

Field Notes from Brazil: We don't believe in Democracy

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Abstract: There is increasing attention to religion and democracy in scholarly research in Brazil. In general terms, when scholars look to religion and democracy, an increasing number focus on the question of evangelicals and electoral politics. Research is reacting to the Brazilian political context provided by the most recent Presidential campaign and the inauguration of a 'terribly evangelical' President. This article considers religion and democracy, particularly with regard to laïcité imported from France to Brazil, and indeed Latin America more widely. The article concludes with 'Field Notes' from interviews and conversations with Pentecostals about contemporary politics in Brazil.

Keywords: Religion, Democracy, Laïcité, Pentecostals.

Notas de uma investigação de campo: não cremos na democracia

Resumo: Há crescente interesse em religião e democracia em pesquisas acadêmicas no Brasil. De modo geral, quando a academia volta sua atenção para religião e democracia, um número crescente foca na questão de evangélicos e política eleitoral. As pesquisas reagem ao contexto político brasileiro fornecido pela última campanha presidencial e a inauguração de um Presidente 'terrivelmente evangélico'. Este artigo contempla religião e democracia, especificamente à luz de laicidade importada da França ao Brasil, e América Latina de modo geral. O artigo termina com notas de uma pesquisa de campo – entrevistas e conversas – com pessoas pentecostais sobre política contemporânea brasileira.

Palavras-chaves: Religião, Democracia, Laicidade. Pentecostais.

Notas de una investigación de campo: no creemos en la democracia

Resumen: Existe un creciente interés por la religión y la democracia en la investigación académica en Brasil. En general, cuando la academia centra su atención en la religión y la democracia, un número creciente se centra en el tema de los evangélicos y la política electoral. Las encuestas reaccionan al contexto político brasileño proporcionado por la

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última campanha presidencial y la toma de posesión de un presidente "terriblemente evangélico". Este artículo contempla la religión y la democracia, específicamente a la luz del laicismo importado de Francia a Brasil y América Latina en general. El artículo termina con notas de una investigación de campo - entrevistas y conversaciones - con personas pentecostales sobre la política brasileña contemporánea.

Palabras-claves: Religión, Democracia, Laicismo, Pentecostales.

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Introduction

Brazil is a democracy. After a period of military dictatorship (1964-1985), the redemocratization process in Brazil, and indeed across the region, has appeared to consolidate itself. Of course, the *coup d'état* still peppers the political scene in Latin America in the twenty-first century. Since the year 2000, the following countries have experienced some form of *coup d'état*: Ecuador, Venezuela, Honduras, Brazil and Bolivia. However, differently from the twentieth century, the *coup d'état* of the twenty-first century appears to be the venture of civilians – normally political and economic elites – rather than exclusively military leaders. It also appears to take place broadly within the democratic system, rather than attempt to overthrow democracy.

Invariably, the military in Latin America plays a powerful role in the life of the nation-states. Historically, with figures like Simon Bolivar, the military has acted as creator and defender of the nation-state². During the twentieth century, this played out through a series of military interventions and military dictatorships designed to defend the nation-state from perceived threats, both internal and external. Frequently, the military interventions and subsequent dictatorships formally announced and promoted their actions as a defense of democracy.

This situation led a number of observers to note the interrelationship between weak states and a strong military³. As attention turned to redemocratization processes, political scientists placed an emphasis on reverting this 'weak state-strong military' situation in order to consolidate democracy in the region. Democracy, it was thought, would be consolidated and strengthened across Latin America to the extent that the

² Bolivarianism tried to suppress nationalist tendencies during the decolonization process across Latin America, developing the idea of the *Patria Grande*. In a strict sense, Bolivar sought to create and defend the *Patria Grande* not create individual nation-states. However, his vision will subsequently inform the nationalisms of various Latin American governments.

³ This theory is not restricted to analysis of Latin America. It is widely applied to Africa and Asia, too.

military was brought under civilian control, and into political processes under civilian control (MARES & MARTINEZ, 2014, p.3). While the progress towards this objective varies across the region, the theory underpinning it is still prevalent.

History tells us not to discount future military interventions in Latin American politics. However, in the twenty-first century, the increasing perceived threat to democracy and its consolidation has come from a more surprising group: civilians acting in the name of religion. While studies of civil-military relations in the region, and particularly new research into the period of military dictatorships, has left untenable popular and populist notions of 'soft dictatorship' and 'economic miracles' (ATENCIO, SCNHEIDER & SCNHEIDER, 2018, p. 3), less attention has been dedicated to popular and populist religious understandings of democracy.

