

Dynamic Secularisms:

Christianity and the Struggle for Human Rights in the Uruguayan Laïcité

by

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## ABSTRACT

From 1973 to 1984 the people of Uruguay lived under a repressive military dictatorship. During that time, the Uruguayan government violated the Human Rights of its opponents and critics through prolonged imprisonment in inhumane conditions without trial, physical and psychological torture, disappearance, and a negation of freedom of speech, thought and congregation. In this project, I argue that these violations of Human Rights committed by the military dictatorship added urgency to the rethinking by religious individuals of the Uruguayan model of secularism, the *laïcité*, and the role that their theology required them to play in the “secular” world. Influenced by the Liberation Theology movement, Catholic and Protestant leaders simultaneously made use of and challenged the secularization model in order to carve a space for themselves in the struggle for the protection of Human Rights.

Furthermore, I will argue that due to the Uruguayan system of *partitocracy*, which privileges political parties as the main voices in public matters, Uruguay still carries this history of Human Rights violations on its back. Had alternative views been heard in the public sphere, this thorny history might have been dealt with in a fairer manner. Thus, I call for further exploration of the “intelligent *laïcité*” model, which might ensure true democratic participation in the public sphere.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

CEDIDOSC – Centro de Estudio y Difusión de la Doctrina Social Cristiana [Center for the Study and Diffusion of the Christian Social Doctrine]

CNP – Comisión Nacional Pro-Referéndum [National Pro-Referendum Commission]

GOU – Government of Uruguay

IAHRC – Inter-American Human Rights Commission

IEMU – Iglesia Evangélica Metodista del Uruguay [Evangelical Methodist Church of Uruguay]

IERP – Iglesia Evangélica del Río de la Plata [Evangelical Church of the Río de la Plata]

MLN -T – Movimiento de Liberación Nacional – Tupamaros [Movement for National Liberation – Tupamaros]

NCC – U.S. National Council of Churches

OAS – Organization of American States

OBSUR – Observatorio del Sur

SER – Servicio Ecuménico de Reintegración [Ecumenical Service for Reintegration]

SERPAJ – Servicio Páz y Justicia [Peace and Justice Service]

SERSOC – Servicio de Rehabilitación Social [Service for Social Rehabilitation]

SIJAU – Secrétariat international des juristes pour l'amnistie en Uruguay [International Secretariat of Jurists for Amnesty in Uruguay]

UN – United Nations

UNCHR – United Nations Commission on Human Rights

USG – United States Government

WCC – World Council of Churches

## Chapter One – Introduction

*How can the repressors and the repressed live in the same land, share the same table? How to heal a country that has been traumatized by fear if that same fear continues to do its silent work? And how to reach truth when we have become used to lying? Can we keep the past alive without becoming its prisoners? And can we forget that past without risking its future replication? Is it legitimate to sacrifice truth to assure peace? And what are the consequences for the community if the voices of the past are suppressed? Is it possible that a community should search for justice and equality if the threat of military intervention remains ever present? And, given these circumstances, how can violence be avoided? In what sense are we all responsible in part for the suffering of others, for the great errors that led to such a terrible clash? And perhaps the most tremendous dilemma of all: in what ways should these questions be confronted without destroying the national consensus, which is the basis of any democratic stability? – Ariel Dorfman in his play “The Maiden of Death”.*

In the play “The Maiden of Death”, Dorfman (1991) reflects on the legacies of the Chilean military dictatorship and poses a question that highlights the difficulty that the Latin American countries who suffered military regimes have faced in the transitions back to democracy. How should the violations of Human Rights committed by the State against its people be addressed “without destroying the national consensus, which is the basis of any democratic stability?” I will focus on the case of Uruguay to explore how Catholic and Protestant actors in particular addressed this question. Specifically, I will ask: *How and why did Christian actors engage in Human Rights advocacy during the Uruguayan military dictatorship?* Their positions, rooted in religious understandings of ethics and informed by the political theology of the Liberation Theology movement faced opposition from within and without their religious communities putting in evidence not only the convoluted nature of the Human Rights debate but also the conflicting understandings of the role of religious individuals with regards to political and social matters.



Authors who have studied the relationship between religious institutions – usually the Catholic Church– and the State during the Latin American dictatorships, often divide Latin American Churches into two groups: those who supported the military regimes and those who were vocal against them. This has often led to a simplistic understanding of the relationship between religious individuals and institutions and the State during times of dictatorship. Using a Rational Choice approach, Anthony Gill (1998) places Uruguay in the group that supported the authoritarian regime because the Catholic hierarchy did not release an official statement against it. Some, such as Carozza and Philpott (2012) and Mantilla (2010) have stated that the Uruguayan Christian Churches were neutral and that, in the context of a dictatorship, this neutral position could be understood as pro-authoritarian, while others such as Ros (2012) state that the Christian churches in Uruguay were anti-authoritarian. These differences show that it is impossible to speak of “The Church”, “Catholics”, or “Protestants” and attribute to the entire collectivity a specific position with regards to the dictatorship. Religious actors are part of the body of citizens and as such, differ in their positions and opinions.

I will use Philpott’s (2007) definition of the “religious actor” to guide my analysis. He defines a “religious actor” as “any individual or collectivity, local or transnational, who acts coherently and consistently to influence politics in the name of religion” (p.506). Focusing on the actors in addition to the abstract institutions will allow for a more nuanced understanding of the intersection between religious and political discourse with regards to the dictatorship and the violation of Human Rights. I will also use Philpott’s understanding of what constitutes a democratizing action. He states that “support for democratization can take several kinds of civic nonviolent modes of

resistance, including explicit statements and actions of protest against authoritarian regimes, conduct of religious ceremonies with an oppositional intent, cooperation with co-religionists across borders in defying the regime, and similar collaboration with parties, unions, and other opposition groups within domestic civil society” (p.510). This expands the analysis beyond the official pronouncements of religious institutions to include the kind of embodied action that is often the only means of protest during violent, repressive times. When taking an official stance could mean imprisonment or even torture and death, as was the case in Uruguay, actions speak louder than words. I will now proceed to explain the history that led to the increased militarization of Uruguay and the 1973 coup d'état.

During 1960s Uruguay, an anti-capitalist revolutionary group of mostly young, socialist activists called the *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional – Tupamaros* [*Movement for National Liberation – Tupamaros*] (MLN-T) started raiding banks, stealing money and documents in order to expose economic crimes, increasingly recurring to more violent tactics (Ros, 2012; Markarian, 2005; Brown & Goldman, 1989). The name “Tupamaros” is thought to have been derived from Tupac Amaru II, who fought against the Spanish colonization of Peru in the eighteenth century, which connects the guerilla movement to a larger narrative of Latin American liberation (Churchill, 2014). In order to deal with the guerillas, president Pacheco Areco called in the military and instituted the “Doctrine of National Security”, which gave the military free reign to do whatever they saw fit to eliminate this guerilla movement. The military used a rhetoric of “the common good” to justify the imprisonment and torture of “subversives” and regarded themselves as the saviors of Western liberal values in response to the invasion

of Communist ideas (Roniger and Sznajder, 1997). In the context of the Cold War era, the Tupamaros were considered a mere symptom of the Communist threat. Because of this, even though the military effectively destroyed the Tupamaros by the early 1970s, it did not withdraw from power and instead supported civilian President Juan María Bordaberry when he dissolved Parliament on June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1973 marking the beginning of eleven years of military dictatorship (Brown & Goldman, 1989). The Uruguayan dictatorship was one of eight concurrent military regimes in South America (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Peru), coordinated under the *Plan Condor*. This was an international operation, supported by the United States, aimed at fighting the “Communist threat” by allowing “subversives” to be detained, imprisoned, and often disappeared by any of the participating dictatorships (Ros, 2012).

The Uruguayan military regime (1973-1985), although not as violent as those in Argentina and Chile in terms of disappearances, was one of the most repressive in the region due to the institution of an expansive system of surveillance. Human Rights were violated by means of prolonged imprisonment in inhumane conditions without trial, physical and psychological torture, disappearance, and a negation of freedom of speech, thought and congregation. This system of complete control did not only apply to those with explicit socialist affiliations. All Uruguayan citizens were classified as A, B, or C depending on their “threat level”. “A” meant that the individual was not a threat to the regime and “B” that they should be watched. A “C” status was the equivalent of being blacklisted, which could mean the loss of jobs, social ties, and even imprisonment. What is more, what group one belonged to did not depend solely on one’s activities since the military coup, but extended to any political involvement prior to 1973 that could be

considered “leftist”. During the twelve years of dictatorship, over 30,000 workers in the public sector lost their jobs for ideological reasons. In addition, twenty-eight newspapers and magazines were closed, and those that remained were heavily censored. Between 1973 and 1979, one in every 50 Uruguayans was detained for interrogation and one in every 500 was imprisoned for months or even years without trial (Brown & Goldman, 1989). According to Amnesty International, this made Uruguay the country with the most political prisoners per capita in the world (Ros, 2012; The Globe and Mail, 1986). Rev. Luis Pérez Aguirre, central figure in the Uruguayan Human Rights movement from the 1960s until his death in 2001, regretted that “Uruguay did not have the most blood-thirsty regime, but it was the most totalitarian through its use of fear and terror to demobilize the population” (quoted in Edmonds, 2013, p.9).

In 1980, the military called an election, thinking that the rhetoric of national security had taken root and they would be able to legitimize their government. However, they misjudged the public perception of their role in the “protection against insurrection” and lost. This enabled the slow transition back to democracy. In 1984, the first presidential election in twelve years was held and President Sanguinetti, representative of the Colorado party, won. Unlike in Argentina, where the military had been discredited by the loss of the Falkland (Malvinas) war against England, Uruguay’s military was still strong and stuck to the narrative that they had fought and won a war against subversion. In contrast, those who had been persecuted expected retribution against those who committed crimes during the regime (Roniger & Sznajder, 1997; Roniger, 2012). Furthermore, even though there was some acknowledgement of the extent of Human Rights violations during the previous twelve years, the military refused to take

responsibility so it was impossible to generate an interpretation of the past shared by the victims and victimizers (Roniger & Sznajder, 1997).

The 1984 presidential elections officially marked the end of the dictatorship. However, the military was still in a position of power and was able to negotiate the transition back to democracy with the political parties. It was implied that the military would only allow for the transition if they were given amnesty for all Human Rights abuses committed during the dictatorship (Roniger, 2012). Many religious actors, including Catholics and Protestants, strongly opposed an amnesty, arguing that long-lasting peace and true reconciliation could not be achieved if this past was not dealt with justly. However, all the political parties voted for the amnesty, and the *Law on the Caducity of the Punitive Claims of the State* (or the Caducity Law) was passed in 1986 (Roniger & Sznajder, 1997). This challenges the assumption that the protection of Human Rights is necessarily tied to the secular State. In the case of Uruguay, the political parties enabled the culture of impunity that would emerge after the return to democracy. In contrast, many religious leaders, in combination with artists, writers, musicians, Human Rights organizations, and civilians, fought against an amnesty that would leave Human Rights abuses unacknowledged and unpunished. The Caducity Law stated that the time to investigate and prosecute the perpetrators of crimes committed prior to March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1985 had passed, so no military officials would be tried for the Human Rights abuses inflicted during the regime (República Oriental del Uruguay, 1986).

Those most affected by the repression fought against this situation and, with the support of the population, called for a referendum on the law. A vote was held in 1989 with the participation of 84.7% of the electorate. The slogan used by those in support of

the referendum was “Voto para que el pueblo decida” [I sign for the people to decide]<sup>1</sup>, which addressed the fact that the transition to democracy had been a political process arranged by those in power without public participation. Thus, they appealed to a national identity that made public participation central to democracy. The information in the flyers used in favor of the referendum constantly referenced the country’s liberating figures and its foundational values. However, 56.6% (vs. 43.4%) still voted in favor of giving amnesty to the military (Roniger, 2012). Brown and Goldman (1989), renowned Human Rights researchers and activists, suggested that many hesitated or refused to vote against the law because of the retroactive punishment experienced during the dictatorship, which meant that “what was legal today might be cause for reprisals tomorrow” (p.410). Furthermore, members of the Colorado Party that was in power after the dictatorship publicly declared all those in support of a recanting of the law as “sympathizers of the Tupamaros”. This rhetorically made almost half of Uruguay’s electorate supporters of the urban guerillas, creating a sense of danger of persecution for all those who were against the law (Brown & Goldman, 1989). Forgetting was thus the approach at reconciliation fostered by the new democratic government. President Sanguinetti would use the phrase “eyes in the back of the head” to condemn as “revisionist” any attempt to investigate the Human Rights violations committed by the military, implying for those seeking truth, reparations, and justice, an inability to move on and look into the future (Ros, 2012).

The transitional democratic government appealed to the country’s official narrative, which made consensus central to its model of civil society, and declared the case closed because that is what the population seemed to want. Roniger (2012) termed this process the “sacralization of consensus” (p.57). In post-dictatorship Uruguay, the

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<sup>1</sup> All translations from Spanish to English are my own.

continuous use of the rhetoric of “democratically achieved consensus” functioned as a way to silence almost half of the population who had voted against the Caducity Law. Even though the country was almost evenly split about whether the Caducity Law should remain or not, those in power emphasized the democratic process by which the law was re-affirmed, stating that this is what Uruguay wanted.

In 2009, Human Rights organizations, former political prisoners, the families of the disappeared, and religious leaders mobilized once again to collect the necessary signatures for a second plebiscite. The vote took place at the same time as the presidential elections and 90% of the electorate participated, but once again, 52% of the population voted to maintain the Caducity Law. Both the Colorado party and the Blanco party advocated to maintain the amnesty (Basile 2; Ros 166). The Frente Amplio party’s influence had been steadily increasing since it won the government of Montevideo, the capital city, in 1990 and maintained leadership in that department<sup>2</sup> ever since. In 2005, it won the governments of eight other departments and in 2009, when the plebiscite was taking place, they won the presidential election. Given that many of the members of the Frente Amplio, including several of the current ministers as well as the President, José Mujica, were imprisoned during the dictatorship, some for over 10 years, one would assume that they would use their influence to make their sympathizers vote against the maintenance of the amnesty. However, this was not the case. Given the value assigned to democratic processes in Uruguay, especially the vote of the majority, they shied away from supporting the elimination of the law in a cohesive, united manner (Roniger, 2012). Even though the political power of the party had been increasing consistently, questioning a law which had been ratified by the population and, implicitly, the general

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<sup>2</sup> Uruguay is divided into 19 departments, each with its own local administration.

validity of the rule of the majority on this issue, is likely to have put their run for presidency in jeopardy.

I will argue that the violations of Human Rights committed during the military dictatorship added urgency to the rethinking by religious individuals of the Uruguayan model of secularization and the role that their theology required them to play in the “secular” world. Influenced by the Liberation Theology movement, many Catholic and Protestant leaders simultaneously made use of and challenged the secularization model in order to carve a space for themselves in the struggle for the protection of Human Rights. They made use of the model by emphasizing their apolitical standpoint as religious individuals, which often protected them from imprisonment. Even though they were using a secularist idiom rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of which Uruguay was a drafter, religious leaders grounded their positions in scriptural understandings of ethics, of the care for the poor and oppressed that had become central after Vatican II, and advocated for non-violent action. At the same time, they unsettled the secularization model by increasing their presence in the public sphere, in the issues that concerned the population as a whole and not just the private lives of Christian individuals.

However, during the transitional process, the political parties returned to the public sphere and re-established themselves as the privileged voices and true representative of public opinion. Therefore, in accordance with the laïcité model of secularism that I will explore in chapter 2, when speaking for Human Rights, religious actors were either ignored, or labeled as socialists by the military state, the media, and conservative Christian groups because being a political actor was a requirement for



access to political debate. This meant that the arguments for Human Rights advocated by religious individuals and Human Rights organizations since the end of the dictatorship, the same arguments that have been used by the United Nations (UN) and the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (IACHR) to condemn Uruguay for its disregard for the fate of the disappeared and the amnesty given to perpetrators of acts against humanity, were not strong enough to sway the population and the positions of the political parties that ignored the violations of Human Rights were legitimized. I would suggest that this is one of the many reasons why almost 30 years after the end of the dictatorship, Uruguay still carries its dark history on its back.

