



## Religion and politics: the Pentecostal participation in Brazilian Public Sphere

### Religião e política: a participação pentecostal na esfera pública brasileira

Elisa Rodrigues\*

#### Resumo

Este artigo é uma tentativa de descrever brevemente a atual participação dos pentecostais na esfera pública brasileira. Uso o termo tentativa, porque não é fácil discutir o campo religioso brasileiro e suas relações de poder, controvérsias e tensões. De fato, nos últimos anos, os grupos pentecostais têm se mostrado mais visíveis, principalmente devido às redes sociais e de comunicação na TV, rádio e internet. Este artigo é um esforço para apresentar esse contexto a partir do problema: como os cristãos, principalmente os evangélicos, poderiam apoiar um Governo Federal que defende políticas destrutivas e não sociais? Como podem os crentes pentecostais reafirmar a desigualdade social, por meio do ódio étnico-racial, da negação da diversidade de gênero e da sujeição das mulheres à autoridade dos homens? Para responder a essas questões, descrevo parte do debate proposto pela literatura brasileira sobre o pentecostalismo e apresento alguns dos principais líderes evangélicos alinhados à agenda conservadora do atual governo federal. Por fim, declaro que a hermenêutica literalista que remonta aos textos da Bíblia Hebraica legitima e autoriza políticas de desigualdade social e violência contra comunidades em situação de vulnerabilidade social e econômica.

**Palavras-chave:** Religião. Política. Pentecostalismo brasileiro. Esfera pública. Hermenêutica literalista. Conservadorismo.

#### Abstract

This article is an attempt to briefly describe the current participation of Pentecostals in the Brazilian public sphere. I use the term tentative because it is not easy to discuss the Brazilian Religious Field and its power relations, controversies and tensions. In fact, in recent years, Pentecostal groups have shown themselves to be more visible, mainly due to social networks and communication networks on TV, radio and internet. This article is an effort to present this context based on the problem: How could Christians, especially evangelicals, support a Federal Government that defends destructive and non-social policies? How could Pentecostal believers reaffirm social inequality, through ethnic-racial hatred, the denial of gender diversity and the subjection of women to the authority of men? To answer these questions, I describe part of the debate proposed by Brazilian literature on Pentecostalism and present some of the main evangelical leaders aligned with the conservative agenda of the current federal government. Finally, I declare that the literalist hermeneutics that goes back to the texts of the Hebrew Bible do legitimate and authorizes policies of social inequality and violence against communities in situations of social and economic vulnerability.

**Keywords:** Religion. Politics. Brazilian Pentecostalism. Public sphere. Literalist hermeneutics. Conservatism.

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\* Doutora em Ciências Sociais. Professora na UFJF. País de origem: Brasil. E-mail: elisa.erodrigues@gmail.com.

## Introduction

Whatever it is, in current the political capital owned by Pentecostals and their interpellate power is so significant that they are constitutive social actors which cannot be disregarded anymore. Although, there is not a relationship between "religious flock" and "electoral flock", there are those who say that their political force may even influence the results of certain elections. (ORO, 2011, p. 392).

The forecast of the Brazilian Sociologist Pedro Ari ORO was partly confirmed in 2018 election. The elected President Jair Bolsonaro got expressive support and votes from the Christian religious people, especially among the conservative Catholics and Evangelicals. At this point, I suppose that it is relevant to indicate: in the last decades, the Brazilian Pentecostal people are increasing. Since Census 2010 the raise process of Pentecostal religions in Brazil over the 15.4% in 2000 to 22.2% in 2010. Among them 60% of this group recognizes the Pentecostal origin; 18.5% are typified in Brazil as from Evangelical Missions (Evangelicals of conversion), and 21.8% called themselves as Evangelicals. In the Brazilian context, it is remarkable that the term Evangelical to mean a kind of generalization, different than North American meaning. Generally, in the Brazilian context the Evangelical is a person or group which declare to be Christian, to follow the Gospels and do not to be a Catholic. There are many autonomous Christian churches in Brazil indirectly connected with Protestants as Lutherans or Calvinists. But, part of these churches were founded by autonomous Pastors or Missionaries. And, in this case is common the Speaker had lived previously an experience in a Baptist, Presbyterian or other Protestant tradition with puritan accents.

However, this type of inheritance is rely on moral, notions about what is right and what is wrong and rules to conduct the daily life. Despite of this finding not to be recent, currently the consequences are evident, especially in political field. During the election campaign and after the elections those groups continued supporting Bolsonaro with demonstrations of joy. Among other questionable agendas such censorship, he defends the armament of the Brazilian people, i.e., the Right of the Brazilian citizens to have a gun.

