

**THE EMERGENCE OF THE MODERN NEO-PENTECOSTAL PRINCE FROM THE LAG OF POLITICAL PARTIES AS A FORM OF COLLECTIVE ORGANIZATION**

***O SURGIMENTO DO MODERNO PRÍNCIPE NEOPENTECOSTAL A PARTIR DA DEFASAGEM DOS PARTIDOS POLÍTICOS COMO FORMA DE ORGANIZAÇÃO COLETIVA***

***EL SURGIMIENTO DEL MODERNO PRÍNCIPE NEO-PENTECOSTAL A PARTIR DEL DESFAJE DE LOS PARTIDOS POLÍTICOS COMO FORMA DE ORGANIZACIÓN COLECTIVA***

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**ABSTRACT:** The 20th century's successful experiences of combining capitalism and democracy allowed Gramsci's diagnosis to be confirmed from the rereading of Machiavelli: political parties would be capable of creating a particular cultural and societal organization. However, in the Brazilian case, such organizations appear with greater vigor in public life after democratic opening, situated in a global environment of the diminished performance of these associations. Beholding the loss of this space of action, the present work addresses the action of neo-pentecostalism in the reconfiguration of the modern prince, achieving a certain collective will and re-updating the institutional political scenario.

**KEYWORDS:** Political parties. Collective will. Modern prince. Neo-pentecostalism.

**RESUMO:** *As experiências exitosas no século XX de combinação entre capitalismo e democracia permitia confirmar o diagnóstico de Gramsci a partir da releitura de Maquiavel: os partidos políticos seriam capazes de realizar uma determinada organização cultural e societária. No entanto, no caso brasileiro, tais organizações aparecem com maior vigor na vida pública pós abertura democrática, situado em um ambiente global de uma diminuta atuação destas associações. Tendo em vista a perda desse espaço de atuação, o presente trabalho aborda a ação do neopentecostalismo na reconfiguração do moderno príncipe, realizando uma determinada vontade coletiva e reatualizando o cenário político institucional.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Partidos políticos. Vontade coletiva. Moderno príncipe. Neopentecostalismo.*

**RESUMEN:** *Las experiencias exitosas en el siglo XX de mezcla entre capitalismo y democracia permitió confirmar el diagnóstico de Gramsci a partir de la relectura de Maquiavelo: los partidos políticos serían capaces de hacer una determinada organización cultural y societaria. Sin embargo, en la situación brasileña, esas organizaciones aparecen con mayor fuerza en la vida pública tras la apertura democrática, localizado en un ambiente global de una diminuta actuación de esas asociaciones. Teniendo en vista la pérdida de ese espacio*

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*de actuación, este trabajo aborda la acción del neo-pentecostalismo en la reconfiguración del moderno príncipe, haciendo una determinada voluntad colectiva y reactualizando el escenario político institucional.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Partidos políticos. Voluntad colectiva. Moderno príncipe. Neo-pentecostalismo.*

## **Introduction**

In recent years it has been possible to observe in the Brazilian political scene the profusion of actors from the evangelical religion. Sometimes having greater collective cohesion than traditional organizations, they have been responsible for reorienting social policies and influencing public opinion on social issues that, due to the delicacy of their subject matter, would require a broad national debate.

Its political action, however, is not a mere historical coincidence. On the contrary, it is centered in a logical dimension that identifies the dilemmas of Brazilian society and acts precisely in its mediation and resolution.

## **Gramsci and Political Party in Brazil**

It was historically understood that Machiavelli dedicated his work to Lorenzo de Medici, addressing a certain set of principles that the prince would inexorably have to have for good governance. After centuries have passed, the question arises: to whom was the Italian author really dedicating his work? Was there a need for a family composed of heirs to the throne to be aware of such political issues?

Gramsci (2007) points out that possibly Machiavelli's goal was not to promote a doctrinal formation to the prince so that he could carry out the necessary formation of the Italian state. What was placed there was his message aimed at the people, insofar as it is possible to trace a set of constitutive aspects of political life that such an actor would be the main agent.

