THE PENTACOSTAL CALLING AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM: Economic Theology and the Work of God in Ghana

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In this article, I examine the entanglement of the theological and the economic in a transnational Pentecostal pastoral project originating in Ghana. More specifically, I explore the kind of work that justifies and energizes this type of organization and underpins its world-making and subject-making power: *the work of God*. In the market economy, we work for multiple reasons—some more pragmatic and self-interested, such as survival, comfort, and recognition; others less so, such as the well-being of institutions, clients, families, or society. The motivational structure that drives the work of God certainly overlaps with these, yet it also remains incommensurable. As the preposition suggests, the work of God is delegated and commissioned by God, exceeding and eventually challenging the forensic models of personhood, agency, and accountability of secularity (Asad 2003, 77–110). Not coincidentally, performing God's work is neither a choice nor an obligation, but a *calling*.

The transcendent origin of God's work does not render it anti-utilitarian, however. Indeed, and as I elaborate below, Pentecostal institutions strive to authoritatively juxtapose aspects of human action often perceived as irreconcilable from a secular standpoint: the rationalities of virtue (MacIntyre 1984; Hirschkind 2006; Laidlaw 2014), eschatology (Harding 2000; Webster 2022), and instrumentality. To do so, they must cultivate among God's workers a *church labor ethic*.

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Pentecostalism's *messianic utilitarianism*, the ethos I examine here, came out with particular force during my fieldwork at the Anagkazo Bible and Ministry Training Center in Accra, back in 2011.[1] Anagkazo is a seminary or Bible school affiliated with Lighthouse Chapel International (LCI). Envisioned by Dag Heward-Mills in 1985, LCI has since morphed from a small charismatic prayer group—composed mainly of born-again, Spirit-filled medical students and health workers—into a transnational apparatus of more than 3,000 churches of varying sizes spread across Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Americas. This expansion is the result of a highly rationalized and rigorously enacted project of "church growth" and "church planting" aimed at fulfilling God's Great Commission.[2]

Immediately on my arrival in Anagkazo, students made me aware that LCI was a "spiritual industry." This initially strange notion found a more systematic expression in one of the "Church Administration" classes I attended. After entering the classroom, the reverend-teacher greeted the students, opened a book authored by Heward-Mills, and began reading aloud from it verbatim:

> God instructed me to industrialize my church. He showed me how our nation, at that time, was only importing goods from Western countries and reselling them at a profit. "There is no future in this," the Lord said. "Have you noticed that the richest nations of the world are all involved in producing important products?" "Yes," I replied. God showed me that the richest nations of the world produce cars. The best cars come from the richest countries of the world. These countries are rich because they produce something. The church will be rich in souls if we begin to be spiritually industrialized! Just as the success of the nations of the world depends on their producing something, the success of the church depends on her producing souls. An industry is an organized system of producing goods and services regularly . . . I am a "businessman" for god, and my currency is human souls. . . . Jesus said in Luke 19:13, "Occupy (do business) until I come." That is, industrialize and commercialize with diligence until I come. In other words, Jesus expects us to take the business of soul winning as a very serious enterprise. Soul winning should be intentional and not incidental. (Heward-Mills 2007, 205)

The passage struck me as both disturbing and all too familiar. Disturbing, because its core analogy—between God and capitalists, churches and corporations, souls and commodities—short-circuits the secular compartmentalization

of the religious and the economic, a division sustained through a chain of deeply engrained oppositions: moral versus monetary value, immateriality versus materiality, meaning versus utility, conviction versus maximization, and so on. Familiar, because churches like LCI have long proved central to critiques of the "marketization of religion," both as a scholarly framework for understanding religious motivation in modernity and as a public accusation of concealed economic agendas.

One should not ignore the deliberately provocative tone of Heward-Mills's testimony. He is clearly aware that many—in Ghana and beyond—regard churches like LCI as little more than businesses cloaked in religious language. His response is to double down: "Indeed, this is a business, a soul-winning business." Under these reflexive conditions, the question is not whether the economic or the religious prevails, but how the two become entwined.

The survival of any religious organization naturally depends on economic factors such as proper accounting, administrative planning, and strategies for maintenance and growth. But churches like LCI often bring these typically "backstage" issues to the forefront of religious life, drawing both God and congregants into economic reasoning—and not only through the "sacrificial economies" of prosperity theology (Coleman 2011). Although the passage above comes from a book read primarily by ordained and apprentice ministers, I frequently heard similar messages and tropes voiced from the pulpit or circulated in conferences and small group meetings. Members of LCI are made aware that they are the product of a mass-production line of souls, and this awareness does not defile the singularity or authenticity of their encounter with God through such an impersonal apparatus. On the contrary, it often constitutes a source of pride, reflecting the high standards by which LCI performs the work of God. This defiant transparency about the economic core of Christianity, I suggest, deserves to be taken seriously.

How do LCI and Anagkazo encourage their members to engage in the work of God? How do they articulate the rationalities of virtue, eschatology, and instrumentality into a church labor ethic capable of producing subjects in light of these norms and expectations? In short, what does it mean to be called by God to do His work in contemporary Pentecostalism? Anagkazo and LCI offer privileged access to these questions by revealing Pentecostalism's messianic utilitarianism *in transmission*. To begin to understand these mutual translations between religious and calculative reasoning (Asad 2018)—without reducing them to an epiphenomenal model of causality—I propose attending to the *economic form* of Christianity. Following Giorgio Agamben (2011), I refer to the economy embedded within Christianity as *economic theology*.

I first compare this approach with Max Weber's sociology of the calling, reading it upside down. Weber described how religious asceticism engendered a secular labor ethic at the dawn of modernity; by contrast, churches like LCI transvalue the "third spirit of capitalism" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018) into a church labor ethic. I then examine how such theo-economic encompassment of the secular economy is enacted at the level of evangelism as emotional management skill and discipleship as human capital formation. This leads me to analyze LCI's minimalist theology of the calling as a "desire to serve," and how such desire is cultivated among apprentice ministers through processes of subject formation and self-recognition based on "as if" action. I conclude by underscoring how the rationalities of virtue, eschatology, and utility remain nonequivalent yet commensurable within the Pentecostal calling, and by stressing how the problem of time in postcolonial secularity proves central to understanding the subject of messianic utilitarianism.

