http://doi.org/10.1590/S1413-24782022270023

ARTICLE

Christianity of liberation, prosperity theology, and perspectives of class struggle in Brazil

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ABSTRACT

This text synthesizes the onset, development, and collapse of Christianity of Liberation in its relationship with the working class. When the Vatican qualified the liberation theology as heresy in 1984, the space occupied by the Christian Base Communities (*Comunidades Eclesiais de Base*) became dominated by a new segment, attracting more underprivileged people to their religious business ventures. For this reason, this paper will analyze the educational role played by the Christian Base Communities in setting up and organizing the working masses and as a consequence of their reflux, which is concomitant with the processes of pentecostalization in Brazilian Christianity. Since then, the masses have been faced with a crossroads posed by the growth of (neo) pentecostal religions in a consortium with the prosperity theology as popular and union movements are refluxing.

KEYWORDS

christianity of liberation; prosperity theology; popular social movements; trade union movement.

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CRISTIANISMO DE LIBERTAÇÃO, TEOLOGIA DA PROSPERIDADE E AS PERSPECTIVAS DA LUTA DE CLASSES NO BRASIL

RESUMO

Este texto apresenta uma síntese sobre a gênese, o desenvolvimento e o colapso do cristianismo de libertação em sua relação com a classe trabalhadora. Após a ofensiva do Vaticano, que qualificou a teologia da libertação como heresia em 1984, o espaço que as Comunidades Eclesiais de Base ocupavam passou a ser dominado por um novo segmento, atraindo seguidores especialmente entre os setores mais pauperizados para seus empreendimentos empresariais-religiosos. Diante disso, objetiva-se analisar o papel educacional exercido pelas Comunidades Eclesiais de Base na formação e na organização das massas trabalhadoras e as consequências de seu refluxo, que é concomitante aos processos de pentecostalização do cristianismo brasileiro. Desde então as massas se deparam com uma encruzilhada posta pelo crescimento das religiões (neo)pentecostais consorciadas à teologia da prosperidade, à medida que os movimentos populares e sindicais estão em refluxo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

cristianismo de libertação; teologia da prosperidade; movimentos sociais populares; movimento sindical.

EL CRISTIANISMO DE LA LIBERACIÓN, LA TEOLOGÍA DE LA PROSPERIDAD Y LAS PERSPECTIVAS DE LA LUCHA DE CLASES EN BRASIL

RESUMEN

Este texto presenta una síntesis sobre la génesis, el desarrollo y el colapso del cristianismo de liberación en su relación con la clase trabajadora. Tras la ofensiva vaticana, que calificó como herejía la teología de la liberación en 1984, el espacio que ocupaban las Comunidades Eclesiales de Base (*Comunidades Eclesiais de Base*) pasó a ser dominado por un nuevo segmento, especialmente invitado entre los sectores más empobrecidos para sus emprendimientos empresariales: el religioso. Por esta razón, el objetivo es analizar el papel educativo que juegan las Comunidades Eclesiales de Base en la formación y organización de las masas trabajadoras y como consecuencias de su reflujo, que es concomitante con los procesos de pentecostalización en el cristianismo brasileño. Desde entonces, las masas se han enfrentado a una encrucijada planteada por el crecimiento de las religiones (neo)pentecostales asociadas con la teología de la prosperidad a medida que los movimientos populares y sindicales están en reflujo.

PALABRAS CLAVE

cristianismo de liberación; teología de la prosperidad; movimientos sociales populares; movimiento sindical.

INTRODUCTION

Pentecostal religious groups grew exponentially as of the second half of the 20th century, reaching their current predominant form, neo-pentecostalism[1]. Marcelo Badaró Mattos, based on data of the Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics (*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* — IBGE), systematized by Ricardo Mariano, states that the percentage growth of these Churches, which shared the ideas of the so-called "prosperity theology," between 2000 and 2010, was five times higher than the growth of the Brazilian population altogether. The data show that, in the 1940s, Evangelicals accounted for 2.6% of the Brazilian population, increasing to 3.4% in the following decade; 4% in 1960; 5.2% in 1970; 6.6% in 1980; 9% in 1990; 15.4% in 2000; and reaching 22.2% in 2010. Mattos defends "that it can be concluded that the number of Evangelicals increased mainly due to a decline in the percentage of Catholics" (Mattos, 2017, p. 145)[2], which decreased from 89.2% to 64.6% of the population — a drop of 24.6 percentage points — between 2000 and 2020. Meanwhile, in the same period, those who self-reported as Evangelicals, according to IBGE, had a rise of 15.6 percentage points, from 6.6% to the mark of 22.2% in 2010. The author also states that

> in the case of Pentecostal/Neo-Pentecostal denominations, "the following groups remained advancing, especially at the bottom of the social pyramid: 63.7% of Pentecostals over 10 years of age earn up to one minimum wage, 28% receive one to three wages, and 42.3% of those aged over 15 years old have completed Elementary School only. (Mattos, 2017, p. 145 and 146)

1 Pentecostalism emerged from the division within the Protestant movements (sociologically classified as historical Protestantism) in the late 19th century around the conflict that took place from the interpretation of the second chapter of the biblical book of Acts of the Apostles. The first Pentecostal churches that arrived in Brazil were Christian Community in Brazil (*Comunidade Cristã no Brasil*) (in 1910) and Assembly of God (*Assembleia de Deus*) (in 1911). As a result of this new variety of Evangelism, its new brand — the emphasis on "the gifts of the Spirit" consisted in a reason for dispute with other Evangelicals and led to the creation of new denominations —, glossolalia is noteworthy, which became the main highlight in the first phase of progress of these churches. A second moment of the advance of Pentecostalism in Brazil occurs with the arrival of the Foursquare Church, in the 1950s, which presents new strategies for mobilizing its audience and ends up determining a new period of Pentecostalism, in which the emphasis is placed on "divine healing." Finally, from the 1970s onwards, the Pentecostal movement caused divine healing to lose its prominence to spectacular acts of exorcism, "spiritual warfare," and to prosperity theology. Ricardo Mariano typifies these three varieties of Pentecostalism as: 1) *classical pentecostalism* (from the Assembly of God and Christian Community in Brazil churches); 2) *deuteropentecostalism* (in which the Foursquare Church pioneered); and 3) *neo-pentecostalism* (currently predominant tendency, whose Universal Church — *Igreja Universal* — is the "spearhead"). Within these tendencies circulate a multiplicity of religious denominations and parachurch organizations (Mariano, 2014).

2 All citations throughout the article were free translated.

Therefore, it is noteworthy that evangelical religions, driven by the growth of Pentecostals, especially the neo-pentecostal tendency, grew; whereas the catholic Church lost space in communities formed by the most impoverished population. This has driven the authors to seek explanations to discover the reasons for such a phenomenon. This alternation between religious beliefs and the interest that leads these Churches to be closer to the working class does not happen by chance, and its explanation lies in the material reality that must be known in its essence. Based on this objective reality, and on bibliographic studies carried out on this topic, this text was written in an attempt to understand this phenomenon inherent in the notions and practices of churches and its reverberations in the organization, education, and conscience of the Brazilian working class as a whole.

