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978-0-521-09848-9 - The Political Transformation of the Brazilian Catholic Church

Thomas C. Bruneau

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The political transformation of the Brazilian Catholic Church

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THE POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE BRAZILIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Thomas C. Bruneau

Associate Professor of Political Science, McGill University

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

TO MY MOTHER AND FATHER

Contents

List of tables	<i>page</i> viii
Preface and acknowledgements	ix
List of abbreviations	xiii
Introduction	1
Section I The political and religious bases of Catholicism in Brazil	
1 Establishment, decay and separation from the state	11
2 The revolution of 1930: Church–state reintegration	38
Section II The Church faces the modern world, 1950–64	
3 Socio-political threats of the modern world	55
4 In search of a new approach to influence: promotion of social change	68
Section III The Church after 1964	
5 Institutionalization of strategies for social change: the CNBB	107
6 Demands of the times and responses in the hierarchy	127
7 Strategies for the promotion of change in the Church	145
8 The ‘Experiences’ of four dioceses: obstacles to change	166
Section IV The Church and state in conflict	
9 Origins and process of conflict	177
10 Consequences of conflict: autonomy and the prophetic mission	217
Conclusion	237
Appendix	242
Selected bibliography	253
Index	265

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09848-9 - The Political Transformation of the Brazilian Catholic Church

Thomas C. Bruneau

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Tables

1	Real growth indices of agriculture and industry	<i>page</i> 56
2	Urban population in Brazil	57
3	Growth of Protestantism in Brazil	62
4	Decrease in priestly vocations	64
5	Clergy and bishops by age	153
6	Increase in ecclesiastical units in Brazil in relation to population	242
7	Founding of secular and religious seminaries	242
8	Profession, occupation and status of seminarians' fathers in Brazil, 1960	243
9	Family size of Brazilian seminarians, 1960	244
10	Urban, semi-urban or rural origins of seminarians, 1960	244
11	Growth of parishes by region	245
12	Inhabitants per parish in Brazil	245
13	Comparative data for parishes in other countries (late 1960s)	246
14	Priests in Brazil: Brazilian and foreign, 1964	246
15	Age of the clergy in Brazil, 1964	247
16	Growth in total number of nuns entering and leaving orders, 1958–68	247
17	Average number of inhabitants per priest and per nun, by geographical regions, 1966	248
18	Selected indices of organizational life	249
19	Relative importance of minifúndios (i), of family plots (ii), of medium size plots (iii), and of latifúndios (iv), by state and territories, 1950 and 1960	250

Chart

1	Formulation of a new Church ideology by the Brazilian hierarchy	74
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Cambridge University Press

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

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface and Acknowledgements

This book is a political study of a religious institution. As the study of religious institutions is infrequently a topic for political scientists, I think it proper to indicate in a few words why I have undertaken this task. I originally became interested in studying the Roman Catholic Church as the Second Vatican Council was nearing completion in 1965. Pope John XXIII was then dead but the forces unleashed within the Church were obvious and had become a subject for intense discussion. As a student of institutions I was sceptical about the degree to which the ferment of change within the Church would be reflected in structural modifications and new programs once the Council ended.

The ferment within the Latin American Churches, which was widely recognized for the first time in North America with the death of Pe. Camilo Torres in February 1966, has increased of late and it has become common for observers of the Latin American scene to refer to the Church as the fastest changing institution in the continent and to dramatic aspects of the religious drama currently being enacted there. Most commonly, the observers note the political as opposed to the exclusively religious nature of the changes and events. Indeed, it is almost impossible to find any point of change in the Latin American Churches which does not have obvious implications for politics. These religious institutions were founded with the societies and politics and have evolved equally haphazardly during the ensuing four and a half centuries. The Churches are so intricately linked with all features of these countries – from overall legitimation to education, to charity, to political pressure groups – that a change in any aspect is immediately recognized as a political fact. This book does describe the high and low points of the Brazilian religious drama with its political content, but I hope to accomplish far more. I am concerned with explaining why change is taking place in this historic institution, its direction and importance not only for the Church but also for the society and polity. In short, I present here a historical analysis of the Church as an institution, in which my main focus will be the Church in its political relations and the political importance of change.

