

PENTECOSTALISM AND POLITICS IN NEOLIBERAL CHILE

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I. INTRODUCTION

A fundamental insight, left by Max Weber (1930) to subsequent scholars of religion, is that processes of wider social and cultural change can be initiated from within religious spheres. Rather than seeing religious ideas and values as epiphenomenal to social, economic structures, Weber conceived of religion as a (semi) autonomous domain with the ability to shape other domains of societal life in significant ways. The legacy of Weber has by no means been lost on scholars of what has in recent decades become the fastest growing religious movement (in the broadest possible sense of the term) in the world: Pentecostalism. While they mostly (and wisely) refrain from asserting any classical Weberian connection between Pentecostalism and large scale capitalist activity, scholars have repeatedly and more or less unanimously been arguing that Pentecostal communities can and often do function as motors of cultural transformation, for instance by redefining gender relationships and economic priorities and by fostering discipline, sobriety, self-confidence and a new work ethics, all of which result in more harmonious domestic environments and enables converts to adapt to insecure labor markets (Brusco 1995; Mariz 1994; Martin 1990, 2002; Martin 1995, 1998; Maxwell 2005). A question that has generated more division and debate is whether the transformative potential of Pentecostal religion may in time be transferred from the private sphere into public spheres, for instance by inspiring and preparing people for political democratic participation and thus indirectly contribute to the strengthening of civil society and democratic values.

While the question of the relation, or relations, between Pentecostalism and political culture has concerned scholars working in

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different parts of the world (Gifford 1998; Marshall 2009), it is, perhaps, no wonder that those working in Latin America have found it particularly relevant and compelling to address. Throughout the region, Pentecostalism has been growing and adapting itself to shifting and often turbulent political climates for a little more than a century. A quick glance at the history of Pentecostalism in Latin America shows a variety of stances to and engagements with political establishments – ranging from total and demonstrative apathy to active support and open criticism of both democratic and authoritarian governments. Whatever opinion one may hold about the compatibility of Pentecostalism with particular political systems, empirical and historical evidence to support it can be found in Latin America. On the one hand, unholy alliances between Pentecostal leaders and authoritarian regimes such as Augusto Pinochet's military government in Chile (1973-90) seem to support a view of Pentecostalism as a conservative and authoritarian religion, whose marked otherworldliness, or anti-worldliness, finds consonance with political systems where popular political mobilisation is discouraged. On the other hand, the waves of democratisation that have swept Latin America during the last three decades have been accompanied by the continuing growth and outreach of Pentecostal churches, and several surveys have indicated that Latin American Pentecostals have positive attitudes towards democracy (Freston 1993; Dodson 1997), all of which makes it difficult to assert any narrow association between the prosperity of Pentecostalism and particular political circumstances.

This article explores relationships between Pentecostalism and politics in post-dictatorial Chile. Some of the main questions to be addressed are: what are the links, if there are any, between processes of democratisation and Pentecostal growth? What does the continued appeal and growth of Pentecostalism tell us about political culture in contemporary neoliberal Chile? Is Pentecostalism as a particular institutionalised religious culture compatible with, or even supportive of, democratic principles and values (as some neo-Weberian scholars would suggest is the case)? I address these questions, both by paying attention to specific aspects of Pentecostal theology and religious practice, and by looking at the growth and consolidation of Chilean Pentecostalism within changing political environments. In particular, I focus on how a culture of political disenchantment has emerged in post-dictatorial Chile, providing new space for religious narratives. I argue that although Pentecostalism may contain certain democratic qualities, there is also a striking compatibility between, on the one

hand, Pentecostal theistic understandings of politics and social change, and, on the other, a neo-liberal social order where political apathy is widespread and where a privatised rather than a communal and associative sense of progress predominates.

II. CHILEAN PENTECOSTALISM: A VERY BRIEF HISTORY

The first Pentecostal denomination in Chile, the Methodist Pentecostal Church, was founded in 1909 in the capital of Santiago and the large coastal city of Valparaíso, after a schism within the Episcopal Methodist Church. Growth was slow during the first two decades, but between 1930 and 1960 the percentage of Evangelicals¹ in Chile rose from 1.4 to 5.6 per cent, with an overwhelming majority of Chilean Evangelicals being Pentecostals. After decades of internal migration, Chile had become an industrialised and urbanised country in the 1930s. However, industrialisation did not take place at the same pace as urbanisation, and in addition to an industrialised working class and a bureaucratic middle class; a marginalised urban underclass of migrants, working in the informal sector or having sporadic jobs started to emerge (Martínez and Diaz 1996:6-8). A wide range of organisational options was available for urban Chileans such as political parties, labour unions and Catholic organisations. However, the Catholic Church was understaffed and mostly oriented towards the upper and middle classes, whereas labour unions and left-wing parties mainly appealed to skilled proletarians. The unskilled underclass, commonly referred to as *'el bajo pueblo'* (the low or humble people) found itself watching the modernisation and democratisation of Chilean society from the sidelines (Sepúlveda 1996:310).