As Karel Kosik explains, an examination of a scientific phenomenon must follow a method that enables new results, and the content that is not explicit in the starting point, but requires an analysis, must be discovered. This analysis must be mediated by the identification of the core of the object, phenomenon, or processes of reality and its categorical explanation, aiming to reach the end of the exegesis and have the same phenomenon of the starting point, though logically enriched — which enables its exposition and in such a way that the unknown is no longer a problem, as it has arrived, through the mediation of the abstract, to the totality of multiple determinations and diverse relationships (Kosik, 1976).

The examination of sources that deal with the process of replacing the place formerly occupied by the catholic Church and which is currently occupied by neo-pentecostalism is included in totality, that is, in the reality of capitalist society. As can be seen in this text, the religious tendencies in question move, within a capitalist society, within positions ranging from active resistance — aiming to improve or transform social relations — or are characterized by total conformation — with a systematic political program aimed at the defense of neoliberal postulates, through which the consensus of faithful and their commitment to the uncompromising defense and deepening of the maintenance of social relations currently established are sought. In the definitions historically encompassed within the Churches, there has always been a strong commitment to disseminating the worldview to which one is affiliated, starting not only from an immediate action with the believers, but also interfering in politics and school education.

Taking this into consideration, the authors formulated three hypotheses about the relationship between theology of liberation, prosperity theology, and political and educational perspectives for the working classes:

- the advance of movements linked to the prosperity theology takes place simultaneously with the implementation of Neoliberalism and, in fact, religious denominations fight for the consensus of the worldview inherent in this imperialist phase of capital, in education, and in society; hence, neo-pentecostalism seeks re-Christianization "from above," engaging with political parties and electronic media as ways of conducting a "spiritual war," and are equally guided by the business logic and scientific neutrality, which makes them act in defense of legislation projects to muzzle the pedagogical practice around the idea of "school without a party";

- the Vatican, during the pontificate of John Paul II, indirectly collaborated for the progress of neo-pentecostal ecclesiastical and parachurch entities — despite the factions of such church that joined the wave of pentecostalization through the "charismatic renewal" — by acting in favor of destructing the movement of Christianity of Liberation, condemning its variety, the theology of liberation, of heresy, and destroying the Base Ecclesial Communities (*Comunidades Eclesiais de Base* — BECs). This moment of victory of the conservative segments of the catholic Church dismantled a work of education and political formation of the masses, organized based on the Catholic Action, a movement that had been influenced by the renewal/progressive attitudes developed during the pontificate of John XXIII;
- the fact that nullified the role of the CEBs and the approximation of the most impoverished strata of the working class to neo-pentecostalism link these communities to a new ethos to be pursued by current and new generations, in which the popular social and educational perspective experienced in CEBs, from the 1960s onwards, gradually becomes entrepreneurial and individualist/competitive, from the end of the 20th century to nowadays.

By analyzing the hypotheses, it will be possible to assess the strategies of the Churches in relation to society and the creation of an ethos for the working masses to follow. Hence, the authors start by analyzing Christianity of Liberation and its relationships with the proletarian struggles in Latin America and Brazil, subsequently addressing neo-pentecostalism and its prosperity theology. Finally, the authors point to possibilities of resistance, which can strengthen an organized working class, according to perspectives consistent with its interests and needs.

CHRISTIANITY OF LIBERATION AND PROLETARIAN STRUGGLES IN LATIN AMERICA AND BRAZIL

After the 1964 Military Coup in Brazil, as the communist parties were driven underground in the face of the State of Exception that was explicitly put into practice in the form of persecution, imprisonment, torture, murder, etc., the movements that stood out — as a form of class resistance to repression — resorted to armed struggle and Christianity of Liberation.

Michel Löwy (2016, p. 54) pinpoints that "After 1967, many militants and some of the main PCB [*Partido Comunista Brasileiro* — Brazilian Communist Party] leaders [...] left the party to found left-wing organizations and engage in armed struggle." At the same time, a movement of theologians, intellectuals, and members of the catholic Church grew in the country, which spread throughout Latin America and played an important role in popular political awareness, called Christianity of Liberation.

Löwy further explains that Christianity of Liberation emerged in the midst of a process of inauguration of the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council. Its theologians, in a sense, were allowed to face old dogmatic certainties. This, according to Löwy, meant the implementation of a catholic behavior open to new ideas and theories. Catholicism was introduced to the world and this enabled some of its intellectuals, such as theologians and Jesuits, for example, to be "attracted by Marxist analyses and proposals — as happened to most intellectuals on the continent during the 1960s" (Löwy, 2016, p. 60). This was, therefore, created by the involvement of Christians in neighborhood associations, unions, student movements, peasant leagues, popular education centers, left-wing parties, and revolutionary organizations. It emerged before theology of liberation, as a demonstration of dissatisfaction with the dominant concept of the Church, the "development theology." The contribution of Christianity of Liberation was decisive in terms of guiding and organizing the struggles, uniting proletarian movements in Brazil and other Latin American countries.

In order to give meaning to the inauguration process initiated with the Second Vatican Council, in 1968, the Second General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate took place in the Colombian city of Medellín. The Medellín Declaration was approved in this event, which, as summarized by Eder Sader, consisted of a "call to the 'more intense and renewed presence of the Church in the current transformation of Latin America.' Recognizing the moment as 'decisive,' it points to "the need to know the Latin American human being" (Sader, 1988, p. 152). This Conference represented a conciliatory process between the conservative and progressive wings that emphasized the guidelines concerning the denunciation of social structures that generate inequality, exploitation, and misery. The author defines this event and its declaration as decisive for the formation of the CEBs in Latin America:

> Hence, recommendations for the "pastoral of the masses": studies to understand popular religiosity; to permeate popular manifestations, such as processions and pilgrimages of the "evangelical word"; "to seek the formation of the greatest number of ecclesial communities in parishes, especially in rural areas among the marginalized urban population." (Sader, 1988, p. 155)

In Brazil, Christianity of Liberation and the popular masses became more closely related after the Catholic Action structures were redesigned. This movement was created and animated under the organization and intellectual direction of Alceu Amoroso Lima, a layman who was the most prominent intellectual of the catholic Church in the country in the first half of the 20th century. According to Dermeval Saviani, and structured from the 1930s onwards, in response to the growth of the renewal movement that occurred in society and education, the Catholic Action included

> a broader militancy through specialized movements aimed at bringing together youth in Catholic Action by encompassing the five vowels: Catholic Agrarian

> Youth [*Juventude Agrária Católica*] (JAC), Catholic Student Youth [*Juventude Estudantil Católica*] (JEC), Catholic Independent Youth [*Juventude Independente Católica*] (JIC), Catholic Working Youth [*Juventude Operária Católica*] (JOC), and Catholic University Youth [*Juventude Universitária Católica*] (JUC), in addition to adult organizations such as Men of Catholic Action [*Homens de Ação Católica*] (HAC), "for those aged over thirty years and married of any age,' and the Women's League of Catholic Action [*Liga Feminina de Ação Católica*] (LFAC), 'for those aged over thirty years and married of any age." (Saviani, 2008, p. 256-257)

In the 1950s, the catholic Church began a process of renewal, adopting pedagogical methods and those of philosophical analysis of reality, referenced in the works of Father Pierre Faure and based on the ideas of Montessori and Lubienska — in such a way to support the survival of their schools, in a period when parents sought to enroll their children in schools deemed as a reference due to their link with New School practices, popular at the time. "The Church needed to renew itself pedagogically at the risk of losing its clientele. The path that the catholic Church found to respond to this demand was to assimilate the methodological renewal without giving up on the doctrine" (Saviani, 2008, p. 301-302).