In chapter two I will explore how the process of modernization in Uruguay was closely tied to the secularization of the public sphere, specifically to its differentiation and delimitation as a political space where extreme “neutrality” was demanded and religious actors had no role. Religion was depoliticized and privatized. Furthermore, the relegation of religion to the private sphere and the expansion of the role of the State resulted in the creation of a civil religion, where political processes were sacralized. More specifically, the system of government that prevailed was the *partitocracia*, which established the political parties as the main referents and sources of identity. However, the economic crisis of the 1960s and the military dictatorship brought about a disruption of the *partitocracia* system, which opened up the public sphere to alternative actors, such as religious leaders.

In chapter three I will look at the deprivatization of Catholicism during the 1960s and its implications for the Uruguayan *laïcité*. I will explore how models of secularism can be challenged in transnational ways by focusing on Liberation Theology as a

rethinking of the boundaries between the religious and the secular spheres and its impact on Uruguayan Catholicism specifically. I will also look at how the incursion of the military state into the “private” spheres of thought and bodily integrity by means of its repressive tactics of control prompted an incursion of religious actors into the public sphere in defense of the freedoms of civil society. Of course, this deprivatization of religion was not accepted by all religious actors so I will treat the internal debates about the limits between religion and politics and the role that Catholic actors should have with regards to the protection of Human Rights within the Catholic Church.

Davidson suggests that a hermeneutical approach is necessary to understand the secularism model at a particular historical context. Changing meanings lead to changing social practices (Cady, & Shakman Hurd, 2010). Through its repressive measures, such as extreme censorship, the military dictatorship in Uruguay changed what was meant, for example, by dissent and rebellion. These changing meanings thus implicated a change in the understanding of social practices. As we will see, religious activities such as fasts were suddenly understood, not only by the military government but also by the actors carrying out the fasts, as political action, even if this was not explicit. I will use this hermeneutical approach when exploring, for example, how the “father” of Liberation Theology Gustavo Gutiérrez’s transformation of the secular lower class into the biblical poor entailed a change in the social practices of Uruguayan Christians who followed the Liberation Theology movement.

Chapter four will focus on how Protestant actors negotiated the boundaries between religion and politics during the dictatorship. The Methodist Church was the only institution that officially pronounced itself against the dictatorship. Furthermore, their

theology had been focused on issues of social justice prior to Vatican II and the emergence of Liberation Theology. As a result, the rethinking of secularism by Methodists did not represent the same transformation as the Catholic incursion into the public sphere because their relationship to “wordly” affairs had been different given that they did not go through the disestablishment process in the same way that the Catholic Church did.

I will conclude with a discussion on the implications of these findings for our understanding of secularisms and the relationship between religion and politics. As Casanova (1994) states, “a theory which is not flexible enough to account for the possibility that some secular worldviews may actually be anti-Enlightenment and that religious resistance in such cases may be legitimate and on the side of Enlightenment is not complex enough to deal with the historical ‘contingencies’ of a yet unfinished modernity and of a not yet completed secularization” (p.38). The protection of Human Rights might actually lie, in certain historically specific contexts, in the inclusion of “religious” perspectives into the secular sphere, which does not necessarily entail a return to established religions and pre-enlightenment notions of individual freedom.

This project is based on archival research carried out in Uruguay during the summer of 2014 with the support of the Friends of the Center Award. I used several official documents published by the Catholic Church as well as by the Center for the Study and Diffusion of the Christian Social Doctrine (CEDIDOSC), which is affiliated to the Episcopal Conference. In order to elucidate the official position of the Methodist Church, I have relied mainly on the *Methodist Bulletin* since this is one of the main methods used by the Executive Commission and the President of the Methodist Church to

reach their community. Keeping in mind the heavy censorship that occurred during the military regime in Uruguay, I combined this research with documents not published by the religious institutions themselves, such as the biographies of prominent religious actors like Pastors Ademar Olivera and Oscar Bolioli, as well as Monisgnor Parteli. I have also made use of articles, particularly from the newspaper with most circulation in the country, *El País*. Finally, the journal published once a year since 1981 by Servicio Paz y Justicia (SERPAJ), the first Human Rights organization in the country, provided excellent empirical information on the disappeared and the extent of the Human Rights violations committed during this time. This archival research was informed and complemented by the work of Uruguayan historians and sociologists such as Gerardo Caetano, Roger Geymonat, Varia Markarian, and Néstor Da Costa, among others.

## **Chapter Two - The Birth of the Uruguayan Democracy: Laïcité and the Cult of the Political Party**

The formation of Uruguay's collective identity was, to a considerable extent, a State endeavor (Roniger & Sznajder, 1997). The "great national project," which aimed at creating a unified Uruguayan identity among a population largely composed of immigrants, began in the late nineteenth century with the participation and collaboration of different actors but was solidified during the presidencies of José Batlle y Ordoñez during the first years of the twentieth century (Markarian, 2005). Modernization was the main focus of the Batllista government and, in accordance with the positivist ideas that influenced this political party, secularization was a necessary part of this process.

In retrospective, I argue that Batlle y Ordoñez believed in what academics have since termed "The Secularization Thesis". The secularization thesis predicts the disappearance of religion in favor of rational, scientific, educated thought. However, according to Casanova (1994), those who have accepted the validity of this proposition without empirical verification have confused three phenomena that might have occurred together in certain locations but do not necessarily entail each other. These are the differentiation and secularization of society, the decline of religion thesis, and the privatization of religion thesis. Secularism is not necessarily the antithesis of religion as the defenders of the secularization thesis seem to propose. It can encompass religion in various ways, depending on the context in which it emerges (Cady & Shakman Hurd , 2010). As I will show in the next three chapters, the relationship between religious institutions and the State has been more fluid than a strict interpretation of the

secularization process as the separation of the religious and the political spheres would suggest.

Due to the late colonization of Uruguay by Spain in the XVIII century, the perceived lack of religiosity among those who immigrated to this area, and finally the fact that Uruguay had no Catholic dioceses of its own but was controlled by the Argentinean ecclesiastical body until the late XIX century, Uruguay has long been regarded as a country lacking in religious feeling (Da Costa, 2003; Fitzgibbon, 1954). The Constitution of 1830, the first after independence was won in 1825, established the Roman Catholic Apostolic tradition as the State religion but declared all traditions free to practice their rituals and beliefs (Fitzgibbon 1954). During the XIX century, the majority of the Uruguayan population was registered as Catholic, would go to Church on religious holidays, and individuals were fined for opening stores or business on Sundays and holidays. But, in spite of the wishes of the Church hierarchies, the Catholicism lived in Uruguay was relatively liberal (Caetano and Geymonat, 1997).

During this time, Uruguay was politically divided between the Partido Colorado (the Colorados) and the Partido Nacional (the Blancos). Soon after Uruguay gained its independence in 1825, these two parties and political armies fought a civil war called “La Guerra Grande” (1846-1851) that was resolved by a political consensus and set the foundation for Uruguay’s civic democracy (Spektorowski, 2000). The ideological distinctions between the two parties, especially with regards to their social platforms, would become sharper with the arrival of José Batlle y Ordoñez as the leader of the Colorado party in 1903. The Blancos defended the ideals of political democracy, free and secret elections, and proportional representation. In contrast, the Colorados defended the

principle of a strong State that would support the workers and the poor (Markarian, 2005).

Unlike most cases in Latin America where modernization entailed the displacement of the old political parties, modernization in Uruguay was interpreted and promoted by the political parties in power, especially the Colorados under the leadership of Batlle y Ordoñez. As Uruguayan historian Gerardo Caetano (1985) explains, modernization in Uruguay “was born (...) from power and tradition, marking a key precedent for the history of the country: (...) reform was possible most of all from a traditional party with vast government experience” (p.18). From the beginning of his first presidency in 1903, Batlle y Ordoñez and the Colorados who supported him put forward extensive reforms, from education and labor laws, to disestablishment from the Catholic Church and the institution of an extensive welfare system. Since then, large reforms in Uruguay have always been spearheaded by the political parties in power and rarely, if ever, by civil society.

Batlle y Ordoñez and his supporters were influenced by humanism and rationalism, rejecting any kind of determinism. By this I mean that they rejected the idea that an institution can tell individuals with the capacity to reason what to think, especially the Catholic Church and religion in general (Markarian, 2005). The Batllista government considered certain aspects of Uruguayan society to be deterministic and pre-modern, particularly religion and more specifically the establishment of the Catholic Church. For example, Batlle y Ordoñez declared in an issue of the newspaper *El Día* published during the celebration of Easter that “Today Catholics commemorate (...) the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (...) As for resurrection, even when children (...) still believe in ghosts,

reasonable men suppose that those that return from the grave can do so only because they have suffered a fainting-fit or a morbid drowsiness” (cited in Spektorowski, 2000, p.92). The contempt that Batlle y Ordoñez felt for the Catholic Church and Catholicism in general is clear in this statement. According to him and his followers, irrational and unintelligent religious feeling would inevitably decline with the process of modernization and education.

The imminent decline of religion is one of the three pillars of the Secularization Thesis. The Decline of Religion Thesis refers to the Enlightenment prophecy that individuals will increasingly become less religious and will continue to do so until religion, a “primitive” form of knowledge disappears. Casanova (1994) identifies three dimensions to the Enlightenment critique of religion: “a cognitive one directed against metaphysical and supernatural religious worldview; a practical-political one directed against ecclesiastical institutions; and a subjective expressive-aesthetic-moral one directed against the idea of God itself” (p.30). During the secularization process of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century we can identify all of these positions in Uruguay’s anticlerical political elites.

The first clash between the Catholic Church and the State occurred in 1859. In opposition to the wishes of the Apostolic Delegate to the area and the State, who wanted Jesuit Estrazulas y Lamas as the new vicar of Uruguay, the Church, which at this time was very conservative and had had many problems with the “liberalism” of the Jesuit denomination, named Jacinto Vera instead. Vera aimed to increase the Catholic Church’s presence in the public sphere (Caetano and Geymonat 1997). He would declare that “only religion has the eminent, moralizing, and irreplaceable power (...) to penetrate the depths



of the heart to attack vice at its source and root, to make virtue reign supreme. Human laws only have power over external actions; they don't influence the thoughts and desires that are at their foundation" (Quoted in Caetano and Geymonat 1997, 201). This quote shows that as early as 1859, Church leaders were already seeing their role in Uruguayan society diminishing. In response, they were trying to assert their power and authority outside and above that of the State by distinguishing what religion could provide for the individual and society as a whole as well as by asserting their independence in choosing their vicars. Even though the State eventually accepted Vera as the new vicar, this event marks the first conflict between the State and the Church.

Another event with great significance for the relationship between Church and State during this time was the "Jacobson case". During the XIX century, the Episcopacy had complete control over cemeteries. Enrique Jacobson was a Catholic doctor who was also a Freemason. Upon his death in April, 1861, the priest in San José, the city where he was from, denied him the right to be buried in the local cemetery because he had not given up his Freemason affiliations upon death<sup>3</sup>. The Freemasons proceeded to take his body to Montevideo and, even though he was not allowed to be driven to the Church or to have a Catholic burial, the government allowed him to be buried in the Montevideo cemetery. Vera believed this was a breach of ecclesiastical power by the government. As a result of this conflict, the government declared the secularization of all cemeteries in 1861 and prohibited the Episcopal or religious blessing of cemeteries, without denying the individual right to bless private burial sites (Caetano and Geymonat, 1997).

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<sup>3</sup> During the process of the separation between the Church and the State in Uruguay, the Freemasons would be some of the strongest advocates for a separation. Even though many of them did profess a belief in God, they rejected the determinism of the Church on very similar grounds to those used by Battle y Ordoñez.

However, this was not a linear process in which the Church increasingly lost power. For example, in 1877, at the same time as the Uruguayan Dioceses and the Theological Seminary were created in Montevideo, the Law of Common Instruction was passed, which made religious instruction in schools optional. For many years, the Church would consider this law one of the most dangerous changes to Uruguayan society (Caetano, et.al. 2004). In 1879, The Law of the Registry of Civil Status declared that couples had to first be married by the State before marrying at the Church for the union to be legal in the country. Religious marriage was thus a choice and not a demand for those wanting the legal rights of a married couple. These changes were a clear indication that the privileged role of the Catholic Church in relation to the State and society at large was being challenged and revised.

The Catholic Church challenged these attacks on their public character by emphasizing the connection between religion and the nation. The Catholic newspaper *El Mensajero del Pueblo* (The Messenger of the People) wrote in 1872: “Among those people where true morality and religion reign, the feeling of patriotism is pure and enthusiastic and, as a result, each citizen esteems his dignity as such, loves the homeland that saw him born and never, no matter how humble and poor she is, he denies her (...)” (Cited in Caetano, et al., 2013, p.24). What they are stating is that Catholic individuals were better Uruguayans because their religion made them more patriotic. Associating true patriotism with religious faith and conviction was one of the most common forms of argumentation used by the Catholic Church in its “holy cause” against secularization and disestablishment.

Nevertheless, the constitutional separation between the Catholic Church and the State, which had been discussed since the early 1900s, was put up to vote in 1917 and was officially entered into the Constitution in 1919. The Unión Cívica, the Catholic Democratic Party, had a crucial role in the eventual achievement of consensual differentiation between the Church and the State by negotiating the terms and conditions of the law. It was a small party with little support among the population and the Constitutional Convention but it was able to deter the passing of some of the harsher versions of the separation law, including President Batlle y Ordoñez's who, for example, wanted all Church properties built with State funds to be returned to the government (Vanger, 2010). However, with the rallying of the Unión Cívica, the law that was ultimately passed

Provided that all religious cults were to be free; the State supported no religion; it recognized the ownership by the Catholic Church of all temples constructed wholly or partially with national funds except those small churches intended for service as 'asylums, hospitals, jails, or other public establishments'; it declared tax exempt all temples intended for worship by any religious faith. The constitution further omitted any reference to deity in the presidential oath and entirely discarded a preamble with its invocation of divine aid (Fitzgibbon, 1954, p.234).

A popular fund of one million pesos was raised for the Church in order to compensate it for the loss of State support (Vagner, 2010). During the official vote, Catholic Benjamín Pereira Bustamante would state that "(...) I will vote with complete tranquility of spirit in favor of a separation that to me means nothing else than to ensure that the State keep ruling over the external actions of the members of this society and that religion stay active where law stops, where the rule of man can do nothing: in the conscience, where my God has a privileged space that no one will ever be able to deny

him” (cited in Caetano and Geymonat, 1997, p. 173). This puts in evidence that even though anticlerical positions such as Batlle y Ordoñez’s were popular, other understandings of the possible relationship between religion and the secular world were already at play during the disestablishment process.

In Uruguay, as in many other Latin American countries, the secularization of society came hand in hand with the influence of positivism, understood as the privileging of rational thought about current challenges over moral ideals, on State policies. During the Secularization process the State increasingly took over functions that had previously belonged to religious institutions, becoming the new source of identity for the population (Monreal, 2006). This process of institutional differentiation is constitutive of modernity (Casanova, 1994). The secularization of Uruguayan society was thus centered on differentiation as the State increasingly defined and expanded its functions and diminished the role of religion. The religious was separated from all public forms of sociability, and politics, in the form of a partitocracy, which I will discuss below, became a privileged sphere removed from civil society.

