“Guadalupe, Respóndeme!”:

Iconoclasm as Spiritual Warfare and Performative Testimony of Faith in Transnational Latin American Pentecostalism

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Abstract:

While the scholarship on Pentecostalism often focuses on glossolalia, healings or pneumatology, the material rejection of ‘idolatrous’ sacred objects remains largely an under-examined practice in the literature. The destruction of these objects function as not only spiritual warfare via the destruction of once-sacred objects reclassified as demonic or idolatrous, but also as a performative testimony of faith.

This paper utilizes a hybrid methodology, combining both a mini-ethnographic case study and digital ethnographic data to examine the practice of image breaking as performative testimony within Spanish-speaking Pentecostal communities in the U.S. and Latin America. To contextualize this data, I use two frameworks from global Pentecostalism to better situate the theology and experience of Pentecostal iconoclasm before applying it to the transnational Latino Pentecostal context: 1. I examine the Pentecostal aesthetic landscape to illustrate the range of Pentecostal attitudes towards art and where Catholic/Eastern Orthodox art falls outside of Pentecostal acceptable use; 2. I use examples provided in Ghanaian Pentecostalism as described by Birgit Meyer to view iconoclasm in the context of a “theology of rupture” in which conversion aims to sever the past entirely.

I argue Pentecostal iconoclastic activity produces dialogue in the public performance of image-breaking: In the transnational Latino Pentecostal context, the performative destruction of Catholic images generates a dialogue with those who are both still Catholic and those who have recently left. The act itself is public and celebratory in nature, characterized by upbeat music, testimonies and preaching, transforming destruction into a demonstrable moment of spiritual liberation for other believers, new converts from Catholicism — and especially for those who still hold onto these images as sacred.

While the scholarship on Pentecostalism often focuses on glossolalia, healings or pneumatology, the material rejection of "idolatrous" objects remains largely an under-examined practice in the literature. In the Pentecostal context, targets of destruction include both sacred images (such as rosaries, icons, depictions of Catholic saints, charms or votives for ancestor worship) and secular or occult objects (such as heavy metal posters or physical copies of secular music). The act itself is usually public, celebratory in nature, and characterized by upbeat music, testimonies and preaching, transforming destruction into a moment of spiritual liberation. As Pentecostalism is the "premier non-Catholic religion of Latin America" — the U.S. included — with more than 60,000 new converts in the U.S. annually, this ritualized destruction serves not only to reinforce the separation of the sacred and the profane, but also as a testimony to Catholics and former-Catholic alike, producing a tactile, embodied dialogue within the Latin American religious landscape.[239]

This paper utilizes a hybrid methodology, combining both a mini-ethnographic case study and digital ethnographic data to examine the practice of image breaking as both spiritual warfare and performative testimony within Spanish-speaking Pentecostal communities in the U.S. and Latin America. Because Latino Pentecostal iconoclasm is not yet documented in the literature, I will use two frameworks from global Pentecostalism to better situate the theology and the experience of Pentecostal iconoclasm before applying it to the transnational Latino Pentecostal context. First, I will examine the Pentecostal aesthetic landscape to illustrate Pentecostal attitudes towards art as differentiated from traditional Protestant, Calvinist-influenced iconophobia. Here, I will explore where Pentecostalism *encourages* art via pneumatological imagination and in

[239] R. Andrew Chesnut, "Cornering the Market: An Anatomy of Pentecostal Success," in *Competitive Spirits*, by R. Andrew Chesnut (Oxford University PressNew York, NY, 2003), https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195161847.003.0003; Barry A. Kosmin and Seymour P. Lachman, "From the Ethnic Factor to the New Age," in *One Nation under God: Religion in Contemporary American Society* (The Crown Publishing Group, 2011).

viewing the artists as co-creator with God using examples from prophetic or live worship art. I will then use this analysis as a baseline with which to compare the ontologies and semiotic ideologies of Pentecostal art itself against those in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, with a focus on Birgit Meyer's concept of "bad objecthood."[240] In doing so, I will show where art transgresses these Pentecostal boundaries of acceptable use.

In the following section, I will examine the complete, radical nature of Pentecostal conversion to contextualize image breaking in the framework of rupture. Here, I will use examples provided in Ghanaian Pentecostalism as described by Birgit Meyer to explore how anti-memory practices actively rewrite the new convert's pre-Christian history in highly negative terms in order to distance one's self from it: essentially, remembering in order to forget. The aim of this analysis is to contextualize examples of "idol breaking" and iconoclasm within the context of "making a complete break with the past."[241] Then, I will look at the example of Restoration House in Puerto Rico, a Pentecostal rehabilitation complex to explore the role of testimony in conversion and the cosmology of Pentecostal conversion, focusing on how accounts of conversion stress deliverance from evil over repentance of personal sin.

With these two frameworks — 1. How devotional statues and Orthodox icons fall outside the acceptable use range of Pentecostal art and 2. Conversion as radical rupture, a break from the past and deliverance from evil — we can then explore examples of Pentecostal iconoclasm in transnational Latin American Pentecostalism. First, we will analyze a mini-ethnographic case study detailing iconoclastic activity in a Spanish-speaking congregation in Texas in the 1980s; I

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[240] Birgit Meyer, "Mediating Absence: Effecting Spiritual Presence Pictures and the Christian Imagination," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (2011): 1029–56, https://doi.org/10.1353/sor.2011.0035.

[241] Birgit Meyer, "'Make a Complete Break With the Past': Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28, no. 3 (1998): 316–49, https://doi.org/10.1163/157006698X00044.

then examine three recent instances of digitally-documented public image breaking. Here, I argue that Pentecostal iconoclasm in this hemispheric context, seen through the lens of aesthetic discernment and the theology of rupture, constitutes both an action of spiritual warfare and a performative testimony of faith.

Part I

Pentecostal Aesthetic Theology

In this section, I will examine the Pentecostal aesthetic landscape to illustrate Pentecostal attitudes towards art. To do this, I will differentiate Pentecostal semiotic ideologies and ontologies of artwork from both 1. Calvinist Protestantism and 2. Catholicism/Orthodoxy. In the first section, I will situate Pentecostal aesthetics in the context of Calvinist Protestantism to show that while there are clear theological continuities with Protestant iconophobia, Pentecostals carry a variety of theologically-supported positions towards religious images in practice.[242] Here, I will explore where Pentecostalism encourages art, including depictions of the divine via pneumatological imagination and in viewing artists as co-creator with God using examples from prophetic or live worship art. I will then use this analysis as a baseline with which to compare Pentecostal semiotic ideologies and ontologies of artwork itself against those in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, using examples of a devotional statue of the Virgin Mary and the Byzantine icon, the *Christos Pantocrator.*[243] In doing so, I will show where art transgresses these Pentecostal boundaries of acceptable use.

