

# Politics, Pentecostals, and Democratic Consolidation in Brazil

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3/7/2005

One of the most controversial subjects amongst Brazilian political scientists is the wave of Evangelical and specifically Pentecostal religious activism in the country since the mid-1980s and its relative influence in the consolidation of a Brazilian democracy. In 1980, Evangelicals made up about 7.8 percent of the Brazilian population. In 2000, this number was up to 15 percent and the numbers continue to increase. The place where one can observe the relationship between Pentecostal growth and democracy is in the formal political participation of Pentecostal and Evangelical politicians as their growth is largely evident in Brazil's Congress.

This paper will analyze why and how a country which had virtually no history of religious cleavages within the party system, has seen the sudden proliferation of Evangelical and Pentecostal politicians moving into formal politics. It will also address why Pentecostal movements in Brazil's Congress have been successful, specifically those tied to Brazil's liberal party, the PL. Although Pentecostal growth was simultaneous to the growth of Progressive Catholic Base Communities in the 1970s and 1980s, Pentecostals politically mobilized their religious followings in a way that Catholic movements have never been able to do.

Scholars of Pentecostalism and politics fail to explain the reasons for a Pentecostal explosion into formal politics in 1986. Given a Protestant history of aversion to formal politics in Brazil, one would not have expected Pentecostals to enter the formal political arena, although Protestants in Brazil continuously competed with the Catholic Church for worshippers and State resources. However, Brazil's transition to democracy spurred a religious pluralism that created incentives for Evangelicals to become heavily involved in the media and formal politics in order to continue their tradition of

competition for followers and State privileges with the Catholic Church. In a religious community dominated by Catholics, Pentecostals seized the opportunity to compete for worshippers by way of mobilizing them in the formal political sphere in a manner that the Catholic Church and even Progressive Catholic Base Communities were never able to do. Pentecostals organized the populace in arenas in which churches had previously not gone in Brazil, formal political parties such as the PL.<sup>1</sup>

Brazilian Pentecostalism has had three waves of institutional creation (Freston, 2001: 95). The first occurred in 1900s, the second in the 1950s, and the third wave started in the late 1970s. Paul Freston argues that the terms Protestant and Evangelical are used interchangeably in Brazil and that the vast majority would be Evangelical in the Anglophone sense (Freston, 2001: 11). In this paper, I will be focusing on Pentecostals from the third wave of Protestant expansion in Brazil from the 1970s. However, when I refer to Evangelicals in this paper, the term will include specifically Pentecostals, neo-Pentecostals, and other non-mainline Pentecostalized Protestant sects, such as Baptists.<sup>2</sup> These sects practice speaking in tongues, millennialist beliefs, and the belief in current day miraculous cure of illness or injury (Serbin, 2000: 20).

Brazil has the largest Evangelical community, in absolute terms, in the Third World, and the second largest in the world, only behind the United States. Brazil, in many ways, has been seen as a trendsetter, in the words of Paul Freston, “a test case where phenomena peculiar to the new mass Protestantism of the South of the globe first appear” (Freston, 2001: 11). Evangelicals make up about 15 percent of the Brazilian population, which are about twenty-six million people (Freston, 2001: 11). The characteristics of the Protestant community, its size, growth rate, institutional autonomy,

and national control, have united with aspects of the culture, media, and political systems. This makes Brazil a crucial study of the ever-expanding Evangelicalism, and specifically, Pentecostalism, of Latin America.

This paper will analyze the political behavior of Brazilian historical Protestants, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals in order to demonstrate that Pentecostals moved into Brazil's formal political field in the 1980s as part of a long tradition of competition with the Catholic Church for worshippers and State resources. Pentecostals viewed democratic opening as an opportunity to formulate a new conversion strategy, formal politics. The next section of this paper will give an overview of past scholarly work on Pentecostals and democracy in order to demonstrate the ways in which they fail to explain the Pentecostal move to formal party politics. Subsequently, I will outline the historical political agenda of Protestants in Brazil and demonstrate the passage of Evangelical politicians from "Protestant politicians," who did not use their Evangelical identities to produce votes that would elect them into office, to the emergence of "politicians of Christ," who are religious-political actors that loan their names and personalities to be used as official political instruments of the Church which, then, chooses them as a candidate to defend them in the political front (Campos, 2002: 2).

I will analyze the political moves of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, the IURD, during the elections of 1989, 1994, 1998, and 2002. The IURD is significant in that its leaders avidly seek to become allies of the State and it used its influence with the Fernando Collor de Mello and Fernando Henrique Cardoso administrations to help build its business, political, and religious strength (Serbin, 2000: 154). The political actions of the IURD will reveal the ways in which Evangelicals and

Pentecostals in Brazil have utilized their media might as well as their political force through the PL in order to replace Catholics as the new “moral watchdogs” in politics and end their status as Brazil's semiofficial religion (Serbin, 2000: 156). They also seek to overpower the leftist Evangelicals associated with urban social movements and the Brazilian Workers Party (PT) whose emphasis on agrarian reform distracts the Evangelical Bench from its focus on morality in politics.

