

Religious practices and development: the case of Chilean pentecostalism

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The title of a book published in the context of the commemoration of the centennial of the Azusa Street Revival (Los Angeles, United States), defined the 20th century as "the charismatic century"¹. The justification of this description is found in the spectacular rhythm of growth that the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements reached along last century, rhythm that seems to be maintained in the beginnings of the 21st century. Sources quoted in this book reckon that in the year 2005, the adherents to the different branches of Pentecostal and Charismatic renewal had reached the 600 millions, figure only surpassed by the Roman Catholic Church². But in Latin America, the continent which concentrates most of the Roman-Catholic population, it is said that the number of members of the Roman Catholic Church is diminishing quickly, among others things, because of the growth of the Pentecostal movement.

The Pentecostal and Charismatic renewal is not, nevertheless, a homogeneous movement. The book already mentioned emphasizes the enormous diversity within the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement from the point of view of its history, its social insertion, its relation with society, and even, from the point of view of its definition on what it means to be Pentecostal. For this reason, it is very difficult, not to say impossible, to analyse the relations between Pentecostalism and Development from a global perspective, and still from a regional perspective. It may be more instructive to undertake this question analysing a concrete case, a case that has been object of numerous studies: Chilean Pentecostalism³.

Chilean Pentecostalism emerged from a local revival developed within the still young Chilean Methodist Church, a revival contemporary to, and independent from, the Azusa Street Revival, generally considered as the common cradle of global Pentecostalism. In fact, this movement started in Valparaíso the year 1902 as a typical revival within the Wesleyan Holiness tradition⁴. Later, in the year 1907, the reception of a pamphlet telling the story of a revival initiated the year 1905 in Pandita Ramabai's Mukti Mission, in Kedgaon, India, helped to reinterpret this revival within the categories of the emerging Pentecostal theology. This meant to visualize more clearly the goal of the revival as the search of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, understood as an additional experience after Justification and Sanctification⁵.

This Indian revival had also been independent from the movement of Azusa Street. Although the experience of "speaking in tongues" is described in the pamphlet as one of

¹ Jack W. Hayford and S. David Moore, *The Charismatic Century. The Enduring Impact of the Azusa Street Revival*. New York: Warner Faith, 2006.

² *Ibid*, p. 3f.

³ This analysis partially is based on two previous articles: Edward Cleary and Juan Sepúlveda, "Chilean Pentecostalism: Coming of Age", in Edward Cleary and Hannah Steward-Gambino. *Power, Politics, and Pentecostal in Latin America*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997, pp. 97-121; and Juan Sepúlveda, "Reinterpreting Chilean Pentecostalism", in *Social Compass* 43 (3), 1996, pp. 299-318.

⁴ Cf. Willis C. Hoover, *Historia del avivamiento pentecostal en Chile*. Valparaíso: Imprenta Excelsior, 1948.

⁵ *Ibid*. p.14.

the manifestations of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, it did not have the normative character of "initial evidence", as was the case in the Azusa Street revival⁶. Thus, the Chilean revival - although it adopted the Pentecostal emphasis in the Baptism in the Holy Spirit and its charismatic manifestations - maintained its strong Wesleyan roots. This meant that the authenticity of the Pentecostal experience should be finally verified by the "fruits of the Spirit", that is to say, in the "changing of life" of those who have experienced it, even when the "gifts of the Spirit" were appreciated and cultivated.

In spite of its strong Wesleyan roots, the Pentecostal revival was officially rejected by the Chilean Methodist Church in its Conference of February 1910. After this rejection, the schism was inevitable, and in May 1910 the "Methodist Pentecostal Church" was constituted, the first Chilean church completely independent from the point of view of its government, resources and means of growth. This church maintained its unity until 1932, year in which started a process of fragmentation that does not seem to have affected the rhythm of growth of Pentecostalism as a whole⁷.

In spite of its possible limitations, the official censuses of population are the most credible sources to analyze the growth of Pentecostalism in Chile. The data of such censuses do not refer specifically to Pentecostalism, but to the whole of the Protestant and Evangelical population. Nevertheless, given that the Pentecostal churches are the ones that are characterized for the fastest rate of growth, the figures of the censuses show mainly the dynamism of this religious movement.

