

THE IMAGE OF THE DEVIL AS AN INSTRUMENT OF FEAR AND PASTORAL POWER AT THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN BRAZIL

A imagem do Diabo como instrumento do medo e do poder pastoral na Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus no Brasil

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ABSTRACT: this article intends to show that the image of the Devil can be understood at the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG) not only as a religious symbol, but also as an agent of fear and an instrument of pastoral power, updated by this Church that endorses the neoliberal standards of success, present in Brazilian society. It also describes the image of the Devil as an audiovisual discursive construction and indicates its meaning for the religious imagery on the UCKG stages. In order to do so, the text invokes the studies of Patrícia Birman about the UCKG, as well as the theories of Bauman and of authors who elaborated on Foucault's thoughts on fear and pastoral power. This study has its *corpus* based on videos of exorcisms created on the UCKG stages and shared on YouTube by the Church itself.

KEYWORDS: UCKG, devil, fear, pastoral power, persuasion.

RESUMO: este artigo pretende mostrar que a imagem do Diabo pode ser compreendida na Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (IURD) não somente como símbolo religioso, mas também como agente do medo e instrumento de poder pastoral, atualizado por essa igreja, que endossa os padrões neoliberais de sucesso presentes na sociedade brasileira. Também descreve a imagem do Diabo como uma construção discursiva audiovisual e indica seu significado para o imaginário religioso nos palcos da IURD. Para tanto, este texto traz os estudos de Patrícia Birman sobre a IURD e mobiliza as teorias de Bauman e de autores que se debruçaram sobre as teorias de Foucault sobre o medo e o poder pastoral. Este estudo tem seu corpus composto de vídeos de exorcismos criados nos palcos da IURD e compartilhados no YouTube pela própria Igreja.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: IURD, diabo, medo, poder pastoral, persuasão.

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INTRODUCTION

This article aims to explain how the UCKG² takes the image of the Devil as an instrument of fear in order to assure its pastoral power in its search for more followers. To do so, the text invokes some of the research developed by Delumeau, which indicates the historical use of a terrifying image of the Devil by the Catholic and Protestant Churches since the Middle Ages through the Modern Age. The article compares the image of the Devil used by these two traditional Churches to the one used by the UCKG. Then, the present text mobilizes the concept of pastoral power described by Foucault, as well as the theories of Foucaultian researchers who studied fear in neoliberal societies. At that point, Bauman's studies of fear in modern societies are also taken into account to clarify the way this Church rules its pastoral power and uses the image of the Devil. Furthermore, the article presents those of Birman's ideas which help prove that the image of the Devil at the UCKG helps that church to build a positive image of its own followers in the context of a society (e.g. Brazil) where neoliberal patterns of financial success are overestimated. The UCKG is visible and actively present in politics, on the internet and on TV, and has built a positive imagery for the people who follow it; an imagery that is distant from that cultivated by the Catholic Church in the past, which praised poverty. In the imagery proposed at the UCKG stages, the believer is turned from victim or loser into a Christian winner, and is persuaded to believe that he is able to achieve financial success in life and all the burden of his success or fail falls on his own shoulders (Birman, 2003: 236-237). Finally, the article shows that the UCKG conquers for itself the image of a great saver, the owner of goodness and power and has the frightening mediatic image of the Devil as a helper to achieve its aims.

² The UCKG, or The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God was founded in Rio de Janeiro by Bishop Edir Macedo and Bishop Romildo Ribeiro Soares, in July 1977. Both Macedo and R.R. Soares were still considered pastors at the time. Before starting the UCKG, Macedo had worked in a lottery shop and worked as an accounting officer for a church called "Igreja Cruzada do Caminho Eterno", which he also helped to found. The UCKG had a Neo-Pentecostal orientation since the beginning and a strong mediatic appeal, for Macedo had developed a radio program during the time he was working at "Igreja Cruzada" (PROENÇA, 2006, p.154). Since then, the number of UCKG temples has increased in Brazil and also around the world, being found in the USA, Portugal and in some countries in Africa. The number of members of the Church in the Brazilian politics scenery has been also increased. According to latest data released by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the UCKG had about 1,873 million followers in 2012 (Duarte, 2012: 1).

