

## Editorial Dossier

# Society, religion and politics in Latin America

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The sociology of religion stems from the very origins of sociology as a discipline. We appreciate this in the theoretical interests of sociology's founders: Marx, Durkheim, and Weber. Some recognize religion as an inherently social phenomenon and that society and religion are intimately related (Durkheim). Views also include the connection between a religious worldview and a model of economic accumulation (Weber) or the interpretation of religion as an ideological element of capitalist society's superstructure (Marx).

The last author's theoretical interest establishes a critique of religion since this ideological element lies within the superstructure, inhibiting revolutionary action. Religion is an inverted consciousness of the world (Marx, 2018) since religious ideology hides the fact that this phenomenon grows from subjects' interaction and accentuates a submission to the economic structures placing, for example, the concern for salvation to an ulterior life and in this way marking a passivity for the situations of the hereafter. In Marx (2018), it is possible to see how religion focuses on an afterlife and is akin to the status quo. However, this author believes religion would be futile in a classless society with capitalism deposed by revolutionary action or internal polarities. The

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inverted dominating consciousness would not exist due to the eradication of society's materialistic contradictions.

On the other hand, Durkheim (1990, 2012) focuses on intertwining religion and society. He established that there is no society without it since it creates cohesion through firmly shared ideas and establishes specific behavior criteria through the group's moral beliefs. The author identifies the essence of the religious fact in the simplest known societies: the totemic Australian tribes; and other more complex organizational levels. The fundamental religious phenomenon is the antagonistic division between the sacred and profane and gathering around the ritual. To further emphasize the religion-society relationship, Durkheim (1990, 2012) proposes that all phenomena have a religious presence at the dawn of sociocultural evolution. In other words, in the beginning, everything is spiritual, then progress and social contrast within different fields (art, science, law, etc.) become independent of religious influence.

Moreover, Max Weber's work (1997, 1998) studies the great religions while interpreting sociocultural elements influencing Western development and Europe's peculiar history of rationalization. In other words, he analyzed how progress in the West contrasts with other world regions. His thesis on the world's disenchantment (Weber, 1998) studies the intellectualization process that began a millennia ago, resulting in the slowly fading of supernatural or magical elements in society. Along with this, there is an interest in analyzing the interaction between a religious worldview and an attitude towards capitalist accumulation among certain Protestant groups, mainly Calvinists. Finally, Weberian sociology of domination establishes a type of charismatic and traditional domination, present among religious leaders, established churches, and hereditary lineages in leadership.

From the above description, we can identify an explicit feature of classical sociology of religion: the emphasis on studying macro social processes or significant trends in sociocultural evolution and religion. Thus, secularization, understood as religion's social decline, is the focus of Weber's disenchantment perspective. Similarly, social integration via morality or shared religious ideas and religion as an ideological element point to processes that involve large collectives rather than focus on individual interaction. In other words, traditional views on the

sociology of religion do not focus on micro-processes or individual action. Also, it has a robust Europeanizing nature because it identifies the region as unique (as analyzed by Weber), or it is in this region where the proletarian revolution will bring capitalism (and with it a religion) to its demise (Marx). In pointing out the above, we conclude that these authors' theorization scope did not include Latin America.

It is relevant to point out that individual issues such as conversion, deconversion, or the expression of religious ideas by the members of a group or movement of this type play a central role in the contemporary sociology of religion. With this, it is possible to point out that since the tremendous macro-social themes of the discipline's founders, throughout the sociology of religion's growth, attention has also focused on the individual aspect of religion. Probably the best-known case of this particular turn is that of Thomas Luckmann and his work *Invisible Religion* (1973). He proposes that a characteristic of contemporary secularization is the individualization of religion. Subjects experience their religiosity individually and use various sources or worldviews to construct it.

The sociological discussion in Latin American matters has been linked to the thematic of religious syncretism and the socio-religious particularities of the region (Morandé, 1987; Paz, 2015), popular religiosity (Parker, 1996), the dissemination of Pentecostalism in the region (Martin, 1993; Martin, 1998) or, more contemporarily, to the analysis of lived religion in popular sectors. (Morello, 2019, 2020, 2021; Morello et al., 2017). With this, it is possible to identify how objects of study that were not present in the classics of social theory find a space given the socio-religious particularities of Latin America. This happens because it would hardly be possible to replicate the European objects of study in a region without an Enlightenment or a Reformation. In other words, rather than exactly copying Western European sociological research, we have the current recognition of diverse trajectories to modernity, Latin America being one of them (Eisenstadt, 2013). The Latin American reality, with its particularities, is reflected in a research plan of its own that differs from other world religious worldviews.

In this sense, and taking into account the individual turn and the region's religious prospect, this dossier seeks to illustrate emerging themes in the study of religion in Latin America. Thus, we can iden-

tify research that analyzes the conversion to Islam in Chile: Álvarez's article provides relevant information, and from the vision of the interviewed subjects themselves, about the implications and reasons for conversion to a religion with a quantitative minority presence in Chile, but that qualitatively is presented as culturally different from Catholicism or Chilean Pentecostalism (two most prominent religions in the country). This research provides relevant information to understand Islam's presence in Chile and displays the national tendencies toward religious and cultural diversification.

On the other hand, the subject of deconversion is analyzed by Gabriel Cortés using a sample of subjects in Temuco. A relevant contribution here exemplifies the individual turn of research mentioned above. Traditionally, secularization was studied as a social phenomenon affecting religion in the modern world. However, Cortés investigates the motives that lead the interviewed subjects to abandon their faith and opt for another option or orient themselves towards secularist attitudes from an individual perspective. With this, the author shows that beyond a social process of religious transformation, he identifies personal motivations to abandon religion or take another position on this issue.

Additionally, Erick Paz's research provides highly topical information on the contemporary phenomenon of religion and the internet. The relationship of how religious subjects or groups interact to transmit their message, disseminate their activities, and even proselytize through the internet and social networks is a phenomenon of recent decades. It shows the interrelationship of religion with social phenomena such as communications. In this sense, the author analyzes the publications on social networks of pro-life figures with numerous followers in this type of network. Here we can see how they disseminate their opinion on value issues and the preservation of life, as well as attacking other subjects of LGBT+ communities or pro-abortion or pro-feminist tendencies. With this, the author shows us how, through the internet, it is possible to extend and reach a much wider public than the traditional religious community located in parish contexts or Pentecostal churches.

Finally, in his article on religion and social cohesion in Latin America, Cáceres points out that in the subcontinent, there has not been a radical transformation at the level of beliefs that could affect social cohesion. However, there are changes in memberships and practices

among Catholics, Pentecostals, or the irreligious. Similarly, the author identifies that there would be low levels of conflict for religious reasons in the region. Still, there would be changes due to the increase in the number of Evangelicals and the influence of the Pentecostal church in these groups that would encourage them to have higher levels of political participation and impact. With this, the author reflects on religion's value and cohesive role in an environment of cultural change.

The articles just mentioned are examples of contemporary themes in the sociology of religion: deconversion; religion and the internet; or conversion to foreign religions, and they are part of the modern panorama in socio-religious matters, unlike the traditional research themes mentioned above. Also, research is done by the subjects to understand their worldview instead of focusing on social macro-processes as the discipline's founders did. In this way, the articles reviewed are a sample of the conceptual richness the field has acquired, which dialogues with Latin American subjects and attends to the region's particularities.

Emerging themes in Latin America continue in a series of articles that demystify the extinction of the sacred, reflecting a multiplication of forms of religious expression. Instead, we argue that in the emergence of new religious terms, fragments of a "rock of religious belief" seem to be maintained by different means in the face of the ordinary rationality of these contemporary times.

When we refer to rock, we are trying to say that it is something solid that, in today's liquid and "highly accelerated" times (McNeill & Engelke, 2014; Steffen et al., 2007, 2015), cracks into tiny stones that still retain a belief in some mystery. If anything, the rest of the articles discussed leave us with religious fragments in themes linked to complex, sometimes traumatic experiences (such as the case of poverty or sexual abuse), the spiritual life of Catholic nuns, and so on. The above argument is related to Luckmann's insistence, in his influential book *Invisible Religion* (1973), that the sociologist must be attentive to religious phenomena that are institutionally diffuse. We could argue that religion may transcend institutional boundaries, a more experiential religiosity highlighted today in this dossier.

In this perspective of individual religion, it is necessary to bring up Stark and Glock (1968). They assert that beneath the plurality of religious expression are five dimensions of religiosity: the dimension of

belief, experience, knowledge, consequentialism, and religious practice. Perhaps, of these five dimensions, we might consider these emerging theme articles to be in the experience dimension. The emphasis on experience and emotions, the relationship between the inner and the outer self, modern culture, and the tension between subjectivity and objectivity lead us to a more obscure author studying Latin America's sociology of religion: George Simmel (1971). Although religion played a relatively minor role in his life, it did occupy a considerable part in the last years of his life. Perhaps it would be necessary for future works to conceptually deepen the research of this German sociologist within the sociology of religion in Latin America, a sub discipline that offers ample space to the classics and at the same time can include new contemporary themes and theories.