The renewal movement then went beyond the school walls, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and it resorted to the process of popular mobilization. Following this tendency, the Church, inspired by the concept of basic education — created and widely disseminated by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to be reproduced in peripheral countries — and by educational experiences via radio, gave rise to the Basic Education Movement (*Movimento de Educação de Base* — MEB) and later, joined the Paulo Freire's Movement of Adult Education (*Movimento Paulo Freire de Educação de Adultos*) (Fávero, 2006; Saviani, 2008). For Saviani (2008, p. 303),

> MEB was a movement created and directed by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and the Paulo Freire's Movement. Despite being autonomous in relation to the hierarchy of the Church, it was predominantly guided by the Catholic orientation, recruiting most of its cadres in the share of students' movements linked to the JUC.

This author further clarifies that both movements were inspired by Christian personalism and existential phenomenology, a fact that is proven in the investigation of MEB documents carried out by Fávero (2006), whose ideological concept and notions of the categories consciousness, politicization, popular culture, among others, are saturated with the aforementioned philosophical notions.

Overall, there is a consensus among most scholars of that period that the Church-led renewal movement in Brazil was, in an eclectic and conciliatory way, an initial, reformist alternative to the capitalist proposal, to the growth of socialist and communist ideas in the country, to the progress of

Pentecostal and Umbanda religions, to the concept of developmentalism and populism, to the adaptation to the pedagogical reformism defended by educational reformers, who disregarded the influence of the church by defending the secularization of teaching. The change in stance and adherence to a class-like tone favorable to the working masses was influenced by the intellectual production developed within the scope of the Superior Institute of Brazilian Studies (*Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros* — ISEB), as well as the contributions of Catholic theorists who approached Marxism, as was the case of one of the most influential intellectuals of the MEB, Father Henrique de Lima Vaz, and the participation of communist militants who were part of the JUC and headed the National Students Union (*União Nacional dos Estudantes* — UNE), in addition to the proximity to lay people who were members of the Popular Center of Culture (*Centro Popular de Cultura*), of UNE itself, and who were also MEB educators. With such proximities and considering the need to confront the counterrevolutionary forces that plotted the seizure of power (and implemented their strategy through the 1964 coup), and especially after the Second Vatican Council and the Second General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate, popular influence was amplified within the Catholic renewal movement, sometimes even assuming a revolutionary perspective and defending socialism, even though it was not a predominant perspective — quite different from the results that the ecclesiastical hierarchy sought in the initial moments of this renewal — as can be seen in MEB itself, which assumes a configuration of a new purpose from the years 1962 and 1963: awareness of the popular classes, of the dominated (Sader, 1998; Fávero, 2006; Saviani, 2008; Cunha, 2009).

During the Military Regime, the actions of the Church were reinforced by welcoming groups that were defeated by repression forces. The death of Lamarca and Barreto by the Army, in December 1971, marks this new phase, which is associated with what Luiz Antonio Cunha identifies as the identity crisis of the revolutionary parties, determined by the lack of adhesion of the masses to the avant-garde movements that adopted the tactics of guerrilla warfare (Cunha, 2009). According to Eder Sader, the revolutionary strategy was not completely uprooted. Certain revisionism was observed, whose cult of the virtues of "pedagogical patience" pointed to a new tendency towards the insertion of revolutionary strategies in the formation of the masses. Therefore, the stray groups of the revolutionary parties linked themselves to collective resistance actions organized within the catholic Church pastorals, in rural areas, and urban peripheries. Thus, they expected "that throughout these experiences — and as long as they were guided by their 'avant-gardes' — workers would acquire the learning that would lead them to class consciousness" (Sader, 1988, p. 172). However, there was a conflict between the ideas of the Church and those of the militants, as "the pastorals did not have a discourse capable of dealing with the problems of class struggles and the conditions of capitalist society, as required by the militants." Indeed, the militants needed to adjust their ideas, which were then "disarticulated from their original discourses," as

"a growing number of Marxist followers were no longer linked to organizations with widespread programs and strategies" (Sader, 1988, p. 177-178). They were nourished by theses formulated by intellectuals such as Gramsci and Paulo Freire. According to Sader (Sader, 1988, p. 168),

> [...] the fact is that, in this movement of "going to the people," seeking to help in a process of awakening the "critical conscience," Paulo Freire's method was more present than the writings of Gramsci, Lenin's "What is to be done," Mao's booklets, and Debray's "Revolution in Revolution?" about a meteoric career. On the one hand, because the dominant means of "connecting with the people" was carried out through educational processes, starting with literacy. The demand was great, and the activity — legal and apparently innocent — could be carried out both individually by students and by organized militants. The new educators pored over Paulo Freire's books — turned up their noses at his philosophical idealism and Christian humanism — and sought to absorb his methodological guidelines for popular literacy. [...] through Paulo Freire's method, space was created for the critical and collective elaboration of the students' individual and social life experiences.

Although it did not agree with the revolutionary perspective and did not aim at taking power, the activities developed in the process of renewal of the catholic Church contributed to a certain elevation of the masses, concerning the content of the oppressive reality and the confrontation with the Military Regime. As the dictatorship became stricter and attacks against the progressive wing grew, the Church articulated itself with social movements and with the "new unionism." Sader details that, when the coup broke out in 1964, "repression fell on the Catholic Action nuclei and even on MEB and rural unions [...] the most conservative sectors overthrew the renovators and abandoned them to the very fate of persecuted groups." It was from this moment that the "new waves of Catholic militants preferred activities in which they opposed the current order, running the same risks as leftist militancy." Nevertheless, in the year "1969, after the enactment of Institutional Act no. 5, which would mark the apogee of the regime's militarization," the conservative sectors of the Church hierarchy were not spared, and suffered the consequences of losing their position with the military. Indeed, the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (*Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil* — CNBB) expanded its support to "pastoral agents who linked themselves to popular organizations and were persecuted" even more deeply after the "marks of barbarism that prevented any justification: an assistant of Dom Helder had been kidnapped and martyred and his body was left exposed by the murderers" (Sader, 1988, p. 150-151).

In the final moments of the Brazilian Dictatorship, as Leôncio Martins Rodrigues explains, the important role of the progressive wings of the catholic Church can be noted — for the Brazilian union movement and, even more, in the

proximity and integration of various popular movements and authentic unionism[3]. These wings counted not only on the full support, but also on the direct action of intellectuals who founded the theology of liberation in the founding process, in the late 1970s, of the new Brazilian unionism, within the struggle for the end of the Military Regime and for social transformations, whose agendas demonstrate articulation with a political character and provide indications of a democratic and socialist project.

