



## ROBERTH McALISTER'S RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

### *THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE OF ROBERTH McALISTER*



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#### Summary

In this article, Robert McAlister's religious experience will be presented, with an approach to his biography with the main events of his life. Subsequently, an overview of the New Life Pentecostal Church, from its foundation to the present moment, the books written by him and the IPNV declaration of faith. Finally, an account of his religious experience based on Eliade<sup>two</sup> and Otto<sup>3</sup>.

**Key words:** New Life Church. Robert McAlister. Pentecostalism.

#### Abstract

In this article we will present the religious experience of Robert McAlister, discussing a biography of the main events of his life. In addition, a panorama about the Pentecostal Church of New Life, from the foundation to the present moment, the books written by him and the IPNV declaration of faith. Finally, an account of his religious experience based on Eliade and Otto.

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#### Introduction

The missionary Robert McAlister, for more than thirty years, exerted a great influence on Protestantism in Brazil, being the precursor of several Neo-Pentecostal Churches, such as Universal

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twoThe Romanian thinker, master, historian specializing in religious issues, mythologist and writer **Mircea Eliade** was born in Bucharest, on February 28, 1907, and died in Chicago, in 1986. In 1970 he gained North American citizenship; the intellectual spoke and spoke fluently in at least eight languages, although much of his academic work was written in his own language. He became one of the most important historians and philosophers of religions in the modern world, later joining the Eranos Circle, devoted to spiritual research (<https://www.infoescola.com/filosofia/o-pensamento-demircea-eliade/>).

3 **Rudolf Otto** (Peine, 25 in September in 1869, Marburg, 6 in March in 1937) <sup>he was</sup> one eminent German Lutheran theologian, philosopher. It is a rudite in comparative religions. Author of *The Sacred* (or *The Idea of the Sacred*), first published in 1917 as *Das Heilige* (considered one of the most important treatises theological in German language of 20th century) and who is best known for his concept of *numinous* [note 1], which expresses a profound emotional experience that he argued is at the heart of the world's religions and that is fundamental to understanding religious. It is philosophical current affairs ([https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf\\_Otto](https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_Otto)).



do Poder de Deus and Internacional da Graça. There is little publication about him and his missionary work in Brazil after the 1960s.

Initially, his biography will be presented, including accounts of the events that made him come to Brazil to establish the New Life Pentecostal Church, after having visited the country on his honeymoon and, according to him, having heard a call to carry out work of evangelization. The history of the founding of the Church will also be narrated, showing all the facts that occurred prior to its founding until the present day. At the end, his religious experience will be discussed based on the reports of Eliade Mircea and Rudolf Otto.



## 2 Theoretical foundation

### 2.1 Biography of Robert McAlister

Walter Robert McAlister was born on August 13, 1931, in the city of London (Canada), into an evangelical family, being the son and grandson of Pentecostal pastors. He had two brothers, Elizabeth and Jack, and they were all educated according to evangelical principles (MCALISTER, 2012, p. 12).

. His father, Walther Edward McAlister, was a man of humble characteristics who He worked as an itinerant missionary in a denomination called Igreja da Pedra, in Toronto (Canada), whose ideal was evangelization and, consequently, the creation of new churches in the region that covered from Toronto to Vancouver. His mother was a housewife and raised her children.

In his youth, Robert went through a phase of indifference towards his parents' religion, but on September 18, 1948, at the age of 17, he had his religious experience, or conversion as characterized by evangelical study. At this age, he was already working as a car insurance inspector.

As a result of his conversion experience, Robert left his job and decided to be a missionary, following in the footsteps of his grandfather and father. He reports that he had a divine call to mission and studied for a period of three years in Peterborough at the Eastern Pentecostal Bible College.

Upon finishing this period of formation, he had the desire to go to the missionary field to evangelize and found Churches, which happened with his trip to the Philippines, where he joined an evangelical mission as a soloist.,because he sang in the church choir. While carrying out his missionary work, Robert encountered a difficulty when



He began to pray for the sick, something that was not accepted by the mission that warned him about this practice, since it could only be carried out during the time of the disciples. However, he was raised in a Pentecostal environment, where the use of spiritual gifts was common and he also experienced healing from a throat disease. Thus, he left the mission.

As time went by, he met Pentecostal pastor Lester Summlal, who was carrying out missionary work in the Philippines and asked to join the mission to develop his Pentecostal ministry (MCALISTER, 2012, p. 15).

There, he worked for some time as a missionary and called Hugh McAlister, his uncle, to help him in evangelistic campaigns with the ministration of divine healing. They performed a mystery with an emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Some time later, they left the Philippines and, taking advantage of an opportunity on the trip, passed through India, where they carried out an evangelical crusade. They then returned to the United States.

On a missionary trip, Robert headed to North Carolina, where he met Gloria Garr, who was from Charlotte and the daughter of Pentecostal missionary Dr. Alfred Goodrich Garr. After three days of meeting each other, he asked her to marry him, which took place on June 10, 1955.

