"I am happy to be Catholic"

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal and the Dynamics of the Religious Field in Brazil

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Abstract *Since the 1970s and increasingly since the 1990s, Charismatic movements have experienced an unexpected boom in Brazilian Catholicism. This development can be interpreted as resulting on the one hand from the dynamics of the religious field in Brazil as a whole, and on the other from the dynamics of the Catholic sub-field. The paper aims to situate the rise of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Brazil in this dual context. I will argue that the rise of Pentecostalism since the 1950s and 1960s has set in motion a previously unknown dynamic of competition both in Brazil's overall religious field and in its various sub-fields. This competitive dynamic, it is claimed, coincides with converging religious beliefs and needs: beliefs in spiritual beings (be they good or evil) and aspirations for deeply personal spiritual experiences (of "baptism in the Spirit", possession, exorcism, deliverance). Competition and convergence are thus interconnected, which fosters a dynamic of 'mimicry' (isomorphism) in the religious field: mimicry in relation to both styles of piety and those religious social forms that facilitate personal spiritual experiences. Particular attention will be given to social forms within Charismatic Catholicism; it will be argued that these provide a flexible new type of institutional access to the traditional infrastructure of the church.*

Keywords *Brazil, Catholic Charismatic Renewal, community, event, mimicry, neo-Pentecostalism, organization, religious field, singing priests, spiritual warfare*

1. Introduction[1]

"Eu Sou Feliz por Ser Católico" ('I am happy to be Catholic') – this is the title of a book by the Brazilian priest Marcelo Rossi which was published in 2000 (Rossi 2000). Marcelo Rossi is one of the most prominent figures of the so-called Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) in Brazil: He is considered not only a fascinating priest but also famous as a singer and songwriter and is omnipresent in both church and private media (Carranza 2011; Clarke 1999). Thus, to give an example, the renowned weekly journal *Veja* featured a long report on him entitled "Uma estrela no altar" ('A star at the altar'; Junqueira 1998).

The Renovação Carismática Católica (RCC) has since experienced an unforeseen boom, especially since the 1990s. As part of this boom, it has produced quite a number of such "singing priests", who – as "stars at the altar" and on the stage – have contributed significantly to the movement's success (Carranza 2011; Clarke 1999; Fernandes 2005; Souza 2005). All of them praise the happiness of being Catholic.[2] Now, happiness is not what we would readily identify as the core message of Catholicism. However, the slogan 'I am happy to be Catholic' sums up what distinguishes Charismatic Catholicism from other styles of Catholic piety: Charismatic Catholics enjoy their faith!

What is the status of Charismatic Catholicism within the religious field in Brazil in general and in the Catholic sub-field in particular? What is its role in the religious dynamics and what social forms are set up to live Charismatic Catholicism? In the following, I will explore these questions.

My conceptual approach is based on Pierre Bourdieu's field theory. While not reconstructing it in detail here (Reuter 2018), I will however clarify some of its central features. In fact, when Bourdieu (inspired by his reading of Max Weber) conceptualized the religious field (Bourdieu 1987 [1971]; 1991 [1971]), he did not have in mind the plurality of different religions in a given context – which is how his concept is mostly applied today. Rather, Bourdieu was concerned with the dynamics of competition and conflict within religions or denominations. His prototype of the religious field was the French Catholic field. Still, Bourdieu's approach can be also applied to contexts of religious diversity. In this

1 I thank David West and Paula König for their thorough editorial assistance.

2 To give another example besides Pe. Marcelo Rossi: João Carlos Almeida, better known as Padre Joãozinho, also sings about the happiness of being Catholic. His song "Sou feliz por ser Católico", which he composed in 2009, became the *leitmotif* of a successful CD (Pe. Joãozinho SCJ 2009).

contribution, I try to intertwine both perspectives: I will look at the dynamics of Brazil's very diverse religious field as a whole as well as (and specifically) at the dynamics of its Catholic sub-field.

In the first part, I will identify the main actors in the overall religious field in Brazil, namely Catholicism, Protestantism (or, rather, Pentecostalism), and Afro-Brazilian religions, providing somewhat more detail about the Protestant and the Afro-Brazilian sub-fields (1.). The second part focuses on the Catholic sub-field, and in particular on the role of the Charismatic Renewal in its internal dynamics (2.). In my final considerations (3.), I will again zoom out to look at the broader religious field of Brazil: The point here is to show how the rise of Pentecostalism since the 1950s has set in motion a previously unknown dynamic of competition in this field (cf. Chesnut 2003). But what is this competition about? I will argue that this competitive dynamic coincides with a cross-religious and cross-denominational converging of religious beliefs and needs: beliefs in spiritual beings of whatsoever character (good or evil) and intense aspirations for personal spiritual experiences ("baptism in the Spirit", possession, deliverance, exorcism). Taking up an expression from R. Andrew Chesnut (2003: 64), I will refer to this as an "option for the spirit[s]". I will argue further that this interconnectedness between competition and convergence of religious beliefs and needs fosters a dynamic of 'mimicry' between religions and denominations. Thus, I claim that there are isomorphic tendencies both in relation to styles of piety and in relation to social forms that enable much-longed-for personal spiritual experiences. Particular attention will be given to social forms within Charismatic Catholicism; I will argue that these provide a new, flexible type of institutional access to the Catholic Church (cf. Hero 2009).

