

EVANGELICALS AND POLITICS
IN AFRICA, ASIA AND
LATIN AMERICA

PAUL FRESTON



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CHAPTER I

Brazil

Brazil is the case the author has personally researched most, and is therefore a convenient benchmark for developing comparative observations as we look at the three continents. However, there are other good reasons for starting with Brazil. It has the largest evangelical community, in absolute terms, in the Third World (with the possible exception of China) and the second largest in the world, behind the United States. Inasmuch as Third World evangelicalisms have common denominators, Brazil can be seen as a possible trendsetter, a test case where phenomena peculiar to the new mass Protestantism of the 'South' of the globe may first appear. This chapter is partly based on my existing studies in Portuguese and English (Freston 1993a, 1993b, 1994b, 1996). The idea is that the analysis should exemplify the sort of information we need on other countries, the questions to ask and the interpretations that might (or might not) be relevant.

Protestants are about 15 per cent of the Brazilian population, some twenty-three million people. (*Protestantes* and *evangélicos* are used interchangeably, and the vast majority would be evangelical in the Anglophone sense.) The social characteristics of this overwhelmingly practising community are illustrated in a survey of Greater Rio de Janeiro (Fernandes 1992): the rapid growth (a new church per day) is largely among the poor (the needier the district, the more churches per capita) and is popular (independent of the initiative of social elites). Of the fifty-two largest denominations in Rio, thirty-seven are of Brazilian origin and all the rest have been long under national control. Denominational creation is definitively nationalised; newly arrived foreign churches no longer create an impact. Protestantism is *national, popular and rapidly expanding*.

Thus, characteristics of the Protestant community (size, growth, institutional autonomy and national control) have combined with facets of the culture, media and political systems to make Brazil a key study of the

emerging popular Protestantism of the Third World. One example is Brazil's second place (behind the United States) in production of evangelical television programmes. And, since 1986, it has been (together with Guatemala) the major example of a significant Protestant political presence in a traditionally Catholic country. But the Brazilian phenomenon not only has a firmer sociological base (being less influenced by one key figure such as Ríos Montt in Guatemala), but also has elements which make it historically unique.

Protestantism began with German Lutheran immigrants in 1823, reached the Portuguese-speaking population with the missionary efforts of historical churches after 1855 and expanded among the lower classes through pentecostal groups from 1910. The historical (non-pentecostal) churches attract, on average, a membership higher in the social scale than the pentecostals. Sociologically, they are *denominations* (throughout this book, I shall use *denomination*, *sect* and *church* in italics whenever they have their technical sociology-of-religion meaning), with greater individual freedom and less intense community life. Today, pentecostals constitute two-thirds of all Protestants, but for long the historicals were numerically dominant and much more socially influential, Brazil being the only Latin American country in which historical Protestantism had reasonable success. Until recently, Protestant presence in politics (albeit discreet) was due almost exclusively to the historicals. The 1986 election was the turning-point, quantitatively (number of deputies) and qualitatively (new churches involved, new trajectories, new political styles). The novelty were the pentecostals, who exchanged their apolitical slogan 'believers do not mess with politics' for the corporatist 'brother votes for brother', electing a numerous and vocal caucus.

The sheer size of Protestantism is relevant to this corporatist politics, but does not explain it. There is no automatic relationship between numbers and political presence. A small church can have great influence through socially prominent members elected on a non-religious vote, while a large church may reject both individual and corporate participation. In addition, Protestantism is extremely segmented. This is functional for expansion (stimulus to flexibility, competition and localised supply) but not to concerted political action. A factor in its very success impedes the conversion of this strength into a political bloc.

Segmentation, however, is not infinite. Despite the existence of hundreds of pentecostal denominations, a few larger ones dominate the field. We shall look briefly at these and their diverse political postures.

Brazilian pentecostalism has had three waves of institutional creation (Freston 1995). The first occurred in the 1910s, with the arrival of the Christian Congregation (1910) and the Assemblies of God (AG) (1911). The Christian Congregation remained more limited in scope, but the AG expanded to become the nationwide Protestant church *par excellence*. The second wave occurred in the 1950s and early 1960s; the pentecostal field fragmented, relationship to society became more dynamic and three large groups (among dozens of smaller ones) were formed: the Church of the Four-Square Gospel (1951), Brazil for Christ (1955) and God is Love (1962). All began in São Paulo. The third wave started in the late 1970s and gained strength in the 1980s. Its main representatives are the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (1977) and the International Church of the Grace of God (1980). Once again, these groups, which start in Rio, update pentecostalism's relationship to society, extending its range of theological, liturgical, ethical and aesthetical possibilities.

The Assemblies of God, founded by Swedes in 1911, represent a third of all Protestants. Their change in political posture was crucial in giving a national dimension to the new Protestant politics.

The origin of the missionaries, the beginnings in the North and the handover to national control in 1930 when the church had scarcely penetrated the South-Eastern cities gave the AG a Swedish/North-Eastern ethos which reflected the cultural marginalisation of early Swedish Pentecostalism and the patriarchal pre-industrial society of the Brazilian North-East before the 1960s. Many leaders are still elderly North-Easterners of rural origin. The government is oligarchical, grouped in lineages around *caudilho*-type *pastores-presidentes* who are virtual bishops. The General Convention, comprised of some fifty state conventions and affiliated ministries, is a relatively weak centre.

