

Postsocialism, Postcolonialism, Pentecostalism

We live in a world of expanded limits and in an age that we are no longer certain how to categorize.¹ Our use of terms like “postsocialism” and “postcolonialism” (like several other “posts”) indicates our reluctance to give a positive definition to the character of our age at all and suggests that we may have finally thrown off a notion that has been basic to Western social theory since the Enlightenment, that the salient features of every age can be best made intelligible in terms of its place in an evolutionary sequence of stages leading to a determinate climax. Now at last it seems to be goodbye to all that—or at least seems so to those who prefer to pluralize the age as one of modernities. It is outside the West that the most definite conceptions are now entertained of what modernity is, along with the aspiration to progress in that direction. The concept of late capitalism—a last echo of the Marxist variant of social-evolutionary thought, absurd because it implies a time schedule that makes sense only within the terms of a historicism that is ostensibly disclaimed—has given way to neoliberalism, a less tendentious way of characterizing our age. While neoliberalism’s primary reference is economic, to the hegemony of the free market, it is also usefully suggestive of other freedoms, particularly (in this context) of religion in formerly socialist states, where a plurality of competing faiths has largely replaced states’ attempts to control, monopolize, or eliminate the expression of religious belief. With the removal of many of the previous barriers to the circulation of religious messages, the activities of transnational religious organizations have burgeoned. State socialism fancied itself as postreligious; postsocialism has seen the revival of religion. In that respect the Soviet bloc, whose historic aim had been to blaze an entirely different trail for the social evolution of humanity, has rejoined most of the rest of the contemporary world, though in a very different situation from the one in which it left it.

The opening up of the former Soviet bloc to new religious influences has occurred at a time when, owing to religious developments elsewhere in the world, transnational flow-patterns of religious influence have become much more poly-centric and multidirectional than we have hitherto thought of them as being. Catherine Wanner presents a particularly striking instance of this:²

When a Nigerian opens a church in Ukraine that sends Ukrainian believers to the US, Germany and elsewhere to save the unsaved and church the unchurched, it is no longer a case of core exerting influence on the periphery. Rather the interconnections and the cultural flow of ideas, objects and people are also significant among non-Western regions and from the so-called Third World to the West.

What she describes as occurring in Kiev is an entirely novel conjuncture of religious currents, of the postsocialist and the postcolonial. A full account of the Nigerian background will open the way to a full appreciation of the paradoxical way in which the postcolonial has here come to the postsocialist world.

The founder of the Ukrainian Pentecostal church known as the Embassy of God is a Nigerian, Pastor Sunday Adelaja, who came to the Soviet Union as a student (like many Nigerians before him) in 1989. His name tells us he is not just a Yoruba but an Ijebu. The Ijebu are one of the most distinctive of the Yoruba subgroups, inhabiting a cluster of towns once organized in an ancient kingdom in the close hinterland of Lagos, Nigeria's largest city and former capital. They were conquered by the British in 1892 in order to break their stranglehold on the trade route that ran from Lagos to the interior; but after the conquest (having previously excluded missionaries) many Ijebu embraced the world religions—both Islam and Christianity—with alacrity.³ Now, it happens that there was an earlier Pastor Adelaja, a trader who migrated in the 1920s to Kano, in Northern Nigeria. He was active in a prayer circle called Faith Tabernacle and later played a key role in the establishment of Nigeria's first independent Pentecostal church, the Christ Apostolic Church.⁴ It is almost certain that *his* father was one of those who became a Christian—very likely an Anglican—in the great wave of Ijebu conversion after the conquest of 1892. Perhaps this first Adelaja to be a Christian was even the John Adelaja, an Ijebu migrant rubber trader, who headed the tiny congregation at Ife in 1899.⁵ Pastor Adelaja of Kiev may or may not be the great-grandson of this John Adelaja or the grandson of Pastor Adelaja of Kano, for Adelaja is not an uncommon name among the Ijebu. But if we imagine he was, then we have a hypothetical patriline of four generations that encapsulates the whole history of Ijebu Christianity as it developed over the colonial and postcolonial periods: the early convert to evangelical Anglicanism in the wake of the British conquest; his son who left Ijebu as a trader to Northern Nigeria and was active in one of the new independent Aladura churches, a man whose life span fell entirely within the colonial period; a putative grandson whose life must have spanned the rise

of nationalism and the early decades of independence; and fourth in line, Sunday Adelaja himself.