The Uruguayan model of secularization, influenced by the French process, has been regarded both by academics and Uruguayans in general as “laicidad” or laïcité. The term was coined by Ferdinand Buisson in his *Dictionnaires de Pedagogie* in 1871. Here he affirmed that laïcité referred to “the equality of all French people before the law, freedom of religious practice, the constitution of a civil State and civil matrimony, and to the exercise of all civil rights in general, without any relation to religious affiliations” (Buisson cited by Monreal, 2006, p. 44). French Historian and Sociologist of laïcité, Jean Baubérot, refers to the new understanding of citizenship under the laïcité model as

“republican abstract universalism” to describe the new idea of the individual that must leave his/her distinctive characteristics in the private sphere in order to become an active citizen in the Republic (Cady, & Shakman Hurd, 2010, p.62).

The Uruguayan modernization push by the Batllista government with regards to religion was directly and explicitly influenced by the French secularization model, which by the beginning of the twentieth century was already referred to as *laïcité*. The term had already been used in Uruguay as early as 1874 by José Pedro Varela. José Pedro Varela was a sociologist, journalist and politician and arguably one of the most important figures in Uruguay during the end of the nineteenth century. It was in response to his book “*La Educación del Pueblo*” [The Education of the People] that the 1877 Law of Common Education was passed. During this time, he was also the Director of Public Education. Even though the Law of Common Education would eventually only include that public education would be free and mandatory, the issue of whether education should also be “*laica*” (meaning that religious ideas would not be taught in school and religious institutions would have no influence over spaces of public education) was discussed both in political and intellectual circles as well as in the general press. In “*La Educación del Pueblo*” Varela (1874) would declare that “the State is a political institution and not a religious institution. Based on the general principles of morality, [the State] has to protect people and property, assuring the kingdom of justice, and should not favor one religious community over others that might be professed by some members of the community. The school, established by the State [, which is] *laico*, must also be *laica*” (p.98). This shows that it was not only the principles of *laïcité* that were at play during the reforms of the end of the nineteenth century, but also the term itself.

Uruguayan historians Gerardo Caetano, Roger Geymonat, Carolina Greising, and Alejandro Sánchez (2013) define laïcité as

1. The institutional marginalization of the religious and its increasing placement in the private sphere, as an expression of both the separation between the State and civil society and of the fracture between public and private, central characteristics of the eruption of modernity. 2. The adoption of official positions that were strongly critical of hegemonic institutional religion (in this case the Catholic Church), together with the transference of sacrality from the religious to the political that little by little derived in the creation of what has been called a civil religion, with alternative systems of symbols and doctrines, rituals and civic liturgies oriented towards the strengthening of the social identity and order (p. 373).

Under a laïcité model the State has no power over religion and the religions have no political power and no voice in politics. This led to the privatization of religion. It was depolitized and separated from the political sphere where religious worldviews no longer had a role.

Uruguayan Historian, Dr. Susana Monreal (2006), suggests that there have been three different models of laïcité. “Intelligent laïcité” is the most recent and yet undeveloped model which has emerged in response to problems presented by the “Combative laïcité” and “Laïcité as abstention” models. The latter two are the ones that I will focus on for the present analysis. “Combative laïcité” is represented in the anticlerical positions advocated by Batlle y Ordoñez. Even though he was an extremely popular president, the terms of the separation between the Church and the State were much less harsh on the Catholic Church than expected by Batlle y Ordoñez and others who supported “combative” laïcité. In Uruguay, “laïcité as abstention” was more popular. This model relies on the “absolute neutrality” of anyone engaged in public matters, especially politics, with regards to religious matters. In contrast to “combative laïcité”,

this position is not against religion as a whole, but against its presence in the public sphere (Monreal, 2006). If a country is to regard itself as a *laïcité*, the public sphere is supposed to be completely “neutral” of all individual interests, which means that political fanaticism is against the principles of *laïcité* as much as religious fanaticism (Maggi, 2006). This was clear in an article published by *El País*, the newspaper with most circulation in the country, in 2007, under the title “La laicidad moribunda” [The dying *laïcité*]. In this article, the author states that with regards to education the *laïcité* model was deemed necessary

not because religion might be understood to be dangerous for the minds of students or bad in itself (...) but because we consider that teachers should not use their position of authority to influence their students in these matters. The vacuum left by the absence of the Churches came to be filled by the presence of the political parties. (...) With subtlety, invoking the freedom of teaching, the [public] school system acquired a definitive leftist tint. (...) Nowadays, with three years in the government [of Montevideo], the Frente Amplio is accused of violating the *laicidad* [*laïcité*] by turning themselves into judges. What awaits our education? What awaits a country whose youth is being formed by the left? (*La Laicidad Moribunda*, 2007, p.1-2).

In spite of the clear political opinion of this particular journalist, what I am trying to show with this quote is that *laïcité* has come to mean neutrality in the public sphere with respect to all personal identities, religious and political.

The *laïcité* model was soon accepted by the large majority of the Uruguayan population, even by many of its religious leaders and institutions (Da Costa, 2006). This can be inferred from, among other indicators, the fact that Batlle y Ordoñez was one of the most popular presidents in Uruguayan history and by the centrality of the topic in the press, usually when journalists or politicians feel that the *laïcité* model is being violated, as was the case of the example cited above. Furthermore, religious Uruguayans have

come to believe, as Monsignor Luis del Castillo (2006) stated, that religious belief and laïcité are not incompatible.

The Catholic Church responded to the acceptance of the laïcité model with a renewed emphasis on the actions and thoughts of believers in their intimate moments (Da Costa, 1999; Caetano and Geymonat, 1997). Women's fashion, dances, theaters, and the "threats of the outside world", as well as family life and the role of women in the instruction of children into the Catholic faith became the focus of Church documents (Caetano and Geymonat 1997; Da Costa, 2003). For example, the Church aimed to organize the day of the faithful by creating prayers and reflections for each moment of the day, organizing "examinations of conscience" and "spiritual exercises" with different topics throughout the week. Thus, believers, especially children, were given rules to structure their "inner lives" every day. The Church also created manuals of confession that put an emphasis on lust and included all possibilities of sin (Caetano and Geymonat, 1997). Instead of fighting for a space in the public sphere that they knew they no longer had, the Catholic Church changed the focus of its theology in response to the disestablishment process.

The institution of laïcité as a defining characteristic of Uruguayan society is part of its origin as a nation-state. What followed, as in France, was the creation of a civil religion to the State, which presented itself as the defender of the population against the ignorance fostered by religion in general and the Catholic Church in particular (Cady & Shakman Hurd, 2010). In place of a Christian system of ethics and the discourses, symbols, and material culture that come with it, Batlle y Ordoñez proposed the notion of the "welfare state" (Spektorowski, 2000).



The reforms promoted by the Batllista government made social welfare the responsibility of the State, not the Catholic Church. When the government proposed to remove all crosses from public hospitals and schools, Senator Pablo de María explained that “all unfortunate people, without distinction of religious belief, should be the same before the public welfare system. (...) All services should be secular because the State is the representative of the community, not this or that community with determinate beliefs, because the times in which the secular and the religious powers were confused and the latter invaded the sphere of action of the first has already passed” (Quoted in Caetano and Geymonat 1997, p.92). This argument would be used to support the secularization of all public assistance in the following years.

The public sphere was redefined in direct relationship to the State, which now had a double role: instrumental and symbolic. The instrumental role of the State, through the work of the political parties, involved the construction of the social order and the differentiation of the public sphere. The State’s symbolic function relates to its centrality as the main referent for social unity. Jean-Jacques Rousseau coined the phrase “civil religion” to address the need for a secular power that would fulfill the gap left by diminished religions once the secularization process was complete. He believed that individuals need systems of public morality but, in accordance with the ideas of the Enlightenment, he did not think that this kind of power should lie in religious institutions. Instead, he proposed that republican politics “must make use of something that resembles religious mysticism” (Baubérot in Cady & Shakman Hurd, 2010, p.60). The civil religion that was beginning to form was identified by Montevideo’s archbishop Monsignor Mariano Soler in the years prior to disestablishment. In 1902 he attacked the *laïcité*

model of citizenship that was developing and accused the Batllista government of trying to institute a civil religion by asking: “Do liberals have the will and right to make adherence to their liberalism, to make the abandonment of the Catholic faith a sine qua non condition for the enjoyment of the title, for the rights and the freedoms of the citizen in their democratic republic? If so, how come your liberalism, following Rousseau and Robespierre, institutes a civil creed, necessarily accompanied by, as in the past, an inquisition and a Syllabus?” (cited by Caetano in Da Costa, 2006, p.129). Monsignor Soler was accusing the government of making itself a religion, using the same tools used by religious institutions to instruct their communities in their faith. They were turning themselves into the same kind of deterministic institution that they critiqued the religions for being.

During Uruguay’s first decades, Catholicism played a primary role in society, providing the symbols and practices that formed the foundation of all social interactions. It was a totalizing worldview that framed day-to-day activities within the Catholic relationship between man and the transcendent, whether Uruguayans went to Church every Sunday or not. This totalizing worldview was replaced by a civil religion rooted in a strong welfare system and democratic participation (Caetano and Geymonat, 1997). Thus, Uruguay’s political elites championed the kind of secularism that “stakes its claim to represent neutral and shared discourses and spaces, and so a standing that is appropriately public, perhaps even universal” (Cady in Cady and Shakman, 2010, p.247).

Rational Choice theorists Gill and Lundsgaarde (2004) argue that it is due to the strong welfare system that Uruguay does not conform to their models of religious participation. According to them, those countries that have the most religious freedom

also present the highest levels of religiosity. However, even though the freedom to practice any religion was written into Uruguay's first constitution, religiosity as measured by participation in religious institutions is very low. They call this the "Uruguayan Paradox". The reason that they give for this is that because the State now provides the kind of economic and social support that individuals would usually get from religious institutions, religiosity decreased. Their perspective on what religion is and what it provides to individuals is far too reductionist. Furthermore, it would be necessary to prove that Uruguayans were more religious prior to the institution of the welfare system in order for the argument to be convincing. However, this analysis does show that different theoretical perspectives can arrive at a similar conclusion – namely that the State could partially fulfill the role of religious institutions. While my analysis does not focus on the kinds of goods and services that Gill and Lundsgaard focus on, it does show that with the creation of the Uruguayan welfare system, the State came to fill a quasi-religious position as a referent for civil society.

Under this "Tutor State", Monreal (2006) warns, individual or collective efforts that do not stem from the political sphere are not valued. Given the centrality of the political parties as the main form of identification for Uruguayans, the political system that was created during the process of secularization and modernization of the country has been termed "partitocracy". In other words, the system of partitocracy, established between 1910 and 1934 is a result of the process of modernization and differentiation of roles in the public sphere that privileged the electoral system as the ultimate form of public participation and, simultaneously, legitimized the voices of the political parties over all others (Caetano, 1985). Caetano (1992) defines partitocracy as "a system in

which the political parties (one, some, all) are recognized as enablers of relevance, as motor-brains, as successful actors in transcendent instances. With these qualifications, in this system the parties represent the government or power; furthermore, they are the supporters of the whole structure, carriers of repeatable experience (...)” (p. 138-139). With the denial of particular identities in the public sphere, the political parties became the referents par excellence, influencing the actions and opinions of voters. As Chasquetti and Buquet (2004) state, even though actors outside of the political sphere have been occasionally able to have some influence on the course of events, Uruguayan history is marked by the freedom of political parties to carry out their projects without the interference of civil society. This put an emphasis on electorally achieved consensus as practically the only way of public participation. Vania Markarian, a Uruguayan historian trained at Columbia University, attributes the relative independence of the political parties from social or economic pressures to their ties to all socio-economic classes (2005). It is important to note that Uruguayan *partitocrazia* does not necessarily carry the negative connotations that the original notion of *partitocrazia* as a “tyranny of the political party” does. On the contrary, it has often been regarded as a key element for the stability of Uruguay’s democratic system (Chasquetti & Buquet, 2004, p.233).

In 1971 a third party would emerge called the Frente Amplio (or Broad Front) as a coalition of various small left-wing parties (Markarian, 2005). Even though other smaller parties exist, the Blancos, Colorados, and Frente Amplio currently dominate the Uruguayan political landscape. Uruguayans are loyal to their political party to the extent that there is little room for individuals or organizations outside of the political system to have real influence in policy making (Chasquetti and Buquet, 2004). As political scientist

David Altman (2002) states: “When Uruguayans go to the polls to decide on a popular initiative, they fundamentally take into account the suggestions of their political party” (p.627). This means that the positions of the political parties are automatically legitimized against the particular positions of alternative actors, such as religious leaders.

However, in the years prior to the dictatorship, the guerilla and the military destabilized the system of partitocracy by regarding themselves as political actors with methods different from those of the consensual democracy that had been established (Caetano, et. al., 1992). The coup d'état disrupted the system in a country where the State was sacralized and the political parties were the main form of identification. This left many Uruguayans immobilized, without a guide for thought and action. In this context, other actors emerged into the public sphere, disturbing the strict differentiation between the religious and the public spheres, and between the political sphere and the rest of civil society that had resulted from the secularization process. Social movements in Uruguay have always been weak in relation to the political parties but the dictatorship and the violation of Human Rights changed this. With no parties to fight the repression lived during the dictatorship, Human Rights organizations, artists, and religious groups became the center of the struggle (Roniger & Sznajder, 1997).

Because of their new role outside of politics, as of 1919, the religions had had to rely on civil society for their legitimacy. As Da Costa (2011) points out, with the absence of State support and funding, religious institutions and individuals were just another member of civil society and their credibility relied on the support of the people. The socioeconomic crisis of the 1960s, the inability of the political parties to deal with this situation and the violence of the guerillas in a satisfactory, just manner, the systemic

violations of Human Rights prior and during to the military dictatorship, and the influence of Liberation Theology would result in what Casanova (1994) terms a deprivatization of religion. He defines “deprivatization” as “the process whereby religion abandons its assigned place in the private sphere and enters the undifferentiated public sphere of civil society to take part in the ongoing processes of contestation, discursive legitimation, and redrawing of the boundaries” (Casanova, 1994, p.65-66). This religious resurgence does not necessarily imply a return of “religion” as we have come to understand it, but represents challenges to the forms that secularism has taken in different contexts (Cady, & Shakman, 2010, p. 21). As will be shown in chapters three and four, Catholic and Protestant actors worked within the *laïcité* model while challenging it at the same time.

In times of crisis, the patterns of legitimation and authority established in the process of shaping a national collective identity are opened to discussion (Roniger & Sznajder, 1997). Studying a time such as the Uruguayan dictatorship allows us to see how the public sphere is constituted and reconstituted and how the separation between religion and politics is much more fluid than expected, even in a country as differentiated as Uruguay. Secularism is a process that involves the constant negotiation, relocation and rethinking of religion and its role in society (Cady & Shakman Hurd, 2010). Casanova (1994) thus calls for a disentanglement of the privatization and the differentiation thesis. Theories of secularization need to be able to account for forms of “public” religion that do not necessarily conflict with a differentiated public sphere. In other words, religions may take new public forms that do not entail establishment or the imposition of religious discourses and worldviews on spaces considered secular and “neutral”. In chapters three

and four, I will explore how religious and secular discourses about Human Rights were used and fused, how religious actors engaged the public sphere during the dictatorship and in the transitional period, and what this says about the constantly evolving process of defining religion in the Uruguayan public sphere.

### **Chapter Three - Catholicism and the Military Dictatorship: “Christian Non-Violence in the Latin American Revolution”**

In this chapter I will analyze how the Catholic Church as an institution and priests as individuals responded to the oppression of the military regime. In chapter four, I will present the case of the Methodist Church and its members. These analysis will allow me to compare how religious institutions with differing structures, relationships to their clergy and lay communities, and historical relationships to civil society and the secularization process “deprivatized” religion by involving themselves in the political and social crisis in Uruguay between the 1960s and the 1980s.

