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Stigmatisation and Ritual: An Analysis of the Stigmatisation of Pentecostalism in Chile

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Abstract: Pentecostalism has been one of the most successful religious movements in Chile due to both its historical growth and its ascendancy in different spheres of society. Nevertheless, from its origins to the present day, it has also been the most stigmatised religious movement in the country. Studies have explained this phenomenon by referring to variables of social class or religious rivalry. However, they have forgotten a factor that is key to this problem and to Pentecostalism: its ritual dimension. The aim of this article is to analyse the relationship between the stigmatisation of the movement and its unusual ritual life. It is concluded from the analysis of documentary sources that the principal contexts in which Pentecostalism is stigmatised are those that feature the staging of ritual, and that the stigmatisation mainly attacks and disparages the most distinctive ritual practices of the movement.

Keywords: Pentecostalism; stigmatisation; ritual

1. Introduction

Over the course of the 20th century, no other religious movement grew more quickly than Pentecostalism, and in recent decades, it has become the most dynamic wing of Christianity. Its magnitude is such that its emergence and development have permanently altered global Christianity (Anderson [2004] 2007, p. 325). It is now present in almost every country in the world, while the largest centre of Pentecostal Christianity continues to be Latin America, where the movement has expanded exponentially. Such is its importance in this region that some authors refer to Pentecostalism as an authentically Latin American movement (Casanova 2004, p. 79), and a measure of its influence is that other relatively successful Christian movements have shown a tendency to “Pentecostalise” in order to survive in recent decades (Bastian 2006a; Gooren 2010; Maduro 2009; Linhardt 2016).

In this context, Chilean Pentecostalism has proved to be one of the most interesting case studies around the world (Lagos 1982; Ortiz 2009), due to its special characteristics. It was in Chile that the first Pentecostal church in Latin America (1909) was established, following an internal schism in the Methodist Protestant Church and precipitated by a “spiritual revival” of a global nature (Cleary and Sepúlveda 1997). Furthermore, from its beginnings this was an autonomous, native, and popular movement, which mainly took root in deprived social strata, in contrast with the development of the great majority of Protestant churches in the region in the 19th century (D’Espinay [1968] 2009). Moreover, as a result of its growing success at a national level, combined with the eminently missionary nature of its work, the movement in Chile became one of the principal driving forces for the spread of Pentecostalism in the Andean region (Rivière 2007, p. 4). But what has most attracted the attention of

researchers is the sustained rate of growth—one of the most significant rates worldwide—shown by the movement throughout the 20th century (Corvalán 2009, p. 94; Linhardt 2012). In addition, in recent decades, its presence has increased in different spheres of society, and it has become an increasingly relevant social player (Cleary and Sepúlveda 1997; Talavera and Beyer 1991; Fediakova 2002a, 2002b, 2007; Calderón 2008).

However, its relative success has not prevented Pentecostals from continuing to be one of the groups that meet with most discrimination and stigmatisation in Chile today (Mansilla 2007a, p. 58). This is an undeniable fact, for which there has been clear evidence since the origins of the movement. With varying intensity and frequency, Pentecostalism has historically been one of the favorite targets of criticism from traditional Protestantism, the leaders of the Catholic Church, social scientists, and, more generally, Chilean society as a whole.

This has aroused the attention of the social sciences, and research conducted basically offers two broad hypotheses by way of explanation. On the one hand, it is maintained that the stigmatisation of Pentecostalism is due, above all, to a historical sociocultural factor, namely that the majority of its followers have belonged to groups that have been socially excluded in the course of Chile's history (Mansilla 2007a, 2007b). On the other hand, from a more general perspective, it has been posited that the symbolic violence deployed against Pentecostalism forms part of the power strategies used by members of other confessions in their struggle not to lose their monopoly on the symbolic capital invested in religion, which is steadily being taken from them by Pentecostalism (Bastian 1990, 2006a, 2006b, 2008).

While aware of the importance and the reliability of these explanations, in this article we approach this problem by focusing on an aspect, which, although it has been studied little, is of vital importance for Pentecostalism: its ritual dimension (Linhardt 2011). We maintain that it is impossible to fully understand the stigmatisation long suffered by Pentecostalism without considering its relationship with the particular way in which Pentecostal religiosity is expressed through ritual. Furthermore, we will propose a hypothesis which provides an alternative, based on an empirically informed interpretation, to the existing literature that seeks to understand the origin of this stigmatisation.

