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## **Undermining the Old Paradigms**

### **Rescripting Pentecostal Accounts**

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In spite of the helpful deconstructions and reconstructions since the sixties sociology as practised can sometimes still proceed along the lines required by defunct intellectual empires. Evidence can be straight-jacketed by the imposition of misleading categories or tidied up and administered to serve the interest of global ontologies. It is these ontologies which determine what is to count as real, primary and consequential and what is to be discounted as epiphenomenal and of no consequence.

It is ontologies which supply the emperor's eye view of the social heap and its propulsions. They feed our knowingness about the underlying forces, the arcane implications of our vocabularies and inverted commas, our governing metaphors of mechanism and function, and our over-generalised concepts for corralling evidence. Without them we might have allowed for the emergence of Islamic revival or student revolution or Pentecostalism – or the collapse of the Marxist empires. Encumbered by them we have been taken aback by unanticipated futures and even have trouble making much sense of them retrospectively. As Kuhn pointed out it takes time for a research community to abandon its paradigms. Intellectual mobility like social mobility takes place over generations.

This is surprising in so self-conscious a discipline. After all, our expertise resides precisely in what is not obvious (as well as in the obvious that needs explaining) and we have constantly probed what eludes the paradigm. The theoretical problems caused by the influence of unacknowledged and pervasive suppositions have been canvassed with great sophistication as has our autobiographical involvement. Maybe it is merely our practice and our vocabulary which remains unreformed. In theory we have amply recognised that people are agents 'looking before and after' yet still we express ourselves as though the social universe were exhaustively accounted for in

pushes and pulls and by the puppetry of forces rather than by personal purposes including moral aspirations. The rejected paradigms live on in our phrasing, or in barely noticeable absences from what on the surface appears to be a comprehensive coverage, or in the annihilation of perplexity by the rapid deployment of a major concept. Once a concept is in play much of our proper perplexity disappears.

Suppose, then, we call up on our mental screen the ambiguous, surprising and unscheduled reality of Pentecostalism. Intellectual economy immediately identifies it according to our programme. Swiftly and silently an ontology locks on to the phenomenon, not merely to place it in an appropriate temporal or evolutionary phase, but to tuck it into a standard package of characteristics. Sometimes it seems not necessary to wait for the Pentecostals themselves to render account before concepts like anomie and alienation take care of them. It is not that anomie and alienation do not exist, or are useless or are labels rather than explanation, or even that they are, too, embedded in their classical frameworks. The problem is that as concepts they are not smart enough, and so explain too much too soon. The mere existence of Pentecostalism attracts the deployment of ‘anomie’ and the activities of Pentecostals are themselves treated as automatic evidence of the anomic condition. Once we have deployed our nomenclature we imagine we have increased in knowledge and understanding.

Another example of docketing and rapid disposal by fiat of a silent ontology is provided by the higher status accorded to the ‘political’ by comparison with ‘the religious’. This difference in status is so pervasive that it requires a fairly extensive treatment below, but basically religion is considered derivative and inconsequential, and even (maybe) temporary, whereas politics is consequential and permanent. As a result there are excellent books on ‘power’ in Latin America with barely any serious reference to religion. Presumably, power is seen as manifest in events and religion appears uneventful. That way our very topic is sequestered among the marginalia. Of course, the marginalization of religion can come about in an entirely unproblematic way simply because a writer’s interests are centred elsewhere. But it is also a matter of ontology.

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## ALLOWING PEOPLE TO ACCOUNT FOR THEMSELVES

We need to take our own advice to ourselves more seriously. People have to be allowed to speak on their own account and that means prolonged waiting and listening. Initially a message needs receiving in its own terms as though it made natural or, at any rate, adequate sense. This is not in any way to embrace a global relativism or to offer messages permanent protected status as an autonomous and safely bounded language game, but it is to stay respectfully and attentively close to whatever discourse is produced. What, after all, could be the scientific or philosophical warrants for rapid or even slow translation into one of the many received forms of analytic speech, such as psychopathology or deprivation and compensation? Social investigators are not decoders of jabber emitted by unwitting puppets. Rather, they stand face to face with other human beings in reciprocal exchanges and mutual conversation. Of course, after much reading of comparable material and many conversations in diverse contexts, and after a critical survey of the various decoding handbooks, one may rescript the material, easing it into wider perspective. But rescripting is a precarious business, and above all not to be conducted as though what believers say is fantasy waiting for analytic solvents to transfer it to some more basic category.

