurities.

Finally, the best way that I can draw a link between current debates about middle class-ness in Brazil, and the people I studied in the CCB, is through the aforementioned idea of aspiration. Very few of the people I met in the CCB would be considered 'poor' in Brazilian terms. All were working toward maintaining or improving their situations, and many had undertaken further education and training in order gain better prospects. In some cases this led to lifestyle improvements and more security. But others, like the people I discuss later in this paper, felt they had run up against the limit of what the conditions in the country would allow them to do, regardless of the investments they had made in themselves. Though my informants' behaviour embodied what has been called an aspirational, middle-class-style attitude, their stories bear out the critical, subjective view that such aspirations may be incommensurate with the realities of compromise that people have to face.

Pentecostalism and Marginality in Brazil

Though it has grown explosively over the past four decades, Pentecostalism remains a minority religion in Brazil,[19] and it is usually associated with people considered marginal in socio-economic terms. People are commonly considered as marginalised when they are subject to forces that sideline them from realms of activity and possibility into which privileged others are allowed. In this way, the condition of being marginal is commonly understood as something negative, to be altered where possible. People throughout Latin America and elsewhere who lack economic and 'cultural' resources are often referred to as marginal because they are structurally barred from the pathways toward opportunities that would enable them to change their status. Thus, marginality becomes construed as something which people naturally should try to overcome through striving for social and economic inclusion.

However, I want to look at marginality as a state that people embrace deliberately and positively. The self-identification of being outside of the mainstream can be a way people feel able to rise above both the limits of their socio-economic situation and the people who may be keeping them down. Since its origins, the Pentecostal movement has encouraged people to separate themselves ideologically, and this message persists in one form or another in virtually all forms of the faith.

For example, in the 1930s, under President Getúlio Vargas' *Estado Novo* regime, the Catholic Church enacted a combative anti-communist and

[19] According to the 2010 IBGE census, there are just over 25 million self-declared Pentecostals in Brazil, or slightly more than 7.5 per cent of the population.

anti-Protestant programme, particularly targeting Pentecostals.[20] Early in the Vargas administration the Catholic 'Department for the Defence of the Faith' was inaugurated, which articulated an intellectual discourse against new Pentecostal sects. Parallel to this, especially in cities throughout São Paulo state, groups of lay Catholics physically attacked and disrupted early Pentecostal meetings. This led converts from different towns and neighbourhoods to gather and travel in groups to offer support and protection in places where other converts were being mistreated. This, Francisco Rolim writes, was the beginning of a sense of solidarity among early Brazilian Pentecostals,[21] founded on the idea that a hostile majority regarded their meek, private piety as a threat.

Recent research by Clara Mafra shows how being on the margins continues to be an important part of what it means to be Pentecostal in Brazil. But while Mafra's work emphasises the economically marginal position her informants are forced into, in the CCB people are generally not dealing with comparable conditions of deprivation. Mafra studied a conservative congregation of the Assembleia de Deus (Assembly of God, AD) in Magé, in the Baixada Fluminense – a vast, economically disadvantaged region on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro.[22] Among those Mafra studied, being outside of the religious majority conditioned the stance that, while the pursuit of modernity in material terms remains necessary, it is impure because material benefits flow only from the hands of the Catholic elite.

Due to the congregation's traditional Pentecostal approach, church members opposed the project of inner purification to the quest for modern goods, services and conveniences. Although they desired improvements in consumer technology, health services and urban infrastructure, these benefits could only flow downward to them from their Catholic religious 'others'. While struggling against urban poverty and the violence associated with drugs gangs, they continued to associate the material remedies for these problems with people whose values they rejected. They reversed their economically inferior position by elevating their piety, in that it is better to become free of the entanglements of casual social relations and blind service to worldly pursuits than to seek prosperity at the expense of spiritual compromise.

Clara Mafra's informants embraced marginality because their pursuit of piety was seen as in dissonance with gaining the approval of those who may be 'better off' in other senses. In contrast, much anthropological discussion

[20] Francisco C. Rolim, *O que é pentecostalismo?* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1987); Andrew Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

[21] Rolim, *O que é pentecostalismo?*, p. 82.

[22] Clara Mafra, 'Casa dos homens, casa de Deus', *Análise Social*, 42: 182 (2007), pp. 145–61; 'Saintliness and Sincerity in the Formation of the Christian Person', *Ethnos*, 76: 4 (2011), pp. 448–68.

of the growth of Pentecostalism since the 1980s in Latin America emphasises how the faith appeals to poorer people because churches offer pathways to socio-economic inclusion. On the one hand neo-Pentecostal churches are known to give members important roles and leadership positions within church organisations, which they are routinely denied in the wider economy.[23] On the other, the discourses promoted in church are said to help marginalised people feel that they gain the sensibilities that allow them to participate in the world of financialised capitalism.[24]

Diana Lima's research explores how the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, UCKG) can appeal to the desire for economic inclusion among the demographic recently re-branded as Brazil's 'new middle class'.[25] Lima herself refers to her group of male informants, from the Largo do Machado location of the UCKG in Rio de Janeiro, as either 'poor' or 'working class'. But she lists lifestyle attributes common to the men whose fortunes have improved since joining the church: home ownership; ability to purchase electric appliances (*eletrodomésticos*); private health plans; children in private schools; holiday travel and small business ownership. Several of her participants also decided to go back to complete secondary school or some other form of training as an investment in themselves.

