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Social Compass 1994; 41; 339

DOI: 10.1177/003776894041003004

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The Sociology of Religion in Latin America: Teaching and Research

La sociologie de la religion en Amérique latine, après plusieurs décennies de limitations dues à la dépendance vis-à-vis de la sociologie des pays développés d'une part, et à un fort conditionnement du champ religieux latinoaméricain de l'autre, commence à vivre une époque prometteuse. Le rôle décisif du facteur religieux dans l'évolution historique, culturelle et politique de la région, pose de nouveaux problèmes auxquels les sociologues autochtones répondent avec de nouvelles recherches et en développant des aspects théoriques et méthodologiques. Cet article passe en revue l'état de la sociologie de la religion dans le cône Sud, les pays Andins, le Mexique et l'Amérique centrale. Cependant, le bilan n'est pas totalement positif, car il existe toujours une dépendance vis-à-vis de l'espace qu'ouvrent ou ferment les Eglises dans la possibilité d'aborder le champ religieux de manière autonome. Pour sa part, l'enseignement de la sociologie de la religion dans les milieux académiques et de l'éducation supérieure continue à se développer.

The sociology of religion has developed significantly in recent years in Latin America. It has been traditionally identified as a “Catholic continent”, but that is changing rapidly. One of the most significant features of the new religious reality in the continent is the proliferation of Pentecostal and new religious movements that are challenging the hegemony of Catholicism. Another feature is the key participation of the churches and Christians in the social and political events in recent decades. Social scientists are hardly indifferent to this reality: there is a constant stream of studies on religious phenomena. It is far from a massive and solid academic output – with the possible exception of Brazil, where the field is more developed¹ – but research and publications on religious issues are increasing. That is not the case with academic programmes in the sociology of religion, but here, too, the panorama is changing.

This new dawn in Latin American sociology of religion² needs to be assessed in the general framework of sociological trends and their conflictive interaction with influential religion in the region. The sociology of religion has not developed independently of the churches and their institutions of higher learning. This is the main concern and hypothesis of this article. Despite impressive research in the past and more recently, ecclesiastical institutions have hardly supported the autonomous development of research and systematic teaching of the sociology of religion in Latin America. Such autonomy has been very rare in most of the countries of Spanish-speaking America, and virtually non-existent in some.

Latin American sociology has grown significantly, and there has been a proliferation of sociology departments, research centres, journals and academic networks. Until recently, however, the sociology of religion has remained marginal. A quick look at past sociology conferences in Latin America shows that only the most recent included sections on the sociology of religion.³

Academic programmes in the sociology of religion are even more lacking. Most Latin American specialists in the field study in the United States or Europe.⁴ Since there are few academic networks for the sociology of religion in Latin America,⁵ little information is available about the overall state of the discipline in Latin America as a whole. This article will centre on the main features of research and academic programmes in the sociology of religion in Spanish-speaking Latin America. These observations, then, should be taken as provisional, to be validated by actual experience in each country and subregion.

The Low Degree of Secularization

Religious reality was seen as a factor of social cohesion by both Comte and Durkheim; it can be argued that the emergence of other factors in modern society that help maintain the social order have tended to displace religion as a unifying element of the social fabric. This theoretical point is debatable, given the contemporary discussion on secularization. Indeed, social dynamics tend to specialize and differentiate the integrating functions of modern society. Therefore social science, autonomous from any extra-social foundation (e.g. theological or metaphysical) develops its approach in a dialectical relationship with the relative degree of development of religion in each contemporary society.

In European societies, in which there are clear signs of a relatively deeper secularization in the production of systematic knowledge – societies in which the churches early on lost their hegemony over culture, science and intellectual production – one can observe a more continuous and systematic production in the sociology of religion. The study of religious phenomena was basic for the classical sociologists. Towards the end of the first half of the 20th century we see in Europe an interaction with the interests and needs of the churches in the resurgence of the sociology of religion. Even though current sociology of religion no longer contributes to social theory as much as it should, it is undeniable that the sociology of religion in Europe and North America is much more developed than in Latin America today.⁶

The development of sociology as a scientific discipline has been significant in Latin America and it has had considerable influence among intellectuals and in society in general. Nevertheless, sociologists never became the “positivist priests”, in Comte’s words, that they would like to be, since the “religious priests” never lost their role in society. Society never became secularized as the classical sociologists imagined it would.⁷

As a scientific and institutionalized discipline in Latin America, sociology

not only developed in a later period than European academic sociology, it also explicitly and implicitly attempted to replace the priest by constantly treating religious phenomena as relics from the past. The enlightened elites were imbued with positivist or materialist (empiricisms, positivisms, functionalisms, Marxisms or vulgar structuralisms) ideas that prevented them from appreciating the importance of religious symbols, magic and myths and the relevance of their function in society.⁸ As a reaction to open secularization – or the latent anticlericalism – of the majority of professional sociologists since the end of the 1950s, a religious sociology was developed that was completely dependent on religious institutions.⁹

It is therefore difficult to understand the development of research and academic programmes in the sociology of religion in Latin America outside the context of an overall analysis of its interaction with the religious field as such. The influence of religious institutions in Latin American society has been like a powerful magnet, attracting or repulsing the sociological elites. The vast majority of sociologists, formed in a secularist tradition, have kept their distance from religious phenomena. A minority have been involved, but from a confessional perspective, to the detriment of academic quality and scientific independence in their studies in the field of religion.

