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POLITICAL PARTIES AND CHURCHES IN ARGENTINA: INTERSECTIONS IN QUICKSAND

Abstract

This work intends to analyze the historical intersections between political parties and churches in Argentina, focusing on Catholic and evangelical interventions, since these are the religious organizations with the most presence, interests and connections in this space. Our analysis will be based on a binary classification: the term *direct intersections* refers to the decision by religious agents to form their own party structures, while *indirect intersections* is the denomination for those practices through which churches exert their influence on political parties without getting involved in the electoral arena. After establishing the degree of effectiveness of these different strategies, we will discuss their impact in the context of the consolidation of democracy in present-day Argentina. Methodologically, the analysis relies on a comprehensive and critical review of the scientific production about religion and politics in the country being studied.

Keywords: Political parties, Catholic Church, Evangelical churches, Argentina

Introduction

Political parties play a number of key roles in a democratic political system: they organize the competition for power, train cadres as leaders, bring civil society's demands to the political power sphere and manage state resources when in charge of public administration. In developing these tasks, they maintain communication channels with different actors, corporations and social movements.

Christian churches are no exception, and their link to politics is particularly strong in Latin America, given their presence in the political space throughout history. The purpose of this article is to analyze the historical intersections between political parties and churches in Argentina through a binary classification: decisions by religious agents to form their own party structures will be called *direct intersections*, whereas the set of practices through which churches exert their influence on political parties without getting involved in the electoral arena will be termed *indirect intersections*. Our first goal is to identify these intersections and

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outline how influential they actually are. The second goal is to frame a hypothesis to account for their impact on the field of political-religious relationships in today's democratic Argentina.

This work will focus on interventions by the Catholic and evangelical churches, since these are the two religious organizations with the greatest influence in Argentine politics. Methodologically, the analysis will be based on a comprehensive and critical review of the scientific production about religion and politics in the country being studied.²

Catholicism and Political Parties in Argentina

The origins of the Catholic hegemony in the Argentine religious space can be traced back to colonial times when, as highlighted by Di Stefano and Zanatta³, the political and religious spheres were not differentiated: the Catholic Church, as an institution, was closely linked with the monarchy.

During the formation of the republic, this symbiotic logic became stronger. The Constitution of 1853, officially identified Catholicism with the Argentine state, as the legal expression of the nation: Article 2 established the state's obligation to provide financial support to the Catholic Church, and Article 63 made being a Catholic a requirement to become president. Political power was even given the duty to foster the evangelization of indigenous peoples (Article 67, Section 15 of the Constitution of 1853).⁴ The institutionalization of Catholic hegemony was moderated only when freedom of worship was recognized (Article 14 of the Constitution of 1853), a provision that confirmed the first guarantees granted in 1925 to contingents of English, German and French immigrants who conducted trading activities in the country, an early sign of the importance of immigrant culture in national development.⁵

In 1870, a liberal political elite emerged, which set out to consolidate and gain autonomy for the state administration. For the first time, the state became free from religious oversight and presented itself as an "enemy state". It was then that the government brought the civil registries and cemeteries under state control and passed the law that established universal, mandatory and lay education (Law 1420). The latter, enacted during Julio Argentino Roca's presidential term, banned religious education from state-run schools, triggering the reaction of the Catholic Church hierarchy, who was unwilling to accept the privatization of its

2 In the case of evangelical interventions in political parties, the article will rely on the empirical research findings that supported our PhD dissertation, which was financed by the Argentine National Council for Scientific and Technical Research between 2008 and 2012.

3 Roberto Di Stefano, Loris Zanatta, *Historia de la Iglesia Argentina. Desde la conquista hasta fines del siglo XX*, Mondadori, Buenos Aires, 2000, p. 16.

4 These two articles were repealed after the constitutional amendment of 1994.

5 Susana Bianchi, *Historia de las religiones en Argentina. Las minorías religiosas*, Sudamericana, Buenos Aires, 2004.

activities.⁶

These tensions ended with the transition to a mass society, between the late 19th and early 20th century. The rules of the political regime were changed by the appearance of new social actors in the political scene, which caused a change from “the restricted republic to an open republic”⁷. None of these social and political transformations went unnoticed by the Catholic Church, which set in motion a process aimed at taking over all social spheres.

Guided by the idea of “catholicizing” society and countering the emergence of foreign ideologies (liberalism, Marxism and anarchism), groups of lay Catholics created faith-based political parties. The first one was the Catholic Union. Founded in 1884, it was meant to imitate the model of the party structure created in Europe to fight against liberalism.⁸ Its members were liberal lay Catholics who had temporarily distanced themselves from the regime due to its attacks against the Catholic Church. When this modernist-secularizing offensive lost force (as a consequence of new conflict perspectives and the economic crisis of 1890), the Catholic Union dissolved, one reason being the scarce number of supporters that it had gained among Catholics themselves.

The first decades of the 20th century saw a second cycle of creation of faith-based parties, resulting from a strengthened representative democracy. In 1907, the Patriotic Union was born, as an electoral league that intended to attract Catholic votes for candidates who were willing to defend the religious doctrine, even if they belonged to different electoral lists⁹. Its failure gave rise to a new attempt, the Constitutional Party, created to face the new political competition scene originated by the law that established universal and secret male suffrage (known as the Sáenz Peña law). This group dissolved in 1918, given its lack of followers, as well as the conflicts that it had sparked within Catholicism itself, since its conservative spirit had met criticism from several prominent figures of this religious space. Finally, this cycle ended with the foundation of the Popular Party, started by Catholic layman José Pagés and inspired by a similar Italian experience. Unlike its predecessors, it presented itself in the electoral space as a lay party, even though its discourse and campaign strategies were aimed at attracting Catholic support. However, its proposal was at a disadvantage to compete against other, already consolidated party identities, such as radicalism, socialism and conservatism. Its performance was further eroded by a permanent characteristic of the strategy deployed by the Church hierarchy: its mistrust of Catholic engagement in party politics and its preference for other means to exert its influence in politics.

6 Fortunato Mallimaci, *Religión, política y laicidad en la Argentina del siglo XXI*, in: *Laicidad en América Latina y Europa. Repensando lo religioso entre lo público y lo privado en el siglo XXI*, Norberto Da Costa (ed.), CLAEH, Montevideo, 2006.

7 Natalio Botana, *El orden conservador. La política argentina entre 1880 y 1916*, Edhasa, Buenos Aires, 1998.

8 Roberto Di Stefano, Loris Zanatta, *Historia de la Iglesia Argentina. Desde la conquista hasta fines del siglo XX*, Mondadori, Buenos Aires, 2000, p. 354.