2. The religious field in Brazil: Main actors

Brazil has always been considered a Catholic country *par excellence*. Although this is not completely incorrect, it doesn't show the whole picture. After all, while 92 per cent of Brazilians still self-identified as Catholic in 1970, that figure had dropped to 65 per cent by 2010, and to 54 per cent by 2017. Remarkably, during the same period, the proportion of Protestants rose substantially from 5 to 27 per cent, this growth obviously being mainly at the expense of the Catholic Church. Among the remaining 19 per cent who are neither Catholic nor Protestant, the largest and fastest-growing group comprises the non-religious (at 14 per cent). The remaining 5 percent are made up of Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews

and Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, indigenous and other religions (at 2.7 per cent), and, not least, Afro-Brazilian religions, including Spiritism (at 2.3 per cent) (Chesnut 2016: 77, 80; da Silva 2016: 490; Engler/Schmidt 2016: 5; Latinobarómetro 2017; Pew Research Center 2013: 2; 2014: 27; Schmidt 2016).

If we now look for the main players in this field, two are obvious immediately: Catholicism and Protestantism. The third is less evident: It is the Afro-Brazilian religions, including the many variants of Spiritism. In terms of statistics, Afro-Brazilian religions are marginal players. But statistics in this case are misleading since they hide the common practice of many Brazilians to identify as Catholic while practicing Afro-Brazilian religions alongside Catholicism. Afro-Brazilian religions thus play a far more important role than the data suggest.

To achieve a better understanding of the competitive dynamics in Brazil's religious field, we must first take a closer look at these main actors. Following Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization, we can speak of a 'Catholic field', a 'Protestant field', and an 'Afro-Brazilian field' as 'sub-fields' within the broader religious field.

Protestantism was of minor importance in Brazil for centuries (Campos 2016; Dove 2016; Dreher 2016). It was only in the early 19th century that Protestantism succeeded in gaining a foothold in Brazil. At that time, Lutherans (predominantly Germans) settled in southern Brazil, where they founded rather 'closed' religious-ethnic communities. As they largely refrained from proselytizing, Brazilian Protestantism at that time basically kept its European character. Missionary ambitions were first developed by North American Protestants (Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, members of the Episcopal Church, and others), who started to proselytize in Brazil in the middle of the 19th century. Their success remained modest – and yet their endeavors represent a turning point in the history of Protestantism in Brazil. Since they successfully recruited converts among local people, the growth of Protestantism became ever more independent of immigration. The constant expansion of Protestantism since the early 20th century is thus due not to immigration but to conversion. However, so-called historical Protestantism (i.e. mainly Lutheranism and Calvinism) did not profit from this 'turn', but remained a minor segment within Brazil's Protestant sub-field. Instead, it was the Pentecostal churches that benefitted from the high conversion rates and were consequently able to establish themselves permanently in Brazil.

The Pentecostal movement emerged in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century (Anderson 2014: 40–70) and reached Brazil soon afterward

(Anderson 2014: 78–83; Chesnut 1997; 2003: 39–63; Rivera 2016). The first Pentecostal church in Brazil, Assembléia de Deus ("Assembly of God"), was founded by Swedish-American missionaries in Belém (in the northern state of Pará) in 1911 (de Alencar 2019 [1998]; Correa 2020 [1998]). The many, mostly small local Pentecostal churches that emerged at this junction did not achieve high conversion rates in the first half of the 20th century. In the second half, however, they experienced rapid growth. Crucially, this growth was mainly on account of Brazilian converts who themselves now founded new churches. As a consequence, the prevailing North American influence gradually diluted. Moreover, the spread of the movement was accompanied by its internal diversification, and this led to the emergence of a new variant, called "neo-Pentecostalism", in the 1970s. Unlike the mostly small, independent local churches of the first Pentecostal "wave", neo-Pentecostalism tends to organize itself in megachurches (Chesnut 2016; Freston 1998; 1999; 2016), which claim theological dominance and rule by means of strict church control and, not least, at great financial expense. The most important neo-Pentecostal church in Brazil is the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (IURD; 'Universal Church of the Kingdom of God'; UCKG), founded in 1977 in Rio de Janeiro by Edir Macedo. Managed like a business, the Universal Church conducts evangelization with marketing strategies. Thus, it has invested an enormous amount of money to gain public influence, especially through mass media: At great financial expense, it has established successful media groups of its own, including TV and radio stations, publishing houses, and so forth. Moreover, immense efforts have been taken to be visible in the public sphere, not least through prestigious church buildings – which are in sharp contrast to the predominantly very modest local Pentecostal churches throughout the country. The best example is the so-called Templo de Salomão in São Paulo ('Solomon's Temple'). Built according to what is thought to be known about the plans of the first Jewish temple in Jerusalem, this oversized church can seat 10.000 people.[3]

Neo-Pentecostalism sees evangelization in terms of what is called "spiritual warfare". And this concept has greatly influenced not only Pentecostalism itself or the Protestant sub-field but the dynamics of the religious field as a whole (Chesnut 2003). "Spiritual warfare" has a double meaning: On the

3 The 2014 inauguration, which was broadcast nationwide on the private channel TV Globo, was attended by Brazil's entire political leadership, including then-President of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party), Dilma Rousseff; cf. the official version distributed on the church's own Youtube channel: Igreja Universal 2014.

one hand, it concerns inner conversion, i.e. the fighting against one's inner demons. On the other (and above all), it relates to proclaiming the exclusivity of (neo-)Pentecostalism with regard to other religions and other Christian denominations. The Universal Church thus stigmatizes certain practices of folk Catholicism as superstitious (such as the very popular cult of the Virgin Mary[4]). Most of all, however, spiritual warfare aims its sights at Afro-Brazilian religions, whose deities and spirits it labels as demons and which it fights aggressively (Macedo 2019 [1989]; da Silva 2007; 2016).

