

# Religious Beliefs and Actors in the Legitimation of Military Dictatorships in the Southern Cone, 1964–1989

by

María Soledad Catoggio  
Translated by Mariana Ortega Breña

---

*The military regimes of 1964–1989 in Chile, Argentina, and Brazil implemented a code of legitimacy that appealed to various secular beliefs rooted in civil society at the same time that they fostered a common myth of religious legitimation—that of defending “Western Christian civilization.” It was under this umbrella that military groups and religious actors faced each other and/or established alliances. In this cultural politics, religious actors that had previously been excluded from the power game sought to support and/or be recognized by the state as allies in the construction of a belief in the legitimacy of the dictatorships.*

**Keywords:** Dictatorship, Beliefs, Legitimacy, Religion, Politics

---

Historical sociology has addressed the military dictatorships of the 1960s and 1970s in Chile, Argentina, and Brazil from various perspectives, both national and comparative. Most of these studies have been limited to the messianic discourse adopted by the military powers and the role of the national Catholic institutions that, depending on the country and the historical situation, either supported or challenged them. Less often examined is the role of belief in the repertoire of legitimation strategies within military regimes. This paper aims to explore these strategies and to compare the roles played by belief in the different national cases. It adopts a classic approach that views the intersection of religion and politics as an area of circulation and exchange in which transactions serve to legitimize past acts or provide practical guidance for action (Löwy, 1999; Mallimaci and Catoggio, 2008). Consequently, it will not focus on “liberation” groups (Löwy, 1999), those that allied themselves with the various social and political actors pursuing revolutionary political projects and were later subjected to repression and denounced the human rights violations perpetrated by these military regimes.<sup>1</sup> My working hypothesis is that this scenario paradoxically nurtured the political vocation of religious actors previously characterized by their “apolitical” intransigence, catapulting actors previously excluded from power dynamics into the public space.

María Soledad Catoggio has a Ph.D. in social sciences from the University of Buenos Aires, where she currently teaches. She is also a postdoctoral fellow of Argentina’s National Council of Scientific and Technical Research. Mariana Ortega Breña is a freelance translator based in Canberra, Australia.

LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES, Issue 179, Vol. 38 No. 6, November 2011 25-37  
DOI: 10.1177/0094582X11412921  
© 2011 Latin American Perspectives

### ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE

The debate surrounding the legitimacy of the South American military regimes includes a variety of perspectives. On the one hand, it is argued that lack of legality does not necessarily mean a lack of legitimacy; in fact the illegitimacy of the deposed political regimes was the source of consensus for the military coups (Rouquié, 1981). On the other, it is suggested that what was unique to these dictatorships was their lack of any original legitimacy in spite of the initial consensus around the coups, which forced them to build or reinvent a practical legitimacy that made up for this deficiency (Ansaldi, 2004). While the first argument is based on a historical perspective involving a naturalized fluctuation between authoritarian and democratic regimes in the region during the twentieth century, the other takes a view based on political science and sees democracy as the only valid basis for the construction of a political regime.

But how were these dictatorships legitimated after the coups? Taking his cue from Weber, Linz (1987) suggests that, in stable democracies, obedience to a freely elected government is mainly based on custom or rational calculation of purely effective and value-based motives, but in critical situations (which may or not trigger the breakdown of democracy) another factor is added: the belief in its legitimacy. With this in mind, I consider the field of belief, both secular and religious, a privileged viewpoint from which to address the construction of practical legitimacy during these dictatorships. In all three cases, appeals to the "national soul," the "ethnic substratum of the people," "economic development," and a "common athletic ethos," among others, had wide popularity because of a deeply rooted belief in the nation and nationality as essential elements of the state and society. On another level, the national-security doctrine operated as a source of belief that made supranational articulation possible in the region. This body of theory and practice led to a set of beliefs, both secular (a civilizing ethos) and religious (the idea of a Christian West), designed to give meaning to the Western capitalist enterprise.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, religious beliefs played a central role in the establishment of these military regimes. Given the supposed prevalence of Catholicism in Latin American societies, these military powers sought to endow their goals with a messianic character, appropriating the national-security doctrine and redefining it in theological and political terms with the firm intention of "restoring the values of Western Christian morality." The appeal to the national-security doctrine helped avoid political deliberation after a "transcendentalization of purposes" (Moulián, 1997) through which the regimes, as "re-founders," could represent themselves as coming from outside of politics. This operation demanded both the use of resources typically present in religious discourse and a relationship with religious actors and groups that were legitimate bearers of this discourse.