9 *Ibidem*, p. 380.

Indeed, for the Catholic hierarchy, creating confessional parties to wield its influence on society was a strategy fraught with danger, since the institution was aware of a latent conflict among different sectors of the same religion about the proper application of the Catholic social doctrine in politics. As has been rightly pointed out by Esquivel¹⁰, the Church preferred to catholicize society by permeating social structures rather than by creating parallel organizations. Just as, in the case of labor conflicts, the Church did not create “Catholic trade unions” but penetrated into those that already existed, it followed the same course of action towards the ruling class: instead of encouraging the creation of an essentially Catholic party, it betted on gaining clout over the ruling class “from the inside”.

Essentially, such a bet resulted in what Di Stefano and Zanatta called “the myth of the Catholic nation”¹¹: a narrative that positioned the Catholic Church as a foundational matrix of the Argentine nation, which preexisted the state and was thus the source of meaning for its social and political organization. This religious imaginary was met with acquiescence by the conservative political groups, who abandoned their proposal to secularize society and chose to appeal to Catholic identity as the criterion to homogenize the Argentine population¹².

As the basis of a political identity, “the myth of the Catholic nation” established its frontiers following a friend-enemy logic.¹³ Criticism was first targeted at representative democracy, viewed by the Catholic hierarchy as a source of conflict, promoting various different sources of legitimacy, at the same time as it had opened the floodgates to ideologies considered as threats,¹⁴ mainly communism, but also the expansionist spirit of the Jewish and evangelical communities.

The myth of the Catholic nation gave rise to a hostile discourse about each of these groups. When referring to the Jewish community, the most integralist members used the medieval argument of deism to exclude them. By the same token, Lutherans, Pentecostals, Baptists and Adventists started to be regarded as representatives of a foreign, secularizing and anomalous ideology that threatened to uproot the foundations of a country with an exclusively Catholic origin. All manifestations of faith outside the temples and ethnic communities and, especially, proselytizing, were prohibited. In this way, the political-religious fabric under the myth of the Catholic nation resulted in an almost total exclusion of

10 Juan Cruz Esquivel, *Detrás de los muros. La Iglesia Católica en tiempos de Alfonsín y Menem (1983-1999)*, Universidad Nacional de Quilmes Editorial, Bernal, 2004, pp. 71-72.

11 Roberto Di Stefano, Loris Zanatta, *Historia de la Iglesia Argentina. Desde la conquista hasta fines del siglo XX*, Mondadori, Buenos Aires, 2000.

12 Laura Rita Segato, *La Nación y sus Otros. Raza, etnicidad y diversidad religiosa en los tiempos de Políticas de la Identidad*, Prometeo, Buenos Aires, 2007, p. 196.

13 See more: Carl Schmitt, *El concepto de lo político*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 1932, 2009.

14 Di Stefano and Zanatta point out that several Catholic sectors were more willing to accept an organic or corporatist democratic model, in which political power was based on the representation of intermediate groups or bodies, according to an organicist social metaphor. See more: Roberto Di Stefano, Loris Zanatta, *Historia de la Iglesia Argentina. Desde la conquista hasta fines del siglo XX*, Mondadori, Buenos Aires, 2000.

every non-Catholic religious actor from the public sphere. These had to adjust to a minimum tolerance situation and confine their activities strictly to private life.

Under a model of integral Catholicism, or Catholicism “for life”¹⁵, the Catholic Church permeated the structures of the state and society, and multiplied its influence on key issues. Its nationalistic preaching, in particular, created affinity within the Army, which, from the 1930s onwards, became the Church’s preferred way to exert its influence on political dynamics.

The links with Peronism (1945-1955) are a manifestation of this characteristic of Catholicism’s political projection, which adjusted more successfully to authoritarian regimes than to democratic ones. Catholicism was involved in forging the Peronist identity, not just because of the nationalistic background of the party’s leader, but also because of the overlap between the Peronist agenda and the Catholic Church’s social doctrine.¹⁶

However, after some years of mutual understanding, tension mounted between Juan Domingo Perón’s democratic government and the Catholic Church. Reciprocal accusations of undue encroachment upon each other’s powers moved Catholic actors to participate in the 1955 *coup d’état*, which overthrew Perón before the end of his second presidential term.¹⁷ Conversely, as a result of this tension, public space was relatively opened to some religious groups, especially evangelicals and members of the Basilio Scientific School, which were granted government permits to worship at places where large crowds could gather.¹⁸

The Catholic Church’s participation in the *coup d’état* that toppled Perón in 1955 paved the way for the renewal of its alliance with Army sectors, sealed in the 1930s. In this way, the Church also reached the point of institutional consolidation, evidenced in a significant increase in the number of dioceses and in the signature of the Concordat between Argentina and the Holy See in 1966. The Church thus won a victory over the power of the state, since this agreement replaced the patronage regime that dated back to colonial times. It also deprived public power of the possibility to appoint or veto new bishops, while the privilege system already described was not affected. Another important Catholic conquest in this period was obtaining state funds for all educational undertakings, including private ones, based on the argument of the universal guarantee of the right to education and parents’ freedom to choose their children’s educational orientation.

15 Fortunato Mallimaci, *El catolicismo integral en la Argentina 1930-1946*, Biblos, Buenos Aires, 1998.

16 Juan Domingo Perón was a high-ranking military officer who, in the 1940s, participated in a nationalistic intellectual climate that fostered positioning the country as far from capitalism as from communism. In this search, Perón studied the Social Doctrine of the Church and, after being elected president, made it part of his government agenda. This activated his affinity with the Church hierarchy, who welcomed the political implementation of their worldview. Perón, in turn, contributed to the Church’s material reproduction by financing the construction of dioceses and Catholic schools. This close relationship came to an end during Perón’s second term in office, when his intention to spread his ideology in different social spheres, such as culture, art and, fundamentally, education, was judged as totalitarian by the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

17 Lila Caimari, *Perón y la Iglesia Católica. Religión, Estado y Sociedad en la Argentina (1943-1955)*, Ariel, Buenos Aires, 1995.

18 Susana Bianchi, *Historia de las religiones en Argentina. Las minorías religiosas*, Sudamericana, Buenos Aires, 2004.

During the last military dictatorship (1976-1983), a number of decrees were promulgated, securing Catholic hegemony within the religious field: law 21.950, which established a monthly allowance for religious dignitaries, law 22.161 establishing a monthly allowance to parish priests who lived in the country's borders, and law 22.950, for the financial support and education of the Argentine clergy.

