

JEWES AS PERCEIVED BY NEO-EVANGELICALS IN BRAZIL

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I. Introduction

This paper presents a preliminary study on the perceptions that Brazilian Neo-Evangelicals¹ have of Jews, and the questions of identity these views raises. The empirical data were gathered as a sideline during the many years I worked at the Cultural Section of the Israeli Embassy in Brazil; data were also collected from years of university teaching, public debates, and speeches at churches, temples, high schools, universities, and military training centers, where debate followed the main presentation. This study deals with two distinct periods: (a) from 1979 to 1982, and (b) from 1988 to 1997, to account for changes in the Brazilian religious scenario in the decades of 1970 and the late 1980s.

The theoretical framework,² still a tentative construction, has been taken mostly from Brazilian authors who have since the late 1980s become aware of the rapid growth³ in the number of Neo-Evangelicals, or Pentecostals,⁴ in a country until recently perceived as the “world’s largest Roman Catholic country.” The current literature regarding this phenomenon is still limited but of good quality. The authors can be thought of belonging to one of two groups: bewildered Roman

1 Neo-Evangelicals, or Pentecostals, as contrasted with historical Protestantism, will be defined in Section II.

2 It should be cautioned that this work is strongly empirical rather than theoretical.

3 The exact figures are not known, but estimates (Ricardo, Mariano and Antonio F. Pierucci “O Envolvimento dos Pentecostais na Eleição de Collor.” *A Realidade Social das Religiões no Brasil*. São Paulo: HUCITED, 1996) suggest that in the last decade or so the number of Neo-Evangelicals has largely surpassed (numbers range from 17,000,000 to 35,000,000) that of *practicing* Roman Catholics (12,000,000) in Brazil.

4 The terms Neo-Evangelicals and Pentecostals will be used interchangeably in this text. For specific affiliations, please refer to Section II.

Catholics,⁵ who try to explain the recent enthusiasm of the Brazilian populace to Pentecostalism and search new ways for the Roman Catholic Church to deal with this loss of its faithful; and anthropologists, geographers, historians, and sociologists, mostly with Weberian leanings who try to explain and/or understand the phenomenon in its own terms, through reference to the Brazilian popular religious culture.⁶ It is the work of the latter group that will provide the historical and theoretical background for this text.

The works on Brazilian Pentecostalism focus on four issues: (a) the internal meaning of the Pentecostal religions⁷ themselves (see Brandão⁸), (b) the political, economic, and social implications of Pentecostalism in Brazil⁹ (see Fernandes¹⁰; Pierucci and Prandi¹¹), (c) the historical establishment of Pentecostal denominations in Brazil¹² and primarily on (d) its relation with Roman Catholicism's popular forms of religion.¹³ Given Pentecostals' strong emphasis on Biblical allegories it comes as a

5 Throughout *Catholic* will signify Roman Catholic.

6 Although it is generally agreed that it is almost impossible to define "Brazilian Culture," for the purposes of this work it will be used in the sense proposed by Geertz (Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), i.e., a web of meanings, all public, which to be *understood* has to propitiate answers to the question of "what is being transmitted by its happenings and by its agency?" (p. 111).

7 Following Gomes (see note 21), this paper will not differentiate between "religion" and "sect," under the assumption that the word sect holds a negative bias given by other religious groups which hold for themselves the status of a religion.

8 Carlos Rodrigues Brandão. "Ser Católico: dimensões brasileiras—um estudo sobre a atribuição da identidade através da religião." Viola Sachs (ed.). *Brasil & EUA - Religião e Identidade Nacional*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Graal Ltda. 1988.

9 See Antonio F. Prandi and Reginaldo Pierucci's *The Social Reality of Religions in Brazil*. São Paulo: HUCITED, 1996.

10 Rubem César Fernandes. "Governo das Almas. As denominações evangélicas no Grande Rio." Alberto Antoniazzi *et al.* *Nem Anjos nem Demônios: Interpretações Sociológicas do Pentecostalismo*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Vozes. 1994.

11 Antonio F. Pierucci and Reginaldo Prandi. "Preface." *A Realidade Social das Religiões no Brasil*. São Paulo: HUCITED. 1996.