The situation has changed substantially in recent years, although the weight of tradition does not make for rapid change.

The Sociology of Religion by Subregions

Southern Cone

The sociology of religion in the Southern Cone (Argentina, Chile and Uruguay) has developed unevenly. In the more secularized intellectual culture of the South Atlantic, especially along the River Plate, the sociology of religion, except for a few exceptions, is underdeveloped. The traditionalism of the Catholic Church in Argentina impeded any significant development of a sociology to support its pastoral action. In Chile, to the contrary, a powerful current of renewal of the Catholic Church flowing from Vatican II stimulated the contribution of the social sciences to pastoral action.

Generally speaking, Chilean sociology has depended on the political sphere and lacked autonomy. This explains why it has emphasized theoretical and methodological issues flowing from politics or linked to the state and development.

The sociology of religion has developed considerably in Chile. But “socio-religious” studies have predominated, carried out by the Bellarmine Centre or the Office of Religious Sociology of the Episcopal Conference. They are socio-graphic studies with a pastoral focus. Only since the late 1970s and early 1980s have some sociologists, with graduate degrees from the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium and other European and North American universities, returned to the country and launched comprehensive and systematic research, seeing religious phenomena in the context of social and cultural structures.

Chile, however, has a long tradition, since the foundation of the sociology department at the Catholic University in 1957, of incorporating the sociology of religion. Father Renato Poblete, S.J. was a key contributor to this tradition during the 1960s. This tradition, which goes back to the very origins of sociology as a scientific and professional discipline in the universities, has been recently revived in the sociology departments of the Catholic University and the University of the Academy of Christian Humanism.

Argentina, with a predominantly Catholic society but where the intellectual culture is cosmopolitan and secularized, presents the paradox of a Catholic state in the context of a secularized society. The sociology of religion began to develop there only in the late 1960s, under the impetus of the Medellin Conference. Father Aldo Buntig was an important figure in this development. Generally speaking, therefore, the sociology of religion was not promoted by the Catholic Church, which kept very much to its traditional ways, but rather by the more advanced and open sectors of the Argentinian Church.

A new Argentinian sociologist admits the virtual lack of any systematic development of the sociology of religion between 1975 and 1988: "We are aware that when we try to understand Catholicism we cannot account for its complexity. This is especially true in countries like Argentina where the systematic and academic study of Catholicism is almost non-existent."¹⁰ Therefore, the most relevant sociological tradition goes back to the early 1970s. But the close relationship between the later military dictatorship and the Catholic Church limited the social sciences and religious studies. With the return to democracy in 1983, religious reality is once again being studied more systematically, and a group is forming that is beginning to develop an authentic Argentinian sociology of religion,¹¹ centred around the journal *Sociedad y religión*, which has produced 11 issues a year for seven uninterrupted years.

Uruguay presents a more discouraging picture, historically. It is the most secularized country in Latin America, where secularized elites, freethinkers or atheists have permeated intellectual and academic output in the universities. The Catholic University of Uruguay is new in relation to the solid century-old Catholic Universities in other countries. The panorama begins to change in the second half of the 1980s.¹² The University of La Republica, a state institution, inaugurated an anthropology of religion programme in its anthropology department to research religious reality in Uruguay. The Catholic University was founded during this same period. It included the Institute of Religious Sciences, geared to a phenomenological and sociological understanding of religion. A course was offered in the sociology of religion for the first time in 1993.

Andean countries

If the elites keep their distance from religion, the masses in almost all the countries of Latin America have maintained a multifaceted religious tradition. So-called popular religion becomes more important to the extent that it is still influenced by ancient indigenous customs and rituals.

In countries with a high density of indigenous population like Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador (the same is true in Guatemala and parts of Mexico), not sociology but more naturally, anthropology, with its ethnographic, ethnological and ethnohistorical perspectives, has studied the religious reality of communities and ethnic groups.

Numerous studies have been made of the relevant religious history of what was the important Viceregency of Peru. Much work has been done recently on the history of the Church and its relationship with the indigenous and mestizo populations, its influence on beliefs and customs, the history of evangelization and catechetical instruction, its interrelation with autochthonous "idolatries" and witchcrafts. The sociology of religion has developed very little in Peru. The anthropological team at the Catholic University, under the direction of Manuel Marzal, S.J.,¹³ has been studying indigenous and popular religiosity and the religious history of Peru for 20 years. But the sociology department has done practically nothing in the sociology of religion. San Marcos University in Lima is planning a postgraduate programme in religious sciences, but it has little experience and tradition in this field.

Numerous studies on "popular religiosity" exist. Virtually all those worthy of mention are in the fields of history and anthropology. Pastoral or theological essays and diagnostic analyses also abound. The most complete annotated bibliography of studies of religious beliefs in Peru from the colony up to 1982 contains 694 entries, the vast majority of which were written by chroniclers, folklorists, essayists, pastoral theorists, theologians, anthropologists and historians. Very few have a sociological perspective, properly speaking.¹⁴ Mention should be made, however, of the place given to the sociology of religion by the Centre of Studies and Publications (CEP) and the Bartolomé de Las Casas Institute in Lima.¹⁵ These centres carry out socio-cultural and socio-theological studies, but their main work is to develop and disseminate the liberation theology connected with the review *Páginas*. Finally, active in the study of Andean religion and culture are the Bartolomé de Las Casas Centre in Cuzco, with notable academic studies, the Institute of Aymaras Studies in Chicuito, Puno,¹⁶ and the Andean Pastoral Institute in Cuzco. The last two have more of a pastoral focus.