RETHINKING THE CALLING: Economic Ethics, the Spirit of Capitalism, and Economic Theology

Max Weber's long-term project of examining the economic ethics of the world religions marks a turning point for any research concerned with the relationship between religion and the economy. His studies of Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism, Taoism and Confucianism, and Judaism, together with his extensive writings on Christianity, pursued an ambitious goal: to produce a "universal history of culture from an economic point of view" (Schluchter 2017, 40). Weber's historical sociology rivaled the grand philosophies of history of the nineteenth century, yet it was no less retrospective. It sought to illuminate the present, and Weber's conception of the present shared with his predecessors a heightened sensitivity to the cultural exceptionality of the West—its pioneering role in overcoming "magic" and, ultimately, "religion" itself by unleashing utilitarian reason from moral constraints.

Weber became interested in the Protestant theology of the calling while seeking an answer to the problem of why modern capitalism arose in Europe and not elsewhere. Why did it happen on a continent that, around 1000 AD, was "backward" in almost every field compared to other major cultural areas, such as China, the Indian subcontinent and the Arab world? Why, in this specific context, were Protestant and not Catholic societies prominent, even if the latter were more affluent? Weber showed that by recasting temporal labor as piety, Protestantism helped establish the cultural-motivational conditions for modern

capitalism before it became a systemic force. In developing this argument, Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* established the calling as a cornerstone for thinking about problems relating to equivalence, commensurability, and "value," in its linguistic, moral, and economic senses (Graeber 2001).

Much of the richness of this work results from the semantic particularities of *Beruf*, a German term that fascinated Weber because it condensed such disparate meanings as divine interpellation, immanent vocation, and utilitarian profession (Büttgen 2014).[3] Weber approached the polysemy of Beruf as a linguistic remnant, which would attest to its mediating role in a historical moment of cohabitation and transvaluation between forms of life now considered incommensurable, one having generated the other through unintended effects. Thus, Luther's anti-monastic sacralization of temporal life and Calvin's theology of predestination made room for Benjamin Franklin's "philosophy of avarice" (Weber 2003, 51); intramundane asceticism generated utilitarian materialism; Providence engendered calculating prognostication; virtue and the promise of eternal life unleashed a mechanism devoid of internal and final goods, a soulless machine that would continue "until the last ton of fossil fuel has burnt to ashes" (Weber 2003, 123).

Weber (2003, 79) was convinced that there was "an irrational element to be found . . . in every calling," a concern he continued to pursue in his equally influential essays on politics and science as calling-vocation-profession (*Politik als Beruf, Wissenschaft als Beruf*) (Weber 2004). *Beruf* granted Weber access to the gray zones of human agency and to the presence of fate and paradox in secular modernity—forces overshadowed both by secular humanism's optimistic emphasis on "choice" and by the social sciences' mechanistic appeal to the "external circumstances" of behavior. He termed this existential space between voluntarism and determinism, autonomy and heteronomy, "ethics," thereby anticipating the recent anthropological revival of this theme (Faubion 2011; Lambek 2015).

Weber's engagement with *Beruf* left behind an immense set of questions. I would like to highlight only two: the first concerns the inheritance of the concept of the "Spirit of Capitalism"; the second, the problem of *Beruf* in its religious and secular modulations.

Is Weber's thesis on the secularization of *Beruf* a general theory of capitalism or a situated historical analysis of its origins? This means asking whether capitalism still requires a Spirit *after* value has been abstracted from virtue in secular modernity (Lambek 2015, 214–41). Weber seems to be reticent. At the beginning of the book, he argues that "the idea of a calling and the devotion to work in the calling . . . has been and *still is* one of the most characteristic elements of our capitalistic

culture" (Weber 2003, 78; my emphasis). In the conclusion, however, he reverses this position and argues that capitalism had come to be based on "purely mundane passions," exhibiting a motivational structure similar to that of sports (Weber 2003, 182). Twenty years later, in *General Economic History*, Weber (1966, 270) corroborates this view while writing his last words on the subject: "Today the concept of the calling is a *caput mortuum* [worthless remains] in the world. Ascetic religiosity has been displaced by a pessimistic though by no means ascetic view of the world, such as that portrayed in Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*, which teaches that private vices may under certain conditions be "for the good of the public."

Providence had fully morphed into "Commerce," eventually into the market's "invisible hand," an immanent yet still miraculous mediator able to transfigure moral vices such as "usury" into abstract "self-interest" and harmonize the latter around the public good (Hirschman 1977). This would have rendered the Spirit of Capitalism obsolete, a view I believe is more congruous with Weber's general approach to secularization as the privatization, compartmentalization, and displacement of religion by secular forces (Casanova 1994, 11–74).

In *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello (2018) offer a compelling critique and reconnection of the Spirit to the Machine. They define capitalism in minimalist terms—as "an imperative to unlimited accumulation of capital by formerly peaceful means" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 4)—and argue that it is precisely because this system is irrational with respect to final ends that it must look beyond itself for reasons and justifications to sustain its existence. While not discounting the raw motivational force of necessity or utility, the sociologists contend that "systemic constraints on actors are insufficient on their own to elicit their engagement" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 10). Recognizing this moral surplus in utilitarian action enables them to redefine the Spirit of Capitalism not as a historical particularity, but as "the set of beliefs associated with the capitalist order that helps to justify this order and, by legitimizing them, to sustain the forms of action and predispositions compatible with it" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 10). The Spirit of Capitalism is embodied by social actors as a means to address economic questions that are both systemic and evaluative: How is commitment to processes of accumulation maintained, even among those who are not the primary beneficiaries of profit? How can participation in capitalist enterprises be justified as a contribution to the common good? Today, the Spirit of Capitalism is invoked not by Puritan preachers but by economists, the educational system, work psychology, business literature, coaches, vocational tests, training programs, and the like.

