OTÁVIO VELHO

Missionization in the post-colonial world: a view from Brazil and elsewhere

I

For many observers the contemporary process of globalization has brought about profound ruptures in social life. However, an equally important element has been the re-reading of the past enabled by these supposed ruptures, or at least the sense of rupture. We can imagine this possibility as a *productive anachronism*, one which paradoxically enables a (re)approximation of the past and present – a temporal fold throwing into question even our naturalized notion of time. Missionization is an excellent example of this phenomenon. Absent in any explicit form in the Bible, the notion is typically associated with the birth of modernity, coming into full force with the great navigations of the 16th century and the formation of the colonial world. Viewed from the present, however, it seems to possess many of the characteristics normally associated with globalization (Velho in press). This particularly applies when we compare it to other forms of spatial dislocation motivated by religious aims that presuppose a particular destination, such as the crusades (Palestine). Missionization, by contrast, takes its agents to any part of the world, a dynamism that reflects not only the universal project driving it forward, but also the fact any route change can be incorporated as God's

design (Roscioni 2001). Examining missionization in the globalized and post-colonial world (a notion used here in preference to the sometimes problematic application of the blanket notion of post-colonialism to highly specific cases) must involve, therefore, a simultaneous understanding of both the new *and* what we can say anew without losing sight of the long-term (or *longue durée*).

Historically, missionization has been associated with *conversion*, a term the historian of religion Arthur. D. Nock defines as follows in his 1933 classic *Conversion* (a book I shall use as our point of reference):

"By conversion we mean the reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right." (Nock 1963[1933]:7)

More than a concept, we are presented here with a central category of Christian thought. The notion of missionization is attached to this category as a movement expanding in the wake of precisely this universal impulse towards conversion. As a result, missionization is frequently associated with various passages from the gospels (Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 2:1-4), although the notion of missionization does not explicitly appear in the holy text and despite the fact there are numerous other verses which define Christianity as a movement internal to Judaism (Matthew 10:5-6 and 15:24). According to Nock, the first conversion in the full sense takes place only with Saint Paul, whose persecution of the early Christians as Saul (even his name will change!) already confirms the sense of being faced with a rupture. From then on, repentance and conversion become an attraction in themselves (Nock 1963(1933):220). Following this line of reasoning, the first missionary voyages were thus undertaken by Paul (and Barnabas) – at least when seen (or reinterpreted) from hindsight (Nock 1963(1933):191).

Although seen from even more hindsight today, we can perceive just how much this narrative is connected to a focus on the western development of Christianity and hence Latin rather than Greek, Syriac or Coptic. Taken to an extreme, this bias ignores the expansion of Christianity into Africa and Asia (especially into Syria, Egypt and Mesopotamia) during the first centuries after Christ – an expansion that did not always involve the same conceptions of rupture (many African Christians, for example, maintained ancient Hebraic customs) or the same relationship to conversion. This eastern Christianity would continue to survive, albeit constrained and subjugated by the tide of Islam from the 7th century onwards. As a result of this ignorance, the Christian West would come to imagine an intimate relationship between classical Latin and the divine Word, the language later serving in Spain, for example, as a model for reorganizing Castilian. The latter in turn subsequently acted as the model for the official grammars of the colonial language, especially (and precisely) for missionary purposes. This complex development meant vernacular languages therefore became appropriated for aims other than those of their speakers (Rafael 1988).

But at a more general level Nock also mentions 'prophetic religion' – closely associated with crises – in contrast to 'religions of tradition:'

"While a Jew or a Christian held that there was only one true God and that most people around him were given up to idolatry and sin, a devotee of Isis could and did think that his cult was the original and best expression of a devotion voiced by all men in their several ways." (Nock 1963[1933]:16)

Here, though, it is worth remembering that the relations between prophetism, conversion and missionization are variable. Although Judaism, for instance, has passed through the moments of missionary fervour mentioned by Nock and illustrated by the Book of Jonah and the experience of exile (Nock

1963[1933]:61), in the long run Israel was perceived more as a sign of God than an active witness, meaning conversion in this case amounts to an eschatological action undertaken by God himself. Indeed, Nock points out how Christianity's earliest period included thinkers who accentuated continuities, not only with Judaism, but also – as in the case of Justin Martyr cited below – with traditions alien to this line of historical development; these included transversal continuities with Greek philosophy and other manifestations of the spirit of the times, sometimes as tools of propaganda (Nock 1963(1933):250). Indeed, Paul himself would say:

"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win the Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law – though not being myself under the law – that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law – not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ – that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." (1 Cor 9:19-22)

Of course, Nock was referring specifically to the Ancient World. While retaining the categories he employs, we can update his survey by including Islam as another prophetic religion and adding many of the 'religions' of the peoples typically studied by anthropologists alongside the 'devotees of Isis.' The issue we face is knowing what an anthropology developed in the context of the post-colonial and globalized world can effectively add to Nock's description while still bearing in mind the customary identification of missionization with colonialism.

II

For Nock, the prophetic religions can be associated with reason, which guides practice; on the opposite pole, religions of

tradition suppose only the sanctity of custom (Nock 1963[1933]:3). Distributed in this way, the first pole has also been labelled by other authors as a set composed by the 'World Religions,' that is, those religions whose impulse towards missionization invests them with a universal vocation. The second pole, meanwhile, is occupied by religions defined as local or traditional, in general associated with a particular territory and people. In fact, this association was not set in concrete by Nock: although he stressed attachments to local traditions, the author also recognized how the worship of Isis and other cults (including other Egyptian and Hellenized Syrian cults and Mithraism) enjoyed a wide circulation and acquired new 'adhesions'. At the same time, these *adhesions* – in contrast to the *conversions* to prophetic religions – were not exclusive in kind; indeed, the author observes the need for traditions of alien origin to become naturalized in order for them to be effective (Nock 1963[1933]:162). While the prophetic religions occupying the first pole have also been labelled the religions of *conversion* and *salvation*, the religions of tradition making up the second pole have been classified as those of *initiations* and *acceptance* of the world. In both cases, however, it is as though the opposition between modernity and non-modernity were already (pre)figured.