In 1907, the same year that the Rev. Willis Hoover received the pamphlet on the Indian Revival written by Minnie Abrams, the National Census showed that protestant population reached barely a 1% of the total population, and that most of them were foreigners living in Chile⁸. A little less than a century later, the 2002 Census showed that the Protestant and Evangelical population had reached the 15.1% of the population over 15 years of age⁹. In the same Census, a 4.4% of the population over 15 years of age declares to belong to "another religion". Most commentators agree that this last percentage should be added, at least in part, to the Evangelical-Protestant population, since the variety of names given to the many Evangelical and Pentecostal churches may induce to misunderstanding. If this last observation is correct, by the year 2002 the whole of the Evangelical-Protestant population was very near of reaching the 20% of the total population over 15 years of age. Of this percentage, the vast majority belongs to the Pentecostal Churches originated in the Chilean revival.

This - mainly Pentecostal - Evangelical-Protestant population is not evenly distributed within Chilean society and territory. From a social and economic perspective, it is obvious that this population tends to be concentrated on the poorest sectors of society. For instance, while in Vitacura, the district (*comuna*) of the Metropolitan Region (Santiago) which presents the highest index of human development (as well as in the national level),

⁶ Cf. G.McGee, "Abrams, Minnie", en Burgess, McGee y Alexander. *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1988, p.7; Padmini Sengupta, *Pandita Ramabai Saraswati. Her Life and Work*. London: Asia Publishing House, 1970, pp.305-308; Allan Anderson, "The present world-wide revival... brought up in India. Pandita Ramabai and the Origins of Pentecostalism". Paper presented at the 34th Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, p.9.

⁷ J.B.A.Kessler, *A Study of the Older Protestant Missions and Churches in Peru and Chile*. Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Contre N.V., 1967, pp.108-133.

⁸ Cristián Parker, "Radiografía a la religión de los chilenos", in *Mensaje* 428 (1994), pp.178-181.

⁹ <http://www.ine.cl/cd2002/index.php>

the year 2002 the Evangelical-Protestants reached only to 4.3% of the population over 15 years of age; in Lo Espejo, the district (*comuna*) of the Metropolitan Region which presents the lowest index of human development¹⁰, the same group reached a significant 21.1%. Historically, Pentecostalism has grown mainly within the heterogeneous “marginal” unskilled sectors forming the urban and rural *bajo pueblo*¹¹.

From a gender perspective, in most districts women show a greater level of religious adscription than man, but this is not a distinctive characteristic of the Evangelical-Protestant population, since the same tendency is shown in the case of the Catholic Church. The figures show that in Chile the growth of the Evangelical churches is as much an urban as a rural phenomenon, and that the regions and districts with a greater presence of native population (Mapuche and Aymara) have likewise been reached. There are also regional or geographical variations. The explanation of these would lead us to concentrate on aspects of the history of the establishment of specific churches, or in specific cultural traits of some regions.

The preceding information shows that, thanks to the spectacular growth of the Pentecostal churches, in less than one century the Evangelical-Protestant population passed from being an insignificant minority, to be a fifth of Chilean population. Here lies the relevance of the question on the impact of Pentecostal growth upon Chilean development. Taking into consideration the objectives of this workshop, we will not refer this question to the Pentecostal ‘discourse’ on development, but rather to the impact that Pentecostal religious practices may have on Chilean development. Anyway, such perspective does greater justice to the character of Pentecostal movement. Chilean Pentecostalism does not see itself as the bearer of a specific contribution to development, but as the bearer of a message of, and a way to, Salvation¹².

This does not mean to ignore that, at least since the beginnings of the second half of the 20th century, some Pentecostal churches have participated on Protestant or Ecumenical development initiatives. But, in most cases, such inter-church initiatives have originated in proposals coming from the worldwide ecumenical movement. Thus, although some Pentecostal churches or leaders may have had certain prominence in such initiatives, it cannot be said that these are expressions of a specifically Pentecostal discourse on development. Anyway, the Chilean case is notable when compared to other countries, because some Pentecostal churches have certainly participated in such ecumenical development initiatives.

In the context of this workshop it does not seem necessary to offer a precise definition of “development”. The term is used in a generic sense, referring to the public concerted action – involving the state and civil society - to resolve problems of public interest in a given society. However, it is necessary to recognize that, at least in the Chilean case, the same question has been addressed in the past using different terms, depending on the theoretical and/or ideological background of those who have formulated it, or depending

¹⁰ Cf. *Las trayectorias del desarrollo humano en las comunas de Chile (1994 -2003)*. Santiago: PNUD Chile – MIDEPLAN (<http://www.revistadesarrollohumano.org/temas43.asp>).