According to Löwy (2016), altogether, the Christianity of Liberation that began in the 1960s gained momentum with the creation of theology of liberation. In 1971, with the book written by the Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutiérrez entitled *Teología de la liberación: perspectivas* (Theology of liberation: perspectives), it was fundamental for "the revolutionary outbreak in Central America" and for "creating new workers' and popular movements in Brazil". According to Löwy, this historical context cannot be understood without considering this "new and unexpected phenomenon — the radicalization of broad Christian sectors and their attraction to Marxism" (Löwy, 2016, p. 59).

Poor people were seen, by this Peruvian priest, as subjects of their own liberation and not as objects of pity and charity; and, bearing this in mind, Gutiérrez rejects the Catholic theory of development — which, from his point of view, was not favorable to the liberation of peoples. When advocating for the subalterns' takeover of power, Gutiérrez was a defender of the socialist revolution, of the radical destruction of the state of capitalist society, which for him was a condition for the transformation of property relations (Löwy, 2016). Still according to Löwy, in this perspective, the efforts of pioneers of theology of liberation on the continent were also highlighted, such as Hugo Asmann, the brothers Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, Frei Betto, Ignacio Ellacuria — murdered by the El Salvador military —, Jon Sobrino, and Pablo Ricards.

Rodrigues (1991) points to this process of "of the Church's behavior 'leaning to the lef' in its clear opposition to the military government" and "to the capitalist economic model," whose contribution of Workers' Pastoral (*Pastoral Operária*), from 1974, was fundamental for the proximity of the union movement to the popular groups, having the neighborhoods, in this period, as one of the places where workers' articulation took place.

Although there was a certain appeal to populism, the work methodology used by the Church in the meetings of the CEBs focused on themes that stimulated critical reflection by the popular masses and counted on the presence of militancy, which instigated awareness and political action of the masses. Basically, the method

3 Authentic unionism is the name of the movement that emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, its history refers to the V Congress of the National Confederation of Industrial Workers, held in Rio de Janeiro in July 1978 (Rodrigues, 1991). Mattos emphasizes that this emergence was marked by metallurgists' strikes in the ABC Paulista region (state of São Paulo), in 1978, 1979, and 1980 (Mattos, 2005, p. 294). For this author, the referred period inaugurated the phase of rise of workers' struggles, promoting "the reentry of workers in the Brazilian political scene."

of debating the themes in the meetings was driven by the "see-judge-act" method. Sader clarifies that such a method:

> [...] it is intended to carry out a critical reflection focused on practice so that the experienced deprivations are no longer considered fatalities. "See" refers to a succession of observations by each of those present regarding the topic in question (which can be abandoned children, marital conflicts, the cost of living, drugs, elections, or anything else that interests the participants), adducing elements of experience and opinions, often reflecting the dominant representations on the subject. The objective is, from the confrontation of observations, to move from superficial impressions to a more objective understanding that relates the fact to its causes. The moment of "judging" implies the contrast between the observed reality and the values of Christianity, often through the question "how would Jesus act on this?" The facts of reality are judged by an ethical requirement, insofar as the "word of God" is brought to the sphere of the living present. Finally, "acting" concerns concluding what those people could do in the face of the problem. As insignificant as the local initiative may seem, considering the dimension of the problem being addressed (the decision to make community purchases after having discussed starving people, for example), the fundamental thing will have been the experience of the possibility of collectively intervening in the given reality, personally engaging each one in this process. (Sader, 1988, p. 160)

This method of working with groups was in accordance with the notions of Christian personalism and existential phenomenology, and it was part of all mobilization actions of popular education of the Church. They were based, essentially, on the categories: awareness, politicization, liberation, and on teaching popular culture. In terms of personalism, the objective was to achieve an alleged personal liberation, through political action (practical part or moment of action after awareness), by means of communication of consciences, mediated by the world. The concept of liberation here is not associated with national liberation, nor with emancipation from a collective process, of a revolutionary nature in the masses. Liberation is simply a process of "awakening of consciences." The category is, therefore, atomized, circumscribed in the sphere of individuality, without denying the collectivity — which has a communitarian character and values the experiences lived by the subjects in the production of their existence as social beings in the midst of popular culture. As Sader explains (1988, p. 165):

> Appearing more detached from the processes of institutional changes (not only *de facto*, as it can also happen with the notion of revolution, but also *de jure*, because it belongs to another register), "liberation" does not allow its operation through some strategic rationality. For this reason, its manifestations in everyday experience (seen as signs towards it) are not as great as collective processes that affect social structures as the "awakening of consciences" and the disenchantment of practices through which each small collectivity feels "sub-

> ject to its own story." Not having as its main objective the establishment of a new structure, but rather the instruction of new meanings and values in human actions, the priority value is that which refers to the promotion of individuals that takes place within communities.

As highlighted by Osmar Fávero, the works of Paulo Freire and Father Henrique de Lima Vaz support the philosophical notion of the triad awareness-politicization-liberation. Every Christian group that launched itself into educational and political practice from the 1960s onwards was inspired by this notion. Taking the work of Father Vaz as the object of analysis, Fávero states that, based on the "dialectics of master and slave," Vaz explains

> [...] "the conflict of two consciences that entered into a struggle to give the world a meaning of service to one of them," and "the success of the struggle will lead to the servitude of one of the consciences." Based on this dialectics of domination, in which the world serves as an intermediary between two struggling consciousnesses, Vaz states that the dialectics of communication of consciousnesses requires three terms: two opposing consciousnesses and the world that mediates these consciousnesses. And this world must be known and transformed aiming at the fully human realization of human beings. (Fávero, 2006, p. 70)

Taking this into consideration, hoping to reconcile consciences between social classes is remarkable, with possible practical results beneficial to both parties — between the dominators and the dominated. It is expected, in accordance with this existential-phenomenological and Christian personalist tendency, that the communication of consciences will result in peace between classes. Domination would not be the problem. The great obstacle would lie in the conduct of the dominators and the "signification, the deepest sense of history, the final synthesis, must occur 'in terms of recognition, of reconciliation; in terms of acceptance of humans: that they accept each other, as human beings, through their deepest demands as people'" (Fávero, 2006, p. 70).

The idealism of these tendencies extended to the notion of popular culture. Demarcated by the anthropological concept of culture, the defense of the elevation of popular culture is strengthened in Brazil, within the scope of the various actions developed by activists, university students, and Christians in the 1960s. Fávero (2006) points to a potential influence of the discussions and experiences of European movements, particularly the French *Peuple et Culture* (PEC). One of the national coordinators of the MEB, Vera Jaccoud, innovated by proposing a work plan to elevate popular culture aiming at complementing the work of basic education in Brazil, after having worked as an intern at PEC, in France, and having gained experience about a cultural animation project in Morocco. As the first experiences of MEB were through radio schools, especially with the rural population, Vera proposed to carry out "popular cultural caravans." Given the study in question, this proposal interests us in understanding the concept of popular culture, taken as a

reference by the activities of the CEBs, as a whole. From the polarization with the culture of the elites, a sense of

> the need to help people to form "one of their own thoughts" prevails, through knowledge of local, regional, national, and international realities, in all sectors of interest: family, political, social and economic, religious and cultural, to foster the birth of a "popular conscience," of a "critical conscience" in the face of facts and news that come from rural areas. (Fávero, 2006, p. 82)

Although with some reservations, such as the lack of perspective of overcoming social classes and the explicit admission and acceptance of the existence of dominators, the actions carried out by the catholic Church, especially through CEBs, were essential for the intellectual elevation of the popular masses and the struggle for more conditions of a dignified existence.