Social studies on religious phenomena in Bolivia have been mostly from anthropological and historical perspectives, given the relatively greater weight of the indigenous component in the social, ethnic and religious fields. The most important figures are Xavier Albo in religious anthropology and Josep Bernadas in church history.

The most common approaches to the study of religion in Colombia are historical, phenomenological and philosophical. Ethics has taken on new importance recently, due to the pacification process and the struggle against drug traffic.¹⁷ The work of Pedro Trigo, S.J. in Venezuela is noteworthy for his sociological perspective on cultural and religious themes in Latin American novels and literature. Angelina Pollak-Eltz should be mentioned here for her remarkable contribution to the anthropological study of Afro-Venezuelans.

The headquarters of the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM) is located in Colombia, leading to a considerable development there of sciences to support theological and pastoral reflection.¹⁸ The perspective of academics like Jaime Velez, S.J. and the vast majority of the publications of CELAM and the journal *Medellín* give priority to cultural and anthropological issues, but also show their pastoral interest.

Given the socio-cultural characteristics, the relevance of indigenous and historical reality, and the fact that the religious field in these countries and in Colombia and Venezuela has been less open to the contributions of the social sciences, especially sociology, there has been very little development in the sociology of religion in the Andean countries. One of the most important Latin American sociologists of religion, Otto Maduro,¹⁹ has spent much of his academic career outside his country of origin (in Louvain, Brazil and the United States), given the uncertain conditions he found in Venezuela.

*Central America and Mexico*²⁰

The sociology of religion in Central America confirms the view that sociological output is conditioned by its social context. While tradition and Catholicism continued to amalgamate in Central America without any socio-political impact, they were key elements of local folklore and were seen as such. Up to the late 1970s there was no felt need for sociology of religion. Given the nascent university system, sociology itself was underdeveloped.

Today, it is impossible to understand the situation of the sociology of religion in Latin America without considering the historical processes of Central America over the last two decades. The revolutionary processes in Nicaragua and El Salvador, the civil war in Guatemala and anti-imperialism in Panama, with their outcomes from interventionism to democratization and pacification, have marked the region in recent decades. To the relevant – notable and contradictory – role played by the Catholic Church and Christians in those processes should be added the explosive growth of Pentecostalism and sects in the region.

This problem is especially interesting for political scientists, and the region has been intensely studied by United States social scientists. A good part of the growing interest in religion is due to the political role played by the churches. But the sects have the most responsibility for awakening interest in the sociology of religion in the different Central American countries. In recent years, in almost all the sociology departments, two or three students each year opt to study Pentecostalism or sects for their licentiate dissertation.

The social sciences have grown constantly in the region, especially in the centres in Costa Rica like the Latin American School of Social Sciences (FLACSO), CSUCA (a body that coordinates Central American universities) and Ecumenical Research Department (DEI). DEI is the only one that is noteworthy for its publications in sociology and the sciences of religion, although mostly interested in promoting a critical social and theological perspective.²¹ DEI offers a course in theology and pastoral theory for Latin

America which uses the social sciences. In conjunction with the University of Heredia, a secular university in Costa Rica with (unusual in Latin America) a theology department, DEI has developed an ecumenical school of the sciences of religion. The perspective is clearly theological (it gives bachelor and licentiate degrees in theology), although courses are also offered in the sciences of religion and the sociology of religion.

Sociology as an academic and scientific discipline is a novelty in the other countries of the region, having been introduced only 10 or 12 years ago. There is little development of the sociology of religion in specialized centres, except in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, although almost all the Catholic and several Protestant seminaries, as well as virtually all the schools of theology in the different countries, have over the last 10 years included a course on the "scientific view of religion" or the "sociology of religion".

Until very recently, Central American social scientists showed remarkably little interest in researching religious reality, and the few efforts that were made were personal initiatives. That has changed over the last seven years. Today, there is more personal and institutional interest in such research. Generally speaking, the predominant perspective on religious phenomena in sociological circles is neo-Marxist. The most frequently studied areas are popular religion,²² the socio-political function of the churches,²³ religion and transitional processes²⁴ and Protestantism and the sects.²⁵

In 1983, CSUCA organized a research team in the sociology of religions that functioned till 1990 under the direction of Andrés Opazo, another Louvain graduate. CSUCA still offers a licentiate programme in sociology in conjunction with the University of Costa Rica, but there is no specialization in the sociology of religion.

Nicaragua is strongly marked by the influence of Belgian sociologist François Houtart. Through his impact on his students he has been a relevant figure in recent years in Central America. As a professor at the Catholic University of Louvain he has influenced a whole generation of noted sociologists of religion throughout the continent.²⁶ Houtart has worked in Nicaragua for the last 12 years, collaborating with the University of Central America, where he directs the Centre for Socio-cultural Analysis, the most important centre for the sociology of religion in the region. His courses on the sociology of religion have been gathered into a systematic textbook.²⁷

Guatemala, the country where the Mayan culture achieved its highest expression, stands out for the importance of indigenous and *ladino* (mestizo) elements and popular Catholicism in shaping its culture, traditions and myths, rituals, arts, literature and music.²⁸ It comes as no surprise, then, that the only academic research centre on popular culture and religion was developed there, the Centre for the Study of Folklore of the University of San Carlos, which has produced numerous studies, mostly ethnographical and historical.