THE USE OF THE IMAGE OF THE DEVIL AS AN AGENT OF FEAR IN CHRISTIANITY: AN OUTLINE

The image of the Devil at the UCKG is similar to the one in the Middle Ages due to the fact that they bear almost the same characteristics. It means that both diabolic images are considered spiritual beings, personifications of evil, filled with negative passion, superior to men and women, but inferior to God, as affirmed by Mariz. Actually, Mariz claims that the ideas of Devil, exorcism, and possession have been present in Christianity since its origin and participate not only in the cognitive universe of Catholicism but also of Protestantism. So, Neo-Pentecostalism is updating and adjusting an already existing representation of the Devil to its reality and interests. Thus, before becoming attached to a Neo-Pentecostal church, the believer already knows about the alleged existence and destructive power of the Devil (Mariz. 1997: 46-47).

Delumeau presents a deep study of the development of fear in Christianity between the Middle Ages and the Modern Age and helps us realize that the use of the image of the Devil to scare people had been used before the appearance of Neo-Pentecostal Churches. For Delumeau, the emergence of modernity in Western Europe came along with a surprising fear of the Devil, for the Renaissance not only inherited concepts and images related to the Devil, but also gave them a coherence and propagation never seen before in History (Delumeau, 2009: 354). The author says that images of the Devil were rare in primitive Christian art and did not even exist in the frescos of Roman catacombs. Nevertheless, these images appear frequently in art between the tenth and twelfth centuries, a period in which the Catholic Church had consolidated and expanded. At that time, the Devil was represented as a horrible hybrid figure with human and animal features. Considered a treacherous vassal by the Feudal Code, the idea of the Devil became more terrifying and showed how necessary the Church was to keep the community safe and away from it. Seductive and dangerous at the same time, in the eleventh and the twelfth centuries the Devil certainly represented a way to scare many people and accomplished its function of establishing the Catholic Church as a great benefactor and savior. Between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, when Catholicism faced the Reformation, the image of the Devil seemed scarier than ever. At that time, it acquired bat wings and dragon like features (Delumeau, 2009: 354-356). As protestants were in their period of consolidation, they also started using a frightening image of the Devil to persuade more and more people to follow them. Delumeau affirms that

since the sixteenth century protestants have seen the doctrine of justification by faith as the only theology able to assure that everybody is born as a sinner and will remain as such until death, and that belief in God is the unique salvation from every evil. Consequently, as Delumeau explains, believers would not have to worry about work as long as they believed in God and in its power to protect them from the Devil (Delumeau, 1983: 551). The author states that the protestant pastor used to build a speech that would persuade people to believe in the strength of the Protestant religion to protect them from the Devil's influence. This speech was emotionally appealing and based in certain manuals that applied a resource called *amplificatio* that means exaggeration. This technique came from ancient Christianity and was practiced especially by Lutheran protestants. The sermons were made to instruct, scold and soothe, in other words, to guide people to follow that religion's precepts. The preacher's duty was to evoke the love for God, hatred for sin, fear of suffering and trust in Jesus (Delumeau, 1983: 554). The image of the Devil by Neo-Pentecostal churches follows a pattern taken long ago by the Catholic and Protestant Churches during their periods of crises or consolidation due to the fact that those Churches used to terrify people to make them believe in their power of protection and salvation, as many of the Neo-Pentecostal Churches do nowadays.

THE FEAR OF THE DEVIL DESTINED TO HELP THE EXERCISE OF PASTORAL POWER AT THE UCKG

The credibility that the Neo-Pentecostal Churches and the UCKG have gained in recent years is thanks to their strategies of persuasion, which are based on a speech that sounds dramatic in order to make people believe in it. The appeal of this speech is also supported by the presence of a leader who is supposed to know a great and divine truth capable of assisting people in their search for salvation. In that context, salvation could mean "social rising". For those believers, this alleged salvation could make someone adjust to the traditional and valued behaviors in society, such as: being heterosexual, economically successful, and not a drug user. Thus, when a Neo-Pentecostal church assumes that it has the power to take care of people and help them achieve special goals, they suggest at once a model of believer: docile and able to peacefully fit into neoliberal society standards. These churches use a kind of power described