2. Materials and Methods

This research applies a qualitative interpretative approach based on the analysis of historical documentary sources. To be specific, two print media sources were used. First, analysis was made of the first 75 issues of *Revista Fuego de Pentecostés*—the official journal of the nascent Pentecostal evangelical movement—which appeared between 1928 and 1934. This journal published general information about the movement, theological reflections and personal testimonies, among other items. The emphasis of the analysis is on the testimonies that related situations of hostility toward Pentecostalism and on the *Historia del avivamiento Pentecostal* (History of the Pentecostal Revival) written by the pastor W.C. Hoover and published in instalments in the journal. Second, the information in the newspaper *El Mercurio de Valparaíso* was analyzed, specifically the reports published in 1909 that covered the revival of the Pentecostal movement in Valparaíso.

In historical terms, the observation of events is limited to the period between 1909 and 1925, the first decade of existence of Pentecostalism and the period to which the accounts of the aforementioned sources refer. It was during this time that the movement aroused considerable hostility in society, clearly reflected in the press, with the result that, today, a large amount of material about the stigmatisation of the movement originates from this particular period.

3. Pentecostalism and Its Stigmatisation

Pentecostalism is a Christian religious movement that emphasises “the working of the gifts of the Spirit, both on phenomenological and theological grounds” (Anderson [2004] 2007, p. 27). The theological basis of the movement is a cosmivision in which the Holy Spirit can invade absolutely everything. But its hallmark is to prioritise the development of a direct and personal experience

with the Spirit, with the aim of making the immanence of God tangible. In order to achieve this manifestation of the Spirit, effervescent liturgies are conducted (worship sessions, vigils, days of prayer, etc.), in which most of the community actively participates. In this context, highly spontaneous ritual practices take place, marked by the predominance of orality, bodily movements, and emotion (Poewe 1989; Mossière 2007), and these even acquire ecstatic connotations at times. Among the most characteristic ritual practices, we find speaking in tongues (glossolalia), healing by the laying on of hands (thaumaturgy), and exorcisms; however, testimonies, visions, prophecies, music, dancing, sacred songs, and public preaching are also seen as spiritual gifts (Cartledge 1998; Anderson 1999; Garma 2000a, 2000b; Guerrero 2000; Mary 2001; Mena 2003, 2009; Llera 2004, 2005; Lynn 2006; Campos 2008; Lucena 2008; Andrade 2008; Barrios 2009; Fancello 2009; Guerra 2009; Plaideau 2010).

The hallmark of Pentecostalism, both in Chile and globally, is the radical importance of its ritual aspects (Robbins 2009). In other words, it is the special ritual practices which have made Pentecostalism an unusual and a particularly striking movement. Specifically, Chilean Pentecostalism is a paradigmatic case study, due principally to its significant success. Since its origins, it has shown sustained growth and one of the highest rates of adherence in the region. For many decades now, it has been the second largest religious group in Chile behind Catholicism and followed at a considerable distance by other religious movements, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons (Corvalán 2009). Furthermore, Pentecostalism has gradually gained a higher degree of visibility and participation in different social spheres, such as education, the media, social welfare, and politics (Cleary and Sepúlveda 1997; Talavera and Beyer 1991; Fediakova 2002a, 2002b, 2007; Calderón 2008).

Paradoxically, the relative success of the movement in religious and social terms has not prevented a phenomenon that has accompanied it since its origins: stigmatisation. In fact, historically, Pentecostalism has been stigmatised more than any other popular religious group in Chile. Although the settings, players, and vestments have changed, evidence of this stigmatisation may be observed throughout the history of the movement, and, on many occasions, there has been a truly dramatic edge to the stigmatisation, mainly in the earliest years of the movement, as we will proceed to show in detail in this article.