### ***Religion, Politics, and Pentecostals***

The current literature on Pentecostals and politics does not explain why Pentecostals in Brazil chose formal political parties as an avenue for political activism. Timothy J. Steigenga argues that while religious factors may not lead directly to the formation of political parties or mass based political action, the effects of religion are no less political in that they “provide resources, generate grievances, provide citizenship identities, and mobilize opinions around issues that impact the day to day lives of participants” (Steigenga, 2001: 11). The degree to which this process results in democratic consolidation or democratic politics in Brazil such as community building, civic duties, and equal rights, is more dependent on the context in which it takes place and not the actual process itself (Steigenga, 2001: 11). Although Steigenga provides reasons for why Pentecostalism might spur various types of political organizing in civil society, he does not give an explanation for the rise of Pentecostals in political organizations like the PL, such as IURD leaders Edir Macedo and Vice-President José Alencar. Maria Das Dores Machado asserts that in the Congressional elections of 2000, Evangelicals were affiliated in nineteen of Brazil’s most conservative parties. Eighty three percent were affiliated with parties such as the PL (Machado, 2001: 52).

The role of religious identity in spurring political mobilization is useful when considering the success that Pentecostal leaders have had in garnering votes from their religious following; however it does not explain why Pentecostal pastors sought formal political power only after the democratic opening in the 1980s. In “Religious Pluralism and Social Change: Coming to Terms with Complexity and Convergence”, Carol Ann Drogus focuses too heavily on the controversy which exists on the topic of religion and politics. She argues that this is due to differing conceptions of the role that civil society has in democratization, the role religious identity has in carrying values, and the role of religious organizations as a source of political mobilization (Drogus, 2000: 263). Again, while the role of civil society and religious identity is important for understanding why congregations vote for the candidates of their churches, this argument does not explain why Pentecostals seek former political power.

Scholars such as Sara Diamond predict that Pentecostal traits will assist in authoritarian politics; however she does not offer an explanation for why Pentecostals would move into formal politics to begin with. Diamond studies today’s primarily Pentecostal character of Latin American Protestantism and sees it as an apolitical, otherworldly religion that is, on its own terms, entirely apathetic towards politics (Dodson, 1997: 25). Diamond argues that although Pentecostals may assist in authoritarian politics through compliance or by lending themselves to the manipulations of the “Christian right”, they do not foster democratic values or promote a sense of civic commitment that is necessary for democratic politics (Dodson, 1997: 26). However, a discussion of a Pentecostal propensity to view formal politics as a conversion strategy is lacking in Diamond's work.

Kenneth P. Serbin offers the most comprehensive study on the increasing religious pluralism that led Pentecostals in Brazil to more democratic freedoms such as the use of media and civil political organization, although he does not explain why some parts of the growing Pentecostal movement sought power through formal party politics. Serbin asserts that one must view Pentecostal expansion in the context of increasing social and religious pluralism that go hand in hand with growing democratic freedoms, the growth of the Brazilian media, and the developing complexity of an ever-growing urban society (Serbin, 2000: 20). He states that in order to sustain their institutional bases, Pentecostal churches sought formal political power and became allies of the State (Serbin, 2000: 29).

Although Serbin explores a competitive religious market that was spurred by the democratic opening, his argument does not explain why some segments of the Pentecostal movement sought formal political power only after the democratic opening. It is imperative to understand the motives of a Pentecostal entry into formal politics in order to make predictions over what effect Pentecostals will have on the consolidation of a Brazilian democracy.

### ***From “Protestant Politicians” to “Politicians of Christ”***

It is clear that scholars fail to explain the transformation of Protestants from a group that tended to disassociate itself from Brazilian public and political life to a group that sought formal political power through accommodation with the State. As aforementioned, a history of Protestant Church-State relations is necessary in order to understand why a sudden Pentecostal entry into formal politics is surprising given their history of aversion to the Brazilian political arena. However, a Protestant tendency to act

in direct competition with the Catholic Church makes their later entry into formal politics obvious.

Very few Protestant politicians appeared in the old Brazilian Republic during the early 1900s; however there are examples of some in small cities and in a few states of the federation (Campos, 2002: 3). They belonged mainly to a second generation of Protestants. Some were mayors, deputies, and Protestant councilmen and all were mainline Protestant politicians. For example, Francisco Augusto Pereira in 1902, a rich coffee plantation owner and convert to Presbyterianism, was the Mayor of Lençóis Paulista (Campos, 2002: 2). The majority of these politicians sought political power for their families or for themselves. Many of them were children of rich plantation owners who could afford to give their offspring good educations. Leonildo Silveira Campos argues that at this time, corporatist strategies where Politicians could run on Protestant platforms and use their religious identities in order to garner votes did not exist (Campos, 2002: 3).