The Catholic Churches in Latin America remained stable for so long that they were regarded as a constant and thus uninteresting for study. The historical and sociological studies available on these institutions in the twenty republics, not to mention comparative material, are minimal. Today, when the institutions are becoming more interesting, there is a spurt of largely journalistic accounts of events and personalities but still very few serious studies. Few hypotheses have been tested and even less material is available for establishing a pattern of study. My approach here is both by necessity and choice *sui generis*. By necessity because there is nothing else, and by choice because I want to approach the Church as a political scientist. I have no theological training, cannot claim to be a competent historian and am not at this point worried about generating broad theoretical propositions. This book is a study of change in one Latin American

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09848-9 - The Political Transformation of the Brazilian Catholic Church

Thomas C. Bruneau

Frontmatter

[More information](#)**x Preface and acknowledgements**

religious institution, yet with obvious theoretical implications. Since I have picked the religious institution of one country, Brazil, a few words are necessary on this choice.

Brazil is the most important country in Latin America. Today, after more than two decades of fits and starts, an industrial and capital infrastructure has been created which produced growth increases of some 9% for three consecutive years, 1969–71. As the government is fond of pointing out and as all the business reports indicate, Brazil is indeed on the move. In terms of size, the Catholic Church in Brazil is the largest in the world, with some 94% of the ninety million population formally declared of the faith. Historically, the Church in Brazil is similar to that in the other Latin American countries; if anything, it could serve as a prototype. Brazil is the world center of Spiritism, which is ironic for the world's largest Catholic country, and is also a fertile plot for Protestant conversion. Several Brazilian Church personalities are of continent-wide importance and in some cases of world renown. Innovation in the Church occurred first in Brazil and Chile on a number of important levels, and the Brazilian institution has played a significant role in socio-political change programs for almost two decades. However, the innovations in the Church have brought it into very serious conflict with the military dictatorship that has ruled the country since 1964 and, in the heat of this conflict, the Church has increasingly adopted a progressive political position. The Church is the only institutional opponent of the government and the number of bishops, priests, nuns and laymen who have suffered for their beliefs and actions are legion. The Church in Brazil is probably the most interesting example of change in a religious institution today, and politically the implications of this change are extremely important. While I doubt that the Churches in the other Latin American countries will follow the exact path of Brazil, I suspect that they will follow one of the various options that this Church has adopted during the century.

It would be impossible for me to give fair recognition to all those who have helped me since I began working on this study some six years ago. Originally I presented the work as a PhD thesis in the Department of Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley. The chairman of the committee, Warren Ilchman, gave many valuable criticisms of the various drafts and at all times offered encouragement, whether it was deserved or not. Ivan Vallier first introduced me to the fascination and importance of studying religious institutions and all but directed me in making this study more than a descriptive story. His work on the Church in Latin America is the best being carried out today and I suspect that more than a little of the 'discovery' I have achieved here really belongs to him. Thomas Sanders of the American Universities Field Staff (AUFS) offered not only initial information and encouragement but a continuing flow of material, as well as the stimulus of a long series of often excellent studies on politics and the Churches in Latin America.

Denis Goulet gave accurate criticisms on a cumbersome manuscript which enabled me to recreate the work for a wider audience. It was Rosalind E. Boyd who further refined the text through her valuable editorial skills. Zeno Santiago

Cambridge University Press

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

Frontmatter

[More information](#)**Preface and acknowledgements xi**

helped me in the translation of the Portuguese originals. Lana Coviensky typed the final manuscript with excellent speed and accuracy.

I originally visited Brazil for fourteen months in 1967–8, with a National Defense Foreign Language grant administered by the University of California. The Institute of International Studies provided the funds and the conditions for writing the thesis and the Center for Latin American Studies, along with Hilgard O'Reilly Sternberg, provided the stimulus for making the thesis into a book by awarding me a recognition grant. I was enabled by the Canada Council to visit Brazil again in the Summer of 1970, so that the material contained herein is not only current but is also offered with some degree of confidence, as I found that my conclusions of two years before were fairly accurate.

Undoubtedly my greatest debt in this work is to the approximately two hundred Brazilians – bishops, priests, nuns, laymen, men of affairs, workers – who were willing to spend their often valuable time with an inquisitive foreigner. Due to their cooperation and kindness, I collected a great deal of material and enjoyed doing so. Initially, Pe. Affonso Gregory of Centro de Estatística Religiosa e Investigações Sociais (CERIS) and Frei Francisco Rolim provided sociological orientation, research information and contacts which proved to be most valuable. Frequent reference to their works in this book will reiterate my appreciation to them. Beyond these two men it is very unfortunate that I can offer only partial recognition. Given the present political situation in Brazil, anyone mentioned in this Acknowledgement might attract the attention of the police. Of the forty people I formally interviewed in the Summer of 1970 at least twenty had been in jail one or more times or had a relative in jail at that moment. If anyone doubts the political relevance of the Brazilian Catholic Church, he need only talk with some of those churchmen now suffering in prison for their understanding of the Gospel message. To those who assisted me so generously I can only say that I hope this book will indicate that their time was not in vain and that they may profit from the analysis of an outsider. I will be pleased if the book at least provides a foil against which they can sharpen their own analyses of the Church's responsibilities and options.

