

# Religious Pluralism and New Political Identities in Latin America

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*The role of religion in Latin American politics can no longer be interpreted with reductionist schemes. The faithful—citizens—are combining faith and politics in unprecedented ways, and churches and denominations are no longer factors of political identity. The reconfiguration of new social and political movements interweaves complex linkages with the religious. The transformations of the political field and especially of democratic processes have reshaped identities in a context of increasing religious and cultural diversity with relatively less Catholic presence and greater Evangelical presence. Institutional secularization and religious pluralism seem to go hand in hand with a new cleavage between religion and politics.*

*La presencia de lo religioso en el campo político latinoamericano ya no puede ser interpretada con esquemas reduccionistas. Los fieles—ciudadanos—entremezclan fe y política de maneras inéditas, y las iglesias y denominaciones ya no son factor de identidad política. La re-configuración de los nuevos movimientos sociales y políticos entretejen vinculaciones complejas con lo religioso. Las transformaciones del campo político y en especial de los procesos democráticos han redefinido las identidades en un contexto de diversidad religiosa y cultural creciente con menor presencia relativa católica y mayor presencia evangélica. Secularización institucional y garantía del pluralismo religioso parecen ir de la mano con un nuevo clivaje entre religión y política.*

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The relationship between religion and politics has been altered because the twenty-first century has not seen the privatization of religion that the theory of secularization predicted. Religious currents have reemerged in the public sphere, being compatible with a democratic system (Casanova, 1994). The differentiation between the religious field and the political field has been maintained, and religious practices and beliefs interact with politics in new ways.

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The main thesis of this paper is that in Latin America rather than a decline in religious practices and beliefs pluralism is observed, and this means that religion can no longer be associated with a specific political orientation (e.g., a conservative stance) as it was for most of the twentieth century.

In fact, the role of religion in Latin American politics can no longer be interpreted with reductionist schemes. Religion is no longer one more ideological factor in the political sphere, but neither is it a dictate of ecclesiastical leaders. In an era marked by post-cold war transformations, globalization, and the development of peripheral capitalism in the region, the religious beliefs and practices of the faithful do not seem to inspire political opinions directly. The faithful—who are also citizens in these new realities—are combining faith and politics in unprecedented ways.

Political parties and movements that in past times were inspired by religious values (although not being denominational parties like the Christian Democrats [Grenoville, 2011]) have fallen into crisis or adopted more pragmatic positions. Religious movements such as the liberation theology of the late twentieth century, which once influenced politics in an important way, are also in crisis. The new social movements interweave complex linkages with values of religious inspiration in the context of a religious and cultural field that is more pluralist than ever. In fact, the political-religious cleavage no longer passes through cold war ideologies. The churches no longer represent conservative options in confrontation with liberal, progressive, and socialist ones. The cleavage is not between believers' choices and secular ones; today believers' choices occur throughout the political spectrum. In the past few decades, since the end of the cold war and in the context of democratization processes, religious denominations have been found no longer relevant to political choices.

Surveys by the World Values Survey Association in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela in the 1990s show that the broad tendencies of Catholics, Protestants, and Evangelicals are not particularly different from the political choices of the general population. Except for slight variations observed in Argentina (survey of 1995), Mexico (survey of 1996), and Peru (survey of 1996), there is no marked tendency for members of different denominations to take clear conservative or leftist positions. These data validate the hypothesis that the right-left cleavage no longer serves to explain the political or religious positions of believers or their churches. Religious identities are based not on ideological premises but on symbolic-cultural assumptions, and political identities are based not on religious choices but on secular values and interests. In the following I will analyze how the Latin American religious field has changed, observing Latin American reality in the framework of a comprehensive neo-Weberian sociological theory focusing on the main social-religious actors in the field: churches on the one hand and faithful citizens on the other. The methodology consists of a mixed sociological and historical analysis that employs primary sources, databases, and surveys at the continental level and various studies at the country level.

The main historical change is that Latin America is no longer a Catholic continent with all its political and cultural implications (Corporación Latinobarómetro, 2014; Parker, 1996; 2012; 2014; Pew Research Center, 2014).