A few studies on religious phenomena have been done in El Salvador, but there has been no systematic or institutional development of the sociology of religion.

In Honduras, the National Pastoral Commission of the Episcopal Conference maintains a team for socio-religious research. Rolando Sierra has done several studies on the history of the Catholic Church and on sects.²⁹ Ignacio Delamó, Germán Calix and Tony Pedraz have studied Honduran peasant culture with its religious beliefs and rituals, and different aspects in the field of religion.

Mexico is unique, in that since the Mexican Revolution in 1910 the government has been officially anti-clerical and has excluded the clergy, theology, and therefore the sciences of religion from academic development and scientific research. Also, the powerful Mexican Catholic Church, except for a few small currents, has been marked by its traditionalism. One exception in the late 1960s was CIDOC, a documentation and studies centre founded by Ivan Illich in Cuernavaca. Between 1968 and 1971 this centre published the *Sondeos* series, a collection of studies on religion in Latin America, in which the sociology of religion played a key role.³⁰

Generally speaking, scientific sociology of religion has not been considered in seminary formation nor in diagnostic pastoral analyses. As in other countries, pastoral writers seldom address socio-religious questions and ethnographical studies. This situation, however, is changing rapidly, since the official policy of the ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) has been more liberal, and diplomatic relations with the Vatican were re-established two years ago.

Given the strong tradition of academic and institutional development of the social sciences in Mexico, religious subjects could not be ignored in research and in academic programmes, especially in Mexican anthropology³¹ and history.³² The sociology and history of Protestantism in Mexico received considerable impetus from the work of Jean-Pierre Bastian,³³ who for more than a decade was the editor of the important journal *Cristianismo y sociedad*,³⁴ a key forum for the sociology of religion in Latin America. Another important sociologist, Gilberto Gimenez, was the first to use a semiological approach to analyse popular religion.³⁵ Gimenez, who has also studied the sociology of communications, is presently teaching in the licentiate programme in sociology at UNAM. The Ibero-American University is developing a licentiate programme in sociology, including, if our data be accurate, a specialization in the sociology of religion.

The growing interest of public opinion and academic circles in Mexico in religious questions bodes well for an increase in attention given to religious issues in research and academic programmes and scientific publications. Indeed, the *Revista mexicana de sociología*³⁶ has dealt with religious questions for the last six or seven years. Another sign of changing government policy towards religious phenomena is the fact that the prestigious and powerful government publishing house, the Fund for Economic Culture, has begun to publish works in the sociology and history of religion in Mexico and Latin America.³⁷

Regional Impetus for the Sociology of Religion

The panorama of the sociology of religion seems to be changing in the Southern Cone and Central America. Public opinion is increasingly interested in religion. Religious pluralism and the end of the Catholic monopoly — especially among the poor — are among the most significant social realities of recent years, pointing to what will be the characteristics of a pluralism of cultures and identities, in which diversity will be shaped in good measure on the basis of religious identity. This reality calls for studies that are more scientific and academic and less theological and pastoral.

A network of ecumenical theological and pastoral reflection centres exists in Latin America, including: Nueva Tierra Centre in Buenos Aires, OBSUR in Montevideo and the Ecumenical Centre Diego de Medellín in Santiago in the Southern Cone; Bartolomé de Las Casas Centre in Lima, Centre for Andean Studies in Bolivia, CINEP in Bogota, Gumilla Centre in Venezuela; Antonio de Valdivieso Centre in Managua, DEI in Costa Rica, CRT in Mexico, etc. Even though they are centres for promotion and reflection rather than scientific research or academic action, they are open to the contribution of sociology and to the publication of critical sociological studies on different aspects of religion.

The work of CEHILA (Commission for the Study of Church History in Latin America),³⁸ with the participation of Dussel, Richard, Beozzo, Salinas, Bastian, Bidegain, Guzmán and others, provides an interesting forum for dialogue with the sociology of religion in the region.³⁹ The fifth centenary of Europe's discovery of America provided the occasion for CEHILA and CERC of the University of the Academy of Christian Humanism in Chile to jointly organize an international conference on 500 years of Christianity in Latin America, held in Santiago in 1990 with the participation of more than 70 experts, historians, anthropologists, sociologists and theologians. The conference attracted extensive attention in academic and ecclesiastical circles.⁴⁰

As already mentioned, studies and interest in the sociology of religion have been increasing in Central America for 10 years. But it would seem that it is in the Southern Cone where the sociology of religion is most clearly developing in Latin America as a scientific and professional discipline — with autonomy from the churches.

