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‘The Greatest Leader of All’

The faces of leadership and Christianity in contemporary Brazil (1980s–2010s)

Karina Kosicki Bellotti

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the leadership discourses and practices based on Christian values propagated in Brazil in the past 30 years. Colonized by the Portuguese from the 1500s to the 1800s, Brazil has a major Catholic tradition, yet is well-known for its wide religious diversity, which includes native religions, African diaspora religions (Candomblé and Umbanda, mainly), Spiritism (by the late 19th century), Protestantism (also by the 19th century) and Pentecostalism (20th century). The 20th century was also marked by an influx of immigrants with Eastern and Muslim traditions, along with the introduction of New Age practices. All of these were minority religions (Dawson 2007; Schmidt and Engler 2016).

Since the 1980s, Brazil has seen a sharp rise in Evangelical Christians, mainly Pentecostals, due to their direct evangelization in peripheral zones inhabited by low-income Brazilians, as well as their use of media and marketing resources (Chesnut 1997). Evangelicals were 6.6% of the population and Catholics were 89% in 1980, and in the 2010 religious census (IBGE 2010), Evangelicals reached 22.2%, while Catholics were 64.6% of the population. Initially founded by US missionaries, Evangelical churches were nationalized by the early 20th century, but the bonds with US Evangelicalism continues until today, through the media, theological institutes, and circulation of laypeople and preachers (Bellotti 2016, pp. 451–461; Freston 2016, pp. 430–450).

During these 30 years, Brazil was also a developing Latin American country that entered the globalized world and economy, facing hyperinflation, recession, and social insecurities, as the consequences of 20 years of civil-military dictatorship. From 1964 to 1985 the country was ruled by the military, with the support of right-wing sectors of civil society (Skidmore 1990). Although some of these problems were overcome by the mid-1990s and 2000s, global issues strikingly affected the country. These included fierce economical competition, an increase in work hours and low paid jobs, and the ebb and flow of speculative capital.

In this context, books and services teaching leadership skills based on Christian values or on Jesus Christ himself, written mainly by US authors, have appeared in the Brazilian self-help industry, along with advice from other spiritual and religious traditions. Reliable figures
on the sales of those books are unavailable, but more titles are placed on the market each year, as is also the case with books on Christian living, Esoterism, and Prosperity. The former theme became popular as new churches arose with the Health and Wealth Gospel. Nevertheless, in a moment of economic and social despair, the apparently timeless recipes for individual success and victory became part of the discourses and practices of Brazilian Christians. Therefore, this chapter aims to historically approach distinct guides for leadership offered by Christian means of communication to equip religious leadership with the know-how of the business and managerial world and endow lay people with Christian leadership skills and morals.

Since the media play a fundamental role in the diffusion of such discourses and practices, the theoretical frame of this study is the analysis of religion, media, and culture regarding the self-help culture and leadership studies. General aspects of such products and services will be presented to evaluate how, and what kind of, readership is addressed in such media. Furthermore, the studies on religion and economy are paramount to understanding the rise of neoliberalism and its impacts on the religious field, with the increases in consumerism, individualism, management, governance, and marketization. What kinds of religiosity and values are appreciated, and which ones are rejected when Jesus Christ is portrayed as C.E. O. or ‘The Greatest Leader of All’? As these messages are conveyed in a self-help culture, the leadership model is individually driven, referring to a direct relationship between the leader and his/her followers, and devoid of further historical and social conditions that explain the leader’s tribulations. Yet, the presence of Jesus as role model is conveyed as an alternative to an allegedly egocentric and greedy contemporary culture. As much as some of the authors wish to give an ethical model of leadership conduct, such advice calls into question whether and how a Christian-based leadership can be reconciled with the recent development of globalized and neoliberal capitalism.

**Self-help literature, leadership lessons, and the American Jesus**

In the recent Brazilian religious field, the main battlefield has become between the media and the market, used to conquer the hearts and minds of Brazilians with effective solutions and spiritual comfort for everyday life problems. The growth of the self-help publishing industry in Brazil since the 1980s was one of the venues in which religious writers from different traditions became popular, stimulating an increasing tendency of individual religious and spiritual autonomy over the course of the 20th century.