If the observer steps back and gains a greater perspective of the development of Pentecostalism, it will become clear that, historically, the movement has been the target of attacks and criticism from a variety of groups in Chilean society (Teenekes 1985; Martin 1990). From the very first days of the revival, the leaders of Protestant Methodism were hostile toward the innovative spiritual manifestations of Pentecostalism and were quick to discredit Pentecostals as a religious group. Later, as the movement steadily gained more converts among Catholics, the traditional Catholic Church was quick to attack it, thereby contributing to its loss of public legitimacy. Moreover, although Pentecostalism increasingly acquired an identity as a popular social movement, society in general, steeped in a Catholic tradition, has greatly encouraged discrimination toward it. Clear evidence of this can be found in the nicknames, ridicule, and negative stories about Pentecostalism which feed the collective imagination of the Chilean people. Finally, the academic world also played its part, since Pentecostalism was largely forgotten about by 20th century historiographers, and the first social studies that took an interest in learning about the movement, completed in the 1960s, were quick to classify it as a mere "sect", using the word in a clearly pejorative sense. In summary, the disadvantaged position of the movement in the national arena cannot be refuted.

The important question here is: Why, historically, has Pentecostalism in particular been the most stigmatised religious movement in Chile? According to a first theory put forward, the discrimination and stigmatisation suffered by Pentecostalism is due to the fact that most adherents have belonged, and continue to belong, to the lowest social strata, comprised of groups that are excluded from Chilean society (Mansilla 2005, 2007a, 2007b).

A second theory is also worthy of mention. Although it does not specifically explain the origin of the stigmatisation of Chilean Pentecostalism, it has offered a hypothesis for understanding the hostility toward the movement in Mexico in particular and Latin America in general. Furthermore, it synthesises

a theoretical approach supported by many researchers in the region toward understanding the situation of Pentecostalism. Wholly based on the theory of fields of Bourdieu [1971] (2006) and Bastian (1990, 2006a, 2006b, 2008), this theory suggests that the opposition historically encountered by Pentecostalism among the population is due to the effect the movement had, when it emerged, of reconfiguring the religious arena.

Both of the aforementioned proposals point to factors that are key to understanding the problem of the stigmatisation of Pentecostalism, and in this respect their contributions are undeniable. However, they fail to resolve certain issues which are worthy of analysis.

On the one hand, Mansilla's theory draws attention to a fact that cannot be denied: by and large, the poor have embraced Pentecostalism. Nevertheless, there are other popular religious manifestations that have mainly given refuge to disadvantaged social groups and which have not received the same stigmatising treatment, or at least, not with the same intensity. On the other hand, if what we might call the social variable ultimately triggered this situation, it begs the question why the Pentecostal movement has been discriminated against and stigmatised by members of the same social class.

For its part, Bastian's theory offers an explanatory outline that is too generic, and the theory is weak when seeking to explain why this religious movement is stigmatised more than others. Two unexplained conditions lack a satisfactory response. When arguing that the hostility of the Catholic Church is due to the fact that Pentecostalism was seen as a clear religious competitor, no answer is provided as to why equally violent action was not taken against other religious movements. The counter argument could of course be that Pentecostalism was its favourite target because it proved to be the most successful competitor in the religious field; yet, at the outset, it was a marginal movement, and years passed before it established itself as a relevant religious player. Moreover, in view of the fact that Pentecostalism has steadily increased its presence in different spheres of society and gained much greater recognition, why has this social recognition not prevented it from being stigmatised?

We consider that both theories reproduce a common supposition in many studies on Pentecostalism. Preoccupied with revealing the diverse relationships that Pentecostalism weaves with various ambits of social life (politics, socio-economics, etc.), relationships that are constituent elements of the movement, the studies often appear to forget a primary essential fact: that Pentecostalism is fundamentally a religious movement (Míguez 1998; Semán 1998; Bergunder 2009), and it is on this plane that we can find insightful explanations about the phenomenon of stigmatisation.

Goffman understood stigma as a "profoundly discrediting attribute" which established a clear difference between the stigmatised and the stigmatiser (Goffman [1963] 2008, p. 15). However, the North American sociologist added that the most relevant aspect of stigma was not its value as a mere attribute, but its relational nature. In other words, neither the person stigmatised nor the stigma considered in isolation is of sole importance, since the fundamental element is the social process involved in the stigmatisation.

... stigma involves not so much a set of individuals who can be separated into two piles, the stigmatised and the normal, as a pervasive two-role social process in which every individual participates in both roles, at least in some connections and in some phases of life. The normal and the stigmatised are not persons but rather perspectives. These are generated in social situations during mixed contacts by virtue of the unrealised norms that are likely to play upon the encounter. (Goffman [1963] 2008, pp. 171–72).