12 Paul Freston. "Breve História do Pentecostalismo Brasileiro." Alberto Antoniazzi *et al.* *Nem Anjos nem Demônios: Interpretações Sociológicas do Pentecostalismo*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Vozes. 1994.

13 Pierre Sanchis. "O repto pentecostal à cultura brasileira." Alberto Antoniazzi *et al.* *Nem Anjos nem Demônios: Interpretações Sociológicas do Pentecostalismo*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Vozes. 1994.

surprise that no work was found that dealt with their worldview and their relations with Jews in Brazil.

This paper emphasizes the symbolic aspects of this worldview, but it must be remembered that this worldview has also economic and political implications, which will be addressed when appropriate. It is important to keep in mind that the way Brazilian Pentecostals perceive and identify with Jews and Israelis *has the potential* of significantly influencing Brazilian diplomacy vis-à-vis Israel.¹⁴ There is as well an economic impact on Israeli tourism,¹⁵ mostly owing to increasing numbers of Brazilian believers visiting the Holy Land.

II. Neo-Evangelicals/Pentecostals in Brazil: Who are They?

As I noted above, most authors use the terms Neo-Evangelicals and Pentecostals for these Protestant sects interchangeably with the defining characteristics being “speaking in tongues” and exorcisms. Institutionally, in the Brazilian context, the concept is used to group members of the “Assembly of G-d,” “Christian Congregation,” “Church of the Four-Square Gospels,” “Brazil for Christ Pentecostal Evangelical Church,” “G-d is Love Pentecostal Church,” “The Universal Church of G-d’s Reign,” “Pentecostal Christ in Brazil,” “Independent Pentecostal Church,” “Good News of Joy,” and all other denominations which self-identify as Pentecostals (see Brandão,⁸ Freston¹²).

According to Brandão,⁸ the Brazilian Pentecostal representation of human reality divides the world into four opposing spheres, from the general to the particular: (1) *religions* (i.e., Catholics, Protestants, Pentecostals, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and other Christian religions¹⁶) *versus non-religions* (non-Christianity, magic, witchcraft, Kardecism, Umbanda, Candomblé,¹⁷ and other cults of African or indigenous origin); (2) *Evangelical* (Protestants and

14 Up to now, as shown by Pierucci (see note 41), the Evangelical representatives tend to cluster in Commissions that deal with civil society matters (i.e., women’s rights, homosexuality, abortion, etc.). There are no records of any interest in foreign affairs.

15 The author has never seen a Brazilian, or any other, source on the subject.

16 As stated in the Introduction to this paper, no study in Brazil has been conducted on the relationship between Pentecostalism and Judaism. This may be due to (a) the newness of the phenomenon; (b) the low academic interest in the Jewish community in Brazil on the part of non-Jews; or, (c) a lack of access to this phenomenon.

17 Umbanda and Candomblé are Afro-Cults (in the sense that they do not form churches).

Pentecostals) *versus non-Evangelical* forms of Christianity (i.e., Catholicism, Seventh Day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses); (3) *Pentecostal Evangelical (or Neo-Evangelicals) versus Non-Pentecostal Evangelicals* (i.e., Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and all other confessions identified as Evangelicals, but not Pentecostals); and a final distinction between (4) *Ego's* religious group (i.e., "my ministry," "my congregation," "my church") *and* other, similar, "religious groups" (i.e., "other ministries," "other churches," and "other congregations").

Having presented the Pentecostal representation of the Brazilian religious world as four sets of opposites—"of things they are not"—we must now explain *what* makes the Pentecostals different from the others—*what they are*. Bittencourt Filho¹⁸ created a profile of Brazilian Pentecostalism through some of its fundamental characteristics: (a) the use of Biblical text in a very specific way — constant reading and repetition of *some* chosen verses to "confirm" the doctrine; (b) the euphoria evident during their meetings that resembles for all the world nothing so much as the contagious excitement of soccer fans during a game¹⁹; (c) openly shown strong emotions, such as one finds on Brazilian TV and radio live audiences; (d) the transformation of the socially and economically less privileged into "princes" and "princesses," providing the poor with some degree of dignity²⁰; (e) a permanent offer of symbolic goods that the faithful can use anytime, day and night, and is in consonance with the chaotic, accelerated rhythm of Brazilian urban centers; (f) no formal teaching for the faithful or long-term training for its ministers; and, finally (g) the very hierarchical structure of power, where religious leaders are in firm control of ideology and administration. In this profile, as in other academic characterization of the Pentecostals, we see no reference at all to any kind of link with Israel.