The remainder of this article focusses on addressing religion and democracy, particularly in Brazil. Firstly, it briefly sketches understandings about religion and democracy. Secondly, based on fieldwork amongst groups of Pentecostals, it documents some approaches and understandings of this group towards religion and democracy. The opinions expressed counter some of the widespread contemporary analysis about evangelicals and electoral politics, and confirm other tensions observable in Brazil. This is in part due to the question of the rise of 'identity politics' and the opportunities and problems that it brings to democracy – both representative and participatory. 'Identity politics' and its consequences for representative and participatory democracy is not addressed in this article⁴.

Specifically, this article arrives at the surprising conclusion that a significant number of people do not believe in democracy for religious reasons. Obviously, this can be understood as a threat to democracy, and forms a part of the wider trends of 'democratic deficit', which undermine confidence and trust in democracy. It also highlights a difference at the micro-level – through the voices of participants in the interviews and conversations – and the macro-level trends. It is clear from the micro-level (in the field notes that follow) that there is reticence and suspicion about democracy both representative and participatory amongst those interviewed. However, this must be balanced by the fact that increasing numbers politicians and civil servants are occupying democratic spaces *in the name of religion*. This dissonance requires further probing to better understand the threats and opportunities that religion brings to democracy in Brazil⁵.

⁴ 'Identity politics' is another key area of discussion and tension in Brazil. It is beyond the scope of this preliminary article, which, as the title indicates, is drawn from field notes during 2020.

⁵ Again, it is beyond the scope of this preliminary text, which draws on field notes from 2020.

Religion and Democracy in Latin America

The newly independent nation-states in Latin America drew heavily on the French and American Revolutions. *Laïcité* was a nation-state principle. Sometimes, this is expressed popularly as the separation between Church and State. However, *laïcité* is a more explicit political project of the nation-state that seeks to control a powerful church. It is not so much a question of separation, as control by the state. The statecraft of *laïcité* is to remove the power of the Church and bring it under control of the nation-state. In some sense, like the contemporary debates around civilian-military relations, *laïcité* brings the Church under civilian control and into political processes under civilian control. This was very important in Latin America where the Church rivalled the Court since the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) in matters of statecraft. The newly configured nation-states had to choose between a powerful Church and a rival political system. The choice, universally in the region, was to bring the Church under control of the Court, and into the political system based on *laïcité*.

The problem with this settlement, and indeed more widely with *laïcité*, is that it depends on having (and controlling) one powerful Church. At the time of independence in Latin America, Roman Catholic hegemony was unquestioned in the region. This is not the case in the twenty-first century. There is now more than one church with significant influence on societies across the region. Coupled with this is the rise of awareness of religious pluralism. *Laïcité* struggles with aspects of religious pluralism. Its struggles are rooted in its own design.

Laïcité is designed to control one powerful Church. It was not designed to address the question of a plurality of powerful churches, or even a plurality of religions with no relation to a church, powerful or not. France's ongoing struggles in relation to how it democratically addresses Muslim political inputs are but one example of this. In Latin America, attention most obviously turns to what the literature loosely describes as 'evangelicals', what in this dossier is called *grupos carismáticos católicos e pentecostais*. What Muslims in France and charismatic Roman Catholics or Pentecostals in Latin America have in common is that neither group is formally contemplated by *laïcité*. This is for two reasons: either they are a minority and by definition not rivalling the nation-state and not needing to be brought under control, or more specifically they are minority not under the

⁶ Ricardo Mariano has noted that Brazilian *laïcité* did not follow the French model to the letter. The Roman Catholic Church still enjoyed huge privileges, and the State still persecuted other religions to the benefit of the Roman Catholic Church. MARIANO, Ricardo. "Laicidade à brasileira: Católicos, pentecostais e laicos em disputa na esfera pública" In *Civitas*, Porto Alegre v. 11 n. 2, maio-ago. 2011, p. 246. In discussing *laïcité* in the course of this article, I do not ignore the varieties of *laïcité* practiced in Brazil and around the globe.

control of the religious hegemony of the nation-state⁷. In both France and Latin America, Muslims and Pentecostals, for example, are not part of a powerful Roman Catholic Church.

