

# Realness through Mediating Body



V&R Academic

# Kirche – Konfession – Religion

Band 71

Herausgegeben vom

Konfessionskundlichen Institut des Evangelischen Bundes

unter Mitarbeit

der Evangelischen Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen

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# **Realness through Mediating Body**

The Emergence of Charismatic/Pentecostal  
Communities in Beirut

V&R unipress

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

ISSN 2198-1507

ISBN 978-3-8470-0719-7

Weitere Ausgaben und Online-Angebote sind erhältlich unter: [www.v-r.de](http://www.v-r.de)

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## Preface

My thesis has been a continuous journey. When I first encountered the Charismatic/Pentecostal movement, I felt intrigued by the energetic rituals and vivid stories. The growing movement, which remained for the most part invisible in the urban context of Beirut, caught my attention. Throughout the year of 2009, I researched a particular Pentecostal group through the lens of social identity for my MA thesis. However, I soon realized the limitations of this theoretical approach. In my PhD thesis I significantly extended my field research towards a cross denominational Charismatic/Pentecostal movement in Beirut and developed the paradigm of realness.

This project could not have been accomplished without the generous help of others. First and foremost, I thank the members of various Charismatic/Pentecostal communities who shared their faith and their lives with me and vulnerably allowed me to learn about their deepest concerns. Special thanks go to the Faculty of Religious Studies at Saint Joseph University, in particular Dr. Fadi Daou, Dr. Nayla Tabbara and Prof. Dr. Thomas Sicking, who stimulated my thinking in relation to the particular Lebanese context. Furthermore, I appreciated the generous research scholarship of Orient Institute of Beirut throughout the year of 2010 and for the financial help for the printing which I received from German Society for Mission Studies. The interdisciplinary critical discourse at OIB triggered new questions and sharpened my analytical skills. In particular, I benefited from my OIB research advisor Dr. Thomas Scheffler, who challenged me to consider the larger socio-political context. Moreover, I am grateful for the crucial insights from my second advisor Prof. Dr. Talja Blokland inspiring me for further research in urban sociology.

I am deeply indebted to my academic advisor Prof. Dr. Andreas Feldtkeller at the Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany. He patiently offered encouragement and wise assistance in navigating new areas of research. Finally, I would like to thank my wife Lisa Fahnstock Dyck, whose academic expertise in Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies enhanced greatly my perspective. Moreover, Lisa patiently proof read the thesis draft and corrected it knowing the typical mistakes

made by a native Russian speaker. Lisa's friendship and emotional support carried me through this project and meant everything to me in this endeavor and beyond.

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## Abbreviations

(AL)	Abundant Life
(CMTC)	Charismatic Movement within Traditional Churches
(CN)	Chemin Neuf
(C/P)	Charismatic/Pentecostal
(EC)	Evangelical Charismatic/Pentecostal Churches
(IC)	Independent Charismatic/Pentecostal Churches
(if)	Immanent Framework
(i/i.t)	Individualist/Internal Definition of Testimony
(MC)	Charismatic/Pentecostal Migrant Churches
(MwG)	Meeting with God
(s/e.t)	Social/External Definition of Testimony
(TC)	Traditional Churches
(tf)	Transcendent Framework
(TOP)	Tent of Praise



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## 1. Introductory remarks

### 1.1. Emergence of the central research question and aim

Every reflection begins with a question. Questions arise when I am uncertain about that which I took for granted previously. Uncertainty is experienced as bodily or mental imbalance within the world. Mostly, this state occurs when the background for my habitual action changes and the previous unquestioned social structure forces itself upon my body. My body and mind seek to restore the past order and create a possible coherent world within which I am able to live.

My earliest memory of an intense reflection about the world was when I emigrated from Russia to Germany at the age of 10. My completely new surroundings triggered a lot of questions. Reflection is therefore an action of our embodied minds about the “is” and “ought” of the world. The question itself proceeds and sketches out the nature and the horizons of the answer.<sup>1</sup> Thus, in order to understand the direction and the scope of the answer, the genesis of the question within a particular life context must be uncovered. Through this process, the answer will be rooted within a particular life setting which is a precondition for abstraction and theoretical extension to other, similar phenomena. The questions a person asks emerges out of their embodied situatedness within a particular life world and the larger discourse s/he is exposed to vis à vis a concrete encounter with other human beings or material objects. The particular biography, gender, geographic world and socio-economic habitus of a person generate different kinds of questions and how these are answered. In the following chapter, I will sketch out the origin of my research question and the discursive context of the question which triggered the reflection for my thesis.