Nonetheless, perhaps we can identify a good example of an apparent *productive anachronism* in the post-colonial doubts over how to describe these 'traditional' religiosities. Still in the field of the history of religions, Terence Ranger – certainly inspired by contemporary globalization – provides a good example of this when he contests the distinction between the local and the global in South African religious history (Ranger 1993). A distinction which, it should be pointed out, provided the basis for one of the most respected theories of conversion (Horton 1971). Ranger argues that the local is itself a product of colonialism, a regime which obscures flows and interconnections

while simultaneously attempting to impede them – an operati-
on which in itself amounts to a (self-fulfilling) prophecy. At the
same time, it is worth observing that in many regions of Africa
– as well as India, for example – the norm is a multilingualism
more commonly associated with modern cosmopolitanism, a
phenomenon revealing the strength with which any pure loca-
lism is negated.

Examples abound of other images constructed by the West
of religions of tradition. A typical case is examined by Bruno
Latour in his critique of the notion of *fetish*, a notion – like that
of mission - which emerged precisely at the start of the great
navigations and the modern waves of missionization. Latour
argues (1996) that the notion of fetish involves a misunders-
tanding produced by supposing an inescapable contradiction
between the real and the constructed (in this case, the cons-
truction of 'idols'), a contradiction which even the religiosity of
the Portuguese themselves – inventors of the notion in their
contacts with Africans on the coast of Guinea – fails to comply.
For Latour this confirms the fact it is we who 'have never been
modern' (Latour 1991). But for now we can concentrate on the
hypothesis that in the post-colonial world (and without losing
sight of the possibility of expanding this hypothesis through
use of the supposed *productive anachronism*) this polarization
between world and local religions can at least be relativized –
a possibility whose implications interest us here primarily in
terms of missionization.

III

Insofar as they symptomize events in this post-colonial en-
vironment, the theological vicissitudes of the notion of *incultu-
ration* are highly revealing. Promoted by the Roman Catholic
Church, the notion is an offspring of the *aggiornamento* esta-
blished by the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and particu-
larly the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* and the Decree

Ad Gentes on the Mission Activity of the Church. The liturgical reform that led to the substitution of Latin by vernacular languages, transformed into *vox ecclesi* (note the revealing paradox of this concept being formulated in Latin!), is at once its result and its condition. In fact, this substitution, together with its modernizing but banal interpretation, should also be read as a (partial) *return* to the era when the dominance of Latin and the Christian West had yet to see the light of day. It is not my intention here to enter into a detailed theological discussion concerning the notion of inculturation; instead, I wish to call attention to certain aspects pertaining to the theme of missions in the post-colonial world, since this movement undoubtedly comprised a response to the new conditions in which the Catholic Church found itself operating. These conditions obviously included a rejection of the missionary work associated with colonialism. Another key factor, though, was the growing influence of post-colonial Christianity in contrast to the supposed *secularization* of Europe, an influence tending over the long-term (and only over the long-term, given the powerful resistances to recognizing its implications) to alter the balance of forces within the Church. This was also closely associated with the need to recognize other religions and with the promotion – including simply for practical reasons – of the so-called 'inter-religious dialogue,' an extremely delicate issue for a tradition generally conceiving a single route to salvation. Indeed, this dialogue sometimes demands the *invention* of religions, insofar as the recognition of religions presupposes the classifications and condensations involved in applying the modern category of religion to encountered practices and traditions (Giumbelli 2002).

Initially *inculturation* focused on the necessary relation between faith and culture. But the attention paid to the question of culture increased over time, including attempts to recognize other 'religions'. A special emphasis was given to the analogy

between the incarnation of Christ and inculturation as a practice: just as the Logos emptied himself to live among us, so the Church should proceed with each culture. The reference to the Logos was in turn associated with a renewed theological interest in this notion. First introduced as a principle by the ancient Stoics, it was given a personalist spin by Philo Judaeus and later adopted by John the Evangelist. The Samaritan Justin Martyr (100?-165) subsequently added the expression *logos spermatikos*. This expression referred to the idea that the seeds of the Word were already present in ancient philosophy, subsequently disseminating to refer to all cultures and to a worldwide religious process (Anastasios 1988). The Decree *Ad Gentes* (no. 11) had already proclaimed: "let them [the missionaries] ... lay bare the seeds of the Word which lie hidden among their fellows," emphasizing a complete immersion of missionaries in the lives of the peoples among whom they work. This shift included a new attention to pre-Augustinian eastern patristic thought, along with an emphasis on the cosmic Christ as presented in the Gospel of John, vis-à-vis his historical manifestation in Palestine; as well as the notion of a God who created *all* things (including cultures). A new emphasis whose association with re-evaluating relations with non-Western Christianity and the eastern patristic tradition should be underlined. At the same time, renewed attention was given to the involvement of lay people and the constitution of autochthonous churches, all of which opened the way for a theological justification for a shift in the Church's relationship with different cultures.

A significant aspect of these developments has been the networking undertaken in the name of *Ecumenism* among those sectors of the Catholic Church that are proponents of inculturation, as well as the equivalent sectors in the World Council of Churches, which congregates protestant and orthodox churches (Fitzgerald & Ucko 1998). This movement creates transversal solidarities that cross ecclesial boundaries even as it

