

Global Pentecostalism

An Emergent Force within World Christianity

When we arrived at 10 A.M., already tens of thousands of people were lining one of the main boulevards of São Paulo, Brazil. Everyone had on a T-shirt or headband bearing a Jesus logo, church identity, or scripture verse. Throughout the crowd were small clusters of youth dancing to Christian rock music or chanting Jesus slogans. The gathering was multiethnic and included numerous families with children as well as some senior citizens. The energy in the air was palpable. It had the feeling of Brazil's famous Carnival festivals, except people were keeping their libidinal forces in check. The crowd was orderly but ready to start their "March for Jesus."

The previous year, a million and a half people had shown up for this annual gathering of São Paulo's Pentecostal and Evangelical community. This year the organizers were hoping for 2 million.¹ It was a collective show of Protestantism's growing presence in this nominally Catholic country. For one day, churches that otherwise competed for clients in São Paulo's vibrant religious marketplace put their differences aside and yielded to the leadership of *Renascer em Cristo*, a fast-growing Neo-Pentecostal movement in Brazil.

The previous Sunday we had attended worship in the former theater

that Renascer Church now occupies. Both floors were packed with upwards of five thousand people, and this was only one of multiple worship services that Sunday. On Monday night we returned for the weekly meeting of businessmen and -women. Maybe eight hundred people were present; some were dressed in suits, having come directly from work. Other weeknight meetings focused on healing, deliverance from demonic forces, and youth- and family-oriented gatherings. And throughout the week hundreds of smaller groups met in members' homes.

Most worship services started the same way at Renascer, with thirty minutes of worship music led by a first-class band. Sunday mornings also featured youth choirs, dancing cheerleaders, a rock star that performed during the offering, and a forty-five-minute sermon, followed by another offering, and then a revved-up band that had people dancing in the aisles as they left the theater. Mind, body, soul, and wallet were all united in this celebration of the Christian faith.²

One evening we skipped the worship service and joined a dozen people who were going to the highway underpasses and skid row area of São Paulo to pass out soup, blankets, and bottles of clean water. There was no preaching, but instead simple mingling with people who were lonely, cold, and hungry. When we interviewed church leaders, they gave us a list of other social ministries of the church. The courts send children to Renascer, which provides them with housing, medical and dental care, psychological counseling, education, and spiritual direction. Renascer also has a home for teenagers, providing similar services. Trained teams go to the jails, providing gynecological and breast examinations for incarcerated women and medical and psychological assistance for men. Church members work with prisoners and their families to prepare them for reentering society and in the favelas (slums) with children and their families. Other programs minister to drug addicts and handicapped people.

But back to the parade! Stretching for block upon block were children, teenagers, and adults starting to move along the route. Interspersed between them were dozens of large semitrucks towing trailers that sported live bands with enough amperage in their speakers to curl your hair.

Mingling among the crowd were vendors selling hot dogs, kebabs, pizza, and soft drinks. One could also purchase a hat emblazoned with “Jesus” script or a T-shirt with a favorite Bible quotation. Some people carried flags announcing their church community. Banners draped on sound trucks promoted an antidrug slogan. These folks did not need drugs to make them ecstatic; they had Jesus and they were proud of it. Finally the parade route ended and people spilled out into a large park where Christian pop singers performed until the early evening hours, and the event culminated in a grand display of fireworks.

THE EMERGENCE OF PENTECOSTALISM

Since its inception in the first century, Christianity has been evolving as a social institution, changing its organizational shape, redefining its mission, and creating new expressions of worship.³ Perhaps the rate of change is no greater in the twenty-first century than at other periods, but the demographics of Christendom are being turned upside down — quite literally, because the vitality of Christianity is moving from the Northern Hemisphere to south of the equator.⁴ In addition, the major institutions of Christianity are being reshaped. Catholicism is losing membership to Protestantism across Latin America.⁵ Mainline denominations are in decline, especially in western Europe.⁶ Independent churches are challenging establishment religion.⁷ And ecstatic, vibrant worship is replacing routinized liturgical forms.

The major engine driving this transformation is Pentecostalism, an expression of Christianity that dates back to the first century, when the Holy Spirit is reported to have visited a small band of Jesus’ followers who spoke in “other tongues” and subsequently healed the sick, prophesied, and established a network of churches throughout Asia Minor (see Acts 2). As Christianity became established as a national religion under Constantine, and then was organized into a hierarchical structure in subsequent centuries, the ecstatic experience of these early Christians became domesticated, even though sectarian outbreaks and monastic movements chan-

neled the religious zeal of individuals who were not content to work within the institutional forms of official Christendom.⁸