Given the benefits of symbolic continuity for the consolidation of a stable political system (Linz, 1987), Catholic groups were destined to become natural allies of the military governments. The metaphor of the "cross and the sword" was used to express this community of interests. However, whether the dictatorships made alliances or came into conflict with Catholic elites depended on

the circumstances. The echo of this religious interpellation varied from country to country and resonated with religious interlocutors who were not always representatives of the supposed religious majority in the society.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, this religious appeal was part of a broader repertoire employed by the military powers to establish links with various civil-society actors and generate an effective consensus that would legitimate undemocratic governance.

The idea of “repertoires of legitimation” assumes their instrumental use by government actors. Max Weber (1993 [1922]) pointed out that legitimation is an essential aspect of domination. If the construction of legitimacy becomes the first task on the political agenda for democratic regimes (Linz, 1987: 86), then this instrumental bias should be all the stronger in the case of authoritarian ones.<sup>4</sup> Given the lack of legitimacy of origin, building symbolic continuity would appear urgent. Paradoxically, the reinvention of democracy and its forms was one of the axes of continuity for military and religious actors that had historically distrusted “politics” (i.e., the party system) and drove them to undertake political action to construct what they considered “true democracy.”

### SECULAR BELIEFS AND LEGITIMACY

The codes of legitimacy that appealed to socially rooted secular beliefs were varied. The cycle of institutional dictatorship in the Southern Cone began with the military regime in Brazil (1964–1985). The coup that ousted President João Goulart was not out of tune with a political tradition that supported such interventions as correctives within a constitutional logic. The novelty of the military coup was that it adopted a “constitutional façade” (Stepan, 1971) that, despite the expurgation and restriction of the political field, maintained the functioning of the parliament and political parties (albeit constrained by successive modifications), the calling of elections (albeit with proscriptive clauses), and the periodic sanction of institutional acts that produced a framework of apparent legality. This façade was an attempt to strengthen the legitimacy of exercise of a military government that understood that the source of its legitimacy was its revolutionary mission as an apolitical force capable of removing subversion from a political system corrupted by populism (Stepan, 1971). To this was added the economic momentum of what is known as the “Brazilian miracle” (1967–1973), which turned Brazil into a country with one of the highest growth rates in the world and ensured industrial development that, without bridging the social and economic gaps, gave a distinctive complexion to a dictatorship that had reformulated the national-security doctrine in terms of “security and development” (Ansaldi, 2004). Brazil’s transformation into an economic power combined with its three World Cup titles to favor a public-relations strategy that associated soccer and Brazilian popular music with progress. This “miracle,” however, was achieved through violence, especially in 1964–1965 and 1968–1974, periods followed by more liberal times during which the toll of victims decreased. A policy of gradual political liberalization coexisted with growing difficulties in ensuring economic growth. At this point, proclaiming a “relative democracy” (Trindade, 1985) allowed the regime to reverse the erosion of authoritarian legitimacy and revitalize government authority.

In Chile, the military regime (1973–1989) was characterized by personalist power. Augusto Pinochet was simultaneously president of the Republic and of the ruling junta (until 1980) and commander in chief of the army. The “sovereign” character of the regime was established in the new 1980 constitution. Attempts to support the regime’s legitimacy were implemented through a national consultation in 1978 and referenda in 1980 and 1988. In contrast to Brazil’s, Chile’s economic miracle became a model of the successful application of neoliberal policies. Arnold Harberger and Milton Friedman visited the country during the critical periods of 1975 and 1977, offering their support for the model implemented by Chilean economists, most of whom had been trained in the Chicago School (the “Chicago boys”; Gazmurri, 2001). At the same time, attempts to institutionalize the regime sought to reinvent democracy with a new qualifier, a “protected democracy” implemented by the army. With regard to human rights violations, the Chilean regime was the second-bloodiest in the Southern Cone (after Argentina’s). The dogma of “holy war” against Marxism was symbolically linked to an overarching notion of the “Chilean destiny” and functioned as a constant source of legitimacy for the military dictatorship (Cristi and Dawson, 1996). Faced with the international outrage sparked by the assassination of Orlando Letelier (Salvador Allende’s former foreign minister) in Washington, the regime dismantled the National Intelligence Directorate and replaced it with a National Intelligence Center. At the same time, it embraced a discourse that used “Chilean” values to delegitimize critics as part of an anti-Chilean campaign.