On this occasion, Robert was invited to go to Brazil to carry out an evangelistic campaign in the city of Santos (São Paulo). He and his wife spent their honeymoon in this city and then left on a ship heading to the port of Santos. It should be noted that this was Robert's first contact with the country.

After their stay in Brazilian lands, they returned to their missionary trips and went to Hong Kong, where a denomination emerged - "Nova Vida". Afterwards, they went to France, Germany and India.

In the latter country, with the same objective of evangelizing, Robert and his wife were prevented from disembarking, as he, as a Canadian, could visit India, but his American wife could not. However, this objective was partially realized, as Robert gave the money he had saved for missionary work there to his friend Mark Buntaim, who worked there for several years.

After their attempt to go to India didn't work out, they returned to Charlotte. After, were invited to carry out another campaign in Brazil, at the Maracanãzinho Stadium, in



Rio de Janeiro state. His intention, upon finishing this campaign, was to continue his travels as an itinerant missionary carrying the word of God.

4 Upon arriving in Rio, he felt that God was showing him that Brazil would be the place where he would preach his evangelistic message for a long time, but at the end of the campaign he returned to Canada, since his daughter was ill. Robert McAlister was general superintendent of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.

In 1959, Robert came to Brazil together with his entire family, that is, his wife and two children (Walter aged two and Heather aged six months). The city of São Paulo was his first destination, but during the time he stayed there he was unable to develop his evangelistic ministry, so he moved to the city of Rio de Janeiro and founded the Cruzada de Nova Vida.

In 1960, he started a program called "Voz da Nova Vida" which was broadcast on Rádio Copacabana and later on Rádios Mayrink Veiga and Guanabara, reaching a significant audience.

In 1961, Robert found a suitable space on the ninth floor of the Brazilian Press Association, where he began his preaching. He also established a pastoral office on Avenida Rio Branco to assist people who needed prayer and counseling.

In 1967, he managed to buy Rádio Relógio, which was the pioneer of evangelical radio stations in Rio de Janeiro, where he began broadcasting a program entitled "Café Espiritual da Manhã".

The first temple of the Pentecostal Church of Nova Vida was inaugurated in 1964, in the north of the city of Rio de Janeiro. In 1972, the second temple was built in the Botafogo neighborhood, where the administrative headquarters of the Church and some apartments for pastors were also located.

In 1973, Robert made the decision to step away from the leadership of the New Life Pentecostal Church for an indefinite period of time and went to the United States, dedicating himself to a sabbatical period for three years.

. Bishop Tito Oscar then assumed leadership of the Church. After this period, Robert returned to Brazil and resumed the Pentecostal Church of Nova Vida. In 1978, he debuted the program Things da Vida on the now defunct TV Tupi and also wrote more than 35 books (MCALISTER, 2012, p. 12). Robert already had some heart problems and at the age of thirty-nine he had his first



heart attack. He subsequently underwent two surgeries to place saphenous bypass grafts, but he did not follow medical recommendations and continued his normal routine with preaching, traveling and working.

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In a routine examination carried out in Charlotte, he was informed that a heart transplant would be necessary, but when a donor appeared, he suffered a hemorrhage and did not survive, passing away at the age of 62, on November 13, 1993.

### 2.3 History of Robert McAlister's church

The New Life Pentecostal Church was born through the work carried out by Robert on a radio program called "Voice of New Life". The first broadcast took place on August 1, 1960, at 6:30 am, on Rádio Copacabana.

In 1961, Robert dedicated himself to studying the Portuguese language to perform speeches on radio programs and began celebrating public services at the Brazilian Press Association. It is worth mentioning that its growth happened quickly.

The first churches emerged in the city of Rio de Janeiro and from them some congregations that quickly began to develop and, little by little, also became churches. But, faced with this rapid growth, the Churches still did not have an identity, structure or global strategy. Given this, Robert decided to follow an ecclesiastical form of government and in 1976 adopted the episcopal model for the direction of the church. With this decision, all of the church's assets began to be managed by an administrative headquarters located in the Botafogo neighborhood. In this structure configuration, the attorneys were the pastors themselves, there was no decision-making autonomy and appointments and transfers were always decided by Bishop Robert.

The legitimizing act for Robert's consecration as bishop of the Church was carried out in an Assembly by unanimous acclamation of the pastors of the New Life Pentecostal Church. From that moment on, it became common to consecrate bishops in Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal circles. Robert was consecrated as primate bishop, and other pastors were consecrated as auxiliary bishops.

One fact that explains the rapid and explosive growth of the Church was its exposure in the media. In this dynamic, Robert held four services per Sunday, two in the morning and two in the afternoon, however this growth generated some problems for the denomination (MCALISTER, 2012). In the year 1986, something important happened through a change in



New Life Pentecostal Church. As the Church's government was centralized in a bishop and an administrative headquarters and with the demand for its growth, there was an administrative overload. The first measure was to remove the term Pentecostal from the name of the church so that there would be no confusion with neo-Pentecostalism. It came to be called the New Life Church.