Modern-day Pentecostalism, however, dates to January 1, 1901, when students at Bethel Bible School in Topeka, Kansas, spoke in tongues under the tutelage of Charles F. Parham.⁹ A few years later, Parham took his message regarding Spirit baptism to Houston, Texas, where William J. Seymour, a black Holiness preacher, became convinced that the Holy Spirit was still in the business of working supernatural miracles. Seymour then began preaching the same message to a small gathering of people in 1906 in Los Angeles, igniting what became known as the Azusa Street revivals, named after the street where an interracial gathering of people began to replicate the acts of the first-century apostles: speaking in tongues, healing the infirm, and prophesying. Within a few years, Pentecostal missionaries were traveling around the world, and the Pentecostal movement was launched, although similar manifestations occurred well before the twentieth century in Africa, England, Finland, Russia, India, and Latin America.¹⁰

In the 1960s and 1970s, another movement of the Pentecostal spirit emerged in a number of Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant churches, which went under the banner of the “charismatic renewal.”¹¹ Once again, people spoke in tongues, many claimed supernatural healing, and a more intimate form of worship emerged that emphasized prayer and meditative praise choruses. As in the early part of the twentieth century, there was a synchronicity to the movement, with Christians simultaneously witnessing to the power of the Holy Spirit in locations as diverse as Argentina, Singapore, and South Africa.

Putting numbers on this emergent expression of Christianity is a difficult endeavor, as is the process of drawing a hard line between Pentecostals and charismatics. According to the *World Encyclopedia of Christianity*, approximately a quarter of the world’s Christians fit this description.¹² Remarkably, whereas in 1970 less than 10 percent of Christians identified with Pentecostalism, by 2025, fully one-third may be Pentecostal.¹³ Since

religious trends typically move at a glacial pace, this is a relatively abrupt shift in the character of the Christian community.

David Martin, a British sociologist who has written extensively on the topic, estimates Pentecostalism at a quarter of a billion people, a more conservative number than the figure of more than 500 million that is frequently cited in the press.¹⁴ Martin states that the growth of Pentecostalism is the largest global shift in the religious marketplace over the last forty years. In his view, what is occurring on the ground religiously simply does not correspond to armchair predictions of the end of religion.¹⁵ Indeed, the growth of Pentecostalism raises significant questions about the so-called secularization hypothesis.

While we are making a number of sweeping generalizations, it is important to qualify that Pentecostalism is not a uniform phenomenon. Like any social movement, it has many different permutations. Internationally, the largest Pentecostal denomination is the Assemblies of God, which can be found in nearly every country in the world and has over 50 million adherents.¹⁶ Smaller denominations, such as the Foursquare Church, are also visible in many countries. But there are also hundreds of indigenous Pentecostal denominations which typically are not linked together and in fact sometimes have deep antipathy toward each other because of doctrinal and leadership splits.¹⁷

Furthermore, some of the largest Pentecostal churches are not associated with any denomination and are part of the growing movement of independent churches that are “networked” together but do not aspire to be organized along denominational lines.¹⁸ *The World Christian Encyclopedia* estimates that the number of independent churches has more than doubled in the last thirty years.¹⁹ Many of these churches see denominational structures hindering their growth, even though they typically sprout daughter churches of their own and hence may be in the early stages of denominational formation.

The overall context for understanding Pentecostalism is the demographic shift occurring in Christianity more generally. Philip Jenkins says

that the phrase “a white Christian” may be an oxymoron in the future.²⁰ He projects that by the middle of this century, only one-fifth of the world’s 3 billion Christians will be non-Hispanic whites.²¹ *The World Christian Encyclopedia* presents equally dramatic figures: in 1900 Europeans and North Americans constituted 80 percent of the world’s Christians, whereas today 60 percent live in Asia, Africa, or Latin America.²² Thus, since the Southern Hemisphere seems to be fertile soil for growing Pentecostalism, and furthermore, since Christianity is expanding in the developing world while contracting in much of the developed world — with the exception of the United States — it stands to reason that Pentecostalism will be a prominent driver of the demographic transformation that is reshaping Christendom.

THREE MYTHS ABOUT PENTECOSTALISM

When we first started this research project, we shared a common set of misconceptions based on stereotypical images of Pentecostals found in Hollywood movies. While there is a grain of truth to each of these perceptions, the reality is much more complex. Pentecostalism is a highly adaptable movement and typically incorporates features of the local cultural context. But even within the same geographical area, different expressions of Pentecostalism are often distinguished more by conflict than collaboration. Hence, all of the following stereotypes bear qualification.

First, while Pentecostals believe in the Holy Spirit, worship services are not always populated with people being slain in the spirit, speaking in tongues, prophesying, and having their crutches thrown away by faith healers. While these things happen in some churches, they do not happen on a weekly basis in all Pentecostal churches, and sometimes these activities, when they do occur, are relegated to small group meetings or special occasions. There is a substantial spectrum of Pentecostal churches. For example, many of the Neo-Pentecostal churches that we studied have warm, contemporary, expressive worship, but they are not chaotic, as presented in the movies, with people falling down and rolling in the aisles.