Just to clarify my point of view about who Brazilian evangelicals are, it is necessary to present a kind of typology of this movement, which does not exactly represent the empirical field and its daily religious actions. But it is just a pedagogical strategy to build some Pentecostal profile to illustrate the diversity of this movement.

In general, the typology used to explain the Pentecostalism development in Brazil affirm that there are three steps to consider. To explain this steps or phases, some scholars created different typologies with descriptive features to each one. Bittencourt (1991) classified the Brazilian Pentecostalism from two basic categories: (1) *Classic Pentecostalism* – a type of Pentecostal religion institutionalized and routinized: when there is a process of

the transformation of the sectarian community towards an institution that during the time ascends socially and economically and, thus, [this institutionalized community] seeking confessional respectability, encouraging the theological formation of its clergy” (BITTENCOURT, 1991, p. 24).

(2) *Autonomous Pentecostalism* – This type of Pentecostal church is characterized by charismatic leadership. They are not a classic dissent. They are charismatic and, at this moment, the crowded worship and healing events it would start to happen in public squares, in tent and simple places like these ones.

For Bittencourt, in Brazil, churches like the Christian Congregation of Brazil (1910) and the Assembly of God (1911) could be understood as Classic Pentecostalism. Foursquare Church (1951), Brazil for Christ (1955), “God is Love” Pentecostal Church (1962), House of Blessing (1964), New Life Church (1960), Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (1977) and International Church of God's Grace (1980) all of them could be related with Autonomous Pentecostalism (BITTENCOURT, 1991).

Generally, for churches classified as autonomous also it is given other adjectives to identify their groups. Some of them are "Healing agency", "Divine healing Pentecostalism" and "Neo-Pentecostalism". These terms used to highlight some opposite characteristics when related to Protestant groups. On

the one hand, Pentecostal groups would be more emotional and, on the other hand, for the opposition, Protestants would be more rational.

These descriptive terms have been used to indicate that the autonomous Pentecostal churches are composed by a large floating population who move among the churches a lot searching for blessings and benefits. In other words, miracles and healings which could promote wellness and wholeness. For some analysts, this population is uncommitted; it is distant from classical Bible Hermeneutic and easily manipulated. For these reasons, some scholars called the Pentecostal churches like God is Love and, after, Universal of the Kingdom of God as “tent revival”. But it is curious how some of these academic analysts, sometimes, they defend much more the Protestants than help us to understand the differences related to Pentecostals. Mendonça (1989), for example, did affirm that Pentecostal leaderships was not “baptized in Holy Spirit”, Neo-Pentecostalism groups don’t are church neither community and, the Pentecostal Preachers and Pastors does not proclaim the Bible message. He almost says that the Pentecostals does not a real Christian, what looks like more a judgment than an academic analyze.

This comprehension had continuity with the Waves Typology main used by Freston (1993) and Mariano (1999)<sup>1</sup>. According to these authors, the origin of the Pentecostal Movement in Brazil can be understood by the foundation of these churches. The First Wave of the Pentecostalism begin with the Christian Congregation of Brazil (1910) and Assembly of God (1911)<sup>2</sup>; The Second Wave (1950-1960) with the Foursquare Church (1951)<sup>3</sup>, Brazil for Christ (1955-56), “God is Love” Pentecostal Church (1962) and House of Blessing (1964). The

<sup>1</sup> The division according with Waves notion emphasizes that there are three subsequent phases of the Pentecostalism in the History. Each one of these periods it would have general characteristics. Thus, the concept of Wave corresponds to the notion of descriptive category that allows the understanding of the development of the Pentecostal movement over the decades. It is remarkable, however, that is possible to observe some similitudes and recurrences between the periods or Waves.

<sup>2</sup> The first Pentecostal Church in Brazil was founded in 1910 with immigrants at Santo Antonio da Platina, Paraná, Southern region of Brazil. It was the Christian Congregation of Brazil (Congregação Cristã do Brasil) created by Louis Francescon (Italian immigrant) which came from Chicago, Illinois. He had a participation in the First Presbyterian Church of Chicago. After that, in 1911 was founded the Assembly of God at Brazil as result of the efforts of the Swedish missionaries Daniel Berg (1884 – 1963) and Gunnar Vingren (1879 – 1933). It is remarkable that the Frida Vingren (Gunnar Vingren spouse) also did an import work in those times. They were receipted in a Baptist Church for a while, but in few days some Baptists disagree with the Pentecostal doctrine and the Swedish missionaries were cast out of community with more 18 Baptists. Thus, it had beginning the Assembly of God in Brazil.