It is perhaps worth a historical detour to note that while at independence Roman Catholic hegemony was unquestioned, Latin American was not universally Roman Catholic. The work of scholars on Judaism, Islam, African Religions and Amerindian Religions, not to mention the scholars of Protestantism in the region⁸, all demonstrate a significant if minority presence of religions other than Christianity under the control of the Roman Catholic Church at least since the 15th century when Latin America enters the World System. The model of *laïcité* – developed centuries later and imported to Latin America – does not contemplate this historical reality. The structures of Latin American nation-states, for example, are inherited from both canon law, and Greek and Roman models of society and politics⁹. This can give the false impression that, in the case of Brazil, for example, its roots and ethos are Roman Catholic. Sometimes this theory is advanced under the guise of lusotropicalism. Lusotropicalism is an influential theory created by Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre in the early twentieth century to denote and explain Brazil's exceptionalism as a civilization. Brazil is more than a nation-state in the understanding of Freyre. He roots Brazil's exceptionalism as a civilization in the Christocentrism of its Roman Catholic ethos (FREYRE, 2010, p. 91). The elision of *laïcité* and lusotropicalism has important consequences for contemporary political processes in Brazil, particularly democracy.

The model of *laïcité* sketched here is not the only way that it need operate. Over time, and in different places, it can and has evolved. The *laïcité* of the French Revolution is different from the secularism of the American Revolution. The USA had no need to bring under control one powerful Roman Catholic Church. Far from understanding *laïcité* as exclusively about controlling a powerful Church, Charles Taylor has advocated for a twenty-first century understanding of *laïcité* as a form of management of different religious and philosophical views (TAYLOR, 2014, p. 59). In its (preferable) model, Taylor argues, that state neutrality is paramount:

⁷ This holds true even for charismatic Roman Catholics who are a minority within the Roman Catholic Church, and not always under the full control of the Bishops' Conferences with many charismatic Roman Catholic movements benefitting from transnational alliances.

⁸ Technically Protestantism is not a different religion from Roman Catholicism. It is a different church within the same religion, Christianity. Frequently, scholarly literature does not make this technical distinction.

⁹ For a broader interdisciplinary study of the influence and legacy of Greece and Rome on Latin America see: LAIRD, Andrew, MILLER, Nicola. *Antiquities and Classical Traditions in Latin America*. Wiley-Blackwell: London, 2018.

the point of state neutrality is precisely to avoid favoring or disfavoring not just religion but any basic position, religious or non-religious. We can't favor Christianity over Islam, but also religion over against nonbelief in religion or vice versa (TAYLOR, 2015, p. 60).

Taylor is attempting to redraw the sometimes-excessive anti-religious nature of some models of *laïcité* and secularism, which seek to control and exclude religious contributions from political processes. However, the matter is perhaps more complex than he is willing to admit. For example, how can a nation-state, which operates a judicial system based on both Christian canon law, and Roman law account for the use of and inclusion of *Sharia* in its constitutional settlement¹⁰? This question arises directly in relation to the constitutions, and the practice of *laïcité* and democracy in Latin America.

These preliminary remarks about *laïcité* are important for two major reason. Firstly, in the 'Field Notes' section of this article, which engages with Pentecostals, the concept of *laïcité* is often rejected for religious reasons. This will be explored further in that section. However, the second reason for addressing *laïcité* is its relation to democracy. Alfred Stepan, and indeed the wider literature in political science related to democracy, does not insist on the need for democracy to practice *laïcité* to be considered democratic. This fact is important to consider in relation to Latin America and specifically Brazil where often the contemporary 'defense of democracy' is couched in terms of 'defense of *laïcité*'. In other words, due to the model of *laïcité* imported from France, democracy and its practice is often conflated with *laïcité* in contemporary politics in Brazil.

Alfred Stepan has drawn attention to two important aspects of contemporary debates about religion and democracy. Firstly, he advocated the concept of 'twin tolerations'. The twin tolerations are a consideration of the necessary boundaries of freedom between an elected government and religious groups, and the necessary boundaries of freedom of religious individuals and groups from government (STEPAN, 2001, p. 213-255). Stepan himself notes that the exploration and practice of the 'twin tolerations' will not produce a 'one size fits all' democracy. In other words, the nature and

¹⁰ This is perhaps the most obvious and pressing issue facing *laïcité*. It is important to note, as in the case of Latin America, that it is not a question of practicing or not *Sharia*. *Sharia* has been practiced in Latin America at least since the 15th century. The question is how – if at all – the constitution of the Latin American nation-state maintains neutrality between different religious and philosophical views, including questions pertaining to canon law and *sharia*. In maintaining this neutrality, how

possibilities of state-religion relations (a broader category in the twenty-first century than the state-church model contemplated by *laïcité* in the nineteenth century) are more varied now than 200 years ago, and the variety of democratic possibilities are more varied too.

