

The Sovereignty of Miracles: Pentecostal Political Theology in Nigeria¹

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Introduction

This is the eve of a national revival. Call it spiritual awakening or revolution if you please. There are few revolutions in history without bloodshed. But there is one revolutionary – the greatest revolutionary of all time – who did not shed another’s blood to establish his Kingdom. . . His was a spiritual revolution and it has changed the course of the history of man. . .

The warfare we are presently engaged in is the battle of translating the victory of Jesus over the devil into the everyday, natural realities of our personal lives and also of our political, religious, economic and social systems. It is a battle of reclamation: to reclaim from the devil what he illegally holds in his control. . . It is warfare. But we are on the winning side. This is the time to muster the army – the Lord’s army. Here is a clarion call to battle. . .

We are disadvantaged if we lean on carnal weapons. Prayer – militant, strategic and aggressive prayer – must be our weapon of warfare at this time. It is a spiritual warfare and it needs spiritual weapons. This is a call into the ring to wrestle, to sweat it out with an unseen opponent. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against spiritual wickedness, against invisible powers in high places (Ephesians 6:12). . . Nigeria is indeed poised for a revival of an unprecedented dimension. You and I are active participants in what God is about to do. . . Join the Lord’s army to bring about rapid changes that we desperately need in all areas of our national life. We are at the dawn of a new era. I can see it in my spirit.²

In this *Call to Prayer for Nigeria* written in 1990, Pastor Ojewale claims that the country is on the verge of an unprecedented Christian revival. Nearly two decades later, we can confirm his prediction. Since the early 1970s Pentecostal Christianity has become a growing force across the world, especially in Latin America and Africa.³ Nigeria has been the site of Pentecostalism’s greatest explosion on the African continent, and the movement’s extraordinary growth shows no signs of slowing. From a marginal group of some 300,000 in 1970, Pentecostalism, or as Nigerians call it, the Born-Again movement,⁴ now counts over 40 million faithful in Nigeria and has become an overwhelmingly dominant socio-cultural force in the south of the country today. Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity is one of the most successful and rapidly growing forms of religiosity across the world today, and constitutes one of the most globally visible forms of what has been called the “return of the religious.” This form of Christianity is also strongly associated with the dangers of religious “fundamentalism” and the threats it poses to the politics of our time.⁵ This paper will examine aspects of Pentecostalism’s global “revolutionary” project as they are being played out in the post-colonial world today in an effort to clarify elements of a Nigerian Born-Again political theology beyond the epithets and the long-standing antinomies and categories of analysis that have marked our understanding of the relationship between the religious and the political.

The dramatic resurgence of religion across the globe has prompted a critical reappraisal of the relationship between the religious and the political. Under the rubric of “political

theology,” these inquiries have brought to light a question, or a field of inquiry, that both the doctrine of secularism and liberal political theory have obscured: the persistence of the theological or the religious in the political.⁶ The field opened up by these questions is vast. In these brief introductory remarks, I will limit my attention to its political stakes, which are today extremely high.

These stakes are firstly and most obviously those we can observe in current political events and debates: new forms of religiously motivated violence and terrorism; the exposure of the liberal limits of tolerance and a politics of aversion in many Western democracies over matters of faith;⁷ the inability of any Rawlsian “overlapping consensus” or “politics of translation”⁸ to accommodate faith-based claims; the paradoxical and auto-immune instigation of anti-democratic measures and decisions against certain religious politics in the name of democracy (i.e. the Algerian elections and U.S. policies in the “War on Terror”);⁹ and the resurgence of “faith-based” politics in the United States.¹⁰ They are signaled in other, more diffuse ways: the renewed political salience of ethics, as well as a politics of difference increasingly staged in terms of moral absolutes, in which the distinction or struggle between good and evil has become crucial. Beyond the dilemmas that politics faces today – of representation, of sovereignty, of community, of justice – there is a growing sense that we are living in a time of political exception and a time of exceptional danger, threat, and uncertainty. As Frank and McNulty point out, citing a plethora of rhetorical postures and recent governmental policies, there has been a rise of a new “decisionism” within a spate of theoretical writings, in particular those focusing on Carl Schmitt’s treatment of the exception: “In a variety of ways what is presented to us as the “post- 9/11 world” is a world in which previous political and legal norms no longer apply. British Prime Minister Tony Blair wrote that the terrorist attacks were a “revelation” that inaugurated an era that is “unconventional in almost every respect.””¹¹ Clearly one of the figures brandished in the name of this diffuse, unidentified “threat” is the “return of the religious,” whose violent powers of “revelation” appear to have opened a new theologico-political era.

Indeed the political stakes go beyond these phenomenal signs of the “return of religion” and the specific challenges they might present for governance or policies. Rather, they speak to the future contours of the political per se. Jean-Luc Nancy argues that what the “civilization of the death of God and the emancipation of reason” must recognize today with urgency is that our future will not be one of the worsening permanence of nihilism. On the contrary, what we must envision are the dangers of a hyper-religious uprising: “Where rationalities are mired in understanding [*entendement*] (technical, legal, economic, ethical and political rationalities, or even ratiocinations), where the instituted religions prolong badly their traditions (through fundamentalist rigidity or a humanist compromise). . .an as yet almost silent expectation is steadily growing, an expectation which turns in the darkness towards the possibility of bursting into flames.”¹² In the face of de-politicization and its paradoxical double, of escalation or ultra-politics¹³ that characterize our times, and a global capitalism whose inexorable power of profanation is matched by its capacity of immiseration, Nancy claims we have every reason to fear a hyper-religious “delirium” which will ignite in “the desert of meaning and truth that we have created or let develop.”¹⁴

As Nancy argues, the site of this conflagration’s potential propagation is “that designated by the perpetual invocation of ‘politics.’ The demand for the restoration of reason in its entirety always focuses itself on a political renewal or a renewal of politics.”¹⁵ However, the political realm today remains without a response, insofar as our “democratic lukewarmness” lacks that which the expression civil religion designated for Rousseau, “which is to say the element in which should be exercised not only the simple rationality of governance, but

that, infinitely higher and more ample, of a sentiment, indeed a passion of being-together [*l'être-ensemble*]." For Nancy, and he is undoubtedly correct, the concept of civil religion has exhausted itself and its possibilities, if indeed these ever truly existed. In short, what distinguishes democratic politics today is not that it is theologico-political, but that "it is precisely *without* a theology, which is what both defines it, and perhaps designates its crucial problem."¹⁶ Contemporary problems of justice, misery, exploitation, freedom and equality necessarily open onto the question of transcendence, which means that politics must determine if it can respond to this demand, or if it can continue to displace it to an external limit, whose possibility and borders must themselves be politically determined. What democracy perhaps reveals, he argues, as it extends its form across the world, is that politics cannot redefine itself except as one of the following alternatives: either refounded in religion, and thus is not even theologico-political (as is often mistakenly said) but well and truly theocratic, or according to a redefinition of the tension between the government of society and the projection of its ends or its *raison d'être*. "Hyperfascism in the first instance, and something radically new to be invented in the second—a reinvention perhaps of what the secular means."¹⁷

To this end, denouncing the ideological or coercive aspects of the secularization narrative, or requiring that the non-believer stand in the shoes of the religious in the name of constitutional patriotism is hardly sufficient. Rethinking the secular all the way down requires more than a genealogy such as Talal Asad's or Charles Taylor's, however welcome such critical enterprises are.¹⁸ It requires a critical engagement with the onto-theological roots of contemporary secular political forms and concepts, an engagement beyond the antinomies which have constituted the "great divide" between faith and reason, beyond confessionalism and a dying humanism; indeed, it no doubt requires nothing less than the rethinking of "first philosophy," as Nancy argues.¹⁹ The philosophical challenge is enormous, and I will leave it to those whose vocation it is.²⁰

In this paper, I would like to examine the challenge of the religious from, as it were, the "other side" of the contemporary divide between the religious and the secular. If "political theology," however prone to misunderstanding such a formulation might prove to be,²¹ asks the question today of the disavowed theological roots of our politics, it most obviously, and perhaps unproblematically, pertains to the politics implicit in theologies. However, this separation is precisely what troubles us today. We need to be certain where such a line can or should be drawn, and the precise reasons for such a tracing. Part of this project entails a closer understanding of the nature of the "threat" contemporary religions pose to a democracy-to-come; or rather, a close look at the political theologies they propagate. But beyond, or before, the specter of the "threat," an examination of their theocratics, their political ontologies or onto-theologies, their "theories" and practices of the subject, and the ways in which these interact with contemporary political and economic processes should be undertaken. This means not only undertaking a necessary political critique of religion, but also an examination of the ways in which religion provides a critique of politics.

We are ill equipped for this task if we rely on dominant social-scientific methods of political analysis. The engagement with, and the explicit staging of, the problem of moral uncertainty and mastery in an uncertain world is central to many practices of faith everywhere today. Yet in the case of Pentecostalism, this engagement relies on realms of experience and modes of cognition that are situated beyond reason (and the rationalities which now stand in for it), displacing the moral relativism of secular modes of political action and thought. The Pentecostal engagement with the demonic, implying a Manichean division of the moral universe, is one of these forms of displacement. The specific form of individualism expressed

through Pentecostal practices of faith emphasizes interiority, purity and righteousness, and practices that “restore to the act of faith itself the dimension of subjectivity which categories of analysis grounded in the Enlightenment prejudice against religion have hardly been able to engage with.”²² In the place of a politics of reasoned deliberation, there is a politics of affect, motivated by the desire or passion for God; in the place of an agency born from the exercise of human reason, of man “making” his own history, the performative power of prayer and the agency of supernatural forces; in the place of a teleology of progress, or the manifestation of Reason in history, the urgency of the messianic instant. Direct, unmediated revelation from God takes precedence over other forms of evidence, and we see the deployment of forms of veridiction (*véridiction*), or truth-telling, which rely on embodied experiences of interiority: prophecy, dreams, or “seeing in the spirit,” as Pastor Ojewale puts it. The Pentecostal focus on the miraculous reveals a post-Cartesian vision of the subject, one of incompleteness and indeterminacy, open to the surprise or the call of God, and an onto-theology that defies the pure transcendence of Deism, developing through the centrality of the Holy Spirit and pneumatological witness as an experience of transcendence-in-immanence. In other words, as Mbembe argues, “we have to take into account the shift from the contested politics of reasoned interpretation as one of the hallmarks of modernity to a more avowedly affective politics of truth and revelation.”²³

Such an enterprise also means recognizing, particularly in the post-colonial world where these movements are exploding, that the dramatic rise of new religious forms are not obscurantist “holdovers” from a soon-to-be-forgotten pre-modern past, nor palliatives for a deluded humanity that has either yet to reach the maturity to recognize, or lacks the courage to face, the abyss opened by God’s death. Rather, attention must be brought to the ways in which certain forms of highly successful transnational religiosity today, in particular Pentecostal or charismatic Christianity, and radical reformist Islam, are at the heart of what Derrida has called “mondialatinization,” and the economic, tele-techno-scientific forms which accompany it, and are not merely one of its effects.²⁴ We should not think of these movements as purely reactionary, in the double sense of the term. They have nothing of the derivative about them; they are more than confused, potentially incendiary “responses” on the part of a desperate humanity. We must lose our secular conceit and recognize that these movements may constitute, in some vital respects, a vanguard, which no doubt only underscores the urgency of Nancy’s call.