The campaign for the Constituent Assembly soon after the constitutionalist revolution of 1932 brought with it the formation of the League of Catholics. This resulted in a Protestant political reaction. At this time, the antidemocratic and antipluralistic Catholic Church benefited from a highly authoritarian and corporatist presidency of Getúlio Vargas as he allowed for the Catholic Church to rise as a national institution by granting it privileges and subsidies in exchange for political and ideological support (Serbin, 2000: 146). In response to the formation of the League of Catholics, an old Presbyterian doctor named Nicolau Soares do Couto Esher started an association for Protestants in São Paulo with political goals called “União Cívica Evangélica Paulista”

whose slogan was “Liberty and Justice” (Campos, 2002: 4).<sup>3</sup> These progressive Protestants sought to keep the Brazilian State religiously neutral, however their attempts were unsuccessful as close Church-State ties continued during succeeding, democratic administrations from 1946 to 1964 and to some extent, into the military regime (Serbin, 2000: 156).

The Catholic advantage of a moral concordat with the Brazilian State and divisions amongst the Protestants are strong arguments for explaining the political difficulties of Evangelicals at this time. In an article expressing his disappointment, Esher wrote it was travesty that Evangelicals had not elected their own candidates for the Constituent Assembly of 1932. Not only had they not elected their own candidates, but also they had elected nine liberal candidates into office who he argued could not defend the liberty desired by the Protestants.

There was also in this period a strong resistance inside the mainline churches to the participation of pastors in political campaigns. An article in a Methodist journal read, “A candidatura de pastores, sustentadas ou não por organizações evangélicas de ação política, deveria ser evitada ou, ao menos, não deveria ser promovida.” (Campos, 2002: 4).<sup>4</sup> In other words, at this time, the “Protestant politician” was preferably not to be a pastor because the Pastor was destined to exert his religious vocation and the possibility of political participation could lead to potential partisan conflicts. This could result in disastrous situations for the local congregation. Protestants suffered of a lack of shepherds in the field as it was, and therefore only lay members of the church should be candidates.

Once again in this period we see the beginnings of a competitive mindset against

the Catholic Church. The politician elected by the Protestants should be a person opposed to the power hunger that the Roman Catholic Church had been demonstrating since the revolution of 1930. Due to their carelessness, a repercussion of some lost powers like the separation of Church and State in 1889 when the military implemented a republic in Brazil led all religious groups to suffer (Campos, 2002: 4).

### ***A New Generation of Politicians for Christ***

Nos, evangélicos, somos conservadores, graças a Deus. Não devemos incorrer no mesmo equívoco da CNBB, que tem abandonado os aspectos fundamentais religiosos para abordar questões de ordem ideológicas repetindo palavras de ordem como se fosse um sindicato.<sup>5</sup>

Fausto Rocha, PFL/SP (Pierucci and Prandi, 1996: 167).

A new cohort of politicians emerged after the first generation of Protestant politicians, and they were elected Evangelicals for the Constituent Assembly of 1986. Brazil's history provides the explanation for the increasing religious pluralism and political success of Pentecostal pastors at this time. As Kenneth Serbin argues, the Catholic-military conflict during the authoritarian era provided an opportunity for other religions to expand through accommodation with the State, and this was a crucial catalyst for the politicization of Pentecostal pastors (Serbin, 2000: 21). After World War II, some sections of the Brazilian Catholic Church changed from an institution that merely supported the status quo, partially because Second Vatican Council introduced Brazilian Catholics to discourse with the modern world and even Marxism (Serbin, 2000: 147). Between the years of 1968 and 1985, the Catholic Church was in opposition to the military regime and acted as a voice for human rights and social justice. At this time Grassroots Catholic Base Communities, CEBs, emerged to promote agrarian reform, an independent labor movement, and Amerindian rights (Serbin, 2000: 147).

After 1985, the CEBs and progressive Catholics continued to try and support

democratic consolidation by way of political activism and criticism of governmental disregard for human rights. However, Pope John Paul II and conservative bishops restricted the progressive clergy's political activities and halted a possible move toward formal politics during the democratic opening well into the 1990s. In addition to pressure from conservative Catholics, Serbin argues that progressive Catholics did not enter the formal political realm because they did not want to jeopardize the legitimacy of the fledgling and fragile democratic government they had helped to foster, although many members of leftist political parties such as the PT began in CEBs. This does not necessarily mean that Protestants were especially strong supporters of the dictatorship. However, although most of the armed forces remained Catholic, some sectors promoted Pentecostalism as a way to offset progressive Catholicism (Serbin, 1999: 21).

Pentecostals saw the halting of a progressive Catholic entry into formal politics by conservative Catholics and their new found accommodation with the State as an opportunity to dismantle the Catholic Church's religious and political hegemony (Serbin, 2000: 148). The religious pluralism set off by the economic and social context of Brazil provided an opportunity for minority religious leaders and pastors to compete for worshippers with the Catholic Church by mobilizing their followers politically, a conversion strategy that was previously unavailable due to the Catholic moral concordat with the State. The formal political sphere in Brazil was an arena in which Churches had formerly never entered and therefore presented itself as an ideal ground for Pentecostal pastors to garner a large national following.