While Diana Lima and other anthropologists (Jesse Souza, Hilaine Yaccoub) tend to highlight how, despite evidence of economic improvement, such people's economic prospects remain extremely precarious, those who argue from an economistic perspective would include Lima's informants in the Brazilian NMC group. For Marcelo Neri, it is precisely the people with an income that allows for holiday travel, private schooling and electronic goods, combined with a willingness to invest in the future through education, who have left behind both the material conditions and the attitudes associated with poverty. Neri's confident declaration that Brazil has now become a middle-class country[26] can be made only if one reckons middle class-ness in such a way.

According to Diana Lima, the UCKG tunes into the 'neoliberal cosmology'[27] which Brazil's poorer classes have internalised since the 1990s – notions such as

[23] Bernice Martin, 'New Mutations of the Protestant Ethic among Latin American Pentecostals', *Religion*, 25: 2 (1995), pp. 101–17; Edward L. Cleary and Juan Sepúlveda, 'Chilean Pentecostalism: Coming of Age', in E. L. Cleary and H. W. Stewart-Gambino (eds.) *Power, Politics and Pentecostals in Latin America* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 97–121.

[24] Diana Nogueira de Oliveira Lima, '"Trabalho", "mudança de vida" e "prosperidade" entre fiéis da Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus', *Religião e Sociedade*, 27: 1 (2007), pp. 132–55; Roger Sansi Roca, '"*Dinheiro vivo*": Money and Religion in Brazil', *Critique of Anthropology*, 27: 3 (2007), pp. 319–39.

[25] Lima, '"Trabalho", "mudança de vida" e "prosperidade" entre fiéis'; 'Prosperity and Masculinity: Neopentecostal Men in Rio de Janeiro', *Ethnos*, 77: 3 (2012), pp. 372–99.

[26] Neri, *A nova classe média*.

[27] Lima, 'Prosperity and Masculinity', p. 374.

individual responsibility for economic success or failure, competitiveness as a virtue and the state as a minimal actor in personal economic life. The UCKG then connects with people by formulating its religious discourse in the language of the marketplace; for example churchgoers are instructed to make of their faith a 'business investment with God as the majority partner'.[28] Also, the pursuit of business and investments 'out in the world' is sacralised as the duty of a saved person.

In the UCKG and other churches that promote prosperity theology, God has promised everyone who truly commits to Him an abundant material life, in which frustrations and disappointments are regarded as an intolerable aberration. Economic failure is construed as a sign that a person has not developed spiritually and/or that malevolent forces have conspired to deny what God wishes for everyone. The following section starts to outline how, in its approach to prosperity and many other aspects, the CCB differs profoundly from the neo-Pentecostal example.

The CCB

> Trapped by customs and organisational, evangelistic and communication strategies that pertain to an ever more-distant past, and which are in dissonance with ongoing changes in the Pentecostal movement, [the CCB] faces increasing difficulty in expanding within a religious marketplace that is dynamic, competitive and geared toward novelty.[29]

By the 1980s, in Brazil and other parts of Latin America,[30] the burgeoning number of Pentecostal congregations, bombastic church leaders and lower-class, darker-skinned converts, was drawing concern and suspicion from religious and economic elites.[31] By the end of that decade it was clear that the 'neo-Pentecostals'[32] were not going away, and Brazil was soon recognised as the hub of the wider Latin American neo-Pentecostal movement,[33] as it hosted the most expansionist churches and the largest Evangelical population

[28] Ibid., p. 388.

[29] Ricardo Mariano, 'Mudanças no campo religioso brasileiro no Censo 2010', *Debates do NER*, 2: 24 (2013), pp. 119–37, here p. 132.

[30] David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990).

[31] See Patricia Birman and D. Lehmann, 'Religion and the Battle for Ideological Hegemony: The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and *TV Globo* in Brazil', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 18: 2 (1999), pp. 1–17; Patricia Birman and M. Leite, 'Whatever Happened to what Used to be the Largest Catholic Country in the World?', *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 129: 2 (2000), pp. 271–90.

[32] Ricardo Mariano, *Neopentecostais: sociologia do novo Pentecostalismo no Brasil* (São Paulo: Loyola, 1999).