Argentina’s military dictatorship (1976–1983) established a proportional tripartite division of power. This institutional engineering sought to avoid the risks of the personalization of power and coexisted with the appointment of civilians (“technicians”) to strategic positions such as the Ministries of Economy and Education or as diplomats. While Brazil and Chile benefited from their economic booms, the neoconservative project in Argentina was hampered by tensions between and within forces that were not addressed successfully. Consensus was built around the battle against subversion, actively supported by various institutions and a passive citizenry (Quiroga, 2004). By 1977, the shift of U.S. foreign policy and the impact of international reports regarding human rights violations led to the dismantling of much of the repressive system, and the regime declared itself the winner of a dirty war against an “anti-Argentine campaign.” Starting a new phase, it fostered political dialogue. This strategy, aimed at producing consensus, began with luncheons of the military president and figures from different fields (science, culture and politics). Eventually, the dialogue focused on a future civil-military convergence in a “tutelary democracy.” This project was undermined by the same tensions that characterized the divided opinions between the creation of an official party or a national public opinion movement. In 1978 the hosting of the World Cup, a national mega-event, served as a plebiscite on the regime’s policy. The athletic triumph was followed by a military enterprise of another kind: the reinvention of a war that appropriated a national cause—Argentina’s claim to the Falkland (Malvinas) Islands—in an effort to link the “dirty war” with a “clean” one and give the regime new legitimacy.

## THE COMMON MYTH OF LEGITIMACY: WESTERN CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION

The defense of the mythical Western Christian civilization was used as a legitimacy argument by all three dictatorships (Rojas Mix, 2007). In many ways, this goal became a crusade in which the military powers appropriated the right to define this political-religious formula as "orthodox." Despite the initial endorsement of the Catholic bishops, who welcomed the military's rise to power, the dispute over the moral content of that formula and its implications led to friction between them and the army when they had at first seemed natural allies as self-described guardians of the nation's morality.

In Chile, the military junta's statement of principles (Rojas Mix, 2007: 129) declared: "The government of Chile respects the Christian concept of man and society. It shaped the Western civilization to which we belong, and it is its progressive loss or disfigurement that, to a great extent, has led to the moral breakdown that now threatens this very civilization." In solidarity, the army's patron, the Virgen del Carmen, was promoted to "General Virgin" (Klaiber, 1997). Instead of bringing the military and the Catholic Church together, however, this intervention revealed the former's theological pretensions and its attempt to wrest legitimate capital from the latter: "The degree of confusion in certain sectors, important spiritual institutions that abandon and betray their transcendent mission, also distances them from the true path of unity and peaceful coexistence among Chileans, leading them into the turbulent waters of political contingencies and to atheistic and materialistic stances" (Augusto Pinochet, quoted by Chacón Herrera and Lagos Schuffenegger, 1986: 49-50).

In Brazil, Marshal Alencar Castelo Branco (1964) endowed the military project with a messianic character:

My government will be that of the laws, traditions, and the moral and political principles that reflect the Brazilian soul. . . . I do not exaggerate when I say that, in this journey into the future, we should devote ourselves with the passion of a crusade to which, with energy and, especially, my own example, I hope to win the adherence of all citizens, making it the supreme guarantee of all men and women of this country. . . . Let the Brazilians come to me, and I will go with them so that, with God's help and with quiet confidence, we can seek better days in our future.

Here the crusade on behalf of the moral and political principles of the Brazilian soul links the call of patriotism with religious and cultural values belonging to the nation's Catholic tradition. This symbiosis, appropriated by the military regime, led to tensions with those who, in principle, were the legitimate spokespersons for the Catholic camp: "I am not a bishop, and you are," [General] Muricy<sup>5</sup> told Dom Lamartine, "But I have the impression that my Catholicism is better than yours, because I think that if the Church does not support Communism it should not be helping to install Communism" (Serbin, 2000: 59).

Similarly, in Argentina the military's appeal to the defense of Western Christian civilization, initially widely supported by Church authorities, generated

conflict with regard to the definition of Catholic orthodoxy. A prime example was the media controversy around the so-called Latin American Bible in 1976. This edition of the bible, which had an average annual sale of 10,000 copies, came under media criticism for its alleged subversive and leftist character. The media attack was backed by intelligence documents that pointed to the Latin American Bible as a serious threat to the national-security doctrine. The controversy began in August and lasted until late October, when the Argentine Bishops' Conference issued a self-censoring document that put an end to it (Invernizzi and Gociol, 2002: 157–169; Catoggio, 2006).

