Time to Move On

Pentecostal Church Shifting and Religious Competition in Contemporary Chile

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A remarkable thing I have noticed about many of the Chilean Pentecostals I have come to know over the years is the frequency with which they shift church. I have met several Pentecostals in their fifties or sixties who have belonged to six or seven different Pentecostal denominations during their “conversion careers” (Gooren 2010a, 2010b) and with the exception of congregants from the Evangelical Pentecostal Church, one of the oldest and most tradition-bound denominations in the country, I have met few Pentecostals over 35 who were life-long members of a single denomination.

Another observation I have made, which in the light of the first one, may be rather unsurprising, is that many Chilean Pentecostals (again with the exception of members of the Evangelical Pentecostal Church) place relatively little emphasis on their attachment to particular denominations. By this I do not mean that Pentecostals are not committed to congregational life (many certainly are), or that they do not form strong bonds to fellow congregants (many certainly do) or that they do not find regular church attendance important (many certainly do). Nor do I mean that Pentecostals are unwilling to take on different responsibilities within their churches (many certainly do so). What I do mean is that they rarely describe their own religious self-identity as born-again Pentecostals as being bound up on membership of a particular denomination but rather identify themselves as
evangelicals (evangelícos) or simply as Christians (thereby implying that Catholics are not real Christians). Many Pentecostals make a clear distinction between religion, referring to institutionalized religious life, and spirituality, referring to a personal connection with God/Jesus. A similar observation has been made by the Chilean sociologist of religion Miguel Mansilla who points to a subjective turn among Chilean Pentecostals, a process he relates to religious pluralism and competition, to privatization of religion and finally to increasing individualism in Chilean society (Mansilla 2008). To be sure, Pentecostals often speak highly of their current denomination, their pastor and of the love and warmth of church communities. But many also tend to consider the denomination in which they participate to be a good place for them to congregate here and now, and they generally remain open to the idea of moving on to another church in the future.

Why do Pentecostals leave their church and often, but not always, join a new one? What does frequent church shifting tell us about Pentecostal religion and perhaps about religion in general in contemporary Chile? And how do “suppliers” of Pentecostal religion respond to a situation where those representing the “demand side” are, to use an analogy from the world of romance and dating, not necessarily looking for “Mrs. Right” but rather for “Mrs. Right Now.” These are questions that have so far received far too little attention from scholars on Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity in Latin America. The existing literature has been very generous and detailed in exploring possible reasons why Latin American Catholics decide to join a Pentecostal church in the first place and pointed to several factors that may explain continued church membership (in the introduction to this book I provide a brief outline of scholarly explanations of Pentecostal growth in Latin America and I shall not repeat myself here). Elsewhere I have tried to broaden the focus a little by also looking at why and how persons who are born and raised within Chilean Pentecostal denominations eventually convert from nominal to committed born-again Pentecostals (see chapter 8 in this volume, see also Lindhardt 2012a). But as mentioned Chileans (and Latin Americans) do not just join Pentecostal
churches. They also very frequently leave them again, either to join a new Pentecostal church, or to go back to secular or Catholic life.

Based on long term research in the neighboring cities of Vaparaíso and Viña del Mar in central Chile¹ this chapter explores processes of church leaving among Pentecostals and further examines how the competition between “suppliers” in Chile’s religious markets has been affected by a growing group of new potential customers, the already converted Pentecostals who consider — or are at least open to the idea of — finding a new place to congregate. I have conducted field work in various Pentecostal denominations including the Assemblies of God (see chapter 8), but in this chapter I mainly draw on findings from two churches, which will serve as points of comparison, the Evangelical Pentecostal Church (EPC) and Christo tu Unica Esperanza (Christ Your Only Hope)². Among Chile’s Evangelical population the EPC is known as a representative of traditional Pentecostalism. Congregants rarely use this term to describe themselves, but they do not object to it either and do not consider it to be derogatory. On the contrary they take pride in being recognized by others as old school Pentecostals. The EPC is one of the oldest and most conservative and tradition-bound denominations in the country (see Lindhardt 2012a). Strict rules for clothing, physical appearance and personal conduct prevail and the church is strongly opposed to any involvement in politics. The consumption of alcohol is strictly forbidden and in the 1990s members were not supposed to watch television, though that has changed by now. Except for an organ no musical instruments are used in services. Many congregants were born and raised within this church and most of those who at one point in their lives converted from Catholicism have never assisted other Pentecostal denominations. In other words, the EPC gains very few members from other Pentecostal churches, whereas several congregants have left the church to join other Pentecostal churches since I started my research in 1999.
*Cristo tu Unica Esperanza* is better described as a prosperity-oriented neo-Pentecostal denomination. In this church members are allowed to dress as they wish; several members allow themselves to drink a glass of wine from time to time; there is more tolerance of divorce than in the EPC and the church has a band with electric instruments whose performances are usually accompanied by a power point show. Unlike the EPC concerns with eschatology are remarkably absent from sermons in *Cristo tu Unica Esperanza* though they did frequently pop up in my conversations with congregants. The pastors put a good deal of emphasis on prosperity, success and material blessings in the here and now, and some sermons are reminiscent of motivational speeches with congregants being encouraged to explore their own potentialities, adopt a winner mentality and not allow themselves to be discouraged by the negativity and pessimism of others. The church has been present in Valparaíso and Viña del Mar since 2006 and a majority (more than 80 percent) of congregants has belonged to other Pentecostal churches, including the EPC, before joining it.