Changes in the political field and especially democratic processes have redefined identities in a context of increasing cultural pluralism. Catholicism, once hegemonic in the political field, is now struggling to regain its predominant symbolic position in the face of the growing number of Evangelical groups and increasing cultural diversity.

The issues raised by the political agenda of the 1990s and 2000s in almost all the countries from Mexico to Argentina have come into conflict with the churches' moral and social positions. New social movements of gender, youth, ethnicity, sexual orientation, poor residents and consumers, migrants, environmentalists, and so on, have cultural connotations that are stronger than the classical ideological views (Garretón, 2002). They raise issues that are opposed to church discourses and espoused by a significant portion of civil society and even progressive governments, among them fundamental liberties, nondiscrimination, indigenous rights, divorce and abortion, gay marriage, and the defense of the environment—themes that the churches, with their traditional discourse and practices, were not equipped to handle.

### RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN LATIN AMERICA: THE WEAKENING OF CATHOLIC IDENTITY

Catholicism is no longer the hegemonic or monopoly religion that it was until at least the mid-twentieth century. It continues to be a majority church and in most countries still enjoys (tacit, no longer legal) privileged status, but the Latin American religious field (Bourdieu, 1971) is now plural<sup>1</sup> and its symbolic-semantic borders are no longer closed.

The Catholic Church contended for religious and moral hegemony with the historical Protestant churches and liberal and anticlerical culture from the independence period to the middle of the twentieth century. From the beginning of the twentieth century to the 1970s that contention was with the anarchists, the socialists, and the Marxists. In the current context, it has competition in the religious field from the Evangelical churches, most important the Pentecostals and independent churches (Mormons, Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses), from syncretic spiritualisms (indigenous, Afro-American), which are often Christian in origin but no longer under ecclesiastical influence (Barrera, 2001; Patte, 2010), from minoritarian religious groups with spiritualities of Eastern origin, and, in the cultural field, from the influential secular and/or neo-magical cultures (hermetism, spiritualism, and New Age syncretisms).

Beyond the various endogenous factors that have contributed to the weakening of Catholicism<sup>2</sup> and the growth of Evangelical churches,<sup>3</sup> a set of exogenous social and cultural factors has decidedly contributed to the increase in religious and cultural pluralism in Latin American society. Among these are the strong influence of the new globalized capitalist economy, which promotes a culture of consumerism that is functional to the diffusion of values contradictory to traditional Latino Catholic culture; changes in education that have increased rates of schooling and educational levels and pluralized educational opportunities; the influence of the mass media and new information

and communication technologies (Castells, 1999); and the emergence of interculturalism with the new social movements, especially the indigenous movement and migrants. All these factors have not only impacted Catholicism but transformed Latin America cultures, including politics itself.

### CHANGES IN THE POLITICAL-RELIGIOUS FIELD

The Latin American countries have gone through a series of fundamental sociopolitical changes over the past two decades. Their economies have become globalized and progress has been achieved in the quality of life, although social inequality and violence persist. Democratization has progressed since the mid-1980s. In the political field there has been relative stability interrupted by episodic crises. The party system has been reconfigured in the framework of a decline in the prestige of politics. While neoliberal movements and policies predominated in the first phase of democratization, in recent years political groups of a new left and center-left have headed governments and achieved advances in the framework of developmentist or popular projects,<sup>4</sup> independent and/or anti-imperialist foreign policies, and supporting policies of growth and stability favoring extractivist economies.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Christian churches (Catholics and Evangelicals) confronted the authoritarian regimes, and their positions were distinguished in terms of whether they defended human rights or supported the dictatorships. The main argument of the churches that defended the national security regimes was the defense of a Christian civilization against communism and socialism. In contrast, the argument of the churches that fought for liberty and human rights was a theology based on the social commitment of the Christian faith. During the transition to democracy in the 1980s the churches returned to their pastoral activities while maintaining a series of social activities. On the Catholic side, given the great influence of liberation theology and ecclesiastical base communities, the Vatican's policy under Pope John Paul II was to strengthen discipline and appoint right-wing bishops, and the emphasis of the official pastoral agenda went from social issues to moral ones. The politics of Benedict XVI was a continuation of this perspective. Now the policy of Pope Francis is shifting in another direction underscoring a social and open approach to world problems. The participation in politics of Evangelicals, especially the Evangelical "parties" or "movements," in various countries (Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Central America), although expressed in religious and/or moralizing discourses, mainly had to do with defending their corporate rights in confrontation with the state and the Catholic Church in the political arena.