[33] John Burdick, *Looking for God in Brazil: The Progressive Catholic Church in Urban Brazil's Religious Arena* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993); David Lehmann,

in the region. Throughout recent decades of neoliberal upheavals in Brazilian social life – often understood as the catalyst for changes in the religious marketplace – the CCB maintained the characteristics of a 'world-renouncing', early twentieth-century church. All other Pentecostal denominations in Brazil, including other first-wave churches, either were established with a neo-Pentecostal ethos or adopted neo-charismatic worship styles emphasising the 'faith' or 'health and wealth' gospel.[34]

While these types of efforts doubtless appeal to many people, as evidenced in the meteoric rise of the UCKG, a comparative, emic perspective on the appeal of traditional Pentecostalism in Brazil is lacking. By taking a close look at a traditional Pentecostal church, this paper aims to provide a counter-balance to the overwhelming attention given to neo-Pentecostalism in popular media and academic studies. The majority of my fieldwork was done along an axis running through the southwest part of the city, in three locations stretching from Morumbi to Taboão da Serra. For six months I lived with a family of CCB members, and for over a year I attended church services at their neighbourhood church, and at three other locations. For one year I participated in the construction of a new CCB church building in southwest São Paulo, where I did manual labour alongside church members who volunteered on the building site. I also participated in the periodic, collective work of cleaning the local temple, and I attended regional orchestra rehearsals. Finally, I visited church members, both from the local church I attended and from other areas, in their homes and workplaces, and conducted interviews on specific topics.

The CCB was started in 1910 when Louis Francescon, an Italian immigrant to the USA, arrived in Brazil preaching the new Pentecostal message to Italian labour migrants who had flooded into São Paulo since the 1880s.[35] After winning a few converts, the group remained a largely Italo-Brazilian movement until around 1935,[36] when membership began to spread to the wider population. CCB congregations now exist throughout Brazil, and the church has temples in over 50 countries. Because of its heritage among turn-of-the-century immigrants, the city and state of São Paulo remain the core area of the CCB population. As the congregations range from places as remote as villages in rural Piaui to opulent areas like São Paulo's Morumbi neighbourhood,

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Struggle for the Spirit: Religious Transformation and Popular Culture in Brazil and Latin America (Oxford: Polity, 1996); Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil*.

[34] Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); see also Lima, '"Trabalho", "mudança de vida" e "prosperidade" entre fiéis'.

[35] Suzana Barretto Ribeiro, *Italianos do Brás: imagens e memórias, 1920–1930* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1994).

[36] The church conducted all services and printed documents in Italian until 1935.

church membership spans Brazil's entire socio-economic spectrum. But virtually all of my informants in the church were from the traditional and 'new' middle classes of São Paulo.

As I found out, CCB members whose forebears also belonged to the church are, by now, solidly positioned in the middle class. The congregation I attended with my host family consisted of many such 'legacy' church members. But most members I worked alongside on the church construction site, which was located in a less prosperous neighbourhood, had converted to the church with no childhood connection to it. These people had come into contact with the CCB as adults through networks of friends and/or neighbours, or through marrying someone already involved in the CCB. But there was consistency in the ways that both those who grew up in the CCB, and those who converted later in life, related their experiences of disappointment – in the world around them, and in their personal or working lives – to their religious lives.

In general, CCB congregations reflect the spectrum of social classes that live in the immediate areas of temples. In line with the other traditional aspects, the church retains neighbourhood-centred congregations. This is mainly because new temple buildings are constructed in response to local need – when an existing church becomes too full and/or when too many people from a particular area have to travel too far to attend an existing temple. In contrast to neo-Pentecostal churches like the UCKG, which tend to select visible, highly-transited locations for temples,[37] CCB buildings are usually on smaller streets, tucked away within residential areas. In addition, baptised church members register with the congregation closest to where they live, which in the CCB is referred to as the *comuna*. The Vila Glória temple was the *comuna* of my host family, as it was for all the members I knew who regularly attended that location. Making a visit to attend a *culto* (service) at another congregation was something people usually declared before or after the event, and was not the norm.

The CCB as an Anachronism

Without the perspectives of those on the inside of the movement, among anthropologists there is a generally-shared perception that traditional Pentecostal sectarianism limits a movement's relevance and success in the present.[38] But from a church member's point of view, the CCB's

[37] Ronaldo Almeida, *A Igreja Universal e seus demônios: um estudo etnográfico* (São Paulo: Editora Terceiro Nome, 2009), p. 53.

[38] Paul Freston, 'Pentecostalism in Brazil: A Brief History', *Religion*, 25: 2 (1995), pp. 119–33; Mariano, *Neopentecostais*; 'Mudanças no campo religioso'; 'Expansão Pentecostal no Brasil: o caso da Igreja Universal', *Estudos Avançados*, 18: 52 (2004), pp. 121–38, here p. 129; Carlos R. Brandão, 'Fronteiras da fé – alguns sistemas de sentido, crenças e religiões no Brasil de

unwillingness to 'adapt' now distinguishes it as the most spiritually pure of Brazil's Evangelical churches. Many people I knew in the CCB had prior experience in neo-Pentecostal ritual environments, and, having converted, came to value the CCB precisely because of its contrast to them. In addition, all CCB churchgoers in São Paulo are exposed to the media put out by neo-Pentecostal churches, and they are familiar with well-known scandals that have made several neo-Pentecostal figures infamous throughout Brazil.[39] Within the CCB, all of this tends to reinforce a view that, through its conservatism, it retains the integrity and spiritual depth now absent in any other Pentecostal church.

