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Might there Be an Inextricable Relationship Between Economics and Religion in the Way Countries like in Brazil Were Offered a Path to Modernization and Development?

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Abstract: Contributions to the study of economic development and modernization in the second half of the twentieth century included little on the role of religion. This paper begins with a statement by the campus director of an American university development project in Brazil making what, at the time, was a shocking statement: that no nation could develop economically, lest their people become Protestant. Six decades later Brazil has a modern economy and is well on its way to becoming a Protestant nation. In addition, Protestants, especially Pentecostals and other evangelicals, have an influence in electoral politics supporting conservative candidates and their policies far beyond their numbers. The paper asks the question, was the statement by the campus director of the development program in Brazil simply his conjecture based on his personal beliefs, or might there be a relationship between the economics and politics of modernity that includes Protestantism as a functionally interdependent part?

Keywords: Brazil, Economic development, Modernization, Religion, Evangelical protestantism.

Part I

Contributions to the study of economic development and modernization in the second half of the twentieth century included little

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on the role of religion. This paper begins with a statement by the campus director of an American university development project in Brazil making what, at the time, was a shocking statement: that no nation could develop economically, lest their people become Protestant. Six decades later Brazil has a modern economy and is well on its way to becoming a Protestant nation. In addition, Protestants, especially Pentecostals and other evangelicals, have an influence in electoral politics supporting conservative candidates and their policies far beyond their numbers.

A Christmas party in Lafayette, Indiana

My first encounter with the interrelationship between Protestantism, economics and politics was at a Christmas party in 1960. I had recently returned after a summer in Brazil where I was collaborating with a cooperative program between Purdue University, where I was employed, and a rural university to bring the 'land-grant' philosophy of teaching, research and extension to Brazil.

In *Viçosa*, a municipality in the state of *Minas Gerais* where the host Brazilian university was located, I was surprised to find that the project leaders, and many of the technical specialists in the Purdue party were devoutly religious Protestants who openly expressed to their Roman Catholic Brazilian colleagues and the people in the community their beliefs about both agricultural development and faith.

At the party a conversation with some of those involved in the Brazil project that started with economic development surprisingly turned to matters of faith. I found this strange because students of development, at that time, rarely ventured into matters of religion. As we were drawn deeper into the discussion, our host, the campus director of the program stated, with apparent total conviction, that "no country could really develop unless its people became Protestant."

Brazil, at the time, was the largest Roman Catholic country in the world. It also was the home of a variety of African derived traditions that had been syncretized with elements of Amerindian practices and

'folk' or popular Catholicism. Kardecism and other smaller groups, each of them with roughly as many followers as there were Protestants in Brazil at the time. Was the Purdue University director of a development project in Brazil simply expressing his personal convictions? Or was he saying something about economic development of which I was unaware? Could there be an intrinsic functional interrelationship between the economic and political institutions of modernity, as they were being brought to Brazil and other what at the time were called under-developed nations that yet had not been examined by scholars? Certainly, there had been critiques of a modernity and development based on the model of the US, but I am unaware of it including concerns about Protestantism replacing already existing religious belief systems. I was familiar with Max Weber's (1958) writings about the relationship between Protestantism and the rise of Capitalism. That book established the importance of Reformation thought, particularly Calvinism, for understanding the development of modern economic behavior. It was not, however, about the establishment of Protestantism as an integral part of the economic development of underdeveloped nations. Here, in the second half of the twentieth century, I was being told that in order for a nation to develop, which is to say to adopt the economic and perhaps other social forms that characterized the most 'advanced' industrialized, market-oriented, modern nations the peoples of the so-called developing countries would have to become Protestant.

I understood that economists and political scientists accepted the evolutionary vision implicit in Enlightenment and the Nineteenth-Century view of progress that postulated societies across the globe inevitably would *modernize* and *develop* in almost linear fashion to eventually approximate the cultural and institutional forms of the nations of Europe and North America[1]. This was the underlying premise of the development theory accepted by the US government – and international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the World Trade Organization (WTO) –

and implemented in foreign policy by successive U.S. administrations. Rostow (1960) invoked the concept of aerodynamics as it applied to five successive stages in the flight of airplanes, and applied this imagery to the developmental process. Most mainstream economists to this day assume, at least implicitly, that developing economies would proceed in stages in a progressive direction (Sachs 2005). Political scientists added that with modernization and economic development, electoral democracies would emerge worldwide. These studies rarely included discussions of religion; nor the premise that Protestantism was as inevitable on the global scene as market capitalism and electoral democracy; but here was the director of a USAID supported project in Brazil stating this clearly and without equivocation.