Instead, worship has an upbeat ambience. Sometimes there will be a few minutes of “prayer language” that is carefully orchestrated. At the end of the service people may be invited to come forward for prayer and healing. But irrational exuberance is not the first image that would come to mind in describing these services. Instead, one might be more likely to view this as a hip gathering of people enjoying themselves, in spite of the conservative moral standards they embrace.

A second stereotype is that Pentecostals are lower-class, marginalized people for whom religion is an opiate. As with the first stereotype, there is some evidence for this image, but it is not the whole story. True, Pentecostalism was born among lower-class people, and much of its amazing initial growth was due to its connection with impoverished people, including those with animistic religious backgrounds. But over the last few decades in particular, Pentecostalism has attracted a new class of more affluent and educated people. Indeed, some of these are “home grown” — their embrace of the Pentecostal ethic and lifestyle has resulted in upward social mobility. So once again, there is a spectrum of Pentecostalism, with many forms of Neo-Pentecostalism representing quite different demographic characteristics than older expressions of classical Pentecostalism.

A third stereotype is that Pentecostals are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good. Historically, Pentecostals have been very otherworldly, with many members waiting expectantly for the imminent return of Christ. In fact, many early Pentecostal missionaries bought one-way tickets to the countries where they were ministering because they believed that Christ would return before they wanted to come home. And only recently have Assembly of God seminaries and colleges begun to solicit endowments as part of their fund-raising activities. The thought has been, “If Christ is returning tomorrow, why should we be banking large sums of money for the future?” Furthermore, there has been little incentive for churches to address social problems in their communities. Instead, the need was to get people “saved” before Christ returns; otherwise they would be eternally damned to hell. This otherworldly characteristic of Pentecostalism, however, is changing. An emergent group of Pentecostals

are pursuing the integral, or holistic, gospel in response to what they see as the example of Jesus, who both ministered to people's physical needs and preached about the coming kingdom of God. In part, we suspect that this change is driven by upward social mobility among Pentecostals who see a reason to make this a better world in which to live. Members with increasing educational levels are applying more sophisticated understandings to social issues, some of which involve structural and systemic interpretations drawn from the field of public health.

In many ways abiding stereotypes about Pentecostalism make life easy for social scientists as well as journalists. They explain away its growth by saying that religion is based on human need—whether it be economic deprivation, anxiety about death, or the need for security in an unstable world. Karl Marx viewed religion as an “opiate” that took the edge off the pain of life;²³ Sigmund Freud thought religion was a fantasy-escape mechanism employed by weak people in search of security;²⁴ Émile Durkheim believed that religious ritual, especially for “primitive” people, was a way of maintaining collective order.²⁵ All of these theories are rooted in deprivation theories of one sort or another, and in fact, they are helpful in explaining some aspects of the growth of Pentecostalism.²⁶ The question, however, is whether viewing religion from a purely functionalist perspective is adequate.

EXPLAINING THE GROWTH OF PENTECOSTALISM

In our review of the literature on Pentecostalism, as well as our own exposure to Pentecostal communities, we see a blend of functional and substantive reasons for the growth of the movement. Some of these explanations fit neatly in the deprivation box of religion as a compensation for the misery and pain of life. And some invite less reductive explanatory frameworks. Our view is that both types of explanations have their place. After all, humans are material beings who seek meaning within specific cultural contexts, and life is filled with problems—especially for the more than 1 billion people who live on less than a dollar a day.

Thus, Pentecostalism often attracts people who are suffering from what sociologists refer to as anomie. They have moved from rural to urban areas. In their birthplace, life was ordered and stable, social norms were clear, relationships were well established, and violations of social norms were dealt with directly through shunning, corporal punishment, or other community-based forms of social sanction. In large urban metropolitan areas the picture is quite different, with loneliness and normlessness being real problems. Employment is often unstable; housing is precarious; and vices, such as gambling, prostitution, drugs, and alcohol, are typically rampant. Within this context, the attraction of Pentecostalism is obvious: it brings order, stability, and hope to people who are living precarious lives.

To their credit, Pentecostal churches often function like surrogate extended families. Typically, large churches have cell groups where members are surrounded by people who care for them and their families. Within these churches, it is also possible to have a social role, an identity, as someone who is valued and needed. And some Pentecostal churches, especially large ones, have formal programs to assist people in need. When one is a member of a cohesive church community, the problem of anomie, thus, is at least partially ameliorated.