In what follows, I will examine aspects of Pentecostalism’s political theology as they are developed and are played out in the post-colonial Nigerian context. This discussion is a highly condensed account, shorn of the wealth of historical and ethnographic information from which it developed.²⁵ This is not a consideration of the movement’s history, political sociology, or anthropology. Rather, I want to principally examine a Nigerian Born-Again political theology as expressed in its doctrinal positions, discursive forms, and practices of faith, for an understanding of how these conceptions inflect on its political deployment and effects in the post-colony. Many of these conceptions and practices, it should be pointed out, are remarkably uniform the world over, but my analysis here is drawn solely from Nigerian sources.

With its paradigm of radical rupture and re-birth, through its insistence on a solid, immutable normative ground for political and social life based on a literalist biblical hermeneutics, Pentecostalism appears to express a bid for the re-instantiation of sovereignty that could be interpreted as underwriting a reconstruction of politics on theocratic lines. It is, in popular parlance at least, the Christian denomination most often associated with theocratic “fundamentalism.” In couching salvation in terms of the necessity

of “global spiritual warfare,” through its Manichean division of the world between the “saved” and the “satanic,” it likewise appears to express a politics of exception and exclusion, in which the identification of “satanic” enemies is at the heart of its political onto-theology. However, on closer inspection, it is not certain that either the figure of divine sovereignty or the friend/enemy division that it expresses²⁶ mirror that of our theologico-political tradition, or even Carl Schmitt’s decisionism pressed into the service of shoring up state power under his apocalyptic vision of the chaos from below.²⁷ Pentecostalism’s antinomianist tendencies, the importance of *sole fides*, and an embodied, charismatic, and experiential faith means that its engagement, particularly in the context of post-colonial anarchic and authoritarian exception, is not one of a theocratic re-foundation. And the first enemy to be identified is the enemy within the self. As I argue in my larger work, it is first and foremost a religion of the subject, not a religion of the law.²⁸

Secondly, whilst Agamben’s insistence that we live in a permanent state of exception²⁹ may have pertinence for the West and its expansionist paradigms of “democratization” and the “rule of law,” it is not clear how helpful his own Benjamin-inspired antinomianism is for understanding post-colonial states of exception, nor how and why many religious movements in the post-colonial world take exception to them. For Agamben, the “political decline” of a permanent state of exception corresponds to the “juridicization of all human relations,” the failure of a necessary dialectical separation between the anomic and the juridical in the organization of human co-existence. This is why, as he argues, “the actual opposition between secular States, founded uniquely on law; and fundamentalist States, founded uniquely on religion, is only a seeming opposition that hides a similar political decline.”³⁰ However, whilst there may indeed exist a conflation between these two experiences of the world in the African post-colony, it is arguably one captured by neither of these poles. Finally, considering the ways in which the miracle is staged within Pentecostalism may show that Schmitt’s analogy in his *Political Theology* – “the miracle is to theology as the state of exception is to the law” – is open to other interpretations, which might sketch another figure of sovereignty, and at the same time help explain why Pentecostalism expresses a different sort of theo-cratics. In particular, the indetermination at the heart of the figures of the miraculous and the modes of veridiction it deploys, means that while it restages the theologico-political promises of justice and emancipation in a powerful new form, it fails to instantiate or institutionalize the connection between power and (religious) law, between authority and obedience. Pentecostal practices of faith do not lead to the creation of a unified community or identity, and thus undermine any theocratic political project. Indeed, Pentecostalism’s self-professed “revolutionary” project is politically highly ambivalent and increasingly coincident – as are many religious and political forms today – with the local logics of our global political economy.

Postcolonial Exception

In Nigeria, the Pentecostal revival began during the 1970s, and exploded over the following two decades, coinciding with a period in which post-colonial governance was perceived as having entered a state of crisis. This crisis was characterized by a chaotic normative and regulatory pluralism where the degree of adherence to acknowledged norms appeared increasingly lax and moral consensus in colonially-created “ethnic publics” were undermined, where old structures and codes underwriting relations of patronage based on kin and ethnicity were breaking down, and where strategies of social mobility through education and patronage were failing. The political sphere saw an increasingly predatory use of power on

the part of elites and the growth of “mafia politics,” a growing premium on access to an increasingly centralized and authoritarian state, but a reduction of opportunities of access. This was coupled with a complete breakdown in popular trust in government and elites in general, and an Orwellian disjuncture between the exercise of power and the norms of the rational-legal state and juridical citizenship it claimed to serve. From the mid-1980s, new economies of prestige and a slippage in the categories and social representations of power developed, reoriented toward the ruse, the con, the informal, the criminal, and above all, the occult or supernatural.³¹ In particular, the secret, esoteric forms of spiritual power understood to underwrite elite authority came to be seen as destructive and demonic, taking the form of a growing public obsession with evil occult powers. Thus in Nigeria, the crisis of the past decades is not merely institutional, economic, or political, but also involves a “crisis of representation” in which the dominant values, signs, and markers that had underwritten the perception of the material world, guided conduct and legitimated authority, accumulation, and relations of inequality while becoming increasingly unstable and polysemic. The themes of insecurity, violence, disorder, and uncertainty came to dominate the representation of everyday social experience, and authoritarian rule became no longer an interregnum, but both literally and symbolically, a permanent state of exception, a “transition without end.”³²

This regime, like many in post-colonial Africa, can be seen as a particular form of authoritarian exception based upon a permanent disjuncture between representation and its objects, between the objects to be governed and objects created through governance, and the plurality of norms and rules informing conduct. In Nigeria, as elsewhere in Africa, domination at the state level is realized less through the stabilization of a governmental or “bio-political” relation of power than through the prevalence of violence and confrontation, giving rise to a situation in which politics may be understood as war by other means³³ and in which the power to kill becomes the ultimate arbiter of conduct.³⁴ The experience of exception or “lawlessness” in Nigeria is one of the overwhelming indeterminacy of all things, such that it becomes impossible to distinguish the real from the fake, the truth from the lie, the rule from its exception or suspension, a situation which applies as much to the realm of goods and services, as it does to the realm of social interaction, the state, and the political sphere. The lawless arbitrariness of a state where policeman are thieves, legislators are criminal predators, and the common man has no hope for any form of redress reflect a situation in which the law becomes in many respects unformulable.

One of the central effects of these developments was a dramatic breakdown in structures of trust and hope, a breakdown associated in popular imagination with the failure of both the religious and political institutions which had taken root during the enterprise of colonialism and its “civilizing mission,” whose triple modalities – political, religious, economic – mutually supported and engaged one another. These modalities and institutions put in place new structures of time, a teleology of progress that instituted the possibility of the subject’s perfectibility, autonomy and authenticity. The colonial period thus marked a dramatic epistemological rupture, resulting not only from the violent universalization of Christianity, the nation-state form and the market, but also the theologico-political promise of democratic emancipation, and the structures of time they opened up. Yet at the same time, behind the ideological edifice of the “civilizing mission,” the colonial regime was a form of government which operated as much through an exercise of libidinal, excessive violence as through bio-political and disciplinary forms of power, a paradoxical regime “concentrating the attributes of logic (reason), fantasy (the arbitrary) and cruelty.”³⁵ It functioned according to an “administration of terror” dependant upon “a certain staging of true and false, a certain rationing of prebends and gratifications, the production of things at once

moving, captivating and always spectacular,” creating an emotional economy and a phantasmal apparatus whose cornerstone is the idea that “there is no limit to wealth and property, and thus desire.”³⁶

The paradigm of democratization and development, with its corollary of “nation-building” and its democratic “transitions without end,” provides the edifice in terms of which a temporality of eschatological deferment overcomes the messianic urgency of the promise inherent in the ideas of democratic emancipation and justice. As Nancy puts it, democracy structurally delivers a hope (*espérance*), without us ever being able to determine precisely what this hope is. This is why “we struggle so hard to find its right and just determination and why it can show itself homogeneous and in conformity with the domination of calculations of general equivalence and its appropriation called capitalism.”³⁷ In the post-colonial context, this experience of deferment is radically intensified, through the everyday ordeal of a democratic emancipation and justice that not only do not take place, but rather appear in the figure of the ruin.

This ideological edifice also provides the conditions for the contemporary extension of the metaphysics of existence developed during the colonial period, and an intensification of an experience of the impossibility of sovereign mastery.³⁸ As Tonda and Mbembe show, the “secret origin” of sovereignty in Africa is historically designated as an “elsewhere,” which, since the colonial period, is indifferently symbolized by the power of God and by a formidable coalition of demonic forces, fashioned in the encounter between Christ, the witch, and the witch finder – a pantheon of pagan spirits, merchandise, writing, technology, and violence.³⁹ Mbembe points out that this absence of individual autonomy, with its logics of infinite social debt and corruption as transgression and license, is enabled in part by the preponderant place accorded to the communicative state between the human being on the one hand and objects, nature and invisible forces on the other.⁴⁰ The supremacy of the domains of the invisible make the human person the perpetual plaything of realities which are out of his reach, creating an “economy of subordination whose forms have not ceased to vary and relay one another, to the extent that they now constitute what we must designate as the structure of servitude and auto-destruction.”⁴¹

Under these temporalities of deferment, the exercise of power and elite domination occur in a perpetual present, in terms of which the achievement of peace, justice, and the guarantee of life may be deferred until the “war” (against indiscipline, corruption, misrule, disorder, underdevelopment) is over, giving free reign to this metaphysics of violence and excess, and a sacrificial politics which has solid historical precedents on the continent.⁴² This entails a total disdain for the very idea of the future, a characterization that resonates powerfully with the Nigerian context of the past 30 years:

Everywhere dominates the perception in terms of which money, power and life are regulated by a law of chance. Immense fortunes are made from one day to the next, without the factors that have contributed to them being in any way apparent. Others disappear at the same rhythm without any visible cause. Nothing being certain, and everything being possible, one takes risks with money, as with bodies, power and life. Both time and death are reduced to a huge game of chance. On the one hand, a strong sense of the volatility and frivolity of money and fortune imposes itself, and on the other, a conception of time and value based on the instant.⁴³