### THE CRISIS OF THE “NATURAL ALLIANCE”

Although Catholicism appeared to be a natural ally of these regimes, public conflicts with the ecclesiastical authorities led the military to diversify its partnerships and pursue other actors capable of competing with Catholicism in providing it religious legitimacy. The dispute over the precise content and scope of the myth of legitimacy and the restoration of civilized Western Christian values was expressed not only in military attempts to define Catholic orthodoxy but also in Catholic authorities' tendency to question certain government actions. The social effects of economic policy and human rights violations became the two main topics of contention.

Demands on these two fronts were expressed early on in Chile (Comité Permanente de la Conferencia Episcopal Chilena, 1977):

We take this opportunity to respectfully ask the President that the government fully cooperate with the Courts in order to clarify, once and for all, the fate of every one of the alleged disappeared from September 11 to date. . . . We have heard hopeful words from the President and the Minister of the Economy. . . . We understand that economic reconstruction demands great sacrifices from us all; however, the peasants, the workers, and the settlers seem to bear an excessive and disproportionate burden.

In Brazil, the initial institutional strategy was to handle human rights violations through private channels. A bipartisan commission made up of Catholic authorities and military personnel came together between 1970 and 1974. Later, open critiques with regard to economic and social matters coming from the bishops in the Northeast and the Amazon region led to public confrontations regarding human rights violations. The document “I Heard the Cry of My People” (Conferencia Episcopal del Noroeste, 1973) was emblematic in its condemnation of both the social inequalities deepened by the “Brazilian miracle” and “official terrorism”:

Repression is increasingly needed to guarantee the functioning and security of the associated capitalist system. The legislature has no authority; urban and rural unions are being forcibly depoliticized; leaders are being persecuted; censorship is intensifying; workers, peasants, and intellectuals are being persecuted; priests and activists in the Christian churches are being persecuted. The regime has used various forms of incarceration, torture, mutilation, and assassinations.

Even in Argentina, where institutional discussions on human rights were almost always exclusively private, the government found itself under criticism (CEA, 1977):

The following facts, among others, give us serious cause for concern: a) The number of disappearances and abductions, which are frequently reported without a response on the part of any authority, would seem to indicate that the Government has not yet gained exclusive use of force; b) The situation faced by many people in our country whom family and friends report as disappeared or abducted by groups that identify themselves as members of the army or the police and whose whereabouts, in spite of family efforts and those of the bishops who have intervened so many times, remain unknown; c) The fact that many prisoners, according to their statements or those of their relatives, were subjected to torture, which is certainly unacceptable to all Christians.

Institutional demands regarding economic policies and their social implications were agreed upon by the bishops (CEA, 1978): "Very often, there are obstacles in the path of peace. . . . 1. *In the economic field*. According to God's plan, the goods of creation are destined for all men. When this goal is not met and someone lacks the necessary means for subsistence, there is growing unease and lack of peace."

In this scenario, which varied somewhat from one country to another, states encouraged the political influence of certain religious groups as a plausible and alternative way of acquiring legitimacy. Other religious actors with a historical presence in civil society were well received and/or encouraged by military powers to show their public support for the regime as legitimate bearers of religious discourse. In all three cases, those that most gravitated toward the political scene were the Pentecostal churches,<sup>6</sup> which left the myth of restoring Western Christian values intact.

In some cases, as in Brazil, Pentecostalist support was supplemented by that of other religious actors such as adherents of the Afro-Brazilian cults, whose identification with the symbolic ethnic origins of the country allowed for the reconstruction of an old national imaginary (Pierucci, 2004: 24–25):

The idea of constructing a national identity was always popular among intellectuals, at least since the Republic, and this immediately favored Umbanda. Affirmatively African and very popular, it was not ethnically encapsulated in blackness but, in Brazilian fashion, was offered to all Brazilians. . . . Brazilian Africanness in the form of Umbanda was always presented as a "typical mix," "very national," with ingredients from different sources being resignified as autochthonous.

In Argentina, the establishment of the National Registry of Religions (non-Catholic religions, that is) in 1978 naturalized and reinforced the myth of the "Catholic nation" (Di Stefano and Zanatta, 2000) at the same time that it regulated and supervised religious diversity. It effectively gave state recognition to other interlocutors in the religious field, opening up an institutional channel for the eventual exchange of symbolic and material resources for legitimation. It also eroded the idea that Catholicism had a monopoly on religious relations with the state (Catoggio, 2008).

## RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY: AN ALTERNATIVE PATH TO LEGITIMACY

All three of the states examined here, independently of the nature of the political regime (democracy or dictatorship), have actively pursued religious legitimacy. At the same time, religious actors have sought to become close to the state, support governments, and/or obtain material and symbolic recognition with a view to achieving a greater presence in society. For a long time, Catholicism was considered to have a monopoly with regard to the state. Until the 1950s and 1960s, a rejection of the world, which was seen as sinful, had been the hallmark of the Pentecostal movements (Bastian, 1997). Their apolitical conception of social life was related to their view of politics as a source of vice and corruption (Löwy, 1999). In this context, it is remarkable that these actors jumped to the political arena during military regimes that claimed to serve as correctives for the vices of democracy (Ansaldi, 2004). In the case of Brazil, the incorporation of Afro-Brazilian religions into politics seemed to follow an opposite path: stigmatized by their association with charlatanism, black magic, and illegal medical practices, they had been banned for much of the twentieth century (Bastide, 1971), but in the context of a dictatorship for which the “Marxist enemy” had acquired satanic connotations they were legalized and encouraged. The privileged role they assigned to the concept of evil was consistent with belief in an authoritarian legitimacy founded on threats from the left and populist leaders that justified the exercise of dictatorial power. In both cases the process had overarching objectives that made it look as if it came from outside of politics.

In Chile, on December 19, 1974, the leaders of 32 Pentecostal churches published a statement in the newspaper *El Mercurio* expressing their thanks to God “because He has freed us from Marxism through the intervention of the Armed Forces, which, for us, represent the barrier raised by God against godless atheism” (quoted in Rojas Mix, 2007: 238). Given the overt hostility of certain sectors of the Catholic hierarchy, Pinochet instead received supportive Evangelical representatives and institutionalized the government’s bonds with religious authorities by creating the Council of Pastors in 1975. When the president of the Chilean Bishops’ Conference refused to receive the dictator for the *Te Deum* of investiture, Pinochet accepted an invitation to celebrate it at the Pentecostal cathedral in Santiago (Klaiber, 1997). Another symbol of this exchange of recognition is the statue in honor of Evangelical preachers erected by Pinochet in the Plaza de Santiago. This unprecedented situation provided Pentecostal groups with the hope of becoming Chile’s official church (Bastian, 1997).

In Brazil, the campaign to “whiten” Afro-Brazilian religions was relaunched during the last dictatorship, which was periodically undermined by statements from certain Catholic Church authorities (Jensen, 2001: 13):

During the military dictatorship (1964–1985), Umbanda obtained official recognition and legitimacy. This was related to the dictatorship’s nationalist project. Presumably the military supported the interpretation of a racially white Brazilian Umbanda democracy. The military regime directly supported Umbanda to manipulate the masses, arousing contempt for those who opposed the government. The regime also used Umbanda against the Brazilian Catholic Church and especially against the clerics who opposed it.

The Umbanda nationalization strategy included a survey of religious affiliation through the census, the official incorporation of Umbanda holidays into the national calendar, the circulation of its literature, and, in 1977, the elimination of restrictions regarding public worship. For their part, representatives of the Afro-Brazilian religions adopted the code of national security (Ireland, 1988). In response, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, created in Rio de Janeiro in 1977, developed a competitive strategy that sought to "Umbandize" Brazilian Pentecostalism and included the use of *terreiros* (the places typically used for Umbanda worship). In this competitive context, various sectors of local Pentecostalism gave their support to the regime. For example, the leaders of the Assembly of God encouraged their congregations to vote for candidates nominated by the military regime in the 1974 elections (Löwy, 1999). In turn, the popular support progressively garnered by both the Pentecostal groups and Umbanda corresponded to an increasing identification of the army with these groups (Serbin, 2000: 433):

Repressed during the Estado Novo and combated by the Church in the 1950s, the nationalistic, syncretistic Umbanda grew rapidly after World War II and by 1964 had drawn in 4 percent of the officer corps. During the regime its popularity increased. . . . In the Amazon region, the Pentecostals received open support from Jarbas Passarinho, a military governor and the Minister of Education, while the Presbyterian Church throughout Brazil heavily supported the regime.