For insiders, the church's quality of seeming out of place in time adds to its ineffable power, as its legitimacy does not rise or fall based on how attractive it appears to outsiders. On the one hand, the movement does not appear subject to fickle changes in technology or fashion or in thrall to the caprice of influential individuals. But on the other hand, in a practical sense rituals promote an alternative set of values, which inverts 'normal' Brazilian social relations, both in terms of class divisions and style of personal interaction.

Within CCB temples, homogeneous, modest codes of dress and speaking reinforce anonymity and minimise signs of economic inequality and status. Worship is also a time to consciously suspend the so-called *personalismo*[40] considered prevalent in other realms of Brazilian life. As there is no direct exchange of words, or eye or physical contact between congregants, rituals give scant space for people to express themselves as unique individuals. Also, when participants offer personal testimonies, they take measures to avoid revealing details about their occupations or lifestyle preferences.

Finally, because of the way the CCB appears regressive, associating with it stigmatises people. The church members I knew in São Paulo are aware of how the movement is seen as backward and unsavoury by non-believers and non-CCB Pentecostals; some informants who converted to the church as adults told me they themselves had to overcome such feelings when they

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hoje', *Estudos Avançados*, 18: 52 (2004), pp. 261–88; Almeida, *A Igreja Universal e seus demônios*.

[39] In the early 2000s Brazilian media widely publicised high-profile scandals in which prominent Evangelical church leaders were implicated in financial crimes including tax evasion and illegal capital flight.

[40] 'nepotism': a common local trope used by my informants, referring to an inherited, supposedly endemic way in which Brazilians relate to one another by seeking special individual treatment. See Roberto DaMatta, *Carnivals, Rogues, and Heroes: An Interpretation of the Brazilian Dilemma* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, [1979] 1991), pp. 133–4. Among other things, *personalismo* refers to a way for people to get things done through appealing in a personal, emotional way to the sympathies of others who can help them bypass norms and regulations.

began attending. In the context of metropolitan São Paulo, the ritualised separation of men and women in the CCB always attracts the most attention from outsiders. Temples have separate doorways for each sex, separate microphones for delivering testimonies, and men and women sit on separate sides of the churches. In church, women cover their heads in white veils, and only men are allowed to preach and to play most instruments in church orchestras.

Because of these customs, non-evangelical contacts of mine who knew of the CCB found it distasteful and fanatical, and were usually perplexed as to why I had chosen to research such an 'un-Brazilian' group of people. Members of the Assembleia de Deus told me that in the pan-evangelical community the CCB is known as 'more of a sect than a church', with the shrouded heads of women responsible for the dismissive nickname 'the church of the veil' (*a igreja do véu*). CCB members are aware that their conventions may disturb their neighbours, workmates and parents of their children's classmates. But, as I describe next, the church's conservative practices do not interfere in wider life, as they are enacted only within what is construed as the separate domain of the church.

A Separate Domain

Part of the appeal of the CCB to middle-class people living and working in a dense metropolis is that it can be treated as something separate from the rest of their lives. First, it does not impinge on the practical necessities of work, nor does get in the way of non-church lifestyle pursuits and aspirations. Second, participating in the CCB gives members the chance to feel part of something that is exceptionally pure. Third, the church organisation itself becomes regarded over time as an entity with an agency of its own, which works according to a higher will.

'The work of God' (*a obra de Deus*) was a standard phrase used by members in reference to the CCB, and ethnographically it is an important metaphor for understanding the way the church is conceived of as separate. When church members refer to 'the work of God', it is to a field of activity that is set apart from 'the world', and which serves as a positive foil for the inherent shortcomings of human institutions.[41]

Within this general sense, there are two dimensions: first, the CCB as an entity is called 'the work of God', meaning that the church was created by God Himself and continues to operate as the living expression of His will on earth. Second, 'the work of God' refers to the voluntary, collective

[41] 'The work of God' is a phrase of diverse, longstanding importance in many forms of Christianity, preceding by more than a millennium its use in Pentecostalism or in the CCB. I highlight in this paper only the vernacular ways that the phrase is used within the CCB, as inherited from the scant writings and preaching of Louis Francescon.

efforts that the members make in the service of the CCB: activities include fellowship at *cultos*, manual labour on temple constructions and temple cleanings, and orchestra rehearsals. Group activity in the church is always oriented toward serious, important tasks so whenever church members come together they are working. In my experience as an ethnographer, the CCB interpretation of 'the work of God' was epitomised by the collective labour church members undertook on the temple construction site. Within the confines of this setting volunteers made sure to enact the ideal values that the church community represents – equality regardless of racial or socio-economic differences, selfless cooperation in collective effort, gender-appropriate roles for men and women, and fellowship as a way to enliven religious commitment. Finally, in recognition of the building as part of the work of God, they avoided treating work days as relaxed social events, and instead focussed one another's attention on efficiently advancing the progress of the construction.