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[242] Birgit Meyer, "'There Is a Spirit in That Image': Mass-Produced Jesus Pictures and Protestant-Pentecostal Animation in Ghana," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52, no. 1 (2010): 100–130, https://doi.org/10.1017/S001041750999034X; Meyer, "Mediating Absence: Effecting Spiritual Presence Pictures and the Christian Imagination."

[243] *Christos Pantocrator*, n.d., Encaustic on wood, 84 x 45.5 cm, Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Spas_vsederzhitel_sinay.jpg.`

The range of positions that Pentecostals may take towards religious artwork may be inferred from a sample of views held by Pentecostals in Ghana, an area which has had exposure to a wide range of spiritual positions on the material world (Ewe, Catholic, and missionary Calvinist Protestantism). On one side of the spectrum, anthropologist Birgit Meyer details numerous examples of depictions of the Sacred Heart — which would have been brought to Ghana by Catholic missionaries — used by Pentecostals in daily life for everything from personal devotion, ethical reminders in the home and protection at sea.[244] She writes, "This is remarkable, because at the leadership level, Protestantism and Pentecostalism have long deployed a heavily iconophobic stance, according to which Catholics are likened to 'heathen' worshippers of 'idols' and 'fetishes.'"[245] Traditional Protestant semiotic ideology held that the material and spirit were entirely divorced from one another: images cannot *contain* the divine.[246] This argument is not very different from the Council of Hiereia's iconoclast response in 754 CE during the period of Byzantine Iconoclasm: the *horos* stated that Christ is both man and God, and to paint the likeness of Christ is either to "circumscribe the uncircumscribable character of the Godhead" or "confuse that unconfused union" — both of which are blasphemous.[247] Notably, the recommendation that the worshipper should "paint in himself their virtues as living icons" is not unfamiliar to Calvinist Protestantism, and as we will see, some uncompromising Pentecostals in the modern day.[248]

Protestant missionaries in Ghana would have destroyed objects associated with traditional African spiritual practices, as they did to the Ewe tribe, to demonstrate this very belief.[249] Ewe

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[244] Meyer, "Mediating Absence: Effecting Spiritual Presence Pictures and the Christian Imagination," 1042–45.
[245] Meyer, "Mediating Absence: Effecting Spiritual Presence Pictures and the Christian Imagination," 1044.
[246] Meyer, "'There Is a Spirit in That Image.'"
[247] Jaś Elsner, "Iconoclasm as Discourse: From Antiquity to Byzantium," *The Art Bulletin* 94, no. 3 (2012): 379, https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2012.10786048.
[248] Elsner, "Iconoclasm as Discourse: From Antiquity to Byzantium," 380.
[249] Meyer, "'There Is a Spirit in That Image.'"

tradition holds that that material world can function as a host for the spiritual, but Protestant iconoclastic activity inadvertently reinforced this core belief, overlaying their own concepts of demonic forces over the Ewe concepts of the spirit.[250] For those with a Ewe background, images and material objects are not to be used, not because the material is *divorced* from the spiritual, but because evil spirits may inhabit these objects to work in the material world.[251]

While images of Jesus are pervasive in many Pentecostal circles, this creates a dilemma for those who adhere to a semiotic ideology that enforces a radical separation of the material and physical like Protestantism.[252] These individuals may believe that a "purer" religion could exist without distracting physical objects. Consequently, they find themselves in the uncomfortable position of navigating how to access, know and feel the presence of the divine when these objects are prohibited for not only encouraging idolatrous behavior but also for hosting or allowing demonic influence (as a means by which the image may acquire the status of "bad objecthood").[253] Birgit Meyer writes that "calling the name of Jesus is much stressed, as well as the experience of being 'filled with the Holy Spirit,' an experience in which the believer's body is held to function as prime medium and index of divine presence."[254] This is quite difficult, however, owing not only to the large range of semiotic ideologies within Pentecostalism and the prevalence of the use of images in personal devotion, but also because of the necessity of the material: Birgit Meyer argues that these images function to "mediate absence" "that renders present what is not 'there'".[255] In another article, she claims that "the idea of an immaterial

[250] Meyer, "'There Is a Spirit in That Image,'" 112.
[251] Meyer, "'There Is a Spirit in That Image,'" 106–13.
[252] Meyer, "Mediating Absence: Effecting Spiritual Presence Pictures and the Christian Imagination."
[253] Meyer, "Mediating Absence: Effecting Spiritual Presence Pictures and the Christian Imagination," 1050.
[254] Meyer, "Mediating Absence: Effecting Spiritual Presence Pictures and the Christian Imagination," 1050.
[255] Meyer, "Mediating Absence: Effecting Spiritual Presence Pictures and the Christian Imagination," 1036.

religion is a fiction; even a semiotic ideology that denounces religious things and pictures cannot do without material forms".[256] Even for the most staunchly iconophobic Pentecostal churches, there remains a Pentecostal aesthetic landscape which includes the Bible itself, church interiors and equipment and aspirations of modernity and middle-class prosperity.[257]

In more recent years, Pentecostalism has grown more open to the use of visual and material 'symbols' (e.g. Italian olive oil prayed over and used for anointing) and live worship art or Christian-themed art displayed on Church grounds.[258] Félix-Jäger writes that

> "people are formed aesthetically through visual art and architecture, and many Pentecostal churches are beginning to understand this as an important aspect of their spiritual formation. While it may be better to opt for a Spirit-filled community over a beautifully affective environment, Pentecostals are beginning to aim for both, seeing these aesthetic options as a false dichotomy."[259]

Some Pentecostal churches have embraced live worship or prophetic art, in which an artist will take part in spontaneous live painting during a worship service.[260] As shown in the videos "Endless Dance: Live Worship Painting by Vanessa Horabuena" and "[Extended] Touch of Heaven + Alabaster Heart | David Funk | Bethel Church," artists typically speed paint on one side

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[256] Meyer, "'There Is a Spirit in That Image,'" 127.
[257] Steven Félix-Jäger, "Material Visions of the Good Life: Pentecostalism, Visual Culture, and the Prosperity Gospel," *Pneuma* 41, no. 2 (2019): 279–90, https://doi.org/10.1163/15700747-04102002.
[258] Meyer, "'There Is a Spirit in That Image,'" 113; Steven Félix-Jäger, "Arts and Aesthetics: The Pursuit of Beauty through the Outpour of the Spirit," in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, 1st ed., by Wolfgang Vondey, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Routledge, 2020), 339, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429507076-37.
[259] Félix-Jäger, "Arts and Aesthetics: The Pursuit of Beauty through the Outpour of the Spirit," 339.
[260] Steven Félix-Jäger, "Introduction," *Pentecostal Aesthetics*, 2015, 204–5, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004291621_002; Félix-Jäger, "Arts and Aesthetics: The Pursuit of Beauty through the Outpour of the Spirit," 338; Vanessa Horabuena, *Live Worship Painting: The Lion and Lamb Passover*, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9qWjdhduI0; Vanessa Horabuena, *Worship Painting w/ Vanessa Horabuena - "The King of Heaven,"* 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iNVNPUvjSnQ; Vanessa Horabuena, *Endless Dance: Live Worship Painting by Vanessa Horabuena | @joycemeyer @nataliegrantmusic*, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XpVA1StzkU8; Vanessa Horabuena, *I Painted The Face of Jesus...And The Crowd Went Silent!*, 2026, https://youtu.be/pIDPG8sDCAU?si=tvYvL_K2SkRaK3nb; Proverbs Media Group, *God's Canvas | The Story of Vanessa Horabuena*, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgQuY2A9RpY; Bethel, *[Extended] Touch of Heaven + Alabaster Heart | David Funk | Bethel Church*, 2021, https://youtu.be/8eMCJSbmI3g?si=keJuwChcREzZuzBa.

