

CHURCH, STATE AND POLITICS IN THE BRAZILIAN CONTEXT

To understand a bit the theme "Church, State and politics", in the Brazilian context, it is necessary, even briefly, to know a little about the Brazilian history. While Zwingli, Calvin, Luther and other Reformers revolutionized the political and religious context of Europe, almost in the same period the Portuguese conquerors arrived at Brazil. Portugal has always been a Catholic country, giving little room for the influence of the Protestant Reformation.

When the Portuguese Catholics arrived in Brazil, they closed all the possibilities to avoid that other settlers would threaten their hegemony in the Terra of Santa Cruz ("the Holy Cross Land"), which name was given to the new discovered lands. They came out of the European context, getting to know the Protestant Reform Movement, so that they closed themselves even more because of the threats of Protestantism.

Historians point out that, roughly speaking, although there have been reports of attempts, for more than 300 years there was no effective and permanent Protestant presence in these lands. In 1557, during the attempt of French occupation, missionaries sent by Calvin celebrated in Rio de Janeiro, on the island of Villegaignon, the first worship service on the American continent. The first holy Supper took place on March 21 of the same year, in the rite of Geneva. The receiving, however, was not good. The missionaries were killed. In 1624 the Portuguese colony was again invaded, this time by the Dutch, known as the Dutch Mission. The northeast of Brazil colony was occupied and greatly influenced by the Dutch Protestants from 1624 to 1654, but this occupation also did not thrive.

The Imperial Constitution, promulgated in 1824, granted certain freedom of non-Catholic worship in Brazil, but at the same time confirmed Catholicism as an official religion. The non-Catholic worship services should be made domestically, in houses, not looking churches from the outside. Only in 1890, a decree of the Republican government dealt with the separation of the Church and State, assuring Protestants full recognition and legal protection. Until the proclamation of the Republic, on November 15, 1889, it can be said that there was no Protestant church in Brazil with Cult in Portuguese. In 1858 the First Congregational Church in Brazil is founded and in 1859 Presbyterianism arrived at Brazil, with the American missionary Ashbel Green Simonton.

Thus, for centuries the Catholic Church was the official Church of the Empire and enjoyed all the privileges of political power. The people said that the deputy, the mayor and the priest were in charge of the cities.

The Brazilian culture was cemented by this religiosity linked with the State and with the political power. It also created the mentality that the policy is for the defense of personal interests or to seek privileges for select groups.

When the Reformed Protestantism was actually established in the country, it remained for many decades confined and distant from any political involvement. Reformed Protestantism has always been like an exotic bird, a religion of "heretics" and foreigners, in a country where religiosity is very strong marked by Catholicism, which is syncretized with afros and indigenous religions.

In the period of the military dictatorship, from 1964 to 1989, there was a remarkable Protestant leadership, with a certain influence in the political world and committed to a biblical theology focused on justice and acceptance (welcoming) what was not well seen by the Military Regime and became target of repression, with persecution and death of many reformed religious leaders and of other Protestant and Catholic families, due to their interpretations of the gospel and, consequently of social life and politics, which were considered threats to the regime. Even the strong Protestant organization called the Evangelical Confederation was exterminated.

At the end of the dictatorship and resettlement of democracy, Protestantism in the country had already grown considerably, especially the Neopentecostal and Pentecostal movements in all its different strands. At this time, the religious leaders of Pentecostal movements, influenced by the culture that approaching politics and the State was a mean to defend the rights of their church and to take personal advantage, saw in politics a viable way. Therefore they started to occupy more and more political spaces and to apply for political positions; they were elected and continue to grow in political influence because of the large number of faithful voters.

As time passed, the evangelicals gained greater expression in the Brazilian religious scenario. The results of the 2010 demographic Census show the growth of the diversity of religious groups in Brazil, revealing that the number of Roman Catholics follows a reducing trend, which was already observed in the previous two decades, although it remains the majority. The evangelical population was the religious segment that most increased in Brazil between 2000 and 2010 (going from 15.4% in 2000 to 22.2% in 2010), especially those of Pentecostal origin, which comprise 60% of the declared evangelicals.