Gomes has written that the "new popular sects probably constitute the most interesting Brazilian social urban phenomenon of the 80s, and certainly the most curious of the early 90s" (Gomes²¹). He bases this statement on the fact that it has been a decade or so since multitudes of peoples started to meet in soccer stadiums, movie theaters, improvised

18 José Bittencourt Filho. "Remédio Amargo." Alberto Antoniazzi *et al.* *Nem Anjos nem Demônios: Interpretações Sociológicas do Pentecostalismo*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Vozes. 1994.

19 The most popular Brazilian sport.

20 Which comprise the majority of the Pentecostals in Brazil.

21 Wilson Gomes. "Nem Anjos nem Demônios." Alberto Antoniazzi *et al.* *Nem Anjos nem Demônios: Interpretações Sociológicas do Pentecostalismo*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Vozes. 1994.

temples, and sports gymnasiums for the exorcisms and cures offered by ministers and pastors, and that it is these practices that the main tenets of Brazilian Pentecostalism rest: the existence of demons who possess (wholly or in part) human bodies and objects, bringing with them disease, unhappiness, and poverty; and the existence of special people—ministers and pastors, seconded by the faithful—who can “cure” one’s misfortunes through the exorcism of the demons who brought them in the first place.

In this sense, for one familiar with the Brazilian popular culture, Pentecostalism’s worldview, filled with possessing demons, closely resembles that of the groups it fights most strongly against—the Afro-Cults (i.e., Umbanda, Candomblé, Macumba, etc.). For Pentecostals, the members of Afro-Cults worship the demons (e.g., Exús and Pomba-Giras²²) through intentional incorporation (many times through trances), propitiating them with ceremonies, sacrifices, and gifts in order to solicit favors for themselves or to bring down curses on someone else. Quite to the contrary, the work of the Pentecostals is to “remove” or to “destroy” these demons.

Because the Brazilian Catholic Church has been quite lenient about religious syncretism, and because the self-definition of a Catholic in Brazil may be quite different from the official Church orthodoxy, it is very common for people to declare themselves as Catholics to the National Census Bureau,²³ and act as such only for specific rites of passage, such as marriages, baptisms, and funerals or, on special occasions, such as Holy Friday, Christmas, or the local or one’s patron saint’s days. Therefore, in the Brazilian popular culture,²⁴ there is no apparent contradiction in being a Catholic and constantly participating in the Afro or indigenous cults, most of them holding to Catholic

22 These are group entities of the marginal world: *Exú* is male and dominates the streets, where strife and danger there is constant and *Pomba-Gira*, a female, is the prostitute (there are many different Exús and Pombas-Giras in the Afro-Cults). In the Brazilian symbolic universe, according to Roberto Da Matta (*Carnavais, Malandros e Heróis*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar Editores. 1978) there is a sharp division between the world of the “*rua*” (street) as dangerous, but full of fun; and the world of the “*casa*” (home), where one is protected, but where boredom looms. So, in the Umbanda, the rites for the *Exús* and *Pombas-Giras* are conducted on the streets, not on the inside of their *barracões* (huts), due to their disruptive potential.

23 Thus the belief that Brazil is/was the world’s largest Catholic country.

24 It is difficult to create a coherent picture of Brazilian culture as stated by Rubem César Fernandes. “Aparecida: nossa rainha, senhora e mãe, saravá!” *Brasil & EUA—Religião e Identidade Nacional*. Vila Sachs (ed.). Rio de Janeiro: Editora Graal Ltda. 1988.

symbology (e.g., Christ, Virgin Mary, saints) as well as to the Pentecostal belief system.