The term 'Afro-Brazilian', examining this sub-field now, denotes a number of heterogeneous religious groups that are institutionally autonomous and often compete with each other (da Silva/Brumana 2016; Engler 2016; Engler/Brito 2016; Engler/Isaia 2016; Prandi 2010). It is a spectrum which stretches from Candomblé groups (that claim to be firmly committed to the African religious heritage) and Umbanda groups (integrating new elements into the Afro-Brazilian religious matrix) to groups that hardly differ from Spiritism, which came to Brazil from France in the 1860s and very quickly found great success (Aubrée/Laplantine 1990).

Despite these differences, most Afro-Brazilian groups share basic features, first and foremost the cult of African deities and spirits that came to Brazil during the transatlantic slave trade from the 16th to the 19th century. In Brazil, these deities are included in a common 'pantheon' together with Catholic saints, indigenous spirits, and other spiritual beings of different origins. Another common feature of the many Afro-Brazilian religions is their focus on healing practices: Indeed, Candomblé and Umbanda groups, as well as Spiritist centers, serve as points of contact for people seeking help with regard to everyday health, family, or work problems.

Over the course of centuries, the Catholic side, despite its dogmatic condemnation, has developed a rather pragmatic 'tolerance of ambiguity' towards

4 Cf. as an example the incident "Chute na Santa" ('Kicking the Saint'). It took place in a religious TV program broadcast nationwide by Rede Record (the TV station of UCKG) on October 12, 1995, which is a national holiday in honor of Brazil's patron saint Nossa Senhora Aparecida. A UCKG bishop, Sérgio von Helder, who had brought a statue of Nossa Senhora Aparacida along, led through the program; he walked around the statue and made remarks about how ugly it was, questioning how anyone could believe that such a figure could even have anything to do with God. He then insulted those beliefs as idolatry and kicked the statue repeatedly. The incident set off a large controversy about religious tolerance. Cf. the report on the incident on Jornal Nacional (1995).

the widespread habit of merging Catholic and Afro-Brazilian practices and beliefs. On the Protestant side, such pragmatic tolerance is found less with Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches strongly rejecting Afro-Brazilian religions. Their special offer of salvation is, as previously stated, strictly exclusive, and in addition acts increasingly aggressively towards competing religions, especially those of African provenance (da Silva 2007; 2016; Oro 2005).

This concludes our brief look at the Protestant and Afro-Brazilian subfields and the emerging competitive dynamics in the overall religious field. In the next part, I focus on what is still the most important religious sub-field in Brazil, at least in terms of statistics, namely Catholicism.

3. The Catholic field in Brazil with a special focus on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal

Brazilian Catholicism is remarkably diverse. We can distinguish (at least) four currents: Folk Catholicism, Romanized Catholicism, Liberation Theology, and Charismatic Catholicism.

Folk Catholicism developed since the beginning of the colonial period in the 16th century. It is a particular Catholic culture rooted in the Iberian Catholicism of the early modern period and shaped by the counter-reformatory ideas of the Tridentine Council (1545–1563). Its central feature is the worship of the saints – first and foremost: the Virgin Mary – which is expressed in shrines, offerings, pilgrimages, belief in miracles, etc. This specific devotional culture was, in a sense, the first religious 'export' from Europe to Latin America. Once there, however, it developed a life of its own, merging with local religious (and non-religious) customs and profane festive culture (González 2016; Larkin 2016; Steil 2016).

Towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the impact of European Ultramontanism also took hold of the non-European branches of the Catholic Church. Brazil was no exception: Here, too, a Roman Catholic culture based on the European model would be established. The main characteristics of this Romanized Catholicism (as Ultramontanism came to be called outside of Europe) are prioritizing the magisterium and the clergy (first and foremost the Pope) as well as focusing pastoral care on providing the so-called holy sacraments (de Roux 2014; Steil 2016). An entirely different pastoral concept was favored by the third current in Brazil's Catholic sub-field: Liberation Theology.

Influenced by Marxism and other anti-capitalist theories, Liberation Theology emerged in various Latin American countries in the early 1960s and gained wide influence in the 1970s. Among its core tenets is the conviction that there is a preferential divine "option for the poor" (Hartch 2014: 57–72, 73–82, 134–136), i.e. the idea that God loves the poor, the deprived, those who suffer, more than the rich and privileged and that he empowers the poor to fight in solidarity for their rights in order to overcome oppression, poverty, and hunger. Liberation theology thus radically challenged clerical Romanized Catholicism. Priests and lay people in this movement founded so-called local base communities, the idea being to come together to read and interpret the Bible in the light of the "option for the poor". Instead of focusing on providing the holy sacraments, these base communities aim at empowering the poor, both religiously and socially: religious practice is thus combined with social work (with the landless, the illiterate, street children, prostitutes, industrial workers, etc.). Liberation Theology was supported by the Latin American bishops (Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano; CELAM) at their conferences in Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979) before it was systematically (and effectively) suppressed by Rome, especially since the pontificate of John Paul II (since 1978).

Much more successful than Liberation Theology is the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Launched in the US with the so-called "Duquesne Weekend" in 1967 (Ciciliot 2019: 252f.; 2020: 131f.), the Charismatic wave spilled over to Brazil soon afterward. In a pioneering study, Brazilian sociologist Brenda Carranza (2000) identifies 1969 as the founding year of Brazil's Renovação Carismática Católica (RCC). In 1969, a US Jesuit, Harold Rahm, who had been working in Brazil since 1964, initiated Brazil's first Catholic Charismatic prayer group in Campinas (São Paulo state) – a group which should become the nucleus of a highly successful movement. In 1971, alongside Harold Rahm, two other priests became involved in establishing the RCC in Brazil: Eduardo Dougherty, also a US Jesuit, and Jonas Abib, a Brazilian Salesian priest of Lebanese origin. Both contributed to the rapid growth of the movement in the following years by encouraging the creation of many such local prayer groups (Carranza 2000; Chesnut 2003; 2016; Cleary 2011: 96–151; Prandi 1997).