<sup>3</sup> The main teaching of Foursquare Church was called “the Foursquare Gospel”. Founded by Aimee Semple McPherson's Los Angeles, this Pentecostal church was created over four bases: Jesus is the Savior, Jesus is the Healer, Jesus is the Baptizer with the Holy Spirit, and Jesus is the Soon-Coming King.

Third Wave (1970-1980) — Healing Our Land Community (1976)<sup>4</sup>, Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (1977), International of Grace Church (1980), Reborn in Christ Church (1980)<sup>5</sup> and others.

The Christian support for the candidate Bolsonaro raised many questions. Is there no some contradiction between the proclamation of the Christian Faith and the defense of the armament? How could Christian people to support a candidate to Presidency who defends punishment policies rather than social ones? How could Believers in Jesus reaffirm the social inequality, through the ethnic-racial hate, the denial of the gender diversity and violence against women?

Differently than Oro understood in 2011, maybe there are some relationships between "religious flock" and "electoral flock". This research intends to offer answers to these questions based on the hypothesis: 1) the Christianity that allows the approximation between the anti-democratic politics of the current Government and the Christian religiosity, especially, from Pentecostalism, is based in a Hermeneutic justified on the Old Testament belligerence; 2) As in the Ancient Judaism, this Pentecostal belligerence seeks to institutionalize itself through the combat of alterity and the adoption of some Judaic symbols and laws. In the Ancient World, this combat was made against foreign nations, its cultures, its customs and its Gods. Currently, this combat is beeing practiced against Indigenous people, women, Brazilians Afro-descendant and LGBTQI+.

In order to develop this research, three steps will be done: 1) a bibliographical revision about the Pentecostal Biblical Hermeneutics<sup>6</sup>; 2) a monitoring of the news (in social media and newspaper) that involves the topic Evangelicals in the politics and 3) the comparative analysis between the

<sup>4</sup> Healing Our Land Community (*Comunidade Sara Nossa Terra*) translated by me. I researched in the internet a possible name used to this group in USA, but I did discover that this group is gathered, apparently, in local communities and in different denominations. In the Brazilian website of *Comunidade Sara Nossa Terra*, the link to know address churches at USA show this group at Orlando (3 cell churches, cell groups or parachurch organization), Michigan (1 cell at Victory Christian Church), Massachusetts (1 cell at regular home), Boston (1 cell at Calvary Baptist Church), Florida (1 cell at Shopping Center Deerfield Square) and Atlanta (1 cell at a building no identified). To find these churches it is necessary to search within the site. Available in: <https://saranossaterra.com.br/igrejas/>. Accessed in: August 03, 2021..

<sup>5</sup> The Reborn in Christ Church is known as *Renascer Flórida* (Brazilian Name) and it was founded in 1997. (RENASCER EM CRISTO).

<sup>6</sup> Especially, the American Literature.

discourses from most eminent Pentecostal leaders in Brazilian public sphere and the set of Biblical references used by them to justify their arguments.

Thereby, we intend to produce a critical-analytical instrument which allows us to understand the kind of Pentecostal religious participation in current Brazilian politics.

## **1 The conservative Participation of Brazilian Pentecostals in the political sphere**

In the last two decades, the evangelical participation in the electoral processes (2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018) has increased significantly in Senate, in Chamber of Deputies (House Representatives), in Federation's States and in municipalities. In the last electoral process to Presidency of the Republic (2018), three candidates did manifest clearly their Evangelical origins. The first, José Levy Fidelix da Cruz (from Brazilian Renovator Labor Political Party, PRTB) has affirmed to be representative of Evangelicals. The another one, Maria Osmarina da Silva Vaz de Lima (from Political Party Sustainability Network), without avoiding its religious affiliation, has emphasized his ethical and moral values, which would be of the interest for whole Brazilian population. And Cabo Daciolo has manifested his clearly evangelical point of view, going to the mountains to pray. Thus, the Evangelical participation on Brazilian Politics has grown and the electoral process gave visibility to this fact.

However, the evangelical incursions into Brazilian politics date back a long time. It is worthwhile to mention that it has happened in a gradual way, but always progressively (FRESTON, 1993; FONSECA, 2011; ORO, 2011; MACHADO, 2012). Differently from the discreet Historical Protestants, Pentecostals have experienced an advancement since the beginning of 20th Century.

In a substantial way, the description endorsed by these authors points to the Classical Protestant principles that assist us to understand the difference between the Protestant conduct and the "spirit" of Pentecostal<sup>7</sup>, notable: (1) the submission of the believers to the earthly authorities and (2) the separation

<sup>7</sup> Mentioning the title "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" (1920), by Max Weber.



between sacred things and profane order. For the Pentecostals this separation was substituted for the notion of the God's people intervention on Earth to proclaim the Kingdom of God which could fulfill in the current days. This movement can be understood as a kind of displacement: from mystical-ascetical logic of separation from the world and of the care with the purity towards to an intramundane-ascetical logic which denies the mixture, but aims at the transformation of the world to enjoy it in the present.