The first thing we would retrieve from this definition is the idea of conceiving stigmatisation as a social distinction between stigmatiser/stigmatised, where, while on one side there is an outpouring of favourable expectations ("normal"), on the other there falls the weight of social discredit ("abnormal"). So, in order to analyse stigmatisation, it is necessary to focus particularly on what is referred to and distinguished from by the stigmatisation.

It is from here that the second aspect of Goffman's proposal is deduced, which is particularly relevant to knowing how to approach the analysis of stigmatisation. The unique feature of the author's

sociological proposal is not only conceiving stigma as a social process, but, above all, emphasising that these phenomena tend to originate and recur in settings in which interactions take place, that is to say, social situations in which at least two persons are physically present, and where the co-presentiality becomes the main focus of attention and communication (Goffman [1983] 1991, p. 173). Hence the author's interest in the "mixed contacts", generated when stigmatisers and stigmatised meet and communicate, for it is in these situations that stigmatisation occurs and its greatest social effects are felt.

On the other hand, Goffman also maintained that high ritual activity took place in the interactional encounters whenever the social players engaged in symbolic practices designed to "protect" what they considered to be highly valuable, indeed sacred for the group (Goffman [1967] 1970, p. 56). But at the same time, these situations provide a favourable setting for the emergence of transgressions and ceremonial profanations. These have the same ritualistic nature, but at the opposite end of the spectrum, because they use actions and language considered incorrect, with the aim of attacking what is valuable for the social group being assaulted. In this respect, a practice like stigmatisation can have a clear ritual connotation, due to both the setting where it may take place and what it may symbolically attack.

This said, the aim of returning to the interesting theoretical reflections of Goffman on the stigmatisation-interaction-ritual triad is to obtain a specific proposal for analysing the research problem under investigation here. In this respect, if stigmatisation is a social process that originates and recurs particularly in situations where stigmatised and stigmatisers interact, in order to genuinely understand the reason why Pentecostalism has been the most stigmatised religious group in Chile, we will proceed by analysing the specific practices of stigmatisation of which this movement has been a victim, devoting particular attention to both the aspects attacked by the stigma and the settings in which this phenomenon most commonly occurred.

4. Results

4.1. *The Origin of Pentecostalism and the Breath of the Spirit in Chile*

The Chilean Pentecostal movement emerged in 1909 in the city of Valparaíso within the Methodist Church, led at that time by the pastor W.C. Hoover. He is key to gaining an understanding of how the movement developed, for it was under his leadership that the nascent Pentecostal movement broke away from Methodism. In 1907, Hoover began to correspond with world leaders of the incipient Pentecostal movement (Orellana 2006, p. 28). The pastor was particularly interested in the baptism of the Holy Spirit, of which there were testimonies in various parts of the world, and he also requested general information about the spiritual renewal that was taking place within the movement. This would have a decisive influence on the way in which Hoover began to develop worship practices and Bible study in the church. From that point on, Hoover was the target of easy criticism for having revived a new form of expressing religiosity that challenged the traditional canon.

At that time, the picture that the Pentecostal proto-movement presented to the rest of society was unusual and particularly striking. People from the lower social classes mainly formed the group; most were poor, many were without work and uneducated, and women played a prominent part. The Pentecostal ranks were even swelled by reformed criminals. For his part, the pastor did not really stand out on the basis of his theological training or the orthodoxy of his practices. Around the year 1908, the church would still meet regularly under a flimsy awning in all forms of weather, although on many occasions the modest homes of the believers served as improvised settings for many of their religious ceremonies. But perhaps of most significance was the unusual nature of their worship practices, which quickly attracted the attention of the local and the national community. This completed the extraordinary image that Pentecostalism began to project, one that would bring them many detractors.

4.1.1. The Manifestations

Throughout the year 1909, this church was one of the focal points of what was dubbed the Pentecostal “revival” worldwide. That year, the worship sessions, the days of prayer and the vigils became more frequent and more intense. A growing number of practices developed that were characterised by an outpouring of emotion and highly effervescent ritual. According to Hoover himself, they were “extraordinary manifestations of various kinds: laughter, weeping, shouts, singing, strange tongues, visions, ecstasy during which the person would fall to the ground and feel transported elsewhere, to heaven, to paradise, to beautiful fields, with various experiences; they spoke with the Lord, with angels, or with the devil” (Hoover [1926] 2008, p. 39). At that time, the fire of the Spirit had begun to burn on Chilean soil, and it would never go out.