Rescripting needs to be carried out with respect for the messages received and that means holding in check the resonances invisibly supplied by ontologies. The analyses of Rowan Ireland in Brazil or of John Peel in West Africa provide models in this respect. Perhaps one or two examples may help. It is perfectly possible to gloss speaking in tongues as the voice of the voiceless and extend that gloss to Pentecostalism as such. This can add to understanding or, at any rate, richly feed our imagination provided it is treated as an additional layer of thick description. The trouble is it can lead us to *assume* voicelessness and can also play into more remoted resonances. Before we know where we are, an imaginative flash has acquired explanatory status whereby tongues are viewed as transferred affect. This notion of transfer derives (inter alia) from a crude model of the psyche as two alternative sets of blowholes, one natural and the other peculiar. Religion then becomes a peculiar blowhole of last resort picking up affect transferred by a concealed conduit away from its natural vent.

Pentecostalism viewed, or rather re-viewed, as ‘the voice of the voiceless’ should also attract a caveat applying to myriads of similar loose sentences we constantly deploy as members of the sociological community. In this case the caveat is the standard one that some who are *not* voiceless speak in tongues and many who *are* voiceless do not. Such loose sentences are unavoidable without pedantry but some concern for logic might also help control the easy resonances contributed by ontologies. In other words, even considered as thick description a phrase like ‘the voice of the voiceless’ has a proper fragility.

Another example of the problems of rescripting is provided by Pentecostal singing and, indeed, by Pentecostal music and dance more generally. Music is clearly very potent in the spread of Pentecostal (and evangelical) religion, and if you are technically equipped it can be used as a remarkably precise indicator of social location, period, ethos and spiritual mode. But once you try to rescript such crucial non-verbal elements as highly repetitious rhythm, hand-clapping, swaying and high decibel levels, you run into multiple difficulties. It is clear enough that *cura divina* groups do not use drums because they are used by their archrivals the spiritists, but are organs scarce in Pentecostal churches because used by Catholics? There exist whole domains here which are as saturated in significance as the domestic interiors later described, but where rescripting is very hazardous.

Even the statement about the potency of music in Pentecostalism is both true and problematic. If you put the question to the believers they will tell you how much they care about their bands and choirs, and proudly acknowledge their public appeal. But once you speak of music as a core element in *conversion* they revert immediately to the scheduled flight paths of the Holy Spirit. The observer then rescripts creatively and suggests that people sense a new spirit through the whole environment of sight and sound. This is not directly incompatible with what believers themselves say, but it raises an interesting question. Why is it so important for faith to refer all power to God in His direct unmediated activity rather than to His discrete operation through the audio-visual environment? Why is potency so carefully denied to co-operative agencies like music? Is it because Catholicism is so associated with mediated divinity? Is it because some Pentecostals have clearly been diverted from God by the potential autonomy of the power of music? Is it because the power of the message depends on protecting the absolute centrality of God’s presence in the Son and the

Spirit? These are classical questions raised by the whole history of the relation of music to Christian religion, but they are also raised quite crucially here with respect to rescripting close to the text.

One more example of rescripting in relation to singing is provided by Bernice Reagan Johnson's comment (on American television) that the hymns of black Americans 'announced they were there'. This surely extends the way we hear black American music and, of course, the music of Latin American Pentecostals. People are collectively present to themselves, as well as 'before God' when they join together in praise, and they are plainly audible to others. Welshness is audible at the Cardiff Arms Park ground before the match when the Welsh sing 'Guide me O thou great Jehovah' and 'Land of my fathers'. After rescripting we can see how music is heard *and* overheard. The rescripting may be further extended to include reflection on the way voices 'come across' in an unthreatening manner. Non-Pentecostals can pick up the potency without catching a hint of threat. Perhaps that is a vital clue in understanding Pentecostalism. What, however, has to be kept at bay in all this gentle rescripting is any reductive ontology whereby Pentecostals only sing or 'fundamentally' sing to make a discreet statement about their social presence.

The point to recollect is that music and dance are, in common with spirit, things in themselves. As Thomas Mann (1968:79) commented in a famous passage, music is a *ding an sich*, and so a manifestation which we encounter as well as a phenomenon we observe and analyse (cf. Martin 1984). Quite apart from the truth or otherwise of a given religion, the thing in itself, the expression on the face of the dancer, is common to the believer and the watcher as a snared manifestation. Our rescriptings deal in the surrounds, not in the moment the lightning strikes, and that holds for a riff on a guitar or Mozart or for Pentecostals' engulfed wordless harmony. This again is where ontologies have to be kept under cautionary leash as unscientific. If we refer reductively to a neediness or to a lack somehow located in some domain other than the elemental desire to body forth in sound or dance, we have appealed to a redistributive economy of the psyche which is given not by science but by a reductionist ontology.

