

Religious Discourses and Politics in Brazil: The Conservative Evangelical Parliamentary Front

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Abstract

The arguments embraced here are those that examine the discourses of parliamentarians and their proposals that represent Evangelical fundamentalism with the support of conservatism of a moral and religious character, no longer exclusive to the right-wing Catholics, as pointed out in the literature of Political Science. The interpretation of religious politicians' speeches is as legitimate and necessary as the discussion of the reverse of secularization and the increasing presence of religion in politics. Secularity is only an issue in Brazilian politics nowadays because of the conflict between conservative evangelical parliamentarians and Brazilian scientists. The latter are representatives of the scientific theories of evolutionism and proponents of scientific research on stem cells and embryos, considered as early as the beginning of the 20th century as threats to Christian civilization according to the Bible. The former, some of them propagators of the Bible, repeat this argument in public discourse, a symptom of fundamentalism as defined by Marsden. It discusses then the dispute between politics of morality and the process of informalization and permissiveness that have gained much widespread support of the young population since the 1960s. This dispute is still going on in Brazil, a country that has aroused the interest of missionaries because of its customs and non-Christian religions, especially Afro-Brazilians. The political crisis and the flaws of a fragmented public security policy has also called attention to the issues relative to the possession and use of guns as well as the role of repressive policies considered by the fundamentalist members of a divided Evangelical Front as the only way to stop violence and crime. This discourse is in flagrant contradiction with their defense of life in pregnancies.

Keywords

Religious actors; Democracy; Discourse; Evangelicals; Parliament.

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Introduction

The insertion of evangelicals—historical Protestants, classical Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals—in the Brazilian political scene, brought to the legislative sphere a confessional rhetoric that, over the years, has changed its character, resulting from its combination with other discursive tendencies characteristic of the environment. This reveals the capacity of political articulation and the disposition of the evangelical parliamentarians in the treatment of the subjects that appear on the agenda in this space. The subjects include research on human embryonic stem cells, abortion, homosexuality, alcohol consumption, smoking, among other topics, that emerge in the political sphere. They are transformed by the rhetoric employed by these evangelical segments, as well as the constitution of statements, and the discursive formations in this disputed scenario, comprised of the ideological attributes that emerge as political and religious speech are modified and made more complex to be effective in parliament. These are transformations of content, enunciation and circulation of themes.

Evangelicals are no longer an aversive segment of political affairs, but a group in accordance with the strictly political discourse. In a way, this demonstrates the ability of these political actors to interpret and negotiate, especially when it comes to corporate or religious issues. However, the discourse of the evangelicals is heterogeneous, that is, there is a plurality of positions on the most diverse themes that are emerging, including those from parliamentarians who belong to the Evangelical Parliamentary Front, which makes the statement that there is a cohesive evangelical group that always votes in unity.

The studies on evangelical churches in Brazil have always emphasized the impressive growth of their followers, and the great impact the new faith had on social life, addressing mainly themes such as the denominations of their organizations, the believers' relationship with the church and its doctrine, their customary religious practices. The scholarly discussion on how and when evangelicals participate in politics has mainly focused on issues of secularization as well as the reverse of secularization or the re-enchantment of the world. In other words, it adopted the perspective that makes the concept of secularization a valuable tool for analysing the relationship between religion and the public sphere, between religion and the State (Pierucci, 1989; Freston, 1994; Fernandes et al, 1996; Mariano & Pierucci, 1992; Mariano, 1995; Bastian, 1999; Novaes, 2001; Machado, 2006; Oro, 2006; Ttadvald, 2015).

These aspects, according to the studies mentioned, would have contributed to the social and political diversification in Brazil, as well as to a stimulating discussion about the thesis of secularization as advocated by Weber (1963 and 1997), a thesis that has been criticized and reformulated. In this theory, the process of rationalization in modern Western countries had produced the division between religion and other planes of social life because religious values had lost centrality in the modern world, replaced by the rationality of scientific thought. This would provoke the disenchantment of the world and secularization—emancipating the instrumental and secular rationality from religious dogmas or faiths.

The researchers of this process in Brazil point to the development of a public space for evangelical agents but ignore that religion always had an important place, even before the growth of evangelical

churches in Brazil (Montero, 2012). Others claim that the secularization process would have been reversed with the growth of evangelical churches and their entry into politics (Sell & al., 2016). However, these studies have hardly touched upon the themes of fundamentalism² and political conservatism³ adopted by some neo-Pentecostal evangelical religious leaders who have been active in the National Congress. Nevertheless, it should be noted that one of the objective conditions in sociological research is to bring to consciousness the constraints, forgetfulness or flaws that influence the analysis social scientists conduct.