On the other hand, the traditional Brazilian rural values were attached to direct contact of the faithful with their patron saints (gods?) from whom “cures” and favors were requested in exchange for *promessas* (promises). The belief in demons as participants in one’s everyday life was commonplace. With the rapid pace of Brazilian urbanization the urban Catholic church²⁵ could not accommodate these rural values, and clashed with them instead. With urbanization new religions came into the country; others were created following their mold, and a new religious “market” emerged, competing for people’s allegiance. The Neo-Evangelical/Pentecostal religions brought with them a special niche for the underprivileged, a promise of cures through direct contact with G-d, riches and miracles, such as “speaking in tongues,” and the immediate destruction of the demons²⁶ which constantly attacked and possessed men, animals, and objects. It also brought with it an explanation for the paradox of the enormous Brazilian social and economic inequities, and a promise for restitution in *this* life,²⁷ not the next, as promised by the Catholic Church (see Gomes²¹).

It is, therefore, no wonder that the Pentecostals also have misgivings toward the Catholic Church, even when accepting it as a “religion” as defined earlier, as opposed to the “non-religions.”⁸

It is interesting to note that although Pentecostals in general do not accept the Catholic Church and Afro and/or Indigenous cults, the overall conclusion of the most important authors on the subject is that, contrary to popular belief, the Catholic Church has *not* lost membership to the Pentecostal churches because the “lost flock” could not be defined as such by the Church’s political, ideological, administrative, and theological orthodoxy. The Pentecostals are mostly poor people: low-wage workers, unemployed, housewives, members of the informal economy, and they live on the periphery of urban areas²⁸ (see Gomes²¹).

25 One should recall Max Weber’s statement that the rational intra-worldly ethic of both Judaism and Christianity is possible only in the context of a specific social configuration: the *urbans* (see “Die asiatische Sekten und Heilandsreligiosität” and “Konfuzianismus und Taoismus.” *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*. Apud Gabriel Cohen. São Paulo: Editora Atica 1979).

26 According to Max Weber (see note 25), in Protestantism “magic” became “demoniac.”

27 Not in political or revolutionary terms. It is based on one’s personal efforts, backed by the religious community.

28 Unlike in the United States, in Brazil, living in the “subúrbios” (outskirts) has a connotation of poverty.

Although they constitute the majority of the population, they are not part of the consumer society and do not enjoy the benefits of welfare and medical services, schooling, decent housing, or efficient transportation systems; they are, in fact, deprived of all of the benefits of Brazilian modernity.

Therefore, in a country publicly defined as "Catholic,"²⁹ where the elites also define themselves as Catholics, the Pentecostals are the "Others," and it is my contention that this is why they look at the Jews as their alter egos and why they view Israel as their "Promised Land."

III. The Pentecostals and the Jewish Identity Equivalence

In 1979 Cardoso de Oliveira³⁰ created a concept that can help one to think through the reason for this allegiance to Israel: the concept of *white ethnicity*. It refers to one's *status* in the sense *identity*, as paralleling the one his country of origin holds on the international scene. If ethnicity is a *set of ideas and value attributes*, it acts to separate symbolic territories. By symbolically affiliating themselves with Israel,³¹ members of the Brazilian Pentecostal movement, in the lower echelons of Brazilian society, take unto themselves the *prestige* of the *Kingdom* of Israel, of which they are subjects. By presenting themselves as "Christian Jews,"³² they fully associate and anchor their new identity with the Bible, from the "Old" to the "New" Testaments.³³

In regard to *identity*, a religious conversion means a rupture, "*a break with own's biography*."³⁴ Thus it means a *change of identity*, in this case

29 Once again it should be remembered that being a Catholic in Brazil does not mean meeting the official Catholic Church criteria for membership.

30 Roberto Cardoso de Oliveria. *Étnia e Estrutura de Classes: A Propósito da Identidade e Etnicidade no México.* *Anuário Antropológico* 79. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Tempo Brasileiro. 1979.

31 Although a Biblical one, as will be discussed in next chapter.

32 A phrase heard many times at the Israeli Embassy when dealing with Pentecostals.

33 This view has been strongly encouraged by both the left and the right wings in South America (Sonia Bloomfield Ramagem. "Jews in Latin America: The Case of Brazil." Paper presented at the 8th International Conference of the Latin American Jewish Studies Association. Mexico. 1995).