In another sense, the CCB is construed as the living expression of divine agency – an entity with a life and will of its own. It began in the original vision of the founder, during an inspired moment when he was able to hear God's precise instructions. Since then, the administration and members have cast themselves as caretakers of the work of God – as stewards of what they have inherited, not as agents who drive it forward. Exemplifying this spirit of passive stewardship, the official title for a preacher in the CCB is '*Cooperador*' (Cooperator). A preacher's stated duty is to guide the church service according to inspiration from the Holy Spirit, and to make sure that 'nothing outside of the Holy Gospel is manifested'.[42] Those who preach in the CCB – Elders (*Anciães*) and *Cooperadores* – undergo no formal training and are not mandated to study the Bible. In practice this works against preachers acting as exegetical authorities. Members never refer to a *Cooperador* as 'pastor' – the most common Brazilian title for evangelical ministers – as this implies leadership over others, while *Cooperador* evokes equal status with lay members.

Proper stewardship of the work of God hinges on being sure not to mix the trappings of human institutions with the domain of church activity. 'The work of God must be separate' was a maxim I heard from people in the CCB on many occasions, but this phrase did not mean that those in the church should live out their lives in isolation from non-members. In the CCB the urge to keep religious practice free from the influence of other aspects of life helps people practise a faith with extremely high standards of piety while they inhabit a dense, heterogeneous urban setting. When religion is treated as an internal, personal construct, it can be held separate from other

[42] Congregação Cristã no Brasil, *Resumo da convenção: realizada em fevereiro de 1936. Reuniões e ensinamentos: realizada em março de 1948. Pontos de doutrina e da fé que uma vez foi dada aos santos* (São Paulo: Congregação Cristã no Brasil [1948] 1998), Article 25.

areas of life.[43] Activities that might contravene one's beliefs can then be carried on without compromising a sense of coherence. Religion considered in this objectified way enables a person to be 'both secular and pious at the same time'[44] without creating an inner conflict. Defining which parts of life activity belong outside of religious practice allows church members to freely traverse the boundaries of potentially antagonistic spheres of activity without compromising their commitments.

As the next section will show, CCB attendance combined in a stable way with the working lives of members I knew, who held diverse jobs ranging from security guards and domestic workers to lawyers, dentists and public sector bureaucrats. Furthermore, association with the church did not exert pressure on people to choose specific ways of making a living; as mentioned above, such aspects of non-church life were intentionally kept out of collective contexts. Instead, separateness in the CCB means that the church domain is kept pure in a way that is above and beyond what is possible for human institutions, including those that church members are part of. Therefore, the separation that CCB members aspire to happens within congregants' own lives, not between them and the rest of the world.

Reimagining Disappointment

In this section I explore the experience of two CCB members who could be considered as part of the Brazilian 'new middle class'. On the one hand, the following accounts of Pedro and Adriano illustrate how people with skills, and the aspiration to improve their life conditions, can encounter severe limits to their hopes and prospects. On the other hand, their stories show how religious discourse can encourage members to re-construe supposed failures or disappointments as signs of purity.

Pedro, in his early 40s at the time, was an adult convert to the CCB originally from the state of Rio Grande do Norte, who had been in São Paulo for several years. He had migrated to the city to ply his trade as a window installer, but at the time of my research he could only find work as a security guard at a warehouse, far out on the city's outskirts in Taboão da Serra. I often assisted him on the church construction site, as he was a competent stonemason, and our conversations revolved around employment and the ups and downs of the labour market in São Paulo. At first he was very unhappy with his job as a security guard, because it was not the profession he trained for, because he did not make as much money as before, and because he had to work seven nights per week in order to keep his job. One of the main problems was that he could not attend *cultos*, because services are always held at night. For

[43] Bruno Latour, *We have never been Modern* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
[44] Ibid., p. 33.

these reasons, at one point he was demoralised and thought seriously about quitting the job.

But he told me that, during a *culto*, he received a direct message from God, which reassured him that he should have patience and refrain from rushing into any hasty decisions about changing his job. The way that Pedro described to me how God communicates messages during *cultos* is something I witnessed on many occasions, and is something that CCB members often talked about; and their descriptions are very consistent. During sermons the preacher often becomes noticeably 'inspired by the Holy Spirit', and certain styles of speaking signal to the congregation that direct personal messages are about to be communicated. On this occasion Pedro heard the preacher say the following: 'I am speaking to someone present here tonight … you are dissatisfied with your work, you want to seek another job. But you should not leave your job. God has opened the door for you and you should stay there until He closes that door.'