This fourth Adelaja came to adulthood in a grim period of Nigeria's history, one of corrupt military rule and chronic economic mismanagement. It was also marked by new levels of religious enthusiasm—for born-again or neo-Pentecostal Christianity and for newly reformist and politically engaged forms of Islam—and by the growing public saliency of religion, extending to episodes of violent conflict.⁶ The sequence that runs from the missionary evangelicalism to which Adelaja I converted, through Adelaja II's adoption of an independent Christianity that turned Pentecostal in the 1930s, to culminate in the globally oriented born-again Christianity of Adelaja IV represents not just a consistent religious trajectory but a series of mediated responses to the colonial and postcolonial experiences of Nigerians. The liftoff of neo-Pentecostal Christianity in Nigeria, as in many other countries, is linked to the deepening crisis of the postcolonial state from the mid-1970s onward, though it is surely not to be reduced to it.

Historically, most missions have gone from the advanced, richer, and more central society to the backward, poorer, and more peripheral one; so what is the import of missions going the other way? The Adelaja sequence shows that Yoruba Pentecostalism, despite its American ancestry, still stands in an orthogenetic local tradition in Nigeria now going back more than a century. How then can Pentecostalism, seemingly more than any other new religion, manage to graft itself so successfully into a society such as the Ukraine, with an ancient Christian tradition to which it seems radically exotic, or into diverse other local cultures in the former USSR? Far-reaching questions are raised here about both society and religion. What is it about the postsocialist situation—really a range of situations, as the diverse studies in Mathijs Pelkmans, ed., *Conversion after Socialism* (2009), show—that creates needs and opportunities to which Pentecostalism has so widely been such a cogent response? What is it about Pentecostalism that has enabled it to offer this solution, and thus to become such a remarkable bridge between peoples in such diverse social contexts?

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Katherine Verdery has already made a strong case for bringing the study of post-socialist and postcolonial societies together, essentially on the empirical basis that there has now come about "the full incorporation of both the former colonies and the former socialist bloc into a global capitalist economy."⁷ While that perception is cogent enough, it is still worth reminding ourselves that the globalization that is everywhere spoken of today is neither so novel nor so essentially economic as Verdery's view may be taken to imply. Socialism, an *ideology* of economic organization before it became anything else, was initially a response to the emergence of capitalism as a systematic material reality in the late eighteenth century. Whereas the socialist internationals were a response to the global outreach of capitalism

from the late nineteenth century, the most prominent religious internationals of our own day—Catholic, Muslim, and Pentecostal—are based on universalist faiths that do not just rest on specific theological assumptions but are inspired by historical traditions reaching back to the empires of antiquity. (Let us not forget that the Soviet Third International was in a sense the legatee of Holy Russia's claim to be the Third Rome.) The European colonial empires of the twentieth century were not able to stop socialist ideas entering the late colonial world as part of anticolonial ideology and becoming a major theme of African and Asian nationalism. Yet despite this influence from the Second to the Third World, it is still essential—especially in the light of later religious convergences—to begin by drawing out the differences between the African colonial world and the Soviet Eurasian world as regards the relations between socialism, nationalism, and religion.

In the USSR there was a full-blooded state socialism and, among its many constituent communities, a number of ancient and coherent nations. Marxism had always seen the proletariat as the universal class that transcended all national boundaries (though it could regard certain nationalisms as situationally progressive and give them conditional and pragmatic support).⁸ The policy of socialism in one country, adopted in the 1920s, entailed a certain reinterpretation of the internationalist ideal, in that the destinies of the universal class were now seen as contingently aligned with those of the Russian state; but other nationalisms were still regarded as potentially dangerous and reactionary. Stalin's nationalities policy—the limited recognition of nations as entities within the Soviet overarching state, the folklorification of national cultural forms, and so forth—was intended to neutralize nationalism, and for a long time seemed to have succeeded in doing so; but the USSR's collapse rapidly led to a renewed assertion of national identities, often with religion as an integral part of their expression.

African states, by contrast, were in nearly all cases externally imposed by the colonial powers and rarely had any significant link with any preexisting indigenous nations (of which few can be said to have existed). African nationalism was a movement led by educated colonial subjects to take control of these states from the metropolitan ruling cadres, but it was undertaken in the name of the mass of colonial subjects whom the nationalist elite claimed to represent; but their claim rested more critically on their sharing a racial rather than a cultural identity with the mass. It was by a kind of courtesy that these states, upon their independence in the 1960s, were referred to as nation-states or new nations, as if political independence was itself enough to create nationhood. In fact, the nationalist leaders who came to power at independence were intensely aware of just how weak their nations were, how prone to faction and fission based on ethnic and regional loyalties. And thus in Africa socialism, so far from being threatened by nationalism—in some form it was professed by most nationalist leaders—was seen as part of the answer to the weakness of the nation. This was so in two respects. First, it gave legitimacy to the

single-party states that became widespread in Africa in the decade or so after independence as the best means for forging the nation, in a collective march toward political and economic development. In this, Eastern Europe seemed to offer an attractive model, and the USSR exploited this situation in its bid for African allies for its own *Weltpolitik*. Second, socialism—more particularly African socialism—enabled the African past, with its communal values, lack of private property in land, and supposed classlessness, to be seen as a springboard to the future. Few things are more consoling than to believe that an aspired-to future—a developed nation—is somehow prefigured in the past. But in reality the weak nations of Africa exhibited a weak, largely rhetorical form of socialism. Paradoxically it was more about building up a new, postindependence class based on political access than about demolishing old classes based on control of the means of production.⁹