More than sixty years have passed since that evening in West Lafayette. Since then, Brazil, including its agricultural sector, has developed economically to become one of the world's largest economies. Furthermore, after several decades of dictatorial rule, since 1985 it has been an electoral democracy. In marked contrast with the situation when I first went to Brazil, nearly a third of its people are now Protestant and overwhelmingly evangelicals. There are almost as many Protestants in Brazil today as there were people in 1960. As Freston (2001:11) noted several years ago, Brazil "has the largest evangelical community, in absolute terms in the Third World (with the possible exception of China) and the second largest in the world behind the United States." Like their North American counterparts, they are actively involved and eminently influential in electoral politics. In 2018 their campaigning and votes contributed, disproportionately to their numbers, to electing Jair Bolsonaro president of Brazil. They voted for him again in 2022 when he lost in an exceptionally close election and continue to support him as he maneuvers to run in 2026.

Were the questionable words of the campus director of the Purdue-Rural University of *Minas Gerais* project a statement of personal conviction, a premonition, a prediction, or a prophecy? Or was he simply stating something that, although never made explicit in aca-

demic discussions, or by the political leaders who made and implemented American foreign policy based on it, that it was an inextricable part of the economic development strategies they were advancing? Could there be an unexamined functional interdependence between more than just the economic and political institutions of modernity, but one that helps to explain the spread and surprising growth of Protestantism, not just in Brazil but also across the globe? (Anderson 2013; Jenkins 2002).

Protestantism in Brazil

Portugal settled Brazil as a Roman Catholic colony and so it remained with but transitory exceptions through independence and the founding of the Republic in 1889; the constitution of 1891 established the separation of church and state and the free exercise of religious worship that continues, in theory at least, to be national policy today.

Protestants entered the country in small numbers first from Great Britain following their aiding the flight of the Portuguese royal family to Rio de Janeiro at the beginning of the nineteenth century to escape Napoleon's advancing armies. Two years after independence in 1822, the emperor arranged for German Lutherans to settle in the contested southern borderlands with Spain. Pastors, brought from Europe, ministered to the recently settled Protestant subjects. In 1835 the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States sent its first missionary to *Rio de Janeiro*, followed in 1850 by others from the Southern Baptist Convention. White Protestant slave owning southern Americans, fearing the loss of their way of life after the Civil War, relocated to Brazil and petitioned their homeland for pastors.

Pentecostalism, the first and largest of the evangelical groups in Brazil today, arrived differently. Unaffiliated missionaries came from the United States to disseminate a revitalized form of Protestantism[2]

In 1906 William Joseph Seymour, an itinerant African American pastor brought the revised vision of Christianity to a church in Los

Angeles where he was invited to officiate (Anderson 2004: Chapter 2; Dochuk 2019:115-16; Chesnut 1997:25). Seymour's teaching derived from an event in the Book of Acts "in which the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles in tongues of fire, causing them to preach in languages previously unknown to them" – a practice known as glossolalia. Seymour claimed that the Holy Spirit would possess those who accepted the faith during spiritual baptism (Chesnut 1997:176). Furthermore, "as the prophet Joel had foretold, the gifts of healing, ecstasy, tongues, and prophecy, enjoyed by the Primitive Church would be restored to the people of God immediately before the Last Days" (Armstrong 2000:179). "All held the conviction that the second coming of Christ was imminent and that a worldwide revival would usher it in" '(Anderson 2013:16). Given this, it became incumbent on believers to "go into the world," as one member of the evangelical caucus in the Brazilian congress stated, "and preach the Gospel so that all people know the truth" (Duarte 2020:18); and that they should "'occupy' the earth and spread the gospel before the Lord's return" (Dochuk 2019:531). Seymour further preached that Christians should read and love what was written in the bible and accept it literally (Westmeier 2000:20).

In 1911 two Swedish immigrants, Gunnar Vingren and Daniel Berg departed for Brazil from South Bend, Indiana, to fulfill the prophecy they had received when they were baptized in the tradition in Chicago. Landing in the city of *Belém* at the mouth of the Amazon River, they attempted to work in harmony with a local Baptist pastor. When their first convert spoke in tongues, after being baptized in the Holy Spirit following an act of faith healing, a chain of events began "that culminated in a church schism and the birth of what was to become the Western Hemisphere's largest Pentecostal denomination, the *Assembléia de Deus* (the Assembly of God)" (Chesnut 1997:27).

A year before Vingren and Berg went to Belém, Luis Francescon, who had emigrated from Italy to the United States where he converted to Pentecostalism, arrived in São Paulo to fulfill his own prophecy. Invited to preach at a Presbyterian Church in a neigh-

borhood of working-class Italian immigrants, he, too, was forced to leave when his converts began to speak in tongues. Francescon established his own church that he called the *Congregação Christã* (the Christian Congregation).