Pedro was transfixed, feeling that the words were meant for him, and he chose to stay where he was working as a security guard. Soon he heard another message at a *culto* in the same way as above, this time assuring that God would grant better hours to someone at a job they were thinking of leaving. Pedro said that immediately following this event, the company he worked for acquired a pit bull terrier to take over from him, guarding the building overnight. From then on his duty was to work by day and leave food for the dog overnight; also the boss gave him two days off per week.

Pedro explained candidly that, although it would be more lucrative to work as a glass installer, the situation was not only about him and his immediate desires. Using a metaphor common among CCB members, he said: 'God opened the door for me, and He will close it. It would not be right for me to quit the job and close the door before God wants me to.' Then, after thinking for a moment, he added: 'God even blessed me with less money.'

He said he was beginning to understand that, previously, when he was installing windows, he had too much money because he would spend it on things that did not edify him spiritually. Now, he said, he was living closer to God, whatever might happen to his situation in the future. Pedro's desire for a more prosperous way to make a living was not only unrealistic in terms of job options available at that time, but his experience at the CCB helped him see that it was improper to think in terms of his own expectations – that he should not close a door that God had opened.

Pedro's case shows how navigating the challenges and setbacks of making a living in São Paulo can be religiously construed as a test of willingness to surrender authorship of one's life to God, with improvement potentially on the horizon. The case of the following CCB member, Adriano, shows, furthermore, that religious belief can help articulate a general sense of pessimism

about any attempt to satisfy oneself through seeking recognition and satisfaction in the job market. Not only does God want us to follow His plan for our lives, as in Pedro's case, but the world can be understood as a deceptive place where our only true refuge and satisfaction should be in God's teachings.

At the time of fieldwork Adriano was 36 years old, and had converted to the CCB six years before. Though he was a qualified, experienced electrician, he was out of full-time work and doing odd jobs through an employment centre. Adriano was one of the most dedicated volunteers on the church construction site throughout his period of unemployment, and I worked as an assistant to him for three months as he organised and installed the wiring network for the new building. He talked to me often about how the working world does not operate by the moral standards that he respects, and how he felt that in order to maintain any job at a decent professional level he would have to comply with duplicitous practices. He lamented that there is a system of personal patronage (literally 'godfathering' [*apadrinhamento*]) in Brazil, wherein people have to enter into relations of unconditional loyalty towards their superiors, regardless of standards or ethics. One Saturday he was struggling to make me understand the degree of absurdity which people are compelled to endure in order to hold a decent job in Brazil, and as we were threading some wires through a duct in the wall, he paused and told me:

> If someone who is more important than you tells you to look at that [a piece of plywood leaning up against the wall] and tells you that it is a stone, then you have to agree with him that it is a stone, even if you know that it is a piece of wood. If you don't then you can't get anywhere. This is how it works here in Brazil.

He felt that people do not have the chance to achieve fair recognition or compensation for their abilities nowadays in Brazil, and that in Biblical times there was a more direct relationship between a man's worth as a person and his opportunities. On another occasion, during a coffee break on the site, he explained to me his view of how, since Jesus' incarnation, people have become progressively more corrupt:

> In the old days, the time of the Old Testament, people were much more responsible for their actions. God was always there, and he would talk to people directly and tell them what to do and what was right or wrong, like sending plagues and things like that. But when Jesus came he took the blame for everything people had done, so God didn't need to watch people so closely any more … then people had more room to make their own rules and so they started to behave however they wanted.

He concluded by saying that the working world in Brazil now operates in this vacuum of morals, and is structured according to dishonourable rules, to which one must adjust in order to prosper. For him and the values he held this was not possible, and instead he put his faith in what the CCB represented. The church provided a way for him to maintain a more personal relationship with

God, in superior contrast to the *personalismo* of *apadrinhamento*, which governs relations between bosses and employees.

Both Pedro's and Adriano's cases show how the CCB's traditional religious message continues to offer a striking alternative to neo-Pentecostal prosperity theology in the way people are encouraged to interpret disappointment. Instead of evidence of a lack of blessing, potential failures can be seen as tests of a person's resolve to accept limitations. Limitations are often the sobering reality that many people are forced to deal with in an economy which encourages individuals to take responsibility for failure or success. Pedro and Adriano illustrate how people in the NMC can meaningfully relate this type of traditional Pentecostal discourse to the uncertainty in their own economic lives.

If, as anthropologists have proposed, the UCKG represents the prototype of cutting-edge Evangelicalism in Brazil, it would appear that Pentecostalism represents one of the only options for many people who aspire to overcome the economic barriers imposed on them by the neoliberal system. In this view churches become attractive as a way to bring people in from the hopelessness of being on the margins of society. Specifically, Diana Lima's work shows that the UCKG helps people harness and participate in the discourse of neoliberal cosmology, from which they are sidelined.