Typically it is the mother of the family that converts first, followed by the children and then her husband. The church is a type of “enclave” in which social order prevails. If the wife’s husband stops drinking, womanizing, and gambling, immediate social benefits emerge, both in terms of income for the family and in tangible results such as shared responsibility for child-rearing and less violence within the household, including less spousal abuse. One may continue to be poor, but at least life is more orderly. One is part of a cohesive, caring community; one has roles and responsibilities; and one has a set of beliefs that provide direction and purpose in life.²⁷

Religion, however, offers more than ordered community for Pentecostal converts. The engine of Pentecostalism is its worship. Whether in a storefront building with bare florescent tubes hanging from the ceiling or in a theater with a sophisticated sound system, the heart of Pentecostalism

is the music. It touches the emotions. It is populist in tone and instrumentation. And the lyrics give voice to feelings — the pain, the joy, the hope for new life. Indeed, it is even difficult for middle-aged researchers to enter a Pentecostal service without doing a little foot tapping, although we resisted lifting our arms in the air with the rest of the celebrants, or jumping off the floor in time to the music, as we witnessed children doing in a church in Santiago, Chile. Is this psychological compensation? Or is it full-bodied ecstasy, something to which all human beings might aspire?

Pentecostal worship, however, is more than music. As previously indicated, healing is often associated with worship. Sometimes it is dramatic and stylized, but more often it is calm, prayerful, and intimate. We have no way of knowing how often, if at all, supernatural healing occurs. Surely sometimes healing is a product of the placebo effect. But clearly many people have experiences that they interpret as the product of divine intervention. For them this is “proof” that Christianity is true and that this is the place where they should anchor their spiritual commitment.

People are also attracted to Pentecostal churches because of the neighborly love they see expressed, both formally and informally. The new face of Pentecostalism is the social ministries that churches are launching in response to a holistic understanding of the Christian faith. While these acts of mercy and compassion typically are not explicitly intended to attract new converts, they are clearly affecting the perception of Pentecostal identity. Some groups associated with Pentecostal churches practice “random acts of kindness” toward their neighbors simply because they believe Jesus taught an ethic of unconditional love. Other Pentecostals are more programmatic and strategic in designing social ministries. Either way, many converts may be attracted to joining with people who are living altruistically.

Another explanation for Pentecostal growth is that for people from traditional cultures where shamanism is frequently practiced, it resonates culturally, because Pentecostals also believe in the spirit world. Indeed, one can find many functional parallels between Pentecostalism and animism; for example, in both kinds of practice demons are cast out, people are healed, and individuals are spirit possessed. Hence, the Pentecostal world-

view is not all that different from what animistic believers have known, except that there is no longer a need to appease a whole pantheon of spirits through magical means. Indeed, the major difference between Pentecostals and people in animistic cultures is that the former affirm that there is only *one* spirit, the Holy Spirit.

Finally, an argument has been made that Pentecostalism is a direct response to modernity. According to this explanation, the Enlightenment produced a flat, materialistic worldview. All the magic disappeared. Everything could be explained rationally through empirical verification. While this philosophy produced one scientific revolution after another, it also put a squeeze on the human spirit. Pentecostalism, therefore, is a reaction to this worldview. It is resuscitating the “feeling dimension” of human life by introducing the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, into everyday life.

While it is possible that Pentecostalism is filling what Harvey Cox called the “ecstasy deficit” in our postmodern world, it is also possible that Pentecostalism is actually a postmodern phenomenon rather than simply a protest against modernity.²⁸ While certain aspects of Pentecostalism may seem primitive to outsiders — a sort of throwback to a premodern worldview — it may actually mesh with a multidimensional post-Enlightenment worldview. Many of the old boundary lines between science and religion are being challenged. Although some may view Pentecostals as demonstrating contradictory qualities as they utilize technology (e.g., in their sound system) while simultaneously engaging in ecstatic behavior, perhaps these activities are incongruous only for those “modernists” who are prisoners of a twentieth-century view of science and technology.

TYPES OF PENTECOSTALISM

The applicability of these explanations for Pentecostal growth becomes more nuanced when set in the context of different strains of Pentecostalism. In other words, not all explanations for the growth of Pentecostalism fit all expressions of the movement. To this end we have identified *five different organizational types* of Pentecostalism along with *four different ori-*

entations that cut across these organizational forms. While we have been tempted to make an elaborate five-by-four chart, the reality is that these types and emphases are not that clear-cut in practice, and hence we want to avoid the sociological temptation to reify people's religious practice. For analytical purposes, however, here are some organizational patterns that can be identified within the Pentecostal movement.

First, one must take into account what scholars have often referred to as classical Pentecostalism, which includes denominations such as the Assemblies of God with 2.6 million members in the United States and 48 million in 191 countries abroad.²⁹ The Assemblies of God denomination traces its roots to the religious revivals of the late 1800s, but, more particularly to the prayer meeting referred to earlier at Bethel Bible College in 1901. As the experience of the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" spread to Missouri and Texas, and then to California and the Azusa Street revivals, considerable momentum built until in 1914 some 300 preachers and laypersons gathered from 20 different states and several countries for a "general council" in Hot Springs, Arkansas. In 1916 the General Council approved the Statement of Fundamental Truths, and this launched a denomination that now has over 12,000 churches in the United States and more than a quarter million churches and stations throughout the rest of the world. Today, the Assemblies of God denomination is joined by the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, the Church of God (Cleveland), the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), and many smaller Pentecostal denominations.