In Argentina, the historical symbiosis between Catholicism, the army, and the citizenry established limits for other religious actors. Still, a few of them lent their support to the regime, responded to the call of the authorities, or seized this historic opportunity to increase their public presence. The support coming from the Unification Church of Reverend Sun Myung Moon was perhaps the most explicit: "Antonio Rodríguez Carmona, Moon's envoy, contacted officials in General Videla's administration and said that the objective of his church was to fight communism. Early in the next year, the local CAUSA committee (one of several associations belonging to this church, which is headquartered in New York) was formed" (Bianchi, 2004: 288). The Unification Church also maintained good relations with sectors of the Catholic Church that were linked to the army (Mignone, 1986: 97–100). Welcoming more allies, the government expanded its horizons. On September 29, 1976, it invited Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox religious leaders to a luncheon: "The invitation to the Protestants was extended by the 'Casa Militar' to the FAIE [Federación Argentina de Iglesias Evangélicas]. The representative for this group was Pastor Vaccaro (Pentecostal) in his capacity as first vice president" (Techera, 1995: 263). Here it is worth noting that Pastor Luis Palau was allowed two radio broadcasts, "Crusade" and "Luis Palau Responde," as well as authorization for a massive event held at Luna Park in 1977, under a full state of siege. Given the restrictions on public acts then in force, these exemptions were signs of governmental goodwill that did not go unappreciated.<sup>7</sup>

This emergence into the political arena led to a breakdown of the imaginary of a Catholic monopoly across these three countries, along with a decline in the number of people who identified themselves as Catholic and a corresponding increase in adherents to Pentecostalism between 1960 and 2000 (Mallimaci and Giménez Béliveau, 2007).<sup>8</sup>

The transitions to democracy inherited this pattern of proliferating religious actors with a political vocation, leading to an unprecedented situation for democratic states: the multiplication of religious actors with which to negotiate in a framework in which the Catholic Church no longer had an exclusive relationship with the state (Bastian, 1997). The Chilean case, in which the state had to recognize as official two *Te Deums*, one Pentecostal and the other Catholic, illustrates this process (Bastian, 1997). Since the late 1980s, Evangelical leaders have tried their hand at forming political parties and movements<sup>9</sup> across different countries that, whatever their degree of success in the short term, highlight the willingness to press politico-religious demands of once-marginalized sectors that are now organized and mobilized.

## CONCLUSIONS

This comparative analysis highlights the role played by secular and religious beliefs in legitimation in situations of the breakdown of democracy. In this context, legitimate religious spokespersons take center stage and are interpellated by military groups in pursuit of legitimacy. Alliances are forged on the basis of affinities both with regard to a concept of “apolitical politics” that invests these groups with the image of a force against the corruption of democracy and the moral reserve of the nation and with regard to an essentialist vision of “the enemy” that justifies the exceptional nature of the dictatorship. As a result, dictatorships expand the spectrum of religious actors with political ambitions and bequeath this legacy to democracies. In this cultural politics, religious actors acquire the capacity to lobby the state and increase their public presence. With the return of democracy, they adopt the forms of democratic politics, forming their own parties or mobilizing their followers to support other parties’ candidates.

This does not necessarily translate—and here perhaps is the challenge—into a belief in the legitimacy of democracy. The democratic promise of a pluralistic project that positively recognizes (i.e., grants rights to) the existing religious plurality clashes with an imaginary and a practice that seek to obtain a comparative advantage from an alliance with the state so as to influence public policy and spread beliefs and practices throughout the nation. The vocation of different religious groups and actors competing over who gets to define national identity and project itself as the religious imaginary of “the Nation,” emulating the role long played by Catholicism, is an obstacle to a political scenario in which the existing plurality can be incorporated into a truly pluralistic program.

## NOTES

1. This phenomenon, though often associated with liberation theology, is much deeper and broader than a theological trend. It constitutes a vast “Christian liberationist” social movement and includes prominent Catholic as well as Evangelical leaders, especially from the ranks of so-called historical Protestantism (Löwy, 1999: 10). These religious actors and the ways in which they dealt with state repression during the military dictatorship in Argentina have been the topic of my previous research (see Catoggio and Mallimaci, 2008; Catoggio, 2010).

2. This doctrine was disseminated by the School of the Americas, based in Panama, which educated most of the power elites in these countries. Statistics compiled by the school in 1994 include 2,405 Chileans, 355 Brazilians, and 931 Argentines among former students. The lower number of Brazilians and Argentines is due to their countries' relations with France, an expert in "counterrevolutionary war" techniques such as those employed in the Vietnam and Algerian wars (Robin, 2006: 359).