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## **RESCRIPTING: STRONG OR WEAK**

It is worthwhile venturing an aside on just how much damage can be done to the evidence as well as to the people concerned by over-strong rescripting. In the instance to be quoted, the rescripting was done by one of the most sympathetic sophisticated of observers, perhaps precisely because he had so many frames to draw upon. In drawing attention to the way some followers of *cura divina* shout 'burn, burn, burn' during public exorcisms, he expressed a fear that this might well break out into arson. But (if one may gently rescript his observation) what does this imply? It implies that a metaphor emerging in the context of the exorcism of spirits has been diverted from its more natural passage and may in time, like a volatile flame, find its proper blowhole. His comment fed off the notion that religion is truncated action, even maybe neutered violence, and so one day Prometheus may be unbound. Metaphorical gesture in the ineffectual realm of the spirit awaits release in the real world of action. Led by this kind of psychoanalytic thread one may sniff out a bad religion by the way it exhibits an incipient criminality.

## **METAPHORS: ALONGSIDE OR FROM ABOVE**

In the discussion of alternative vents, some natural and others peculiar, mention has been made of metaphors. It is metaphors which do the work of ontologies by their ability to seem right and proper. One of the initial moves in tracing an ontology back to its control tower needs to be the suspicious scrutiny of metaphor, particularly metaphors based on mechanism (e.g. hydraulics) or metaphors portraying people only as responding to stimuli rather than initiating purposeful action to make something of themselves. Sociology is saturated in metaphor. That is the first point to establish because the adherents of positivistic ontology either discuss sociological metaphor as mere decorative facilitation, or else attempt to bleach language and dry it out. Bleaching is undertaken in order to suggest objectivity, and dried out prose is utilised as a criterion of professional and scientific credentials. This means that ontologies are present not only in silences and absences, but need to be discerned under carefully

covered tracks. When it comes to positivism you have to uncover what has been covered with great care.

Not only do metaphors lead back to the control towers of an ontology but they often emerge as governing figures exhibiting the explanatory core of a given analysis. It is perfectly possible for these governing figures or metaphors to exist alongside a religious discourse, and feed off it sympathetically, but they can also look down from a great height. Some idea of this difference can be given by contrasting two governing metaphors, one operating alongside and the other above Pentecostal discourse. One is my own metaphor of the 'walkout' from society involved in Pentecostalism, and the other is Christian Lalive D'Épinay's metaphor of the somnambulistic shift from the patronal 'fold' of the hacienda to the pastoral fold of the Pentecostal church (D'Épinay 1969). These contrasting metaphors for the same phenomenon have the additional advantage of illustrating another significant element in sociological writing. Jean-Pierre Bastian (1992) makes the perfectly proper comment that David Martin's work does not supersede that of Lalive D'Épinay. Indeed not, but one would in passing put a query against the whole *idea* of successive supersessions. Different metaphors work at different heights and have different advantages and dangers. They operate in multidimensional conceptual space, and they constitute alternatives, some of them complementary, some not. We are not *necessarily* operating in a scientific mode based on supersessions. To take an example from art history the rich experimentation of Degas was not necessarily going anywhere. Manet was not superseded by Cézanne. We have to take simple complementarities into account as well as supersessions.

Lalive D'Épinay suggested that a central element in becoming a Pentecostal was the recovery of the solidarity and security of the hacienda in the haven of 'the sect'. The safety of the religious fold was, therefore, *like* the safety of traditional agricultural society, and Pentecostals experienced a putative need to recreate the former in the latter. But, of course, no Pentecostal speaks of needing a father figure in the person of the pastor to replace and be functionally analogous to the patrón. And the moment a little pressure is exerted on this beguiling suggestion it is difficult to see what could be the warrants for it. Do we not all need 'security'? Are Pentecostals specially identifiable as security seeking agents? The comparison between old and new fold might also be thought to imply that Pentecostalism constitutes a backward-

looking *cul de sac*. In that context, deference to the authority of the pastor takes on the semblance of an ancient submission reassembled in the modern era but now untimely and out of place. Yet these implications, built so naturally into the comparison, are entirely unnecessary. The existence of vigorous authority in the sect can be understood entirely in terms of what is required to maintain norms at variance with those obtaining in the rest of Latin American Chilean society. Or maybe it reflects *and* rejects its environment.

In other words, the characterisation of Pentecostalism as a shift from one fold to another easily allows us to view Pentecostals as making the transition somnambulistically, guided by the need to reacquire a shepherd. We, as sociologists, unlock the heart out of their somnambulism and analytically wake their action from its dream. Once again an alien and distant ontological power has stretched out its arm and in a swift metaphor has despatched people's action in terms foreign to their own understanding.