It was mainly among members of the latter group of Chileans that new converts for Pentecostal churches were won. Two classical studies of urban Pentecostalism in Chile in the early 1960s by the Swiss sociologist Christian Lalive D'épinay (1969) and the German sociologist Emilio Willems (1967) both ascribe the growth of Pentecostalism to processes of urbanisation, migration, social anomie and the dissolution of rural communities. In Pentecostal denominations, marginal migrants found new intimate communities, a certain dignity and a new spiritual authority. As a lay movement where the poor and poorly educated could acquire ritual responsibilities and formal leadership positions, Pentecostalism represented a symbolic inversion of the class structure of Chilean society. During the first decade of its history, Chilean Pentecostalism was far removed from Chile's political sphere. Pentecostalism mainly

appealed to sectors that were marginalised from political processes and organisations, and most churches considered politics to be a matter of the 'world' in which members should not get involved (Sepúlveda 1996:315; Lalive D'epinay 1969:154).

In the 1960s Pentecostalism grew at a slightly slower pace than in the preceding decades and in 1970 6.18 per cent of Chile's population defined themselves as Evangelicals (Sepúlveda 1996:317). The 1960s were characterised by the political integration of hitherto excluded sectors, a process that was intensified after the Christian Democratic Party was elected to power in 1964. The new government encouraged popular mobilisation in labour unions, women's movements, neighbourhood associations and organisations working for the provision of housing and basic services in urban slum areas. Following the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the Catholic Church in Chile became more focused on human rights and social inequality. With the assistance of new pastors, arriving from Europe and North America, the Catholic Church became more engaged in social educational work among the urban poor, and it was also during this period that the Catholic Base Communities were established (Smith 1982). The Pentecostal response to these developments was multifaceted. A few denominations became engaged in social work and cooperated with secular organisations, whereas some of the largest denominations such as the Methodist Pentecostal Church and the Evangelical Pentecostal Church maintained their introvert position and discouraged members from getting involved in social work and political organisations.

After the 1970 elections a center-left coalition came to power, and the socialist Salvador Allende became Chile's new president. Allende's three years in power was a period of increased politicisation and polarisation of Chilean society. Studies from Santiago in the early 1970s showed that Pentecostals were less involved in political and other organisation, less interested in politics and less willing to place themselves on a right-left scale than other Chileans (Martin 1990:239). Other studies indicate that many Pentecostals were positively inclined towards the government and that they generally voted according to class based concerns, though many also abstained from voting for the Christian Democratic Party because of its close connections to the Catholic Church (Smith 1998).

III. PENTECOSTALISM DURING THE PINOCHET DICTATORSHIP

The violent *coup d'état* on September 11, 1973, where the military, led by General Augusto Pinochet seized power, radically shook the foundations of Chilean society. In addition to putting an end to more than four decades of peaceful democracy and consistently violating human rights and harassing political opponents, the biggest achievement of the regime was a radical reorganisation of the Chilean economy along neoliberal lines. Among other things, this reorganisation implied significant cuts in public spending, and a privatisation of the educational and health systems. Although considered a success or a 'Chilean miracle' by many, the policies of the regime also had devastating effects such as increased poverty, growing inequality, insecure labour conditions and impediments to collective bargaining (Lindhardt 2012a; Paley 2001).

The Catholic Church soon became a harsh critic of the regime. As Chilean civil society was weakened and social and political organisations were banned or faced severe restrictions, the Catholic Church provided the only safe haven for political discussion and mobilisation. Pinochet did attempt to use a civil religious discourse to legitimise the policies of the regime, presenting himself as an instrument of God, struggling against atheist Marxism (Lagos Schuffeneger 2001), but he did not find much support among Catholic authorities. Instead, support was offered by leaders of the Methodist Pentecostal Church, the biggest denomination in the country, which in 1974 invited Pinochet to the inauguration of the Cathedral, *Jotabeche*, in Santiago. Pinochet accepted the invitation and on December 13 an Evangelical declaration of support for the regime was published in a daily newspaper, *El Mercurio*. In this declaration the coup was described as an answer to the prayers of all Christians who feared the evils of Marxism (Deiros 1991:142).

In July 1975, a Council of Pastors was founded by leaders of the Methodist Pentecostal Church and a variety of other Evangelical denominations. In September 1975, the Council of Pastors organised the first Evangelical *Te Deum* in the *Jotabeche* Cathedral. Until then, the ceremony had been an exclusively Catholic event, an annual service in memory of Chilean independence (September 18, 1810). New governments are usually given an official welcome at the Catholic *Te Deum*, but the regime had received no such recognition. At the 1975 Evangelical *Te Deum*, which was attended by Pinochet and other government officials, the coup and the regime were praised. The president continued to attend Evangelical ceremonies throughout

the 1970s and 1980s. Catholic *Te Deums* were also held during this period but, unlike their Evangelical colleagues, preachers often took the opportunity to address questions of human rights (Martin 1995:222).

The alliance with the regime resulted in a new public status for Pentecostalism in Chile. However, the relation between the Council of Pastors and the regime mainly consisted in an exchange of moral support and religious legitimation for official recognition and certain legal privileges (such as the right to teach Evangelical religion in schools). Pentecostal churches never participated in political processes in the same way as the Catholic Church did. Catholic leaders played an important role in preparing the transition to democracy, but Pentecostal leaders took no part in these processes. Furthermore, Pentecostal churches did not provide havens for political debate and mobilisation in the same way as the Catholic Base Communities. For the military regime, that did not want the popular sectors to become too involved in political and social organisations, the Pentecostal stance towards politics as a matter of the ‘world’ was strikingly convenient. On several occasions the regime hailed Pentecostals, Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses as true Christians who stayed clear of politics (Fleet and Smith 1997:177).