How did the surrounding Catholic sub-field react to the charismatic "awakenings"? Actually, the pioneers of the movement were invited to a first meeting with the Brazilian bishops in May 1973. The bishops declared that the Charismatic movements were "um novo modo de ser Igreja" (Carranza 2000: 37; 'a new way of being church'). On the one hand, with this phrasing the movement's

claim to renew the church as a whole was taken up and, in a sense, legitimized; at the same time, however, the bishops thereby also verbalized their expectation for the Charismatic Movement to take its place within the institutional structure of the Church and to submit to the magisterium. And this is what happened in the following years.

The further organizational development of the movement took place rapidly; in the course of 1974, starting from local prayer groups and regional prayer meetings, transregional coordination groups were established. In the same year, the RCC held its first national congress in Itaicí (São Paulo state); a nationwide representation, the Conselho Nacional da Renovacão Carismática Católica, was created to support the movement's further development. Organizational units and "ministries" with specific tasks were established at different ecclesiastical and political levels (parish, diocese, federal states) – in short, the movement institutionalized and professionalized.

The fact that after initial hesitation, both the 'National Conference of Brazilian Bishops' (Conferência Nacional dos Bispos Brasileiros; CNBB) and the Vatican[5] eventually gave their "blessing" to the RCC might partly be due to the fact that they finally saw it as an opportunity to "save" Catholicism from its leftist politicization represented by Liberation Theology. But it was clearly also motivated by the rapid rise of an efficient competitor outside the Catholic subfield: namely, Pentecostalism. Supporting the Charismatics thus seemed to be a good strategy to fight both competitors, inside and outside the Catholic subfield. And it was effective – certainly relatively effective, for statistics are clear about one point: the RCC has not succeeded to any significant extent in winning back former Catholics (who converted to Pentecostal churches or opted for non-religion). Instead, its success so far remains limited to the shrinking Catholic sub-field, which is witnessing 'conversions' from Romanized or Folk Catholicism or from base communities to Charismatic Catholicism.[6]

In terms of geography, the RCC has spread all over Brazil since the 1970s, and particularly since the 1990s, with a focus in the southeast (namely São

5 The Vatican supported the Charismatic Renewal through the establishment, of a central service unit called International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Service (ICCRS) in 1978, which changed its name to Catholic Charismatic Renewal International Service (CHARIS) in 2019. For the development of the CCR from its beginnings in the US, its global spread and the changing attitude of the Vatican cf. Ciciliot 2020.

6 Chesnut (2016: 77) estimates that at least 50 percent of Brazilian Catholics belong to the Charismatic spectrum.

Paulo) and south. In the following, a few examples from the extremely broad spectrum of Catholic Charismatic communities in Brazil shall be presented (for the following: Cleary 2011: 96–131).

I start with a preliminary remark: After the first spillover of the Charismatic impulse from the US at the end of the 1960s, it was initially Charismatic communities operating internationally that gained a foothold; nevertheless, soon after Brazilian Charismatics themselves began to establish a variety of new communities of their own. Among them, we can distinguish between "life communities" and "covenant communities". The members of life communities are expected to share their entire lives with each other, which often includes giving up their private property for the benefit of the community to which they have bound themselves by certain vows. The members of covenant communities, in contrast, usually carry on with their lives outside the community where they gather exclusively for specific communal activities. Some communities combine both types.

One of the first international communities to take root in Brazil is the Comunidade Emanuel.[7] Founded in France in the early 1970s, it is also successful in Europe (cf. Dolbeau's chapter in this volume). Its Brazilian branch was founded by the Benedictine Father Cipriano Chagas in Rio de Janeiro in 1976. The Comunidade Emanuel combines life community with covenant community features. It counts diocesan priests as well as married people among its members, and likewise lay people who feel called to celibacy and to placing their lives at the service of the community. As the name of the community suggests ('Emanuel' means 'God is with us'), members see their specific vocation in joyfully proclaiming and praising God's presence in the world.

Canção Nova ('New Song'), one of the most successful Charismatic communities in the country, was founded by the above-mentioned Jonas Abib in Cachoeira Paulista (São Paulo state) in 1978 (Cleary 2011: 106–109, 120f.; de Oliveira 2009).[8] At the center of this covenant community's vocation is – as its name indicates – music, which Jonas Abib identified as a special instrument of evangelization and mission. Canção Nova thus promotes composers and singers and the production and dissemination of popular Christian music. Starting in its early days, the community established its own radio station, and today runs one of the largest Catholic media groups in the world, including radio and television stations that broadcast around the clock, a publishing house

7 Cf. https://emanuelnobrasil.com.br/.

8 Cf. https://www.cancaonova.com/.

and, unsurprisingly, a professionalized internet presence, naturally including social media. Cancão Nova also sells a wide range of products, from books, CDs, and DVDs to clothing, devotional objects, and merchandising items. At its headquarters in Cachoeira Paulista, the construction of one of the largest religious meeting places (called Centro de Evangelização) in Latin America (seating 30.000 people plus 44.000 standing) was completed in 2004. Canção Nova is successful not only in Brazil, but worldwide; it also has branches in Europe, especially in Portugal (Gabriel 2009).