by Hobbes³ in the 17th century, and analyzed by Foucault in the 1980s, which is called pastoral power. According to Foucault, pastoral power appeared in Christian institutions and was developed during the Middle Ages; it was also present in the 15th century, due to the Protestant Reformation. He says that it consists of a technique of power in which one leader sacrifices himself in order to guide other individuals to salvation. The pastoral power is a way to take the individual towards salvation, which nowadays means the achievement of a good state of being. To do so, the pastor or leader must have the ability to lead and be aware of what is in the follower's mind, be able to make the followers share their thoughts and ideas. Foucault also affirms that this kind of power is not limited to religious contexts in modern societies (Foucault, 1994: 229-231). Although pastoral power is not limited to the field of religious institutions anymore, one can see that some churches still use it as one of their ways to persuade people to follow them, as the UCKG does.

Taking Foucault's concept of pastoral power, Ottavianni, Fabra and Chacon say that this kind of power is applied not only to a group of individuals, but also to their own lives. It means that each person should watch their own attitudes and choices (Ottaviani, *et al.*, 2012: 149). That is, as a leader, the pastor needs to show his followers that they have to behave according to the precepts of their Church and by doing so, they will reach the divine graces such as prosperity and good health. Many of the followers can end up believing that they also ought to tithe as proof of obedience in order to receive the blessings for the Church and the pastor represent God, to whom they own that obedience. Then, the followers are supposed to believe that they must pay attention to the ways in which they behave in order to reach the blessings they wish. Their social conditions are never taken into consideration and they feel completely responsible for their success or failure, for being able to follow the pastor or not. This premise of Christian control is also taken by the UCKG, because the believer who searches for this Church can be motivated to fulfil his wishes by tithing and following the model of behavior appreciated by the Church leaders. In addition, at the UCKG, confession is a practice that is also useful to the pastoral power;

³ For Hobbes, Tuck explains, the pastoral power would be held by the State or what he called the "Christian republic", which was centered around a Christian sovereign. This sovereign would rule his "subjects" through laws they would have to obey, so that everyone could live peacefully. The author affirms that Hobbes believed that a government should be based in reason and in Christian moral values, which would influence the laws as well. This agreement would put even the sovereign under the yoke of these laws, preventing him from taking arbitrary measures against his own subjects or people (Tuck, 2014: 313-589).

Foucault says that this form of power is not possible if the leader does not know his followers' ideas, if he does not persuade them to own up their secrets or tell him what they think (Foucault, 1994: 229). At the UCKG the believer confesses his sins not to a single clergyman, but to an audience that can watch and be aware of his mistakes in life, getting to know what not to do in order to keep on what they call the God path. These confessions take place during the testimony of life which believers share with the pastor and the audience, or during exorcisms, when the believer presents himself as if he were possessed by the Devil, who is allegedly responsible for that person's failure in life, according to what the UCKG leaders say. So, for the UCKG narrative, the believer who says he is being controlled by the Devil should not be seen as a miserable guilty person, but as a winner who is ready to be saved from evil. He is in fact a good example to be followed by the other believers. Fear can be used by a leader to justify his power and the UCKG leaders use the image of the Devil to scare and persuade their believers to follow the Church. It is important to say that the image of the Devil or the fear that it can provoke are not the only resources used by the UCKG to attract more followers or even to keep them attached to this Church. Moreover, the existence of this kind of power in the UCKG pastors' and bishops' practices does not mean that they do not believe in the precepts of the Church themselves. Before explaining more specifically how the UCKG uses the fear of the Devil as an instrument of power, it is worth mentioning some authors who worried about the use of fear as a way of power in the neoliberal societies.

Through reflection on Foucault's theories about the ways to exercise pastoral power, Debrix and Barder affirm that fear and relations of power derived from fear production are praised by the modern State and its leaders so that they can control and supervise the social body. They do so through multiple mechanisms of preservation of life such as health insurance, police organization, alarm systems, planned retirements and so on. The authors state that fear must be produced and shared by the individuals who take part in a society. As a consequence, this fear moves the market of security, which ensures order and safety, in order to make this society economically productive. Hence, neoliberal societies have been interested in maintaining people's fear for their lives through various governmental techniques and procedures (Debrix, Barder, 2012: 50-51). These authors also assert that the State, as any agent of control, would lose its meaning in a society, if they did not have the alleged function of protecting the individuals from dangers caused by violence and helplessness. Then, the State would guarantee peace and order to make people produce goods and money.