Studies on the number of religious in the country reflect in a very similar way in the political scenario. As the Roman Catholic population diminished, those who declare themselves Roman Catholics, although they are still the majority, also decreased in the Chamber of Deputies. The Evangelicals, in turn, increased from 2010 to 2019 by 10%. This fact relates to a large extent with the way in

which public policies are built and laws are elaborated. In representative democracy, a great factor that leads people to vote in a certain individual is the identification of affinities or thoughts in common with him or her. Many times this motivation for identification is bigger than that the qualification of the individual to perform his duties.

The representative democracy in Brasil allows any citizen to be elected to political positions in the two spheres of power (legislative and executive), safeguarding the minimum ages established by law. There is therefore no restriction to the election according to intellectual formation, which can have positive aspects, but allows people without qualification, whether academic or not, in public policies or other sciences that dialogue with them, being elected democratically. Thus, many religious have applied in recent years to public positions in Brazil without necessarily having qualification to do so, often trying to impose their religious values on the population, although the Brazilian state is secular.

The current Federal government seeks to address its agenda, relying on the support of Roman Catholics and Evangelicals, who were responsible for their election in 2018, according to the research. The government's base seeks to align itself with the so-called evangelical bench in Congress, appealing to values which were traditionally associated with Christian as a traditional family and Christian morals to pass on their interests that attend conservative policy in customs and liberals in the economic market.

Seen with good eyes by many of the Christians, the president adopted in his campaign an openly religious discourse, using even the verse of John 8:32: "and you will know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." Although Catholic, on May 12, 2016, President Jair Bolsonaro was baptized in the waters of the Jordan River by a Pentecostal shepherd, revealing the way he instrumentalizes religion in order to achieve his political goals. Finally, noteworthy is the mark of the electoral campaign that became the greatest symbol of the Federal government : "Brazil above all, God above all", nevertheless it is not the official slogan of the government. This phrase, echoing the slogan of Nazi Germany (Deutschland über alles) reveals how excludent the Federal government's proposal was already campaigning, assuming only one God, disrespecting the laic state and all other religions in Brazil. The president assumed a Christian discourse to be electes and made use of it to obtain the support of the people and the Congress, but his government, although recently installed, already gives signs of setbacks in human, environmental and social rights, as noted with the easing of the carrying of weapons, increasing the number of allowed country's pesticides, cutting of funds in public universities and commitment to reform the legislation of social security (harming thousands of Brazilians).

If for many centuries the Roman Apostolic Catholic Church, the State and the political power were holding hands in Brazil, today we can say that this picture can be seen, also, in the evangelical environment. There have been changes in this relationship and it has become more complex, but in many respects the sensation is that the *modus operandi*, is the same.

Finally, for the theme proposed for today's conference, it is possible to add one more word: Church, State, Politics and Market. These four structures are together and relate conveniently in the Brazilian context. In the face of this scenario, many churches of Reformed tradition, are internally divided by political tendencies, therefore, to avoid the loss of members, because in Brazil the religious market is quite competitive, most of them avoid talking about the theme: Church, State, Politics and Market. Those that are not divided, and are clearly expressed in a manner contrary to the market relations in the churches and also positioning themselves contrary to government exclusion policies find great resistance in relation to the other churches, even among the Reformed. They are excluded from ecumenical relations, seen as extensions of political parties and are often even not recognized by some churches.

In view of this scenario, it is clear that there are many challenges for the country and for Christians who are provoked by the Holy Spirit to act in the face of injustice. Many Brazilian Christian churches need to undergo a process of conversion to the values of the Kingdom of God in order to assume their prophetic role and their function of salt and light in society. It is necessary, especially among the evangelicals (reformed or not), to understand that being a faithful nation to God it is not to impose it on the whole country or to grant its values as unique. Having a prophetic voice requires, fundamentally, respect for democracy, other religious expressions, especially those that are constantly threatened and victims of racism, such as Africans. It is essential, to have a prophetic voice, for the Christian Church to be oriented to the society and interact with it, instead of closing in bubbles (domes) seeking holiness for herself in an ascetic and isolated way.

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