Although there is separation between church and state in all countries, religious minorities do not always feel that they are treated with equality of rights compared with the once hegemonic Catholic Church. In the great majority of cases, constitutions, laws, and norms guarantee institutional equality for the non-Catholic churches and religious beliefs, but in practice non-Catholic churches and cults see themselves as at a disadvantage and even discriminated against. At the same time, the reconfiguration of civil societies under globalization has changed

identity referents from ideological-political to political-cultural (Lechner, 2006). The new social movements have both local and global connotations and are no longer constructed on the basis of social class. The ideological references of these movements are no longer concepts such as development/underdevelopment or dependency/liberation. Rather they tend to oppose globalization (McMichel, 2005) under the slogan "Another World Is Possible," rejecting neoliberalism from diverse perspectives in a framework that Sachs (1992) calls "cosmopolitan localism": cultural diversity, human rights, and the claims of local and particular identities confronting a globalizing project that supports growth, extractivism, and unequal models of development.

The autonomy of these new social movements, which emerged under the shelter of the churches under authoritarian regimes in various countries (Teixeira et al., 1993), has had important consequences for the religious field. With democratization, the majority of their leaders have left the churches and become receptive to liberal doctrines (such as accepting divorce) and new spiritualities and syncretic beliefs that combine elements of social Catholicism with neo-esotericisms and New Age (Tavares, 2000). We are seeing movements that, in contrast to the classical union movements of the twentieth century, with their orientation toward anarcosindicalism, populism, or socialism, do not in any way question religious convictions. Quite to the contrary, some of them support values inspired by social or liberation Christianity. In this context the democratic system has been trying with ups and downs to satisfy its citizens' demands. The agenda has been economic and social; religion has not been an issue of public debate.

In 2008 and 2015 *Corporación Latinobarómetro* (2015) asked citizens of 18 countries what rights democracy guaranteed in their countries. The first mentioned was "freedom to profess any religion" (79 percent in 2008, 76 percent in 2015), followed by "freedom to choose my trade or profession" (68 percent in 2008 and 69 percent in 2015), "freedom to participate in politics" (63 percent in 2008, 62 percent in 2015), and "freedom of expression always" (58 percent in both years). The last mentioned were "just distribution of wealth" (25 percent in 2008, 32 percent in 2015) and "protection against crime" (24 percent in 2008 and 32 percent in 2015).<sup>5</sup> Thus, the Latin American democratic political systems seem to have guaranteed religious pluralism more than security or a just distribution of wealth.

At the same time, the prestige of churches has declined during the past decade (2005–2015). Complaints of pedophilia and corruption—the former being more relevant to the Catholic Church, the latter to the Evangelicals—have weakened the standing of churches in the public sphere. For years it was typical for the Catholic Church to have political influence on the Latin American states, given its enormous importance in a society that was mainly Catholic. In some societies, such as Venezuela, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, political parties with Christian Democratic values were developed. In the late 1960s, after the Cuban Revolution and the example of the guerrilla priest Camilo Torres, some Christians opted for socialism. The emergence of liberation theology—in an era of profound renovation of the Catholic Church, post-Vatican II Council and post-Medellin Bishops' Conference—in the early 1970s marked a very important turn that

legitimized Christians' adopting leftist positions. At its peak, the orthodox forces of Marxist socialism were already in crisis, toward the end of the 1970s and the 1980s. The heterodox Sandinismo headed Central America's leftist alternatives, real socialisms were in decline, Gorbachev's reforms were under way, and everything was changing in the Eastern European countries. All this culminated in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall. These religious transformations influenced the post-cold war political field. Historical events overcame the critical view of religion as the "opiate of the masses."