One of the first communities active in northern Brazil is Shalom, which was founded in 1982 in Fortaleza (state of Ceará) – and not, like the two previously mentioned communities, by a priest, but by a layman: Moyses Louro de Azevedo (Cleary 2011: 112f.; Mariz/Aguilar 2009).[9] Azevedo was influenced by Jonas Abib and the Canção Nova community. It is thus no surprise that Shalom also draws on music as a central missionary tool. It runs more than 50 community houses in Brazil, which organize religious orientation days and summer camps; it is also present on the radio and television with its own programs and has spread internationally, including to France, Italy, Switzerland, Canada, and Israel (Cleary 2011: 112f.). Once a year, it organizes the annual music festival Halleluya (cf. below).

Very successful is also the community Toca de Assis, which again originated in the southeast of the country, in Campinas (São Paulo state) (Cleary 2011: 113f.; Portella 2009).[10] Founded in 1983 by a priest (Roberto José Lettieri), its members see their specific vocation in following the footsteps of Francis of Assisi, i.e. in a simple lifestyle and in caring for the poor, especially the homeless; accordingly, they call themselves "filhos da pobreza" ('sons of poverty'). Toca de Assis is a lay congregation that maintains more than 100 houses throughout Brazil, with a focus on the state of São Paulo.

The boundaries between the numerous Charismatic communities, of which only a few have been mentioned here, are blurred; membership is often not formalized and specific cross-community events contribute to the emergence of an overarching Charismatic sense of community. Among them are the large-scale worship services for which stadium-like meeting places have been created (modeled on Pentecostal megachurches, though mostly less representative). The best-known example is the Santuário Theotókos – Mãe de Deus ('Shrine of the God-bearer – Mother of God') in São Paulo, initiated by

9 Cf. https://shalombrasil.com.br/.

10 Cf. https://tocadeassisirmaos.org.br/.

the aforementioned singing priest Marcelo Rossi.[11] The Santuário Theotókos is Brazil's second largest church in the country; it can accommodate about 25.000 people inside and 100.000 people outside.[12] The Holy Mass is read here several times a week and broadcast by both church-owned and private TV stations.[13] When celebrated by Marcelo Rossi, it resembles a staging that alternates between pop concert and Sunday service, i.e. secular pop cultural forms are adopted and embedded in a Catholic context. I shall come back to this further on.

This melting of Catholic elements with pop-cultural ones is also the recipe for the success of religious music festivals such as those hosted by Canção Nova or Shalom. Shalom organizes an annual five-day festival of Catholic music called Halleluya in Fortaleza (northern Brazil): more than a million people gathered for more than 40 individual events as part of this festival in pre-COVID years. On the professionally designed website, the festival is advertised with the slogan "Mais que um Festival. Uma experiência!" ('More than a festival. An experience!').[14] A similar three-day event – named Hosana Brasil – is organized annually by Canção Nova in Cachoeira Paulista (in the southeast; São Paulo state) and brings together hundreds of thousands religious 'fans' from numerous different communities and local prayer groups.[15]

Within Brazil's Catholic sub-field, the RCC provides an alternative to the other styles of Catholic devotion: Its dynamic and emotional approach to liturgy, which is focused on a belief in the actual presence of the Holy Spirit, is in sharp contrast with the rigid clerical culture of Romanized Catholicism as well as with the rather ascetic liturgical style practiced in Liberationist base

11 Cf. https://padremarcelorossi.com.br/ and the Facebook and Instagram accounts of the Santuário Theotókos.

12 The largest being the Sanctuary of the national patron Santa Maria Aparecida (São Paulo state). The Santuário Theotókos was financed exclusively by donations and the proceeds from the sale of CDs, DVDs, books, etc. Its 2012 inauguration was broadcast by Brazil's largest TV-station Rede Globo (cf. the report: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHZAYyFuFXw&t=47s).

13 According to the website "Horários de Missa em todo o Brasil" the Holy Mass is read at the Santuário Theotókos twice on Sundays (5:45 a.m.; 8:45 a.m.) and once on Wednesdays (7:45 p.m.) and Saturdays (3:00 p.m.); all four masses are broadcast either by the private TV- and radio-station Rede Globo or by the Catholic TV station Rede Vida or by Web TV; cf. https://www.horariodemissa.com.br/igreja.php?k=Ag7U9.

14 Cf. https://www.festivalhalleluya.com/festival.

15 Cf. https://eventos.cancaonova.com/edicao/hosana-brasil-17/.

communities (Oro 1996: 89–119; Prandi 1997: 97–157). What distinguishes the RCC from other currents in Brazilian Catholicism, however, is not just its expressive, enthusiastic style of piety (which strongly resembles Pentecostal forms), but also the social forms that Charismatic spirituality takes on. It is noteworthy that, in terms of social structure, the basic social form of Charismatic Catholicism – the usually small local prayer group ("grupo de oração") – resembles the base communities and thus the social form invented by Liberation Theology, the main competitor of Charismatic Catholicism in the Catholic sub-field (Prandi 1997: 97–121). However, Charismatic prayer groups and base communities fill their respective basic social forms, which are similar in some regards, with fundamentally disparate religious messages and completely different devotional styles: The primarily sober spirituality observable in base communities reflects experiences of suffering and oppression. Base communities apply the biblical message to the living conditions of the poor in order to obtain religious guidelines for social action – social action that aims at changing those unjust social conditions. Charismatic prayer groups, in contrast, concern personal experiences of the Holy Spirit ("baptism in the Spirit") and thus individual spiritual renewal. Charismatic religiosity is joyful, its focus is on praising God and on the personally (not socially) liberating experience of the Holy Spirit. 'I am happy to be Catholic' – this slogan, brought to life by singing priests like Marcelo Rossi, sums up what Charismatic Catholic piety is about, and how it differs from all other types of Catholicism in Brazil: While Romanized Catholicism is experienced as ritually petrified, Folk Catholicism is marked by magical ideas, and Liberation Theology takes a rather rational approach to religion, while Charismatic piety simply makes Catholics happy!