All metaphors, of course, simultaneously eliminate and illuminate, and it is wise to emphasise that before turning to my own governing metaphor where Pentecostals are seen as engaged in a social walkout. It, too, has its vulnerability. All the same, it is a metaphor deployed alongside what Pentecostals themselves say, and constitutes a rescript of their own accounts of the transition from 'World' to 'Church'. Pentecostals and, indeed, evangelicals more generally (as well as Witnesses and Mormons) speak of moving from an old life to a new life in the Spirit, from degradation to renewal, incapacity to empowerment, dirt to cleanliness. That does indeed constitute a walkout. Nevertheless, the idea of a walkout specifically from 'society' might easily be taken to emphasise social motives for departure, in particular departure from an injurious social system. True, the social system is injurious, but Pentecostals in their own accounts concentrate on injuries which are self-administered. In other words, Pentecostals when enquiring what may be done in the crisis of their existence concentrate on the one resource in their own control: the moral self. This is absolutely crucial. Everything unhappy and damaging visited on them in the outer world they see as exacerbated by a self-inflicted moral injury. Sociological readings 'naturally' concentrate on injuries received, because these readings are themselves generated by a certain philosophical anthropology, whereas Pentecostals concentrate on injuries actively committed by themselves. If like some sociologists Pentecostals focussed on



*being* victims rather than agents, then they would in fact offer very little to study. Their impact would be nil. Of course, they know the environment is corrupt; but at least they foreswear corruption and so exercise the one personal option open to them. If their marital situation is grievous they deal with it through a radical personal transaction. No doubt there is 'protest' here. Of a sort, just as sociologists say there is, but it is protest lodged against evil, beginning with the moral self, and it seeks global betterment. Pentecostals are not 'masses' huddling together as victims from an oppressive social system, but people who refuse to be *en masse* or to be victims, and who have walked out of their own situation. In other words, one has to question our warrant for tracing their *genesis* in terms of a specifically *social* protest.

Let me repeat. They do, indeed, recognise injustice, as Rowan Ireland (1991) and John Burdick (1994) have properly insisted, but we cannot assume that is *why* they become Pentecostals. The recognition of injustice could come in part precisely from the radical conversion of the moral self and not the other way round.

### **RHETORICAL FRAMING: FUNDAMENTALIST, SECT, SYNCRETIC**

Not only is sociology saturated in metaphor but it is framed in rhetoric. Latin American Pentecostalism (and evangelicalism generally) is held in a rhetorical frame purveyed in a vocabulary. Needless to say, this vocabulary conveys more by way of multiple implication than it conveys by way of precise description, even where the words used have in the past been accorded careful sociological content. Three words in particular are worth scrutiny, since their use in the context of Latin American Pentecostalism obscures more than it clarifies. They are fundamentalist, sectarian and syncretic.

'Fundamentalist' derives part or its driving power from an understandable moral panic about fanaticism and also about moral visions imposed on whole societies which are inimical to individual preference and personal choice. The issue was symbolised by the fatwa issued against Salman Rushdie. We see it as an intrusion into modernity of the kind of punitive compulsory solidarity characterising undifferentiated societies. But to bracket Pentecostalism, even subconsciously, with this kind of intrusion is clearly inappropriate since Pentecostalism represents fission,

not all-embracing fusion. Though moral fervour and the search for respectability are certainly related to pastoral authority, these pastoral authorities are remarkably numerous and mutually contradictory. Few have any ambition to act as the legal arbiters and moral dictators of whole societies. After all, they emerged historically in societies where there was recognised dissent or where Church and State were separated. By their origins as well as by their contemporary practice and social reality they go in precisely the reverse direction to much of contemporary Islam. One of the main accusations against them is that they *fragment* whole societies and tribes and even complete civilizations, not that they restore monolithic solidarity. Hispanic maids crisscrossing Los Angeles or Santiago de Chile are not to be bracketed with mullahs and ayatollahs or, for that matter, with Hindu communal ‘fundamentalists’ determined to erase a Muslim holy site.

The remaining (and original) driving power of ‘fundamentalist’ derives from the attempts of the so-called Moral majority in the USA to constitute themselves a coherent pressure group. Behind this lies a complex history of deliberate counter-definition on the part of evangelicals to ‘east coast liberals’ which has turned on the literal truth of the Bible and on the ‘fundamentals’ of Christian doctrine. North American Pentecostals happen to be aligned with this Moral Majority in their moral conservatism, though they tend to vote for the Democrats far more than (say) the liberal Episcopalians, and are anxious to secure the benefits of a comprehensive health service. But in Latin America, Pentecostals are not defending biblical truth against east coast liberals but rather promoting the gifts of the spirit over against Catholicism, seen as the umbrella religion or, for that matter, over against what they regard as the moral deficits of Afro-Brazilian spiritism. Cultural and religious battles over Creationism, and so on, are utterly irrelevant to Latin America. The proper term for Pentecostals might be ‘pneumatic’ rather than ‘fundamentalist’, but such a vocabulary has very little appeal to western journalists. They, with sublime ethnocentrism, prefer to export the cultural alignments and terminology of North America or even Europe to the rest of the world. As a result the essential characteristics of Latin American Pentecostalism are obscured by a mist of North American associations. The Latin American believers find themselves labelled and docketed and framed by imported terminology as if they were a variety of Texan Baptists, and as if their social reality could be summarised by the international

activities of the televangelists. Movements become joined by incidental similarities when they should be disjoined by basic differences.