The purpose of this article is to understand the discursive actions of the evangelical segment in the Chamber of Deputies, identifying how these congressmen construct their speeches using religious rhetoric and confession precepts as justification for performance in front of demands that arise in the legislative process. The article focuses on evangelical parliamentarians that are inclined towards issues that involve more conservative and repressive legislative deliberations, such as the self-defence discourse around gun possession, the change in Brazilian legislation on a reduction of the highest penalty and the defence of Israel's military dominance in the Middle East.

For this reason, the forgotten themes are precisely those embraced in this text when examining the content and form of discourses used in propositions that have been presented by evangelical parliamentarians. Some of them represent the reinforcement of a moral and religious conservatism, no longer exclusive to the right-wing Catholics, as pointed out in the literature of Political Science (Codato & Oliveira, 2004). This perspective is as legitimate and necessary as the discussion on the reverse of secularization and the increasing presence of religion in politics. The reversal of secularity is only a concern in Brazilian politics nowadays because of the conflict between conservative evangelical parliamentarians and Brazilian scientists. The latter are representatives of the scientific theories of evolutionism and proponents of scientific research on stem cells and embryos, considered earlier, at the beginning of the 20th century, as threats to Christian civilization embodied in the Bible. The former, some of them strict broadcasters of the Bible, repeat this argument in public discourse that became a symptom of fundamentalism as defined by Marsden (1980) one hundred years ago.

Such discursive interventions by religious actors in politics have long roused the interest of sociologists in other countries who analyse how secularization did not prevent religious interferences in what they call the politics of morality (Fink, 2008; Larsson & Green-Pedersen,

²The concept of fundamentalism (Bottomore & Alia, 2019) entered into the works of various sociologists of religion from the seminal work of George Marsden who studied the connection between Protestantism and American culture. According to this well-known author, Fundamentalism was a movement initiated in the 1920s by those who were displeased with what had provoked the profound cultural and intellectual crisis in the twentieth century. Among the faithful, this crisis was blamed on modernism and its rationality, as expressed in the theories of evolution that had shaken the biblical foundations of American civilization, founded by Puritans and other Protestants who fled from religious persecution or from the deterioration of their churches' precepts. Evolutionism was then considered the greatest threat to Christianity as a religion and a civilization. Subsequently, the movement took on such a dimension that it began to be analysed in other religions, and in ideologies of political parties.

³The concept of conservatism appears in discourses as the aversion to change, or the willingness to keep things as they have always been, an aversion that would be triggered by the outbreak of any rapid change (Bottomore & Alia, 2019). In Norberto Bobbio's Dictionary of Politics, conservatism is associated with party ideologies designed to organize consensus for political actions and government practices, thus differentiated from ideologies that discuss the legitimacy of power, directed at participating communities or collectivities.

2013; Knill et al., 2014). Although Fink underlined the influence of the Catholic Church on legislation of abortion or same-sex marriage, there is a clear hegemony of theories that admit its effect on political dynamics for delaying decisions, but not for the rigidity of legislation. European Catholic countries have already admitted the continuity of the revolution on customs, or the informalization process that had begun in the 1960s, that religious morality could not prevent. In other words, the moralistic discourses did not inhibit the general tendency of permissiveness observed in present morality policies, such as legal abortion, euthanasia, artificial reproduction and same-sex marriage that are currently present in social practices as well as in laws. Even a recent study that compares many religions and countries, concludes that the effects of religious discourse are more pronounced during phases in which differences increase inside a country, since religious speech, in fact, slows down the reform process (Budde et al., 2018). Nevertheless, religious effects weaken whenever a policy convergence between countries appears. In other words, the religious speech factor is important but is not the only one and will lose its dominant role whenever the national debate is driven by other international political agendas (Budde et al., 2018).

The latest studies point to a lack of research on Protestantism and Islam but warn that it is not enough to consider only the strength of churches and political institutions of a country. To these issues one must add the relevance of informality structures or the process of informalization (Knill & al., 2014; Wouters, 2011) that vary among countries, change over time, but certainly lessen the influence of churches and their moral discourses.

In Brazil, such debate on the politics of morality are still going on, as a result of several conflicting processes: the weakening of the Catholic Church, the growth of neo-Pentecostal denominations (most of which are politically conservative and morally rigid), the growing fear of violent crimes (a serious problem in the country), as well as the informalization process in some urban areas. It is not yet clear what will be the outcome of these debates inside and outside the National Congress, even harsher after the election of an extreme right-wing president.⁴

But this article is focused on an extensive research of the discourses made inside the National Congress by some evangelical parliamentarians, carefully analysing the voting of these for each of the Law Projects (PL) presented around the themes related to the conservative agenda. Discussions around it have been prominent within the National Congress, some of which were addressed in a doctoral thesis on topics related to the politics of morality, such as, the prohibition of abortion and embryonic stem cell research, of which the main argument has been “the defence of life”. (Gonçalves, 2016).