The main route to the pastorate is a lengthy apprenticeship to a *caudilho*. The generally slow ladder of promotion is a strong means of social control in the hands of the *pastores-presidentes*. The latter often rule for thirty years, creating a patriarchal style of administration. This model, in which no specialised education separates clergy and laity, is contested by some younger pastors who are products of an alternative route involving seminary education. The AG model also faces other crises, especially the schism between Madureira Convention and the General Convention in 1989. Madureira is an especially successful oligarchical lineage whose growth threatened the survival of the others, leading to its exclusion from the General Convention. There have also

been small schisms of upwardly mobile groups who wish to modify the behavioural taboos. The AG is riven by tensions between the desire for respectability and the 'populist' religious tradition which values the socially 'humble' person as more receptive to the gospel. The outcome will have implications for the current corporatist politics.

The other large church of the first wave, the Christian Congregation (CC), founded among Italian immigrants in São Paulo in 1910 by an Italian layman living in Chicago (the only foreigner ever to work with the church), is the chief remaining case of pentecostal opposition to electoral politics. Members are effectively banned from politics. There are several pillars to this aversion to politics, making it unlikely to change in the near future. The CC rejects all mass proselytism through radio, television, open-air preaching or literature. This affects its relationship to modernity. Its doctrine of predestination frees it from pressure to adapt to modern methods of communication, whereas the practical Arminianism (the predominance of free will in salvation) of all other Brazilian churches obliges them to modernise as propaganda agencies in the name of efficacy. The rejection of mass media also protects the CC from one source of pressure to enter politics. Strong *sectarian* elements (extreme 'rejection of the world' which protects from status anxiety) and the absence of paid clergy also contribute to apolitical attitudes by reducing operating costs and avoiding careerist tendencies of professional pastors.

Pioneer of the second pentecostal wave, the Four-Square Church was the last foreign church to succeed in Brazil. Indeed, of the large pentecostal groups, it is the only one of American origin. It has multifocal leadership. Gaining total independence from the Americans in the 1980s, it also freed itself from their apolitical stance. Besides choosing official candidates in internal elections after the fashion of the AG, many leaders (especially former pioneer faith-healers) are themselves politicians.

The first large Pentecostal church founded by a Brazilian, Brazil for Christ was also the first to elect politicians from its own ranks on a corporate vote. The charismatic founder, Manoel de Mello, a poor migrant from the North-East, built a new relationship with society and with São Paulo's populist political culture of the period. His pioneering role reflected not only his Brazilian citizenship but also his personalist leadership in a church without an apolitical tradition and the church's concentration in the most developed urban centre of the country with the freest electorate. The example of the federal deputy elected in 1962

and 1966 would only be imitated by other pentecostals over twenty years later. But it did not last, due partly to the disincentive of the legislature's restricted powers during the 1964–85 military regime, but also to the internal evolution of the church in which Mello's personalism gave way to a faceless structure which did not facilitate such initiatives.

Although famous in the 1960s for criticisms of the military regime and affiliation to the World Council of Churches (WCC), Mello's political progressivism was mainly for external consumption and had little impact on the church. By the late 1970s he had electoral links with the party which supported the military government. Even so, Brazil for Christ's critical stance during the most repressive period of the regime was, amongst Protestants, second only to the Lutherans. Sociologically, this is not surprising, since the latter was the only large *immigrant church*, whose multiclass nature gave it both a perception of the situation and the possibility of protest. This combination approximates the Lutheran Church to the Catholic sociological context. A *church* (in the sociology of religion sense) is more protected in the adoption of politically risky postures. Other Protestant groups either lacked a popular base capable of provoking a pastoral crisis in part of the clergy, or were composed of the poor who were unable to protest without exposing themselves to the full weight of repression. The partial exception confirms the rule: Brazil for Christ was the only pentecostal church to make remarks at all critical of the regime, and the only one to join ecumenical organisations. This affiliation made criticising the regime somewhat less risky.

The third church of the second wave, God is Love, is highly *sectarian* (non-cooperation with other churches and an extreme moralism) and attracts a very poor clientele. It invests heavily in radio but rejects television. Leadership is very personalistic. The founder, Davi Miranda, has avoided politics and built a diversified economic empire.

The largest church of the third wave, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, was founded by Edir Macedo, of lower-middle-class origin. With rapid growth in large cities, its cultural ethos is in strong contrast to the AG. The bold vision of penetration of cultural spaces makes political support necessary. Besides electing its own candidates with impressive electoral discipline, the church recruits other political allies through its media empire.

Our survey has shown one church of Swedish origin, one American and four Brazilian. Brazilian pentecostalism is considerably more independent of foreign institutional links (and of foreign personnel) than the historical churches.