As was the case in the 1960s, the Pentecostal response to political developments in the 1970s and 1980s was not unison. The Council of Pastors attempted to present itself as an official representative of Chile’s Evangelical population, but the Evangelical Pentecostal Church, the second largest denomination in the country, did not join the council. In 1982, the organisation *Confraternidad Cristiana de Iglesias* (CCI) was founded by leaders of Pentecostal and other Evangelical churches who were critical of the regime. However, the CCI only represented a minority of Chilean Pentecostals, and the decision of church leaders to join this organisation did not necessarily reflect the opinion of lay members (Kamsteeg 1998).

During the Pinochet regime, Pentecostalism grew at a remarkable pace, especially among the poor. In 1992, 13.2 per cent of the population belonged to Evangelical Churches (Sepúlveda 1996:317), but a study from Santiago in 1990 showed that 26.1 per cent of Chileans from the poorest sectors were Evangelicals (Ossa 1991:144). A great deal has been written on the alliances between the Council of Pastors and the regime, but sadly, ethnographic literature that sheds light on the motives for conversion of poor Chileans is scarce. However, it seems reasonable to assume that part of the

explanation of Pentecostal growth during this period, is due to the weakening of Chilean civil society. Organisations representing the popular sectors, such as neighbourhood associations, trade unions or indigenous associations, were eliminated or marginalised by the regime (Portales 2000), which meant that Pentecostal communities did not face the same competition as in the 1960s. As mentioned, the economic policies of the regime resulted in growing poverty, but also in an expansion of the informal sector to which many Pentecostals belonged. For marginal groups who did not feel that the state and secular organisations were working for their benefit and for whom macro-economic growth had little relevance as long as their own household budget remained limited, a religious movement defining itself in opposition to the 'world' is likely to have a certain appeal. The few studies that do focus on Pentecostal lay people in the 1980s, indicate that most Pentecostal lay people were not involved in politics during the Pinochet regime and further suggest that the most common motives for conversion and continued church membership were social insecurity, existential meaninglessness, frustrations with the health system (which was privatised by Pinochet) and a search for healing through prayer and social networks (Canales et al. 1991; Ossa 1991; Sloomweeg 1991; Reyes 1986).

IV. PENTECOSTAL DIVERSITY IN POST-DICTATORIAL CHILE

After the return to democracy, Pentecostalism continued to grow and in 2001 the percentage of Evangelicals in Chile had reached 15.2. In the late 1990s, scholars estimated that between 80 to 90 per cent of Chile's Evangelicals were Pentecostals (Cleary and Sepúlveda 1997:102; Parker 1998). A majority of Chile's Pentecostals still belong to the lower social sectors. However, a significant number of 'native' Pentecostals (children of Pentecostal parents) are now entering the middle classes. Thus, a national survey from 2001 showed that 7 per cent of Chile's 'middle middle class'² were Evangelicals, a number that indicates some degree of social mobilisation among Pentecostals (Lindhardt 2012b).

There are now several hundred Pentecostal denominations in the country. A very rough distinction can be made between the 'traditional' Pentecostal denominations, such as the Evangelical Pentecostal Church where strict rules for dress and the use of cosmetics still prevail, and the 'modern' or 'renewed' (*renovadas*) denominations. The latter, which are less ascetically focused, allow congregants to dress according to fashion, and offer effusive services

reminiscent of rock concerts, and have a greater appeal among the middle classes. The so-called prosperity gospel has also made an impact in several of Chile's newer Pentecostal denominations. Central to the prosperity gospel is the outspoken conviction that every saved or born-again Christian has the right to receive divine blessings of wealth and health as well as the duty to pay tithes and donate money to God through a ministry. Prosperity preaching tends to have certain similarities with motivational speech. Preachers may present the children of God as winners (*vencedores*) and further emphasise that the belief in Christ should be inseparable from a firm belief in oneself and one's abilities, and that a Christian should always pursue his dreams, for instance by starting a business, without allowing him or herself to be held back by the pessimism of others. Such rhetoric seems to be tailored to the model citizen of neoliberal society, the individual entrepreneur who believes in him or herself but does not expect too much from the system.

V. RELIGION AND POLITICS AFTER 1990

After the restoration of democracy, the Catholic Church has continued to be an important political actor, though the political focus on human rights violations and on the devastating effects of the implementation of neoliberal reforms have, in part, been replaced by a focus on moral issues such as family life, contraception, and abortion. Church authorities have actively opposed government policies concerning sex education in schools and the introduction of a divorce law, which was nevertheless implemented in 2004.

Pentecostals, on the other hand, have made relatively few attempts to gain a foothold within the political sphere. Throughout the 1990s, the political mobilisation of Pentecostals was mainly focused on one particular cause, namely the improvement of the legal status of the churches. Even though the Catholic Church was separated from the state in 1925, the Church continued to enjoy a privileged position, whereas Evangelical, Pentecostal churches had the same status as neighbourhood associations. After the transition to democracy, the Council of Pastors made an effort to maintain its close connections with the State. During the electoral campaign, presidential candidate Patricio Aylwin met with representatives of both the Council of Pastors and the CCI in order to discuss the legal status of Evangelical churches. After being elected president, he was officially congratulated by the Council of Pastors. Evangelical *Te Deums* have been held each year since the restoration of democracy (with the

exception of 1990) with the presence of democratically elected leaders (Lindhardt 2012a).