These manifestations rapidly attracted the attention of the inhabitants of the city. One of the most surprising and innovative practices was preaching on the street, a distinctive feature of Chilean Pentecostalism which has continued to the present day and has led to countless conversions. In the early stages of the revival, the tremendous spiritual manifestations frequently overwhelmed the believers themselves, propelling them on to the street to proclaim their religious message:

This Spirit encouraged young people to take to the street with their “God is love” and inspired the baptised to proclaim the mercy of God in the streets with remarkable fervour and courage. It was generally an impulse totally removed from their intentions or thoughts, and their exhortations and messages were delivered with a zeal and a fearlessness that was clearly not natural to them—boys and girls and shy women spoke with a power that overcame those listening, frequently making them tremble or cry (. . .) Inspired by these circumstances, the brothers began to go out in groups to preach in the streets (I.E.P 1928e, p. 8).

Up until that time, Protestants worshipped privately inside churches, in a formalised and discreet fashion. Although popular Catholic manifestations such as processions took place in the public space, these were staged on specific days in the calendar (feast days) and normally in or around a particular location (shrines, grottoes, etc.). Thus, it was impossible for an activity so out of the ordinary to go unnoticed either by devotees or by detractors. On many occasions, the police arrested the Pentecostals while they were preaching and sent them to the nearest police station, charging them with disorderly behavior in a public place or some other minor offence. However, they were then released due to the lack of more serious charges. Sometimes, the believers used the police station to continue preaching, providing personal testimonies of God’s work in their lives and calling on their listeners to be converted. It is interesting to note that, from then on, public spaces such as squares, streets, taverns, and bars were scenes of notable ritual violence against Pentecostals (Mansilla 2007b, p. 2), who increasingly sought to make inroads into society, adopting an unusual and distinctive manner of relating to the sacred and addressing their fellow citizens.

4.1.2. The Press

But the revival continued its course. It would reach its zenith between the months of August and September 1909. The use that Pentecostalism made of public space and its “scandalous and noisy” ceremonies quickly attracted the attention of both the local and the national secular press.

An example can be found in the coverage given by the newspaper *El Chileno* to the events that occurred in the church led by Hoover. The editorial management sent a reporter to investigate the new situation that was causing such a stir in the city. For two weeks, the newspaper published a series of daily reports, but the information was presented in a clearly derogatory and tendentious tone, offering “a conglomeration of half truth and half lies, conveniently coloured to produce a sensation of scorn and disdain”, in the words of Hoover himself. The pastor provided an example of this when he reproduced a headline from the newspaper that refers to the activities of his church. The daily caption in large print occupied two columns and read as follows: “The New Escobar, the work of a swindler or a madman.

Shouts, swoonings and slaps. Tragi-comic scenes. Full details. Police complaints. Intervention by justice officials" (Hoover [1926] 2008, p. 47).

This quotation clearly shows the image of Pentecostalism that began to be circulated. On top of the falsehood, deception, madness and lack of reason that supposedly defined the activities of the new movement, there came disdain delivered in a mocking tone ("tragi-comic scenes"), epitomising the way the press wrote about the movement. In this way, the news that monopolised the headlines of *El Chileno* for weeks made a decisive contribution to smearing the reputation of the movement in Chilean society.

While the incidents filled the pages of the press, the fervent revival in Valparaíso continued and began to spread to neighbouring areas. Adherents to this new wing of the church were on the increase, and they were anxiously waiting for the Conference so that Hoover could offer his testimony of the goodness of the events that had occurred during this period. They believed that the success of the church was irrefutable proof of the action of the Spirit in their lives.

4.2. The Annual Conference

The Annual Conference was held in Valparaíso in the temple recently raised by the Pentecostals themselves, a building that could accommodate 1500 people. At that moment, the movement had 220 new probationary members, a school attendance of around 600 and a congregation of almost 1000. The movement was in the ruddiest of health. But the passionate atmosphere, although prepared for a "great blessing" (Hoover [1926] 1948, p. 65), augured a dramatic outcome.