In this vein, Stepan, in line with the political science literature on democracy, noted that there are four popular misconceptions assumed about democracy and its practice. Firstly, the misconception that democracy always requires a strict separation of state and religion. Secondly, the misconception that Christianity, particularly Western Christianities¹¹, are tolerant. Thirdly, the misconception that religion has no place in political processes and instead consensus is built on philosophical shared principles. Fourthly, the misconception that democracy requires and is strengthened by the decreasing presence and practice of religion (STEPAN, 2015, p. 270-272). In different ways, each of these misconceptions is played out in contemporary political debates in Brazil about religion and democracy. Again, this will be explored more fully in the 'Field Notes' section.

At this stage, it is perhaps important to underline that Alfred Stepan is not an outlier. His scholarship on democracy and on Latin America is still referenced and recognized within both the fields of political science and Brazilian studies. He was recognized as a Brazilianist. His observations on democracy also find support and resonance in the political science literature. None of the classic works treating democracy advocates for a definition of democracy that conflate democracy and *laïcité* (DAHL, 1971; LINZ & STEPAN, 1996; LIPHART, 1999). This consensus in the scholarship is significantly different from the contemporary discussions in Brazil about religion and democracy, whether in academic circles, amongst different religious groups, or in the echo chambers of social media. This, again, will be an important background to the exploration in the 'Field Notes' which follow.

Field Notes from Brazil

This section is based on a series of interviews and conversations conducted by the researcher during 2020 with Pentecostals in Vitoria, ES. In November 2020, Brazil held municipal elections during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews and conversations about religion and democracy were conducted between August and

does the constitution recognize the practice and contribution of *Sharia* within the life of the nation-state?

¹¹ The term is used in the plural to denote that Western Christianities, at least in theological terms, exert a continuing influence on theologies and Christianities that no longer consider themselves Western. Brazilian and Latin American Christianities being a case in point. I make this observation because it is important for some of the documentation in the 'Field notes' section.

November 2020 by videoconference. The interviews and conversations were always conducted in groups. Twenty-seven people participated in the interviews and conversations – five women, 22 men. The participants were aged 20-55. The majority of the participants live in urban peripheries and come from low-income backgrounds¹². Pentecostalism influenced all of the participants, but not all participants are formally members of Pentecostal churches. One person was from the Roman Catholic Church, 4 people from the Presbyterian Church and 4 people from Baptist churches. The remaining participants were from the Assembly of God Church, or a series of independent Pentecostal churches strongly influenced by the Assembly of God Church¹³.

Pentecostalism in Latin America is a movement. Different scholars hold differing opinions about whether it is an autonomous movement indigenous to the region, or whether it is imported, primarily from the USA. Both scholarly arguments have merits and shortcomings. Historically, Pentecostalism is inserted into Brazil in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by missionaries under the influence of the pietistic revival in both Europe and the USA. Differently from what are sometimes called historic Protestants, Pentecostals quickly asserted their autonomy from the foreign missionaries and assimilated Amerindian and Afro-Brazilian cosmovisions and practices. Similarly to historic Protestants, Pentecostals perpetuated a strong feeling of anti-Roman Catholicism across the region. The exponential growth of Pentecostalism, and the birth of Neopentecostalism, occurred during the period of the military dictatorship. In an analysis of religion and democracy, the correlation between Pentecostalism and military dictatorship should not be overlooked¹⁴. Indeed, this dossier notes the presence of religious candidates for legislative and executive functions as early as the 1980s during the transition to democracy.

Pentecostalism, as a movement, whether indigenous or imported, demonstrates two further characteristics in Brazil. It is part of a transnational movement, and it is an expression of massified religion¹⁵. These two characteristics appear to be important in any

¹² Faculdade Unida de Vitória understands 'low-income background' as students from families with a monthly income of up to 3 minimum wages (the minimum wage is R\$ 1.045,00 per month).