strengthens these sectors in their internal clashes with the more traditional sectors in both organizations. At the same time, by maintaining a certain ambiguity over the actual scope of ecumenism (strictly speaking, only *macro-ecumenism* would address relationships outside the Christian fold) the wider problematic of inter-religious dialogue can be addressed. The presence (alongside the protestant churches) of orthodox churches on the World Council of Churches has also been fundamental, thanks to their experience of being the objects of conquest rather than conquerors. Indeed, their presence has been especially important in re-evaluating the eastern patristic tradition mentioned earlier. After the Willingen Conference in 1952, the world of protestant ecumenism and the World Council of Churches witnessed the development of the related notion of *Missio Dei* (which later had a significant impact on those sectors of the Catholic Church more committed to inculturation). This notion – despite his own exclusivist tendencies – was attributed to the prominent theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968). It suggests that mission begins with God, thereby implying that the mission is already present when the missionary arrives: hence the latter is never faced with a society with no knowledge of God. This notion is itself linked to the idea of the *evangelical preparation* derived from the eastern patristic tradition and associated with Eusebius of Caesarea (263-339), a dimension which also involves attempts to counterbalance the attention traditionally given to orthodoxy with a focus on *orthopraxis* – in other words, acts which extend beyond formal declarations to *speak* of the presence of God. This emphasis is associated with the pragmatic endeavour to break with past impasses, shifting attention from doctrinal issues onto pastoral concerns – all of which expresses an implicit critique of the intellectualist emphasis on belief-statements at the cost of embodied and performative practices. Recognition of this critique, in turn, reposes the issue of communicative action (and consequently 'in-

ter-religious dialogue') in a way that remains extremely challenging for modern religious institutions, accustomed as they are to privileging declarations of faith and the incompatibilities between them.

Taken as a whole, it is interesting to note how, despite all the novelties that seem to have emerged, this style of rhetoric (in contrast to scientific rhetoric, for example, though closer to juridical rhetoric) continues to assume the supposed *productive anachronism*. In other words, it continually makes reference – including in polemics – to precedents that generally relate back to the same period covered by Nock. After all, it is always possible to maintain "I have become all things to all men" (1 Cor 9:22). Just as in the case of the *figure* studied by Eric Auerbach (1984) where the personalities and episodes from the Old Testament *pre*figured personalities and episodes from the Gospels, here contemporary personalities and episodes *post*figure personalities and episodes from the Bible and the first centuries A.D.. The Jesuits, on the other hand, who played a central role in the development of the notion of inculturation (the term gaining full acceptance within the order after the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus in 1974) could not fail to associate it with the famous controversy on Chinese rites (1645-1742) where their position of *proto-inculturation*, so to speak, had been defeated with the ban on Christians participating in Confucianist rituals. Similarly, they could not fail to link the emptying of the Logos with the annihilation of the individual extolled by the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola as a means of reaching God (thus very far from the usual notion of the exclusive and ethnocentric relation between missions and colonial conquests), already associated with missionary experiences and spirituality itself (Agnolin 2004).

Obviously, all this has allowed leeway for multiple interpretations, provoking a permanent tension between the 'local' applications of this doctrine (in Latin American countries with

large indigenous populations, for example, the theme of auto-
chthonous churches has been transmuted into one of the 'Indi-
an church') and the Vatican's efforts to maintain a common
language and the Church's universality. This tension is revea-
led in the paradox mentioned earlier of affirming vernacular lan-
guages in Latin (*vox ecclesi*) – indeed a paradox that in itself
reveals the complexity of this process, where the voice of uni-
versality cannot be considered *apriori* less tuned to the vicissi-
tudes of globalization than those of multiculturalism. All of
which effectively relativizes the polarization between local and
global: not only does incultured Christianity valorize the local
and global simultaneously, it also demonstrates a respect for
other religions reminiscent of Nock's 'devotee of Isis' in the idea
that Christianity (simply) provides a better formulation of so-
mething which is already present everywhere. Although this
idea still distinguishes the seeds of the Word from its full blos-
soming, it undoubtedly runs counter to the conception (parti-
cularly associated with certain currents of the reformed chur-
ches and Augustinianism) of the absolute nature of the biblical
Fall. Nonetheless, this full blossoming is not supposed without
some kind of missionary support, already implicitly contained
in the notion of an *evangelical preparation*. Indeed, this missi-
onary support has now transmuted into the 'inter-religious di-
alogue' – a fact to be borne in mind when distinguishing the
Church's culturalism from the culturalism of mainstream an-
thropology, though in many cases, such as Brazil, inculturati-
on has provided a large margin for collaboration (sometimes
based on a productive misunderstanding and hybrid personas)
between anthropologists and religious figures.

Yet it is important to record that the missionaries associa-
ted with inculturation are consistently filled with hesitancies
and doubts. Indeed so much so that they frequently give up any
attempts to convert and, in certain cases, even abandon the
priesthood. In either case, the sociocultural fate of the popula-

tions seems to be a higher priority than the question of individual salvation, for centuries the apparently indisputable keystone of the missionary endeavour. In hindsight, it could be argued that ecumenism was to some extent a pagan invention, while its rediscovery (after a period of burial or at least of severe restriction caused in part by watershed events such as the defeat of Arianism and the schism between eastern and western Christianity) can be seen as the announcement of a post-Christian era. Especially after the 1970s, the established missionary apparatus, considered to be authoritarian, was practically dismantled. And here the new conceptions proved crucial. Perhaps the most infamous case of these authoritarian practices was the separation of aboriginal children from their families in Australia, but this was far from the only example of its kind. (In Brazil, for instance, boarding schools were set up for indigenous children, also closed down during the 1970s.) However, these practices were not replaced by any consensual alternative, although many missionaries stood apart through their defence of the living conditions and culture of the populations to which they were associated. Furthermore, important (though sometimes obscured) remnants of the past conceptions continued, especially within the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