My earliest memory about religion can be traced back to one experience when I was about five or six years old. I grew up in the 1980's in the city of Omsk in Russia. My father was a lecturer on Marxism/Leninism and Economics at the local College for Applied Sciences. Every year, we would travel to visit my

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1 Gadamer, 1995, p. 162.

grandparents in a Siberian village. My grandfathers' parents had been accused of being "Kulaki"<sup>2</sup> during the Stalinist repressive regime and were murdered as part of "cleansing activities" in the 1930's. My grandfather therefore, was orphaned, never visited school and remained illiterate. However, he remembered the Lords' prayer from his Lutheran parents and would murmur this prayer every night before falling asleep. I did not understand any German back then and thought that he was whispering some sort of magic spell. One day while walking home with my father we were caught in a downpour of rain and roaring thunder. I was impressed by this event in nature and told my father about my grandmother in the village who shared with me about a God who is up there controlling nature. I asked my father, "What is this God like?" My father dismissed my question as nonsense telling me that old people in the village are not very bright and make up all kinds of fairy tales. He then went on to explain to me how thunderstorms develop as a natural phenomena.

For the first time I became aware of two possible views on what constitutes a real world. For my father, the real world could be conceptualised as causal events within a spatio-temporal immanent framework. For my grandparents, God was the super-human agent who stood beyond this immanent framework and was able to interact with it. However, even if these two views seemed contradictory, these views existed within a world, which contained them both.

These two answers are examples of what I call the antagonistic tradition within the western discourse on the nature of reality. The one views reality as an immanent framework (if), which is exhausted through causal events, the other views reality as a transcendent framework (tf) with a divine being beyond the spatio-temporal confines. Charles Taylor views these opposites as poles, which create "cross pressures" in social discourse, as all other positions are suspended between these two extremes.<sup>3</sup>

Constructing sharp (tf) or (if) boundaries is understandable during times of crisis or out of a desire for a clearly demarcated identity negotiation in order to establish an authoritative framework of understanding. However, the every day interaction between humans with diverse views about the nature of reality betrays a more fluid negotiation process. Charles Taylor, in his genealogical account of the secularization process draws a complex interaction between various religious and secular spheres in creating a pluralist modern framework. He rejects a subtraction theory of modernity as too simplistic.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the initial

2 "Kulaki" is a derogatory term referring to the bourgeois class.

3 Charles Taylor, 2007, p. 598.

4 Charles Taylor summarizes subtraction theory as the following: "Concisely put, I mean by this stories of modernity in general, and secularity in particular, which explain them by human being having lost, or sloughed off, or liberated themselves from certain earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge. What emerged from this process – mo-

impression of hardened identities and definitions is misleading and academic reflection must subvert these pragmatic power games and uncover mechanisms which underlie these constructions. My initial childhood impression confirmed the sharp boundary between (if) and (tf). The setting also allowed me to associate (if) with progress and modernity, as my father, an urban academic, embodied this view. On the contrary, my grandparents, although loved by me, embodied (tf) as a passing tradition, within an ignorant past. Only much later did I begin to understand and question this typical modern narrative.

I did not initially set out to do research on the C/P movement in Beirut upon moving to Lebanon in 2007. However, one day, I was walking through my neighborhood of Furn el-Chebbak and heard singing and clapping coming from an apartment. I later learned that what I had heard was a Pentecostal Ethiopian migrant workers' group meeting. This awoke my initial curiosity and I discovered in the process an entire religious movement, which was almost invisible in the urban setting, yet growing in numbers in unexpected places.

While researching the emergence of the Charismatic/Pentecostal (C/P) groups/churches in Beirut I found myself living and thinking within seemingly incommensurable life worlds: On the one hand, I was a research fellow at the German research institute which embodied a sober, rationalized world order. On the other hand, I spent my evenings with the C/P believers who met in art studios, shopping malls, in church basements and private houses. They danced, sweated, shouted enthusiastically and their prayers called down divine interventions into the immanent sphere thereby questioning the definition of the real world my colleagues at the Institute took for granted. Both the secular academics and the C/P believers lived and thought in accordance with the life world background which they presupposed to be real. At an academic reception, in the beautiful garden of the research institute, while sipping from my wine glass, I talked to my German colleague about my research. He looked at me with surprise and exclaimed: "Why are you researching those weirdos?" His evaluative statement suggested a sharp boundary between his seemingly logical reality which he took for granted and the C/P believers' life world, which he perceived to be an illusion.