In Chile, concern for religious reality is growing even in academic circles traditionally indifferent to it, like the sociology department of the University of Chile.⁴¹ In addition to the sociological tradition of Catholic groups, evangelical groups have also developed an interest in the sociology of religion. The Evangelical Theological Community has maintained a centre for socio-religious studies in Santiago for eight years. Also, the academic sociological community recognizes the importance of the sociology of religion; the last four sociology conferences in Chile had sections on it.⁴²

There is a growing interest in Uruguay and Argentina in a phenomenon proper to this paradoxical modernization: the proliferation of Pentecostals, sects and even expressions of the African-Brazilian religion, Umbanda, in modern, white, urbanized, secular societies.

In Argentina, the government scientific research agency CONICET and organizations connected with Dr Floreal Forni have been funding research since 1987. Also, the University of Buenos Aires, the University of Salvador and the Catholic University of Argentina have courses on the sociology of religion.

In Uruguay, interest centres on new religious movements. The anthropology department of the University of La Republica has begun a series of studies of these movements. OBSUR, a private institution, has been encouraging students since the late 1980s to study religious themes. In 1993, the Catholic University offered a course on the sociology of religion for the first time in the history of university education in Uruguay.

The journal *Sociedad y religión* of Buenos Aires convened specialists from other countries of the Southern Cone in September 1993 for the third conference on religious alternatives in Latin America, which treated the following themes: Pentecostalism, identity and biography; new religious movements; knowledge and religion; ethnography in the construction of beliefs; popular religiosity; new developments in Catholicism; fragmentation and disputes in religion; paradigms for the social study of religions. The fourth conference took place in April 1994 in Montevideo and the fifth for 1995 in Santiago, Chile.

Institutional Development of Research and Academic Programmes

Competition between the production of religious discourse and the production of scientific discourse explains the lack of institutional development and support given to research and academic programmes in the sociology of religion in most Latin American countries. Social scientists have been too preoccupied with the "problems of an underdeveloped society" and more recently with "modernization". They have presumed religion has nothing to do with those social problems, or they have considered it the field of other specialists, theologians.

The Catholic Church, as we mentioned, encourages the development of centres and socio-religious studies with little academic value. But the auxiliary function they fulfil for pastoral planning and action means they receive constant support. Indeed, most of the Episcopal Conferences and some dioceses in Latin America have teams for socio-religious studies that update statistics and socio-religious sociographs of Catholicism.⁴³

What has been presented so far explains for the most part why university centres (except those linked with Catholic universities) have generally not allocated funds for research and even less for academic programmes in the sociology of religion. The state universities usually have a long secularist tradition, some with strong Masonic groups, where the affirmation of freethinking often means rejecting the influence of Catholicism, seen as an influence from a monopolized field that goes against the freedom of thought.

The urgent need to develop strong autonomous scientific and technical

research in the basic sciences and engineering has meant that government funding for the social sciences has been insufficient in most Latin American countries. Funding for studies on religion from government institutions was non-existent up to four or five years ago when CONICET in Argentina and CONICYT in Chile began to fund some projects in this field. Except for universities linked with one church or another, which have been more open to the sciences of religion and have funded some studies, universities and academic centres in general have provided no resources or funds.

Concern outside the continent about the impact of religion on political and historical events in Latin America has led different European and North American Catholic and Protestant agencies to fund research on religious subjects. This funding has provided a steady flow of studies by certain Protestant and ecumenical institutions in Latin America and by some North American and European researchers.

The only exception we know of in Spanish-speaking South America⁴⁴ with respect to systematic postgraduate academic programmes in the sciences of religion is the licentiate programme in social sciences with a specialization in culture and religion at the University of the Academy of Christian Humanism⁴⁵ in Chile, which is becoming known throughout the continent.

Philosophy and theology continue to be the basic disciplines in Catholic seminaries. History is normally limited to church history rather than being presented as a scientific and critical discipline. Except for a few cases, such as the seminary in Quilmes, Argentina, where the history of religions is taught, and some seminaries in Central America which give courses on sociology or the "scientific approach to religions", sociology is still absent from the systematic training of Catholic priests and religious. The same is true for systematic training in evangelical theological centres, although some mainline Protestant churches⁴⁶ are more open to the social sciences in the training of their pastors and pastoral agents.

The training of priests and religious leaves "knowledge of reality" to individual initiative and occasional courses, talks and seminars after systematic training. A superficial contact with the social sciences allows for posing problems of "inculturation of the faith" or for speaking of the need for "socio-anthropological analyses" of reality for pastoral work.

In the Catholic Church, the training of personnel is dependent on the hierarchy and centrally controlled from the Vatican. This influences the degree of openness to the place of social sciences in the training of priests. Given present Vatican policy, there is no strong desire to promote a more integral education of future priests that would include sociology, anthropology and history.