In this context, power takes the form of enchantment, and the realm of the political, in which struggles for justice and liberation should find their concrete expression, becomes a mere simulacrum in which the merging of violence and the law suspends life upon the free play

of untrammelled desires and infinite debt. Thus if there is a conflation between the juridical and the anomic, a failure of their necessary dialectical separation in the post-colony, it is not the expression of a “totalitarian principle” which Taubes and Agamben identify in Schmitt,⁴⁴ nor the complete juridicization or “normalization” of human relations under contemporary bio-politics, but rather it takes the form of the free reign of anomie, shored up and extended by the anomie of the market.⁴⁵

Pastor Ojewale’s revolutionary program is more than a simple utopian form of proselytizing; rather, it is part of an explicit, strategic program that self-consciously responds to and engages with this context of epistemological, normative, and ontological insecurity. While it is principally concerned with the question of religious salvation, in its Nigerian articulation it also makes claims for collective political redemption, deliberately positioning itself as a response to what are represented as corrupt or ruined religious and political traditions. Through a self-conscious engagement with the Nigerian past and the failures of the civilizing mission to redeem its promises, the Pentecostal program attempts to revitalize the promise of hope at the heart of the ideals of democratic emancipation and justice, and the possibility of the new that Arendt identifies as inherent in the very fact of natality.⁴⁶

Making a Complete Break with the Past: Providence and the Messianic

The Born-Again program for Nigerian political redemption is set out with prophetic force by Pastor E. A. Adeboye, General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, which is now arguably Africa’s largest Pentecostal empire. This speech, entitled “Who Is on the Lord’s Side?” made in 1993, five months before the annulled presidential elections, illustrates many elements which are central to Born-Again political theology:

In Nigeria we can become a fantastic force for good. What kind of force? A fantastic force for good for this nation. . . Brethren, God expects us to reach a situation whereby we will decree that there will be no rain in Nigeria. And until we call for it again there will be no rain. The Almighty God wants us in a situation where we will say, alright, because the government could not do what it was asked to do, from hence forth we ask the supernatural power of God to paralyse the electricity and power generators, they will not work because the current will not flow. . . It is written in Proverbs 29:2 “when the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice.” And how are we going to get someone who is righteous in authority? Don’t let anybody deceive you, thieves will never vote for a policeman. Never. Thieves will always vote for thieves, robbers vote for robbers, in other words, only the righteous will vote for the righteous. So how are we ever going to put the righteous in authority? It is by winning the masses to Jesus Christ. Nobody can bribe him to vote for the wrong man. . . We can become the force of change not by loving politicians, but by winning souls. If we do what God wants us to do, i.e. if we can get at least eighty percent of the people in Nigeria born again, you can be sure a Christian will be the president. You do not even need to spend a kobo to get them; you won’t even need to be a rich man before you become president, because the people will say you are the one they want and you must be there. . .

The plan of God is not limited to Nigeria alone. Very soon, there will be an extension when PFN will become PFA, i.e. Pentecostal Fellowship of Africa. We will take over the whole of Africa. And that is not the end of the whole vision. The Almighty God wants PFN to become number one in the gospel for the world, and other nations of the world will say, what is happening? We thought Nigeria was finished, but all of a sudden it has become leader of the world. Because I want you to know, brethren, when the spiritual climate is right, things will happen in the economy. . . I remember the time when 1 Pound Sterling was almost equal to 1 Naira. Today, what is the situation? And the politicians are telling you there is no hope. God has promised, it is not going to come from the promises of politicians

who said we will do a mighty thing and they didn't build mighty things when they were there. They spoilt the thing. . .

Brethren, may I tell you that the strategy we are going to use to win Nigeria has to be the strategy of an invading army. When an army wants to take over a nation, they have certain characteristics, they don't make noise, like so many of us are doing. Look at those who are really doing substantial work in Nigeria today. They have started building churches, house fellowships are spreading, they are winning people all over the place. . .people who are working while others are sleeping and they take over the essential things, they don't just go and kidnap the president. They take over the media, the radio, the television stations, they convince the rich people, the businessmen, they get the students, they get backings, because when they take over it is the market women and the students they will tell "come and demonstrate it if you are in support." If you want to take over Nigeria you better win the students, win the market women, the media, the broadcasters, the rich, the poor and the press. Glory be to God, I am sure they are here today. By the time they leave, they will be born again.⁴⁷

The idea of "making a complete break with the past" and instituting a new mode of individual and collective life through conversion derives its central force from the reinstitution of a prophetic and providential reading of history and a messianic structure of time. Through the representation of radical and permanent rupture, Born-Again discourse articulates its revolutionary program of redemption in which the future appears both as the possible overcoming of what has gone before and as the fulfillment of an original promise, in keeping with a long Christian tradition. While Pentecostal doctrine is concerned with how to guarantee eternal life in the hereafter, it finds its principal force through the staging of a claim for justice and a demand for "life more abundant" in the here and now. One might want to frame these alternatives in a more prosaically political language as demand for development, on the one hand, and the realization of justice or right, on the other – both of which are understood as promises presented through the "civilizing mission" but at the same time ruined through colonial and post-colonial practices.

The Pentecostal construction of redemption introduces new ruptures with respect to the missionary tradition. One of the innovations introduced by Pentecostalism is the ways in which it opens the possibility of *operational* time, resituating the present in a new relationship to the past and the future, through its emphasis on the messianic. This represents a departure from the dominant temporalities of the post-colony that enable domination based on excessive expenditure, violence, a politics of sacrifice, and a notion of time and value based on the instant, an *inoperative* time. In this context, the relationship to future emancipation is one of a certain eschatological paralysis. And unlike the theology of history presented through mission and the civilizing project more generally, the messianic and the miraculous encapsulate a sense of time and history fundamentally opposed to the modern teleology of progress whose utopian conception perpetually defers the end, or the *eschaton*. In a complex argument, which I shall not reproduce here, Agamben argues that in the Pauline conception, messianic time should neither be understood as the time of the end nor be confused with apocalypse; rather, it is the time *before* the end, which is not simply another period of chronological time, but a time that "begins to end," that "contracts itself."⁴⁸ It is not a time separate from chronological historical time, but rather *the time that remains* within chronological time. Rather than staging a perpetual deferment of the *eschaton*, messianic time is the incorporation of *parousia* into every instant of chronological time, implying a transformation in the actual experience of time; a time of *kairos*, not *chronos*. As Agamben argues, messianic time, unlike chronological time (which is unrepresentable and in whose flow we merely exist passively) presents itself as the *only time we have*.⁴⁹

In a certain limited, yet decisive sense, Pentecostalism is more messianic than it is eschatological, even though it takes the Kingdom literally, identifying the *parousia* as the thousand-year reign of Christ after the “rapture” and the seven years of tribulation under the rule of Satan and before the *eschaton*.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, messianic time is also staged in Pentecostalism as an operational time, as a time *within* the present time. The Pentecostal experience of faith is centered on a total openness to the presence (*parousia*) of the Holy Spirit and miracles, and the conviction that the urgency of evangelism and conversion lies not only in preparing believers and the world for the messianic arrival, but also in fulfilling God’s plan and *hastening* this fulfillment, underscored by the insistence that we are living in the “end-times.”⁵¹ In this conception, action in the present takes the form of an actualization of potentialities, providentially given within a divine plan. When I arrived in Lagos on October 29, 1992, the first question I was asked by the friend meeting me was “Did you think the world was going to end yesterday?” I soon learned that the leader of a Korean church, Mission for the Coming Days, had announced, with much global publicity, the second coming of Christ and the rapture of the true believers to take place on October 28.⁵² Nigerian newspapers reported that thousands of people had failed to come to work, preferring to stay at home in preparation, many having bid farewell to friends and family members, colleagues and neighbors, in the days before. In the Nigerian context, where the everyday often has a truly apocalyptic quality, the urgency of achieving a spiritual state worthy of the rapture is given an added poignancy. Pentecostalism’s double messianism – the presence of the Holy Spirit and the imminent arrival of the Messiah – stages both the dangers and promises of the present in an idiom that presents change not only as urgent, but also as immanent in the present moment.

Prophecy and visions are the central discursive form in which these conceptions find their expression, and like Pentecostal discourse in general, they have a properly performative power, as I shall explore in more detail below. They resituate the task of the present within a providential structure, in which each action is endowed with significance and agency insofar as it has the miraculous power of *revelation*. Adeboye makes reference to this providential, prophetic structure of Pentecostal faith when he says “God has promised,” contrasting “God’s plan” to the empty promises of politicians, and a political realm of corruption and ruin where “thieves vote for thieves” and politicians “spoil the thing.” Providential thinking is central to the message across the doctrinal scale – from the promise of an abundant life in the other world to the guarantee of “prosperity now,” a doctrinal emphasis of the “Faith and Word” or “Prosperity” movement in Pentecostalism which argues that God has provided wealth and success for every individual who sincerely converts: all the believer has to do to receive his “blessing” is to “name it and claim it.” This providential structure links individual conversion and the struggle against the demonic within the self, to the collective and historic project of hastening the Messiah’s return by defeating the devil across the globe through evangelisation in the form of “global spiritual warfare.”

In Adeboye’s articulation, the invading army also refers to the urgency of evangelism in the end-times, thus connecting the project of Nigeria’s political redemption to a broader global Pentecostal program. Pentecostalism’s zeal in evangelism is related to its approach to the end-times in which the Messiah cannot return until all nations have heard the word of God. Alongside Christ’s exhortation to preach the gospel to all nations, another scriptural warrant for this zeal is the enigmatic 2 Thessalonians 2:3–9,⁵³ which outlines the events preceding the “day of the Lord,” which shall be preceded by apostasy and lawlessness. The revelation of the “lawless one” will occur when the “one who is restraining him” is removed, and the Messiah will arrive. For Pentecostals, the “lawless one,” whom they read as Satan and

his demonic hosts, is already at work in the world. The enigma in this text lies in the identity of “the one holding him back” – the arresting force or *katechon* – who is not specifically identified by Paul. Among Pentecostals, the *katechon* is interpreted as the Holy Spirit, the only force capable of holding back the “lawlessness” of the current age, a presence embodied in every Pentecostal Christian. The “church,” thus constituted, embodies this arresting force until the rapture. Coupled with the central Pentecostal text that can be read as characterizing worldly power in Satanic terms (Ephesians 6:12) cited by Ojewale above, we see how the invading army should function as the “arresting force” against “lawlessness.” At the same time, it also is implied that this work of “arresting” lawlessness or wickedness, this battle “to reclaim from the devil what he illegally holds in his control” is a *necessary* step. Thus the spread of the gospel is a prophetic actualization of God’s plan, which places the experience of Pentecostal faith and truth as having a historical role to play in its realization. Pentecostals depict this battle for global conversion and the struggle against Satan and the demonic not only as urgent, but also as a victory already achieved – as Pentecostals say, “be of good cheer, we are on the winning side.” Significantly, this reintroduction of an eschatological horizon requires of the believer not simply preparedness, but also action, insofar as the exact terms of its realization are not given in advance. More precisely, it is a possibility immanent in the present time, in a state of messianic potentiality, but one that must still be enacted through the work of faith.