3. A large body of literature has portrayed religious minorities as mechanisms of mass alienation, espousing a conspiracy theory that attributes the emergence of new religious movements to the advance of U.S. imperialism (Stoll, 1990).

4. This does not imply homogeneity, directionality, or teleological coherence of objectives.

5. General Antonio Carlos da Silva Muricy was chief of the army and played a key role in the 1964 coup. A declared devout Catholic, he was put in charge of organizing the bipartisan commission at the behest of President Medici (Serbin, 2000: 3).

6. In contrast to the Pentecostal churches, which allied themselves with the dictatorships, many Evangelical leaders, historically linked to Protestantism and supported by the World Council of Churches, organized the opposition, promoting and articulating various networks through which they denounced human rights violations in their countries and abroad (Green, 2003; Paredes, 2007).

7. The importance of a figure such as Luis Palau in the context of the dictatorship becomes clear when we consider his association with Billy Graham, the U.S. preacher who brought together the dissenting international Evangelical sectors in the World Council of Churches (WCC). In Latin America, sympathetic Evangelical and Pentecostal sectors came together through the Latin American Evangelical Fellowship, created in 1982; its affiliates promote differentiation among the historical churches, challenge the ecumenical character of the WCC, and condemn socialist and Marxist approaches (Bianchi, 2004: 245).

8. In contrast, Umbanda's popularity seems to be declining: in 1980, 0.6 percent of Brazilian residents identified themselves as followers of African religions; in 2000, only 0.3 percent did. This decline could be attributed to the aggressive competitive strategies developed by the Pentecostal churches (Prandi, 2004).

9. Several partisan initiatives were created between the late 1980s and the early 1990s: Argentina's Independent Christian Movement in 1991 and Independent Reform Movement in 1994, Brazil's Evangelical Caucus in 1986, Progressive Evangelical Movement in 1990, and First National Evangelical Political Conference in 1991, and Chile's National Christian Alliance in 1996 (Bastian, 1997).

## REFERENCES

Ansaldi, Waldo

2004 *"Matriuskas de terror: algunos elementos para analizar la dictadura argentina dentro de las dictaduras del Cono Sur,"* in Alfredo Pucciarelli (ed.), *Empresarios, tecnócratas y militares: La trama corporativa de la última dictadura*. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI.

Bastian, Jean Pierre

1997 *La mutación religiosa de América Latina: Para una sociología del cambio social en la modernidad periférica*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Bastide, Roger

1971 *Religiões africanas no Brasil: Contribuição a uma sociología das interpretações de civilizações*. San Pablo: Pioneira.

Bianchi, Susana

2004 *Historia de las religiones en la Argentina: Las minorías religiosas*. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana.

Castelo Branco, Alencar

1964 Inaugural address. April 15.

Catoggio, María Soledad

2006 "Vigilancia, censura, gobierno y castigo en el caso de la llamada Biblia Latinoamericana: una perspectiva foucaultiana." *E-Latina: Revista Electrónica de Estudios Latinoamericanistas* 4 (14).

2008 "Gestión y regulación de la diversidad religiosa: políticas de 'reconocimiento' estatal: el Registro Nacional de Cultos," in Fortunato Mallimaci (ed.), *Religión y política: Perspectivas América Latina-Europa*. Buenos Aires: Biblos.