When I asked a C/P believer, who happened also to be a professor at a prestigious college, as to why he became a C/P believer, he explained: "The Holy Spirit made it clear to me. Jesus became real to me." Similarly, throughout other interviews, similar expressions were used in order to describe the motivation for conversion into C/P form of life. Thus, "realness" is not static, but dynamic. Both C/P converts and secular academics, who also converted into (if) framework

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dernity or secularity – is to be understood in terms of underlying features of human nature which were there all along, but had been impeded by what is now set aside." Taylor, 2007, p. 22.



from their religious backgrounds,<sup>5</sup> describe their transition as a journey toward a more realistic conception of the world. Thus, what is perceived as real does undergo changes. However, in order to change between (if) and (tf), there must be a common framework in order for understanding to occur. In order to answer the question as to why C/P movement emerged, I begin with the claim of C/P believers themselves and construct a hypothesis how “realness” can be conceptualized. Based on this theoretical tool, I will employ ethnography in order to understand and explain the emergence of post war C/P movement in Beirut. Theoretical reflections emerged during the process of my field research. Therefore, theory will be addressed towards the end as an outgrowth of empiric research. In my concluding remarks, I will apply my hypotheses of realness to the academic context as well in order to show that the difference between (if) and (tf) can be conceptualized within a common world.

## 1.2. Methodological procedure and field research in Beirut

Since I took the key answer about the emergence of C/P groups from my informants, I employed primarily an intensive approach<sup>6</sup>, starting with participant observation within particular groups, describing and interpreting concrete practices and situating them within specific socio-cultural contexts. I based my interpretation on my field research notes. However, I did not distinguish clearly between empirical findings and analytical interpretation. Even though transcription of particular interviews evokes a notion of objectivity and preserving the voice of researched people, it remains an artificial construct as interviews depend highly on the particular approach of the researcher and a constructed setting. While in theory a distinction between the voice of the other and the interpretation is helpful, in practice these two often merge as the unarticulated subjective assumptions of the researcher and the conversation dynamics can not be fully uncovered. To avoid this methodological difficulty, I simply followed interpretative anthropology<sup>7</sup> which advocates a close link between social reality and interpretation.

While employing qualitative methods, I entered each of the main chapters with a prior theoretical discussion in order to clarify the point of departure. As Sayer pointed out, social sciences mainly relies on abstraction and careful conceptualisation.

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5 Antony, 2007.

6 Sayer, 2000, p. 20.

7 An example for this way of writing ethnography can be found in Geertz, 2000.

Much rests upon the nature of our abstractions, that is, our conceptions of particular one-sided components of the concrete object; if they divide what is in practice indivisible, or if they conflate what are different and separable components, then problems are likely to result.<sup>8</sup>

As ethnography attempts to represent a social phenomenon through a particular medium of writing, it begins with and ends with reduction of and generalisation of lived reality. Therefore, theoretical questions can not be separated from empirical research, for “[...] research without theory is blind, and theory without research is empty.”<sup>9</sup> Researchers setting out to study lived practices are not able to understand any social phenomena without a prior theoretical concept about it. Thus, as Gadamer pointed out, any understanding begins with a prejudice (German: *Vorurteil*). While a “*Vorurteil*” stands at the beginning of any understanding, it can also prevent a person from moving beyond a pre-conceived understanding about the researched social phenomena. As Talal Assad pointed out, the Protestant definition of religion as a mental assent to the propositional truth has influenced European theorizing about religion thus preventing European sociologists to engage with other, non-Protestant conceptions of religion.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the “*Vorurteil*” must be dissected by theoretically and historically tracing the employed concepts. However, in order to avoid the hermeneutical circle and arrive at a progressive spiral, the empirical phenomena must be brought into conversation with the prior “*Vorurteil*” in order to draw out insights, which surpass the prior horizon of “*Vorurteil*”. Connecting what has been seen prior as distinct generates new insights about the shared reality. Thus my work engages both a particular empirical case and a theoretical discourse in order to arrive at a hermeneutical model which will help to understand both (tf) and (if). Just as my selection of the theoretical discourse is very particular, so is my relationship to the C/P movement contingent on lived interactions within a specific field culture.

Researching a minority religious group proved to be more challenging than I initially expected. My field research depended mainly on the trust of particular groups. The degree of immersion determined the depth of trust and disclosure. As I immersed myself within the Lebanese context, I attended a seminar entitled “cultural and religious dynamics in the Middle East” at Saint Joseph University in Beirut. An American researcher presented a paper on the question of religious

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8 Sayer, 2000, p. 19.