The break with the past is also realized through a process of judgment, which is expressed in a strong indictment of “traditional” cultural and spiritual practices, models of sociability, kinship, social distinction and prestige, and forms of social debt and obligation. Breaking with “unbelievers” goes hand in hand with the rejection of a whole range of cultural practices and beliefs that underwrote the old hierarchies and distinctions of gender, kinship, ethnicity, class, age; “traditions of men” that are presented as forms of “spiritual bondage”:

Do not believe in superstitions and traditions of men. This is a sin, it is a form of bondage. You cannot grow and prosper in sin and bondage. If your father or your husband tells you pregnant women that you cannot come to night vigil because the demon is waiting to drive your baby out and replace it with demonic baby, that is a lie. You shall come to night vigil covered in the blood of Jesus, no demon can come near you. If people from your place come and say, don’t eat that thing, you will bring *wahala* [trouble] on us, don’t mind them. Eating anything cannot affect you. You are in a new family now, it will make you strong. When I was preaching in Ondo in the 1970s, the people there, they don’t eat bush rodent. They would bring it to my house, I was frying it, eating it. I invited my Ministers one day to eat with me, they said, “the day we will eat this thing we will die! We are in another world eating our elders!” Who is your elder? WHO?! JESUS!! If you believe this superstition, it is a sin. The two brothers ate with me, and nothing happened. Now Ondo people are eating rodent, and nothing is happening. It has even become costly.⁵⁴

As Agamben notes, messianic time is not merely oriented toward the future but also involves a recapitulation of the past, implying a summary judgment of it. Pentecostal witnessing to the individual or collective past is a practice that, like Benjamin’s anachronism, seizes “hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.”⁵⁵ The critical judgment against the evils and dangers of the “sins of the fathers” and their expression in local cultural practices should not be seen in terms of a pure rejection, but also of a *recognition* of the past and its role in rendering the convert’s changed state both significant and providential.

New practices, forms of self-presentation and address are self-consciously affected, under the egalitarian idiom of Christian fraternity: “brothers” and “sisters” in a new Christian

“family,” giving rise to trans-ethnic communities in which the old hierarchies are in principle suspended. They do not entail a pure rejection of the old distinctions – ethnicity, gender, age, kinship – rather through their forms of address and practices they behave as if they were not. The break with the past deploys the notion of the messianic call, which under messianic time involves the “revocation of every vocation,”⁵⁶ as in 1 Corinthians 7:17–24,⁵⁷ or again, as in verses 29–32, in which the “new creation” does not furnish an identity, but the suspension of every juridical or factual property.⁵⁸ As one young believer put it: “Maybe I’m a banker, and this brother is a clerk, and because of emotions and everything involved, I can meet him, maybe he talks to me anyhow, but I can take it.”⁵⁹ Distinctions based on ethnicity, age, status, and gender are to be lived in such a way as to liberate the subject from their previous strictures. This sense of the call may also be seen in the ways in which the vocation of being born-again is deployed not only to the realm of religious activity, but to everything the convert does in his professional and social life. The break with the past also implies material changes and projects, through the creation of what are self-consciously “modern,” functional spaces and institutions, forms of worship and self-presentation, forms of sociability and family structures. It involves the creation of new networks and the provision of effective forms of social security and services, as well as new attitudes to wealth, labor, and debt that find their expression in the creation of new entrepreneurial structures and modes of accumulation. While distinct material and social benefits could be achieved through conversion, Pentecostalism’s radical success has as much to do with its reconceptualization of the moral and political order, representing a vision of citizenship in which the moral government of the self is linked to the power to influence the conduct of others.

Governing the Self and Others: Between Grace and Law

In its programmatic form then, the Pentecostal “revolution” does not imply the foundation of a new institutional order, a new constitution, or the elaboration of new laws. In Pastor Adeboye’s speech, it is through the conversion of individuals that political redemption may be realized, not through some radical change to the political system itself. So how is the “new creation” to be realized? And what are the means of creating obedience to Pentecostalism’s prescriptive regime? The focus of doctrinal prescriptions are classically Christian: control of desire is associated with purity and righteousness, living a “new life in Christ” where “sins” such as greed, profligacy, lying, cheating, bribery, fornication, adultery, drinking, smoking, gossiping, jealousy, pride are to be “swept away.” Pentecostal “conversion” to this regime involves a process of subjectivation, achieved through the application of techniques of the self such as bodily asceticism, fasting, prayer, assiduous Bible study, permanent self-examination, and especially public witness.

Doctrine and preaching are centered on the idiom of rupture and change, perpetual overcoming, employing a language of will, intentionality, self-help, self-mastery and personal empowerment. And yet, the individual is acknowledged as being fundamentally powerless, at God’s mercy, dependent entirely upon His grace: “we must crucify the self and allow the Spirit of God to possess and control us.”⁶⁰ The term “ethic” is more apt here than politics, since this form of submission does not involve submission to the laws of an authority, whether secular, ecclesiastical, or even that of God (in his wrathful, law-giving, Old Testament sense), nor does orthodoxy prescribe or impose the exact terms of this submission. Pastoral authority is represented as inhering in a personal call from God; anybody with a “vision” can start a church, a fellowship, or a mission, and they do. Very significantly, access to knowledge and spiritual power is represented as being free, open, and public, a representation that stands in

stark opposition to the secrecy and exclusivity that characterize longstanding local regimes of knowledge and power in Nigeria. The principle means of the message's propagation occurs through the circulation of narratives of testimony and evangelical witness, increasingly through mass-mediated forms, giving rise to transnational, media-created publics with no sense of place.

Thus, with respect to institutions, Pentecostal doctrine remains attached to the anti-institutional model of the "body of Christ" as embodied in the form of the fellowship. Religious authority may not in principle be monopolized by an individual simply by virtue of his or her institutional position – as pastor, evangelist, or leader – but rather should be determined by the ethical state of the individual and the presence of the Holy Spirit as evidenced through acts of faith and work, couched in terms of the presence of divine miracles operative in her life or through her as God's "vessel." Conversely, any institutionalized form or forum cannot be taken as representative of the community of believers writ large. Pentecostal institutions themselves are notoriously schismatic, and very few are able to command long-term loyalty from a stable clientele. Despite ongoing attempts on the part of pastors to monopolize charisma, and institutionalize their authority, these attempts are constantly undermined by the fundamentally democratic access to divine grace and miracles. Indeed, Pentecostalism, perhaps more than other form of Protestantism, provides the contemporary archetype of Christianity as "a community without an institution,"⁶¹ but a community of a new type, in keeping with the forms of diffuse, individualized, virtualized and non-isomorphic forms of connectedness in our globalized world. Nigerian Pentecostals are part of a transnational community without a "proper place," that in many ways goes beyond the "proper" or the "authentic" altogether, and the closure they imply. Being Pentecostal does not furnish a distinct identity, nor does it imply a necessary institutional identification – as Pentecostals say, "we don't go to Church, we are the Church." In principle at least, the new creation is simply the messianic use and deployment of the old.

Pentecostalism thus takes an ambivalent form of "negative" political theology, in contrast to those interpretations of the 2 Thessalonians text, such as Schmitt's, that see the *katechon*, or the restraining power, in terms of sovereign institutions such as the state according to a representative model of divine sovereignty.⁶² The question of the embodiment of divine sovereignty can be thought of as taking one of three forms: first, representation, in which the sovereign is God's representative; second, "dual sovereignty," which strictly distinguishes between spiritual or worldly sovereignty; and lastly, theocracy, in which divine sovereignty is instituted directly on earth in an unmediated form.⁶³ At the same time, it refers to two potentially contradictory meanings, if we consider the concept of the political. The political implies a horizontal aspect, as expressed in the notion of the *polis*, community, the public sphere, or more generally, the social, as well as vertical dimension that refers to the structure and organization of the commanding, sovereign power within the social sphere.⁶⁴ Thus in political theology we can also find two aspects: a theology of sovereignty and a theology of community. Schmitt's understanding of sovereignty is a secularization of a representative model in the vertical understanding of the term, in which 2 Thessalonians 2 can be seen as a foundation for a Christian doctrine of state power. This represents a culmination of an ancient tradition going back to Tertullian (and reinforced by Augustine), which saw the Roman Empire as the power that delays or restrains the end of time.⁶⁵

For Schmitt, the Roman empire could be understood as an historicization of the figure of the *katechon*: "the belief in an arresting force that can stave off the end of the world is the only link leading from the eschatological paralysis of every human action to such a great historical agency."⁶⁶ The dictum "all power comes from God" provides the basis of

Schmitt's vertical concept of the political, in which sovereignty is the affair of the highest authority and ultimate decision, the declaration of the state of exception that founds the law. As Agamben points out, every theory of the state that sees it as a power destined to block or delay catastrophe can be seen as a secularization of this interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2. Taubes characterizes Schmitt's interpretation of the *katechon* as that of "someone who thinks apocalyptically from above. . .who struggles so that chaos doesn't rise to the top, so that the state remains."⁶⁷

Pentecostalism does not provide any theological warrant for a theory of state power under any of the three figures. It reiterates, albeit in ambivalent terms, the Pauline understanding that the rule of man over man cannot represent the messiah, and that the messianic cannot legitimate real, existing political orders but only make them irrelevant and ultimately replace them, as in 1 Corinthians 15:24: "then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God and the Father, when he will render inoperative all rule, all authority and power." A conception, it is worth recalling, that finds its secularized re-articulation in Marx. Even if it does distinguish in principle between temporal and spiritual powers, spiritual power is not seen in representative terms (as in the "dual representation" approach), even if the *katechon* may be seen as the embodiment of the sovereign power of God as incarnated horizontally in the "body of Christ," or the community of the saved, through the presence of the Holy Spirit in every individual. However, this distinction between temporal and spiritual power is never entirely clear, because Pentecostals subscribe to the notion that Satan works through secular powers. The powers of God and, indeed, of Satan are understood as being potentially embodied within each and every individual and at large in the world. What remains to be seen then is how the individual experience of faith may give rise to a form of sovereignty and community which might enable the original claim for justice and the alleviation of suffering to find a stable expression and secure the connection between righteousness and authority, between a new mode of self-government and the government of others, a new ontology or ethology of being-together.