One of the most fascinating points of this book is how its authors (in a Weberian spirit) present the Spirit of Capitalism less as an immaterial ideology, applied a posteriori and oriented toward consensus, and more as a locus of ethical problematization (Rabinow 2011) oriented toward critique and dialectically linked to historical mutations in the economic system itself. One example is the critique of the impersonal and restrictive qualities of the centralized and bureaucratized capitalism established after the Second World War (the Second Spirit of Capitalism), which the book reconstructs through business literature. Boltanski and Chiapello (2018) show how this critique appropriated the "countercultural spirit of 1968" to demand a broad organizational and moral reform of the bureaucracy. Decentralized organizations—linked in "networks" with more space for the expression of individual talents, and guided by values such as "innovation," "flexibility," and "autonomy"—were defended as more suitable for both personal self-realization and collective prosperity. The book shows, in sum, how the neoliberal model of enterprise, state, and society became morally desirable *before* systemically imposing itself as a necessity, for example via fiscal arguments.

Boltanski and Chiapello (2018) have renewed the Weberian debate on *Beruf* by framing it as a debate on how social actors are interpellated and morally engaged by economic projects and build mutually transformative relationships with them. A second set of problems, which concerns me more directly, relates to Weber's focus on Christianity solely as a genealogical matrix of capitalism—a ladder that, once climbed, could be discarded, as allegedly happened with *Beruf*. However, the post–Cold War expansion of revivalist, transnational religious movements oriented toward moral and spiritual reform, including Pentecostalism, has brought the question of religion back to the forefront of social theory. This resurgence has fostered a more critically reflective awareness of the historicity of the category *religion* itself (Asad 1993). Moreover, it has underscored the necessity of analytically distinguishing secularism—as a political doctrine—from "the secular," understood as its epistemological and ontological conditions of possibility (Asad 2003). Talal Asad demonstrates that the secular does not embody a single, homogeneous temporality but rather a constellation—often precariously aggregated—of concepts and sensibilities with plural genealogies. There is, therefore, no reason to dismiss a priori the persistent force of Providential time in modernity, even after its liberal abstraction into the "invisible hand" of the market.[4]

Today, God's calling resonates widely, eventually rivaling the secular market in its capacity to interpellate people into labor, work, and action. It is

therefore essential to re-evaluate the question of the calling in its full theological force. This does not imply reducing it to purely economic components or resolving the multiple meanings Weber found condensed in *Beruf* toward an authentic, pure religious core. For instance, Brian Grim and Melissa Grim (2016) estimated that the annual revenue of all religious organizations in the United States in 2016 amounted to $378 billion—more than the combined revenues of tech giants Apple and Microsoft that year. In Ghana, few secular corporations have been able to mobilize volunteer labor, produce as many paid jobs, or expand as transnationally as Lighthouse Chapel International (LCI) and its thousands of branches over recent decades. Ignoring the economic strength of this project would be absurd. Yet the complexity of its soul-making networks remains inaccessible to the secular "great divide" that conceptualizes religion and economics as essentially distinct domains of practice. This invites us to also consider the economical from within Christianity, or how it unfolds as an *economic theology* (Agamben 2011).

Agamben (2011) has argued that the history of Christianity can be read as a long elaboration on "the mystery of economy" (*oikonomia*), the articulation of salvation through faith (*pistis*, credit), the internal economy of the Trinity, and the economy of the Church as the pastoral care of souls. His reflections on the messianic, public, and ever-expansive Christian appropriation of the domestic and reproductive Greek concept of *oikonomia* have stimulated a renewed interest in "economic theology" as an interdisciplinary field of inquiry (Schwarzkopf 2020). In contrast to its twin concept of *political theology* (Marshall 2014; McAllister and Napolitano 2021), however, *economic theology* remains comparatively underdeveloped within anthropology.

Economic theology examines the interactions and mutual borrowings between religious and economic imaginaries and forms of organization in space and time, that is, both before and after the "Great Transformation" (Polanyi 2001), and therefore the very (and always precarious) compartmentalization of "the economy" as an isolable domain of social and individual life governed by secular expertise and prognosis (Mitchell 2005). Economic theology has allowed different authors to rethink Christianity-as-economy, tracing back in time the links between salvation, piety, and management carried out by the Church's economic form. In short, it points to the Christian origins not only of the Spirit in the machine, but of the machine itself.

Economic theology allows me to recognize a robust Christian differential (Cannell 2006) embedded in LCI's instrumental rationality. I used to interpret analogies between evangelization and industrialization, souls and commodities,

almost intuitively as "economization of non-economic domains" (Kirby 2019, 586), a concession to the neoliberal axiom that the capitalist enterprise should be the prime model for human flourishing, encompassing the state, the economy, families, and individuals. However, this intuitive vision began to prove evidently reductionist. First, because LCI's maximizing imperative was often punctuated by criticism of how materialism had made Western countries atheistic and nihilistic. In other words, the equation with neoliberalism left out the main actor in God's work, as if capitalist values were encompassing (Robbins 2013) religious values, and not the other way around. In short, I realized the importance of emphasizing that this constituted a *messianic* utilitarianism, whose telos is the accumulation of souls, not of material profit.

Second, if LCI's utilitarian language indexes the contamination of religion by an external logic, should we not attribute the adjective *neoliberal* to Paul, when he defines himself as *apostolos* (commissioner) and *oikonomos* (administrator in charge) of God's work (Agamben 2011)? Or to patristic theology, which defined God as a "divine economist," Jesus as a "cosmic payment" and "divine currency," and the Church as an "administrator" of His transcendent assets (Singh 2018)? Or the Byzantine methods of accounting for souls reconstructed by Marie-José Mondzain (2004, 63), in which "all sacred expenditures, all divine expenditures, are methodical, purposeful, justified, balanced by material profits as well as spiritual benefits." My point is not that this ancient theo-economic grammar carries the same semantic charge as that of LCI, but rather that it reflects an impulse toward the rationalization of pastoral work endowed with its own historicity.