¹³ The interviews and conversations confirmed the thesis of Bernardo Campos about the Pentecostalization of both Protestantism and Popular Religion (2002). Historic Protestants – Presbyterians and Baptists – and have not traditionally paid much attention to popular religion, mainly due to questions of social class, however, even the participants from these churches demonstrated Pentecostal influences.

¹⁴ It is not a topic for discussion in this article.

¹⁵ I am using the term 'massified religion' in line with the theological reflections of Juan Luis Segundo. In Segundo's analysis massified religion elides membership of a church, popular religion and socio-cultural values so that they are sometimes used synonymously (1982, 185).

consideration of religion and democracy. A transnational religious movement, like Pentecostalism, enables a local group, in this case Brazilian Pentecostals, to mobilize global networks in support of or defense of issues apparently pertaining to their practice, customs or institutions. This transnational aspect of Pentecostalism is important to understand how it engages with democracy and the perceived threats it attributes to democracy. Any localized debate about religion and democracy is configured by the transnational nature of both religion and democracy. The ongoing debates about religious freedom and belief are perhaps the most evident manifestation of this transnational movement. Sometimes what appears to be a local situation is in fact part of a transnational mobilization. Perhaps a concrete example of this in Brazil is the ongoing (and sometimes fractious) debate about the place of God in political life: *Deus acima de tudo, Brasil acima de todos*. Alternatively, even the fear amongst Pentecostals of the threat of communism¹⁶. It is important to remember that these local manifestations and debates actually form part of transnational religious and political movements¹⁷.

The second characteristic – that of massified religion – is also important. Pentecostalism is frequently, although not exclusively, experienced as a popular and populist religion and a socio-cultural value system. The massified Pentecostal movement also affects other christianities, which are not necessarily Pentecostal, with Roman Catholicism and Protestantism in Latin America being a case in point. Some have argued that christianities in Latin America are undergoing a process of Pentecostalization (CAMPOS, 2002). This process of Pentecostalization is experienced as the massification of a certain kind of religious culture. Some scholars, notably Gideon Alencar, have identified it as religious culture, which is anti-Roman Catholic, and anti-democratic (ALENCAR, 2005)¹⁸. This kind of massified religious experience in Brazil has important consequences when we consider religion and democracy.

For example, all of those participating in the groups advocated separation of Church and State as necessary in Brazil. In part, this is perhaps a reflection of the popular (and scholarly) misconception in Brazil that democracy always requires a strict separation of state and religion. Alfred Stepan is right to draw attention to this misconception. However, in the interviews and conversations with participants about this strict

¹⁶ Anti-communism was a strong feeling amongst participants. As the weeks passed, increasingly certain participants were addressed as ‘comrade’ by other group members when identified as engaging with agendas perceived to be in the human rights field, or associated with left-wing political ideas.

¹⁷ It is important not to homogenize Pentecostals and Pentecostalism. However, the reflections in this text are derived directly from the interviews and conversations with participants, which did demonstrate a certain massified religious experience, sometimes associated with fundamentalism.

¹⁸ It also has strong anti-intellectual aspects, although Alencar does not directly address this.

separation, other elements came to the fore. The strict separation advocated by participants owed more to feelings of anti-Roman Catholicism than necessarily support per se for *laïcité*.

When probed further about models of government, the majority of participants suggested that the only biblical form of government, and therefore the only form of government in line with the will of God, is a theocracy¹⁹. Obviously, there is little evidence of systematic reflection amongst participants about how to reconcile theocracy with *laïcité*. It was surprising how effortlessly a number of participants moved between an articulation of strict separation (*laïcité*) and a theocracy as the preferred model.

Perhaps by interpreting *laïcité* through the lens of a massified anti-Roman Catholic religious culture can help to explain this apparently incongruous political comprehension of participants. As mentioned earlier, it is certainly possible to interpret *laïcité* as a way of limiting, controlling and even excluding the Roman Catholic Church from its traditional influence on the politics and culture of Brazil. In this sense, participants are not articulating a position in favor of *laïcité*, nor are they articulating a position in favor of Charles Taylor's suggestion of a neutral nation-state. Instead, participants advocated *laïcité* as a policy of statecraft to favor other religions²⁰ at the expense of the Roman Catholic Church. The participants, in favoring another religion, are also not assuming a position of favoring other religions per se in a context of religious pluralism. They are assuming a position of the nation-state favoring *my* religion at the expense of the Roman Catholic Church. Understood in this way, the nation-state becomes an 'instrument in God's hand to fulfill God's will'. We can call this a theocratic-*laïcité*.

