

# **Religious Tastes and Styles as Markers of Class Belonging:**

## **A Bourdieuan Perspective on Pentecostalism in South**

### **America**

#### ***Draft Version***

Article to be published in: *Sociology*

Doi: 10.1177/0038038517722288

Author:

Jens Koehrsen, University of Basel, Switzerland

Address: Jens Köhrsen, University Basel, Faculty of Theology, Nadelberg 10  
4051 Basel, Switzerland.

Email: jens.koehrsen@unibas.ch

## **Abstract**

Studies on the relationship between social class and religion tend to highlight the demographic dimension of class, but neglect its symbolic dimension. By addressing the symbolic dimensions through a Bourdieuan approach, this article contends that religious tastes and styles can be employed as class markers within the sphere of religion. A case study on Argentinean Pentecostalism and in-depth analysis of a lower and middle class church illustrate how symbolic class differences are cultivated in the form of distinctive religious styles. While the lower class church displays a style marked by emotional expressiveness and the search for life improvement through spiritual practices, the middle class church performs a sober and calm style of Pentecostalism. The study highlights the role of styles in the reproduction of class boundaries, while shedding a critical light on the importance of tastes.

**Key words:** Bourdieu, Latin America, Pentecostalism, Religion, Social Class

## Introduction

The relationship between social class and religion has been an almost forgotten topic in sociology. Despite having marked the beginnings of the discipline, in recent decades, the topic has been relegated to a marginal role (McCloud, 2007: 844; Smith and Faris, 2005: 103). It was Marx (1844) and Weber (1972[1921]) who first pointed to the impact of social class on religion. While Marx described religion as the opium of the masses (Marx, 1844), Weber argued that the privileged evolve religious necessities differently from the marginalised (Weber, 1972[1921]: 296, 298-299). Richard Niebuhr gestured in the same direction, arguing that the boundaries of US-denominations stretch along class, race, and nationality (Niebuhr, 1929). The stratification thesis, stating a close link between social class and US-denominationalism, enjoyed strong support in sociology up until the 1970s (Demerath, 1965; Goldstein, 1969; Pope, 1948). However, with novel empirical evidence and the rise of alternative approaches – claiming, for instance, a ‘new volunteerism’ in the field of religion (Roof and McKinney, 1987) – the stratification thesis lost support and approaches highlighting the liberties of free religious choice in growing religious markets came to take its place (Berger, 1979: 28; Park and Reimer, 2002). In a similar vein, rational choice theorists Stark and Finke regard the impact of class on religious behaviour as very modest (Stark and Finke, 2000:198). Nevertheless, an increased ubiquity of ‘free’ religious choice does not necessarily prevent social class from informing the choices. Thus, recent studies indicate an ongoing relationship between social class and religious affiliation (Coreno, 2002; Darnell and Sherkat, 1997; Davidson and Pyle, 2006; Keister and Keister, 2003; Keister, 2008; Keister and Sherkat, 2014; Schwadel, 2008; Schwadel, 2011; Sherkat and Wilson, 1995b; Sherkat, 2001; Smith and Faris, 2005). The majority of these studies are based on the analysis of large quantitative samples, a focus that carries two limitations: first,

studies based on vast quantitative data sets are not able to explore the interaction of class and religion on the micro-level; second, quantitative studies face difficulties in fully considering the symbolic dimension of class. Most studies show how religion relates to manifest ('objective') social inequalities in education, income, healthcare etc.; for instance, by analysing how religion affects wealth accumulation (Keister, 2008) or describing education and income inequalities between US-American denominations (Smith and Faris, 2005). How religion itself becomes a part of social class structure by creating (religious) status markers, however, has been largely ignored. The potential role of religion in creating and marking social class concerns the symbolic – as a counterpart to the 'objective' – dimension of social stratification. This article highlights this dimension by proposing a Bourdieuan approach for unfolding the relationship between class and religion, suggesting that individuals mark social class differences within the sphere of religion by showing distinct religious tastes and styles.

The objective of this contribution is: (a) to sketch a Bourdieuan approach for tackling the relationship between class and religion, (b) to illustrate its application for the case of Argentinean Pentecostalism, and (c) critically reflect on the potential and limitations of this approach. The article first sketches the theoretical apparatus of a Bourdieuan approach before moving on to a review on Pentecostalism and social class in Latin America. The next section portrays the methodology and the empirical case study on Argentinean Pentecostalism. Then, a critical discussion of the results contextualises the role of class by taking further elements such as social networks into account. Finally, the conclusion summarises the results, portrays avenues for research on religion and social class, and critically reflects on the relative role of tastes and styles in reproducing social class boundaries.

## A Bourdieuan Theory of Religious Tastes and Styles

Over the course of his academic activity, Pierre Bourdieu developed a vast sociological theory that has received wide academic reception, ranging from harsh criticism to approval and refinements of his approach (cf. Bennett et al., 2010; Calhoun et al., 1993; Gartman, 1991; Lahire, 2004/2006; Lamont, 1992; Sallaz and Zavisca, 2007; Schäfer, 2015; Swartz and Zolberg, 2005). As an in-depth discussion of the reactions to Bourdieu's theory would go beyond the scope of this paper, I will focus on applying Bourdieu's theory to the sociological study of religion.

In his early work, Bourdieu himself ventured to analyse the religious field. Creatively referring to Max Weber, he conceived of the religious field as one of power struggles between different types of religious producers; namely: the priest, the sorcerer, and the prophet (Bourdieu, 1971a; Bourdieu, 1971b). Scholars have been criticising this approach for its focus on the 'supply side' of religion and its disregard for the active role of 'religious consumers' and the internal diversification of the religious field (Dianteill, 2003; Dillon, 2001; Rey, 2007; Urban, 2003; Verter, 2003).

