New religious “prosperity” movements and their social and economic implications for the political process.

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Prosperity religious movements

- Those movements that make a strong link between religious belief and faithfulness and growth in personal wealth
  - Strongly materialist in their emphasis
- Religious faith is seen as something direct, active and interventionist
  - There is an active spiritual being/force in the universe (God/Allah) that dictates/influences daily events
  - The desire of that power is to make believers healthy and wealthy
  - This power is available to those who believe in it to use to benefit themselves
- All a person has to do to enlist that power is
  - To claim it verbally (word-act)
  - To act in a way that gives that power the opportunity to work (faith-act)
- A global movement: they now represent the largest and most rapidly growing and spreading churches and movements across the globe.
An overlooked global, cultural, political, economic phenomenon

- Overlooked...

- Examples
  - City Harvest Church, Singapore.
    - Membership: 28,000. Budget: $49 million
  - Yoido Full Gospel Church, South Korea
    - Weekly attendance: 250,000
  - The House Church movement in China
  - The African Charismatic movement
  - Embassy of God Church, Kiev
    - Membership: 25,000
    - Branches: 70

- Diminishment of religion
- Interventionist religion seen as primitive, superstitious
- Independent, decentralized movements “hard to cover”
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- Christians in China
  - 70-100 million
  - > CCP
- CCP tolerance of the “grey” religious economy
- “By frequenting McDonald’s and converting to Christianity, young urban Chinese get psychological peace, security, and certainty. They also gain a sense of participating in the new and glamorous dimensions of contemporary cultural change without exposing themselves directly to the vagaries of the global market.” (Yang, 2005)
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    – >10,000 new churches
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Significance

• The political and economic context
• The reworking of religion in the global marketplace
• The reworking of religion in the media marketplace
• Globalization and social order as religious “flow”
• Political influence
• Prosperity religious movements as major NGO’s
• Prosperity religion as economic philosophy
• Prosperity religion and the new spirit of capitalism
The political and economic context

- A decentralised, grassroots response to the collapse and dysfunction of social and economic systems in the post-colonial period of developing nations.

  – “In Ghana economic decline was paralleled by the rise of new churches. These so-called Spiritual churches, which promised their members not only salvation but also material well-being in this world, became increasingly appealing to mission church members after Independence in 1958. From the 1980s onwards (a disastrous period in Ghanaian socio-economic history which was marked by severe starvation), pentecostalist churches became increasingly popular.” (Meyer, 1998, p. 759)
Religion as access to globalized consumer culture

• Finke and Stark: Religion as a market economy
• Charismatic, prosperity churches as market phenomena
  – Independent, standing or falling on the market
  – Dynamic services that create spectacle and participation
  – Ideology with emotional engagement.
  – Accessible
  – Emphasis on relevance and usability
  – Flexibility
• Global in their orientation
Reworking religion in the media marketplace

• The remediation of Christianity
  – From the institutional structures of modern rational literate religion
  – To those of the electronic post-modern: visual, sound as ground>figure, spectacle, mobile, participatory, eclectic, entertaining, sloganeering, dynamic, fluid.

• The reframing of religious authority
  – From the institution to the audience
  – From traditional-formal to charismatic
  – Weber:
    – From formal authority - power legitimized on the grounds of “an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them.”
    – To charismatic authority - power legitimized on the grounds of an individual recognized or revered as being extraordinary and “endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities.”
Globalization and social order as religious flow

• Strongly oral in its cultural forms
• A culture of “flow” – of words, of worship leadership, of people moving in and out of services, workshops and groups, people changing allegiances depending on where the flow is.
• The flow is global – not just local
• Money is part of this flow – the expectation / cultivated faith that in the great scheme of things money given away will return.
  – “The speaking out of words and the giving away of money are therefore akin to each other in the way they provide means of reaching into a world of opportunity as well as threat…An ideology of uninterrupted flow and reception is reinforced by the global charismatic habitus in combination with particular ways of structuring linguistic and financial ‘transactions’.” (Coleman, 2000, pp. 202-203)
Political influence

• A conservative social and moral ideology that is supportive of political positions that serve those interests.
  – A special emphasis on “family values,” structured gender relations, anti-homosexuality.
  – In the US – a strong resistance to “big government” – development of a “biblical theology of taxation.”