Normally, the Annual Conferences tended to deal with various concerns that affected the congregation, but on this occasion all attention was focused on the analysis and evaluation of Hoover's work as the leader of the revival. A "disciplinary commission" was specially appointed by the Conference to judge the matter, and Hoover had no choice but to sit on the accused bench. The commission decided to present two charges: "First charge: Teaching and disseminating false and anti-Methodist doctrines, publicly and privately" and "Second Charge: Conduct gravely imprudent". But the most interesting thing about these accusations was the series of specifications that accompanied each of these charges. With respect to the first accusation, two specifications show where the crux of the Methodist attack lay:

Specification One: Whereby during the ecclesiastic year 1909–1910, in the Methodist Episcopal Church of Valparaíso, W. C. Hoover on many occasions has taught false and anti-Methodist doctrines, namely: In the public services he has declared that the baptism in the Holy Spirit manifests itself by visions, rolling on the floor, the gift of tongues and prophecies. (. . .) Specification Six: W. C. Hoover has disseminated literature that teaches false and anti-Methodist doctrines (. . .) teaching the doctrines of the raising of hands, baptism with fire, miracles of healing by faith, visions, gift of tongues, prophecies, the fixing of the date of the advent of Christ, falling under the power of the Holy Spirit, and opposition to the organised churches (I.E.P 1928h, p. 8; I.E.P 1928i, p. 8).

With regard to the second accusation, some of the specifications put forward by the disciplinary commission were the following:

First Specification: Forasmuch as said W. C. Hoover has done and permitted in the services things gravely imprudent and unworthy, such as when in a Sunday school service of the Valparaíso church in the month of August or September, Miss Elena Laidlaw took most of the time allowed for the Sunday school for the imposition of her hands on the heads of many persons, pretending in this way to impart the Holy Spirit. And W. C. Hoover himself knelt before her, receiving the imposition of her hands. (. . .) Specification Three: He permitted that the services develop confusion and cries, putting our church as a cause of scandal in the neighbourhood, especially during the months of September and October, which brought about an investigation by the Judge of the Criminal Court (. . .) Specification Four:

He permitted a series of scandalous acts in the services during the months of September and October when people, falling on the floor—men and women and young people of both sexes—were left together in a dishevelled fashion, offensive to decency and morals (I.E.P 1928i, p. 8).

We have reproduced these extensive texts because they splendidly sum up the type of opposition that Pentecostalism had to contend with. If analysis is made of the specifications supporting the first accusation—the promotion of “false and anti-Methodist” doctrines—it is interesting to note that, despite the title of the accusation, the theological or doctrinal aspect is not the main focus of attention. The specifications primarily attack the “inappropriate” Pentecostal practices of worship. It is these practices that lead to the conclusion that the principles that potentially underpin them are inappropriate. Essentially, it is the practices of glossolalia, thaumaturgy, the gift of prophecy, visions, the raising of hands, etc., which lie behind the accusation that seeks to exclude the movement from the heart of Methodism. Indeed, faced by a variety of similar accusations, Hoover defended himself by declaring and demonstrating that doctrinally he followed the journals of John Wesley, one of the fathers of Methodism. Furthermore, in response to the accusation of the Conference, Hoover asked repeatedly for a trial to be staged at which these theological issues could be discussed, but the Methodist leaders never granted him this request.

This said, the fundament of the “inappropriateness” of these ritual activities is made clear in the specifications of the second charge, which accuses Hoover of promoting conduct “gravely imprudent”. Although a direct attack is made on a ritual practice, healing by the imposition of hands, one of the aspects that proved to be genuinely disturbing for the disciplinary commission is the fact that this had been carried out by a woman, who had already been humiliated earlier by the superintendent, and furthermore, that the leading pastor, a man, had even gone so far as to kneel before her, inverting roles and positions of power. It is this inversion of what is “correct” that angers the accusers most. Thus the scandal, the cries and the confusion appear to be a clear attack on the “correct order” of things. This is shown even more clearly when the division of the sexes is questioned: men and women together, lying on the floor, could only represent an attack on morals. In summary, it is the effervescence, spontaneity and emotional intensity of the Pentecostal ceremonial activities that place these manifestations outside the everyday, in a kind of strange religious marginal area, clearly questioning the established canon. Not for nothing is the commission responsible for evaluation first and foremost “disciplinary”.