In contrast to his early work, Bourdieu's more advanced sociology makes allowances for the 'demand side' by proposing, for instance, the concept of 'habitus'. Although Bourdieu himself never took advantage of his advanced sociology to study religion, its theoretical and methodological tools can be applied equally to religion, as has been shown, for instance, by contributions stressing the concept of 'habitus' (Barrett, 2010; Fer, 2010; Köhrsen, 2014; Nelson, 2009; Rey, 2005; Schäfer, 2011; Schäfer, 2015) and the notion of the social field (Seibert, 2010; Swartz, 1996). As Bourdieu's work is highly complex and multifaceted, a full review of the potentials of Bourdieu's theory and the entanglements of different concepts (e.g. relationship of fields with tastes, styles and habitus) is beyond the scope of this article. Veering away from the different interpretations and power struggles that

have arisen around an 'authentic' reading of Bourdieu's theory, this article employs Bourdieu's sociology as a tool box: it chooses relevant aspects for a productive analysis of the relationship between social class and religion, by emphasising tastes and styles as class markers within religion.

In his ground-breaking work *La Distinction: Critique sociale du jugement*, Bourdieu (1979) studies the correspondences between social class positions and cultural tastes and lifestyles in French society of the 1960s and 70s. His analysis shows that individuals from different social positions tend towards different cultural tastes and lifestyles. Based on these findings, Bourdieu claims that tastes and lifestyles constitute emblems – markers of class belonging – through which individuals classify themselves and others (Bourdieu, 1979: I-II, VI, 59-64). Accordingly, individuals perform their social belonging by demonstrating specific tastes and lifestyles. However, these are not solely a strategy that allows individuals to perform – or pretend – class belonging. They are also the outcome of learned, incorporated dispositions, as described by Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus', which constitutes an individual's system of dispositions to perceive, judge, and act. It is shaped by the biography of the actor: the individual incorporates the 'way of being' of the given social environment. Thus, groups of individuals with close social bonds tend to generate similar habitus, differing in their 'way of being' from socially distant groups. Forming an incorporated sense of class belonging, the habitus leads actors towards cultural tastes and lifestyles that correspond to their social position (Bourdieu, 1979: 230-232). As a consequence, an actor's taste and lifestyle can be described (a) as the outcome of his/her class related socialisation processes and (b) as a – conscious and/or unconscious – strategy to perform and illustrate a specific class belonging. Tastes and lifestyles create visible class boundaries: they constitute the symbolic features of social class (Bourdieu, 1982: 18).

As the general dispositions of the habitus are likely to manifest in similar ways across different cultural fields (e.g. 'habitus of necessity' in the fields of nutrition, clothing, housing decoration), classes are likely to show similar patterns of likes and dislikes in different fields of cultural consumption (Bourdieu, 1979: 192-195). Whenever actors practice a specific style and display a particular taste in cultural fields, peers can recognise them as corresponding to a certain 'class of people'.

Based on this Bourdieuan approach, it can be argued that actors mark social class differences within the sphere of religion by employing specific religious tastes and styles. The religious style concerns the performative dimension of religion and encompasses all the characteristics that are visible and potentially differentiating. The religious style of a church, for instance, concerns the features that potentially differ from that of other congregations. Therefore, it embraces the way in which church services are performed as well as the physical infrastructure, organisation, and symbolic recognition of the church.

By contrast, religious taste can be defined in two ways. Firstly, as an analogy to style as a visible performance of class belonging: in this case, the emphasis is on the expressive dimension of taste, which does not differ from the notion of the style. However, in opposition to the concept of style, taste can also be defined as a system of predispositions embedded in the habitus of the actor. In this case, taste constitutes an actor's system of preferences, which potentially guides the actor towards religious styles that match an 'objective' position. This article utilises the latter meaning to create a heuristic difference between style and taste.

When religion becomes a freely electable cultural 'good', individuals may consume religious 'products' in a way that suits their social position (cf. Sherkat and Wilson, 1995b): actors from different 'objective' social positions are likely to evolve dissimilar religious tastes and tend towards religious styles that correspond to their 'objective' social position,

differing from the styles associated with other social classes. Furthermore, religious styles may be employed as a boundary drawing strategy (Lamont, 1992; Wimmer, 2008), demarcating visible class boundaries and signalling class belonging to other actors. As such, middle class actors may avoid religious styles attributed to the lower class and exhibit religious styles that underline their middle class belonging and visibly differ from the styles associated with the lower class. The following explorations into Argentinean Pentecostalism illustrates this application of the Bourdieuan approach.

### **Pentecostalism and Social Class in Argentina and Latin America**

With an estimated number of 141 million adherents, Pentecostals are the second largest religious group in Latin America (Anderson, 2004: 63, 169), exceeded only by Catholics. According to different surveys (Conicet, 2008; Mallimaci et al., 2015; Pew Research Center, 2014), between 7.9% and 10% of the population in Argentina is Pentecostal.

Despite the evolution of new Pentecostal styles which appeal to the middle class, Pentecostalism has primarily been a lower class movement in most parts of Latin America (Anderson, 2004; Chesnut, 1997; Chesnut, 2003; Freston, 1998; Lehmann, 1996; Mariz, 1994; Martin, 1990; Martin, 2002). Likewise, in Argentina, Pentecostal churches recruit their members predominantly from the lower class (Conicet, 2008; Esquivel et al., 2001; Mallimaci, 1999: 86-87; Semán, 2000; Wyncarczyk et al., 1995).

The predominance of the lower class in the movement has led scholars to question what causes particularly poor sectors to be attracted by Pentecostalism. Many approaches refer to different kinds of deprivation to explain the lower class appeal of Pentecostalism (cf. Chesnut, 1997; Mariz, 1994): Pentecostalism is conceived of as providing comfort and coping strategies for those affected by poverty and other hardships.

Focusing rather on the religious supply side, market theorists of religion point out that the Catholic Church's negligence of the lower classes (Gill, 1994; Chesnut, 2003; Smilde, 2005), both contribute to the success of Pentecostalism in Latin America. Furthermore, the shared class background of religious 'suppliers' and 'consumers' is paramount. As religious 'consumption' is likely to take place when religious 'products' appeal to the potential 'consumers', fitting to their socialised class-related preferences (cf. Sherkat and Wilson, 1995b), the cultural match between suppliers (pastors and proselytising members) and demand (potential affiliates), which is facilitated through a shared class background, fosters lower class affiliations with Pentecostal churches (Chesnut, 2003). The Bourdieuan approach relates to this match between supply and demand, explaining the lower class appeal of Pentecostalism by its fit to the religious taste of Latin American lower classes.