Following Casanova’s (1994) models of differentiation, I argue that one of the ways in which the differentiation between the religious and the secular was structured during the disestablishment process in Uruguay was by separating the private/home/feminine/moral from the public/work/masculine/legal. Along with religion, morality became a private, individual matter. This meant that politics, as part of the public sphere, become “amoral” spaces. As Seyla Benhabib has shown, the imposition of “neutrality” in public discourse functions as a “gag rule” by excluding all opinions that are not properly “public” (Casanova, 1994). In a partitocracy it is the politicians that become the privileged voices of the public sphere at the expense of alternative perspectives. As I will show in this chapter, during the dictatorship and in the face of Human Rights abuses, Catholic bishops, priests and lay people “deprivatized” their moral systems in order to advocate for the protection of Human Rights from a religious perspective. As we will see, Catholic actors rooted their arguments in Biblical understandings of the equality and freedom of all humans, but grounded them in the



Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, due to the fact that they were not strictly political actors, these voices were not heard loudly enough.

### **The influence of Vatican II**

During the Second Vatican Council, better known as Vatican II, held from 1962 to 1965, the Catholic Church addressed its role in society, calling for stronger advocacy by the Church on democracy and social justice (Carozza and Philpott, 2012). Vatican II produced a simultaneous centralization and decentralization of Catholic doctrine and structures. It produced centralization in the reaffirming of the teachings of the Catholic Church from the Vatican and reestablishing a transnational Catholic message. However, it also promoted decentralization by “nationalizing” Catholicism as it was applied to the social realities of different countries and also by emphasizing and accepting the fact that establishment was no longer an option. In addition, Catholic action was also decentralized by expanding the role of lay Catholics (Casanova, 1994).

Four main documents established the new attitude of the Catholic Church after Vatican II. *Dignitatis Humanae* recognized individual freedom of conscience based on the “sacred dignity of the human person” (Casanova, 1994, p.72). This document was crucial for the creation of the *possibility* of public Catholicism in the modern world. It was only by accepting individual freedom, the principle of disestablishment and the denial of any incursion by the Catholic Church into the political sphere, for example, by sponsoring a particular political party, that Catholicism could reenter the public sphere without being rejected by modern society. While acknowledging the fact that Jesus did not engage in politics in the sense of criticizing the State, Uruguayan philosopher and

theologian García Venturini (1974) reminds his readers that politics and ethics cannot be completely separated and advocating a certain morality is within the action of the Church. According to him, it is only when sin is at play that the Church must engage in politics. All other political action would fall under the already condemned clericalism.

*Gaudium et Spes* established the acceptance of the secular world, which meant that the Church could no longer live in a parallel universe with no historical context. This meant that “from now on, action on behalf of peace and justice and participation in the transformation of the world will become not an added but a constitutive dimension of the church’s divine mission” (Casanova, 1994, p.73). This would be central to the hermeneutic approach to theology advocated by the followers of the Liberation Theology movement.

*Lumen Gentium* included the laity and the clergy as active parts of the Catholic community and *Christus Dominus* “stresses the collective, collegial nature of the episcopate as successors to the college of the Apostles, who in communion with the pope exercise jointly the pastoral and magisterial office of the entire church” (Casanova, 1994, p.73). These last two documents prompted an expansion of the cast of relevant actors within the Catholic community.

In the period after Vatican II, modern Catholicism continued to be concerned with the private affairs of Catholic individuals but also became a public religion that recognized the legitimacy of the modern world and its institutions. At the same time, Vatican II emphasized the Catholic Church’s acceptance of religious freedom, which means that, in most cases, its leaders understood that establishment was no longer an option (Casanova, 1994). This was a key development for the deprivatization of

Catholicism in the Uruguayan context. If the modern principle of freedom of conscience was accepted and the requirements of toleration fulfilled, it could be justified for religions to enter the public sphere to protect modern notions of freedoms and rights and, more specific to the Latin American context, to protect the freedom of civil society against an authoritarian State.

The redefinition of the “appropriately” religious and, as a result, also the secular, was an international Christian movement. Carozza and Philpott (2012) argue that the focus on Human Rights and democracy at Vatican II was crucial in the “Third Wave” of democratization that swept over roughly eighty countries during the late twentieth century, one of which was Uruguay. Echoing Samuel Huntington, they observed that three quarters of these countries had a population that was mostly Catholic, thus concluding that this was a “Catholic Wave of democratization” (Carozza and Philpott, 2012, p.28). The rethinking of the Uruguayan model of laïcité that prompted the reintroduction of religious actors into the “wordly” matters of civil society would not have occurred without Vatican II and the Medellín Conference, which I will discuss below.

### **Monsignor Carlos Parteli and the restructuring Uruguayan Catholicism**

In Latin America, this “deprivatization” was largely influenced by the growth of the Liberation Theology movement, inspired by Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, which resulted in the commitment of various religious groups to fight the oppression of the poor in a general sense, and the repression of military regimes during the 1970s-80s. Even though they may be inspired by religious ideas, the engagement of religious

individuals in matters of politics implies a repolitization of previously private religions and a change in their political theology. I am using “political theology” following Philpott’s (2007) notion of a religious perspective on legitimate authority, justice and Human Rights issues.

Uruguayan Catholicism, especially from the 1960s to the 1980s, was influenced by the figure of Monsignor Carlos Parteli. He was bishop of the department of Tacuarembó as of 1960, named Coadjutor Archbishop of Montevideo, the capital city of Uruguay, in 1966 and was named Archbishop of Montevideo in the midst of the Dictatorship in 1976. He was a man concerned with the poor and the social inequalities that he saw in Uruguayan society, which is why the messages of Vatican II would resonate with him. These concerns led him to take a new position, away from the private lives of the believers, and more active in regards to the social problems of the country. In a Pastoral Letter, written by Monsignor Parteli and published in 1961, he critiqued the problems in the agricultural sector. The letter denounced the inhumane conditions that workers in the countryside had to endure, reaping none of the benefits of their labor. The impact that this letter would have was not anticipated by its writer. During this time, the national Parliament was voting on agrarian reform and would include the letter in the documentation presented (Da Costa 2003, 64). “The words of an unknown Bishop from inland Uruguay resonated like an unexpected scream, provoking the clamor of supporting voices, as well as dissenting ones that said: a Bishop should not do politics!” (Martínez, 2004, p.45). It was the first time since the separation of the Church and the State that a bishop tackled issues that directly affected the population, other than their spirituality. The letter was also supported by Leonel Montes de Oca, the secretary general of the

Association of Agricultural Producers of Tacuarembó, who affirmed that this letter could be supported by all because it was not engaging in party politics (Martínez, 2004). This does not mean that the letter did not have opposition. The accusations of Marxism against Monsignor Parteli and the Church in general began to flourish.

In 1968, Monsignor Parteli and the bishop of Melo issued another letter critiquing the social conditions in the country:

Our economy is designed to benefit a few and impoverish the many (...) Ranch hands and workers in the cane fields cannot keep a family together; they do not get a fair wage and they are often fired thus losing their right to work. Inequities in land distribution choke the small producer and benefit the large landowners. Confronted with this situation, we are compelled by Christ's charity to say that God does not wish this. So we call on our communities to walk hand in hand with all the oppressed who are striving for liberation (Quoted in Edmonds 2013, p.7).

This statement shows the extent to which the political theology of some of the Uruguayan Bishops during this time was influenced by Vatican II and the Liberation Theology movement. The emphasis was on the poor and the need to address the social injustices in the country in order for all to be liberated from oppression. Furthermore, it shows that some Bishops were taking a new public position within the laïcité model, which was resulting in the repolitization of Uruguayan Catholicism.

Monsignor Parteli was not the only member of the Uruguayan clergy to play an active role in the re-structuring of the political theology of Latin American Catholicism. Juan Luis Segundo, a Uruguayan Jesuit priest, was “one of the most important figures in the tradition of Liberation Theology” (Leech 1981, p.258). This movement emerged in Latin America after, and as a response to, Vatican II. In his own writings, particularly *The Liberation of Theology*, published in 1975, Juan Luis Segundo stated that the

Catholic faith should not be static, but should change in response to the needs of the society. According to him, it was first necessary to do charity and service and to understand the social conditions of the time. Only then could a theology be developed (Leech, 1981). “Faith, [Segundo] says, is only authentic if it is committed to the struggle for a new world” (Leech, 1981, p.263). If faith is necessarily connected to the creation of a more just world, it has to be preceded by an analysis of the current social problems that need to be addressed. After Vatican II, the Church continued its dogmatic action but added a dialectical attitude that connected it to the realities of the world of the time, which had an impact on its dogma. No longer did the Church rely on its authority to evangelize, but on the hope that dialogue would bring the faithful (Clement, 1974, p.26). Segundo was also editor of the magazine *Perspectivas de Diálogo* (Perspectives of Dialogue), published by a group of Jesuits that would become increasingly critical of the social turmoil, increased violence and repression in 1960s Uruguay (Martínez, 2004).

The Uruguayan Episcopacy was not only influenced by the renovations in the role of the Church occurring after Vatican II, but was a key participant in the Latin American implementation of its message. In 1968, the Latin American bishops met at Medellín, Colombia. The goal of this conference was to determine how the new approach of the Church highlighted during Vatican II would apply to the particular social, political and economic situations of Latin America. In the Conference documents, the bishops expressed that the “situation [in Latin America] demands all-embracing courageous, urgent and profoundly renovating transformations. We should not be surprised, therefore, that the ‘temptation to violence’ is surfacing in Latin America. One should not abuse the patience of a people that for years has borne a situation that would not be acceptable to

anyone with any degree of awareness of Human Rights” (Quoted in Foroohar, 1986, p.48). Monsignor Parteli acted as the president of the commission that drafted the Conference’s position on Peace. Gustavo Gutiérrez was also a member of this commission (Da Costa 2003).

The Medellín Conference of 1968 marked a turning point for Latin American Catholicism in that it legitimized and made official the new social mission of the Latin American Catholic Churches. Furthermore, it provided a unity to Latin American Catholic action that accepted regional differences and identities while framing them within a cohesive, transnational and collective Catholic project (Casanova, 1994). The concerns expressed by the Latin American bishops at the Medellín conference mirrored those already discussed in the Pastoral Letter of Advent of 1967 discussed previously (Arce, 2008).

As Casanova (1994) states, while liberation theology first emerged in Latin America in response to the process of capitalist expansion and the resulting widening of the gap between the rich and the poor, the radicalization of the Church in its defense of the positions advocated by the Liberation Theology movement was a result of the institutionalization of the doctrine of national security by military states, “subversive” and “repressive” violence, and the widespread violation of Human Rights. Before Vatican II, Catholicism was mainly concerned with protecting its community and was restricted to its own Catholic actions, parallel to the actions of civil society, without relating these to each other. The emphasis was on the individual in his/her private life, not on his/her social dimensions (Arce, 2008, p.339). After Vatican II, the language of the Catholic Church changed, placing a focus on lived faith in accordance with the will of

God (Arce, 2008, p.340). The Church was no longer conceived as its own sphere, apart from the world, but *in* the world and thus grew and changed in accordance with the socio-historical context of the time. This resulted in a shift from an emphasis on the individual, to the transformation of the world. Vatican II and the Medellín Conference not only placed a new emphasis on the need of a faith that is not divorced from the secular world, but acts in it, but also resulted in a restructuring of the Church hierarchy. Lay Catholics were invited to organize charities and act in their communities in the name of the Church and mass was no longer conducted in Latin but in Spanish (Da Costa 2003). Catholic individuals took on a new, empowered, active role in the pastoral action of the Church through the coordination of small groups (Arce, 2008, p.341). In 1967, the Uruguayan Catholic Church in Montevideo began a campaign to highlight the importance of lay Christians, which resulted in the creation of “reflection groups” and the “Ecclesial Base Communities” (CEBs) (Arce, 2008, p.345). Casanova (1994) connects the emergence of Ecclesial Base Communities in Brazil to the weak institutional penetration by the Catholic Church in Brazilian society. I argue that the same can be said about Uruguay. This development reflects both the response of an institution that is trying to increase its public presence and the transformation of religious participation in a modern direction.

By 1968, over a thousand reflection groups of an average of 10 people were formed in Uruguay. At the end of the year, these groups would develop three documents: one on the national situation, another on the theological interpretation of such situation, and a third on the pastoral options that this situation entailed and required (Arce, 2008, p.256). Not all members of the Church agreed with these changes in the restructuring and expansion of Catholic action, claiming that asking Catholic lay people to meet and reflect



on the current situation in the country took away from their reflection of strictly religious matters. Furthermore, the language used by the Church, critical of social situations and structures was considered scandalous by this minority of conservative clergy (Arce, 2008, p.358).

In a document on the Social Doctrine of the Church following Vatican II, the Medellín (1965) and Puebla (1979) Conferences, the Uruguayan Episcopacy declared their adherence to the reconceptualizations of the mission of the Church and its followers that came out of these events. In this document, they recalled the participants' of the Medellín Conference condemnation of the "spiral of violence" that stems from the systematic and structural violence that denies the right of life. In Puebla, when the Latin American dictatorships were in full swing, the bishops affirmed that the biggest problem facing the Latin American Catholic Church is poverty and recalled the "anguish that results from the abuses of power (regimes of force): imprisonments without judicial order, tortures and exile, disappearing of people, systematic or selective repression, and the exercise of a justice that is tied and submitted" (Conferencia Episcopal Uruguay, 1988, p.26). According to the Latin American bishops, the structural violence that oppresses the poor causes "subversive" violence, which then causes "repressive" violence (Conferencia Episcopal Uruguay, 1988, p.26). The Doctrine of National Security, the ideological justification of repressive violence, created a state of permanent war. Alluding to the problems of partitocracy, the bishops at Puebla stated that "where formal democracy exists, democratic representation is taken advantage of to influence the electorate" (Conferencia Episcopal Uruguay, 1988, p.28). Where freedom is taken away, the bishops continued, justice cannot exist, and where justice does not exist, freedom is

denied (Conferencia Episcopal Uruguay, 1988, p.30). Following the model of the Liberation Theology movement – see, judge, and respond – they judged this situation in Latin America as a violation of human dignity (Conferencia Episcopal Uruguay, 1988, p.39). The preferential love of God for the poor was invoked to denounce marginality, the violation of Human Rights, and the lack of respect for human dignity.

Like the Bishops at the Medellín conference predicted, as social and economic conditions remained dire the guerilla group, Movimiento de Liberación Nacional – Tupamaros (MLN-T), became increasingly violent, planting bombs, kidnapping and murdering public figures (Ros 2012). President Pacheco Areco responded by putting the military in charge of anti-guerilla security measures (Edmonds 2013). In April of 1972, the MLN-T killed four military officials and, in turn, the military killed eight Tupamaros (MLN-T members) (Edmonds 2013, p.8). Given the position taken by Monsignor Parteli at the Medellín conference, it should come as no surprise that he attended the public funerals held for the guerilla members, as well as those held for the police officers. This attested to his disapproval of the use of violence, whether repressive or subversive. After the events of 1972, President Juan Bordaberry declared a state of “internal war” and in 1973 he closed down parliament and started ruling by decree with the support of the military (Klaiber 1998).

During the initial years of the dictatorship, the Catholic Church, through its bishops, was very vocal against the government’s politics. However, the arguments used to critique the current situation were always rooted in religious discourse and all documents released emphasized the religious, not political, perspective of the speakers. In 1973 they wrote:

We have been receiving a great number of coinciding testimonies related to the inhuman treatment given to some prisoners, who have been linked or not with subversive activities (...) In connection with our ministerial duties and in the service of all men, we cannot remain silent when death, physical maltreatment, torture, and unjustified imprisonment constitute forms of a radical rejection of the dignity expected from a human being (Episcopal documents quoted in Edmonds 2013, p.8).