34 Camargo Procópio. *Católicos, Protestantes e Espíritas*. Petrópolis: Ed. Vozes. 1973. Antonio F. Pierucci and Reginaldo Prandi. "Religiões e Voto: A Eleição Presidencial de 1994. *A Realidade Social das Religiões no Brasil*. São Paulo: HUCITED. 1996.

through a “*rebirth in Christ*,” which gives them a new “*ethnicity*,” that of Hebrew/Jews.

Keppel noted that the concept of the modern, democratic state is foreign to the processes of Islamization and Judaization. On the other hand, they are an integral part of the Christianization processes (mostly in Europe and North America). In a modern, democratic state, identity can be chosen, even one based in Biblical allegories. As such, it is clear how the choice of an identity link with ancient Israel on the part by Brazilian Pentecostals reflects the country’s modernization.

However, according to Keppel,³⁵ Judaism is based on Monism while Christianity is based on Dualism, and these two categories are opposed to each other, so how do Pentecostals deal with the discrepancy? First, as I’ve already noted, Pentecostals do not generally follow orthodox Christian doctrines, and in Brazil, particularly, they hold other sources of religious thought, based on Pluralism, where good and evil are not exclusive (i.e., *Exús* are both demons and tricksters as well as messengers of the gods as in the Afro-cults); second, Pentecostals in Brazil perceive the Jew in general, and Israel in particular, as mythical entities, not as real beings in a modern state.

Pentecostals read the Bible in a sparing fashion, selecting key points to affirm their views; and since there is no incentive for extended theological training for its leaders and lay members, what is retained from those reading are selective perceptions. On the other hand, owing to their generally low level of schooling, they do not have access to detailed information about Israel, and surprisingly the Israel they hold dear to their hearts, and with which they identify, is an idealized Israel, much like the one described in the Bible. The Pentecostals also clearly identify their own struggles with the sufferings of Israel through the ages.

IV. Involuntary Fieldwork: Working at Israeli Embassy in Brazil

In the Introduction to this paper I noted that the empirical data were obtained during the many years I worked in the Cultural Section of the Israeli Embassy in Brazil, together with information (i.e., informal interviews) collected as an academic, a lecturer, and a debater. The study has been divided into two periods, 1979 to 1982, and 1988 to the present,

35 Giles Keppel. *A Vingança de D-us: Cristãos, Judeus e Muçulmanos à Reconquista do Mundo*. Lisbon: Publicações Dom Quixote. 1992.

because these have been quite different in character. In the fact that they mark the strong Neo-Evangelical presence in Brazil and the intensification of their identification with Israel.

a. 1979/1982

In the years from 1979 to 1982 I worked exclusively at the Israeli Embassy in Brasília, and was responsible for answering letters and phone calls, and for receiving unofficial visitors to the Embassy.

At that time Brasília was a small city, with a population of some 400,000 people, in a country where an economic “miracle” was taking place. The pressure of overpopulation was not felt there, and the military regime then in power made sure that the Capital City was safe and quiet. The number of residents was relatively small and jobs were still readily available. The inhabitants “outside the miracle” lived on the outskirts of the city and the urban “ruling elite” controlled their access to the city itself (e.g., during an epidemic of meningitis, in 1974, buses carrying people from the periphery of the Federal District, bound for “downtown” were stopped and passengers were vaccinated, even against their will).

Most of the letters and phone calls handled by the Cultural Section of the Israeli Embassy were requests for stamps for collections and no statistics were ever compiled. These letters usually came from Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Brasília. They were generally xeroxed or mimeographed, and were addressed “To the Cultural Attaché,” with no specific country mentioned, indicating that they were form letters being sent to embassies in general. The phone calls were mostly from Brasília itself. There were other, more exotic, requests such as: water from the Jordan River and sand from the Sea of Galilee, but they did not include any mention of religion.