Popular religion, which refers to the most common patterns of religion among Latin America's lower classes, reflects the religious taste of lower class Latin Americans (cf. Ameigeiras, 2008; Parker, 1996; Semán, 2004). Pentecostalism accommodates the main elements of this religious taste (cf. Semán, 2000): it imparts a holistic worldview and a strong belief in supernatural intervention in everyday life. Many Pentecostal practices such as glossolalia, faith healing, and exorcisms are based on this belief and strive to alter the empirical reality through favourable supernatural intervention. Overcoming of members' hardships is a frequent objective of the various spiritual practices. Moreover, Pentecostal worship services assume a festive and emotional character; popular chants and intense prayers play an important role in establishing a highly expressive atmosphere (Anderson, 2004; Chesnut, 1997; Robbins, 2004). As the religious style of 'mainstream' Pentecostalism matches the popular religious taste, it particularly attracts lower class actors – those predisposed to this religious option.

In contrast to the lower class, Argentinean middle and upper classes are not only unlikely to share the religious predispositions towards Pentecostalism; they may even be inclined to actively seek distinction from the popular style of religion and choose different religious options to mark their middle class status. Pentecostalism, which, in Argentina's mass-media, is often portrayed as a lower class phenomenon and frequently faces mockery, constitutes an inappropriate religious choice, as it marks a lower class status (Algranti, 2010; Frigerio, 1998; Wynarczyk, 2009: 194-197; Semán, 2004). Only specific styles of Pentecostalism, clearly distinguishable from 'mainstream' Pentecostalism, may attract the middle class.

## Empirical Findings: Religious Styles and Social Class in Argentinean

### Pentecostalism

#### Methods

The relationship between religion and social stratification was investigated in a research project on Pentecostalism in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The field research consisted of several steps. The first explorative wave included participative observations in numerous Pentecostal churches in the city and the outskirts of Buenos Aires. Research then focused on two Pentecostal churches, applying a case study approach (Yin, 2009) with contrasting sampling along two criteria: first, location of the churches in urban middle class districts accessible to the lower and middle class; second, significantly divergent social composition with each of the churches being composed mainly of lower or middle class actors. Pastors and members of the lower class (God Is Love/GIL) and the middle class (Assembly Of Christ/AOC) churches supported the research. In order to explore the religious style of both churches, ethnographic observations were carried out in a wide variety of church services

and other congregational activities. Moreover, to compare the social composition of the two churches, a quantitative survey with a total number of 162 interviewees from both churches (75 members from GIL, 87 members from AOC) was conducted. Additionally, ethnographic observations as well as 16 narrative interviews with pastors and members were carried out in the two churches. Interviewees were asked about their biography, social and religious background, and their religious practice and taste. Further interviews included short video sequences showing the religious practices of different Pentecostal churches, particularly AOC and GIL. After watching the video sequences, interviewees were asked for their opinion. This technique converted the interview into an open laboratory, enabling interviewees to communicate likes and dislikes concerning specific styles of Pentecostalism. The analysis and comparison of the two churches is at the heart of the following case study. The final step in the research process was to enlarge the sample of studied churches. In order to identify the particular style of middle class Pentecostalism, in comparison to its well-studied lower class counterpart, the research focused predominantly on congregations that recruit a significant proportion of middle class Pentecostals, exploring a total of 12 middle class congregations in and around Buenos Aires City.

### **'Objective' Class Differences**

Despite their accessibility for different social classes, each of the two churches – AOC and GIL – tends to attract specific social sectors. Figure 1 shows the 'objective' social position of members of both churches. The horizontal scale refers to the level of education starting from illiteracy and ending with a PhD degree. The vertical scale displays the level of household income per capita in Argentinean pesos.

*Figure 1*

The figure illustrates the strong differences in the 'objective' social positions of members of both churches. God Is Love recruits the majority of its approximately 400 active members from the lowest social ranks of Argentinean society: 81.33% of the interviewed GIL members live with household incomes per capita lower than those of the average Argentinean ((Instituto Nacional De Estadística Y Censos (INDEC), 2015)).<sup>1</sup> Also the level of formal education is lower than average: 82.8% of the interviewed members had not finished secondary school, as compared to 55.3% of the Argentinean population and 78.47% of Protestants ((Conicet, 2008); (Instituto Nacional De Estadística Y Censos (INDEC), 2015)).

In contrast, the majority of the approximately 300-400 active members of AOC are from the middle and upper middle class. The level of education is above the national and Protestant average: while 21.63% of Protestants in Argentina have finished secondary school (Conicet, 2008), in the case of the Assembly Of Christ, 63.2% of the surveyed members hold secondary school degrees. Moreover, 75.87% of the surveyed AOC members have higher household incomes per capita than the average Argentinean ((Instituto Nacional De Estadística Y Censos (INDEC), 2015)).

For both churches, social networks form the most efficient factor for getting in touch with future members: two thirds of AOC-interviewees and almost half of GIL interviewees state that their first contact with their current church was through relatives, friends, or acquaintances. This result aligns with other studies that underpin the role of social networks for affiliation with Pentecostal churches (Algranti, 2010; Chesnut, 2003; Martin, 1990; Míguez, 1998; Smilde, 2005; Smilde, 2007).

## **Symbolic Class Differences**

### **God Is Love**

The observed branch in Flores is the central branch of the Brazilian Pentecostal church God Is Love (GIL) in Argentina. Embedded in a vibrant urban middle class district, the social composition of GIL raises the question of why the church does not attract its members from the middle class living in this neighbourhood. The Bourdieuan approach relates the class bias of the church to its religious style. GIL's style is marked by a rudimentary infrastructure and organisation, an emotional and expressive atmosphere, and religious practices that seek an improvement of daily life.

The church building is sparsely decorated and has the appearance of an old industrial building while the congregations' organisational focus is on church services: it offers a vast array of church services each week to its members, whereas other types of organisational structures such as educational courses, church groups, and social projects are absent. A pastor explains the lack of a more encompassing organisational structure as the congregation's emphasis on spiritual practices and miracles (Interview A). Given the prominence of spiritual deliverance, members consider the church to be a 'spiritual emergency room' (Interview F). Pentecostal practices emphasising the improvement of daily life, like exorcism and faith healing, and a doctrine of spiritual warfare are predominant in church services. Accordingly, individuals with difficulties like poverty, illness, unemployment, alcoholism, domestic violence, and drug addiction approach GIL in search of relief. Pastors frequently attend to these problems by conducting different forms of faith healing. These practices take place in an emotionally charged atmosphere, in which the pastors and the audience shout and speak in tongues, and the possessed may scream.