Given the vocal position that the Church took during the first years of the dictatorship, the logic of surveillance and punishment that was instituted after the military came into power extended to the institution of the church (Ros 2012). The military began a smear campaign against the Church and Archbishop Parteli and created a commission to investigate all Church activities, sermons, meetings, and publications, and restricting all religious education (Edmonds 2013). General Forteza, for example, declared that international communism “has reached the Church itself, violating in this institution the rights and obligations that the State has granted to the different religions” (Quoted in Edmonds 2013, 11). Five Catholic publications were closed between 1972 and 1976, such as respected journal *Vispera* and the newspaper *Informaciones*. The last was closed after publishing a picture of a house in the slums surrounded by armed military (Edmonds 2013). In response, the bishops publicly stated that “society cannot be renewed based on the principle that some among us are enemies. Social peace and national reconciliation will not come from one group dominating other groups (...) Reconciliation is based on love and rejects hatred; it requires respect for the dignity of the human person and his inalienable rights” (Quoted in Edmonds 2013, 10).

## **Conflict within the Church**

In the context of the Cold War, when the population was divided in their positions and opinions towards the “Communist threat” and how to respond to it, it should come as no surprise that the clergy was divided as well (Da Costa 2003). Several conservative bishops, who saw the Communist threat as a threat to Christianity, aligned themselves with the military, publishing literature such as *Leftism in the Church: Communist Fellow Travelers in the Long Adventure of Failures and Changes*, which denounced the Uruguayan Catholic Church for “completely abandoning their duty and aiding the enemy of religion and country” (Quoted in Edmonds 2013, p.11). The military touted this book as a bestseller. The support and promotion of this minority political theology by the regime may have resulted in a legitimization of this position, which could explain why theorists of Church and State relations have so often placed Uruguay in the pro-authoritative group. However, I am inclined to interpret this work by the conservative members of the clergy as an indicator that the institution of the Church and the majority of its bishops were against the military regime. I do so because of the emphasis that the writers of the book put on the threat presented by progressive bishops. This suggests that the dominant stance within the Church’s leadership was that of opposition against the regime. It is important to note that in order for the Church to make an official pronouncement it had to be approved by every single member of the Episcopal Conference. So even if conservative Catholicism was a minority, it could prevent the Church from making official denunciations of the State (Da Costa 2003). Because of this, my methodology included not only the analysis of the official documents published by the Episcopal Conference, which represent those issues on which all of the clergy

agreed, but also alternative sources such as the biographies of prominent Catholic actors, such as Pastors Ademar Olivera and Oscar Bolioli, as well as Monsignor Parteli, and the publications of Catholic organizations not officially affiliated with the Church.

Nevertheless, the zealotry with which the conservative clergy rejected the changes occurring within the Catholic Church, which they perceived as the infiltration of Communism shows that even the conservative members of the clergy still felt that the Catholic Church needed to have a more public presence and should actively and vocally oppose Communism. The conservative lay community was also advocating a more forceful and public opposition of Communism by the Church. This was clear in the book *Leftism in the Church*, published by a conservative sector of the Catholic laity called *Sociedad Uruguaya en Defensa de la Tradición* (Uruguayan Society in Defense of Tradition). In this book, they condemned the fact that the Catholic Church refused to issue an explicit condemnation of the Communist party and did not try to dissuade the Catholic electorate of voting for it. They also condemned the public actions and commentaries made by Monsignor Parteli and his followers, stating that they had helped the Tupamaros by fostering the idea that the country was in “crisis”. They believed that they had exaggerated the social and economic problems of the time and had aided the “Tupamaro show” that created the false idea that structural changes needed to happen to eliminate the oppression of the poor in the country (*Sociedad Uruguaya en Defensa de la Tradición*, 1976). They accused the Church of “moral relativism” because they did not speak against Communism even though Monsignor Parteli and the Church often clarified that they did not think that Communism was the answer to social problems, even if they

did find commonalities with the critique of structural oppression of this political ideology (Martínez, 2004).

### **The Church under attack**

It was when priests and nuns began to be arrested and deported that the Church reconsidered its outspoken attitude (Edmonds, 2013). From a rational choice perspective, taking into account the historical position of the majority of the Catholic leadership, we could argue that the Catholic Church made a practical decision that was not based on their theology, but on the real needs for the safety of their clergy and congregation in the context of the military repression. As we will see below, this approach will not work when analyzing the persistent activism of the Methodist Church.

Several prominent Catholic leaders, such as Father Arnaldo Spadaccino, head of the pastoral program of Montevideo, and Bishop Marcelo Mendiharat of Salto were imprisoned and interrogated by the military. Mendiharat was forced into exile as early as 1972 (Edmonds, 2013). “In 1975, the Uruguayan Episcopal Conference issued a pastoral letter, unanimously signed, asking the military for ‘the widest possibly amnesty’ for the Uruguayan people; they also stated that for there to be peace in Uruguay, the military must ‘abandon the philosophy of hatred and violence, humbly recognize its errors, and desist from the spirit of vengeance’” (Edmonds 2013, 12). The government banned the publication of the letter and warned the bishops to “tone down” their language or they would expel all foreign-born priests (30% of the clergy). According to Monsignor Parteli, who met with representatives of the government to ask what exactly was deemed inappropriate about the letter, it was the word “amnesty” that had been the most

significant source of contention. Even though the Church withdrew the letter from circulation, the government still expelled four Dominican nuns (Edmonds, 2013). This led to a tightening of security measures and a refraining of all pastoral actions and letters that could be a cause for suspicion. In response to the request for continuous action of some of the clergy such as Presbyter Dabezies, Monsignor Parteli stated “I can say anything, but who is going to pay for the broken dishes? You and the laity. I am not going to be imprisoned” (cited in Martínez, 2004, p.155). As we will see, even though the Methodist Church was in an even more compromised position given their smaller size, the danger of repression did not stop them from officially declaring themselves against the Dictatorship.

Even though the Church largely withdrew from the public sphere due to the military repression, anti-regime activity continued in the parishes, which were perceived as a safe space for social and political organization (Da Costa 1999). In December of 1977, the US Embassy sent a series of reports to the Secretary of State where they described their meetings with the Catholic bishops. They declare that the bishops condemned the Doctrine of National Security as an ideology rather than a system meant to protect the Uruguayan citizens. Furthermore, they declared that “order and security are not ends in themselves: the State exists to benefit the individual, whose rights take priority over those of the State” (United States Embassy, 1977, p.n/a). They declared the Doctrine of National Security a “moral error” and called for a reestablishment of all political processes, which they deemed a “privileged form” of human discourse (United States Embassy, 1977,p.n/a). In accordance with the rational choice approach as presented by Anthony Gill (1998), which argues that religious institutions would be more

willing to challenge a country's elites if they thought it would garner them a larger following, the United States Embassy also reported that:

Archbishop Partelli, given an opening by the ambassador, leaped right in to condemn the Human Rights excesses of the GOU [Government of Uruguay], praise the USG [United States Government] position, and emphasize his own desire for a greater Church role in this area. (...) Throughout these conversations, there was evident a growing realization that this could be an historic moment for the Uruguayan Church. Several of the Church leaders endorsed the belief that if the Church can overcome its indecision and speak out now, when no one else dares to speak, it may be able to attain the leadership role and prestige in Uruguayan society which it has not enjoyed in the century. Some clergy are also concerned that, if the Church continues to remain silent on a basic moral and spiritual issue such as Human Rights, its position and influence in hemispheric Church affairs and in Uruguay could decline even further (United States Embassy, 1977b,p.n/a).

This shows not only that the Church leaders were against the violations of Human Rights, but also that speaking out against them was not only a moral but a strategic decision. The US Embassy also reported that "Given the Uruguayan Church's own internal conflicts over the Human Rights issue, a public posture of silence is the price currently required for unanimity among the hierarchy. Nevertheless, it is significant that the Church is willing to take any position at all, however quietly, especially one as forthright as the present statement" (United States Embassy, 1977, p.n/a). Even though they ceased making public announcements in opposition to the violence and repression of the military regime, individual actions by both the bishops and religious individuals did not stop.



## **Servicio Paz y Justicia (SERPAJ) – The first Human Rights organization in Uruguay**

A key actor in the struggle against the military regime was the Human Rights organization Servicio Paz y Justicia (SERPAJ). SERPAJ was first created in Argentina after the Medellín Conference with the slogan “Christian non-violence in the Latin American revolution”. The Uruguayan chapter was founded in 1981 by the Jesuit priest Luis Pérez Aguirre, who had formerly been imprisoned by the military. The group met at a house donated by *The Missionary Sisters of the Catholic Church*. Their first public event was held at a parish and affiliated priests used mass as a space to denounce the torture and abuse of the military regime (Alonso, 2010). A follower of the Liberation Theology movement, Pérez Aguirre demanded an ethical alternative for the poor and oppressed. The protests led by Pérez Aguirre were not only calling for the respect of Human Rights but also for the government to address the social and economic problems faced by Uruguay that led the country to the dictatorship in the first place. He led several hunger strikes, the most notorious of which was held in 1983 at the SERPAJ headquarters. He was joined by Catholic priest Jorge Osorio and the formerly imprisoned Methodist pastor Ademar Olivera (Alonso 2010). This strike was particularly instrumental in showing public discontent because it was followed by a *cacerolada*, in which people took to the streets with pots and pans to support the strike. The military barricaded the SERPAJ headquarters with armed forces and denied anyone entrance. Not even Monsignor Parteli was able to enter when he tried to visit the protesters and express his support (Alonso 2010). General Linares (the Minister of the Interior), claimed that SERPAJ was infiltrated by Marxism-Leninism and condemned it for receiving support

from foreign sources and tried to discredit the organization by emphasizing Pastor Olivera's connections to the Tupamaros (Coad 1983; The Globe and Mail, 1983).

SERPAJ also supported several other Human Rights groups, giving them visibility and financial assistance (Alonso 2010). They were instrumental in the consolidation of *Mothers of Uruguayans Disappeared in Argentina*, *Family of the Disappeared in Uruguay*, and *Mothers of Prisoners of the Military*. With SERPAJ as the umbrella organization for Human Rights in Uruguay, the movement gained a cohesion that it previously lacked. Another religious organization that emerged in 1984 was the *Ecumenical Service of Reintegration* (SER), which aimed to provide financial assistance to former prisoners and returned exiles (Alonso 2010).

### **The transitional period**

In 1980, the military proposed an election to settle their position in power. They thought that the fear of the guerillas would keep them in power, but they were wrong (Klaiber 1998). As did the Church in Chile (Gill 1998), the Catholic Church in Uruguay openly opposed the plebiscite and distributed information pamphlets that spoke against the doctrine of national security espoused as necessary by the military. Prior to the 1980 plebiscite, several parishes became spaces to discuss and reflect on the options being presented to the Uruguayan population. They also became spaces for resistance of the legitimating of the military government. The conservative newspaper *El País* would regret the fact that “some pulpits in our country have been used to incite the negative vote of the constitutional project” (cited in Corbo Longueira, 2006, p.149).

Uruguayans took to the streets to demonstrate against the regime and rejected the plebiscite that would legitimize the military's power (Edmonds, 2013; The Globe and Mail, 1986). In 1983, the Episcopal Conference stated that "Security does not 'produce freedom, but is at its service... a national security that does not show clearly that it is at the service of national freedom, but rather seeks to steady itself by manacling social freedom, is no longer national security, but slavery'" (Quoted in Edmonds, 2013, p. 15). During the same year, both the Catholic Church and SERPAJ called for a wide amnesty for all political prisoners. The military agreed to hold another election in 1984 and effectively transmitted power to the democratically elected President in 1985 (Edmonds, 2013).

However, after the transition back to democracy, the documents produced by the Church and SERPAJ for the amnesty of the political prisoners were used as an argument for the amnesty of the military under the Caducity Law that was passed in 1986. Because of this, before the plebiscite of 1989 SERPAJ released a letter clarifying their position by focusing on a Christian understanding of forgiveness as opposed to forgetting. They understood forgetting as an act of weakness, as an inability to face reality that only creates a pseudo-peace. In contrast, forgiveness, according to them, entails remembering in order to move past that which is remembered. True national reconciliation thus relied on forgiveness and the fulfillment of justice through the reestablishment of the absolute value of life and dignity. This led them to disagree with the Caducity Law, which, according to SERPAJ, weakened civil institutions and the democratic system. Thus, their call for a wide amnesty, rooted in what they called the "universal consciousness" about Human Rights that resulted of the atrocities committed during World War II, necessarily

excluded all those who committed or supported acts against humanity (Servicio Paz y Justicia, 1989, p.1).

In the “Pastoral Reflection on the current situation” , which began as a discussion within the clergy on November of 1986 and was later shared with the population at large, the Uruguayan Episcopacy wanted to foster a discussion of the Caducity Law from an ethical perspective rooted in scripture but informed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They explicitly declared that they agreed with the statement made in the preface of the declaration that affirmed that the acknowledgment of the intrinsic nature of human dignity and equality is necessary for the existence of justice, freedom and peace in the world. But then stated that “what we want now, as Christians and pastors, is to ground it [The Universal Declaration of Human Rights] on the Word of God, which is the only truly solid foundation for Human Rights” (Conferencia Episcopal Uruguay, 1988, p. 3). This shows that their ethical considerations, while rooted in Catholic theology, were considered to be supported by this secular, international system of rights. Furthermore, they explicitly stated that they did not regard the Church’s new incursion into the debate over Human Rights as a violation by the Church of a space where it did not belong. Instead, they saw it as central to their mission. By advocating for the respect of Human Rights, the Church was “fulfilling the mission given to it by its founder: evangelize, announce the Gospel and, by means of the divine force of its message, convert at the same time the individual and collective conscience of men and women, the activities with which they are committed, their life and concrete spheres” (Conferencia Episcopal Uruguay, 1988, p. 4).

Putting in evidence the influence of the hermeneutic approach advocated by the Liberation Theology movement, they declared that the Church had learned from history, paid attention to the “signs of the times” and welcomed the new world-wide awareness and discussion on matters of Human Rights. They emphasized their condemnation of all forms of totalitarianism, either from the left or from the right (Conferencia Episcopal Uruguay, 1988, p. 5). They supported the changes that came out of Vatican II and added that “in our Latin American continent the voices of Medellín and Puebla were raised in the defense of the dignity and the rights of all, especially the most poor and suffering (...). The teachings of the Latin American bishops have been very explicit in their condemnation of abuses of all kinds against the dignity and rights of the human, affirming with clarity the freedom of all men in Christ Resurrected” (Conferencia Episcopal Uruguay, 1988, p.6).

In this document, the bishops defended democracy as the political system that is better suited to understand humanity in its full complexity, composed of free individuals that come together to fully realize human capacity and not as merely producers and consumers (Conferencia Episcopal Uruguay, 1988, p.9). Even though the language used could be interpreted as being both anti-capitalist and anti-communist they emphasized that their analysis of the current situation was not political but pastoral: “we do it from the heart of the believer and the perspective of the pastor that, without forgetting the positive, looks for the suffering, that which calls for salvation, that which still needs to be transformed by the word of God to be illuminated” (Conferencia Episcopal Uruguay, 1988, p.7). The Episcopacy regarded their perspective rooted in an absolute truth as the only solution to social problems and disagreements arguing that while socio-political

analysis about the current state of events are illuminating, by leaving out morality as the central problem they fall into relativities and half-solutions (Conferencia Episcopal Uruguay, 1988, p.19).