Both Pentecostal Churches and CEBs stressed active participation in contrast to the passivity of traditional Catholicism. However Pentecostalism offered a popular

religiosity in Brazil that did not even “implicitly recognize the institutional hegemony of the Catholic Church” (Freston, 1993: 94). Catholicism was always a public and civic religion into which Brazilians were born and spent their lives. Pentecostalism offered poor and marginalized Brazilians a choice in an ever more varied religious arena.

During the economic crises of the 1980s, church membership exploded. Pentecostal Pastors were practicing more effective methods than Catholic Priests for attracting the poor and disenfranchised into formal political arenas because progressive Catholics were forced to cut back on many of the innovations introduced during the days of the dictatorship (Serbin, 2000: 2). The popularity of the Progressive Catholic Church declined due to their failure to produce deep social transformations and due to the collapse of communism (Serbin, 2000: 148). In addition, the intervention of conservative Catholics in progressive movements along with the end of a fight against the dictatorship reduced the enthusiasm and membership of CEBs (Serbin, 2000: 148).

Pentecostals addressed people with afflictions such as drinking and adultery, afflictions that were not being addressed by Catholic Church (Serbin, 1999: 21). Many of the Pentecostals converting at this time were Afro-Brazilians whom the Catholic Church had great difficulty in assimilating (Burdick, 1993: 45). Overall, Pentecostals had great success during the 1980s because they responded more effectively to people’s suffering, immediate needs, and fears than either conservative or progressive Catholicism (Serbin, 1999: 21).

Pentecostals leaders, therefore, changed from a group that tended to disassociate itself from public and formal political life to a group that rose above their state as a minority religious group in order to take on a more systematic and calculated role in the

political sphere. This is the moment in which the Evangelical bench first appears, organized through right-wing conservative political parties such as the PL, the PMDB, the PDT, and the PFL.<sup>6</sup> This bench was formed by the new “politicians of Christ,” of Pentecostal origin. This move was not necessarily from day to night. In the election of 1982, Evangelicals were interested in voting as far as “brother in Christ voting for brother in Christ” went in legislative elections (Pierucci and Prandi, 1996: 167). This election had modest results as the Chamber of Deputies had ten members of the parliament that were Evangelicals.

In 1986, Pentecostals showed a remarkable performance in the Congressional election with eighteen successful candidates. Including other Evangelical groups and historical Protestants, this Evangelical bench totaled 36 representatives (Pierucci and Prandi, 1996: 168). As Kenneth Serbin notes, these deputies were not members of the traditional political elite but new politicians elected on the basis of church connections (Serbin, 2000: 27). They made up the fourth largest bench in the Congress, only behind the PMDB, the PFL, and the PDS (Pierucci and Prandi, 1996: 168).

Although the initial goal of Evangelicals entering politics may have been to acquire a larger religious following, Antonio Pierucci and Reginaldo Prandi assert that the Evangelical bench eventually desired to set terms precisely to the ways of the pre-separation of church and State (Pierucci and Prandi, 1996:174). Pentecostals proclaimed “Ou estado reconhece o Deus do Povo, ou o povo não reconheceria o estado” (Pierucci and Prandi, 1996: 174).<sup>7</sup> Pierucci and Prandi state that this Evangelical bench was composed of biblical fundamentalists and moralists that had the advantage of making more immediate contacts with civil society and their relationships to society were deeper

and more persuasive than conservative secular candidates.

Evangelicals were not the majority religious group in Brazil at this time; however they were appealing to populist moralist beliefs through usurpation of delegation (Pierucci and Prandi, 1996: 174). Pentecostals joined groups such as the “Commission of Sovereign and Guaranteed Rights for Men and Women” which defended the traditional Christian customs of moral sexual conventions. Evangelicals defended these conventions in the name of a Brazilian people, which they believed to be a moral people. A representative of that group and pastor of the Assembly of God church, Salatiel De Carvalho (PFL) asserted: “Evangelicals don’t want homosexuals to have equal rights because the majority of society doesn’t want homosexuals to have equal rights” (Pierucci and Prandi, 1996: 175). Other examples of the traditionalism of the Evangelical bench was their staunch opposition to abortion, gambling, feminism, pornography, censored behavior on television, and favoring religion in school (Pierucci and Prandi, 1996: 175).

Pierucci and Prandi argue that the Evangelical Bench of 1986 had the visibility of a minority leftist group, making a conservative generalization impossible (Pierucci and Prandi, 1996: 180). However, the minority being liberal is an indicator of the direction this new type of Evangelical political activism would take (Pierucci and Prandi, 1996: 166). Pierucci and Prandi assert that this Evangelical coalition could not separate the ethical sphere from the moral sphere. Their conservatism had many popular appeals, which were traditionalist and moralist, appeals that have not stopped being demanded in the popular sectors. They argue that their inability to leave the “Evangelical protest” out of the Congress opened the door for the participation and electoral mobilization of many marginalized and politically excluded Brazilians.