With its emphasis on life-improvement and its under-developed infrastructure and organisation, the style of GIL resembles Bourdieu's description of the lower class taste (Bourdieu, 1979): a taste of the necessary, marked by pragmatism and functionalism, as seen

by the comparison to an ‘emergency room’. Religion therefore resembles a tool for the improvement of daily life. Everything else – i.e. practices, organisation and infrastructure – is structured around this function and therefore receives little attention. Narrative interviews with GIL members underpin this supposition: neither aesthetic affinities nor social acceptability inform the religious taste of those interviewed, which is instead shaped by a need for (faith) healing (cf. Chesnut, 1997). GIL-interviewees assess the quality of Pentecostal churches along the experienced presence of the Holy Spirit which becomes, according to them, manifest in the deliverance from evil spirits (Interview C, D, E, F). However, apart from being influenced by their bare needs, interviewees also show a preference for emotionality and expressiveness in religious practice, highlighting the joy in GIL church services (Interview D, E, F). AOC worships, in contrast, are usually experienced by GIL members as boring, unjoyful and lacking power (Interview E, F). Only one AOC video sequence showing the most emotional AOC practice triggers high approval.

### **Assembly Of Christ**

The investigated branch of Assembly Of Christ (AOC) is situated in the middle class neighbourhood of Villa Devoto. This congregation differs from other Pentecostal churches, not only with regard to its exceptional social composition, but also in its style. It provides a well-developed infrastructure and organisation to its members, and abstains from the expressiveness, emotionality, and strong spiritual practices that mark the movement.

In contrast to GIL, the church building was originally constructed as a church and provides a warmer atmosphere. Besides the ordinary Christian masses, the church supplies a range of different religious and secular services to members and non-members, including a vast array of church groups and educational courses, a kindergarten, Sunday school, and a

primary school. AOC is also engaged in social outreach projects (e.g. sending clothes and school equipment into Argentina's poorer provinces).

Similar to Nelson's comparative study on US communities (Nelson, 2009), the level of physical expression in worship services serves as a class marker, allowing AOC to distinguish itself from lower class congregations. Thus, AOC abstains from many practices that involve the Holy Spirit, such as exorcisms, faith healing, and speaking in tongues. Despite sharing the general belief in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, physical manifestations and experiences are not as present as in other Argentinean Pentecostal churches (cf. Pew Research Center, 2014: 67).

Practices that include significant bodily and emotional manifestations tend to be regarded as distressing and socially unacceptable, and are banned from the church service. At the same time, some members mentioned that they would sometimes speak in tongues at home, but not in the church where they regard it as inappropriate. There is a separation between a considerably controlled front region – the church service – and a private back region, in which middle class individuals practice less socially acceptable elements of Pentecostalism (Goffman, 1959). The separation between front and back regions can be interpreted through Bourdieu's 'taste of pretension' (Bourdieu, 1979): inadequate features are disguised, while the visible performance of Pentecostalism is enriched with elements that are regarded as legitimate in middle class circles. Thus, instead of physical and emotional practices, AOC stresses a verbal, intellectual practice of religion through its focus on sermons. Preachers speak in an unaccented, white-collar Spanish, frequently employ metaphors, and interpret the Bible in an almost theological fashion, sometimes making the sermons reminiscent of a university lecture.

Besides the sermon, high-quality musical praise with well-trained musicians playing different styles, ranging from classical music to pop-hymns, assumes a central role in AOC's

religious practice. Although musical praise offers a space for physical and emotional expression, the majority of the audience abstains from enthusiastically singing, clapping their hands, or calling out. One member reflecting on the unspoken behavioural standards in her church summarises it as follows: ‘Don’t sing too loud, you shouldn’t be too jubilant, you shouldn’t clap too much, you shouldn’t yell. It looks bad, you shouldn’t jump’ (Interview O). Striving for a more legitimate style, practices that may ‘look bad’ to fellow members (or non-Pentecostal visitors) are banned.

Middle class interviewees from AOC usually communicate a taste for a quiet style of Pentecostalism in church services, rejecting the demonstration of emotionality and of strong spiritual practices, instead favouring educational activities (courses, workshops etc.) and well-prepared sermons. Thus, one interviewee states: ‘I don’t like it when things get overly emotional, when faith becomes something emotional, I don’t like it’ (Interview N). Watching video sequences from GIL, middle class interviewees disapproved of its style. One middle class AOC member viewing a video of a GIL exorcism states that the turmoil would lead non-Pentecostals to perceive them as insane: ‘It annoys me. Because if someone from outside comes in, he will say “they are mad” and he is right’ (Interview L).

In total, AOC evolves a style that signals middle class belonging, hiding non-conformance and highlighting specific features that are often associated with the Argentinean middle class – i.e. focus on education, controlled behaviour, orderly structure, tidiness (Adamovsky, 2009; Svampa, 2005; Tevik, 2006).

### Competing Styles

The observed differences parallel general tendencies within South American Pentecostalism. The religious practice of many churches in the poorer districts of Buenos Aires resembles the style of GIL more closely than that of AOC (cf. Algranti, 2010; Míguez, 1998; Semán,

2000). Small and medium size churches that are, in contrast, shaped by a significant middle class membership display a different style: practices of exorcism and faith healing disappear; speaking in tongues is less pronounced (or even absent); the emphasis on miracles is weaker; and church services are less expressive. Similar observations regarding middle class Pentecostalism have been made in the case of Brazil and Chile (Corten, 1995; Freston, 1997; Gooren, 2011; Martin, 1995; Martin, 2006). Put simply, the two constitute competing styles, each of them setting its own standards for 'good' Pentecostalism: the popular 'mainstream' style promotes expressiveness, emotionality, the experience of the Holy Spirit, and faith healing rituals as features of 'good' Pentecostalism; whereas middle class Pentecostals contests that these should be legitimate features of Pentecostalism, instead promoting education and self-control.

### **Contextualising Social Class: Social Networks, Social Adaptation, and Contingency**

A frequent criticism of Bourdieu's sociology is determinism (cf. Bennett et al., 2010: 27; Gartman 1991 #575): 422, 438; King, 2000: 427-430; Savage, 2003: 540-541). Focusing on social class, Bourdieu-based approaches often run the risk of limiting their explanations of social practice to class and becoming class-deterministic. To contextualise class, other factors that influence religious tastes and styles in the studied cases – such as (a) social networks, (b) the adaptation of individuals to 'legitimate' styles, and (c) the class-deviations of individual tastes – are identified and discussed according to their implications on the approach and the relationship between social class and religion.

Two thirds of AOC-interviewees and almost the half of GIL interviewees were attracted to their current congregations via social networks.<sup>2</sup> In some cases, members even affiliated with their current church, despite initially disagreeing with its style: one AOC interviewee affiliated with the congregation because his new girlfriend/future wife, whom he

had met at the local sports club of the middle class neighbourhood, is a devoted member of the congregation (Interview J). At first, he experienced the church services as bizarre and often left before end. But over time, he himself became a devoted member of the congregation. This example indicates that the match between taste and style is not always decisive for the affiliation process and does not necessarily explain the class bias of the churches: given their homophily (McPherson et al., 2001), social networks might play a more important role in the class bias of the two churches than mere class-related tastes (see also Sherkat and Wilson, 1995a).

Social networks are not only crucial for the affiliation process, but also for the performance of the church style, as they trigger alignment processes. Becoming affiliated with the church and participating regularly in its activities, new church members integrate into the social network of the church: in order to not lose fellow members' recognition or even falling out of the supportive social networks of the congregation, members are likely to adapt their visible performances to the type of style that is considered as legitimate within the church, even when not fully agreeing with it. In the case of interviewee J, his relationship with his future wife and her family hinge on his participation in the congregation, as does his professional career, since he has received a well-paid job through the patronage of another church member. The importance of social alignment is also illustrated by AOC members who are dedicated to more expressive styles of Pentecostalism outside AOC (e.g. speaking in tongues at home), but avoid practicing these in AOC church services. For instance, one middle class member of AOC states a preference for a more expressive style and criticises her church for being stiff: 'Look, when someone says that he is Pentecostal he lets the power and the joy of the Holy Spirit flow...I would say that here, at this church, Assembly of Christ, there is little flowing. I mean, it's not because of the Holy Spirit. It's just that people here are stiff, cardboard almost, very "I'm not going to open up, because the person next to

me will look at me and say, ‘What’s wrong with you?’” (...) Why do they have to have their hands in their pockets, their mouths closed, (...) with their foreheads and faces scrunched up?’ (Interview O) The same interviewee reports an exercise of self-control in her church, in contrast to being more expressive when visiting other churches in the surroundings of Buenos Aires. Being inclined towards religious tastes regarded as inappropriate in middle class circles, these members adapt their performances in AOC’s church services to what is experienced as the legitimate style. Accordingly, a match between the individual taste and church style is not indispensable and seems to be even partly absent in many cases.

The aforementioned examples show that religious tastes, though often influenced by class, are not a bare function of social class. These cases parallel Bernhard Lahire’s (2004/2006) observation that deviations from expected ‘class-bias’ are frequent, as multiple – and sometimes conflicting – socialisation channels influence the individuals’ predispositions. Given that individual tastes constitute contingent products of actors’ socialisation processes, they may often deviate from expected class-related cultural patterns and therefore only partly explain the observed overlap between class and religion. However, even with religious tastes deviating from class patterns, social networks and alignment processes within churches appear to contribute to the reproduction of class-related styles that signal symbolic class boundaries within religion.

## Conclusion

This article illustrates that religion itself can become a part of social class by creating (religious) status markers. It, thereby, touches upon the issue of what cultural features shape class boundaries in the 21st century. Focusing on how other cultural domains mold class identities (e.g. arts, food, media, music, sport), current class research tends to neglect religion (cf. Bennett et al., 2010; Savage et al., 2013; Savage et al., 2015). However, as

religion continues to shape the everyday life of billions of individuals all over the world (cf. Berger, 1992; Davie, 2010), it is likely to have a stake in the drawing of symbolic class boundaries. Although in the sociology of religion, the topic has received more attention, here, existing studies on social class and religion often employ quantitative methods, stressing the demographic ('objective') dimension of class, while disregarding its symbolic dimension. Employing a Bourdieuan approach, the present contribution explores the symbolic dimension of class within the sphere of religion. The approach suggests that religious tastes and styles can serve as class markers.

Providing a framework for studying the entanglements of class and religion, the Bourdieuan approach offers various research perspectives. Further research could, for instance, carry out broader in-depth studies on religious tastes and styles of lower and middle classes. Profound research into this topic may reveal, besides typical class markers in the religious field, competing style-formations within each class that are related to particular class sections (Bourdieu, 1979: 128-138). Analogous to French research on the very wealthy (Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot, 2010), the religion of the upper classes, which has, so far, been overlooked, could also be an intriguing candidate for a study of religious styles and tastes.

Nevertheless, engaging a Bourdieuan framework runs the risk of reading empirical variations only in terms of social class and overstating its influence on attitudes and practices. In the above Pentecostal congregations, social networks, the adaptation to legitimate styles, and the individuality of actors' tastes, intermingle with social class and shape the performances of actors. Taking these factors into account allows for a more critical study of the drawing of class boundaries. In particular, the observed differences between individual tastes and class-related styles shed a critical light on the supposed embodiment of class culture: rather than being fully incorporated in their habitus and unvaryingly present in the lives of the studied middle class actors, social class is performed in specific situations

(middle class church services), playing a less important role in others (e.g. at home, lower class church services). In particular, when there is a disjunction between individual tastes and the expected class-related styles, social class, rather than being automatically reproduced, becomes a social ‘play’ on the ‘front region’ (Goffman, 1959), the ‘marchés tendus’ (Lahire, 2004/2006), on which actors negotiate their social recognition, seeking to adapt their visible performances to the legitimate style. The difference between predispositions and performances indicates the importance of the heuristic distinction between taste and style that was introduced at the beginning of the article. While styles are – knowingly or unknowingly – employed to mark social class belonging and distinctions, tastes – though often stimulating the performance of class-related styles – might be less relevant for the drawing symbolic class boundaries than Bourdieu’s habitus concept suggests, as actors may orientate their performances along those styles that are established as appropriate in the given situations (cf. March and Olsen, 2009). Accordingly, even in the case of class-deviating tastes, the reproduction of class boundaries is ensured by the alignment effect of ‘legitimate’ styles.