IV

However symptomatic inculturation may be of contemporary processes of post-colonial globalization, missionary fervour *par excellence* today resides elsewhere – so much so that this fervour even foments accusations against it of lack of interest in specific cultures. Much of Christianity's contemporary growth in the old Third World appears to be unconnected to the theological currents responsible for formulating the notion of inculturation. Instead, it seems to be spurred more by the determination of missionaries who – in vivid contrast to the hesitancy displayed by proponents of inculturation – not only jour-

ney into remote areas, but also whenever possible go preaching from door to door in the towns and cities developing rapidly in the South; ever less alien and ever more part of an urban landscape, precisely by targeting dislocated migrants. Philip Jenkins, in his recent book *The Next Christendom* (Jenkins 2002), synthesized a series of available (if sometimes questionable) information in order to formulate a fascinating and provocative thesis, one useful to us here as a point of reference. Jenkins claims Christianity is experiencing a period of exponential growth, going as far as to declare that this growth is *inversely* related to the end of colonialism, heralding a new relationship which challenges any essentialist identification of colonialism with missionization. He also underlines the predominance of Pentecostalism in this missionary boom, including the impact of what has already been termed the pentecostalization of the religious field as a whole, a phenomenon that equally applies to the so-called historical churches (Velho 1999-2000). He goes on to make the important insight that the Church has always been 'incultured,' insofar as the theological formulation is minimized as a driving factor in favour of a natural process of inculturation that mostly unfolds unconsciously. This is a process the Church has always known how to accept, despite the resistance of minorities, today represented by the non-Hispanic whites, descendents in turn of the beneficiaries of the widespread and by now naturalized (and perhaps surpassed) inculturation that took place with the original migration of Christianity to Europe. The Church also knew how to accept and even exploit local cultures, even with theological formulations occurring *post facto* in relation to new patterns of worship and practice in general. With the secularization of Europe, the tendency has been for an enthusiastic version of Christianity to rise to the fore, one more directly associated with the supernatural through prophecies, visions and cures: the *southern Christianity* of Asia, Africa and above all Latin America. Indeed, this

predominance is becoming global through migrations, a diffuse influence and, in certain cases, even through a brand of missionization that takes the First World as its target, reversing the direction of the missionization in force from at least the 16th century onwards. But although enthusiastic, this version of Christianity is also held to be conservative. Taking a highly provocative standpoint, Jenkins claims, for example, that rather than being the product of a gerontocracy doomed to disappear, as western liberals suppose, the conservatism manifested by the current papacy is a reflection of the growing influence of the South within the Catholic Church and the conservatism of this southern Christianity. Thus, in contrast to the premises contained in the theological formulation of inculturation, the latter does not always seem to go hand in hand with an acceptance of religious pluralism.

As mentioned above, some of the information synthesized by Jenkins appears questionable. Clearly it would be impossible to discuss this impressive set of information in its entirety, but we can briefly analyze the Brazilian case to at least test the possibility of generalizing his ideas – employing a kind of *methodological suspicion* – especially since Jenkins himself highlights the importance of Latin America in the development of *southern Christianity*. In this case, it is undoubtedly an exaggeration, for example, to claim that the well-known and internationally active Universal Church of the Kingdom of God has its own political party (at least for the present). Likewise, there is no basis for declaring that Brazil has been just as devastated as Africa by the AIDS crisis, to the extent of being reflected in the population growth rate. Indeed, this declaration obscures other more important factors, namely the changes that have tended to draw Brazil closer to Euro-American demographic patterns as the outcome of the rapid growth in the urban population (from 44.6% in 1960 to 81.2% in 2000) and the influence of new social models. According to the Brazilian

Institute of Geography and Statistics, the population growth rate dropped from 3% per year in the 1950's to 1.44% in 2004, and is projected to reach 0.24% by 2050. Brazil is estimated to attain a zero growth rate around 2062. The average number of children per mother, which was 4.06% until 1980, fell to 2.31 in 2004 and may drop as low as 1.85 by 2050. There is no evidence this is related to AIDS. In fact, Brazil is widely renowned for the success of its program for controlling the epidemic. Any disturbances in the population growth rate are more than likely due to the increase in violence.

These observations are made simply to demonstrate that it is safe to take some of Jenkins's generalizations with a pinch of salt, however thought-provoking they may be. Continuing to use Brazil as a test case, we can turn to the question of conservatism. First of all, Jenkins's argument undoubtedly makes a lot of sense at a global level. In addition to the examples listed by the author, we can mention the recent crisis which shook the Lutheran World Federation, prompted by African and Asiatic churches taking a vehement stance against the recognition of homosexual unions given by the European Lutheran churches. In terms of Catholic conservatism, we can also cite the recent cooling of relations with the Kimbanguist Church in Africa. But in Brazil, two correlated questions arise: to what extent can Brazilian Christians be said to be conservative; and what does being conservative actually mean?

From the outset, we should note that individual style and self-presentation displays an immense variety across the country. Even within the Pentecostal world, members of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, for example, are far from conservative (in contrast to those from the Assembly of God and other churches). But this immediately prompts another question – namely knowing what it means to be conservative in the first place. Can a church that takes part in Carnival playing percussion instruments, dancing samba and singing in praise

of God and against drugs be described as conservative or advanced? At minimum, it must be admitted the Universal Church is *innovative*, both in terms of the ecclesiastical world and from the point of view of Carnival itself.

But what about the Catholics, the target of Jenkins's original thesis, that the conservatism of the papacy is already a response to the demands of the South? After all, Brazil is usually held to be the largest Catholic country in the world, where a Catholic culture developed largely independently of the priests. *For the sake of argument*, we could accept that Brazilian Catholics are conservative. But a paradox immediately arises: the conservatism of Brazilian Catholics, insofar as it is real, includes the idea of tolerance and therefore contains an element which impedes this supposed conservatism from becoming absolute by promoting an inter-religious dialogue *avant la lettre*. In other words – and contrary to what is usually presumed – conservatism in this case is *not* a synonym of intolerance. It is *traditional* for Brazilian Catholics to be tolerant. This can be observed in relation to syncretism, the sexual life of priests, the belief in the agency of spirits, acceptance of marriage involving divorcees and even issues which have recently been the object of admonitions from the Vatican, such as the use of contraceptives and even – albeit in an undoubtedly complex fashion – homosexual practices. It could be retorted that these topics fail to touch on people's deepest beliefs or their declarations of faith. But Jenkins himself claims with good reason that the way in which we worship reveals what we believe (*lex orandi, lex credendi*), and the same can be said of practices in general. Whatever the case, it remains patent that what is taken as conservatism needs to be 'deconstructed' – especially if we adopt a viewpoint that values practices.