Discussions about the legal status of Evangelical Churches were initiated during the presidency of Aylwin (1990-94) and in 1992 a Committee for Evangelical Coordination was founded by the Council of Pastors, the CCI and other Evangelical denominations that did not belong to any of these organisations. The Committee was founded with the purpose of allowing Chile's Evangelical population to speak with a single voice. After years of discussions, the law of equal status for all churches was finally passed in 1999, despite Catholic resistance. Since then, Pentecostal leaders have continued to maintain good relations with democratically elected governments.

Although Pentecostals were able to unite on a specific political issue, they have been more or less invisible in parliamentary politics. There were no Pentecostal members of Congress in the 1990s, but a few Pentecostals have been involved in local politics. An Evangelical party, the *Alianza Nacional Cristiana*, was founded in 1995, and entered into a coalition with the conservative right wing party *Renovación Nacional*. This coalition was a source of controversy among Chile's Pentecostal population. Besides, the popularity of the *Alianza Nacional Cristiana* suffered when leaders attempted to present their party as a representative of Chile's entire Evangelical population at a time when the Committee for Evangelical Coordination was also playing that role as it was struggling to achieve legal status for Evangelical churches. The existence of *Alianza Nacional Cristiana* turned out to be a rather short chapter in Chile's political history. In 1999, a bishop of a small Pentecostal Church, Salvador Pino Busto, tried to run for president as an independent candidate, claiming to have received a revelation that God wanted him to become president, but he did not manage to collect enough signatures to be able to register (Freston 2004:142).

There are different reasons why Evangelical/Pentecostal parties and candidates find it difficult to gain a foothold in national politics. A binominal electoral system does not favour new and small parties. Besides, Chile's Evangelical population is so heterogeneous that any claim by a single candidate or party to represent the majority of Evangelicals is doomed to failure. Furthermore, Pentecostals are hesitant to join the right wing parties *Renovación Nacional* (RN) and *Unión Demócrata Independiente* (UDI) that promote Christian values, because these parties are both closely connected to the

Catholic Church. Finally, many Pentecostals are suspicious of any mixing of religion and politics, a theme to which I will return shortly.

VI. DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL DISENCHANTMENT

We have seen that 17 years of dictatorship, where political mobilisation among the popular sectors was strongly discouraged, turned out to provide fertile ground for Pentecostal growth. But we have also seen that Pentecostalism has continued to grow and renew itself after the restoration of democracy. And it is clear that Pentecostals, despite their numerically strong presence, have been rather marginal actors in Chile's political processes. In order to understand these developments and tendencies, I suggest that a few details of the processes of democratization need to be considered. What I want to argue below is that the continued appeal of Pentecostalism can in part be seen in the light of a growing political disenchantment in post-dictatorial Chilean society.

The consolidation of democracy turned out to be a long and fragile process. Although the transition from dictatorship to a multi-party democracy in 1990 was an important turning point in Chile's political history, several Chilean and Western scholars have argued that the transition did *not* mark a radical break with the policies of the previous regime (Moulián 2002; Portales 2000; Paley 2001; Lindhardt 2012a; Cancino forthcoming). First of all, the authoritarian regime managed to impose several constraints on the newborn democracy, which resulted in far-reaching institutional continuity that for many years impeded a constructive public debate about the military past and the violations of human rights (Lindhardt 2012a; Lindhardt, Kristensen and Cancino forthcoming; Portales 2000).

Besides, the democratically elected governments, including the two that were led by socialist presidents Ricardo Lagos and Michelle Bachelet (2000-2010), have all chosen to continue the neoliberal policies of the previous regime, including privatisation of health care, education and social security, while at the same time increasing social expenses. In many ways, the policies of the democratic governments have been successful and resulted in declining poverty rates and educational mobility. But several elements of insecurity prevail. The Chilean economy depends for its competitiveness on low salaries and laws that favour the employers rather than the employees. Many of the latter have to put up with jobs without contracts, subcontracts, arbitrary layoffs and restrictions on collective bargaining. Chilean trade unions are weak, and large numbers of Chileans are engaged in

the informal economic sector, where social security is low (Portales 2000:450). Democratically elected governments have done little to support social mobilisation among the popular sectors, and organisations that could contribute to the strengthening of civil society, such as trade unions and women groups, have very little influence in political life and do not represent any real challenge to the neoliberal model (Portales 2000:401; Paley 2004:505). According to the American anthropologist Judith Paley, the democratic governments have attempted to convince the population that living in a democracy implies a lowering of expectations in the abilities of the state to solve social problems and that too much popular pressure on the state will undermine democracy and might provoke a return to dictatorship (2004:506). As noted by Kristina Pilmark (forthcoming:106), Chile's so-called 'protected democracy' as defined in the 1980 constitution, is based on the assumption that democracy must be limited in order to avoid the political polarisation and totalitarianism of the 1960s and early 1970s.

