



Christians pray inside *Renascer em Cristo* church in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in 2007. On that occasion, the church was filled with about 4,000 worshippers. Conversions to non-Catholic forms of Christianity are increasingly common throughout Brazil - and surging throughout other South and Latin American nations. PHOTO: CNS, CAETANO BARREIRA, REUTERS



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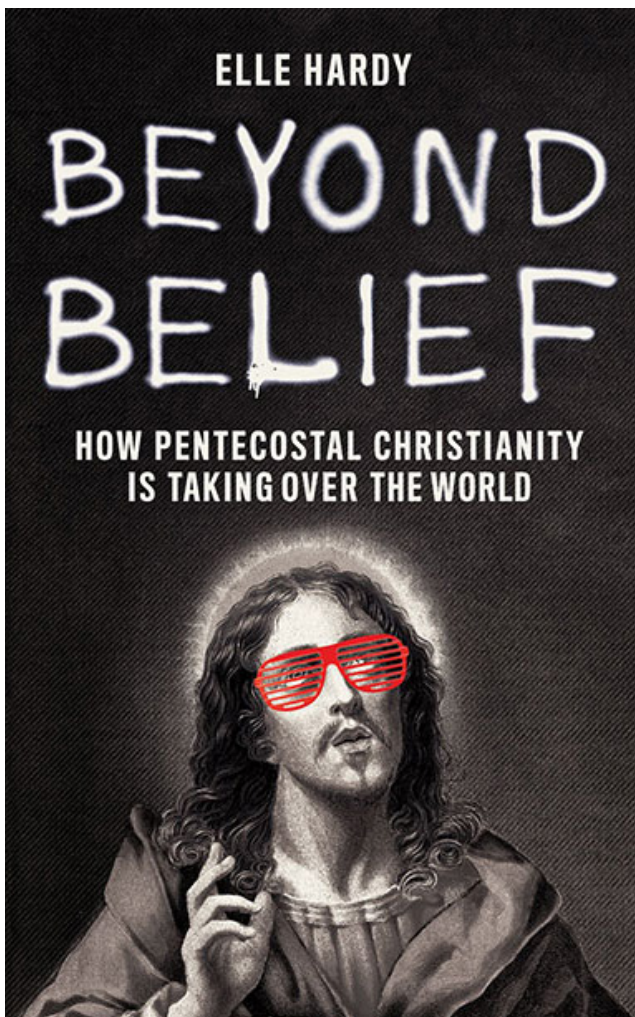
adoption of concepts from labour sociology embraced by US Pentecostals of the "third wave", like John Wimber and C. Peter Wagner.

They sought to avoid the "routinisation of charisma" and the loss of person-to-person connection and intimacy as their movement became more established.

So although Pentecostalism is "likely to become the

dominant Christian faith" in those areas where it's growing quickly, to become a kind of "Catholicism without priests", according to Hardy, it still retains a personal feel.

Of course, this all comes with a price-tag, and Hardy's investigation lays out the Pentecostal approach to financialising church life with great aplomb - from the extravagant lives of preachers, to



Beyond Belief: How Pentecostal Christianity Is Taking Over the World by Elle Hardy. IMAGE: WWW.HURSTPUBLISHERS.COM

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Elle Hardy

the cozy relationship between Pentecostal "reform" programmes and governments, and the money-making leviathan of Hillsong Music.

"Whatever their flaws, third-wave churches have only absorbed an idea from the secular world that affects believers and non-believers alike: we've learned to conflate valuing something with paying for it," she writes.

In *Beyond Belief* Hardy investigates Pentecostalism as a global phenomenon, travelling to Nigeria, Korea, Latin America, Eastern Europe and other locales to chart just how rapidly (and sometimes insidiously) it has grown.

Catholics need to rapidly update their concept of evangelical Christianity; instead of thinking of Hillsong as a God Box out in Sydney's Hills district, imagine instead urbane and upmarket locations in Moscow, Kenya, Tokyo and other world cities.

One major factor in its growth is the tendency of Pentecostalism to poach upwardly-mobile Christians from established denominations. In Latin America and the Philippines in particular, the lion's share of converts are disillusioned and under-served cultural Catholics.

"Pentecostalism addresses the needs of people in the

here and now. It's health and wealth. It's miracles, it's 'Prosperity Gospel,'" Hardy said.

"Catholicism is seen as quite bureaucratic, Pentecostalism is felt to be local. It's not a priest who has been educated in Spain, or Portugal, and dropped into your little corner on the edge of the Amazon.

"It's a local guy who grew up with you, is mixed race like you, who looks and sounds like you. He's often the most charismatic guy in the village."

Pentecostalism is also committed to a radical sense of "born again" conversion that appeals to ex-Catholics who feel the Church has compromised too much with the social and political norms of the world.