- 2010 "Cambio de hábito: trayectorias de religiosas durante la última dictadura militar." *Latin American Research Review* 45 (2): 27–48.
- Catoggio, María Soledad and Fortunato Mallimaci  
2008 "El catolicismo argentino en la dictadura y en la post-dictadura: redes y disputas." *Puentes* 8 (23): 76–82.
- CEA (Conferencia Episcopal Argentina)  
1977 "Reflexión cristiana para el pueblo de la Patria." MS, May 7.  
1978 "La paz es obra de todos." MS, November 18.
- Chacón Herrera, Arturo and Humberto Lagos Schuffeneger  
1986 *Religión y proyecto político autoritario*. Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Literatura Americana Reunida y Programa Evangélico de Estudios Socio-Religiosos.
- Comité Permanente de la Conferencia Episcopal Chilena  
1977 "Nuestra convivencia nacional." MS, March 25.
- Conferencia Episcopal del Noroeste  
1973 "He escuchado el clamor de mi pueblo." MS, May 6.
- Cristi, Marcela and Lorne L. Dawson  
1996 "Civil religion in comparative perspective: Chile under Pinochet (1973–1989)." *Social Compass* 43 (3): 319–338.
- Di Stefano, Roberto and Loris Zanatta  
2000 *Historia de la Iglesia argentina: Desde la Conquista hasta fines del siglo XX*. Buenos Aires: Mondadori.
- Gazmurri, Cristián  
2001 "Una interpretación política de la experiencia autoritaria (1973–1990)." Instituto de Historia Pontificia de la Universidad Católica de Chile, no. 1.
- Green, James N.  
2003 "Clerics, exiles, and academics: opposition to the Brazilian military dictatorship in the United States, 1969–1974." *Latin American Politics and Society* 45 (1): 87–117.
- Invernizzi, Hernán and Judith Gociol  
2002 *Un golpe a los libros*. Buenos Aires: Eudeba.
- Ireland, Rowan  
1988 "Comunidades católicas de base, grupos espiritistas, y la profundización de la democracia en Brasil." *Revista Sociedad y Religión*, no. 6, 58–102.
- Jensen, Tina Gudrun  
2001 "Discursos sobre as religiões afro-brasileiras: da desafricanização para a reaficanização." *Revista de Estudos da Religião*, no. 1.
- Klaiber, Jeffrey  
1997 *Iglesia, dictaduras y democracia en América Latina*. Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Fondo Editorial.
- Linz, Juan  
1987 *La quiebra de las democracias*. Buenos Aires: Alianza.
- Löwy, Michael  
1999 *Guerra de dioses: Religión y política en América Latina*. Madrid: Siglo XXI.
- Mallimaci, Fortunato and Verónica Giménez Béliveau  
2007 "Creencias e increencia en el Cono Sur de América: entre la religiosidad difusa, la pluralización del campo religioso y las relaciones con lo público y lo político." *Revista Argentina de Sociología* 5 (9): 44–63.
- Mallimaci, Fortunato and María Soledad Catoggio  
2008 "Introducción," in Fortunato Mallimaci (ed.), *Religión y política: Perspectivas América Latina-Europa*. Buenos Aires: Biblos.
- Mignone, Emilio Fermin  
1986 *Iglesia y dictadura: El papel de la Iglesia a la luz de las relaciones con el régimen militar*. Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes/Página 12.
- Moulián, Tomás  
1997 *Chile actual: Anatomía de un mito*. Santiago de Chile: Arcis-Lom Ediciones.
- Paredes, Alejandro  
2007 "Santiago de Chile y Mendoza, Argentina: la red social que apoyó a los exiliados chilenos (1973–1976)." *Redes (Revista Hispana para el Análisis de Redes Sociales)* 13 (4): 1–33.
- Pierucci, Flávio Antônio

- 2004 "'Bye, bye Brasil': o declínio das religiões tradicionais no Censo 2000." *Estudos Avançados* 18 (52): 17–28.
- Prandi, Reginaldo  
2004 "O Brasil como axé: candomblé e umbanda no mercado religioso." *Estudos Avançados* 18 (52): 223–238.
- Quiroga, Hugo  
2004 *El tiempo del "Proceso": Conflictos y coincidencias entre políticos y militares, 1976–1983*. Santa Fe: Homo Sapiens/Fundación Ross.
- Robin, Marie Monique  
2005 *Escuadrones de la muerte: La escuela francesa*. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana.
- Rojas Mix, Miguel  
2007 *El dios de Pinochet: Fisonomía del fascismo iberoamericano*. Buenos Aires: Prometeo.
- Rouquié, Alain  
1981 "Dictadores, militares y legitimidad en América Latina." *Crítica y Utopía*, no. 5, 11–28.
- Serbin, Kenneth  
2000 *Secret Dialogues: Church-State Relations, Torture, and Social Justice in Authoritarian Brazil*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Stepan, Alfred  
1971 *Brasil: Los militares y la política*. Buenos Aires: Amorrortu.
- Stoll, David  
1990 *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?* Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Techera Marset, Walter  
1995 *Entre la resistencia y la sumisión: El discurso de las iglesias protestantes frente a la realidad socio-política argentina (1955–1982)*. Buenos Aires: Editorial ISEDET.
- Trindade, Helgio  
1985 "Bases de la democracia brasileña: lógica liberal y praxis autoritaria (1824/1945)," in Alain Rouquié and Jorge Schvarzer (eds.), *¿Cómo renacen las democracias?* Buenos Aires: Emecé.
- Weber, Max  
1993 (1922) *Economía y sociedad: Esbozo de sociología comprensiva*. Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica.