

**Religion and Politics: Clash of Meanings about the Evangelical Faith in Pastors' Posts on Instagram / *Religião e política: embate de sentidos sobre a fé evangélica em posts de pastores no Instagram***

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ABSTRACT

This work aims to reflect on possible meanings for the evangelical faith based on utterances produced by three evangelical ministers in their social networks when they enunciate on themes that are linked, directly or indirectly, to political agendas. Based on the theoretical scope of studies in Applied Linguistics and on Bakhtinian conceptions of language, our analyzes point to three predominant meanings, which mean the evangelical faith as: i) reaffirmation of identity; ii) exercise of otherness and respect to the other; and iii) political practice. Such meanings demonstrate that there are contradictions within the religious discursivity, which allows the beating between hate speeches and respect and empathy ones within the realm of the evangelical faith. Thus, looking for cracks in religious discourse that oppose fundamentalist and authoritarian discourses is an ethical duty of a religious leader who recognizes his social and discursive role as influential in taking positions and, therefore, in the lives of the members of their congregation.

KEYWORDS: Discourse; Evangelicals; Ethics

RESUMO

*Este trabalho visa refletir sobre possíveis sentidos para a fé evangélica a partir de enunciados produzidos por três pastores evangélicos em suas redes sociais ao enunciarem sobre temas que se vinculam, direta ou indiretamente, a pautas políticas. Fundamentados no escopo teórico dos estudos em Linguística Aplicada e em concepções bakhtinianas de linguagem, nossas análises apontam três sentidos predominantes, os quais significam a fé evangélica como: i) reafirmação da identidade; ii) exercício da alteridade e respeito ao outro; e iii) prática política. Tais sentidos demonstram que há contradições no interior da discursividade religiosa, o que permite o batimento entre discursos de ódio e de respeito e empatia no âmbito da fé evangélica. Assim, buscar as fissuras no discurso religioso que se contraponham a discursos fundamentalistas e autoritários é um dever ético de um líder religioso que reconheça o seu papel social e discursivo como influente nas tomadas de posição e, por conseguinte, na vida dos membros de sua congregação.*

*PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Discursos; Evangélicos; Ética*

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In fact, it is possible to view religion as if it were nothing more than a meaningless discourse, as empiricists/positivists did. But, as Camus observed, it is not possible to ignore that people find reasons to live and die in their religious hopes, launching themselves into grand undertakings and daring crazy gestures, composing poems and songs, marking the place where the beloved dead were buried and, if necessary, even surrendering to martyrdom.<sup>1</sup>

*Rubem Alves*

## **Introduction**

Among the subjects that, according to popular wisdom, should not be discussed, here we dare to reflect on two: religion and politics. More specifically, we are interested in thinking about some meanings that are produced for evangelical faith in the intersection between politics and religion.

According to the online Michaelis Dictionary, religion can be defined as “service or worship to this superior being or supernatural forces that is carried out through rites, prayers and observance of what are considered divine commandments, generally expressed in sacred writings.”<sup>2</sup> From the perspective of the sciences of religion, Santos (2021, p. 34) states that this is “a form of knowledge” that “has the world and life as its objects, seeking solutions and interpretations of reality, but with distinctions of origin,”<sup>3</sup> Such definitions give us little insight into the complexity of beliefs, social interactions, rituals and views of the religious subject. In fact, it tells us little about the dynamics of religious practices, given their diversity and the countless possibilities for professing faith.

In this sense, the title of this paper points to our understanding that the discussion about evangelical faith needs to be situated in a universe marked by the plurality of visions, beliefs, and practices, by tensions, contradictions, and dissensions between

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<sup>1</sup> In Portuguese: “De fato, é possível encarar a religião como se ela não passasse de um discurso sem sentido, como o fizeram os empiricistas/positivistas. Mas, como Camus observou, não é possível ignorar que as pessoas encontram razões para viver e morrer em suas esperanças religiosas, lançando-se em empresas grandiosas e atrevendo-se a gestos loucos, compondo poemas e canções, marcando o lugar onde os mortos amados foram enterrados e, se necessário, entregando-se mesmo ao martírio.”

<sup>2</sup> In Portuguese: “serviço ou culto a esse ser superior ou forças sobrenaturais que se realiza por meio de ritos, preces e observância do que se considera mandamentos divinos, geralmente expressos em escritos sagrados.”

<sup>3</sup> In Portuguese: “uma forma de conhecimento” and “tem como objetos o mundo e a vida, buscando soluções e interpretações da realidade, porém com distinções de origem.”

subjects. In other words, what evangelical faith are we talking about? Making up 31% of the population, and growing significantly in Brazil, the number of evangelicals will probably surpass that of Catholics by the year 2032.<sup>4</sup> However, Spyer (2020) draws our attention to the diversity that the term evangelical encompasses. In his words,

(...) the current interpretation positions the evangelical Christian - including Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal - within the tradition of Protestantism. But if, on the one hand, an evangelical is also a Protestant, on the other, within everyday usage, being an evangelical can have a different meaning from being a Protestant<sup>5</sup> (Spyer, 2020, p. 51).

Thus, one could distinguish between “historical Protestants” and “evangelical Protestants.” The first concern “Christians belonging to churches that emerged as a more immediate development of the Protestant Reformation from the 16th century onwards, as is the case of the Lutheran, Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopal and other churches”<sup>6</sup> (Spyer, 2020, p. 51). The second, in turn, include more recent groups such as Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostals, representing, in most cases, churches that emerged in the 20th century. Echoing Spyer, we will use the term “evangelical” to encompass both groups because we understand that the boundaries between them are fluid and the terminological distinction is insufficient to demarcate the identity complexity that brings together religious subjects.

In recent years, we have experienced an increase in tensions in the political scenario, marked by discursive clashes, ideological polarizations, as well as the circulation of hate speech and fake news (Butler, 2021; Trindade, 2022; Mercuri and Lima-Lopes, 2020; Silva, 2021). In this scenario, religious discourse seems to have played a fundamental role in operating as a catalyst for tensions and political positions of different natures. Perini (2023), for example, when investigating speeches by former

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<sup>4</sup> The study was carried out by demographer José Eustáquio Alves, retired professor from the IBGE – *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* [Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistical] published on the website: <https://veja.abril.com.br/brasil/evangelicos-devem-ultrapassar-catolicos-no-brazil-from-2032>, by journalist Zylberkan (2020).

<sup>5</sup> In Portuguese: “a interpretação corrente posiciona o cristão evangélico - inclusive o pentecostal e o neopentecostal - dentro da tradição do protestantismo. Mas se por um lado o evangélico é também um protestante, por outro, dentro do uso cotidiano, ser evangélico pode ter um significado diferente de ser protestante.”

<sup>6</sup> In Portuguese: “aos cristãos pertencentes a igrejas surgidas como desdobramento mais imediato da Reforma Protestante a partir do século 16, como é o caso das igrejas Luterana, Batista, Presbiteriana, Metodista, Episcopal e outras.”

president of Brazil (2020-2023) addressed to evangelicals, highlights how, when intertwined with political discourse, the seizure of biblical discourse reinforces the maintenance of a power project. In his words, “biblical discourse, when co-opted by political discourse, functions both as an instrument, used with cynicism and hypocrisy, in the service of a political project of power, and as a way of saying that calls on the evangelical Christian subject to identify”<sup>7</sup> (Perini, 2023, p. 192).

In light of these considerations, we inscribe ourselves in the theoretical scope of studies in Applied Linguistics (AL) and in Bakhtinian conceptions of language to reflect on possible meanings for evangelical faith based on utterances produced by the evangelical pastors André Valadão, Henrique Vieira and Ed René Kivitz. The choice of these pastors is due to their significant representation in the evangelical environment and repercussion on social networks.

André Machado Valadão, born in 1978, is an evangelical pastor from Minas Gerais, singer, and composer of contemporary Christian music. He is a 45-year-old white male, presents himself as a public figure and has around 5.8 million followers on Instagram and almost 1.4 million followers on Twitter (currently X).

The Baptist pastor Henrique dos Santos Vieira Lima, born in 1987, is known as Henrique Vieira, has 771 thousand followers on Instagram and almost 52 thousand followers on his YouTube channel. He is an actor, poet, teacher, and federal deputy for the *Partido Socialismo e Liberdade* [Socialism and Freedom Party]. In 2022, he was elected federal deputy for Rio de Janeiro with 53,933 votes. He has a degree in theology, social sciences, and history, studies the art of clowning and is a member of the deliberative council of *Instituto Wladimir Herzog* [Wladimir Herzog Institute].<sup>8</sup> He is present in various media, including television, and is the author of the book *O amor como revolução* [Love as Revolution] (Vieira, 2019).

Pastor at the *Igreja Batista da Água Branca* [Água Branca Baptist Church], in São Paulo, Ed René Kivitz, born in 1963, has 340 thousand followers on Instagram, 151 thousand subscribers on his YouTube channel and 123.6 thousand followers on Twitter. According to the Instituto CPFL – Companhia Paulista de Força e Luz [CPFL Institute –

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<sup>7</sup> In Portuguese: “o discurso bíblico, ao ser cooptado pelo discurso político, tanto funciona como um instrumento, usado com cinismo e hipocrisia, a serviço de um projeto político de poder, como um modo de dizer que convoca o sujeito cristão evangélico a se identificar.”

<sup>8</sup> Information available at the website: <https://www.companhiadasletras.com.br/colaborador/06015/pastor-henrique-vieira>

Paulistan Company of Energy and Light]<sup>9</sup>, the pastor has a master's degree in Religious Sciences from *Universidade Metodista de São Paulo* [Methodist University of São Paulo], is a theologian, lecturer and writer, having published the following books: *Vivendo com propósitos: a resposta cristã para o sentido da vida* [Living with a Purpose: Christian Reply to the Meaning of Life] (Kivitz, 2003), *Outra espiritualidade: fé, graça e resistência* [Another Spirituality: Faith, Grace and Resistance] (Kivitz, 2014a), *O livro mais mal-humorado da Bíblia: a acidez da vida e a sabedoria do Eclesiastes* [The most badly-tempered Book About Bible: Acidity of Life and the Wisdom of Ecclesiastes] (Kivitz, 2014b) e *Talmidim: o passo a passo de Jesus* [Talmidim: step by step of Jesus] (Kivitz, 2012).<sup>10</sup>

More specifically, we developed a qualitative and interpretive research, in order to analyse the meanings that emerge when, based on certain positions, these pastors enunciate on their social networks about topics that are linked, directly or indirectly, to political agendas.

Still with Spyer (2020), we are aware of the risk of simplistic and reductive views, commonly used to define evangelicals. According to the anthropologist,

The most common stereotypes describe evangelicals as merchants of faith who take advantage of the superstition of a naïve and ignorant people. They are also conservative, against abortion and perceives homosexuality as a disease that can be treated and cured. They are fanatical in rejecting science, especially Darwinian evolutionism, in favor of a literal reading of the Bible. And as intolerant, they fight the “unfaithful ones,” which in Brazil are especially those who belong to Afro-based religions<sup>11</sup> (Spyer, 2020, pp. 94-95).

In this way, investigating discourses produced by pastors from different political-partisan positions – even under the “label” of the same religion – can contribute to the understanding of the nuances of meaning that constitute certain religious practices, as

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<sup>9</sup> The CPFL Institute is a private social investment platform of the CPFL Energia Grupo.

<sup>10</sup> Information available at the website: <https://institutocpfl.org.br/play/palestrante/ed-rene-kivitz/>

<sup>11</sup> In Portuguese: “Os estereótipos mais comuns descrevem o evangélico como mercador da fé que se aproveita da superstição de um povo ingênuo e ignorante. Ele é também conservador, contra o aborto e percebe a homossexualidade como uma doença que pode ser tratada e curada. Ele é fanático por rejeitar a ciência, especialmente o evolucionismo darwinista, em favor de uma leitura literal da Bíblia. E como intolerante, ele combate ‘infiéis,’ que no Brasil são especialmente aqueles que pertencem às religiões de matriz afro.”

well as to discuss the representation of evangelicals that currently operates in Brazilian society, mainly by non-evangelicals.

In terms of organization, besides this introduction and final considerations, we discuss, in the next section, the relationship between religion, language and politics, from AL and Bakhtinian studies; later, we present our gestures of analysis.

## **1 Religion, Language and Politics**

To analyze and understand how the production of discourses and possible meanings of *evangelical faith* takes place in posts of pastors André Valadão, Henrique Vieira and Ed René Kivitz, we situate our work within the scope of trans/interdisciplinary studies in Applied Linguistics (AL) (Moita Lopes, 2006; Kleiman, 2013), for whom language is a social practice, constitutive and constituent of subjects. AL takes as its object of study language in its socio-historical, political, cultural and ideological concreteness and provides possibilities for theoretical-methodological and analytical interfaces that are responsive to social life and that contribute to the understanding of the “role of discourse in the constitution of the subject, of the subject as multiple and conflicting, of the need for reflexivity in the production of knowledge”<sup>12</sup> (Pennycook, 2006, p. 78).

The social subject, in this sense, admittedly multifaceted in its linguistic practices, represents an important research interest for an AL increasingly ethically implicated in everyday life and with a political refusal of academic thoughts that say little to/about embodied subjects or those which have historically been placed on the margins of academic-scientific knowledge production processes. We understand that this position brings us closer to Bakhtinian studies, for which, as Molon and Vianna (2012, p. 155) reinforce, “understanding language as a social practice refers, without any mediation, to the Circle’s statement that the fundamental reality of language is verbal interaction (or

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<sup>12</sup> In Portuguese: “papel do discurso na constituição do sujeito, do sujeito como múltiplo e conflitante, da necessidade de reflexividade na produção do conhecimento.”

discursive interaction) and that it takes place between socio-historically situated subjects.”<sup>13</sup>

In this sense, thinking about religion from a discursive perspective represents recognizing that religious discourse is not immune, for example, to the enlacement of political-partisan ideologies, in such a way that the subjects who inscribe themselves in this discursive place must also be taken as constituted by an identity amalgam (Moita Lopes, 2006) and which, therefore, enunciate under the aegis of intertwined voices, points of view and world views that imply, as reinforced by Bakhtin (1986)<sup>14</sup> in the essay *The problem of speech genres*, a diversity of direct responsive attitudes and dialogical resonances.

As a result of this positioning, we inscribe ourselves in the philosophy of language of the Bakhtin Circle, for which the process of enunciation and the concrete utterances that emerge from it function as the product of interaction between socially organized individuals and materialize speeches full of dialogical tones, what, in our view, appears to be convergent with the agenda of AL mentioned above. Thus, when we take discourse as the language in operation at a given socio-historical-ideological moment, we return to Bakhtin (1993),<sup>15</sup> defending the conception of a subject who is always social, with an axiological positioning in the world. In this context, it is worth reinforcing that “every utterance always and necessarily emerges in a cultural context saturated with meanings and values and is always a responsive act, that is, the taking of a position”<sup>16</sup> (Faraco, 2009, p. 25).

In this way, we understand that this subject, always social, actively responsive, “manages to imprint traces of autonomy and uniqueness in his speech and actions”<sup>17</sup> (Santos; Lima, 2013, p. 4) in the different contexts of social insertion (political, economic, religious, cultural, among others). This allows us to recognize that the conception of meaning in Bakhtinian studies is related to dialogue with others and to the relationships

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<sup>13</sup> In Portuguese: “compreender a linguagem como uma prática social remete, sem mediação alguma, à afirmação do Círculo de que a realidade fundamental da língua é a interação verbal (ou interação discursiva) e que ela se dá entre sujeitos sócio-historicamente situados.”

<sup>14</sup> BAKHTIN, Mikhail. The Problem of Speech Genres. In: BAKHTIN, Mikhail. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986. pp. 60-102.

<sup>15</sup> BAKHTIN, Mikhail. *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Translation and notes by Vadim Lianpunov. Edited by Michael Holquist. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1993.

<sup>16</sup> In Portuguese: “todo enunciado emerge sempre e necessariamente num contexto cultural saturado de significados e valores e é sempre um ato responsivo, isto é uma tomada de posição.”

<sup>17</sup> In Portuguese: “consegue imprimir traços de autonomia e singularidade ao seu dizer e as suas ações.”

that are established between history and language, in which subjects in becoming “enunciate, evoking voices from a past that constitutes them and a future that is being realized”<sup>18</sup> (Guilherme, 2013, p. 273).

Furthermore, to analyze the voices put into dialogue in the concrete utterances of the pastors, we mobilize the concept of polyphonic referentiality, developed by Santos (2000; 2012) as an extension of the Bakhtinian thought and which represents the “heterogeneity underlying the discursive bases of the socio-discursive imaginary of the subjects (...) permeated by distinct discourses, [in which] the voices of the subjects are interspersed by several other voices and by several other discourses”<sup>19</sup> (Santos, 2000, p. 231). For the author, this conceptual extension helps us think about how the discursive bases that guide the subjects’ imagination are made up of elements of a “historical, social, cultural, philosophical, psychological, political and linguistic nature”<sup>20</sup> (Santos, 2012, pp. 109-110), which influence and are constitutive of social inscriptions and, consequently, of their speeches, functioning as voices in confrontation and confluence.

Considering, in this sense, the pastors’ utterances from the perspective of a polyphonic referentiality, it is necessary to reinforce that every “utterance occupies a particular *definite* position in a given sphere of communication. It is impossible to determine its position without correlating it with other positions” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 91, emphasis in the original).<sup>21</sup> Thus, understanding language in line with what the Bakhtin Circle advocates presupposes the refusal of any neutrality in the enunciation of the word or a word “not touched” by humans. Even though the idea, in some aspects of Christianity, that “God speaks” regardless of the historical-social, cultural and ideological conditions of speech is very seductive, Bakhtinian studies invite us to consider that, in enunciative processes, the word is placed on stage based on the language production of concrete and socially situated subjects.

It should also be noted that thinking about religion is above all reflecting on the issue of language. It is about, for example, questioning which conceptions of language

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<sup>18</sup> In Portuguese: “enunciam, evocando vozes de um passado que lhes constitui e de um futuro que está a se realizar.”

<sup>19</sup> In Portuguese: “heterogeneidade subjacente às bases discursivas do imaginário sociodiscursivo dos sujeitos (...) transpassada por discursos distintos, [em que] as vozes dos sujeitos são entrecortadas por várias outras vozes e por vários outros discursos.”

<sup>20</sup> In Portuguese: “histórica, social, cultural, filosófica, psicológica, política e linguística.”

<sup>21</sup> For reference, see footnote 14.



can support a faith anchored in a “biblical discourse.”<sup>22</sup> *What is meaning? What is text? What is the sacred text? What status do speakers have?* These are some questions whose answers, implicitly or explicitly, guide religious beliefs and practices, as well as ways of reading the Bible (the book that contains God’s revelation for Christians).

Questioning the crystallized meanings that underlie religious beliefs and practices is, in a way, recognizing that “*the immediate social situation and the broader social milieu wholly determine – and determine from within, so to speak – the structure of an utterance*” (Vološinov, 1973, p. 86).<sup>23</sup> Thus, our investigation into the meanings of evangelical faith in the words of pastors comes from the perception that their positions and arguments reflect and refract the “intersecting of differently oriented social interests within one and the same sign community” (Vološinov, 1973, p. 23)<sup>24</sup> and, therefore, they are not immune to ideological, economic, social and political discourses and crossings that resonate in their historical moment.

Let us now move on to the analytical discussion.

## 2 Gestures of Analysis

As previously stated, we developed qualitative-interpretative research in order to understand possible meanings for the evangelical faith that are (un)veiled in posts by the 3 pastors mentioned. This choice is due to the fact that they appear as public figures on Instagram, are quite present and influential on social media, as well as speaking from different political orientations, namely: pastor André Valadão, of a more conservative orientation, generally associated with thoughts of aversion to diversity of ideas that tend to reinforce prejudiced positions; and pastors Henrique Vieira and Ed René Kivitz, considered more progressive, generally associated with a debate that includes reflection

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<sup>22</sup> We chose the definition by Perini (2023, p. 179) who, in his study from the perspective of materialist Discourse Analysis, understands biblical discourse as one that “takes the Holy Bible as its material base, has a particular functioning when being instrumentalized by discourse presidential politician, in other words, by being reproduced/updated in the service of a certain political project” [In Portuguese: “toma como base material a Bíblia Sagrada, tem funcionamento particular ao ser instrumentalizado pelo discurso político presidencial, noutras palavras, ao ser reproduzido/atualizado a serviço de certo projeto político”]. We understand that this definition dialogues with the perspective of analyzing the ideological intersections between religion and politics undertaken here.

<sup>23</sup> VOLOŠINOV, Valentin. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Trad. Ladislav Matejka and R. Titunik. Translator’s Preface. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973.

<sup>24</sup> For reference, see footnote 23.

on prejudices and inequalities within and outside the religious community.<sup>25</sup> Our selection consists of the analysis of 5 posts on Instagram by pastor André Valadão; 5 posts on Instagram by pastor Henrique Vieira; and a brief preaching video posted by pastor Ed René on his Instagram.

We highlight that the pastors' speech represents a significant portion of the discourses that constitute the evangelical faith, so that their positions reverberate socio-historically, engendering subjectivities and producing (im)material effects. We also emphasize that we do not intend to cover all possibilities of meanings, rather, we are interested in thinking about how some utterances that emerge in the words of the subjects under analysis circulate within the scope of the evangelical religious sphere. Thus, considering that words mean from the resumption of what has already been said, we seek to analyze how the statements in the posts configure the production of possible meanings about and of evangelical faith.

Let us, then, analyze the posts by Pastor André Valadão.

## 2.1 Evangelical Faith as Reaffirmation of Identity

André Valadão is a pastor who is very present on social media, standing out for his use of jovial and colloquial language. He became well known for his use of the catchphrase “*cê num é crente não*” [you ain't no believer], given in response to questions asked by internet users on a wide range of topics.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Despite the complexity that the terms ‘conservative’ and ‘progressive’ present, the distinctions presented in the Dictionary of Political Concepts (Ortega & Silva, 2020) are sufficient for the scope of this article. According to him, ‘conservatism’ refers to a “social philosophy that designates a system of beliefs that aims to maintain current policies and standards of order. It is based on attachment to tradition and old customs in opposition to changes or innovations” [In Portuguese: “filosofia social que designa um sistema de crenças que visa a manutenção das políticas e padrões de ordem vigentes. Apoia-se no apego à tradição e nos antigos costumes em oposição [sic] às mudanças ou inovações [sic]”] (Ortega & Silva, 2020, p. 24). As for progressives, it is understood that they are historically identified as those who “fight against inequalities, social injustices, for inclusion and recognition of diversity: social, ethnic, gender, race, etc. They fight for social change with their practices and demands, participate in the construction of a nation’s political-social culture, and contribute to raising awareness in society, like the women’s movement today” [In Portuguese: “lutam contra as desigualdades, as injustiças sociais, pela inclusão e reconhecimento da diversidade: social, étnica, de gênero, raça etc. Lutam pela mudança social com suas práticas e demandas, participam da construção da cultura político-social de uma nação, e contribuem para a conscientização da sociedade, a exemplo do movimento das mulheres na atualidade”]. (Ortega & Silva, 2020, p. 103).

<sup>26</sup> Pastor André Valadão even published the book *Faça sua pergunta!* [Pose your Question!] (Valadão, 2021) based on interactions on his Instagram.

On his website, one can read, in the ‘biography’ tab (<http://www.andrevaladao.com/biografia>), that he has been a volunteer pastor at the *Igreja Batista da Lagoinha* [Lagoinha Baptist Church], located in Belo Horizonte-MG, for 17 years, and founder of Lagoinha Orlando Church, in Florida, since 2017. Mention is made of the pastor’s numerous musical releases, the various countries in which he has been “breaking borders” with his music. The various social networks he has stand out, as well as the various awards in recognition of his work are pointed out. The website highlights that André Valadão is “a great entrepreneur,” having created the brand *Fé* [Faith], which “at first was something he developed within his local church, but, after the release of the album of the same name (2009), has become one of the best-known brands in Brazil.”<sup>27</sup>

André Valadão has significant representation in the context of evangelical faith in Brazil and abroad. A supporter of the former president of Brazil, the pastor actively positioned himself during the 2022 presidential elections, through posts with content against political movements considered to be left-wing and their (re)known political platforms and defense agendas. We are interested here in understanding the discourses he produced, problematizing the extent to which his utterances are echoed in other, “already-said” discourses that acquire, based on the concreteness of language practices, the status of novelty.

Among the more than ten thousand posts on Instagram, the following stand out: preaching, personal photos and photos related to religious events, interaction with internet users, among others. With our objective in mind, we selected 5 posts - derived from the question box format - published between February 2022 and February 2023, in which the pastor responds to questions from his followers, and which refer more explicitly to some relationship with politics. It is worth mentioning that the holder of the account is the one who selects which questions will be answered and, eventually, published in their Instagram stories.

We present, in tables, the transcription of the Instagram posts with the question and the answer given by the pastor, in video format. Let us see.

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<sup>27</sup> In Portuguese: “a princípio era algo que ele mesmo desenvolveu dentro de sua igreja local, mas, a partir do lançamento do álbum homônimo (2009), tornou-se uma das marcas mais conhecidas do Brasil.”

Question:	What do you think of a pastor getting involved in politics?
Answer:	I think it's very important. There was a time when it wasn't so necessary, but now, my daughter, pastors and churches must take a stand regarding this ideology that is trying to contaminate schools and colleges. It's time for the church to take a stand.

Table 1 - Transcription Post 1 AV.<sup>28</sup> Source:

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/CZfbDLahVA9/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y%3D>

Question:	Electoral propaganda in the service, what do you think?
Answer:	Today more than ever, the church must tell people the level of ideological war, of worldly philosophies that are trying to enter our children, our lives. The church must indeed position itself in some way.

Table 2 - Transcription Post 2 AV.<sup>29</sup> Source:

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/ChnjZZ6FiXE/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y%3D>

The first two selected posts date respectively from February 2nd and August 23rd, 2022. In the first one, André Valadão appears standing, wearing a black t-shirt and in the background one can see a television on the wall with a sign above it which reads “kitchen.”<sup>30</sup> The post is accompanied by the following comment from the pastor: “Open your eyes people! Look at the media today, most of the professors, deans, reports... 🙄.”<sup>31</sup> In the second, he responds sitting in the seat of a moving car and wearing a cap with the Mercedes brand logo, the following comment accompanies the post: “Yes, the church is a voice!”<sup>32</sup>

The questions raised by internet users explicitly point to the relationship between politics and religion. It is observed that, in both, the pastor establishes a temporal rupture that marks a before and after for the church: the past did not demand a political position

<sup>28</sup> In Portuguese: Pergunta: “O que você acha de pastor se metendo em política?” / Resposta: “Acho importantíssimo. Houve um tempo que não era tão necessário, mas agora, minha filha, os pastores e igrejas têm que posicionar sim quanto a essa ideologia que tá tentando contaminar as escolas, faculdades. É hora da igreja se posicionar.”

<sup>29</sup> In Portuguese: Pergunta: “Propaganda eleitoral no culto, o que o senhor acha?” / Resposta: “Hoje mais do que nunca, a igreja tem que falar pras pessoas o nível da guerra ideológica, de filosofias mundanas que estão tentando entrar nas nossas crianças, na nossa vida. A igreja tem que se posicionar sim de alguma forma.”

<sup>30</sup> The sign is originally written in English and means ‘cozinha’ in Portuguese.

<sup>31</sup> In Portuguese: “Abram os olhos gente! Olhem a mídia hoje, grande parte dos professores, reitores, reportagens ... 🙄.”

<sup>32</sup> In Portuguese: “A igreja é voz sim!”

from the church like the present. However, “today more than ever” the church needs to take a political stance.

But what event establishes the need for a political positioning of the church today? The answer, according to him, would be in the ideologies that contaminate schools and colleges. Resuming utterances about “ideologies that contaminate” produced by pastor André Valadão himself, which can be seen as recurrent within the discourses that convey the Christian faith, one understands that the pastor refers to political positions considered to be left-wing, which acquire, in his speech, meanings such as “dirt.” Evangelical faith would then be an exercise of purity, protected by the affiliation with right-wing political ideologies, which would give it the duty to “get involved” in this agenda.

The expressions “ideological war” and “worldly philosophies” circumscribe the response within a moral scope. The need to protect children and life itself from such ideologies and philosophies would therefore justify what the question calls electoral propaganda within the churches, which are now a “indeed” voice. The use of the term “war” is interesting, placing the argument in the military field, so that there would be a dispute against an enemy, materialized, in this case, in perverse concepts and ideas. This is a warning reinforced, in the comment on the first post, by the call to “open your eyes” and by the reference to “professor, deans, reports.” An opposition is discursively created between an external world (represented by everything that would contaminate and distort the truths of faith) and the church (a place of protection for relying on the truth).

Considering that, for Vološinov (1973),<sup>33</sup> existence is reflected and refracted in the ideological sign, with the refraction appearing from the intersection of multi-directed social interests, the “enemy” sign, in the evangelical Christian religious space, is linked to a network of meanings that feed the idea of a confrontation, of an entity to be fought, which is corroborated by a verse, in the Letter of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians, commonly mobilized in sermons: “for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”<sup>34</sup> (Ephesians 6:12). Through the binary logic that underpins Christianity, it can be inferred that, in the enunciative context under

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<sup>33</sup> For reference, see footnote 23.

<sup>34</sup> New Testament. *BIBLE*. Ephesians. Available at: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%20%3A12%2CEfesios%20%3A12&version=NIV;NVI>. Last access: 04 Jan. 2024.

analysis, if the ideological principles that govern the political left are worldly and secular, those on the right seem to be elevated to the status of the divine and sacred.

This is not about defending here the political neutrality of churches or refusing the right of ministers to position themselves and support candidates for election, since, according to the Circle’s conception of language, every utterance is always ideological. Rather, we are interested in understanding the discursive functioning that allows the formulation and circulation of meanings that, when producing effects of truth, bring material implications that affect the conditions of existence of subjects. Taking a position against or in favor of an ideology in a space where the polyphonic referentiality of social subjects is ensured and recognized through their diversity of equipollent and equivalent voices could be an exercise of citizenship and respect, that is, healthy for democracy. However, by demonizing the left and praising the right (or vice versa), from an inscription in a discursive place constituted by binary logics of dispute and conflict (evil x good; God x devil; heaven x hell; world x church), one produces a reductive and Manichean vision of society and the world.

Question:	Pastor, can anyone who voted for the thief in both rounds be considered evangelical?
Answer:	I consider, I André, I am convinced that anyone who believes in the philosophy of the left does not really understand it or is not a believer.

Table 3. Transcription Post 3 AV.<sup>35</sup> Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CkzE5MUr6VV/><sup>36</sup>

When asked about “who voted for the thief,” on November 10, 2022, André Valadão, although not mentioning the name of the current president of the republic, Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, assumes the ideological position of the judgment made by the internet user by associating the question with a left-wing party. In his response, he is incisive in saying that “those who believe in the philosophy of the left either do not

<sup>35</sup> In Portuguese: Pergunta: “Pastor, pode se considerar evangélico quem votou no ladrão nos 2 turnos?” / Resposta: “Eu considero, eu André, tenho a convicção de que quem acredita na filosofia da esquerda não entende mesmo ou não é crente não.”

<sup>36</sup> In a consultation carried out on December 9, 2023, it was found that the post is no longer available on Pastor André Valadão’s Instagram. In it, one could see the pastor sitting in the seat of a car answering the question via video. Our choice to maintain it comes from the understanding that the post can be eliminated, but the meanings continue to produce historical effects. The withdrawal even seems to us to be an indication of the clash of meanings in the social sphere.

understand it or are not believers.” With the aim of stabilizing the meanings of “being a believer,” the pastor’s words produce meanings that lead to a perception that those who have the “legitimate” evangelical faith must be affiliated with right-wing political ideologies, being the affiliation to left-wing ideologies evidence of ignorance or the absence of evangelical/Christian faith. It is noted that the response is not limited only to the defense of a presidential candidate but takes up the utterance “is not a believer,” an already said term with expressive intonation that operates as the pastor’s catchphrase (“you ain’t no believer”), which discursively circumscribes what is acceptable (or not) for a Christian.

Thus, when we consider that the meanings about evangelical faith, produced by a subject who occupies a place of spiritual authority, open little - or no space - for dissent, we reinforce that there seems to be a desire for stabilization that silences deviant possibilities of ideological inscription of the faithful. Thus, “being a left-wing party believer” would be an utterance of the order of impossibility since one is either a believer or votes for a left-wing party.

De Almeida (2023), based on the utterance “*Deus, pátria, família*” [God, homeland, family] (motto of Integralism<sup>37</sup> used by former president of Brazil), discusses the contradictions of religious discourse, which, in contemporary times, reinforces fascist discourses. For the author,

In the political sphere, a conservative reading of religion, authoritarian of the speeches and meanings engendered by them, gains representation in equally authoritarian and/or fascist discourses. It is necessary to consider, moreover, that authoritarianisms are generally expressions of the economic system itself that organizes us socially – authoritarianism is the way in which desires, wishes and ambitions are expressed in order to obtain more power, and this power only occurs in economic-based materiality, which comprises the Marxian superstructure of legal power that is coupled with it and feeds it back<sup>38</sup> (De Almeida, 2023, p. 202).

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<sup>37</sup> In general terms, in Brazil Integralism has as its ideological premises the defense of private property and economic liberalism, the rescue of national culture, Christian moral values and the fight against communism.

<sup>38</sup> In Portuguese: “Na esfera política, uma leitura conservadora da religião, autoritária dos dizeres e dos sentidos por eles engendrados, ganham representação em discursos igualmente autoritários e/ou fascistas. É preciso considerar, ademais, que autoritarismos geralmente são expressões do próprio sistema econômico que nos organiza socialmente – o autoritarismo é a maneira pela qual se expressam vontades, desejos e ambições no sentido de se obter mais poder, e este poder não se dá senão na materialidade de base econômica, que comporta a superestrutura marxiana do poder jurídico que se lhe acopla e a retroalimenta.”

In line with what De Almeida (2023) discusses, we observed an authoritarian tone in pastor André Valadão’s post when associating the idea of “acceptable healthy spirituality” with the right-wing political position. In dialogue with Bakhtin (1986)<sup>39</sup> in the text *Discourse in the Novel*, we understand an authoritarian utterance based on a well-marked hierarchical characteristic, which seeks to impose itself in relation to others, without space for questioning and negotiation of meanings. It is, therefore, the closure of the senses, the refusal of polysemy and polyphony (of faith, of visions, of ways of practicing the relationship with the transcendental). Which, in a way, produces contradictory effects, since, in favor of a neoliberal market agenda - continually reiterated by discourses of material prosperity -, meanings about the existence of a single way of experiencing the Christian faith emerge.

Question:	Pastor, New wave of progressive churches. Do you believe they will have a future?
Answer:	No, I don’t believe it, because everything has passed, we are not the first generation and what prevails and remains is the word of God. This one in a genuine form and will continue like this.

Table 4. Transcription Post 4 AV.<sup>40</sup> Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CmuhYO6h0XO/>

On December 28, 2022, when asked about “progressive churches,” André Valadão, in a video in which his face appears in a room with a lamp in the background, gives an answer that corroborates the meanings produced in the previous post. Associated with left-wing ideologies, churches considered progressive are seen by him as not genuine, being in the order of ephemerality. A progressive church would be nothing more than a “wave,” foreign to the word of God, since this is the one that remains. To the “word of God” are added meanings of permanence (“we are not the first generation”), truth (“genuine form”) and stability (“it will continue like this”). The claim for himself of the place of connoisseur of the “word of God” is anchored in a fundamentalist view of the word itself: there would be a truth (revelation) given *a priori*, of immutable (which

<sup>39</sup> Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* by M.M. Bakhtin. Edited by Michael Holquist and translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986.

<sup>40</sup> In Portuguese: Pergunta: “Pastor, Nova onda de igrejas progressistas. Acredita que terão algum futuro?” / Resposta: “Não, não acredito, porque tudo já passou, nós não somos a primeira geração e o que prevalece e permanece é a palavra de Deus. Ela de forma genuína e vai continuar assim.”



prevails) and untouchable character, since it “has no future.” In this way, faith is considered ahistorical and independent of the subjects and their social environment.

Furthermore, if we consider the neoliberal discourse as a constitutive enlacement of what is stated by Valadão, his speech about discrediting new progressive churches also produces meanings regarding the defense of a kind of market reserve of faith. Thus, new churches with dissonant thoughts can produce destabilization that would cause losses in the number of believers, followers and, consequently, in the layers of financial prosperity that gravitate around a church. This meaning is reinforced by the pastor’s comment on the post, which reads: “*Ai ai ai né crente MESMO 🤔!*” [Oh oh oh, right, you ain’t no believer AT ALL!]. The use of informal language, the emoji and the adverb in capital letters can contribute to generating identification with the interlocutor, through a proximity effect, as well as work to restrain any meanings contrary to the argumentative line of the post.

After all, even though market business discourse seems strange to the most orthodox religious principles, we must take into account that “the conditions of verbal communication, its forms, and its methods of differentiation are dictated by the social and economic prerequisites of a given period” (Vološinov, 1973, p. 123),<sup>41</sup> so that it is these changing conditions inherent to socio-discursive communication that allow ideological rearrangements in certain socio-historical contexts. Even the Catholic Church has promoted reformulations of its principles due to a considerable loss of believers around the world, which reinforces that there is a dialogue in the Christian-based religious discourse of the 21st century with the ideological values of neoliberalism.

A truth I read lately: EVERYONE [use of masculine pronoun in Portuguese] NEEDS A UROLOGIST. EVERYONE [use of feminine pronoun in Portuguese] NEEDS A GYNECOLOGIST, AND everyone [use of neutral pronoun in Portuguese] NEEDS A PSYCHIATRIST.
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Table 5. Transcription Post 5 AV.<sup>42</sup> Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cohuyn-rIZ6/>

Finally, we bring here a post from February 11, 2023. Although there is no explicit mention of the political-partisan issue in the post above, the utterance refers to current

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<sup>41</sup> For reference, see footnote 23.

<sup>42</sup> In the original: “Uma verdade que li ultimamente: TODOS PRECISAM DE UROLOGISTA. TODAS PRECISAM DE GINECOLOGISTA, E todos PRECISAM DE UM PSIQUIATRA.”

discussions about the use of neutral language, by ironizing the use of a related term to this identity agenda (the pronoun ‘todes’ in Portuguese). The allusion to the use of neutral language in the post works as a strategy of clash with some political agendas of the current Brazilian left-wing, namely, gender identities, strongly opposed by the Bolsonaro government.

It could be argued that the utterance ridicules a purely linguistic issue. However, the intersection between language and sexuality is reinforced by the mention of medical specialties focused on areas of sexuality: urologists for males (‘todos’ in Portuguese) and gynecologists for females (‘todas’ in Portuguese). The ideological sign “todes,” in turn, when associated with the area of psychiatry, is placed within the scope of mental disorder. In other words, it is based on a strategy of purist criticism of accusing a deviation from the standard norm of the Portuguese language, that is, a gender flexion not established by grammar, that the subject ironizes positions that question the discourse of heteronormativity also in the linguistic scope.

By refusing “todes” (and not just the use of this term), which is even written in lowercase letters, it is possible to recognize that a discursive image of evangelical faith is configured as an exercise of disciplining bodies and subjectivities. From this perspective, there would be no room for dissonant discourses and differences regarding other possibilities for experiencing sexuality; everyone (“todos” e “todas”) is welcome (as long as they are well confined to their places); but there is no room for “todes.”

It is important to mention that there is, next to the post, a comment published by André Valadão, which reads: “These are the facts. Hundreds of years after we die, if our bones are found, it will be decisive to know who was male and who was female. The bones themselves ↪ point to this fact. AGAINST FACTS THERE ARE NO ARGUMENTS. IT’S NOT ABOUT FREEDOM. IT’S ABOUT AN INFERNAL DISTORTING AND ALREADY BANKRUPT IDEOLOGICAL AGENDA THAT DEPENDING ON EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES IN GOD WILL NEVER OVERCOME THE TRUTH OF JESUS’ LOVE.”<sup>43</sup> There seems to be an attempt to add,

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<sup>43</sup> In Portuguese: “Fatos são estes. Centenas de anos depois de nós mortos se os nossos ossos forem encontrados será determinante o saber quem era homem e quem era mulher. Os próprios ossos ↪ apontam para este fato. CONTRA FATOS NÃO HÁ ARGUMENTOS. NÃO É SOBRE LIBERDADE. É SOBRE UMA AGENDA IDEOLÓGICA INFERNAL DETURPADORA E JÁ FALIDA QUE NO DEPENDER DE TODO O QUE CRÊ EM DEUS NÃO VENCERÁ NUNCA A VERDADE DO AMOR DE JESUS.”

to the moral-Christian position, meanings of scientificity by defending that these are facts. However, this argument soon gives way to the religious aspect with the affirmation, categorically expressed using capital letters, that there is a truth (that of the “love of Jesus”). Only this truth would be enough to combat “an infernal distorting and already bankrupt ideological agenda” that seeks to present itself as “freedom.” In this way, the idea is clear that the identification or practice of a sexuality outside heteronormative standards is not in line with evangelical faith and is doomed to eternal perdition.

It should be noted that the pattern of interaction with the public frequently used by the pastor, in his social network, also produces (new) effects of meaning on the evangelical faith. By using the discursive interaction strategy of the Instagram question box, and answering questions about politics, faith, behavior, relationships, sexuality, among others, the pastor not only builds the image of someone accessible, close to those who follow him, open to dialogue. Considering that the content of his answers is predominantly marked by incisive formulations and authoritarianism, with no room for questioning, typical of monological and authoritarian discourses, it can be said that the pastor projects himself as the guardian of knowledge and morals; as the one qualified to define standards of good conduct. Consequently, his speech seeks to crystallize a representation of the “ideal believer” as someone who, without having the autonomy to make their own decisions, seeks the authoritative and approved discourse of someone who can lead them to the “good path.” Thus, one reinforces the sense that evangelical faith, in this case, is constituted and permeated by discourses that imply normative practices of a moral nature.

Understanding truth as precepts revealed by God and recorded in a sacred book, possible for believers to experience, regardless of their socio-historical, cultural, and ideological context, faith would translate into a reaffirmation of identities (class, gender, social roles, among others) given in advance. It is up to the religious person to accept and profess this truth, practicing it without distorting or questioning it. From this perspective, there seems to be little room for dissent or discursive resignifications.

Let us now turn to the analysis of the posts by pastors Henrique Vieira.

## 2.2 The Evangelical Faith as an Exercise of Otherness and Respect for the Other

In addition to being pastor of *Igreja Batista do Caminho* [Baptist Church of the Path] and federal deputy for Rio de Janeiro, pastor Henrique Vieira is present in various media and has 617 thousand followers on Instagram. Furthermore, we understand that the fact that pastor Henrique Vieira ran, at the time of the publications analyzed here, for the position of federal deputy for PSOL,<sup>44</sup> gives his words a political content even if the content appears merely religious.

I don't need the Bible to defend equal rights. The constitution is enough. The state is secular! I'm not fighting over the Bible verses with Feliciano. I'm going to fight in politics!
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Table 6. Transcription Post 1 HV.<sup>45</sup> Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/ChXtGsiJdHv/>

In this post, published on October 17, 2022, pastor Henrique defends the secular state and addresses the federal deputy, and also pastor, Marco Feliciano, known for his conservative and often controversial positions. Being a pastor and federal deputy, the attempt to discursively separate religion and politics produces overlapping meanings, which is even evident in the very naming of “pastor” and “deputy.” In the utterance in question, politics, and not religion, would be the field of dispute and discursive confrontation, which is corroborated by the pastor’s own comment on his post: “Up with fundamentalism! Faith is not a project of power, but a testimony of love. 5033! Let’s go up!”<sup>46</sup>

It is worth emphasizing that, currently, the term ‘polarization’ has been used quite frequently to designate a communication model based on the intensification of points of view, generally associated with political and/or identity issues. Therefore, the pastor is part of the polarization and common discursive confrontations with visibility on social media to send a message to his other partner, Feliciano, who, from what can be assumed from the post, questions the ideological point of view defended by pastor Henrique: the secular State.

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<sup>44</sup> PSOL stands for *Partido Socialismo e Liberdade*. In English: Socialism and Freedom Party.

<sup>45</sup> In the original: “Eu não preciso da Bíblia para defender igualdade de direitos. Basta a Constituição. O Estado é laico! Eu não vou ficar disputando versículo bíblico com Feliciano. Vou disputar na política!”

<sup>46</sup> In Portuguese: “Pra cima do fundamentalismo! Fé não é projeto de poder, mas testemunho de amor. 5033! Bora pra cima!”

In this way, by projecting himself as someone who, based on the Constitution and not the Bible, defends equal rights, the pastor displaces already said utterances that support a greater incidence of religious discourse in the functioning of the State, which gives rise to a discursive proposal of evangelical faith covered by a conduct that respects the individuality of citizens. Thus, it is possible to understand that, even though pastor Henrique occupies a discursive position as a religious leader, his enunciation activates effects of meaning on a conception of faith that, exercised in a secular State, cannot be confused with the public space for decision-making.

A lot of people ask. My church is @ibcaminho. We are hosted in Rio de Janeiro. We bet on love and communion, in celebrating diversity and sharing. We believe in Jesus and our faith is not a project of power but inspiration to love and serve. Open doors and hearts!

Table 7. Transcription Post 2 HV.<sup>47</sup> Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CkCTAA6Jbtg/>

Tomorrow is a day of worship in the community of faith in which I participate @ibcaminho. Sharing the gospel, praying for each other, reaching out to the communion table, being a sign of peace, consoling the downcast hearts, celebrating Jesus together. As simple as that!

Table 8. Transcription Post 3 HV.<sup>48</sup> Source: [https://www.instagram.com/p/Cjc\\_Z3JrqMo/](https://www.instagram.com/p/Cjc_Z3JrqMo/)

In the posts above, published, respectively, on October 8 and 22, 2022, and, therefore, after the first round of the Brazilian presidential elections, pastor Henrique Vieira comments on the Christian community of which he is part. The comments on the posts provide information about the time of the services, namely: “Tomorrow is the day of worship in the faith community I participate in, @ibcaminho. With the presence of Pastor @vlad\_oliveira27”<sup>49</sup> and “With open doors and hearts, @ibcaminho. TOMORROW (09/10), at 09:30, we have our shared coffee and at 10:30 the service

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<sup>47</sup> In the original: “Muita gente pergunta. Minha igreja é a @ibcaminho. Ficamos no Rio de Janeiro. Apostamos no amor e na comunhão, na celebração da diversidade e na partilha. Cremos em Jesus e nossa fé não é projeto de poder, mas inspiração para amar e servir. Portas e corações abertos!”

<sup>48</sup> In the original: “Amanhã é dia de culto na comunidade de fé que participo, @ibcaminho. Compartilhar o Evangelho, orar uns pelos outros, estender a mesa da comunhão, ser sinal de paz, consolar os corações abatidos, celebrar Jesus juntos. Simples assim!”

<sup>49</sup> In Portuguese: “Amanhã é dia de culto na comunidade de fé que participo, @ibcaminho. Com a presença do Pastor @vlad\_oliveira27.”

begins. 📍 Sacadura Cabral Street 60, Downtown. Service at 10:30 am. Coffee at 9:30 am.

📍 The service starts at 10:30am and will be at Sacadura Cabral Street, 60,”<sup>50</sup> respectively.

“Love,” “communion,” “celebration,” “diversity,” “serve,” “pray,” “peace,” and “console” are words that circumscribe faith in meanings of plurality and openness. Furthermore, it is possible to infer that the utterance “open doors and hearts,” to a certain extent, opposes the biblical premise that “many are invited, but few are chosen”<sup>51</sup> (Matthew 22:14), which corroborates meanings of separation between believers and non-believers. Thus, the utterance “open doors and hearts” reinforces not only that his church is available to interested believers, but also associates it with an ethical stance of empathy and acceptance of diversity.

The reference to politics can be seen in the use of the negative, in “our faith is not a project of power,” which resumes, above all, the clash with Christian politicians whose proposals disregard the secularity of the State. Furthermore, the utterance “simple as that” brings into play – to refute – fundamentalist religious discourses, which are based on rules and customs of a moral nature. Thus, even if there is no change in the paradigm – one continues, for example, anchored in the belief that there is a superior and transcendental being –, we believe that there is, in the excerpts above, a shift in the possibilities of enunciating faith and, therefore, of experiencing it.

God is not above all. He is in our midst
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Table 9. Transcription Post 4 HV.<sup>52</sup> Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CjeDXd0pud/>

Also published on October 8, 2022, the post on screen presents an utterance that explicitly dialogues with the campaign slogan of the former president of Brazil, namely: “Brazil above all, God above all.” By resuming a Christian premise – He is among us –, the pastor dialogues with the biblical discourse<sup>53</sup> to endorse his discursive confrontation

<sup>50</sup> In Portuguese: “De portas e coração abertos, @ibcaminho. AMANHÃ (09/10), às 09:30, tem o nosso café compartilhado e as 10:30 começa o culto. 📍 Rua Sacadura Cabral 60, Centro. Culto às 10h30. Café às 09h30. 📍 O culto começa às 10:30h e será na Rua Sacadura Cabral, 60.”

<sup>51</sup> New Testament. *BIBLE*. Matthew. Available at: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2022&version=NIV>. Last access: 4 Jan. 2024.

<sup>52</sup> In the original: “Deus não está acima de todos. Ele está no meio de nós.”

<sup>53</sup> Like the verses in the Gospel of Luke, which read: “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.” (Luke 17:20-21). [New Testament. *BIBLE*. Ephesians. Available at: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%2017&version=NIV>. Last access: 4 Jan. 2024.]

with the utterance that refers to the ex-president's words, which is still reinforced by his comment on the post: "In our midst!"

Thus, by returning to "He is among us," an effect of proximity is produced in the relationship between God and the believer, refusing the belief in hierarchical relationships, as if God were at the level of humans. Furthermore, the conflict with discursive positions that attempt to place the Bible above the Constitution, and, consequently, justify laws "in the name of God" once again reverberates. In this way, it is also possible to assume that relationships between people would be in the order of horizontality.

About the right to cry, the need for love and the strength to overcome racism This is the theme of the message I share tomorrow at @ibcaminho. Either the church fights against racism or it is racist. Let's celebrate Black Jesus, God in our midst!
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Table 10. Transcription Post 5 HV.<sup>54</sup> Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CIJYX9PrDM7/>

The last post by pastor Henrique Vieira here analyzed, published on November 19, 2022, mentions the theme of the message to be shared by him in his community, which is emphasized in the comment: "Let's celebrate Black Jesus, God in the midst of us! @ibcaminho. Worship tomorrow starts at 10am. Sacadura Cabral Street, 60."<sup>55</sup>

By bringing to light the issue of racism, a topic commonly silenced within the scope of evangelical faith, the pastor assumes the political content of the religion he follows and reaffirms the utterance "God in our midst," by placing on the scene the image of a "Black Jesus" in contrast to the image of the white Christ, with blue eyes, a legacy of Eurocentrism. "Black Jesus," spelled as a proper name, evokes (and refutes) not only the Eurocentric vision of Christianity, but the colonial matrix of power, being, knowledge that has subjugated/subjugates bodies and subjectivities over the centuries.

Thus, by questioning a discursive representation of an exceptional Jesus, one constructs the image of a form of faith as a phenomenon that must dialogue with discourses that articulate social issues, with the issue of racism being urgent. It is,

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<sup>54</sup> In the original: "Sobre o direito ao choro, a necessidade do amor e a força para vencer o racismo. Este é o tema da mensagem que compartilho amanhã na @ibcaminho. Ou a igreja luta contra o racismo ou ele é racista. Vamos celebrar o Jesus Negro, Deus no meio de nós!"

<sup>55</sup> In Portuguese: "Vamos celebrar o Jesus Negro, Deus no meio de nós! @ibcaminho . O culto amanhã começa 10h. Rua Sacadura Cabral, 60."

therefore, a discursive conception of faith that is embodied and does not exempt itself from addressing extremely sensitive and urgent social issues.

Faith as an exercise of otherness and respect for others rejects the idea that there is a sacred truth to be followed and practiced to the detriment of subjects, that is, without considering their singularities, sexual orientations, social class, race and any other aspects that constitute the human. In other words, faith would be constituted as an experience that is constructed in the very act of exercising and experiencing it through interpersonal relationships marked by diversity and inevitable estrangement that (mis)encounters with others provoke.

Let us move to the analysis of Pastor Ed René Kivitz's post.

### 2.3 Evangelical Faith as Political Practice

Pastor and theologian, Ed René Kivitz is president of *Igreja Batista de Água Branca* [Água Branca Baptist Church] and president of the *Conselho Diretor da Visão Mundial do Brasil*. [Board of Directors of Brazilian World Vision]. Known for his criticism of the conservative rise in Brazil, Pastor Kivitz was expelled from the Order of Pastors of the Baptist Convention of the State of São Paulo [*Ordem dos Pastores da Convenção Batista do Estado de São Paulo*] for defending updates to the reinterpretations of Bible texts.