Randall Collins (1986, 58) corroborates this perspective in a fascinating critique of Weber's association between the medieval Church and anti-capitalist "traditionalism." He argues that the Church resisted the emerging private capitalism of the late medieval period "not simply because its religious ethic disagreed with capitalism's lack of charity, but because there was a political battle between two economies: church capitalism and secular capitalism." Collins (1986, 54) recognizes in "the organization of the Catholic Church itself," especially after the rise of the Cistercian orders, almost all the administrative prerequisites for modern capitalist corporations. Much of what Collins (1986, 57) calls "Protestant ethics without Protestantism," an intramundane asceticism that rationalizes law, land, currency, credit, and labor around new productive technologies and accounting techniques, was justified by the care of souls, material prosperity being the effect of a salvific telos.

I argue that, from an institutional point of view, LCI does articulate an economic ethic, but one that unfolds within—and remains bound to—an economic theology. Various sectors of its organizational apparatuses—preaching, small thematic ministries, and faith-based initiatives—instill among members an economic ethic that resonates with the moralities of the neoliberal market economy (Rudnyckyj and Osella 2017). The mutually reinforcing relationship between the neo- in neo-Pentecostalism and neoliberalism has seen wide examination in the literature, both in conversation with and in critique of Weber's thesis (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000; Meyer 2007; Wariboko 2012; Kirby 2019; among others).

In contrast to that of other charismatic churches, LCI's current engagement with prosperity theology is "mild" when it comes to sacralizing consumption, testifying to miraculous "breakthroughs," or engaging in narratives of "occult economies." But it does emphasize notions of Christian success in the secular market through entrepreneurship, globality, time discipline, and risk-taking (van Dijk 2012). What ultimately drives this corporation, however, is an economic theology oriented toward the accumulation and training of souls for God's work. LCI has grown and formed Christian subjects not by reconfiguring temporal work as a form of worship or religious duty (Rudnyckyj 2010), but by reconfiguring worship and religious duties as work that must be carried out with virtue, eschatological fervor, and strategic purpose. To do this, it selectively borrows components and dispositives from neoliberal rationality to professionalize the work of God.

EVANGELISM AND EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Pastoral labor—and Pentecostal spirituality more broadly—are characterized by two primary ethical stances (Keane 2016): evangelism and discipleship. The first refers to the quantitative imperative of "enlarging the Kingdom"; the second, to the qualitative imperative of pedagogically transforming subjects into Christ's likeness. Evangelism is typically associated with conversion as a moment of temporal rupture or "spiritual rebirth" (Robbins 2007), while discipleship involves the slower process of "spiritual maturation"—a realignment (Engelke 2010) with doctrinal norms, embodied practices, and relational networks (Reinhardt 2018). These two ethical imperatives may or may not align seamlessly and often do so in diverse ways, reflecting the vast heterogeneity of pastoral projects within global Pentecostalism. As we shall see, LCI is intensely concerned that these two authoritative axes generate positive feedback loops, configuring a form of power and authority I call *apostolic*—a term that highlights its emphasis on empowering members and training ministers (Reinhardt 2017, 2021). In this

section, I examine LCI's evangelistic apparatus through three examples of theological-economic synthesis. In the next, I turn to the apparatus of discipleship, focusing on the theology of calling that undergirds the organization's formation of Christian subjects.

As do most Pentecostal churches, LCI understands the act of conversion, carried out by the "sinner's prayer"—when the individual repents of the past and "accepts Jesus as Lord and personal savior"—as the first stage of a relatively structured conversion career (Gooren 2010). Conversion must be followed by baptism by immersion, the baptism by the Holy Spirit, as well as the participation of new members in "small ministries" led by lay leaders. Central to this circuit of souls are "camp meetings" dedicated to training lay leaders. These are organized by every church branch in members' homes, public spaces, eventually in hotels and universities. During camp meetings, new members are made aware, among other things, of the "networks of flourishing" (MacIntyre 1999) that Christianity relies on so as to take root and reform the habits of a previous life toward piety. They learn that new converts, or "spiritual babies," can only become "mature" Christians in communities formed by horizontal bonds of friendship, as well as by vertical bonds of authority, exemplarity, vigilance, and care among those with more and less "age in Christ."

But members are also warned on these occasions about the strategic nature of these same personal networks for the organization. After all, when congregations grow, it is inevitable that pastors distance themselves from their sheep, so experienced members must fill this gap through their "service" to God. In line with this reasoning, Christian networks of flourishing also become publicly dissected during camp meetings into an impersonal and pragmatic set of rules of conduct called "interaction." When objectified as interaction, religious care itself is instrumentalized by the instructors and systematically divided into micro-strategies such as "memorize the newcomers' names," "get to know their work," "ask how they are," "invite them to lunch the same week they convert," "pray for them regularly," and so on. The most revealing rule of this professional ethos was: "You must interact, even if you don't feel like it," a rendition of Heward-Mills's epiphany about soul-winning being intentional, not incidental.[5]

I now move into the Anagkazo seminary, where I found the same pattern applied to the students' compulsory dress codes: black suit, tie, white shirt, and short hair for men, long black dress, white shirt, and long hair or wig for women. Like any school uniform, these sartorial codes had an *institutional* purpose in Anagkazo. They homogenized the sociocultural, ethnic, and economic

backgrounds of students who came from multiple regions, countries, and settings, and they helped create an esprit de corps: the Lighthouse Family. Students and faculty also described these costumes as generative means for the embodiment of Christian *virtues* such as "humility," "holiness," and "excellence" (Reinhardt 2014). Finally, these modes of self-presentation were also understood as a matter of "impression management" (Goffman 1990, 8), and as professional *tools* to increase evangelistic influence. According to a fourth-year student, Isaac: "God looks to the inside, but men look to the outside. Even though God is looking to your heart, if you want to bring people to Christ, you have to care about how you look on the outside." The uniforms were described by the students and faculty as "decent," in light of the virtuous norm of holiness, but also as a "business style," in light of the maximizing norm of evangelism.