Another decision taken by Robert was the division of the Church's assets, granting administrative and financial autonomy to all. This measure gave complete freedom to pastors to walk, creating a National Register of Legal Entities.

Under Robert's leadership, the Nova Vida Church expanded across several Brazilian states, reaching an average of seventy temples. Currently, she remains firm in her purpose of evangelization.

## 2.4 Religious experience

In analyzing Robert's religious experience it is clear that he lived the first years of his life in the religious context of his parents, however, as a teenager he had his experience with the sacred. According to Eliade, "man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself to be something absolutely different from the profane" (ELIADE, 1992, p. 13). This experience provided a broad vision for Robert that completely defined his life, that is, an existential value, a creation of the world (ELIADE, 1992).

This vision was based on his experience with evangelical Christianity, on a vision of the God who reveals himself. In Barth's conception, revelation is the manifestation of God's sovereignty towards man and mystery. For "Geheimnis [...] is the last instance of judgment on the human being" (BARTH, 1996, p. 184). It is up to man to accept it, since this is the only way to achieve salvation. Given this explanation, the revelation is anchored in the figure of Jesus Christ. In Mondin's words,

By the term "Christian", Barth means that one cannot think theologically "except having before one's eyes the living figure of Christ. A Christian dogmatic must be Christology in its fundamental structure as well as in each of its parts, if it is true that its only criterion is the Word of God revealed and attested by Holy Scripture and preached by the Church and whether it is true that this revealed Word of God is

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<sup>4</sup>Barth never tired of proclaiming the sovereignty of God, both in being and in acting. In being, the distance between God and creatures is so infinite that he can do everything and the creature can do nothing. In acting, God does everything, which is why there is neither cooperation nor freedom of action in the creature. "God is God, being totally different from any human reality, including man's culture and religion." In 1922, in a letter to a friend, he says: "Never stop affirming: 'God is God'. Do not be content with preaching it. Learn to affirm that 'God is God' with theological precision, that is, with all the exultation that accompanies it "Jesus is the Christ" (MONDIN, 2003, p. 66).



identifies with Jesus Christ." "Christology must occupy all space in theology. [...] that is to say, in each branch of dogmatics and ecclesiology [...]. Dogmatics must be fundamentally a Christology and nothing more." In this concern to place Christ at the center of all theological reflection lies the most innovative and characteristic note of Karl Barth's work. Christ constituted the point of view from which Barth places himself to understand the rest of Revelation (MONDIN, 2003, p. 46).



Its manifestation is associated with God's freedom to grant it to the man who confesses it through faith and based on Jesus Christ. The unknown God becomes known through revelation that touches and involves the human person. For Barth, the word of God is the means by which He spoke, speaks and will speak to human beings, and it will act in them and in their favor.

[...] in his word, God reveals his actions within the horizon of his covenant with human beings; and in the history of the constitution, maintenance, realization and conclusion of that covenant he reveals himself. He reveals his holiness, but also his mercy as a father, as a brother, as a friend. He also reveals his power and majesty as lord and judge of human beings; therefore, he reveals himself as the first partner in this covenant, himself as God of the human being [...] reveals the human being as his son and servant, as loved by him and, therefore, as the second partner in the covenant ; in short: it reveals the human being as a human being of God (BARTH, 2007, p. 19).

Barth is mentioning the double revelation that is the content of the gospel, in which the divine covenant provides a relationship between God and human beings. Given Barth's understanding of religion, with the revelation of God in his work the Letter to the Romans, he presents some points about religion as a human projection.

This view of Christianity (evangelical), as superior to the status of religion that appears in Barth, is also Robert's aspect, but with a Pentecostal bias, but the supremacy of Christ is his revelation to man.

In short, for Robert McAlister, his religion becomes the sacred space that has an existential value, there is a foundation of a world, that is, a fixed, central point (ELIADE, 1999, p. 26). This conception led him to live and disseminate this religious experience. In Otto's words, it is the energetic aspect as "vividness, passion, emotional nature, will, strength, commotion, excitement, activity, range" (OTTO, 1981, p. 27).

## Final considerations

This article's main objective was to present the religious experience of Pastor Robert McAlister, through his biography that includes the main events of his life, from birth to death. He also described the panorama of the Pentecostal Church of Nova



Life founded by him, which greatly influenced his choices as a Minister, writer of several books and declarer of an unshakable faith in God.

After a call, he converted, studied and became a missionary following the example of his father and grandfather. He faced some obstacles such as, for example, not being authorized to pray for sick people, as this task was only the responsibility of the disciples. He later resigned from that mission

Robert fulfilled his ministry as a pastor in some countries and never gave up on fulfilling his purpose, for example in Brazil, where he founded an evangelistic crusade and created radio programs to develop his evangelization ministry. He also found an appropriate place to begin his preaching, established a pastoral office to assist people who needed prayer and counseling, purchased a radio station to broadcast the gospel and created temples. During his life, Robert experienced and disseminated his religious experience based on the true Word of God, until his death.

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