In this document, they also clarify their political theology by stating that they distinguish between three different definitions of politics: a. the effort to organize social and economic life; b. party politics that function to promote the interests of groups within society; c. the struggle for power within society. The Uruguayan Episcopacy understood their political mission in terms of the first definition of politics. “Present in the world as ‘light and ferment’, it gives light and energies that can help establish a human community that lives in accordance with the will of God. The Church cannot be neutral in the face of the concrete problems of humanity: in the face of injustice and oppression” (Conferencia Episcopal Uruguay, 1988, p.50). They acknowledged that this political mission of the Church could be enacted through the episcopacy or also through the commitment and actions of individual Christians (Conferencia Episcopal Uruguay, 1988, p.51). Connecting their political involvement to the actions of Jesus, they remind the reader that Jesus did not support any political group but he did condemn all abuses of power, including Roman oppression, and searched for the root of injustice at particular historical contexts, always placing its origin in sin and the denial of God (Conferencia Episcopal Uruguay, 1988, p.52). Given the international nature of Catholicism, they also advocated for international systems of justice (Conferencia Episcopal Uruguay, 1988, p.70). They explicitly reject the Capitalist/Marxist binary and advocate for a profound individual and social conversion to live in the justice, love and peace of the kingdom of God (Conferencia Episcopal Uruguay, 1988, p.81).

According to Levine (2005), “the creation of a vocabulary of rights, with roots in social, religious and political norms and practices, provides a theoretical and empirical bridge between religion and politics” (p.17). Neither religion nor politics are static – they change in relation to the social context and relevant actors (Levine, 2005). During the 1960s, Uruguayan Catholicism was influenced by a growing concern among the Latin American clergy over the structural oppression of the poor. This new commitment “deprivatized” Catholicism by advocating the need for the Catholic Church, its priests, and laity to be engaged with the reality of civil society, of which they were a part. The increasing use of violence during the 60s and 70s as well as the violation of Human Rights by repressive military governments prompted a rethinking of the model of *laïcité* for Catholic individuals that could not reconcile their religious belief in the dignity of all humans created in the image of God with a support of the oppressive forms of government. However, this might have not happened without the new international orientation of the Latin American Catholic Church. Even though the Uruguayan Catholic Church was not as successful or influential as the Church in, for example, Chile in organizing social movements against the dictatorship, as Levine (2005) concludes, “they participated in the opening of public life to voices that had been previously silenced and they brought new and urgent topics to the agendas of national and transnational institutions” (p.25).

## Chapter Four - Reimagining secularism: The Methodist Church and its Social Mission.

*I remember that the coup d'état was a Friday. I assume that for many pastors the anguish must have been the same as for me: 'What should I preach about this Sunday? Should I say what I think and maybe it will be my last sermon or do I ignore what is going on, and continue to preach but feeling unworthy? (...) The sermon was meant to be more than the communication of doctrines of which we were sure, or it ceased to be a sermon and God knows what it ended up being. So, during this time, we learned that communication goes beyond words and that the Bible was more radical than we had thought. The symbols, gestures, liturgy, everything became an important part (Bolioli, 2009, p.24).*

The Methodist Church was the only religious institution that officially declared itself against the dictatorship. During this time, many Methodist pastors and lay people were imprisoned for assisting political prisoners and their families both economically and with the procuring of visas to escape to leave the country (Alonso, 2010). The Crandon Institute, a school run by the Methodist Church, was one of the few places that would hire professors and teachers who had been fired for ideological reasons during the dictatorship (Bolioli, 2009). The Church also assisted the families of political prisoners and exiles by hiring lawyers, providing financial support for judicial processes and for transportation to visit the prisons, and delivering monthly food and medicine baskets which were put together with the collaboration of the members of the Catholic Church “Santa Gema”<sup>4</sup>. Those who engaged in these activities were aware that they could be accused by the military state of assisting delinquent activities (Olivera, 2009, p.61). However, the Methodist Church was able to make use of something that the Catholic Church did not, which was the protection that being affiliated with international organizations provides. Although the Catholic Church is an international institution and, as I discussed in Chapter

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<sup>4</sup> Churches in Uruguay are often given names.



three, was very influenced by the Liberation Theology movement, it did not seek the support of international religious and secular organizations like the Methodist Church did. The latter was especially supported by the United States Methodist Church and the World Council of Churches (Alonso, 2010). Argentinean historian Luciano Alonso (2010) states that this complex web of religious affiliations, made possible by a shared Christian understanding of justice, allowed the Uruguayan Methodist Church to carry out these activities. The fact that they carried out these activities that put them directly at odds with the military government does not mean that the Methodist Church did not feel the repression of the military. Members of the Methodist Church were imprisoned and exiled and the state apparatus monitored their activities, sermons, and communications. Brazilian member of the World Council of Churches and Human Rights activist Rev. Charles Harper (2007) recalls a humorous anecdote in which the military insisted that members of the Uruguayan Methodist Church reveal the hiding place of a certain “Pablo de Tarso” referenced in several letters between Evangelical churches. They were discussing Paul the Apostle. This anecdote shows the extent to which the Church was being watched. Methodists made use of the principles of *laïcité*, which did not allow the State to interfere in religious matters, to defend their religious freedom to act according to their interpretation of the Bible. This also enabled them to protect themselves from retaliation from the military by providing religious arguments for all of their actions while at the same time influencing the public sphere in a way contrary to the secular model. The views espoused by the Methodist Church did not oppose the values of modern Western societies. In fact, they were acting in defense of inalienable Human Rights as stipulated by secular organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the

Inter-American Human Rights Commission (IAHRC). However, accepting the principles of laïcité as it has come to be understood in Uruguay meant that there was no space in the public sphere in which religious action was accepted as appropriate. Not only political elites and academics, but the large majority of the Uruguayan population have accepted and defend the principles of laïcité, especially the strict differentiation between religion and politics. The Methodist Church called into question this strict differentiation by engaging in social and political action in opposition to the military regime and the violation of Human Rights.

The first record of a Protestant presence in Uruguay dates to the British invasion during the early 1800s. Geymonat (2013) identifies two distinct forms of Protestantism developed in Uruguay: Ethnic and Evangelical. Evangelical Protestantism was largely urban, practiced in Spanish and adapted to the realities of the Uruguayan context because of its aim to proselytize and evangelize. The Methodist Church is the most prominent example of Evangelical Protestantism in Uruguay. In contrast, Ethnic Protestantism was formed around immigrant groups that kept largely to themselves, perceiving their religion as a part of their cultural identity that needed to be protected in order to maintain a sense of community in a foreign land. The Waldesians, the Anglicans, the Swiss Reformers, the Armenians, and the Menonites are examples of this kind of Protestantism (Geymonat in Caetano, et al., 2013). While Ethnic Protestantism arrived in Uruguay first, towards the decade of 1860, the first forms of Evangelical Protestantism developed with the arrival of North American missionaries. The first Protestant service in Spanish was carried out in 1868 by Methodist Pastor Juan Thomson, which led Geymonat (2013) to agree with those who had previously stated that Thomson and the Methodists made Protestantism

“Uruguayan” (Geymonat in Caetano, et al., 2013). Thomson’s work was later carried on by Thomas Wood, who became an emblematic figure of Uruguayan Protestantism and would also take controversial public positions during the disestablishment process of the late XIX century, such as supporting the removal of religious education from public schools. In 1877, he created the journal *El Evangelista* (The Evangelical), which illuminated some of the Protestant ideas with regards to the separation of the Catholic Church and the State, which I will detail below. While their presence was still limited, by 1890 5% of the population of Montevideo already claimed affiliation with a Protestant Church (Geymonat in Caetano, et al., 2013).

According to Geymonat (2013), it is possible to state that, in general, the Protestant Churches in Uruguay supported the secularization process. First, as a minority religion, disestablishment would benefit them by taking power from the Catholic Church (Geymonat in Caetano, et al., 2013). This attitude is described perfectly by the Rational Choice approach as used by Anthony Gill (1998). The Protestant’s defense of the secularization measures were not based on their theology, but on the assumption that they would gain more freedom and a bigger following from disestablishment. Specifically with regards to the North American Methodists, their affiliations with Freemasonry also aligned them with some of the positions espoused by the Batllista government, such as the need for secular public education (Geymonat in Caetano, et al., 2013). Even though there were practical, non theological reasons for the Protestant support of secularization, their position was also influenced by developments in Latin American Evangelical theology during the 1800s, which Geymonat (2013) calls “social” or “liberal” Evangelism. “This current, with a strong Anglo-Saxon influence, advocated for the need

to modernize the Hispano-American society – aim shared with the political elites of the time – by means of the expansion of Protestantism in order to erase Roman ignorance and obscurantism” (Geymonat in Caetano, et al., 2013, p.107). They supported the new role of the State as the sole protector of civil rights and the only legitimate sovereign over the Uruguayan population; Uruguayans would be “citizens” before “Catholics”. Their explicit political theology, as expressed in *The Evangelical*, was that there should never be an alliance between a religious tradition and the State (Geymonat in Caetano, et al., 2013). “The ‘authorization of such a union’ did not exist in the New Testament: neither Jesus nor his apostles made use of the ‘secular arm to ensure respect of the rules and decisions of the Church’” (cited by Geymonat in Caetano, et al., 2013, p.119). Religious belief was private in that it could not be imposed by external forces such as the government (Geymonat in Caetano, et al., 2013).

Even though these positions made them sympathetic to some of the reforms advocated by the Batllista government, such as secular education, the removal of Catholic symbols and artifacts from public spaces, and the creation of the civil registry, when the secularization process transformed from anticlerical and anti-Catholic to anti-religious this alliance could not be maintained (Geymonat in Caetano, et al., 2013). Echoing some of the positions of the Catholic Church during this historical process, *The Evangelist* would declare that “it is easier to conceive of a camel passing through the eye of a needle, than the existence of a society with no religious principle whatsoever. There has never been, there is not, and there will never be a people without religious faith” (Geymonat in Caetano, et al., 2013, p.108). While supportive of the disestablishment process as it related to the Catholic Church, Protestants rejected the restricted role now ascribed to

religion. However, the increasing anti-religious impulse of the secularization process with the privatization of religious opinions, practices, and actions that it entailed resulted, as in the case of the Catholic Church, in the Protestant Churches restricting their scope of action and attention to their existing community. Because of this, their social creed, which had been central during the first years of Evangelical Protestant Churches and included aspects such as the search for equality and justice among all humans and the fight for the rights of workers in the industrial sector, lost its importance and applicability. In other words, because Protestant Churches were forced to focus on their own communities and the role of religion in the public sphere was limited, it was more difficult, if not impossible, to enact their social creed, which focused on the assistance of the population at large and not just the Protestant communities. Towards the 1920s, a new theological understanding of social change emerged, which placed an emphasis on individual conversion (Geymonat in Caetano, et al., 2013).

The secularization process thus had a more significant impact on the Evangelizing Protestant Churches than on the Ethnic ones since they relied on the public and social aspect of religion for their proselytizing. Furthermore, this process affected the Methodists most of all, given their public presence prior to the disestablishment (Geymonat in Caetano, et al., 2013). However, the Methodist Church would reevaluate its position during the 1960s, when the economic and social crisis of the time, the violence of the guerilla movement, and the violations of Human Rights and freedoms demanded a renewed focus on their social doctrine.

According to Uruguayan Pastor Ademar Olivera, a central figure in the Human Rights movement during and after the dictatorship, the focus on lived faith, located in the

concrete reality of the times, has been a distinctive aspect of Methodism since its inception (Olivera, 2009). When he discusses what drew him to become a pastor for this Church in his autobiography, he refers to the Methodist sensibility and interest in social issues, especially with regards to the poor as well as the active role of the lay community of the Church (Olivera, 2009). The inclusion of the lay community, to the extent of having lay presidents, is a characteristic that distinguishes Methodism from Catholicism, even taking into account the increased role of the Catholic lay community as of Vatican II. I will expand on this further with regards to the *Methodist Bulletin* and its role in advocacy of the Methodist Church for the respect of Human Rights.

Pastor Emilio Castro was the first president of the Methodist Church when it was separated from the Argentinean Methodist Church in 1968. He later served as the president of the World Council of Churches (WCC) from 1985 to 1992. Concerned with the violence and political intolerance beginning to be experienced in Uruguay, in 1970, with the support of the Catholic priest Justo Asiaín Márquez, he tried to mediate between the government and the Tupamaros after three foreign diplomats were kidnapped by the guerilla movement. However, on the day that a meeting was scheduled to take place, a Tupamaro leader, Andrés Cultelli, was arrested near the church where the mediation would take place. After this development, Pastor Castro and Márquez were imprisoned for a week. Pastor Olivera's autobiography is not clear as to why Castro and Márquez were immediately linked to Cultelli. The Methodist Church issued an official declaration stating that even though Pastor Castro was acting as an individual in response to his interpretation of the message of the Bible, they supported his initiative (Olivera, 2009).

This official support of Castro's attempts at mediation shows that the Methodist Church was embracing a new public role.

In fact, they expressed their support of the message of the Council of Methodist Bishops of 1965 in the *Methodist Bulletin*, the official journal of the Church. The *Methodist Bulletin* published its first issue in 1961. It is distributed by the Methodist Church, which implies that they support the views represented in the Bulletin. However, it is only when articles are signed by the Executive Committee of the Church that we could understand them as representing the official position of the institution. Pastors and lay people can publish in the bulletin with their own name, or choose not to sign the article at all. This willingness to publish the opinions of members of the Church that are not part of the Executive Committee distinguishes the *Methodist Bulletin* from other forms of communications by religious institutions, such as the official Episcopal Documents published by the Catholic Church<sup>5</sup>.

As described in the *Methodist Bulletin*, during the 1965 Council of Methodist Bishops, the leaders reaffirmed their belief in the inviolable dignity of all individuals and also that God had given all citizens the right to their own opinion. During this Council, the bishops favorably discussed the developments in the Catholic Church in relation to the Second Vatican Council and declared their openness to dialogue and collaboration with other Christians for the protection of Human Rights (Mensaje del Concilio de Obispos de la Iglesia Metodista, 1965). The Methodist Church would make repeated efforts to form an ecumenical front, with a focus on seeking the support of the Catholic Church due to its prominence in Uruguay (Bolioli, 2009). However, as I noted in Chapter

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<sup>5</sup> The *Methodist Bulletin* also proved to be an excellent primary source for my current project, since I was able to extract the views of individual pastors and members of the Church, as well as the official pronouncements of the Executive Committee.

three, the Catholic Church refused to make official pronouncements as an institution until after the military had left power.

Nevertheless, one of the ideas which the Methodist Church shared with Monsignor Parteli and his followers was the need for non-violent forms of resistance to the structural oppression of the poor. In 1968, the *Methodist Bulletin* used biblical metaphors to express their disagreement with the use of violence, even for subversive means:

Those who reject the path of love, and take the path of hate, those who today prefer weapons to dialogue, violence to non-violent action, are the same as those who would think of Jesus as poor, miserable, and useless, (...) that it is pointless to hear his words or follow his example; that Barabbas is the one who was right, the dynamic and violent nationalist, the active looter, the effective fighter whose brilliant example is rarely remembered but experienced by millions of beings all over the world, two thousand years later! Those who today call for weapons and aspire only to kill those who impose on them the violence of injustice, are the same who in the mob would scream again 'Crucify him! Crucify him!', and 'release Barabbas!' (La violencia y la nueva criatura en Cristo, 1968, p.1).

Violence, according to the *Methodist Bulletin*, is antithetical to love, which is the basic principle of Christian ethics, and thus unacceptable. Even though some of Methodist pastors collaborated with the Tupamaros and shared some of their ideals, the Church and many of the supporters of the Tupamaros, such as Pastor Ademar Olivera, critiqued the guerillas use of violence and did not believe that Communism was the answer to oppression. They were especially critical of the Soviet Union and the idea of a communist dictatorship:

(...) the use of subversive violence is currently, in Latin America, too ambiguous and tends to place those who wield it beyond good and evil, like semigods that arbitrarily dispose of others' goods and lives (like the cases of Aramburu in Argentina, Mitrione in Uruguay) without really



knowing who or what dark forces they are serving and transforms a supposed fight for the liberation of the people into an endless series of terror and counter terror, retaliation and counter retaliation, subversion and repression, in most cases, without clear and defined goals with regards to the new society that is professed (La ética cristiana ante el problema de la violencia, 1971, p.2).

In this statement, the Methodist Church is condemning Communism and the Soviet Union for their use of violence to bring about a future that is unclear and undertheorized. However, the military and conservative sectors of society started to accuse Pastor Emilio Castro of being a communist for his collaborations with the Frente Amplio party. In response, the Methodist Church vocally defended the right of their president to have, as an individual, a political position. They opposed the allegations that he was part of the Tupamaros but acknowledged that he was drawn to the ideas of the newly created Frente Amplio party even though he did not officially align himself with any political party. In their communication, they called individual political participation and meditation a “responsibility” that needed to be taken on by all who were committed to the current reality and emphasized that the right for all individuals to act politically was part of the Constitution of the Republic (Remitido de la Iglesia Evangélica Metodista en el Uruguay, 1972). Therefore, they were encouraging not only their pastors but also their lay community to influence the public sphere through their vote, a vote rooted in Christian ideas.

Pastor Ademar Olivera was one of the most active Methodist pastors in the struggle for the protection of Human Rights during the dictatorship. In fact, he was imprisoned even prior to the coup, when the “Doctrine of National Security” was put in place by President Pacheco Areco. The reason for his imprisonment was his involvement

with the Tupamaro movement. While he explicitly criticizes communism, in his autobiography he wonders: “How do I justify my being part of the MLN [Tupamaros] when my pastoral function is to occupy myself with spiritual concerns? This question allows me to express my conviction that our mission as Christians is to concern ourselves with the totality of the human being, as an integral, indivisible being, which also includes his conditions of life. It is not only about ‘saving the soul’, but saving the person, and nobody can save anyone, nobody can save themselves, we all save ourselves together, in communion” (Olivera, 2009, p.43). For Olivera, becoming involved in the guerilla movement was necessary in order to stay true to his interpretation of the Bible. However, he clarifies that he never let his militancy interfere with his pastoral work, acknowledging that his congregation had a varied range of opinions that he had to respect (Olivera, 2009). Nevertheless, he did use his sermons to reflect on the current state of society and the oppression of the poor.

Olivera found justification for his actions in the figure of Jesus, who he perceived as being in the world, concerned with the fate of the poor and suffering. He thus rejected the idea of a limited, separated “sacred” space inside the Church (Olivera, 2009, p.84). This expansion of what constitutes “sacred space” is a clear challenge of the laïcité model. Furthermore, by making worldly affairs part of the sacred, Methodists who got involved in the Human Rights struggle made their Christian faith political.

As Pedro Corradino, an active member of the Methodist Church expressed: “The interest and preoccupation for the poor and the suffering comes from the Bible, but when one wants to apply its message to reality it goes through an ideological ‘sieve’ and this creates divisions. Unfortunately, the ideological was, for many, stronger than faith. Faith

is understood as something personal and intimate; in contrast, ideology affects the day to day, human relationships, and the political position permeates it all” (cited in Olivera, 2009, p.114). Olivera (2009) took the connection between religion and politics further by stating that religion had to encourage politics and active citizenship. It should not be the “opium” of the masses, but invigorate them to participate following the example of Jesus.

Interestingly, this new public presence and challenge of the laïcité model led the military government to defy some of the laïcité principles as well. In 1977 the State attempted to control who would be appointed to the Executive Commission of the Church, violating the terms of disestablishment and the subsequent institution of laïcité as the relationship between the State and religious institutions. The argument used by the Methodist Church to oppose this, which they would reference in several occasions, was that of their right to freedom of religion as expressed in the Constitution. They were thus making use of secular language to defend their religious/social/political action (Bolioli, 2009). In a bold move, the Methodist Pastors of Montevideo used the *Methodist Bulletin* to declare that “The Church is autonomous and independent. The Church acknowledges the authority of the State in the temporal world; God calls [the Church] to accept the responsibility to help or disagree with the State when its functions conform or not to the values expressed in the Bible” (cited in Olivera, 2009, p.137). They were challenging the State’s claim of authority over the structure of the Methodist Church as they emphasized their right to have an opinion on the actions of the State and to act in accordance with it.

In 1972, the Methodist Church was shaken by the assassination of Armando Acosta y Lara from a window of the Central Church in Montevideo. He was a politician and was accused by the Tupamaros of training the military “Death Squads” in torture

techniques. Pastor Ilda Vence, the first member of the Methodist Church to be allowed to make a religious visit to the women's prison, was in the building when the assassination took place. According to her, when she arrived at the Church building, a group of Tupamaros had forced the groundskeepers into a room, in which she was locked too (Olivera, 2009). After the killing of Acosta y Lara, Pastor Castro, still president of the Church at the time, issued a letter expressing the Church's regret that this had occurred in their building and emphasizing that they had not encouraged, helped, or participated in such an event. In this letter, he also reflected on the conflictive times that Uruguay was living, when people were divided by new political and social ideas. He stated that "The Church participates in this ambiguity, it is torn by division, it does not know what to believe" (Castro, 1972, p.1). This emphasized the presence of the Church "in this world". Even though it was guided by eternal truths, the members of the Church were conflicted as to what real social and political options the Bible's teachings led them to. In the same edition of the Methodist Bulletin that published Pastor Castro's letter, the Executive Council of the Methodist Church, declared their repudiation at the fact that the assassination had occurred from a Church building and expressed their sympathy for those families who had lost dear ones during this time of social conflict, thus extending their condolences not only to the families of the kidnapped and killed politicians and entrepreneurs targeted by the guerilla movement, but also to the families of the guerilla members imprisoned and killed by the State (De la Iglesia Metodista a la opinión pública, 1972). Pastor Castro declared: "Do not let anger and vengeance guide our actions. Let us visit the homes of those affected, with no regard for the political color of their mourning. (...) Let us not accept easy explanations that want to justify any kind of moral or physical

torture in the name of an ideological position or a supposed or real efficacy” (cited in Olivera, 2009, p.132).

The Methodist community was further shaken when, two days later, a bomb, assumed to have been placed there by the military for what they believed had been a conspiracy between the Methodist Church and the Tupamaros to kill Acosta y Lara, exploded at the door of the Church. Pedro Corradino, a lay member of the Church, stated that this created tension and fear in the community. Even though the majority of the congregation continued to go to the Church, when it was clear that officials of the government were watching the masses some stopped assisting in fear of being labeled as “communists” (Olivera, 2009). According to Pastor Oscar Bolioli (2009), an important leader of the Methodist Church who will be discussed in detail below, the explicit condemnation of the Methodist Church by the military government meant that it lost some membership, but it also gained them support among other sectors of society. On the occasion of the Christmas of 1973, Pastor Castro, reflected on salvation. He stated that the fight for God’s people is not a private, national, or political concern but a universal, spiritual fight (Navidad 1973, 1983). Castro was exiled due to his use of messages such as these, which critiqued the current state of society and used the metaphorical language of religious salvation to discuss the real need for actual freedom, in addition to his involvement in the Human Rights movement and the actions of the Methodist Church under his leadership. Pastor Araceli Ezzati regretted that the permanent detention and interrogation of pastors and lay members of the community and the exile of Church leaders such as Castro created a constant state of tension and fear. Because of this, one of the methods used to support the community was publishing messages of hope and

encouragement in the *Methodist Bulletin*, hidden in religious metaphors (Olivera, 2009). For example, in his Christmas message in 1973, Castro recalled the story of Simeon as told in Luke 2: 25-33. Poor and waiting for the liberation of Israel, oppressed by the Roman Empire, Simeon hoped for the day of salvation, which would come when he met Christ. Castro used this story to express that while the poor and oppressed in Uruguay might be suffering, God was present on earth and salvation would come. “No longer will any human situation be absolutely desperate because God will be present in solidarity. There is no room for desperation or misery in the manger, or the cell next to the gallows, because He has been there before us and is there with us now” (Castro, 1973, p.1). Castro was trying to remind those who were suffering due to their political beliefs that God was with them even in the prison cell. The laity had to develop the ability to read and listen in between lines (Bolioli, 2009).

The Methodist Church, in accordance with the daring position that they had taken, did not rely solely on Christian ideas of human dignity but made explicit connections between these and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In a 1973 edition of the *Methodist Bulletin* they declared their support of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights because of its advocacy for not only civil and political rights, but also economic, social and cultural rights such as the right to work, rest, and a fair salary (Vigencia de los derechos humanos, 1973). They refer to Latin America as a privileged continent in that it not only has the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a guide, but also the American Declaration of Human Rights and the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (IAHRC) of the Organization of American States (OAS). In spite of all of these secular instruments for the protection of Human Rights, they decried the fact that

misery and poverty were still rampant in Latin America. According to them, this was partly due to the dependence of Latin American countries on the developed economies of the “first world” (Vigencia de los derechos humanos, 1973).

Luis E. Odell, the lay President of the Methodist Church during the dictatorship, was central to the services that the Church was able to provide the families of political prisoners. He served as the link between the Church and the UN Refugee Agency, part of the UNCHR. With the support of the World Council of Churches (WCC) the Methodist Church and the UNCHR helped many persecuted Uruguayans obtain the category of “refugee” in order to leave the country. Pastor Oscar Bolioli, a member of the Executive Council of the Methodist Church of Uruguay from 1973 to 1979 and later its president, served as another link between the Uruguayan Methodist Church and the WCC. He served as the Associate Secretary General for Latin America at the U.S. National Council of Churches (NCC) from 1980 until 2000. Both organisms were crucial to the Methodist Church’s ability to assist families of political prisoners in Uruguay as well as to put international pressure on the Uruguayan government to both protect the members of the Church that engaged in Human Rights advocacy and to bring international attention to the Human Rights abuses in Uruguay (Bolioli, 2009). The Methodist Church took advantage of an international web of religious and secular organizations to access and distribute resources and information to those most affected by the repression (Levine, 2005). Since the Uruguayan government was monitoring all of the church’s correspondence, the church made it a point to visibly correspond with these international organizations, so the government would know that the Methodist Church had foreign support (Bolioli, 2009). With the election of President Carter in the U.S. and his

condemnation of the Human Rights abuses committed under the Condor Plan the U.S. embassy started showing more interest in assisting the Church in its work. The British, Dutch, Swiss, and Vatican embassies were also in contact with the Uruguayan Methodist Church. At events celebrated in these embassies, Pastor Bolioli and members of the Church would connect with other political and social actors who also opposed the dictatorship (Bolioli, 2009). According to Sociologist Mara Loveman (1998), these kinds of international networks are crucial to analyze the propensity of any organization to engage in high-risk collective action.

The WCC assisted several Uruguayan Human Rights organizations, particularly those connected to the Association of Christian Youth of Uruguay, which assisted with the psychiatric and psychological rehabilitation of former political prisoners and victims of torture and their reinsertion back into society. One of these organizations was the Ecumenical Service of Reintegration (SER), which alongside the Service for Social Rehabilitation (SERSOC), helped hundreds of former political prisoners and exiles obtain jobs after the dictatorship. The WCC supported organization also assisted the 31 members of the military who had refused to participate in the coup and had been imprisoned for 13 years (Harper, 2007). In addition, the WCC collaborated with the International Secretariat of Jurists for Amnesty in Uruguay (SIJAU), making sure to do so discreetly in order to not expose the work carried out by the Uruguayan Evangelical Churches to the military government (Harper, 2007).

Furthermore, The WCC assisted SERPAJ, founded in 1981, which had become “the main center of the prophetic denunciation of the violations of Human Rights in the country” (Harper, 2007, p.52). As was mentioned earlier, the military was constantly



watching and threatening the members of SERPAJ. The organization was officially banned in 1983. Its president, Jesuit priest Luis Pérez Aguirre, was imprisoned by the military government and tortured in four occasions. The WCC advocated for the organization at the international level and pressured the government to allow the only Human Rights organization that existed in Uruguay at the time to function (Harper, 2007).

The Methodist Church worked in partnership with SERPAJ (Alonso, 2010). As was discussed in the previous chapter, in 1983, Pérez Aguirre organized a fast with the assistance of Catholic priest Jorge Osorio and Pastor Ademar Olivera to protest the dictatorship. Hundreds of people congregated outside of the building where he was fasting to show their support. However, the police soon came and started detaining those present. “With horror we saw that, while we were praying the Lord’s Prayer, several vehicles of the Metropolitan Guard surrounded [the attendants] and violently detained more than 150 people, including religious women, priests, elderly and children. It was unbelievable: this whole display simply for praying the Lord’s Prayer!” (Olivera, 2009, p.89). This quote not only shows the climate of violence and repression lived during this time, but also the fact that the government thought it necessary to respond to these religious activities. Even though these religious actors clearly had a political message too, the military’s response demonstrates that that they saw them and their religious activism as a threat to the stability of the regime. This shows that organizations such as SERPAJ and its leaders were becoming referents for the democratization movements. SERPAJ was banned soon after. The authorities claimed the organization used a religious “veil” to mask prohibited political activities (Olivera, 2009). The government now considered

public displays of religious faith to be “political” action, particularly if they critiqued the government.

In 1984, the *Methodist Bulletin* announced the creation of an Ecumenical Commission called Human Dignity (Dignidad Humana), composed of members of the Catholic Archdiocese of Montevideo, the Evangelical Church of the Río de la Plata (IERP), the Waldesian Church of Uruguay and the Methodist Church of Uruguay. Their objective was to become advisors to the political leaders who would negotiate the transition to democracy in matters of Human Rights, thus seeking to maintain their presence in the public sphere. They stated that “the voice of suffering Christ calls us in the name of all of men, above creeds, races, political positions and ideologies. Our mission of fraternal solidarity goes beyond the political or ideological game; the violation of the dignity of all men constitutes a human challenge that undoubtedly interpellates those of us who profess to follow Christ” (Comisión Ecuémica – Dignidad Humana, 1984, p.3). They were calling on civil society to pay attention to what was going in Uruguay and to become active. From their perspectives as men of faith, they would work with the newly formed National Commission of Human Rights (Comisión Ecuémica – Dignidad Humana, 1984).

In the same issue of the *Methodist Bulletin*, the Methodist Church explicitly stated their support for the Liberation Theology movement and lamented that when religious leaders took on active roles for the liberation of the poor and oppressed the government and conservative sectors of society labeled them as Marxist. According to the writers of this article in support of Liberation Theology, the future of the Church was at stake if religious individuals did not take a more committed approach to the “signs of the times”,

by which they meant those social problems and inequalities in civil society, beyond the walls of the Church, that need attention and response (Apoyo a la Teología de la Liberación, 1984). They insisted that an ethical or mystical battle that continues to be rooted in abstract notions of love and justice was no longer enough to live up to the Christian faith. Faith needed to be practiced, not just preached. Liberation Theology rejects the capitalist system but, since most of its followers do not feel that economic and political theorizing is part of their role as religious leaders, their theology does not provide an alternative to capitalism. Their political theology is thus made clear: even though they call for a Church that is socially engaged and politically active, the role of religious actors ends where the development of political understandings of authority and economic systems begins. “The true meaning of our Christian faith leads to the breaking of these [capitalist] structures of domination, which is not to engage in politics but to adopt an attitude of denunciation” (Ideología y Fe, 1985, p. n/a). This shows that while Liberation Theology calls for Christians to be more involved in the public sphere, in those aspects of life and society that a strict separation between Church and State do not allow for, it does not call for establishment or even a direct involvement of religious institutions in political and economic decisions. As I have shown, Liberation Theology had a strong impact in Uruguay, both among some of the leaders of the Catholic Church, as well as on the Methodist Church. This resulted in an involvement of religious actors in political matters, which violated the principles of laïcité. However, this was not done by trying to actively engage in politics but by shedding light on social and political problems and advocating, from a theological standpoint, for certain ways of dealing with the

history of abuses left behind after the military dictatorship, such as focusing on the need for truth, justice, and forgiveness.

