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978-0-521-09848-9 - The Political Transformation of the Brazilian Catholic Church
Thomas C. Bruneau

Excerpt

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Introduction

My goals in this book are threefold: to describe change in the Church and give a case study of the process in Brazil; to explain why change came about and present a hypothesis based on this analysis; and to speculate on the political implications of change in the Church. Once the goals are stated the question of how I am going to achieve them is immediately raised. The work of Ivan Vallier is most relevant and useful in this regard, for he focuses on the institutional level and relations between the Churches and other social orders.¹ In opting for this approach, which I selected when beginning my field research, I am intentionally leaving other approaches aside. For example, I am not particularly concerned here with the 'Catholic ethic' and its role in economic underdevelopment. Nor am I going to focus exclusively on the Church's programs of social change, although I do devote the better part of a chapter to them and their importance. Nor will I focus directly on 'Church and state' in the traditional sense of studying concordats and the nuncios' machinations with political leaders.

This book brings together much of the institutional character and process of the Church and links it to the society and politics. I have opted for this larger and more complex approach because it is quite impossible to analyze change in this institution independent of others. To clarify the changing nature of the interrelationships between the Church and other groups, and to show the political dimension of the problem of change, I analyze the Church from a historical perspective.²

By 'the Church' I mean four distinct but closely interrelated components: a message, an institution and its relationships with the Universal Church and the state. The message is that of Christ, which seeks to lead all men to salvation. The Church is inseparable from this message: it is holy because it was created by God to bring his message to man. This message is, of course, transcendental as it relates man to an ultimate end in a Creator. Thus the Church has a very special 'product', and one which gives it a distinctive identity far beyond secular institutions. The total message in doctrine and theology has been systematized and is constantly being updated to relate the message to different times and places. Thus the religion, as a system of symbols, beliefs, and acts, shows tremendous continuity over the past two thousand years as well as considerable variations with relation to particular questions. In some cases, an apparently minor reinterpretation in a concrete situation can have tremendous importance.

¹ Ivan Vallier, *Catholicism, Social Control, and Modernization in Latin America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1970).

² My approach is informed by Selznick's. 'The study of institutions is in some ways comparable to the clinical study of personality. It requires a genetic and developmental approach, an emphasis on historical origins and growth stages. There is a need to see the enterprise as a whole and to see how it is transformed as new ways of dealing with a changing environment evolve.' Philip Selznick, *Leadership in Administration* (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson and Co., 1957), p. 141.

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In Brazil, for example, the theological linking of man as soul with man as body, during the grave social situation of the 1950s, was instrumental in the move toward religion as a stimulant rather than an opiate. At times, also, the message is out of the control of the institution. Beyond the official doctrine, there are often pockets of 'folk' or 'cultural' Catholicism which have become captured or bounded in a particular time and place.

While the endowment of Christ's message makes the Church a very special institution, it is basically just that – an institution. There have been varying stresses upon the Church as institution at different times. Today, after the Second Vatican Council, the emphasis is tending toward the idea of the Church as a community, but this community is still an institution and if one doubts it he need but review one of the thousands of texts on Canon Law which set forth the institutional rules to regulate its operations.³ While there are competing interpretations of the institutional content of the Church, it is worth noting that the CERIS study entitled *A Igreja no Brasil* (The Church in Brazil) deals exclusively with structures and personnel.⁴

In Brazil, this institution is divided into 190 ecclesiastical units, such as archdioceses, and dioceses, under approximately 241 archbishops, bishops, and other ecclesiastical dignitaries. These units are further divided into 4,947 parishes under the supervision of some 12,000 priests. Then there are 40,000 nuns and a few thousand brothers who teach in the Church's 2,000 secondary schools and 12 universities or who minister to the sick and needy in 865 hospitals and 2,334 social institutes. Personnel are trained in 77 major seminaries, 283 minor seminaries and 85 novitiates. The faithful are reached not only through services in the parishes, but also through some 50 lay movements or organizations.⁵ Although Canon Law sets forth explicitly the relations between all units, in actual fact there are enormous complications in administering the institution and it bears little resemblance to the monolithic image critics often present.

The two relationships of a national Church are with the Holy See and with the state within whose boundaries it is located. These relationships are integral aspects of the Church, not being in any way tangential or secondary to its nature, yet they are often ignored in discussions or dealt with as matters of secondary importance.