Mention should also be made of middle-class charismatic Protestantism. From the 1960s pentecostalising schisms occurred in historical churches. More important, however, are the newer independent charismatic denominations, now the main focus of conversion in the middle and upper classes. However, they are less important than in Central America, where they form the bulk of middle- and upper-class Protestantism and produce presidents (Ríos Montt and Serrano).

Many charismatic communities have a political vision based on 'spiritual warfare'. The recipe is ritualism (exorcism of demons which govern a certain area of life, such as the 'demon of corruption', or of hereditary curses on the country caused by social sins like slavery or spiritist religions) and the placing of Christians in power. The multiplication of demons can be a useful metaphor for ideological battles. As one charismatic, the son of a politician, told me, 'people from the Workers Party [the main left-wing party] always look oppressed'; the oppression being demonic and not social.

What is the potential of this abandonment of pietistic individualism in favour of ritualistic solidarity? As Stoll (1994) says, social exorcism could be the language of a top-down reform project, or a magical rationalisation for not treating structural problems. I believe it could also reflect the desire for a place in 'civil religion'.

Sociologically speaking, exorcising collectivities would require an environment like an aboriginal corroboree, capable of producing collective effervescence throughout the social group. Without this, the political vision of the charismatic communities remains vague. The gap is sometimes filled by an American political theology called reconstructionism. This mixture of extreme neoliberalism and Old Testament theocratic laws offers a ready-made alternative for dissatisfied conservatives. In Central America, defenders of a moderate reconstructionism are in the vanguard of Protestant politics. In Brazil, reconstructionism does not have the same importance. Its main strength is in the charismatic communities, but it is unlikely to conquer the current political vanguard of pentecostal leaders of modest social origin, unaccustomed to reflecting on national problems. Reconstructionism's themes (elaborated in a context of fuller citizenship), non-dualism, post-millennial optimism and emphasis on analysis and debate are distant from them. In short, middle-class charismatic religion is not as central for the Protestant field, and even less so for its politics, as in Central America.

We have mentioned the large Protestant media in Brazil. Most televangelism is pentecostal. Media evangelism may be somewhat

more efficacious evangelistically than in the United States, but its main importance is still internal. If in the States it reinforces evangelical values in a secular society, in Brazil it fortifies the self-image of an expanding minority. In addition, it is a way into politics, and politics is also a route to media ownership. The media are easily associated with political activity, through the visibility they give to their presenters, through the power of owners in relation to Protestant leaders who for various reasons (proselytism, status or business) desire access to them, and through concession-holders' need for political support. (Radio and television in Brazil are governed by a mixture of economic and political forces. Concessions of channels are a prerogative of the executive, with congressional approval. Although there are technical and financial criteria, ownership depends, in the last analysis, on political factors.)

Nearly half of the Protestant congressmen since 1986 have had links with the media, whether as presenters of programmes or owners of stations. Some have gone from the media into politics, and others from politics into the media. The Chamber of Deputies' commission on communications always has several Protestants, most of whom have opposed proposals to democratise control of the media.

The Protestant media are neither uniformly political nor politically uniform. Most Protestant media personalities have no electoral activity. But the sizeable minority who do have demonstrate the media's force as intermediary between a conversionist community and public life. The media express the style of *conversionist sects* and are an important business in the growing Protestant market. It is true that there is a close link between media and politics in Brazil as a whole; evangelicals just accentuate the tendency.

The politics of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UC) is closely connected with the media. The church purchased TV Record, the fifth largest network, in 1989; and the need for political support was the main motive for the construction of a solid parliamentary base in 1990. Although the UC's second-in-command had been elected in 1986, he was forced out of the church by Edir Macedo when the latter perceived a danger to his own leadership. The three federal deputies elected in 1990 were not spiritual leaders and could not threaten Macedo's pre-eminence. Electoral discipline is the greatest of any church. In Rio, the Universal vote was divided by computer to guarantee the election of two deputies. One hardly visited the state during the campaign, such was the efficiency of the pastors as vote-gatherers. The UC

was already controversial for its money-raising methods and mass exorcisms, and this strengthened members' electoral solidarity. Its deputies frankly admitted defence of the church's interests (especially TV Record) as the reason for their presence in congress. The Universal's political clout (votes, money, media) was demonstrated in the protests against Macedo's preventive imprisonment in 1992. He was released after twelve days.

In executive elections until the mid 1990s, the church favoured conservative candidates and demonised the left. It feared what a left-wing government would mean for its communications empire and for its preaching, based on a recipe for financial success through self-employment. Although many analysts saw its extreme anti-leftism as inevitable, it was in fact too early to weigh the pragmatic and ideological factors.

The church had a long fight to retain control of TV Record. The latter was not acquired by government concession but by purchase of an existing channel: a route which postpones the political work to a second moment, that of government approval of the transfer. Having the money but not yet the political clout, Macedo bought Record in 1989, and did his best to protect himself by supporting Fernando Collor in the presidential election. When in power, Collor broke with Macedo and tried to acquire his own communications network. Macedo might well have lost Record to front men for Collor if the latter had not needed parliamentary help against impeachment in 1992. In the dying moments of Collor's administration, Macedo's possession of TV Record was guaranteed.