In my examination of church shifting and my comparison of the EPC and *Cristo tu Unica Esperanza* I draw on Laurence Iannaccone’s definition of strict churches that demand adherence to a distinctive morality, faith and life style, place severe restraints on the conduct of members, condemn deviance and repudiate the outside world (Iannaccone 1994:1182-84). Iannaccone’s well know argument is that strict churches are stronger because they raise the level of commitment and participation, enhance benefits of membership and make free riding difficult. However, Iannaccone does not develop a simplistic the-stricter-the-better argument but acknowledges that beyond a certain point excessive demands and increased strictness will drive away current members and scare off potential ones (ibid.: 1201-1202). He further notes that very strict churches are not for everyone. Those most likely to accept a church’s severe restraints on personal conduct and on social participation with non-members are generally those with the least to loose (ibid: 1200).
A glance at the history of Chilean Pentecostalism provides some support for Iannaccone’s argument. For most of the twentieth century, most Pentecostal churches were characterized by social encapsulation, relatively high levels of tensions with the surrounding society and not least by marked anti-political stances. Pentecostalism mainly appealed to the impoverished sectors of society such as urban migrants, wrenched out of rural worlds, who were searching for new communities and whose marginal status within Chilean society meant that they had little to lose by joining a church that maintained high levels of tension with that society (Willems 1967; Lalive D’epinay 1969; Sepúlveda 2011). But contemporary Chile is, in significant ways, different from the Chile that early sociologist (Lalive D’epinay 1969; Willems 1967) wrote about. Poverty and not least extreme poverty has been reduced since the restoration of democracy in 1990 and though Pentecostals are still relatively poorer than other Chileans, many of them are by many standards better off than Pentecostals in Chile were thirty to sixty years ago (see Fediakova this volume; Fediakova and Parker 2009). Besides the range Pentecostal options in Chile’s religious market has greatly increased. The EPC and Cristo tu Unica Esperanza can be seen as representatives of two major categories of denominations in Chile, the traditional, conservative and strict denominations and the neo-Pentecostal denominations that are less strict, less ascetically focused, less restraining of the conduct of members, more effusive in their services and place less emphasis on a tension with the surrounding society. In an overwhelming majority of cases of church shifting that I have recorded, the movement was from a strict church to a less strict church or between churches with similar degrees of strictness.

In other words there appears to be a new demand for a less strict kind of Pentecostal religiosity in contemporary Chile. This demand needs to be taken into account in an analysis of religious market competition. Theories of religious markets and religious economies were originally developed by sociologists with an interest in the United States (Berger 1967; Iannaccone 1992; Finke and Stark
1992) but it is little wonder that such theories have been picked up by scholars working on transformations of Christianity in Latin America (see the chapters by Chesnut and Hunt in this volume, see also Chesnut 1997, 2003; Gill 1999; Gooren 2010a; Stark and Smith 2012; Lindhardt & Thorsen 2015). From being known as a quintessentially Catholic continent, Latin America has within the last three quarters of a century become a highly pluralistic region, characterized by various ways of being Christian and not least by fierce competition between different Christian denominations. Chile, which together with Brazil is the most Pentecostalized country in South America (the highest percentages of Pentecostals and other Protestants in Latin America are found in Central American countries such as El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala) represents no exception to this pattern. Protestants now make up more than 25 percent of the country’s population and an estimated 85 percent of Chilean Protestants are Pentecostals (see Gooren’s contribution to this volume). Chile’s Protestant population is distributed among several hundred if not thousands of different denominations. Although there is no institutional unity among Protestants, many especially Pentecostal Christians, do feel that they belong to one large community of evangélicos, a feeling reflected by the apparent ease with which they shift from one church to another and by their enjoyment of Evangelical radio programs with sermons and teachings by pastors from different denominations.

The main focus in the existing literature tends to be on competition between Pentecostal and Catholic suppliers of Christian religion. Thus several studies have shown how Pentecostalism appeals to Latin Americans by offering a different kind of religiosiety (including healing experiences) and a different kind of religious community and social participation and by promoting a different gender relations than the Catholic Church (Burdick 1993; Lehmann 1996; Chesnut 1997). More recently scholars have also argued that the explosive growth of the Catholic Charismatic movement in different Latin American countries should be seen as a response to
Pentecostal competition (Cleary 2011; Stark and Smith 2012; Thorsen 2015, this volume; Lindhardt and Thorsen 2015). However, even though the rise of neo-Pentecostal denominations that offer an alternative to traditional and more other-worldly Pentecostal churches has not gone unnoticed by scholars (Chesnut 2003; Mansilla 2006, 2007, 2008; Oviedo 2006, 2009; Garrard-Burnett 2012), church shifting and the fierce competition between different Pentecostal groups are still understudied phenomena. For instance, it is worth noticing that the few studies of religious disaffiliation in Latin America that do exist mainly provide information about people who drop out of Protestantism all together and return to the Catholic Church or simply to a life without institutionalized religion (see Bowen 1996; Cleary 2004; Gooren 2010a; Gross 2012). But there is not much on Latin Americans who leave one Pentecostal church in order to join another.

However, the kind of Pentecostal de-affiliation that does not lead to a return to Catholic or secular life, but rather to affiliation with another Pentecostal church is very common and should be explored further. In contemporary Chile, new Pentecostal churches pop up on a regular basis but the number of new converts does not grow fast enough to fill them, which means that the competition between Pentecostal/charismatic ministries is, to some extent, becoming something of a zero-sum game where ministries can mainly grow and thrive through "sheep-stealing". The overall story of Chilean and Latin Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity is one of growth, expansion and mass conversion, often at the expense of the Catholic Church, but stories of particular Pentecostal denominations are sometimes stories of declining membership, internal struggles, divisions, crisis and dissolutions. For many ministries retaining members probably presents a greater challenge and concern than gaining new ones.

In this chapter I argue that a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the religious market in contemporary Chile requires that attention be paid to Pentecostal church shifters as a particular category of religious “consumers” or “customers”. As noted by Gooren (2010a:55-56) the religious
market model mostly focuses on the “supply side” whereas demand is often conceived of as being more or less constant or reduced to a matter of purely individual taste. But religious demands can vary significantly, not only between societies, between different historical periods and between generations but also during the life course of individuals. While supply-side models have proven to be useful in terms of explaining the behavior and techniques of recruitment of religions institutions, Gooren argues that what is needed is an approach that systematically explores and analyzes “the connection between the individual demands of religious believers and the supply of competing religious firms” (ibid: 63, emphasis in original). It is such an approach that I adopt in the present chapter. What I argue in particular is that Pentecostal “customer demands” in Chile are changing with many contemporary Pentecostals opting for less strict churches. I further argue that an analysis of the supply side needs to move beyond a focus on how Pentecostalism represents an alternative to Catholicism and instead pay more attention to how Pentecostal denominations compete with each other, not only over potential Catholic converts, but increasingly over the already converted Pentecostals who may be on the lookout for a new church. In the last part of the chapter focus is on Cristo tu Unica Esperanza. This church has successfully defined a niche for itself within Chile’s religious market by specializing in “picking up” already converted Pentecostals who were dissatisfied with the church in which they formerly congregated. Examining this church, its recruitment techniques and principles of congregational life will be helpful in terms of understanding how some providers of Pentecostal institutional religiosity respond to new kinds of religious competition and to the demands of new group of religious “customers.”