4.3. The Following Years

From 1910, the new Pentecostal movement began to spread within Chile, meeting with particular success in the poor outlying areas of Valparaíso, Santiago, and Concepción. However, it did not make a great impact on Chilean society in general, and several decades passed before the remaining religious and social groups really recognised it as a religious movement. In this new phase, evangelisation and the role played by small local churches with their respective leaders (many of whom were charismatic) were key factors in the gradual expansion of the movement.

Nevertheless, stigmatisation continued to accompany the movement, and in many areas, it would even increase and intensify. Thus, for example, whereas the Catholic Church barely noticed its ascendancy in its first phase, after the 1920s, it pounced on Pentecostalism and joined in with initiatives to stigmatise the movement. However, the daily hostility that flared up, above all in public spaces where Pentecostals would frequently mix with non-Pentecostals, continued to originate from members of the poorer social classes on the whole, most of whom had grown up in the Catholic tradition. For example, many documents testify to the violence that occurred as a reaction to preaching in the street, an activity that became a regular feature of Pentecostalism as the years went by. This situation is clearly reflected in two eye-witness accounts published in *Revista Fuego de Pentecostés*.

In 1925, in Villa Alemana, some people were preaching on the street and a man broke into the group, interrupting them. He had a litre of wine with him and he wanted to force the brothers to drink some. When they refused, he threatened to pour it over their heads. Since they ignored him, he did indeed pour the wine over their heads and clothes, and then he left. He returned later, and from outside the group he did the same thing again. He eventually withdrew into a nearby bar (I.E.P 1928d, p. 4).

On another occasion, in 1925, we were preaching in Quilpué at a crossroads where a butcher had a stand on the corner. The butcher said to a policeman: “Arrest these donkeys that are braying”; and the policeman stopped us from preaching (I.E.P 1928i, pp. 4, 6).

The public humiliation suffered by the Pentecostals is evident in these incidents. In the first account, it is interesting to observe that use is made of an element charged with symbolism in order to offend them: wine. Although wine has sacred associations within Christian ceremony, one of the principal criticisms that Pentecostalism voiced against popular Chilean practices was the abuse of alcohol in many traditional festivities. For Pentecostals, this was a social scourge that showed the presence of the devil in their lives. It is interesting to note that one of the main effects of converting to Pentecostalism in deprived social groups has been the decision to give up alcohol. Therefore, the practice of urging the Pentecostals to drink wine while they were preaching is clearly provocative and a desecration of a sacred ritual, and the subsequent action of pouring wine over them simply made the humiliation worse. This baseness is expressed even more clearly in the second account, in which the preachers—preaching being a characteristic activity of Pentecostals—are reduced to mere animals, the image of the donkey evoking ignorance, the lack of intellectual capacity, and obstinacy. On top of everything, the humiliation is supported by the official power of the police.

Finally, the Pentecostal movement continued to be stigmatised in the years that followed. In fact, this dynamic remains even today. There can be doubt that the settings, the protagonists, and the frequency and intensity of the stigmatisation have changed, but the logic that has driven this social process and which continues to inundate the popular imagination with ridicule, jokes and remarks, constantly reinvented with new material, remains present in Chilean society. The analysis of specific situations in which Pentecostalism was treated with hostility during the period of the first two decades following the birth of the movement clearly demonstrates the nature of this stigmatisation and the settings in which it tended to surface.

5. Discussion

We would like to first present two findings based on our empirical research, then propose a new hypothesis, and finally to briefly discuss these findings. First, the analysis of historical sources has shown that on both a semantic and a practical level, stigmatisation of the Pentecostals principally attacked their unusual ritual practices; these included glossolalia, thaumaturgy, public preaching, testimonies, and dancing. These activities were explicitly reviled since they were thought to be based on ignorance, madness, falsehood, superstition, inhumanity, and moral degradation. But it was really “the form” acquired by these ritual manifestations that was the focus of the stigmatisation. The spontaneity, emotional intensity, and ritual effervescence of these manifestations went against the social and religious canons of the time, becoming an easy target for stigma. Moreover, this ritual activity offered the possibility of establishing more direct communication with the sacred in forms—unheard of until then in the context of Chilean Christianity—whereby the body itself of the believer could be possessed by the Spirit, symbolising the very limit between transcendence and immanence since this activity represented the irruption of the sacred into the world.

