

# The political responsibility of the Protestant churches in Brazil: A post-coup *d'état* approach towards the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation

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## Abstract

This article grapples with the actual political context internationally, focusing on the Brazilian *Coup d'état* more specifically. It reflects on the responsibility of the Protestant churches in this watershed experience of the celebration of the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation that happens during a time of crisis. It suggests an apocalyptic approach for theology towards the radical transformation of society, regarding especially the actual crisis of financial Capitalism. It starts from the contextual analyses of Protestantism in Brazilian society, historically and contemporarily. It then reflects on the actual challenges of protestant churches in such a context and suggests some theological assertions towards an apocalyptic theology for the end of Capitalism.

## Key words

*Brazilian Coup d'état; Protestantism in Brazil; Reformation Anniversary; Apocalyptic theology*

## 1. Introduction

The contemporary political and economic situation internationally requires us to revisit the religious tradition and to reconsider the contributions they can offer to bring about justice. The economic crisis, which since 2008 has been creating political instability throughout the world (Badcock 2016; Piketty 2014; Žižek 2015; Roy 2015), has also led to the development of an

atmosphere of disregard for human rights<sup>1</sup>. This neoliberal capitalism offers itself as an absolute belief, a religion, as referred to by Walter Benjamin (1991), which corrodes solidarity. Hugo Assmann (1994) reminds us that, in this regard, solidarity would be the new challenge for theology against the economic exclusion of the contemporary capitalism that diminishes the culture of rights with the notion of ‘sacrifice’ to save the stability of economies.

Another fundamental reference for the approach to theology from the economic debate is the work of Franz Hinkelammert. The German author who lives and has been working for a long time in Latin America reflects on theological responses to economics (1983; 1995; 2013). We mention three of them which are pertinent to our reflection. In the first, he refers to the “ideological weapons of death”, criticizing, from a Marxist perspective, the *fetishization* that occurs on neoliberal capitalism, becoming the market rule a new form of idolatry. Regarding the second response, Hinkelammert emphasizes how capitalism works with the notion of sacrifice. For him, theological reflection should engage critically with the idea that in capitalism economic growth demands the sacrifice of the poor, perpetrating itself through structural economic inequality. The third idea refers to the myth of modern logic that lies behind capitalism. The author argues that behind this idea of “plain rational logic” there is an illogical order that builds an economic system towards the destruction of human dignity. The “rational logic” of capitalism is a “rationalization of the irrational” as it puts the economic system before people. In a more recent book, Hinkelammert creates a tension between Market and Human Rights (2016). He says that at its origins, human rights discourse used to be a protection of individuals in the face of a draconian State and its authorized power to use violence. However, in the contemporary world, he sees how it changed, as the focus on the State has migrated to the capitalist corporations and media discourse, which defends their interests and their violent measures towards people.

It leads us to ask what place and role the churches and church related organizations should take, especially when the public role of religion

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1 The references to human rights abuses and violations will mostly be based on a report produced by social organizations in Brazil: Rede Social de Justiça e Direitos Humanos 2016, *Direitos Humanos no Brasil 2016*. São Paulo: Outras Expressões.

is being questioned. The political interference of different forms of fundamentalism, such as Christian fundamentalism, Zionism, Islamic fundamentalism, and the like, pushes reformed or protestant Christians to reaffirm privacy as the most convenient sphere to live out their religious experience. Secularization and privatization of the religious experience are modern contributions resulting from the Reformation. They are a result of modernity as much as religious fundamentalism (Dreher 2004), started by the protestants in United States of America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, the Reformation as a religious and theological event, as Max Weber (2012) points out, forged the ethical principles that sustained the emergence of capitalism, in its colonial and universal impetus. However, now capitalism became a religion in itself, overcoming its religious and theological justification, to become a self-referring ethical and theological system (Benjamin 1991; Sung 2010). The only accepted expression of religious discourse in the public space – occupied by capitalism, market rule and consumerism – is a religious experience which adheres to neoliberal logic, mainly represented by prosperity theology (Martikainen & Gauthier 2016) or triumphalist Zionism, either Christian or Jewish, as articulated by Robert Smith (2013)<sup>2</sup>. These forms of religion corroborate and support the overarching logic of contemporary capitalism, which does not need these religious and theological references to justify itself anymore<sup>3</sup>.