A second distinct type of Pentecostalism is indigenous Pentecostal denominations that have no connection with North America. For example, Winners' Chapel began in Nigeria in 1983, and by 2000 it had spread to thirty-eight African countries. In 2001, this church held the Guinness record for the largest auditorium in the world, with a church in Lagos seating 50,400.³⁰ Another example of an indigenous denomination is the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, founded in Rio de Janeiro. Not only has it spread throughout Brazil, but it has developed an extensive network of churches in many parts of the world, including Africa and North

America.³¹ These independent denominations tend to develop spontaneously and are not the direct result of colonial missionary activity. In fact, we may be on the verge of witnessing a “reverse” missionary phenomenon, where individuals from indigenous churches in the Southern Hemisphere are coming to secular Western countries in the north to Christianize them. The definition of who is pagan has shifted in a relatively short period of time.

A third expression of Pentecostalism is independent Neo-Pentecostal churches that may have one or more offshoots but have not evolved to the organizational state of a denomination and in fact typically resist that formulation. Often they have been founded by entrepreneurs who are dissatisfied for various reasons with the current religious marketplace. Typically the pastors are individuals who grew up in relatively unchurched homes and had dramatic, life-changing religious experiences and subsequently found the available vessels for their vision sterile or unreasonably inflexible. On one hand, these charismatic pastors are not “company men” and typically lack seminary training or other formal theological education. On the other hand, however, they are market-savvy and often grow extremely large churches. In our view, these independent Neo-Pentecostal churches are the cutting edge of the Pentecostal movement: they embrace the reality of the Holy Spirit but package the religion in a way that makes sense to culturally attuned teens and young adults, as well as upwardly mobile people who did not grow up in the Pentecostal tradition.

A fourth expression of Pentecostalism is typically identified as the charismatic renewal movement, whose origins are often linked to St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in Van Nuys, California, where in 1960 there was a spontaneous outbreak of speaking in tongues. Within a few years this movement spread to college campuses, including Yale, Dartmouth, and Stanford. By the mid-1960s the movement had spread to parts of the Catholic Church, and in 1969 some 450 Catholic charismatics met together, including 25 to 30 priests. Five years later, 30,000 Catholic charismatics gathered at Notre Dame, followed by 10,000 who met in Rome in 1975.³² Within both Protestant and Catholic settings, the charismatic

movement can be interpreted as a renewal movement that revitalized worship by inviting people into more intimate expressions of prayer and thanksgiving. Running counter to the “God is Dead” movement of the time, there was a focus on divine intervention through healing and laying on of hands. And, of course, people were speaking in tongues, prophesying, and on occasion, having demons exorcised. The charismatic renewal movement, however, had a different feel from standard versions of Pentecostalism. For example, in churches associated with the Vineyard Christian Fellowship, Pentecostalism had a laid-back quality that embraced “soft” Christian rock, warm embraces, and gentle touching—experiences that are quiet alien within mass urban culture.³³

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that many individuals who may not belong to a Pentecostal or charismatic church nevertheless embrace some of the qualities of this tradition. Hence, we are adding a fifth category called proto-charismatic Christians. These individuals typically do not have roots in traditional Pentecostalism, and in fact, they may not even identify themselves as charismatics. On the other hand, they affirm most, if not all, of the experiences that Pentecostal and charismatic Christians believe are central to their lives. Thus, they may speak in tongues but may relegate this activity to times of personal devotion or small group meetings. They may believe in miracles but invoke divine intervention only in relatively quiet ways. They are typically open to the possibility of God speaking to them in dreams and visions, but such communication is not a regular part of their worship experience. Many proto-charismatics identify with a postdenominational expression of Christianity that is completely uninterested in defining labels. They are simply attempting to follow the example of Jesus and the model of the early Christian church, which they see as being filled with manifestations of the Spirit.

ORIENTATIONS WITHIN PENTECOSTALISM

Cutting across these five different expressions of Pentecostalism are four different emphases, some of which have already been discussed. For exam-

ple, some Pentecostal churches are legalistic and otherworldly. In our discussions with Assemblies of God pastors we found a clear split between those who were fairly legalistic in terms of their stress on the prohibitions surrounding membership (e.g., long-sleeve dresses for women, prohibitions against jewelry, makeup, social dancing and use of alcoholic beverages) and those who viewed these legalistic practices as a carryover from a former era when Pentecostals were clearly trying to separate themselves from the world and, furthermore, often could not afford “worldly” possessions. Today, however, there is a progressive element within the Assemblies of God movement and other denominations that is not sectarian in a legalistic sense and instead embraces many elements of contemporary culture, albeit with clear limits regarding promiscuity, corrupt business practices, political compromise, and other behaviors.