Although conservative Evangelicals did not label themselves as right-wingers, they were an important part of the right because they were aligned with socio-economic conservative parties. When leftist minorities of the Evangelical bench such as Lysaneas Maciel (PDT), Benedita da Silva (PT), Nelson Aguiar (PMDB), and Celso Dourado (PMDB) brought questions of agrarian reform to the table and urged the party to consider the economic situation of their constituency, rightist Evangelicals such as Daso Coimbra (PMDB) and Fausto Rocha (PFL) would argue “Não se envolvessem em questões controversas” (Pierucci and Prandi, 1996: 183).<sup>8</sup> For the conservative sects of the Evangelical bench, they believed that in order to compete with the Catholics, their political agenda should appeal to a moral society and be in the defense of good customs, the conservation of good traditional values, and the reaffirmation of Evangelical churches by the State.

When asked if he would like to hear the Evangelical bench approach questions of agrarian reform, Fausto Rocha, one of the most conservative promoters of Evangelical bloc unity stated, “Não devemos incorrer no mesmo equívoco da CNBB que tem abandonado os aspectos fundamentais religiosas para abordar questões de ordem ideológica, repetindo palavras de ordem como se fosse um sindicato” (Pierucci and Prandi, 1996: 167).<sup>9</sup> In order to stress that the approach this new Evangelical bench would be unmistakably religious, deputy and Pastor Antonio de Jesus of the PMDB initiated a proposal to make the presence of the Bible obligatory during Congressional hearings (Pierucci and Prandi, 1996: 181).

Another indicator of the influence of the Evangelical entry into the Congress of 1986 was their representation in the Congress’ commissions and sub-commissions during

the preparation phase of the first text. Evangelicals were present in sixteen of the twenty-four sub-commissions (Pierucci and Prandi, 1996: 176). They were in the Commission on Family and the Commission on Education and Culture. Their method was to center conservative forces of familial and private morality in these commissions as well as to give Evangelical politicians an image of diverse interests in public opinion. Of the 36 members, twelve were in this commission, which was subdivided into three sub-commissions (Pierucci and Prandi, 1996: 176). These were the Sub-Commission on Education, which Pastor Antonio de Jesus from the PMDB was represented. Roberto Vital of the PMDB and the pastors Arolde de Oliveira and Fausto Rosha of the PFL were part of the Sub-Commission on Culture and Sports. Finally Eliel Rodrigues (PMDB), Eraldo Tinoco (PFL), Eunice Michiles (PFL), Joao de Deus Antunes (PDT), Matheus Iensen (PMDB), Lezio Sathler (PMDB), Roberto Augusto (PTB), Sotero Cunha (PDC), and Nelson Aguiar were on the Sub-Commission on Family of Youth and Elderly.

The democratic period of the 1980s is when new Pentecostal candidates and politicians began to classify themselves as *Evangélicos* using the phrase “of Christ.” In this way, they were able to win votes by gaining better visibility in the presence of civil society. Groups such as “the Athletes of Christ”, “Men of Evangelical Affairs”, “Militant Evangelicals”, “Men of Christ”, and the “Politicians of Christ” began to emerge. It is in the period that we begin to hear Evangelical politicians claiming that only those elected by God should hold governmental positions that were integral for the nation’s progress (Campos, 2002: 7).

Nevertheless, these different denominations and religious sects had an innovative strategy for gaining the legitimization to exercise this type of theocracy over civil society.

Evangelicals claimed that the majority of the Brazilian people believe in God and the constitution should express the will of the majority. At this time, the Evangelical bench considered the enemies of the nation to be feminist movements, gay movements, the left, secular humanism, cultural modernity, the porn industry, intellectual snobs, youth culture, liberal educators, and liberal countries, to name a few (Pierucci and Prandi, 1996: 174). They were not interested in representing the leftist minority candidates such as Benedita da Silva, but they were there to represent a moral majority.

### ***Evangelical Politicians and the Media***

It is imperative to understand the role of the Evangelical media in politics in order to comprehend how Evangelicals were successful at converting and mobilizing the Brazilian masses in the post-transition era. Paul Freston asserts that nearly half of the Protestant congressmen since 1986 have had links with the media, whether as presenters of programs or owners of stations (Freston, 2001: 16). Pentecostals have used their media might in order to compete for worshippers as well as to organize followers into political arenas. Most televangelism is Pentecostal. Freston asserts that Pentecostal media might in Brazil has served as a way for an expanding minority to fortify its self-image as well as serve as a way into politics, and politics is also a route to media ownership.

The media are very much associated with political activity by way of the visibility it gives to its presenters, through the power of the owners in relation to Evangelical leaders who for multiple reasons desire access to the media, and through concession-holders' need for political support (Freston, 2001: 17). Many Evangelicals have gone from media into politics or from politics into the media. The Chamber of Deputies'

commission on communication always has many Protestants who staunchly oppose proposals to democratize control of the media.

This is not to suggest that the Evangelical media are homogeneously political or politically homogeneous, but the Evangelical media personalities that do have electoral activity do demonstrate the media's force as a liaison between a conversionist community and public life (Freston, 2001: 17). An example of a Pentecostal church that uses its media might as a political tool is the IURD. This Church purchased a TV record, Brazil's fifth largest network, in 1989 (Freston, 2001: 17). The need for the IURD's political support was a main reason for the construction of a solid parliamentary base in 1990.