Consequently, in recent decades institutional prerogatives and moral issues (values) motivated the churches' interventions in the political arena much more than ideological-religious (political) factors. The Evangelical churches have been abandoning dualist positions and social and political marginalization. Their intervention in the public sphere is not clericalist in nature but rather reflects their development from sects opposing the sinful world to churches accommodating to the world the better to evangelize it. In fact, in the classical typology of Troeltsch (1960 [1912]), the sect is positive in that it is an effort to renovate, to return to the origins of Christianity and break with the sinful world. Churches, from this perspective, are conservative institutions that seek to accommodate to the world.

Churches in Latin America have been fundamentally conservative with regard to moral issues and at most reformist in the social sphere. Indeed, in the history of Christianity churches have never been revolutionary; prophetic or millenarian religious movements or groups (within or without churches) have been revolutionary. The Catholic Church has fundamentally, since the colonial era, been an important factor of stability for the social, moral, and political order. For the same reason, as the Pentecostal or Evangelical churches have abandoned their originally sectarian positions of radical condemnation of the world in favor of accommodation to the world, they have begun to participate in the political field as actors subject to the same influences as others in civil society. The Protestant and Evangelical churches have been struggling to leave behind their status of religious minorities and therefore have had to enter the political world to defend their interests,<sup>6</sup> opposing Catholic hegemony and pragmatically forming alliances with political forces that guarantee them recognition, whether they be authoritarian, centrist, populist, or leftist.

## NEW REALITIES IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND POLITICS AND DIVERSE IDENTITIES

The social influences on the decline of Catholicism have not principally come from the political field or from historical processes and conjunctural crises. What has been important in this change is a cultural transformation that has produced new ways of thinking, acting, and feeling, new relations with goods and their uses in a market that increases gaps and generates diversity of lifestyles, opens to international contacts, and breaks down traditional moral standards, media that connect with a much wider range of cultures, higher levels of education and more educational alternatives, and the materialization

of a pluricultural society and movements that claim rights and ways of life that are contrary to traditional institutions and values. These changes in cultural currents have interacted with changes in the religious field (see Davie, 2004; Debray, 1996; Frigerio, 1999; Pace, 1997; Parker, 2008a; 2009).

The increasing presence of new indigenous movements, together with claims for the rights of women (Htun, 2009; World Bank, 2012), ethnic minorities (Afro-Americans, immigrants), and sexual minorities, is a constant challenge to Catholic orthodoxy. The contradictions of capitalist society since the 1990s have stimulated the emergence of populist movements and a new Latin American left, but now they are not in contradiction with religion. We are no longer confronted with movements whose inspiration is secular. Similarly, new social movements against injustice are inspired by heterogeneous ideologies, and many accept, coexist with, and are implicitly nurtured by theologies (of liberation, feminist, ecological, among others) or spiritualities (cosmic, ecological, holistic, anticonsumerist, antiglobalization) without in any way reproducing religious-oriented ideologies.

Political trends among the faithful today are much more diverse and heterogeneous than before. In analyzing this phenomenon, we should remember that the relationship between religion and politics and the relationship between church and state cannot be understood in the abstract but must be considered in their historical and national context. Given that Latin American countries have different histories, it is to be expected that the panorama we are confronting is very diversified (see Campos, 2006; Da Costa, 2009; Oro, 2006; Parker, 1996; Steil, 2001).