To return to the theme of this article, there is one key point on which we can fully agree with Jenkins. Accepting for the sake of argument the sociological contents of the notion of in-

culturation, it is undoubtedly a much more widespread process than theologians formulate – even if we choose to recognize this process via the distinction between discourses and practices rather than the question of the unconscious (as does Jenkins); or if we admit that this expansion of inculturation, on the other hand, highlights the fact that it is not necessarily synonymous with the acceptance of religious pluralism. P. Roberto Mosher has pointed out how the inculturation of Pentecostals in Latin America has placed much emphasis on an intensely lived spirituality, as well as the role of women, the importance of one's own natural appearance and so on. However, this is an inculturation that does *not* represent subordination to the dominant culture (which, after all, is generally held to be sexist): instead, it acts as an 'inspiring principle' capable of immersing itself in cultural questions and recreating the culture based on the seeds of the Word (Mosher 1998), a process echoing the ideas of Justin Martyr at the beginning of the Christian era. A kind of *counter*-inculturation. But for this very reason, we can say that the culture operating in this process is *itself* different. Theologians – in part under the sway of anthropology – tend to have a highly territorialized notion of culture. And yet what we consistently find among Christians is a very natural acceptance of religious claims that seemingly have little connection to the 'local' culture. Such as when a Brazilian pastor from the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God declares in a service in Lisbon that Afro-Brazilian entities – now diabolized – are present and active in Portugal too. Apparently we are not only face-to-face with the re-performance of a diabolizing practice that took place during the first centuries A.D. vis-à-vis paganism, but also an 'inculturation' that is much more globalized than its more crystallized forms found in political and theologically correct vocabulary. A very clear example of how Minerva's owl has much to learn from the 'objects' of its research, people who are typically agents of a kind of *wild*

applied anthropology running counter to established know-ledge. Indeed, the latter also provide proof of the fact that – to use a theological vocabulary – the seeds of the Word (the *logos spermatikos*, after all) can be found everywhere rather than being confined to particular cultures. In fact, by accentuating discontinuities, these particular cultures may have always been (again, the supposed *productive anachronism*) more erudite constructions than social categories of unrestricted circulation. In constituting *Others* as such, we cannot suppose that the opposite is true and that *we* are necessarily the others of our others, a trap that continually betrays the ethnocentrism of the champions of multiculturalism. The very division of the world into particular cultures is far from being a universal. Had we taken seriously the actions and achievements of missionaries and their disrespect for these divisions, we would have known this much earlier.

Another factor that complexifies these cultural processes is what we can dub the syndrome of being *more royalist than the royals* (Velho 2005). The book *More Blessed to Give: a Pentecostal mission to Bolivia in anthropological perspective* (Johansson 1992) tells us of a visit to a church among Chimba Indians in Bolivia:

"The pastor, Rosemir Donizetti, is a Brazilian missionary. That explains the austere and 'Swedish' outward form of the service (like it was in the 1950s)." (Johansson 1992: 111).

And the author goes on to explain:

"The encounter between the Brazilian and Swedish Pentecostal Missions in Bolivia illustrates the change which is taking place within the missionary enterprise. In the doctrinaire controversies between Swedish and Brazilian missionaries the latter hold the trump cards. They can assert 'We alone follow the way you once taught us. You are the ones who are changing'." (Johansson 1992: 102)

In other words, within this complex globalized cultural pro-

cess, rather than being a mirror of the local culture, conservatism is often a mirror (sometimes a rear-view mirror) of the relation with the missionaries themselves. Indeed, this process is clearly much more generalized (Velho 1995 and 2005), such as in the case of *localism* examined by Ranger in South Africa. It may be asked to what point the regional division into South and North proposed by Jenkins, although wider than the division into particular cultures, does not itself suffer from the same type of restriction.

V

Whatever the case, Jenkins's work at least highlights the seachanges affecting the context in which missionization takes (or does not take) place, as well as the challenges these pose for analysis. But perhaps this is a timely moment for re-evaluating the very terms in which the question is framed. As we have seen, Jenkins concludes southern Christianity is a conservative force. A conservatism which contrasts with European modernity. Taking a different position, Latour declares that 'we have never been modern.' This suggests we perhaps have to question to what extent European secularism is really happening. Various authors have insisted that Christianity continues in Europe in new forms (Davie 2000). In other words, we have to differentiate between official discourses and officious practices (Latour 1991). We also need to ask whether it is still valid to treat European Islam as an exogenous factor or whether it should be recognized as a (religious) element endogenous to this context; an internal development running counter to secularization in its usual sense and capable of affecting even those who do not count among its adherents. But what interests us here is what Jenkins calls southern Christianity.

This returns us to the symptom of being 'more royalist than the royals.' In contrast to the disparity between the official and the officious found in European modernity, we can ask whe-

ther, paradoxically speaking, those countries traditionally targeted by missionization are not the ones who take the discourse(s) of modernity the most seriously by narrowing the gap between the official and the officious. If so, what appears as conservatism may perhaps very often be no more than a reified modernity; a *cargo cult* modernity, so to speak. Seeing the world in this way – turning common-sense upside-down – requires us to accept the idea that the tendency towards purifications, binary classifications and the classificatory impulse itself is modern rather than conservative (in the sense of non-modern). And if so, western Judeo-Christianity emerges as the tradition *par excellence* enabling this modernity to flourish. A Judeo-Christianity marked by what Nietzsche (who, as it happens, made no distinction between the western and eastern versions of Christianity) considered to be its *artificialism* (Nietzsche 1980), leading for instance to conversion becoming so demanding and absolute. From the critical viewpoint of eastern Christian orthodoxy, this western Judeo-Christianity has accentuated the operation of dichotomy since Augustine – according to some authors, an aspect that can be traced back to the manicheism of Augustine himself (Cracknell 1994) – while seeking to overcome its own construction (Anastasios 1988). In this sense, the South is the home of modernity today – more modern, perhaps, than Latour believes possible anywhere (Velho 2005). The home of a sometimes triumphant modernity, which, for example, hinders the emergence of ecological awareness or any intimate relationship between nature and culture, humans and non-humans, as the basis of an alternative paradigm. An alternative paradigm which in this sense would be conservative. And the missionary work undertaken by Pentecostals seems to be very much part of this triumphant modernity.