**Leaving Pentecostal churches**
As mentioned, we know a good deal about why Latin Americans join Pentecostal churches in the first place but a lot less about why they leave them again and, in many cases, join new ones. Of course, the mere fact that so many Pentecostal options are now available can take us some way in understanding the frequency of church shifting. An urban Latin American Pentecostal who is for one reason or another unhappy in his or her current denomination will always have an alternative just around the corner. I have met several Chilean Pentecostals who told me that they shifted church for practical reasons such as the wish to find a denomination close to their home. Many of my Pentecostal informants have also explained to me that they had at some point in their lives moved to a new city where they started looking for some Pentecostal denomination to congregate, but not necessarily the same as the one they used to assist.\(^4\) Several other informants told me about dissolutions of the Pentecostal churches they used to assist, in many cases caused by sexual scandals involving a pastor or by misuse of church funds.

Processes of routinization can also motivate Pentecostals to look for new places to congregate. In so far as high levels of effervescence or emotional energy generated in worship are one of the main attractions of Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity (Robbins 2011, Jennings 2015), people are likely to be disappointed in periods where things appear to cool down a little. “La iglesia se enfrió” (the church cooled down) was the explanation of Carmen\(^5\), a woman who left a Pentecostal Church called Visión Mundial de la Familia and joined Cristo tu Unica Esperanza four years before I interviewed her (in 2013). She added that there used to be an intense search for spiritual experiences in Visión Mundial de la Familia and that manifestations of the Holy Spirit during services for instance in the form of glossolalia and prophecies, were common but that eventually things started to quiet down and become more routine. In other cases unfulfilled expectations in networks of mutual support may motivate people to leave a church. A few informants explained to me that at one point they had gone through a period of distress, related to illness or unemployment, in which
they came to church on a less regular basis, and that they were extremely disappointed that none of their fellow congregants had offered any kind of support.

In my interviews with church shifters many also cited intra-church conflicts and gossip as reasons for their decision to leave a given church. In many cases conflicts were related to theological disagreements and in particular to a widespread tension within Pentecostal denominations between individual freedom in the spirit and submission to manmade rules and church authorities. As has been noted by a few scholars, the Pentecostal emphasis on individual experience and on direct inspiration and guidance from God and the Holy Spirit sometimes clashes with the need to impose a certain institutional order (see Percy 1998; Lindhardt 2012a). In 2008 I interviewed a woman, Alicia, who used to congregate in the EPC before moving on to the Assemblies of God, and from there to numerous other churches. In the EPC women are not allowed to wear makeup and they must have long hair and always wear long skirts. As she was approaching thirty Alicia became increasingly frustrated that no man had presented himself in her life. She started to suffer from low self-esteem and felt very unattractive with her long hair, pale and unrouged face and long skirts. At one point she prayed to God and asked him what she could do to feel better about herself. After a short while, she heard an internal voice saying “cut your hair.” She took the advice as she felt confident that it came from God. Besides, she had never been fully convinced that her heavenly father did not want her to make herself a little more appealing by cutting her hair, wearing jeans or wearing a little make up. But the pastor and the leader of the women group in the church were both infuriated and Alicia was told that she would not be allowed to participate in an excursion with the youth of the church.

Laila from *Cristo tu Unica Esperanza* told me that she had left another Pentecostal denomination (the first one she joined after converting from Catholicism) after the pastor scolded her for attending an interdenominational revivalist seminary in Santiago without his permission. Laila felt that her
assistance at this seminary was an important part of God’s plan for her and that it would mature her spiritually. In her view the pastor was in no position to question God’s plans. In Cristo tu Unica Esperanza she felt she had more freedom to pursue her own spiritual growth. Margarita, another woman who, like Carmen, had left Visión Mundial de la Familia and joined Cristo tu Unica Esperanza told me that she sometimes got prophetic messages from God before or during services. In Visión Mundial de la Familia the pastor was not very keen on changing the program of the service in order to let her share the message that she received with the congregation. In Cristo tu Unica Esperanza, on the other hand, she felt free to approach the pastor before or during a service if she got a divine message and he would then either pass the message on to the congregation or allow Margarita to do so herself. Margarita felt that this kind of freedom to be used as instrument of God was very important for her personal spiritual growth.

Another woman, Beatrice, joined Cristo tu Unica Esperanza three weeks before I interviewed her in July 2013. She had lived in Concepción in southern Chile where she congregated in another denomination which she eventually left due to internal conflicts. Shortly after she moved to Valparaíso and joined Cristo tu Unica Esperanza after having heard about this church on the radio. Beatrice felt that God had called her to serve as a prophetess. It was therefore very important to her to be in a church where she could respond to the divine call and develop as a prophetess. She felt that God had sent her to Cristo tu Unica Esperanza so that she could learn and grow and mature spiritually, but she also suspected that he only planned to keep her in this church for a limited period of time. Although she felt confident that Cristo tu Unica Esperanza was the right church for her here and now and that she would definitely learn new things there, she was unsure if her continued spiritual development into a prophetess that God had planned for her would take place in this church.
Individualized religion in neoliberal Chile

The importance of personal spiritual growth was a recurrent theme in my interviews and informal conversations with church shifters. Many, including many of those who started out by citing practical concerns or conflicts within their previous denominations as the main reasons for moving on to a new one, also framed their own history of church shifting within a narrative of a divine plan that was intended to make them grow and mature spiritually.