A Roman Catholic Church located in any part of the world has as its primary referent, in terms of controls and doctrine, the Universal Church with its center in the Vatican. Bishops are finally selected by the Pope; they must visit Rome

³ See e.g., René Metz, *What Is Canon Law?* trans. Michael Derrick (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1960). One can also note that, in a recent excellent book, John L. McKenzie gives particular emphasis to the structural features as they define for him what is particularly Roman about the Roman Catholic Church. John L. McKenzie, *The Roman Catholic Church* (Garden City: Image Books, 1969).

⁴ Winifredo Plagge, *A Igreja no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: CERIS, 1965).

⁵ Centro de Estatística Religiosa e Investigações Sociais (CERIS), *Anuário Católico do Brasil* 3rd. ed. (Rio de Janeiro: CERIS, 1965). See Appendix for further selected statistics on the institution. CERIS is in part a research center for the Church. Much of their material is in mimeographed form, which makes it difficult to give full and consistent citations.

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every five years and remain in constant communication with the various sectors of the Holy See. Since the Second Vatican Council, the National Bishops' Conferences have increasingly gained in jurisdiction, but their standing is minimal in comparison with the Pope and his ambassador – the nuncio, legate, etc. Seminary training is closely regulated by Rome; liturgy and catechism changes must be approved there and all recourse must ultimately be directed to this level.

After having stated that a national Church is only part of the Universal, I must turn around and point out that it shares the same territory, constituency and aspiration for men's allegiance as that other all-inclusive institution, the state. For reasons of power as well as the impact of belief, the relations between Church and state have been historically dynamic and often intense. In those countries of the world (Latin America, Latin Europe, Holland and even Germany) where the Church has been established, and thus linked with government, and where a majority of the population are members of the faith, the state must pay considerable attention to its relationship with the Church. The latter, for reasons of survival if nothing more, pays equal heed to this relationship.

The Church is the combination of these four components. In order to bring them together and to discuss change, I have adopted as an analytical focus the setting and implementation of goals. The goals of any institution are definitions of its relationship with its environment. Goals inform us where the institution fits into society and what it is expected to accomplish for society. The Church's goal is to influence individuals and whole societies.⁶ Influence means that the Church gives a specific and direct orientation to individuals and societies. It is 'marking' the object of influence with the message of Christ. Influence, in this sense, is the capacity whereby one actor has another act in a way he ordinarily would not. For the Church, this meant at times forced conversion or religious wars; occasionally, it refers to spontaneous conversion on the basis of beliefs; and sometimes it just means assuming that a Catholic culture will gently guide the individual towards salvation. Optimally, the bases of influence lie in belief, faith, or reliance upon written and spoken authority. It implies a commitment which leads the believer to move more or less spontaneously in the direction of salvation, as defined by the institution.⁷

The use here of the Church's goal of influence is very broad. The goal is the stated end in salvation, as well as the particular formulation of this goal in

⁶ 'It [the goal] consists in two points: 1. to convert men to make them disciples; therefore, evangelization; 2. to guide the world towards God; therefore, action in the temporal sphere, or civilization.' Yves Congar, O.P., *Priest and Layman*, trans. P. J. Hepburne-Scott (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1967), p. 307.

⁷ Vallier's definition of influence is appropriate here. 'In my judgment, influence should be equated with the capacity of a unit (whether an individual, a group, an association, or a state) to generate commitments – loyalties, resources, behavioral support, etc. – in amounts sufficient to allow the agency of influence to impose a direction of its own choosing on the structure, and thereby to change a situation. An influential is thus a person or corporate unit that is able to place a distinct stamp on a valued sphere of interest or activity.' Vallier, p. 12. See also Robert H. Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), pp. 14–35 for a formulation of influence similar to the one used above.

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concrete situations, and the mechanisms or instruments whereby the goal is achieved. I am thus combining both the message and the institution when I refer to the goal of influence. Change for the purposes of this work is change in both the goal and the instruments or mechanisms whereby it is implemented. Some categories which can be useful in constructing a model or ideal type are: 1. the dominant organizational principle which describes the Church's perception of the environment and the obstacles to implementing the general goal of influence. 2. the groups or sectors of society to which the Church directs its particular attention, the favored strata, so to speak. 3. Church-society relationship or the manner in which the organization seeks to link itself with the larger environment. 4. the instruments or mechanisms whereby the Church exercises influence and generates commitments.⁸

I should emphasize that I am talking about the goal of influence and the manner in which it is implemented *vis-à-vis* the institution. This approach could be distinguished from another, which takes the individual as its primary focus and studies the functional, therapeutic, etc. role of influence on him. Probably the main difficulty in describing influence is that it is almost impossible to measure. Social scientists have devoted a great deal of time to the conceptualization and quantification of influence and still have not made much progress. If there are difficulties with political influence, how can one expect to measure religious influence, where the goal is salvation? I have completely ignored quantification of saved souls and have relied instead on intermediate data of importance to the Church itself, such as mass attendance, ability to stimulate vocations, number of schools, money received and percentage of the population formally declared members of the religion.