The theoretical frame of religion, media, and culture studies aims at the complex relations between media and religion. If the first studies were on the instrumental uses of media by religious institutions (Horsfield 1984), this field had lately incorporated different perspectives on both subjects (Morgan 2008; Lynch et al. 2012). By media I refer not only to the means of communication but also to the communication systems that permeate everyday life in the globalized context. Thus, media are meaning-making systems, engaged in the social construction of reality (Morgan 2008; Gauthier 2014, pp. 75–88). By religion, I refer to the religious and spiritual beliefs and practices of both individuals and social groups, related or not to traditional religious institutions. The deinstitutionalization and detraditionalization of religion enhanced religious autonomy and the media are at the very core of the reshaping of religion in terms of identity construction, consumerism, and expressions of authenticity—characteristics of the neoliberal and globalized context since the 1980s (Gauthier et al. 2016).

Such processes can be observed in Brazil, and, in the main subject of this chapter, the circulation of Christian leadership discourses, refer to a media phenomenon built by
independent religious agents—writers, consultants—aimed at a wider audience. A historical approach to the relations between media and religion is useful for comprehending the trajectory of the self-help literature and the leadership lessons from the United States to Brazil.

Self-help literature has been one of the most enduring popular genres and has become the primary vehicle for religious agents to convey advice from their experiential point of view, fomenting a media culture based on an individualistic and therapeutic approach to numerous types of problems. Donald Meyer (1988), Roy Anker (1999), Cohen and Boyer (2008), and Erin A. Smith (2015) demonstrate that self-help literature has roots in Anglo-Saxon Calvinism from the late 18th and early 19th centuries, diffused with the popularization of printed media in the United States. By the turn of the 20th century, these books focused on the adaptation of one’s personality to succeed in the urban-industrial and impersonal world of work and business. Thus came the popularity of positive thinking, mind cure, personal magnetism, among other techniques to fight daily problems and personal issues with the power of the mind and faith (Meyer 1988). To this day, this genre specializes in how to deal with emotions and thoughts, with short chapters and sentences, suggestions of application of lessons, self-reflexive questions, popular wisdom, and quotes of celebrities, scholars, political authorities, and religious leaders to give legitimacy to the author’s ideas (Illouz 2007).

Since the printed media of the 19th century (Schneider and Dornbusch 1958; Meyer 1988), self-help literature has shaped and sold religious narratives and advice for success, victory, happiness, and self-realization within a therapeutic, experiential, and pragmatic religiosity, in cultural products like the books and Christian coaching and consulting services analyzed in this chapter.

Self-help literature became popular in the 20th century, with wide distribution throughout the world. In Brazil, there has been a surge in religious publication since the 1980s. The growth of the Evangelical population has run in parallel with the increase in Evangelical publishing over the past 30 years, which sold mostly translations of US authors, such as Max Lucado, Benny Hinn, and many others. Among the themes approached by these books was leadership, which combined Christian values and lessons with the secular leadership literature.

Such production in the United States bloomed by the 1980s (Rost 1991), following the rise of yuppie culture and valorization of highly competitive marketplaces, in times of nascent globalization, or what Boltanski and Chiapello (1999) named the ‘third spirit of capitalism,’ marked by neoliberalism. In his analysis of the field of leadership studies since the late 19th century, Rost (1991, p. 94) demonstrated that the language of the leadership literature came from the industrial paradigm of management and social psychology. That meant: good leadership means good management, especially after the 1980s, when US discourses and practices regarding leadership were part of a mythological narrative of the so-called enduring position of the United States as a world military, political, and economic leader. Such literature was also released in Brazil with translations into Portuguese.

The leadership discourses give us a glimpse of the wider processes of globalization and neoliberalization of religion. Therefore, another theoretical frame is given by the studies on religion and economy, developed by Gauthier et al. (2013a, 2013b), which are pertinent to explaining why anyone should aspire to become a ‘leader’ and not just a manager. Since the late 1970s, in the affluent Northern Hemisphere, neoliberalism has risen as the dominant economic ideology, pushing the globalization processes along with consumerism and individualism: ‘from being embedded within the social, the political and the religious, the neoliberal age is that in which market economics are henceforth that in which other social realities are said to be themselves embedded’ (Gauthier et al. 2013b, p. 13).
In Brazil, although neoliberalism as economic politics was not implemented until the late 1990s, consumerism and individualism have long been valued as distinct expression of status, in a profoundly unequal society. According to Gauthier et al. (2013b), religion and economy are not separate spheres, although not reduced to one another. The economic changes resonate in the religious field in the form of the neoliberalization of religion, i.e., religion becomes deregulated and directed to individual consumption, providing this-worldly, experiential, and emotional solutions to everyday issues, in which freedom of choice is imperative (Gauthier et al. 2013b). This generates the paradox by which ‘deregulation’ shapes religion in novel ways, in tune with a ‘market model,’ and according to new modes of authority and authenticity that are oriented toward experience and self-realization. Neoliberalization also enacts the valorization of marketization, governance, and management. The latter is crucial to our analysis, since all the books explored in this chapter (and many more on religion and leadership) use management language and concepts to depict religious leadership. As Gauthier et al. write:

Management lies at the crux of the economy, politics, society and culture (...) as with consumerism, management has infused social life to the point where it provides the language with which personal and social aspirations and realities can themselves be expressed.

(Gauthier et al. 2013b, p. 16)

Our case study shows one particular means by which this process has produced novel and intricate crossovers between economics (management) and religion that have penetrated whole strands of mainstream culture.

Although managerial books and manuals have existed since the early 20th century, by the 1980s, they focused on the production of the leader, and when they appropriated the Christian symbolism to humanize the workplace, also hid the mechanisms of exploitation and profit of capitalist companies behind the religious/spiritual curtain.

In this context, religious literature of leadership has been released in the United States and translated into Portuguese, prescribing lessons of leadership for church leaders, and role models of leadership for laypeople based on examples of Jesus, taken from diverse interpretations of the Gospels, mixed with concepts of leadership developed from the early 20th century onwards. Some such theories are: the great men or traits theory (leadership is explained by one’s exceptional traits), behavioral theory (leadership is determined by the sole relationship between leader and follower), and excellence theory (typical of the manuals of management, featuring CEOs; popular in the 1990s) (Rost 1991, pp. 13–36). Such theories can still be seen in both secular and religious leadership books today, as in the examples that follow.

From the books of the 1990s to the leadership media industry of the early 2000s, there is a predominance of US authors in the religious field. These authors also offer courses, webinars and seminars, and consulting services worldwide, holding representation in countries such as Brazil. Especially in the Evangelical Brazilian field, the presence of North Americans in the marketplace of culture is common and welcomed as a sign of prestige. And the reason that Jesus is the primary character in such literature is also historical—not only because he is the main figure of Christianity but also due to the US Protestant transformation of his figure in the popular culture at the turn of the 19th through the 20th centuries (Prothero 2004).

Since the 19th century, the figure of Jesus Christ has become increasingly devoid of his supernatural characteristics to fit human representations, becoming more a US national icon.
than a deity. This strategy has helped to shape Jesus for national mass consumption, interreligious understanding (the creation of the concept of Judeo-Christian culture in the early 20th century), and missionary purposes. Jesus was the son of God made man among humanity, whose examples can be followed by anyone. The fact that his humanity was the main material for popular literature and pop culture portraits also explains this preference for his story and personality as role model (Prothero 2004).

Jesus as leadership model

Before the popular portraits of Jesus as a model leader of recent decades, just a few books explored this idea. One of the first was Bruce Barton’s The Man Nobody Knows (1925), presenting a masculine representation of the Jesus of Nazareth. The servant leadership model was first developed by Robert Greenleaf in The Servant as Leader in 1970, in which Jesus is a servant leader, i.e., a humble leader who serves (and sometimes sacrifices himself for) his followers, with high moral and ethical standards. As neoliberalism advanced, the representations of Jesus as leader became popular by the 1980s and 1990s with US books like Jesus C.E.O. by Laurie Beth Jones (1996), Lead like Jesus (2005) by Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges, and The Servant—or The Monk and the Executive, by James C. Hunter (2004). Hunter’s volume has popularized the idea of servant leadership in Brazil in the 2010s, demonstrating that while religion is reshaped by economy, economy also can be conceptualized in religious and spiritual terms (Gauthier et al. 2013b, p. 9)—such are the following cases.

James C. Hunter, Baptist and human resources specialist, wrote The Servant, a fictitious story of a frustrated executive who seeks refuge in a distant monastery to rethink his life. There, he finds a former and famous C.E.O. who became a monk and taught leadership based on Jesus Christ and the Golden Rule (to treat others as one would like to be treated). Although the monk is one of the main characters, his Catholic affiliation is not mentioned. The book mixes situations of daily challenges of leadership, ideas from management and social psychology theories, and lessons of a non-authoritative type of leadership that make leaders put first the needs of their followers.