In Charismatic prayer groups, the "baptism in the Spirit" as an experience of being personally called, is longed for, prayed for, and sung for together. It is experienced as spiritual empowerment to cope with the given life conditions and thus acknowledged as a path to healing. Healing is understood both in a concrete sense, as recovery from physical or psychological suffering, and in a figurative sense, e.g. as turning away from alleged sexual or religious aberrations, namely homosexuality, promiscuity, or the practice of Afro-Brazilian religions (Maffi 2019). The experience of being "baptized in the Holy Spirit" is also interpreted as a divine calling for further commitment – commitment both in the sense of developing one's own faith (inwardly) and of actively engaging in missionary work (outwardly). This is far from trivial: In a country where not long ago (as recently as the early 1970s) more than 90 per cent of the population still identified with Catholicism, both concerns point to a profound reli-

gious change. The Renovação Carismática Católica is both part of that change and a response to it. This unprecedented zeal for evangelization and mission challenged the established pastoral praxis, which could not rely on approved models. The Charismatics thus first had to invent practices and build up social forms appropriate to their evangelization and mission goals – or borrow them from other contexts.

In this regard, the RCC's representatives proceed methodically. An example of this is a document entitled "Planejamento Estratégico de Evangelização" ('Strategic Planning of Evangelization'), authored by the National Council of the RCC in 2014.[16] The document, which was presented at a national meeting of RCC leaders, unfolds a general agenda to be implemented nationwide in anticipation of the (then upcoming) 50th anniversary of the global Catholic Charismatic Renewal in 2017. It displays a range of activities based on seven pillars: evangelization, pastoral care, spirituality, formation (of multipliers), communication, administration, and mission. These pillars are in turn structured according to the criteria (general) intention, (concrete) objective, (possible) action, and responsibility. In addition, a structure for self-assessment is provided (not yet implemented; ongoing implementation in per cent; already implemented). It should not be considered a coincidence that this seven-part spectrum is framed by the pillars evangelization and mission, since one's own anchoring in the faith is considered the prerequisite for effective missionary activity.

Besides, the document exemplifies how a religious renewal movement which began from below might gradually become controlled from above. Here, we can observe the particular tension between microsocial religious community building and meso- or macrosocial religious organization: While it is correct that organizational logics risk inhibiting the dynamics of spontaneous Charismatic experiences and community building, especially those based on eruptive experiences such as the "baptism in the Spirit", this is only one side of the story. The other is that religious organizations might also create conditions that make Charismatic experiences and subsequent processes of community-building possible in the first place. This somewhat paradoxical effect can be observed in the case of the RCC.

16 Cf. https://novoportal.rccbrasil.org.br/blog/planejamento-estrategico-de-evangelizacao/.

For instance, the RCC's website[17] provides not only general information on the movement and its organizational structure, but also contains interactive pages that allow committed adherents to register their prayer groups,[18] and, as a result, interested people to find a prayer group in their neighborhood. The RCC thus uses its organizational structure (which is supported by the church hierarchy) to promote grassroot activities, i.e. to encourage local people to start Charismatic prayer groups or to participate in existing ones. At the same time, it also channels this process by providing general explanations about the religious purpose of prayer groups and offering suggestions for prayer or communal activities as well as pictures and videos visualizing such activities.[19] As a result, a certain standardization of piety is being pushed: The RCC as a well-structured organization (on the macro-level) provides a model that individuals and local Charismatic prayer groups (on the micro- and meso-level) are supposed to follow.

In contrast to Max Weber's line of argumentation, who assumed that the Charismatic character of a movement would be lost (by routinization) when the movement is transformed into an organization (Weber 1968 [1922]: 246–254), the RCC exemplifies that setting up professional organizational structures does not necessarily slow down the initial Charismatic impetus, but might even promote further Charismatic experiences and initiate processes of Charismatic community-building – because of and not despite efficient church organization. Thus, typical events which can only take place with a great deal of professional organizational effort, such as the above-mentioned music festivals Halleluya and Hosana Brasil, transregional or national prayer meetings ("cenáculos"), local 'Jesus bars' ("barzinhos de Jesus") or 'Christotheques' ("cristotecas"), or the alternative carnival ("Carneval

17 Cf. https://novoportal.rccbrasil.org.br/.

18 Cf. https://novoportal.rccbrasil.org.br/cadastre-um-grupo-de-oracao/; https://novoportal.rccbrasil.org.br/o-que-e-grupo-de-oracao/. In this way, data on the spread of the RCC is collected. At the beginning of 2022, a total of 14.313 prayer groups were listed on this website, broken down by states; according to this, the greatest density was found in the south and southeast. These numbers were no longer publicly accessible in August 2023; the call to register groups and the possibility to find groups in one's neighborhood are still in place.

19 Cf. the websites "O que é Grupo de Oração e como participar?" ('What is a prayer group and how can I take part?') and "Grupo de oração – Formação" ('Prayer group – Formation'): https://novoportal.rccbrasil.org.br/o-que-e-grupo-de-oracao/; https://novoportal.rccbrasil.org.br/grupo-de-oracao-formacao/.

de Jesus"), open up new social spaces for Charismatic experiences for both individuals and groups.