Descriptively, therefore, we now have the categories to be used in discussing Church change in influence and its implementation. The analytical part of the work seeks more – namely to explain how change takes place. My approach to this subject is both a conceptual scheme and a hypothesis to be explored throughout the book. Initially it can be observed that goals are not defined in a vacuum but by an institution in relation to its environment. Environments change and if the institution is to maintain influence, it must adapt.⁹ However, what will be argued here is more than the generalized control of environments over goals and implementation. I propose that the Church's goal of influence and its implementation is determined by the institution in interaction with the state and the Holy See. In other words, the Church is not a free actor, is neither autonomous nor independent and cannot set its own goals. It falls prey to its relationship with the other actors and is in fact dependent upon them for its survival as the environment changes and influence wanes.

⁸ Vallier's work was again helpful in the formulation of these categories, although I have selected only four of his ten and am using each one in a slightly broader sense. I have found that the empirical material fits these four very well. Cf. Vallier, p. 72.

⁹ For a very provocative analysis of these issues, see Shirley Terreberry, 'The Evolution of Organizational Environments', *Administrative Science Quarterly* 12 (March 1968), pp. 590–613. See also J. Thompson and W. McEwen, 'Organizational Goals and Environment', *American Sociological Review* 23 (February 1958), pp. 23–31.

It is well to recall that any national Church is but part of the Universal Church. However, the character of the relationship fluctuates according to various factors, including the political position of the papacy, the intermediate goals of the papacy, the nature of communications, the strength of a national hierarchy and particular religious and political issues. The fluctuations may be so drastic in fact that a brief outline of some conceptual indices for describing the relationship may be useful. I want to discuss them by levels of autonomy in order to capture a dimension of the control involving not only the setting of goals, but also the structures that implement them. From the level of least autonomy to that of the greatest, four relationships can be stipulated: coalition – the virtual identity of goals and structures; cooperation – at times identical goals pursued through separate structures; competition – similar goals pursued through separate structures utilizing different strategies; and conflict – mutually exclusive or antagonistic goals pursued through distinct structures.

It can be presumed that even though the structural relationships between the Universal Church and a national Church vary, the goal of influence – salvation – remains the same and changes only at some intermediate points. When one considers the relationship with the state, however, the situation becomes more complex. To put it quite simply, when they were first set up, the Latin American Churches had closer relationships with the Iberian states than they did with the papacy and this situation continued up to the turn of this century. The Churches have been more dependent upon the states than on the Vatican in many important respects, with the result that change in the Church's goal of influence is of political concern and is in essence a political problem. The formulation of the proposition that I will argue in the work is that from the start, and continuing until the present, the Church's goal of influence was defined primarily through the mechanism of power. What is special about power is that it is linked with positive and negative coercion and is thus by definition linked to the state, as this body regulates physical coercion and the distribution of societal values and resources.¹⁰ Power is but one mechanism or basis for influence, but for these Churches it was always the central one and is still crucial to the way they define influence. There are built-in problems when defining influence by means of power; with this basis, there was no need to develop other bases of influence such as personal commitments, beliefs, faith and mobilization of the layman. Thus change, adaptation to a changing environment, involves not only an autonomy relationship with the Vatican and the state, but also the generating of new bases for influence.

Despite what one might imagine from the transitory nature of political events – of changes in government, military coups, congresses being opened and closed – there is in fact a tremendous degree of institutional stability both in Brazil and Latin America as a whole. I find the initial observation of Claudio Veliz much to the point.

¹⁰ See Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis*, pp. 14–35, and also the difficult but valuable essay by Talcott Parsons, 'On the Concept of Political Power', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 107 (June 1963), pp. 232–62.