The relationship between religious beliefs and democratic choices is very revealing. By the 1980s, the Latin American authoritarian regimes were being replaced by democratic ones, and the 1990s and 2000s saw a certain consolidation of democracy. Nevertheless, the risk of authoritarianism remains. According to *Corporación Latinobarómetro* (2015), support for democracy was 61 percent in 1996, 53 percent in 2004, 61.5 percent in 2009, and 56 percent in 2015 while support for authoritarianism was 18 percent in 1996, 15 percent in 2004 and 2009, and 16 percent in 2015. Indifference, much more significant as a latent threat for democratic delegitimation, went from 16 percent in 1996, 21 percent in 2004, and 17 percent in 2009 to 20 percent in 2015.<sup>7</sup>

The results by religious denomination reveal that religion is not a sure predictor of attitudes toward democracy nor to authoritarianism.<sup>8</sup> Support for democracy among Catholics—the largest number of people surveyed in all 18 countries in the study—was the same as that of the general population, and so was that of those who called themselves Evangelicals (without specifying what church). Except for the Methodists, who were consistently defenders of democracy in many countries (Bolivia, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Uruguay, and Venezuela), all religious groups displayed local variations. Those who classified themselves as “Other” declared themselves democratic in Bolivia, Costa Rica, Honduras, and Nicaragua, while in Guatemala they were divided between support of democracy and authoritarianism and in Mexico they were indifferent. In all the other countries they followed the average for the population.

Those who declared themselves “believers but not church members” defended democracy in Colombia, Honduras, Mexico, and Peru and chose authoritarianism in Bolivia, Costa Rica, and Venezuela, while in Guatemala they were indifferent. Those who classified themselves as “agnostic” (a category that was not present in all countries) were in favor of democracy in Chile, Costa Rica, Peru, and Uruguay and either authoritarian or indifferent in Ecuador. Atheists were defenders of democracy in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Paraguay, and Venezuela and authoritarian in Bolivia and Mexico. Members of Afro-American cults, a survey category in Argentina, Brazil, and Nicaragua, and Uruguay, supported democracy in the first three countries and were distributed the same as the average for the population in the last.

In conclusion, with the exception of Methodists, there do not appear to be churches predisposing their faithful to either democracy or authoritarianism. Members of Pentecostal and other Evangelical churches were found at both ends of the spectrum and in the middle. There is no evidence that they consistently and coherently systematically supported antidemocratic and conservative choices. There was, however, a slight tendency toward political indifference among Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Pentecostals.

These data are generally consistent with the trends observed in the surveys carried out by the World Values Survey between 1995 and 2004 in nine Latin American countries.<sup>9</sup> In these surveys the classification of religious denominations is narrower.

My own tabulation has grouped together the following categories: Catholics, Protestants and Evangelicals, Jews, and Other. Presented with the statement “Democracy may have problems, but it is better than other systems,” those who declared that they “strongly agreed” or “agreed” ranged from 78 percent to 93 percent. Religious affiliations were distributed in the same way as the median distribution of support for democracy with minor variations. Declaring oneself Catholic or Protestant is not a variable that has influence: both supported democracy to the same degree as everyone else in their country.

It should be highlighted that the religious choices of the leftist political parties and progressive, populist, and/or leftist movements are no longer antireligious. They even often rely on nondenominational religious values and symbols, something that would have been unthinkable at the height of the cold war. The cases of the late Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil are paradigmatic. Both adopted a special position with regard to religion. Chávez, proclaimed the founder of twenty-first-century socialism, frequently declared his Christian faith and said that he was inspired by the values of liberation theology (Rincón, 2009). His religious inclinations increased toward the end of his life (he died March 5, 2013), when he also received spiritual support from the masters and rituals of Santería. Dilma came from the Workers’ Party, which emerged in the era of dictatorship under the protection of the churches and had many leaders who were inspired by liberation theology. During the years of government by her predecessor, Lula da Silva (2003–2010), the party’s socialist and liberating Christian ideological inspiration became more pragmatic, and Dilma appeared to take a less religious position and even one inclined toward values opposed by the churches such as abortion

during the campaign. Her strategy when confronting José Serra (electoral campaign of 2010), who had more support from the churches, was to promise that no pro-abortion banner would be raised during her administration and to project the image of a person committed to Christian rituals and values, often visiting Catholic and Evangelical churches (Mariano and Oro, 2012).