But Clara Mafra's depiction of a positive construal of Pentecostal marginality allows an understanding that can go beyond compensatory or instrumentalist explanations[45] for why people find the faith meaningful. While prosperity theology encourages people to search for material wealth through assertive entrepreneurialism, traditional Pentecostal marginality can help people disinvest emotionally from the economic system and the ways it rewards people. Pedro, Adriano and other CCB members could potentially find other outlets for chasing after wealth if their faith encouraged them to seek wealth as a necessary sign of blessing.

Fellowship at the CCB, however, can encourage people to temper their expectations of the world, and it can help to morally frame their aspirations in terms that do not cohere with the logic of the market. Entrepreneurial ventures, parallel to those energetically pursued by Diana Lima's informants in the UCKG, did not emerge as options in my discussions with informants like Pedro and Adriano; in a way, CCB members' resignation about their situations was more fatalistic. They recognised that they did not follow the rest of the crowd, and that they found strength in resisting the competitive, self-maximising ethos of the 'neoliberal cosmology'. Rather than regard the

[45] For a helpful discussion of instrumental understandings for the growth of Pentecostalism in Latin America, and their implications for analysis, see David Smilde, 'Skirting the Instrumental Paradox: Intentional Belief through Narrative in Latin American Pentecostalism', *Qualitative Sociology*, 26: 3 (2003), pp. 313–29.

disillusionment arising from underemployment as an aberration to be overcome, Pedro and Adriano cultivated disappointment as an important religious lesson about not being seduced by worldly rewards. In the end, this lesson helped them confront the inexorability of a system over which they have little control.

Conclusion

The words quoted at the very beginning of this article were recorded as I was sitting opposite a church Elder named Marco, in the administrative wing of the CCB's main temple headquarters. We were talking in an open room, among the sounds of typing and the low voices of dozens of male professionals who regularly volunteered their services for the church's legal and administrative affairs. The complex sits deep in the neighbourhood of Brás – the epicentre of turn-of-the-century Italian immigration to São Paulo, where some of the first people gravitated toward Louis Francescon's preaching. Marco was trying to answer my questions about why the CCB remains so large despite the fact that it does not evangelise. His statement – that it attracts people who 'feel cheated or frustrated with the worlds they came from' – points precisely to the CCB's resonance with a type of sentiment expressed by Brazil's middle classes. Pedro and Adriano, though not born into the church, identified with a Pentecostal movement that does not equate limitations to prosperity in 'the world' with a lack of spiritual blessing. Although they could potentially seek ways to achieve more in material terms, for them it was necessary to take a stand for purity over pressures, discourses and priorities that emanated from a system regarded as unfair and corrupt.

In this paper I have argued that both the success and the contemporary relevance of traditional Pentecostalism in Brazil have been overlooked, and that thereby the views of millions of evangelicals active in the CCB have been bypassed. The same aspects of the church that are discussed as anachronistic by other Pentecostals, non-Pentecostals and even anthropologists, are valued by those involved in the CCB as signs that it rises above man-made notions. From the beginnings of Pentecostalism in Brazil, the faith encouraged people to relegate judgments from 'the world' to second stage, and offered an alternative form of self-realisation. The same message continues to resonate with people who are critical of contemporary forms of hierarchy and social exclusion in Brazil. Even for middle-class members, church affiliation provides a way to regard themselves as not colluding with the way the mainstream world operates.

But I do not wish to leave the impression that separation from the mainstream is the main reason that people find the CCB compelling. Underlying the elevation of marginality is a strong impulse toward fellowship, complicity

and community with other church members. This may sound paradoxical in an organisation that offers scant ways for its members to associate with one another outside of ritual contexts. The CCB definitely does not work to fill in the 'institutional deficit'[46] left by the post-crisis withdrawal of the state, as do many new churches, by furnishing new networks to help solve practical problems. Yet there is a strong sense among CCB members that they are firmly part of a spiritual community, all of whom, regardless of their differences in class, attend *cultos* for the same reasons.

The radical departure from the rest of 'normal' life, writ large by the anachronistic aspects of CCB, creates a binding 'religious aesthetic' experience for those who participate.[47] Congregants often expressed to me that one of the most important things they share with their *irmãos* (brothers and sisters) throughout and beyond Brazil is an unspoken understanding of the CCB's peculiar ritual customs. Church aesthetics bring people together according to what they share within the space of religious worship, not according to their lifestyles or aspirations outside of it.

The same anachronistic practices that mark participants off as separate from people outside of the church work to efface signs of individual and socio-economic difference within the ritual space. While practices such as women's use of the veil, addressing fellow congregants as 'brother'/'sister' and the austere ritual dress codes index a bygone era, they also blur disparities between backgrounds and lifestyles, and deflect attention away from individual personalities.