The continuation of the neoliberal policies by the center-left governments has blurred the traditionally important and clearly demarcated left-right cleavage in the political landscape, inspiring scholars to speak of a neoliberal hegemony or a neoliberal consensus in post-dictatorial Chile (Moulián 2002; Larrain 2005; Portales 2000; Pilmark forthcoming). The limited room for alternative ideological projects, the undemocratic elements of the political system and the fact that the economy in a neoliberal order appears to enjoy certain autonomy and to be more or less immune to political control, all combine to produce widespread political apathy. Thus, an abundance of surveys made in Chile over the last twenty years, show declining popular confidence in politicians, political parties and the legislative, falling levels of electoral participation, and an increasing number of citizens who define themselves as a-political (Manzi and Catalan 1998; Portales 2000; Cancino forthcoming; Larraín 2005; Lindhardt 2012a).

According to several Chilean scholars, political apathy is also related to the power of consumerism as a dominant ideology in Chilean society (Moulian 2002; Larraín 2002; Christoffani forthcoming). With the privatisation of health care, education and social security, the military regime managed to transform the Chilean citizen from being a political subject to being an individual consumer choosing among services, and democratically elected governments have done little to reverse this process. Besides, the military regime

lowered restrictions on imports in the 1980s which resulted in a massive arrival of new consumer goods. In addition, Chilean mass media have contributed to the emergence of a popular culture where status is constituted and communicated through the consumption of prestige goods. Modern technology (cell phones, computers, television) has become more accessible to Chileans, but at the same time the widespread credit card system of payment has resulted in the indebtedness of a growing number of people, especially from the lower social strata. Critical voices have pointed out that such a pattern of consumption and debt is functional for a neoliberal political model, as it tends to foster individualism and conformism rather than associative notions of progress (Moulián 2002:92; Portales 2000:447; Larraín 2005:53; Oviedo 2009:80; Christoffani forthcoming).

Pentecostalism has grown and renewed itself in a context of democratisation and economic growth, but also in a context of persisting social insecurities, increasing individualism and consumerism and not least, widespread political apathy. During the recent decades, the growth of Pentecostalism has been paralleled by the growth of a Catholic charismatic movement, an indigenous revival, and the increasing popularity of New Age spiritual movements. Reflecting upon this religious/spiritual upsurge, the Chilean sociologist Christian Parker characterizes the development in Chile in the 1990s as a dialectic between political disenchantment and religious re-enchantment (1998:665–6). In a society where many people have lost their faith in politics and politicians, a new room for alternative narratives and projects can easily emerge.

VII. PENTECOSTALS AND PUBLIC MORALITY

One narrative into which many Chilean Pentecostals insert themselves is that of a clash between Christian values and moral decadence in contemporary society. Of course, there is nothing new in stating that Pentecostals in Chile and elsewhere define themselves in opposition to the moral decadence of the ‘world’ they left behind when Jesus saved them. But several of my Pentecostal informants of all ages and from different denominations expressed the view that in recent years Chilean society has been characterised by a particularly rapid moral decline, which, some of them interpret as an apocalyptic sign. The sense of moral crisis or increased *libertinaje cultural* (cultural debauchery) is shared by many non-Pentecostal Chileans and echoed – albeit in more descriptive and less derogatory terms – by national scholars. According to the Chilean sociologist Eugino Tironi

(2005:214), a general rupture with the conservative moral order in Chilean society occurred around the turn of the millennium and is reflected in new gender roles, an increasing number of unmarried couples living together, more nudity and eroticism in the mass media, new reality shows, an increasing acceptance of homosexuality, etc. In what is often considered to be the most morally conservative country in Latin America, drastic changes in public morality can be experienced as overwhelming and threatening by many people.

The popular perception of a rupture with a conservative moral order is reinforced by the fact that public morality has come to play an increasingly important role in political life. As a consequence of the neoliberal consensus in Chilean politics, described in the previous section, moral issues (family life, sexuality, prevention, abortion, the rights of homosexuals, etc.) have become crucial political themes through which especially right wing parties can position themselves. Catholic politicians from the right wing parties *Renovación Nacional* (RN) and *Unión Democrática Independiente* (UDI) are taking pains to promote a 'moral fundamentalism', while at the same time accusing center left parties for being moral relativists (Pilmark forthcoming :108).

Although they tend to stay clear of politics, Pentecostals do feel that they have an important and relevant role to play within the contemporary clash of values in Chile. As self-proclaimed defenders and harbingers of decency and firm moral standpoints, Pentecostals represent a counterweight to the perceived moral debauchery of contemporary Chile. The Catholic Church also attempts to play this role, and alliances between Catholic authorities and the political right have become a lot closer since the restoration of democracy than they were during the Pinochet dictatorship, but the discrepancies between the official positions of the Catholic Church, for instance on sexuality, and the views and behaviour of lay Catholics represent an obstacle to this ambition. Pentecostals, who are known for their austere life styles and moral strictness, see themselves as more serious and committed Christians (not without some justification) than Catholics, and hence as the most credible and ambassadors of public morality. So far, Pentecostals have made few attempts to initiate a transformation of public morality from within the political sphere. But could this change?