Maria Das Dores Machado asserts that the media and the political realm interact in an interesting manner when it comes to intervening variables such as legislative debates and political alliances as well as political factions (Machado, 1998: 7). In other words, discussions about governmental regulations on same sex civil unions were favored by viewers of the Evangelical media, as well as covertures on abortion and planned parenthood. In September of 1996 to August of 1997, The IURD had dedicated 36 programs to the topic of abortion (Machado, 1998: 7). This seemed to put these topics on the forefront of the political agenda of Evangelical politicians and increased their commitment to conservative stances on these subjects in the electoral campaign of 1996 (Machado, 1998: 7).

### ***Politicians for Christ After 1986***

In the elections 1990, the Evangelical Bench dropped to 23 members, but the IURD increased its share from one to three members and in 1994 to six members. Protestant representatives have been twice as likely to win re-election as non-protestants

(Serbin, 1999: 20). The bench rose to 35 after the 1998 election. The IURD elected fourteen members including one of its top bishops, to become the largest Evangelical contingent in the Congress.

Serbin describes the new generation of Evangelical politicians in congress as part of the slightly rightist clientilistic center, which is more involved with patronage than ideology (Serbin, 2000: 20). The Evangelical bench has candidly defended the interests of its churches and has sought after government resources and privileges in competition with the Catholic Church, and obtained television concessions in exchange for support of Sarney, in particular his successful bid to extend his term (Serbin, 2000: 20).

As a result, the Evangelical bench has gained a reputation for practicing the gross deal making for which the Brazilian Congress is infamous. Its centrism came into play during the Collor impeachment proceedings, when it remained vague about its position until opting for removal at the end (Freston, 2001: 17).

### ***Presidential Elections and the IURD***

The divisions that existed early on in the Evangelical bench between rightists and leftists and an Evangelical desire to replace Catholics as the primary voice of morality in the Brazilian political sphere sheds light on the preemptive actions of conservative Evangelicals during the elections of 1989, 1994, and specifically the elections of 1998, and 2002. Pentecostals have continued to use their media resources and direct appeals to the faithful in order to support conservative candidates in presidential elections. This is due to the fact that in a country with high inequalities such as Brazil, those who mobilize the poor will possess the most power. Early on, Pentecostals in the IURD allied with influential and conservative interest groups and used their media might to rally their

faithful in order to acquire votes.

In 1989 and 1994, a strong sense of political polarization on the left and right continued to threaten the conservative Evangelical majority. It was around these two extremes that the rightist Evangelicals organized themselves on many instances, completely against Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the PT. However, conservative Evangelicals in the PL strategically moved to the center through an electoral alliance with Lula and the PT once it was determined that he would win the election of 2002, in order to isolate Evangelical leftists and Catholics to become the moral watchdogs of Brazilian politics. In the elections of 1998 and 2002, the IURD calculated its every move in order to outdo the leftist Evangelicals that were competing for the conservative bloc's place as the voice of morality. The IURD proved its ability to produce successful political outcomes, as Bishop Rodrigues demonstrated the church's organization and strength to distribute the votes of his faithful.

#### *The Campaign of 1989*

In the presidential election of 1989, there was a hope amongst Evangelicals that an Evangelical candidate would be inaugurated. There were many hopes that Iris Resends of the Evangelical Christian Church would be the candidate for the PMDB. Pentecostal pastor Manoel Ferreira of Assemblies of God Church affirmed he had had a revelation from God saying the next president would be an Evangelical. However, the most notable revelation given to a Pentecostal Bishop was the one received by Edir Macedo of the IURD who ascertained: “Após orar e pedir a Deus que indicasse uma pessoa, o Espírito Santo nos convenceu de que Fernando Collor de Mello era o escolhido” (Campos, 2002: 19).<sup>10</sup>

It was no coincidence that shortly after this statement, Collor began to visit many Pentecostal churches as well as serve as a guest speaker on several of the IURD's radio shows. This support for Collor was not reserved strictly for the IURD. In fact, all Pentecostal churches demonized Lula and presented Collor as heaven sent. The pro-Collor majority muted the Evangelical leftist minority (Campos, 2002: 19). The pro-Lula Evangelicals were not successful at stopping the staunch euphoria implanted by so many years of anti-communism that had been strategically cultivated by conservative Brazilian Pentecostals. Lula's successful progression to the second round in the 1989 election made Pentecostal leaders fear the worst (Pierucci and Prandi, 1996: 98). It had been said that Lula and the PT would bring Brazil to communism and that they would eliminate religious liberty and persecute the believers.

The Catholic Church at this time hoped to negotiate Church-State relations and create a legal distinction between the Catholic Church and other religions in politics. They worked to influence Collor to safeguard financial assets and its philanthropic organizations' privileges; however their efforts were unsuccessful (Serbin, 2000: 149). On the other hand, the IURD in conjunction with the PL, to whom the IURD's Bishop Macedo was a member, organized pro-Collor committees in each of its temples. They were in charge of passing out posters, flyers, and pictures of Collor. In return, Collor accepted the IURD's Pastor Edir Macedo as well as eleven pastors and sixteen Evangelical deputies into Brasilia on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1992.