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There exists in the region a resilient traditional structure of institutions, hierarchical arrangements, and attitudes which conditions every aspect of political behavior and which has survived centuries of colonial governments, movements for independence, foreign wars and invasions, domestic revolutions, and a confusingly large number of lesser palace revolts. More recently it has not only successfully resisted the impact of technological innovation and industrialization, but appears to have been strengthened by it.¹¹

With specific reference to Brazil a broad and sophisticated sociological and historical literature exists on the stability of institutions. For example, José Honório Rodrigues argues that 'The socio-economic institutions remain the same, independent of the transitory names they are given. The granite stability of the institutions corresponds to a mere governmental instability.'¹²

In Brazil, at least, there is a form of consensus on the stability of institutions. I agree with this consensus but will show that the Church as an institution has indeed changed and is now changing. I feel that certain lessons can be drawn from my study about the conditions of change which are applicable to other Brazilian institutions.

At the risk of anticipating the conclusions, I would go one step further and argue that change in the Church will probably make for substantial change in other institutions and social orders. The Church has always been linked with the state; it was never autonomous. Today, however, it is defining its autonomy through an intense process of conflict. In the development of this process, the Church has increasingly adopted a role of promoting social change and is presently taking on a role of prophecy. This is at the intentional level. Further, because the institution has always been linked with all other orders, this change has direct implications for the whole society. The Church in Brazil is indeed coming to play a 'transformative role' in society, because as it changes there will of necessity be greater secularization, increased pluralism and further structural differentiation. A number of sociologists have developed hypotheses on the role of religion in transformation of societies and from my data I can make a strong case for this role in Brazil. In the simplest terms, the Church is moving from a position as unifying force in the creation and support of a cultural synthesis to a revolutionary and disruptive force in the present political situation.¹³

¹¹ Claudio Veliz, ed., *Obstacles to Change in Latin America* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 1.

¹² José Honório Rodrigues, *Conciliação e Reforma no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Civilização Brasileira, 1965), p. 13. See also: Raymundo Faoro, *Os Donos do Poder* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Globo, 1958), p. 271; Francisco de Oliveira Vianna, *Populações Meridionais do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria José Olympio Editora, 1952) 1:222; Nestor Duarte, *Ordem Privada e A Organização Política Nacional* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1966). Unless otherwise stated, all Portuguese originals have been translated by the author.

¹³ See on the 'transformative role', Vallier, p. 6. For key parts of this argument see also: S. M. Eisenstadt, 'Transformation of Social, Political, and Cultural Orders in Modernization', *American Sociological Review* 30 (October 1965), p. 670; Robert Bellah, 'Religious Evolution', *American Sociological Review* 29 (June 1964), p. 368; Christopher Dawson, *Religion and Culture* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), p. 202.

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The historical scope of this study is rather broad. The range of description and analysis is also comprehensive, in that I move from the realm of institutional interrelations to internal political tactics, to political opposition and to prophecy. I have divided my discussion into four main sections. The first two chapters cover historical ground from 1500 to 1950; here I show how the Church was linked with political power and remained so tied until at least the middle of this century. Section II begins with an analysis of the threats to Church influence presented by the social and political changes which took place in Brazil after World War II. The Church responded to the threats as perceived in two rather contradictory ways; on the one hand, it acted through a political pressure group to ensure traditional influence, and on the other, it innovated and assisted the 'Brazilian revolution' prior to 1964. The innovation will be analyzed with particular emphasis on the autonomy relationship. Section III begins with a discussion of the problems inherent in a changing society for the Church's traditional influence and goes on to show the impediments to innovation. This section is mainly concerned with internal Church problems and strategies but concludes with case studies which indicate that the problem of change does not lie exclusively within the Church's competence. Section IV describes a long series of Church-state conflicts and analyzes the results of the conflict process for the Church, its relations with the state and the likelihood of change.

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Section I:

The Political and Religious Bases of Catholicism in Brazil

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1. Establishment, decay and separation from the state

Brazil was founded by the Portuguese in 1500, and the type of Church established in the colony was an extension of the one current in the mother country. Even after the Protestant Reformation, the model of Church then prevalent in the rest of Europe remained intact in both Spain and Portugal, the two countries promoting the Counter-Reformation and then engaged in founding and colonizing the New World. This Church model is best characterized by the term 'Christendom' and was dominant in Europe from approximately the fourth century until the Reformation. Until the latter part of the period, no conception of the state *per se* existed, so the Church was the overriding institution in most realms of society. As it possessed a monopoly on the means of salvation and as all matters can somehow be related to salvation, the Church then had authority over both spiritual and temporal affairs.¹