The term 'sect' is hardly in a better case, though for somewhat different reasons. It has become almost impossible to refer to 'the sects' since such a usage is firmly lodged in the hostile propaganda of some Catholics and most cultural nationalists. Of course, the standard sociological usages are in principle available as heuristic devices for distinguishing sects from churches and for distinguishing one type of sect from another. But after the classic work of Bryan Wilson there is little to be gained from continuing what some while ago became a sterile debate about where this or that group fits in an apparatus of categories. It is more useful to say simply that Pentecostals are focussed on conversion, they work 'miracles', they expel demons, they believe in the Second Coming, they exhibit enthusiasm and the gifts of the Spirit, and they reject the corruptions of 'the world'. Socially they are fissile and communal, and erect strong boundaries against 'the world'. They are often socially (and geographically) mobile, and there are *some* shifts in certain instances (the Assemblies of God) to the status of a normal denomination, as well as some modest professionalization and bureaucratization. The important point is to see them as pullulating variations on mainstream evangelical Christianity in the revivalist, holiness and Methodist traditions, and to ask how and why they have inundated a hitherto Catholic continent.

The use of the word 'syncretic' can also prejudice understanding of Pentecostalism. So far as Jean-Pierre Bastian (1992) is concerned, Pentecostalism in Latin America should be labelled 'syncretic' because it sometimes contains magical elements and usually 'works wonders'. It follows in Bastian's view that it is not particularly helpful to align it with Methodism and the Anglo-American tradition, either in substance or (maybe) genealogically. Thus, whereas with regard to 'fundamentalist' a continuity is asserted, with regard to 'syncretic' a discontinuity is asserted. I would rebut both assertions.

However, it is necessary at this point to back up a little to gain a more comprehensive grasp of what is at issue. After all, the very notion of a pure Protestantism is itself a construct derived from Western history which elides precisely those mixed elements which do not fit, let us say the appeal to augury made by the Puritan forces in the English Civil War. This artificially cleansed construct is then

placed against the more exotically non-Western varieties of Latin American Pentecostalism, and the Pentecostal movement as a whole declared syncretic. But religion does not cease to be Protestant because it works wonders. Many, perhaps most of the wonders under consideration, not only have some continuities and overlaps with Roman Catholic and indigenous wonders, but are readily identifiable as the wonders reported in the New Testament. It is perfectly possible, indeed quite natural and normal, for a miracle (or 'wonder') to be found simultaneously among Pentecostals and Catholics and practitioners of indigenous religions. (In a rather similar way, the pursuit of health and wealth in some forms of *cura divina* is simultaneously North American, African and indigenous, and to stress one overlap rather than another is quite often a matter of propaganda rather than real connections.)

Bastian and others follow through the implications of 'syncretic' by further characterising Pentecostalism as a bricolage, meaning it is a medley of items (Bastian 1992:544-546). Inevitably, this raises the broad issue of coherence in religion, which offers unending opportunities for discussions of the degrees and kinds of coherence found in this or that tradition. Certainly Pentecostalism lacks the rigorous articulation of Calvin's 'Institutes', but Methodism as a major form of Protestantism has in the past been labelled incoherent and the accusation might even reinforce the idea that Pentecostalism and Methodism share common roots. For the present author not much follows from a discussion of the extent to which a given religious apprehension can be stretched out and nailed down on a rationalising frame, since religions in practice work by profound assonances and symbolic propinquities. Creeds are sung as well as said. Nevertheless, the introduction of this criterion of rationalization does offer a clue as to what problematic is being applied. Pentecostalism in Latin America is being shadowed by Weber in a manner which ensures a particular kind of placement. It is that omnipresent Weberian shadow that has to be put in question, not of course with regard to the general issue of economy and ethos but with regard to the evolutionary scale implicit in the concept of rationalization. Once rationalization is accorded a central place in determining what is to count as *real* change and *significant* development, the impact of Pentecostalism is minimised and misconstrued. The ontologies are once again in action. In this, as in other spheres, the conceptual centrality accorded to rationalization has become an intellectual nuisance. Phenomena

in Latin America are not queuing up to ascend the Weberian escalator with respect to technical rationality.

The point is that rationalization represents only one sector in the various scales of change and there is plenty of room for religion and rationalization to co-exist together. The expansion of one is not the diminution of the other. Religion in Latin America can co-exist with rationality in a multidimensional universe, and shepherd forward real changes which do not replicate the evolutionary steps of the European west. Otherwise Pentecostalism is consigned to some archaic phase, too incoherent and ‘syncretic’ to ascend the prescribed escalator. The key issue is rather why this particular mixture among all the other mixtures in Latin America is so potent, and what specific ingredients it contains to effect massive cultural changes from Punta Arenas in Chile to Tijuana in Baja California.