1. Methodology

Regarding the methodological steps of this investigation, the first step consisted of a literature review of investigations already carried out by different authors (Freston, 1994; Pierucci; Mariano, 1992; Novaes, 2001; Machado, 2006) on the insertion of evangelicals in Brazilian politics, especially their participation in the National Legislature. After this first stage, the reading was

⁴ Jair Bolsonaro is now the head of the Executive. Environmental, gender and public security policies have been changed from top to bottom, according to the values of the main political force that elected him, i.e. conservative evangelical believers. However, the debate is even more mordant against his evangelical ministers and their polarized and moralistic speeches.

followed by an analysis of some news published in newspapers, websites and magazines in the period that refers to the beginning of the legislative work of these evangelical parliamentarians. With regard to the process of development of research, priority was given to statements from evangelical parliamentarians with mandates in the last legislatures of the Chamber of Deputies. Such pronouncements were found in the Official Journals and the House of Representatives website. The themes being researched were selected through a previous reading of the news of the Official Portal of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front and the official magazine of the organization. Also used as a reference in the identification of these themes, the electronic bulletins for monitoring the parliamentary mandates made available by the Chamber of Deputies through the creation of a register that allows the receipt of information on the work of each deputy. After identifying the most recurrent subjects that constituted the major themes investigated in the article, that is, the remarkable subjects, the moment of collection of these subjects in the Official Journals began. The search was carried out at the Chamber of Deputies Bank of Speech and Shorthand Notes.

Thus, the corpus of analysis was the discourses of the evangelical parliamentarians in the Federal Chamber from the time when the Evangelical Parliamentary Front was created in 2003 until 2015, when a serious political crisis ended with the impeachment of former president Dilma Rouseff. The basis for interpretations were based on the forms they used to shape their speeches in the National Congress, as well as their ability to exert influence in the secular political field.

From the start, one noticed a particular characteristic of this religious segment regarding their discourses: they were almost always reactions to initiatives on the parliamentary agendas that were not elaborated by evangelicals, as a way to demarcate their political identity in opposition to other groups. Linked to the division lines between Evangelicals and the others, the evangelical discourse also appears as a propositional discourse whenever it seeks to respond to certain claims that are perceived by evangelicals as "offenses" and "attacks" on religious freedom, on family traditional, on life from conception, on morality in general. It is a common strategy of evangelical politicians to speak as a threatened segment whose purpose is to awaken supporters to defend their demands concerning delivering society from evil, which is identified with scientific progress, Afro-Brazilian religions, homosexuality, abortion and other private issues that are presented as demanding urgent public action.

However, the statements of evangelical parliamentarians are not directed only to moral subjects; on the contrary, it is perceived that, although they always mention morality and evil, evangelical deputies pay attention to the typically political issues that arise in Parliament. Even if initially presented as a segment averse to political matters, evangelicals have begun to be a group concerned also with strictly political matters, showing a capacity for negotiation, especially when it comes to issues that have impact on corporate or religious interests.

Thus, the political discourse of the evangelicals in the Federal Chamber, including those of the members of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front, is heterogeneous, that is, there is a plurality of positions in the face of the most diverse topics that emerge. It is therefore problematic to affirm that there is a cohesive evangelical group that always votes together. Congruences and discrepancies on the main subjects treated by these parliamentarians, as well as the transformations on their rhetoric were verified. The discursive formations appeared in a scenario of disputes, so that the attributes that appear as political and religious speech are modified and made more complex for effectiveness in Parliament.

The evangelical conservative inclination was also recognised at the parliamentary fronts depicted as carrying forward interests that ended up converging in proposals to reduce the legal age for responding to a judicial process, changing the Statute of Disarmament created in 2005, and stating an unconditional support for the State of Israel. These themes were highlighted by conservative groups working in the Parliamentary Front for Public Security, the Evangelical Parliamentary Front and the Parliamentary Front for Agriculture, informally known as the "Bullet Bench", the "Bible Bench" and the "Beef Bench" by their opponents. This article goes beyond the more common concern with the insertion of evangelicals, mainly Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostals, within the Brazilian political space. It analyses the institutional factors that work in this regard: the weak party institutionalization in Brazil, the weak presence of the State along the less favoured social segments, and the organization of evangelical churches with enough penetration in this sector that allows a strong political influence on their poorer followers.

When one looks at the political participation of these Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches, one sees that the majority of parliamentary members are linked to parties of right and centre-right positions, according to the ideological spectrum. This persistent connection over the years demonstrates the growth of a new conservative political movement more concerned with attacking science, and procedures for acknowledging gender or religious diversity, as it happened at the beginning of 20th Century in the United States of America. Former President Eduardo Cunha (PMDB-RJ), a member of the Assembly of God Church and a former member of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front, has occupied the presidency of the Chamber of Deputies between 2013 and 2016. Cunha had a parliamentary agenda that went from the defence of interests of business sectors related to the field of telecommunications, transportation and construction, the main financiers of his electoral campaigns, to the presentation of Constitutional Laws and Amendments that meet the ideological aspirations of sectors linked to the evangelical segment, especially neo-Pentecostal. One of them was PL7382 / 2010 that established penalties for any act that refers to discrimination against heterosexuals, as well as PEC 164/2012, which determined the inviolability of the right to life from the moment of conception.

Exactly because it is a culturally and religiously diverse country with many African or indigenous religions, Brazil has become an attractive field for reformers who wanted to Christianize or purify the people, if not for building a society free of absolute evil but certainly for granting them refuge in their faith through a battle against it. Brazil is also a country that lends itself to research on such issues precisely because it has been going through a process of democratization and affirmation of rights, accompanied by a remarkable growth of new religious denominations, especially neo-Pentecostals, to the detriment of the Catholic Church and Afro-Brazilian religions, such as Candomblé and Umbanda. The increase of the population that professes one of the neo-Pentecostal denominations has been considered directly proportional to the fall of the Brazilian population that professes the Catholic faith and cults of Candomblé and Umbanda, although the religious traffic between these last religions and the neo-Pentecostal groups is maintained. Moreover, this process is related to the dismount of the Base Ecclesiastical Communities (CEB) that were developed under the Theology of Liberation in order to struggle for the poor's or people's social rights. These communities, supported by the Catholic left, spread during the 1970s and 1980s in favelas and poor peripheries of large Brazilian cities like Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, as well as among poor rural labourers. In the 1990s, the Vatican decided to indict the Brazilian bishops responsible for this important movement that was the basis for popular parties like Workers' Party (PT). In the void created by the halt of communitarian associations in poor areas, the neo-Pentecostal churches found

orphaned people full of affliction and in need of answers as well as care. That is a main content of their discourse: care for the suffering and disoriented people.

The Evangelical Parliamentary Front gained prominence and vows to underline the defence of traditional family values, such as the lives of embryos and foetuses, and the heterosexual family built in religious marriage. Therefore, opposition to the recognition of same-sex marriage, abortion, and scientific research done with embryos has characterized its main parliamentary action. Recently, Congressman Eduardo Cunha, now in prison for corruption, presented the Bill 5.069 that makes abortion difficult even for women who are victims of rape. This legislative activity could be understood as conservatism in favour of life by itself and "good behaviour", in an evident attempt to moralize or civilize social practices of the Brazilian population in which marital unions are often informal and temporary.

On the other hand, however, parliamentary activity is far from defending life and peace. Members of the same group have advocated themes such as reducing the legal age for responding to crime, undoing the Disarmament Statute, and supporting Israel's military intervention in the Middle East. Other issues of the conservative agenda were thus related to State actions on crime or insurgencies, supporting repressive internal and external policies. These three themes occupied the discourses given by members of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front and the Parliamentary Front of Public Security: Firstly, the position on the legislative proposal that deals with the reduction of criminal legal age from 18 to 16 years old, which would allow Brazilian system of justice to indict and judge adolescents as adults, giving them sentences of imprisonment, that is, putting them in penitentiaries, away from their families and in the company of adult criminals even for petty crimes. Secondly, revoking the Disarmament Statute would have the unquestionable consequence of putting a greater number of—and therefore more accessible—guns into circulation for all those who seek to resolve conflicts by armed confrontation.⁵ Thirdly, commitment to belligerent actions also becomes evident in the defence of Israel's military intervention, a surprising identification, for Christianity has emerged in conflict with Judaism. The neo-Pentecostal parliamentary members have defended the supremacy of the State of Israel in the Middle East, and justified segregation and local war against Palestinians⁶. How can one explain such belligerent positions?

2. Relations between politics, society and religion

The debate about the connections between religion and society has concentrated much more on the impact it would have on differential economic growth between countries in the world. From the Weberian theses, on the importance of the process of rationalization and the ideas of predestination for the constitution of an ethic of daily behaviour among Protestants, especially the Calvinists, this discussion has acquired theoretical contours and empirical accuracies that have involved much research around the world. One author points out that, in fact, religion has been a tremendous force throughout history, in every corner of the globe since it would have been more responsible for human deaths than class exploitation and the market. Over the centuries, says the author, given the

⁵The president Jair Bolsonaro has just issued a decree increasing the categories of people that can be legally armed, as well as the number of guns and ammunition that they can buy.

⁶President Jair Bolsonaro tried to transfer the Brazilian Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, but Arabic countries threatened putting an end to commerce with Brazil.

resources that religions have controlled and their power over individuals' hearts and minds, we should expect that following some religious practice would still have greater economic consequences (Iyer, 2015).

Recently, Robert J. Barro and Rachel M. McCleary (2003), Harvard University, have revisited the study of religious bearing on economic life by the dimension of beliefs, somehow criticizing the secularization theory. In this study, they investigated the correlation between variables such as church attendance and belief in heaven and hell, comparing economic growth indices from 1965 to 1995. They took religion as an independent variable with independent determinants or correlates of the economy and assumed the hypothesis that there would be a positive correlation between certain religious beliefs and economic performance, considering the diverse practices of participation and the various beliefs in the afterlife (Barro & McCleary, 2003: 761-2). Religion would affect economic activity mainly through the promotion of religious beliefs that influence individual traits such as honesty, work ethic, frugality etc. Beliefs in heaven and hell could affect these characteristics by creating the perception of rewards and punishments for "good" and "bad" behaviour in one's life (Barro & McCleary, 2003: 771). In this perspective, organized religion, and more specifically, attendance at religious services, would affect beliefs that would affect individual traits that would affect aggregate economic effects. The study confirmed the assumption that greater economic development is associated with lower religiosity, which is understood as participation in religious activities, that is, in the country where the church was most attended they would take time and readiness from other activities (Barro & McCleary, 2003: 778). But in two countries where attendance at religious service was essentially the same, the one in which people demonstrated greater belief in heaven and hell had experienced faster economic growth.

This "quantitative approach to the study of religion" relies on the assumption that the Christian religion can affect the economy by promoting beliefs that influence productivity, emphasizing characteristics such as frugality, effort, and honesty. A widespread feeling that such behaviour may eventually be rewarded - belief in heaven - or that lack of such behaviour can be punished -belief in hell - can therefore promote economic growth. However, if more people and resources are dedicated to religious services, i.e., a higher level of religious participation, this tends to decrease productivity in the economy. In other words, national economies can perform better whenever people have relatively higher levels of religious beliefs than higher religious participation.

In Brazil, the debate about the relationship between religion and economic action was based on which dimension would be the determinant of the others. Studies, such as Dias Duarte (2014), emphasize the importance of values, influenced by the thinking of Louis Dumont, author who analysed complex societies by the predominance of the hierarchical or individualist principle that he understood as a historical phenomenon. It would be this trait of ideology, internalized by individuals that would explain religious adherence, individualistic or hierarchical. Others, such as Arenari (2015), adopt the Marxist or materialist perspective and understand the growth of adherence to evangelical churches, especially Pentecostalism, as an effect of the capitalist system expansion. Pentecostalism would be a typical religious form in the periphery of the capitalist system, being directly related to the members of the social classes who began to be crowded and broken in such societies. They did not address the political issues related to the class situation in a developing democracy.

However, quantitative studies of the relationship between religion and the economy, as discussed here, do not say anything about the effects of religion on the institutionality and development of democracy in the examined countries. Could belief in hell, for example, have effects on how political opponents are perceived by believers? Would the strength of such beliefs as expressed in political discourses encourage antagonism and religious intolerance or belligerence?

Weber also analysed the relationship between religion and politics, addressing issues such as the institutionalization of state-bound churches, pacifism as a way out of wars, the removal of any political involvement from the displeasure that political transactions provoke. In his historical approach, Weber always worried about the specific circumstances in order to understand one or another stance adopted by the religious leader. During the Roman Empire, the Christian religion of fraternal love, which renounced any violence, was understood not by interest in social reform, but by the complete loss of political concerns, that is, indifference to the warrior struggle for power (Weber, 1963: 225). During the Reformation, coexistence between asceticism and structures of power as instruments of the world's ethical transformation were not easy. Weber pointed out it happened because an even greater abandonment of ascetic values, than that existing in enrichment-oriented economic activities, would appear in public pronouncements of the struggle for power, in the plots, agreements and political compromises (op.cit. 226).