"That is probably most overwhelmingly powerful, when you hear people give testimony about their conversion," Hardy said.

The practice of public testimonies of conversion is "probably fairly alien to a lot of people in the Catholic faith" and forms a stark point of cultural difference between Catholics and Pentecostals.

For many young Pentecostals conversion is the great marker of the authenticity of their movement, in comparison to established Churches. This can be jarring for Catholics who are accustomed to thinking of the Church of Rome as the main game in global Christianity.

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In fact, Pentecostalism considers itself as having managed to rise above the old denominational divisions - Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and so on - of past centuries and embrace a faith of pure personal

connection with the Lord. Whether it has actually left behind the agonising Christian problematics of previous generations is another question altogether - especially as it becomes an establishment institution.

"I think the main issue will be, because they're converting so many people now, will second and third-generation Pentecostals have that 'born again' moment?" Hardy asks.

It is not hard to imagine future "cultural Pentecostals" who fade out of the church of their parents in search of something else.

The lack of theological rigour and loose approach to Christian orthodoxy that defines the so-called "power evangelism" - which relies on dramatic displays of "signs and wonders" like speaking in tongues, being "slain in the spirit", and emotionally-charged conversions - has made it eminently adaptable to local conditions.

It also makes Pentecostalism able to respond in a decentralised way to political issues. Today they tend to take a looser approach to culture wars and have "been very good at reading the room," Hardy said.

"They don't necessarily want to alienate their audience. There might be some guys whose brand is 'the fire and brimstone guy', but most are more cognisant of the bigger picture."

Yet adaptability also poses difficulties for the future, because "anyone can set up a church with no training. It's completely unregulated". Characterisations of shallowness, charlatanry and parasitism are not without warrant when it comes to the proliferation of "church plants".

Pentecostalism is also unable to avoid the issue that has typically been the crucible of Christian theology, the relationship between church and state.

Former US President Donald Trump, Hungarian PM Viktor Orban, President of the Philippines Rodrigo Duterte and Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, all characterised as strongmen by their critics, have evangelicals eagerly looking over their shoulders for influence in government.

And, as Hardy writes, "Israel has become the movement's totemic moral centre" because of the tendency of evangelicals to embrace a "dispensationalist" theology that collapses revelation and history into one confused process, leading to strong identifications between biblical Israel and the importance of the contemporary state of Israel for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

This shift from entrepreneurship to increasing militancy is a major theme of *Beyond Belief*. Indeed, as Hardy concludes, the networked global Pentecostal movement's attachment to the methods of marketing and PR haven't dulled its self-understanding as "a formidable armoury" for a faith "called to war".

***Beyond Belief: How Pentecostal Christianity is Taking Over the World* is available now from Hurst Publishers.**

SYNODALITY

Francis has no favourites

Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich SJ of Luxembourg said Pope Francis has nothing against either 'conservative' or 'progressive' Catholics - if they learn from life and keep the whole church in mind. The cardinal was appointed the relator general at the 2023 Synod of Bishops, whose theme is "For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission." Commenting on the ordination of women as deacons, Cardinal Hollerich said, "I would have nothing against it. But reforms need a stable foundation. If the Pope were now simply to allow [the priestly ordination of married men] and deaconesses, the danger of schism would be great ... In Africa or in countries like France, many bishops would possibly not go along with it." "The Pope has nothing against conservatives if they learn from life," he added. "In the same way, he has nothing against the reformers if they keep the whole Church in mind. And the Pope does not like infighting in the Church."

THE VATICAN

Vatican faces year in the red

The Vatican projects a budget deficit of €33 million (\$30 million) for 2020, with \$721 million in expenses exceeding an anticipated \$691 million in revenues. Although the expected deficit is less than last year's \$38 million figure, the continuing shortfall will force the Vatican to dip into reserves. And the difficulty is complicated by a sharp decline in contributions to the worldwide Peter's Pence collection. Father Juan Antonio Guerrero Alves, the prefect of the Secretariat for the Economy, presented the basic budget figures to Vatican News. He said that the Secretariat for the Economy would soon be offering a full accounting of expenditures to the world's bishops—and hinted that dioceses may be asked to help make up the Vatican shortfall. "We certainly need a plan to improve revenues," he said.

UNITED STATES

Compensation payout to agency

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services has agreed to pay US\$550,000 to St Vincent Catholic Charities in Lansing. In 2019, the state had threatened to close adoption agencies that did not place children with same-sex couples. "The teaching of the Catholic Church and, hence, the adoption policy of St Vincent is rooted in both faith and reason: that children, on the whole, do best in life when they grow up with a mom and dad who are married to each other," said Rich Budd, Director of Marriage and Family Life for the Diocese of Lansing.