This intertwined religious, political and economic reality can be described as part of the context in which we celebrate the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. It is also a possible description of the main features of the global context in which protestant and reformed traditions question their own role in the “global era”, asking especially if circumstances demand keeping religion private or acting publicly in political and social realities.

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- 2 Zionism is understood here as the religious and political ideology that is part of the political justification of the State of Israel as a “Western nation” in middle east, bringing capitalist values to a considered “uncivilized Arab world”. This religious and political ideology is found not only in Judaism but also adopted by Evangelicals in many places. Considerably in United States of America, but growingly in other places like Brazil. It is seen as not being conflictive with Capitalism values and, therefore, it is well accepted in the political sphere.
  - 3 This is precisely the aspect in which Walter Benjamin disagrees with Max Weber, as Benjamin understands that Capitalism does not relate to basic theological presuppositions anymore, as Weber affirmed in *Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism* (1905).

Our reflection assumes that as we take into account the political and social role of religion in contemporary society, especially from the perspective of protestant tradition, it must lead us to public advocacy against capitalism and its recent impacts to the global order. Public advocacy against capitalist theology means promoting a “radicalization of Reformation”, or even a rupture to break out of our own theological tradition which is profoundly connected to the formulation of the capitalist order.

To contextualize the discussion, this article will briefly reflect on the development of religious influence in the Brazilian public sphere. It will offer some historical features of Brazilian cultural and religious background, asking about the political role of religion in Brazil and the initial contribution of protestant churches to this. Thereafter, it will move on to an analysis of the contemporary role of religion in Brazilian public space, giving special focus on the “evangelicals” and their participation in politics in Brazil. Some aspects of the Brazilian *Coup d’état* (2016) will be developed to understand features of the contemporary crisis of Capitalism. The final part of the article reflects on some critical questions that should be considered for an apocalyptic theology, as a theology that imagines and foresees another reality, after capitalism.

## 2. Religion and the public space in Brazil – a historic background

Brazil is a multicultural country, before the colonial period, the ethnic diversity in Brazil was vast. Today, even after 500 years of violence and persecution, there are more than 1000 ethnicities and more than 200 languages still spoken by the indigenous Brazilian population<sup>4</sup>. This diversity of cultures was the context in which the colonization of the Portuguese took place. From 1500 until 1822 Brazil was a Portuguese Colony, after which the Independence of the Brazilian Empire was declared by Dom Pedro I. During this period, the cultural and religious mix was established in Brazil, while the Catholicism was the official religion in the so-called “Padroado System”<sup>5</sup>. As a result of representing both the

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4 To see some of the Brazilian indigenous people: [http://www.cimi.org.br/site/pt-br/?system=paginas&conteudo\\_id=5742&action=read](http://www.cimi.org.br/site/pt-br/?system=paginas&conteudo_id=5742&action=read). Last access in October 2016.

5 For historical information about the colonial period see Hoornaert (1994).

crown and the Church, the “Padroado System” had tremendous political power. It means that political domination and religious expansion were both parts of the colonial experience. During this time, Catholicism had to relate to the traditional spirituality of indigenous peoples and to the beliefs and spirituality of Africans, who were brought as slaves to Brazil. Silva (2010) reminds us that during the period of colonialism, Brazil was the country that received the highest number of slaves – more than 6 million Africans of different ethnicities, with their different cultures, languages and religious practices. This mix of cultures in the social experience during the Colonial period created what has been called the Brazilian Religious and Cultural Matrix, mostly represented by the popular Catholicism (Schultz 2008). The Popular Catholicism was not under the ideological and religious control of the institutional Roman Church in Brazil and had as its basis the beliefs and practices of Indigenous peoples, African descendants and Portuguese families. The church was not institutionally present in all the corners of Brazil and the political power, which was in charge of the Church, had no special interest in controlling the beliefs or practices of Popular Catholicism.

This religious and cultural composition at the very beginning of the colonial experience defined much of the Brazilian identity. At the time of Brazilian independence (1822), especially at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the first Protestants started to arrive in Brazil (Dreher 1999), adding to the multicultural experience with new cultural and religious inputs.