---

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> The data for the income distribution of the Argentinean society is provided by the National Statistical Institute of Argentina (Instituto Nacional De Estadística Y Censos (INDEC) (2015) and refers to the national distribution of household incomes per capita in the second quarter of 2009: the median household income per capita is 820 Argentinean pesos per month, the equivalent of 231 US Dollars (based on an exchange of 3.55 Arg. Pesos per USD).

<sup>2</sup> Instead of social networks, Bourdieu employs the notion of ‘social capital’. Referring to an actor’s social acquaintances as a resource in the struggle for social dominion (Bourdieu

---

2011), the concept centres on the way in which social relationships allow actors to maintaining their social positions while excluding others from them, eventually leading to the reproduction of social inequalities. As the analysis in this article focuses on the processes of affiliation and adaptation, it refrains from using the term ‘social capital’ to avoid misunderstanding and instead employs the more common term ‘social networks’.

## References

Adamovsky E (2009) *Historia de la clase media argentina: Apogeo y decadencia de una ilusión, 1919-2003*. Buenos Aires: Planeta.

Algranti J (2010) *Política y Religión en los márgenes: Nuevas formas de participación social des las mega-iglesias evangélicas en la Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones CICCUS.

Ameigeiras AR (2008) *Religiosidad popular: Creencias religiosas populares en la sociedad argentina*. Buenos Aires: Biblioteca Nacional; Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento.

Anderson A (2004) *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Barrett DB (2010) Religion and Habitus: Exploring the Relationship Between Religious Involvement and Educational Outcomes and Orientations Among Urban African American Students. *Urban Education* 45(4): 448–479.

Bennett T, Savage M, Silva E, Warde A, Gayo-Cal M and Wright D (2010) *Culture, class, distinction*. London: Routledge.

Berger PL (1979) *The Heretical Imperative*. New York: Anchor Books.

Berger PL (1992) *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*. Washington D.C.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Bourdieu P (1971a) Genèse et structure du champ religieux. *Revue française de sociologie* 12(3): 295–334.

Bourdieu P (1971b) Une interprétation de la théorie de la religion selon Max Weber. *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 12(01): 3–21.

Bourdieu P (1979) *La distinction: Critique sociale du jugement*. Paris: Les Éd. de Minuit.

Bourdieu P (1982) *Ce que parler veut dire: L'économie des échanges linguistiques*. Paris: Fayard.

Bourdieu P (2011) The forms of capital.(1986). *Cultural theory: An anthology*: 81–93.

Calhoun CJ, LiPuma E and Postone M (1993) *Bourdieu: Critical perspectives*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

Chesnut AR (1997) *Born Again in Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers Univ. Press.

Chesnut AR (2003) *Competitive Spirits: Latin America's new religious economy*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

Conicet C (2008) *Primera Encuesta sobre Creencias y Actitudes Religiosas en Argentina*. Buenos Aires.

Coreno T (2002) Fundamentalism as a Class Culture. *Sociology of Religion* 63(3): 335–360.

Corten A (1995) *Le pentecôtisme au Brésil: Émotion du pauvre et romantisme théologie*. Paris: Éditions Karthala.

- Darnell A and Sherkat DE (1997) The Impact of Protestant Fundamentalism on Educational Attainment. *American Sociological Review* 62(2): 306–315.
- Davidson JD and Pyle RE (2006) Social Class. In: Ebaugh HRF (ed.) *Handbook of religion and social institutions*. New York: Springer, pp. 185–206.
- Davie G (2010) Resacralization. In: Turner BS (ed.) *The new Blackwell companion to the sociology of religion*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 160–177.
- Demerath NJ (1965) *Social Class in American Protestantism*. New York: Rand Mc Nally.
- Dianteill E (2003) Pierre Bourdieu and the sociology of religion: A central and peripheral concern. *Theory and Society* 32(5-6): 529–549.
- Dillon M (2001) Pierre Bourdieu, Religion and Cultural Production. *Cultural Studies and Critical Methodologies* 1(4): 411–429.
- Esquivel J, García F, Hadida ME, Houdin V and Mallimaci F (2001) *Creencias y religiones en el Gran Buenos Aires: El caso de Quilmes*. Buenos Aires: Univ. Nacional de Quilmes.
- Fer Y (2010) The Holy Spirit and the Pentecostal habitus. *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*(2/2010): 157–176.
- Freston P (1997) Charismatic Evangelicals in Latin America: Mission and Politics on the Frontiers of Protestant Growth. In: Hunt SJ, Hamilton M and Walter T (eds) *Charismatic Christianity: Sociological perspectives*. New York: St. Martin's Press, pp. 184–204.
- Freston P (1998) Pentecostalism in Latin America: Characteristics and Controversies. *Social Compass* 45(3): 335–358.
- Frigerio A (1998) Les "sectes" vues par les "religions": le discours médiatique des prêtres et des pasteurs en Argentine. *Social Compass* 45(3): 437–459.

Gartman D (1991) Culture as Class Symbolization or Mass Reification? A Critique of Bourdieu's Distinction. *American Journal of Sociology* 97(2): 421–447.

Gill AJ (1994) Rendering unto Caesar? Religious competition and Catholic political strategy in Latin America, 1962-79. *American Journal of Political Science*: 403–425.

Goffman E (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books.

Goldstein S (1969) Socioeconomic differentials among religious groups in the United States. *American Journal Of Sociology*: 612–631.

Gooren H (2011) *The Pentecostalization of Religion and Society in Latin America: First Findings from Chile*. Milwaukee.