Although the author affirms that these lessons can be used in any type of organization, his language is permeated with management jargon, referring to business and work relations primarily. Jesus is mentioned as the main example of love and understanding, but the idea of servant leadership does not refer to any biblical passage. Hunt sustains that most problems between employees and employers in companies come from their bad relationships, yet he is silent about the capitalist nature of work relations. The application of the Golden Rule and the Servant approach to relations would bring happiness and satisfaction to all, and it would make for a better world if used in other social organizations. The contemporary world suffers from egocentrism and greed, so servant leadership would contribute to the improvement of relations between leaders and followers. Such ideas are typical of the behavioral theory of leadership in which there is only the interaction between the leader and the follower, while other variables affecting work relations, such as market demands, economic variations, and political regulations, are absent. As such, this literature conveys deeply neoliberal values and an exclusively individualist, de-socialized, and depoliticized conception of the social world.

According to Hunter, in his third book, Back to the Monastery (2014), 80% of copies of his previous books were sold in Brazil, although there is no data on the profile of its buyers. Around four million copies of his first two books were sold, according to the cover of the third book, but no precise data are available. Recently, in 2016, a major public bank, the
Bank of Brazil, offered an instructional online certification course based on Hunter’s work to its employees. Also, a theater play based on the book, named *The Monk and the Executive*, was promoted by a human resources company called Valoriza-te (Value Yourself, in Portuguese), which staged the play for companies, universities, schools, and the general public (Monge 2018). Since 2018, the company has been offering an online course, providing the play in full HD, along with weekly lessons on leadership, such as: ‘Is authority built on service and sacrifice? How?’, and ‘The greatest leaders were servants: Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Mother Theresa’ (Curso 2018).

The behavioral approach to leadership is also present in *Lead like Jesus* (2007), by Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges. Hodges is a Christian and a human resources specialist, and Blanchard is known for his management books from the early 1980s (Blanchard and Johnson 1982), in which the leader gradually delegates more tasks to his/her subordinate, according to his/her level of expertise. According to the authors, this model was also offered by Jesus to his disciples—a practical leadership model for every organization, with the main objective of transforming followers into leaders. A new model of leadership is urgently needed, in the face of the disbelief in traditional models of leadership in society. Therefore, Jesus of Nazareth, servant of God, is the ultimate model of humble leadership, which can promote the kingdom of God based on love, justice, and service in any situation. However, the language of business and management reminds us that such goals can be translated into efficacy and excellence in organizations. It produces better results: the best service for clients and employees, overcoming incompetency, and bringing success, which would stimulate ethics and honesty. The servant leader becomes an asset to the company. As Michel Foucault (2008) observed, one effect of neoliberalism is that individuals are shaped by the entrepreneurial model, leading them to be oriented toward economic productivity and growth, as well as to style themselves as entrepreneurs. Here, the religious figure of Jesus serves to give transcendent legitimation to this neoliberalization of the self at the same time that it reframes religion and religious leadership in neoclassical economic terms.

The management of emotions is also targeted by *Lead Like Jesus*. The demonstration of compassion by Jesus preceded the contemporary preoccupation with emotional intelligence (Goleman 2005) in organizations. In *The Servant* (Hunter 2004), love is not only an emotion but also something to be put into action for the greater good. It is interesting to note that emotions are welcomed to be part of the world of work, but only if controlled to be productive, rationalized. Eva Illouz (2007) defends that capitalism has instituted a new culture of emotions, an ‘emotional capitalism,’ in which ‘affect is made an essential aspect of economic behavior and in which emotional life—especially that of the middle classes—follows the logic of economic relations and exchange.’ And, according to Thomas Frank (2002), when such emotions are conveyed by a man, he is considered noble—the leader cares—but when the same emotions are shown by a woman, she is considered weak and uncontrolled. Most of the leadership books available in Brazil are written by men, referring to a male-oriented type of organization.

In *Jesus C.E.O.* (1996), by Laurie Beth Jones, as in *The Servant* (Hunter 2004), Jesus sacrificed himself many times on behalf of his disciples, until he made the ultimate sacrifice on the cross. The idea of sacrifice is present in *Jesus C.E.O.*, as Jones advises her readers that the leader should put first his followers, his employees, his subordinates, his clients—service and sacrifice go hand in hand, indicating a close relation with the post-industrial reality of work, with extra working hours taking the scarce time of leisure, to achieve excellence and productivity.

