

Religious and political leadership in Brazil at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries – the case of Father Cícero

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Abstract: Brazil is a very interesting place for academic research on religious and political leadership. It does not happen only due to the continuous supply of religious leaders, but also owing to their social and political influence. One of the good examples of such leaders at the turn of the XIX and XX centuries is certainly Father Cícero, who, in spite of the problems connected with the disapproval of his activity on the part of the Vatican, is still regarded as a perfect example of both an outstanding politician and a non-canonized popular saint with the place of his earthly religious and political activity turned long ago into a destination of pilgrimages and important popular religiosity shrines. Using the biographical method and coming out of the Weberian concepts of charismatic leadership, the author tries to explain the reasons behind his tremendous popularity and a conflict with the Catholic hierarchy, as well as to comment on the background of his cult in the context of social, economic and political changes taking place in Brazil during his lifetime.

Keywords: leadership, Brazil, popular religiosity

Liderança religiosa e política no Brasil na virada dos séculos XIX e XX – o caso do Padre Cícero

Resumo: O Brasil é um lugar muito interessante para a pesquisa acadêmica em relação à liderança religiosa e política. Isso não acontece apenas devido à oferta contínua de líderes religiosos, mas também devido à sua influência social e política. Um dos bons exemplos de tais líderes na virada dos séculos XIX e XX é certamente o padre Cícero, que, apesar dos problemas relacionados com a desaprovação de sua atividade por parte do Vaticano, é considerado um exemplo perfeito do político notável e de um santo popular, com o lugar de sua atividade religiosa e política transformado há muito tempo em destino de peregrinações e santuário popular importante. Usando o método biográfico e saindo dos conceitos weberianos de líderes carismáticos, a autora explica as razões por trás da enorme popularidade do Padre e do seu conflito com a hierarquia

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eclesiástica, assim como também comenta o pano de fundo do seu culto no contexto das mudanças sociais, econômicas e políticas que aconteceram no Brasil durante a sua vida.

Palavras-chave: liderança, Brasil, religiosidade popular

Liderazgo religioso y político en Brasil a fines del siglo XIX y al comienzo del siglo XX - el caso del Padre Cícero

Resumen: Brasil es un lugar muy interesante para la investigación académica sobre el liderazgo religioso y político. Esto no sucede sólo por el suministro continuo de líderes religiosos, sino también por su influencia social y política. Uno de los buenos ejemplos de tales dirigentes a comienzos del siglo XX es sin duda el padre Cicerón, que, a pesar de los problemas relacionados con la desaprobación de su actividad por parte del Vaticano, es considerado como un ejemplo perfecto de un destacado político y de un santo popular, con el lugar de su actividad religiosa y política convertido hace tiempo en destino de peregrinaciones e importante santuario de religiosidad popular. Utilizando el método biográfico y surgiendo de los conceptos weberianos de los líderes carismáticos, la autora explica las razones de la tremenda popularidad del Padre y de su conflicto con la jerarquía de la Iglesia, así como comenta los antecedentes de su culto en el contexto de los cambios sociales, económicos y políticos en Brasil durante su vida.

Palabras clave: liderazgo, Brasil, religiosidad popular

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Introduction

The term ‘leadership’ is nowadays such a complex concept that researchers using it currently, depending on the discipline they represent, adopt completely different definitions, often arguing with regard to what leadership is and how to study it (ROST, 1991; STOGDILL, 1974; BURNS, 1978; CIULLA, 2004; EDWARDS, 2000; GOLEMAN, 2000; GOLEMAN, 1998). Therefore, there are multiple perspectives from which the phenomenon is and can be analyzed. However, for the purpose of this article, we should try to outline at least some universal qualities of leadership, protecting the concept against definitional blurring and misunderstandings that may happen when the author does not share the common intuition on the meaning related to the used terms with the reader.

