

Preliminary Program

11 June

Public Event in Dutch. Communication of research findings to a large public

12 and 13 June

Keynote lectures by Matthew Engelke (London School of Economics and Political Science), Lewis Rambo (San Francisco Theological Seminary), Simon Coleman (University of Sussex, to be confirmed)

Presentation of findings research programme Conversion Careers and Culture Politics in Pentecostalism directed by André Droogers and funded by NWO's (Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research) program "The Future of the Religious Past" and by the Vrije Universiteit. Henri Gooren studied conversion to various (Neo-)Pentecostal churches and to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Nicaragua, Ikuya Noguchi looked into the transnational and local dynamics of the South-Korean Full Gospel Tokyo Church in Japan, Linda van de Kamp studied the culture politics of Brazilian Pentecostal Churches in Mozambique especially with regard to marriage, family and personhood, the work of Miranda Klaver is on experiences of conversion in the conversion narratives of Dutch Pentecostals and Evangelicals, and Regien Smit works on migrant Pentecostal churches in the Netherlands studying a Brazilian and a Portuguese-Angolan Pentecostal church.

Discussants and Presenters: Wonsuk Ma, Mel Robeck, Kwamena Asamoah-Gyadu, Catherine Wanner, Rijk van Dijk, Birgit Meyer, Martijn Oosterbaan, Marleen de Witte, Zé d'Abreu

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<http://www.hollenwegercenter.net> <http://pentecost.religionresearch.org/>

Conversion and Time in Global Pentecostalism: a lifelong 'live' experience

Conference

VU University Amsterdam

11-13 June 2008

*Research Program
'Conversion Careers and
Culture Politics in Global
Pentecostalism'*

The conference seeks to explore new directions for the study of conversion looking specifically to Pentecostalism. The need for new directions emerged out of the work of the research program *Conversion Careers and Culture Politics in Global Pentecostalism* at the VU University in Amsterdam. In this program all researchers studied the meaning, experience and function of conversion in various Pentecostal churches all over the world.

In this conference we seek to bring together different perspectives of local settings in the global encounter between Pentecostalism and cultures (for example culture as modernity, culture as neo-liberalism, culture as individualism and culture as migration). In considering our specific cases, our aim is to discuss how conversion and the construction of time work together in a mutually constitutive dynamic. Thinking of recent debates on conversion as change or as continuity (Cannell 2005, Engelke 2004, Robbins 2007) we propose conversion to be a lifelong experience beyond the important notions of rupture and radical change while acknowledging them to be important elements in conversion stories and experiences. It is the continuous appeal to change and the recurrent negotiation of the present, past and future in conversion processes we want to stress in order to move away from time-restrained models. In that sense conversion is not only a *lifelong* but also a continuously *'live'* experience, i.e. 'in the here and now'. We believe that perceptions of time in Pentecostal practices are a powerful instrument in a world where people seem to be captured by culture and identity politics of flows and closures (Antze and Lambek 1996 and Meyer & Geschiere 1999). It is through conversion that converts and converters understand culture and personal lives. In all the Pentecostalism we study, conversion and the making of *time* and its various *temporalities* are reciprocally implicated in new and powerful ways, which, we feel, demand constructive scholarly engagement.

By emphasizing the mutually constitutive relationship between conversion and time, we propose to consider the dynamic from multiple perspectives:

- 1) We suggest a focus on the particular ways converts experience and address time and temporalities, i.e. past, present and future in their construction of a (new) Pentecostal identity. How do they themselves shape their life trajectories? In addressing the concept of 'live', we focus on conversion as continuously experienced in the 'here and now'. What does this mean for the aspect of continuity and change in processes of conversion? How are the politics of memory in the specific context of the society (post-colonial, post-war, or post-modern), of the convert's life and of the converters connected to conversion? What is the view about one's present and future life? Does conversion also have a social agenda? If the state of conversion is continuously re-experienced, what does this mean

for the signification and impact of 'conversion' and for its analytical strength as a concept?

- 2) We also want to consider the embodiment of temporalities in the process of conversion. How is the body an important medium for conversion? In which ways converts use their body to experience, to express and to internalize conversion? And what about the connection of the person's conversion and the position in the world and the role of the body in positioning oneself?
How much is the Pentecostal project related to neo-liberalism and modern consumerism, also in terms of behavior of the converts? (Weber 1958, Campbell 1987)
- 3) We further suggest rethinking the relationship between time and space in conversion. What locations do implicate conversion experiences in the eyes of the converts? How do certain spaces of life and of society become dangerous and forbidden or permissible? In what ways do Pentecostals use public space? How do converts perceive Pentecostalism as a space? Here we want to link our thoughts with the discussion on religious market. Is the concept of the religious market adequate to understand the relationships between converts and religious groups? Would the notion of a shared cultural space give us more hold of the ways converts move between various spaces? Conferences, concerts, healing rooms, prayer camps, healers, specific music and books are all part of what we could call a shared Pentecostal space. This space can be virtual as well. How do converts move in this space and how are differences addressed? What are boundaries and flows in global Pentecostalism? What do African, Asian, Latin American and European Pentecostals have in common? What are the main differences between them?

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Campbell, Colin (1987) *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*. Blackwell Publishers.

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Engelke, Matthew (2004) Discontinuity and the discourse of conversion. *Journal of Religion in Africa* 34 (1): 82-109.

Meyer, B. & P. Geschiere (1999) *Globalization and Identity. Dialectics of Flow and Closure*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Robbins, Joel (2007) Continuity of Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture Belief, Time and the Anthropology of Christianity. *Current Anthropology* 48 (1): 5-17.

Weber, Max (1958) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by Talcott Parsons. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.