One book directly associated Jesus with the Prosperity (Health and Wealth) Gospel: *The Leadership Secrets of Jesus* (1996), by Mike Murdock, Prosperity preacher. Jesus was an
entrepreneur who solved problems and marketed his products—salvation being the most important product—with joy and boldness. He was persecuted and misinterpreted, and yet he understood the insatiable appetite for excellence and personal development. The book carries managerial and prosperity language directed to a presumed readership of entrepreneurs (or aspiring entrepreneurs), claiming that Jesus was rich and wanted to multiply people’s finances, fulfilling the will of God. However skewed and improbable the foundations in scripture for such affirmations may be, such representations of Jesus resonate with the Prosperity Gospel, which claims that a good Christian deserves financial rewards due to his/her personal sacrifices. Exit narratives of humbleness and poverty in the Gospels, as well as any foundation for social and humanitarian interpretations, such as those found in Liberation theology and Social Gospel.

These books usually don’t include explicative notes to US cultural references; neither do they provide comments of Brazilian editors about the application of these leadership lessons to the Brazilian reality. They convey the figure of Jesus as the same, today, yesterday, and tomorrow, and yet he becomes multiple according to each appropriation of his figure. He is usually portrayed with his human traits and extraordinary personality, devoid of his historical context. It’s a personal Jesus who helps readers cope with the world of deregulated work, giving a sense of self-worth to readers who wish to overcome their challenges. These books present an open interpretation of leadership, success, victory, to be imagined by each reader from his/her experience. This a-temporal characteristic is one of the main ingredients in the longevity of this genre, along with its open interpretation, and in countries like Brazil, the fact that the authors are foreign also attracts readership. Readers are also treated as individuals devoid of their historical, social, and cultural context, whose problems and solutions depend on their own actions and thoughts. There is no specific data on readership, but from the appropriations of the leadership concepts analyzed in the next section, these ideas circulate within and outside the religious communities.

Leadership services in business and Christian fields

In the Christian services for the development of leadership skills available in Brazil, Christian coaches, counselors, pastors, and other specialists claim to be inspired by Jesus as a role model of leader. The Christian leadership lessons become part of a greater industry of leadership worldwide, in which the frontiers between the secular and the sacred realms are blurred, to the point where the leader is someone vested with both spiritual and material qualities.

In instructional materials for MBA courses at the Getúlio Vargas Foundation, one of the most prestigious business institutions in Brazil, there are modules of leadership with a historical approach to managerial studies and the latest tendencies in leadership studies (Motta 2011). The materials reinforce the idea that the leader is not a manager and must be committed to the growth of the team, allowing each member to reach his/her full potential and become a leader him/herself—in other words, to become a prophet of self-realization through entrepreneurialism. The leader must have a vision, an idea of mission, a sense of responsibility and accountability, sensibility to listen to his/her subordinates. In terms of emotional intelligence, the leader should connect emotion, reason, morals, ethics for the greater good, while bearing impeccable character and honesty, as everyone is looking up to him/her. It is a heavy weight on his/her shoulders, as the leader is deemed to be the cause of success or failure of a team or even a company.
Several Christian services and professionals aim to develop appropriate leadership skills, such as the Global Leadership Summit, promoted worldwide by Willow Creek Community Church (Global 2018), the US megachurch founded by Bill Hybels (Sargeant 2000). The summit is hosted in the United States and is a two-day event with several speakers from both religious and secular fields, such as US megachurch pastor Rick Warren and mega-rock star Bono, who share their experiences of success as leaders. In Brazil, the GLS has been broadcast since the early 2000s in partnership with Evangelical churches, along with Brazilian facilitators and translated instructional material, provided by the company Envisionar.

That company also offers its own online training courses, books, and consulting services for churches, children’s ministries, and Christian businesses. The consultancy aims ‘to help churches, denominations, or organizations to identify what God wants to do [with them] and proposes practical strategies on how to execute such plans’ (Capacitação 2018). The company also sells courses to prepare leaders, whether in churches or secular organizations—in their portfolios there are many modules to be personalized by the customers (Cursos de Capacitação 2018).