9 Bourdieu quotes Kant here. If the aim of research is the production of knowledge, both empirical research and theory have to be brought into fruitful interaction. “Consequently, it has more to gain by confronting new objects than by engaging in theoretical polemics that do little more than fuel a perpetual, self-sustaining, and too often vacuous metadiscourse around concepts treated as intellectual totems.” Bourdieu, 1992, p. 161.

10 Asad, 1993, pp. 40–54.

identities which he conducted on various campuses. A Lebanese scholar challenged him on the question of the usefulness of formal interviews within the institutional setting. As I related to students on the campus of American University of Beirut, they shared with me that they often answer the questions posed by Western scholars according to the expectations of the AUB professor through whose permission the Western scholar got his field entry. Therefore, the expectation of the Western scholar implied within the set questionnaire pre-determines the answers.

There are several reasons as to why quantitative methods in isolation fail within the Lebanese context. In the Lebanese society the concept of honour and shame regulates the social status of the clan, family and the individual. The insiders usually provide an outsider with information which s/he perceives would enhance their honour. In Lebanon information becomes a means to gain power as the religious communities struggle for influence within a power field constantly under foreign intrusion.<sup>11</sup>

During Syrian occupation of Lebanon it was dangerous for people to state publicly their opinions and therefore it became second nature to conceal their true views. Mary, the founder of one C/P group, gave me the following explanation,<sup>12</sup>

Sometimes, western Christians come and want to find out how Christians live with Muslims and Druze. Muslims and Druze tell them: "Oh, we love Jesus!" We have three Bibles at home. We love Jesus and Christians. And the Westerners go home and tell that Lebanon is an open minded country with peaceful coexistence. However, in reality, they are hiding the truth. They do not say what they mean. We have a saying here: 'I show you a lot but not what is in my stomach.' Christians, Muslims and Druze lived together in this country for a long time. Sometimes there was pressure on Christians. Nominal Christians absorbed the culture in order to survive. They learned how to survive. We have a saying: 'If you are not a wolf, wolves will eat you.' Because Christians lost their faith, they became like Druze and Muslims.

Mary weaves historical, sociological and religious perspectives into a cohesive narrative which seeks to provide an explanation as to why Christians do not say what they really mean. She enhances her narrative with well known sayings. The sectarian past of the Lebanese society, the current socio-economic inequality and my cultural otherness as a researcher create high barriers to get inside the C/P culture in order to better understand the native point of view. I have attempted to cross the boundaries which would only allow me a very surface look at the C/P

11 As I am editing this paper the civil war in Syria threatens to unsettle the confessional balance of Lebanon as both Alawite, Christian and Sunni refugees flee into Lebanon. Lebanon is moreover the scene of a tug of war between larger sectarian powers.

12 Most of the following interview/conversations quotations are dynamic-equivalent translations from Lebanese Arabic dialect.

culture. The following thesis is a result of my ongoing negotiation of my position vis à vis the C/P culture. My research position can not be easily described as an insider or an outsider, as identity boundaries are fluid and meaning polyphonic. Instead, my position can be described as fluid transgression of boundaries. As a Christian, I was to some degree accepted as an insider. However, as culturally western, I remained an outsider. The otherness was further emphasized as I did not share all the C/P practices and could not commit to the same degree as did group members, which are preconditions for belonging to the core group.

Several of my interview partners asked me if they could read over the thesis if I quoted them directly and mentioned their names. They were very aware of the contextuality of any propositions, as the academic representation is not value free and detached from particular interests. Unfortunately, I was not able to receive and incorporate the feed back of C/P believers, which would go well beyond an academic thesis. However, I became aware of the limits of academic writing in relation to the dialogical nature of human relationships. C/P believers reject any possibility of looking at the world from a moral distance. Within their meta-narrative there is no space for a position beyond good and evil. Due to this belief C/P believers maintained that the sociologist Coleman had arrived “at the ministry for divine purposes” which he himself did not understand.<sup>13</sup> In this way the outsider is welcomed into the sacred sphere of the good which may be viewed by the cultural anthropologist as a naïve ethical dualism. However, this dualism poses a challenge for the western scholar and deconstructs his seemingly privileged position as a critical observer. Once the metaphorical language of social science is traced back to its root ontology one finds historical power struggles which also lay bare strong value judgements which in fact guide the research of a seemingly detached observer.<sup>14</sup> In their daily life outside of their academic habitus, academics also exhibit an unmediated, direct way of relating. Although the ethical stance toward life is different between the C/P believer and the anthropologist due to their differing socio-economic positions of power, both are ethically committed social agents.<sup>15</sup> The contrast between most charismatic believers and the cultural anthropologists who study them is the imbalance of power and the resulting difference of speech, action and communal

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13 Coleman, 2006b, p. 3.

14 Charles Taylor argues that fundamental, qualitative judgements are constitutive of human identity. See: Taylor, 1992, p. 9–52.

15 Nancy Scheper-Hughes advocates for the primacy of ethical commitments within cultural anthropology (Scheper-Hughes, 2005). Robbins (2006a) views anthropology in contrast to theology as a non-committed discipline due to the absence of a set canon and therefore as less effective in conveying its message of the other. It takes only a religious outsider to the discipline of cultural anthropology in order to disprove these seeming differences (See: Priest, 2001, p. 37–46). It seems that the only real difference is the social convention which defines the identity of its member.

identity. When I sat down with one of my C/P interview partners, who I also became friends with over a period of time, he looked at me incredibly and asked: “So you get paid to talk to me?” His question revealed the imbalance of socio-economic power and my position of being an outsider through connections to powerful western research institutions and finances. What appeared to him as a casual conversation over coffee, his free time, was work time for me. Thus, this realisation eliminated the impression of equality. Thus, ambiguity was introduced into our relationship as it was no longer clear whether this relationship could be viewed as mutual friendship or as a professional client relationship. This tension pervaded throughout my research.

Due to my conviction that field research without the consent of the people being studied is ethically wrong, I asked the leadership if I could conduct research among them and write about their lives. Their reactions ranged from amusement to quiet resistance to curiosity. Their main question concerned how my field research fit into the plans of God for both my life and their lives. If a C/P believer would ask a group of western anthropologists or philosophers whether s/he could do research about their communal academic identity including their rituals, practices, in-group discourses and their basic beliefs there would probably also be an inquiry about the relation of the onlooker to their group. The question would arise whether the C/P researcher has the necessary qualifications and permission from scholarly authorities and whether the researcher had undergone the necessary academic rites of passage. Within the C/P leadership group one woman also referred to authority in order to ascertain whether my field research was legitimate by asking, “Did you really hear it from God or is it your own idea?”<sup>16</sup> I felt tested by this question and struggled to mask my annoyance. I snapped back: “What do you mean by ‘hearing God?’” The person simply repeated the question and did not respond to my question. From the perspective of the C/P leader, God also intervenes in my academic affairs through prayer. Therefore, how God speaks to me was less relevant than giving testimony to God’s intervention into my academic affairs. Thus my answer had a practical implication upon whether I would get access or not to the specific C/P form of life. Moreover, the C/P believer inquired about deeper realities of my academic work. She wanted to know whether my academic work had any relation to God and the C/P life style. A denial of the validity of her question and failure to give evidence to a deeper spiritual meaning to my academic work would most likely evoke less willingness to help me as my academic work would

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16 Of course there is a difference between the authority as defined through human discourse within scientific communities and the divine authority. However, human authority is often abstracted as an institution and thereby unquestioned. On the other hand, in the C/P meta-narrative God is made human through the image of incarnation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

be seen as an attempt to enthrone human autonomy over the relation between God and believers which C/P believers emphasize.

Since religious confession in Lebanon is acquired through birth, my reference to Christianity did not guarantee the insider status. Moreover, there are various membership markers, such as participation and practice. Thus, when I interviewed a Roman Catholic C/P believer and inquired about a split and misunderstanding of two C/P groups, he asked me to stop the tape. After I turned off the recorder, he looked straight at me and turned the tables, asking me,

“Now about you: Are you a believer?”

I shared my biographical journey from an atheistic family background and upbringing towards Christian faith. However, my testimony seemed to be not sufficient and he inquired further:

“Do you read the bible every day?”

“No, not every day.” I replied.

He paused and seemed a bit confused.

“Do you pray regularly on your own?”

“Yes.”

He proceeded then by avoiding my direct question and presented instead a very harmonious picture of what occurred between the two groups. I concluded that he could not neatly place me within the C/P in-group and therefore presented a more coherent picture intended for outsiders instead of the more detailed description of power relations and differing personalities which led to the split. The insider-outsider dichotomy does not adequately describe the fluid nature of social interactions.