The Pentecostal Movement in Brazil is intrinsically diverse and the literature available on it has offered distinct classifications to attempt to map the existing tendencies. With their different classifications, Freston (1993), Bittencourt (1991), Siepierski (1997), Mariano (1999), among others, agree that the 1990's testified the emergence of Pentecostal Churches with their particular features within the Pentecostal movement.

These features are: (1) emphasis on spiritual gifts<sup>8</sup> (as glossolalia, healing, prophecy and, recently, exorcism), (2) ecstatic utterance in the religious assembly and (3) fluid spirituality (a kind of spirituality not limited by the Catholic or Protestant churches systematic theology). Because of this fluidness, the scholars consider these new Churches a (4) deinstitutionalized movement. And this movement would be characterized by answering the questions and the demands of the contemporary societies while requiring exclusive commitment from the faithful.

This deinstitutionalization in the recent Pentecostalism (also called as Autonomous Pentecostalism, Neopentecostalism, Deuteropentecostalism or Pos-Pentecostalism, as was mentioned) has provoked debates on themes as Pentecostal identity, the weakening of the denominationalism, religious transit, conversion/adhesion process to Faith (belief), Market Religious, among other topics.

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<sup>8</sup> "For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another to discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues; But all those of worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will". (1 Cor 12, 8-11).

Part of these themes were discussed from a historical-sociological perspective. When this methodological and theoretical option was made, many Scholars have chosen to investigate the third phase (or Third Wave) of the Brazilian Pentecostalism based on the observation of the religious phenomena from an external point of view. As a result, these studies develop descriptive approaches emphasizing features of the movement such as: (1) The origins of the Pentecostalism, (2) habits and customs codes and, finally, (3) the religious practices in their followings. They propagate this in their public messages to the crowds, and in intensive use of the media (TV and radio) and the social media (internet).

Thus, it is possible to say that the attention given to the Pentecostal religious phenomena, their religious discourse and their theology were quite reduced, except for the interest to explain the exorcism made by some of these Churches from third generation (ALMEIDA, 2009). Concerning this topic some Scholars sought to understand internal terms of Pentecostal religious discourse as: “Spiritual Warfare”, “Eschatological Battle” and “Battle between good and evil”<sup>10</sup>. Thus, the scolding and expulsion practices of the evil spirits were associated immediately (1) with the combat of foreign divinities unrelated to the Christian Belief System and (2) with a belligerent attitude (SILVA, 2007; FERRETTI, 2005).

In our view, the limit of these approaches is that they have not investigated the narratives and myths from which emerges the images of war and combat used by Pentecostals leaders. The Brazilian literature on Pentecostalism firstly has focused on the combat foreign divinities and how in Brazilian Pentecostalism these foreign divinities were associated with Catholic saints accused of being false idols. Subsequently, they highlighted the aggressions against Afro-Brazilian entities venerated in Candomblé and Umbanda (FERRETTI, 2005; SILVA, 2007) and, more recently, against homosexual people (NATIVIDADE; OLIVEIRA, 2007). So, the Pentecostal belligerence- against Catholic saints, Afro-Brazilian orishas and LGBTQI+

<sup>9</sup> Term used by the Adela Yarbro Collins (1977) in their article.

<sup>10</sup> On this subject, see the interesting article by Cecília Loreto Mariz (1999).



community was characterized by the total denial and aggressive reaction to these deities and people. This is exemplified by countless episodes of violence, such as the depredation and attacks to the sacred spaces. (MARIZ, 1999; SILVA, 2007). But it seems to us that there is still lacking of attention to how these myths has been employed or used by Pentecostal Hermeneutics.

In some biblical texts, when there is reference to the eschatological battle or the spiritual battle, it is often an allusion to the confrontation that there will be between the children of light or children of Israel (Gen 32, 24-32) and the children of darkness or sons/children of Belial (1 Sm 2, 12; 1 Kings 21, 13). *Beliya'al* from hebraic occuring very frequently in the Old Testament to refer "worthlessness". Afterward, Belial became a sort of name for Satan, or for Antichrist, very used in the Jewish Apocalyptic writings such as the Book Jubilees, etc.