The second misconception identified by Alfred Stepan is that Christianity, particularly Western Christianity, is tolerant. In the global literature on Pentecostalism, there is a debate about whether it is in fact 'Western'. However, the leading scholars in Brazil side with an interpretation that roots Pentecostalism in the tradition of the Protestant Reformation (normally the so-called radical Reformation), the Protestant missionary movement (normally the pietistic revival movements), and North American socio-cultural values (normally WASP, racist and fundamentalist) (MENDONÇA & VELASQUES FILHO, 1990)²¹. This Western root of Pentecostalism exposes it to the

¹⁹ I do not propose to discuss the hermeneutics of this reading of the Bible by participants. That would merit a full discussion on its own.

²⁰ See earlier note about religion and church.

²¹ This understanding is not restricted to scholars in Brazil. The Assembly of God Church, perhaps the most influential Pentecostal church in Brazil, assumes this position in its Declaration of Faith produced by its theological committee and approved by its leadership (SILVA, 2019).

practice of Western Christianity's intolerance. Alfred Stepan notes that part of the intolerance in Western Christianity is demonstrated by its 'multivocal' approach to democracy (STEPAN, 2014, p. 270). From the 16th century onwards, Western Christianity continued to display anti-democratic tendencies. Indeed, in the case of the Roman Catholic Church, it was only with the Vatican II (1962-1965) that the church finally came down decidedly in favor of democracy.

The anti-democratic nature of Pentecostalism – the theocratic form of government as the only biblical form in line with the will of God, as expressed by participants – is worth exploring in light of this 'Western' legacy of intolerance. It is important to note that intolerance is not intrinsic to Pentecostalism, but is a legacy of its radical reformation, pietistic, WASP, racist and fundamentalist roots in Western Christianity's story of intolerance. Moreover, in the specific case of Brazilian Pentecostalism, it is also important to note that it massified during the military dictatorship in the twentieth century. It is clear from scholarship on the period of the military dictatorship that some churches thrived, while others were persecuted. In general, Pentecostalism thrived and responded positively to the military dictatorship's 'civil religion' built on 'family values'²². Interestingly participants all identified a recent sermon from pulpits about 'the family'; none could recall ever having heard a sermon about democracy.

However, as Alencar rightly notes, Pentecostalism grows from an ecclesiological model that should favor democracy: congregationalism (ALENCAR, 2005, p. 54). Not all 'Western Christianity' was intolerant of democracy. Churches played and continue to play important roles in democracy. In other nation-states, particularly the USA, this congregational ecclesiology has been influential in creating a culture of democracy. Alencar, as a sociologist of religion, is also quick to note that congregational ecclesiologies, in addition to helping create a democratic culture, have aided the creation of a popular or massified democratic culture reaching parts of the population normally excluded from traditional democratic statecraft. What, we might ask in harmony with Alencar, has gone wrong in Brazil?

Part of the answer comes from the participants themselves. While Brazilian Pentecostalism formally operates a congregational ecclesiology, in practice each congregation functions with an episcopal ecclesiology. "The Pastor decides", was how one participant put it. However, again this should not come as a surprise. Brazil's politics and culture has been shaped and influenced by Roman Catholicism, and therefore an

²² For a study about the civil religion of the Brazilian military dictatorship, see: AZEVEDO, Thales de. *A religião civil brasileira: um instrumento político*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1981

episcopal ecclesiology²³. The institutions of state are, largely, Roman Catholic influenced institutions of state. Popular culture has the same influences. For a religious movement – indigenous or imported – to survive and thrive in Brazil, it needs to adapt to this Roman Catholic context. Brazilian Pentecostalism is congregational in theory, and frequently episcopal in practice. This enables it to fit the ‘*sabe com quem está falando?*’ culture described by Roberto da Matta (1997, p. 193), a culture which, it should be observed, is both interpersonal and impersonal, and deeply rooted in authoritarianism.