The case of Evo Morales (elected president of Bolivia in 2005) is paradigmatic in another sense. In declaring that the Catholic Church should be superseded and Catholic religion classes in public schools abolished, he confronted the hierarchy not because he was anticlerical but because his government's claims of ancestral indigenous values, identities, and culture led him to revalorize indigenous worship and symbols such as Pachamama and to question the preeminence of Catholic symbols in the Bolivian state.

In various Latin American cases, governments assert the separation of church and state in the framework of advocacy of a secular state and seek increased religious pluralism. Now the main conflicts with regard to religious freedom are moral and juridical-institutional. One conflict is over abortion and gay marriage and another is about the prerogatives that the Catholic Church seeks to maintain in relation to the Evangelical churches that are increasingly seeking recognition and institutional legitimacy in the politico-judicial context. Central here are conflicts between churches and the state, the positions of the churches, and the pursuit of alliances among parties and movements to obtain electoral support and avoid the moral veto of the churches. At the same time, political parties of religious inspiration such as the powerful Christian Democratic parties and political-religious movements such as the popular church and liberation theology (Correa, 1986) no longer have the influence they once had. A number of them are in crisis, and those that survive have abandoned the ideological inspiration of classical social Christianity. Where Catholic centrists have allied themselves with the left, they have found themselves in a very difficult situation. "In adopting an attitude of moderate openness on the issue of values, they have exposed themselves not only to attack by the new right but also to pressures from the Church itself" (Santoni, 2012).

### **NEW IDENTITIES: CROSSCUTTING AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL FACTORS**

As I have said, many trends—the influence of the market and the new economy, the information and communication media, changes in the educational field, and the new social movements—have influenced the religious field. They have generated the conditions for Catholics to seek alternatives and no longer to reproduce their traditional adherence to the faith received from their parents. While Catholics make political choices that correspond to those of the majority of the population in their countries, Evangelicals have been adopting widely varied positions, depending on many circumstances and factors. Political party choices are no longer exclusive or exclusionary and combine in different ways with value and cultural choices for both believers and nonbelievers. Political identities are no longer marked by religious traditions.

Generally new social movements develop in settings framed by interculturality. (Ameigeiras and Jure, 2006; Fornet-Betancourt, 2007; García Canclini, 2003; Gutiérrez Martínez, 2006; Parker, 2006; 2008b). This trend is mainly a product of ethnic and social movements (Bastida, 2001; Bengoa, 2000), increasing migration, and religious pluralism. The indigenous awakening, in particular, has meant the revalorization of these peoples' religious traditions (Parker, 2002; 2008b), revitalizing a religious field that is different and distant from official religions and churches. Indeed, recurrent concepts such as ethnic conflict, multiculturalism, interculturality, and mestizo culture reflect, among other things, the contribution of immigrants and ethnic groups to the cultural diversity of Latin American societies (Gutiérrez Martínez, 2006) that, although always constructed through intercultural relations (denied and colonized), were once represented as monocultural: Catholic, apostolic, Roman, and Western.

At the same time, even though a strong culture of consumerism exists, it influences religious and political choices only indirectly. The idea that the religious choices of Latin Americans follow the "buy, use, and throw away" culture of consumption must be discarded. While symbolic-religious goods are variable and can be replaced, in general, shifts in orientations of faith and belief, whether radical or superficial, do not follow fashion. These changes are related to more fundamental decisions that affect the lives of persons, usually by conversion. Current interpretations point to consumer culture, with its emphasis on hedonism, the cultivation of expressive lifestyles, and the development of narcissistic and selfish personality types, as the end of religion. For Featherstone (1991: 207), consumer culture generates symbols that have religious connotations through which the sacred, in this context, is sustained outside of organized religion.