Interestingly, I could find such reconciliation of virtue and instrumentality even in the spiritual exercises practiced at LCI's Bible school. Anagkazo is characterized by intense devotional routines of fasting, prayer, spiritual meditation ("hearing God"), and Bible memorization. The students' involvement with daily memorization exercises is not merely cognitive. The practice carries with it Christian virtues, and they highlighted how "eating" and "digesting" the word of God allowed them to "think biblically," using language reminiscent of medieval *ruminatio* (Leclercq 1982). Bible memorization in Anagkazo also had charismatic affordances, being considered a medium of/for intimate manifestations of the Holy Spirit to its vessel through textual revelations (Reinhardt 2017). However, even this visceral spiritual exercise was framed as a professional tool aimed at *maximizing persuasion*. According to fourth-year student Dixon:

> The Bible says that we should always be ready to give an answer to someone who asks about our faith. It's better to have the answers with you than to start looking for them in the Bible, showing doubt, fragility, you know? Reading this is easy [points to the Bible], but not putting it in your memory, not committing to it. . . . Even right now, you believe in what I'm telling you, about my life, about my calling, because I've been speaking it from my heart. If I was like, "Let me confirm this fact, I'll look at this book," you would not believe in me as much.

Networks of flourishing, sartorial codes, spiritual exercises all form components of Pentecostals' technologies of the self (Foucault 1988; Marshall 2009). Through their iterative practice and internal goods, practitioners emerge as

spiritually "mature" Christians, endowed with particular skills, virtues, and charisms. Yet the same practices are also framed instrumentally through a professional ethic that recasts them as impersonal, maximizing tools. Clear evidence comes in the form of how the Christian norm of sincerity (Keane 2007), of speaking "from the heart," appeared in all three examples. In the case of interaction and self-presentation, sincerity appeared as hierarchically inferior to the duty to evangelize: one must interact even unwillingly and "God looks at the heart, but men look at the outside." In the case of memorization, the "heart" itself is thematized by Dixon as a faculty whose malleability allows virtue and instrumentality to collapse into a habitus, a theme I will develop later.

I would like to point out that Christian sociality, self-presentation, and Scripture memorization are objectified by the economic theology of LCI, both as means of ethical self-formation and as "emotional management skills," a concept developed by Arlie Hochschild (2013) in her engagement with the economic ethic of service capitalism. Hochschild (2013, 6) defines these skills as "the effort to appear to feel and try to feel the right feeling for the job, and to try to induce the right feeling in certain others," like the flight attendant who is "trained to manage fear during turbulence, exasperation with cranky passengers, or anger at abusive ones." Emotional management skills prove vital to the late capitalist services industry, where human relations and experiences have been converted into immaterial labor (Hardt 1999), acquiring the abstract and replicable quality of the commodity form.[6] My contention is that the evangelistic telos of LCI legitimizes a theo-economic encompassment of emotional management skills, a reconciliation between service capitalism and the Christian duty to serve God and His Church. This brings us back to God's calling to serve, where we find the absorption of another secular economic dispositive for discipleship purposes: human capital.

HUMAN CAPITAL FOR GOD: Discipleship and the Calling's Capillarization

We can already foresee that the soul-hungry God who governs LCI as a "spiritual industry" does not manifest His sovereignty, as in the Calvinist case studied by Weber, through the opacity or randomness with which He "elects" people to salvation or service. For Heward-Mills, God calls many, and this can be deduced from simple mathematics. As I witnessed during one of his sermons:

> If you were God and you had six billion people to save, what would you do? Would you send one or two people to save them or would you send a lot of people? Of course, you would send many people into the fields of harvest.

> And that is exactly what God has done. He has called many people! Do not be deceived by the few pastors you see sitting in the front rows of churches. That always gives the impression that only a few have been called, or that the majority of the congregation has not been called. Actually, it is the exact opposite. Many, and not just a few pastors, are called to the work of saving the world!

What churches like LCI retain from historic Protestantism is a renewed emphasis on the "priesthood of all believers," linked to a pyramidal model of ministry (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005, 75–80). Luther originally invoked this theological principle to demolish the Roman Catholic division of religious labor between *virtuosi* (priests and monks, "religious" in a pre-secular sense) and commoners ("secular" in a pre-secular sense), in which the latter delegated most of the ascetic weight of Christian piety to the former, both groups meeting hierarchically in the liturgical apparatus of the Church. Luther's intervention was based on a strong opposition between the Roman theology of Glory and the theology of the Cross, reducing the former to a human economic effort disguised as liturgy. In doing so, Luther attacked the economic-theological structures that underpinned what Collins (1986) called "church capitalism," thus inaugurating the long-term transfer of its biopolitical powers to the state and the market. For Weber, the priesthood of all believers broke the institutional "dam" that contained asceticism within the pastoral body and monastic orders, and triggered the historical process of rationalizing temporal labor.

I believe that the Kingdom theologies of global Pentecostalism are theologies of Glory revisited. They revitalize the expansive messianic telos of the Christian *oikonomia* (Agamben 2011) under new conditions, and are therefore more than simple adaptations to exogenous economic forces like neoliberalism. In LCI, the priesthood of all believers is mobilized by a church labor ethic oriented to "service," which encourages passive members to actively engage in the "vision" and "mission" of the corporation in a pyramidal fashion. By dissolving the authority gap between the virtuous and the "religiously unmusical," their theology of the calling gives capillarity to pastoral work. In fact, different reverends proudly told me that 80 percent of the work that kept the denomination running was done by the congregation itself. This helps us understand why these congregations do not take offense when their "souls" are treated like a commodity in public: they are both the product and the producers of the "spiritual industry." They produce themselves while producing other souls, and they are incited to consider LCI as their own, in a "shareholder" version of church capitalism (Bialecki 2017, 48–60).

Heward-Mill and other LCI leaders constantly scorn in public what they call "large and barren churches" that simply accumulate passive souls who do not "work for God." Expanding on the elective affinities between the trope of spiritual industrialization and late capitalism, we can say that LCI is fundamentally interested in producing human capital (Foucault 2008, 215–38) for God. By this expression I mean that, just as the quantitative potential of money generates more money when it is qualitatively transformed into capital, for LCI, souls must be conquered and empowered to generate more souls. They must contribute to the mission not only with regular tithes but also with their time and energy, the most valuable resources LCI wants to extract from converts via discipleship. By doing so, LCI governs its congregations as virtually called to ministry, unless they are not.