The key comparative question to be asked is: How did religion stand in relation to the two other great ideologies, socialism and nationalism, as between the two regions? Marxist-Leninist dogma objected to religion on two distinct grounds: first, that it was offensive to scientific reason and so a source of backwardness; and second, because it served to legitimize the position of the ruling class. So in the Soviet Union religion was at the worst suppressed, though on occasion or in certain circumstances it had to be tolerated or could be used by the regime to its own ends—mainly because of its linkage with particular ethnic or national interests. Things were very different in colonial Africa. There was little general antipathy to religion on the first of these grounds: first, because spiritual forces were generally regarded (by elites as well as by the masses) as governing the real conditions of existence and so compelling respect;¹⁰ and second, because Christianity—I shall here leave Islam out of consideration—was so strongly linked with modern education that it was more plausibly regarded as a force for progress rather than for reaction. It was only during nationalist mobilization, continuing into the period of postcolonial socialism, that many elites came to feel distinctly ambivalent about Christianity (despite the fact that most of them had had a mission education), because it was seen as having legitimated colonialism. Yet it was rare for this feeling to be extended to independent African churches, still less to a generalized antagonism to religion as such.

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These generalizations are best made concrete through a consideration of three countries that constitute varying degrees of exception to them on account of their having tried most seriously to emulate the Soviet socialist model: Benin, Mozambique, and Ethiopia. I shall consider them in sequence from the least to the most like the situation of Soviet Russia.

Benin (the former French colony of Dahomey) stands closest to the African norm, in that it had no European settlers and gained independence in 1960 without a violent anticolonial struggle. It was a society that had both a traditional religion

of great tenacity—the source of Haitian Voodoo—and the most educated elite of French West Africa through the efforts of the Catholic Mission. A decade of extreme political instability, arising from acute ethnoregional factionalism played out against a deepening economic crisis, resulted in a coup in 1972 that brought to power Colonel Mathieu Kérékou. In 1974—significantly, at the place where the last king of Dahomey had surrendered to the French; for this was about nationalism as much as it was about socialism—Kérékou declared Marxism-Leninism to be the ideology of the state. Yet the superficiality of Benin's socialism—in popular humor it was mordantly known as *Laxisme-Beninisme*—expressed the absence of the social structures and historical experiences that are needed to give weight to a revolutionary agenda. Its coercive, incorporative statism was always more apparent than real, with the Roman Catholic Church, as easily the largest and most powerful institution of civil society, the obvious prime target. While the takeover of church schools was understandable for a regime that saw itself as committed to scientific socialism, it is some measure of how shallow and desperate this project soon became that it adopted Vodun as the state religion: a gesture of nationalism because a cultural rebuff to the church. Yet the church kept its grass-roots support, and as the regime staggered to its end in the late 1980s, its social strength made it the only force that could chair the national conference that paved the way for a return to multiparty politics in 1991. Kérékou lost the election despite announcing that he had become a born-again Christian, but he was elected again in 1996, one of the great survivors of African politics.¹¹ Since the 1990s, under a democracy renewed “at a chameleon's pace,”¹² there has been a diverse resurgence of religions, from the neo-traditionalism of the irrepressible *vodun* cults to a Pentecostal boom, flooding in from Ghana and Nigeria along the coastal corridor with a message of modernity, rupture from the past, empowerment, and openness to the world, especially to the Anglosphere.¹³ One Pentecostalist quoted by Claffey drew a contrast between “a suffering Christianity as Francophone and Catholic . . . [and] his own, which he [saw] as American and Protestant with a strong emphasis on health, wealth and success.”¹⁴