Second, the fastest-growing movement within Pentecostalism has been called the Prosperity Gospel, or health-and-wealth churches.³⁴ Sometimes this emphasis has permeated churches associated with one of the classical Pentecostal denominations, but more often it is characteristic of independent churches and indigenous denominations. Especially prominent in poor communities, these churches emphasize the miraculous power of God to heal incurable diseases and to bring wealth to those who faithfully support the ministry of the church. On occasion these churches have been influenced by televangelists from the United States (e.g., Kenneth Hagen and Benny Hinn), and other times the emphasis on health and wealth seems to have emerged quite spontaneously. To outside observers, these churches often appear to trade in magical thinking and psychological manipulation. On the other hand, they also have the capacity to inspire people with the idea that their lives can be different, and sometimes pastors of these churches are quite practical in telling their members how to save money, start small businesses, and so on. It is also true, however, that the founding pastors of these churches tend to personally enjoy the Prosperity Gospel, sometimes at the expense of their churches' impoverished members.

A third emphasis within Pentecostalism — and the focus of this book —

is what theologians refer to as the “integral,” or “holistic,” gospel. In our view, this movement, which we identify as Progressive Pentecostalism, began to emerge in the 1990s, although it has had a residual presence since the beginning of the Pentecostal movement. But as Pentecostals have become upwardly mobile, better educated, and more affluent, they have begun viewing the world differently. Pentecostals no longer see the world as a place from which to escape — the sectarian view — but instead as a place they want to make better. Reading the Bible from this perspective, Pentecostals have begun to model their behavior after a Jesus who both preached about the coming kingdom and healed people and ministered to their social needs. Consequently, an emerging breed of Pentecostals are putting their faith to work in highly practical ways: establishing medical clinics, ministering to orphans, caring for widows; the list goes on and on, and varies from country to country, depending on the social needs that confront Pentecostals in their local context. While Progressive Pentecostals can certainly be found in the classical denominations, they are also frequently represented within independent Neo-Pentecostal churches that typically are as innovative and progressive in their social ministries as they are in their worship and organizational structures.

To fill out our typology, a final emphasis within Pentecostalism might simply be described as routinized Pentecostalism. In this category are churches that have shed their sectarian heritage and have embraced many elements of contemporary culture, including secular music melodies and rhythms, but they still hold on to the idea of spirit-filled worship, although in a somewhat more restrained way.³⁵ People raise their hands in praise, but they seldom are slain in the spirit in public meetings. They believe in the power of prayer, but dramatic healings are a matter of their heritage more than an ongoing reality. Prophecy in public worship is controlled, almost to the point of extinction. And speaking in tongues during worship sounds more like an orchestrated ritual than a spontaneous expression of the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, some of these churches conform to the typical megachurch pattern, with multiple programs for youth, singles, divorced parents, and others. But lest one dismiss them as

impotent, these churches have substantial power and vision and may be one of the great resources for the development of Progressive Pentecostalism. Indeed, one might even argue that embrace of social ministry is a natural progression of the routinization process — although this does not completely explain the emergent phenomenon described in this book.

PENTECOSTALISM AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

The central question of this book is whether Pentecostalism in all of its different manifestations can have an impact on the many problems facing our world, and especially developing nations. Our answer to this question is a qualified “yes,” acknowledging that some expressions of Pentecostalism may actually retard social transformation. It is highly unlikely, for example, that legalistically oriented Pentecostals will do much more than save their own souls. Perhaps this is too harsh, because they are typically upright citizens, disciplined employees, and honest businesspeople. Often customers prefer them to their competitors because they know that these conservative Christians will not put their thumb on the scale. Furthermore, they may practice informal expressions of charity, being the first to help out a believer in need — or even a non-Christian neighbor. But their focus on the imminent return of Christ typically restricts them from engaging in more programmatic and long-term expressions of Christian social involvement.

It is also unlikely that churches emphasizing the Prosperity Gospel of health and wealth will be genuine agents of change within their communities. Too frequently they put most of their energy into producing crusades, tent revivals, and healing meetings and have little time left for addressing the practical social needs of members of their local community. But there is a dimension of the Prosperity Gospel that is often overlooked and might have political implications. Namely, these churches promote worldly success rather than pie-in-the-sky-in-the-sweet-by-and-by. And once people’s expectations have been raised regarding the possibility of a

better life, it may be difficult to pacify them with off-the-shelf religious placebos. When their child is not healed or they continue to live in grinding poverty after giving sacrificially to the church, they may be tempted to turn to political means to alleviate their suffering. The reason that peasants seldom revolt, according to Marxist social theory, is that they have no hope. But if poor people actually believe in the possibility of a better life, they might pursue it politically when religion fails them. Another possibility is that disenchanted members of Prosperity Gospel churches may eventually find their way into Progressive Pentecostal churches that are concretely addressing the social needs of the community. Little research has been done on the number of people dropping out of Prosperity Gospel churches, but there is anecdotal evidence that some members may seek more stable organizational forms.