LCI is explicitly opposed to churches it deems excessively centered on "men of God" in Ghana, especially prophetic ministries. The authority structure of these organizations is strongly personalized and resonates with the accumulative structure of bigmanship (Lauterbach 2017). The most decisive version of God's calling in these churches are extraordinary events such as dreams, visions, and spiritual encounters. It can acquire a more procedural quality when it is inferred from a chain of charismatic interpellations, one framed as "confirmation" of another. Prophecy also adds a vicarious component to the pastoral calling in this type of church, since God can use prophetic vessels to announce someone else's election. In popular churches, resistance to God's interpellation to serve can often lead Him to "withdraw blessings" and eventually use misfortune (e.g., illness and accidents) as media of/for subjecting the vessel to His interpellation. These latter cases are close to the way traditional spirits call their priests and caretakers in Ghana, and I have never encountered similar sensibility among LCI members.

There are various models of/for God's calling in LCI. For example, a student from Anagkazo, Akosua, told me that God began to call her through dreams in which she saw herself preaching. Then, during a collective prayer session, she was touched by the Holy Spirit and fell unconscious. This happened again the next day, and she decided to seek counseling. During this personal meeting with a pastor, "when I opened my mouth," she told me, "what the Spirit of God spoke through my mouth was: 'She has a calling,' like 'I have a calling.' The call had fallen upon my life and it was really pressing down on me, so I had to submit." Others claimed to have been called "from the womb," retrospectively interpreting their whole lives before conversion in light of this interpellation. But all types of calling in Anagkazo, the most and the least impressive, were subjected to the same ultimate site of veridiction or "confirmation": the examination of desire. Students considered themselves authentically called because they had a

"desire to serve," a desire to persuade and care for souls. It constituted a virtuous and effective desire, an index of the Holy Spirit's agency in their bodies.

Like most LCI norms, this minimalist theology of the calling derived from Heward-Mills's books, preaching, and behavior. His influence on the organization is not demarcated by charisma or extraordinary command, but by mimetic engagement (Reinhardt 2014). According to this shareholder version of church capitalism, the head of the spiritual industry is not the authoritarian "boss-owner" of early industrialization, nor the bureaucratic "manager" of the Second Spirit of Capitalism. He is closer to the neoliberal "leader," "the one with the capacity for *vision*, who knows how to communicate it and get others to support it" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2018, 76; my emphasis). As such, Heward-Mills presents his own calling in an almost anticlimactic fashion, in order to encourage replicability. During one of his preachings in LCI's headquarters in Accra, he commented:

> I'm always amazed when I hear how people receive their call to the ministry. I have had no such dramatic encounters, but I believe I am genuinely called by God. Amen? Look at this church. Am I not called? [the audience nodded affirmatively and shouted "yes"]. I did not see a light or hear any voices. Jesus has never appeared to me commissioning me to go into the world of ministry. Yet I believe that I am genuinely commissioned for ministry.

The bishop told the audience that he knew he had been authentically called because he had "the desire to serve" and, by acting on that desire, "he had borne prosperous fruits for God."

By operating as a final space of "confirmation," this theology of the calling bases its most extraordinary versions—what Anagkazo instructors named "high callings"—on a single structure of veridiction, shared by the "religiously unmusical," like Emmanuel, a fourth-year student of Anagkazo:

> Many people say "I'm called, I'm called," and I didn't really know if I was called or not. I had this mystical notion that you must have some experience. I had a dream! Somebody talked to me! I heard a voice! I never heard a voice. The only voice I heard was my pastor's voice who called me on the phone and asked: Emmanuel, do you want to come to the Bible school? But some of them had a calling, they heard a voice and all that. Only after I came to the school, I realized that God had put something in me, a desire, which showed me I was really called. The zeal was there, but only now I can see.

Emmanuel's cynical view of "high callings" did not prevent him from joining Anagkazo, graduating, and, in less than seven years, morphing from "an unbeliever" into a branch pastor in Côte d'Ivoire.

But what is the difference between being called to ministry through desire and simply choosing it, like any profession? Isn't this understanding of God's call too constructivist and manipulative, even by LCI standards? To examine this question, it is necessary to understand some of the affordances of desire, which allow it to be a privileged mediator of God's immanent manifestation in this denomination.

DESIROUS SUBJECTS

What is desire? In his analysis of volition in the secular individualist notion of personhood in North America, Roy D'Andrade (1987) distinguishes desire from intention and resolution. Intentions are volitional states by which an individual anticipates the future in the light of a goal, while resolutions would be second-order intentions, intentions to reinforce certain intentions as opposed to certain desires. Desires would be affective responses to intentional states, aroused by, but never reducible to, the latter. Thus, desires can be distinguished both from "wishes," conceptual responses to intentional states, and from "needs," physical or emotional impulses to satisfy intentions. Although desires may merge with intentions as participants in resolutions, they remain inchoate, so that "one can have desires about which one intends to do nothing" (D'Andrade 1987, 121), and one can do something intentionally without neither understanding it nor having a desire to act accordingly.

In my comments on the overlapping of virtue and instrumentality in LCI's evangelistic strategies, we saw how desire is sometimes intertwined with intentionality through a pedagogy of virtues and, at other times, detached from it when the same practices are framed as instrumental techniques. On the former scale, the relationship between externality and internality is generative and embodied (Hirschkind 2006), containing internal goods, and on the latter, they operate as "emotional management skills," which must be put into practice with professionalism, "even if you don't feel like it." I would point out that it is in the midst of this loose and laminated overlap between distinct rationalities that desires can be molded into a Christian habitus in LCI, when "as if" action gains traction and becomes, via repetition, "skillful action," part of the practitioner's own flow of attention (Ingold 2000; Reinhardt 2017).[7]

The framing of the calling as desire adds grace and charisma to this unique overlap between virtue and utility. In the Pentecostal model of personhood—composed of body, mind, and Spirit—desire operates as a hinge that infuses the will, and therefore both body and mind, with charismatic proclivities. The incipient quality of desire (this non-self in my-self) indexes the eccentricity of the calling, becoming a dynamic means of revelation *in the midst of* practice. As a result, equating God's calling with desire (and not merely with the will), it also infuses LCI's discipleship networks with the Holy Spirit, including their goal-oriented components, giving a quite literal meaning to the "spiritual" in "spiritual industry."