In Mozambique colonialism began much earlier and lasted nearly twenty years longer than in most of Africa. Though the Portuguese first established coastal footholds in the sixteenth century and created settler estates up the Zambezi Valley in the seventeenth, the colony did not assume its modern form till the end of the nineteenth century. Since Portugal was one of the poorest countries of Western Europe, its colonialism was correspondingly archaic and undercapitalized, relying heavily on forced labor and the supply of contract labor to South Africa. In accordance with the right-wing dictatorship of Antonio Salazar in Portugal (1926–74), the Catholic Church was a key ideological mainstay in all its colonies and held a privileged position in the field of African education. As a result the nationalist leadership (much of it drawn from Protestant mission schools) was markedly anticlerical. Further radicalized by Portuguese political intransigence, the main

nationalist party, FRELIMO, turned to armed struggle. Independence came only in 1975, after disaffection among the Portuguese military had spread to Lisbon and led to the overthrow of the Salazar regime. In 1977, amid the economic wreckage from years of war, FRELIMO adopted Marxism-Leninism and soon took measures against religion as superstitious and counterrevolutionary: churches closed, activities banned, missionaries excluded, property confiscated.¹⁵ There ensued more than a decade of civil war against regional and other opponents, backed by white South Africa; but before it ended in 1992, FRELIMO had abandoned socialism for the World Bank's prescriptions. The establishment of a free market in religions had occurred some years earlier, resulting in a phenomenal growth in Pentecostalism in particular. In this, southern Mozambique was much subject to influences from South Africa; the refugee camps were a fertile terrain for the propagation of charismatic religion; and the Lusophone connection prepared the way for the entry of dynamic groups of Brazilian origin, notably the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, reputedly the largest Pentecostal church in the world.¹⁶

Our third case, Ethiopia, comes closest to the Soviet paradigm. Here was an ancient sacred monarchy closely bonded with an Orthodox Church that was the cornerstone of national identity. These institutions rested upon a material base more characteristic of Eurasia than of the rest of sub-Saharan Africa: namely a plow-based agriculture and a feudal class structure wherein landlords held estates under service tenure from the emperor and extracted rents from a peasantry.¹⁷ In the late nineteenth century the core Christian kingdom not only beat back European colonialism but engaged in imperial expansion itself, bringing under its sway a vast area to the east and south, ethnically very diverse and overwhelmingly non-Christian in religion. The revolution of 1974 was the work of a radicalized intelligentsia (extending into the army) that, disgusted with the failure of Emperor Haile Selassie's attempt at a form of conservative modernization, saw a Marxist-Leninist command state as the only solution to the country's backwardness. Its own mistakes (particularly in the agrarian sector), natural catastrophe, and the draining effect of war against Eritrean secessionism kept the regime—known as the *Derg* or revolutionary council—in fairly permanent crisis, despite Soviet aid and backing. When this dried up in 1989, the socialist experiment was abandoned; and the *Derg* collapsed in 1991, a pendant to the final debacle of state socialism in the USSR.

The vicissitudes of religion in the trajectory of Ethiopian socialism have been brilliantly analyzed by Donald Donham from the perspective of one of the southern peripheral regions of Ethiopia, Maale.¹⁸ (The story evokes several parallels with the experiences of the peripheral non-Russian peoples within the Soviet Union, such as the Nenets and Chukchi.)¹⁹ Though the Orthodox Church reached Maale as part of the structure of imperial overrule in the 1890s, its local impact was minimal, and Christianity made slow progress until the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) started to make significant numbers of converts in the 1950s. The great irony was that, while the

SIM had originated in Canada as a fundamentalist-faith mission strongly opposed to the liberal Protestantism of the day—and to that extent was antimodern—in Maale it became the very epitome of local modernization (and as such opposed to the Orthodox Church, which seemed both reactionary and a tool of alien control). As a result, when the revolution spread from the Ethiopian heartland, the young converts of the SIM were naturally its first allies in Maale. But a few years later, when the *Derg* was forced into defensive turmoil by Somalia's invasion of the Ogaden, it sought to consolidate national morale and its own legitimacy by reversing its policy of hostility to the church (in a manner strikingly reminiscent of Stalin's rehabilitation of the Russian Orthodox Church during the straits of World War II). Then, in line with the replacement of the USA by the USSR as Ethiopia's major foreign ally and arms supplier, a further shift in the regime's religious alignment took place: Protestant churches of North American origin (so recently local supporters of the revolution) found themselves stigmatized as antirevolutionary fellow travelers of imperialism and capitalism, foreigners who "rejected the nation and the revolution."²⁰ It is interesting that they were also labeled as Pentecostals or "pentes," even though none of the major missions such as the SIM or the Lutherans was Pentecostal and there were as yet very few Pentecostal missionaries. Only in 1967 was Ethiopia's first Pentecostal church founded, among students in Addis Ababa, though the imperial government refused to recognize it. But the *Derg* rightly divined its ominous potential, a straw in the wind that would blow strongly after Ethiopia was liberalized in the 1990s. There are now estimated to be several million Pentecostals in Ethiopia.²¹