In the New Testament, this confrontation is expressed through key expressions such as: "and then shall the end come" (Mt 24, 14; I Cor 15, 24), "day of judgment" (Mt 10, 15; 2 Pt 2,9) and "in that day" (Mt 7:22; 2 Ts 1, 10; 2 Tt 4, 8). The origin of these references indicates a real geographic space, called Harmagedon in the Hebrew – also called Armageddon, Mount of Megido. This location, according to the Hebrew Bible (or Old Testament), is the great battleground where the eschaton will take place. Due to its strategic position, between Damascus and the Mediterranean, it was the scene of several battles between the Israelites and the enemies of God's people. On this plain Barak won victory over the Canaanites and Gideon over the Midianites (Judg, 4, 5 and 7). In this place Saul died at the hands of the Philistines (1 Sm 31, 8) and Josiah, at the hands of the Egyptians (2 Kings 23, 29-30; 2 Chr 35, 22).

Symbolically, this historical place takes us to the prophetic battlefield, where the children of light fought with the children of darkness and where the kings of the Earth will gather for the eschatological battle on the great day of the Lord (2 Chron 35, 22; Ap 16, 16). Therefore, this set of texts whose literary genre is called "eschatological battle" is related to the notion that there will be a day when the forces that represent good will fight the forces of evil. In the

contemporary Pentecostal Hermeneutics, believers (or Evangelicals) are the children of Israel warring against the enemies of Yahweh. They are updating the narrative of Israel in the Old Mediterranean fighting against the children of darkness. Within this mythical logic, everything that opposes the morals, ethics and doctrine of these representatives of God on Earth is considered malevolent, cursed or demonic. In that sense, it deserves to be destroyed. This is what I call Pentecostal belligerance.

Another topic of the Pentecostal discourse that has been investigated by Brazilian Scholars has been the Prosperity Theology (or Prosperity gospel). According to this Theology, the sons of God are inheritors and have Rights upon whole Creation and everything in the world. Therefore, it should be natural that the sons of God have dominion over everything (MARIZ, 1996; MARIANO, 1999; LIMA, 2007). The devil always wants to have dominion over the Earth. But God has given everything to men. So, according with the Prosperity Theology, if the sons of God demand wealth and other things from God, these will be given to them. In this topic some scholars emphasized the belligerent language used by Pentecostals in order to get their requirements. Thus, the Pentecostal believer does not request. He or she simply claims.

In these studies, the interpretive bias informed by sociological perspective points to Prosperity Theology having more power with poor people which don't have support from the State. This missing link between State and people was filled in with the Pentecostal churches action. Because of the political implication of this role of Pentecostal churches, some scholars have said that there is an audacious project of power ongoing. But in our view, it is more than this.

It is about shortage to accomplish the guaranties which the State is obligated to provide, in order to sustain the people. There are people in a difficult situation in Brazil and, for this people the Pentecostal Church is a private institution that accomplishes the State obligations or duties. Since the 1990's until nowadays, Pentecostal action has helped many people in

precarious situation. To these people to think that a policy of Minimum State would be good has become natural. This people defend more field for private enterprise actions and its business, because to this people the State never has given a real support<sup>11</sup>.

What seems to have not be considered by the Political prognosis and many academic interpretations is that over the decades the Pentecostal movement has expanded and recruited believers. Throughout this process, it also has built a network of relationships beyond the religious environment. This network of relationships needs more attention and analysis. It is a network of relationships made up of people from all social classes, from the agro-business and commercial sectors, public personalities, politicians and others, many of whom does not declare be faithful or admit religion affiliation. Therefore, the relationship between "religious flock" and "electoral flock" seems no longer absurd. This network of relationships is constituted by people who advocate causes such as the return of morality, good values, the maintenance of the nuclear family, the affirmation of biological gender, denial of the abortion, denial of the Women's health Policies, investments in a technical education, the privatization of the Public universities, the right to private property, a Minimum state, liberal market economy, reduction of state's duties and of the social policies, among others.

As it is possible to see, this is a set of claims under the umbrella of the moral agenda, supported by Evangelical leaders who are known in whole country such as: Pastor Silas Malafaia (from Assemblies of God, AG), Pastor Marco Feliciano (Revival Cathedral, from Assemblies of God) and the Bishop Edir Macedo (Founder of Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, UCKG).

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<sup>11</sup>Interestingly, as agencies and private institutions, these churches may have more recently aligned with the political project of a minimal state, precisely because in recent history they have occupied state space, which allowed this advance, possibly in the expectation that religious institutions were only interested in the consolidation of the democratic state.

**Figura 1 – Pastor Marco the side of the candidate Jair Bolsonaro**

**Fonte: Amorim (2019).**

The alignment or alliance of people favorable to a Neoliberal Economy and Politics Project has been drawn with stronger tonalities at the crossover of interests of this network of relationships and this Pentecostal sector. Within this project, the Evangelical group has more power and influence to clash with the social agenda and made it impracticable. Although nonpartisan, this project, connects different Political parties from a conservative Christian perspective.