The third of the misconceptions outlined by Alfred Stepan is that religion has no place in political processes and instead consensus is built on philosophical shared principles. This is the classic position set out by John Rawls (1996). The Rawlsian position is not without contestation amongst scholars, indeed, to some degree, the ongoing discussion of his proposal sustains whole fields of scholarly activity, such as so-called public theology. Moreover and perhaps more importantly, the Rawlsian position is not without contestation in contemporary political processes in Brazil. Alfred Stepan built his ‘twin tolerations’ in dialogue with the Rawlsian principle and, in Brazil, it is precisely the pressure on the ‘twin tolerations’ and the presence of a minority, but massified Pentecostalism, that brings democracy into dispute.

The ‘twin tolerations’ are a consideration of the necessary boundaries of freedom between an elected government and religious groups, and the necessary boundaries of freedom of religious individuals and groups from government. In Brazil’s most recent Presidential election, and in the practice of its subsequent executive and legislature, the necessary boundaries suggested by Stepan are clearly under pressure, or being reconfigured to reflect the Brazil of the twenty-first century. Oftentimes it has been the judiciary which has stepped in to ‘police’ the necessary boundaries. This in itself is another sign of the transnational nature of religious and political movements whereby we are seeing an emerging trend of a judicialization of politics in the attempts to maintain the ‘twin tolerations’ and *laïcité* à la Rawls.

The participants clearly articulated a preference for an elected government in harmony with their socio-cultural values. However, there was not a consensus about the necessary boundary of freedom exercised by both government and Pentecostals. One participant asked, should churches and church people be involved in elected politics at all, especially when using the name of the church in an election campaign? Another

²³ Indeed a large part of the shift in Roman Catholic ecclesiology following Vatican II, with *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base* (CEBs), and the work of theologians like Leonardo Boff, is an attempt to deploy a Protestant ecclesiology – specifically along the lines of a congregational model. It is therefore no surprise that CEBs, with this congregational ecclesiology, were so important to the redemocratisation process in Brazil.

questioned the use of religious language by elected legislative members, and indeed some government ministers in the exercise of their duties. Interestingly – at least publicly in the interviews and conversations – no participant related these questions to the figure of the President of the Republic, that is to say either his use of Pentecostals for electoral purposes nor his use of religious language in official communications. It seems that the participant Pentecostals are aware of the ‘twin tolerations’ within democracy, but reject the Rawlsian proposition of no religion and therefore a philosophical basis for common values. It is also worth noting that the current figure of the President of the Republic is exempted from the necessary boundaries of the ‘twin tolerations’ by participants, and is positively appreciated for contesting the Rawlsian proposition and bringing a religious bias to common values.

Another factor worth mentioning in passing in relation to the ‘twin tolerations’ and the rejection of the Rawlsian proposition is the anti-intellectualism of the Pentecostalism of the participants. This anti-intellectual undercurrent in Brazil is an important consideration in reflections on religion and democracy. Gideon Alencar credits Pentecostalism with helping to reduce illiteracy in urban peripheries, and this is certainly important (2005, p. 53). Democracy depends on literacy. However, among the participants in my groups not one person was able to identify a Pentecostal church that has literacy classes. Moreover, participants shared that the Bible was at the center of religious practice, particularly memorization. Memorization is a well-known technique for illiterate adults to negotiate the signs and symbols of modern urban life. It is based on recognition and recollection more than understanding. The experience of the participants echoed the description by Ruben Alves in his book, *Religião e Repressão*, when he describes a theology of ‘affirmative propositions’ appropriately memorized and repeated.

This anti-intellectualism, coupled with illiteracy and a popular religious culture that operates through the memorization and repetition of ‘affirmative propositions’, is precisely the point of friction in the ‘twin tolerations’ in Brazil. The use of religious language and symbols – Pentecostal in this case – by elected government demonstrates a willingness to engage anti-intellectual, illiterate popular religion in the construction of common values of shared signs and symbols. Obviously, the signs and symbols used by elected government need to be those memorized and repeated by Pentecostals in the exercise of their necessary religious freedom. From outside this Pentecostalism, and this specific form of operation of ‘twin tolerations’, it is all too easy to deride the Pentecostalization of democracy through the elision of massified religion – church, popular religion and socio-cultural values – with Western Christianity’s practice of intolerance. The major argument against the presence of religion in politics, and

particularly monotheistic religions, is their supposed epistemic intolerance towards others.

