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Pentecostal Prayer as Personal Communication and Invisible Institutional Work

Yannick Fer

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In the opening sections of his unfinished thesis on prayer published in 1909, M. Mauss described an historical movement of internalisation and individualisation of prayer, contrasting its ritual, institutional and collective forms with more personal practices: 'At first strictly collective, said in common or at least according to forms rigidly fixed by the religious group (...), prayer becomes the domain of the individual's free converse with God' (Mauss 2003: 24). From his perspective, this evolution was in line with the transformation of the notion of the person into the 'category of the "self "' at the end of the eighteenth century in Europe, a change in which he saw the decisive influence of Protestant 'sectarian movements':

> There it was that were posed the questions regarding individual liberty, regarding the individual conscience and the right to communicate directly with God, to be one's own priest, to have an inner God. The ideas of the Moravian Brothers, the Puritans, the Wesleyans and the Pietists are those which form the basis on which is established the notion: the 'person' (*personne*) equals the 'self ' (*moi*) equals consciousness, and is its primordial category'. (Mauss 1985: 21)

This historical transformation echoes a more recent trend towards individual empowerment and a de-legitimisation of institutional regulations, a 'shift in the repository of the truth of belief from the institution to the believer' (Hervieu-Léger 2000: 168). So does contemporary prayer seem all the more free and personal, taking place in a context of de-institutionalisation of religion, with individuals moving away from religious apparatuses of validation and control to build by themselves a 'spiritual but not religious' experience (Roof 1994: 59–60).

[50] A theological filiation links Pentecostalism to the eighteenth century Protestant movements mentioned by M. Mauss – especially the Wesleyan revival. They share a common quest for

individual sanctification through a deepening of the personal relationship with God, so that Pentecostalism appears as 'an extension of Methodism and the Evangelical Revivals (or Awakenings) accompanying Anglo-American modernization' (Martin 2002: 7). At the end of the nineteenth century in the southern United States, many Evangelicals worried about the success of theological liberalism and Darwinism joined the Bible schools of the holiness movement to pray for a 'new blessing' (Séguy 1975: 40). For these first Pentecostals, the experience of the 'baptism in the Holy Spirit', or glossolalia, has marked the restoration of the bond between the individual and God, through an 'immediate' communication (without visible mediation) that brought both personal salvation and an 'increased power' into missionary activities. However, the 'emotional' feature and the effervescence of Pentecostal services have driven many sociologists who draw their inspiration from the Weberian theory of modernity to underestimate – or even forget – this dimension of internalisation and individualisation of the relationship with God (Fer 2010a).Caught in a simplistic opposition between emotion and institution, the various dimensions of the Pentecostal prayer have thus been too quickly interpreted in terms of a 'de-modernisation' (Hervieu-Léger 1990). And because this interpretation regards, *a priori*, the 'charismatic' experience as asynonym for de-institutionalisation, it neglects the possibility of a Pentecostal institution able to produce a relatively stable and coherent type of religious sociability based on a specific articulation between a 'spiritual' subjective experience and 'religious' objective control (Fer 2010b).

Drawing mainly on fieldwork conducted since 2000 in the Assemblies of God (AoG) of French Polynesia,[1] I aim to show that in this kind of classical Pentecostalism, the pivotal role that prayer plays in the implementation of an 'enchanted' individualisation should prompt us to reflect further on the reshaping of institutions in these times of 'de-institutionalisation'. Pentecostal prayer is indeed at the core of a well-grounded illusion which proclaims the primacy of personal experience ('personal relationship with God') over the truths of any church, while giving to this same church the responsibility of establishing and [51] maintaining the communication with God, through institutional work destined to remain ‘invisible’.

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[1] The most recent field data mentioned in this chapter comes from fieldwork conducted in French Polynesia from July to September 2009, in the frame of the research project titled MYSTOU, 'A Mysticism for All. Conception of the Individual and the Conditions of Evangelical Protestantism Emergence, Europe, Maghreb, Arctic, Oceania' (ANR-08- JCJC-0060–01) directed by Christophe Pons (IDEMEC).