VIII. PENTECOSTALISM AND DEMOCRACY: AFFINITIES AND DISAFFINITIES

Most empirical research suggests that Latin American Pentecostalism mainly brings about transformation in the private sphere, for instance by redefining gender relationships and changing economic priorities (Brusco 1995; Lindhardt 2012a; Mariz 1994) but has done relatively little in terms of encouraging political mobilisation and participation. Although Pentecostals worry about the moral state of the societies they live in, they tend to hold theistic views of social change and therefore doubt that political struggle is an efficient means of transforming a society in accordance with the will of God (Smilde 1998; Lindhardt 2012a). In other words, Pentecostal theology in itself provides little incitement for engagement in political democratic processes. Nevertheless, a vivid, and to a large extent speculative scholarly debate, exists about the *potential, long term and indirect* contributions of Pentecostalism to processes of democratisation in Latin America and elsewhere. Scholars engaged in this debate do not just search for historical, empirical evidence that Pentecostals are, or are not, prone to become engaged in politics. They also examine Pentecostalism as a particular (ideal typical) institutionalised religious culture that cultivates specific values, skills, orientations and perceptions of social change, all of which may facilitate or impede democratic participation in a near or distant future.

The early and pioneering works of Christian Lalive d'Epinay (1968) and Emilio Willems (1967) stake out two positions in this debate. Although he did not use a Marxist vocabulary, came close to an 'opiate of the masses' position in his portrayal of Pentecostal communities as introvert and highly restrictive concerning congregants' participation in political and other secular organisations. He further noticed that Pentecostal pastors who participated in a survey displayed a striking ignorance of and lack of interest in political issues. Lalive d'Epinay concluded that Pentecostal religion provided congregants with few incentives to pursue better lives through political struggles and therefore indirectly contributed to maintaining the political status quo (1969:170). Arguing along similar lines, later scholars have pointed out that the Pentecostal understanding of spiritual causality removes the focus from structural, political causes of (and possible solutions to) social problems (Deiros 1991; Brouwer, Gifford & Rose 1996). And it has been suggested that Pentecostals churches, despite their emphasis on spiritual individualism, are also too authoritarian to be able to foster modern liberal attitudes (Bastian 1993). Another argument found in the

literature is that Pentecostals have individualist and non-structural approaches to social change (Smith 1994; Smilde 1998; Lindhardt 2012a). In the views of many Pentecostals, the main cause of social problems is the fact that human beings have distanced themselves from God, and it follows that a society can only be transformed through the conversion and salvation of a large number of individuals. To a certain extent, this understanding of social change explains why Pentecostals in Chile and elsewhere are less involved in charity and other kinds of social work than the Catholic Church. However, scholars, such as Christian Smith, have argued that the Pentecostal individualist approach to social change does not necessarily exclude the possibility that Pentecostals may regard political processes as a practical this-worldly way of addressing some material problems (1994:129-30; Dodson 1997:33). Research shows that many Latin American Pentecostals do vote, often according to their own class-based concerns, at elections (David Martin 1990; Freston 1993; Anthony Gill 2004; Steigenga and Coleman 1995).

In contrast to Lalive d'Epinay, Willems (1967:191-93) predicted that organisational and rhetorical skills acquired in Pentecostal churches may prepare people who are marginalised from political processes for future democratic participation. To some extent Willem's optimism is shared by one of the leading scholars on Latin American Pentecostalism, the British sociologist David Martin (1990, 2002). Martin argues that Pentecostal denominations, although introvert and apolitical in their initial stages, in fact promote fundamental democratic values and teach congregants basic democratic skills, all of which *may in time* (Martin is careful only to make cautious predictions) inspire active participation in the political sphere and contribute to the emergence of a healthy democratic culture in Latin America.

In Martin's view, the growth and proliferation of Evangelical churches all over Latin America represent an important break with a hierarchical and monopolistic Catholic culture in the region. During the recent decades, the religious structure of Latin America has become more pluralist, and religious voluntarism and individualism are now dominant features and values. But more importantly, Pentecostal religion teaches skills that are functional in terms of democratic participation. These include the ability to express oneself in public and to organise church events, and the capacity to create voluntary associations. In Pentecostal churches the distinction between ritual experts (priests) and lay people is not as marked as in

the Catholic Church. Lay Pentecostals participate actively in ritual life, for instance as preachers in church and in public squares, as faith healers, as narrators of testimonies, and as prophets and Sunday school teachers. Furthermore, Pentecostalism promotes values such as individual autonomy, self-esteem and self-expression that are compatible with democratic principles and with Enlightenment notions of personhood that inform modernist democratic ideologies (Martin 1990, 2002; Mariz 1992:64; Christian Smith 1994; Burdick 1993; Dodson 1997). Research from a variety of Latin American countries shows that relationships between spouses tend to become more democratic (based on dialogue and consensus) after conversion to Pentecostalism (Mariz 1994; Brusco 1995; Lindhardt 2012a; Martin 1990). In other words, Pentecostalism contains a number of democratic elements or features. Drawing on the work of Martin, Peter Berger has pointed to an 'exceptionally high' affinity between Pentecostalism and modern democracy (2004:10).

In my view, a note of caution needs to be introduced in the discussion about this affinity. The language of ritual Pentecostal discourse and the validity claims on which it rests, are quite different from the language and validity claims of political democratic discourses and debates. Acquiring organisational and rhetorical skills and gaining the necessary confidence to speak in public are not equivalent to learning the art of political dialogue and political compromise. History is by no means short of examples in which superb rhetorical and organisational skills have been put to use in order to promote and defend non-democratic causes. Furthermore, the sense of individual autonomy that is fostered through Pentecostal religious practice is informed by notions of human dependence upon God and differs markedly from the notions of individual autonomy that inform modernist ideologies of democracy and citizenship (Lindhardt 2012a).