The Vatican launched an offensive against Christianity of Liberation and, on August 6, 1984, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith's *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation* was published, directed by cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, which "denounced Theology of Liberation as a new heresy based on the 'indiscriminate' use of Marxist concepts" (Löwy, 2016, p. 61). One of the repercussions of this conservative practice in Brazil was, in 1985, the imposition of the vow of silence on Church members, prompted by a Ratzinger's report and applied against the brothers Leonardo and Clodovis Boff (Fontes, 2010).

The consequences of the Vatican's counter-revolutionary offensive made room not only for the weakening of the catholic Church itself, but also for the progress of Evangelical Churches, linked to pentecostal and neo-pentecostal tendencies, in communities where the work of members of theology of liberation had been extinguished. Undoubtedly, the destructive aspect of the "witch hunt" undertaken by cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and his conservative group yielded greater damage not to the Church, but rather to the possibilities of liberating workers from the yoke of social enslavement, especially in the peripheries and slums of large urban centers, as Mattos (2017, p. 145) explains:

> The collapse of CEBs[4] and the movements promoted by them distanced the Catholic Church not only from the most organized segments, but also from the most precarious parts of the working class. If in the struggles of rural workers the Pastoral Land Commission [*Comissão Pastoral da Terra*] has continued to represent an instrument at the service of resistance, in the slums and outskirts of large cities the shrinking of progressive Catholicism made room for the Pentecostal/Neo-Pentecostal rise.

4 To get an idea of the implications of the dismantling, the scale of the Communities' work in the country can be considered. According to Sader, "CEBs have multiplied, first and foremost in rural areas, but they have also taken over the periphery of large cities. The country was estimated to have 80,000 CEBs in 1981, but the numbers were quite inaccurate" (Sader, 1988, p. 156).

By considering theology of liberation a heresy, the Vatican contributed to subjecting exploited peoples to the violent thirst for neoliberal power, which in David Harvey's view was no more than a project aimed at restoring the power of a class, the bourgeoisie, threatened by the perspective of workers controlling society and by casualties in capitalist accumulation during the process of embedded liberalism, *i.e.*, the welfare state from the Keynesian perspective. The catholic Church was consistent with this new onslaught of capital, whose first experience was developed in Chile, in the 1970s, under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet and the command of the Chicago Boys — a group linked to the University of Chicago, which generated the neoliberal notion, and, locally, to the Pontifical Catholic University of Santiago and to the group of anti-left businessmen "Clube da Segunda-Feira" (Monday's Group) (Harvey, 2014). In any case, the effects were tragic for the working class, considering the offensive to interdict its organization and unity in favor of social transformation, as subsequently discussed.

BUSINESS/RELIGIOUS VENTURES AND THE PROXIMITY TO THE POOREST SECTORS OF THE WORKING CLASS

The ebb of theology of liberation gave way to the vigorous theological-political-business notion of prosperity theology. In its essence, in a completely antagonistic sense to the work carried out by CEBs, the ideological notion disseminated by neo-pentecostal religious and parachurch denominations supports the profound "adaptation to order through the idea of individual effort and underpins a business expression of the churches in several economic sectors, particularly in communications" (Mattos, 2017, p. 146). Indeed, the strong motivational appeal that encourages the construction of individualistic, competitive, and shameless personalities by blind greed — with "no holds barred" to achieve a prestigious place — is in accordance with the general stimulus of entrepreneurship, whose tentacular or pyramidal financial structure, which predominates in these so-called Christian political-ideological associations, is added to

> [...] a political project oriented towards the occupation of spaces in the State apparatus on the part of religious leaders with conservative stands in relation to customs and, in most cases, positions aligned with Neoliberalism in the political-economic debate. (Mattos, 2017, p. 147)

According to Ricardo Mariano, the neo-pentecostal movement represents the third wave of Pentecostal tendencies (the others are: Classical Pentecostalism and Deuteropentecostalism), and was imported to Brazil by New Life Church (*Igreja Nova Vida*), founded in 1960 by Canadian missionary Robert McAlister. The initial signs of the neo-pentecostal tendency were popularized from the second half of the 1970s onwards, growing in the 1980s and 1990s. McAlister was the intellectual mentor of the religious people who continued his work in Brazil and founded the first neo-pentecostal denominations created in the state of Rio de Janeiro, as was the case with Edir Macedo, from Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (*Igreja*

Universal do Reino de Deus), inaugurated in 1977; Romildo Ribeiro Soares, a top authority of International Church of God's Grace (*Igreja Internacional da Graça de Deus*), founded in 1980; and Christ Lives Church (*Igreja Cristo Vive*), founded by Miguel Ângelo, in 1986. "These three, together with the Sara Nossa Terra Evangelical Community (*Comunidade Evangélica Sara Nossa Terra*) (state of Goiás, 1976), Grace Community (*Comunidade da Graça*) (state of São Paulo, 1979), Reborn in Christ (*Renascer em Cristo*) (state of São Paulo, 1986), and National Church of Jesus Christ (*Igreja Nacional do Senhor Jesus Cristo*) (state of São Paulo, 1994)" (Mariano, 2014, p. 32) are among the main neo-pentecostal churches that emerged in the period. Still according to Mariano, such denominations (*Universal*, *Internacional da Graça de Deus*, and *Cristo Vive*) stood out for spectacular practices that caught the audience's attention and still attract many followers. For instance, "interviewing demons" and "fighting Afro-Brazilian cults" can be mentioned. The entire process of breaking with the "Pentecostal legalism" began in the Church that consisted in the emerging source of Neo-Pentecostal denominations, the *Nova Vida* Church. This was the Church where "Edir Macedo, R. R. Soares, and Miguel Ângelo also took their first steps towards the Prosperity Theology" (Mariano, 2014, p. 42) and where the first strategies deemed as innovative — concerning what was usually practiced within the scope of Pentecostal religions — were developed. The worldliness aspect was differential. Later, concerning the denominations created by Macedo, Soares and Ângelo, this aspect was exacerbated and surpassed the interviews with demons and the fierce fight against African-based religions, also comprising the marks of the classic Pentecostal sectarianism of a devout, ascetic, apolitical life, waiting for divine salvation (Mariano, 2014).

Mariano lists at least six aspects of the link between all Pentecostal tendencies. For him, believers of Classical Pentecostalism, Deuteropentecostalism, and neo-pentecostalism agree upon:

- anti-ecumenism;
- the organization of churches centered on strong leader figures;
- the need for extensive use of mass media;
- the appeal/stimulation to emotional expressiveness in cults;
- active participation in political parties;
- the preaching of divine healing.