of the stage where music, singers and sometimes other forms of embodied art such as praise dancing, spontaneous dance or flag twirling take place.[261] The artist may have a planned composition ahead of the service that emphasizes the pastor's sermon points, or they may depict an unplanned work based on their own inspiration and impressions in the moment.[262]

Painters may see their own creative process as prayer and worship itself, with bidirectional communication between artists and the Holy Spirit who inspires the piece.[263] Sometimes, like in the example of Paint and Worship's video, "$10,000 ART/ "The Bride of Christ" art by Paint and Worship/ prophetic art with prophetic word," painters may report having a specific word or message they received during the creative process.[264] Here, painter Julyza Ruiz reads the exact words she heard from God: she says "I heard the Lord so clearly speak to me and I wrote down the prophetic word and he said 'Walk in purity my beloved. Walk in love all the days of your life, for I am your bridegroom and you are my bride. You are perfect, wholly without blemish. There is no sin in you or upon you for my son Jesus's blood has cleansed you and made you whole…".[265] In another example, Christian worship artist and performance speed painter Vanessa Horabuena, associated with the Church for the Nations in Phoenix, a Spirit-filled non-denominational church with Pentecostal-style worship, often prays before, during, and after: "I hear God say to me 'I

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[261] Félix-Jäger, "Arts and Aesthetics: The Pursuit of Beauty through the Outpour of the Spirit"; Horabuena, *Endless Dance: Live Worship Painting by Vanessa Horabuena | @joycemeyer @nataliegrantmusic*; Bethel, *[Extended] Touch of Heaven + Alabaster Heart | David Funk | Bethel Church*.

[262] Félix-Jäger, "Arts and Aesthetics: The Pursuit of Beauty through the Outpour of the Spirit," 338; Horabuena, *Endless Dance: Live Worship Painting by Vanessa Horabuena | @joycemeyer @nataliegrantmusic*; Bethel, *[Extended] Touch of Heaven + Alabaster Heart | David Funk | Bethel Church*.

[263] Alana Sawrey and Emma M. Austin, "Praying through Artmaking: Imaginal Dialogue with Artistic Archetypes and Opportunities for Pentecostal Aesthetic Expression," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 34, no. 1 (2025): 133–58, https://doi.org/10.1163/17455251-bja10069.

[264] Paint and Worship, *$10,000 ART/ "The Bride of Christ" Art by Paint and Worship/ Prophetic Art with Prophetic Word*, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnklxAdZixg&list=PLOoCOWB-62OUHhcdpKn3tSMTTOmoUbYyl&index=11.

[265] Paint and Worship, *$10,000 ART/ "The Bride of Christ" Art by Paint and Worship/ Prophetic Art with Prophetic Word*.

want you to worship me like you're a kid again, you're just dancing for me.'"[266] While not restricted to Pentecostalism, the prophetic art movement sees art as a means of prayer, both listening to and hearing from God, and the art produced is a product of collaboration with the divine, sometimes a physical, visual prophetic message or spiritual reminder.

Recognizing the diverse perspectives within Pentecostalism — ranging from viewing photographs as potentially demonic or at least distracting and idolatrous, to seeing art as a product of collaboration between the artist and the Holy Spirit as co-creators —we now examine two oft-confused categories of art from the Catholic and Eastern rite/Orthodox traditions: 1. Devotional or sacred images, as seen in the example of a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes and 2. Icons, as seen in the example of the *Christos Pantocrator*.[267] The first, a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes, would depict the Virgin in all-white with a light blue sash around her waist, a rosary over her arms, and a yellow rose on each foot (see Fig. 1).[268] The image was created in the 1870s by well-known religious sculptor Joseph Fabisch to remember a Marian apparition that is believed to have taken place in Lourdes, France in 1858 when she appeared to St. Bernadette Soubirous, then a child. The location of the grotto in Lourdes is sacred and now has an association with healing, especially with the use of Lourdes water: a statue was placed in the original location of the apparition to aid devotional practice. While the original was made from Carrara marble, devotees may obtain a certified replica or another faithful reproduction, provided the essential elements of the images are the same (the white mantel, blue sash, rosary and yellow roses): this image received a canonical coronation in 1876.[269] These are sacred images used in churches, other sacred spaces, or the home, as a mental reminder and focal point for attention in prayer. If

[266] Proverbs Media Group, *God's Canvas | The Story of Vanessa Horabuena*.
[267] Joseph-Hugues Fabisch, *Our Lady of Lourdes*, 1864, Carrara marble, Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes, Lourdes, France; *Christos Pantocrator*.
[268] Fabisch, *Our Lady of Lourdes*.
[269] "Take the Statue of Our Lady of Lourdes Home with You," Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes.

destroyed, a beautiful piece of art is destroyed, but one's connection to the Virgin Mary is unaffected: the image is simply an aid in prayer.