The understanding of the work in its context is of greater relevance than the identification of its target audience. In a period, therefore, of great political instability in the Italian scenario, the prince must have a set of values for the resolution of such conflicts and the consolidation of the nation-state. Machiavelli had a close knowledge of these conflicts, not only because he was a historian and philosopher, but also because of his work as a diplomat and advisor to the Florentine Republic. However, he is a man of his time, and it is necessary to

understand him from this basic premise. In this sense, Gramsci highlights the particularities of such a period:

1) the internal struggles of the Florentine republic and the particular structure of the state that could not free itself from the communal-municipal residues, that is, from a blocking form of feudalism; 2) the struggles between the Italian states for a balance within the Italian sphere, which was hindered by the existence of the Papacy and of the other feudal, municipalist residues of the citadine and non-territorial state form; 3) of the struggles of the more or less solidary Italian states for a European balance, that is, of the contradictions between the needs of an internal Italian balance and the demands of the European states in struggle for hegemony (GRAMSCI, 2007, p. 29, our translation).

Based on these details of the objectives of his work, the prince would have the purpose of performing the organizing function of society and of the national culture. It was up to him, therefore, to act in a certain area in which homogenization was sought, containing in itself some basic, though disperse, mechanisms, such as language, customs, and values.

In a period of political agitations of another order, Gramsci (2007) resumes Machiavelli aiming to understand the reasons for the failure of the revolution in Italy and seeks to re-signify a Marxist understanding about politics. Since the works of Marx, the understanding of democratic politics by socialists, as a way of operating politics within the State, was only possible having in mind the maintenance of power by the dominant class, the bourgeoisie. From this conception, it was understood that any qualitative change in the situation of the proletariat would be through the revolution that aimed at communism, an assumption that excluded representative democracy, resulting in the negation of politics itself. By retaking Machiavelli, therefore, party politics for Gramsci becomes positive, to the extent that the political party performs the functions that were previously destined to the prince, regarding its capacity of cultural and societal organization.

Given such dimensions of this process, it is undeniable that the political party has great importance for the realization of politics. As an outstanding relevance, party competition was able to unite two antagonistic poles in the 20th century: capitalism and democracy.

Many thinkers believed that both spheres were incompatible with each other. This was a common observation between two authors who were distinct in their orientations, Stuart Mill and Marx, for example. According to Offe (1984), the former asserted that in the occurrence of "mass democratic politics," the values dear to liberalism were being threatened, namely, freedom and independence. Marx, in his way, analyzed the "French democratic constitution of

1848 as a political form that would exacerbate social contradictions" (OFFE, 1984, p. 356), undermining the sustaining values of bourgeois society.

Contrary to what Mill and Marx expected, the capitalist system and representative democracy continued to exist simultaneously. This was only possible because party competition, in conjunction with the Keynesian welfare state economic model, made it possible to arrange a model of regime that the intellectual traditions of the 19th century viewed as irreconcilable. However, as the work in question is considered a trend study of the 20th century, Offe warns that this model is gradually being called into question:

It is possible to argue (...) that the form of political participation of the masses based on and channeled through the party system (i.e., according to the principles of territorial representation, party competition, and parliamentary representation) has already exhausted much of its usefulness in reconciling capitalism and mass politics. This seems to be because the political form of the party is increasingly being outmoded and replaced by other practices and processes of political participation and representation (OFFE, 1986, p. 367, our translation).

It is necessary to raise a consideration from this problematic in the Brazilian case. For Offe, the form of conciliation between capitalism and democracy was situated between the 1930s and the 1970s, the period in which aspects of its crisis begin to emerge. However, this period in Brazil is marked by the occurrence of two distinct dictatorial regimes interspersed by a vague democratic experience, making the same historical event impossible.

Another dimension of the same problem is the attempt of the movement undertaken since the 1988 Federal Constitution. Through a process of "social catching up", Brazil could identify which were the historically advantageous experiences that could be adopted in a democratic environment. However, the period in question is situated in a new global configuration of governance, highlighting measures of less state action (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016; KERSTENETZKY, 2012).

In this sense, to the extent that there was an unfeasibility of the performance of political parties as organizers of culture given the absence of a propitious environment - except for the crucial role played by the Workers' Party (PT) in the democratic opening process - there is the emergence of a new social actor that claims such means: the Neo-Pentecostalism.

### **The political phenomenon of Pentecostalism**

Representing a great force in the religious field as of the 1970s in Brazil, the Neo-Pentecostal religion embraces, in its majority, individuals from the lower strata of the social

stratum. In this sense, its main directive focus is centered on a reversal of values in the conception of Protestantism: at the moment of conversion of its soul, the individual does not seek primarily eternal faith; on the contrary, he is directed to obtain earthly gains. In other words, it is what has become commonly known as Prosperity Theology (BURNATELLI; LAHUERTA, 2014; FRESTON, 1993).

In addition to the search for prosperity, the Neo-Pentecostal churches are centered on the commitment to healing and deliverance. Based on the criticisms established by this religious segment, Mariz lists a set of characterizations of these churches:

- To be immediate, to look for pragmatic solutions;
- They offer magical solutions by appealing to popular superstition; - Practicing charlatanism (making or promising false cures or impossible cures. Ordering, for example, that the faithful break their glasses); - Appeal to emotionalism;
- Lacking theology, not using the Bible sufficiently, adopting a superficial Christianity;
- They do not emphasize an ethical and moral proposal (MARIZ, 1995, p. 42, our translation).

For the purposes of this paper, it is important to emphasize that there is a clear distinction between traditional Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostals: their proposed relationship between religion and politics. While the former aim at distancing themselves from politics, the latter favor their approximation, adopting a clientelistic perspective in their guidelines (MARIZ, 1995).

From this point on, Gramsci should be rescued to understand this problematic. It was alerted previously that political parties in Brazil emerged after the democratic opening in an unstable environment regarding the resolution of their organizational roles. This process allows the origin of a new form of organization, acting in the spaces that were proper of these political associations. This possibility is well highlighted by the Italian political scientist:

The modern prince, the myth-prince cannot be a real person, a concrete individual, he can only be an organism; a complex element of society in which the concretization of a collective will recognized and affirmed mainly in action has already begun (GRAMSCI, 2007, p. 16, our translation).

And further on:

The modern Prince must not and cannot fail to be the herald and organizer of an intellectual and moral reform, which means, moreover, creating the ground for a new development of the national-popular collective will towards the realization of a higher and total form of modern civilization (GRAMSCI, 2007, p. 18, our translation).

The Neo-Pentecostal movement, to the extent that it assumes the role of the modern Prince, addresses a set of variables that are related to a certain collective will. First, there is a marked process of individualization - identified in the figure of the entrepreneurial individual (BURNATELLI; LAHUERTA, 2014) - in the sense that their material gains are oriented to a collective process of offerings and tithes. From this, the recurrent realities witnessed of prosperity - a certain ritualization of the process from penury to opulence, from failure to abundance - ground and legitimize both mechanisms. This economic capital will even be one of the filters for the selection of the religious who launch themselves into politics.

Secondly, although in the formation of Neo-Pentecostalism there is a great symbiosis with religions of African matrix, there is in its internal practices a massive production of enemies to be fought, in which its main target will be the Afro-Brazilian religions (ORO, 2006).

Finally, the last variable is the synthesis of this whole process. The confluence of more and more political actors of this slant disputing elections in the most diverse spheres incorporates all these dimensions in the defense of this group. Instead of adhering to an eminently public demand, these segments are destined to represent their biases of a mostly conservative nature.

As pointed out earlier, the Pentecostal movement was understood by a certain distance between religion and politics. Now in which both Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism present themselves as the new organizer of a certain collective will, some aspects are constitutive of this change of slant. Freston lists three of them:

Aspects of the political system (such as proportional electoral system and weak parties), the political and economic conjuncture of the New Republic (of political re-democratization in the economic context of the "lost decade"), and the internal evolution of AD<sup>2</sup> (overlapping of a minimal structuring of the Conventions with sectarian "totalitarianism") facilitated the electoral mobilization of the faithful and party-political insertion (FRESTON, 1993, p. 181, our translation).