The end of the colonial regime, the establishment of the Empire and the opening of the harbours for business with England in 1808 demanded tolerance towards Protestants in a Catholic country. Besides some initial experiences of colonization of Protestants in Brazil, the most important event was the arrival of Lutherans in Nova Friburgo, Rio de Janeiro, and in São Leopoldo, Rio Grande do Sul in 1824. From that period on Protestants started to struggle politically for religious rights, civil rights and for a secular State, which would result in Constitutional changes, recognizing Brazil as a pluralistic country with no official religion. This would happen only in 1889 when Brazil became a Republic under the inspiration of the liberal spirit of modern European States. Despite the political changes in Brazil during the nineteenth century, no revolution had a popular character. The power was always in the hands of the political aristocracy. The first

Emperor, who proclaimed independence, Dom Pedro I, was a member of the Portuguese crown. The generals, who proclaimed the Republic in 1889, were part of the ruling aristocracy. They wanted to bring Brazil closer to the liberal political order established internationally by the European countries. In this context, Protestant churches had a very important role, contributing to a pluralistic society and to the establishment of a secular and democratic state. In this sense, we notice that the changes promoted by the Reformation in the modern religious culture were brought to Brazil only in the second half of the nineteenth century.

As a result, historically, religion in Brazil has always had a close relationship with the established political order. Firstly, in a close and organic relationship between the colonial power and the Catholic Church through the “Padroado System”, which is virtually a Christendom system. After the beginning of the Republic (1889), the Catholic Church still had a strong influence in politics. It was the religion of more than 95% of the population. Protestant churches, which since 1824 were growing in public and political influence, have changed perceptions and pressured to create a secular State, protecting religious freedom and plurality in a multicultural country. They were persecuted as a minority or had, at least, less rights than Catholics. It is important to note this, because more recently many churches which resulted from the Reformation – especially Pentecostals, Neopentecostals and Charismatics or evangelicals – have developed a different position regarding other religious minorities, like the African Brazilian religions. In fact, these specific groups are the most intolerant regarding minorities’ religious practices<sup>6</sup>.

### **3. Various faces of Brazilian Protestantism and their role in society**

Contemporarily, protestant churches have a very ambiguous role in Brazilian society. The face of Protestantism has changed dramatically since

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6 There are many reports on a daily basis in Brazil on the violence against Afro-Brazilians, especially when they are worshipping or dressing traditional clothes. These attacks are mostly perpetrated by Evangelicals (Pentecostals or Neopentecostals) for religious issues. Here, Reginaldo Prandi explains some of the reasons for religious intolerance in Brazil: <https://extra.globo.com/noticias/rio/pesquisador-das-religoes-afro-no-brasil-explica-raiz-historica-dos-preconceitos-contr-umbanda-o-candomble-229772.html>. Access on 5 June 2017.

the nineteenth century. During the migration and mission period in the nineteenth century, there was the establishment of what has been called *historic* protestant churches, more related to the protestant churches that resulted from the Reformation, the Calvinist tradition and the Lutheran tradition, or other specific denominations, like Baptists or Methodists and so on. These churches are still present but in a much lesser number than other contemporary protestant churches, like the Pentecostal and Neopentecostal – or even the charismatic movements inside the historic protestant denominations – churches, usually described as the evangelicals (Léonard 1981). More recently, Protestantism scholars in Brazil, like Dreher (1999) or Mendonça and Filho (1990) usually divide the protestant denominations into four categories. The first are the *historic churches*, mainly represented by the Lutheran Church which arrived in Brazil “on the bag” of the immigrants who came in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, fleeing from the economic crisis in Europe and finding land to live and work, mostly in the south of Brazil. Brazilian interest at that time was to make Brazilian population “whiter”, to occupy and produce in southern parts of the country and to fight the indigenous people who could eventually disturb the progress. This Protestantism is also characterized as an ethnic religion. The Lutherans lived for a long time under a cultural ghetto, maintaining close relationships with the “mother churches” in Germany. Just recently (1970), the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil (ECLCB) decided to move into a more engaged position in Brazilian socio-political context, considering itself finally a Brazilian Church (Schünemann 1992)<sup>7</sup>.