What is more, these events bring something else to light that is typical of the social forms that Charismatic Catholicism in Brazil takes on: they are hybrid. We can observe a mingling of (1) distinct Catholic practices, symbols and social forms (such as the Eucharist, the rosary, the Virgin Mary, reverence for the pope, etc., and, not least, the social structure of base communities) with (2) historically successful social forms from other religious origins (especially from Pentecostalism, such as prayer groups or the camp meetings) and (3) social frames drawn from pop culture (discotheque, bar, concert, camping, even sports, etc.). For instance, "cenáculos" ('prayer meetings') typically take place in large sport arenas or as camp meetings and resemble, for one thing, the Great Awakenings that took place in the US in the 18th and 19th centuries; at the same time, however, they make use of basic social elements from present-day pop culture (just think of music festivals). Even the Holy Mass with its core ritual of the Eucharist is not exempt from this hybridization. The singing priest Marcelo Rossi actually stages the Holy Mass like a pop show.[20] The point here is that we are dealing with highly organized religious events that facilitate individual as well as communal Charismatic experiences.

Music plays an important role in (almost) all of this. In Brazil, Charismatic Catholicism has developed its own style of music, which is popularized by the "barzinhos de Jesus", the "cristotecas", and not least the festivals of religious music, and has become successful on the commercial music market. In fact, music is at the heart of the dynamic process of Charismatic community-building in Brazil today, and this dynamic is driven by a figure exclusive to Charismatic Catholicism, namely, the singing priest.

Singing priests are key figures for the movement's success (Cleary 2011: 1–29, 96–151; Clarke 1999; Chesnut 2003: 64–101; Souza 2005). One reason might be their ability to perform smoothly in highly different social fields: they are big names in the pop-cultural scene and renowned personages in the religious field. They perform proficiently both at the altar and on the stage; they turn Holy Mass into an event that oscillates between show and Sunday service; they run daily radio and television programs, sell their own CDs, DVDs, and books, stream their music, maintain personal websites, Instagram, and Facebook accounts, etc. And they are successful. In 2002, the most famous

20 His latest videos can be watched via his personal website: https://www.padremarcelorossi.com.br/WebTV.php.

of Brazil's singing priests, Padre Marcelo Rossi, received a nomination for the Latin Grammy.

The singing priests represent a style of joyful piety that is compatible with the modern world and its 'well-being' ideals. They act as ambassadors of a renewed Catholicism whose core message is that Catholicism is about being happy, and moreover about being happy in *this* world!

To conclude this part: The reason that the RCC does quite well in gaining followers among Catholics might be that Charismatic Catholicism (in Brazil) has created a joyful culture of piety that combines traditional Catholic elements with new non-Catholic practices, ideas, and social forms. Popular elements from outside the Catholic sub-field are thus embedded within a Catholic framework and invested with a Catholic meaning. Particularly important in this regard is not least the devotion to Mary, which connects the Charismatic current with the other three currents in the Brazil's Catholic field. This is most evident in the case of Marcelo Rossi. Not only did he name the huge religious arena that he founded in São Paulo after Maria Santuário Theotókos ('Shrine of the God-Bearer'); Mary is also iconographically omnipresent there as well as on his website and in his books. She is a constant point of reference in his songs, and the prayer of the rosary is a preferred and recommended devotional practice, streamed every day through his personal website, thus creating a virtual community of praying believers.[21]

4. Final considerations: 'Option for the spirits': Dynamics of competition and convergence in the religious field in Brazil

Now that we have taken a closer look at the heterogeneous Catholic sub-field and especially the role of the Charismatic Renewal in its dynamics, I will again 'zoom' out of the Catholic sub-field and cast a glance at the dynamics of the entire religious field of Brazil. Let's take a quick look back: Even though Pentecostal churches had begun growing in the 1950s, the Catholic Church only started taking other religious actors seriously in the 1970s, and even then, only

21 Cf. https://www.padremarcelorossi.com.br/IndiceDoRosario.php. In a 2003 film entitled "Maria, Mãe do Filho de Deus" ('Mary, Mother of God's Son') Rossi even participated as an actor; cf. Moacyr Góes (dir.) 2003.

reluctantly. As a result, the church was late in realizing that it had come under competitive pressure in the religious field and, consequently, was late in actually taking care of the faith and inner devotion of Catholics themselves.

As 'newcomers' in the religious field, Pentecostal churches, in contrast, have presented themselves from the beginning as an alternative to Catholicism, thereby triggering a dynamic of competition in the overall religious field. They did so not only by offering alternative beliefs, but also by introducing alternative social forms of religion, with Pentecostalism organizing itself into 'sect'-like social forms rather than 'churches'. By 'sects', I understand (in line with Max Weber's and Ernst Troeltsch's definition; Weber 2011 [1920]; Troeltsch 1960 [1912]; cf. the Introduction to this volume) exclusive communities whose members are expected to be deeply devout and to live a life that consistently pleases God. Pentecostal sects thus represent a social alternative to the 'church' and thus to the dominant social form of Catholicism in Brazil until at least the mid-20th century. Unlike sects, churches (still according to Weber and Troeltsch) follow an inclusive model of membership, i.e. membership does not necessarily require an inner commitment. Religious communities that follow the sect-type and its corresponding devotional style (which in the case of Pentecostalism consists of a combination of emotional religiosity and strict lifestyle) proved to be very successful in Brazil. It is therefore not surprising that Catholics should have imitated sect-like social forms, based on the personal calling as experienced in the "baptism in the Spirit", the key moment in the religious life of Charismatics.