So the soft socialism that usually accompanied African nationalism turned in a handful of cases into a much harder kind when hopes for national development faltered in the 1970s. The weaknesses of the Soviet model were not yet apparent, and the geopolitics of the Cold War created opportunities. But there was another predisposing condition, which points the way to appreciating how religion fitted into both the rise, and the demise, of these socialist regimes. The more a regime is founded on an integral bond between the nation/state and a single church or religion, the more likely it is that, if that regime is challenged or overthrown, it will be replaced by an alternative of the left that mirrors its integralist character but with an inverted, antireligious content. Thus, strongly Catholic or Orthodox national regimes, as in Spain or Russia, were much more likely to generate anticlerical attitudes and vigorous communist movements than Protestant regimes were, whether the latter had state churches of nearly universal membership along Scandinavian lines or a high degree of religious pluralism as in Great Britain and (to an even greater extent) the United States. Something of the same correlation is also seen to occur in Africa when we contrast former British colonies, none of which—not even the most left-wing ones, like Nyerere's Tanzania or Ghana under Nkrumah—took its socialism to the extreme of Marxism-Leninism with the three countries we have considered. For British colonies tended to have more missions operating

in them, missionaries of more diverse national origins and a higher proportion (if not a majority) of Protestants—all making for a more plural religious scene—than French or Portuguese colonies did, and a fortiori than a country like Ethiopia.

Moreover, this pluralism, besides being unpropitious for the emergence of an antireligious socialism, was also the best climate in which Pentecostalism might take root and flourish. Late fruit of the evangelical revival, Pentecostalism first arose in the most plural of all religious contexts, the United States, and soon after in the more peripheral regions of Protestant Northern Europe. Unsurprisingly, it found its first African footholds in English-speaking milieus like South Africa and British West Africa (Nigeria and Ghana) in the first decades of the twentieth century.²² But in countries outside the Anglosphere like Benin, Mozambique, and Ethiopia—to say nothing of the countries of the former Soviet bloc—a turn to Pentecostalism after Marxism-Leninism represented a radical change of cultural direction.

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The sociological explanation of religious change consists largely of showing the fit between the demands of a novel social situation and the potential of a religious tradition. Or, if this sounds too functionalist, it is about why and how answers to the predicaments that people newly find themselves in are drawn from particular traditions. Before we ask why Pentecostalism has so widely been taken as the answer to the predicaments of the present age, it is worth emphasizing the link between the extraordinary diversity of the situations that Pentecostalism has answered and (what has made this possible) the extremely protean quality of Pentecostalism itself. Simply on the basis of examples from the papers presented at the Halle conference entitled “Conversion after Socialism,” Pentecostalism and closely related forms of evangelical Christianity have made significant headway in at least four quite different kinds of setting in the former Soviet bloc: first, among Roma or Gypsies in Eastern Europe; second, among some peoples of the northern peripheral regions, such as the Nenets and Chukchi; third, on a small scale, among some Muslim peoples of Central Asia, such as Uighurs and Kyrgyz; and fourth, the Embassy of God in the heart of Ukraine. There could hardly be more variety here—in prior religion, cultural context, rural or urban location, mode of life, political placement—so what accounts for the extraordinary range of Pentecostalism’s appeal?

We may see grounds for the adoption (or rejection) of a new religion or church in terms of two very general criteria of religious value.²³ The first is that potential converts must feel that its message expresses the reality of things: what we may call its truth value. The second is that they must regard the identity conferred by joining the new religion to be compatible with what they feel or want themselves to be, in relation to other identities, especially communal, ethnic, or national ones: what we may call its identity value. In stable religious situations, truth and identity values are likely to be in accord, and in periods of steady adaptive change, truth values may be

adjusted without identity values being undermined. In times of crisis, the truth value of a religion is perhaps more likely to be first called into question, and if conversions to an ostensibly truer religion result, it may create tensions with existing identities. This was often the case with early Christian converts in Africa who thereby became estranged from their communities, resulting in an agenda for the Africanization of Christianity. On the other hand, it was often those whose identity attachments had been undermined (e.g., by being sold into slavery) who were most responsive to the preaching of Christian truth; whereas provided that communities (and the identities they sustained) remained viable, prosperous, unchallenged by defeat or natural disaster, they were likely to remain content with the truth that they had.