CCB rituals encourage participants to let go of a need for the practices they engage in to make sense on their individual terms, or for their church to reflect the technologies, fashions or sensibilities promoted in other areas of their lives. As God's commandments for how to worship, and His ultimate plans for the world, are construed as inscrutable to human beings, one must follow them out of faith, not because they are vetted to serve practical priorities. This is an understanding that builds among churchgoers as their contact with the CCB increases, and it becomes *the* thing which all of them share.

The sense of religious community I outlined above is especially meaningful to people living in a metropolis of 20 million people, as it becomes a space in which to invest the kind of hope that can be withdrawn from other outlets such as career, consumerism or politics. Yet nor does church life lead to a practical withdrawal from these activities. For some people who are aware of and experienced in the realities of living in contemporary Brazil, the collective experience of CCB worship stands out as a superior referent, an alternative model of how to relate to and respect other people.

[46] Martin, *Tongues of Fire*.

[47] Birgit Meyer, 'Aesthetics of Persuasion: Global Christianity and Pentecostalism's Sensational Forms', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 109: 4 (2010), pp. 741–64.

Finally, the traditional Pentecostal ideal of purity is unattainable within, and therefore must be construed as separate from, the institutions, fashions and forms of knowledge that people heed in 'the world'. Since Louis Francescon, the first Pentecostal missionary on Brazilian soil, preached to uneducated immigrant workers, the faith has spoken to people with a keen awareness of the constraints placed on them in the labour and social pyramid. And the faith continues to offer many people a way to look outside of Brazil's seemingly intractable hierarchical arrangement for senses both of self-realisation and of collective identification.

Recent research shows middle-class Brazilians expressing a profound disappointment with the way that local socio-economic structures fail to afford to all citizens an equal chance to prosper. Middle-class people participating in the wave of street protest that began in June 2013 expressed disillusion with the PT's questionable record on strengthening government institutions, such as education, which are seen as the bedrock to a fairer society in which upward mobility is possible for the majority. Many of these same people harkened to the subsequent, successful call to remove Dilma Rousseff from office in May 2016.

In contrast to recent turbulent popular efforts aimed at altering Brazil's socio-economic realities, CCB fellowship does not encourage people to work to transform structures in the world. Instead, an ideal model of how people should relate to one another is preserved within the confines of the CCB precisely because it does not depend on the possibility of realising it outside of the church community. In this sense, the church ideal cannot fail because it will not be tested outside of temple walls, in a world never meant to uphold its standards. By the deliberate act of associating with a movement seen as backward, participants express a critique – resonant with people in the middle classes – which acknowledges the futility of hoping for the realisation of any true ideal outside of the religious domain. The enduring number of people in this church suggests that, rather than being an outdated form of religiosity, such a view can make as much sense now as it did to a handful of industrial labourers in 1910.

Spanish and Portuguese abstracts

Spanish abstract. Al analizar el pentecostalismo tradicional en Brasil, este artículo revela cómo personas de la clase media en São Paulo, Brasil, manejan sus frustraciones relacionadas a las actuales condiciones socioeconómicas. La investigación etnográfica sobre la iglesia pentecostal más antigua de Brasil, cuya práctica preserva un estilo anacrónico, muestra cómo la gente adopta una identidad marginal y por lo tanto critica las condiciones sociales del país. Con un marcado contraste con formas más nuevas de pentecostalismo, las personas analizadas acá responden a un 'credo de la anti-prosperidad', en el cual las fallas y los fracasos se construyen como signos de

pureza y desarrollo espirituales. En un país donde una 'nueva clase media' supuestamente está encontrando prosperidad, este estudio muestra formas de ser orientadas religiosamente en la que la gente confronta la frustrante distancia entre las promesas del neoliberalismo y las realidades del crecimiento sin empleo.

Spanish keywords: Brasil, pentecostalismo, antropología, nueva clase media

Portuguese abstract. Ao analisar o pentecostalismo tradicional no Brasil, este artigo revela como a classe média de São Paulo, Brasil, lida com a decepção relacionada à situação socioeconômica atual. A pesquisa etnográfica na igreja pentecostal mais antiga do Brasil, que preserva um estilo anacrônico de prática, demonstra como as pessoas adotam uma identidade marginal e assim criticam as condições sociais do país. Contrastando profundamente com novas formas de pentecostalismo, as pessoas representadas neste artigo respondem a uma 'teologia da anti-prosperidade', na qual fracassos e adversidades são considerados sinais de pureza e desenvolvimento espirituais. Em um país onde uma 'nova classe média' supostamente está encontrando prosperidade, este estudo apresenta uma forma orientada pela religião pela qual as pessoas confrontam a frustrante distância entre as promessas neoliberais e as realidades de um crescimento sem trabalho.

Portuguese keywords: Brasil, pentecostalismo, antropologia, nova classe média