This question is linked to the polemics surrounding the theology of liberation since 1978 and the Vatican struggle against that theology with Cardinal Ratzinger's 1984 document *Libertatis Nuntius*. Since the method of liberation theology assigns to the social sciences a mediating role in analysing reality, this social scientific basis is challenged by the Vatican for, among other reasons, being "contaminated" by Marxism. In trying to repress and replace liberation theology, Rome decided to suppress all references to social

analysis, has emphasized the need to return to the social teachings of the Church and has given priority to a more scholastic and less socio-historical programme in diocesan seminaries and religious congregations.⁴⁷

There are no major centres for the sociology of religion. Those that developed during the 1960s in association with FERES⁴⁸ have mostly disappeared, are inactive or have switched to other kinds of research. The lack of institutional support from state research agencies, private foundations, universities or church institutions has made the work of the sociology of religion sporadic. Even so, some centres can be mentioned, like CEIL-CONICET in Buenos Aires⁴⁹ and CERC, University of the Academy of Christian Humanism in Santiago, Chile⁵⁰ that have specialized areas in the sociology of religion and have been working in the field since the mid-1980s. Also worthy of mention is the contribution to the anthropology and history of Andean religion made by the Centre for Regional Andean Studies Bartolomé de Las Casas of Cuzco.⁵¹

The areas studied over the last 10 years are no longer church oriented. Now religious phenomena are studied in their context, with their functions and meaning in the socio-political sphere and as a semiological vehicle that articulates meaning for groups and classes in the social fabric. There is also a growing interest in coming to know the tremendous significance of the work of the churches for social promotion and development.

All this indicates that, despite the persistence of the limitations and difficulties outlined here, the sociology of religion in Latin America is far from being in a period of crisis, and new horizons are opening up today for the development of academic programmes and research in the field.

NOTES

1. No other country in Latin America can compare with the number of researchers and academics specialized in the sociology of religion in Brazil. Their work, however, will be excluded here, since it is treated in another article in this issue.

2. Our main concern here is the sociology of religion generated and developed by autonomous researchers and centres in Latin America. North American and European social scientists were the first to study the religious reality of Latin America; their work is still abundant. But we limit ourselves in this article to the work of Latin Americans.

For a more detailed view of the history of the sociology of religion in Latin America — its late beginning, its dependence on northern hemisphere sociology, its defects, biases and achievements — see Cristián Parker, "Perspective critique de la sociologie de la religion en Amérique latine", in F. Houtart, ed, *Ruptures sociales et religion*, pp. 35–52, Paris/Louvain-la-Neuve, L'Harmattan/CETRI, 1992.

3. François Houtart, a Belgian sociologist and a major figure in Latin American sociology of religion, presided over the section on the sociology of religion at the last sociology conference held in Havana, Cuba in 1991.

4. Licentiate programmes in sociology in Latin America generally have no specialization in the sociology of religion, and doctoral programmes in sociology are non-existent.

5. A group of Catalan social scientists failed to organize an Ibero-American group linked with ISSR in 1987. Elio Masferrer K. organized an international group

in Mexico in 1990. Only in April 1994 was organized the Southern Cone Social Scientists of Religion Association in Montevideo.

6. See the articles of Poulat, Houtart, Dobbelaere, Beckford, Allardt and Oommen in *Social Compass* 31 (1) (1990) from the proceedings of the 20th International Conference on the Sociology of Religion which took place in Helsinki in August 1989.

It is significant that Beckford barely mentioned Latin American sociology of religion in his survey of the sociology of religion since 1945. This is his perspective, but it also corresponds to a reality. See James Beckford, "The sociology of religion, 1945-1989", op. cit. pp. 45-64. See also the commentary of T.K. Oommen, pp. 71-73.

7. For more on Latin America's particular brand of secularization, which has consisted not so much in a linear rise in non-belief as in a rise in religious pluralism, see Cristián Parker, *Otra lógica en América Latina, religion popular y modernización*, Santiago, Ediciones FCE, 1993.

8. Pedro Morandé has highlighted the illuminism underlying Latin American sociology's perspective on culture and religion, in *Cultura y modernización en América Latina*, Santiago, Ediciones Universidad Católica de Chile, 1984.

9. Even the broad and systematic effort promoted by FERES (see note 48) to develop scientific research on popular religion in different countries of Latin America between 1969 and 1972 was not exempt from a theoretical orientation inspired by theological and pastoral criteria. The formation of these teams in Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Chile and Argentina was supported by the Catholic Church and funded by European Catholic institutions.

10. Fortunato Mallimaci, "Catolicismo integral, identidad nacional y nuevos movimientos religiosos", in A. Frigerio, ed., *Nuevos movimientos religiosos y ciencias sociales* (II), p. 26, Buenos Aires, Centro Editor de América Latina, 1993.

11. The outstanding figures are Floreal Forni, with a PhD from Chicago, Fortunato Mallimaci, PhD from Paris, and Alejandro Frigerio, PhD from California. See A. Frigerio (editor and author of the introduction), *Nuevos movimientos religiosos y ciencias sociales* (I) and (II), op. cit. Note 10, including studies by Forni, Mallimaci, Pessina, Soneira, Tort, Wynarczyk, Carozzi, Frigerio and Tarducci.

12. Nestor Da Costa, "The Social Sciences of Religion: Teaching and Research in Uruguay", SISR Conference, Bucharest, July 1993.

13. One of his most important studies is *La transformación religiosa peruana*, Lima, Catholic University of Lima, 1984.

14. See José Luis Gonzales and María Teresa van Ronzelen, *Religiosidad popular en el Perú, bibliografía*, Lima, Ediciones CEP, 1983.

15. Sociologists like Catalina Romero, Cecilia Tovar and Carmen Lora, all graduates of the Catholic University of Louvain, collaborate with both centres. Mention should also be made of Imelda Vega Centeno for her studies on the religious mythology of APRA populism.