The search for personal autonomy—very present in the transformation of gender relations and thus more evident among women—is common not only among the wealthy but also among low-income communities (Hagopian, 2009a; Htun, 2009; Loaeza, 2009). In the religious milieu, lay people are playing a larger role, showing increasing autonomy with regard to ecclesiastical authority and a new search for religious meaning that goes beyond the boundaries of the official beliefs and rituals of the established churches. In new contexts of redefinition of affiliations and local communitarian experiences, with historical and collective references left behind, the resurgence of the pursuit of spiritual dominion of the body, within a greater sensitivity to ecology, there is an ambience that is apt for the proliferation of syncretic spiritualities of the New Age type, with mystical, esoteric, and even magical components (Carozzi, 1999; Guerreiro, 2003; Tavares, 2000). This revalorization of personal autonomy—most of all present in youth culture—leads to a reaffirmation of anti-institutional trends and the rejection of orthodoxies. It is a search for freedom in the pursuit of personal experience. We find this anti-institutional tendency not only with respect to churches but also with respect to political parties and even the state.

In summary, citizens' religious choices do not seem to be a strong determinant of their political choices. The varied political positions of members (or nonmembers) of different churches and beliefs seem to be influenced by a

number of different secular variables and not exclusively by religious convictions or values. Religion has been freed from its political connotations of yesteryear. Nineteenth-century Catholicism invariably associated with hardline conservative attitudes, Protestantism with more liberal positions, and radicals and progressives with secular and anticlerical positions are outdated. The cleavage between religion and politics in the twenty-first century crosses other factors, mainly sociocultural, and its dynamics no longer obey the ideological, political, and religious traditions of earlier society. Religion per se is no longer a weapon in the ideological struggle between progressives and conservatives.

The religious discourses of the churches are more often oriented toward customs, values, and morality. Religious practices are diverse and independent of the churches, and religious rituals and beliefs follow paths very distinct from those of ideology or political choices. While the Church may condemn abortion, the faithful may support liberal and progressive parties. Communists who participate in the pilgrimages of popular religion are no longer seen as exotic, and atheists who are active in right-wing parties are common.

## CONCLUSIONS

One of the fundamental explanatory factors in the paradigm shift in the relation between religion and politics and the reconfiguration of identities we have observed is political and cultural change in post-cold war Latin America. The faithful do not base their political opinions on ecclesiastical references, theologies, missionary sensibility, or the religious cultures of their churches. They have moved beyond the direct association between being religious and conservative and being leftist and atheist, a classical distinction in the Latin American intellectual culture. The dividing lines today are complex, multiple, and transversal. These transformations in the religious field—the reduced influence of Catholicism and increasing pluralism—constitute a challenge for sociology and political science, which must assess them in terms of their advantages or disadvantages for governability, the development of the democratic system, and the advance toward a just society (McCarthy, 1993).

Radical secularism still holds that faith threatens liberal democracy, but the Christian churches in Latin America have long since reconciled themselves to the democratic system and—except for some clerical traditionalism and fundamentalism—have abandoned theocratic positions. Political democracy—negotiation, deliberation, and compromise—is the way conflicts of interest are resolved. Religious institutions that claim absolute and divine truth have difficulty with this kind of commitment because it puts their principles in danger. Therefore, dialoguing attitudes from the Church's hierarchy—responsible for ensuring revealed truth—but not long-winded or pragmatic openings are to be expected. The faithful are not subject to the same rules as their hierarchies; among them, diversity of positions is tolerable and expected.

The separation between church and state and the maintenance of the distinction between state, market, and religion continue to be at the heart of a stable and democratic order (Casanova, 1994) and to guarantee respect for fundamental human rights including religious freedom. The struggle for democratization

within the pluricultural societies of Latin America involves respect for various alternative religions (among them indigenous ones) in relation to the religion that was once the official one (Catholicism) rather than respect or lack of it for religious freedom itself. The right to religious freedom guaranteed by constitutions and laws provokes conflict precisely because it often sanctions only formal pluralisms. Therefore, while it would be absurd to assert that organized religions are incompatible with democracy, low-intensity tensions between religious authorities and secular state authorities will remain.

What Alexis de Tocqueville (2006 [1835–1840]) said about North America in the nineteenth century remains valid: the democratic system has been possible among other reasons because citizens share a faith—mainly the Protestant faith—whose free agents observe the clear boundaries between the churches and the democratic state. Tocqueville's reservations about the situation in Europe, particularly in relation to Catholic nations, where he saw religion as an obstacle to democracy, are no longer relevant to Latin America, where Catholicism is no longer a conservative hegemonic force and religious and cultural pluralism has been implanted in civil society.