A few “Protestants” (the term “Neo-Evangelical” or “Pentecostal” has only recently come into use among the general public) came to the Embassy asking for movies about Israel and for recordings of Israeli songs to play during their services. The most frequent visitor was a Seventh Day Adventist³⁶ minister. He called himself and his church fellows “the Christian Jews” because they kept the *Shabbat*, in contrast with the “Others.” He kept on inviting the Embassy personnel to visit the church (located close to the Embassy compound) and to participate in its cults, saying that “you won’t see a difference from a Synagogue. We keep our services just like Yohshua did. It is like yours.” As far as I know no one from the Embassy ever went there, but we always welcomed the

36 Seventh Day Adventists are not Protestants.

Minister at the Embassy, and loaned him the movies routinely. The Embassy personnel were courteous toward him, but totally indifferent, and I was the one who dealt with him on the Chancery premises.

b. 1993 to Present

From 1982 and 1987 I left the Embassy to live in the United States. Then in 1988 I again worked at the Embassy for a brief time, and it was clear to me that many things were changing: the number of “Evangelicals” (now explicitly differentiated from the “Protestants”) requesting booklets, posters, movies, and general information about Israel had increased substantially but still no statistics were kept.

In the political arena, the number of “Protestants” in the Brazilian Parliament had gone from fourteen,³⁷ in 1982, to thirty-three (out of which eighteen were Pentecostals), in 1986.³⁸ They clustered on the Parliamentary Commission on Family, Education and Culture, and as far as I know, they were never involved in the Foreign Affairs Commission. According to a popular Brazilian magazine, *Veja* (Pierucci³⁹), although the Pentecostals were not all in the same party, their sheer numbers made them the fourth most powerful group power in the Parliament, at a time when the Brazilian Constitution was being rewritten (1986).

Ten years later, in November 1996,⁴⁰ the media (i.e., *Journal de Brasília* – November 11, 1996) announced that the Pentecostals were circulating a petition, throughout the country, to obtain the 240,000 signatures needed to get a political party registry. It is expected that by June 1997,⁴¹ there will be a *National Evangelical Party*. Their first goal is to register the Party, and then either elect the governor of the State of São Paulo, or the new president of Brazil, in 1998 and the 1999 general elections.⁴²

In 1989 I again left Brazil, this time to become a Ph.D. candidate in the United States. I returned in 1993 and again worked at the Israeli

37 With only two Pentecostals.

38 The Pentecostal slogan was “Brothers vote for Brothers.”

39 Antonio Flávio Pierucci. “Representantes de D-us em Brasília: A Bancada Evangélica na Constituinte.” *A Realidade Social das Religiões no Brasil*. São Paulo: HUCITED. 1996.

40 The author could not find a reliable source for their numbers in the Congress.

41 This paper was written in April 1997.

42 In 1999, for the first time, *Veja*, a major national magazine, is carrying a full page add for non-alcoholic beer (Kronbeer) directed toward the “Evangelicals” [sic] consumers.

Embassy. The Brazil of 1993 was a very different country, and I found a much changed Brasília, now with 1,700,000 inhabitants and a shrinking job market. There was also a different Embassy clientele: the vast majority of phone calls and letters to the Embassy came from the Neo-Evangelicals and the nature of the requests also showed a different Brazil.⁴³ Offers were now coming to serve in the “Army of G-d” as they said (meaning the Israeli Defense Forces), from young male Pentecostals from as far a field as the Amazon River Basin. Other requests were from Evangelicals were for information on immigration to Israel, and from travel agents asking for tourism information in order to prepare group tours to the Holy Land — again no statistics were compiled.

Messages came from all over Brazil to the Embassy telling the State of Israel what to do in order to get salvation, mostly through the acceptance of Christ as the real Messiah. Enraged Pentecostals called the Embassy to protest the establishment of relations between Israel and the Vatican. One tried to reach the Embassy compound by scaling the walls and got as far as the verandah of the Ambassador’s house before being caught by security. One madman kept on mailing sperm with specific instructions to inseminate a virgin in Israel in order to bring about the coming of the Messiah.