Instituto Nacional De Estadistica Y Censos (INDEC) (2015) *Encuesta Permanente de Hogares (EPH) continua*. Available at: [www.indec.mecon.ar](http://www.indec.mecon.ar) (accessed 21 March 2015).

Keister LA (2008) Conservative protestants and wealth: How religion perpetuates asset poverty. *American Journal Of Sociology* 113(5): 1237–1271.

Keister LA and Keister LA (2003) Religion and wealth: The role of religious affiliation and participation in early adult asset accumulation. *Social Forces* 82(1): 175–207.

Keister LA and Sherkat DE (2014) *Religion and inequality in America: Research and theory on religion's role in stratification*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

King A (2000) Thinking with Bourdieu Against Bourdieu: A 'Practical' Critique of the Habitus. *Sociological Theory* 18(3): 417–433.

Köhrsen J (2008) Religious Taste: Explaining religious choices by the concept of religious taste. Available at: <https://www.uni-bielefeld.de/theologie/CIRRuS-downloads/KohrsenReligiousTasteCIRRuSWorkingPaper.pdf> (accessed 7 July 2015).

Lahire B (2004/2006) *La culture des individus: Dissonances culturelles et distinction de soi*. Paris: Découverte.

Lamont M (1992) *Money, Morals & Manners: The Culture of the French and the American Upper-Middle Class*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

Lehmann D (1996) *Struggle for the spirit: Religious transformation and popular culture in Brazil and Latin America*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Mallimaci F (1999) Catolicismo en Argentina: Presencia popular y antiliberalismo. *Cristianismo y Sociedad* 37(142): 81–92.

Mallimaci F, Esquivel JC and Gimenez BÉliveau V (2015) What do Argentine people believe in? Religion and social structure in Argentina. *Social Compass* 62(2): 255–277.

March JG and Olsen JP (2009) The Logic of appropriateness. *Arena Working Papers* 4.

Mariz CL (1994) *Coping with Poverty: Pentecostals and Christian Base Communities in Brazil*. Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Pr.

Martin B (1995) New Mutations of the Protestant Ethic among Latin American Pentecostals. *Religion* 25(2): 101–117.

Martin B (2006) The Aesthetics of Latin American Pentecostalism: The Sociology of Religion and the Problem of Taste. In: Arweck E and Keenan WJF (eds) *Materialising religion: Expression, performance, and ritual / [edited by] Elisabeth Arweck & William J.F. Keenan*. Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, pp. 138–160.

Martin D (1990) *Tongues of fire: The explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Martin D (2002) *Pentecostalism: The world their parish*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Marx K (1844) Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie. In: Ruge A and Marx K (eds) *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. Paris: Bureau der Jahrbücher, pp. 71–85.

McCloud S (2007) Putting Some Class into Religious Studies: Resurrecting an Important Concept. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75(4): 840–862.

McPherson M, Smith-Lovin L and Cook JM (2001) Birds of a feather: Homophily in social networks. *Annual review of sociology*: 415–444.

Míguez D (1998) *Spiritual Bonfire in Argentina: Confronting Current Theories with an Ethnographic Account of Pentecostal Growth in a Buenos Aires Suburb*. Amsterdam: CEDLA.

Nelson TJ (2009) At Ease with our own Kind.: Worship Practices and Class Segregation in American Religion. In: McCloud S and Mirola WA (eds) *Religion and class in America: Culture, history, and politics*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 45–68.

Niebuhr RH (1929) *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*. Connecticut: Henry Holt and Company.

Park JZ and Reimer SH (2002) Revisiting the Social Sources of American Christianity 1972–1998. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41(4): 733–746.

Parker CG (1996) *Popular religion and modernization in Latin America: A different logic*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Pew Research Center (2014) *Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region*. Available at: [www.pewresearch.org](http://www.pewresearch.org) (accessed 20 August 2015).

Pinçon M and Pinçon-Charlot M (2010) *Les ghettos du Gotha*. Paris: Éd. du Seuil.

Pope L (1948) Religion and the class structure. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 256: 84–91.

Rey T (2005) Habitus and hybridity: an interpretation of the syncretism in the Afro-Catholic religion according to Boudieu. *Social Compass* 52(4): 453–462.

Rey T (2007) *Bourdieu on religion: Imposing faith and legitimacy*. London, Oakville: Equinox.

Robbins J (2004) The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33(1): 117–143.

Roof WC and McKinney WC (1987) *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future // American mainline religion: Its changing shape and future*. New Brunswick, London: Rutgers University Press.

Sallaz JJ and Zavisca J (2007) Bourdieu in American Sociology, 1980–2004. *Annual Review of Sociology* 33(1): 21–41.

Savage M (2003) A New Class Paradigm? *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 24(4): 535–541.

Savage M, Devine F, Cunningham N, Friedman S, Laurison D, Miles A, et al. (2015) On Social Class, Anno 2014. *Sociology* 49(6): 1011–1030.

Savage M, Devine F, Cunningham N, Taylor M, Li Y, Hjellbrekke J, et al. (2013) A New Model of Social Class? Findings from the BBC's Great British Class Survey Experiment. *Sociology* 47(2): 219–250.

Schäfer H (2011) Explaining Central American Pentecostalism within social inequality and conflict. On habitus-analysis as a clue to describe religious praxis. In: Smith CL (ed.)

*Pentecostal Power: Expressions, Faith and Politics of Latin American Pentecostalism.*  
Leiden/Boston: Brill, pp. 137–156.

Schäfer HW (2015) *Habitus-analysis: Identities and strategies, fields and social space according to Pierre Bourdieu - models for research on religion and culture.* Wiesbaden: Springer.

Schwadel P (2008) Poor teenagers' religion. *Sociology of Religion* 69(2): 125–149.

Schwadel P (2011) The effects of education on Americans' religious practices, beliefs, and affiliations. *Review of Religious Research* 53(2): 161–182.

Seibert LH (2010) Glaubwürdigkeit als religiöses Vermögen: Grundlagen eines Feldmodells nach Bourdieus am Beispiel Bosnien-Herzegowinas. *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* 20(1): 89–117.