I conducted field research between Okt. 2008 and February 2011 with a short four month research break in Berlin in 2009. From among the 15 groups I visited, I focused my observation on four particular communities which represent various organizational forms. I usually visited three communities weekly and spent time with their members during the service and in a more informal setting after the worship service. I also conducted interviews with the leaders and members of the groups. Due to the sensitive nature of religion in Lebanon, I discovered that building trust is crucial in order for the informant to construct his or her narrative with a lesser representational intention. Furthermore, to encourage open narration, I employed a semi-structured interviewing format. I conducted 21 interviews in length between one and two hours. Moreover, I met weekly for about one hour throughout the course of one year with a founder of one particular group. This biographical research provided me with deeper insights into one particular case. I utilized quantitative methods, such as surveys and statistics only as complementary to the qualitative methods. Collaboration with the scholars from the Faculty for Religious Studies at Saint Joseph University, Beirut, and various colleagues from the German Orient Institute further

stimulated my thinking. Most of my field research interaction was conducted in the Lebanese Arabic dialect and to some extent English and French. For the purpose of transliteration I have used the Library of Congress system. I also consulted some of the C/P newsletters and their brochures/magazines. However, I quickly realized that the aim of this media is directed towards a different communication setting and creates a specific discourse, which must be looked at within its own terms. Therefore, I attempted to avoid analyzing the self representation of specific C/P groups towards others through their publications. My living situation in Furn el-Chebbak was ideal for this purpose, since it was less inhabited by Europeans and Americans and allowed me to practice Arabic and interact with C/P groups which are predominantly active in the Christian quarters of Beirut.

All the names in the following thesis are either changed or abbreviated in order to protect the identity of the people I have been doing research among. There is relative religious freedom in Lebanon in comparison to the rest of Middle East and the change of religion is even legally permitted by the state. However such an act could bring about severe retribution from the religious community as well as the family and larger clan most families belong to. Moreover, as I finish writing my PhD thesis, Lebanon is grappling with around 2 million Syrian refugees as ISIS, a terrorist Islamic militia, brutally takes over large territory in Syria and Iraq. In particular, Lebanese Christians and other minorities fear severe retributions if ISIS should overrun Lebanon as well. However, the most vulnerable groups are the converts from Islam toward C/P movement.

### 1.3. Positioning and contribution

The phenomenal rise of C/P Christianity since the 50's has not gone unnoticed by the academia. Since the 60's, research on C/P Christianity<sup>17</sup> has been conducted mainly in the USA and England. There are numerous reasons for this regional gravity of research. Most immigrants from regions where the C/P movement has the largest impact have tended to immigrate to English speaking countries. A possible reason for the very limited attention to the C/P Christianity in Germany is the institutional domination of the state church and its influence within universities, which also plays a prominent role in setting the agenda for theological research focusing more on the traditional liberal Protestant per-

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17 Hollenweger, 1986, p. 3–12; Main overview resources on C/P Christianity: Burgess, Stanley M., & van der Maas, Eduard, 2002; Anderson, 2004. On Theories and Methods in studying global Pentecostalism see: Anderson et. al., 2010.

spective. The focus of Religious Studies scholars within Germany remains on the reformulation of the secularization thesis and less on the resurgent global religions. Moreover, anthropological research has been traditionally strong in England, a former colonial superpower and the USA, a country of significant immigration.

The research on C/P Christianity has been mainly conducted along disciplinary and regional lines. While it is an impossible undertaking within the scope of my research to give a comprehensive overview of the entire research on C/P Christianity, I will attempt to give a rough framework for the disciplinary perspectives in the study of C/P Christianity, listing exemplary works within particular disciplines in order to position my work within past research.<sup>18</sup> The rise of C/P Christianity is well documented from anthropological and sociological perspectives, in particular as the C/P movement is an expression of and itself triggers social change.<sup>19</sup> Within sociology and anthropology, particular C/P ritualistic practices, such as healing, preaching and praying have been extensively studied from the cultural anthropological angle.<sup>20</sup> As C/P Christianity constitutes a global phenomenon, sociologists have given special attention to its global spread in connection with economic, political and cultural issues.<sup>21</sup> The global impact and rise of C/P Christianity, together with Islam also changed the prevailing theories on modernity, religion and secularity. Whereas until the 70's the unanimous agreement was that progressive modernization would lead to the diminishing of religion, nowadays, many theorists advocate a more nuanced perspective in favor of plural modernities.<sup>22</sup> Gender and feminist studies also began looking at the specific role of women in the C/P communities.<sup>23</sup>

Theology, as an academic reflection, could not ignore the impact of C/P Christianity as the gravity of Christianity shifted from the north/west to the

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18 One of the most extensive collections on C/P research is currently in University of Birmingham, UK. There are also numerous journals which are solely devoted to the study of C/P Christianity:

*AJPS – Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*

*CPCR – Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research*: <http://www/pctii.org/cyberj/>