The emphasis on personal spiritual growth rather than on communal congregational life is in many ways symptomatic of a neoliberal society where faith in grand political narratives has declined and individualism and consumerism have become dominant ideologies. A number of scholars have related the rise of individualism as one of the most important “isms” of Chilean society to the weakening of civil and political society and the implementation of neoliberal reforms during Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship (1973-1990) and not least to the decisions of subsequent democratic governments to carry on with the neoliberal policies they inherited from the regime (Portales 2000; Moulián 2002; Larrain 2005; Tironi 2005; Parker 2008; Lindhardt 2012c; Lindhardt and Kristensen 2012; Christoffani 2012). The regime implemented a far reaching policy of privatization and democratic governments have done little to reverse this process. With the privatization of health care, social security and education, the Chilean citizen has been transformed from being a political subject to being an individual consumer choosing among services. Scholars have further related the rise of consumerism as a dominant ideology within Chilean society to economic growth, the increased access to new consumer goods that resulted from new import policies in the 1980s and finally to a widespread credit card system of payment. A result of this system is that a large number of Chileans, especially from the lower social strata, have significant consumer debts. Critical voices have pointed out that such a pattern of consumption and debt is

Although caution should be applied in asserting direct causal connections, it seems reasonable to suggest that a culture of individualism and consumerism provides a fertile ground for a kind of religion that allows room for self-expression and is more focused on personal spiritual development than on institutional affiliation and submission to rules (see Parker 1998, 2008; Oviedo 2006; Mansilla 2008). The partial de-institutionalization of Chilean religious life is by no means confined to Pentecostalism but is probably even more prevalent among Catholics. In surveys on religious identification in Chile in the 1990s and in the first decade of the new millennium a large number or respondents chose to define themselves as Católico a mi manera (Catholic on my own terms) or as “believer without religion” (Paker 2008:292) Besides, research from different countries has shown that even practicing Latin American Catholics who do feel attached to the institutional Church tend to be selective in their appropriation of its teachings and largely ignore official ecclesial positions on issues such as contraception, premarital sex, divorce and re-marriage (Hagopian: 2009: 25–26).

A few scholars have used the analogies of shopping or consumerism to describe processes of religious mobility, disaffiliation and of picking and choosing between religious products in North and South America (Bibby 1987; Roof and McKinney 1987; Mauss and Perin 1991; Cleary 2004; Oviedo 2006; Mansilla 2008). The argument generally goes something like this: In a modern and individualized world where religious institutions have lost their power as a source of social cohesion and traditional denominational boundaries are eroded, Christian and other religious individuals are best seen as “shoppers” who are looking for a brand of religion that meets their particular needs at a particular time. Although the analogies of shopping and consumerism are useful and telling, other scholars have insisted on adding a note of caution before we push them too
far. Thus Steven Bruce (1993:204) argues that religion is not quite comparable to many of the other goods that shoppers can purchase. Having joined a religious institution people do tend to form an attachment that is deeper and more enduring than the attachments most of us have to our washing machines and PCs. Bruce proposes marriage as a more fitting analogy than consumerism. What has replaced lifelong monogamy, he argues, is not polygamy, but serial monogamy (ibid.). I think Bruce has a point. Although many Pentecostals in Chile shift church several times and are open to the idea of doing so again in the future, many certainly form attachments to their current congregation and its members. Leaving and moving on is an ever present possibility, but not a pre-given necessity. As in marriages, Chileans who have “relations” to a Pentecostal church are open to the idea that this could and might last forever. That being said, I would add that the idea that this should last forever is a more essential ingredient of a marriage than of a relationship between a Chilean Pentecostal and his or her current denomination. For Pentecostals what should last forever is their relationship with Jesus, but that does not depend on membership of a particular denomination.

As already mentioned Pentecostals often conceive of church shifting in terms of spiritual growth and divine planning. Although they do not use the term, I suggest that “career” is another possible and supplementary analogy that is probably more in sync with Pentecostals’ own understandings of moving between churches. It should be noted that I use the term in conventional work-related way that differs from Gooren’s definition of conversion career, referring to shifting levels of religious affiliation, activity and identification (Gooren 2010a, 2010b). In the world of work, a career is generally understood as progressive, by which is meant that it consists in moving up the ladder towards positions of higher incomes, more responsibility and prestige. But for many people a good career also has to do with a sense of personal realization and fulfilment. One can move up the ladder within a company, but in many cases the dynamic pursuit of a career also implies moving
from one company to another. Many college graduates do not necessarily expect the first job they get to also be the last one. Rather they consider their first workplace to be a good place to start a career, gain valuable experience and improve their curriculum so that they can later move on. Of course, we should also be careful not to push the career analogy too far. Pentecostals do not plan their religious careers in the same way as some people plan their secular careers, but prefer to leave planning in the hands of God. And people who join a Pentecostal church for the first time rarely see it as a mere point of departure for a religious career that should end somewhere else. But many Pentecostals do in retrospect see their affiliation with different churches as stages in their own spiritual growth. And as mentioned, many also consider their current congregation as a good place to be at a particular stage in their journey towards spiritual growth while at the same time remaining open to the idea of moving on in the future.

**Pentecostal on my own terms**

In the aforementioned surveys on religious identification in Chile in the 1990s and the 2000s respondents could define themselves “Catholic on my own terms” but there were no “Evangelical on my own terms” or “Pentecostal on my own terms” categories. As I have argued in the introduction to this volume, designers of future questionnaires would do well to include such categories. Although Pentecostals generally assist church on a more regular basis than Catholics and tend to be more committed to the faith stances and moral standards of their congregations, exceptions to this rule do exist. And for church shifters, whose faith stances and religious identities are shaped by previous church membership, joining a new Pentecostal church does not necessarily imply buying the whole packet, so to speak. For instance, a person who decides to join a prosperity oriented ministry does not necessarily have to be convinced that material prosperity is an important
part of God’s plan for human beings. Within churches, there can be considerable theological
differences of opinion, for instance on divorce, the use of musical instruments in worship, clothing,
prosperity and not least on the mixture of Pentecostal religion and politics (see Lindhardt 2012b).