Increasing religious pluralism may be an indicator of democratic advance, but this will be so to the extent that the various religious movements effectively promote an attitude of tolerance and ecumenism rather than becoming locked into fundamentalist positions (as indeed is still a danger in a small number of them). In terms of value-based and moral choices churches—mostly Catholic and Evangelical—retain, in general, a conservative stance, and it is unlikely that they will adopt liberal positions in the near future, but their members, according to opinion polls, do not follow suit. In terms of social teachings, however, churches may be open, plural, and more progressive and democracy-oriented.

Religion is a main symbolic component in the construction of the meaning of life, but religious identities are no longer tied to political identities. The autonomy of these two spheres in the construction of social representations in Latin America requires that analyses be carried out on the basis of historical conjunctures, taking cultural and religious pluralism into consideration.

## NOTES

1. On religious pluralism and Catholicism in Latin America, see Parker (1996; 2008a; 2009; 2012; 2014), Hagopian (2009a), Siqueira and de la Torre (2008), and Levine (2005).

2. Many factors have led the Catholic Church away from the masses of believers in recent decades: institutional weakness (fewer priests and religious consecrated agents), the relative crisis of liberation theology and the ecclesiastical base communities since the 1980s, the growing conservatism of the Catholic hierarchy, especially on moral issues, the incapacity to compete with other churches, and the prominence of the ecclesiastical apparatus and discipline to the detriment of missionary flexibility. The impact of the renovating stance of the papacy of Pope Francis in recent years is now slowly changing these tendencies.

3. Pentecostal churches have been gaining ground in the Latin American population since the mid-twentieth century. Protestants are leading, with a total of 19 percent of the population by 2014 (Pew Research Center, 2014). On Evangelical and Pentecostal churches in Latin America, see Martin (1990), Stoll (1990), Bastian (1993), Mariz (1995), B. Gutiérrez (1995), T. Gutiérrez (1996), Mafra (2001), Barrera (2001), Wynarczyk (2009), Fediakova and Parker (2009), Fediakova (2011), Freston (1998; 2012), Orellana (2011; 2015), and Gooren (2012).

4. According to data for 2005–2009, 31 percent of Latin American governments were leftist, 31 percent center-left, 23 percent center-right, and 15 percent rightist. In the period 2009–2013, 30 percent were leftist, 30 percent center-left, and 35 percent center-right, but the rightists declined by 5 percent (Corporación Latinobarómetro, 2011).

5. See the Latinobarómetro database, <http://www.latinobarometro.org> (accessed November 28, 2015).

6. Both Catholic and Evangelical churches oscillate in their positions in the public sphere between defense of their institutional interests, defense of their moral values, and defense of social justice (Hagopian, 2009b).

7. Surveys were conducted in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. The question was “Which of the following phrases are you most in agreement with? ‘Democracy is preferable to any other form of government.’ ‘In some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one.’ ‘People like us have no preference between a democratic regime and a nondemocratic one.’” See the Latinobarómetro database, <http://www.latinobarometro.org> (accessed November 28, 2015).

8. Absolute frequencies are not taken into consideration, but significant relative trends (percentages) were considered in the cross tabulation of questions. My own tabulation is based on the Latinobarómetro database, <http://www.latinobarometro.org> (accessed November 28, 2015).

9. My own tabulation with database of World Values Surveys for Argentina (1995, 1999), Brazil (1997), Chile (1996, 2000), the Dominican Republic (1996), Guatemala (2004), Mexico (1996, 2000), Peru (1996, 2001), Uruguay (1996), and Venezuela (1996, 2000). <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>; European and World Values Surveys four-wave integrated data file, 1981–2004, v. 20060423, 2006; surveys designed and executed by the European Values Study Group and World Values Survey Association (accessed April 20, 2009).

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