Without fear, individuals may not recognize the State's legitimacy and could not accept being subdued by its laws and policy (Debrix, Barden, 2012: 54).

Bauman, who also studied the function of fear in social organizations, admits that a great part of the trading capital is accumulated due to the feeling of insecurity people have nowadays⁴. He quotes as examples the fears of terrorism, natural disasters, and urban violence. For the author, the existing fear in neoliberal societies causes a lot of insecurity and a permanent feeling of hopelessness in people who see themselves as unable to rule their own lives (Bauman, 2007: 18-32). The author even says that this kind of fear is scarier when it is diffused, as a kind of threat that can suddenly assault. It is what Bauman calls the derived fear, a stable mental structure that produces in the individual a feeling of being constantly threatened and vulnerable not able to trust the available defenses. It is a continuous sensation of anxiety and alert, even though there is no real or present danger (Bauman, 2008: 9). According to Bauman, there are three kinds of derived fear: one that threatens the body and the individual's own assets; another that threatens the social order; and another that threatens social hierarchy. For the author, the derived fear is not really linked to a real and imminent danger, that is to say, people affected by it cannot understand it or connect it to any of the three kinds described above (Bauman, 2007: 10).

For Gross, it is necessary to establish an enemy in contemporary societies where fear is applied as an instrument of control. However, this enemy is not always identifiable, in fact, it is very often unknown as a suspect should be. An identified enemy would probably come from a foreign country and would be a cold and calculating deceiver of others, instead of the suspect, who would not be noted, and would act unpredictably. The suspect could even be a neighbor. Gross affirms that we live in a time of distrust, where anybody or anything can suddenly turn into an enemy (Gross, 2014: 27).

Bauman says that at a time people have lost their faith in institutions and great ideals, the fear of a probable enemy becomes ubiquitous and justifies the existence of a State that can supposedly protect them and ensure conditions in which people can take care of their lives. It is worth noting that the feeling of safety cannot be long-lasting in a neoliberal society, because fear must help drive consumption. Thus, in neoliberal societies, people always have to fear something, such as a terrorist, a hurricane, or a severe type of flu, so that the

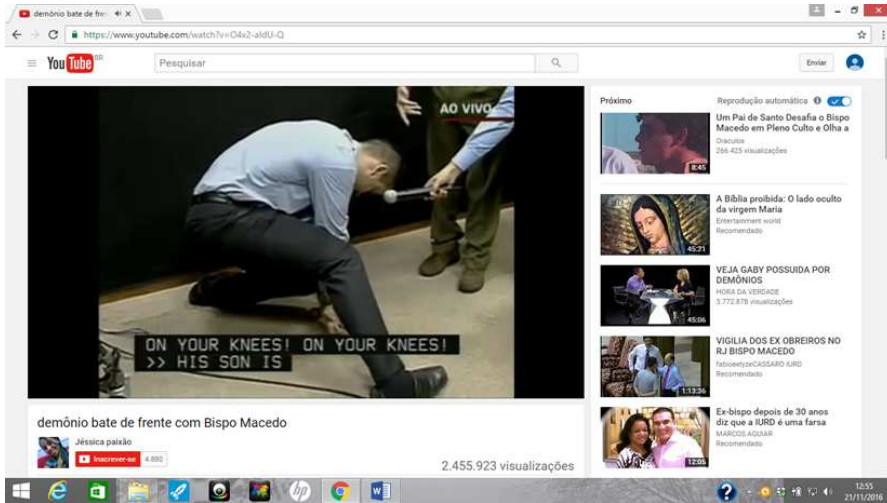
⁴ The fear mentioned by Debrix, Barden and Bauman, is not the natural feeling, impetus of life preservation, known by many animals. Well defined by Lagrange, it is a cultural fear, developed in neoliberal societies, which makes people react to a stimulus that is not an actual threat. It means that people can get alarmed by a hoax or a not imminent danger (Lagrange, 1996, apud Bauman, 2008: 9).

consumption of medicine and security systems is increased and they are able to generate profit. Bauman reiterates that in neoliberal societies the great enemy is the other, or everything that escapes the limits of someone's individuality: his home, country, beliefs and values. For the author, in these societies, trust and attachment to others are dissolved, giving place to suspicion and fear (Bauman, 2008: 32). In other words, fear is what makes the market system thrive. The UCKG takes hold of a fearful image of the Devil in order to exercise its pastoral power and guarantee for itself the fame of an institution able to protect and save. At the UCKG stages, the Devil is pictured as a recognizable foe, the incarnation of evil, whose actions can come from a variety of sources, such as music, TV programs, people or even animals. It means that the ideas of distrust and uncertainty centered around the suspect are rescued for this Devil, assumedly able to assault anybody at anytime or anywhere. At the UCKG or at other Pentecostal Churches, the Devil is understood to be responsible for illness, unemployment, misery and addiction. Astonishingly, the Devil is believed to lurk on the path of the ones who already joined the Church. So, this fear of the Devil can be seen as a derived fear, because it makes the believer feel continuously anxious and unsafe, even though it is not an actual menace. Consequently, this fear of the Devil persuades the believer to trust the Church and consider it as the source of solutions to his problems and as his great protector, as long as he keeps participating in the cults. During the cults, which is what meetings at the UCKG are called, or even during their TV programs, bishops and pastors advise their followers not to forget about going to those meetings. They say the Devil could take control of the followers' lives if they stopped attending those cults. Then, the image of the Devil is an agent of fear at the UCKG because the belief in its existence must keep the follower scared and always alert not to be controlled by it. The UCKG leaders state that the only way to get rid of the Devil's menace is to participate in the meetings during which believers frequently contribute financially to the Church. Then, apart from tithing, the believer must behave according to the role model valued at the UCKG that is not to use drugs, not to cheat on their spouse, not to be weak or to give in. He must do so in order to avoid being controlled by the Devil, the alleged cause of every evil done, within the UCKG ideology. This is the implied narrative that guides the use of the image of the Devil at the UCKG, and makes this representation of evil an instrument of the pastoral power at that church.

Picture 1. picture shows part of a YouTube post. Note the follower who presents himself as if he had been possessed by the Devil gets on his knees, al-

legedly subdued by the words of the bishop. The whole scene was recorded by the TV apparatus and spread in the media.

PICTURE 1. PART OF A YOUTUBE POST



Fonte: Demônio bate de frente com Bispo Macedo, 2012.

THE FEAR OF THE DEVIL AND THE SEARCH FOR SOCIAL ADVANCEMENT

As one of the ways to assure its pastoral power, the UCKG uses the image of the Devil to persuade its followers to be present at the meetings and to tithe. During the scenes of exorcism in which the Devil appears, the main idea is that the possessed follower loses his image of a loser and becomes a free Christian winner, able to seek wealth and prosperity. According to Birman, while considered possessed by the Devil the follower's image is associated with an idea of poverty, linked to a rural and traditional imagery, opposed to a progressive, industrial and urban entrepreneur, closer to the neoliberal standards of success that places the responsibility for success or failure on the individual himself. Thus, Birman continues, the UCKG Devil with features of Afro-Brazilian divinities, which are linked to a rural and traditional part of Brazilian culture is associated with poverty and all kinds of negativity, and that explains why the UCKG reproaches Afro-Brazilian religions and their sacred images. As soon as the follower is freed from the alleged Devil, he gains the status of a winner who is finally ready to search for success and wealth. The construction of this new image of the believer, projects him into a spectacular and globalized world that the UCKG has built for itself, by being visible and influential in the media and

politics. Birman says that the UCKG untied the image of poor people in Brazil from stereotypes of victims and gave them a chance to see themselves as possible winners within the neoliberal system (Birman, 2003: 242). The author remarks that the reason for the UCKG's success among underprivileged people is the fact that it includes them in the universe of business and modern economical values. Instead of praising poverty and tradition, the UCKG preaches wealth and blessings for everybody in this world. Birman explains that the UCKG prefers its followers not to be associated with the humble conditions of believers in local saints, in *yalorixás*, or in Catholic rituals in poor districts. The UCKG associates its followers with cosmopolitanism and wealth (Birman, 2003: 252).

In the model of society propagated by the UCKG, says Birman, Christian endeavors are rewarded by financial prosperity, because the ones who start following the Church abandon the image of losers, subdued by social exclusion, and start to identify themselves as potential winners and entrepreneurs, adapted to a world that was once denied to them. For Birman, the believer idealized by the UCKG is someone who leaves a stigmatized perspective of poverty, attached to those who live in slums and suburban areas to achieve the possibility to be in a place of political, social and mediatic visibility, which is the Church. So, the UCKG follower can be seduced by a religious practice that separates him from an imaginary of tradition and rural culture to instead invite him into a Christian world, characterized by the neoliberal standards of success (Birman, 2003: 253). However, the UCKG follower must be fearful of the Devil and afraid of the possibility of returning to poverty and illness. This fear has to keep him motivated to continue following the Church. Then, although the UCKG offers its followers the possibility to identify themselves with a prosperous and wealthy universe, it is interesting for this Church to keep those people always afraid of the Devil and his alleged powers to ruin anyone's life. Once in contact with the Church, a follower will regularly be encouraged to tithe and to give other contributions. As the UCKG bishops say: the more you receive, the more you should give to God⁵; whose representative on Earth would be the UCKG. According to the UCKG ideology, the Devil is solely responsible for anybody's failure and the only cause of every health problem, which hides the real social and historical reasons of social inequality.

As Huang says, the monsters incarnate the negativity and the threats that are originated in neoliberal social organizations, and are able to disguise the

⁵ That is what bishops of the UCKG say during the cults called "Congress for Success" which take place on Mondays in the Temple of Solomon, in São Paulo.

economic and historical circumstances that have caused poverty and illness to a part of the population. For Huang, the monsters have the function of purging the horrors and antagonisms inherent in a society (HUANG, 2011: 45). This is what the Devil does in the UCKG speeches, since it is in charge of every kind of misery and difficulty undergone by the followers. Apart from purging the contradictions of a neoliberalist society, the Devil also becomes an instrument of fear and control at the UCKG. It is important to remind that fear is not the only instrument of control existent at the UCKG. This Church uses hope as well, because it persuades the followers not to give in the meetings and to continue to struggle and tithe. The UCKG intends to make people believe that if they obey its precepts, they will achieve wealth and financial prosperity on Earth.

CONCLUSION: THE AUDIOVISUAL IMAGE OF FEAR AND PERSUASION

The image of the Devil created at the UCKG can be seen as the result of a discursive process that utilizes fear in order to help control people's lives, according to the model of the pastoral power, in which a leader is seen as the one able to guide individuals to salvation by showing them the alleged correct path. By adopting this kind of exercise of power, the UCKG proposes a new idea of reality in which the Devil exists and causes every wickedness. With this tool, the UCKG frightens its followers and motivates them to be alert and watch their own steps, so that they do not fall into the Devil's tricks and are worthy of achieving success in their lives. The UCKG presents itself as the institution able to protect anyone from evil, able to encourage its followers to have the strength and discipline to escape from the Devil and one day, achieve their wishes of prosperity in this world. Being a discursive construction, the Devil at the UCKG is designed, defined and built to persuade and reinforce the alleged power of the Church that is believed to be able to protect its followers and guarantee their wealth. Hence, the image of the Devil can be understood as an instrument of fear and a tool at the UCKG system of power. It is not only a visual image that can be represented by some believers during the cults, but also an audiovisual image broadcasted on TV and on the YouTube. In order to make people believe in the power of its Devil, the UCKG would not merely tell people stories about this Christian personification of evil. Instead, they show individuals who represent the Devil as if they were possessed by it, and considered possessed, these individuals describe in front of the audience exactly what they have been suffering while subdued by the alleged Devil. This physical and audiovisual image is

spread on TV and on the internet and gets its persuasive power increased. As Bauman says, cameras are able to give the impression that what they show is true and worthy of trust, while human intermediates, who talk about things cannot achieve the same power of persuasion (Bauman, 2008: 29). Thus, the image of the Devil at the UCKG is designed to be a spectacular and mediatic event that helps that Church exercise its pastoral power by scaring its followers, which means this image of the Devil tries to frighten in order to convince people to follow that Church.

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