At the same time, alongside this modern Christianity *à outrance*, the South is also home to a non-artificial Christianity –

in contrast to the version exclusively considered by Nietzsche. A *paganized* Christianity, non-exclusivist and unanticipated, though amply reflected in the anthropological literature (Hefner 1993), where *adhesion* (as among the ancient pagans) seems more appropriately descriptive than *conversion*. Inculturing theology is to a certain extent left to chase this Christianity by applying a complex hermeneutics to re-readings of the biblical text, including in terms of the relationship with nature and non-humans. This is despite the fact this paganized Christianity is more usually treated by anthropologists as a transformation of indigenous thinking and cosmology, an approach which typically finds support in the native point of view. A revealing example is Chinese Christian glyphomancy, which involves revealing how Chinese characters contain a Christian symbolism as manifestations of the true seed of the Word (Jordan 1993). Or the case of the Tagalog in the Philippines, which leads Vicente Rafael to state that "... conversion ... was predicated on conventions of signification, exchange, and authority distinct from those of the missionaries" (Rafael 1988:84). In all cases, we encounter a paganized Christianity which a modern perspective *stricto sensu* and its focus on discontinuities calls *syncretism*, *bireligiosity*, *double archive*, and so on. But a paganized Christianity that paradoxically forms a pair with *modern* Christianity *stricto sensu*, one feeding off the other (although the dichotomy itself is more a product of the modern perspective, often also represented by the missionaries). Indeed, they feed off each other just like Christianity and paganism in the first centuries. This also has an even closer latter-day equivalent, an interesting example of this influence being the post-colonial tendency to re-interpret African (and Afro-Brazilian) religions as monotheistic, a process analogous to the interpretations of paganism during the first centuries A.D. (Nock 1963 [1933]), especially under the pagan revival promoted by the emperor Julian (331-363).

In fact, the analogy drawn here with the first centuries of the Christian era was also explicitly made at the start of colonization, though contemporary analysts generally take it to be a product of the lack of conceptual tools adequate for dealing with the new situation. However this evaluation may likewise be taken as a product of a strictly modern perspective, itself incapable – unlike this religious culture – of imagining a non-linear time that produces *folds* and *abductive connections* (Velho 2005). These folds create proximities between apparently distant historical moments and allow an anachronism to become productive. But here a crucial point needs to be made: *this is anachronism only from the perspective of linear time* and it is for this reason and no other that whenever reference is made to the *productive anachronism*, I adjectivize it as apparent or supposed. From a non-linear time perspective there is in fact no anachronism involved and such analogies do not necessarily reveal any particular conceptual carelessness.

VI

It is important to note that, even in the West, the allure of the *pure* is opposed by the allure of *connections*. This also applies to the special case of the Gnosis (Velho 1999) which traverses the ages – although we should note its esoteric version has been privileged, a symptom of the fact that it has always been taken as a counter-current in the West (at least until the 1960s). Indeed, this is the same fascination which still feeds the imagination today and makes us more open to various kinds of orientalism, at least at a fictional level – meaning that, for example, we are told on the very first page of the first chapter of *The Da Vinci Code* that the interest of the main character Robert Langdon, Professor of Religious Symbology at Harvard (sic), lies in the "pagan symbolism hidden in the stones of Chartres Cathedral" (Brown 2004:7). The great conflict with purism occupies this entire book, not by chance a bestseller (and perhaps

not just because of the substantive narrative). Here *epistemology* – in the sense of ways of thinking – seems to be the primary attraction. Likewise, the notion of 'hidden' connects it with a wider set of literary works that take abduction and detective stories as a model (Eco and Sebeok 1988). Perhaps we are faced here with a fascination for the most heterogenic connections possible; one that today enables, for instance, at an apparently diverse level and already free of the limits of esotericism, even a growing number of specialists to believe (in contrast to the purists) that "[t]here was no such thing as the Scientific Revolution" (Shapin 1998:1) – a revolution which would supposedly mark a fundamental rupture that denies the "intimate connections between science and religion" (Shapin 1998:195). Although we should bear in mind connections do not signify identifications and purification may be tacitly reintroduced when the risk of a reduction in favour of the strongest is present. At any rate, the question of intimacy and connections is also found closer to anthropology (and again in the religious field) in the issue of the relationship between nature and culture, humans and non-humans, and so forth.

The religiosities of *non-artificial* Christianity (in contrast to Nietzsche's version) may be conceived as non-modern. But it is equally possible to think of them as an *alternative modernity*: an imagining of modernity closer to its practices and in favour of connections, mixtures and continuities that allow room for analogies and the supposed *productive anachronisms*. This favours, therefore, the *production* of compatibilities rather than ruptures (Velho 2005), adhesions instead of conversions. The conviviality displayed between these religiosities and economic development, globalization and complexity seems to point in this direction, as well as to the importance of modernity as a *project*, as Talal Asad insists (Asad 2003a and 2003b). Indeed, the same Asad appears to be describing this kind of alternative modernity when he analyzes the outcome of reforms imple-

mented in Egypt at the turn of the 20th century as "... expressions of different experiences rooted in part in traditions other than those to which the European-inspired reforms belonged, and in part in contradictory European representations of European modernity" (Asad 2003b:217).

Jenkins warns of the risks of widescale conflicts between Christians and Moslems occurring during the 21st century. However, conflicts between *artificial* Christianity (in the strictly modern sense) and *non-artificial* Christianity should also not be underestimated, just as in the 4th century the conflicts between rival Christian groups – especially Arians and non-Arians – matched the conflicts between Christians and pagans. Indeed, these clashes continue to have a present-day relevance, including in terms of their impact on Christianity's relationship with Islam. Not only because the latter faces similar questions, but, above all, because of the different postures in the face of them. Always remembering that in all cases – whether that of compatibilizations (via fusions, convergence or co-existence) or incompatibilizations – this involves *productions*, whose meaning is not given *a priori* but always depends on a network of interactions. At an extreme, even the notion of the Christian God as a being separate from the world is not today immune to re-readings produced via an apparent *productive anachronism* that holds modernity responsible for the naturalization of this image. This casts doubt on any essentialism or consequent claims of incommensurabilities. Fundamentalism sometimes seems to be more in the eyes (and mind) of the beholder than in those whose practices we should observe in addition to discourses.

VII

A degree of mystery still surrounds the success of Pentecostalism. Particularly given the fact that Pentecostal movements do not seem overly sensitive to cultural variations. Various

anthropologists, for example, confess (especially in informal conversations) their surprise over the conversion of *their* natives. We have already mentioned Mosher's *counter-cultural* interpretation (1998). But a number of authors have suggested hypotheses that undoubtedly deserve more extensive verification. Alvarsson (2003a and 20003b) provides a synthesis of some of these ideas and here we can make a selective use of his conclusions. The first point concerns the fact that, socially speaking, Pentecostalism has been from its outset (represented by a single church located in Asuza Street, Los Angeles in 1906) a highly heterogenic movement with a strong black presence, including in its leadership. This is further reflected in its strongly anti-hierarchical and libertarian approach and its emphasis on the *experience* rather than the declaration of faith. An emphasis which in turn helps accentuate the centrality of spiritual and bodily *rapture*, the vivacity of *power* as well as *healing*, in detriment to (or at least in conjunction with) questions such as sin, repentance and redemption, which do not always encounter equivalents in other cultures. Thus conversion to these movements contains from the outset a certain double-bind: although it indeed represents an adhesion to the conqueror's religion, this adhesion is achieved via a popular and peripheral movement, conversion in some cases even being experienced as the freedom to revive threatened aspects of traditional life. A freedom accentuated by the emphasis on personal interpretation which allows (individual and collective) appropriations potentially very different from those of missionaries, despite their co-participation in religious practices, a fact which in turn facilitates communication across ethnic and linguistic barriers. This participation has a levelling effect, one which neutralizes the hierarchy generally present in the relations between natives and colonizers, insofar as the spiritual experience is taken to be uncontrollable either by those involved in it or by missionary authority. In turn, the

ambiguity and polysemy of symbolic language (in contrast to dogmatic language) enables a similar latitude, providing space for idiosyncratic or culturally specific interpretations.

None of this seems far from the observations made by Birgit Meyer in Ghana, but which can be given a more general application. Meyer argues that Pentecostalism, by promoting a discourse and ritual practices that include demons, offers a bridge with tradition which enables problems with modernity and globalization to be thematized (Meyer 1995:64-65). On the other hand, members of societies that practice shamanism or spirit possession regularly discover affinities in the Pentecostal experience that allow chains of meaning to be constructed in a veritable *democratization of shamanism*, previously reserved for specific figures, through the development of a possibility that was always in some sense present. Indeed, Brazil possesses many cases corroborating this line of reasoning, such as that of the shaman who, according to a report from the anthropologist Lux Vidal (personal communication) converted to Pentecostalism – without ever catching sight of a Pentecostal in flesh and blood – via radio waves in a procedure associated with shamanic trance; with the detail that before abandoning his position as shaman, he prepared his successor. Or the case of the Palikur Indians where "… the ways through which God is experienced, primarily through dreams and trances, allude directly to the universe of the shaman" (Capiberibe 2004:24). Although this does not exclude the possibility of Pentecostalism also implanting itself among groups that do not practice shamanism; indeed, this is consistent with the idea propounded by several authors that shamanism (also) tends to flourish extraordinarily "… when people are caught by the gears of the world system" (Carneiro da Cunha 1998: 8). Thus, Pentecostalism could both follow shamanism and serve as an alternative response to similar questions.

Using the case of the Tagalog in the Philippines, Rafael, in turn, has already called attention to a possible source for conversion's success – one also applicable, perhaps, to some examples of contemporary Pentecostal conversions: namely, that conversion may act as a way of taming the fear produced by invisible spirits, substituting this fear for the hope of encountering the Christian God – this in the Kingdom of Heaven, finally made visible (Rafael 1988: 191/2). Whatever the case, the key point for our purposes in this line of reasoning is once more the removal of the ideological and discursive veil that presumes a necessarily absolute rupture between Christianity and the 'pagan religions.' Even in the case of its enthusiastic Pentecostal form. And even if in extreme cases this interconnection takes place through the *diabolization* of the *pagan* pantheon, insofar as this remains a paradoxical form of recognition (Meyer 1994). And none of this fails to be just as surprising as the Pentecostal success itself. A success, in fact, that needs to be relativized: all these characteristics are only capable of unleashing a process of conversion (with or without quote marks) in the face of concrete circumstances such as the current wave of ethnicization. An ethnicization whose valorization of native traditions (reconstructed, obviously, in accordance with a pattern established by the process of globalization) contributes powerfully towards the valorization too of the substantively or epistemologically *paganized* Christianities. This is the case, for example, of the importance of spiritual healing for identity politics in the 'Fourth World' of the Navajo, as shown by Thomas J. Csordas: prominent alongside traditional Navajo healing and Native American church healing are the healing of independent Pentecostal pastors and charismatic catholic prayer groups with their "communal integration of Navajo and Roman Catholic practices;" these are matched by "a number of independent congregations and network of congregations that appear to be proto-denominations, all headed by indigenous

Navajo pastors" and that "constitute an emergent and distinctly Navajo form of Christianity" (Csordas 2002:151).