However, the papacy was threatened immediately from within by the Counciliar Movement and even more severely from without by the Turks, and as the states developed, the lack of distinction between Church and state created a situation in which the authority was reversed. The state became dominant in place of the Church. The initial Portuguese Church model was elaborated in Brazil by an extensive system of patronage grants, given to the Crown by the papacy to further what had begun as a crusade against the Turks and continued as a mission for souls in the New World. Before describing the details of patronage, a brief overview of the 'Christendom' model is necessary.²

First, the organizational principle was total coverage of all territories; where people could be found, a Christian ruler had to ensure conversion, even if this meant the imposition of religion through force. The whole world was to be Christian: the message of Christ was universal. Secondly, the groups and sectors focused upon were all-inclusive, as the form was based on a monopoly of the faith. Everyone in the geographical entity was fair game for the religion. In Brazil, for example, Indians were baptized *en masse* as were the slaves from Africa before they landed in their new homeland.

A third factor of this model was the comprehensive relationship of the Church and society. As all matters were related to salvation, the Church was bound up with every phase of man's existence. Society itself was constructed from within the Church, on the Church's terms, and received from it express and direct regulation. Finally, the instruments used in exercising and generating influence were the webs of structures and groups which constituted society. Through a

¹ For a description of the Church in Europe during this period and the outline of the Christendom model, see Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 2 vols., trans. Olive Wyon (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1931, repr. 1960), 1, Chapter 2.

² For a comprehensive treatment of the patronage and an analysis of its causes and evolution, see W. Eugene Shiels, SJ, *King and Church: The Rise and Fall of the Patronato Real* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1961). For particular discussion of the crusade basis of the patronage, see pp. 44–50.

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Christian ruler, the influence of the Church filtered down to all people. Structures made men Christian rather than the other way around.

What is manifest in the description of these four categories is the comprehensiveness of the model; it sought to permeate everything, through any means, by all mechanisms of state and society. This model contrasts significantly with the form of Church established in the United States, where the minority status of the Church meant that total coverage was impossible. A monopoly was also not feasible, especially in the strongly anti-Catholic areas, and the Church focused mainly on ethnic minorities. Fusion of Church–society in a Protestant society was impossible and even the U.S. Constitution forbade the integration of Church and state. Men were made Catholic through the sacraments and evangelization; they then made the structures Christian. The Reformation spelled the passing of the Christendom form in Europe, but it was implemented in Latin America at about the same period. From their beginnings, therefore, the Churches in Latin America were in important ways different from those in other areas, although all were part of the same Universal Church.

A key premise of the Christendom model is the integration of Church and state. The state must assist the Church if all people in the area are to be influenced through all the structures. The discovery and settlement of Brazil was a joint venture of the Portuguese state and the Catholic Church. With the sword went the cross, and in fact the colony was originally called the land of the true cross, Vera Cruz. Expansion in the colonial period by the Iberian powers was based on a combination of economic, political and religious motives. Gilberto Freyre makes a widely-accepted point in stating: ‘It is impossible to deny that the economic imperialism of Spain and Portugal was bound up in the most intimate fashion with the Church and the religious. The conquest of markets, lands, and slaves – the conquest of souls.’³

The Crown of Portugal had been historically on very good terms with the Church. Because of Portugal’s efforts in the Reconquest from the Moors and in the propagation of ‘the true faith’, in 1179 the Pope accorded the King of Portugal divine right and in effect guaranteed the country’s statehood. Portuguese expansion in Africa, Asia and finally America was always carried out with strong religious overtones, and is seen by many as simply a continuation of the Reconquest (completed in Portugal in 1249; Spain in 1492). The expansion and conquests were appreciated by the Popes and duly recognized. Von Pastor’s comments on Pope Leo X and the King of Portugal are indicative of the good will between them. Leo X sent the sword and hat blessed by him at Christmas in 1515, and von Pastor observed: ‘In this way did the Supreme Head of the Church proclaim before the whole world the value he set on the war which the King of Portugal alone among Christian princes had been found to carry on against the infidel by which such brilliant prospects were opened to Christendom.’⁴

³ Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves*, trans. Samuel Putnam (New York: Knopf and Co., 1946), p. 249.

⁴ Ludwig Freiherr von Pastor, *The History of the Popes*, 40 vols., trans. E. F. Peeler (St Louis, Mo.: Herder and Herder, 1898, repr. 1953), 7:78.