For the scope of this work, we selected a fragment of a speech published by the pastor on his Instagram, on June 2, 2022, which we transcribe below.<sup>56</sup> The posted video is accompanied by a comment that reinforces its line of argument, in addition to presenting information about the event held by the church: “There is nothing more political than saying that religion and politics don't mix.” [Desmond Tutu] “Pastoral Politics for an Election Year” is the theme of @conversaspastorais in 2022. Watch the first meeting in full at [youtube.com/conversaspastorais](https://youtube.com/conversaspastorais). Next meeting: June 23rd, at 10am, at @oficialibab (open to everyone).<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> In italics, we mark expressions and words that best explain the meanings produced in the fragment in question, according to our gesture of analysis.

<sup>57</sup> In Portuguese: “‘Não há nada mais político do que dizer que religião e política não se misturam’ [Desmond Tutu] ‘Pastoral Política para um Ano de Eleição’ é o tema do @conversaspastorais em 2022. Assista o primeiro encontro na íntegra em [youtube.com/conversaspastorais](https://youtube.com/conversaspastorais). Próximo encontro: 23 de junho, às 10h, na @oficialibab (aberto a todos e todas).”



I hear, on my social networks, people say: “pastor, stop getting involved in politics. Preach only the Gospel.” I say this is not possible, it is not possible to preach “just the Gospel,” because *the Gospel is not intended for disembodied spirits* that inhabit a spiritual sphere. No, the Gospel is aimed at people like you and me, *people of flesh and blood, historicized, historically-cultural-social-economically, politically determined*. So, it is not possible to preach “just the Gospel.” *The Gospel has political implications*. We must not forget that Jesus was murdered by an Empire. Jesus’ religious crime was blasphemy, but the Roman Empire did not authorize religious crimes to be punished by the death penalty. Only Rome could kill. So, Jesus died for the Roman Empire, *Jesus died as a political prisoner*, accused of being the king of the Jews. Jesus’ crime was sedition, he conspired against Caesar. This is the accusation that weighs on him and it is even what is placed by the Empire on that plaque affixed to the cross where the crime of the crucified man was identified and the plaque said: “King of the Jews,” he was killed as a king, *he was killed politically*. We cannot deny that, although Jesus said “My kingdom is not of this world,” he *has an impact on this world, he has repercussions on this world*, he bothers this world, especially he *bothers those who claim to be masters of this world*. I quote Martin Luther King<sup>58</sup> for you: “I am convinced that any religion that professes a concern for the souls of men but is not equally concerned about the slums to which they are condemned and the economic conditions that strangle them and the social conditions that weaken them is a spiritually moribund religion, it just needs to be buried. It has been said very well: a religion that ends in the individual is a religion that ends.” That is, *the Gospel has implications for relationships*. The experience of Christian faith is necessarily, undoubtedly, *indispensably collective*. And *everything that is collective is political*.

Table 5 - Post ER.<sup>59</sup> Source: [https://www.instagram.com/p/CeUdGH\\_j1gv/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CeUdGH_j1gv/)

Pastor Ed René Kivitz’s speech points to his belief in the impossibility of separating faith from politics. By refuting the voice that “only the Gospel” should be preached, the pastor rejects conceptions of a neutral, impartial faith, restricted to the scope

<sup>58</sup> The pastor is actually referring to Martin Luther King Jr.

<sup>59</sup> In Portuguese: “Eu ouço, nas minhas redes sociais, as pessoas falam assim: ‘pastor, para de se meter em política. Prega só o evangelho’. Eu falo não é possível isso, não é possível pregar ‘só o evangelho’, porque *o evangelho não se destina a espíritos desencarnados* que habitam uma esferosfera. Não, o evangelho se destina a pessoas como você e eu, *pessoas de carne e osso, historicadas, determinadas historica-cultural-social-economicamente, politicamente*. Então não é possível pregar ‘só o evangelho’. *O evangelho tem implicações políticas*. Não devemos esquecer que Jesus foi assassinado por um Império. O crime religioso de Jesus foi blasfêmia, mas o império romano não autorizava que os crimes religiosos fossem punidos com a pena de morte. Apenas Roma podia matar. Então Jesus morreu pelo Império Romano, *Jesus morreu como um prisioneiro político*, acusado de ser o rei dos judeus. O crime de Jesus foi sedição, ele conspirou contra César. Essa é a acusação que pesa sobre ele e inclusive é o que está posto pelo Império naquela placa afixada na cruz onde se identificava o crime do crucificado e a placa dizia: ‘Rei dos judeus’, ele foi morto como rei, *ele foi morto politicamente*. Nós não podemos negar que, embora Jesus tivesse dito ‘Meu reino não é deste mundo’, ele *tem impacto nesse mundo, ele tem repercussão nesse mundo*, ele incomoda esse mundo, especialmente ele *incomoda os que pretendem ser donos desse mundo*. Eu cito Martin Luther King pra você: ‘Tenho a convicção de que qualquer religião que professe uma preocupação com as almas dos homens, mas não esteja igualmente preocupada com as favelas a que eles estão condenados e com as condições econômicas que os estrangulam e com as condições sociais que os debilitam é uma religião espiritualmente moribunda, só falta ser enterrada. Já se disse muito bem: uma religião que termina no indivíduo é uma religião que termina’. Isto é, *o evangelho tem implicações para as relações*. A experiência de fé cristã é necessariamente, indubitavelmente, *imprescindivelmente coletiva*. E *tudo que é coletivo é político*.”

of merely transcendental doctrines: “the Gospel is not intended for disembodied spirits,” but relates to “people of flesh and blood, historicized, determined historically-cultural-social-economically, politically.” Therefore, the belief in a truth established *a priori*, static and independent of its social environment, is rejected. The Gospel, based on the discursive positioning presented in the pastor’s words, is only realized in concreteness, in the event-existence (Bakhtin, 1993)<sup>60</sup> of the subjects.

And it is in this argumentative vein that, inscribed in the biblical discourse, Ed René uses the figure of Christ to validate his argument in terms of a form of faith that is necessarily crossed and constituted by a political discourse: “Jesus died as a political prisoner,” “he was killed politically,” which works as an enunciative mechanism that produces the effect of neutralizing opposing positions: after all, what Christian could question Christ himself?

Like pastor André Valadão, Ed René defends the need for the political positioning of the church. However, unlike this, the vision of politics here distances itself from the partisan issue – or from a binary orientation marked between right/left. Politics, in his words, would be everything that involves relationships between subjects, people. Furthermore, once again bringing a voice of authority, the pastor quotes Martin Luther King to corroborate his view that spirit and body must intertwine in the experience of faith. From this perspective, faith gains meaning when it is sensitive to the social inequalities that affect the social and political existence of people of flesh and blood, otherwise it becomes “a spiritually moribund religion,” virtually designed for disembodied spirits. It is also worth emphasizing that pastor Ed René uses biblical discourse in the construction of his arguments, which demonstrates that the biblical argument participates in the clash of positions when mobilized by subjects who subscribe to antagonistic proposals for the presence of political discourse in the evangelical faith.

One can also see, in his words, the enlacement of economic discourse into religious discourse, marked by the clash with the vision of a progressive and humanist conception of faith that is “uncomfortable to those who claim to be masters of this world.” In this aspect, one can observe Ed René’s ideological alignment with the positions that emerge from the words of pastor Henrique Vieira, by also establishing a conception of

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<sup>60</sup> For reference, see footnote 15.

evangelical faith that aligns with a collective and political indispensability, by bringing to the fore minorities and looking at the less favored.

Understood as a political practice, faith would consist of a continuous movement of searching and understanding oneself and others, since the idea of a ready-made and rigid truth is refuted. One understands that exercising faith is positioning oneself in the world, based on a concrete and singular vision, impossible to be universalized. Faith is political, because it will always involve taking positions and decisions on the part of historically situated subjects, who need to be responsive to the demands of their time.

## Final Remarks

According to Bakhtin (1986, p. 89),<sup>61</sup> “in each epoch, in each social circle, in each small world of family, friends, acquaintances, and comrades in which a human being grows and lives, there are always authoritative utterances that set the tone.” Thus, if we consider that in contemporary times religious discourse also needs to operate in the media and social networks, it is necessary to recognize the importance of pastors’ speeches being covered by an ethical responsibility, since, as in cults, their sayings are received, most of the time, as truths that affect the responsiveness of evangelical believers regarding faith.

The utterances produced by the pastors were analyzed here from the perspective of a discursive web, that is, a network of relationships of meaning that always mean dialogically, never “in themselves.” In the words of the three pastors, we identify evangelical faith as:

- i) *reaffirmation of identity*: anchored in the “Word of God,” faith would be based on the practice of immutable precepts, which reinforces senses of passivity and conformity;
- ii) *exercise of otherness and respect for others*: advocates welcoming diversity; faith is, therefore, conceived as a practice of resistance and questioning;
- iii) *political practice*: situates religious practices and believers socio-historically and is sensitive to the demands of their time.