Pentecostalism now goes back a century, and the wide variety of forms it now exhibits is ample proof of the adaptability of its basic themes.²⁴ Its core truth has always been its vision of the self as reborn and empowered through the Holy Spirit, as described in the charter biblical narrative of Acts II. Bible and Spirit are indeed the two cornerstones of the movement, and many of its current tensions and options can be seen in terms of the emphasis distributed between impulses that flow from either of them. Pentecostalism's first constituency in America was drawn from poor, recently rural people, both white and black, experiencing the dislocations of urban life in a quickly developing capitalist economy. The fundamentalism of its use of the Bible as a source of validation came out of a long tradition of popular Evangelicalism. But its great innovation was to complement the ascetic disciplines of Protestant morality with a lively sense of the corporeal gifts of the Spirit. These ranged from the ecstasy of speaking in tongues (which was the main thing immediately distinctive of the new movement), to divine healing, prophecy, the casting out of evil spirits, efficacious prayer, and the possibility of miracles. In effect this new orientation represented a fusion of two distinct strands within American religion: the perennial this-worldliness of African belief mediated through African-American practice, and the new acceptance within Protestantism at large of wealth, health, and happiness as legitimate rewards of faith.²⁵ Finally (and somewhat paradoxically in the light of the last point), a kick of urgency was given to the new teachings by a fresh wave of millennial expectancy.

This repertory of themes proved highly flexible in application, enabling Pentecostalism both to connect with the aspirations of diverse audiences and to move with the times. Its two sides, the scriptural and the pneumatic, enabled members to strike a variable balance between discipline and ecstasy, adjustment and mobility, as their particular circumstances required. Because the gifts of the Spirit might be variably construed in terms of intrinsic or expressive rewards and of external or instrumental ones, Pentecostalism could connect both with the self-improvement techniques of popular psychology and with rituals to exorcise evil spirits that block one's progress. Though "an option for and of the poor"²⁶ (which still remains a fair characterization of the bulk of its adherents across the world),

Pentecostalism has never encouraged class *ressentiment*; but neither has it worked to reconcile the poor to their poverty—rather to empower them within it so that they may move up out of it. So, sidestepping Marxism’s strategy of class action, it has facilitated social mobility, initially of individuals but also (especially where adopted by ethnic minorities or in peripheral regions) collective self-enhancement.

Pentecostalism soon started to move up in the world. By 1950, it was no longer solely a religion of the poor and marginal: it had risen with the growth in population and wealth of its American heartland in the South and West, and some churches were acquiring fine buildings and facilities. Of the various doctrinal developments of the following decades, none was more telling than the so-called faith gospel, also known as the gospel of prosperity, which was reciprocally related to this growth: it both appealed to members’ material aspirations and generated large revenues for church expansion. To the small, egalitarian congregations of earlier days were added a number of megachurches run by high-profile and wealthy charismatic preachers, prominent among whom was a handful of celebrity televangelists, for Pentecostalism had responded with alacrity to the new opportunities offered by the electronic media. The movement became more consciously identified with American values, and it entered into a phase of energetic transnational outreach and exchange: in Africa and Latin America Pentecostal missionaries now far outnumbered those of mainstream denominations. Yet this was never a univocal or one-way process, never *just* a matter of “exporting the American Gospel,”²⁷ since Pentecostalism lends itself so readily to selective appropriation. In Africa the 1970s saw a massive takeoff of neo-Pentecostalism, initially in Anglophone countries like Nigeria and Zimbabwe, where it could build on an existing Pentecostal tradition going back many decades.²⁸ Yet even though this depended on African initiatives, it adopted a markedly more internationalist (which means in effect American) style. The economic and political backdrop of this—the crisis of the postcolonial state—was, of course, what had also led to the Marxist-Leninist turn in Benin, Mozambique, and Ethiopia.

Now that state socialism, as a form of political and economic organization, is exhausted, some variant of neoliberalism is pretty well the only main course on the menu. Whereas Marxism-Leninism, like its integralist predecessors, aspired to be a total social system and tried to generate its own cultural underpinnings—and when it came to religion, fell down badly—neoliberalism can afford to be more eclectic. As a main course, it can be combined with cultural side dishes *à l’africaine, islamique, russe*, or whatever, but it has to be said that few religions match its flavor better than Pentecostalism. As a product of the most demanding religious marketplace in the world, Pentecostalism is better able than most other religions to express the experiential truth of the conditions in which people and communities in today’s world have to seek development. And this is also a practical truth, since Pentecostal churches, by their lifestyle teachings and social support

systems, also do much to equip their members to survive—and in some cases to prosper—in the neoliberal environment.

Pentecostalism is also persuasive in another way that expresses the spirit of modernity. Compared with the two other great transnational movements of our day, Pentecostalism has nothing of Catholicism's hierarchical structure, or of the central places of Islam and Catholicism, or a unifying ritual like the Muslim *hajj*. Its unmistakable unity in diversity is realized through a dense, many-stranded, noncentered global network of exchanges, employing a distinct but ever-shifting stock of themes and motifs. This permits its participants both to feel their fellowship as part of a movement across which there is much sharing and borrowing, and to draw on this stock and to innovate as they respond to the demands being made in their part of the network. The unbounded and noncentered unity of global Pentecostalism strongly evokes the character of the Internet. Like the Internet, Pentecostalism bears many signs of its American origins, and America is where the mesh of exchanges within the whole system is at its densest. But despite its influence, America is not *formally* privileged as its center: Pentecostals may look to it as the epitome of modernity but not in the way that others look to Rome or Mecca.