These debates have been conducted on the ground identified by Alfred Stepan as the fourth misconception, namely, that democracy requires and is strengthened by the decreasing presence and practice of religion. This perception and argument derived from a European Enlightenment tradition, which sees religion as irrational, and therefore dangerous, and inferior, therefore to be overcome. It strongly underlies theories of religion in the fields of sociology and anthropology, as well as the social sciences more broadly²⁴. However, many scholars have argued against this misconception. Perhaps one of the leading examples is Miroslav Volf. Noting that religious people generally act from religious convictions, he demonstrates that the Rawlsian proposition is untenable in a world where the majority of people are religious. A major shift needed in democratic politics, argues Volf, is how to distinguish between tolerant and intolerant religions – between religions that contribute to human flourishing and those that are malfunctioning totalitarianisms (to use Volf's own language) (2011). The participants demonstrated a positioning in line with Stepan's 'twin tolerations' and Volf's observation that there can be no compulsion in religion. According to Volf, religion grounded in the 'golden rule' – to treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself or the 'love of neighbour' in monotheistic religions – commits religion to pluralism and the exercise of the necessary freedoms in democracy.

One final observation from the participants was about democracy itself. 'We don't believe in democracy' was a widely held opinion. I would like to explore this a little. To do so, I would like to restate some of the contributions from participants and from the scholars. According to scholars, 'belief in democracy' is fundamental to its functioning. The increasing concerns around 'democratic deficits' point to fears about the ebbing of belief in the model. However, when scholars discuss belief in democracy and attempts to reduce democratic deficit they do so generally on the philosophical basis outlined by Rawls. In other words, belief in democracy is about the philosophical basis of common values that include democracy, human rights and the common good.

The participant Pentecostals do not express their lack of belief in democracy in these terms. Put simply, the Pentecostal participants do not believe in democracy because it is not a biblical form of government, and therefore it is not God's will. At one level, this observation is quite correct. We do not find democracy in the Bible, at least not in

²⁴ It is worth noting that Brazil's public universities are founded on this concept of the exclusion of religion. While nowadays, there are many scholars of religion in public universities and flourishing fields of study, structurally, Brazil's public universities continue to look at Theology & Religious Studies with suspicion.

the form that it is practiced today. However, this does not necessarily mean that it is not biblical. The question of God's will, as any theologian will tell you, is very difficult to discern. A classic contribution from the political theology of Oliver O'Donovan might help us (1996). O'Donovan notes that Christianity has no specific preference for a polity, neither democracy nor theocracy are inevitable in Christian theology. Likewise, Christianity has lived under, and survived, many different kinds of polity. Some have allowed Christianity to thrive, while others have brought persecution. There is no blueprint; there is no idealized Christian polity that could ever be biblical or fulfilling God's will, in the sense articulated by participant Pentecostals.

The position of Pentecostal participants about not believing in democracy, and O'Donovan's scholarly sophistication in searching for the theological roots of politics, brings a new challenge to debates about religion and democracy in Brazil. Can Brazilian democracy make the religious argument for democracy to encourage Pentecostals, and others, to believe in democracy? The practice of democracy depends on belief in democracy, and religious people generally act upon religious convictions. As Brazil continues to navigate the 'twin tolerations', and to consolidate and deepen its sometimes fragile democracy, the twin threats to its democracy are military intervention and religious revindication. Can Brazilian democracy find a way to bring both military and religion under civilian control and into the democratic process? This is a huge challenge in light of my interviews and conversations with Pentecostals in Vitoria, ES. I would argue that the nation-state now needs to be able to make the religious argument for belief in democracy. If not, perhaps Brazil risks authoritarianism and theocracy.

A Coda by way of Conclusion

Democracy and *laïcité* are both equally important, but they are not dependent on each other, as Alfred Stepan has reminded us. In Brazil, the reconfiguration of religion and democracy posit the question as to whether, as important as they are together up to this point in Brazilian history, they are equally tenable in their current form for Brazil's future? This kind of discussion places us before the social theory of Roberto Mangabeira Unger, particularly his theories of 'institutional imagination' (2005) which are concerned with a deepening of democracy, an expansion of opportunity and an overcoming of false institutional determinism. For democracy to deepen and expand in Brazil, institutional imagination is urgently needed to help its massified religions – churches, popular religion and socio-culture values – believe in democracy. It is not clear that Brazil's nation-state structure, inherited from *laïcité* and lusotropicalism, is fully open to what Stepan has called the variety of democratic possibilities in the twenty-first century. This article, drawing on

Field Notes amongst Pentecostals, sets out some of the misconceptions, frictions and possibilities for religion and democracy in Brazil.

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