The population of Brazil at the time Pentecostalism arrived was about 17 million and located mostly in the interior of the nation. Converts of the missionaries carried the new faith from the coastal provincial capitals of Pará and São Paulo inland. From these inauspicious beginnings, Pentecostalism spread slowly. By 1936, the *Assembléia de Deus* (AD) and the *Congregação Christã* (CC), had more converts than the other Protestant groups, although this represented but a tiny fragment of Brazilian religious believers.

In the 1950s, as Brazil was beginning to develop its own industries and to urbanize, a second wave of Pentecostal missionary activity came to the country, once again from the United States. It represented an expansion of the movement as mainline Protestant churches and Roman Catholic believers took up aspects of the original Pentecostal message. The term charismatic is used to refer to this more general Christian movement. Meanwhile, modifications that aligned the movement with business and political interests in the United States (Poloma 1982:11-18) correlated with another missionary wave bringing what is known as neo-Pentecostalism to Brazil.

In 1953, Harold Williams, a film actor turned missionary, who was a disciple of Aimee Semple McPherson, brought the Four-Square Gospel to Brazil. McPherson, who had integrated Hollywood showmanship into evangelistic campaigns in both Canada and the United States, had pioneered the use of radio and owned her own station. With Raymond Boatright, another American actor turned preacher belting out gospel hymns to rock rhythms on the electric guitar, Williams launched a National Evangelization Crusade in São Paulo using the quintessentially North American tent revival. Opposition by local Pentecostal leaders brought the crusade to a premature end, but Williams founded the *Igreja Cruzada* (Crusade Church), which was

reorganized the following year as the *Igreja do Evangelho Quadrangular* (The Evangelical Four-Square Church or IEQ), but this time, under primarily Brazilian leadership. While acquiring few converts until the 1970s, the IEQ provided a modern sheen to the Pentecostal message for Brazilians. Collective faith healing sessions, of both mind and body, that formed the core of Seymour and McPherson's ministries in the United States and were at the heart of Williams and Boatright's crusade, were the primary recruiting technique of the IEQ (Chesnut 1997:35).

Brazil's industrialization began in the 1960s when the federal government orchestrated the creation of, and investment in modern manufacturing, primarily to replace the nation's dependence on imported goods. Previously, the economy had been based on agriculture and mining, which left Brazil as an exporter of raw materials and an importer of consumer goods.[3] The years following, with greater emphasis after the military coup of 1964, are referred to as the period of development and modernization. Relying on the orientation provided by Washington, the military government, collaborating with North America's fight against communism, provided incentives to bring together capital from foreign and domestic sources to build factories that were located primarily within the triangle formed by the cities of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Belo Horizonte. When the federal government simultaneously reduced support for agriculture, workers from the interior flocked to these cities.

This migration, in which rural inhabitants formerly marginal to the market economy were adapting to and learning a new set of expectations and behaviors, led to a proliferation of *favelas* (slums) growing up at the margins of most Brazilian cities.[4] This was followed by a considerable increase in the national population and a shift from Brazil being a rural nation to one that was overwhelmingly urban.

In 1940, for example, the national population was approximately forty-one million with almost 87 percent living in the countryside. As large numbers flocked into the cities the national population grew

from 52 to more than 70 million between 1950 and 1960. By 1990 almost 80 percent of the nation's 150 million people resided in metropolitan centers (Santos 1993).

As the country industrialized, Pentecostals and other evangelicals directed their proselytizing to the places where there were increasing numbers of people who were having difficulty adjusting. There they entered a vibrant – and at times bitter – competition, not only with Roman Catholicism, but also with the syncretized Afro-Brazilian and Spiritist groups.

Unlike the other religions, the Pentecostals became active politically. In 1955, for example, Manoel de Mello, a charismatic lay preacher from Pernambuco, left the *Assembléia de Deus* (AD) church to join the National Evangelization Crusade in São Paulo. De Mello rose quickly to national prominence by performing miraculous healings. His great popularity quickly transcended the crusade, leading him to establish his own church, *Brasil para Cristo* (BPC) (Read 1965:144-145). On the model of the crusade, he and the BPC took the message to rented stadiums, theaters, auditoriums and gymnasiums (Freston 1993:87). Mello started a radio program on which he sang hymns set to the rhythms of the Northeast that proved to be very popular with the many migrants from that region who were to relocate in São Paulo in the years to follow.

Pentecostals, as Donald Curry (1967) observed in his study of a community in the eastern highlands of Minas Gerais, and Chesnut (1997) tells us for Belém, became active participants in Brazilian electoral politics soon after they formed their own communities. Through the period of the military dictatorship (1964 to 1985) they voted as blocs, under the direction of their pastor, but mostly in local elections. Consistent with the patron-client exchanges that permeated Brazilian politics, the pastor offered the votes of his parishioners for material favors from candidates for office. It was only after Brazil returned to electoral democracy in 1985 that Protestants began to run for offices themselves and elect their own at the national and local levels.