In order to outline the aspects that differentiate the dominant tendency, that is, neo-pentecostalism, Mariano states (2014, p. 36) that churches that are circumscribed in this tendency are marked by

- "exacerbation of the spiritual war against the Devil and his retinue of fallen angels";
- "emphatic preaching of the Prosperity Theology";
- "liberalization of stereotyped uses and customs of sanctity"; and
- "the fact that they were structured as a business enterprise."

In short, the theological differences, arising from the previous tendencies, but with an emphasis on exorcism; behavioral differences, with the abandon-

ment of intramundane asceticism; and social differences with the reduction of sectarianism are aspects that make neo-pentecostals a tendency that gained organicity and rose to the predominant condition among Pentecostals to the point of making the other tendencies feel compelled to make changes to maintain themselves and attract new followers. Regarding the tendencies, the author concludes that:

> what justifies the division between Classical Pentecostalism and Deuteropentecostalism is, above all, the historical and temporal cutoff, the forty years that separate them. In the case of Neo-Pentecostalism, however, justifications include its considerable doctrinal and behavioral distinctions, its bold forms of social insertion, and its ethos of affirming the world [...] the less sectarian and ascetic and the more liberal and tending to invest in extra-church activities (business, political, cultural, assistance), especially those traditionally rejected or proven by Classical Pentecostalism, the closer such hypothetical church will be to the spirit, ethos, and to the way of being of the components of the Neo-Pentecostal tendency. (Mariano, 2014, p. 37)

Based on all the data and information analyzed so far, it can be inferred that a large fraction of the working class is increasingly subject to the influence of this religious tendency. The theological orientation of neo-pentecostalism is completely opposite to theology of liberation, that is, prosperity theology. Such notion, created by Kenneth Hagin, was quickly spread among North American preachers and ministerial leaders. The leitmotiv of this theology is being fully dedicated to this world and this life and, for this reason,

> its discourse focuses primarily on the existence in this world and promises that the Christian will do well in it. [...] They intend to transform society through individual conversion and the inculcation of biblical morals, but also (which is new) through the growing accomplishment of social works, participation in political parties, conquering positions of power in the private sector, and the public and religious use of radio and TV. (Mariano, 2014, p. 45)

Prosperity theology is closely related to dominion theology — the mainstay of spiritual warfare. From Dominion Theology derives the exacerbation of exorcism in liberation cults, as occurs in *Igreja Universal*, which grants "to the Devil and demons, identified as corresponding to the entities and gods of Afro-Brazilian and Spiritist religions, unprecedented prominence and importance." The essentiality of spiritual warfare goes beyond the performative exorcism rituals, so much so that denominations do not practice it and they do not fail to be neo-pentecostal for not doing it. What is at stake is not restricted to the invisible world and has objective consequences converted into practical actions in the concrete world. Its corollary is the intense search for "re-Christianization of society 'from above,' that is, through the political party and, I would add, through electronic media" (Mariano, 2014, p. 44). In fact:

> They invert the traditional Pentecostal posture of rejecting the pursuit of wealth, the free enjoyment of money, social status, and the pleasures of this "world." Rather, they preach the Prosperity Theology, a doctrine that roughly speaking, defends that the believer is destined to be prosperous, healthy, and happy in this world. [...] the main sacrifice that God requires of His servants, according to this theology, is of a financial nature: being faithful in our tithes and giving generous offerings with joy, love, and selflessness. [...] With no guilt and no tricks, these believers are legitimately interested in leading a good life. No wonder that the testimonials given by successful believers about the blessings achieved are taken to radio and TV broadcasts, and they talk about being converted to Jesus, renunciation of idolatrous religions, restored marriages, miraculous cures, overcoming depression, alcoholism, drug abuse, and even involvement in crimes, and about employees who became bosses, acquisition of luxury cars and real estate, business profits, success and victory in the most varied activities. (Mariano, 2014, p. 44-45)

Also specific to neo-pentecostalism is the organization around parachurch entities, embodied in the prosperity theology. Some examples of these entities are Youth for Christ (*Mocidade Para Cristo* — MPC), Businessmen Association for the Full Gospel (*Associação de Homens de Negócio para o Evangelho Pleno* — ADHONEP), Christian Businessmen Committee (*Comitê Cristão de Homens de Negócio* — CCHN), and the interdenominational Athletes of Christ in Brazil (*Atletas de Cristo no Brasil*). The example of ADHONEP is emblematic of how these entities operate. According to Mariano (2014, p. 40), the "main conversion strategy" of this parachurch entity is to hold "dinners, lunches, breakfasts, and banquets to convert the guests, generally self-employed professionals, businessmen, executives, and even mayors and governors, through testimonials of financial, marital and healing blessings."

The model of human relations inherent in prosperity theology is the same as that of Neoliberalism, whose basis is "entrepreneurship." Indeed, as Luiz Carlos de Freitas explains, this model "expresses the 'entrepreneurship' of human beings, constituting the source of personal and social freedom and whose most developed organization is the 'enterprise'" (Freitas, 2018, p. 31). It all comes down to "the idea of 'merit,' of 'resilience in the face of adversity': improving life depends on accumulated merit, taking advantage of opportunities — something that can be translated into 'entrepreneurship' and which Chauí (2017) effectively defines as 'being a seller of oneself' in a free market." The common vision inherent in Neoliberalism "also provides the basis for explaining personal 'failure'." Following the guidance of one of the main apostles of Neoliberalism, James Buchanan, neoliberals agree on the idea that "those who do not make an effort, having no way to meet their future needs, 'should be treated as members of an inferior species, similar [...] to animals that are dependent'" (Freitas, 2018, p. 115).

This is the new model of Christianity on the rise in Brazil and to which our working class has been very close since the decline of movements affiliated with

the theology of liberation. In short, there has been a migration from the ethos of individual liberation, mediated by a critical conscience of the world and humankind, corroborating community solidarity, to an ethos of entrepreneurship, mediated by an individualistic and selfish conscience, corroborating the world of the best, where "rotten fruits" must be eliminated.

The most recent disastrous situation shows all the regression and destruction of fundamental principles, among them the respect for life, with which prosperity theology movements are aligned. Faced with the current pandemic of the new coronavirus responsible for causing the COVID-19 disease, which is highly lethal in the world, many of these religious groups corroborate the position of the Brazilian president and his co-religionists. From the very beginning, president Jair Bolsonaro mocks the pandemic and is in favor of its spread, with total disregard for human lives. His attitude was reinforced by his most loyal ministers and his sons, who use their parliamentary functions to perform their services as commanders of the "office of hate"[5]. Therefore, his posture and that of his followers have been to relativize the global context of chaos in healthcare systems, funerals, and increasing lethality, and even to propagate mystical cures, as long as followers pay for it[6].