The second type is *mission* Protestantism, which results from missionary impetus of American and European churches. They are mostly from a Reformed and Calvinist background (but also the Lutheran Missouri Synod sent missionaries). These missionaries started to arrive more systematically in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This includes Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Anglicans, and so on. This group, together with the Lutherans, had a very important political role in struggling for the rights of the religious minorities, winning many civil rights for the protestant

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7 This critically engaged position over against the government happened most definitely in 1970, with the Curitiba General Council and its manifest (Manifesto de Curitiba). Available in <http://www.luteranos.com.br/textos/manifesto-de-curitiba-1970>. Last access on 5 June 2017.

religions – such as the right to have temples with external symbols, the right to have their marriages recognized or to use the public cemeteries. The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was difficult for Protestants. The main contributions of these churches are related to the establishment of a secular state and the acceptance of religious pluralism, as much as the individual rights to freedom of choice. These are primarily achievements of the liberal and modern society that result from the reformatory movement.

Nevertheless, there was religious diversity already in Brazil before the arrival of the Protestants, but the religious dynamics of the colonial experience presupposed Catholicism as the only officially accepted religion. Other religions, belief systems, and cultural practices of indigenous and black populations, for instance, were never respected by the European ‘conquerors’ and ‘civilizers’ (Westhelle 2010). Therefore, either the religious practices were lived in a hidden way or they transmuted into Catholic symbols, as many cultural and religious practices indicate (Droogers 1985)<sup>8</sup>, creating the propitious context for a hybrid religious experience or what is often called the multiple religious pertaining ability of Brazilian people (Sinner; Bobsin & Bartz 2012).

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we can observe the emergence of another experience of Protestantism. After the influence of pietism in many European and Christian denominations and the arising of a Pentecostal movement, many missionaries went to Brazil from Sweden and United States of America, creating Pentecostal Churches, as the “Assembly of God”, amongst others. This third face of Brazilian Protestantism is defined as *Pentecostalism*. These denominations are mostly religiously conservative, constructed on the idea of “separation from this world”, at least in its initial experience. This means that the position related to Brazilian society was normally the rejection of public affairs and non-participation in politics (Cesar & Shaull 1997). In the beginning of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many Protestants of *mission* churches adhered to the Pentecostal movement. At that time, Pentecostals started to have a more active political participation, especially when the Military Coup happened

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8 One way of doing this ‘syncretism’ is calling the “orixás” or the “entities” with a name of a Catholic saints. Iemanjá (Goddess of the sea) is one of these examples, popularly identified with Virgin Mary.



in 1964. According to their narrative, the Pentecostals were supportive of the military regime because they saw it as one which could bring about order, morality, and could defeat the ‘communist threat’. In fact, most of the protestant churches were supporting the military regime<sup>9</sup>. It is true that many critical voices emerged from the protestant atmosphere, like Richard Shaull (1953), Rubem Alves (1969) and later Walter Altmann (1992), but it is also true that until 1970s the official position of the churches was supportive of the military regime. However, these critical contributions were quite important to give form and voice to the theological shift that gave birth to the Liberation Theology, which is a transconfessional and ecumenical theological reflection.

From the Pentecostal movement emerged the fourth type of Protestantism, namely the *Neopentecostalism*. As many things can be said about it, once it is sociologically and from the perspective of religious studies quite a new and rich religious experience, Neopentecostalism is a result of the socio-political conditions of the Brazilian society during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Baptista 2009). Three characteristics are important to note. Firstly, different from classic Pentecostalism, Neopentecostalism is not afraid of going public. Neopentecostalism affirms itself in a “sacred” war between Jesus and the Afro Brazilian religions. The battle to convert people from what they consider demoniac practices inaugurated a context of symbolic and physical violence and religious intolerance against other religious practices. In religious terms, Neopentecostalism brought all the spirits (from traditional religions and the Holy Spirit) to the spectacle to perform a religious war in the service. The Neopentecostalism dominated the communication techniques and invested in them as a strategy to be used in this “public crusade” to conquer followers and to demonize the traditional religions (but also all other sorts of Christian experiences).

Secondly, Neopentecostalism adhered completely to the new established economic order, namely, neoliberalism and its prevalence at the end of the socialists’ experiences, symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall

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9 This involvement of the churches with dictatorship was recently exposed by documents kept in secret by the World Council of Churches (WCC) when they gave it back to Brazilian authorities. [http://istoe.com.br/141566\\_05+EVANGELICOS+E+A+DITADURA+MILITAR/](http://istoe.com.br/141566_05+EVANGELICOS+E+A+DITADURA+MILITAR/). Last access on 18 January 2017.