By 1970 the number of evangelicals in Brazil had risen to 5.2 percent of the national population. A decade later it was up to 6.6 percent.

In 1977, Edir Macedo, a Brazilian lottery employee founded the quintessential example of a Brazilian Pentecostal church. It also became one of Brazil's first multinational corporations. Macedo moved to Rio de Janeiro from the interior of the state where he had participated in Umbanda, a syncretism of the Afro-Brazilian traditions and Kardecism.[5] After converting to Protestantism, he and some relatives started the *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (The Universal Church of the Reign of God, or IURD).

Incorporating the beliefs shared by other Pentecostal churches, Macedo moved in two different directions. First, he declared the Afro-Brazilians, whose beliefs he had learned before switching to Pentecostalism, to be his sworn enemies (Macedo 1990). He taught his followers that they should participate in the exorcisms performed on those who came to the IURD's healing sessions. Before turning to those seeking aid, the IURD pastor leading the services would "drive the devils" out of those that had come for help.[6] The devils referred to the deities that were brought from the places where their ancestors had been captured and who they continued to venerate. Once the demons were driven out, those who felt that Jesus had helped them, as the supernatural(s) of their previous faith had not, converted to a new faith.

Macedo turned to radio and television to expand his following, using funds donated by his followers. Unlike other Protestant groups, Macedo established a centralized hierarchical administration into which all collections were funneled. Only he and his closest associates – who served as a board of directors – had access to and control over IURDs funds, as they had over the properties purchased in the church's name (Mariano 2004). In addition, this group selected parishioners to serve as missionaries to carry the message to other cities and states with some being sent overseas to countries – including the

United States – where they established branches of the IURD. To reinforce the control of their centralized administration, local IURD pastors were rotated and brought back to Rio periodically so the leadership could better supervise their activities**.** Macedo's managerial group selected the candidates that were to run for public office under the egis of the IURD.

In 1986 the church's faithful elected their first federal deputy. In the next election cycle in 1990 four federal deputies represented the IURD with the number climbing to six in 1994, fourteen in 1998 and twenty-two in 2002 when they elected their first federal senator – who then ran for mayor of the city of Rio de Janeiro in 2004. This was in addition to electing dozens of members of state assemblies and members of city councils across the country (Mariano 2004).

The electoral success of the Workers Party (the *Partido dos Trabalhadores,* or PT) caused great consternation for the IURD and other evangelical groups who saw them as the "devil incarnate." They told their followers that Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the PT candidate elected President in 2002, was going to close all evangelical churches and pass laws prejudicial to them. This helped evangelical leaders to mobilize their parishioners to go to the polls and elect their own candidates to oppose the PT in congress and state assemblies.

This opposition intensified in the first and second decades of the present century as the PT strove to help the traditionally marginalized to become more active citizens and participants in the national society. In addition to programs such as the *bolsa família* (family stipend) that helped millions of Brazilians out of poverty, the PT supported the liberalization of the concept of human rights to enable the LGBTQ community to be open about their sexual and gender preferences. The evangelicals, in reaction, viewed this as an assault on what for them were 'traditional family values.' They took aim at the PT and the LGBTQ community while also doubling down on their opposition to abortion. Unable to elect a president – or state governors – on their own, they sought to broker the votes of their growing numbers with

candidates running against the PT. In the meantime, they continued to increase their representation in congress, state legislatures and municipal councils.

Evangelicals also expanded their proselytizing to the growing prison population. Brazilian jails always have been grossly overcrowded. This was exacerbated with the arrests and convictions of members of drug cartels against whom in many areas, the state has been engaged in what approaches being a civil war.[7] Their success resulted in large numbers of the drug gang members and their leaders converting to evangelical Protestantism.

When Brazil went into an economic downturn and rates of un- and underemployment increased in the second half of the 2010s, evangelicals were able to gain an advantage over their religious competitors. As Robbins (2004:136) explains more generally, evangelical "asceticism renders members trustworthy and reliable workers who employers often seek out. By hiring [them] to fill lightly supervised positions in the postfordist service economy, employers can, in effect, outsource the task of work discipline to the churches." Robbins continues that within the church the prosperity gospel provides a way for members to improve their lot. It holds "that health and wealth are the believer's due and that illness and poverty are caused by sin and demonic influence." Their mostly poor congregants, many of whom are newcomers to the capitalist market system, are told that God wants them to be rich and successful, but first they must accept Jesus, be baptized, and seek his assistance by tithing and contributing donations as much as possible until Jesus reciprocates. Should a believer not obtain the hoped for results, the pastor will tell them to try harder, meaning to increase the amount of money they give the church.

As we entered the third decade of the twenty first century Protestants constituted an estimated thirty percent of the Brazilian population; and their numbers continue to grow. Evangelicals also have broadened their offensive against other religions. Gangs of their young, "the 'soldiers of Jesus,' and groups of drug traffickers who

adopt the religion…" openly attack and close down Afro-Brazilian and Spiritist religious centers threatening their priesthood with their lives should they reopen (Cuadros 2020). According to IBGE, "by 2040 the number of evangelical faithful will outnumber Roman Catholics" (Fleischer 2020:5).

In retrospect it appears that the seemingly audacious claim of the head of the campus Purdue-Rural University of Minas Gerias project is well on its way to becoming reality. Brazil has developed economically, modernized, and is well on its way to becoming a Protestant nation. Was this just a lucky guess, the expression of a deep-seated personal belief being hopefully projected, or might there be something about the modernity and development the United States government and the institutions of the United Nations it dominated were offering to Brazil and developing nations that included Protestantism as an inextricable part? Or could it be, in the words Philip Jenkins (2002:2) attributes to unidentified "radical writers" who "have seen Christianity" – and specifically Protestantism – as "an ideological arm of Western imperialism."

Part II
A functionalist perspetive on the religion and political economy of modernity

Anthropologists have long analyzed the functional relationships between the various institutions that form the culture of a society. The approach first was applied to the cultures of the small-scale societies. Looking out from the role of religion, and focusing on North America, the source of Brazilian Protestantism, I turn to this next.

The religious beliefs and the practices that oriented and gave meaning to the economics and politics of the United States were never included in discussions of what was being offered to developing nations. Instead, as we have seen, the Protestant religions of North America arrived separately. Moreover, they usually are studied on their own by specialists who do not necessarily concern themselves

with issues of economic development and the political organization of society. I turn next to an analysis of the functional interrelatedness of the institutions of the United States, starting with its religion as I believe it will help to explain how Protestantism, market capitalism and electoral politics grew so rapidly first in the United States and then in Brazil and other parts of the world the United States helped to develop and modernize.

Modern religion

First, however, a few words are necessary about the Protestantism that emerged in Europe and was carried, first to North America where it became intertwined with a political economy also of European provenience, and then to Brazil and other parts of the world with the push to modernize them. Protestantism emerged as a reaction to a form of Christianity that had dominated life on the continent since shortly after the fall of the Roman Empire. In contrast with this Roman Catholic tradition in which the creator God was actively involved in all aspects of his creation including the lives of humans, the new Christianity placed the deity and his cast of supernatural helpers in a separate domain of reality that was to be worshipped individually in private. An opposition was recognized between the domain of humans to be understood by science, acted on rationally and by human agency and that of the supernatural. A consequence of this was that those who studied religion, the discipline whose subject was the world of the supernatural and how humans related to it, scarcely followed what those in the sciences were doing. The reverse also was true. This, I suggest, may explain why advocates of modernization and development rarely acknowledge a place for religion in their policy proposals.

If we look at modernity as a cultural whole, however, it will enable us to explore the interrelationship between its institutional parts. In this way, religion, as one of its institutional parts, can be seen in a different light. Or as Jenkins (2002:141) put it, we can reverse "our Enlightenment-derived assumption that religion should be segregated

into a separate sphere of life, distinct from everyday reality." Religion may be viewed and examined as part of a larger interrelated whole, that of a distinctive cultural complex.[8]

To do this I turn to the social history of the United States drawing on scholars who specialize in religion and examine the interrelationship between its religion and economic arrangements. These studies, as we shall see, clearly demonstrate, in the words of historian Kevin Kruse (2015:8) that "Christianity and capitalism are inextricably intertwined."[9]

Chris Lehmann (2015) sets the historical and developmental analysis in motion by exploring the transformation that occurred when the North American colonies were brought into the orbit of Great Britain's sprawling transatlantic commercial market system.[10] The communal vision of the early Puritan settlers was soon rejected. The First Great Awakening, in which ordinary people reacted to the rules set out by the early elites, according to Lehmann, set this in motion. He draws, for example, on the words of the Reverend George Whitefield who he sees not only as a leader of, but more importantly, as exemplifying the spirit of the awakening. In place of the earlier imagery that "excoriated the communal pride and vanity associated with the accumulation of personal wealth" the new view was

> "a radically individualist idea of salvation, in which its divine authors were patient, far-seeking investors, and anxious sinners were errant credit risks who might, in a moment of miraculous accord with the true financial order of things, be restored to the 'blessed stock' that had been humanity's windfall at the moment of creation".

This return to Calvin's imagery of individual salvation set Americans on a path in which their religious beliefs oriented them to strive to compete as individuals in the market to accumulate material wealth. Entrepreneurship and work, concepts of importance in economics, provided the primary way for them to order their lives. Members of the many sects that emerged as settlers spread out across

the continent came to share the beliefs that were at the core of the Awakening. They were committed to the then radical belief -- shared by all of today's evangelical fundamentalists -- of the imminent end of the world when Christ would return as prophesized in the Book of Revelation. The Old Testament told how God had created the earth and all its creatures culminating with Homo sapiens. Since humans were special and created in God's image, this was interpreted to mean that all else was put there for the use of these special beings (White Jr. 1967). In the Old Testament vision, the universe, the earth and all on it began with the creation; there was no end point; seemingly it would go on forever. Christianity's sacred texts offered a closing chapter but did not provide an end date. Fundamentalists, Jewish and Christian, debated with archeologists the date as to when the world began. When it would end, when Christ would return, was specified nowhere.

Most, referred to as postmillennialists, contended that for the reign of Christ to begin, it would be necessary for humans to first improve society as the savior would "take a dim view of disarrayed social conditions and rampant injustice" (Lehmann 2015:65). This interpretation gave rise to the development of America's charitable institutions.

Others, known as premillennialists, held that the great moment of cosmic reckoning foretold in Revelation would be swift and would occur suddenly (Dochuk 2019:97). Puny human efforts would be irrelevant. In either case, believers had to spread the word, tell others of all faiths that the end of the world was at hand and that they had best prepare for it by converting and being baptized in the only true faith.

Some, such as the Reverend Jonathan Edwards, saw in the First Awakening evidence that "God was finally bringing the millennium to pass" (Anderson 2015:62). Anderson sees in the later sermons of Jonathan Mayhew the joining of the vision of a vast redeemed nation with a divinely authored influx of commerce (ibid.). American Protestantism then in its view of redemption provided the belief system

that oriented individuals in the performance of productive and commercial activities that, in turn, led to the economic growth and material prosperity that would characterize the nation. These religious beliefs, with their emphasis on competition with entrepreneurship and work as keys to personal salvation, provided meaning to the lives of Americans. The expansion of capitalist commerce and the emphasis on economic growth, led some to see a growing secularism as fewer people were frequenting houses of worship. Nevertheless, religious imagery continued to provide meaning for those engaged in economic matters.

Open confrontations with science, especially as academic knowledge gained credence in public circles, resulted in religious fundamentalist's strategically retreating from the public stage, notably following just after the Scopes trial in the mid 1920s. Conservative evangelicals emerged from this period of self-imposed exile with a firmer sense of missionary purpose and a determination to revive what they took to be the moral conscience of a nation that they felt was losing its way. They weren't anti-modern in that they continued to actively participate in the capitalist market system striving to achieve its goals of material accumulation. Nor did they completely eschew the desire for participation in the public square (Anderson 2015:224).

The ravages of the Great Depression and the economic hardships it ushered in for so many, especially those at the lower end of the socio-economic stratification system, contributed to their staying on the sidelines. Some viewed these events as signs that the end-times had arrived. Others meanwhile sought to regain their position in the public square.

In the 1940s and 1950s in southern California, for example, the Reverend James W. Fifield Jr. and others who shared his thinking[11] organized a socio-religions movement that was to re-conceptualize Christianity and move it away from the Social Gospel that had emphasized public service to accentuate, once again, the salvation of the individual. This "Christian libertarianism" that saw "Christianity and

capitalism as ever more inextricably intertwined" provided the ideological framework that was to serve the interests of American business leaders seeking to reverse the New Deal policies of President Franklin D. Roosevelt that they found to be restrictive of their unfettered entrepreneurial aspirations. Fifield and the others reached out to these business leaders "assuring them that their worldly success was a sign of God's blessing." He contacted thousands of pastors across the nation who in turn preached his reinterpreted version of the gospel – that taught that the Bible "needed to be sifted and interpreted" – to their parishioners (Kruse 2015:3-15). This brought into being the coalition in which evangelical Protestant ministers exhorted their parishioners to go to the polls and vote for candidates that advocated the free-market principles championed by business while pro-business candidates promised to support the social issues valued by the revitalized believers.[12]

Success was almost immediate. The coalition of religious fundamentalists and conservative businessmen helped convince military hero General Dwight D. Eisenhower to run and then helped to elect him president. This enabled the religious leaders to pressure the politicians to publicly affirm the relationship between the Protestant religion and the economic success or the nation.