#### *The Campaign of 1994*

In the election of 1994, Lula presented himself to the Brazilian people once again as the PT's presidential candidate. The IURD through the PL began a period of

campaigning against Lula in full awareness that there was no chance for an Evangelical presidential candidate in this election. Once again, the IURD claimed that Lula's communist regime would persecute the Evangelicals and that the Catholic Church supported these attacks. The official IURD journal began to publish images of Lula attending Afro-Brazilian services with the title "Lula Apela Para Candomblé" and "O povo brasileiro não quer um presidente com dez religiões" (Campos, 2002: 22).<sup>11</sup> In July, the IURD held a convention in the Flamengo stadium in Rio de Janeiro with the theme "Clamor Pelo Brasil".<sup>12</sup> The goal of this convention was to awaken the Brazilian public to the prospect of being taken over by leftists. Macedo alerted the crowd that once again, Brazil had a choice between God and Satan. Pastor Julio Cesar Dias condemned Lula's campaign due to the participation of Father Betto, asserting that his participation proved the PT's alliance with the Catholic Church.

It is certain that out of the 63,305,971 million Brazilian voters in 1994, the IURD achieved to sway the votes of more than five million of its Brazilian adult members and perhaps ten million Brazilian adults indirectly (Nicolau, 1993: 225). This makes them a large reason for Lula's rejection in 1994.

### *The Campaign of 1998*

The Evangelical vote in the presidential election of 1998 did not alter the results for Brazil's decision to elect Fernando Henrique Cardoso, but it is important to note their force in the election of 44 Evangelical federal deputies. Of this number, 17 were from the IURD in the state of Rio where Bishop Carlos Rodrigues of the PL, chief of political campaigns for the IURD, was elected. Therefore, the IURD had one federal deputy in 1988, three in 1990, six in 1994, and 17 in 1998 (Campos, 2002: 22). In the state of Rio,

where there are 600,000 to 800,000 members of the IURD, the Evangelicals elected 13 state deputies, and six were of the IURD. About 95% of the members of the IURD in 1998 declared they voted for candidates of their own churches (Campos, 2002: 22).

### *Campaign of 2002*

In the campaign of 2002, Bishop Rodrigues, with the backing of the now highly influential Pentecostal PL party, made a strategic move to the center and formed a coalition with Lula who, prior to June of 2002, seemed invincible. A prominent textile industrialist, member of the IURD, and president of the PL, José Alencar became Lula's candidate for vice-president. Lula defended his decision in light of protests by leftist PT members and Catholics. He argued this coalition represented a great social pact in the country; it was an alliance between workers and honest businessmen and between nationalists and advocates for economic development. Of course, the PL's Pentecostals considered this move essential in order to assert their position as a primary source for morality over Catholics in Lula's possible government, which would not normally have the backing of conservative fundamentalists.

It is important to note the numbers of Catholics had decreased from 95.2% in 1940, to 93.1% in 1960, to 89% in 1980, to 73.8% in 2000 (Campos, 2002: 22). The number of Evangelicals had risen to 15.5% in 2000. This incredible increase in numbers of converts to Evangelical churches and denominations in addition to their loyalty to their respective pastors and churches had without a doubt an enormous effect on the visibility of Evangelical politics in Brazil (Campos, 2002: 26).

### ***Pentecostals and Democratic Consolidation in Brazil***

Protestant politics in Brazil has changed drastically since its inception in the

1900s. The advent of religious pluralism, along with the stifling of a progressive Catholic movement in formal politics, led to the success of Pentecostal organizations, such as the PL, because they appealed to a moral majority and utilized the media to get their agenda across. The initiation of democracy in Brazil and a tradition of competition with the Catholic Church changed how Pentecostals viewed their role in the religious and political sphere. Religious pluralism opened the door for Pentecostals to use formal politics as a new conversion strategy. Brazil's ever growing competitive structure continues to lead Pentecostal incentives and they have calculated their political moves in order to wipe out leftist Evangelicals and replace Catholics in politics. Pentecostals now use their media resources and direct appeals to the faithful to support conservative candidates in presidential and congressional elections.

It is now evident why some sections of the Pentecostal movement in the 1980s chose formal party politics as an avenue for political activism, but it is important to note what their participation will mean for the future of Brazilian democratic consolidation. As Kenneth Serbin asserts, although the new Evangelical Bench is one of the largest coalitions of representatives, Pentecostal involvement in politics has not led to any significant change in Brazilian politics from a top down perspective (Serbin, 2000: 22). Pentecostals play along with the system, not against it.

At a grass-roots level, Pentecostal activity is integrating the illiterate, uneducated, and disenfranchised into political structures (Pierucci and Prandi, 1996: 174). The PL's leadership in alliance with the IURD coordinates electoral strategies to ensure that its candidates do not compete against one another in legislative contests. It publishes a newspaper with a political page that provides an alternative to the unfavorable coverage

of the church in the mainstream press as well. The IURD's newspaper also offers a means for elected officials to offer accountability to their supporters. Pentecostal churches encourage voter registration and during campaigns, members of the church serve as canvassers. Individual churches hold meetings for introducing candidates. Successful Evangelical politicians maintain their electoral base by acting as "brokers" between the members and the government agencies.