The political movement of the evangelical churches - including here both Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal segments - seek a marked differentiation from the aspects that surround traditional political organizations. In the formulation of their electoral narratives and programs, their commitment is not shaped by aiming at a broad adhesion of voters; such segments, on the contrary, seek identification with the adherents of Protestantism.

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<sup>2</sup> Assembly of God.

This fact is related to the exercise of voting by the citizen. There is a whole academic literature, especially the works produced from the rational choice theory, which endow the voter's action of choosing a candidate with rationalism (DOWNS, 1999). In the case in question, the instruments arranged by political leaders coming from evangelical churches produce a more effective effect in this enterprise: the response expected by them by individuals is centered in a movement of identification, to the extent that their electoral base is mostly evangelical.

Moreover, while the parties seek their possible candidates from prominent positions in civil society, there is a tendency - especially in the Assembly of God - for candidates to affiliate with an internal environment. In this sense, individuals are found and chosen inside the churches, except for businessmen.

Freston still presents a variety of alternation of party legions and ideological trends that the same evangelical politician experienced during his political career. According to the author himself, this happens because of an accentuation of an "anti-partisanship due to the sectarian structure" (FRESTON, 1993, p. 207). Thus, it is possible to make a consideration.

The "political adventure" of the evangelical churches was presented as a lack of commitment to the existing political mechanisms of mediation (MARIZ, 1995). Added to this fact, there is a progressive discrediting of the ability of political parties to apprehend and realize a certain collective will. Now, the anti-partisanship addressed by Freston is nothing more than the natural element of the operating logic of these groups, given that their proposals are not aimed at society, and the parties are mere formalities to enter the electoral dispute institutionally.

Since they refer to a Protestant electorate, such politicians accomplish the counterpoint of what Mitchels identified in political parties: as their professionalization occurs, there is a need of de-radicalization of their party bases, thus accomplishing a loss of identification to the parties' affiliates (MITCHELS, 1911). By going in this direction, the relationship undertaken with their electoral base is deprived of bureaucratic and institutional mediations, producing greater cohesion in the formatting of the collective will and enabling a greater finish of cultural hegemony (GRAMSCI, 2007).

In the hegemony dispute, evangelical politicians establish in their narratives a set of moral and cultural defenses that produce a direct effect on their electorate (FRESTON, 1993; MARIZ, 1995). Such acts of defense (affront to Afro-Brazilian religions and anti-communist stance) are not merely defensive: it is the modern prince in action, seeking to homogenize its cultural and value perspectives.

Moreover, the project in question performs a biblical re-reading of its stances. The evangelical is no longer understood as detached from politics, being of its scope to fulfill its "manifest political destiny" (FREESTON, 1993, p. 213, our translation).

### **Final considerations**

The recent development of the evangelical religions allows us to demonstrate a change of attitude in a recent period. It is no coincidence that there is an increasing number of politicians coming from this religious segment.

Their political strategy, however, is not merely something simplistic in the political game. With the tendency of the decline of the role of political parties in a global context, and the instability of the political scene after the democratic opening, the religious segments - Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism - tend to play a more effective role in this political environment.

Having as his main constituency the Protestant base, the politician in question brings with him a certain set of mechanisms distinct from those arranged by political parties. His differentiation is centered on a more energetic narrative placed on social, moralistic, and cultural issues, without the due concern for having moderate stances to garner a larger number of votes.

In this sense, while the modern Prince is not necessarily the political party - due to its current unfeasibility -, the evangelical segments take upon themselves this space of action in the perspective of realizing a collective will already in action, agglutinating with themselves political forces that were until then dispersed. From the above it can be concluded that, unlike any other social force, such segments were more perspicacious in the construction of a political strategy in which a cultural and political identity is established.

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