In the years immediately following World War II the United States was well on its way to returning to its origins as a nation who's economic and Protestant religious beliefs and daily practices were intimately intertwined. As Lehmann (2015:xv-xvi) writes, Americans "are, and always have been, crass worshippers of Mammon, eager to seize on any available spiritual alibi to make the mythologies of American success appear, not merely venerable, but sacred and foreordained." This was not, it should be emphasized, solely a response to the emergence of the Soviet Union as a world power after the war. What the Cold War made possible was the return of American Christianity to the place it had held in public life prior to the economic crash of the Great Depression. The Soviet Union provided an enemy the United States could mobilize against. It could reach out to the peoples in

the many nations that had recently gained their independence, for example, to assist them in modernizing economically in a way that included freedom to worship. The latter was in opposition to the negative attitude to all religion of its godless Marxist foe. In the hands of economists who advised political leaders, the programs offered to the new or developing nations were seemingly secular. No explicit mention was made of the specific religious beliefs that underpinned the American brand of capitalism being offered to them and their functional interrelatedness as part of a larger cultural system. As sociologist D. M. Lindsay (2007:208) writes in the concluding chapter to his book on *Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite*, "Evangelicals have spent the last thirty years building and strengthening an array of organizations focused on transforming the cultural mainstream." Their "leaders have gained access to powerful social institutions – the U.S. military, large corporations, and many others – and because their religious identities are so important to them, they have brought faith to bear on their leadership, changing the very institutions they lead in the process."

This acknowledgment of the role of religion as central to America's material success blossomed at the end of the twentieth and first quarter of the twenty-first centuries as a new generation of charismatic evangelicals revitalized their belief system in a way that dovetailed with the takeover of the Republican Party by Donald Trump and his MAGA supporters. As Taylor (2024) tells it, this network of Christian leaders who refer to themselves as the *New Apostolic Reformation* (NAR) has developed a revised theology built around politics and spiritual warfare that they have disseminated through a network of local church leaders who turn out their followers in support of Trump and the Republican candidates he endorses. "Engaged in a cosmic spiritual war against the forces of darkness [read liberals, Democrats and anyone not them], they believe God has mandated them to use spiritual violence [that they do not object to becoming material] to defeat Satan and build the kingdom of God on earth" (ibid:3). From the Unit-

ed States they again are spreading their message that now includes a belief in world domination across the globe. This third wave of messianic Christianity has come to Brazil and been adopted by the evangelicals there who support Jair Bolsonaro and his right-wing agenda. Brazil's evangelicals, going beyond the IURD's focus on Afro-Spiritist religions, now maintain that everyone who opposes Bolsonaro and his extreme political vision are instruments of the devil who they must defeat in God's name. Whether they were involved in or provided a theological justification for the reported coup attempt and planned assassination of Lula and his vice-president after the 2022 election, is presently unknown but consistent with the NAR's contention, taken from the book of Matthew (11:12), that "the violent take it by force'" (Taylor 2024:11; see also Stewart 2025).

Modernization, Protestantism and Purdue University

In 1954 President Dwight Eisenhower appointed Earl Butz Under Secretary of Agriculture. Butz, at the time of this appointment, was chair of the Department of Agricultural Economics at Purdue University. His immediate superior in Washington was Ezra Taft Benson who simultaneously was a member of the Quorum of 12 Apostles of the Church of Latter-Day Saints, the leadership group of the Mormon church of which he later became president. Public Law 480, the Food for Peace Program was instituted during their tenure. The Purdue University-Rural University of *Minas Gerais* collaborative project was revived after being dormant for several years.

Butz returned to Purdue in 1957 to become Dean of the School of Agriculture. Almost all the Americans that participated in the Brazil program, including my host at the Christmas Party in 1960, were associated with the Purdue University Department of Agricultural Economics. Like his superior in Washington who was reprimanded for supporting the then recently established John Birch Society, a radically conservative organization, word in West Lafayette was that at least some of the people in the School of Agriculture were members

of this organization that had a large footprint on campus and in town. The Society publicly advocated both the economic philosophy that was to develop into globalized neo-liberalism along with evangelical Protestantism. Its motto, for example, as entered in the Congressional Record, is: "Less government, more responsibility, and with God's help, a better world." The head of Purdue's project in Brazil prior to taking the position had replaced Butz as Chair of the Department of Agricultural Economics when Butz went to Washington.

Had I gone to church services when I was in Lafayette in the company of my Purdue colleagues associated with the Brazil project, I might have heard some of the pastors preach sermons emphasizing the Christian libertarian message Reverend Fifield and his associates were disseminating. Then I might not have been surprised when I heard the comments made by the campus director of the Brazil project. Like colleagues doing research elsewhere in the developing world, I too had not examined my own culture sufficiently to understand the functional interrelationship between American Protestantism and our capitalist market economy. Had I heard it from pulpits, I might not have been surprised by the comment by the campus director of Purdue's project in Brazil. I would have realized that what was being offered to Brazil and other nations in the name of modernization and economic development was a package of which evangelical Protestantism was a functionally interrelated and inextricable part.