Semán P (2000) El pentecostalismo y la religiosidad de los sectores populares“, in: Svampa, Maristella (Hg.) *Desde abajo: La transformación de las identidades sociales*, Buenos Aires, S. 155-180. In: Svampa M, Auyero J and Isla AR (eds) *Desde abajo: La transformación de las identidades sociales*. Buenos Aires: Ed. Biblos, pp. 155–180.

Semán P (2004) *La religiosidad popular: Creencias Y Vida Cotidiana.* Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual.

Sherkat DE (2001) Tracking the Restructuring of American Religion: Religious Affiliation and Patterns of Religious Mobility, 1973-1998. *Social Forces* 79(4): 1459–1493.

Sherkat DE and Wilson J (1995a) Preferences. Constrains and Choices in religious Markets: An Examination of Religious Switching and Apostasy. *Social Forces* 73(3): 993–1026.

Sherkat DE and Wilson J (1995b) Preferences. Constrains and Choices in religious Markets: An Examination of Religious Switching and Apostasy. *Social Forces* 73(3): 993–1026.

Smilde D (2005) A qualitative comparative analysis of conversion to Venezuelan evangelicalism: How networks matter. *American Journal Of Sociology* 111(3): 757–796.

Smilde D (2007) *Reason to believe: Cultural agency in Latin American evangelicalism*. Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press.

Smith C and Faris R (2005) Socioeconomic inequality in the American religious system: An update and assessment. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44(1): 95–104.

Stark R and Finke R (2000) *Acts of faith: Explaining the human side of religion*. Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press.

Svampa M (2005) *La sociedad excluyente: La Argentina bajo el signo del neoliberalismo*. Buenos Aires: Taurus [u.a.].

Swartz DL (1996) Bridging the study of culture and religion: Pierre Bourdieu's political economy of symbolic power. *Sociology of Religion* 57(1): 71–85.

Swartz DL and Zolberg VL (2005) *After Bourdieu*. [New York]: Springer Science + Business Media, Inc.

Tevik JC (2006) *Porteñologics: El significado del gusto y la moralidad en la clase media profesional porteña*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Antropofagia.

Urban HB (2003) Sacred Capital: Pierre Bourdieu and the Study of Religion. *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 15: 354–389.

Verter B (2003) Spiritual Capital: Theorizing Religion with Bourdieu Against Bourdieu. *Sociological Theory* 21: 150–174.

Weber M (1972[1921]) *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Wimmer A (2008) The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries: A Multilevel Process Theory. *American Journal of Sociology* 113(4): 970–1022.

Wynarczyk H (2009) *Ciudadanos de dos mundos: El movimiento evangélico en la vida pública argentina 1980-2001*. Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de San Martín.

Wynarczyk H, Semán P and Majo M de (1995) *Panorama Actual del Campo Evangélico en Argentina: Un Estudio Sociológico*. Buenos Aires.

Yin RK (2009) *Case study research: Design and methods*. Los Angeles, Calif: Sage Publications.

## Figures and Tables

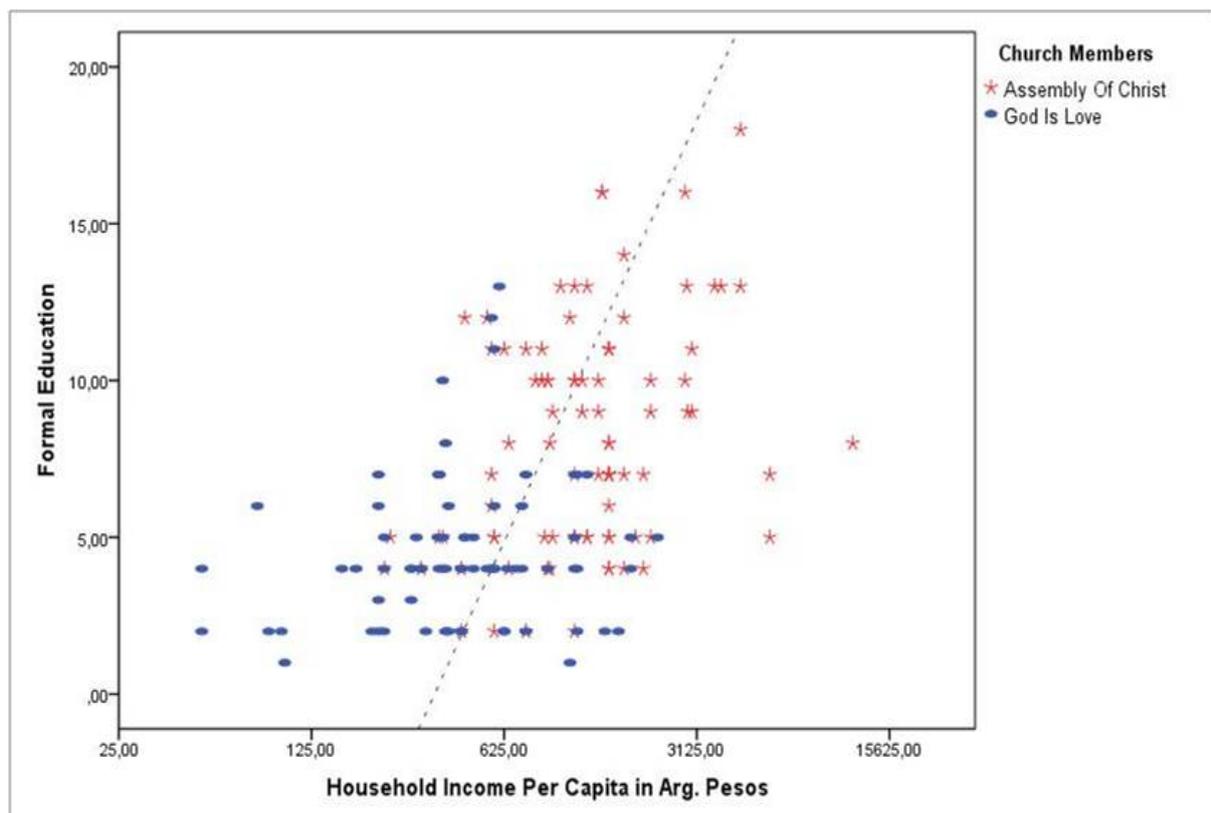


Figure 1: Social Composition of GIL and AOC, source: own survey (n=162)