Personal prayer, the most usual and ordinary form of Pentecostal prayer practice, also sheds the brightest light on the Pentecostal apparatus that ensures the progressive integration of specific ethical dispositions, and the acquisition of the cognitive and linguistic patterns that help to identify God’s presence, to ‘hear God’ (Luhrmann et al. 2010: 68): when Pentecostals pray, they ‘communicate’ with God through a set of ‘invisible’ mediations that enable them to ‘stay online’ and to be guided in their everyday life by a ‘voice of the Holy Spirit’ functioning as a voice of the Pentecostal habitus.

Prayer in tongues represents a second aspect of this Pentecostal system of communication, associating ‘a cognitive grasping with an affective capture’ (Gonzalez 2009: 214) in an intense moment of ‘meta-communication’ with God that has no other signification than the certainty – felt both within the body and through a series of empirical sensory experiences – that one is communicating with ‘a living intimate God’ (Brahinsky 2012: 222).

Finally, the prayer of intercession, especially in those practices inspired by the theology of ‘spiritual warfare’, is one of the routes by which the individual commitment to an intimate relationship with God is made to serve the church community and collective mobilisations for missionary activities (evangelistic campaigns) or political purposes (prayers for the nations).

Personal Prayer and the ‘voice of the Holy Spirit’

In the run of a day, we often encounter persons or circumstances that annoy us. In such cases, we can apply the ‘Pray ceaselessly’ principle with the ‘SOS’ prayers. And if we have been staying online with God, then we can pray ‘Lord, help me to have your attitude towards this person or in these circumstances’ and at that moment, God will answer you. (Venditti and Venditti 1996: 127)

This advice comes from lesson 6 (‘the well-balanced prayer’) of the INSTE[2][2] programme for discipleship training, published by the Evangelical network of the Open Bible Standard Churches and used by the AoG of French Polynesia for the socialisation of new converts. As T. Luhrmann remarks in her study of Vineyard Churches, prayer was understood by the congregants of these churches to enable the person who prays to develop a dialogic, interactive relationship [52] with God. And they perceived this ability to hear God 'speak' as 'a skill, which they needed to learn by repeatedly carrying on inner-voice "conversations" with God during prayer and being attentive to the mental events that could count as God's response' (Luhrmann et al. 2010: 69–70). Until the mid-2000s, this learning was systematically implemented within the AoG of French Polynesia in the INSTE groups, which bring together each week a dozen new church members willing to 'grow in (their) relationship with Jesus-Christ and follow him as a disciple'.[3]

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[2] Institute of Theology by Extension.

This notion of 'growth' underscores the fact that the decision to join a Pentecostal church is experienced less as a way to establish a needed relationship with God than as the logical consequence of a preliminary appeal, a dialogue initiated by God himself. Through the evocation of 'changed lives', a presentation of the Bible focused on individual psychology, and a preacher who 'allows the social background of his hearers to "put him off "' (Hollenweger 1988: 466), the Pentecostal evangelistic rhetoric indeed aims for personal appropriation of the message it delivers. It aims to convince individuals already engaged in a search for 'solutions' – and therefore more inclined to think that 'God knows their situation'– that a personal communication with God has actually been established, and that it is now up to them to maintain and deepen this communication. 'Jesus is speaking to you tonight, he died for you and wants to save you, are you ready to open your heart to him?', Pentecostal preachers ask.

This representation of the heart as the place of contact with God 'seems to operate as an extension of the love language', P. Gonzalez notes, 'taking God as that great Other that bursts into the faithful's interiority, even to the point of inhabiting and filling it'(Gonzalez2009:213–14). The learning of personal prayer in the INSTE groups uses this same symbolic vocabulary to describe a more concrete process of integration and embodiment of Pentecostal ethical norms, ultimately leading converts to experience the voice of God – initially 'heard' as an external appeal – as an inner-voice of conscience, expressing both God's will and their new identity 'in Christ', in an

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[3] 'Commitment to the Discipleship Training', first day, lesson 1 (Venditti 1996: 8).

‘intensely participatory sense of God acting in one’s mind’ (Luhrmann et al. 2010: 69).

So the ‘relationship with God’ which is established and maintained through personal prayer is not just the enthusiastic experience of an ‘emotional’ contact with God, it aims more broadly to achieve a biographical invention, as expressed in the INSTE handbook, by use of the notion of discipleship (‘follow Jesus’) and the search for a ‘godly attitude’ in everyday interactions.

[53] The plausibility of this invention first relies on a distinction drawn since the outset of Pentecostal socialisation between who converts are supposed to be, and who they continue to be, in Pentecostal terms, between their ‘new identity in Christ’ and their ‘old nature’. As soon as they join the church, converts have indeed to testify to what God has done in their life, and to demonstrate clear signs of in-depth change. They must attempt to become their ‘true’ selves as proof to themselves, to other potential converts, and to other church members that the effects of conversion are both ‘real’ and ‘miraculous’. Prayer then becomes a way to submit their relationship to the world and their psychological conflicts (expressed in terms of tensions between the true self and the old nature) to the mediation of God: ‘Is that thought from you, Lord?’, Pentecostals ask in their prayers, ‘are my thoughts, my reactions, my attitude in a given situation really inspired by God?’

Thus prayer takes place within a long-term effort of self-reformation. And rather than an intimate dialogue lived at some distance from religious institution, personal prayer represents the most complete expression of the institutional work of socialisation, training and control which contributes to the subjective enchantment of a ‘spiritual’, highly personal experience. As M. Mauss noted:

> Even in mental prayer where, according to the formula, Christians abandon themselves to the Spirit (...), this spirit which controls them is the spirit of the Church. The ideas they generate are those of the teachings of their own sect, and the sentiments which they speculate on are in accord with the moral doctrine of their denomination. (Mauss 1985: 33)

In classical Pentecostalism, personal prayer is precisely where the ‘spirit of the Church’ is to be heard, not in the frame of an absolute domination over individual conscience, but rather a relational paradigm establishing a dialogue between the ethical dispositions instilled by Pentecostalism and the inertia of pre-existing social dispositions. This 'inner-conversation' is based on a system that B. Boutter (drawing from Bateson's work) has defined as a 'system of complementary interactions between the individual and God'. Previously engaged in 'symmetrical relations', the individual had to cope with the limitations of his/her own will and the conflictive nature of ordinary social relations. After conversion, he/she strives to cast off this direct confrontation by establishing a triangular communication in which God intervenes as an omnipresent mediator (Boutter 1999: 251–4). Between the self and others (including this 'other' within him/her), there is now God, who 'answers all prayers'. Ideally, this system of communication contributes to a moderation of personal behaviours [54] (more thoughtful and less reactive, being less directly involved with 'worldly' stakes) which is part of the ethical rationalisation of lives that the Pentecostal conversion promises ('a righteous life before God').

The result of this double process of incorporation of the Pentecostal ethics and appropriation of this specific system of communication is that the 'voice of the Holy Spirit' becomes, as a member of the AoG of French Polynesia explains, 'more than conscience in a life', 'He is there and if you do something that does not conform to the word of God, he will show you, he will warn you, that's not the good way. It's more than conscience, the Holy Spirit in a life'.[4] In fact, this acquired capacity to issue reminders to oneself without any visible mediation other than the practice of prayer points to the progressive incorporation of a Pentecostal habitus (Fer 2010b): the convert who 'stays online' can rely on a set of stable and systematic dispositions in order to transform his/her relationship to the world, and this 'mediation of God' can thus be described in the same terms as the habitus, as 'a principle of real autonomy in relation to the immediate determinations of the "situation"' (Bourdieu 1984: 135). But this Pentecostal habitus can't totally overcome the tensions generated by the lasting presence of the 'former self', or the relative uncertainty of 'God's answers' in some situations, without activating a set of 'invisible' mediations. Such mediations function as an apparatus of both indirect communication (through which part of the 'answers' can be received) and control (through which the institutional authority and the church community objectively intervene within the frame of the 'personal' relationship with God).

So, while personal prayer is experienced as an intimate conversation, associated with the biblical image of the 'upper room' (where the INSTE handbook suggests believers should return to pray), it also involves several 'ratified participants' (Goffman 1981, 9), church members or ministers who get to share personal 'matters of prayer', and to forward answers 'on behalf of God' that they may 'receive' during their own prayers.[5] From the third day of the INSTE programme, a 'partner of spiritual growth' is assigned to each student: 'they shall pray together, sharing their prayer requests as well as their fulfilment', the authors explain (Venditti and Venditti 1996: 15). They also recall the [55] community dimension of Christian life: 'Your decision to follow Christ is personal, but life in Christ is very relational', as communion within the 'family of God' is a 'means of spiritual growth' (Venditti and Venditti 1996: 237).

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[4] Interview with Marthe in Papeete, 2 April 2001.

Prayers said in common and the sharing of prayer requests, prompted by the conspicuous sympathy of 'brothers and sisters in Christ' and by a duty of transparency, foster the circulation of personal information within the church, thus enabling God to 'answer' individual needs through a kind of community control subjectively experienced as an intimate conversation with God. When this system of 'enchanted' communication fully works, the institutional position of the pastor can itself be interpreted as linked to specific relational competences, those of an 'exhibitor of communication' (*montreur de communication*) who contributes to resolving problems by translating them in terms of 'a lack of information, exchange, listening' (Neveu 2001: 111). It is always God who answers prayers, so it is with God that believers need to reconnect, by distancing themselves from bad influences and their 'old nature', correcting deviant behaviours, wiping out old conflicts, or persevering in prayer and biblical reading.

This Pentecostal 'relational Gospel' attuned to the contemporary ideology of the 'society of communication' (Neveu 2001) states that communication is always the solution, and no conflict can withstand an open and transparent dialogue. Moreover, because personal communication with God is regarded as the core of religious commitment, this 'relational Gospel' also implies moments during which the moderation that personal prayer (through the 'mediation of God') introduces in one's relations with the 'world' gives way to a more direct and emotionally intense communication with God which is an end unto itself, and freed from the constraints of 'the world'.

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[5] In his ethnography of a Catholic charismatic prayer, S. Parasie also uses this concept of 'ratified participants' to specify the different modes of participation implemented by the three actors involved in the prayer's interactions (the speaker, the other participants, the Holy Spirit). For example, during praises, 'the speaker talks directly to the Holy Spirit and indirectly to the other participants in prayer, acting as '"ratified participants"' (Parasie 2005: 350).

Prayer in Tongues and Meta-communication

During services held in the Assemblies of God of French Polynesia, following a series of enthusiastic songs expressing the fighting spirit of a 'victorious' community ('We are the King's Army'), and after the sermon, there is in a more personal tone a 'time of praise', when a torrent of words strives to express the frantic will to communicate to God feelings so intense that they run up against the limits of ordinary language. 'You have blessed us *so many times*', 'you're *so* wonderful', '*how much* your presence does me good', believers say, while the lyrics of the songs play on the same theme: 'Flood my heart, flood my life, come upon me, Spirit of God', 'plunge me into your river of love' (Fer 2005: 307). 'Prayers in [56] tongues', uttered in an unintelligible language, are to be heard during this time of praise, as everyone begins to pray simultaneously in a noisy hubbub. At first glance, this emotional effervescence may appear as contradicting the processes of internalisation of the religious experience, or the rationalisation of behaviour associated with personal prayer. Thus does this apparently disordered time of prayer in tongues seem to fit the classical scheme wherein a 'primitive' emotional experience is opposed to a more institutionalised and developed form of religion, dominated by the 'modern primacy of reason' (Hervieu-Léger 1990: 229). The Pentecostal rhetoric, which rejects intellectualism, proclaims that salvation is a matter of 'heart', advocating 'a return to the source' of Christianity through the palpable experience of God's presence. This would seem to explicitly include Pentecostalism among the 'emotional religiosities' that M. Weber described: from his perspective, such religiosities seeking 'the integration of one's pattern of life in subjective states and in an inner reliance upon god, rather than in the consciousness of one's continued ethical probation', must have 'a completely anti-rational effect upon the conduct of life' (Weber 1978: 571). In this way Pentecostal services, being distant heirs of the 'whining cadence' of Moravian Pietism evoked by M.Weber (Weber 1978: 571), should be considered as a religiosity of immediacy, naturally unstable and without any durable impact on the rationality of individual behaviour.

J.-P. Willaime suggests a more subtle approach through the notion of a Pentecostal 'ambivalence', generated by the coexistence of 'the emotion of the believing community' on one hand, and a

'Pentecostal ethical qualification fostering (...) upward social mobility and access to positions of responsibility' on the other (Willaime 1999: 13, 23). But he still implicitly considers these two dimensions (emotional and ethical) as opposed and deriving from the unique perspective of individual integration into an encompassing community, leaving unexplored the articulation between subjective individualisation and institutional control: emotion is seen as an inherently collective fact, and it is through a 'reshaping of community belonging in the context of a destabilised traditional socio-economic order' (Willaime 1999: 20) that the convert manages to reform his/her life.

This kind of theoretical opposition between body, emotion and community on one hand and spirit, reason and the individual on the other tends in fact to hinder a full understanding of the emotional contents expressed during prayers in tongues; such an understanding would require an approach to religious emotions not as some universal, raw material but rather as 'embodied thoughts' shaped by specific socialisation processes (Fer 2010a). The following example, collected in 2000 during a service at the AoG in Faa'a (Tahiti), helps to identify [57] the thoughts and feelings that these prayers in tongues contain by re-situating them within the continuity of praise offered in intelligible language:

> Thank you Lord, your presence does us so much good, we celebrate you, we exalt you, thank you for your goodness, your fidelity, thank you because you love us just as we are, receive all the recognition of my heart, you touched my heart, you saved me, you are everything I have, Lord, *I can't find words*, you're so wonderful, your immense, incomparable love [followed by a prayer in tongues].

In this moment of collective effervescence, during which the emotions shared by the church community are subjectively perceived as one sign of the immediate presence of God, prayer in tongues comes as the expression of a set of incorporated beliefs and dispositions focused on the intimate, individual relationship with God. Here, as M. Rosaldo wrote regarding the substantive relations between emotion and thought:[6]

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[6] She regarded as a crucial point 'that feeling is forever given shape through thought and that thought is laden with emotional meaning' (Rosaldo 1984: 143).

> what distinguishes thought and affect, differentiating a 'cold' cognition from a 'hot', is fundamentally a sense of the engagement of the actor's self. Emotions are thoughts somehow 'felt' in flushes, pulses, 'movements' of our livers, minds, hearts, stomach, skin. They are *embodied* thoughts, thoughts steeped with the apprehension that 'I am involved' (Rosaldo 1984: 143).

Thoughts and feelings, expressed to the extent of overflowing the limits of ordinary language, show the personal involvement of the convert engaged in intense and transparent communication with God, as well as the will to tell God everything, within a ritual frame where 'God is there' and 'is acting' more than ever. So the same system of communication encompasses the seemingly contradictory dimensions of Pentecostal experience, the ethical moderation introduced through personal prayer and the emotional intensity of prayer in tongues. This prayer in tongues doesn't use a system of complementary interactions, made necessary by the presence of a 'third' actor (the 'world' or the 'old nature'), but rather a meta-communication between two actors. The establishment of 'verified' communication with God then becomes an end unto itself, and the most important message, beyond what is actually said: [7]

> [58] In your prayer, when you don't know what to say", a pastor from the AoG of French Polynesia explains, "those of you who are baptised in the Holy Spirit, just speak in tongues, and the Holy Spirit will speak for you. (…) When you're in adoration, you don't know which words to use, pray in tongues, the Holy Spirit will raise unspeakable words to God.[8]

This exhortation underlines that "for most people, glossolalia does not come easily, and improves greatly with practice" (Wolfram, 1974: 128; Samarin, 1972: 44-72): in the AoG of French Polynesia as in many other classical Pentecostal churches, the ability to speak in tongues indeed comes less from spontaneous dispositions than from a learning process implying argumentation, theological convictions and sensory work (Brahinsky, 2012: 223-224). In this regard, Pentecostal practices of speaking in tongues are similar to the necessary emotions described by M. Mauss (1969: 269-279), as the acquisition of this specific skill marks an important step in the evolution of individuals' status within the church: this experience officially recognised by the Pentecostal institution as the "baptism in the Holy Spirit" indeed demonstrates a personal capacity to fully hear the ‘voice of God’; and therefore opens access to church positions of responsibility.

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[7] This meta-communication, Winkin explains, is based on the fact that 'when A communicates with B, the simple act of communicating can include the implicit statement: "we are communicating". In fact, this statement can be the most important message sent and received' (Winkin 2001: 60).

[8] Pasteur L. Levant, service at the AoG of Papeete (Tahiti), 27 March 2001.

In her PhD dissertation on charismatic Christianity in Reunion Island, V. Aubourg mentions the analysis developed by F.A. Sullivan, who describes a mental attitude consisting of allowing sounds to be formed on a subconscious level, close to a daydream, in which believers express their will to ‘let go’ (Sullivan 1988: 235, quoted by Aubourg 2010: 409–10). Anna, a member of the AoG of French Polynesia who had to wait for five years after her water baptism before she managed to speak in tongues, uses a similar expression to explain her own experience: ‘One side of me was stuck with these things (...) I was afraid, for a long time I had this fear’, she says, until she ‘understood the importance of it’ and decided that ‘I should be open to the Holy Spirit. Before, I was afraid, I didn’t feel the need, I didn’t know how to let go’.[9] This ‘letting go’ shows a will to open oneself to God, including – as P. Gonzalez notes – a radical acceptance of God’s touch, of sensory capture in continuation of the move first made by converts when they accepted the reception of ‘God in their heart’. Prayer in tongues can thus be considered in terms of an ‘intimate conviction’, pointing out to ‘two dimensions which are intimacy, interiority, on one hand, and conviction, [59] understood as a commitment inseparable from a certainty, on the other hand’ (Gonzalez 2009: 214).

Prayer of Intercession and Spiritual Warfare

Because Pentecostals largely see religious commitment as a ‘self-surrender’ to God, they tend to correlate the degrees of personal involvement with parallel variations of ‘God’s presence’. A ‘strong’ presence of God (indicated by ‘evident’ acts of the Holy Spirit, such as healing and prophecies) logically corresponds to an equivalent personal involvement/surrender, and vice versa: during the service, the emotions shared by the church members (who express a high degree of involvement) are thus perceived as one of the signs of ‘God’s presence’. Following this same circular reasoning, in the prayer of intercession, individual dispositions nurtured by a particularly intense involvement with God are *in fine* made to serve as collective ‘spiritual warfare’. There are indeed circumstances in which it seems evident to Pentecostals that a struggle between Good and Evil is taking place (for example, during evangelistic campaigns). But there are also personal experiences whose particular intensity testifies to an ongoing struggle, taking place in a higher spiritual dimension accessible only to believers endowed with a specific ‘gift’.

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[9] Interview with Anna in Bora Bora, 6 December 2000.

Therefore, the observation of practices associated with this ‘gift of interceding’ throws light on the Pentecostal elaboration of a commitment to others, based on the subjective experience of an intimate relationship with God. ‘The key for intercession’, the INSTE handbook explains, ‘is to acknowledge responsibility for fighting the enemy of our souls’ (Venditti and Venditti 1996: 138). And the mechanisms through which at some point individuals or church communities endorse this responsibility indicate how this shift from personal concerns towards collective mobilisations occurs, notably through the prayer of intercession.

The first of these mechanisms is the Pentecostal system of distribution of ‘gifts’ and ‘ministries’, an orientation process which progressively determines the ‘mission’ of each church member, through a constant interaction between (on the one hand) social distinctions ‘enchanted’ by the religious discourse on equal dignity of all ‘gifts and talents’, and (on the other) a relative liberation from social determinations based on the accumulation of religious capital (rewarding faithfulness to the institution) and/or spiritual capital (the strength of a personal ‘testimony’) (Fer 2010b: 166). Depending on his/her personal dispositions, each convert (called to be ‘witness of God in the world’) is given a role both in the [60] Pentecostal missionary enterprise and within the field of church positions. The position of intercessor acknowledges a specific and personal ability to intervene with God in the interests of others, and offers to the most disadvantaged converts (in terms of social, cultural and economic capital) the opportunity to access highly respected positions on the basis of ‘spiritual’ capital.

Hinano, working in Moorea hotels as a housekeeper, owes her ‘ministry of intercession’ within the AoG of French Polynesia to an episode of ‘healing’ attributed to the Holy Spirit – she stopped taking pills that were prescribed for life against the effects of serious obesity – and also to a ‘vision’ she received during a heart attack. During the surgical operation, her heart ‘gave up’ and she ‘found herself upstairs’, walking in a garden along with ‘an angel aged about 30, he wore a white tunic, I know it was Jesus’:

> The mission I have consists – she says – in interceding for lost souls. Sometimes, I wake up in the night and I pray, I pray and then a name gets out of my mouth. He puts names and figures in front of me, I just intercede. (...) Now I know that, when there is an evangelistic campaign, it’s my duty to go with God’s servants and to pray for lost souls, I have to go with them and it’s my greater pleasure, my greater joy.[10]

In her case, the physical evidence of the heart attack marks her accession to a spiritual dimension that remains invisible to others and where the salvation of ‘lost souls’ is at stake. Drawing on this foundational event, she can legitimise her position within the church missionary apparatus (‘with God’s servants’, meaning with the pastors) by the equation posited between a total personal commitment (night and day) and a strong presence of God. Thus intercession finally situates her intimate experience within the frame of an action for others ‘wanted by God’, an aspect of ‘God’s plan’ encompassing her individual destiny.

Evangelistic campaigns, in which Hinano participates, constitute a second mechanism leading Pentecostal converts from their personal relationship with God towards collective mobilisations. These campaigns dramatise the struggle between Good and Evil around the salvation of souls, in a way immediately understandable to any church member, with a unity of time and place: this struggle takes place here and now. Their organisation by the AoG of French Polynesia, with the installation of a marquee on private or public land, underlines the territorial dimension of this struggle: ‘Evangelisation is an incursion into enemy territory’ (Gonzalez 2008: 47), into the world outside the church walls. [61] Prayers of intercession contribute to this dramatisation, while they also proclaim through a call for divine protection the solidarity that unites the ‘brothers and sisters in Christ’ in this confrontation with evil forces (which is inseparably a confrontation with the dominant society’s gaze on converts).

In July 2009, the small AoG assembly of Moorea held a one-week open-air evangelistic campaign.

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[10] Interview with Hinano, 24 December 2000, in Moorea.

Each evening, a group of four to six people was formed to intercede 'from the beginning of the preaching until the final call'.[11] They gathered under the small marquee of the refreshment stall, a few metres from he main marquee, and formed a small circle, praying with closed eyes. Thus they symbolically set up a spiritual protection whose efficiency depends on the state of relations amongst church members, as the pastor in charge of this campaign warned: in this 'spiritual warfare', division is the best weapon of 'the enemy'[12].

An evangelistic campaign organised on a larger scale – as in July 2001 when the AoG of Tahiti sent fifteen people to Nuku Hiva (in the Marquesas Islands, a distant archipelago where Catholicism is dominant) for a three-week campaign – implies a more complex 'strategy of prayer', including a series of intersecting prayers of intercession from the local level to the whole of French Polynesia:

> During these three weeks, I divided the group in five groups of ten people. (...) I developed a strategy of prayer for the city. I sent five people, half of a group, to the diocese, in the cathedral of Taiohae, some of them went to the diocese and the cathedral to pray. Another group stood on the hill over the bay of Taiohae, in order to intercede towards the hospital, which is a key symbol, representing illness, death, etc. So everyday, during two hours, people have interceded, interceded. It even happened that some people interceded during the night, several hours during the night. And from my point of view, this enabled the spirit of God to work into the hearts and it enabled us to have an open sky, that's an important point. (...) We also had the support from all the assemblies over here (in Tahiti) and all the assemblies in French Polynesia, and that's very important, everyday they interceded for us. From my point of view, this contributed to the good outcomes.[13]

Such territorialisation of religious imaginary draws its inspiration from the vocabulary and practices spread since the end of the 1980s by the charismatic theology of spiritual warfare, which has theorised a change in the scale of [62] religious commitment, from the torments of the individual soul to a spiritual war against the guardian spirits of cities and nations. The growing influence of this movement amongst Evangelicals contributes to a shift from individuals towards territories, from a ‘spiritual’ experience towards political–religious activism. These new forms of commitment originate from the sense of a declining influence of Christianity over secularised Western societies and urban territories of ‘inhuman’ size fostering a fragmentation of social life. This is what F. McClung (an international leader of the charismatic missionary network Youth With a Mission) explains:

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[11] AoG of Moorea, preparatory meeting with Pastor E. Barber, 13 July 2009.

[12] Ibidem.

[13] Interview with Pastor E. Barber, 24 September 2001, in Tahiti.

> Demonic bondage is normally associated with individuals, but the moral disintegration of our society makes the possibility of large-scale spiritual warfare against entire cities or nations seem possible. (...) If we have a view of sin that is limited to personal choices, we will miss an important truth, Cities and nations take spiritual characters and lives of their own. (McClung 1991: 29–31)

The personification of territorial entities helps Evangelicals to conceptualise the sense of a resistance to Christianity beyond individual consciences. It prompts converts to situate their personal experience, initially focused on an inner confrontation between Good (‘the new identity’) and Evil (the ‘old nature’), in the frame of a broader spiritual warfare requiring a collective effort: converts need to become ‘warriors of prayer’ to take part in this struggle, in which God himself is involved and where the salvation of souls is at stake. These practices of intercession articulate several levels of action, from local ‘targeted’ prayers to the World Prayer Centre founded by the main theologian of spiritual warfare, Peter C. Wagner (described by one of his admirers as ‘a spiritual version of the Pentagon’ (Jorgensen 2005: 447)), including the intermediary level of the prayers for the nation. Nations, symbolised by their emblems and flags and understood in terms of an ontological bond between a people and a territory, today indeed crystallise a new charismatic political imaginary (Gonzalez 2008), inspiring a combination of prayers of intercession and political commitment in order to ‘cast the demons out of the structures (and) get structures back to their role, their vocation, the kingdom of God’.[14]

[63] **Conclusion**

The historical internalisation and individualisation of prayer that M. Mauss described as a rather linear process in fact includes a more ambivalent reconfiguration of religious experience. The observation of Pentecostal practices of prayer – understood as a personal communication with God – shows that the individualisation of subjective experience does not systematically imply (as Mauss believed) a concomitant decline in institutional or collective practices and controls. By enjoining individuals to 'become themselves' through free and voluntary choices, distancing themselves from any compulsory destiny or obedience to institutional authorities (Ehrenberg 2000: 156), the Pentecostal rhetoric is in line with an historical process of de-legitimisation of institutional constraints. But it produces a kind of biographical invention which is not merely a synonym for religious dis-belonging. Converts are convinced that they need to take responsibility for their own lives and find in their constant and transparent communication with God a mediation enabling them to symbolically achieve their independence, while this mediation objectively relies on an 'invisible' institutional apparatus of control.

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[14] Tom Marshall, undated video recording (VHS), ‘lesson 2’, personal archives of Chris Marshall, viewed in December 2007 (Victoria University in Wellington, Religious Studies Department).

This communication with God is lived as an intimate conviction, felt in bodies and 'verified' through a set of inculcated evidences ('the manifestations of the Holy Spirit'). It nurtures a sense of personal commitment to God which finally leads to collective mobilisations, where 'God calls' on his followers to take part in the confrontation with spiritual forces that govern the world, endowing them with 'spiritual gifts' and exposing them to circumstances which 'require' an activist involvement. So the distance between the most intimate prayer (when, in their 'upper room', converts call to God to struggle against the inherited dispositions of their 'old nature') and collective prayers, inspired by the theology of spiritual warfare, is not the same distance that M. Mauss observed between 'elementary' forms of religion and the more developed expressions of modern individualisation. Rather, it points out that prayer 'is always, basically, an instrument of action' (Mauss 2003: 22) and underlines the existence of a continuum connecting the contemporary personalisation of religious experience to new forms of commitment for others.

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