Anyway, we have to ask "how", "what" and "from where" do emerge the notions that allow us an understanding of this articulation of actors and agendas which guide Pentecostal actions in the Brazilian public sphere? What kind of religious discourse and Hermeneutic does support these conducts?

Maybe, the same logic which gives reason for Pentecostals to support Bolsonaro in Brazil is the same (or similar) employed by Trump in US. The AP News (Associated Press News) published in last October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019 an interesting News about the connections between Conservative Evangelical leaders and the American last president Donald Trump. Among other important topics, the next quote is compelling for us:

[...] while Trump's use of profane language and the multiple sexual assault allegations against him have sparked debate about why the religious right's support is so enduring, Suarez says most backers never expected the president to be "the model of Christianity." Noting that "as the Bible says, all of us have fallen short," Suarez said Trump's close ties to his evangelical base stem from his success achieving its policy goals, from restricting abortion to defending Israel. (SCHOR, 2019, p.1).

Rev. Tony Suarez is the executive Vice President of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference. In addition to Suarez, there are more Evangelical leaders in the corner for Trump's fight. They are "the biggest pastors" or Trump's Evangelical advisory board formed by names as Rev. Mark Burns (South Carolina pastor and televangelist), Pastor Robert Jeffress (A megachurch Southern Baptist pastor), Rev. Franklin Graham (son of the Rev. Billy Graham), Jerry Falwell Jr. (Liberty University President) and Ralph Reed (a Trump's Evangelical strategist).

For all of these pastors it is not so important that some behaviors and certain opinions of Trump clash with the Bible<sup>12</sup>. Ralph Reed has said to Fox News that "whatever you think of Trump personally, it is undeniable" (SCHOR, 2019) that he has succeeded in enacting conservative Christians' agenda.

So, it is not just about morality. It is about power and about subduing the Other using power to destroy it.

## **2 Biblical references that support conservative thinking and belligerence**

It is a presupposition of this article that there is an exclusivist logic in the Pentecostal Theology based on the Biblical references of the Historical gender, from the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible). These references talk about many episodes of Israel people and their conflictual relationship to their God, Yahweh, and the Ancient Mediterranean nations, worshipers of other divinities (as Baal and Asherah, for example). These relations were featured as conflicting because they ignored the order of Exclusivity given by Yahweh to his people. As the elected nation, Israel should be faithful only to the Lord, the Yahweh.

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<sup>12</sup> A Pew Research Center survey in August found 77% of white evangelical Protestants approving of Trump's job performance.

In this narrative, Israel does not always respond to its God with the faithfulness expected by Him. In many episodes, Israel has prostituted itself with other divinities. The betrayal with other gods, explained by constant contact with neighboring nations, resulted in the jealousy and the abandonment by God, and many chapters about the Israel people full of sin and suffering with chaos. Consequently, there were wars, battles, plunders, deaths and blood a lot (RODRIGUES, 2019). Generally, in these situations God has raised up prophets and judges in order to show to the people the correct way to be followed and to adjust the covenant with Yahweh.

**Tabela 1 – Yahweh does not accept betrayal**

Judges 3:7, quote:	I Kings 18:19, quote:
And children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served Baalim and <b>groves</b> . (Versão KJE)	Now therefore send, <i>and</i> gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the <b>groves</b> <sup>13</sup> four hundred, which eat Jezebel's table.

**Fonte: Elaborada pela autora.**

Considering this, how does this alignment of the neoliberal project and the Brazilian neopentecostal sectors works?

These kinds of Old Testament narratives have been used by Pentecostal groups which compose the advisory board that supports Bolsonaro in Brazil. So, we can suppose that the alignment of the neoliberal project and the Brazilian neo-pentecostal sectors is possible because the belligerence is a common attitude presented in both groups. Supposedly, the belligerent attitude inherited from Old Testament could be the basis.

In this case, this set of references from Old Testament work as a technical framework to support the peculiar conservative fundamentals of elitist groups against popular religiosities and religions engaged with grassroots movements.

<sup>13</sup> Groves and wooden poles are terms to signify Asherah.



As in the historical books of the Hebrew Bible, the belligerence attitude is necessary to efface the deinstitutionalized religiosity. Paradoxically, as we know, the Brazilian Pentecostalism from Third Wave (or Neopentecostalism) started as a fluid religion in the 1990's. However, currently, the evangelical leadership represented by men as Bishop Edir Macedo gradually seems more and more aligned to the priestly elite from the Judges and Kings times.