The Miracle and Sovereign Power

Rather than through pastoral or ecclesiastic authority, obedience within Pentecostalism occurs principally through the creation of a *verisimilitude* via the performative effects of witness, the perpetual public repetition of testimony about the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit. The relationship between power and truth which grounds the Pentecostal model of governing the self and others is "constructed through this infinitely repeatable discourse"⁶⁸ and not, as Hobbes argued, through the power of the sovereign to pronounce and guarantee the reality of miraculous manifestations.⁶⁹ Hobbes's argument makes the distinction between private conscience and public reason, and submits the former to the latter in the matter of determining the "real." For Pentecostals, the production of the real, the experience of its significance, occurs through the ongoing process of personal witness, the development of a receptivity to divine interpellation in everyday life. This process emphasizes the performative power of the Word: a power of revelation that is central to all Pentecostal techniques of the self.

The notion of the "crucifixion of self," a total openness and submission to the power of the Holy Spirit, the imperative nature of the "call," all these themes are expressed endlessly by preachers and converts in describing what it means to take Jesus Christ as one's personal savior. The act of conversion, "giving one's life to Christ" and "accepting Christ as one's personal Lord and savior," is presented as an intensely powerful and private dialogue of the self with the self, yet one in which the individual recognizes herself as being in the

grip of a power that goes beyond her, that reveals itself in an imperious fashion, demanding that she cede or capitulate. The power of the Holy Spirit and the Word is experienced as a presence, an almost physical force under whose grip the subject falls and is in some ways powerless to resist. One young woman told me how she really enjoyed going to services at Glory Tabernacle in Ibadan, but always left just before the altar call, since she was “afraid of getting converted.” She was the mistress of a very rich military officer and told me how she was afraid of having to give up her current lifestyle, all the gifts and good things he gave her. It is here that we may locate the agonistic relation between an outside, which works upon the individual, soliciting in him an openness and a desire, and the inside of the self, which suddenly receives and appropriates this call through a private communication of the self with the self.

Prayer – “unceasing” and “fervent” as the Pentecostal prescription has it – is a central technique of the self, in which, through a personal communication or discussion with God, the convert articulates both desires and fears, plenitude and lack, and is brought to envision in a prophetic fashion an imagined future. Prayers are used to invoke both divine protection and empowerment, and the fervency of Pentecostal prayer creates in the subject an emotional, almost ecstatic state. Indeed, in public services and in private practices, prayer is the discursive form that directly precedes glossolalia, or speaking in tongues, a trancelike state in which the individual experiences the “infilling of the Holy Spirit.” Through her prayers, the convert is perpetually brought to evaluate her efficacy and question herself as to what aspects of her life or conduct may hasten or block a divine response. But at the same time, prayer is one of the principal ways in which the “word of faith” finds its performative power: it is both a supplication and a witness.

Constant study of Scripture and a perpetual quest for understanding also constitute a central part of the work of the self on the self: converts are given biblical instruction in fellowships and services; however, daily study of the Word is considered the first responsibility, or work, that the convert must undertake for her transformation. In individual study, the convert reads the Word to find a sign for its relevance to her personal situation. “God gave me an understanding of Jeremiah 17:5. I used to trust man for my needs and it had become a part of me. In fact, I could not trust God for so many things. In 1996, people I trusted disappointed me. When I came across Jeremiah 17:5, it dawned on me that I had been carrying a curse on me for trusting man. I repented and asked God for forgiveness. Then I began to trust God and doors began to open in several ways. When one door closed, seven would open for me. Praise God!”⁷⁰ We can see in this account the marriage of revelation and critical understanding involved in such study. Matters of trust and credit are associated with the very being of subject: “it had become a part of me.” The sudden revelation of the meaning of the scriptural text, the act of repentance, and the renewal of trust are witnessed as life transforming. Scripture is an authoritative form of knowledge whose study and deciphering provides the basis for the regulation of conduct and the acquisition of spiritual power and authority. At the same time, the act of reading the Word has the performative power of revelation.

The central Pentecostal technique of the self, the one that best demonstrates the ways in which the subject’s openness and submission to spiritual power and her own work of self-transformation creates its effects of truth, is that of testimony or witness to the manifestation of the miraculous in the everyday. Testimony and witnessing is part of the evangelical obligation that falls upon all converts. It is a central technique of evangelism, and indeed, it is the principal mode of creating obedience and collective belonging. Sometimes the testimonies are highly dramatic, with the convert having suddenly received incredible wealth

or opportunities, or having been saved from life-threatening situations or incurable illnesses, violent crimes, witchcraft attacks, or the “outer limit” of perdition as figured in covenants with Satan and his minions. Others, in fact the great majority, are very banal and everyday. How God saved me from slipping on the soap in the shower; how Jesus made the water come out of the pump clear and not dirty; how I passed my exam when I was sure to have failed. Anything that happens to an individual may be seen as the miraculous sign of God’s grace and power in her life. Converts are urged to testify to this grace and power at every occasion.

Witness and testimony are central not only for bringing into being a world changed by grace, but also as a means of staging the dangers of the present moment and the urgency of change, through elaborate testimonies about the works of “demonic powers” with their “Satanic underwater computers;” their night flying, blood sucking, flesh eating rituals; their secret rooms full of money, counted by zombified victims, from which the convert must be protected and delivered, often through dramatic rituals of exorcism, which Pentecostals call “deliverance.” They thus stage an enchanted world in which spiritual powers are perpetually present, and in which the struggle between good and evil within the self mirrors an epic struggle against the demonic forces at large in the world. This imaginative reworking involves a vivid critique of the dominant political economy and exercise of power, attempting to re-moor floating signs and uncertain identities within a restructured moral order.⁷¹ These stories should not be read as simple metaphors for more “material realities,” such as commodification, capitalist exploitation, or military authoritarianism, or as vernacular attempts to understand the mysteries behind new forms of power and wealth, although they did involve new modes of interpretation, “revealing” the “demonic,” and estoric forms of power seen as underwriting elite domination. More than mere cautionary tales, they should be viewed as forms of knowledge about the world in terms of which the convert and the unbeliever may contemplate both the promises and dangers of different modes of self-conduct, functioning as techniques of “making believe.”

Through all these practices, Pentecostalism attempts to restore the original Christian experience of faith, of conversion and ongoing transformation as the *performativum fidei* (act of faith), which is expressed in the word of faith: in the declaration “Jesus Messiah,” or as the Pentecostals put it, “declaring for Jesus” or “professing Jesus Christ.” Indeed, every Pentecostal practice of the self, every testimony, prayer, song of praise, is at once a profession and a witness; performing, through its very enunciation, a *being-in* belief that transforms the believer, empowering him or her and giving access to another experience of the world. The centrality of witness must thus be understood in terms of its performative powers of subjectivation, transforming the subject through the experience of the truth-event. Witness—of which testimony, prayer, and praise are but specific examples—refers to a different and more foundational status of the word, one that goes beyond representation and the relationship between signifier and signified, beyond the denotative relationship between language and the world to the experience itself, rendering inoperative the distinctions between consciousness, reason, affect, and the body. The power in the name of Jesus, which Pentecostals shout as a means of spiritual protection, no longer represents simply a form of magical practice, it enacts the experience of faith itself and its transformative effects: through witness, converts do things with words.⁷² Professing Jesus and witnessing in the Spirit take the form of a revelation: “Each revelation is always and above all a revelation of language itself, an experience of the pure event of the word that exceeds every signification.”⁷³ Witnessing and declaring Jesus and testifying to miracles do not have a denotative or constative function, they are performative. They refer to a reality they themselves produce and reveal. In short, they give access to the experience of the event.

As Agamben argues, comparing the performative effects of language in the Old Covenant and the New: “there are two ways of going beyond the denotative function of language toward the experience of the event. The first, according to the oath paradigm, attempts to use it as a means to ground contract and obligation. For the other, however, the experience of the pure word opens it up to gratuitousness and use. The latter is the expression of the subject’s freedom (“our freedom which we have in the Messiah,” Gal. 2:3); the former is the expression of his subjection to a codified system of norms and articles of faith.” As one young believer put it: “In the Old Testament, there are a lot of dos and don’ts, but in the New Testament, we are being led by the Spirit. So nobody has to tell you to cover your head, or don’t wear jeans, or don’t do this or that. The Spirit of God in you should tell you what is right and wrong.”⁷⁴

Notwithstanding the importance of witnessing in public, as well as public rituals of repentance and forgiveness, the effects of truth that are produced through witnessing and testimony do not principally depend upon recognition, as in Butler’s theory of subject-formation,⁷⁵ but rather on experiences of interiority in which revelation and judgment are almost indiscernible. It is in the personal space of embodied affectivity and reflection, in the elaboration of a dialogue with the self, and in ecstatic bodily experiences that the signs of God’s presence in the convert’s life are sought, expressed, and verified. It is in this precise sense that the Pentecostal program is a prescriptive apparatus that expresses an ethic whose central force does not lie in a code, where the “essential aspect is found in the instances of authority which prescribe this code, impose the learning and respect of it and who sanction the infractions.”⁷⁶ Rather, it expresses an ethic where the accent is placed on processes of subjectivation and the forms of the relationship that the self elaborates with the self, on the development of a style of life.⁷⁷

For Pentecostals then, the miracle is not, as it was for Hobbes or Schmitt, a contravention of the “natural” order or the laws of nature, an exceptional occurrence that reintroduces sovereign power into the world. Schmitt’s analogy has as its purpose the reinstatement of the possibility of an interruptive sovereign decision, at a time when indecision appeared to put the very existence of the state, and thus legality, in danger. The miracle’s analogous function serves as an unexamined ground for Schmitt’s decisionism, reflecting Schmitt’s impatience both with Deism and parliamentary democracy, which had variously banished the miracle and the figure of sovereign power to an unreachable transcendent realm.⁷⁸ Schmitt’s miracle, like his sovereignty, is foundational, grounding the normal or natural legal order, and exhibiting thereby its naked power. In this sense it is “magical”, inaccessible to rationalism and its deliberations.