Using the classical concept of “a charismatic leader”, Weber sees the charisma as a necessary feature of any leader, a kind of a divine stigma, allowing him/her to base the emotional relations with the supporters on fear, admiration, enthusiasm, respect and total devotion. Charismatic leadership is thus characterized by rising above mediocrity, having a vision and specific personality traits, among which are: self-confidence, the ability to articulate a vision, determination, strength and effectiveness, i.e. the ability to meet expectations, combined with a unique gift - a kind of magnetism that induces a given group to support the leader. This is an attributional model of leadership, which is also the oldest mainstream reflection on this phenomenon – they are the unique gifts and abilities, significantly outgrowing those of other group members that make a leader. One of the most important functions of a leader is the ability to lead his/her supporters through and out of the stormy periods of crisis – the appearance itself of charismatic leaders is usually

a social response to the times of problems and uncertainties, requiring the use of emergency measures and the presence of persons equipped with specific gifts of body and spirit (WEBER 2002, p. 817), which are considered supernatural (and thus not available to everyone).

Thus, analyzing the leadership phenomenon in the Brazilian context (especially leadership functioning at the interface between the world of religion and politics) should involve specific circumstances that shaped a particular leader, allowing him/her to rise above mediocrity, including also independent of him/her processes, phenomena and events preceding his/her leadership activities. As I assume, among such determinants that contributed to the emergence, in the late 19th century, of the phenomenon of Father Cícero, the following matters can be mentioned: the problem of centuries-old royal sovereignty over the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil, including the law of patronage and the reaction of the Church to its abolition²; a strong ethnic and cultural miscegenation of the Brazilian society that has made Brazilian Catholicism syncretic and unorthodox and the belief in magic and miracles widespread; the existence of lay religious brotherhoods, strengthening popular religiosity not tolerated by the hierarchical Church; the appearance, at the end of the 19th century, of prophetic religious revival movements in the region; authoritarianism of the Brazilian culture of those times, in which leadership has become the basis of functioning of the whole socio-political system warranting space for strong individuals, extending their activities to many different areas of life, including the spheres of religion and politics (MONTERO, 2005; MORRIS, BLADE, 2010); and, last but not least, a deep social and economic crisis in the northeastern region of Brazil provoked by long-lasting droughts.

This article aims to show the religious and political leadership in Brazil at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, using the biographical approach put in the socio-political context of the Brazilian Northeast (Nordeste) – the region comprising the state of Ceará and the town of Juazeiro do Norte, linked inextricably to the life and work of Father Cícero. This text, not revealing the ambition to create a complete profile of this Brazilian religious and political leader, focuses on the controversial figure of Father Cícero, supporting the thesis that his charisma, derived from exceptional events (miracles), enabled him to go far beyond the realm of religion and become an important catalyst and stimulus for many socio-political changes that strengthened his ties with the world of politics, leading to an open conflict with the Church hierarchy. Father Cícero's support of popular Catholicism helped him not only to build a significant political career, but also earned him the status of a popular (folk) saint already in his lifetime.

² The initial close cooperation between the Iberian monarchies and the Church was a necessity against its weakness resulting from the schisms, the capture of Constantinople, Avignon Papacy, widespread heresies, Reformation, etc. It was precisely in such a difficult moment that the Church entrusted, under the Law of Patronage, the Iberian monarchies with the obligation of Christianization of the new continent, agreeing to their control over the Church in America. In 1454, Pope Nicholas V threatened those who questioned the 'spiritual conquest' conducted on behalf of the Church by the Iberian monarchs with excommunication (RIBEIRA, MOREIRA NETO, 1993, p. 65-66).