The postures on aggressive dispute or war have also been multiple among Protestants (Weber, op.cit.: 228-230). The Quakers, in the United States, were organized on the foundation of pacifism and thrived alongside the natives without ever resorting to guns or violence. In other denominations, attitudes varied according to the nature of the struggle in question, either to defend religious freedom against an abusive political authority, or to participate in the struggle for political power. Luther completely rejected revolutions or religious wars and abstained from participating in the game for the rational control of the world by demanding that the latter should follow ethically rationalized demands. In Calvinism, it was a religious obligation to defend, by violent means, religion against tyranny which would prevent the propagation or profession of the faith, but only when religious authority took the initiative of resistance through the use of force. In the religions or sects that developed the missionary enterprise as a war, practitioners embarked on the project of a religious revolution which they responded to as a call, even when they acted as mercenaries. Therefore, the most vocal militants of evangelism seem to be Calvinists and Puritans, that is, the English Calvinist groups who were called Puritans because they sought to purify the Anglican Church from the residue of Catholic ritualism by bringing its liturgy closer to Calvinism. The idea of purification reinforced the idea of an absolute evil that should be condemned in many words so that the purified good prevailed. They were the ones who populated the United States and South Africa, where repression of non-Christian religions was more pronounced and racial segregation became legal. Therefore, segregation seems to harmonize with the purification of social practices and beliefs, or the dichotomy between good and evil. Weber (1997: 188-189) states that:

... The world of purity and the world of impurity, from whose mixture emanated the fragmentary empirical world, separate themselves repeatedly into two detached realms. The more modern eschatological hope, however, causes the god of purity and benevolence to vanquish, just as Christianity causes the Saviour to triumph over evil. The most coherent form of dualism is the worldwide popular conception of heaven and hell, which re-

establishes God's sovereignty over the evil spirit, which is His creature, and thereby believes that divine omnipotence is saved.

In any case, the discussion on the relations between religion and society since the beginning of the 20th century has always dealt with aspects and themes that have made this relationship more complex and multifaceted, bringing, even to the debate between religion and economic development, between religion and political power, religion and public space, aspects that were not previously considered, such as participation, religious diversity and civic culture. The discussion on the process of democratization, both with regard to electoral practices and with regard to the debate on the institution of citizenship rights in various sectors of social life, can illuminate some of the issues to be explored.

One of the possibilities of interpretation and analysis of the effects of religiosity is to study the relationship between the political and religious fields to evaluate how religiosity can affect civic participation and the postures before the representative electoral process. In this dimension, the debate has been around the origins of the democratic game in the various instances of internal debate in religious institutions, such as Catholic brotherhoods where elders shared decisions with their members. Another important theme concerns the debate on secularism and secularization, the Weberian thesis most criticized by sociologists of religion who have dealt with the re-enchantment of the world, that is, the return of a religious discourse to symbolize or justify everyday practices, especially political ones.

However, the theme less analysed is the one that brings to light the effects of a vision of absolute evil, that is the belief in devil, and how it impacts common sense talks, informing every day social practices and forming individual subjectivity. The idea that a belief in hell and devil is important for economic growth must be rethought in the light of its consequences for conviviality, especially in liberal democracies. Trying to understand how religion impacts on the political development of the country, the consolidation of its democracy, may astonish sociologists and political scientists as it acquires negative and threatening aspects regarding the others.

An example coming from Brazil is a case in point. After being prevented by National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) from continuing to evangelize indigenous people in Brazil, the missionary of the New Tribes of Brazil Mission (MNTB), Onesimo Martins de Castro, an evangelical preacher that presents himself as an expert in indigenous cultures, explained the government's decision in 1991:

We know that behind all is the Prince of Darkness who, according to the revelation of God in the book of Revelation, "came down to you full of wrath, knowing that he had little time left." He also knows that "when the gospel is preached in the whole world the end will come," and he and his angels will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone with all the people who follow their wiles. It is no wonder that he uses every means to postpone this day and one of his main strategies is to prevent the Gospel from being announced, especially to isolated peoples. Yet as the Lord Jesus himself prophesied, the gates of hell would not prevail against the advancement of the Church, and God did not give up revealing himself to the Zo'é as well. [...] The work continues! And in a partnership relationship

between missionary agencies, Brazilian church and indigenous church we proceed to the target in the certainty of soon seeing the Zo'é Indians know the Word of God and have their messianic expectation fully satisfied (Castro, 2008: 148, apud Ribeiro, 2015).