But the miracle is open to a variety of theological interpretations. For Pentecostals, it is not “exceptional” in the sense of Schmitt’s analogy; rather than being the figure of an interruptive sovereign power, it is closer to the miracle as articulated by Rosenzweig,⁷⁹ whose essential character lies not in its interruptive form, but rather in its character as the realization of a providential prediction. For Rosenzweig, miracle and prophecy go together: the miraculous character of a miracle rests “not on its divergence as regards the course of nature predetermined by laws, but on the fact that it was predicted.”⁸⁰ As Honig argues, what is essential in the miracle for Rosenzweig is that it is a sign and an invitation, an understanding that requires us to look beyond a paradigm of explanation. The miracle exceeds both the magical and rationalist explanations, since, its context of possibility is not explanation but *orientation*.⁸¹ Rosenzweig is concerned to draw attention to the conditions in which a miracle may be experienced, and in this is close to Arendt’s albeit secular understanding of action, which she also likened to the miracle.⁸² Thus the other aspect of Rosenzweig’s understanding

pertinent to the case in hand is the sense in which such religious dispositions of openness to grace and receptivity to miracles are the products of a ritual, liturgical structuring and study within a shared community. In other words, such receptivity is the product of a religious subjectivation. In Pentecostalism, the *deus absconditus* returns to the world not in the figure of an irruptive, law-giving Sovereign, but as a permanent *parousia*, or presence, the witness to which performs a new state of being. The miracle, as a sign of divine grace and providence, opens the subject up to the experience of the divine in the everyday; to the experience of the mundane as miraculous, and the extraordinary as an event that may be expected, fated or willed. It renders experience *significant*, and requires of the subject a state of watchfulness.⁸³

Here we arrive at the question of veridiction. As Rosenzweig points out, the creation of receptivity is one thing, but the God of miracles is also the God of human freedom. Receptivity does not guarantee correct interpretation. Rosenzweig notes that miracles may also be performed by magicians, arguing that the miracle is an ambiguous sign that leaves open the possibility of human freedom, and which places on the individual the responsibility to receive and read it correctly. How can the miracle, in its form as a prophetic sign rather than an exceptional sovereign irruption, function as the ground for a new normative order? The effect of truth, which is the new creation, must be realised through a process of veridiction, in terms of which knowledge or meaning may ground its authority. If obedience is created through the process of the repetition of witness to grace, if Pentecostalism develops an ethic based on a relationship of the self with the self, what are the mechanisms of veridiction at work? And what sort of figure of sovereignty, what sort of *theo-kratie* does this imply? Let us recall Hobbes again on veridiction: the veracity of the miracle as a sign must be established by powers vested with the sovereign responsibility for the community of believers: “we are not every one to make our own private reason or conscience, but the public reason, that is the reason of God’s supreme lieutenant, judge; and indeed we have made him judge already, if we have given him a sovereign power to do all that is necessary for our peace and defense.”⁸⁴

In contrast to Hobbes, the principal mode of veridiction of miracles and grace in the Pentecostal articulation is stated very clearly here, in the explanation offered by a convert whom I questioned about how one could tell the difference between the power of the Holy Spirit and the operation of other spiritual powers in the life of the believer:

A religious man is serving God. . . If he is not looking to God, then he is serving the devil. For instance, you’re looking for children, and you go to the *babalawo* or witch to give you [them]. . . You have to look at Christianity and witchcraft, and you have to draw the line. That’s where you need to know the Word in quote. I went to a revival, and there’s a man who’s speaking in tongues, and he was possessed by a demon. How do we solve that? We solve that by saying that they speak in the tongues the spirit gives them. In the church, we have a lot of people and it’s not the Holy Spirit giving them utterance. One has to test the spirit, and if it is of God, it will confess that Jesus is Lord and that He’s our only savior. People believe in miracles, and people use miracles to further their own ends, for making money. If a miracle is going to operate through you, the Spirit must be willing, not you. This might be where you come into witchcraft. Because you are willing, but not the Holy Spirit. Just to keep up your image. You might easily fall into witchcraft in all the prosperity churches, because some people mostly emphasize power. You can’t seek power without seeking the giver of power. You might end up getting power from a different source. Most people go into witchcraft because they needed power. What really matters is maintaining a balance between studying the Word and the Spirit. There are a lot of Pentecostals who don’t speak by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The only way you may know is by a witness, a personal witness in your spirit. You need the spirit of discernment.⁸⁵

The site of truth-telling and authoritative discernment between true and false thus lies in the subject's capacity for perception and the existence of a nebulous "spirit of discernment" within her, a faculty in which both revelation and judgment are merged.

The verse "by their fruits ye shall know them"⁸⁶ is perpetually repeated by Pentecostals, as the mode in which both the reality of miracles and the conduct of others may be evaluated and spiritual authority grounded, linking the experience of faith to the execution of "works" in accordance with the normative prescriptions of doctrine. This mode of veridiction increasingly frames the question of *what* is to be governed in an ambivalent way such that the object of governance oscillates between the self and the world of unseen and chaotic powers. The power of the Holy Spirit and the nefarious powers of the devil are both at large in the world and present within the subject. Indeed, we could say that the central work of the self on the self, which is never truly achieved, is a permanent deciphering of the line between the self and the world and the powers that inhabit it, and is an attempt to interpret or control these forces and their effects through various techniques.

There is thus a perpetual slippage possible between the miracle and magic, between the Holy Spirit and the spirits of witchcraft or other "demonic" forces. The "vessel" may at any time be revealed as a simple magician. Pastors may lose their legitimacy for sinful and "un-Christian behavior," but accusations against particularly successful leaders may also claim that their power is from "another" source. As a worker in an extremely successful pastor's church remarked: "so many people think that the Archbishop is just a magician, but they are wrong. The man simply inspires people, he understands how to rouse the potent tool of faith in people for them to use in achieving whatever they desire."⁸⁷ The Nigerian federal state through the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission intervened in 2004 to ban "unverifiable miracles" on Nigerian state television, accusing televangelists of defrauding the public, and thereby giving Hobbes' advice an unlikely twenty-first-century application. While state broadcasting services were disgruntled at the anticipated losses of considerable revenue, and some directly indicted ministries sought to challenge the ban in court,⁸⁸ the great majority of the Pentecostal population was not bothered by the ban, as neither the state nor pastors were seen as incarnating the sovereign authority who might pronounce on their truth or falsity.

The Pentecostal experience of faith as a messianic suspension of the law and the subject's "freedom in the Messiah" means that ultimately, the people decide. Within Pentecostalism, prophetic power is accessible by all. What Pentecostal temporality and its framing of miracles projects is thus a form of "weak" or contestable sovereignty, one dependant on an openness to interpellation and the fragile and fallible power of individual discernment. God has promised, but it is up to every individual to interpret the exhortations and prescriptions of the Word and its revelation through miracles and signs as particular manifestations of this providence. It underscores the ambivalence of its political theology, between a theocratic or foundational impulse and a prophetic, quasi-democratic potential. The Pentecostal mode of veridiction need not return us to a Schmittian form of decisionism; it gestures rather to the aporetic nature of the binary of exception-legality itself,⁸⁹ in particular through the ways in which witness is performed in public and structured through standard, mediatized, discursive forms. Pentecostalism's mode of iterability means its attempts to secure the sacred in its purity, such that it might provide a solid ground for its ethics and politics, are constantly interrupted. The mediation of the private prophetic experience and the relation to the other is fragile in the extreme, perpetually undone by the figure of the demonic and the interiority of experiences of faith. It is clear that such a formulation has great difficulty in resolving the situation of anomy in the Nigerian post-colony. Yet at the same time, this ambivalence, or auto-immunity,⁹⁰ is

also what mitigates Pentecostalism's strong propensity towards what Derrida has called "the worst."⁹¹

The Politics of Conviction

There is no question that the devil was working during the regime of Sani Abacha, the iron-fisted dictator who ruled Nigeria from 1993 until his sudden death in 1998. A Muslim who had aligned himself with military thugs, Islamic radicals and occult sorcerers, Abacha was steering the country toward another war. It is widely known that he asked Islamic clerics to perform occult rituals in the capital to keep him in power. But Christians say God heard the prayers of the church and sent a miracle. It came in the form of Olusegun Obasanjo, a military leader and Pentecostal Christian who had been jailed by Abacha for treason. Like a character from an Old Testament drama, Obasanjo was suddenly plucked from his prison cell and placed in the presidency after a free election in early 1999.⁹²

Over the three decades of its dramatic expansion, Pentecostalism has failed to redeem its revolutionary promises. Pastors attempt to monopolize charisma, harnessing supernatural power for the performance of miracles, creating a circular economy in which enchantment and debt reappear in the relationship between pastor and convert. Pastoral authority itself becomes a form of enchantment, and mirrors in many ways the exercise of power on the part of the political elite. The longstanding phantasmal apparatus and emotional economy in which there is no limit to prosperity (and thus to desire) finds its clear re-articulation within the "prosperity" gospel, such that the new multi-millionaire pastors may be seen as "magicians" who will enable people to "achieve whatever they desire." The "potent tool of faith" is increasingly dislocated from the work of self-fashioning, and the autonomy of the individual suspended on the performance of the thaumaturge.

The urgency to which the Pentecostal revival responded was that of post-colonial radical insecurity, the permanent disjuncture between signs and their objects, the unreliability of human relations, the impossibility of securing the grounds for certitude and trust in a world of falsification, violence, and arbitrariness. If the central success of the movement was the ways in which the exercise of faith opened up the world to the believer for gratuitousness and use, creating a new form of autonomy and empowerment which enabled liberation from old structures of debt and bondage, then Pentecostalism fails to re-moor floating signs, recreate trust, or provide intersubjectivity with new and stable forms of expression in which acts of promising and forgiveness may provide the guarantees that make living together possible. In many ways, it upholds and extends the occult political economies of the post-colony, providing a new relay for enchantment and subjection.