Brazil at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries – the historical context

Gaining independence led Brazil to strengthening the imperial patronage over the Church (KLAIBER, 1997, p. 28-29), which was not conducive to reinforcing the authority of the institution or its clergy. Therefore, soon, in the Church, there appeared (and grew in strength) ultra-conservative postulates, which stressed the necessity of tightening cooperation with the papacy, especially after the provisions of the First Vatican Council (1869-1870), striving for greater centralization and discipline within the Church (the so-called *ultramontanismo* policy). This meant an inevitable “romanization” of the Brazilian Church and a growing resistance against the imperial sovereignty among the clergy. Conservative bishops began to openly rebel against the law of patronage, they introduced stricter discipline measures (an obligation to wear the cassock, a ban on participation in Masonic lodges) and combated syncretic popular religiosity, which began to be referred to as superstition, fanaticism and heresy. This way, they attempted to implement the idea of orthodoxy in the Church and to marginalize all major manifestations of popular religiosity and the activity of the laity.

At the end of the nineteenth century, many changes occurred in Brazil: in 1888, Brazil abolished slavery without any compensation to slave owners, which often meant bankruptcy of the representatives of the major social group supporting the Empire - sugar barons, the owners of gigantic rural estates in the region of the Northeast. They used to gather around themselves a loyal *parentela* and decided the fate of the region and the country. Suddenly, their power began to waver. Less than a year after the abolition (1889), the Empire fell in a bloodless military coup, paying for the royal support of the abolitionists, the majority of whom held Republican views. Under the provisions of the new Constitution (1891), a separation of the Church and the State was implemented, depriving Brazilian Catholicism of the royal patronage, including its financial support. A weakened Church quickly began to feel the consequences of ‘dismantling’ the patronage by Republican liberals. Additionally, especially in the Northeast, Brazilian Catholicism was not free from heresy movements and local sects, whose activities highly intensified at the turn of the centuries, showing the weakness of the institutional Church depending only on its historically fragile bonds with the papacy. A sharp criticism of the unorthodox folk religiosity, called primitive, marginal or ignorant by the clergy, also made the Church hierarchy lean strongly towards the political and financial elites, exerting pressure to regain all the lost privileges. In the meantime, the agricultural Northeast plunged more and more in the economic downturn, additionally reinforced by prolonged and severe droughts. Thousands of people wandered across the dry and poor *sertão* to the already heavily overcrowded coastal towns, which were not able to absorb all the refugees - like mushrooms after the rain, shantytowns and slums began to spring up and extreme poverty, epidemics and crime became rampant. In the backlands, the loose bands of *jagunços*, once members of private armies of the big estate owners, spread panic by attacking villages, stealing, raping and killing. For many years, no regular army was able to cope with them – they knew the area, had their local informants and nothing to lose but life, which was not respected. In addition, they also began to enter political alliances

relatively quickly, acting as ‘protection’ during the election, or waging local wars against the political opponents of their ‘lords’.

It was in such conditions that, amid droughts destroying *sertão*, suddenly, at the end of the 19th century, there appeared local prophets called ‘fanatics’ by the authorities of the Republic. Walking in rags from village to village and from town to town, preaching the Gospel and calling for conversion before the imminent coming of the Kingdom of Christ, they gathered crowds of poor people, prompting them to organize the mutual assistance increasing their chances of survival. One of such folk prophets was Father Ibiapina – a former lawyer from the city of Recife, who donned the habit and went into arid backlands to help the poorest. Taking advantage of the system of *mutirão* (collectively performed social work), his followers built houses for beggars, orphans and widows (*Casas de Caridade*). Soon the activity and the increasing influence of Ibiapina started threatening the authority of local clergy. Helpless hierarchs asked Vatican to intervene and the Pope condemned Ibiapina, who capitulated under the resistance of the Church and died soon after. But when it seemed that the situation in the Brazilian backlands had been pacified, the miracle in Juazeiro happened and there emerged a new, charismatic spiritual leader of the region – Father Cícero. At the same time, a little further North, in the state of Bahia, Antônio Conselheiro, another great prophet, was declared saint by his supporters during his lifetime. Tens of thousands of people guided by his words built a vibrant and abundant town in the middle of the wild and dry *sertão*. It resisted the attacks by regular army several times until 1897, when almost all the inhabitants of the famous Canudos were killed in combat and the cadaver of Antônio Conselheiro, who had died during the siege, was dug up by soldiers, desecrated and put on public display as a warning. Afterwards, a few survivors of Canudos walked one thousand kilometers on foot to Juazeiro in order to follow another popular saint – Father Cícero.

Father Cícero – a religious and political leader³

Cícero Romão Batista is still today one of the most controversial figures in the history of the Catholic Church in Brazil. Interpretations of his life and activities continue to provoke disputes on their positive and negative effects on religious, social and political life of the entire region of the Brazilian Northeast. Father Cícero appears both in the context of issues of millenarianism and messianism in Brazil (where the efforts of researchers focus mostly on his importance for the popular religiosity in Brazil and on the conflict between the Church hierarchy and the laity and local clergy), as well as in the context of interpretation of the causes and significance of his political career. It seems, however, that only all of these issues put and considered together allow to grasp the complexity of the socio-cultural phenomenon of Father Cícero as both religious and a political leader.

Cícero Romão Batista was born into a poor family in the town of Crato in the Ceará State in 1844. Raised in the Northeast, he absorbed specific, regional religiosity from the

³ Based on the following biographies of Cícero Romão Batista: NETO, 2009; ANSELMO, 1968; BARROS CAVALCANTI, 1988; BARTOLOMEU, 2004; SILVA de ANDRADE, 1989.

beginning, stretched between two worlds: on the one hand, the magical and mystical *sertão*, with its widespread belief in miracles, holy men, werewolves, the lost souls of ancestors and folk saints; on the other hand - a world of rigorously romanized Catholic doctrine of the *ultramontanismo* period, increased discipline in the Church and the total dependence of the local clergy and hierarchy on the Vatican decisions. Cícero Romão Batista was ordained a priest in 1970, despite the resistance of the seminar supervisor, who regarded him as a weak student and not a very promising priest and preacher. His lack of oratorical skills was especially noticeable, hindering the ability of preaching fiery sermons. That is why in 1872 Cícero Romão Batista remained one of the few poor priests not assigned to any parish, which was not a standard due to the constantly high demand for pastoral care in the region. He, therefore, accepted an invitation from the inhabitants of a small town of Juazeiro near Crato to celebrate a solemn Christmas Mass for the community. During the visit, as he repeatedly claimed, he was ordered in a dream by Jesus himself to stay forever with that small and poor congregation.

After his obtaining a consent for the creation of the parish, for 45 years, there were no clear signs that the history of his pastoral care would be somehow special, despite the fact that already at that time he could not be regarded as a typical representative of the local clergy. From the beginning deeply involved in the life of the local community, he supported the people entrusted to him with his advice, skills and very hard work. He never refused to help and never charged any fees for his pastoral services, which conflicted him with other clergymen. He was known for visiting parishioners in their homes, for his intervention in domestic conflicts, promoting healthy, ecological and environmentally friendly lifestyles, land cultivation and cattle breeding.⁴ He chose as aides local women (*beatas* or 'the blessed') - of impeccable reputation, single women or widows, forming a secular confraternity working in the parish under his direct authority.

It was in 1889, the year of the fall of the Empire, that blood appeared in the mouth of one of these women (Maria de Araújo, a poor seamstress) while she was receiving holy communion from Father Cícero a.. This occurred several times in the presence of eyewitnesses. The mysterious phenomenon, quickly called a miracle, provoked the arrival of crowds of pilgrims and the story began to be widely commented on in the regional