**Figura 2 – Bishop Edir Macedo.**



**Fonte: Zaidan (2018).**

In the ancient times, the kind of religion named as the “folk religion” was violently denied. It is not the goal of this paper to define “folk religion” but is important to highlight that folk religion goes back to a certain religiosity not oriented by the Institutional discourse or, in that case, by the Judaic-Priest discourse. We can say that this primitive popular religiosity was rejected by priestly male elite which intended to extinguish it, in name of the exclusivity to worship Yahweh alone.

The effacing of the female sacred (i.e., Goddess’s image Asherah) inside of the Judeo-Christian Tradition, for example, resulted in deep consequences to the relations between the genders in the West, imposing regulations and taboos



to both women and men bodies. In Brazil, this kind of folk religion is important to understand the conversion process of Catholics to Pentecostalism and what kind of role is attributed to women inside the Pentecostal Churches. In some parts of the Catholicism popular religious practices involving magic, sanctified objects, amulets, sacred plants, and other more mystic conducts are common. In general, they are performed by women. We can say about it is a kind of strategic filler to occupy spaces inside the religion by women. But these spaces are marginal or boundary spaces, among Catholics as well as Evangelicals. Indeed, the main spaces are destined to men. The Pentecostal priestly elite.

It can be affirmed that when religions derived from Judeo-Christian axis are constituted only around the masculine and the exclusivist God, they legitimize symbolically the patriarchal societies and the social inequalities among men and women. And, this divine power imagined as unique Creator-Father-masculine-God affects the social and political relations in modern societies. From this theological background emerges the masculine imperative of the domination by force, power, oppression and hierarchization of the relations. There are a terrible depredatory culture and anti-democratic awareness fed by the influence of the religious discourse of conservative Christians within the imaginary of the elite White-Men, from Brazilian oligarchies of agribusiness, and in the mentality of people co-opted by consumption ideology. This is true especially to the Pentecostals.

Just as took place with the bureaucratization of the Judaic Temple and the movement to exclude other gods in favor of the priestly elite Monotheism, the Brazilian Pentecostalism has a process of institutionalization that seeks to regulate popular religiosity and the grassroots movements.

Interestingly, this process makes the Pentecostal movement far off from its origins. This means that two of the characteristics that we indicate at the beginning of this research are changing. What we called “fluid spirituality” and “deinstitutionalized movement” has lost ground. The effort of pastors such as Silas Malafaia and Edir Macedo is that Pentecostals in Brazil affirm their commitment to rigid morals and irrefutable values such as 1) the exclusive Truth, which is the Bible, 2) the nuclear family, which is formed by man, wife

and children, and 3) the Men authority represented by the leaderships instituted by God, over everything and everyone.

In order to do that, what kind of leadership or kind of Government is it necessary?

### **3 A Government made by God's elect**

But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. (1 Cor 1, 27-29).

With the slogan "Brazil above everything, God above all", presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro was received by Pastor Silas Malafaia in his Church, Assembly of God Victory in Christ (founded in 1959 in Rio de Janeiro).

On this occasion, the candidate Bolsonaro in front of a crowd of believers said: "I'm sure that I'm not the more capable man, but God makes capable the chosen ones" (PASTOR, 2019). After this saying, Bolsonaro was acclaimed strongly by the people in the audience. Consequently, the Pastor Silas Malafaia has called himself as a "prophetic voice" justified by the God authority and, then declared in the name of Jesus that God would give to Bolsonaro "wisdom, grace and health to make difference in this nation [...] to change the history of this country".

And, then, quoted 1 Corinthians 1:27-29.

**Imagem 3 – Pastor Silas Malafaia**

**Fonte: Ferreira (2015).**

After this quote, Pastor Silas Malafaia highlighted two points: 1) God has chosen the foolish things; and 2) He has chosen the insignificant people of the world to demonstrate his power. According to this perspective, both Malafaia and Macedo have given support to the idea that persecuted people will be exalted in the future. The justice of God will be done when all people who deny God will be dismissed of the power, ashamed and destroyed.

In this point, we arrived at an important topic to understand the Brazilian Pentecostalism: the “dialectic of the persecution” (MAFRA, 2002). According to this interpretative key, the Pentecostals understand themselves as a group of people which are systematically ignored and mocked by the authorities. Particularly, by the progressive political sectors, the artistic class and Brazilian intellectuals. Part of Pentecostals thinks that this persecution takes place because they are the special People of God. Despite of being an “exclusive people”, they feel shamefaced.

In the Pentecostal logic the shame is interpreted as provoked by evil forces. And these forces are represented by the progressive political sectors, by the artistic class, by the Brazilian intellectuals and by others that think from a different (and divergent) point of view.