By acting "as if" they were already pastors—engaging in constant trial and error under the guidance of mature mentors—members discerned the location and "depth" of their calling within a division of God's labor. What Emmanuel called "zeal," an intensified and spontaneous level of personal commitment, an evangelistic habitus, was systematically produced by LCI's discipleship system and provided him with the ultimate index of the authenticity of his calling. What changed with the circumstances was not God's decision, but the context in which Emmanuel "bore fruit." This work of self-examination and discernment is always carried out at LCI *while working for God* because, as a reverend once told me, "You can't hear God calling you if you spend most of your time in a nightclub."

The denomination's production line of souls offers these same souls the opportunity to "yield" to God, to learn to "receive" His sovereign decision, made in His own time.[8] God's desire-based calling in LCI is neither manufactured nor learned: it is a virtuality (Reinhardt 2015; Bialecki 2017) that has always been real, but which is actualized (or not) in the plastic fluidity of desire, understood as a privileged charismatic and ethical medium for a disciple's self-examination and subject formation.

Much of the accelerated maturation process of someone like Emmanuel takes place in Anagkazo, a highly disciplinary institution, where he spent four years before being ordained a minister. As I have argued elsewhere (Reinhardt 2018), the lay workforce at LCI is trained through a loose, almost non-prescriptive incitement to act through peripheral legitimate participation (Lave and Wenger 1997). Basically, converts are offered opportunities to get involved, to move from a passive to an active stance if and when they want to. Many, in fact, remain just tithe-paying members for life and never move on to the status of working leaders. Joining Anagkazo is also not difficult: You need to believe that you have been called, bring some kind of evidence (testimony), and a letter from a pastor or spiritual mentor legitimizing this aspiration. Yet once admitted to the school, you will find the disciplinary bar suddenly raised.

Anagkazo is characterized by strict control of time and space, high standards of excellence, and an intense routine of activities, from spiritual exercises to classes, from preaching exams and worship meetings to manual labor in maintenance. Half of the 400 students admitted each year leave the school sooner or later. They usually return to lay activities after realizing they have not been called to the ministry, at least not full-time. A call with "depth," a call to exclusive and lifelong service to God, is discerned at Anagkazo when a student's desire to serve manages to withstand the litmus test of self-sacrifice: if their zeal intensifies rather than reduces after the experience of institutional authority. "If you've managed to graduate from Anagkazo, you've been called," is what everyone used to say.

For those who stay, the call of God becomes "clearer" along with their desire. According to the Kenyan student Amorine, "Evangelism here is a habit. Wherever I go, I think: Is this person reborn in Christ? Should I tell them about God? If an accident happens now, *how many* people will go to heaven in this place? It's a habit." Amorine has not only developed the generalized evangelistic habitus that characterizes committed Pentecostals, a generic addiction to "souls." She has also incorporated the economic-theological disposition that characterizes this religious corporation, as reflected in the quantitative and allocative dimension ("how many") of her evangelistic desire. "Zeal" in Anagkazo is precisely the name of this tutored desire, a lust for souls that is virtuous, eschatological, and calculative, just like the spiritual industry.

POSTCOLONIAL SECULARITY AND THE SUBJECT OF MESSIANIC UTILITARIANISM

In this article I approached the Pentecostal "work of God" as a set of laminated practices that strive to juxtapose authoritatively the rationalities of virtue, eschatology, and instrumentality. We now have resources to envision how they are juxtaposed.

First, God's work carries embedded/internal goods or virtues, which differentiate it from instrumental action, behavior justified by goals only contingently and externally related to it (MacIntyre 1984). Practices associated with evangelism, for instance, are not only instrumental means to expand Christianity quantitatively. They *are* piety, hence have self-generative or autopoietic (Faubion 2011) effects on practitioners themselves. Evangelism produces its own structure of motivation teleologically by hosting Christian virtues of faith, excellence, humbleness, and especially service, sincere submission to God's will through any unrewarded, tangible action that contributes to the well-being of His Church.

But God's work also departs from the rationality of virtue by incorporating ultimate, eschatological ends into teleological reasoning. Unlike virtuous

practices—which, as Aristotle emphasized, are characterized by contextual responsiveness (*phronesis*) and therefore always risk tipping into vice (courage into recklessness, generosity into prodigality)—God's work is oriented toward the End. Its spatiotemporal limits unfold with a messianic expanse: "the whole world, that all nations may hear [the Gospel]; and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). As Ruth Marshall (2010, 205) argues, messianic time allows Pentecostals to actively integrate eschatological waiting (*parousia*) into every instant of chronological time, thus transforming lived temporality into *kairos* rather than *chronos*. This temporal reconfiguration lies at the heart of Agamben's distinction between the reproductive, domestic character of Greek *oikonomia* and the boundless, world-expanding character of its Christian appropriation.

Like a Möbius strip, Pentecostals' eschatological orientation invites the logic of instrumentality back and allows it to coexist in God's work with the teleology of virtue. This engenders a *messianic utilitarianism* familiar to anyone who has spent time with these soul-craving Christians. By this expression, I mean the way an ultimate conviction—the salvation of humanity—justifies the meticulous, eventually manipulative rationalization of persuasion. To "serve" God, one must know and attract the world, not isolate oneself from it. The pragmatic church is Paul's early church—virtuous, convicted, and opportunistic—a view corroborated by some historians (Blanton 2017).[9] Pentecostal ministers are "fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19) and are not shy about using the most effective weapons at their disposal to fulfill this mission, including new communication technologies and secular knowledge drawn from economics, psychology, business administration, advertising, and the like. They instrumentalize the media of salvation to amplify the circulation of divine grace, whose world-breaking and world-making power is anti-instrumental, sovereign, and free (Pitt-Rivers 2011).