⁴ Father Cícero used his authority to protect the natural environment of the region, with full awareness of its importance to feed the growing population of Juazeiro. Here are his famous principles presented in sermons, in interviews to the press and during pastoral visits in homes of his parishioners: "Do not destroy the forest (...), nor meadows; do not hunt wild animals, grow cattle; do not let the cattle loose without supervision, make sure the land can recover after the pasture; do not cut trees in the mountains or on the slopes (...) in order not to destroy the soil and cause landslides; collect rainwater for the time of droughts; build dams on streams in order to retain access to fresh water in case of the lack of rain; plant every day at least one tree, so that we can re-forest together the desert terrain of *sertão*; learn how to use plants that can store water; if we all follow these recommendations, we will be able to defend ourselves against the effects of drought and we will not suffer from hunger. If we do not do it, *sertão* will turn into a desert." in: "A última entrevista", *O Povo*, 20/07/2004, Caderno Especial: Padre Cícero, p. 4.

press. Pieces of cloth with visible signs of blood that dripped from the woman's unhurt mouth began to be venerated as relics. Father Cícero, facing the sudden popularity of his parish, threw himself into organizational work in order to ensure conditions for receiving incoming masses of pilgrims. However, in spite of the fact that the miracle was proclaimed instantly by the people, it was not later confirmed by the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The first pilgrimage there took place already in 1889, organized by the rector of the seminary in Crato, - more than three thousand people reached Juazeiro, whose population had never exceeded 400. Quickly, the news of the huge influx of the faithful in Juazeiro reached the local bishop Dom Joaquim Veiry, who demanded an explanation from Father Cícero. However, he did not receive it for a long time, so he decided to establish a commission to investigate the alleged miracle, simultaneously ordering Father Cícero to keep silence on the matter. The commission reached Juazeiro in September 1891 and confirmed the occurrence of a miracle, noting that the issue is serious and requires further procedures in the Vatican.

Dissatisfied with the results of the work of the commission, the bishop accused Father Cícero of fraud, ordered isolation and physical punishment of Maria de Araújo and the destruction of all the alleged 'relics'. Such far-reaching skepticism towards the miracle proclaimed by local people coincided perfectly with the policy of the conservative Brazilian hierarchy, for whom it was hard to believe that, as pious pilgrims said, "Christ fled Europe to perform miracles in the Brazilian *sertão*".

Indeed, the Vatican soon (1894) skeptically commented on the alleged Juazeiro miracles and the bishop forbade Father Cícero to perform pastoral duties, including celebration of the liturgy and the sacraments. Father Cícero, however, remained in Juazeiro as a resident - by no means lonely. Rejected by the institutional Church, in the collective imagination he became automatically a martyr for the true faith, enjoying a growing social prestige and - growing affluence due to the resources offered by pilgrims. It was just then that Father Cícero began to play an increasingly important role in the lives of the inhabitants of Juazeiro: being invited to participate in family celebrations, assisting his parishioners in need, baptizing hundreds of children, helping pilgrims constantly coming to Juazeiro, a large part of whom decided to settle down in the village, under the patronage of Father Cícero. In return for help and advice, Father Cícero required full compliance with the laws established in Juazeiro from the newcomers, including the principle of sobriety, family unity, prohibition of prostitution. In the land marked by violence, droughts and poverty, on Father Cícero's request, the bands of *cangaceiros* saved and aided pilgrims coming to Juazeiro. He was obeyed and respected by them.

In 1898 Father Cícero was already rich enough to go to the Vatican to present his case to the pope, who freed him from censorship, but left him suspended until the full clarification of the "miracle case". When Father Cícero returned to Juazeiro, he was given a great welcome. The pilgrimage movement again intensified, despite the lack of new miracles. Father Cícero became an owner of extensive lands and herds of cattle, one of the richest, most powerful and influential people in the region. The immigrants made his