HTC – Harold Turner Collection, University of Birmingham

*JEPTA – Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association*

*JPT – Journal of Pentecostal Theology*

*Pneuma: Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*

*SPS – Society of Pentecostal Studies Annual Meeting Papers*

19 Martin, 1990; Gershon, 2006; Robbins, 2004a & 2007; Martin, 1998; Rodriguez, 1997; Miller & Tetsunao, 2007.

20 Coleman, 2006; Csordas, 2002; Robbins, 2001; Stringer, 1999.

21 Coleman, 2006; Martin, 2002; Robbins, 2004b; Poewe, 1994.

22 Martin, 2005; Wagner, 2000; Davie, 2002.

23 Benvenuti 1995; Drogus 1997.



south/east.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, western theological reflection, mainly in the USA and England, began to incorporate this shift through reflection on the Holy Spirit and specific C/P practices into its traditional theological disciplines.

I also believe that the growth of C/P Christianity indirectly contributed to the resurgent interest in the philosophy of religion. The diminishing of a strong form of positivism in the philosophy departments since the 50's enabled a new interest in the meaningfulness of theological questions to emerge. Among them are specific C/P questions such as the religious experience and the rationality of Christian beliefs. Instead of revisionist theology, where theological doctrines and practices were apologetically made palpable to the current philosophical paradigm, now the assumption began with the realness and truth of Christian experience. The burden of proof had shifted to those who rejected the basic Christian assumptions.<sup>25</sup>

Regionally, most researchers focused on Africa, Latin America and Asia where C/P Christianity has experienced the most prominent growth. To a lesser degree, the growth of C/P Christianity in Europe and North America has also been documented. However, with the exception of a few articles, I have not found any substantial research conducted on the C/P movement in the Middle East. The contrast of the bulging research of growing Muslim presence in the West to the almost absent research on Christian migrant workers into the Middle East and conversion from Islam to other religions is striking. One journalist, who did research in the Middle East on religious conversion from Islam to other religions conveyed to me that conversion from Islam to other religions in the heartland of Islam, constitutes a very delicate topic which has the potential to stir religious sensitivities and even pose a physical threat to the converts and those who make it public. Kaoues notices that conversion from Islam "receives a great deal of media attention and is treated in a sensationalist manner."<sup>26</sup> Since the media thrives on the attention of the audience, it needs to break taboos in order to make a good story. Thus, conversion from Islam still constitutes a taboo in the Middle East, as "an apostate calls into question the definition of the borders of social cohesion".<sup>27</sup> Contrary to journalism, research is more conservative and relies on substantial government funds which are often tied to particular political interests. At this point, the intricate relation between research and political implications must be further examined.

The specific contribution of my research lies in its regional placement and in its interdisciplinary approach. Thus it is both practical and theoretical in nature.

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24 Jenkins, 2002; Cox, 1996.

25 Blond, 1998; Frei, 1992; Lindbeck, 1984; Milbank, 1993; Plantinga, 2000.

26 Kaoues, 2013, p. 13.

27 Ibid., p. 13.

The growing presence of C/P Christianity in Africa and Asia inevitably leads to engagement with Islamic cultures. This engagement will increase in the future. I have observed growing C/P communities in the Middle East, who were made up of migrant workers from Asia and Africa. Also the underground, publicly invisible C/P communities of converts from Muslim background who are also present in the Middle East and growing have yet to be researched. However, my focus is on the Arabic speaking C/P communities, whose members mostly converted from other traditional Christian denominations, most of whom were only rudimentary practicing Christians. My work represents the beginning research of C/P Christianity in the Middle East.

After completing the first draft of my PhD I came across an article written by Fatiha Kaoues on the current activities of the emerging evangelical Pentecostal churches in Lebanon.<sup>28</sup> She mentions some of the same churches I have also conducted research among within the evangelical denomination. Her work seeks to answer the question as to why conversion happens and its role for citizenship and sectarian politics. In explaining the phenomena of religious conversion, Kaoues mainly follows the deprivation paradigm in describing how cultural and economic modernization creates pressures and needs, which then are addressed by the emergent evangelical Pentecostal churches. Among the cultural benefits she mentions is the culture of “compassion, ethics and authenticity.”<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the Pentecostal church with its various networks offers new converts economic upward mobility and a socio-political identity beyond sectarian divides.<sup>30</sup>

Olivier Roy, summarizing various chapters on conversion in the Middle East, points out the discrepancy of sociological concepts used to describe religious conversion and the language used by the converts themselves. Whereas sociologists employ the change of identity, describing a horizontal transition from one culture to another, the converts employ a strong normative language of leaving something behind of no value. “So there is no symmetry between the point of departure and the point of arrival.”<sup>31</sup> Further, Roy suspects that this incommensurability creates a misunderstanding. On the one hand,

The convert puts forward something that could not be understood in sociological terms: faith as a primary mover, not as an element among others constituting a religious identity.<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, the sociologist is prone, due to this exhaustive claim of the believer, to reduce this claim to more familiar paradigms such as “culture, social

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28 Kaoues, 2013, pp. 13–28.