My family accepted more than any family should in the writing of this book. They made life in Brazil both richer and more pleasant, and during the writing in Berkeley and Montreal they tolerated my frequent periods of intolerance. To the little ones goes a reluctant admission that children do in fact make life far more interesting although chaotic. My wife Celia helped at various points in this work and typed the draft that was presented as a thesis. That I could maintain my momentum through several writings is due to her emotional support.

La Prairie, Quebec, Summer of 1972

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Abbreviations

ACB	Ação Católica Brasileira
ACO	Ação Católica Operária
AEC	Associação de Educação Católica
AP	Ação Popular
ARENA	Aliança Nacional Renovadora
AUFS	American Universities Field Staff
CC	Comissão Central
CDN	Conselho Diretor Nacional
CEI	Centro Ecumênico de Informação
CELAM	Conselho do Episcopado Latino-Americano
CENFI	Centro de Formação Intercultural
CERIS	Centro de Estatística Religiosa e Investigações Sociais
CICOP	Catholic Inter-American Cooperation Program
CIDA	Comitê Interamericano de Desenvolvimento Agrícola
CNBB	Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil
CONTAG	Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura
CRB	Conferência dos Religiosos do Brasil
DOPS	Departamento de Ordem Política e Social
FNT	Frente Nacional do Trabalho
IBGE	Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística
IBRA	Instituto Brasileira de Reforma Agrária
IBRADES	Instituto Brasileiro de Desenvolvimento
<i>IDOC</i>	<i>International Documentation on the Contemporary Church</i>
IFT	Instituto de Filosofia e Teologia
INDA	Instituto Nacional de Desenvolvimento Agrário
ISPAC	Instituto Superior Para Pastoral de Catequese
ISPAL	Instituto Superior Para Pastoral de Liturgia
ITER	Instituto de Teologia do Recife
JAC	Juventude Agrária Católica
JEC	Juventude Estudantil Católica
JIC	Juventude Independente Católica
JOC	Juventude Operária Católica
JUC	Juventude Universitária Católica
<i>LADOC</i>	<i>Latin American Documentation</i>
LEC	Liga Eleitoral Católica
MDB	Movimento Democrático Brasileiro
MEB	Movimento de Educação de Base
MFC	Movimento Familiar Cristão
MG	Minas Gerais
Msgr.	Monsignor
<i>NIU</i>	<i>Notícias da Igreja Universal</i>
O.F.M.	Franciscan
O.P.	Dominican (religious order)
OPENO	Operação Nordeste
PDC	Partido Democrata Cristão
Pe.	Padre
<i>PMV</i>	<i>Pro Mundi Vita</i>

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09848-9 - The Political Transformation of the Brazilian Catholic Church

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)**xiv Abbreviations**

PPC	Plano de Pastoral de Conjunto
PSD	Partido Social Democrático
PSP	Partido Social Progressista
PTB	Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro
<i>REB</i>	<i>Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira</i>
RN	Rio Grande do Norte
RS	Rio Grande do Sul
SAR	Serviço de Assistência Rural
SCAI	Serviço de Colaboração Apostólica Internacional
SEC	Serviço de Extensão Cultural
<i>SEDOC</i>	<i>Serviço de Documentação</i>
SJ	Jesuit-Society of Jesus
SNI	Serviço Nacional de Informação
SORPE	Serviço de Orientação Rural de Pernambuco
SPESE	Sociedade de Pesquisas e Estudos Sócio-Eclesiais
SUDENE	Superintendência do Desenvolvimento do Nordeste
TFP	Tradição, Família e Propriedade
UDN	União Democrática Nacional
UNE	União Nacional dos Estudantes



A Political Map of Brazil (Based on a map from *Politics in Brazil, 1930-64* by Thomas E. Skidmore. Copyright © 1967 by Oxford University Press, Inc.)