Accusations of "ideological infiltration" against Jewish and evangelical communities during the 1950s¹⁹ continued during the 1960s, when a *de facto* government created the Registry of Religious Organizations. The new law mandated that every non-Catholic creed should register, so that its activities and the appointment of its authorities could be subject to oversight. In the Registry of Religious Organizations, the Catholic Church kept the privilege of preserving its public legal entity status, whereas all other religious entities (especially evangelical and Pentecostal ones) had the obligation to register as "non-profit organizations" in the Superintendence of Corporations (IGJ), a requirement still in force today. This mechanism, added to the exclusive financial support for the Catholic Church, reinforced the Catholic hierarchy's institutional power to the detriment of religious pluralism.²⁰

The restoration of democracy in 1983 and its consolidation over the following decades provided an interesting context for Catholic interventions in the Argentine political arena. Direct interventions continued to be exceptional. A remarkable fact was the participation of bishop Jaime de Nevares in the 1994 Constitutional Assembly, representing the FREPASO (*Frente País Solidario* or Solidary Country Front) party, which opposed president Menem's Peronist government. The Bishop was invited by this party given its renowned background as a human rights champion in Argentina and his severe criticism of the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s. However, his participation in the constitutional experience was short-lived, since discrepancies with FREPASO's leaders caused his resignation soon after.

Later, in 1998, priest Luis Farinello decided to create a political grouping in order to compete for power against Peronism in the province of Buenos Aires. Farinello had been part of the Movement of Priests for the Third World during the sixties, and was known for his social work in the district of Quilmes (a densely populated city in the province of Buenos Aires). His party, *Polo Social* (Social Pole), gathered Peronist supporters who were disappointed at Menemist reforms, Catholics with a deep and active social commitment and, as will be shown soon, also evangelical leaders and pastors who were concerned about the dire social situation. In the 2001 elections, *Polo Social* did not obtain a significant number of votes, so Farinello decided to dissolve the party and return to ecclesiastical life.

In 2006, bishop Joaquín Piña headed the mobilization of several civil and political society actors in the province of Misiones, grouped in the *Frente Unidos por*

19 Ibidem.

20 María Soledad Catoggio, *Gestión y regulación de la diversidad religiosa. Políticas de "reconocimiento" estatal: el Registro Nacional de Cultos*, in: *Religión y Política. Perspectivas América Latina-Europa*, Fortunato Mallimaci (ed.), Buenos Aires, Biblos, 2008.

la Dignidad (United by Dignity Front), which opposed the reelection of governor Rovira by referendum. The bishop had great social support, since he constantly denounced the critical situation which affected the most disadvantaged sectors of the province and the excessive power of the provincial elite. Under his leadership, the opposition was able to thwart the governor's project at the polls. After this victory, the bishop went back to his ministry, since he had stated that his political intervention was strictly related to that particular situation.

The last case was the appointment of priest Juan Carlos Molina as head of the Secretariat of Planning for the Prevention of Drug Addictions and the Fight Against Drug Trafficking, on December 4th 2013, by Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's government. Having started a foundation of his own, Molina had specialized in the therapeutic approach to drug abuse. He was politically close to the Minister of Social Development, Alicia Kirchner. The priest spent a short but intensively active period as head of this government agency: he promoted the decriminalization of drug use, an initiative that met criticism from broad Church sectors and which debilitated him to such an extent that he stepped aside from his position on May 14th, 2015.

None of these four experiences had any institutional support from the Catholic Church. They were individual initiatives, based on the notability of those who undertook them and on their links to specific sectors of the political world, which became activated in particular contexts. The Catholic Church as an institution continued to intervene in political parties according to the historical pattern of indirect influence. Research by Donatello and Mallimaci (2013), Mallimaci and Giorgi (2016), Cucchetti (2010), Donatello (2010) and Levita (2014) has shown that an important part of the Argentine political class, across the political spectrum, was socialized in Catholic spaces (parishes, Catholic Action groups, scouts). This education is responsible for those schemes that naturalize proximity to the Catholic hierarchy in power spaces. In this regard, the study conducted by Esquivel²¹ about national lawmakers' perceptions turns out to be revealing: in 2011, almost 90% of members of Congress considered that religious beliefs had an influence on how bills were drafted and how votes were cast in Congress. In particular, three out of four lawmakers stated that the Catholic Church's opinion permeated the vote in the case of bills that broadened sexual and reproductive rights. Officials further admitted to frequently meeting with leading religious figures.²²

In addition to these elements, there is also a structural dimension of the Argentine political system that must be considered: as pointed out by Prieto²³,

21 Esquivel Juan Cruz, *Religión y política: la influencia religiosa sobre las definiciones parlamentarias en materia de derechos sexuales y reproductivos*, in: *Permeabilidades activas. Religión, política y sexualidad en la Argentina democrática*, Juan Cruz Esquivel, Juan Marco Vaggione (eds.), Biblos, Buenos Aires, 2015.

22 *Ibidem*, pp. 28-29.

23 Sol Prieto, *El desempeño de los partidos confesionales católicos en Argentina: una revisión crítica*, *Religião & Sociedade*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 2014.

based on the theory developed by Lipset and Rokkan about the forming of political parties²⁴, in Argentina there was no Church-state cleavage at the basis of political formations. This explains the lack of a lay culture in the Argentine political class from the times when it was taking shape.

Ultimately, a significant part of the Argentine political class views the Catholic Church as a powerful actor, to be respected and taken into account when decisions have to be made. Symmetrically, when political leaders undertake territorial tasks in sensitive areas (education, welfare, health and security), they encourage Catholic agents to take part in the planning, execution and evaluation stages of such policies. Esquivel²⁵ has coined the expression “subsidiarity culture” for this behavior pattern, which is tied to Catholicism’s value framework, more specifically, to the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church. Within this framework, civil society sectors are encouraged to take on an active role, and state intervention is allowed only when the common good cannot be guaranteed by the former. Based on these premises, this worldview is critical of direct intervention by the state and legitimizes religious mediations in the social sphere.

In order to maintain and reproduce its influence on the political class, the Catholic Church has promoted both formal and informal interaction spaces. Some examples are the frequent meetings that bishops request to have with state officials, the Social Week, an event organized every year to address the problem of poverty and aid for the needy (and consistently attended by leaders, business people and heads of political parties) and, fundamentally, the *Te Deum*, a ritual held every May 25th (a significant patriotic day in Argentina). On this date, the president and the Cabinet of Ministers attend Mass and listen to the homily delivered by the bishop of Buenos Aires, which includes an opinion about the country’s social and political reality. As Esquivel²⁶ points out, *Te Deums* are often spaces where the Church makes political power listen to its criticism.

In brief, the intense links between the political class and Catholic power, as regards transferred legitimacy, circulation of actors, symbols and utopias, inspired Mallimaci and Esquivel²⁷ to conceptualize the political and the religious as a continuum, bringing into question the view of a strict separation between spheres, inherited from the most reductionist versions of modernity’s secularization process.

For the Church, it was a successful strategy to influence the party system through the early socialization of its cadres and the reproduction of interaction

24 Seymour Lipset, Rokkan Stein, Estructuras de división, sistemas de partidos y alineamientos electorales, in: *Diez Textos Básicos de Ciencia Política*, Albert Batlle i Rubio (eds.), Ariel, Barcelona, 1992.

25 Juan Cruz Esquivel, Laicidad, secularización y cultura política: las encrucijadas de las políticas públicas en Argentina, *Revista Laicidad y libertades*, Escritos jurídicos, No. 8, Madrid, 2008.

26 Juan Cruz Esquivel, *Detrás de los muros. La Iglesia Católica en tiempos de Alfonsín y Menem (1983-1999)*, Universidad Nacional de Quilmes Editorial, Bernal, 2004.

27 Fortunato Mallimaci, Juan Cruz Esquivel, Catolicismo, política y sociedad en el Bicentenario de la Argentina, *Revista Argentina de Ciencia Política*, No. 17, 2011.

spaces. Not only did its legal privileges remain almost untouched during the democratic period²⁸, but they also multiplied: although the 1994 constitutional amendment repealed the requirement of being a Catholic to become president and the obligation to evangelize indigenous territories (since these articles were considered to be outdated), this process did not eliminate the state's duty to financially support the Church, and it introduced the legal notion that life begins at conception. In the religious sphere, Catholic hegemony perpetuated itself: Catholicism continues to be the only creed which does not need to register with the state, and all the legislative initiatives that aimed at changing the unequal structure of the religious field were unsuccessful²⁹. Actually, in the case of several public policies, the power of the Church became even greater. Under the Audiovisual Communication Services Law, the Church was recognized both as a non-profit and as an institution with public legal status, so the institution became entitled to twice the material and symbolic resources provided for by this piece of legislation. The Church also continued to gain access to decisive public policies, through state funds transfers for social relief and, fundamentally, for educational activities.

However, the reproduction of Catholic power was challenged by a number of tensions that arose when different governments intervened in issues that were sensitive for the Catholic hierarchy³⁰. In 1985, during the term of Radical president Raúl Alfonsín, the divorce law motivated public mobilization and rejection from the Church, which however was unable to prevent it from being passed. During the Kirchners presidential terms (2003-2015), tensions were marked by the government's intention to stress the autonomous power of the state in terms of public health and sexual and reproductive rights³¹. The Catholic Church viewed these initiatives as an attempt by the state to subvert the idea of a heterosexual patriarchal family, and publicly decried them. The institution was particularly critical of the debate concerning regulations to provide sexual education in schools, and of the bills to decriminalize abortion and legalize same-sex marriage. The bitterness of the relationship led president Kirchner to request the resignation of the military bishop (who had criticized the Minister of Health over the distribution of condoms), while the Church opted for lobbying and mobilizing publicly against same-sex marriage, in the streets and in the media. It even requested the

28 Juan Cruz Esquivel, *Detrás de los muros. La Iglesia Católica en tiempos de Alfonsín y Menem (1983-1999)*, Universidad Nacional de Quilmes Editorial, Bernal, 2004.

29 See more: Hilario Wyncarczyk, *Ciudadanos de dos mundos. El Movimiento evangélico en la vida pública argentina 1980-2001*, UNSAM EDITA de Universidad Nacional de San Martín, San Martín, 2009; Marcos Carbonelli, Mariela Mosqueira, *Evangélicos y política: tensiones en torno a la libertad e igualdad religiosa en Argentina*, *Revista Científica Guillermo de Ockham*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2012; Marcos Carbonelli, *Valores para mi País*, *Evangélicos en la esfera política argentina 2008-2011*, *DADOS- Revista de Ciências Sociais*, Vol. 58, No. 4, 2015.

30 Rubén Dri, *Proceso a la Iglesia Argentina. Relaciones de la jerarquía eclesiástica y los gobiernos de Alfonsín y Menem*, Biblos, Buenos Aires, 1997; Juan Cruz Esquivel, *Detrás de los muros. La Iglesia Católica en tiempos de Alfonsín y Menem (1983-1999)*. . . ;

31 Fortunato Mallimaci, *Política y catolicismo en el Gobierno del Dr. Kirchner: recomposición y disputa del poder simbólico*, in: *Religión, política y cultura en América Latina: nuevas miradas*, Christian Parker (ed), Instituto de Estudios Avanzados- Asociación de Cientistas Sociales de la Religión, Santiago de Chile, 2012.

population at large, and especially Catholics, to refrain from voting in future elections for the representatives and senators who had advanced the new legislation. In spite of this, the same-sex marriage law was passed, and as Esquivel points out³², even though this was not due to a prevailing lay culture in Argentina, it bore witness to the progress made by the democratization process and the growing political class's acceptance of support from multiple social sectors. This point will be referred to again in the conclusions, when the situation of religious power in Argentina and its future perspectives are reviewed.

Evangelicals and Political Parties in Argentina

Having been persecuted for a long time in Argentine political history, it was not until quite late in history that Evangelicals became involved in party politics. During the 19th century and for the most part of the 20th century, its members' political activity was confined to defending their rights as a public minority, whether through legal action or mobilizations³³. With the restoration of democracy in 1983, new communication channels with the political field could be opened, with the participation of the previously marginalized religious agents.

The first evangelical initiatives (1983) were spearheaded by groups of lawyers and businessmen who belonged to Baptist and Free Brethren congregations and who reflected on the need to participate in party structures.³⁴ These groups, called ALEVA (*Asociación Alianza Evangélica Argentina* or Argentine Evangelical Alliance Association) and later on CEA (*Civismo en Acción* or Citizens' Action) did not directly turn into political parties, although some of their members affiliated to the Democratic Progressive Party. Wynarczyk³⁵ highlights the importance of this transitional period, because it was then that two different evangelical traditions and perspectives met: on the one hand, the middle and high class evangelical groups, which leaned politically towards liberalism; on the other hand, Pentecostal groups made up of low and middle class individuals who had "converted" to evangelicalism and felt closer to Peronism. While evangelicals chose the strategy of gradually adapting to Argentine party structures, Pentecostal sectors upheld the idea of creating a political party of their own, in line with parallel Latin American experiences³⁶. In 1993, the province of Buenos Aires saw the formation of the

32 Esquivel Juan Cruz, *Religión y política: la influencia religiosa sobre las definiciones parlamentarias en materia de derechos sexuales y reproductivos*, in: *Permeabilidades activas. Religión, política y sexualidad en la Argentina democrática*, Juan Cruz Esquivel y Juan Marco Vaggione (eds.), Biblos, Buenos Aires, 2015.

33 Paula Seiguer, *Laicidad y pluralidad religiosa temprana. Los metodistas y el Estado laico en la década de 1880*, *Revista Quinto Sol*, Vol. 19, Santa Rosa, 2015; Susana Bianchi, *Historia de las religiones en Argentina. Las minorías religiosas*, Sudamericana, Buenos Aires, 2004; Hilario Wynarczyk, *Ciudadanos de dos mundos. El Movimiento evangélico en la vida pública argentina 1980-2001*, UNSAM EDITA de Universidad Nacional de San Martín, San Martín, 2009.

34 Hilario Wynarczyk, *Sal y luz a las naciones. Evangélicos y política en la Argentina (1980-2001)*, Siglo XXI, Buenos Aires, 2010, p. 27.

35 *Ibidem*, pp. 65-69.

36 See more: Silveira Campos Leonildo, *De "políticos evangélicos" a "políticos de Cristo": la trayectoria de las acciones y mentalidad*

first evangelical party: the MCI (*Movimiento Cristiano Independiente* or Independent Christian Movement), which took part in the 1993 and 1995 general elections, as well as in the 1994 vote for representatives to the Constituent Assembly, with a poor performance. The MRI (*Movimiento Reformador Independiente* or Independent Reformer Movement), a group that became detached from this political force in the province of Córdoba, achieved no significant electoral results, either. In brief, both parties proposed to redeem and rebuild the political³⁷, using biblical principles as the guidelines of a transformational practice. Strategically, these parties' leaders sought to consolidate their electoral base within evangelical congregations, so their electoral campaigns developed in the temples.

The call for a constituent assembly in 1994 encouraged MCI members to contact evangelical federations' leaders and to present themselves as the representatives of a minority that was discriminated against and which, they argued, had to mobilize for a new worship law³⁸. Mallimaci³⁹ contrasts this model with the exceptional form of participation as a representative to the constituent assembly chosen by Methodist pastor Míguez Bonino, who belonged to the *Frente Grande* (Broad Front) party, alongside other religious figures, such as the already mentioned Catholic bishop Jaime de Nevares. For this author, the case of Míguez Bonino is an example of a highly regarded leader who joined a political party because of his affinity with its proposals and agenda, but did not attempt to take advantage of his position as a religious leader, or encouraged creating exclusively faith-based parties.

After being defeated time and again in the 1993, 1994 and 1995 elections, the MCI eventually broke up. Some members of this space founded the MR (*Movimiento Reformador* or Reformer Movement), which discarded the idea of a faith-based party and opted for an alliances policy, behaving as an evangelical space inside "secular" political structures and upholding a platform based on social justice, the fight against corruption and the defense of the interests of the most vulnerable sectors. Given the affinity of these ideas with the Peronist tradition⁴⁰, it was possible for them to successively approach different "dissenting" Peronist groups: first, their members joined the FREPASO, then, the Christian Democracy and, finally, the already mentioned *Polo Social* party, led by Catholic priest Luis

política de los evangélicos brasileños en el paso del siglo XX al siglo XXI, *Ciencias Sociales y Religión*, No. 7, 2005; Maria das Dores Campos Machado, *Política e Religião. A participação dos evangélicos nas eleições*, Editora FVG, Rio de Janeiro, 2006; Álvaro Cepeda van Houten, *Cientelismo y fe: dinámicas políticas del pentecostalismo en Colombia*, Universidad de San Buenaventura, Bogotá, 2007.

37 Enzo Pace, Políticas de Redención y Redención de la Política, *Ciencias Sociales y Religión*, No. 8, 2006.

38 Hilario Wynarczyk, *Ciudadanos de dos mundos. El Movimiento evangélico en la vida pública argentina 1980-2001*, UNSAM EDITA de Universidad Nacional de San Martín, San Martín, 2009, pp. 109-111.

39 Fortunato Mallimaci, Protestantismo y política partidaria en la actual Argentina, in: *Protestantismo y política en América latina y el Caribe*, Tomas Gutiérrez (ed.), Cehila, Lima, 1996.

40 Javier Auyero, *La política de los pobres. Las prácticas clientelistas del peronismo*, Manantial, Buenos Aires, 2001.

Farinello⁴¹. In spite of changing its strategy and adapting its political proposals, the MR never managed to reach public positions in subsequent elections and dissolved after the *Polo Social* experience came to an end.

In the new millennium, evangelical political participation developed in two different forms: on the one hand, a territorial modality, involving evangelical groups which took part in electoral competitions in the Greater Buenos Aires Area within Peronist structures, in the 2011 election, and on the other, an ethical modality, centered in the career and public projection of representative Cynthia Hotton, who started her political life in center-right spaces and then created a cross-confessional party, *Valores para mi País* (Values for my Country), which gathered supporters from evangelical sectors, but also from Catholic ones.

Research by Carbonelli⁴² has analyzed the politicization of Pentecostal pastors of neighborhood communities who were dedicated to multiple forms of social aid, such as organizing workshops about gender violence, soup kitchens and second-hand clothes markets, among other activities. These actions built a relief network that reached not only churchgoers, but also the people living in the neighborhood and nearby areas. Studies by Míguez⁴³ and Semán⁴⁴ have revealed the importance of these religious groups during the nineties, when neoliberal policies caused a soaring rise of unemployment. In the context of labor flexibility, an eroded social fabric and weak traditional institutions (political parties, unions, social organizations, among others), evangelical churches became one more survival strategy for popular sectors.

This social role also paved the way for evangelicals to step into the political arena. Indeed, studies by Carbonelli⁴⁵ show how evangelical leaders' social work in the most vulnerable sectors of the urban periphery attracted the attention of several political leaders, who wished to have among their ranks actors with mobilization power who were close to the reality of the most disadvantaged social sectors.

Such was the case of the *Movimiento Justicialista Cristiano* (Christian Social Justice Movement), which had an outstanding electoral performance in the dis-

41 See: Hilario Wyncarczyk, Partidos políticos conservadores bíblicos en la Argentina. Formación y ocaso 1991-2001, *Civitas-Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, No. 2, Porto Alegre, 2006, p. 29; Hilario Wyncarczyk, *Sal y luz a las naciones. Evangélicos y política en la Argentina (1980-2001)*, Siglo XXI, Buenos Aires, 2010, p. 325.

42 Marcos Carbonelli, Los evangélicos en la arena política del Conurbano. Dilemas y horizontes de una apuesta religiosa territorial, *Mitológicas*, No. XXIX, Buenos Aires, 2014, pp. 41-63; Marcos Carbonelli, Los evangélicos y la arena partidaria en la Argentina contemporánea, *Estudios Políticos*, No. 37, México D.F, 2016.

43 Daniel Míguez, *Spiritual bonfire in Argentina: Confronting current theories with an Ethnographic Account of Pentecostal Growth in Buenos Aires Suburb*, Tesis de Doctorado, CEDLA, Amsterdam, 1997; Daniel Míguez, Política y Magia en un suburbio de Buenos Aires: estrategias indirectas de expresión demandas en un contexto de clientelismo político, *Sociedad y Religión. Sociología, Antropología e Historia de la Religión en el Cono Sur*, No.16/17, Buenos Aires, 1998.

44 Pablo Semán, El Pentecostalismo y la religiosidad de los sectores populares, in: *Desde Abajo. La transformación de las identidades sociales*, Maristella Svampa (ed.), Biblos-Universidad Nacional General Sarmiento, Buenos Aires, 2000.

45 Marcos Carbonelli, Los evangélicos en la arena política del Conurbano. Dilemas y horizontes de una apuesta religiosa territorial, *Mitológicas*, No. XXIX, Buenos Aires, 2014, pp. 41-63.

trict of Hurlingham, and of the *Cristianos en Acción* (Christians in Action) group, and the *Frente Unión por la Fe* (Union for Faith Front), which participated in the municipal elections of the district of Quilmes. The three groupings were started by leaders and pastors of mid-sized churches (around five hundred members) who were invited by local Peronist leaders to compete in their lists in the municipal elections. In general, the agreement was the following: pastors ran for mayor, while the rest of the candidates to municipal councilors were church and party members in equal parts.

The campaign messages of the three organizations shared a common denominator: the defense of neglected social demands, and social sensitivity as the paramount political virtue. Thus, Christian politicians intended to position themselves as leaders who upheld not just community rights, but also their neighborhood needs. From a strategic point of view, evangelical movements deliberately sought to reproduce the imaginary about the existence of an evangelical vote, based on the assumed ability of religious leadership to influence the political will of the faithful.

The 2011 elections revealed the limits of these evangelical-political attempts. None of the pastors was able to win in their districts. Discouraged by this defeat, they chose not to resume their political activity and focused exclusively on their pastoral role.

The second format of Christian politics was the political career of representative Cynthia Hotton and the foundation of her political organization, *Valores para mi País*. Cynthia Hotton belongs to a prominent family in the Argentine evangelical space, holding staunch political positions. Following in her father's steps (a career diplomat), she became involved in politics in 2001, as a member of the center-right party RECREAR. Having obtained unfavorable results in the 2003 and 2005 elections, this party forged an alliance with the *Compromiso para el Cambio* (Commitment to Change) party, headed by Mauricio Macri (the current president of Argentina) for the general 2007 election. To comply with the female quota requirement, the party alliance proposed Hotton as second in the list of candidates running for national representative in Congress, a position for which she was elected. It should be stressed that she did not owe her victory to the evangelical community's votes, but to the accumulated votes cast for the party alliance.

Once a congresswoman, Hotton reinforced her religious identity by creating her own political space, *Valores para mi País* (VPMP). This organization's proposals focused on three areas: a) drafting a new freedom of worship bill, b) adopting a critical stance towards the decriminalization of abortion and same-sex marriage, and c) constructing a discourse against corruption and in favor of transparent political practices. Representative Hotton relied on this agenda to position herself as a point of reference, not only for the evangelical community but also for a broader, cross-confessional social sector sharing ethical principles beyond ideological cleavages. In this regard, her political space was initially made up by pastors and

leaders of evangelical megachurches who endorsed the ideas of the party being formed. However, in later years, it drew also Catholics who were active in their parishes and agreed with imbuing politics with Christian values.

In line with her political platform, in 2010 Hotton stood out publicly as one of the voices against the bill that gave same-sex couples legal marriage and adoption rights. Her position was based on legal, scientific and religious arguments, and she garnered support from conservative evangelical federations, but also from Catholic sectors which partook of her public activities. These included TV show appearances, strictly parliamentary debates and street mobilizations. Even if her position was defeated when the same-sex marriage bill was passed, she became famous as a champion of life and family values. This reinforced her joint work with Catholic organizations and personalities in similar causes, such as opposing the decriminalization of abortion.⁴⁶

In the same year, Hotton introduced a bill about freedom of worship in Argentina. Its purpose was not to counterbalance Catholic privileges, but to establish a new demarcation between legitimate and illegitimate creeds. The spirit of this legislative proposal was to keep the differential position of the Catholic Church unaltered in the religious field and to create a legal entity status concept for all other religions that registered with the National Register of Religious Entities (Freedom of Worship Bill, 2010, Art. 8). Such legal recognition was dependent on compliance with a number of requirements, e.g. providing proof of actual presence in the Argentine territory, submitting a detailed report of religious principles and doctrines and identifying administrative authorities. Religious organizations meeting these requirements would be entitled to a number of rights, such as tax exemptions, non-seizability and unenforceability of temples, places of worship and sacred objects, and free access by their ministers to prisons, hospitals, retirement homes and Armed Forces facilities to provide spiritual assistance to those who lived there and wished to receive it (Freedom of Worship Bill, 2010, Article 9, Subsections 2 and 6, and Article 15, Subsections 3, 4 and 6). Hotton's bill also included a restrictive clause, refusing the denomination of religion to the study of parapsychology, and to astrophysics, astrology, fortune-telling or magic, satanic rites and creeds that included animal cruelty as part of their religious services (Freedom of Worship Bill, 2010, Article 6).

Based on these criteria, Hotton's bill intended to transform what Giumbelli⁴⁷ calls the social definition of religion: a legitimate agreement on what can or cannot be defined as a religion in a society at a given moment. Hotton's legislative initiative was aimed at partially reshaping the boundaries of the religious field using a three-layered model. Catholicism would continue to be entitled to the state's financial support, thus retaining its privileged religion status. Other creeds

46 Marcos Carbonelli, Gabriela Irrazábal, *Católicos y evangélicos ¿Alianzas religiosas en el campo de la bioética argentina?*, *Nómadas. Revista Crítica de Ciencias Sociales y Jurídicas*, No. 26, 2010.

47 Emerson Giumbelli, *O Fim Da Religião dilema da liberdade religiosa no Brasil e na França*, Attar editorial, Sao Paulo, 2002.

that were “recognized” by public power would be granted guarantees to expand their proselytizing activities in several public spaces. The description of such activities (free access to hospitals, prisons and Armed Forces facilities) refers implicitly to the pastoral work of the evangelical communities, so the spirit of the bill was to give such religious expressions some of Catholicism’s powers to gain a foothold in institutional spaces. Finally, there is a bottom layer for African American creeds (umbanda, batuque, candomble) and for the practices of healers and fortune-tellers, unrecognized by the state and excluded from the legitimate religious field.

Given its characteristics, the bill was met with disapproval by the marginalized religious minorities, by sectors of the press which considered that religious specialists would be given excessive privileges, but also by important sectors of the evangelical community itself, which accused Hotton of forsaking the historic cause of equality and wrongly proposing a new unequal regime for the religious world. Facing different types of criticism, the bill was finally withdrawn from Congress, due to lack of internal agreement within political forces and in civil society.

Hit by this failure, Hotton betted on relaunching her political career by stressing her profile as an honest leader who upheld traditional values. She left the *Compromiso para el Cambio* party because its leaders deferred taking a position against the same-sex marriage bill and because of the limited space that top party officials gave collaborators in future lists. As an independent party, *Valores para mi País* participated in the city of Buenos Aires municipal election, with Cynthia Hotton running for representative to the Buenos Aires legislature at the top of the list. In the context of an electoral competition polarized by the governing party and opposition forces, VPMP obtained 18,335 votes in the election, held on July 10th 2011. This amount was insufficient to obtain a seat in the legislature. After this political setback, and without her seat as a national representative, since her term was over and could not be renewed, Hotton tried to revive his cross-confessional party project —unsuccessfully so far— in smaller districts of the province of Buenos Aires.

Specialized analyses on evangelical party experiences agree in pointing out their limitations. Both in the nineties⁴⁸ and during the new century⁴⁹, evangelical confessional party experiences (wrongly) based their political potential on the effective weight of the evangelical vote. This proved to be an imaginary that failed to reflect reality rather than an effective electoral behavior. The meager number of votes obtained in successive elections reinforced the importance and historical density of traditional political identities over religious affiliation at the polls. If we

48 Hilario Wynarczyk, Partidos políticos conservadores bíblicos en la Argentina. Formación y ocaso 1991-2001, *Civitas-Revista de Ciências Sociais*, No. 2, Porto Alegre, 2006; Hilario Wynarczyk, *Ciudadanos de dos mundos. El Movimiento evangélico en la vida pública argentina 1980-2001*, UNSAM EDITA de Universidad Nacional de San Martín, San Martín, 2009.

49 Marcos Carbonelli, Los evangélicos y la arena partidaria en la Argentina contemporánea, *Estudios Políticos*, No. 37, México D.F., 2016.

add to this that Christian politicians had no experience at managing the formal and informal rules of the Argentine political field and that they received little support from evangelical churches and federations, it is possible to understand the uniqueness of the Argentine case and its repeated failures, which is different from other, successful experiences, such as the Brazilian one and, to a lesser extent, that of Colombia.

Although engagement in political parties proved unsuccessful, evangelicals did not abandon their political activity in the new millennium, but diversified it in different variants. Anthropological studies have found that pastoral practices and discourses are successful at shaping believers' subjectivities, providing decisive material and symbolic resources to go through and overcome downward social mobility processes⁵⁰, problems such as crime, domestic violence and alcohol and drug addictions⁵¹, and fundamentally, to conduct a lifestyle that enables projections into different practical spheres⁵² as well as detraditionalization and autonomy.⁵³ At the same time, institutionalist research has analyzed the positions taken by evangelical entities in the public space, first demanding a new freedom of worship law, under the classical form of social movements⁵⁴, and later making their voice heard in debates like those about sexual education, same-sex marriage, bioethics and abortion.⁵⁵

For the purposes of this article, there is a revealing third form of evangelical politicization that recent studies have pointed out, namely, evangelical involvement in public policies in Argentina. During the 2000s, different party leaders at the municipal, provincial and national levels decided to gradually include evangelical churches in the structures of state relief for the most vulnerable sectors by transferring to them material resources that these institutions started to manage (food, infrastructure for housing reconstruction, health and safety operations,

50 Pablo Semán, El Pentecostalismo y la religiosidad de los sectores populares, in: *Desde Abajo. La transformación de las identidades sociales*, Maristella Svampa (ed.), Biblos-Universidad Nacional General Sarmiento, Buenos Aires, 2000.

51 See more: Daniel Míguez, *Spiritual bonfire in Argentina: Confronting current theories with an Ethnographic Account of Pentecostal Growth in Buenos Aires Suburb*, Tesis de Doctorado, CEDLA, Amsterdam, 1997; Daniel Míguez, Política y Magia en un suburbio de Buenos Aires: estrategias indirectas de expresión demandas en un contexto de clientelismo político, *Sociedad y Religión. Sociología, Antropología e Historia de la Religión en el Cono Sur*, No. 16/17, Buenos Aires, 1998; Daniel Míguez, Conversiones religiosas, conversiones seculares. Comparando las estrategias de transformación de identidad en programas de minoridad e Iglesias pentecostales, *Ciencias Sociales y Religión*, No. 2, Porto Alegre, 2000.

52 Joaquín Algranti, *Política y Religión en los márgenes. Nuevas formas de participación social de las mega-iglesias evangélicas en la Argentina*, Ediciones Ciccus, Buenos Aires, 2010.

53 Pablo Semán, Pentecostalismo, política, elecciones y poder social, *Cultura y Religión*, Vol. 7, 2013.

54 See more: Matt Marostica, La Iglesia Evangélica en la Argentina como Nuevo Movimiento Social, *Sociedad y Religión. Sociología, Antropología e Historia de la Religión en el Cono Sur*, No. 12, 1994; Matt Marostica, *Pentecostal and politics: the creation of the Evangelical Christian Movement in Argentina, 1983-1993*, Ph. D. dissertation (in Political Science)-Political Sciences Department, University of California, Berkeley, 1997; Hilario Wynarczyk, *Ciudadanos de dos mundos. El Movimiento evangélico en la vida pública argentina 1980-2001*, UNSAM EDITA de Universidad Nacional de San Martín, San Martín, 2009.