Many of the leaders of such Churches took advantage of the opportunity and were elected to take on executive and legislative positions. The Assemblies of God Convention (*Convenção das Assembleias de Deus*) published on its website a text about its pride in "having helped to elect 110 city councilors, five mayors, and four deputy mayors linked to it over the past elections" (Dip, 2018, p. 25). In describing the role of the evangelical delegation in the Brazilian Congress, Andrea Dip narrates the practice of the Pro-Political Commission (*Comissão Pró-Política*), which is concerned with expanding the political activity of Evangelicals linked to it and of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front (*Frente Parlamentar Evangélica* — FPE), chaired by Hidekazu Takayama (Christian Social Party — *Partido Social Cristão do Paraná* — PSC-PR), "who has been sued in the Federal Supreme Court

5 Responsible for disseminating false information, *i.e.*, fake news, which benefited the rise of the far-right politics in the 2018 electoral process and which currently spread lies about the pandemic in order to confuse, misinform, and agitate the population against political enemies and in defense of the interests of certain dominant economic groups. Meanwhile, many lives have been and are still being wiped out with the full spread of COVID-19 in the country, especially the lives of poor people.

6 The Federal Prosecution Office sent a police investigation request to the State Prosecution Office of the State of São Paulo so that Valdemiro Santiago de Oliveira, leader of World Church of God's Power (*Igreja Mundial do Poder de Deus* — IMPD), could be investigated for the practice of false pretenses. The religious leader appears in a video published on several Internet pages announcing the cure of COVID-19 through magic beans that sprout with the writing "Be thou a blessing," the mystic-advertising slogan of the religious organization, according to a publication entitled *MPF pede que Ministério Público de São Paulo apure conduta do pastor Valdemiro Santiago* (The Federal Prosecution Office asks the State Prosecution Office of São Paulo to investigate the conduct of pastor Valdemiro Santiago). Available at: http://www.mpf.mp.br/sp/sala-de-imprensa/noticias-sp/mpf-pede-que-ministerio-publico-de-sao-paulo-apure-conduta-do-pastor-valdemiro-santiago. Accessed on: May 11, 2020.

for embezzlement, false pretenses, and crime against the tax order" (Dip, 2018, p. 26). The project of the "bible delegation" to seize power is disclosed through Bills, Constitutional Amendment Bills, having the floor during sessions, and holding of cults in the Federal House of Representatives.

> The pastor and chaplain of the cult — which takes place every week in the House of Representatives — is Deputy Francisco Eurico da Silva, Pastor Eurico (PSB Party-PE), who is serving his second term[7]. With palms facing the heavens and eyes closed, he leads the opening prayer. An active member of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front [*Frente Parlamentar Evangélica do Congresso Nacional* — FPE] of the Brazilian Congress, Eurico is the co-author of a bill that is intended to stop a decree allowing the use of social names and recognizing the gender identity of transvestites and transsexuals. He is also the author of a Legislative Decree Project [*Projeto de Decreto Legislativo* — PDL] whose objective is to overturn a resolution of the Federal Council of Psychology that establishes norms of conduct in relation to sexual orientation and prohibits sexual orientation therapy, known as the "gay cure." He has also submitted Bill no. 6.055/2013 to repeal the law that guarantees mandatory and comprehensive care for people who have been victims of sexual violence. [...] Pastor Eurico said: "Go to these little delinquents and offer them a good home, a life with dignity, school, everything. You'll find a lot of them who don't want any of that, who want to live in banditry. Today [the minimum age for being arrested] is 16 years old; if it turned out to be 14, I would vote for it, I don't care. [...] The jail is a place where you can think. The problem is that here [in Brazil] the jail is not strict. Does our system have to change? It does. Are the living conditions inhumane? They are. Do they live like animals? Indeed. Fifty people are placed in a cell for ten. I'm aware of that. But I wasn't the one who committed the crime. Every bad boy is now deemed to be a good person. What do these people want? [They want] to take these kids to your home to live with your family." (Dip, 2018, p. 23-25)

In addition to these positions, the "bible delegation" defends other causes within the scope of public security — in the same perspective as pointed out by Francisco Eurico da Silva —, of the traditional family, of the militarization of schools, of the (School Without a Party Project (*Projeto Escola Sem Partido*).

This delegation was decisive in triggering the institutional coup of 2016, which proceeded with the offensive of the ruling class and was perpetrated by the articulation between the mainstream media, the judiciary branch, and a considerable part of the parliament in order to help guarantee measures in favor of capitalist accumulation, which were not fully feasible in governments led by Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores* — PT). These measures include curtailing workers' right to strike; labor reforms; unrestricted outsourcing; reform of High School

7 He is currently serving his third term in the House of Representatives.

education to impoverish the education of the poorest population and implement a National Common Curricular Base that will negatively impact the education of the working class; dismantling programs that encourage scientific development; creating a program to support the militarization of schools, while public schools face severe financial restrictions because of budget freeze policies that are intended to make private investments profitable through the payment of public debt interest; intervention in university campuses by choosing non-democratically elected rectors; social security reform, which, in other words, deprives most Brazilian workers of the possibility of a decent retirement; among other actions that express the offensive of capital over work.

Everything that has happened demonstrates that the Churches, even if they decide to adopt a progressive stance, must not lead the proletariat. Nothing prevents religious institutions or any other from defending the interests of the masses, but it is the organized working class that must take responsibility for fighting for the transformation of society. Holding Churches accountable or being dependent on them means leaving the masses in the lead of interests that can change and quickly become conservative. That is why consciences must be freed from "any religious haunting," as argued by Karl Marx and "The government and the Church must first be excluded from any influence on the school" in such a way that the necessary intellectual elevation of an unanthropomorphizing proletarian conscience can take place and the State can "receive from the people a very rigorous education" (Marx, 2012, p. 46), by having the class, which needs to transform society, destroying the current form of the bourgeois State by annihilating classes, a condition for real and essential equality among everyone.

Taking this into consideration, a new position on the part of popular and revolutionary movements is required. Trade unions, parties, and popular struggle movements have been increasingly facing the imminence of a reevaluation of their conventional structures, strategies, and tactics. Therefore, at the historical crossroads we live in, what can we do?

WHAT CAN WE DO? PERSPECTIVES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A POLITICAL STRUGGLE CONCERNING THE HISTORICAL INTERESTS OF WORKERS

The most recent history of proletarian movements, especially in the 1990s — with the retreat of leftist political parties and the weakening of Brazilian unions due to the attitude of the largest union in the country, namely Unified Workers' Central (*Central Única dos Trabalhadores* — CUT), which adopted a position of proactive unionism and conciliation with the government and employers — points to Landless Workers' Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores sem Terra* — MST) as the first one to advocate for and be in accordance with the historical needs imposed by the hegemonic perspectives, which call for the elimination of exploitation relations. But another movement also had this understanding and was conceived to organize workers placed in the humiliating situation of not having access to housing

in urban areas. It is Homeless Workers' Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto* — MTST).