#### **EXCURSUS: THE AUTONOMY OF RELIGION VIS-A-VIS POLITICS**

Initially one has to reassemble some of the points made above. One of the evolutionary universals espoused by some contemporary analysts concerns a shift to ‘the political’. This has some limited purchase as an empirical observation but it belongs precisely to the ontology which awards religion a subordinate status compared to politics and frames evangelical religion as *basically* aborted political protest. Moreover, as was argued above, there is a further restriction here which confines real politics to overt and eventful conflict about the ‘*central*’ institutions of society. The political ‘centre’ is construed as hard, active and eventful, whereas the cultural periphery is construed as soft, reactive and uneventful.

The term ‘pre-political’ as used by some anthropologists is a particularly useful tool of this ontology. Following Hobsbawm (1959) and Worsley (1957) it is frequently applied to enthusiastic movements in the so-called third world and the effect is to frame Pentecostalism as diverted and neutered social protest. It is assessed alongside cargo cults and millennial dreams, as a mythic and fantastic prelude to real and effective political programmes as these are understood in ‘the West’. Once social formations mature and develop, the mythic disguise will be sloughed off as the product of a bygone phase, and energy released for real action. The political potential

can then be unlocked from its religious box and maybe the sexual potency wasted in orgasmic piety redirected to its true objective. Meanwhile, it remains a moot point whether the potential discerned as hidden in religion is to be regarded as positive, given its interim place in a temporal sequence of social evolution, or else as a perverse damming up of what would otherwise flow freely in the right channel.

Of course, it is a matter of observation that religious mobilizations from time to time overlap or anticipate political mobilizations. Indeed, the power of religion to initiate change is illustrated inter alia by its capacity to symbolise transitions to better things or to sustain hope against hope or to build models of social organisation which *can* eventually be realised on the political plane. All kinds of mutations occur so that it is perfectly plausible to view the righteousness of Bloomsbury as a child of the righteousness of Victorian Protestant Christianity. Major influences like T.H. Green and Leslie Stephen are just individual instances of such a mutation and significant for the politics of conscience so influential in Anglo-American society.

What is less clear is that a build up in the religious sphere is somehow waiting to be released or emptied into the political sphere. It does not follow that the free churches in Victorian Britain or the Black Churches in the United States were obscurely awaiting a proper translation into liberalism and Civil Rights to render them otiose. In a similar manner Black Muslims are clearly able to carry forward a desire to stand tall in the American community and to exhibit a black integrity. It does not follow that such a desire is what really counts and Islam merely the outward form of thwarted political ambitions.

*A religion has consequences without being the creature of what it in fact creates.* As for Pentecostalism it may well have all kinds of latent possibilities, and even pass through political phases, without being driven by those possibilities or emptied into those phases. Once it is conceived in such a way, its own self-understanding is annihilated by fiat and faith put under a special kind of supervision not far from what John Milbank (1990) recently called the ‘policing of the sublime’, or from the strategies unmasked by Kieran Flanagan (1996).

It is not all that difficult to unmask the unmaskers, just as one may also relativise the relativisers, to use a phrase of Peter Berger (1969). One has only to ask the intellectual police for their philosophical warrants. What is more taxing is any attempt to establish the autonomous and intrinsic character of religious experience and action

vis-à-vis other sectors of social activity. After all, the religious and the political do interact and intertwine in the most complex manner and it is very hard to establish a logic of the religious sphere *sui generis* contrasted with a logic of the political sphere *sui generis*.

In any case the complexity is increased because that logic varies somewhat between the different world religions, so that the Christian understanding of 'Church' and 'World' generates a specific distribution of social and secular space which historically affects the interaction of the religious and the political in a profound manner. That has very important implications because though Pentecostalism and Catholicism play distinctive and opposed roles respectively as a voluntary group interacting with a disintegrating establishment they still share the governing logic of Christianity. In that wider context there is no major chasm between the two. Pentecostalism is not an oddity or perversion but rather shares 'the political problem' with Catholicism, including the base communities.

A helpful way to articulate the Christian logic governing all its branching extensions is to consider the general concept of 'power' shared by politics and religion, and to understand the special kind of power sought by faith. That special power needs to be recognised as largely realistic in its objectives, because within its own terms the power can be demonstrated. Faith can for the most part bring about the transformations it promises. In that sense at least it is not an illusion, certainly not by comparison with the promise of politics

The main point relates to the *partial* incompatibility between the specifically religious pursuit of a power personally to be transformed and the political pursuit of the power of social transformation. It is *not* that Christian religion as a social phenomenon is restricted to the individual or that Christianity lacks a broad vision of redeemed social relationships, but that the pursuit of personal transformation has to be undertaken in a space protected and sequestered from the distinctive logic attending political action. The two can interact and there may be powerful flows between them, but the integrity of religious action requires a distinctive space. That is what is provided by 'Church' with its protected spaces and monitored social boundaries.