More significant contacts began with the invitations to the Embassy’s Cultural Section (the Ambassadors’ presence were often requested but for security reasons they never participated) to speak about Israel (any subject) in schools and churches in the periphery⁴⁴ of Brasília.⁴⁵ The Cultural Attaché and I were usually present at these events, and a speech about Judaism and Israel was always the first thing on the program. In the question-and-answer segment that always followed, the one question that would always be asked was: “Why did you Jews kill Christ?” After the speaker explained the political situation at the time of Christ’s death

43 The late 1980s and early 1990s showed for the first time Brazilians leaving the country as immigrants, legally or not for the first time driven by the deteriorating economic conditions (Maxine Margolis. *Little Brazil: Imigrantes Brasileiros em Nova Iorque*. Campinas: Editora Papirus. 1994).

44 Later, major denominations such as Baptists, found in the Center of Brasília, began inviting Embassy personnel to appear on their radio talk shows and for the *Semana de Israel* (Israel Week). At one of these events, the minister told the church members to beg the Israeli embassy personnel forgiveness for the killing of Jews by the Inquisition and by the Nazis: we were surrounded by people crying and asking for forgiveness—a very uncomfortable situation.

45 No statistics were ever recorded, so it is impossible to estimate the numbers.

and reminded the audience of the fact the country was under the Roman domination, people seemed to be satisfied and the topic changed. It was always a tense moment, although there were never any attacks on Jews, verbal or physical.

By late 1994 I left the Embassy to become a full-time professor at the University of Brasília. However, I have maintained contact with Neo-Evangelica/Pentecostals groups and the Embassy and the local rabbi have often recommended me to them as a public speaker. These occasions have enabled us to maintain our connection through events at schools, churches, universities, and other institutions, as well as by my contact with a large body of Neo-Evangelical students at my University.

V. Findings on Neo-Evangelicals' Perceptions of Jews

Some very interesting points arose out of these personal contacts, letters, and phone calls. A standard question asked by Pentecostals was: "Why are you not wearing those clothes?," "those clothes" being the long tunics, robes, head covers, and veils they associate with Biblical figures. A common request was for the Embassy to lend them "typical clothing" for reproduction. By "typical" they meant robes and veils.

Thus, it is easy to see that the Israel these people are looking for is not what they can see inside the Embassy (men with suits and women with skirts or slacks) or the one shown in information booklets distributed to them with, or even, in many cases, Israel, which they had visited previously. Questions about stoning adulterous women in Israel came up after my speeches, and the requests to serve in the army in Israel were for the "Army of G-d," not the Israeli Defense Forces. *It is quite clear that "their" Israel is not the State of Israel, but a timeless Holy Land.*

Although they claim to *love* the Bible, it is clear that their Biblical knowledge is very limited. As to the Tanach, they are generally familiar only with the Psalms, and that it is the "New Testament" that provides them with most of their imagery of Israel. A constant refrain is: "What do Jews think Christ was?," and "Haven't you read that in the Bible (meaning the Gospels)?" It comes to them as a source of surprise that Jews do not accept the Gospels; "How can you not? They are part of the Bible!"

Many requests also come asking for help in finding a rabbi "to teach us how to keep the Shabbat as the Lord [Christ] did," or to celebrate ceremonies for their religious gatherings. Brasília has two Jewish institutions: one is *Beit Chabad*. And the other is the Israelite Cultural

Association of Brasília—ACIB—which has no rabbi. *Beit Chabad* functions in a quiet area of town, and the rabbi and his family live in the same building. It is not identifiable from the outside, and it is open only to the local Jewish community, so no Pentecostals congregate there.

ACIB, however, as a cultural association and a center for local liberals takes Evangelicals as members,⁴⁶ and they are welcome on such holidays as *Pesach*, *Shavuot* *Sukkoth*.⁴⁷ On these occasions one can easily spot the Pentecostals: they dress very severely and look plain, and are continually looking around and announcing their joy at being with the “Lord’s people” (see note 47 regarding their opening of a Messianic Synagogue). However, their participation has alienated some members of the community, who have stopped attending.

As I noted earlier, for the Neo-Evangelicals/Pentecostals Israel is not the State of Israel, but a timeless Holy Land. As such, it cannot be a modern State, but is rather a Holy State, different from other states. The Pentecostals see Jews as their alter egos because they are “the people of Israel,” and therefore *different* from other people. But the Jews and Israelis they meet at the Embassy or at ACIB do not conform to their ideas of what a Jew should be, look like, or act. A contradiction is created, which they have to resolve.