In this article, I argued that, unlike Weber's economic ethics framework, economic theology allows for a non-reductionist view of such a Möbius strip. Economic theology's provocative focus on religion-as-economy helps me readdress how grace, faith, merit, guilt, sacrifice—all theo-economic operations at their origin (Benveniste 2016)—give life and motion to religious traditions and organizations. It deals primarily with the articulation of salvation, piety, and management, the administration of human and nonhuman resources vicariously as divine assets. It allowed me to show how LCI absorbs managerial values and techniques from the third Spirit of capitalism—emotional management skills, human capital, capillary leadership—for a distinctive Christian telos: to work for the Kingdom. This is not simply a reaction to neoliberal economics as an exogenous force, but the capture of the Third Spirit of Capitalism by a project of prosperity endowed with its own historicity. It is also an inversion of Weber's

original argument about rationalized capitalist labor as piety at the dawn of modern capitalism. It is piety as rationalized labor.

Such a focus on distinctly religious economies—economies that circulate and grow with, around, and for God—may seem insignificant when compared to Weber's original argument. However, they also entail highly concrete material effects, which are often overshadowed by the secularist notion that "religion" and "economy" are qualitatively distinct. Much of the distinction between secular capitalism and what Collins called "church capitalism," between economies of private profit, which seek moral justification outside of themselves, and economies of Glory, which incorporate and seek moral justification in the will of God, concerns temporality (Haynes 2020). Scholars such as Reinhart Koselleck (2004), who approach the secularization of time from a European perspective (therefore still linked to the notion of a modern overcoming of Christianity), have framed this long-term process as a shift from temporal "abbreviation" to temporal "acceleration," from transcendence-oriented eschatology to immanent and calculating progress, from prophecy to prognosis. This is also the spirit that drives the Weberian thesis.

Alternatively, organizations like LCI belong to a present shaped by a notion of modernity long entwined with Christianity, dating back to its entanglement with the European "civilizing mission" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). They emerged and expanded at a historical atmosphere marked by a temporal disposition that Charles Piot (2010) has called "nostalgia for the future"—the affective trace of the erosion of independence-era utopias and the waning of secular imaginaries oriented toward the sovereign state and the national economy. These churches acknowledge the historical role of mission-founded mainline denominations in introducing Christianity and the gift of salvation to Ghana and Africa more broadly. Yet they critique their deep involvement with civil society and "development" as having come at the cost of the church's salvific vocation. A child of this present, LCI articulates an alternative temporal synthesis, one in which the managerial instruments of capitalist acceleration are absorbed into the eschatological abbreviation of time, and reoriented toward the production of "human capital" for God. From this angle, the organization's economic theology and its particular notion of the calling allowed me to ethnographically engage the kind of subject this spiritual machinery generates: a zealous subject, formed within a structure of agency in which virtue, conviction, and instrumentality remain distinct and non-equivalent, but acquire a shared measure (commensurability) in the plastic matter of desire.

ABSTRACT

In this article, I examine the relationship between value and virtue, utility and conviction, in global Pentecostalism through an economic-theological analysis of the calling to ministry. Max Weber's classic analysis of Beruf *(calling, vocation, profession) addressed the transvaluation of religious asceticism into a secular economic ethic at the dawn of modernity. Today, we observe a reverse process: the transvaluation of the "third spirit of capitalism" into a church labor ethic intended to be virtuous, eschatological, and professional. Based on ethnographic research at the seminary of a transnational denomination in Ghana, I show how this theological encompassment of the economic is driven by a specific notion of the calling: fluid, demystified, and associated with a pedagogy of desire.* [calling; economic theology; religious labor; subject formation; Pentecostalism]

NOTES

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1. This article elaborates on unresolved questions that emerged during fieldwork performed in Accra between 2009 and 2011. Since then, I have been following the pastoral careers of my interlocutors in Anagkazo through virtual meetings and by visiting one of their branch churches in Brazil, where I live.
2. A few changes in the organizational structure have occurred since my extended fieldwork, and they deserve mention. Anagkazo opened a new and larger campus in Mampong, to which it relocated most of its activities, while its basic pedagogical principles remain as examined here. In 2016, Lighthouse Chapel International restructured its system of governance and became the United Denominations Originating from the Lighthouse Group of Churches (UD-OLGC), a federation of semi-autonomous denominations that trace their origin to the Lighthouse movement; for clarity, I will continue to refer to it by its previous nomenclature. This reorganization corroborates the broader drive toward decentralized leadership that I analyze in later sections of the article.
3. Phillipe Büttgen (2014, 104) argues that this term lacks equivalents, especially in neo-Latin languages, so that "*Beruf* does not divide languages *qua* languages, but reveals another division that separates Protestant peoples from others, and from Catholic peoples in particular."
4. The claim that we are living in a "post-secular" world is undoubtedly misleading. Secularism concerns not only the social relevance of religion but also and above all the various secular media used to define and govern religion. However, it is reasonable to argue that social theory itself has developed a *post-secularist* sensibility to religious difference, adapting cognitively, ethically, and politically to its shifting object (Connolly 2000; Harding 2019).
5. "Interaction" was not the only set of pastoral skills formalized and transferred to members in these pedagogical environments. Others were "knocking" (house-to-house evangelism), "carrying" (keeping an eye on new converts' church attendance), and "shepherding" (mentoring new members and having access to their home life) (Reinhardt 2018).
6. According to Michael Hardt (1999, 94), immaterial labor is "labor that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, knowledge, or communication." One of its components

is affective labor, "the labor of human interaction" (Hardt 1999, 94). Although the products of immaterial labor are not circumscribable as a conventional commodity, they are still concrete and visceral: "A labor is immaterial even if it is affective, in the sense that its products are intangible: a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, passion—even a sense of connectedness to a community" (Hardt 1999, 96).

7. According to Tim Ingold (2000, 415), for the "as if" actor "to have an intention is to prefix that behavior with a thought, plan, or mental representation which it serves to deliver." Here intention and attention precede action, which becomes a form of expression of a preceding state. Conversely, for the "skilled practitioner," intentionality "is launched and carried forward in the action itself, and corresponds to the attentive quality of that action" (Ingold 2000, 415).
8. Thomas Csordas (2001, 196) defines submission among American Catholic charismatics as "the proper attitude toward authority, also a synonym for 'yielding,' in that one submits or yields to the gifts [i.e., accepts the gifts] given by God."
9. In an exemplary statement of messianic utilitarianism that my interlocutors brought to my attention, Paul declared to the church in Corinth: "I have become weak to the weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that by all means I might save some" (1 Cor 9:22).

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