(Martikainen & Gauthier 2016). Neopentecostalism then formulates a Prosperity Theology, which is to a certain extent rooted in Protestantism, especially in Calvinist theology (according to Weber's logic). Furthermore, we can say that, in negotiating blessings, it stands against one of the fundamental principles of the Reformation. Nonetheless, many perceptions underlying these religious practices are the radicalization of notions initially developed by the Reformation (Roberts & Yamane 2012). A third characteristic is the public incidence of these churches in the field of politics. Neopentecostals have, to use the expression of Edir Macedo, a "plan to power" (Macedo & Oliveira 2008), which is based on the North American notion of "Moral Majority". Biblically based, it builds on the notion of the chosen people. This biblical fundamentalism entered politics and is currently struggling to impose a conservative agenda on the whole society, with powerful resources and an ever-increasing political influence (92 deputies in a chamber with more than 500 deputies/senators represent the evangelical block<sup>10</sup>).

Some other features are interesting, regarding the actual context of Protestantism in Brazil. Firstly, this growth of "evangelicals" – Pentecostals and Neopentecostals –, for instance, created a transconfessional tendency (Bobsin 2002). This theological approach, characterized by a spiritualized and emotional religious experience and by the gospel of prosperity, invaded even the historic churches and the Catholic Church (Carranza 2000). Most of the churches are divided with the charismatic movement creating internal instability and theological divergence in the historic denominations. This transconfessional influence became so strong that much of the mission protestant churches are experiencing a kind of 'neofundamentalist' turn (Cavalcante 2010). This means, in general terms, that a considerable part of the protestant churches in Brazil are taking the public space and entering the political realm based on biblical fundamentalism. They impose a public agenda that threatens the culture of rights slowly constructed in Brazil. It defends only one perception of family, persecuting and condemning sexual diversity, defending a patriarchal system that leads to a culture of violence against women and LGBTTTs people, and persecuting people of

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10 For more information about the "Evangelical Block": <http://www.metodista.br/midiareligiapolitica/index.php/composicao-bancada-evangelica/> Last access on 18 January 2017.

other faiths, especially Afro Brazilian religions and indigenous peoples' practices. In the congress, "Evangelicals" in Brazil compose what is called BBB block (Gun, Cattle and Bible), which pushes for a conservative order, privilege for economic elites and regional aristocracies, the imposition of neoliberal "adjustment", and the deconstruction of a human rights culture. Nowadays, this political block is responsible for much of the political crises that create political instability and threaten democracy in Brazil. The "national" agreement between these conservative and fundamentalist sectors of society, along with corrupt politicians, want to stop investigations. Furthermore, the mass media push to impose neoliberal measures as a way to overcome the economic crises at the background of the political coup against the elected president Dilma Rousseff.

#### **4. Brazilian *Coup d'état*, political harshness and the role of Protestants in the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation**

Two themes suggest the context for some concluding remarks in this reflection. The first theme is related to the political and economic instability experienced in many parts of the world, with special attention on the happenings in Brazil. Brazilian democracy has been puissant for the last 25 years<sup>11</sup>, a period in which the country thrived in raising people out of poverty (Iulianelli 2009). Since the global (permanent?) economic crisis exploded in 2008, political instability changed the way democracy was regarded by the corporate world and its representatives all over the political spectrum. Liberal and modern democracy has weakened and, for the sake of 'economic stability', states are compromising on its basic presuppositions (Agamben et al. 2011). In Brazil, using the words of Boaventura de Souza Santos (2016), we can observe this change happening with a "judicial, parliamentary and mediatic *Coup d'état*". This political push, which is happening in many places, is widely understood as a new way to interfere in the democratic processes in order to impose the neoliberal agenda and protect the interests of the economic elites, nationally and internationally. In Brazil, this push has many facets that are still under critical evaluation,

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11 It is important to [remark], regarding to Brazil, that the country has experienced a military dictatorship of 25 years (1964–1989) which affected profoundly the recent political history. The similarities and differences between both "*Coup d'état*" are still object of research.