It is evident that the IURD leadership's involvement in the PL leads them to treat their congregations as political parties in their quest for votes and influence. Serbin asserts that in terms of organization and discipline, they actually outdo many of the baseless and ephemeral political parties for which Brazil is infamous. Our discussion of IURD politics demonstrates a Pentecostal propensity to view formal politics as an integral part of missionary work. The church teaches the faithful to elect candidates who will attend to its needs. Pentecostal churches emphasize the vote for a fellow Pentecostal as support for a "brother" who truly understands persecution and acts as a bridge between the faithful and the outer world.

However, new Pentecostal structures do not necessarily encourage democratic practices (Serbin, 2000: 30). Hierarchy is what counts in Pentecostal churches. Candidates of the Pentecostal churches today are composed of subservient members of the church who have worked their way up the ranks. It has also been proven that members of the IURD participate very little in political work such as community organizations and have demonstrated a high level of support for a hypothetical return to military rule (Carneiro, 1997: 37).

Bishop Rodrigues of the IURD argues that Pentecostal churches are composed of

the poor and marginalized whose voices have been strengthened thanks to the Politicians they are voting into office. He asserts:

A democracia foi pensada para o povo e não para a elite. Os evangélicos são hoje os mais próximos do povo. A maioria dos líderes evangélicos saíram da base, são oriundos da pobreza, dos bairros pobres, da classe média-baixa. Eu vejo que os evangélicos oriundos dessa classe lutam por essa classe. (...) Acho o seguinte, nós evangélicos temos uma vontade de mudar muito grande. Já é da nossa mensagem a mudança, o inconformismo. A nossa formação intelectual e espiritual que se deu na igreja é de mudança. É de romper valores. O evangélico por filosofia já é democrático (Fonseca, 2002: 20).<sup>13</sup>

A new association between Brazil's poorest communities and a new political activism is an occurrence that in years to come may help consolidate a young Brazilian democracy. However, while Pentecostals continue to work within neo-liberal frameworks in place, we may continue to see inequality in Brazil. Although the poor are being given a voice, a Pentecostal view of the left as the enemy, their focus on morality in place of economic reform, and their corporatist and clientelistic praxis will continue to favor the national elite. Evangelical opposition to funding for public school, minority and homosexual rights will continue to be issues that divide the Evangelical community.

The Establishment of a solid democracy in this context will only be achieved through a political intervention that places as its priority the fight against inequalities. Pentecostal expansion in politics serves as important in the Brazilian political sphere as it proliferates religious pluralism in a changing, but still predominately Catholic country. However, the Brazilian State must assume a role of neutrality in reference to its relationships with religious groups in order to guarantee equality and democracy in Brazil.

## *Notes*

<sup>1</sup> The PL has recently become the party most closely affiliated with prominent Pentecostal churches such as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God to which Brazil's current vice president, José Alencar is a member. Most of its members consist of Pentecostal pastors that have entered formal politics.

<sup>2</sup> Neo-Pentecostal churches are churches formed after the 1970s such as the IURD, which are known for teaching a progressive prosperity theology.

<sup>3</sup> Translation: Evangelical Civic Union of São Paulo.

<sup>4</sup> Translation: "The candidacy of Pastors, supported or not by Evangelical political organizations should be prevented or at the very least, not promoted."

<sup>5</sup> Translation: "We Evangelicals, thank God, are conservatives. We should not incur the same mistake as the CNBB, which has abandoned fundamental, religious aspects in order to address ideological questions, repeating words of order as if it were a union."

<sup>6</sup> PMDB: Brazilian Democratic Movement Party; PDT: Democratic Workers Party; PFL: Liberal Front Party.

<sup>7</sup> Translation: "Either the State recognizes the God of the people, or the people do not recognize the State."

<sup>8</sup> Translation: "Do not become involved in controversial topics."

<sup>9</sup> Translation: "We should not incur the same mistake as the CNBB, which has abandoned fundamental, religious aspects in order to address ideological questions, repeating words of order as if it were a union."

<sup>10</sup> Translation: "After praying and asking God to indicate a person, The Holy Spirit convinced us that Fernando Collor de Mello is the chosen one."

<sup>11</sup> Translation: "Candomblé appeals to Lula" and "The Brazilian people do not want a president with ten religions."

<sup>12</sup> Translation: "An Outcry for Brazil."

<sup>13</sup> Translation: "Democracy was created for the people and not for the elite. Evangelicals today are the closest to the people. The majority of Evangelical leaders come from base communities, from poverty, from poor neighborhoods, from the lower-middle class. I see that the Evangelicals that come from this class fight for this class (...) I believe the following; we Evangelicals have a will for change. Our message is of change, changing the irreconcilable. Our intellectual and spiritual formation in the church focused on change. It is of breaching values. A person through his Evangelical philosophy is inherently democratic."

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