VIII

In many Pentecostal groups the notion of *freedom* is fundamental. Indeed, so much so, it displaces the notion of *salvation*, despite the theological, historical and institutional importance of the latter. This seems to be symptomatic of the forces shaping contemporary religiosity. Apparently, the greatest success is achieved by religious groups that focus on 'freeing' people from their concrete, physical and emotional problems, sometimes materialized in the figure of demons and analogous entities. This in turn is often associated with personal projects for transforming living conditions that do not fit neatly under the rubric of *conservativism*, but which can actually have a transformative effect on their surroundings, as Clara Mafra has shown in relation to the activities of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Portugal (Mafra 2002). Likewise, it is frequently claimed that among the poorer sections of the Brazilian population, belonging to a Pentecostal group comprises the only form of protection against drug trafficker networks, particularly as a way of building an alternative life for one's children. The Pentecostal groups thereby simultaneously create bonds with these poorer sectors, meaning these groups are prevented from being consistently conservative. This know-how is itself exported; indeed, today Brazilian missionaries can be found in many parts of the world, especially among poor and migrant populations in need of networks of protection.

In fact, Brazil is an interesting case of a country that by never having been a colonial power (and therefore escaping the stigmas attached to this condition) has been developing into a middle-size *post*-colonial power, so to speak (Velho 2000). Particularly in Latin America, in the Caribbean and in the vacuum left by Brazil's past colonizers, the Portuguese. This situ-

ation at state level also applies at the missionary level, in general in inverse order: for instance in Africa, Timor and among the Portuguese themselves wherever they are found (not just in Portugal, but elsewhere in Europe, Africa and the United States). In the same way, Brazil has begun to occupy spaces such as those left in Latin America by the United States, which since the end of the cold war and the neutralization of Cuba has demonstrated (including among academics) its inability to prioritize the continent. This occupation has included incursions into the United States themselves where Brazilians have belatedly discovered their identity as Latins and 'Hispanics.' In fact, it is notable that missionaries are not limited to Christians but also include adepts of Afro-Brazilian religions and others who have even developed a variety of rites based on the consumption of a hallucinogenic drink of indigenous origin: *ayahuasca*. Although numerically insignificant, the latter are highly symptomatic of globalization, having spread (in this instance among the young middle classes rather than the poor) all the way from Holland (Groisman 2000) to Japan, denying in practice the opposition between World Religions and religions of tradition, while transforming Portuguese into an esoteric language whose meaning is typically unknown to practitioners of the rites. The Afro-Brazilian martial art known as *capoeira* has also been spreading worldwide, whether retaining or losing its mystical contents in the process. Brazil also plays a part in the *democratization of apparitions*, especially of the Virgin Mary (where Medjugorje is the point of reference), manifested today across the world and enthusiastically welcomed by the charismatic Catholic movement, though they also serve as a model for displays of popular religiosity on the fringes of the Church.

All these kinds of diffusion invariably challenge the state apparatus of the recipient countries in terms of legislation. They even challenge the very definition of what comprises a religion, such as the controversy over *sects* in France, a label which in-

cludes the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (Giumbelli 2002). One of the most provocative examples of globalization produced by Brazil has been the case of the new-age 'missionary' Paulo Coelho, whose work is read and discussed in more than a hundred countries, even in Eastern Europe and Islamic nations; a peculiar and revealing 'ecumenical' phenomenon which has been recently studied with special emphasis on Argentina (Semán 2003). In many of these instances, in an analogous fashion to the actual *invention* of religions studied by Roland Robertson (1992) and Peter Beyer (1994), Christian missionization serves as a point of comparison in the constitution of these new breeds of missionaries, whether as a paradigm or as a contrast (Velho in press).

Pondered in more general terms, all of this undoubtedly contradicts those who contend globalization flows outwards oneway from the central powers. Just as it challenges culturalist notions that every social group has a corresponding culture and religion, as well as essentializing conceptions that presume a defining nucleus to each religion. It also questions generalizations such as the supposed conservatism of Christianity in the Third World. It is highly likely, therefore, that study of these phenomena may have a key role to play in advancing our knowledge of the contemporary world, after neutralizing the tendencies towards secularist fundamentalism that have extolled academic centres as the kernel of development. The denial and narcissism involved in these tendencies impede Minerva's owl from ever taking flight. Recently the Moroccan sociologist Reda Benkirane proposed that analysis of the controversy surrounding the use of the Islamic veil in France may shed light on what French *universalism* – as well as, by contrast, Anglo-Saxon *differentialism* – are really about. Both of these are associated as models with their respective traditions, while "transnational horizons widen their sphere of influence well beyond the anthropological zones which once saw their emergence"

(Benkirane 2004:50). Indeed, Benkirane argues that this kind of analysis, along with the recognition given to other traditions, could also facilitate the emergence of hybrids, such as a 'gallic Islam,' once again challenging our more essentializing conceptions. Perhaps this suggestion is a step forward from (or to the side of) what Talal Asad has in mind when he asks "What kind of conditions can be developed in secular Europe – and beyond – in which *everyone* may live as a minority among minorities" within a complex space and time (Asad 2003a:180). Even in Brazil, the 'more royalist than the royals' elites would certainly be sensitive to any signs of such a process of recognition emerging from the very source of the models which serve them as (reified) points of reference.

Within this interplay of complex spaces and times, the very notion of mission has acquired such scope and diversity that it is a moot point whether it may in fact implode, a paradoxical victim of the very sensation of contemporaneity mentioned at the start of this article. Again echoing eastern tendencies (Anastasios 1994), today ecumenical theological circles seem to display a symptomatic bias in substituting the notion of mission for that of *witness* (*martyria*), once more raising the question of non-linear times and *folds*. But whether or not it is imploding, we are certainly still capable – avoiding a binary logic – of recognizing the presence of the notion of mission. Had we taken it seriously much earlier – especially in terms of its dynamic and implications – we might have avoided some of the errors that have hindered a more rigorous appreciation of the history and actuality of the issues pertaining to religion extending beyond a certain benign indulgence in relation to *the Others*.