16. Some recent works are those of Diego Irarrazaval, *Tradición y porvenir andino*, Lima, Ediciones IDEA/TAREA, 1992; *Rito y pensar cristiano*, Lima, Ediciones CEP, 1993.

17. See several authors (AA.W.), *Colombia una casa para todos, debate etico*, Bogotá, Programa por la Paz, 1991.

18. For example, see several authors (AA.W.), *Las sectas en América Latina*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones Claretiana-CELAM, 1st edn 1984, 8th edn 1991, with articles by Santagada, Bravo, Diaz de Leon, Bueno, Muñoz, Kollenburg and Capanna.

19. Otto Maduro has written one of the few theoretical works on Latin American

sociology of religion: *Religión y conflicto social*, México, Centro de Estudios Euménicos/Centro de Reflexión Teológica, 1980.

20. We are grateful to Rolando Sierra for the valuable information he provided on the state of sociological research and teaching in Central America.

21. Its most important researchers are Franz Hinkelammert, Pablo Richard, Guillermo Melendez, Carmelo Alvarez, Victorio Araya and Oscar Sierra.

22. See the special issue of *Estudios sociales centroamericanos* (No. 51, 1989), on popular religiosity and culture, with articles by Luis Samandú, Jaime Valverde, América Rodríguez Herrera, Rosa María Soley, Abelino Martínez Rocha and Carlos A. Lara Figueroa.

23. See Jorge Cáceres et al., *Iglesia, política y profecía*, Costa Rica, Ediciones DEI, 1983; Andrés Opazo, *Costa Rica, la Iglesia católica y el orden social*, Costa Rica, DEI, 1987; Gustavo Blanco and Jaime Valverde, *Honduras, Iglesia y cambio social*, San José, DEI, 1987.

24. Besides the work of François Houtart, see "Religion et transition au Nicaragua", *La pensée* 248 (1985): 15–29; J. Amando Robles, "La transformation de la vision religieuse du monde dans le passage de la tradition à la modernité", in Houtart et al., op. cit. Note 2, pp. 99–120.

25. See Abelino Martínez, *Las sectas en Nicaragua, oferta y demanda de salvación*, Costa Rica, DEI, 1989. Jean-Pierre Bastian, a Swiss-Mexican sociologist, has perhaps done the most interesting research on Protestantism and new religious movements in Central America and Mexico.

26. These include Otto Maduro, Venezuelan; Pedro Ribeiro de Oliveira, Luis Ignacio Geiger, Brazilians; Andrés Opazo, Humberto Lagos, Cristián Parker, Chileans; Francisco López, Uruguayan; and Rolando Sierra, Amando Robles, Abelino Martínez, Central Americans.

27. See François Houtart, *Sociología de la religión*, Managua, Ediciones Nicarao, Centro de Estudios sobre América, 1992.

28. See Ricardo Falla, *Quiché rebelde*, Guatemala, Ediciones Universitaria, 1978; *Esa muerte que nos hace vivir. Estudio de la religión popular de Escuintla*, San Salvador, Ediciones UCA, 1984; Rafael Cabarrús, *La cosmovisión k'ekch'í en proceso de cambios*, San Salvador, Ediciones UCA, 1979, and the work of Luis Samandú, who has developed a global approach to popular religion.

29. See Rolando Sierra Fonseca, *Iglesia e historia en Honduras; Iglesia y liberalismo en Honduras en el siglo XIX; La creación de la Arquidiócesis de Tegucigalpa; Fuentes y Bibliografía para el estudio de la historia de la Iglesia de Honduras*, Honduras, Publications Centre, Diocese of Choluteca, 1993.

30. These studies were summarized by Roger Bastide in *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 35 (1973): 139–150.

31. Among the papers presented at the First Colloquium on the History of Religions, organized by the Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in August 1983, under the auspices of the Mexican Society for the Study of Religions (affiliated with the International Association for the History of Religions since 1975) and the Institute for Anthropological Research of UNAM, are several on indigenous chamanism, Mixtec religion and current expressions of indigenous and popular religions. All are from an anthropological or ethnohistorical perspective. See Barbro Dahlgren, ed., *Historia de la religión en Mesoamérica y afines, I. Coloquio*, Mexico City, Ediciones UNAM, 1987.

32. See Martin de la Rosa and Charles Reilly, eds, *Religión y política en México*, Mexico City, Ediciones Siglo XXI—Center for US Mexican Studies USCD, 1985. The studies of Lafaye (Quetzacátl y Guadalupe) and Meyer ("La Cristiada e Historia de los Cristianos") are considered notable European contributions to a socio-religious knowledge of Mexico and the continent.

³³. See Jean-Pierre Bastian, *Historia del protestantismo en América Latina*, Mexico, Ediciones CUPSA, 1990; *Los disidentes, sociedades protestantes y revolución en México 1872-1911*, Mexico City, Colegio de México-FCE, 1989; *Protestantismo y sociedad en México*, Mexico City, Ediciones COPSA, 1983.