It is also important, however, not to draw too rigid a line between churches promoting the Prosperity Gospel and those that fit our definition of Progressive Pentecostalism. The world is not black and white or either/or. It is a mixture of both elements, and indeed there are some Prosperity Gospel churches that are developing social ministries for their members while they hold healing crusades and promote the notion of an abundant God. Prosperity Gospel preachers often have a very practical side. It serves their interests to help members develop their entrepreneurial talents so that they can contribute more generously to the church. On more than one occasion we observed these pastors telling their members how to multiply their flocks and how to save money to invest in their small business operations. Many Prosperity Gospel churches see no contradiction between making claims about God's ability to heal people and bless them financially, and setting up health clinics, developing schools, and the like.

We identify at least three ways that Pentecostalism has the potential to be an agent of social transformation. The first follows the argument of Karl Marx, which is that religion has the potential to blunt the pain of poverty and human rights violations by promising people a better life in the hereafter.³⁶ In Marx's view, people revolt against their oppressors only if they acutely feel the pain of their poverty. If they think that their reward

in heaven is inversely correlated with their suffering here on earth — which is how Marx interpreted the Sermon on the Mount and other teachings of Jesus — then religion will pacify people rather than embolden them to address the source of their oppression. This point was brought home to us by a radical Catholic priest whom we interviewed in India. He had previously been very involved in the charismatic renewal movement but eventually decided that it was incapable of changing the caste system that was imprisoning people in abject poverty generation after generation. He had turned to political organizing as a better means for people to change their life circumstances.

A second possibility is that Pentecostalism may have an incremental impact on people's social welfare. There is substantial evidence for the "social uplift" associated with Pentecostalism, in that Pentecostals have a competitive economic advantage over their neighbors because of their moral proscriptions against alcohol, drugs, gambling, and womanizing (see chapter 6). Without these social evils, believers may produce surplus capital that can then be invested in business enterprises or in the education and welfare of their families. In addition, Pentecostal youths are encouraged to delay their sexual debut, potentially contributing to higher levels of education, especially among young women. Furthermore, the argument has been made that the social networks associated with Pentecostalism create a supportive community that contributes to the social welfare of members. Not only do people help each other when in need, but they also patronize each other's businesses and loan one another money for pursuit of business opportunities. Hence, Pentecostalism may resonate positively with capitalism, resulting in upward social mobility for at least some of its members.

The third potential social impact of Pentecostalism is its focus on human rights. Everyone is made in the image of God, and all people have equal value in God's sight, according to Pentecostals. At its root, Pentecostalism is a religion of the people: everyone has the right to interpret scripture themselves; they are not dependent on a priestly class. Believers have direct access to God, not needing a mediator, and everyone

has a role within the body of Christ, regardless of social class, race, ethnicity, and family lineage. The social and political implications of these theological views are quite radical. They establish the basis for democratic rule in which all persons are equal, in which each person has a right to cast a vote as a member of the community, and in which established authorities can be questioned as one claims the right to personal interpretation of scripture. Heretofore, some have seized on examples of alliances between politically repressive regimes and Pentecostal and charismatic churches, drawing the implication that Pentecostalism is inherently conservative, but this is not the entire story.³⁷ In fact, we believe that Pentecostalism may potentially be a subversive political force, especially within autocratic governments that centralize authority within a single omnipotent ruler who claims godlike status.

In some ways, the preceding three forms of Pentecostal social transformation are all *indirect* results of the religion. That is, they are not explicit goals of Pentecostalism, but instead function as latent corollaries. In contrast, Progressive Pentecostals view their responsibility toward social problems within their community as a mandate from God. There is nothing latent or indirect about the commandment to love others with the same intensity as you love yourself. Progressive Pentecostals see their social activism as an expression of their identity as Christians. To simply focus on inward purity and proselytizing the unconverted is, in their view, a truncated version of the Christian gospel.

THE SECULARIZATION THESIS AND PENTECOSTALISM

In the course of conducting our research, we were frequently put on the defensive by friends as well as colleagues in the academy who wondered why we would spend several years of our lives visiting Pentecostal churches. Sometimes they would make awkward references to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, assuming that Pentecostalism and fundamentalist Islam must have the same social roots. Other times they would ask us

for a definition, never having heard of Pentecostalism, and the moment we said something about faith healing or speaking in tongues it was clear that they saw Pentecostalism as a socially regressive phenomenon. In fact, our liberal Protestant friends were the worst. All they could think of was sex: in their view, it was Pentecostal and charismatic Christians from the developing world who were dividing their denominations on issues such as the ordination of gay clergy. At this point in the conversation, it seemed hopeless to point out that Pentecostals are often more progressive than liberal Protestants — especially when it comes to organizational structures and contemporary forms of worship. Although it may sound judgmental, we came to wonder if many of our friends were prisoners of a modernist worldview that limits their understanding of postmodern ways of viewing reality.