Within the Pentecostal imaginary (mindset) the “evil forces” need to be stripped from the power, especially, the progressive political sectors, intellectuals and scientists. The Liberal or progressive parties, the left, need to be stopped. They are enemies of the Pentecostals and all concerning to them is against the God’s people, the New Israel. So, the believers have to raise up and to combat them. Currently, there are two ways to combat the left: 1) in the Political realm and 2) taking them away from Sacred spaces, schools, universities, associations and other collective spaces.

Therefore, as a consequence of this imaginary, accusations against Laborer’s party are justified (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT) and their eminent leadership Luiz Inácio da Silva, “Lula”), the censorship of some artistic productions in Brazil and the investments cuts in the public system of education. In the time of Lula’s government these were the areas that had more increase and development. But since the 2000’s, specially in 2010, when the Evangelical group grew in Congress, the demonization of the social policies from the Brazilian left simultaneously grew. It is interesting that the main accusation against Lula and the Left is the financial and moral corruption. To this group of Brazilian evangelicals the left represents a kind of threat to good values, strong families and the necessary hierarchical norms among the elite and the people.

## **Conclusion**

Finally, this framework allows us to affirm that currently the political meaning of the word dissent was emptied of meaning. The significance of the respect to diversity that was so important to democratic debate in the Brazilian public sphere has been weakened.

**Imagem 4 – Temple of Salomon, São Paulo, Brazil.**

**Fonte: (TEMPLO DE SALOMÃO, 2019).**

Nowadays, to not think, to not act and not be like the Brazilian Pentecostals means to be their enemy. Government policy as well as the religious narrative of these Evangelical representations are in accordance with the aggressive and systematic exclusion of those considered foreign to this system, i.e., Indigenous, Afro-descendants, gay people and women. There is no space for inclusion and even less for mediation. Therefore, the mentality and current policies are governed by the extermination of human life, in the same way as Israel did with the neighboring Nations of the Ancient Mediterranean.

Although the presence of the conservative groups in the Brazilian history to be a fact, it can be possible to say that the social and progressive issues were considered by many Christians in different moments of the Brazilian history. Indeed, the grassroots movement as homeless and landless movements in Brazil

always had a deep participation of the Christians from Catholic and Protestant Churches<sup>14</sup>.

In order to understand how this background was constructed in the last decade, therefore, there are relevant topics to investigate on the horizon. Some of them are:

- a) To research authors and literature specialized in American Pentecostal Hermeneutics. This is important because to allow us to construct a comparative analysis emphasizing the possible similarities, continuities and ruptures between the participation of the Pentecostals in the Brazilian and North American public sphere. It is remarkable that our goal is to verify the reception of the Bible by Brazilian Pentecostal. Because this, the focus is the interpretation and use of Biblical references of the Old Testament as made by them.
- b) To investigate and to analyze the participation of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG) in the Brazilian Politic. Especially, to analyze the process of the institutionalization of this Church and the adoption of the Judaic symbols and laws. The “Judaification” process adopted by the UCKG is a controversial attitude very criticized even by other Evangelicals groups. Generally, the judaification is a process of cultural assimilation in which a group, a person or Christian religion acquires Judaic symbols, values and religious beliefs. An evidence of this judaification process is the replica of the Temple of Solomon built by UCKG in São Paulo. The temple was officially inaugurated on July 31, 2014, and has 10.000 seats for visitants and worshipers. In 2019, it was more visited by tourists than well-known touristic sights such Cristo Redentor and Pão de açúcar (in Rio de Janeiro).

Finally, it is important to say that Pentecostal participation in the Brazilian public sphere has been made with systematic efforts by evangelical leaders such as Damarens Alves (Brazilian Progressive Party). She is currently

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<sup>14</sup> In the 1990's, for example, an important Catholic Theologian called Leonardo Boff wrote about the sustainability and ethic as a new perspective to the Modern Christianity, especially, to the “Rights to live with dignity”. The Boff's propose was called Social Ecology because he have claimed for sustainable development. But in the same time, the Pentecostalism movement has started to increase and, as it seems to me, towards a different direction. Maybe, because the Social Gospel and grassroots movements lost the people.



part of Bolsonaro's government as Minister for Women, Family and Human Rights. Interestingly, she says that the role of women in modern societies is to support men as the center of the family and the education of children. Among the topics on her agenda is the fight against "gender ideology" and the defense of the nuclear family, i. e., the family consisting only of men, women and children. To that end, it requires its intense action against progressives, intellectuals, teachers, researchers, artists and all those who threaten the set of Christian values. To be successful in these matters, she is known for her advocacy for the Political School Without Party Project and for the practice of Homeshooling. According to her, these ways of teaching children and adolescents offer parents more freedom. In addition, parents can teach their children without progressive ideological influences, which are detrimental to Christian families.

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