55 Marcos Carbonelli, Karina Felitti, Mariela Mosqueira, Religión, sexualidad y política en la Argentina: intervenciones católicas y evangélicas entorno al aborto y el matrimonio igualitario, *Revista del Centro de Investigación*, Vol. 9, No. 36, México D.F, 2011; Daniel Jones, Marcos Carbonelli, Evangélicos y derechos sexuales y reproductivos: actores y lógicas políticas en la Argentina contemporánea, *Ciências Sociais Unisinos*, Vol. 48, No. 3, 2002.

among others)⁵⁶. In addition, research by Jones and Cunial⁵⁷ has noted that political decision-makers in health matters recognize the evangelical expertise in addressing drug abuse and that, accordingly, they support this activity by allocating financial resources to it.

As established by Carbonelli⁵⁸, these political-religious exchanges follow both a strategic and cultural pattern. From a pragmatic point of view, leaders reinforce religious networks, to consolidate them in the territory and because replacing them would demand an amount of time and resources which are incompatible with the urgent matters of public administration and electoral pressures. In turn, this strategic position is combined with the subsidiarity logic, already analyzed in the case of Catholics, and which legitimizes the intermediary role of religious actors in the implementation of public policies. In other words, giving evangelicals' participation in the space of public administration evidences their indirect intersection with the Argentine political parties world, at the same time as it reveals a recurring pattern in political-religious relationships in Argentina, that will be analyzed in the conclusions below.

Churches and Political Parties in Argentina. A Balance in Quicksand

The first assessment of historical intersections between Christian churches and political parties in Argentina shows the failure of direct interventions, both early on, in the case of Catholicism, and later, in that of evangelicals. The reasons are the long-standing and strong Argentine party identities (regardless of their mutations and eventual crises)⁵⁹ and the institutional decision by the ecclesiastical hierarchy to probe other forms of influence on the party space.

These forms of influence, here termed "indirect intersections", consist of training cadres and intervening in the management and implementation of public policies. In this regard, the Catholic Church has a major advantage over evangelical churches, given the historical density of its presence. Its comprehensive *modus operandi* enabled it to permeate party structures at an early stage and contribute to shape long-term cultural patterns. This explains why the political class recognizes the Church as an authorized voice on the solution of key public problems, like poverty, education and sexual and reproductive rights. In terms of public policies, the reproduction of the current subsidiarity culture has enabled, and still enables, the Catholic Church not only to manage state welfare funds, but also to have a decisive power on educational matters, evidenced by the fact

56 Marcos Carbonelli, Valores para mi País. Evangélicos en la esfera política argentina 2008-2011, *DADOS- Revista de Ciências Sociais*, Vol. 58, No. 4, 2015.

57 Daniel Jones, Santiago Cunial, Más allá de los límites del Estado. Instituciones católicas y evangélicas de partidos del Gran Buenos Aires (Argentina) en la implementación de políticas públicas sobre drogas, *Desafíos*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2016.

58 Marcos Carbonelli, Valores para mi País. Evangélicos en la esfera política argentina 2008-2011... pp. 78-79.

59 Inés Pousadela, Los partidos han muerto. ¡Larga Vida a los Partidos!, in: *¿Qué cambió en la política argentina? Elecciones, instituciones y ciudadanía en perspectiva comparada*, Isidoro Cheresky, Jean Michel Blanquer (ed.), Homo Sapiens, Rosario, 2004.

that all parochial schools are legally entitled to full financial support. As to evangelicals, their work to help the most vulnerable sectors of urban centers and their pioneering efforts to address drug abuse have caused them to be recently recognized by a significant portion of the political class and to be included in the tasks of planning and implementing state policies in these areas.

In our opinion, the recent inclusion of evangelicals in the national political-religious fabric reveals a second reason why the Argentine political class is so often permeable to the demands and stances of religious agents. This motivation finds its deep roots in the structural conditions in which the political class conducts its representative work and permanently strives for governance.

Argentina is a young democracy. After a century of almost constant interruptions of constitutional order, it has remained stable since 1983, though it has also gone through severe social and economic crises, like the *coup d'état* attempt in 1987, the 1989 hyperinflation (which caused the then president Alfonsín to leave office before the end of his term) and the fall of the *Alianza* government in 2001, which caused Argentina's greatest social and economic crisis ever, with destitution and unemployment levels reaching a historic peak. If we add to this the changes in the representative relationship (which erode classical party identities and favor strong but ephemeral leaderships which depend on the volatility of votes), the result is a context that also shapes political class expectations. Assuming that governance is unstable and under constant threat, the political class pragmatically relies on religious power to obtain two key resources from it. These are, on the one hand, substitutive legitimacy at times of crisis and, on the other, a safe link for policy implementation. This involves measures which it is paramount to materialize in order to show citizens good administration capacity and an efficient representation of interests.

This hypothesis, centered on political work and the conditions under which it is carried out, has not been sufficiently explored by those studies specializing on political-religious relationships in Argentina. As shown throughout this article, the historical analysis has focused on the historical density of the links between religious institutions and political actors, particularly, on socialization processes and their effectiveness to create meaning frameworks that make religious influence possible. Without denying the arguments that support this hegemony-based conjecture, we think it is relevant to complement it with the structural hypothesis proposed here, since it would help to gain a deeper understanding of the decisions and omissions by political decision-makers and would contribute to placing political-religious relationships in a terrain that is metaphorically more like quicksand than solid ground. In other words, it is possible to envision that, as democracy in Argentina consolidates and governance conditions stabilize, future cracks and shifts may occur in political-religious relationships as we know them in present-day Argentina.

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**ПОЛИТИЧКЕ ПАРТИЈЕ И ЦРКВЕ У АРГЕНТИНИ:
ПРОЖИМАЊА У ЖИВОМ ПЕСКУ**

Сажетак

Овај рад анализира историјска прожимања између политичких партија и цркава у Аргентини, са фокусом на римокатоличка и евангеличка прожимања, јер су управо те две верске организације са највише присуства, интереса и веза у овом простору. Наша анализа се заснива на бинарној класификацији: појам *директно прожимање* се односи на одлуку верских агената да формирају своју партијске структуре, док се појам *индиректно прожимање* односи на оне праксе кроз које цркве утичу на политичке партије без да се мешају у изборни процес. Након успостављања степена ефективности ове две различите стратегије, дискутоваћемо о њиховом утицају у контексту консолидације демократије у Аргентини тренутно. Методолошки, анализа се заснива на свеобухватном и критичком прегледу научних студија о религији и политици које се односе на државу која је предмет наше анализе.

Кључне речи: политичке партије, Римокатоличка црква, Евангеличке цркве, Аргентина

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