Yet, to fully comprehend the religious dynamics in Brazil we must realize something else: All three main actors share a fundamental conviction, namely a belief in the power of spirits – be it the (one and only) Holy Spirit of Christians or the many spirits of African, indigenous, or other provenance that are worshipped in the Afro-Brazilian religions. Just as important as this shared belief in the existence of powerful spirits, however, are the differences in the background beliefs about the character of these spirits. While the Holy Spirit of Christians (as an aspect of the divine trinity) is imagined as unambiguously good, the African, indigenous, and other spirits, for their part, are without exception highly ambiguous, i.e. neither good nor evil, or both good and evil at the same time. Christianity, by contrast, has split off all evil from the idea of God and transferred it to the figure of the devil.

This is no theological hair-splitting. Rather, it is crucial if we want to understand how (neo-)Pentecostalism and Charismatic Catholicism relate to Afro-Brazilian religions: They imagine the African spirits as demons, and

therefore see ritual trance as demonic possession, as the bestseller *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias: Deuses ou Demônios?*[22] ('Orixás, Caboclos and Leaders: Gods or Demons?') authored by Edir Macedo (2019 [1989]), founder of the neo-Pentecostal Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, testifies; this highly aggressive bestseller was first published in 1989 and relaunched in 2019. Neo-Pentecostal churches, in particular, are highly aggressive towards Afro-Brazilian religions, even physically attacking their centers and their adherents (da Silva 2007; 2016). There are no reports yet of Catholic Charismatic groups behaving in a similar way, but Charismatic Catholics are also increasingly distancing themselves from Afro-Brazilian religions (Maffi 2019), interestingly much more so than representatives of Romanized Catholicism and in contrast to Folk Catholicism and Liberation Theology.

We can thus state that there actually is a dynamic of competition in Brazil's religious field – a dynamic that emerged with the rise of Pentecostalism, and that has since then impinged upon other actors.

What determines this competition? In his book *Competitive Spirits* (2003), R. Andrew Chesnut noted the prevalence in the Catholic sub-field in Brazil of what he calls a "Preferential Option for the Spirit" (ibid.: 64–101) – "Spirit" in the singular, referring to the Holy Spirit. What he (alluding, needless to say, to the liberation theologists' phrase of a 'preferential option for the poor') describes as the basic logic within the Catholic sub-field, however, seems to apply to the religious field as a whole: it is the search for personal spiritual experiences that determines the religious dynamics in Brazil – whether these experiences can be traced back to the one and only Holy Spirit or to the many other spirits of any origin. The logic of the religious field in Brazil is thus dominated by an 'option for the spirits' – this time in the plural.

As a result, religious 'providers', so to speak, will do their best to make such experiences available. The convergence of religious beliefs (in powerful spirits) and demands (the search for personal experiences of those spirits) thus leads to competition among religious providers. Convergence and competition are mutually dependent. And this – which is what I am getting at – favors a dynamic of 'mimicry' (or 'isomorphism') in Brazil's religious field: styles of piety and their corresponding social forms (actually, social forms that allow for spiritual experiences) are being reproduced across religious and denom-

22 "Orixá" is the name for the deities of African origin; a "caboblo" is an indigenous spirit; "guia" is an umbrella term for a variety of spirits that are worshipped in Umbanda.

inational boundaries, namely across Pentecostalism, Catholicism, and Afro-Brazilian religions. I shall explain this a little further.

I will start with the 'mimicry' of devotional styles: actually, trance experiences, possession – and its counterpart: exorcism – are at the center of the devotional culture of all successful religious providers in Brazil. They are accompanied by certain patterns of bodily expressions, such as glossolalia, physiognomic changes, falling, clumsy movements or spasms, etc. (which usually turn into harmonized body performance after a while). Significantly, a positive tone underlies this style of piety: It is not only 'I am happy to be Catholic' – we could replace Catholic with Pentecostal, Spiritist, or Afro-Brazilian to obtain a motto which concisely expresses the basic attitude of those who, to refer to Chesnut, 'opt for the spirit(s)' and corresponding devotional styles. Successful religion in Brazil is thus about being happy and healthy, namely: being happy and healthy in *this* world – not primarily about eternal 'salvation' (such as preached by both 'Romanized Catholicism' and historical Protestantism, the two 'losers' in Brazil's religious field).

The mimicry of devotional styles is accompanied by a second form of 'mimicry': mimicry of social forms of religion. This becomes obvious when we compare the social structure of Charismatic Catholicism with that of Pentecostalism: both have developed a scheme of religious social forms and activities that ranges from the micro- to the meso- to the macro-level, i.e. from small local groups (with high interactive commitment) to regional worship gatherings (with medium commitment) to, eventually, large transregional or even national religious events (with only loose personal commitment). Unsurprisingly, the macro-level receives the greatest recognition in Charismatic Catholicism: the RCC has gradually adapted to the hierarchical organizational structure of the Brazilian church, thus securing the Vatican's approval as well. This, however, has set off its own dynamic: the more Rome has supported the Charismatic "awakenings" in Brazil (and worldwide), the more the movement and its social forms have come under the control of the papal magisterium and thus have been standardized.

I will conclude: In Brazil, those religious 'providers' that respond to the prevalent 'option for the spirit(s)' are most successful. These are: Afro-Brazilian religions, Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches – and Charismatic Catholicism. The latter, as we have seen, is prospering, but its success remains limited to the (otherwise shrinking) Catholic sub-field. Despite the backing of the Brazilian bishops and the Vatican, the RCC has so far failed to win back former Catholics. Instead, it has succeeded in gaining ground among

Catholics themselves. The number of Catholics identifying with Charismatic groups is currently estimated as being as high as 50 per cent (Chesnut 2016: 77). Whether the trend towards Charismatic piety will stop the ongoing erosion of the Catholic sub-field is almost impossible to predict. Yet, one observation persists indisputably: The Charismatic Renewal has significantly changed the social forms of Catholicism in Brazil.

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