¹¹ This expression, which could be translated as ‘lowly’ or ‘humble’ people, was at the beginning of the twentieth century the common designation of the lower classes. It has been brought into historical research by Gabriel Salazar, “The History of Popular Culture in Chile: Different Paths,” in Kenneth Aman and Cristián Parker, eds., *Popular Culture in Chile: Resistance and Survival*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1991, pp. 13-39.

¹² Manuel Canales, Samuel Palma and Hugo Villela, *En tierra extraña II. Para una sociología de la religiosidad popular protestante*. Santiago: Amerinda-SEPADE, 1991.

on the historical context of the country. For instance, some have spoken of "Pentecostalism and Modernization", "Pentecostalism and Social (or Cultural) Change", "Pentecostalism and Reform", "Pentecostalism and Revolution", "Pentecostalism and Dictatorship". Perhaps we may now add "Pentecostalism and Neo-liberalism", or "Pentecostalism and Globalization". In fact, these are different ways of framing the old question on the "social function" of Pentecostalism, a question that seems legitimate for social sciences, as long as it is kept in mind that such question is being applied to a movement whose explicit purpose is not to comply a determined "social function", but to carry out a religious or spiritual mission.

The early growth of Chilean Pentecostalism attracted - already by the 1960s - the attention of the first foreign scholars who attempted to address these questions. The work of one of them, Emile Willems¹³, of Vanderbilt University, covered Pentecostals not only in Chile but also in Brazil. "His conclusions - as summed up by Edward Cleary - are consistent with the spirit of modernization theories in seeing Pentecostalism as fostering a work ethic. Employers often prefer to hire Pentecostals because they are punctual and disciplined; Pentecostalism and the capitalist wage system reinforce one another. They help persons moving from traditional rural patterns to adapt to urban life. Pentecostalism helps persons and families rise above anomie and socioeconomic pressures toward the integration of personal and family life. Reaching out to convert others empowered newcomers, turning them into active participants. Although enthusiasm for Willems's ideas of 'lower-class culture' has waned, one can profitably read his work for his closeness to what was happening to individuals"¹⁴.

The other, Christian Lalive d'Épinay¹⁵, a Swiss sociologist sponsored by the World Council of Churches, "created - as described by Edward Cleary - an imaginative view of Chilean Pentecostalism that gained considerable attention. He pictured Pentecostalism as re-creating for those transposed from countryside to city the traditional structure of the *hacienda*. The Pentecostal pastor became the *patrón*, keeping the faithful out of politics and rendering them conservative and passive in relation to authority. Moral renewal took precedence over economic advance and did not necessarily lead to increased capital accumulation. This religion had little effect on social mobility or on the attitudes and values thought necessary for economic development. It was, in Lalive d'Épinay's terms, 'alienating' but expressive in its own way of social discontent. For Lalive d'Épinay the political product of this religion was passivity; he described Pentecostals as being on 'sociopolitical strike' - of reconstructing a moribund society. What many remember of his work is his image of Pentecostalism as a 'refuge for the masses,' facilitating an escape from the world"¹⁶.

These two pioneering studies arrived at quite contradictory or paradoxical - as would say André Droogers¹⁷ - conclusions. But it was the book of Lalive, possibly thanks to its

¹³ *Followers of the New Faith. Culture Change and the Rise of Protestantism in Brazil and Chile*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967.

¹⁴ *Op.cit.* p.101.

¹⁵ *El refugio de las masas. Estudio sociológico del protestantismo chileno*. Santiago: Editorial del Pacífico, 1968. The English edition was published the year following: *Haven of the Masses. A Study of the Pentecostal Movement in Chile*. London: Lutterworth Press, 1969.

¹⁶ *Op.cit.* p.102.

¹⁷ "Visiones paradójicas sobre una religión paradójica: Modelos explicativos del crecimiento Pentecostal en Brasil y en Chile", in B.Boudewijnse, André Droogers and Frans Kaamsteg (eds.), *Algo más que opio: Una lectura antropológica del pentecostalismo latinoamericano y caribeño*. San José: DEI, 1991, pp.17-42.

Chilean edition, the one that achieved greater local impact, becoming almost the 'classical' interpretation of Chilean Pentecostalism. His vision of Pentecostalism as an intrinsically conservative movement seems to have been confirmed few years later, when the 'Cathedral' temple of the Methodist Pentecostal Church in Santiago became the headquarters of the Evangelical *Te Deum* initiated the year 1975, in open support to the new military authorities.