The Pentecostal participation in politics and the public sphere, graphically alluded to in the citation above, illustrates the ways in which Pentecostal political spirituality has increasingly given rise to two related tendencies: on the one hand, an attempt to develop authoritarian forms of pastoral power, which are constantly undermined, and thus, in turn, contributes to the ongoing fragmentation of the community. Here I will cite the remainder of Adeboye's speech, in perfect contradiction to his vision of creating a nation of ideal citizens who will provide a living incarnation of the *nomos* of an ordered political realm, reminding us that God is not a democrat:

Everybody must take orders from the commander-in-chief. No arguments, no debates. I told you last time you came, I said, God is not a democrat. . . . I want PFN to become an

invading army. I don't want it to become a social club. I want to see a PFN by the grace of God that when the devil hears "P" he will begin to shake. That cannot happen if we go about it democratically. Because when God has spoken and we say this is the way we shall go, someone will say, let us vote. I can tell you, whenever you go to vote, the majority will vote for the devil. . . How am I going to discipline the people who are present founders [of churches]? How am I going to make them soldiers of the cross, how am I going to make them obey orders, unless there are some people on the Lord's side? . . . When I became the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, we had almost the same problem as we are having with the PFN now. Everybody doing what he thinks is right in his own sight. Ask somebody to go on transfer, they will tell you "let me go and pray about it." Or they may even resign, or take the church away. Then all of a sudden the Holy Spirit moved. He did something that I am praying He will do among the Pentecostals. All of a sudden, we held a meeting, we reached an agreement that from now on, once the General Overseer has spoken, the pastors will see to it that it comes to pass."⁹³

On the other hand, there is a process of *conviction*, in its double sense – identifying the demonic within the unconverted other and overcoming it through conversion. This process both inhibits the stabilization from the inside, of a coherent community, or *ekklesia*, within which trust may be established yet also encourages the creation of a precarious collective identity, impelled from the outside through the clash with a formidable religious other. In the national space of Nigeria and in the light of its political history, this other is of course Islam.⁹⁴ Here we see the development of a politics of identity based upon the notion of conviction and, increasingly, on a politics of vengeance, or settling of scores. Islam has a privileged position with respect to a broader politics of conviction, insofar as the project of conversion runs up against Islam's own project, particularly since the adoption of sharia'a by the majority of northern states and the growth of radical reformism: one can convict Muslims in the first sense, but not necessarily convert them. Pastor Adeboye's speech contains a direct reference to this politics of conviction. Without specifying the "enemy," it nonetheless contains a perfectly clear message about the nature of the "wickedness" of those who have ruled: it implicitly refers to northern political hegemony and condemns what is understood as Islam's competing theocratic and imperialist program for government in a way that listeners could not mistake. As we see in the passage cited at the beginning of this section, it also opens up the space for the recuperation of Pentecostalism by political elites, and the interpretation of political events in terms of the demonization of the other. These two developments have nonetheless not reached the proportions many observers feared – Pentecostals are less mobilized in Nigeria's recent religious violence than might be expected. At the same time, the reciprocal exploitation of religious and political office, where political elites recuperate Pentecostal discourse, and pastors use political patronage to shore up their authority is a strategy that has not met with popular mobilization or assent. Indeed, very few Pentecostals took Obasanjo seriously as a new form of Christian ruler due to a cynicism borne out by his performance in office, and Adeboye's association with him created a notable, albeit temporary, crisis of legitimacy in his ministry.

However, even if the establishment of a strong identity that could enact a violent politics of identity and exclusion is constantly interrupted by the nature of Pentecostal spirituality, nonetheless, this question posed by Mbembe remains pertinent: "At which point does the engagement with the demonic at the heart of salvation, the writing of terror and exultation, destruction and exhilaration as the law of divinity and the logos of redemption—at which point does all of this become a symptom of something even darker—a symptom of a vengeful state, of a suicidal state, one of the main justifications of which is to be permanently conscripted in settling scores—the permanent settlement of scores becoming itself an ecstatic

experience?”⁹⁵ Pentecostals and Muslims are “condemned” to live together in the political space they share. While a mutual politics of vengeance has yet to take on the proportions many observers fear, nonetheless, it exists, and finds its relay within the Pentecostal program of governing the self and others.

Despite its religious form that presumes the insufficiency of the human subject, Pentecostal political spirituality nonetheless continues a tradition that began with the notion of platonic ruler, centered on the domination of the self and drawing its guiding principles “from a relationship established between me and myself.” In this articulation, Arendt argues, “the right and wrong of relationships with others are determined by attitudes towards one’s self, until the whole public realm is seen in the image of “man writ large,” of the right order between man’s individual capacities of mind, soul and body.”⁹⁶ This long political tradition sees sovereignty and freedom as identical. And yet, Arendt argues, there can be neither freedom nor sovereignty, because “sovereignty, the idea of uncompromising self-sufficiency and mastership, is contradictory to the very condition of plurality. No man can be sovereign, because not one man, but men, inhabit the earth, and not, as the tradition since Plato holds, because of man’s limited strength, which makes him depend upon the help of others.”⁹⁷

The Pentecostal ethics of submission to the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit takes the form of a compensation for this original weakness: a capturing of power by individuals that will permit their liberation from the debt and bondage imposed by others, free them from their past actions, and protect them from the actions of others. Sovereignty that is claimed in this way, as Arendt argues, is entirely spurious.⁹⁸ Divine sovereignty as employed in the messianic vocation demands above all an action toward the other, the only thing that may release all men from wandering “helplessly and without direction in the darkness of each man’s lonely heart.”⁹⁹ The messianism and interiority of Pentecostal practices of faith, and the centrality of grace and miracles, all perform an ongoing interruption of processes of institutionalization that might secure the connection between righteousness and authority, between a new mode of self-government and the government of others, a new ontology or ethology of being-together through the embodiment of sovereignty in a community within which the identity of those promising and keeping promises may be verified.

The Pentecostal articulation stages the experiences of promising and forgiveness as a matter of the relationship between the self and the self, mediated by the Holy Spirit. Despite collective experiences of testimony, in which sins are enumerated, forgiveness demanded, and promises made, these take the form of standardized narratives whose principal function is that of faith’s performance. The individual’s release from the consequences of her acts – making a complete and ongoing break with the past – occurs through God’s grace in private prayers of repentance and in the fulfillment of promises through the miraculous apparition of God’s blessings in her life, not through the enactment of the central principle of the New Covenant – love thy neighbor as thyself – or the public confirmation of the identity between the one who promises and the one who fulfills. The convert may thus liberate herself from old forms of indebtedness or bondage, but the primacy of individual experiences of faith based on interiority, the blurring of the experiences of faith and works, interrupts the dialectic between the enactment of faith and obedience to prescriptions that would consolidate trust among men. This situation is compounded by the mistrust created by the need to counter the ever-present possibility of spiritual attacks not only for one’s protection, but as both the evidence for and the performance of one’s salvation. This underscores the impossibility of confirming the identity of the other, of dispelling the darkness of one’s own heart or that of others through the Pentecostal articulation of sovereignty, an impossibility that disables the messianic, and fundamentally democratic, vocation as a being-toward-the-other.

In many respects, Pentecostalism demonstrates the contemporary dilemmas of both religion and politics. It is at once post-secular and post-religious, incapable of providing a sovereign, transcendent foundation for human co-existence, but also unable to renounce the fundamental truth that religion and philosophy have always recognized but which our contemporary politics has forgotten. “As the world becomes both global and resolutely “worldly”—without nether-worlds, heaven, or celestial powers—how and where may be inscribed the necessary affirmation that the meaning of the world must be found outside the world?”¹⁰⁰

NOTES

1. Some of the arguments and empirical material developed here have been drawn from my book *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) I thank the University of Chicago Press for their permission to reproduce parts of this publication here. I also thank members of the Jackman Humanities Institute Working Group in Religion, Culture, Politics at the University of Toronto for their suggestions, and in particular Jason McKinney, JHI Fellow.

2. M. O. Ojewale, *A Call to Prayer for Nigeria* (Lagos: Peace and Salvation Publishers, 1990), 23–24, 37.

3. The World Christian Database estimates that there are 84 million “renewalists” – Pentecostals and charismatics – in Brazil, 72 million in China, 41 million in Nigeria (Pentecostals), 38 million in India, 25 million in the Philippines, and 80 million in the USA. My research suggests that the figure of 41 million is conservative. See the Pew Research Forum’s 10 country study *The Spirit and the Power: a Ten Country Survey of Pentecostals*, <http://pewforum.org/newassets/surveys/pentecostal/pentecostals-08.pdf> accessed online May 9, 2009.

4. For the sake of simplicity, in this paper I use the term “Pentecostal,” rather than “Born-Again,” which is the term used in Nigeria, (or simply “Christian”). However, the term should not be thought of as designating a unified or homogeneous group, or as corresponding to its use in the sociology of religion.

5. See for example, *The Fundamentalism Project*, five volumes, M. E. Marty and R. S. Appleby, eds (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993–2004).

6. Claude Lefort, “The Permanence of the Theologico-political?” *Democracy and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988).

7. See, for example, Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2008) and J. W. Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

8. This is a shorthand for Habermas’ recent position on the challenge of religion. See Jürgen Habermas *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays* (London: Polity Press, 2008), especially chapter five. However, I agree with Calhoun that a more accurate term for what the recognition his communicative theory and constitutional patriotism requires, is “transformation”; a view on the relationship between the subject and truth with a solid Christian heritage. See the blog by Craig Calhoun on “The Immanent Frame,” <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2008/09/15/translation-and-transformation/> (accessed online May 9, 2009.)

9. See Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Derrida, G. Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) and Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

10. See discussion “These Things are Old” on “The Immanent Frame.”

11. Jason Frank and Tracy McNulty, “Introduction: Taking Exception to the Exception,” *Diacritics* 37, no. 2–3 (Summer-Fall 2007): 3.

12. Jean-Luc Nancy, *La décloison: Déconstruction du christianisme, I* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 2005). 12 (my translation).

13. See particularly Slavoj Žižek, “Carl Schmitt in the Age of Post-Politics” *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London: Verso, 1999) and the rest of the volume; also H. de Vries and L. Sullivan, “Introduction,” *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-secular World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

14. Nancy, *La décloison* 12.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, 13 fn. See also Derrida on justice beyond the law and sovereignty, *The Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority*, in *Acts of Religion*, ed. G. Anidjar (New York, Routledge, 2001), 255.

17. *Ibid.*, 14.

18. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007).
19. Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).
20. Nancy and other "post-foundationalist" philosophers such as Jacques Derrida, Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, Giorgio Agamben, as well as thinkers of radical democracy such as Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, to name but the best-known.
21. See De Vries and Sullivan, "Introduction," *Political Theologies*. Nancy points out the common confusion associated with this term, which is generally employed to mean a collusion between the two, in particular with respect to Schmitt, whose project was to provide a secularization of the theological.
22. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Religion, Politics, Theology: A Conversation with Achille Mbembe," *boundary 2* 34, no. 2 (2007): 156.
23. Ibid.
24. "Faith and knowledge: the two sources of 'religion' within the limits of mere reason," *Religion*, ed. Derrida and G. Vattimo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). 1–78.
25. See *Political Spiritualities*.
26. On the nature of Schmitt's enemy, see Derrida's discussion in *The Politics of Friendship* (New York: Verso Press, 1997).
27. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, eds George Schwab and Tracy Strong (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); *The Concept of the Political*. trans. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
28. See *Political Spiritualities*, especially chapter 4.
29. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).
30. Agamben, *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 134.
31. Richard Banégas and Jean-Pierre Warnier, "Nouvelles figures de la réussite et du pouvoir," *Politique Africaine* 82 (June 2001): 6.
32. See Larry Diamond, Anthony Kirk-Greene, and Oyeleye Oyediran, eds., *Transition without End: Nigerian Politics and Civil Society under Babangida* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1997).
33. See Michel Foucault, "Il faut défendre la société": *Cours au Collège de France, 1976* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), Cours du 10, 17 mars, 139–235.
34. See Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40.
35. Mbembe, "La colonie: Son petit secret et sa part maudite," *Politique Africaine* 102 (July 2006) 108–9.
36. Ibid.
37. Nancy, *Vérité de la démocratie* (Galilée: Paris, 2008), 59. Derrida and Nancy draw our attention to the ways that modern democracy, with its aporetic structure - the paradox of equality (the calculable) and freedom (the incalculable, incommensurable) – and its designation of the place of power as "empty," beyond appropriation or incarnation, does not have a telos, understood as the possibility of its own closure. See Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).
38. See Mbembe, "La colonie: son petit secret et sa part maudite," 101–27.
39. Joseph Tonda, *La guérison divine en Afrique Centrale: Congo, Gabon* (Paris: Karthala, 2002) See also *Le Souverain Moderne* (Paris: Karthala, 2007).
40. Mbembe, "La colonie," 110.
41. Ibid.
42. See J.C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade 1730–1830*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).
43. Mbembe, "La colonie," 108–9.
44. Agamben, *Time That Remains*, 135; Taubes, *Political Theology of Paul*, 103.
45. See novelist Wole Soyinka's *A Season of Anomy* (Rex Collings: London 1973).
46. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 247.
47. Pastor E. A. Adeboye, "Who is on the Lord's Side?" address, PFN Biennial Conference, Lagos, 13 February 1993.
48. Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 67–68.
49. Ibid.
50. Dispensationalism, originating in the early 1800s, advocates a form of premillennialism, in which it sees the past, present, and future as a number of successive administrations, or "dispensations," each of which emphasizes aspects of the covenants between God and various peoples at various times. According

to most accounts, there are seven dispensations, and we are currently living in the sixth, known as the “church” or “grace” dispensation, beginning with the birth of Christ and the establishment of his church, which involves the evangelization of the world’s peoples. This period is the last one before the seventh and final dispensation, the millennial reign of Christ. At the end of the church dispensation will occur the rapture and the premillennial tribulation of Satan’s reign on earth for seven years. It thus places a heavy emphasis on prophecy and eschatology, the study of the end times.

51. See, for example, the website “Rapture Ready,” complete with prediction index, which the site calls “the prophetic speedometer of end-time activity,” www.raptureready.com

52. Lee Jang Rim, leader of the Korean Mission for the Coming Days (also known as the Tami Church), predicted that the rapture would occur on this date. Lee was convicted of fraud after the prophecy failed. Lee’s church was part of the larger Hyoo-Go (Rapture) movement, which took Korea by storm in 1992. “The World Did Not End Yesterday,” *Boston Globe* (Associated Press), October 29, 1992.

53. “Let no man deceive you in any way. Because it will not be unless the apostasy shall have come first, and the man of lawlessness, the son of destruction is revealed. He who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god and object of worship. As a result, he seats himself in the sanctuary of God and declares himself to be God. . . You know what it is that is now holding him back [to *katechon*], so that he will be revealed when his time comes. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but only until the one now holding him back [ho *katechon*] is removed. Then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will abolish with the breath of his mouth, rendering him inoperative by the manifestation of his presence [*parousia*]. The presence [*parousia*] of the former is according to the working of Satan in every power.” I have used Agamben’s translation of this text, as the King James Version is opaque and convoluted. Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 109.

54. Digging Deep Bible Study Class, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Theme: Pastor E. Abedoye “Traditions of Men,” Lagos, 29 March 1993.

55. Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History, VI,” *Illuminations* (London: Fontana, 1992), 247. “The true image of the past flees by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. . . For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own threatens to disappear irretrievably.”

56. Agamben, *Time That Remains*, 25.

57. “But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all communities [*ekklēstias*]. Is any man called being circumcised? Let him not remove the mark of circumcision. Is any called with a foreskin? Let him not be circumcised! Circumcision is nothing, the foreskin is nothing. . . Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called being a slave? Care not for it: but if thou mayest be free, *use it rather*. For he that is called in the Lord being a slave is the Lord’s freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is slave of the Messiah” (1 Cor 7:17).

58. Verses 29–32: “But this I say, brethren, time contracted itself, the rest is, that even those having wives may be as not having, and those weeping as not weeping, and those rejoicing as not rejoicing, and those buying as not possessing, and those using the world as not using it up. For passing away is the figure of the world. But I wish you to be without care,” Agamben’s trans., *ibid*, 19, 23.

59. Interview with T. Johnson, student and volunteer worker at Christ Chapel, Lagos, 30 April 1991.

60. Adekola, *Understanding Demonology* (Ibadan: Scripture Union Press, 1993), 30.

61. W.-D. Hartwick, A. Assman, and J. Assman, “Afterword,” Taubes, *Political Theology of Paul*, 131.

62. See Schmitt, *Political Theology*.

63. Hartwick, Assman, and Assman, “Afterword,” *The Political Theology of Paul*, 138.

64. *Ibid*.

65. See Agamben, *Time That Remains*, 109. He notes Tertullian, who writes: “We pray for the permanence of the world [*pro status saeculi*], for peace in all things, for the delay of the end [*pro mora finis*].”

66. Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. G.L. Ulmen, (New York: Telos, 2003) 59–60. As Taubes and Agamben argue, Schmitt is from this point of view a fundamentally anti-messianic thinker, as the messianic is precisely the release of such paralysis, through its effect of suspension, which returns the law to its state of potentiality, to be fulfilled through faith. The messianism of 2 Thessalonians 2 shows that this passage cannot in any way be used as a foundation for divine authority or a theory of the state. Agamben, *Time That Remains*, 111. See also Agamben, *Le Règne et la Gloire: Homo Sacer II*, 2 (Paris: Seuil, 2008).

67. Taubes, *Political Theology of Paul*, 103.

68. Andre Corten, "Miracles et obéissance: Le discours de la guérison divine à l'Église Universelle," *Social Compass* 44, no. 2 (1997): 283.
69. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: Penguin, 1981), Part III, chap. 37, "Of Miracles and Their Use."
70. Testimony, Sister Abassey Udom, Christ Life Church, Sword of the Spirit Ministries, Ibadan, September 1997. Jeremiah 17:5: "thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord."
71. See *Political Spiritualities*, chapter three.
72. J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).
73. *Ibid.*, 134.
74. Interview, Dr. O. Segun, medical doctor, member of Redeemed Evangelical Mission, Lagos, 7 April 1991.
75. Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).
76. Michele Foucault, "Usages des plaisirs et techniques de soi," in *Dits et Ecrits*, Vol. 4: 1980–1988, 559.
77. *Ibid.*
78. "The idea of the modern constitutional state attains predominance along with deism, with a theology and metaphysics that just as much banishes miracle from the world (along with any sort of interruption of natural law—the exception that belongs to the very concept of miracle) as it does the direct intervention of the sovereign into the governing rule of law. The rationalism of the Enlightenment repudiates the state of exception in every form," Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 43.
79. Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. B. Galli. (Madison: U of Wisconsin Press, 2005). See also the excellent analysis by Bonnie Honig, "The Miracle of Metaphor: Rethinking the State of Exception with Rosenzweig and Schmitt," *Diacritics*, 37, no. 2–3 (2007), 121–134.
80. *The Star of Redemption*, 104.
81. Rosenzweig, *The Star*, 105; Honig, "The Miracle of Metaphor."
82. Arendt, *The Human Condition*.
83. Bonnie Honig, "The Miracle of Metaphor: Rethinking the State of Exception with Rosenzweig and Schmitt," *diacritics* 27, nos. 2–3 (2007): 78–102.
84. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 296.
85. Interview, Brother T. Johnson, journalism student and lay worker, Christ Chapel, Lagos, Nigeria, April 30, 1991.
86. Matthew 7:15–20: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. 19: Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them."
87. "Nigeria's Miracle Workers. . . Sources of Power Revealed," *Fame*, 3–9 February 1998, 4.
88. See BBC World Service report, "Crackdown on Nigeria TV Miracles," April, 30 2004 (accessed online).
89. Here Agamben's "phonocentric" recuperation of Paul aims to reintroduce the "messianic" event in the face of a "permanent state of exception." However, as Jason McKinney pointed out to me, Agamben's analysis, and his dismissal of Derrida's "thwarted messianism," shows that he does not maintain the aporia of the hyphen in his understanding of the theologico-political, but rather resolves it in a political theology which is a dialectical reversal of Schmitt's (personal communication, November 20, 2010). See Agamben's discussion of Derrida's messianism, *The Time that Remains*, 102–3.
90. For Derrida, religion is constitutively aporetic and auto-immune; faith requires iterability, thus a certain technology or machinelike repetition which corrupts (always already) the purity of the sacred, unscathed, immune, holy. Today its auto-immunity is increasingly apparent, with religion's reliance or alliance with "teletechnoscience" and "tele-mediatization" as its mode of iteration. "Religion today allies itself with tele-technoscience, to which it reacts with all its forces. It is, *on the one hand*, globalization; it produces, weds, exploits, the capital and knowledge of tele-mediatization . . . But *on the other hand*, it reacts immediately, *simultaneously*, declaring war against that which gives it this new power only at the cost of dislodging it from all its proper places, *in truth from place itself*, from the *taking place* of its truth." "Faith and Knowledge," *Religion*, 46.
91. For Derrida, "the worst" (*le pire*) should be distinguished from what, referring to Kant, he calls "radical evil." Radical evil as a form of violence stems from the hiatus between the self and the other, or between the self and the self, (*différance*, which is both a repetition and deferral of the address, the inability

of an address to the other to reach its destination). The “worst,” or the worst violence, on the other hand, is the obliteration of the hiatus, when the other, or the other in the self, is completely appropriated, when the address reaches its destination, and only its destination, excluding others, thus potentially, all others. See Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge” *Religion*, 25, 65; *Rogues*, 15, 101–2 .

92. J. Lee Grady, “Nigeria’s Miracle,” cover story, *Charisma*, May 2002, 4.

93. Pastor Adeboye, “Who Is on the Lord’s Side?”

94. See Marshall, *Political Spiritualities*, Chapter Six, “The Politics of Conviction.”

95. Spivak, “Religion, Politics, Theology,” 154.

96. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 234.

97. *Ibid.*

98. *Ibid.*, 235.

99. *Ibid.*, 237.

100. Nancy, *La décroissance*, 15. See also Lefort “Anything that bears the mark of human experience bears the mark of an *ordeal* and the recognition that humanity can only open onto itself by being held in an opening that it did not itself create,” *The Permanence of the Theologico-political?* 220.

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