IX. PENTECOSTAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLITICAL FIELD IN CONTEMPORARY CHILE

We have seen that Pentecostalism, as a particular religious culture, consisting of beliefs or assumptions about the world and a set of religious practices shaped by such assumptions, contains both democratic and undemocratic elements. But while the analysis of Pentecostalism as an ideal typical religious culture is in many ways a fruitful and helpful endeavour, understanding the kinds of elements which predominate and shape Pentecostal stances to politics within

specific societies at specific times also requires a more empirical approach. So how do Chilean Pentecostals conceive of the political world and their own (potential) role within it? Do they believe that a moral purification of society can be pursued through political struggles? And in what way and to what extent are their perceptions of politics and sources of social change shaped by their religious beliefs?

Pentecostalism has a long history in Chile and its 'democratic effects' have yet to manifest themselves. A national survey from 2001 showed that Evangelicals were less interested in politics than Catholics and people from other religions. In a study from 2008, only 1.1 per cent of Evangelical respondents showed interest in joining a political party and 3.5 per cent claimed to have a high interest in political discussions (Fediakova and Parker 2009:55, 62). My own research in a variety of Pentecostal denominations³ does not distort the picture of Pentecostals as a group with a particularly low interest in politics. But caution should be applied in establishing causal links between religious affiliation and interest in politics. As described, political apathy is widespread in Chile, especially among the lower social sectors, to which a majority of Pentecostals belong. The fact that Pentecostals have little interest in politics and generally perceive it as a 'worldly' matter in which a Christian should not participate, may indicate a successful socialisation into a particular religious worldview. But it may also indicate that Pentecostalism mainly appeals to people who *already* felt alienated from politics.

The simple picture of Pentecostal perceptions of politics is complicated by the introduction of variables such as age, level of education, social status and the theologies of particular churches. In a study of Pentecostalism and politics in Venezuela, the American sociologist David Smilde (1998:290) distinguishes between religious action, religion-oriented action and religiously motivated action. Whereas religious action seeks to bring about ends through the agency of supernatural beings (for instance praying for healing), religion-oriented action is ordinary secular action that aims at facilitating religious practice. An example of religion-oriented action could be seeking a legal permission for preaching in a public square. Religiously motivated action is ordinary secular action inspired by religious beliefs and values. An example could be attempts to prevent the legalisation of abortion or divorce. The latter kind of action is informed by a more mundane sense of agency than religious action, which mainly consists in evoking the power of supernatural others in order to get things done. Smilde argues that people who experience

upward social mobility are more likely to adopt a religious frame containing a more mundane sense of agency (1998:300).

I have found Smilde's distinction between different kinds of action helpful in analysing my own findings, in particular in terms of highlighting nuances in Pentecostal perceptions of politics and sources of social change. In some of Chile's most conservative Pentecostal denominations, such as the *Evangelical Pentecostal Church*, a majority of congregants, and an overwhelming majority of congregant older than 35, have little formal education and low status employment. This church is characterised by a particularly harsh anti-‘worldly’ rhetoric, and congregants are strongly discouraged from participating in politics. During services preachers continuously remind listeners that the political world is corrupt and that only God has the power to change things. Hence the main recipe for achieving social change is prayer to activate divine powers (religious action). Ricardo, a retired worker from the church, expressed himself as follows:

I pray for all the presidents, but no president will ever give me food or a roof over my head. He is the one who gives me that [pointing his index finger upwards].... You know Martin, when you finish your studies, if you don't find a job, neither the president nor anyone else will help you, only the Lord. The politicians just take all the money and help themselves and each other.

In some of Chile's ‘modern’ or ‘renewed’ Pentecostal churches, I encountered different views. In 2007 and 2008 I interviewed 35 young (18-32 years) congregants from the *Assemblies of God* in Valparaíso (Lindhardt 2012b). The majority was ‘native’ Pentecostals (children of Pentecostal parents) and went to university or held degrees. Their political views were complex. A few respondents pointed to compatibilities between socialist ideals of solidarity and the biblical ‘love thy neighbour as yourself’ commandment, whereas others had no confidence in the ability of politicians to address moral problems and instead looked for parties and candidates with a responsible economic policy. Most respondents (22) were unable to place themselves on a traditional right-left scale and showed little or no loyalty towards parties. Instead they looked for particular candidates with firm opinions on moral issues such as abortion and the morning after pill. As one young man from the church put it: “Politicians, they are all thieves, both right wing and left wing politicians. If one candidate shows a little moral integrity, he will get my vote!”

My young respondents from the *Assemblies of God* did, although with varying degrees of enthusiasm, share the view that it is

acceptable for a Pentecostal to become involved in politics and that decent politicians with a firm commitment to Christian values are too few and far between in contemporary Chile. When asked why a Pentecostal should involve him or herself in politics, most respondents replied that political action could facilitate religious work, for instance by securing permits to construct churches, preach on the street, etc., i.e. religion-oriented action. Many added that the level of corruption and nepotism in Chilean political life would probably be reduced if more Pentecostals became involved. Approximately one third (11) of my respondents held the view that the Pentecostal moral agenda could be pursued through political struggles and that Pentecostals have a duty to make public statements about abortion, the morning after pill and a possible legalisation of homosexual marriages, i.e. religiously motivated action. But the majority had very little faith in political action as an efficient means of changing public morality. As Claudio, a 25 year old university student, expressed it:

I think it is okay for a Christian⁴ to participate in politics. But I really do not think that things will change very much if a Christian becomes president one day. New laws will not create social change in the lives of people. We can make laws against the consumption of alcohol or laws on closing hours for discotheques. People know that they are not allowed to drink and drive but they do it anyway. Politics can be useful in terms of improving the conditions of the churches, for instance permissions to preach in the squares. But true change in the lives of people is not created by implementing new laws. Change is created when the church preaches the word of God.