The solution is found in “New” Testament language:⁴⁸ “the End of Times” or “The Second Coming [of Christ],” i.e., the Apocalypse. But what is the “end of times” for them? It means the time when they will bring their “brothers and sisters of Israel to the kingdom of the Lord”—The New Jerusalem—and the “kingdom of the Lord” will come upon the victory of Christ over the unfaithful: only the faithful, “the people of Israel” will live forever in the New Jerusalem. In order to prepare for this the Pentecostals attend the Baptist theological seminaries to study ancient Hebrew mores, foods, rituals and prayers.

The “end of times” will be the time of the *return*, not the *coming*, of the Messiah (Christ), when he shall be accepted by the Jews. Then according to many Pentecostals, the beginning will meet the end, and there will be no more death, disease, inequality, wars, or demons. Humankind’s history will be over and there will be only a timeless

46 In December 1998 a group of these Evangelicals opened a “Messianic Synagogue,” and this has led to much publicity which has provoked the Jewish community of Brasília, which the author is now studying.

47 Although they do not count as part of the *Minyan*.

48 “The Revelation of John” in *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1971.

heaven. The whole Earth will be Holy, and the center of holiness will be in the “New Jerusalem,” where not even a new Temple will be necessary, since all of its space will be “holy.”

VI. Conclusions

As this study is based on data were obtained casually while I was working at the Israeli Embassy in Brazil, my conclusions cannot be validated statistically. However, the evidence of growth of Neo-Evangelicalism in that country points to the fact that further and more detailed research should be undertaken in order to assess the impact of these churches and their membership on the political—internal and external—arena in regard to the Jewish community.

The present members of Neo-Evangelicals/Pentecostal churches perceive themselves as “different” from the majority of the Brazilian populace, self identified as Catholic. However, academic findings show that in reality the category includes a religiously sincerity culture, where Afro and indigenous systems of beliefs merge with Christianity.

Trying to keep themselves separate in this syncretic society, Pentecostals dress plainly, don’t drink, and do not socialize outside their own fold. Their sense of identity is expressed as the “Other” in Brazilian urban culture and they view Israel and the Jews as the ultimate Other. This conception has three bases: (a) one rooted in the distant past, in the Iberian distinction between a Christian, and “someone with infectious blood of Moors or Jews”⁴⁹; a well-known Brazilian country song says that “the decision to take a Christian’s life it is up to G-d.” Implying that for non-Christians it can be left to human hands; (b) from knowing, through movies and TV, although not in any systematic way, about the Holocaust; and (c) by their view of Jews as the “People of the Bible,” although from an “outmoded” part of the Bible, and it is their duty to bring Christ to “end the Times.”

Thus, rethinking the theory of *white ethnicity* in the light of these ethnographic findings, one can perceive the potential for its expansion in the religious domain. One’s *ethnic status* does not depend anymore on one of “concrete” nation-states, but rather can be attributed to symbolic territories, such as the “Kingdom of Israel.” That is the reason for the existence of a “Jerusalem International Christian Embassy,” supra-

49 Anita Novinsky. *Cristãos-Novos na Bahia*. São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva. 1972.

national entity, based in Jerusalem,⁵⁰ which has “Embassies” throughout the world, including one in Brazil,⁵¹ but which has no connection to the Israeli Embassy.

The membership criteria for becoming a “subject” of this “Kingdom” is to be “born again in Christ,” following a Fundamentalist approach to the Bible. The “End of Times,” with its cataclysmic battles between angels and demons, is approaching, and then from being the lowest strata in Brazilian society, they will become the “citizens of the New Jerusalem,”⁵² the “People of Israel.”

50 Its aim is to force secular governments all over to accept Jerusalem as Israel’s capital city (*Brasil-Israel Magazine* - November 1996).

51 The Israeli General Consul in São Paulo, the Israeli Honorary Consul, Rabbi Henry Sobel, and the El Al (Israeli Airlines) Brazilian representative were present at one opening ceremony.

52 Where death, disease, poverty, and sadness will be no more.