³⁴. Recent issues since 1987 provide a good anthology of the sociology of religion in Latin America:

- 94 (1987) Nicaragua: pluralismo y revolución
- 95 (1988) Convertir ¿para qué?
- 96 (1988) Iglesia, tierra, campesinado
- 97 (1988) Bolivia; religión y sociedad
- 98 (1988) Marxismo y teología de la liberación
- 99 (1989) Inmigración, libertad de cultos y desarrollo económico
- 100 (1989) Catolicismo en tensión
- 101 (1989) México: religión y sociedad
- 102 (1989) Iglesia, familia y raza en las colonias
- 103 (1990) América Central: religión y conflicto social
- 104 (1990) Sociología, religión, Estado
- 105 (1990) Pentecostalismo y milenarismo
- 106 (1990) Perú, religión y sociedad
- 107 (1991) Protestantismo y educación
- 108 (1991) Del integralismo a los partidos católicos: Argentina, México, Puerto Rico
- 109 (1991) Sectas y nuevos movimientos sociales
- 110 (1991) El cristianismo y los 500 años de América Latina
- 111 (1992) América Latina: subordinada y excluida
- 112 (1992) Iglesia y sociedad en Centro América

³⁵. See Gilberto Gimenez, *Cultura popular y religión en el Anahuac*, Mexico City, Centro de Estudios Euménicos, 1978.

³⁶. See Jean-Pierre Bastian, "Protestantismo y política en México", *Revista mexicana de sociología*, Special Issue (1981), pp. 1947-1966; and in 1987 the renowned *Revista mexicana de sociología* dedicated No. 3, Vol. XLIX, July-September, to the theme of "Iglesia y clase obrera en América Latina"; and in 1993 in an issue about Mexico, 'Relaciones Iglesia y Estado en México' by Marta García Ugarte.

³⁷. See the recent book by Roberto Blancarte, *Historia del cristianismo en México*, Mexico, Ediciones FCE, 1993; also Cristián Parker, *op.cit.* Note 7.

³⁸. The best-known work of CEHILA is its monumental *Historia general de la Iglesia en América Latina*, in 11 volumes.

³⁹. See, for example, the text produced conjointly by CEHILA and CERC in Santiago, Chile: C. Parker and R. Salas, eds, *Cristianismo y culturas latino-americanas*, Santiago, Ediciones Paulinas, 1992; the text produced in Argentina conjointly by the Centro Nueva Tierra and CEHILA: M. Cristina Liboreiro et al., *500 años de cristianismo en Argentina*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones Nueva Tierra, 1992, with articles by Fortunato Mallimaci, Emilio Fermin Mignone, Leonardo Perez Esquivel and Floreal Forni, among others.

⁴⁰. See Cristián Parker, "Desafío al cristianismo en los 500 años de América Latina", published in *Páginas*, in Lima, in the *Revista eclesiástica brasileña*, and in *Pasos*, in Costa Rica, in 1991.

⁴¹. The last two issues of the *Revista de sociología* published by that department include articles, book reviews or commentaries on books treating religious subjects. See Arturo Chacón, "Pluralismo religioso y modernidad en la sociedad chilena", No. 6-7 (1992), and the book reviews by Manuel Ossa, B. Boudewijnse, and others on Latin American Pentecostalism and C. Parker on popular religion and modernization, in No. 8 (1993).

42. At the most recent Chilean sociology conference, held in 1992, papers were presented on the development of Pentecostalism among indigenous peoples, religions and sects, and the social history of the religious feast of La Tirana.

43. We know positively that the Episcopal Conferences of Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Honduras and Mexico, among others, have active teams for socio-religious studies.

44. Brazil has had postgraduate courses in the sciences of religion for years and Mexico has similar programmes.

45. The University of the Academy of Christian Humanism was founded at the initiative of Cardinal Raúl Silva in 1976 when the dictatorship of Pinochet persecuted and suppressed the social sciences in Chile. It quickly became a space where the social sciences could develop freely. It became a private university, autonomous from the Church, in 1988.

46. The fundamentalism of the Pentecostal churches in most cases closes them off from any contribution from the social sciences.

47. See José Comblin, *Realidad y desafío para los cristianos hoy*, pp. 54–60, Córdoba, Ediciones Centro Tiempo Latinoamericano, 1993.

48. In 1958, the International Catholic Institute of Socio-religious Research became the International Federation of Catholic Institutes of Social and Socio-religious Research (FERES), headquartered first in Fribourg and later in Louvain. Since the 1960s it functions in seven Latin American countries.

49. See CEIL-CONICET, *Reseña: 1985–1990*, Buenos Aires, Centro de Estudios e Investigaciones Laborales, 1991. The journal *Sociedad y religión* has developed around the figure of Dr Floreal Forni since 1987 and has been important in opening a space for developing the sociology of religion in Argentina and the Southern Cone.

50. Since 1991 the area of culture and religion of CERC (Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Contemporánea) of the University of the Academy of Christian Humanism has published seven books on religious aspects of Latin America: Marian devotion; popular religion in Chile and Latin America: popular beliefs and rites in Chile; Christianity and Latin American cultures, and modernity and the church in Latin America.

51. The catalogue of publications of the Centre for Regional Andean Studies Bartolomé de Las Casas of Cuzco offers 22 titles of recent historical and anthropological studies. These include studies on oral Andean tradition and its myths, gods and religious heroes; colonial chronicles and archives; Andean witchcraft and inquisition, “rooting out of idolatries”; church history; faith and customs, etc. Henrique Urbano, Gabriela Ramos, Pierre Duviols, Pilar García Jordán, Irene Silverblatt, Ana Sanchez and Javier Flores are some of the authors.

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