A growing tendency in the leadership field is Christian Coaching, which has existed in the United States since the early 2000s and among Brazilian professionals and companies since the early 2010s. On one of these services’ websites, there’s a quote from Jack Welch, the famous General Electric C.E.O. and best-selling leadership author: ‘In the future, all leaders will be coaches. S/He who won’t develop such ability, will be automatically discarded by the market’ (Act Coaching 2018). The fact that the quotation is displayed by a coaching company—Act Coaching—with texts on Christian Coaching, is indicative of how rapidly coaching is being appropriated by Christian professionals. According to the Institute of Christian Coaching, Christian coaching is a process of helping people develop, whose practices are based on biblical teachings. The relationship between coach and coachees is based on such virtues as love, humility, and sincerity.

Many Brazilian Christian coaches are certified by the International Association of Christian Coaching and by the Federation of Coaching, US organizations that provide guidelines for the work of coaches. Will Christian coaching be the final frontier of the leadership programs—until another idea of authority or power becomes the new gospel? This is a new issue, to be followed by future studies.

**Challenges in the studies on leadership, media, and religion**

The focus of this chapter was the analysis of discourses on and practices of leadership, based on representations of Jesus Christ as a very flexible role model, which inspires Christian and secular services of leadership skills’ improvement in the contemporary global and neoliberal economy, within a management culture. This is a typical case of an intricate relationship between religion, economy, and media, in which leadership content and messages are framed by mediatic experiences—in this case, the leadership lessons conveyed by self-help books and by different social practices, like the play, the training courses, the counselling, and coaching services, in both religious and secular instances.

The Brazilian Evangelical field has always been influenced by its US Protestant and Pentecostal counterparts, consuming their media, as seen in the case of the leadership industry. Thomas Frank (2002) maintains that the discourse of leadership, especially servant leadership, is ambivalent: as it preaches being in the service of others, the churches and leaders who embrace it are usually committed to church growth—multiplying leaders and
members—which puts considerable pressure on them. Further studies must be conducted to explore the impact of leadership models on the dynamics of the churches, their leaders, and their flock. This chapter therefore complements Moberg’s chapter in this handbook, which analyzes a linked phenomenon in the likes of the churches’ responses to the marketization of religion. Yet more research is needed to fully assess the breadth and complexities of such a reconfiguration of religion due to marketization and neoliberalization as we go deeper into the processes of globalization. In addition, since the leadership culture is entangled with the neoliberalization of religion, and of society as a whole, how are non-Christian religions in Brazil and elsewhere responding to such trends?

If leadership is worth studying and encouraging in the religious field, more than role models, various experiences of leadership should be analyzed as historical and social facts, with their contingencies and potentialities. One particular facet must be considered: the role of women in the religious field, usually underestimated by institutional hierarchies, but with constant activity in prayer circles, healing services, pastoral care, and community services. Not only in Brazil but in Latin America as a whole, in disenfranchised areas, women deal with the problems of poverty, violence, and gender inequality. Instead of looking at constructed role models, future leadership authors could bring real-life examples of challenging leadership, preferably with transnational comparisons.

In the Brazilian case, the circulation of leadership initiatives explored in this chapter shows the intertwining of secular and religious notions of leadership as neoliberal capitalism unfolds. The appeal of religious figures like Jesus of Nazareth as role models serves the purposes of religious agents to provide ethical examples of leadership, but their readership is also burdened with the weight of responsibility of becoming a leader in every aspect of their lives. The example serves to show how religion is reformatted to cater to ethics (i.e., how individuals should behave, versus collective projects and morality) as well as inner-worldly versions of salvation (self-realization, health, wealth). In addition, it shows how neoliberalism shapes religion and also how religious figures such as Jesus are somewhat ‘naturally’ absorbed in neoliberalism-drenched cultures, thereby providing it with transcendent legitimation.

Another challenge for the study of contemporary religion is the relationship between leadership principles and political activism—which Christian leadership role models are present in the agenda and the socioeconomic activity of Evangelical politicians and their supporters? This becomes pertinent as large sections of Brazilian Evangelicals have supported a neoliberal and populist politician such as Jair Bolsonaro, the Christian right-wing presidential candidate elected at the end of 2018.

Another challenge is the investigation of the relationship between the concepts of poverty and wealth, and the religious narratives and solutions for social inequality and inequity in the global economy—which are the actual roles taken by Christian leaders, regardless of their theological differences, in the face of social and economic inequality? Given the sacralization of the market, or ‘capitalism as religion,’ as Walter Benjamin (Löwy 2009, pp. 60–73) put it, in contemporary global societies, how—and which—religious discourses and practices may confront the serious consequences of environmental and human degradation?

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