town grow rapidly and soon its emancipation from the administrative influence of the nearby municipality of Crato became a necessity. Father Cícero, postulating a new bottom-up development of Juazeiro by promoting handicrafts and local agricultural production contained in the slogan “every home a shrine, every backyard a workshop” was viewed as the best candidate for the first head of the new municipality. And, elected in 1911, he performed this function for 20 years, skillfully establishing political alliances with the elites of the region, sometimes even threatening the governors and municipal authorities if they acted against Juazeiro and its population. His intransigent behavior once provoked the state government’s military intervention and the decision to deprive him of the legally acquired mandate. Due to the resistance of the population of Juazeiro, the governor sent regular troops to deal with the problematic priest/politician on the spot. However, taking advantage of the advice of survivors of Canudos who had taken refuge under his wings, Cícero ordered digging a gigantic trench around the city. The attack of the troops collapsed and as counteroffensive, Father Cícero, , sent his own faithful troops to attack the capital, which resulted in overthrowing the governor and Father Cícero becoming the second most important politician in the state of Ceará. It is said that even one of the most famous leaders of *cangaceiros* - Lampião - became his devoted follower, supporting him against his political opponents.

Due to successful political career of Father Cícero and his disobedience towards the Church hierarchy, in 1916 the Vatican decided to excommunicate him, but the local bishop never told him of this decision, officially due to his grave health problems. At the same time, by the decision of the Vatican, the body of the deceased Maria de Araújo was exhumed and moved away from Juazeiro to prevent further spreading of the cult of another local ‘folk saint’. After several years Father Cícero won the mandate of the federal congressman, but due to his advanced age, he decided to remain in Juazeiro, engaging himself only in local and regional politics. As an active member of the Conservative Republican Party (PRC), then he participated, along with other most significant politicians of the region, in negotiations on the conclusion of the first (and so far the only) bipartisan alliance (The Colonels’ Covenant), aiming to calm down the political situation and social unrest in the region.

After the revolution of 1930, Father Cícero never took to Getúlio Vargas and his political importance and influence in the region began to decline rapidly. His deteriorating health, provoking blindness, prevented him from any public activity in the last years of his life. But his dwindling political role did not lead to a simultaneous decline in his influence as the most important spiritual leader of the popular Church in the region. What is more, this position has remained essentially unchallenged until now.

In 1934, Cícero Romão Batista died at the age of 90, leaving in his last will all his possessions to the local Church. The bishop of Crato ordered the destruction of all traces of his activities related to the miracles of Juazeiro in order to prevent the spread of heresy in the region. However, these commands have not been fully implemented by his subordinate clergy and also by the residents of Juazeiro, who continued protecting and nourishing memories of Cícero as local relics. As a folk, popular saint, and at the same time a prominent politician, Father Cícero kept boasting, contrary to the decisions of the

Brazilian Church hierarchy and the Vatican, huge popularity in the Northeast and influencing the functioning of the local Church, especially in its popular dimension.

A popular saint or an official saint at last?

The emergence of the phenomenon of popular saints in Brazil was due primarily to the presence of the numerous, strong and well-organized religious brotherhoods (*irmandades*), having a much more pronounced influence in the local communities than priests or missionaries.⁵ *Irmandades* popularized folk religiosity, they were responsible for the creation of rituals, devotions and prayers far from theological purity or orthodoxy and for promotion of deeply syncretic cults of saints, not necessarily accepted by the Church hierarchy. In addition, since the colonial times, Brazil, has always been strongly regionally diversified and polycentric in terms of 'geography of religion' - in each region, Brazilian Catholicism focused on different religious symbols marked by various cultural influences and had its own regional sanctuaries whose importance and influence were indisputable.⁶ Such religious regionalism always meant a gap between the official doctrine of the Catholic Church and its regional implementations and factual, everyday religious practices of followers attached primarily to their own, local saints. In Brazil, "the people and the clergy may not pray in the same way, in front of the same images" (FERNANDES, 1994, 108), which continues to strengthen the phenomenon of popular religiosity, especially in inland rural areas.