Thus, Fernández and Katz's research uses a socio-historical approach to answer suggestive questions for these times: Why do women choose religious life? What do they find in Catholic communities that contemporary societies do not offer them? This is how the Argentinian researchers analyze the trajectories of women's religion in Catholic communities in Argentina in the 21st century. They investigate their stories before opting for religious life, their feelings about their religious vocation, community dynamics, and the difficulties they face. The authors conclude that women's motivations for choosing spiritual life arise from their Catholic socialization during childhood and youth. This motivation is initiated by a call from God, which they conceive as a falling in love, courtship, and marriage with Jesus, whom they consider a person. On a spiritual level, religious women perceive the bond of love with Jesus with a greater degree of purity than relationships with flesh and blood persons due to the vow of chastity they take and the fullness that religious life gives them. In some communities, religious life is conceived as a vocation. All activities are consecrated to God through an active asceticism that positions religion as a divine instrument in the world. According to the authors, the conceptions of the communities as a family make visible the fraternal bond between the religious through the collective project that they share in the space of emotional, spiritual, and material support.

In another article of this dossier, we find the interpretative study of the Chilean author Cristián Padilla who analyzes the representations

of homosexuality in Catholic and Evangelical leaders in the context of the debate on the law of equal marriage in Chile, specifically in the region of Araucanía in the south of Chile. The author, in effect, highlights the changes that confirm the emergence and consolidation of a new discourse of openness around sexuality, emphasizing that its conceptualization is also a historical construction. He conducts ten interviews with Christian leaders in his analysis, addressing the representations of the homosexual “other” involved in Christian identities. Interestingly, the results of Padilla’s research show that the foundations that give meaning to the positions of Christian leaders on homosexuality refer to two distinct and related dimensions simultaneously. First, the importance of certain interpretations of sacred scripture (Bible), tradition, and the magisterium as epistemological and ontological foundations of meaning about reality are highlighted. In this sense, homosexuality is signified - under these foundations - negatively and associated with a deviation of the subject. And secondly, Christian leaders recognize the change of eras and the little integration of the homosexual minority. Finally, all this directly challenges Christian leaders who speak of a process of integration of homosexual people, despite- warns the author- the persistence of an unofficial discourse on rehabilitating homosexuals.

In the following article, Vilchis Carrillo’s research addresses the relationships between religious beliefs and causal attributions of poverty. We analyzed three logistic regression models based on the information provided for Mexico by the World Values Survey, Wave7. From a subjective point of view, the author points out that certain religious beliefs, such as providentialism, traditionalism, or deregulated believer, have different effects on individualistic, fatalistic, and structural attributions of poverty. Consequently, providential beliefs are incompatible with causal attributions and akin to individualist beliefs. All this complicates -in the author’s opinion- the understanding of the relationship between poverty, inequality, and religion, at the same time that it gives light to encourage reflection on the participation and integration of believers in the fight for the reduction of poverty and inequalities. In the results, therefore, Vilchis Carrillo proposes to work on three lines of research: 1) The reflection on the causal mechanism in which religious beliefs are related to causal at-

tributions; it is suggested to recover Max Weber and his elective affinities to illuminate this type of relations. 2) To explore the subjective perceptions of inequality that influence and shape new religious beliefs and attitudes. 3) To investigate mechanisms and strategies of integration of believers in the struggle against the reproduction and legitimacy of inequalities.

The last article, by Erick Oñate, addresses the impact of sexual abuse suffered in an ecclesial context. The author presents the concept of “stolen youth” to analyze the reality of violence experienced by the interviewees. On the other hand, the dimension of usurpation of their youth by being subjected to abusive relational and doctrinal structures. The article addresses two dimensions of sexual abuse. The first examines abusive relational dynamics that the perpetrator installs in his victims from a hierarchy of institutional power. In the results, Oñate understands under the title “relational context” that sexual abuse, perpetrated by clerics in ecclesiastical contexts, must be understood in a broader sense than the sexual activity to which a person has been exposed against their will or consent in an asymmetrical relationship. The second dimension captures the impact of this abusive relationship on the construction and meaning of youth for the interviewees. For them, sexual abuse is a theft of their youthful experiences. As the author concludes, the context of control using the formation conditions the way of living the youth according to the parameters established by the adult-centric duty to be, the fear of not being good in front of God or infringing the norm.

Finally, we invite readers to read the following dossier on the sociology of Latin American religion. For our part, we thank the School of Sociology of the Catholic University Silva Henríquez and its journal *Temas Sociológicos* for allowing us to present this sub discipline of sociology and the current state of studies in this line.

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