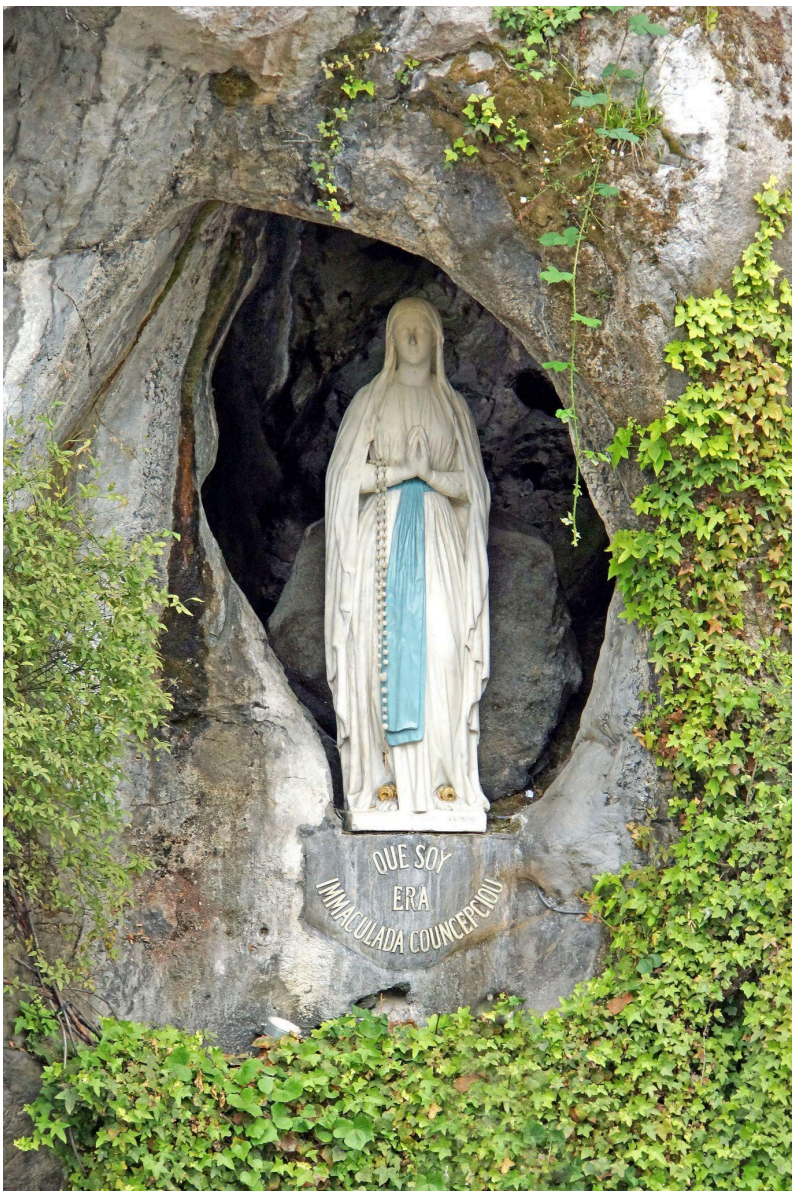


Fig. 1. Joseph-Hugues Fabisch, Our Lady of Lourdes, 1864. Carrara marble. Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes, Lourdes, France. (Photo by Dennis Jarvis; available via Wikimedia Commons).

This may be contrasted with the icon: here, I will turn to the *Christos Pantocrator,* a 6th century encaustic icon of Jesus Christ (see Fig. 2).[270] At St. Catherine's Monastery at the foot of

[270] *Christos Pantocrator*.

Mt. Sinai, its distant residence likely protected it from the iconoclasts of the 8th century.[271] In the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, icons are "symbols that *make present* what they convey"; they are not representational like portraits in the Western art tradition or even the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes just discussed.[272] Rather, they are *sacramental* in nature: they are physical objects which function as a touchpoint between the physical and spiritual worlds (Meyer might say they "mediate absence" – making present what is not present).[273] For this, icons are "written" by an iconographer in prayer (never "painted"), functioning as a *visual sacred text*.[274] In *Letters to a Young Catholic,* George Weigel describes the *sacramental imagination* of Catholicism as "the core Catholic conviction that God saves and sanctifies the world through the materials of the world."[275] The icon is a part of this imagination: rather than simply *represent* or *depict,* the icon *makes present* that which it conveys. Instead of simply saying "this is what this man looked like," the *Christos Pantocrator* was written to effect the *encounter with* Christ Almighty.[276] In an icon, as the viewer looks at Christ in the painting, it is also believed that Christ is looking back, and this capacity is not diminished in replicas of the image. Because these images function as sacred windows to the divine, icons are typically blessed by a priest, including replicas to designate them as such. Ontologically, the *Christos Pantocrator*, unlike other depictions, facilitates an encounter with the Christ, participating in the reality of the prototype.[277]

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[271] George Weigel, "Letter Three: St. Catherine's Monastery, Mt. Sinai/The Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem," in *Letters to a Young Catholic*, Revised and Expanded edition (Basic Books, A Member of the Perseus Books Group, 2015).
[272] Weigel, "Letter Three: St. Catherine's Monastery, Mt. Sinai/The Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem."
[273] Meyer, "Mediating Absence: Effecting Spiritual Presence Pictures and the Christian Imagination."
[274] Weigel, "Letter Three: St. Catherine's Monastery, Mt. Sinai/The Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem."
[275] Weigel, "Letter Six: The Olde Cheshire Cheese, London," in *Letters to a Young Catholic*, Revised and Expanded edition (Basic Books, A Member of the Perseus Books Group, 2015).
[276] Weigel, "Letter Three: St. Catherine's Monastery, Mt. Sinai/The Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem."
[277] Elsner, "Iconoclasm as Discourse: From Antiquity to Byzantium"; Weigel, "Letter Three: St. Catherine's Monastery, Mt. Sinai/The Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem."



Fig. 2. Christos Pantocrator, 6th century. Encaustic on wood, 84 x 45.5 cm. Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt. (Source: Wikimedia Commons).

With an understanding of the ontologies of Catholic or Orthodox sacred images and icons, we now return to the Pentecostal aesthetic landscape and notice where religious art may have some functional overlap. Influenced by contemporary Anglican theologian Jeremy Begbie, Pentecostals are influenced by the concept of God as creator and human as co-creators in the creative act of producing art, and many artists would cite the Holy Spirit as inspiration: and so, when the artwork is produced in prayer and worship, and is seen as a creative collaboration with

the divine, we might see some similarity here. Both Pentecostal prophetic artists and Orthodox iconographers would consider the art they do *prayer &* they both create these images *inspired by God.*

Some images do not fit this framework, providing context for Pentecostal anxieties with images, particularly Catholic ones. In his article "Inspiration and Discernment in Pentecostal Aesthetics," Felix-Jager outlines a method for Pentecostal artistic discernment based on the fruits of the Holy Spirit: "Spirit-inspired rituals are those that promote social cohesion, enable religious devotees to negotiate social change, are emotionally and aesthetically transformative, bring liberation and healing, and intensify human creativity."[278]

The evaluation of artwork concerns both the ontological nature of the object (secular or cursed/demonic) and the actions it encourages in viewers (idolatry). Birgit Meyer highlights these concerns through an illuminating example in Ghanaian Pentecostalism: she recounts a story of a woman who displayed an image of Jesus in her own home, but her sister warned her against this saying: "There is a [demonic] spirit in that image...they use the eyes."[279] This view of images is influenced by Ewe spirituality which holds that spirits need physical hosts to act in the material world: in Ghanaian Pentecostalism, even a picture of Jesus may "slip" into what she terms "bad objecthood."[280] In this case, the anxiety is not merely around an object which encourages an idolatrous response, but also around the potential for this object to host an evil spiritual presence ("bad objecthood").[281] This particular anxiety is specific to Ghana, but Pentecostal semiotic

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[278] Steven Felix-Jager, "Inspiration and Discernment in Pentecostal Aesthetics," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 23, no. 1 (2014): 85–104, https://doi.org/10.1163/17455251-02301009; Amos Yong, "Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions" (PhD dissertation, Boston University, 1999), Publication No. 9923992, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, https://www.proquest.com/docview/304493464.
[279] Meyer, "'There Is a Spirit in That Image,'" 121.
[280] Meyer, "'There Is a Spirit in That Image,'" 121.
[281] Meyer, "'There Is a Spirit in That Image.'"

ideology and theology allows room for it. In the case of a depiction of the Virgin Mary, which would encourage a devotee to pray in front of it, no distinction between "veneration" and "worship" is made: the Virgin Mary is not God and must not be prayed to. According to Pentecostal artistic discernment based on the fruits of the Spirit, the Spirit could not encourage idolatrous behavior: the depiction would then transgress Pentecostal boundaries of acceptable use, and may even fall into "bad objecthood."