29 Ibid., p. 26

30 Ibid., p. 23.

31 Roy, 2013, p. 182.

32 Ibid., p. 183.

movements, ethnicity, nationalism”.<sup>33</sup> As a consequence, Roy sees limits in approaching religious conversion through sociological terms. He concludes:

A sociological approach cannot exhaust the experiences and agency of the converts. There is autonomy of the religious sphere that social sciences have a problem grasping. Building a faith community is not just building a new kind of community: members’ agenda (including politics and economics, the impact on social bonds, the increased social mobility) is largely determined by a religious perspective and attitude.”<sup>34</sup>

During my field research I also came to a similar conclusion when I sorted through possible paradigms through which I could approach the emergence of C/P groups and churches, most of which happened through conversion. While I agree with Roy that not only sociological paradigms, but the academic nature of understanding per se is reductive, I also believe that the recognition of the limits of current sociological paradigms in grasping social reality is not a final conclusion, but poses a challenge to put forward a better paradigm. Thus, Roy’s conclusion has been my starting point as I sought to construct a paradigm of realness which could include both the secular sociologist’s criteria and the C/P believer’s perspective. Through this attempt, I have departed from one particular disciplinary angle in the conviction that scientific disciplines are merely pragmatically constructed lenses, which sometimes need to be fused in order to grasp a complex biological and social world.

While I also consider the larger external macro structure in my study, I believe that a broader sociological theory must be complemented with the internal micro perspective of meaning employing ethnography and hermeneutics as deprivation theories in themselves are tautological and have no explanatory power. For this reason, the beginning of my research on the realness of a C/P life world stems from the particular practices of C/P believers. My approach lies at the intersection between Philosophy/Theology and Social/Cultural Anthropology/Sociology due to the nature of the research question. However, I bypass the extensive discourse on reality within philosophy, which primarily focuses on mental state or attitude. Since bodily action is a key to understand how C/P impression of realness is acquired, I focus mainly on theorists within the fields of philosophy and sociology who worked on the theory of action such as Austin, Berger/Luckman, Ricoeur and Taylor. I construct a theory through empirical observations and hope that other researchers will continue where I ended and help to fill in the gaps my own work will necessarily leave. Thus, I hope to sketch out a research paradigm which will serve as a unifying framework for religious as well as secular social phenomena and overcome the discrepancy mentioned by

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33 Ibid., p. 181.

34 Roy, 2013, p. 184.

Roy. This desire stems from the ethical observation of the common world, which fuses and shrinks temporally and spatially due to globalization and modern technology and where the need to envision a common conception of realness is more urgent than ever before.



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## 2. The emergence of Charismatic/Pentecostal communities in Beirut

### 2.1. Introductory remarks

#### 2.1.1. Negotiation of the self-reference “Charismatic/Pentecostal”

In the following thesis, I use the term “Charismatic/Pentecostal” (C/P) in order to classify a local movement. As a broad definition, the C/P movement emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the trinity within Christian theology, through both their beliefs and practices. Since the Holy Spirit is perceived as active within their bodies and in the world, their practices follow this divine agency and therefore are in general, more expressive than that of Christians in the traditional churches. However, this definition of a communal identity is to some extent problematic. On the local level, the groups I have observed would not necessarily classify themselves as C/P out of fear of possible connotations which may come along with these labels. The evangelical Pentecostals in Lebanon are wary of the term “Pentecostal” due to the tendency among Pentecostals particularly in the West and Africa to support Christian Zionism<sup>35</sup> which could present them as traitors of their own country as Lebanon is formally still in a state of war with Israel. The Charismatic Roman Catholic, Maronite and various Orthodox Charismatic groups are also wary of particular various charismatic practices which could compromise their position within the official churches. One of the founders of a C/P group within the Roman Catholic Church reported to me about a Greek Orthodox priest who had begun to be more open towards the Catholic Charismatic movement. He then travelled to the USA and visited some C/P mega churches only to return and curtail any interaction with the local Lebanese Charismatic movement. The Charismatic leader believed the behaviour of the Greek Orthodox bishop was due to having “met some emotionally unstable people and took it as representative for the Charismatic movement.” Moreover, globally active C/P mission agencies send out mis-

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35 On more detailed account of Christian Zionism see 2.3.3.