Besides, in contemporary Chile the increased availability of Pentecostal/Evangelical mass media
(literature and pamphlets, radio programs, web sites, foreign television channels) means that
Pentecostals may find religious inputs from a variety of sources other from their church. And some
Chileans who define themselves as Evangelicals/Pentecostals do not belong to a church or are only
loosely affiliated to one. Leaving a Pentecostal church does not necessarily imply joining another
one right away, or at all, and several of the church shifters I have interviewed had gone through
periods as churchless believers before finding a new denomination. José, a man in his fifties told me
that three years passed from he left the church Centro Mundial de la Familia before he joined
another Pentecostal Church, Dios es Amor. In that period he kept his faith alive by reading the Bible
every day, listening to Evangelical radio stations and going to public squares where Pentecostals
preach on Sundays. Eventually he felt the need to congregate and joined a Pentecostal church called
Dios es Amor and when he left that church after two years he immediately joined Cristo tu Unica
Esperanza.

There are, in other words, many ways of being Pentecostal in contemporary Chile. As an example
of an individual believer whose religious trajectory has passed through different phases I will
introduce the reader to a friend of mine, Veronica, whom I first met in 2000 and who was 34 years
old when I last interviewed her in July 2013. Veronica grew up in a Pentecostal family. Her parents
were lifelong members of the EPC, and when growing up Veronica and her 11 brothers and sisters
assisted the church and participated in the Sunday school. Her father died a few years back, but her
mother and all her brothers and sisters, except one, were still active and committed church
members. Most of her siblings had found spouses within the church. As a teenager Veronica
distanced herself from the church and lived a “normal,” though, she stressed, “not all that wild” teenage life with parties and friendships. At this point she also started wearing jeans and make-up, something that women in the EPC are not supposed to do. For years she only visited the church on very rare occasions and always sat in the back. But at the age of twenty she had a powerful religious experience when she on one occasion accompanied her mother to the church. After that she decided that the time had come to commit fully to Christ and to the church she grew up in. After the church meeting where she had the religious experience she went home, found a scissor and cut all her jeans into pieces and she further threw out all her make up. She described the transformation as a very radical one, and for a couple of years the main focus in her life was on spiritual growth and on exploring and strengthening her relationship with Christ. At the time of her reentry into the church she was studying computer science at a technical institute, but eventually she decided to drop out as she found that her focus on spiritual growth was incompatible with a secular study environment. For Veronica re-entering the church and becoming a committed born-again Pentecostal also implied social rupture with previous friends from outside the church.

After three years as a committed church member, Veronica started to grow a little tired with the rigidness of the EPC. Eventually she met a young Catholic man who became her secret boyfriend, but when she became pregnant the secret came out. Veronica never considered abortion. Her pregnancy resulted in certain sanctions in the church. During a Sunday meeting the pastor publicly announced that she had committed a sin and would no longer be permitted to sing in the church choir. That was a very painful moment for Veronica, and even though understood that her acts could not go unpunished and did not blame the pastor for the public humiliation she did start to distance herself from the church. Soon after her baby daughter was born he split up with her boyfriend and continued to live in the house of her parents where she raised the child. She also started working in a mall and soon adapted to the “worldly” ways of her new work environment.
She cut her hair short, started wearing makeup and trousers again and occasionally went out with her colleagues. After a while she found a new boyfriend at work, also a Catholic, and got pregnant once more. She is now living with her two children and the father of the youngest child in a small rented house.

For a couple of years Veronica did not assist the EPC at all. Yet during that period she did not stop to define herself as a believer and an evangélico. She started drinking a little alcohol from time to time, but never got drunk and she never swears. Before moving in with her boyfriend she lived with her two children in her mother’s house. When the second child, a boy, was an infant, he fell seriously ill. He would sometimes lose conscience and his eyes looked very strange. Veronica suspected that he was being attacked by demonic forces. At that point she had not moved in with her boyfriend yet but still lived in with her mother and some of her brothers and sisters, and she asked them to come to her room and pray for liberation. She is still wondering if the fact the boy was born outside of marriage could be the reason that he was so vulnerable to demonic attacks.

As mentioned Veronica now lives with the father of the second child, but it troubles her a good deal that he has not proposed to her, as she is well aware that living together as husband and wife without actually being married is a sin. She does however find comfort in the belief that God knows her intentions. Thus she explained to me that “por lo menos el señor sabe que en mi corazón esta la intención de casarme” (at least the Lord knows that the intention of getting married is in my heart). When Veronica is home she mostly listens to Evangelical radio stations and Evangelical music, but only on rare occasions to secular music. When her oldest child turned 6, Veronica started to worry about giving the girl a proper Christian upbringing. Veronica receives some financial support from the father and is therefore able to send her daughter to a private Evangelical (Presbyterian) primary school. Furthermore, Veronica started assisting the Sunday School (on Sundays from 10 AM to 12 PM) in the EPC, where there are special classes for children. She is, however, determined that she
will not become a full time member of this church again. Veronica is highly critical of the conservativeness and excessive rule-boundedness of this church and feels that being a proper Christian is by no means incompatible with wearing jeans or make-up (she always wears a skirt when she goes to church). She has on a few occasions visited the Assemblies of God where rules for clothing and physical appearance are considerably more relaxed and where services are generally more lively and effusive, and she feels much more at home in this church. She told me that if she were ever to become a full-time church member again, a thought that has crossed her mind on several occasions, it would have to be in the Assemblies of God or in a similar denomination. However, for now she has decided to be a part-time member of the IEP because her mother, brothers and sisters all belong to this church and her daughter greatly enjoys meeting her cousins whenever she comes to church.

Veronica would, without doubt, define herself as an Evangelical in a national survey (or as a Pentecostal if such a category was included in surveys). Her story can easily be related to Gooren´s model of conversion careers (2010a, 2010b) as it portrays changing levels of commitment and affiliation as well as eventual de-affiliation. Although she has spent a good deal of her post-conversion adult life (here I see her decision to become a committed church member after having had a powerful religious experience as her conversion) as unaffiliated or loosely affiliated, it is not difficult to detect certain continuity in her faith and her moral standards. She may not live up Pentecostal standards (she lives with a boyfriend without being married) but they do constitute a frame of reference for her evaluation of her current life, and not least for her interpretation of the illness of her child. While Veronica is an Evangelical-Pentecostal, she is so on her own terms. Her religious trajectory has been highly heterogeneous and her Pentecostal self-identity has been renegotiated throughout her conversion career. To a large extent she defines her own way of being
Pentecostal in opposition to the formalism, conservatism and rule-boundedness of the EPC where she still brings her daughter.

The story of Veronica is not atypical, or perhaps the most atypical thing about it is that she has so far not joined a new Pentecostal church but has instead chosen to become loosely re-affiliated with the EPC, though in her case strong networks to family members within that church provide a plausible explanation for this choice. But many other Pentecostal church leavers do end up in new churches. Veronica and many others like her belong to the new category of religious consumers in Chilean society that I have defined earlier, namely the already converted Pentecostals who are either unaffiliated or who are dissatisfied with their current denomination and who may therefore be on the lookout for a new place to congregate.

*Cristo tu Unica Esperanza: A church for the already converted Pentecostals.*

So how do suppliers of institutionalized Pentecostal religion in contemporary Chile respond to the demands of this particular group of religious customers? In the following we will have a closer look at Cristo tu Unica Esperanza a church, which as mentioned has gained ground on Chile’s religious market by specializing in picking up the already converted Pentecostals. It thus provides a marked contrast to a “traditional” Pentecostal church like the EPC where most members have never belonged to other Pentecostal denominations.

*Cristo tu Unica Esperanza* was founded in Santiago in 1986 after a schism within the Iglesia Pentecostal Trinitaria, which is one of Chile’s more conservative and traditional churches. The leader, Fernando Chaparro, was a police officer before he became a full time pastor of his new church. In addition to purchasing a building where congregants of his newly founded church could gather Chaparro started buying air time on radio channels in order to spread the message.
Eventually the church grew and opened new branches in different parts of Santiago and in other cities. Besides, Chaparro has managed to open his own radio station, *Radio Corporación*. This is one of the most popular Evangelical radio stations in the country and its listeners include Pentecostals from a variety of denominations. Due to his regular sermons and other kind of appearances on the radio Fernando Chaparro has now become something of trans-denominational Pentecostal media celebrity in Chile.

The branches of *Cristo tu Unica Esperanza* in Valparaíso and Viña del Mar were opened in 2006. Initially, Fernando Chaparro’s younger brother Marco Chaparro served as the pastor of both churches but in 2009 he decided to concentrate on the church in Viña and left the church in Valparaíso in the hands of another pastor. Marco, whom I have got to know quite well over the years, explained to me that the vision of his brother was to create a church that was less focused on rules, for instance for clothing, and more focused on the word of God than traditional Pentecostal churches. He added that his brother’s reading of the book of Psalms (the Old Testament) had led him believe that God wishes to bless his children materially in the here and now which is why prosperity is a dominant theme in the church.

The denominations in Valparaíso and Viña both count with 100-150 members. Most congregants belong to the lower or the lower middle classes but there are also a few persons with college degrees and a few relatively successful independent shop owners or mechanics in the churches, especially in Viña, which is a more affluent city than Valparaíso. Several of the young congregants study at universities or other institutes of tertiary education.

More than 80 percent of congregants have previously belonged to at least one and in some cases several Pentecostal churches. So why did they end up in *Cristo tu Unica Esperanza* and not in some other church? In many cases it had to do with the radio. Here Gooren’s distinction between conversion and affiliation (Gooren 2010b: 108) becomes important. Research on religious
conversion in Latin America and beyond almost unanimously emphasizes the importance of networks between members and non-members of a religious community. People are almost always drawn into new kinds of church or religious movement because they know someone within it (Rambo 1993; Smilde 2007; Gooren 2010a, this volume; Lindhardt 2012a). In Chile as elsewhere in Latin America Pentecostals now make extensive use of the radio in order to spread their message and invite people to their churches. But my own research in Chile shows that the number of Catholics who decide to visit a Pentecostal church in which they do not know anyone, simply because they heard about it on the radio, is close to zero (few Catholics even listen to Pentecostal radio programs). Catholics are usually introduced to Pentecostal churches through personal contacts (see Gooren’s chapter in this volume, see also Lindhardt 2012a). But once a person is converted and has adopted a Pentecostal world view, shifting to another Pentecostal church is a different story and is not to the same extent dependent on networks. In my interviews with church shifters no-one described shifting between Pentecostal churches as even remotely comparable to leaving Catholicism or the secular world behind in order to become a Pentecostal in the first place. The group of religious customers that I have identified in this chapter, namely the already converted Pentecostals, who are looking for a new place to congregate (and sometimes prefer one in which they have no history of animosity with other members) do often end up in a church such as Cristo tu Unica Esperanza in which they knew no one beforehand because they became aware of it through the radio. When branches of Cristo tu Unica Esperanza were founded in Valparaíso and Viña in 2006, the soil for their growth had already been fertilized by Radio Harmonia. Several congregants had been listening to the preaching of Fernando Chaparro on the radio during the 1990s and the 2000s, when they assisted other Pentecostal denominations. So when they eventually started looking for a new church to congregate and learned that Cristo tu Unica Esperanza had opened branches in Valparaíso and Viña, checking one of them out was an obvious option.
In other words, the use of the radio is only an efficient recruitment technique when it comes to a specific kind of religious customers. The concern of the church and its leaders with establishing a public presence is also reflected in the choices of church buildings. Cristo tu Unica Esperanza is not a local neighborhood church and it does not pretend to be. The EPC has church buildings all over Valparaíso and Viña. The church has a total of four main church buildings in these two cities, each with its own pastor. Each of these four churches has between six and ten local church buildings, los locales, in different neighborhoods where congregants living in those neighborhoods have church meetings on weekdays. The leaders of los locales are not pastors but ordinary lay members. One of the main church buildings of the EPC is located near downtown Valparaíso, but not in a crowded street with many shops. By contrast Cristo tu Unica Esperanza only has two buildings, one in a very crowded street with many shops in downtown Valparaíso, and one next to the central bus station in Viña. My interviews with congregants have shown that no one decided to visit Cristo tu Unica Esperanza simply because they passed by and noticed that the church was there. But the location of church buildings does reflect an ambition of reaching out to people by establishing a public and visible presence, rather than merely relying on local networks.

Flexible Pentecostalism

The kind of Pentecostal religiosity that is practiced in Cristo Tu Unica Esperanza is somehow more flexible and less standardized than in the EPC, making it easier to accommodate persons with different backgrounds and preferences. Many Pentecostals who end up in Cristo tu Unica Esperanza were looking for a less strict church than the one they used to belong to. At the same time the already converted Pentecostals who join new a church are influenced by previous religious socialization in other churches. In Cristo tu Unica Esperanza congregants are not expected to
become re-socialized into a particular Pentecostal identity; rather within certain limits room is allowed for different ways of being Pentecostal.

Like other neo-Pentecostal churches, *Cristo tu Unica Esperanza* is less ascetically focused and places much less emphasis on submission to pastoral authority than the EPC. In the latter church young couples who fall in love need to consult the pastor before starting a relationship (obviously there should be no sex before marriage). And a congregant who wishes to assist a bible course in another church also needs the permission of the pastor. This is not the case in *Cristo tu Unica Esperanza*. Furthermore, in this church there are no dress official dress codes and fewer explicit guidelines for a sanctified Christian life than in older and more conservative churches. Congregants from *Cristo tu Unica Esperanza* told me that they had never heard any instructions regarding alcohol, tobacco, and pre and extra marital sexual activities in the church. They would add that it was also pretty unnecessary to provide such instructions, as some things go without saying. Everyone knows how a proper Christian is supposed to behave, so there is no need for the pastor to remind congregants about that all the time. Nevertheless, the lack of explicit teachings does leave a little room for individual interpretations proper conduct. Thus several church members told me, unashamedly, that they did drink a little alcohol from some time (something I have never heard from a congregant from the EPC).

Divorce is another theme on which *Cristo tu Unica Esperanza* has a slightly more tolerant stance than many other Pentecostal churches. Though the pastor and most congregants agree that in theory no man should separate what God has put together many also recognize that “to death do you part” is an ideal that sometimes clashes with reality. In the EPC a person who is involuntarily left by his or her spouse should accept living alone. In *Cristo tu Unica Esperanza* divorce is not a matter congregants can afford to take lightly and they are expected to try very hard to make a marriage work. But in cases where divorce is inevitable, for instance if one spouse has left the other and
cannot by any means be persuaded to return, moving on and finding a new partner is acceptable. A couple of male congregants told me that they had been left by their wives, in part because the latter did not share their husbands’ passion for Pentecostal congregational life. Both men used to belong to churches where a man who is left by his wife is expected to simply accept a life in celibacy (one of them congregated in the EPC), and the wish to find a new partner was a main reason for their decision to move on. One of them explained to me that “the gospel is a gospel of second chances.” He blamed the pastors and the ordinary members of the EPC for not acknowledging that. In Cristo tu Unica Esperanza he had had consultations with Marco Chaparro who encouraged him to look for a new partner.

Living together without being married is also something Pentecostals are not supposed to do. But in the case of persons who are divorced or have broken up with a partner who is the father or mother of their children and where there can therefore be no illusion of virginity, moving in with a new partner is tolerated in Cristo tu Unica Esperanza, unlike in the EPC. Thus there are some couples in the church who live together without being married and some women who live with boyfriends who are not congregants. Such living arrangements do not affect their status within the church.

As previously explained the pastors of Cristo Cristo tu Unica Esperanza place a good deal on emphasis on material prosperity and success in the here and now in their sermons. But what struck me during my conversations with ordinary congregants was the remarkable absence of these themes. Congregants generally told me that they liked the pastor and his personality as well as his style of preaching. But when I asked explicitly about prosperity and success during interviews, some congregants answered that one should be careful in not being too concerned with material blessings whereas others expressed a moderate and relatively unenthusiastic support for the pastors’ message. But no one seemed to be buying wholeheartedly into the message of prosperity, winner
mentality and exploration of one’s own potentialities. However, the lack of wholehearted support for the pastors’ message was not perceived to be a problem. One older woman who had assisted four different churches before joining Crísto tu Unica Esperanza in Valparaíso told me that the pastor was really a very unimportant figure for her. She liked him, but had no intentions of becoming attached to him and found it very likely that she would move on to another church at a later point. Needless to say, too much outright disagreement with the pastors and the theology of the church would be a problem. But for many already-converted-Pentecostals, joining a new church does not necessarily imply a complete identification with its message or its pastors as long as they have a pleasant and welcoming place to congregate and are allowed some room for practicing their own way of being Pentecostal.

Testimonies

The lack of standardization in Crísto Unica Esperanza is particularly prevalent in the testimonies of salvation of congregants. Most Pentecostals in Chile (and elsewhere) have their own personal testimony about how and when they were “saved”. As noted by Ervin Goffman in his seminal study of Asylums (1961) institutions may exercise power over people by providing a restricted formula for the construction of self-stories. In the EPC I have noticed a remarkable standardization of conversion testimonies and an ongoing ritual training in the construction of such testimonies (Lindhardt 2012a). Most Pentecostal testimonies are structured around a particular turning point, which is when a person chooses to receive Christ as a personal savior. But in testimonies in the EPC, a church that maintains relatively high level with the surrounding society, the contrast between living in the “world” and being close to God is much more prevalent than in other churches. Also, congregants from the EPC generally describe the break with the “world” as radical
and clean, although testimonies do often include an account of a subsequent process of growing in faith. In the ritual life of the EPC church there are several occasions in which congregants are encouraged to go the pulpit and share their own testimony with the congregations. On Mondays church meetings are devoted to “sharing”, which means that congregants are expected to stand up, one by one, and thank God for that which he has done for them. They more often than not take this opportunity to share a story about divine intervention in their life or to tell a short version of their own testimony. Testimonies are also an important part of late night Saturday meetings (vigils) in the EPC. If the congregation in Valparaíso receives a visit from a church member from another part of the country he or she will often introduce him or herself by approaching the pulpit and sharing his/her testimony. Thus a personal and standardized testimony becomes something of a membership card in EPC. In *Cristo tu Unica Esperanza*, on the other hand, testimonies are not an integral part of ritual life. In my interviews with congregants I always asked for testimonies, and the extent to which they were structured around a difference between the “world” and the life with God varied significantly. Also, some respondents in *Cristo tu Unica Esperanza* would portray their conversion as a gradual process. One woman in her sixties told me that she was actually uncertain when she was truly saved by Jesus and that she was unable to point to any particular incident in her life that could be defined as a turning point. Such variation in testimonies provides a marked contrast to the EPC. But this kind of variation can be tolerated in *Cristo tu Unica Esperanza*, in part because testimonies are left out of “public” ritual church life.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have argued that an analysis of religious competition and religious supply in contemporary Chile needs to consider the emergence of a new kind of religious consumers or
customers, namely the already-converted Pentecostals who may be looking for new place to congregate. Drawing on Iannaccone's definition of strict churches I have further argued that there appears to be growing demand for a less strict kind of Pentecostal religiosity in Chile. This demand has to do, both with a general growth in individualism in Chilean society and more particularly with the number of Pentecostals whom we may refer to as "Pentecostals on their own terms" and who wish to congregate in a denomination that allows them to be so. In a context of increased religious pluralism and new kinds of religious competition a traditional Pentecostal church like the EPC appears to be losing some ground, even though there still are plenty of customers for the kind of religiosity this church offers. I hope to have demonstrated how a neo-Pentecostal denomination like Cristo tu Unica Esperanza has managed to come up with a relatively successful recipe for responding to new kinds of demands for Pentecostal religiosity.

This is not to say that Cristo tu Unica Esperanza does not lose members. It certainly does. When I returned to Chile in July 2013 after more than four years of absence, several of the congregants I knew were no longer worshipping in the church. Needless to say retaining members is important for any church, but probably a little less for a denomination like Cristo tu Unica Esperanza than for many others. What is, of course, very important for the church is to maintain a positive balance between losing members and gaining new ones. There is a significant in and out flow of members in Cristo tu Unica Esperanza, but when I returned to Chile in 2013 the congregations of both Viña and Valparaíso had experienced overall growth. When asked about ex-congregants who had moved on, the pastor and the congregants from Cristo tu Unica Esperanza generally did not regret having lost members as much as the pastor and congregants in the EPC. In Cristo tu Unica Esperanza the fact that congregants had moved on could easily be explained as part of a divine plan that would benefit their new denominations. Thus Sabina, a young woman from the church explained to me that “the lord has taken persons out of our church and established them in other churches”. People from the
EPC came up with no interpretations of this sort when speaking about the church shifting of their former co-congregants.

I am not trying to downplay or underestimate how concerned pastors and congregants of *Cristo tu Unica Esperanza* are with retaining existing members. Ordinary church members make significant contributions to congregational life, for instance by playing and singing in the church band, participating effusively in services, helping out in the church cafes, running and participating in the youth groups, organizing social events with meals, cleaning the church, paying tithes and offering spiritual advice to others. Obviously losing members who play an active role in congregational life can be a setback. Nevertheless, the fact that many congregants eventually move on is somehow considered a natural fact of life in a denomination, which has gained ground in Chile's religious market by appealing to the already converted Pentecostals who do not need a thorough religious re-socialization and who are mainly looking for a pleasant, tolerant and welcoming place to congregate at a particular stage in their religious career.

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These two cities are located at the coast, approximately 100 kilometers from Santiago. The center of Viña is about 8 kilometers north of the center of Valparaíso, and the two cities have grown together and can thus be said to constitute a single urban area of around 600,000 people.


As explained in chapter 8 in this volume, the level of education among Pentecostals has increased significantly within recent decades.

This does not apply to members of the EPC, who tend to look for a branch of their own church wherever they go. One friend of mine from the EPC in Valparaíso moved to Sao Paolo, Brazil in 2005 to do a Ph.D. The EPC has a branch in Sao Paolo, but it took a two hours bus ride to get there from my friend’s home. He nevertheless chose to spend a total of four hours in a bus each Sunday, together with his wife and child, rather than looking for another denomination close to his home. My friend is a lifelong member of the EPC; he was a youth leader in the church in Valparaíso before moving to Sao Paolo and upon his return to Valparaíso after some years he got a senior leadership position in the church.

All names of respondents are pseudonyms.

It would probably have to be “Evangelical on my own terms”. Of course, it would be tremendously helpful for scholars if statistic material on religious membership and self-identification in Latin America made clear distinctions between Pentecostals and other Evangelicals/Protestants. However, the problem is that many of the churches and congregants that scholars would identify as Pentecostals do not self-identify as such. One young man from Valparaíso told me that he had been a member of the Assemblies of God for two years before he realized how much this church had in common with traditional Pentecostals. In neo-Pentecostal denominations such as Cristo tu Única Esperanza members generally acknowledge their affinity with Pentecostalism, but they nevertheless mostly use the term Pentecostal to refer to traditional Pentecostal churches such as the IEP

It probably goes without saying that most traditional Pentecostals would disagree with the perception that they are not also focused on the world of God.

Despite several schisms the EPC is still one of the largest Pentecostal congregations in Chile.
Most Latin American content producers started producing content on YouTube as a way of experimenting their reach and style, pretty much like Khan Academy did back in 2006. But they quickly found out that they couldn't make a living with it.

Platzi: Previously known as Mejorando.la, this Y Combinator startup is the preferred destination for many students in Latin American who want to learn how to code.

veDuca: This Brazilian online video platform aims to democratize access to quality education via video lectures from universities worldwide.

On January 12, 2016, Grindr announced it had sold a 60% controlling stake in the company to Beiji 1 day ago.