Second, empirical evidence also shows that the principal situations in which stigmatising practices toward Pentecostalism occurred and recurred correspond to scenes that involve a high degree of ritual. This staging of stigma only made the stigma more dramatic and effective. A clear example of this can be seen when, on repeated occasions, the Methodist authorities, policemen, press reporters and

onlookers would burst in on the places of worship of the Pentecostals, with the aim of an inspection, or to mock them, insult them and even make arrests; in one way or another, all of these practices clearly represented sacrilegious acts. A further example may be observed in people's violent reactions to preaching in the street. While the Pentecostals saw the public space as a scene of sin and degradation, and therefore a place where the Christian message also had to be taken, many viewed this type of evangelism as a provocation, a kind of desecration of a space assigned to sociable practices; therefore, violence and stigmatisation were the arms employed in response to this situation created by the presence of Pentecostals in the street.

We would like to propose a tentative hypothesis to advance the understanding of why Pentecostalism has been the most stigmatized religious movement in Chile. Indeed, our interpretation is that Pentecostalism is viewed in the social context of Chile as a profoundly disturbing manifestation because symbolically it brings together a set of stigmas that are severely condemned by this society. In this respect, both the fact that this is a religious minority that questions traditional religious authority (Bastian) and the fact that its adherents are essentially people from social classes that are clearly excluded by Chilean society (Mansilla) are influential and reinforce the image of Pentecostalism as posing a threat. However, these factors are catalyzed and heightened by the ecstatic ritual life practised by Pentecostals. As a minority religious movement that engages in its various practices in specific settings with particular people, what Pentecostalism really does on a symbolic level is to attack society at large, questioning the pre-established order through its worship practices. This leads to the broad spectrum of opprobrium and insults that can be read in the language used against the Pentecostals, a language which encompasses the most diverse dimensions of social and human life. It is in this respect that, in some way, with their ritual practice, the Pentecostals embody a kind of social chaos.

This symbolic condensation (Turner 1967) of social stigmas (Goffman [1963] 2008) that appears in Pentecostalism can help us begin to understand, on the one hand, the depth of the process of stigmatization to which it has been subjected, and on the other, its constancy in time. However, this observation must be given a double nuance. In the first place, we should avoid imagining the Chilean Pentecostal movement and its actors as mere victims of stigmatization. It is important here to return to the origins of the notion of stigma as defined by Goffman [1963] (2008), which in that sense relates to "deviance" phenomena. In this context, American sociologists showed how these social groups tried to manage the stigma that society had imposed on them, one of their specific forms being stigmatization owing to religious conditions.

Our case study here, then, presents a dialectical issue: It is true that Hoover, when facing the charges of the Methodist authorities, alleged that the new Pentecostal movement had been the victim of a series of accusations that would stigmatize it among Christians, which in turn would deepen its social stigmatization within Chilean society in general; yet, the other aspect of the dialectic leads us to the realization that we should not conceive of Pentecostalism as having both a hierarchical and a distant relationship with other Evangelicals or with Christianity in general in Chile. Pentecostalism is not a denominational equivalent of "pollution" (to use Goffman's image once more) and is not seen solely as such by the rest of society. At this point, we can note the diverse relationships that the Pentecostal movement has woven to treat stigma on a symbolic and ritual level with respect to the larger society, within Christianity, and even within the Pentecostal movement itself.

This is a field of research that would help us to test our preliminary hypothesis and advance the understanding of our study. Here, it would be interesting to clarify whether, during the historical period investigated, there were various symbolic and ritual oppositions between Pentecostalism and other social groups that would have operated in a hegemonic way as a kind of "iconization process in linguistic ideology" (Irvine and Gal 2000, pp. 37–38). This would also allow us to explore the scope of this sociocultural phenomenon more fully. However, while this perspective would be quite relevant, it exceeds the limits of this article.

The analysis of the historical stigmatisation experienced by Pentecostalism should be continued in the future, for not only will this enable the hypothesis we have put forward here to be tested, but, most importantly, it will also allow more to be learnt about this social problem. Only through an understanding of this dynamic will we be able to contribute to the creation of a less distant and more reflective image of the religious idiosyncrasies of Pentecostalism, underlining the need to definitively consider this movement as a truly valid religious proposal.

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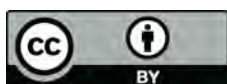
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