Two major recent facts demonstrate that the MTST played a mobilizing role that, in the 1980s, was typical of union movements. In the first of them, the MTST, together with other social movements of the working class, boosted the growth of the strike movement in the country, from the, albeit contradictory, journeys of June 2013. As it is a somewhat spontaneous movement, as described by Mattos (2017), these journeys were the object of a dispute by the Brazilian ruling class, which, opportunistically, took the opportunity to infiltrate their representations under the pretext that they were, in a non-partisan way, fighting corruption in the country. Also according to this author's analysis, the "June legacy" was ambiguous, as at the time it fueled the proletarian struggles, with strikes and urban occupations, the struggle for housing "brought back to the streets (fifty years after the reactionary mobilizations that justified the 1964 coup)" the "organizations funded by national and international representations of capital, with social bases from the middle sectors, presenting explicitly reactionary agendas" (Mattos, 2017, p. 143), such as, for example, appeals for intervention and the establishment of a new military regime, in addition to the calls for greater neo-liberalization of the economy.

From the point of view of the interest of the working class, the "June journeys," through strike movements and urban occupations, were organized to present a set of urgent and necessary agendas that extrapolated the concerns with inclusion via consumption that was central in conciliatory governments with the ruling class, under the leadership of the PT. It was, therefore, the exposure of an agenda that portrayed the set of immediate needs of the working class that were forgotten by the Public Authority and by union bodies and left-wing political parties, involved in the destructive project of institutionalization and bureaucratization. The struggles of popular movements demanded decent living and working conditions that are related to urgent current issues, such as urban transport, police violence, more government spending on health and education, and this agenda "unified immediate interests of both formal and informal sectors" that did not remain silent in the "claim for universal social rights" (Mattos, 2017, p. 142).

The great challenge in that context, which ended up supporting the growth of the infiltration strategy of the ruling class was, also according to Mattos, that there was no "organization or set of class organizations that could unify those demands scattered in the streets into a program and centralize the fight towards its implementation," especially in a scenario in which

> Left parties and trade unions had no role in the summons and were even harassed by the majority of the protesters, partly as a result of the wear and tear of PT governments — and of the association, in common sense, of the entire left with PT. (Mattos, 2017, p. 142-143)

When people say that the "June Journeys" were practically spontaneous and that their legacy, from the point of view of the working class, cannot be

continued, in other words, there was no set of articulated organizations and movements. Perhaps this articulation is or could come to be underway, taking as a reference the second great fact that demonstrates the significant performance of the MTST in mobilizing the popular masses. As Mattos points out, creating the Fearless People Front (*Frente Povo sem Medo*), which began at the initiative of the MTST, represented "a step in this direction." Nevertheless, the author draws attention to its "situational nature," indicating two inherent problems of this front. The first concerns the fact that the Fearless People Front was deemed as "a front of struggles against the government of Brazilian President Temer and its policies that attacked the rights of the working class." Now, would this front be limited to such a twisted aspect? In other words, the unit did not plan tactics based on a breakthrough strategy. It was coalesced only in defensive aspects and acted depending on the destruction of rights perpetrated by the de facto government of Michel Temer. The second aspect criticized by Mattos is what he considers to be a "dubious action of the organizations run by the 'Lula 2018!' project." According to the author, this banner limited the action of social movements organized by the Fearless People Front. Nonetheless, he still believes that these contradictions can be overcome e that the front can reorganize in such a way "to generate something more solid in the future" (Mattos, 2017, p. 150).

Reflecting on the possibility of articulating and maintaining an organization that unifies the social and union movements of the class altogether, while criticizing, Mattos also recognizes the need for unions to be rethought, as they still have the conditions and material resources to join or lead a robust process of struggles in the interests of the class as a whole. For this reason, the author mentions with optimism the potential that the Union and Popular Central *Conlutas* (*Central Sindical e Popular* — CSP) has to start carrying out this task:

> Considering the characteristics of the working class, which imposes the need for organization, not only in the workplace, but also in the social territories in which the workforce is reproduced (housing, food, leisure, etc.), integration in exclusively unionized entities, even the central ones, tend to be insufficient to articulate immediate and historical struggles of the "working class as a whole." Hence the importance of the original proposal of *Central Sindical e Popular* (*CSP Conlutas*) to organize not only unions, but also the various social movements that act in struggles related to the collective life experience of the working class. (Mattos, 2017, p. 142)

Therefore, from a historical and concrete point of view, it can be seen that, from the same perspective of Latin America in general, but with its particularities, the movements of the left and the objective struggle of workers for the transformation of society have been limited. These add structural crises of capital to the mistaken guidelines and plans of the Brazilian proletarian movements, ranging from insurrections crushed by the force of armed groups and institutions in the service of the bourgeoisie, to the abject betrayal after the bourgeoisie triumphed in

its interests of capitalist accumulation, and soon after attack the workers who have united with it on popular fronts in the past and have become enemies, having their organizations and parties driven underground, or rights revoked after the conquest of power by the monopolistic group of the bourgeois that has never been, and by its nature, will never be able to bring about the national-democratic revolution. Neither the bourgeoisie nor the churches or other organizations outside the proletarian movement can be held accountable for the tasks that only the organized proletariat can carry out.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

As it has been observed, the advancement of prosperity theology is completely in line with the destructive and regressive project of exploitative and genocidal Neoliberalism and Conservatism. The expression of the business-religious movements is completely in line with the interests of the dominant layers and against the real needs of the workers.

This scenario had the direct cooperation of the catholic Church. It resulted from the Vatican, which indirectly collaborated with the progress of business-religious enterprises, when the agitation regarding the conservative ideas that turned to the destruction of the Christianity of Liberation movement took place, condemning its variety, the theology of liberation, of heresy and dismantling the CEBs.

Although it was born from the Christianity of Liberation, from a commitment to the struggle of peoples for emancipation and equality, and part of it had found inspiration in Marxism to defend and articulate with the historical interests of the working class, in favor of the transformation of society, the Theology of Liberation movement internally faced fragmentation. And, overall, it does not consist of a workers' movement, but a movement of the Church, which was of great historical value for the class, but which has become a threat to the development of workers' struggles — a fact that makes it clear that any movement that sought to take over the tasks of fighting for the workers deprives them of the independence of a struggle that belongs to them only, although cooperation is welcome in the emancipatory movement of the class.

From the authors' point of view, the three hypotheses raised in the introduction of this text are thus confirmed. The path of proximity to the evangelical movement linked to the prosperity theology is the path of neoliberalism, unless these churches revolutionize their guidelines according to the materialist, historical, and dialectical notion, something that completely contradicts the mystified and bourgeois worldview that supports these churches. Therefore, it is up to social movements, trade unions, and political parties of the masses to free themselves from any dependencies and rebuild the struggle for transformation that implies the urgent overcoming of the capitalist mode of production by workers and the institution of true democracy, through permanent revolution, which makes it impossible for humanity to regress to the current condition of social enslavement to capital.

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Conflicts of interest: The authors declare they don't have any commercial or associative interest that represents conflict of interests in relation to the manuscript.

Funding: The study received no funding.

Authors' contributions: Project Management, Formal Analysis, Conceptualization, Data Curation, Writing – First Draft, Writing – Review and Editing, Research, Methodology: Pena, A. A. P.; Zientarski, C.

Received on May 11, 2020
Approved on April 26, 2021