• The case of Singapore
  – Article 17, Statement of Belief, City Harvest Church
  – “We believe that Government is ordained of God, and the powers that be are ordained as ministers of God to us for good. To resist the powers and the ordinances is to resist the ordinance of God. We are subject not only for wrath sake but for conscience sake, rendering to all their dues, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. We declare our loyalty to our Government and its leaders, and will assist in every way possible, consistent with our faith in the scriptures as Christian citizens.”
PRM’s as an economic movement

• The context of post-colonial crisis

• RPM’s as major NGO’s – the creation of “autonomous” economic subjects free from the binds of traditional tribal and extended family
  – Literacy education and practical training
  – Rebuilding of moral frameworks of accountability, particularly for youth
  – Abstinence from counter-productive practices
    – Violence at home, tobacco, alcohol, secular entertainment
  – Systems of social welfare
    – Burial societies, wedding gifts, welfare support, housing
  – Economic training and development
    – Training in entrepreneurship
    – Building of supportive social and business networks
    – Training in budgeting and financial planning
    – Microfinancing and seed-funding
Economic influence

• “By the turn of the millennium, World Bank and ILO sources put Africa’s informal economy at 42% of GDP, 78% of the non-agricultural labour force, and 93% of new employment, giving Africa the dubious distinction of being the most informalised region in the world. This not only makes informal actors an important political constituency in the era of democratisation, but raises important questions about the alternative forms of governance through which this enormous informal economy fills the regulatory gaps left by contracting, and in some cases collapsing, states. As Linda Weiss (1987) pointed out in another context, informal economies are not sites of atomistic entrepreneurship; they require networks of social relations for mobilising labour, credit and trust. While ethnicity has played a prominent role in organising African informal economies, religion has, historically and in contemporary times, also been a critical factor in the organisation of reliable economic networks outside the framework of the state.”

PRM’s and the new spirit of capitalism

• Jameson’s three stages of capitalism:
  – Market capitalism, the growth of industrial capital in largely national markets - 1700-1850;
  – Monopoly capitalism in the age of imperialism - exploitation of the raw materials and cheap labour of colonial territories
  – Late capitalism, multi-national corporations with global markets and mass consumption, creating the world space of multinational capital.
Boltanski and Chiapello’s New Spirit of Capitalism

• “There is a recognition that capitalist relations of production cannot function entirely through their own intrinsic logics or through direct coercion. They are always socially and culturally embedded and require appropriate attitudes and feelings in their agents to move the whole system at the human level. **Capitalism needs lots ‘spirit(s)’ to make it work on the human plane.** Often thought through from above in terms of the need for managerial or entrepreneurial skills, equally vital for the functioning of capitalist social formations is a subordinate ‘spirit’ from below, a willing submission, at some level, or at least withdrawal of subjective negation, to the formal relations which subsume labour power to the labour process under the direction of capital or its managers.” (Willis & Maarouf, 2010)
PRM’s and the new spirit of late global capitalism

- Injecting enterprise and wealth with a spiritual meaning and calling
  - Praise for wealthy people, displays of leaders’ wealth, opulent buildings.
  - Paul Yonggi Cho: “The bible says of Jesus, ‘Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.’ – so believers are wasting the poverty of Jesus Christ if they do not become rich.”

- Teaching and encouraging money-making through workshops and within a worship environment
  - At a time of declining wages and high unemployment in the 1990s, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Brazil, with over 1 million members, devoted two days of its weekly schedule of services to preaching the virtues of entrepreneurship and having prayer services for those who were seeking to be self-employed.
  - The Zimbabwe Assemble of God holds “Talent Projects” where members are given money to use, classes in enterprise and financial management, with money collected in community gatherings and recorded on computer.
PRM’s and the new spirit of late global capitalism

• Promoting religion as an important element in the ordering of the financial marketplace
  – “Then where does the greatest difference between the US and China ultimately lie. My personal opinion: churches….The market economy has one major advantage: it discourages idleness….However, a market economy that relies solely on the individual will never be perfect, since it can only call people away from idleness but cannot discourage lies and injury….From the perspective of human society, the most successful model is the church + market economy. That is to say, the happy combination of a market economy that discourages idleness together with a strong faith (ethics) that discourages dishonesty and injury.”
PRM’s and the new spirit of late global capitalism

• Through various devices that exorcise the dangers and demonic forces from money and goods and that spiritualize consumption
  – “The Pentecostalist discourse on consumption does not stop at exposing the dangers of commodities. It also claims to have the power to provide a safe alley towards consumption… By turning church members into vessels of the Holy Spirit, who are capable of fighting Satan and his demons through prayer, Pentecostalism empowers believers to transform commodities into mere objects.” (Meyer 1998)