Especially as religious institutions gravitate towards the status of voluntary institutions the power plays within them acquire an unction quite distinct from the clout exercised by political bosses. That in turn affects any negotiations which may be

carried out between pastors and bosses, because their discourses, like their kinds of power, are largely incommensurate. Pastors may speak of justice at the level of proximate policy as between competing groups. As for religious confession, forgiveness and contrition they hardly enter into the matter at all. The result is that conversations between pastors and bosses cannot long continue beyond a crisis, or beyond a delimited sector of issues, for example the moral aspects of public order or local matters relating to (say) gross danger to health on account of poor sewerage. The most extended conversation possible takes place when a religious leader speaks for an oppressed people or ethnic minority, as Lazlo Tokes did in Romania. But in the last analysis such a conversation either takes place over a limited time period or the religious leader becomes absorbed in his political role to the detriment of his religious efficacy. Indeed, he will eventually become a bone of contention even among those of his own constituency, because there are unavoidable, proximate and moral ambiguous choices which simply have to be made. At that juncture the religious leader as a sign of unity in faith becomes a source of political division within the household of faith and between different households.

The experience of Pentecostal leaders in Brazil bears out this argument. It has been possible for them to engage in local pressure group politics concerned with the betterment of facilities, but engagement at the national level has been highly problematic. Many Pentecostals have found it easier to become corrupted by the political system than to reform it, and insofar as they have taken sides the obloquy of partisanship has rubbed off on them. Even where they have not reproduced the clientelist mode of Brazilian politics they have found their innocence misused or have had to walk a tight rope between personal integrity and the culture of wheeling and dealing.

Nor are Pentecostals alone in these dilemmas since the base communities likewise find it easiest to operate at the local level of pressure group politics aimed at delimited objectives. In common with Pentecostals they have found the Christian ethos of harmony and unity politically disabling and limiting. But there are specific problems attaching to Pentecostal interventions. One is that they are for the most part just not able to create specialist agencies or give houseroom to ecclesiastical bureaucrats with portfolios in social responsibility. The advantage of having such people is that their comment can be semi-detached from the national image of the church. Another



problem derives from having very few people ensconced by long habituation in the political class and sufficiently well-known to gain some protection in times of danger from their international visibility. Catholics by contrast know their way around and have long-established norms for negotiating the transition from the religious to the political. There are vague but intermittently useful theories to guide the lay catholic in his behaviour as a member of the political class. Furthermore, there are understood absolutions and remissions available when these theories need conveniently to be forgotten. Not too much is expected.

Pentecostals in politics are aliens to the political class often belonging to the culture of the pastorate, and they are always potential clients in a world suffused with Catholic presumptions. That indeed is why for the most part they have preferred not to risk their newfound dignity in places where they count for next to nothing. Their sole guide is the Bible, apart from some standard norms about separation of Church and State. So far as the New Testament is concerned, they are offered little more than the dualism between the loving kindness which should suffuse 'the church' and the baleful maleficence of the world'. Nor is this surprising since the earliest Christians counted for no more in the Greco-Roman political classes than do the latest Pentecostals. They could not hope to exercise a political influence for good in the world which in their view was under judgement and passing away.

The proclaimed goal of Pentecostalism is holiness and righteousness and Pentecostals know by experience how that goal has raised them from the dirt floor. The pursuit of love always finds itself confused and aborted by having to trade politically in images of polarised hostility and embattled abuse. In the same way the political pursuit of peace is compelled to descend to coercion; and the pursuit of truth necessarily succumbs to the dissemination of propaganda. Even the pursuit of humility is under duress to re clothe itself in the garb of self-righteousness.

After all, Pentecostals are a people committed to peace and they find militancy and coercion repellent. To the extent that they overcome their repulsion they find the peace they have so intermittently and hardly won even in the church corroded from within and sapped from without. They have put their citadel of betterment at risk and exposed their integrity to compromise. It is a high price to pay.

The main object of this excursus has not been to examine the far wider range of political identifications adopted by evangelicals in Latin America or even the special

problems attending groups remote from the political class, but rather to establish the different dynamics governing the political and the religious fields. The argument is simply summarised. In Christian culture these dynamics are analytically separate and there is no warrant for supposing that the dynamic of the one is an occluded version of the dynamic of the other awaiting eventual release from the enclave of delusion.

## **MORAL TRAJECTORIES AND PURPOSEFUL AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

The sense of being a person with spiritual gifts and a story to tell leads naturally to the 'rendering of accounts', including moral accounts. The sociologist observing the predicaments of the Latin American poor vis-à-vis the evangelical option reworks their moral accounting, its precise costs and rewards. Moral sowing and reaping is a strict discipline from which none are exempt.