In such a socio-cultural context, the phenomenon of charismatic religious and political leadership of Father Cícero and his recognition as a popular saint are still one of

⁵Brazilian multicultural Catholicism grew up on a sugar plantation, had little in common with orthodoxy, was adapted to everyday needs and morality of plantations' owners (far from Christian ideals), as evidenced by the testimony of the first Apostolic Nuncio in Brazil, "Here religiosity is manifested primarily in music, sounds of bells and fireworks, and the event taking place on several occasions in the churches are characterized by a high degree of permissiveness and frivolity. The worst is the clergy that combines ignorance with demoralization. Priests officially live in de facto unions, surrounded by their offspring" (ACCIOLY, 1949, p. 240). Researchers of the Brazilian Church also emphasize the scale of conflicts between religious orders and missionaries, which were inflamed to such an extent that the king issued in 1693 a special warrant separation of missionary lands on which each of the religious orders led its missionary activity separately. Another problem was with female religious orders, where life did not deviate from the secular standards, including the possession by nuns of their own slaves. As suggested by BENNASAR and MARIN (2000, p. 134), it was provoked by the tradition of sending all unmarried women to religious orders, irrespective of their convent vocation.

⁶ Brazilian regions exhibit enormous disparities - according to KOHLHLEPP (2010, p. 457), the region of Northeast, with a home state of Father Cícero - Ceará and the municipality of Juazeiro, is by far the poorest in Brazil, characterized by the highest rate of social stratification, the highest concentration of income, the highest birth rate, the highest mortality among infants and children under the age of 5, the shortest average life expectancy, the worst access to education and health care, the highest level of illiteracy, the highest percentage of the population without access to running water and electricity, the lowest wages and the level of HDI, where Brazil occupies in the world ranking position 57, but the Northeast region - only 109.

the most debated and controversial issues in contemporary Catholic Church in Brazil. Father Cícero appears both in recurring discussions on drought and its effects on local population life (as the one who was able to effectively fight it or as the one to which thousands of pilgrims pray begging for rain in the still informal shrine) and in the debates on rampant poverty and backwardness of the region (as the one who was able to make, out of “the place forgotten by God and the government”, a flourishing center of agriculture, craft and trade). The name of Father Cícero also appears in the context of the famous miracles of Juazeiro do Norte, pronounced both by enthusiastic followers of his cult and by skeptical disbelievers, who view the veneration of Father Cícero as more than just a religious phenomenon - barred from his priestly duties, he turned to politics, becoming the first mayor of Juazeiro do Norte, calling itself “The Capital of Faith” and later was chosen lieutenant governor of his home state and elected to Congress, though he decided not to serve effectively in either post.

Controversy over Father Cícero can be also seen on the basis of the changing attitude of the Vatican towards his life and activities - Cícero died suspended and excommunicated, but now some procedures aimed at his rehabilitation have proven not only successful, but also opened the legal way to his beatification.⁷ Cardinal Ratzinger, before he became Pope, had ordered the establishment of a special commission to investigate the matter. Even before the results of the Commission’s research were known, some decisions of the Vatican had made the supporters of Father Cícero optimistic - in 2008, the Church of Our Lady of Sorrows in Juazeiro was elevated to the status of basilica and the Chapel of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, where he is buried, had stained glass windows installed, in which he appeared among the official saints of the Church. Finally, on 13th Dec., 2015, Father Cícero was officially pardoned by the Pope Francis I. The process of beatification has not been initiated yet, but this is exactly what his followers expect to happen, sooner or later - at the “House of Miracles” in Juazeiro do Norte, the floor is piled high with plastic and wax models of body parts, left by pilgrims who credit Father Cícero for their recoveries from fatal diseases and accidents. There are also many photographs and letters of gratitude.