On the Image of Guadalupe in Latino Catholicism

This sentiment among Pentecostals is important for the discussion at hand because where the destruction of Catholic imagery is concerned, the Virgen de Guadalupe, is the most common religious image among Catholics in Latin America (see Figure 3); as such, it is a primary target in the filmed instances of Latino Pentecostal iconoclasm we will discuss later. The image of the Virgen de Guadalupe is deeply significant to many Latino Catholics, embedded in the religious landscape: Fr. Elizondo, in his 1988 work *The Future is Mestizo*, writes that Guadalupe is not merely a Christianized figure but one who actively incorporates the blood, identity, and suffering of the indigenous: he writes that "one cannot know, understand, or appreciate the Mexican people without a deep appreciation for Guadalupe."[282]

[282] Virgilio P. Elizondo, *The Future Is Mestizo: Life Where Cultures Meet*, Rev. ed (University Press of Colorado, 2000).



Figure 3. Virgen de Guadalupe, ca. 1531. Oil and tempera on maguey fiber (cactus cloth), 170 x 105 cm. Basilica of Guadalupe, Mexico City. (Image: Wikimedia Commons).

The story begins on the morning of December 9, 1531, when Juan Diego, a recent native convert to Catholicism, was on his way to mass in Tlatelolco and unexpectedly heard beautiful singing. Moments later, he witnessed an apparition of the Virgin Mary on Tepeyac, the very site of worship of the goddess Tonantzín, radiating like the sun, and not with a European complexion – but an indigenous one. Juan Diego's "Beloved Maiden" was Mary, now as *La Morena,* the mother

of God who would bring life to *mestizos* of the New World (Figure 3). Fr. Elizondo writes that without Guadalupe, "there would be no Mexico today. There would simply be new Spain and the descendants of the native peoples, co-existing but never merging into one people."[283] The significance of Guadalupe is the creation of a Catholicism that embraced indigenous heritage and demonstrates how deeply embedded Guadalupe is for not only spirituality in Latin America, but also for embracing the new *mestizo* identity. In the last section, we will discuss the unique dialogic significance of Pentecostal iconoclastic activity towards Guadalupe in the transnational Latino spiritual context.

In the next section, I will explore the second pillar for contextualizing transnational Latino Pentecostal iconoclasm towards Catholic sacred images and icons: the complete, radical nature of Pentecostal conversion through the lens of "rupture." Here, we will explore how Pentecostal converts are "born again" and so encouraged to "make a complete break with the past."[284]

Theology of Rupture

We will now turn to the second pillar of understanding transnational Latin American Pentecostal iconoclastic activity: conversion as complete rupture, break with the past. To do this, I will use examples provided in Ghanaian Pentecostalism as described by Brigit Meyer to explore how anti-memory practices actively rewrite the new convert's pre-Christian history in highly negative terms in order to distance one's self from it: essentially remembering in order to forget. Then I will look at the example of Restoration House in Puerto Rico, a Pentecostal rehabilitation complex to explore the role of testimony in conversion, focusing on how accounts of conversion stress deliverance from evil (over repentance of personal sin). The aim of this analysis is to

[283] Elizondo, *The Future Is Mestizo*.
[284] Meyer, "'Make a Complete Break With the Past': Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse."

understand Pentecostal conversion as total: "making a complete break with the past."[285] Those who convert are considered to be "born again," encouraging a radical rupture with one's pre-Christian or even Catholic past — even to the extent of breaking with any image or object which may encourage one to slip back into their previous life.

The concept of "rupture" in Pentecostal conversion, though now garnering more academic attention, is primarily documented by the anthropologist Birgit Meyer, who conducted her fieldwork in Ghana. In her article "Make a Complete Break with the Past," Meyer focuses her attention on what might be considered post-conversion rituals like deliverance which function to sever the new convert's ties to the past.[286] While conversion may take place in a single moment, "deliverance is not considered to be brought about instantly, but rather is regarded as a long-term process" and it not something which comes automatically.[287] She cites a 1993 booklet written by Ghanaian pastor S.Y. Kwami which details areas of deliverance including "deliverance from the immediate past," "deliverance from the ancestral past," (which may include a break from African rituals, which are "completely diabolized" in this view), "deliverance from occultic bondages" and "deliverance from demonic control and influence."[288] In this context, "virtually all other religions other than Pentecostalist Christianity" are considered "occult," and when they make use of ritual object such as "talismans, rings, black powder…candles, incense, amulets," etc… "Kwami asserts that anybody whoever had any connection with any of these organizations prior

[285] Meyer, "'Make a Complete Break With the Past': Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse."
[286] Meyer, "'Make a Complete Break With the Past': Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse."
[287] Meyer, "'Make a Complete Break With the Past': Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse," 321–23.
[288] Meyer, "'Make a Complete Break With the Past': Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse," 324.

to becoming born again has to denounce such links and destroy all objects related to them."[289] In this way, converts are encouraged to take a deep inventory of their own past — including that of their ancestral past — to rewrite this narrative in highly negative terms (e.g. a view that might see Ewe ritual as demonic), to diabolize, and to then separate, liberate and forget the past; essentially, what Meyer terms an "anti-memory practice" which is remembering the past to forget the past.[290]

The phenomenon of total conversion in Pentecostalism is worldwide and tied to a Pentecostal epistemology of rupture: anthropologist Hansen writes in her book *Addicted to Christ* that the "ultimate goal of the encounter is to achieve a complete break with pre-conversion ways of seeing the world, and to re-people the world with enchanted experiences, beings, and passions. Christian knowledge, then, only is gained through radical rupture with everyday perception."[291] The rupture "separates people both from their pasts and from the surrounding social world… as Gill reports from Bolivia they sharply distinguish between their pre- and post conversion lives."[292] These choices are then reinforced when the convert works to stay within their new Pentecostal community, which enforces a specific moral code including conservative dress and abstinence from relations outside of marriage and drinking alcohol.[293] Hansen and Robbins identify other postconversion "rituals of rupture" which aim to solidify the break including everything from sleep deprivation, prolonged fasting, attending *culto* or service multiple days a week, spirit baptism and deliverance practices.[294] These deliverance practices may include the destruction of

[289] Meyer, "'Make a Complete Break With the Past': Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse," 324.
[290] Meyer, "'Make a Complete Break With the Past': Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse"; Meyer, "Mediating Absence: Effecting Spiritual Presence Pictures and the Christian Imagination."
[291] Helena Hansen, *Addicted to Christ: Remaking Men in Puerto Rican Pentecostal Drug Ministries* (University of California press, 2018), 25.
[292] Joel Robbins, "The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33, no. 1 (2004): 127, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.32.061002.093421.
[293] Hansen, *Addicted to Christ*; Robbins, "The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity."
[294] Hansen, *Addicted to Christ*; Robbins, "The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity," 128.

belongings, media and religious objects which have ties to the pre-conversion life, with the aim of "freeing" the new convert from past bondages.[295] Citing Loret Mariz, Hansen notes that "Being free means being free to reject evil.... According to this model, the individual is fragile and the force of his own will is not strong enough to escape evil.... For this reason, accounts of conversion do not stress repentance of sins but deliverance from evil."[296]

Hansen, who did her fieldwork at a Pentecostal drug ministry in Puerto Rico, Restoration House, discusses the role of testimony as a narrative tool in creating and telling stories of rupture, allowing the faithful to clearly delineate their pre- and post-conversion lives. She describes testimony as a tool for self-orientation in both the physical and spiritual realm: in narrative "the apparent disorder of addicted pasts became part of a grander design, and which portended a victorious future."[297] As such, testimony is not only a tool for those who may need to hear it, but it is an equally important tool for self-alignment and the cultivation of one's own faith.[298] As such, a new convert may perform iconoclastic activity, either in the home or publicly, to not only demonstrate that they are no longer "bound" by their past life, but that they also have the power to rewrite their new lives and reject sin and demonic influences. When public, this is both a demonstration to witnesses and a demonstration to the self, marking an important rite of passage within Pentecostalism.

Part II

In the previous section, we discussed two frameworks with which to view Pentecostal iconoclastic activity: 1. How devotional statues and Catholic/Orthodox icons fall outside the

[295] Meyer, "'Make a Complete Break With the Past': Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse."
[296] Loret Mariz as quoted in Hansen, *Addicted to Christ*, 43–44.
[297] Hansen, *Addicted to Christ*, 37.
[298] Hansen, *Addicted to Christ*, 37.

acceptable use range within Pentecostalism 2. Conversion as radical rupture, making a complete break with the past and deliverance from evil. Within Pentecostalism, iconoclastic activity — though not well-documented or discussed academically — is a worldwide phenomenon. In the examples above, new converts in Ghana, Bolivia, and Puerto Rico participated in the breaking of objects as a postconversion ritual. In the next section, I will turn to examples of Pentecostal iconoclasm in the transnational Latin American context. First, I will provide details from a mini-ethnographic case study, taken from a semi-structured interview, which details iconoclastic activity in a Spanish-speaking congregation in Texas in the 1980s. Then, I will proceed to discuss the digital ethnographic data: three examples in the Latin American hemispheric context in which iconoclastic activity was briefly filmed in a public setting. Finally, I will discuss the significance of the specific destruction of Catholic images in the transnational Latin American context in the context of testimony, rupture and iconoclasm as dialogue.

Iconoclasm of Catholic Imagery at the Templo de Alabanza, Dallas, TX

Templo de Alabanza was a Spanish-language Pentecostal church located in Oak Cliff. The building itself was an old, converted theater, painted with Old City Jerusalem on its interior with reliefs on the wall to create the appearance of a colonnade. The church held Spanish-only services and Dallas locals would attend church events several times a week, gathering in this space for worship, prayer and healing services, Bible studies and more. In a semi-structured interview, I asked Antonio, a former congregant, about the church's history, semiotic ideology, views on media consumption and secular music before he narrated his experiences with the church's practice of image-breaking. Antonio described the church itself:

> In the early 80s, services were held at 2010 W. Jefferson in an old converted movie theatre. In those days, you could tell it had been an old movie theatre because the seats and layout were very much in the style of a theatre. The church was probably one of the most vibrant, up-and-coming Latin Pentecostal churches in the U.S. at the time. I had never

> seen a Spanish-language church that appeared to have the same energy and resources as the Anglo ministries I watched on television. In those days, most Spanish-language churches in Dallas were small and had very few resources. The Templo of the 80s was not the same as the Templo of the 90s or 00s because they eventually changed leadership. Even the building today has no association with the original ministry that converted the old theatre. I think about those days often because there was always this anticipation and expectation that they could be the biggest in the world. They were extremely popular. The pastor at the time was dynamic and liked, and he even held classes on Sundays (between services) that you could take where he would teach people "how to preach."[299]

In the Templo de Alabanza, the material world was treated as a broken place and not the ultimate home for any of the faithful. This concept is expressed explicitly in music and sermons, and allows the faithful to rewrite the way they view their world and life circumstances. Antonio recounted this belief:

> This world is not my home. There's a place waiting for me. God has a place waiting for me. God has a reward for me in heaven. Sometimes you get the sense that there wasn't a lot of expectation for this world being any good...we shouldn't be too attached to it. It's temporary. That this world that, that the danger is being too attached to it, right? That there's, there's a danger that you can turn, and I remember hearing this so explicitly, like so directly: you have to be careful not to turn your car or your possessions or your house into an idol, that you, you have to be careful not to turn anything material into an idol. Nothing...you can't put something before God and something you can't give too much importance to anything physical or material…Now you've edged God out.[300]

This ideology creates the backdrop for iconoclastic activity in that a fear of the bad use of material objects is imbued into every object: any object could slip into "bad objecthood" if its importance is placed before God. This also extended into media consumption, which could be another attachment to "the things of this world." Antonio recalled a story of a couple who was afraid of having the appearance that they watched too much TV:

> I got the sense the pastor didn't really, you know, that he was talking about how, you shouldn't be consuming so much media, consume so much TV…the pastor did a drop in visit on one of [the] couples. And so it's the big tube TVs, right? It's basically furniture. So he walks in and starts talking to them, he puts his hand on the TV to see if it had been on, see if it was warm. That's what they said after he left, that he put his hand on the TV to see

[299] Antonio (pseudonym), follow-up interview by author, May 9, 2026, San Antonio, TX.
[300] Antonio (pseudonym), "Interview with 'Antonio,'" (San Antonio, TX), March 12, 2026, Personal Interview.

> that like, oh, are y'all, is this thing on all the time or that kind of thing, right? And so they got super embarrassed. Because they turned it off when he got there.[301]

In another instance, secular media is not simply viewed as an attachment or potential temptation to idolotry, but that it is actively demonic, making the breaking of physical media an act of spiritual warfare. Antonio narrated a moment from his childhood:

> I walk in the house, and my dad comes, walks in from my bedroom, and takes the metal box that I used to keep on my stuff in, like you know, under the bed, that stuff I don't want them to read or see, like, my journal, and my cassette tapes that were secular music, and just dumps it, dumps everything out in front of me. And then he takes the, it was Depeche Mode, the Violator album, which is the first real full-length secular cassette I ever bought. It's a classic now, right?...And so he threw them in the sink. and poured water on him. Like, he was really pissed and they were yelling. Both of them were just basically yelling at me about bringing that into the house and how I'm wasting my money...up to that point, we had been pretty much told that, like, that music has demonic influence.[302]

It is within this context that Antonio describes the moment in which he witnessed the breaking of Catholic images at the Templo de Alabanza:

> So, this was just a midweek service. I didn't even know if it was, like, I don't even know where they came from, who brought them, but there was a bunch of, like, uh, what looked like Catholic, you know, idols...So they put down a big giant, it looked like it looked like a bunch of bed sheets sewn together. And they covered the entire front of the altar with it. And then they brought out these oval statues and there was a bunch of them. So they told the men to come to the front, we're going to start the music up and you're going to smash them with your feet. And so the music starts right, and it's usually like 145 BPM, like really fast. *Dun keh dun keh dun keh dun keh*, right, real fast. And so they start going like wild and stuff, and then here come the idols, right? Here come the statues, I mean. They throw them down and they're just stomping on them. And they're also like saying that idols must be destroyed and, you know, the only thing that has power is God and Christ and the Holy Spirit…I remember this guy, he had just like some church shoes, some dress shoes on, and he just stomped [on the statue], his foot went right through, because I guess they're hollow? His foot went right through it. And he just looked so happy, really happy about that.[303]

Labelling these objects as "idols" rather than sacred images allows the participants to perform a linguistic iconoclasm that precedes the physical act. This semantic shift effectively de-sanctifies

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[301] Antonio (pseudonym), "Interview with 'Antonio.'"
[302] Antonio (pseudonym), "Interview with 'Antonio.'"
[303] Antonio (pseudonym), "Interview with 'Antonio.'"

the object, reclassifying what might be seen as a holy mediator in Catholicism as a material deception that must be destroyed to liberate the believer's space and spirit. For a former Catholic, this act would have been especially meaningful as a postconversion ritual aimed at making a definitive break with one's own now-idolatrous past. We will now turn to three examples of Pentecostal iconoclasm which were filmed and posted online in recent years, analyzing them through the lenses of Pentecostal aesthetic theology and semiotic ideology, and conversion as rupture.

Digital Ethnographic Data

In this section, I discuss three filmed instances of recent Pentecostal iconoclastic activity with Catholic images. The first video, "Ex-católico destruye idólatria," is recorded at a gas station "Lima Viaje Fresco."[304] The speaker is ex-Catholic and is speaking to a man named Frank, who works at the gas station. After reciting verses from Psalm 115 (quoted again below), he destroys Catholic images to, as he states, prove they have no power to do good or evil, and challenges the fear that God will punish for breaking images saying: "*todo es una obra mentirosa es una tanta mentira que el vaticano ha lanzado en el mundo entero"* (English: It is all a deceitful work, it is such a huge lie that the Vatican has launched into the whole world).[305] Here, the speaker is referring to both sacred images and icons in the Catholic tradition, claiming that the Vatican has created these knowing they are idolatrous, but lies to the whole world. In this video, we see an example of performative, dialogic image-breaking: the pastor addresses a Catholic fear that God will punish an individual for destroying a sacred image by the demonstration of its destruction.

[304] Camino de salvación, *Ex-Católico Destruye Idólatria*, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxKj2BsQ5Pc&list=PLOoCOWB-62OUHhcdpKn3tSMTTOmoUbYyl&index=4.
[305] Camino de salvación, *Ex-Católico Destruye Idólatria*.

For those watching, the message communicated is that the image itself is powerless, the Vatican is deceitful, and destroying the image will invoke no punishment.

The second video, "Increíble!! Pastor Destruye Imágenes, Ídolos de la Iglesia Católica," takes place on a public street where the pastor destroys both Catholic statues, like the Virgin de Guadalupe and the Divine Child, as well as folk magic items like *aquas de ruda* (rue water).[306] Notably, he says this must be done in public, claiming that destroying idols privately in a room "has no authority."[307] Tearing a printed image of the Virgen de Guadalupe, the pastor shouts: "*La Guadalupe no tiene poder*! *La Guadalupe no tiene poder*!"[308] Because the images are Catholic, this statement is important for understanding the *performative* and *dialogic* nature of public iconoclasm: this pastor believes it's necessary to do this in public — for Catholic onlookers. He wants Catholics to see that the idols – specifically Guadalupe among others – are powerless to defend themselves against a "simple pastor." Some Biblical justification for iconoclasm is found in the texts referenced in the video: Ex. 32: 7-14, 19-29.[309] This is Moses' petition to God on behalf of the idolators who made the golden calf. The pastor sees himself as fulfilling a Mosaic role: he is tearing down the corrupting objects to appease God's wrath on behalf of the idolators, while extending grace, salvation, and the cleansing blood of Christ to those trapped in idolatry (in this case, Catholics).

In third video, entitled "predicador rompe imágenes catolicas," this pastor ("predicador" or public street preacher) speaks to the *pueblo ecuatoriano* about the statue of the Virgen de

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[306] Oscar Ramirez, *Increíble!! Pastor Destruye Imágenes, Ídolos de La Iglesia Católica*, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkrZsoX_GuE&list=PLOoCOWB-62OUHhcdpKn3tSMTTOmoUbYyl&index=3.
[307] Oscar Ramirez, *Increíble!! Pastor Destruye Imágenes, Ídolos de La Iglesia Católica*.
[308] Oscar Ramirez, *Increíble!! Pastor Destruye Imágenes, Ídolos de La Iglesia Católica*.
[309] Oscar Ramirez, *Increíble!! Pastor Destruye Imágenes, Ídolos de La Iglesia Católica*; *The Holy Bible: New King James Version* (1982).

Guadalupe he is holding.[310] The incident is posted in two short videos in which the pastor breaks an image of the Virgen to demonstrate to a [rhetorial] "*amigo catolico"* that the statue is powerless. The pastor repeatedly holds his microphone to the statue while asking questions and making rhetorical demands: *"Guadalupe, Guadalupe respóndeme, respóndeme si está viva."*[311] When, of course, the statue does not respond to his interrogation, the crowd laughs. This is a performance. While the video references texts such as Ex 20: 4-5 and Dt 4: 15-18, the Biblical justification for this video is primarily found in Psalm 115 "The Futility of Idols and the Trustworthiness of God":

> Their idols are silver and gold,
>
> The work of men's hands.
>
> They have mouths, but they do not speak;
>
> Eyes they have, but they do not see;
>
> They have ears, but they do not hear;
>
> Noses they have, but they do not smell;
>
> They have hands, but they do not handle;
>
> Feet they have, but they do not walk;
>
> Nor do they mutter through their throat.[312]

In each video, a message is communicated to a Catholic audience: that the Vatican has lied to the whole world, that images of the Virgin Mary are powerless, and that the right thing to do is not simply to avoid their use, but to break these images and free one's self from idolatry. Helena Hansen writes that "Pentecostal cosmology holds that power is located not in people, but in

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[310] MiguelHndz, *Predicador Rompe Imágenes Catolicas*, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/shorts/EzpxFgeshYo.
[311] MiguelHndz, *Predicador Rompe Imágenes Catolicas*.
[312] *The Holy Bible: New King James Version*.

spirits. In this cosmos, freedom is not human autonomy, it is liberation from evil spirits, enabling individuals to submit their will to the Holy Spirit."[313] According to this logic, if power is located not in people, but in spirits, then Mary herself could not have had power either — much less an image of her.