Concerning to his analysis of the social ethics of Chilean Pentecostalism, Lalive tried to make explicit the implicit 'discourse' of a sample of Pentecostal leaders (without formal theological education) by means of the application of a questionnaire, the results of which he compared with a control group constituted by Methodists pastors (with formal theological education). His conclusions, therefore, were derived from the 'discourse' thus reconstructed, rather than from an analysis of the actual religious practices of Pentecostal Churches. Such 'discourse' was evaluated by comparison to the Methodist, 'discourse', and not to the 'discourse' - in fact not considered at all - of the social sectors within which Pentecostalism has actually grown. It is precisely the analysis of the concrete social behaviors of the Pentecostal population in the years following Lalive's study, what calls into question his conclusions.

If one sees the history of the Chilean political system in the 20th century as a progressive integration of new social sectors into the democratic life of the country, one soon realizes that up to the 1960s those sectors we have described as the *bajo pueblo* had been generally excluded from any kind of political or even labor organization. The traditional Conservative and Liberal Parties were expressions of different factions within the upper classes. The Radical and much later the Christian Democratic (former Falange) Parties were mainly expressions of the middle class, which started to emerge towards the end of the 19th century. The increasingly popular Communist and Socialist Parties were expressions of the skilled proletariat of the still tiny industrial sector of the economy to which the labor unions were also restricted. For the heterogenous, 'marginal' unskilled sectors forming the urban and rural *bajo pueblo*, there was no opportunity of social participation other than the street or the *Quinta de Recreo* (the local bar). They watched the processes of democratization and modernization of Chilean society from its sidelines.

Lalive's image of "refuge for the masses" is perhaps an adequate account of Pentecostalism up to the beginnings of the 1960s. Indeed, it offered those on the margins of society a protective community and also a new meaning of life. But the image is misleading if what is meant is that Pentecostalism prevented people from participating in social, labor or political organizations. For the *bajo pueblo*, this kind of organization simply did not exist.

However, the situation began to change rapidly in the early 1960s. Chile was transforming itself into a social laboratory for confrontation between reform advocates and those favoring revolution¹⁸. The Christian Democratic Party, representing the reform alternative, took power in 1964. It needed to build a strong base among the lower classes to counterbalance the hegemony of the left (Communist and Socialist) on the workers movement. So began an impressive work of social engineering by the government, aiming at integrating those on the margins with those in the mainstream of society. Empowered by the Agrarian Reform Law of 1965, the government moved strongly toward organizing labor in the agrarian sector¹⁹. With the legal creation of *Juntas de Vecinos* (neighborhood

¹⁸ Cf. D'Antonio-Pike (ed). *Religión, revolución y reforma*. Barcelona: Herder, 1967.

¹⁹ In contrast to 1964 (the year of Eduardo Frei Montalva's election as President.) when from a total of 335,537 agricultural day workers only 1,647 (0.49%) belonged to labor unions, en 1972, of a total force of

organizations) and other types of organizations such as women's centers²⁰, the government began a process of co-optation, aiming at taking over the grassroots movement which had begun developing on the margins by means of land invasions supported by the left. The issues to which these organizations devoted themselves were the provision of housing, and the improvement of the conditions of their neighborhoods.

During the last years of the Frei (Senior) government the socio-political climate turned more conflictive and polarized. The lack of co-operation of the economic elite made it impossible for the government to carry out its social programs, especially the provision of more housing. The frustration of expectations caused the *movimiento poblacional*, originally mobilized to support government policies, to move toward the leftist opposition. In this context the electoral victory of the *Unidad Popular*, which represented the revolutionary alternative in the dilemma of how to address change in Chile, took place. The three years' government of Salvador Allende were characterized as much by heightening of expectations as by deepening of political cleavages and increase in belligerence in political conflict. Politics became all-absorbing and divisive for people. There is no comprehensive study of how Pentecostals related to society and politics during those intense nine years of Chilean history. However, drawing from some partial observations and from formal²¹ and informal conversations with Pentecostal pastors and lay leaders, it is possible to produce a provisional picture.

There are no grounds for thinking that Pentecostalism as a block acted against the current of social change and participation. It seems that a variety of factors, including the characteristics of particular geographic areas, of the Pentecostal presence in such areas, of its particular leadership, etc. acted in favor of or against Pentecostal involvement in social organizations. For instance, in places where population groupings were small and the level of formal education lower, as in rural and semi-rural villages or small towns, the scarcity of human resources with some kind of organizational experience made it easier for members of Pentecostal churches, and even pastors, to reach positions of leadership in the new social organizations. In turn, this made it easier for Church members to join those organizations. This is tragically illustrated by the fact that most of the victims of a massacre against rural labor leaders in Chihuío, near Lake Maihue, after the military coup, were members of Pentecostal churches. Something similar happened in other places.

It was a different situation in the context of big urban neighborhoods, often with a higher rate of social problems and delinquency. As a protective measure for the newly converted, Pentecostal Churches tended to hold services every night, and fill the free time of their members with evangelistic activities, so that no spare time was available for other kind of social commitment. In this context, cases of Pentecostal participation in social organization tended to be more isolated, and to some extent involved conflicts of loyalty. But it is debatable whether this small proportion was significantly different from the level of participations of their non-Pentecostal neighbors.

335,343, those unionized numbered 207,910 (62%). Cf. Manuel Castells, *Reforma Agraria, lucha de clases y poder popular en el campo chileno*. Santiago, CIDU, 1972.

²⁰ Until the middle of the 1960s the popular movement was concentrated in the worker's movement. By 1972 it has expanded and it was estimated that there were about 800,000 members of neighborhood and village movements within a vast network of territorial organizations up and down the country. This amounted to a greater number than all rural and urban workers' unions. Cf. Manuel Castells, "El movimiento de pobladores y lucha de clases en Chile", in *Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios Urbanos Regionales* (EURE) 3(7) (1973):9-35.

²¹ Cf. Irma Palma (ed.), *En tierra extraña: Itinerario del pueblo pentecostal chileno*. Santiago: Amerinda, 1988, which contains interviews with ten Chilean Pentecostal leaders.

Full membership in political parties, however, was generally regarded by Pentecostals as incompatible with Church life²², not only because both commitments are highly time-consuming, but also because political militancy could force them to compromise some key aspects of their life style. But this rejection of membership of political parties should not be understood as an absence of political preferences.

Analyzing Pentecostals' political preferences is also difficult because of the lack of information. Given the strong identification of the Christian Democratic Party with the social doctrine, and even with the pastoral policies of the Catholic Church, it is very unlikely that this party had received substantial support from the Pentecostal electorate in the presidential election of 1964. Traditionally, most Protestants supported the Radical Party, seen as the representative of the ideals of religious freedom and total separation between church and state. But because in the 1964 election the Radical candidate was supported by the right, it is probable that many Pentecostal gave their vote to Salvador Allende. As the Radical Party joined the *Unidad Popular* for the 1970 election, it is likely that Salvador Allende received substantial support from the Pentecostal electorate. An indication of that may be a survey carried out in relation to the 1971 local (municipal) elections²³, in the Santiago congregations of the Methodist Pentecostal Church: 77% gave their vote to *Unidad Popular*, 19% to the Christian Democratic Party; 4% to the National Party (right). One may conclude that Pentecostal political preferences did not differ significantly from those of their neighbors, except that the 'anti-Catholic motive' prevented many Pentecostal from supporting the Christian Democratic Party, making their support for the left stronger than that of their neighbors.

The 1970 Census showed that the rate of Protestant growth during the 1960s was lower than the three previous decades. This could be understood as a by-product of the increasing of social participation during those years. The climate of rising expectations for social change acted as a powerful magnet for participation in social organizations, so that for the first time Pentecostalism suffered real competition. While some Churches reacted to this kind of pressure in a defensive way, that is preventing their members from joining social organizations, others saw the pressure as a challenge to adapt themselves to the new times. A simple example of this adaptation is the reduction of the number of the services during the week, thus producing spare time for their members to devote to other activities.

Some external factors also influenced the way in which Pentecostal Churches faced the challenge, and here we have the origin of explicit Pentecostal involvement in some sort of development activities. The creation in 1958 – with strong support from Church World Service, of the National Council of Churches of the United States, and from Lutheran World Relief – of *Ayuda Cristiana Evangélica*, a protestant relief organization, helped to involve many Pentecostal Churches in distribution of relief to poor people and to victims of natural catastrophes²⁴. From this experience, some Pentecostal churches started to consider 'service' (*diakonia*) as a dimension of their mission. This experience has been interpreted as an attempt to prevent Pentecostals from supporting the revolutionary alternative, making them support actively the reform alternative, in the context of the already mentioned Chilean dilemma. On the other side, some conservative Evangelical organizations made considerable efforts to influence Pentecostal Churches to oppose actively a leftist way of social change. Particularly during the government of *Unidad Popular*,

²² Lalive d'Epinay, *Op.cit.* (English edition) pp. 106ff.

²³ Hans Tennekes, *El movimiento pentecostal en Chile*. Iquique: CIREN, 1985.

²⁴ Lalive d'Epinay, *Op.cit.* (English edition) pp. 161-190.

the bulletin “*La voz de los mártires*” and copies of Richard Wurmbrand’s book *Torturado por Cristo* were widely distributed free of charge to the leadership of the Churches. But this campaign aimed to involve Pentecostal in ‘anti-communist’ politics, rather than to call them to withdraw from politics.

This provisional balance on the way in which Pentecostal related to politics during the years 1964 to 1973, suggest that the social and political behavior of Pentecostals as individual did not differ significantly from that of the *bajo pueblo* as a whole, and that Pentecostal Churches as such showed the first signs of awakening to public life. Pentecostalism certainly did not operate as a major obstacle to social change. At any rate, one could say that Pentecostalism kept its identity as a religious community, appealing mainly to those who approached life’s problems from a religious perspective.

Things changed drastically again with the 1973 *coup d’etat* and the subsequent 17 years of military rule. From this period, we shall mention only two important dimensions relating to the religious field. First, the military government making illegal and systematically repressing political parties, labor and social organizations, together with the social consequences of its policies of economic adjustment, produced indirectly in the general populace a shift toward the churches. Particularly in the popular sectors, the churches, in as much as they were the only places authorized for meetings, were filled with people seeking protection, spiritual support, meeting places, and the like.

Second, the historical and social weight of the Catholic Church turned itself into the principal bulwark in the defense of human rights, and as a consequence, became the voice of the denunciation of the violation of rights. This produced the major crisis of relations between the Catholic Church and the State since the times of national independence. It was this withdrawal of religious and moral support by the preponderant Church which drove the government to look for moral support in the second religious force in the country. So the scenario was prepared for a rapid emergence of the Protestant world, Pentecostals contributing the bulk, into public life: official and public meetings with the military authorities offering support and recognition; “Evangelical *Te Deum*” held in the new “Evangelical Cathedral”, meant to be a thanksgiving for national independence, but was openly presented by the government as a thanksgiving for the *Pronunciamiento Militar* – all with the maximum of publicity. Those Protestant sectors (Pentecostals included) who felt misrepresented by this new political agenda were forced to emerge into the public space to make clear their own perspective, initially with little impact on the press²⁵.

If this search for moral support found a ready partner within and important sector of Protestant leadership (not exclusively Pentecostal), this was not mainly because of political affinity, but rather for reason relating to the struggle for ‘religious power’. Despite the fact that the Political Constitution of 1925 separated the church from the state, the Catholic Church retained a powerful position in Chilean society: its cultural power, as well as its influence in the political life of the country, made ‘religious equality’ something of an illusion. Protestant continued to be regarded as ‘dissenters’, and many people, especially the middle and upper classes, looked down on them. This religious discrimination, coupled with the reality of social exclusion, caused Pentecostal to grow up with the feeling of being treated as ‘second class citizens’. The main motive for organized Protestant intervention in

²⁵ Cf. Humberto Lagos, *Crisis de la esperanza. Religión y autoritarismo en Chile*. Santiago: PRESOR- LAR, 1988; Juan Sepúlveda, *De peregrinos a ciudadanos: Breve historia del cristianismo evangélico en Chile*. Santiago, Fundación Konrad Adenauer – CTE, 1999, pp. 139-147.

public life has long been the struggle to overcome this religious discrimination, to obtain public recognition. While the position of the Catholic Church in society is contested by Protestants, at the same time represents the only model of what it means to be recognized by the state. That this struggle for recognition was behind the support to the military regime is illustrated by the number of practices borrowed from the Catholic model: the building of a 'Cathedral', the organization of a *Te Deum* (keeping the Latin designation), the importance given to the presence of authorities and political dignitaries in the temple. The military government, on its part, was ready to provide this sort of symbolic recognition plus other facilities for the day-to-day work of evangelical pastors. But it was not ready to risk a deeper break with the Catholic Church by promoting real changes regarding religious equality.

The continuation of all these practices after the re-establishment of democracy in Chile confirm that they were not designed to support a government of a particular ideology, but were a statement of the demand for a new place in society of Protestants, mainly Pentecostals: "We are no longer second class citizens". In fact, it was in democracy that the Evangelical Churches finally succeeded in their search of real changes regarding religious equality: In 1999 it was dictated a special law for religious organizations, which allow any religious institution to get a legal status similar to that of the Catholic Church.

The preceding analysis of the relations between Pentecostalism and Chilean society - during the years following the publication of Lalive's book - seems to contradict that Pentecostal churches are, by definition, politically conservative, and that they act as a refuge which prevents the active participation of their members in society. By the contrary, our analysis suggests that neither the actual social behavior, nor the political preferences of Pentecostals, differ significantly of the behavior and preferences of the non Pentecostal people of the same social sectors. On the other hand, the way in which Pentecostal churches as institutions relate to the state, to contingent politics, and to society as a whole, seems conditioned - rather than by a conservative ideological position - by the dynamics of changes and tensions within the 'religious field' of the country.

Willems, in reflecting on the social impact of the properly religious Pentecostal practices - rather than focusing on Pentecostal discourse about society - seems to have opened a more productive road in the effort of interpreting the relations between Pentecostalism and development. However, the theoretical framework he used led him to affirm too hastily the coherence between Pentecostal religious practices and the cultural changes required for the process of capitalist modernization. In doing so, he ended reducing Pentecostalism to an adaptation mechanism of the new urban inhabitants to capitalist modernity. If Lalive had seen in Chilean Pentecostalism a symbolic reconstruction of traditional society, and therefore, an obstacle for social change, Willems saw it as a link between traditional and modern society. Thus, he inaugurated that line of interpretation - which has a more recent representative in the English sociologist David Martin²⁶ - that sees in Pentecostalism an expression, and therefore a facilitator, of capitalist modernity.

As Droogers as pointed out²⁷, these contradictory conclusions reflect the paradoxical character of Pentecostalism itself. Some aspects of Pentecostal practices may seem traditional, while other may seem modern. But one may also conclude that these categories are inadequate to understand Pentecostal practices. Later studies have concentrated more effectively their attention on the actual Pentecostal religious practices, for instance, a 1972

²⁶ *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990.

²⁷ *Op.cit, passim*

research by Hans Tennekes²⁸, and the collective research of Manuel Canales, Samuel Palma and Hugo Villela²⁹, published in 1991. The latter concentrates its attention in the meaning of, and the way to, salvation that Pentecostalism offers, as shown in Pentecostals 'testimonies', their typical form of giving witness of conversion³⁰.

The Pentecostal proposition of salvation has to do mainly with the offer of a way of changing one's life. To be saved is, first of all, to change one's way of life, not the conditions of living. What is changed is the way in which the person establishes a relationship with those conditions of living. Being saved means, therefore, to be a different person; it means to be, almost literally, a 'new creature'. In this way, the idea of 'perdition' takes on more significance: the 'world' is perdition in the sense that life before conversion is a life that is lost, it is an unsustainable way of life; it is the lack of a 'livable' life. In short, 'world of perdition' refers to a place, or a time, where life and the individual 'are lost', where identity is impossible and the permanent risk of the fall is visible.

What is behind this understanding of 'perdition' is the permanent risk of failure of building viable lives that the poorest sectors of rural and urban society have to endure. From this permanent risk emerges a search of salvation to which Pentecostalism is able to answer, providing the opportunity of an intense experience of God. Thus, Pentecostalism offers a religious answer to an equally religious search. But in doing so, Pentecostalism provides a new meaning for life, allowing the converted to regain control on their own lives, to recover a name, an identity.

If one is to interpret this experience in terms of a 'social function', one may say that such function is to help people to regain control on their own lives. This may be considered as a precondition for peoples' involvement in development. But the way in which these 'new creatures' may participate, or refrain from participating, in society, may have much to do with other biographical, ecclesial or contextual factors, rather than being an immediate consequence of their religious experience.

I should think that is better to stop here, and to leave open the table for further collective discussion.

²⁸ *Op.cit, passim*

²⁹ *Op.cit, passim*

³⁰ My own review of this research may be found in: Juan Sepúlveda, "Pentecostalism as Popular Religiosity", in *International Review of Mission* 309 (1989) pp.80-88.