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<sup>61</sup> For reference, see footnote 14.

It is important to highlight that, once published, such utterances circulate on networks and acquire different meanings, being interpreted based on the ideological positions of the interlocutors, as well as the relationships they establish with other utterances produced in different enunciative instances. If, on the one hand, the methodological and analytical approaches we undertake here run the inevitable risk of simplifying the utterances; on the other hand, we understand with Bakhtin that inconclusibility is constitutive of the process of enunciating, with the completion of the words being nothing more than an effect.

In fact, with the Bakhtin Circle we learn that we do not hear words, but truths, lies, offenses... Being the word the ideological sign *par excellence*, the production and circulation of these discourses have material effects and, at times, are felt in the body, especially when they contribute to the intensification of hate speech and intolerance (religious or not).

We do not intend here to establish polarizations between progressive evangelical faith and non-progressive evangelical faith or to defend a Manichaean vision. Rather, we understand that there are nuances, ambivalences and constitutive and constituent contradictions in/in the discourses produced by pastors. Furthermore, it must be emphasized that, between a pastor's utterance and what the believer actually affiliates with (and does), there are no guarantees. By inscribing ourselves to AL, we return to Moita Lopes (2006, p. 90) to remember that the "ethical research agenda for AL crucially involves a process of re-narration or redescription of social life as it presents itself, which is directly related to the need to understand it."<sup>62</sup>

Thus, when analyzing the pastors' utterances, we also seek to recognize that there are crystallized discursive clashes about the evangelical faith that repeat authoritarian speeches that do not always value the diversity of ideological positions. Thus, re-narrating the conception of evangelical faith based on this research also means demonstrating that there is contradiction within all discursivity, which allows us to identify hate speeches and speeches of respect and empathy within the same religious denomination.

Our analyzes invite us to think about the implications of religious discourses for the subject's identity practices and the constitution of subjectivities in the contemporary

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<sup>62</sup> In Portuguese: "agenda ética de investigação para a LA envolve crucialmente um processo de renarração ou redescrição da vida social como se apresenta, o que está diretamente relacionado à necessidade de compreendê-la."

world. However, our focus here is to open space to reflect on how the intersection of politics and religion can affect the different spheres of social interaction, positioning subjects in their material conditions of existence.

Just as the Circle's philosophy of language considers subjects not as abstract instances, but concrete ones, made of flesh and blood, and which formulate their existence through practices of verbal interaction, the discourses that direct taking ethical positions within the scope of evangelical faith also needs to consider its faithful as always social subjects, constituted by a polyphonic referentiality that implies an infinity of ideological and political positions of different natures.

When the political (partisan) positioning of ministers of faith, in conjunction with religious discourse, acquires the status of truth (or of "the" truth), questioning their assumptions equals discrediting a divine authority/revelation. Thus, looking for fissures in religious discourse that oppose fundamentalist and authoritarian discourses is an ethical duty of a religious leader who recognizes their social and discursive role as influential in taking positions and, consequently, in the lives of the members of their congregation.

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### **Statement of Author's Contribution**

We declare that both authors of the article “Religion and politics: clash of meanings about evangelical faith in social networks” contributed fully to all stages of the work, namely: i) conception of the proposal, analysis and interpretation of data; ii) writing the article; iii) final approval of the version to be published; and iv) responsibility for all aspects of the work in ensuring the accuracy and integrity of any part of the work.

### **Research Data and Other Materials Availability**

The contents underlying the research text are included in the manuscript.



## Reviews

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana*. Revista de Estudos do Discurso [*Bakhtiniana*. Journal of Discourse Studies] to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

### Review I

I approve the article, as it brings a relevant topic to contemporary discussions about religion and politics supported by theoretical references appropriate to the analyzed *corpus*. However, some corrections and updates are required as noted below.

Update the References, as they do not appear in them:

- The author PENNYCOOK.
- The Michaelis dictionary.
- Datafolha article.
- Study by José Eustáquio Alves.
- The NIV biblical version (New International Version).
- The author ORLANDI.
- The book “Amor como Revolução” [Love as a revolution], by Henrique Vieira.
- The books by Ed René Kivitz mentioned.
- The address of the website from which Ed René Kivitz’s statements were taken.

It is desirable to update the information that Henrique Vieira is currently a federal deputy.

In the last paragraph from p. 15 correct the expression: “points of view.”

On p. 20 the author quotes “Martin Luther King” when, in reality, he should quote “Martin Luther King Jr.” APPROVED WITH RESTRICTIONS [Revised]

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Reviewed on October 03, 2023.

### Review II

The author proposes the objective of “reflecting on possible meanings for evangelical faith.” The selected corpus were posts taken from the social network Instagram by “three evangelical pastors “on topics that are linked, directly or indirectly, to political issues.” The author established studies in Applied Linguistics and Bakhtinian conceptions of language as a theoretical foundation. In the summary, there is an indication of the results of analyzes that indicate “three predominant meanings, which mean evangelical faith as: i) reaffirmation of identity; ii) exercise of alterity; and iii) political practice.” Starting from the guiding question “What evangelical faith are we talking about?,” the article was organized into the following sections: Introduction, 1 Religion, Language and Politics, 2 Gestures of Analysis, section subdivided into 2.1 Evangelical faith as a reaffirmation of identity, 2.2 Evangelical faith as an exercise of otherness, 2.3 Evangelical faith as a political practice, Final considerations, references.

The proposed title partially reflects the content of the text, as it promises to analyze the posts taken from the Instagram social network of three pastors, which does not appear in the title. As for the introduction, it presents a brief definition of religion, taken from the

online Michaelis Dictionary, some brief information on the Brazilian panorama of “evangelical faith and the marks of “plurality of visions, beliefs and practices, due to tensions, contradictions and dissensions between subjects.” I believe this section deserves some revisions to clarify whether the question is “religion” or “evangelical faith.” In the article archive, I made several suggestions regarding the use of more specialized dictionaries.

The methodology needs some clarification: What criteria were adopted to select the three evangelical pastors André Valadão, Henrique Vieira and Ed René Kivitz? What is the relevance of selecting posts from the social network Instagram? What is the justification for choosing the digital genre “posts”? There is no indication around understanding. It is important to justify the choice of these pastors and not others.

As for the first section, it is necessary to clarify/deepen the announced statement: “the relationship between religion, language and politics, based on AL and Bakhtinian architecture.” What concepts are adopted from Applied Linguistics? What does Bakhtinian “architecture” mean? Could it be the concept of “architectonics”? This proposal, however, disappears from the article and other concepts such as statement and ideological sign are used in the analysis without any prior presentation.

As for the second section, it presents the three points to be clarified. The author analyzes the posts of the three pastors, partially considering the posts, without taking into account the interweaving of the verbal-visual text, the composition between the left and right column, the digital linguistic markers. There is an erasure of the digital sphere, of how the text was produced (historical, social, cultural issues), the readers of each pastor’s page, in an interaction. It is necessary to make the comparison of different discourses, authorship, etc. clear in the analysis. The suggestion is to write a comparative study, which was done in a preliminary way, and can be part of the “Final considerations” section. Thus, faced with a relevant topic, bring to the article the conflicts between the speeches of each pastor and between them, since the evaluative positions are all tense and build an arena of voices.

To conclude, the text deserves revisions (syntactic, conceptual, analytical), and a careful review of the bibliography cited throughout the article because some citations do not appear in the references.

I am attaching the file with comments and suggestions that I hope will help the author in the article review stage.

The topic is relevant, but some Bakhtinian concepts deserve review and the analysis presented deserves a careful review. APPROVED WITH RESTRICTIONS [Revised]

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Reviewed on November 16, 2023.

### Review III

The work is appropriate to the theme of the issue and fully encompasses the proposal of this specific call for the journal. The objective of the article is clear and is pursued coherently throughout the development of the text. I also highlight the conformity with the proposed theory, demonstrating up-to-date knowledge of the relevant bibliography, since the author proposes to work with notions coming from Applied Linguistics and the

Philosophy of language coming from the writings of the Bakhtin Circle. I draw attention, however, to the need to present in a more ostentatious and clear way a concept mobilized for discussion, but not effectively and sufficiently developed, which is the notion of “polyphonic referentiality,” apparently developed within the scope of research in the field of Semiolinguistics. The work presents originality in terms of reflection and makes an effective contribution to the field of knowledge, since there are still gaps in the investigation into the complex relationships between religious discourse in interface with other discourses, such as politics. Finally, I highlight the clarity, correctness and suitability of the language for a scientific work, with few adjustments to be made, as I pointed out in the body of the work.

Although it does not constitute an impediment to the approval of the text, I recommend the author to make some corrections noted in the version I evaluated and sent to your attention, so that the text acquires greater precision regarding the aspects highlighted.  
APPROVED WITH SUGGESTIONS

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Reviewed on November 29, 2023.

#### **Review IV**

The review was careful and met requests. According to the publication of the text.

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Reviewed on December 14, 2023.