Accepting the truth of Pentecostalism brings a new identity with it: indeed one may say that its truth and identity values fuse in the figure of the person who is born again through the Holy Spirit. This self-defining experience serves to mark off the born-again in two dimensions: from their own past and from other individuals who are not reborn. Clearly, any act of individual conversion implies some degree of dissatisfaction with the personal past as well as a readiness both to break from it and to associate with a new group of people: an act of both severance and attachment. In Pentecostalism's early days, the wider identity implications of this were limited in two respects. First, the born-again came from the same Protestant American milieu as the unregenerate, and—insofar as they had a wider message—it was largely to *recall* them to traditional values that they had neglected. Second, Pentecostalism was the product of a highly individualistic society, and its regeneration was imagined as extending not to society as a whole, merely to the aggregate of other born-again individuals. (In one widely held Pentecostal belief the born-again are to be raptured into heaven at the end time, leaving the mass of the unregenerate to their fate.) But when Pentecostalism went abroad, these two conditions were often not met, so the issue of how it would sit with other identities became more pressing. In postcolonial and in postsocialist societies, it typically came as a religion bearing American attributes with the promise of modernity and global mobility. At the same time, despite its appeal as a powerful vector of individualism (especially among the young), it was also often looked to as a vehicle of collective regeneration. So in Nigeria in recent years, it has become commonplace for Pentecostal leaders to offer renewal, deliverance, and prosperity to the *nation*, as if in reproach at the failure of the nationalist state to deliver the fruits of development. (See chapter 10)

Now, where a community is the focus of renewal, such that the Spirit is anticipated to work its signs not just on the human body but also on the body politic, the issue of the balance between rupture and continuity presents itself in a particularly acute form. For this implies that the community, by the very fact of its being worth renewal, is seen as a site of positive value. But since Pentecostal conversion rests on the conviction that the prevailing state of affairs is profoundly corrupt, there is inevitably a problem about how to reconcile the rupture that this implies with the continuing value that attaches to the communal identity of its potential converts. A resolution is not always easy to achieve, and the shifting and variable outcomes have led to some interpretive schizophrenia, at least in the literature on West African Pentecostalism. Some observers, following the common self-representations of Pentecostals, have perceived a radical rupture, “a complete break with the past,”²⁹ of which the demonization of ancestors and local spirits, and the provision of rituals of deliverance from them, are a conspicuous sign; whereas others have seen in the emphasis on healing and prosperity the strength of values drawn from primal or traditional religion.³⁰ The concrete reality is always a mix, and it is a mix whose formula can only be worked out in situ. It is in the protean genius of Pentecostalism that it has so often enabled this to be done, turning rupture into redemption.

Several of the postsocialist cases illustrate how the tensions between rupture and continuity may work themselves out.³¹ At one pole is the Embassy of God in Kiev, an American-style megachurch like several other Nigerian ministries, which has succeeded in implanting itself as a genuinely Ukrainian movement: a singular achievement when one considers that such a church in London (of which there are several) would have been strongly tied to a mainly Afro-Caribbean constituency.³² Ukraine’s own tradition of religious pluralism was helpfully permissive, but the critical factor for the Embassy of God’s success was how it linked its truth for individuals—its message of redemption from alcohol, drugs, and other personal problems—with a cogent claim to share the identity of the new, democratic Ukraine and to be a positive force in the rebuilding of its civil society.

At the other pole stand the cases where Pentecostalism (or evangelical Baptism, which is close to it) has been taken up not at the heart of a large historic nation but among marginalized ethnic minorities. Take the case of the Nenets:³³ here the tension between truth and identity presents itself more starkly yet is resolved with a striking paradox. With the survival of much of the old shamanic worldview and the influence of Russian Orthodoxy largely erased by decades of official atheism, both face the challenge of reframing their identities after the collapse of the Soviet order. Laur Vallikivi describes the faith of Nenets Baptists (many of whom are born-again) in terms that recall the discourse of African Pentecostalism: “total transformation,” the old spirits pushed into a “demonic periphery,” the “negation of the past,” and so on. Yet he also characterizes their use of language in prayer as “represent[ing] at the same time continuity and rupture” and “creating a clear continuance with the past”

in their conviction of the power of the Word in relations with the spirit world.³⁴ At the same time, the new faith serves both to integrate the Nenets into the wider society by its adoption of the Bible in Russian and to preserve their identity within it by a faith that stands in contrast to Russian Orthodoxy.