but some aspects are clearly visible and we indicate some briefly, although we do not analyse them deeply<sup>12</sup>. These are: 1) To defend the political class and to maintain the political establishment that is currently challenged by the critique regarding the influence of capital in the political system; 2) To defend the economic interests of the stakeholders of corporate business, nationally and internationally; 3) To debilitate the State as an agent of change, implementing neoliberal measures of austerity; 4) To change protective labour laws and to establish precarious working conditions in order to increase the profit of the capital owners; 5) To retrocede on the human rights agenda, especially related to black populations, women, LGBTTTI, indigenous peoples, and other minorities, imposing a conservative agenda especially formulated by evangelicals and (Neo)Pentecostals; And lastly 6) to criminalize protests and social movements, enforcing a security state that controls different aspects of life, affecting civil rights and liberties.

The second aspect that formulates the context of this reflection is the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, celebrated internationally. This event is calling Protestants and Reformed Christians from all around the world to reflect on the public responsibility of the church in society. It leads to reflection on the present contribution of the reformatory heritage and the way forward in a context that is dealing with the modern history profoundly determined by the European Reformation of the Sixteenth century. Relating these two main factors, the question that remains is how the churches and Christians related to the Reformatory tradition reacted in the face of this ‘Leviathan’ that arose and is now undermining the possibility of critical voices from the protestant churches?

The first thing to be mentioned is that the churches and Christians (sometimes against the main position of their churches) have always struggled against all sorts of setbacks regarding the culture of human rights and respect for the dignity of life (Teixeira & Dias 2008). So attests the history of the ecumenical movement in Brazil. It is not necessary to go into the history of the ecumenical movement in Brazil and Latin America, but it is important to mention that during all the changing processes in the protestant identity in Brazil, there was always this critical voice coming

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12 For a deeper understanding of what is happening in Brazil: Singer, A. et al. (2016), *Porque Gritamos Golpe*. São Paulo: Boitempo Editorial.

from individuals and sectors of the protestant churches, most of them working ecumenically and, more recently, interreligious<sup>13</sup>. Since today, the ecumenical movement in Brazil, although not much representative in general numbers comparing to the majority of evangelicals<sup>14</sup> (Mariano 2013), represents a critical voice against the imposition of a conservative and fundamentalist identity to the Christian presence in society (Bock, Garcia & Menezes 2016). The Ecumenical movement has worked, especially during the dictatorship (1964–1985), and still works with Brazilian civil society for the building of human rights<sup>15</sup>. That is certainly an example of public participation of Churches and Christians, heirs of the Reformation, for the social and political transformation of society.

However, with a visible tendency towards the separation of many churches from ecumenical initiatives, ecumenical action in society is not the position of the majority of the protestant churches. It is obviously related to the neofundamentalist tendency in the protestant churches, but another main behaviour can be observed, especially by the official churches, which is the stepping back from the public scene, as they become silent on political and social issues. It relates to what the South African Kairos Document (1986) calls a “Church Theology”, already identified by Gerald West (2000) and Steve De Gruchy (2004) as also happening in South Africa after the end of apartheid. It relates to the fact that membership is divided and mostly adhering to a political change to more conservative behaviours, as much as the churches are concerned about not losing the remaining people in the pews, as the growth of evangelicals is taking many people out of the traditional and historically protestant churches. Therefore, the most comfortable position is to return to the modern and liberal position – created by the reformatory movement – according to which religion must remain

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13 A good example of this process is the ecumenical organization called *Koinonia*, that was created during the Military Regime in the 1970s and that recently changed for an inter-religious entity, with support from churches that concentrates its action on protecting the rights of African Religious minorities: <http://koinonia.org.br/quem-somos/sobre-koinonia>. Last access on 18 January 2017.

14 25% of the population, while Catholics represent 68% of Brazilian population.