Discussion

We just discussed four different examples of Pentecostal iconoclastic activity towards Catholic images in the transnational Latin American context. In each, the act was performative and dialogic: preachers specifically addressed Catholic onlookers, often speaking of the Virgen de Guadalupe, and even those who would practice other indigenous spiritualities (rue water is destroyed in one video).[314] At the Templo de Alabanza, those who may have been former Catholics were invited up to smash the "idols" in the church: when I asked Antonio what he believed was the rationale or mentality behind the image-breaking he witnessed, he answered:

> I do know that they felt, from being in that service, they felt like they were number one doing the Lord's work, okay? Two, that it was our obligation or responsibility to do this. Three, that maybe some of you in the congregation need to come do this. Right? For whatever reason, maybe. Maybe you haven't let it go enough. Stuff like that got said very directly.[315]

That the necessity for congregants to participate in the breaking of Catholic idols in this small Spanish-speaking congregation calls attention to the drastic change in the religious landscape among Latinos in the U.S. since the 70s: that at estimated rates of 60,000 annually, Latino Americans are leaving the Catholic Church for charismatic Pentecostal church communities throughout the nation.[316] For many converts in this hemispheric context, the past is

[313] Hansen, *Addicted to Christ*, 43.
[314] Oscar Ramirez, *Increíble!! Pastor Destruye Imágenes, Ídolos de La Iglesia Católica*.
[315] Antonio (pseudonym), "Interview with 'Antonio.'"
[316] Kosmin and Lachman, "From the Ethnic Factor to the New Age."

marked by oppression, struggle, and perhaps severe poverty or addiction.[317] In the U.S., Francisco Olazábal experienced marginalization within the Assemblies of God and formed the Concilio Latinoamericano de Iglesias Cristianas (CLADIC).[318]

Unlike Alcoholics Anonymous, Pentecostal ministries do not force individuals to admit they are powerless in the face of addiction, which may hardly be a mechanism of change for individuals experiencing powerlessness already. In one example, Hansen spoke with Juan, a convert to Pentecostalism: he said his mother was Catholic, "and the Catholics let you smoke and drink, they don't teach that God is against that. Then he heard who Jesus was."[319] In this case, Pentecostalism offered radical healing from his affliction of substance abuse and offered a better life; at the time he spoke with Hansen, he was both a staff member of Restoration House and a university student. The focus in Pentecostalism that spiritual liberation and victory: although individuals do not have power, the Holy Spirit does.[320] This spiritual liberation and affirmation of the Holy Spirit's power (which is exclusive of all others) extends itself into the space of image breaking when the image is tied to a pre-conversion past.

For Latin American preachers, iconoclasm is not merely a public display of smashing wood or metal with no power: it's a performative declaration of spiritual victory in which an object, many times an image of Guadalupe herself, which may be seen to have some spiritual power, is reclassified as idolatrous — or worse, demonic — and smashed to demonstrate faith, to show God alone has power, and to break the heavy chains of a past life. As the pastor smashes

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[317] Hansen, *Addicted to Christ*; Chesnut, "Cornering the Market"; Tony Tian-Ren Lin, *Prosperity Gospel Latinos and Their American Dream*, Where Religion Lives (The University of North Carolina Press, 2020).
[318] Gastón Espinosa, "El Azteca: Francisco Olazabal and Latino Pentecostal Charisma, Power, and Faith Healing in the Borderlands," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67, no. 3 (1999): 597–616, https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/67.3.597.
[319] Hansen, *Addicted to Christ*, 28.
[320] Hansen, *Addicted to Christ*, 43–44.

this image, he is breaking the chains of a past life and declaring spiritual freedom and independence to serve God and change medical or socioeconomic circumstances. As the Holy Spirit, and Christ as liberator of the oppressed are invoked, the public smash of the Virgen de Guadalupe itself symbolizes deliverance from heavy, demonic forces that would hold one back from worshipping God. The act is not only personal testimony, which is both just as important for the one delivering as the one listening, but also a dialogic, demonstrative act for those who are Catholic or formerly-Catholic. Importantly, as is the case with all aspects of Pentecostalism, the communication is not a propositional theological pronouncement for one to contemplate and assent to from a distance, but rather an act which is experiential, sensory and embodied with an open invitation for all to participate and do likewise. Liberation is accessible for all, here and now: one must only believe.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Pentecostalism displays a variety of attitudes towards art, and these attitudes are not perfectly consistent worldwide: but Pentecostal aesthetic theology allows room for these varied positions and time for discernment.[321] Where Pentecostal art is encouraged, prophetic artists engage in participatory prayer to produce work as co-creators with God. But even prayer is passing: Pentecostalism does not recognize the use of icons as images which facilitate an encounter with the divine, instead drawing from older Protestant semiotic ideology that the material and spiritual are indeed separate. This semiotic ideology forms one basis on which religious image destruction is justified: not all images fall under Pentecostal acceptable use cases.

Another basis is formed through the theology of rupture: as Pentecostalism is a mechanism for radical healing and deliverance, new converts “make a complete break with the

[321] Meyer, “‘There Is a Spirit in That Image.’”

past."[322] Where iconoclastic activity is examined, one might look back to Helena Hansen's observations that "Pentecostal knowledge is experiential. It is based on a sensory theology, a theology of emotional and tactile encounter — some call it possession — that is all-encompassing."[323] As images are broken, so too are the chains of the past, and the believers are delivered from oppression.

As seen through the lens of Pentecostal aesthetics and semiotic ideology, as well as through conversion and rituals of rupture, Pentecostal iconoclasm can be understood as spiritual warfare, as well as dialogic and performative testimony of faith. I explored three examples, combining both a mini-ethnographic case study and digital ethnographic data to examine the practice of image breaking as both spiritual warfare and performative testimony within Spanish-speaking Pentecostal communities in the U.S, and Latin America. For Spanish-speaking Pentecostal communities across the U.S. and Latin America, the gritty, public smash of an "idol" is a message of deliverance, victory and freedom.

[322] Meyer, "'Make a Complete Break With the Past': Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse."
[323] Hansen, *Addicted to Christ*, 25.

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