The whole life world of Pentecostals and a fortiori of evangelicals of similar mind is a complex giving and making of moral account. Within the pricks and constraints of everyday life as they are perforce negotiated by every convert, there is a constant monitoring by individual conscience in terms of the overall goods sought by and set before Pentecostals. What we as observers think about free will is as irrelevant as what we think about the existence or the immortality of the soul. The point is that in order to understand them we need not merely to monitor their circumstances, to analyse the roles open to them, and impressed upon them, but to articulate their characteristic moral accountancy. That requires probing their moral ends and hopes and purposes, charting the contours of the moral landscape as they together construct and receive it. Pentecostals purposefully traverse moral landscapes along preferred paths. They move precariously between icons of threat and promise, and between rival poles of good and evil.

In other words, Pentecostal lives need to be retold in terms of the moral tale, looking before and after, teasing out the connectedness of events, acts and experiences as they bear on the Pentecostals' 'pilgrimage from this world to the next' since that pilgrimage governs their whole being. They do not simply have an economic ethic which can be independently elucidated item by item in terms of 'honesty is the best policy', or 'always give correct weight' or 'work is divinely ordained' or 'prosperity

is a blessing (or a snare)'. Rather they have a complete horizon of hopes and expectations within which such injunctions and sayings make sense. It is the sacred narrative which provides this horizon, and the pathways within which to trace the separate narratives of their own lives. They walk companionably inside the Bible, considered as the tale of tales and the book of books, and so script their own autobiography out of Scripture. Like Scripture itself, their autobiographies are testimonies, honed repetition, as well as assorted chronicles of selected events

As for the pathways and route finders, they are laid down between the alternative powers of the Enemy of souls and the Friend of souls. It is a well-nigh Faustian landscape, lit up in vivid and sometimes lurid colours, through which some walk securely, conscious of miracles, while others stumble along precarious ledges above unfathomed chasms. Some lives are pursued at the edge of the world. They fall and are retrieved in continuous dramas of redemption and recidivism. In the course of this study, realization came rather late as to how important it was to collect these as modern versions of *Pilgrim's Progress*, told with the same artless eloquence. Some are offered later, but for a narrative religion the key to understanding lies to an important extent in continuous narratives of changed lives. They are sacred theatre where everything is to be won or lost and where psychomachia take place in a manner reminiscent of the late Middle Ages. Eternity turns on it, let alone the goods of this passing world.

If one wants to know the anatomy of temptation in terms (say) of corrupt practices socially incumbent on all participants, or the nature of aspiration as expressed in priorities for everyday consumption and overall betterment, then the proper setting is spiritual autobiography. With a scrutiny of that autobiography must go a scrutiny of images and artefacts in domestic interiors and in the Pentecostal conception of the decoration and shape of God's own house. Why, for example, are cleansing cataracts and still waters so ubiquitous? Why do they turn to the flowers and the mountains? If the subject of enquiry were life-worlds in Thailand, it would be necessary to observe the appropriation of a complex iconography of saints and demons on every temple wall, and the same is true for Pentecostals. Their world is just as delicate and multi-layered.

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## THE DETAILED ANATOMY OF BETTERMENT

Questions also have to be pitched at a more mundane level. The governing category of betterment includes moral recovery, the righting of previous wrongs and it suggests a reversal of old ways and wasteful or destructive priorities. To seek betterment is to adopt personal disciplines and restraints, to be reliable and punctual, to accept regimes of health, wholeness and holiness and conduct transactions in a spirit of integrity and trust. Beneath the notion of betterment is a broad search for wealth by way of contrast with what Ruskin called 'illth', for worth rather than worthlessness, for a clean future rather than the dirt or the past. It is clear from previous investigations that the economic category of 'goods' is part of the moral category of the good. The economic is subsumed within such moral rubrics as prudence and sobriety. The seamless web of living rejects a separation of the economic aspect and treats goods as intimately linked to the gods. How, for example, do the gods deliver the goods? Are blessings indirect responses to open petition? How far are the random donations of fact or luck converted into empowerments conferred by a co-operative Providence?

From such questions subsidiary ones flow quite naturally. What followed on conversion? What happened to family? Were whole families converted at once, or was there a gradual conversion which began usually with the women? What did the church require with regard to respectability, life-style and discipline? Whom did it put off by rigour or censoriousness? What contacts emerged through the church for help in unemployment and sickness? How did believers understand their economic situation and their work under God's sovereignty? How were abandoned women helped to improve their position? How did women help each other? Did believers see themselves as active agents able to exploit whatever chances were offered them?

Again, what skills of reading, speaking, leadership, musicianship or administration did they acquire through the church? By what principles did believers conduct business especially with regard to credit or bribery? How did they construct their budgets of time and money, and what were their doctrines of time and money or of commerce and consumption or of leisure? What ladders for advance did they envisage? All such questions lie in the interstices of any global aspiration to improvement and betterment.

These are the lineaments of life worlds which can be evoked in conversation. I have tried to show how research into dramatic changes in lives gradually wrought changes in the research itself and its governing methods and assumptions.

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