Most sociologists writing in the last half of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century believed that religion was on its last legs.³⁸ This notion continued relatively unchallenged until the last third of the twentieth century. The premise was based on the Enlightenment doctrine that science would replace religion, since it was clearly superior to the mythologically based irrationalism of religion, which solved problems through magical and illusory projections of human attributes onto hypothesized gods. Another aspect of the secularization argument was that religion would become increasingly individualized, relegated to the private sphere of life, thus having little influence on the public domain. Hence, people might hold on to religion for personal rites of passage related to birth, death, and even marriage, but according to the secularization hypothesis it would certainly have no influence on public policy or moral principles governing business, medical research, and other areas in the public realm. Mystical and transcendent experiences would be the exclusive province of desert saints untouched by modernity.³⁹

In the latter part of the twentieth century, however, sociologists started to notice that religion had not disappeared — even though it had marginal importance in some western European countries. Instead, there was the sprouting of new religious movements in some of the most technologically

sophisticated nations. Church attendance rates in the United States remained rock solid. But more surprisingly, political movements were under way to reestablish the connection between government and religion, public policy and moral values, including those that were spiritually informed.⁴⁰ And large portions of the world seemed to be getting more serious about the importance of religion. Ironically, the most secularized denominations — liberal Protestants and Reform Jews — were declining while their more conservative counterparts — those who believed in the supernatural — were the ones that were growing.⁴¹

Not surprisingly, a new theoretical paradigm emerged that attempted to account for the relative prosperity of religion. Under the old paradigm of secularization, religious pluralism led to skepticism, because who could possibly believe in an ultimate truth when there were so many different claimants to it? Under the new paradigm, religious competition creates niche markets, religious monopolies are challenged by hardworking and innovative religious entrepreneurs who operate outside of the mainstream religious traditions, and homogenized religious products (one size fits all) fail to command much interest. Indeed, new paradigm theorists argued that the religious marketplace actually creates better religious products or, at minimum, religious offerings that better meet people's needs,⁴² which does not necessarily mean that religion is simply pandering to base desire. While this might be the case in some instances, many recognize that religious belief and practice have the potential to tap into the most profound desires for human meaning — which for some people may involve service to others, the pursuit of social justice, and the possibility of unconditional love.

Within this context of the new religious marketplace Pentecostalism has experienced a resurgence of growth, contrary to all of the standard secularization theories. One might expect the lower classes to be attracted to ecstatic religion, but why is Pentecostalism growing among the middle class? Supernatural healing, according to secularization theory, will be replaced by medical science; but instead people are flocking to healing

services, just as they are embracing various forms of alternative medicine. Furthermore, secularization theory predicts increased private religious experience, but the fastest-growing churches are filled with people having collective religious experiences. And multiplication of brands has not hurt the growth of Pentecostalism — it seems to have enhanced it, developing niche markets that mainline Protestantism and Catholicism have been missing.

In our view, the emergence of Progressive Pentecostals is simply one more nail in the coffin of secularization theory. How is it possible for Pentecostals, purveyors of a supposedly otherworldly religion, to be involved in community development, while at the same time maintaining the reality of the supernatural? Why are Pentecostals not simply saving their own souls, holed up in their sectarian enclaves awaiting the end of the world?

One possible answer to these questions is that Progressive Pentecostalism is simply an evolutionary way station on the way to routinization. That is, if one can no longer believe in some of the “magic” associated with traditional Pentecostalism, then the logical step if one wants to stay connected with this tradition is to roll up one’s sleeves and figure out ways to feed, clothe, shelter, and heal people using modern means. But this explanation is cynical; it simply does not reflect the way Progressive Pentecostals think about their moral obligations as Christians. They frequently cite scripture to justify their actions — so they must be continuing to read their Bibles. They surround their activities with prayer, which is something that secularized Pentecostals might easily skip in the rush to do the work of ministry. And in their strongest argument against the secularization hypothesis, they frequently say that the Holy Spirit speaks directly to them about their social involvements in the community. The most economical explanation may simply be that social theorists should include some reference to the spiritual realm in their attempts to understand social movements. Perhaps the demographer’s toolbox, loaded with the variables of race, class, ethnicity, and social location, is inadequate. The primary moti-

vator for those joining Pentecostal churches, based on our interviews, seems some type of encounter with the sacred, with all of these other elements simply contextual variables.

We, of course, could not express such bold ideas to our colleagues in the hallways of the academy. Tenure may protect the positions of some of us who hold unpopular ideas, but old-fashioned shunning can still make a situation untenable. So at this point in our discourse, let us simply raise the question of whether the realm of the Spirit should be taken seriously in trying to understand what motivates people. In studying a religious movement that places the Holy Spirit at its center, we must include some reference to the transcendent in our analysis. We are not, however, going to isolate the Spirit in the following chapters as the major explanatory variable. We simply will include this factor along with the others that should be taken into account to understand something as complicated as religion.