15 There are several examples of Forums and networks established in order to jointly work for the building of human rights and to foster a culture of respect with the diversities. Some latest can be found on the following pages. 1) <http://fd.com.br/blog/lancado-forum-inter-religioso-e-ecumenico-pela-dem/>; 2) <http://www.conic.org.br/portal/noticias/1981-forum-ecumenico-act-brasil-realiza-encontro-em-brasilia>; 3) <http://reju.org.br/>. Last access on 18 January 2017.

in the private sphere of life. Therefore, the privatization of the religious experience, especially after the establishment of democracy, represented an absent participation of churches in political and social matters, as the church became politically “neutral”<sup>16</sup>. One of the measures commonly adopted was the creation of a Church Related Organization (Bock; Garcia & Menezes 2015), which in practical terms are civil society organizations. These organizations could have a public incidence and advocacy, taking stances on political matters and having their own strategies for acting in society (Swart 2006).

This strategy has its promises and its shortcomings. On one hand, these organizations can support political and social activities together with other members of civil society and social movements, acting in such a progressive way that would certainly not be approved by the churches they are related to<sup>17</sup>. On the other hand, Churches – but most importantly, Christians – are regarded as neutral and not involved in politics, not being responsible for acting in the transformation of society. In the end, it means that Christian people, who participate in the congregation’s life, and the churches officially give over their responsibility to change the world to organizations of civil society. Church is considered, then, a place to experience a spiritualized faith disconnected from the world. It has become a social activity that mostly reproduces the unjust and unequal patterns of relationships that result from contemporary culture. It creates, what I would dare call, a ‘schizophrenic’ perception of public engagement by the protestant churches. These dilemmas are still part of the discussion on the role of protestant churches in the public space that

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16 Although we see no increase of statements by some churches in Brazil at this moment, especially by the National Conference of Bishops of the Catholic Church (<http://www.cnb.org.br/>), the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil ([www.luteranos.com.br](http://www.luteranos.com.br)) and the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil ([www.ieab.org.br](http://www.ieab.org.br)).

17 One example of this relationship is between the Lutheran Church (ECLCB) and the Lutheran Diaconia Foundation (LDF). LDF is an independent organization of the civil society that has institutional relation with the Church (<http://www.fld.com.br/>). LDF’s action is not ruled by the Church, but by its own policies. It allows it to act in political and social initiatives that could be considered sensitive and complicated for the church, as it demanded taking sides in political issues. LDF, for instance, is at the moment supporting a network of organizations that struggles against the *Coup d’État* called “Mais Democracia, Mais Direitos”, or More Democracy, more Rights (<http://maisdireitosmaisdemocracia.org.br/#inicio-2>).

must be addressed by theological reflection. The question that motives this theological quest should be to ask if theological reflection can contribute to affirming the public responsibility of the churches in the contemporary world, recognizing its characteristics and its challenges.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

So long, the article presented an analytical reflection. It looked back to the historical constitution of Protestant identity in Brazil, analysing its role in Brazilian public space. It was identified that the modern feature of the reformatory movement created in the “late modernization” of Brazil another culture of participation of Protestants in public space. After this, we reflected on the contemporary dilemmas of the participation of Protestants in Brazilian public space with an especial emphasis on the changes resulted from the emergence of Neopentecostals. It was pointed the dubious character of the participation of Protestants in politics in contemporary Brazil – through a critical ecumenical movement or through a political conservative evangelical movement. The last item reflected on the challenges of Protestant churches in their relationship with the contemporary civil society, especially through the engagement of Church Related Organizations. Giving the economic and political crisis referred to at the introduction of the article, it is important now to prescribe some ways for theological reflection aiming to identify suitable ways to understand the role of the church in the contemporary crisis of capitalism. Having as ideological background the assumption that, in order to create a more just society, capitalism has to be overcome, we point to the construction of an apocalyptic theology<sup>18</sup>. Although we point to some possible results in terms of continuous theological reflection, the main focus here has been the critical reflection on the political responsibility of the Protestant churches specifically from Brazilian reality.

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18 As this article is part of a wider research, the topic will be further developed in other articles. Here, our emphasis is to address the problematic from Brazilian reality. Next steps will include the same procedure from South African reality and, finally, some reflections, in the systematic theology point of view, on what can be understood as an apocalyptic theology for the end of capitalism.

Therefore, we conclude this reflection suggesting some elements that could guide the protestant churches in taking over their political responsibility towards the celebration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation. We understand that it is time for an eschatological theology that criticizes the world from the perspective of the Kingdom of God, identifying the “quotidian *Eschata*” (Westhelle 2012, p. 91) and developing eschatological practices for the everyday struggle (p. 119), in order to “unveil the Empire” (Howard & Gwyther 1999): an apocalyptic theology for the end of capitalism.

This theology has to address the following questions:

- 1) Initially, it is necessary to understand that the modern and liberal democracy – which accompanied capitalism – is unable to create another reality. Democracy needs to be deeply reconfigured with a transformation of the structures of the inter/national political institutions that are at service of the maintenance of the actual system with its vices and unequal patterns (Guizardi 2016). Democracy has to be decolonized (Mignolo & Arturo 2013) by a “destituent power”<sup>19</sup>, as Agamben (2013) claims.
- 2) This destituent power must be strategized and formulated from the grounded experience of these social movements (Castells 2012). Theology must become a “theology of the multitude”, as established by Rieger and Pui-Lan (2012, p. 57), occupying the public space. Chung, Duchrow and Nesson write that, “as governments at present are responding to the deep crises of humanity and earth by trying to repair the dominating system, all forces working for alternatives are called to increase their efforts and build alliances” (2011, p. xi). There is a political persecution by the national state, criminalizing social movements, implementing a “permanent state of exception”, again according to Agamben’s public lecture<sup>20</sup>. Churches must

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19 The notion of destituent power can be found on <http://www.chronosmag.eu/index.php/g-agamben-for-a-theory-of-destituent-power.html> (Last access on 17 February 2017).

20 Many examples make it clear, in Brazil and South Africa. One of them is certainly the criminalization of the youth struggles. In Brazil, the state represses strongly the “occupying schools movement”. <http://www.politize.com.br/ocupacoes-de-escolas-entenda/> Last access on 20 January 2017. In South Africa there is an abuse of police/state power against #FeesMustFall movement, portraying students as criminals and strongly repressing the freedom of manifestation [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/23/world/africa/fees-must-fall-anatomy-of-the-student-protests-in-south-africa.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/23/world/africa/fees-must-fall-anatomy-of-the-student-protests-in-south-africa.html?_r=0) Access on 20 January of 2017.



join, express support and solidarity for these movements because they are an important space to live out a different kind of democracy.

3) There is a strong movement re-creating what Boaventura de Souza Santos calls a global “Social Fascism” (2007). With the exit of England from the European Union and the racist discourses that sustained this move and not at least, with Donald Trump’s election and his clear and unashamed xenophobic discourse, this can be seen in the immigrant crisis in Europe and the xenophobic discourses that arose with it. In such an environment, the churches and their theological reflection must strongly defend human rights, defending minorities and protecting the most vulnerable of societies and their basic rights. We cannot foster racism, xenophobia and any type of prejudice or inciting violence, as many churches easily do. Churches have to commit themselves permanently to the promotion of rights and justice for women, LGBTTTI people, indigenous populations, black people, and criminalized youth, religious and cultural minorities, promoting understanding, respect and tolerance.

4) Lastly, churches have to stand against Capitalism. Especially in its financial and vociferous neoliberal form. A recent report by Oxfam, an international organization that works with issues of economic inequality, has showed how inequality has exploded in the last few years<sup>21</sup>:

New estimates show that just eight men own the same wealth as the poorest half of the world. As growth benefits the richest, the rest of society – especially the poorest – suffers. The very design of our economies and the principles of our economics have taken us to this extreme, unsustainable and unjust point.

All this points to what Žižek (2015) calls a “zero point”, in which capitalism will destroy itself from within, from its own self-destructing tendency, which was already identified by Karl Marx. Theology has a word to say to the reality in such circumstances. It draws from the scriptures and from the theological tradition to affirm that capitalism is not a last reality, is not the last word to be said about humanity. Theology can articulate the imagination of something new, the prophetic announce of a different world, building on the experience of God that emerges and transforms

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21 <https://www.oxfam.org/en/tags/inequality>

reality radically, breaking all human projects. Therefore, we suggest the need to develop an apocalyptic theology for the end of capitalism, by which we develop symbols fostered by renewed praxis, new economic relations that overcome the very modern, colonial and unjust relations established by Capitalism. By this, may God allow us to be part of the transformation: “The Empire of the World has become the empire of our Lord and of his Messiah!” (Rev. 11:15–18).

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