All respondents shared a profound scepticism of Chilean politics and saw the current political culture of the country as detached from Christian values and principles. Though some respondents believed that a Christian candidate could bring some moral integrity into the political field, they also feared that the political world could very easily bring corruption and moral decay into the Christian and that extreme caution would therefore be absolutely mandatory for any Christian who wishes to become involved in politics. Gonzalez, a 27 year old engineer and leader of the youth group in the Assemblies of God put it as follows:

Surely, politics can be used to achieve results, such as better conditions for the churches. But politics is complicated. Those who win are those who are good at lying, those who allow themselves to be corrupted and to compromise their values and principles.

The views expressed by Gonzalo are typical and representative of the youth group in the Assemblies of God and of many other Chilean Pentecostals. Though some Pentecostals, for instance in the Evangelical Pentecostal Church, believe that politics is in itself incompatible with Christian values, many others insisted that it is mainly Chilean politics in its current corrupted state that makes the involvement of a Christian candidate an impossible project. But while some Pentecostals believe that a Christian may be able to transform politics, a majority considers the opposite outcome of political involvement to be much more likely.

X. CONCLUSION

In much of the existing literature, the relation between Pentecostalism and neoliberalism in Latin America and beyond has been conceived of in terms of adaption. Neo-liberalism, the argument often goes, creates all kinds of social, material and cultural insecurities in the lives of people and Pentecostalism provides strategies for coping with those uncertainties. Pentecostalism offers new communities to those wrenched out of rural worlds in their aspiration for modernist individual identities, and it offers healing rituals to those who do not have proper access to health care. It further provides enchanted versions of the market that enable people to make sense of a neoliberal, 'casino-capitalist' social order in which the production of wealth is not in any obvious ways related to production. And finally one encounters the view that Pentecostalism cultivates a kind of personhood that is particularly well suited to an insecure and flexible neoliberal labour market. Thus it has (repeatedly) been argued that participation in Pentecostal churches fosters sobriety, new economic priorities, discipline and initiative, optimism and confidence in the protection of a heavenly father, all of which enables converts to cope with poverty and adapt themselves to unstable work conditions, for instance in the informal economy. My own research in a variety of Chilean Pentecostal denominations has provided me with little evidence to refute such arguments. I would only add that the relatively harmonious co-existence between Pentecostalism and neoliberalism should *also* be ascribed to a neat ideological congruence between, on the one hand, theistic and individualist understandings of social change and a view of politics as a (potentially) corrupt and "worldly" matter, and, on the other hand, a socio-political order where political apathy is widespread and where individualist rather than communal notions of prosperity predominate.

Even though there may be a certain affinity between Pentecostalism and modern democracy in terms of values, notions of individual autonomy and of the organisational and rhetoric skills required of competent participants, I have also argued that certain disaffinities need to be taken into consideration. Besides, in the case of Chile, it cannot be ignored that Pentecostalism grows and thrives in a historical period where popular confidence in politics and politicians is low. There are so far no indications that Pentecostalism is doing anything to reverse these tendencies. Pentecostals feel that a moral transformation of Chilean society is necessary, but only a minority of them believes that such a transformation can be achieved through political struggles, and of the few Pentecostals I have spoken to who did believe that, no one expressed an actual interest in becoming politically active.

In conclusion, I find little reason to be very optimistic about the potential contributions of Pentecostalism to the strengthening of a healthy democratic culture in Chile in any foreseeable future. My own research experience leads me to concur with the Chilean sociologists Evguenia Fediakova and Christian Parker's description of Chilean Pentecostals as a restricted cultural citizenship that acts much more on the basis of religious than on national identities. If popular perceptions of politics in Chile were to change in more positive directions, Pentecostals might react by becoming more open to political participation. But whether Pentecostalism could *in itself* become a decisive cultural motor in processes of democratisation is a different question. The striking ease with which Pentecostals adapt to a disenchanted political culture indicates otherwise.

The continued growth and appeal of Pentecostalism in post-dictatorial Chile should mainly be ascribed to the ability of this religious movement to bring about transformations in the private spheres. In Pentecostal communities, many Chileans find a new sense of community, a new sense of self-esteem, new patterns of consumption, new models for family life and gendered behaviour and, not least, a set of moral absolutes. But at the same time the prosperity of Pentecostalism is also symptomatic of a neoliberal order where confidence in politics and politicians is low, and where a privatised rather than a communal and associative sense of progress prevails.

NOTES

¹ The term 'Evangelical' includes several non-Pentecostal Protestant denominations such as Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians and Anglicans. In 1907, just before the birth of Pentecostalism, one per cent of the population in Chile was Evangelical.

² In statistics on income distribution, the Chilean middle class is usually subdivided into upper middle, middle middle and lower middle class.

³ I have conducted field work on Pentecostalism in Valparaíso, Chile, on and off between 1998 and 2009.

⁴ By 'Christian' he means 'Pentecostal'. Most Chilean Pentecostals insist that Catholics are not real Christians.

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