Yet, the same federal government device was not used to protect religions of other ethnic minorities, such as the descendants of African slaves who became the preferred object of evangelization in the country. *Pais de santo* and *mães de santo*, Afro-Brazilian spiritual leaders, as well as other adherents who dress in white and carry religious symbols with them, have been the target of physical offenses and aggressions. Temples of worship or *terreiros* have already been destroyed by virtue of supposed association of these religions with demonic practices and their followers' alleged incorporation by the devil. For Pentecostals, according to Lehmann (2013, p. 18), "heaven and hell are indeed here on earth, and the churches offer a cure for the afflictions of the world more than a refuge."

The other issue that links religion to politics concerns the internal relations of religious congregations, which Weber regards as important matrices for understanding the religious bureaucracy that is formed within communities of the believers to preserve the religious order and its officials continuing existence (Weber, Op.cit.: 60-79). But relations between leaders, bureaucracy and the community of believers are also important in assessing commitments to the organization that different churches have. At the religious question lies the supposed opposition between community and society, between social dependence ties and individual autonomy as defended by the ideology of Protestantism. However, today it is increasingly clear that this dichotomy goes far from the real social dynamics of so-called modern or post-modern and post-industrial societies. Considering above all the meaning that community is acquiring for those living in state societies, already institutionalized or in development, it is possible to verify the permanence of communities, imaginary or not, desired or real, with which people identify themselves. Tensions are placed between the two models – society or community - because patrimonialism and clientelism pacts still arise from the possible combinations between community and society principles and rules. That is why Bertrand Badie refers to the communitarian culture of the politician, that is, the one in which the political space refers to the internal group rather than to the external ones or to the national territory, to interpersonal relations of loyalty or dependence more than to an abstract system of rules and assignments. (Badie, 1991: 119-123) The result of this hybridity is the clear segmentation between interest groups who are fighting for advantages or privileges.

Finally, there is the confirmation that, by affirming the individual responsibility for success and enrichment, by affirming the moral and intellectual superiority of followers of the church—White / European citizens of the institutionalized political field and only of them—evangelization ends up creating the exclusion of the most humble, as was evident in the systems of social segregation in the United States and South Africa, colonized by Puritan groups and British and Dutch Baptists. Open, egalitarian, and pluralistic debate was erected only within the religious community, just as the election of the priest was reserved for faithful churchgoers (Hermet, 1991: 136-8). To the humble believers remained only obedience to the religious precepts with respect to the "right way" or the morally correct life as approved by the church.

It is undeniable, however, the persistent fearless and courageous posture of those who have developed the propagation of the Gospels, hence the general denomination of evangelicals, in defence of their religious, economic and political values and interests. This posture is also present in the work of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front in the Brazilian National Congress.

Yet, the discourses of the Brazilian evangelical parliamentarians offer an overview of the purposes, ambivalences and conflicts that the evangelization project can bring when trying to construct a world without evil in a hybrid political sphere as the one found in Brazil. This sphere encompasses various forms of personal dependency or clientelism in communities, while maintaining adherence to individualism; accepts informal or illegal means to reach and remain in strategic positions of power, an evil validated by the greater cause, the one in which ends justify the means.

The discourses of the evangelical deputies at the Brazilian National Congress have served to spread biblical arguments that justify such bellicose positions, as we shall see below. With regard to the reduction of the penal age, there are indications that not all discourses come from moral principles or from religious ideology. Economic interests also move congressmen.

The approval of the procedure of Constitutional Amendment Project (PEC) 171/1993, which allows the reduction of the criminal legal age from 18 to 16 years, by the Commission of Constitution and Justice (CCJ), had the support of 41 deputies, 8 of the Parliamentary Evangelical Front. Only one evangelical voted against (Aguinaldo Ribeiro, Progressive Party – Paraíba, (PP-PB), of the Baptist Church). The text presented by two Evangelical deputies from two Evangelical political parties—Rogério Rosso, Social Democratic Party – Federal District (PSD-DF) and André Moura, Social Christian Party – Sergipe (PSC-SE)—was also approved in the first round of voting in the Federal Chamber of Deputies on July 2, 2015. The approval occurred with the score of 323 favourable votes and 155 opposites. The deputies of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front voted as follows: 55 in favour, 9 against, 10 did not vote. The majority of the Universal Church deputies voted in favour of the PEC 171. Most of the members of Assembly of God, another Pentecostal church, were also in favour. However, many Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians opposed or did not vote.

At the time of the creation of PEC 171/1993, biblical arguments were used to justify their content, abstracting from the social, economic and political context in which they were written, which is the standard of religious fundamentalism that seeks to organize society as a whole today. Such biblical precepts were important discursive arguments for the justification and ultimate approval of the Constitutional Amendment Project.

At some point in the Old Testament, the prophet Ezekiel gives us the perfect dimension of personal responsibility. One does not even think of age: "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." (Ezek. 18) From the capacity to commit error, to violate the law comes the punishment: to receive also the admonition proportional to the crime. At that age, the features that mark personal identity are already being created" (Chamber Of Deputies, 1993: 23063).

The evident ambivalence in the defence of life, with which the evangelical deputies wish to present themselves discursively when opposing themselves to Abortion or Embryonic Stem Cell Research,

appears likewise in the legal basis of the PEC 986/2015. The Constitutional Amendment Project in question deals with the Disarmament Statute aiming at retracting the law that created the rules on the possession and sale of arms by making it more flexible. Some evangelical deputies of the Parliamentary Front of Public Security, among other deputies commonly known as "Bullet Bench", use as their most important argument that people want the guns and so that they are just following the "popular will". Thus, in order to justify withdrawing the Disarmament Statute, they employ a political and pragmatic argument that is far from a religious discourse. Again, according to our records, this position is not consensual. Some members of traditional historical and Pentecostal churches are not in favour of dismantling this Statute.

However, deputies of the Evangelical Front also used biblical psalms to justify the PEC presented by a Deputy who is not evangelical. The text, which has acquired a new name - Firearms Control Statute - and repeals the previous Disarmament Statute, was approved by a Special Commission in October 2015, but still needs to be reviewed by the Senate and the Executive Power. Through it, all citizens who meet the minimum requirements established in the new law have the right to carry firearms for self-defence and protection of their property. The new text also reduces the minimum age for guns purchases from 25 to 21 years, though the firearms cannot be carried anywhere. The possession of weapons today is exclusive (besides to members of the Judiciary), to all police professional categories existing in the country, except for the Municipal Guards of some cities, such as, Rio de Janeiro. Under the new bill, the possession and use of guns would extend to city councillors, state and federal deputies as well as senators.

The esteem of evangelical leaders for Israel is not a phenomenon that occurs only in Brazil. In the United States, for example, there is a movement composed of evangelical defenders of Israel called Christian Zionism. This movement defends the existence of the State of Israel and understands that any act of this nation is understood as an act of God, a divine orientation, produced by the "chosen people." As for Christian Zionists, because Brazilian evangelicals that model themselves on the former, any attack against Israel must be repudiated, and the Israeli reaction to these attacks must be understood as an attitude of a sovereign state standing against its enemies.

Neo-Pentecostalism in Brazil represented mainly by the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (*Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*: IURD), has adopted a theological position close to Judaism. At the inauguration of the Temple of Solomon of the Universal Church in São Paulo, the bishop Edir Macedo opted for a new look, wearing tallit and kippah, traditional Jewish clothing. At that time, the hymn of Israel was performed during the liturgy of the inauguration and other ceremonies. These elements corroborate the growing affinity between the discourses of the Evangelicals and those of Zionist Jews. The former members of FPE have consistently revealed that the guidance they receive from the Old Testament will reverberate with the behaviour and customs emanating from the analysis of biblical passages that address the saga of the Jewish people and their role as "chosen people". The discourses of Brazilian Evangelicals and the discourse of Zionists, at several occasions, resort to the same substrata that are contained in the Sacred Scriptures, adopting a similar textual interpretation on the confessional dogmas.

Conclusion

It is not the purpose of this article to make a judgment of the evangelical parliamentarians as if they were all committed to a warmongering standpoint and their corresponding speeches. There are non-Protestant deputies who are equally extreme in defending these more conservative and repressive legislative deliberations. Nor do we conclude that the evangelical deputies want to control the whole society and the state through this legislation. However, the tradition of the interventionist state and demiurge of transformations in Brazil leaves a concern for those who do not want a setback that these bill changes will bring. There are also the discourses of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front that contradict, even opposite to the non-parliamentary believers and pastors, the positions in favour of traditional family, social harmony and peace. Their discourses on behalf of guns, teenage imprisonment and Israeli military intervention deny the peace speech by taking up the defence of order at any costs. Greater repression of adolescents, support for Israel's current warmongering government and greater access to firearms in Brazil are not in favour of peace and social harmony. Undoubtedly, the evangelical parliamentarians who have opted for politics in this world try to establish a direct influence on these matters, which were not previously explored by Protestant Christians. These developments represent an innovation in the place they occupied in Brazilian politics, this time in favour of a more despotic state and more in accordance with New Christian Right (NCR) in the United States from where the missionaries came to Brazil.

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