Having surveyed the Protestant field and media, we shall now look briefly at the history of Protestant politics in Brazil. Although legal impediments to Protestant political activity were abolished by the electoral law of 1881 and separation of church and state in 1890, social factors (limited suffrage, rigged elections, unfree rural electorate) prevented effective participation. The 1930 Revolution brought new possibilities (secret ballot) and a new incentive (Catholic attempts to implant a neo-Christendom). The first Protestant congressman, a Methodist minister, was elected to the 1933-4 Constituent Assembly. When democracy was restored after Vargas' authoritarian period, the same Methodist was elected to the 1946 Constituent Assembly. After 1950, as structural transformations freed larger portions of the electorate, Protestant representation in congress rose, stabilising at about thirteen. These were historical Protestants. Some had a Protestant electorate, others did

Table 1. *Number of Protestant congressmen (federal deputies and senators) in each legislature, Brazil 1946–2000 (February–February)*

Legislature	Congressmen elected	Total (including substitutes who took office)	Legislature	Congressmen elected	Total (including substitutes who took office)
1946–51	1	1	1975–79	13	14
1951–55	5	7	1979–83	12	13
1955–59	6	8	1983–87	12	17
1959–63	7	11	1987–91	32	36
1963–67	10	13	1991–95	23	35
1967–71	12	13	1995–99	32	38
1971–75	9	11	1999–2003	49	54 ^a

^a Until Feb. 2000.

Table 2. *Protestant congressmen (including substitutes who took office) and terms of office, Brazil 1933–2000 (February–February)*

	Congressmen			Terms of office		
	Total	Historicals	Pentecostals	Total	Historicals	Pentecostals
1933–87	50	47 (94%)	3 (6%)	109	104 (95%)	5 (5%)
1987–2000 ^a	104	41 (39%)	63 (61%)	163	64 (39%)	99 (61%)
1933–2000 ^a	143 ^b	79 (55%)	64 (45%)	272	167 (62%)	104 (38%)

^a Until Feb. 2000.

^b Eleven congressmen held seats before and after 1987.

not; some had support from their denominational leaders, others did not; but none had official endorsement from any church.

Although Protestant relationship with the military regime (1964–85) is generally regarded as close, there was no increase in parliamentary representation, and their congressmen were actually more weighted to the opposition than congress as a whole. In short, between 1950 and 1986 a stable presence was established in congress, characterised by party dispersion with no strong ideological concentration, ranging from the non-Marxist left to defence of the military regime. It was concentrated in the more developed South-East and came almost exclusively from the historical churches.

The 1986 election of a Congress-cum-Constituent Assembly following the military's withdrawal from power unexpectedly changed the public face of Protestantism.

Since 1986 there has been a numerical increase and a change in ecclesiastical composition. Pentecostals, previously insignificant, now predominate. This pentecostal irruption is coordinated; the great majority are official candidates of the AG, Universal or Four-Square. Only pentecostals work with this model, the *sectarian* sociological type being basic.

Not all pentecostal churches entered politics. Of the six main churches, only three did so. The Christian Congregation and God is Love have remained apolitical; and Brazil for Christ has not overcome aversion to Mello's old political adventures. The AG was initially pre-eminent. In 1985, its General Convention decided to elect one member from each state to congress. Eighteen states chose candidates in internal polls (occasionally a pentecostal from another denomination); fourteen were elected and another later took office as a substitute.

All this has led to other changes in Protestant politics: in geographical dispersion, social profile, party links and political trajectories.

The AG is the most nationwide church, and its entry into politics caused considerable increase in Protestant representation from the less developed regions. Social origin is lower than that of non-pentecostal congressmen. It is composed of people who, in physical type and style of discourse, typify the clientele of their churches. They identify more with the cultural style of popular Protestantism than with dominant political culture. On the other hand, they are not average church members. Rather, they exemplify the desired results of conversion, either in religious leadership or financial success. They are not people who stand out in the secular world of the poor (such as union leaders), but poor people who have 'succeeded' and are elected on their religious and/or financial prestige.

The previous tendency for Protestant congressmen to be slightly left of the average is reversed. The new Protestant political class practises a party nomadism even greater than the national average. Many switch to smaller parties considered havens for time-servers and those marginalised by large parties. Anti-party sentiment is common in Brazil, but pentecostal *sectarianism* accentuates it. *Sects* usually reject autonomous participation by members in spheres which escape their control. Membership in parties is obligatory, but woe betide the pentecostal politician who makes his party a competing source of authority.

Pentecostal official candidates are typically the following: men prominent in the church as itinerant evangelists, singers or media presenters; sons and sons-in-law of *pastores-presidentes*; and pentecostal businessmen who make agreements with their ecclesiastical leaders.

Why did some pentecostal leaders want to break with the traditional ‘believers don’t mess with politics’ and present their own candidates? And, since the pentecostal vote is not automatic, why were they relatively successful in mobilising their electorate? The new posture was not the result of theological changes; belief in the imminent end of the world, previously a justification for shunning politics, continues.

The causes of pentecostal politicisation have to do with the evolution of the religious field and the defence of *sectarian* frontiers. The first factor is the ‘clergy’ itself. The main beneficiaries of corporate politics have been the church leaders. Using the analogy of the pastorate as an escalator onto which one generation steps to ascend socially and which the next generation leaves for more attractive alternatives (Martin 1990: 64), corporate politics extends this upward social mobility of pastoral families. Unlike the historical churches, with their tradition, middle-class clientele and bureaucratic standards, the pentecostal field is young, fast-expanding, popular and *sectarian*. Pastors often suffer a double status contradiction: as holders of *de facto* power not legitimated by *sectarian* ideology (which tends to be egalitarian and anti-clerical); and as leaders in the church but marginalised by society (Wilson 1959). These contradictions are not new, but they become more acute as pentecostalism grows. Moreover, it becomes possible to attenuate them. Going into politics, or sending in a relative or protégé, can reduce tensions and help to professionalise one’s religious field. Public connection helps internal structuring, strengthening individuals and organisations. Politics also helps access to the media, another way of structuring the pentecostal field. Politics and the media reinforce each other in structuring the Protestant world.

Like all *sects* not geographically isolated, pentecostals oscillate between their own status system and that of society. Although ‘despising the world’, they often accept ‘worldly’ opinions about themselves when favourable (*ibid.*: 503). Many leaders value highly the freedom of the city and other symbolic honours. But politics also brings material resources which help to structure this vast popular religious field whose rapid expansion is always producing new leaders anxious to strengthen their positions.

Pentecostal politicisation also reflects other factors in the religious field. A crucial part in mobilisation is telling ‘a reasonably coherent story about why what is wrong is wrong and what can be done about it’ (Bruce 1988: 76–7). What story did the AG leaders tell in 1986?

One element is the mystique of the Constituent Assembly (CA) as a moment for rewriting Brazil from scratch, or at least making sure others

did not do so. The CA mobilised many ‘minorities’, as pentecostals knew. But they did not see themselves as one more group seeking a place in the sun. Awareness of numerical growth favoured a new reading of the Scriptures. The Bible which had justified apolitical stances now spoke of a manifest political destiny of the *evangélicos*. ‘Let us prize the biblical phrase “the Lord will make you the head and not the tail”’ (*Mensagem da Paz*, March 1985: 2). Brazilian evangelicals are heirs of the Old Testament theocratic promises.

In explaining their involvement, AG leaders talked of a ‘threat’ to religious freedom. ‘The Catholic Bishops’ Conference had a scheme to establish Catholicism as the official religion’, the president of the AG told me. The future constitution would prohibit open-air preaching, said the *Mensagem da Paz* (July 1985: 12). The idea of a return to an official religion, a hundred years after separation and without any previous public campaign, seems strange. Were the AG leaders totally out of touch with reality? Or was it cynical manipulation of the faithful for unworthy objectives? Or should we understand ‘religious freedom’ as a code word for something broader and more anchored in reality?

In fact, it meant more than the mere right to exist in an officially lay state. The AG said they were victims of discrimination. Not the individual abuses of the past, but unequal treatment as a community: *evangélicos* are not consulted on important government decisions as the Catholics are; they have few chaplaincies in the armed forces; Catholic images are still placed in government buildings; public resources go disproportionately to Catholics (Sylvestre 1986: 44). These are the claims of a minority which almost equals the dominant religion in practising members and desires to abolish all signs of its inferiority. Combat on this front is a sociologically correct intuition, in the sense that these things are important for the Catholic project and pentecostals should oppose them *if they wish to compete with the Catholic Church on the same terms*. Expanding popular Protestantism tends to acquire the characteristics of the former dominant religion.

The book *Brother Votes for Brother* (Sylvestre 1986), influential in propagating the new politics of the AG hierarchy, emphasises the motif of religious competition and of acquiring public financing. ‘The taxes a believer pays go to finance idolatry [Catholicism] and witchcraft [Umbanda] . . . Each parliamentarian receives a part of the federal budget . . . See what a fabulous sum could be helping our organizations in the social and educational sector’ (ibid.: 62ff.).

Thus, under the slogan of ‘threat to religious freedom’, pentecostal

leaders joined battle with Catholicism for space in civil religion, demanding equal status in public life. The *sect* begins to see itself as the *church* of tomorrow, and seeks public funds as a right justified by its numerical size.

AG leaders also talked of a ‘threat to the family’. There were, supposedly, moves to include in the constitution legalisation of abortion on demand, drugs and homosexual marriage. Entry into politics was an act of *cultural defence*: a reaction to changes in the social milieu threatening to undermine the group’s capacity to maintain its culture (Bruce 1988: 7, 16).

In many countries, television has been fundamental in spreading metropolitan lifestyles and provoking reactions from those who discern a threat to the family (Martin 1978: 97). In Brazil, the modern communications system was established during the military regime and the television habit extended to all classes. This growth was accompanied by censorship. When censorship was relaxed with redemocratisation, the impact on mores was considerable, making it harder to maintain *sectarian* subculture.

In short, pentecostal politicisation seeks to strengthen internal leaderships, protect the frontiers of *sectarian* reproduction, tap resources for religious expansion and dispute spaces in civil religion. But for these concerns to lead to electoral action, going against church tradition, something else was needed: ‘an increasing sense of optimism about the possibility of effective action’ (Bruce 1988: 23). Aspects of the political system and immediate context facilitated the pentecostal debut as political actors.

In Protestant countries, one factor in political engagement by theological conservatives is the absence of a two-party system based on class divisions (Wallis and Bruce 1985: 161). Brazil is relatively open to the participation of religious groups, being closer to the American than to the (highly unfavourable) British system. It has a federalist structure, relatively open mass media, weak parties and a proportional electoral system with state-wide voting districts, increasing the electoral chances of a dispersed minority.

With redemocratisation unrestricted multi-party competition returned. Parties sought to diversify their clienteles. But pentecostal politics is not fundamentally a response to outside incentives. There is no evidence that the AG decision to present its own candidates was encouraged by secular politicians. Bruce, writing of the United States, explains the limits on any desire conservative elites might have to

politicise religion. 'In so far as non-religious conservatives are prepared to use religion as a means of diverting political choices from economic issues, most will seek to define religion in the most inclusive . . . terms . . . [to avoid] the disadvantages of social instability and sectarian conflict' (Bruce 1988: 52, 56).

Another possible outside incentive would be from the American religious right. But the numerical success and political ambitions of Brazilian pentecostals are explicable without recourse to a conspiracy theory for which there is no evidence. On the contrary: the AG has few links with the United States, the Universal Church is totally Brazilian and the American president of the Four-Square was against political involvement.

The transformation of the rural electorate since the 1960s helped the AG. It has a strong rural presence, and capitalisation of the countryside freed electors to vote for candidates chosen by the church and not by local bosses.

The economic context was the 'lost decade' of the 1980s which bloated the informal economy and weakened organisations based on the workplace. Economic crisis, urban growth and expectations created by redemocratisation also weakened urban patronage politics. The old rural dependency was built on 'moral bases of kinship', whereas modern urban clientelism is a mercantile relationship lacking in mutual confidence (Zaluar 1985: 234-7). A space thus appears for fusing patronage politician and rural boss in the figure of the 'brother' deputy. *Sectarian* networks have advantages over fragile parties and weakened patronage.

For pentecostals, the 'lost decade' meant the traditional fruits of conversion (honesty, frugality and hard work) became less effective for social mobility, making the collective demands of the poor more attractive. With redemocratisation, repressed currents were allowed free expression, putting at risk the capacity of *sectarian* socialisation to protect from undesirable politicisation. Corporate politics could function, therefore, as a 'pre-emptive' politicisation. But it depended on the 'totalitarianism' of the *sect*, the capacity to interfere in large areas of members' lives, including the right to indicate how to vote, something the historical denominations completely lack.

Thirty-two Protestants were elected to the Constituent Assembly in 1986 and two more took office as substitutes. Eighteen were pentecostals. The number of Protestants was soon appreciated, and a complex dynamic began, involving internal factions and outside forces. President Sarney made early overtures, since the government majority

in the Assembly had to be constantly renegotiated. The large parties were internally divided, opening the way for non-party groupings.

Experienced conservative historical deputies took the lead in attempts to form a Protestant bloc. The recipe for united action was to be defence of Protestant institutional interests, a pro-government stance, emphasis on moral questions (abortion, homosexuality, pornography) and indifference on social questions such as land reform. It was immediately opposed by a minority of six (including only one pentecostal) in the name of a different concept of faith and politics.

Leadership in attempts to form a caucus soon passed to pentecostals. They were the majority; many had no position on various questions; and re-election, without the mystique of the CA, would be uncertain. The government was offering rewards for support. This new pentecostal leadership was more 'aggressive' in its self-identification as evangelical, less ideologically committed to the right and bolder in seizing opportunities.

The formula used exploited the lack of a pan-Protestant organism. An Evangelical Confederation which had folded but never been dissolved was resurrected. Most of the new directors were congressmen, and the reinauguration took place, symptomatically, in the presence of important government figures. The Confederation was given property in Brasilia and donations from government social programmes, especially before important votes in the CA. The destination of the money is uncertain; appeals of Protestant leaders for public audit of its books were not heeded. Eighteen regional offices were opened, almost all in the states with pentecostal congressmen.

Much of the evangelical community challenged the Confederation's legitimacy and motives. Despite fierce criticism, it survived for three years, due to AG support. Most politicians involved had been official AG candidates. As long as it was receiving federal money, criticisms were overlooked. But what ethical questioning could not do was achieved by the drying up of government money once the CA was over. The Confederation closed in 1990.

The fact that a pan-Protestant organism could arise from the articulations of congressmen shows how vulnerable Brazil's growing and divided Protestantism is to political power. The contrast with Catholicism is stark. But the Confederation's fate also permits a contrast with Umbanda. The role of politicians in organising Umbanda federations is well known. But, in the last resort, the Protestant world does not allow so much liberty to its politicians. It is not so difficult for a politician

to work with a federation of *terreiros* organised on clientelistic lines; it is more difficult to work with Protestant denominations organised on communitarian and doctrinal-ethical lines. The Confederation explored the limits of organisational autonomy of the Protestant political class; only in exceptionally favourable circumstances was it able to survive for three years.

The relationship of the Protestant caucus to the conservative *Centrão* group (formed to oppose elements in the first draft of the constitution) reveals other characteristics. Although twenty-five of thirty-two Protestants voted with the *Centrão* initially, most were not ideologically faithful. A group of eighteen linked to the Confederation broke publicly from it. It was this group which became notorious for vote-selling on important issues. In August 1988 the *Jornal do Brasil* denounced these practices. 'Many *evangélicos* are making a profitable trade out of preparing the new constitution, by negotiating their votes in exchange for advantages for their churches, and often for themselves. . . . The list of rewards includes a television channel, at least half a dozen radio stations, important posts in government, benefits of many types and, above all, a lot of money' (7 Aug. 1988). This provoked debate in the Protestant world over the ethics and ideology of the caucus. It became the equivalent of the televangelists' scandal in the United States. Symptomatically, the American scandal occurred in the private sphere; in Brazil, with its weaker private sector, it followed the tradition of channelling public funds. The group most identified with such practices had a nucleus of official AG deputies, with a fringe of other Pentecostals and a few historicals.

The family was a theme of great interest, having been a major justification for electing representatives. There were three proposals for severe legislative restriction on abortion: Protestants, notably pentecostals, were significantly more favourable than the average member of the CA. There is a strong correlation between left-wing evangelical dissidents and opposition to legislative control on abortion. Both evangelical sides echoed classical Christian positions on the legislation of morality.

The homosexuality debate centred on the term 'sexual orientation' in the list of characteristics for which no one should be discriminated against. The Protestant vote again differed from the average, being much less favourable.

The majority Protestant positions on abortion and homosexuality coincided with official Catholic positions. On divorce, however, there is

a historic difference. Catholic power barred divorce in Brazil until 1977; Protestants had traditionally defended its introduction. In the CA, an anti-divorce bill was supported by only 13 per cent of congressmen, but 59 per cent of pentecostals. The AG was the vanguard of this new legislative anti-divorcism in Protestantism.

The end of dictatorship was not favourable for retaining artistic censorship. A bill sponsored by two AG deputies was supported by only 22 per cent of congressmen, although 93 per cent of pentecostals were in favour.

There was no danger to religious freedom as such, but pentecostal deputies invested considerably in symbolic measures. Successes were made much of, especially the open Bible in the CA sessions and the name of God in the constitution. The *Mensagem da Paz* described the latter as 'a bitter defeat for the atheists' (Nov. 1987: 7). When pentecostal leaders embrace politics, they often attach great significance to the penetration of the public sphere (the quintessential 'world' with all its negative doctrinal connotations) by ostentatious religious symbolism and conspicuous ritual performances.

The media were another focus of interest. A polemical point was the question of concessions; nearly all the Protestants on the committee united to prevent changes in the system which has permitted the acquisition of Protestant radio and television empires.

Two votes which influenced the public image of the caucus were land reform and the duration of President Sarney's term of office. A bill to permit effective land redistribution fell thirteen votes short; twenty-two Protestants voted against, most in a last-minute switch. This was widely attributed to donations from the landowners' organisation. In the case of Sarney's term (which would decide whether the first direct elections for president would be in 1988 or 1989), the coin used was different. An insignificant AG deputy, evidently used by the government, was the author of the bill granting an extra year to Sarney. Despite widespread popular protest, the bill was passed by 59 per cent of congress, 76 per cent of Protestants voting favourably. The government was prodigal in its rewards, including four radio stations and one television channel to Protestant deputies.

In the above two votes, there was no great difference between historicals and pentecostals. But in the 'questions of interest to the workers' used by the Trades Unions' Parliamentary Advisory Department (DIAP) to classify the members of the CA, the picture changes. The classification from zero to ten corresponds broadly to the right-left

spectrum. The Protestant average was 4.61, below the general average of 4.94. However, historicals averaged 4.09 and pentecostals 5.06. Despite their conservative public image, one cannot label pentecostal politicians *tout court* as a new Christian right (as does Pierucci 1989).

On Kinzo's (1988: 23) classification on five scales (governmentism, conservatism, democratism, nationalism and opposition to the financial system), pentecostals, as compared to the overall average, were highly 'governmentist' but slightly less conservative, less 'democratist' but more nationalist, and considerably less opposed to the financial system. Historicals were consistent on all scales, in a centre-right position. But pentecostals' oscillations justify calling them not an ideological right but an opportunist centre.

Official pentecostal politics thus rejected any position even remotely connected with Marxism, but did not adopt neoliberalism. In rejecting anti-capitalism, religious doctrine and social factors intertwined. The AG journal showed the centrality of dispensationalist eschatology in its leaders' world-view. The supposed line-up of forces for the imminent end of the world led to a geopolitical dualism which rejected any non-capitalist ideal. With the collapse of the Soviet bloc, this dualism has weakened. In any case, doctrinal systems are not straitjackets; they are supermarkets from which some products are purchased, others thrown away and others left on the shelf. The apolitical stance which seemed so central to pentecostalism proved to be temporary; geopolitical dualism might also.

There are other reasons for opposing anti-capitalism. Many converts better themselves, or at least broaden their expectations. The ideology of betterment through conversion does not favour restrictions on this possibility in the name of egalitarianism. Pastors are the most threatened, being often the main beneficiaries of conversion. They fear the left will interfere with the competitive religious system in which they prosper. They are also influenced by corporatism: excepting anti-communism, economic postures are based less on principle than on maximisation of gains. In a rapidly growing church, there are factors encouraging pastors to be politically more conservative than their members, and more conservative than the clergy of a numerically stable historical church.

Protestants were the only religious 'caucus' in the CA. Only at the state level are there politicians whose political rationale is the defence of Umbanda. Umbanda does not break a large mass away from Catholicism with a separate identity. It lacks the doctrine and organisa-

tion which make possible the new pentecostal politics. The Catholic Church has other channels. Its militants in congress are discreet, as expected of a *territorial church* which, in theory, does not compete with anyone. But it does, of course, defend corporate interests: through politicians sensitive to its influence, through appeals to popular religious sentiment, and through non-religious corporations in which it has weight (such as the association of private schools). This makes its political action less evident. Besides not being in good taste for a *territorial church*, there is no need for it to behave publicly like the pentecostals.

The AG considered the caucus relatively successful. The name of God was in the constitution, religious freedom augmented and religious teaching maintained in public schools. Homosexual 'orientation' and the death penalty were barred. However, pentecostals were defeated on abortion (although existing limitations remain in force), censorship and divorce. But reactions in the Protestant community were divided. AG leaders attributed all criticism to 'false Protestants', but in fact discontent was widespread. A leading (theologically conservative) Protestant journal described the caucus as a 'vile treason of the people... The warped moral stature and the egoistic and conservative interest merit shame and our repulsion' (*Kerygma*, 11, 1988: 23).

In the presidential election of 1989, Brazil's first since 1960, Protestant involvement began with Iris Rezende's attempt to capture the nomination of the largest party, the Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (PMDB). Rezende is from a small non-pentecostal denomination in Goiás and became the first Protestant to be elected governor of a state. He had never depended on the Protestant vote and had not always been seen as 'one of us' by all Protestants. This changed after 1986 when he became Minister of Agriculture. Record grain harvests were commemorated in thanksgiving services attended by the president and Protestant leaders. This forged a new relationship, with Iris presenting himself as political leader of a nationwide community, and Protestants portraying the harvests as the result of prayer and Protestant administrative efficiency. A mystique developed that Rezende's mere presence in the presidency would bring divine blessing on the country.

Rezende attracted broad Protestant support. Pastors and businessmen (notably the evangelical businessmen's movement Adhonep), launched the Pro-Iris Evangelical Movement. Although the AG journal made no mention of the candidature, the leaders say they would have given enthusiastic support. The Madureira Convention of the AG, strong in Rezende's region, gave support buttressed by prophecies.

After Rezende's failure to get his party's nomination, most church leaders who had supported him did not adopt another candidate in the first round. Even the coordinator of the Evangelical Pro-Collor campaign waited for the PMDB's decision before committing himself to Collor. The candidature of a politically centrist Protestant like Iris, with his optimistic message, moralising fame and administrative efficiency, would have mobilised most Protestant votes and electoral militancy. In the end, the story was very different.

Since the evangelical world is sociologically diverse, when looking at executive elections we need to ask not only what the hierarchies say, but what these pronouncements represent in each denominational structure, what the degree of obedience to their recommendations is and what influence autonomous Protestant campaign movements have.

Historical churches cultivate the ideology of the autonomous citizen. Their bureaucratic structures and middle-class memberships do not encourage electoral definitions by the leadership. Like the Catholic hierarchy, they stick to 'principles'. Despite variations in ideological sympathy, the range of official actions is limited. Churches affiliated to the ecumenical Council of Christian Churches emit pronouncements in the Catholic style, tending more or less explicitly to the centre-left. The effect on members' voting is dubious. The larger historical churches (Baptist and Presbyterian), non-ecumenical, are more democratic internally. This, plus pietistic theology, discourages official pronouncements. The leaders communicate their (usually conservative) preferences indirectly in articles in the official journals.

The main pentecostal hierarchies had another range of positions. However, the political effect is not always the same. Bishop Macedo of the Universal Church has much more power over pastors and influence over members than does the president of the AG.

The Christian Congregation and God is Love kept an apolitical posture which largely corresponds to their practice. The AG and the Four-Square did not adopt a candidate in the first round, but discouraged voting for those associated with 'atheistic Marxism'. In the run-off between conservative Fernando Collor and Workers Party leader Lula, they came out officially for Collor. Brazil for Christ and the Universal Church supported Collor from the first round, the latter campaigning openly. According to Bishop Macedo, 'if Lula wins, the Catholic Church will give the orders' (*Jornal do Brasil*, 3 Dec. 1989). The details of the agreement between Macedo and Collor are uncertain, but all the versions agree that Macedo wanted to pray at the inauguration. It