One reason for this change in the Church’s attitude towards Father Cícero is his steadily increasing cult – millions of people come annually to Juazeiro to honor his memory and to pray for a miracle. For decades already Juazeiro do Norte has been famous for a huge, alabaster statue of Father Cícero (80-foot alabaster statue, showing him in his distinctive flat-brimmed hat and walking stick in hand), now one of the biggest tourist attractions of the region. But to the Church, especially in Brazil, Cícero’s rehabilitation certainly means more than supporting local religious tourism – it means facing and embracing millions of worshippers and numerous pilgrims left for a century on the margins of the local Church. Officially recognizing Father Cícero’s popularity as a saint is also viewed as an effective means for limiting the expansion of other religious organizations (for example the dissident Brazilian Catholic Apostolic Church, which

⁷ <https://international.la-croix.com/news/vatican-pardons-brazilian-miracle-priest/2344>, accessed: 16.12.2015.

canonized him) and many local sects that long ago accepted his cult as a local saint without hesitation.

Conclusions

Father Cícero is perhaps the first Brazilian charismatic religious and political leader and, at the same time, the first popular saint who strongly objected to the Catholic Church hierarchy romanizing ideas, including the necessity to curb the influence of popular religiosity in the Northeast arid region. However, Cícero's charisma appeared only in his adulthood, after the occurrence of miracles – earlier he was respected for launching crusades against drunkenness and prostitution and for proclaiming the need for greater social equality, but it was really the miracles that quickly made him popular in the Northeast with settlers increasingly flocking to Juazeiro to hear him speak and to receive his counsel. Interestingly enough, though, after becoming a politician he challenged local government and officials rather to avoid the need for sudden changes and revolution than to proclaim it, instead pointing to Christian charity and good-heartedness as the means for social justice and improvement. Indeed, he even regularly worked with local political chiefs, proving to be an extremely powerful and efficient political force.

It was, therefore, these miracles (and the resistance of the Church hierarchy in their recognition) that triggered his multiple activities and his increasing popularity, allowing him to base a close emotional relation with his followers on admiration, enthusiasm, respect and total dedication. Politicians, outlaws, rich landowners and peasants alike went in their thousands to ask “Padim Pade Cico”, as he was popularly known, for his blessings – even after he was officially suspended by the Vatican, and later, when he was expelled from the Catholic Church. Even today, politicians running for national or state offices tend to make a ‘political campaign’ stop in Juazeiro do Norte, with some of them paying for the chartered buses and overcrowded trucks that bring their electorate – pilgrims to the very popular religiosity shrine.

The context of miracles and the need to care for parishioners and pilgrims alike polished Father Cícero's many organizational and political talents used to the benefit of his supporters and followers - residents of Juazeiro. Only then Father Cícero, as the undisputed leader, having a clear vision, confidence, determination and strength, did manage to meet all their expectations. Although later on his political power started fading, he continued to hold sway over the numerous poor in Brazil's northeast up to his death in 1934.

It was, therefore, by means of such unique and unusual events, interpreted by his contemporaries as ‘miracles’, that Father Cícero, a humble local parish priest, became a distinguished and much respected leader of the region, offering his followers a program of moral, cultural, social and economic revival and a safe haven in Juazeiro under his undisputed authority. In addition, the conflict with the Church hierarchy unquestionably strengthened his leadership position – one could easily say that the bishops and the Vatican themselves opened the way, contrary to their intentions and presumptions, to his instant political career and to his cult as a popular saint, which was considerably strengthened by a difficult social and economic context of Brazil at the turn of the 19th

and 20th centuries (abolition, poverty, the collapse of the plantation), climatic problems (prolonged droughts), political issues (the fall of the Empire) and a difficult ecclesial reality (lack of unity in the Brazilian Church, a deepening gap between of the official Church and folk religiosity). Such indicators of a serious crisis must have definitely amplified the demand for new and effective leadership in the region fulfilled so well in the collective consciousness by Father Cícero. And, as a result, nowadays, the army of pilgrims has become simply too numerous and powerful a spiritual force to be ignored by the Vatican – while Pentecostal denominations are challenging the Roman Catholic Church's dominance all over Brazil, Father Cicero's devotees have finally started being viewed as allies rather than fanatics and sectarians.

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