One way in which rupture may be reconciled with continuity is through their placement at complementary levels, individual and collective, respectively, as Ludek Broz shows in his account of evangelical Christians in the Altai Republic of southwest Siberia.³⁵ Here, because the core truth value of Evangelicalism lies in its promise of individual self-renewal, of liberation from an old life of sin and addictions like alcoholism, the theme of rupture from the past is most strongly evident in what Broz calls “personal narratives of discontinuity.” But while a new and foreign religion is well suited to be a vehicle of such personal liberation, the charge of alienness—which its rivals throw at it—is embarrassing; so it makes sense that evangelicals have responded by being warmly enthusiastic in their support for Altai language, music, and customs. This is a claim to belong through the assertion of continuity with the local cultural past. Here the Altai evangelicals faced a problem similar to one that challenged the inculturation of Christianity in Africa. Though there was no indigenous Altai concept of religion, local identity was deeply bound in with practices that evangelical Christians could not but regard as heathen, such as some of the rituals involved in *Chaga*, the celebration of the New Year. As often in Africa, the solution was to draw a novel distinction between what was religion and what was culture, so that the latter could be embraced as part of Christian practice. Thus the demands of truth and identity might be reconciled in a specific blend of rupture and continuity.

Of course, Pentecostalism does not always manage to achieve this elusive reconciliation, as Johannes Ries’s study of Pentecostalism among the Transylvanian Gypsies shows.³⁶ Of the two main components of the Gypsy population, the relatively privileged Corturari, who retain much more of Roma culture, have been impervious to the appeal of Pentecostalism, whereas it is the impoverished but culturally more assimilated Tsigani who have started to turn to it. Rupture would cost the Corturari too much by way of ethnic identity loss; by contrast, the cultural value attached to Tsigani identity has been so far eroded that Pentecostalism can offer the converts an altogether new kind of solidarity, as members of a trans-ethnic family of God. Elsewhere, movements other than Pentecostalism have met the yearnings of the postsocialist world, though it is notable how often they echo Pentecostal messages and have Pentecostal groups as their main competitors.

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The range and flexibility of Pentecostalism have enabled it to put down roots in very diverse social contexts. The two very broad categories of context that I have considered here, the postsocialist and the postcolonial, though each of them is now

the designation of a distinct academic subfield, are themselves internally very heterogeneous as well as overlapping. In relation to the new religions that now flood across them, their main overarching feature is that they both have had to come to terms with the exigencies of the neoliberal order. Behind that lies the failure of the state, whether (in the case of the former Soviet bloc) of long-established socialist states, or (in the case of the African Marxist-Leninist countries) of postcolonial socialist regimes that lasted barely two decades, or of the majority of African former colonies, including the Anglophone ones, that had adopted a softer African socialism. When the crisis of the postcolonial state first hit Africa, in the 1970s, there were two very different responses: a turn to Marxism in a handful of cases and a dramatic surge of Pentecostalism in others. Of course these cannot be seen as strictly analogous or alternative options, though it is significant that as responses they could not be combined. But when Marxism-Leninism's failure became evident, at the end of the 1980s, Pentecostalism was widely seen to be some kind of answer. But an answer to what, and what kind of answer? Religions just don't have viable answers to the problems of political and economic organization posed in today's world, though some Muslims think they do, in such forms as Sharia law or Islamic economics.³⁷ But Pentecostalism is happy to leave this task to the engineers of neoliberalism and to complement it by fashioning subjectivities that enable individuals to make practical sense of the experiences of living in a world so organized.

If the operational requirements of neoliberalism, then, are lessons that tend to flow from North to South or West to East (via agencies like the World Bank), the modes of experiential adaptation to it—of which, I have argued, Pentecostalism is one—now often move in other directions: South to North (or from the old Third to the old Second World), as from Nigeria to Ukraine, or South to South, as from Brazil to southern Africa. This is not surprising, since experiential solutions have to take account not just of the objective external conditions but of the cultural personalities of those on whom the adaptation is imposed. In creating these transcontinental bridges, Pentecostalism has the great asset that, behind the North-Americanness of its expression, its ease with the electronic media, its modernity, and its individualism, it is also the bearer of a much older religious ethos, concerned with healing, visionary guidance, the various ways in which the spirit may imprint on the flesh. This is what has enabled it so often to click with newly urbanized ex-peasants, or tribal populations caught in the peripheries of modern states, or transnational migrants in search of a better life, to achieve, in some cases, paradoxical combinations of the old and new or unexpected fusions of rupture and continuity.