Summary and conclusion

This essay started with a comment made by the head of a joint Brazilian American development project sixty years ago who emphatically contended that no nation, referring specifically to Brazil, could develop (by which he meant modernize and create a new means of producing and distributing goods and services) unless they became Protestant. In retrospect it appears he was right. Brazil now has one of the largest economies on the planet and is well along the way to becoming a Protestant nation. When economists and other social

scientists at the time advocated an agenda that the United States government and international agencies implemented, they made no mention of a specific new religion being part of what they were offering. A reason for this, I proposed, is that in the worldview of what I call the culture of modernity, each institutional domain is assigned to specialists who pursue their investigations independent of the understanding and knowledge being accumulated by students in the other domains. Hence the economists, and the governmental officials they influenced, treated religion as a private matter that was studied by its own specialists and unrelated to what they were doing. I have suggested that the functionalist approach of anthropology, in which the interrelatedness of the component parts of a culture are examined, when applied to what I call the culture of modernity, shows that the Protestant religion, in perhaps its more extreme forms, is inextricably intertwined with market capitalism, which is the name used for the economy of modernity. If perhaps we had thought at the time of modernity as a distinctive cultural form, as Marshall Sahlins (2023) has recently done, and had applied a functionalist perspective to its analysis, the project director's statement would not have been a surprise. But it might have led the leaders of developing nations and their religious constituents to think twice about accepting what the mostly well-intentioned economists and their governments were offering.

Notes:

[1] Today these beliefs are seen as an intrinsic part of the colonialist project of the nations of Europe and the United States.

[2] Its message was "that believers could bring the forces of heaven to bear on the material world to effect miraculous change ..." (Blumhofer, cited in Dochuk 2019:115). Moreover, the "personal 'born again' conversion experience that became the hallmark of evangelicalism stressed individual decision and was therefore in synch with the individualism that characterized modernity..." (Anderson 2013:15).

[3] It should be noted that primarily the elite – the coffee planters and those in the urban centers that were the ports from where the export items were shipped and those imported arrived – participated in this market based economic transactions. The agricultural workers, who at first were slaves and then sharecroppers and poorly paid field laborers, and the residents of urban favelas or shantytowns, were marginal to what is referred to as the national economy.

[4] Local governments unfortunately did not provide the infrastructure needed by the increasing number of people to reside there.

[5] Kardecism is a philosophic and religious belief system based on the writings of a French intellectual who wrote under the name of Allan Kardec that was carried to Brazil in the second half of the nineteenth century.

[6] In Brazil it is not uncommon for people suffering physical, mental or spiritual pain and anguish to seek help from other religions should they feel that the deities of their own group had not adequately helped ("cured") them (Greenfield 2016).

[7] The US war on drugs made a little examined impact on the expansion of the drug cartels into Brazil.

[8] In contrast with Max Weber (1958) I am not seeking a causal relationship between religion (Protestantism) and capitalism. Instead, I am examining the interrelationship between institutions that are parts of a larger cultural whole. In this way we can see how when the parts of the whole, its economics and politics, where foisted on developing nations, Protestant religion came along as part of the package.

[9] Individual members of what I am calling this culture of modernity with its capitalist market economy participate in it by competing with each other to gain greater access to the material goods and services that it defines as value (Mazzucato 2018).

[10] This was at the time that activist thinker John Locke (1632-1704) and others were busily fashioning the modern economy (Greenfield 2014).

[11] Including dairy farmer Demos Shakarian who is credited by some as one of the founders of what is known as neo-Pentecostalism (Poloma 1982:13).

[12] While there is no evidence I am aware of showing that Williams and/or Boatright, who brought Four Square Pentecostalism to Brazil in the early 1950s, had participated in Fifield's movement, or actually accepted its economic philosophy and effort to implement it in collaboration with conservative businessmen through the ballot box, it would have been difficult for them and others active in Christianity in southern California at the time not to be exposed to it. They did urge their Brazilian converts to become active in electoral politics and also to support conservative candidates.

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Poderia Haver uma Relação Inextricável entre Economia e Religião na Forma como Países como o Brasil Receberam um Caminho para a Modernização e o Desenvolvimento?

Resumo: Contribuições para o estudo do desenvolvimento econômico e modernização na segunda metade do século XX incluíram pouco sobre o papel da religião. Este artigo começa com uma declaração do diretor do campus de um projeto de desenvolvimento universitário americano no Brasil, fazendo o que, na época, era uma declaração chocante: que nenhuma nação poderia se desenvolver economicamente, a menos que seu povo se tornasse protestante. Seis décadas depois, o Brasil tem uma economia moderna e está a caminho de se tornar uma nação protestante. Além disso, os protestantes, especialmente os pentecostais e outros evangélicos, têm uma influência na política eleitoral apoiando candidatos conservadores e suas políticas muito além de seus números. O artigo faz a pergunta: a declaração do diretor do campus do programa de desenvolvimento no Brasil foi sim-

plesmente sua conjectura baseada em suas crenças pessoais, ou pode haver uma relação entre a economia e a política da modernidade que inclui o protestantismo como uma parte funcionalmente interdependente?

Palavras-chave: Brasil, Desenvolvimento econômico, Modernização, Religião, Evangélico, Protestantismo

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