On occasion of the 1984 presidential elections that would secure the transition to democracy, Methodist Pastor Yamandú Rey wrote in the *Methodist Bulletin* that it is not possible for religious actors to be engaged with the world without taking political stances. For example, he argues that even the position that regards discussion of politics in a religious setting as inappropriate involves taking a political stance. Therefore, any relationship between religion and politics implies an opinion on what religion and politics are and where their boundaries lie. In this respect, all forms of secularism are political. According to Rey, saying that Christians should not engage in temporal politics is restricting a Christian commitment that is not only concerned with religious matters but with the entire life experience of all individuals. That being said, he clarifies that the commitment of a Christian is first and foremost towards Jesus Christ and not a political party or leader. Without using the term, Rey warns against partitocracy by stating that “we affirm that Jesus Christ is the Lord, but, unfortunately, we often make our political leaders semi-gods, citing their actions and words as perfect and accepting them as norms of our political militancy” (Las elecciones, 1984, p.n/a). This perspective is typical of those who followed the Liberation Theology movement in Uruguay. Religious individuals should be involved in worldly affairs, not from a political standpoint, but from their theology, as followers of Jesus Christ. This does not mean that their positions will not have political implications, but the starting point is in religious ideas rather than political or economic ones.

After the elections of 1984, the Methodist Church reaffirmed its commitment to fight for the rights of the poor and oppressed (Después de las elecciones, 1984). The Methodist Church, like Monsignor Parteli, called for an amnesty for political prisoners imprisoned for political or ideological reasons. They argued for this position by citing sections of the Bible in the *Methodist Bulletin*, such as Leviticus 25: 35-43. In this passage, they state, it is never conceived that freedom can be denied permanently: “35. If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien or a temporary resident, so he can continue to live among you. (...) 39. If one of your countrymen becomes poor among you and sells himself to you, do not make him work as a slave. 40. He is to be treated as a hired worker or a temporary resident among you; he is to work for you until the Year of Jubilee. 41. Then he and his children are to be released, and he will go back to his own clan and to the property of his forefathers.” According to the writers of the article in the *Methodist Bulletin*, since Freedom was given as a gift by God, humans cannot take it from others or prevent others from gaining it back once lost (La amnistía: Un ministerio de la Iglesia?, 1984). Similarly, they cite Isaiah 42: 6 and 7<sup>6</sup> and 61: 1 and 2<sup>7</sup>, which they interpret as a specific call from God to work for the opening of the jails. According to their interpretation of these texts, the mission of the prophet is to work for the enactment of the freedom given by God, especially the freedom of those who suffer most: the poor, the marginalized, and the captive (La amnistía: Un ministerio de la Iglesia?, 1984, p.1). They

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<sup>6</sup> “6. I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, 7. to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness”

<sup>7</sup> “1. The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, 2. to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn”

also cited Monsignor Parteli and supported his view that “at the same time, those responsible of the crimes committed against human dignity and the public good that still have not been judged, will have to be submitted to the ordinary justice system, without prejudice that, once the responsibility is finished, we proceed with the same spirit that inspires the national pacification, which should not be postponed” (Parteli: Por la amnistía, 1984, p.n/a). The Caducity Law that was eventually passed did not allow for the justice system to do its work and put to trial those members of the military and police who had committed Human Rights abuses. Even though the Methodist Church and Monsignor Parteli were not arguing that the perpetrators of these crimes should serve jail time (since their freedom could also not be permanently denied), they thought it necessary that these crimes be acknowledged through the justice system. This is why, when the campaign for the 1989 referendum of the Caducity Law was taking place, the Executive Council of the Methodist Church released an official statement in support of the referendum stating that it validated the democratic process legitimated by the Constitution (El consejo ejecutivo: La Iglesia y el referéndum, 1987). If the perpetrators of these acts against humanity were not put to trial, true freedom would not be regained.

As we have seen, the Methodist Church had a different relationship to the secularization process and the laïcité model than the Catholic Church. They initially supported the new measures of the Batllista government that sought to take power from the Catholic Church. They often found themselves in agreement with the new laws passed during the disestablishment process such as a the removal of all religious symbols from public institutions such as schools and hospitals, the elimination of religious education from public school curricula, and the establishment of the civil registry. It was

only when those anti-Catholic sentiments became anti-religion sentiments that the Methodists could no longer support the secularization process. Their political theology opposed establishment but they did not necessarily agree that a religious identity should prevent individuals from engaging in political arguments. However, like the rest of Uruguay, they came to accept the *laïcité* model that established just that. The economic and social crisis of the 1960s, the violence of the guerilla movement and the violation of Human Rights by the State during the dictatorship prompted a new presence, not only by Methodist individuals but by the Methodist Church as a an institution, in the public sphere. They challenged the model of *laïcité* by engaging secular organizations and political structures such as foreign embassies. They made explicit condemnations of the violations of Human Rights, basing their opinions and actions not only on religious scripture but also on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the American Declaration of Human Rights. At the same time, they used their religious identity as a form of protection from repression. Pastor Oscar Bolioli concludes his memoir with a reflection that is indicative of the change experienced within the Methodist Church with regards to their relationship to “worldly” affairs: “We had to learn something obvious, so obvious that sometimes it is forgotten. I am referring to the fact that we are a community of faith. Not a political party or an NGO: As Christians and the body of Christ we are a Church. This meant discovering the mission as something dynamic. (...) After all, we are called by God to comfort his people! It is the essence of pastoral work. And when I say ‘pastoral’ I am not referring to the work of the pastors but to a pastoral attitude in the community of faith” (Bolioli, 2009, p.58). The dictatorship and the Human Rights abuses committed during this time refocused the social creed of the Methodist Church. Much

like the advocates of Liberation Theology, the Uruguayan Methodist Church now understood that responding to the social, political, and economic problems of their time was a necessary part of their role as religious actors.



## Chapter Five – Conclusion

The 1973 coup d'état marked the breaking point of the Uruguayan system of *partitocracy*. Encouraged by their success in fighting the guerilla movement and their increased power in the political sphere, the military pushed the political parties, along with Parliament, out of their traditional position (Caetano, et. al., 1992). While this was not something that anyone planned, the displacement of the political parties as the representatives of the people's opinions opened up the public sphere to other actors in civil society, like Human Rights organizations and religious individuals. Religious institutions in the Uruguay did not historically play a decisive role in social matters because disestablishment occurred less than fifty years after Uruguay's independence and *laïcité* was so firmly established as a constitutive element in the country's identity. Because of the little involvement that religious institutions had had in "worldly" affairs, those religious individuals who tried to influence the public sphere during the 1960s-1980s were accused by the military government and the more conservative sectors of society of violating the model of *laïcité*, created and determined by the State (Loveman, 1998). Political action was not part of the restricted space assigned to religious institutions and individuals. Because of this, religious activities took on a political meaning, such as being Marxist, when they had a potential social and political effect, even if they were fundamentally grounded in theological reinterpretations of the role of the Christian. These reinterpretations, inspired by international developments in Christian theology, gained urgency in the context of the violence of the guerilla movement and Human Rights abuses committed by the military state against the Uruguayan people.

According to Caetano, et al. (2003) the laïcité model involves the differentiation of the public sphere in such a way that the State is separated from the rest of civil society and the political sphere is sacralized into a “civil religion”. I have argued that, in Uruguay, this notion of “civil religion” took the form of a partitocracy. In this context, it is the political parties and their leaders that are followed with religious fervor. Uruguayans put their faith and loyalty into their political party. The laïcité model also involves the privatization of religion as a central characteristic of modernity, and a strong critique of institutional religion. This privatization and differentiation resulted in religious institutions having to rely on civil society for their legitimation.

In the context of the deprivatization of Christianity during the 1960s, of which Liberation Theology was an example, and the sudden proliferation of authoritarian military regimes, Christian individuals expanded their notion of “sacred space”, disarticulating the strict differentiation and privatization that had resulted from the secularization of society. This is particularly apparent in Uruguay, where laïcité had become central to the national identity. I have attempted to show how Catholic and Protestant individuals and their ecclesiastical institutions engaged civil society and the social issues of their specific historical context thus challenging the model of laïcité that restricted the “sacred” to the Christian home and the Church.

In spite of the fact that my analysis is mainly focused on the theological arguments used by Catholic and Protestant actors during and after the dictatorship, I have engaged the Rational Choice approach at several points throughout this project. This is because it is important to also acknowledge those objectives and constraints that were not

ideological but also affected the response of religious institutions and individuals to the secularization model and the Human Rights violations committed by the military government. The Protestant Churches initially supported the secularization process because they believed they would benefit from the Catholic Church losing its State privileges. The Catholic Church considered the possibility that advocating for Human Rights during the dictatorship would improve their standing in Uruguayan society and garner a larger following. At the same time, even though their theology might have given them arguments for an anti-authoritarian position, the attacks of the military State on the Catholic Church and its clergy resulted in their silencing. All of these responses were not theological, they were practical and influenced by the needs of the individuals and the organizations, regardless of their religious identity. Furthermore, it is not certain whether this deprivatization would have occurred at all if it had not been for the repression of the military and the Human Rights abuses committed by the Uruguayan government. However, even though rational choices are a part of the functioning of any human and any institution, I would not say that the reason that Protestant and Catholic actors engaged the public sphere in a new way during the Uruguayan dictatorship was entirely because of these. In the case of the Methodist Church, while the Rational Choice approach might be able to explain their earlier attitudes with regards to the disestablishment process, it cannot explain why they would continue to engage in the advocacy of Human Rights after they were not only targeted by the military, in danger of being imprisoned, but also losing membership. After my analysis, I am more inclined to believe that, in the Uruguayan context, the influence of the Liberation Theology movement and the leadership of particular individuals such as Carlos Parteli, Luis Perez

Aguirre, Oscar Bolioli and Emilio Castro led significant sectors of the Catholic and Protestant communities to respond to the violation of Human Rights with a theological understanding of morality that might not have been called upon otherwise.

As we have seen, many Catholic and Methodist actors were active against the repression of the military regime and the violation of Human Rights.

However, the extent of their actions was limited by the institutional structure of each Church. During the 1960s, under the guidance of Monsignor Carlos Parteli, the Catholic Church started to include the lay community in ways that they had not before, such as the creation of reflection groups about the current situation.

However, they stopped short from supporting any Catholic action that was explicitly against the dictatorship, such as SERPAJ. The Catholic Church's ability to take official action, like the Methodist Church had, was complicated by the fact that the Episcopal Conference was limited to only making statements that all bishops had agreed on. Although the Methodist Church is centralized with an Executive Commission and a President, it was much more flexible with regards to what Methodist individuals could do and say as representatives of the Church.

The Church leadership saw all their members as being both Methodists and individuals with political responsibilities. In addition, allowing for the publication of opinions under the name of specific pastors or lay members in the *Methodist Bulletin* allowed them to implicitly support pro-Human Rights and anti-regime ideas without the signature of the Executive Commission.

In spite of the progressive positions espoused by religious leaders, the role of the political parties and democratically achieved consensus were not forgotten

as the pillars of Uruguayan society. Because of this, the military soon realized that they could not legitimize their actions or their power without the support of the political parties (Caetano, et. al., 1992). During the transitional period, the political parties became the mediators between two seemingly irreconcilable positions: that of the victims of the repression and that of the military (Roniger & Sznajder, 1997). The transition was arranged by the political parties and the military and was characterized by a process of reinstitutionalization where the new democratic government reinstated political and civil rights as well as the traditional divisions within civil society, especially the separation of the political sphere from civil society (Chasquetti & Buquet, 2004, p.239).

Markarian (2005) mentions “party politics” as one of the reasons for the weakening of Human Rights claims during the transitional period. Instead of undertaking broad consensual policies of truth and justice, the 1982 primaries and the 1984 presidential elections fostered competitive differentiation among the parties’ platforms. Furthermore, the transition was negotiated between party delegations and the military (Markarian 2005, p.165). The alternatives proposed by other social actors lost importance, once again, in favor of the positions advocated by the political parties. There were no links between the movements for Human Rights and the political parties (Markarian, 2005, p.166). These two sets of social actors were proposing different alternatives for the return to democracy, but they were never in conversation with each other. As a result, the positions of Human Rights organizations (and the religious actors that led several of them) were not heard by the political parties and the Uruguayan voters,

and it was only the demands of the military and the propositions of the political parties that defined the transitional period.

During the referendum of 1989, the “Green ballot” represented the option for the elimination of the Caducity Law, which had been decided by the political parties without the input of civil society. The “Green Ballot” was not unanimously or officially supported by any of the political parties. According to Caetano, et al., a win of the “Green ballot” may have resulted in a true dismantling of the partitocracy system (Caetano, et. al., 1992). 84.78 percent of the electorate went to the polls and 56.65 percent voted to maintain the Caducity Law. The Colorado Party praised the referendum as a symbol of the vitality of Uruguayan democracy but warned that those funding the “Green Ballot” were communists and former guerilla members (Roniger & Sznajder, 1997).

Nevertheless, the 1989 referendum was significant in that it was the only instance of such a democratic process, out of the twelve that had been carried out until that point in Uruguay that emerged from civil society and not the political elites (Roniger & Sznajder, 1997).

As we saw, Catholic and Protestant leaders actively supported the referendum and also the Green Ballot, claiming that an amnesty for those who had violated Human Rights was not only unjust for the victims, but would also be detrimental for the perceived legitimacy of the military. However, because the transition to democracy and the institution of the Caducity Law was a political project, individuals outside of this sphere were not heard. For example, when Matilde Rodriguez, as the representative of the CNP (National Pro-Referendum Commission), proposed a public debate among the supporters of the Green and Yellow Ballots, the political leaders refused stating that as she was not a

potential presidential candidate or even a professional politician she did not have the same political responsibility (Roniger & Sznajder, 1997).

The language of “Human Rights” was regarded as “too radical” even by the new Frente Amplio, which was trying to define itself as a political party worthy of serious consideration (Markarian, 2005). Public discourse had been dominated by the positions of the dominant Colorados and Blancos and the call to confront the legacies of the repressive regime was regarded as “destabilizing” and not conducive to the reunification and pacification of the country. In supporting the Caducity Law, as Roniger and Sznajder (1997) put it, instead of viewing the Caducity Law as a moral issue, the majority of the population decided to focus on its pragmatic rather than its ethical implications. This puts in evidence the differentiation of society along the home/private/moral and work/public/legal lines as explained by Casanova (1994).

The transition to democracy was a political process in which civil society played no part (Markarian, 2005). According to Loveman (1998), the difference between the success of the Chilean Catholic Church in influencing the return to democracy and the weak impact that the Uruguayan Church had during the same period is due to the secular model of Uruguayan society. Because of the laïcité model, the Church lacked any connection to political parties and, because of the partitocracy system, this meant that they were not relevant actors in the public sphere in the same way that the Chilean Catholic Church was. Given the small size of the Catholic Church and the lack of influence of religious traditions in general in Uruguay, they were easier targets for the military. Chile’s regime did not dare to openly attack the Church, whereas Uruguay’s

military leaders immediately targeted all religious individuals who engaged in advocacy of Human Rights.

Even if they were not ultimately successful in influencing the population in their direction, Catholic and Protestant individuals deprivatized their religion by applying religious ideas to the current social and political situation in Uruguay. This was evident in their Biblical interpretations of the role of remembrance and forgiveness in the achievement of true national reconciliation. Even though they actively and openly supported the referendum and the right of every individual to have a vote in the implementation of the Caducity Law, they tried to influence not only the Christian community but the Uruguayan population at large to take into account not only their interest, but the fates of those who had been the victims of the regime. Thus, “by bringing into the public sphere issues which liberal theories have decreed to be private affairs, religions remind individuals and modern societies that morality can only exist in an intersubjective normative structure and that individual choices only attain a ‘moral’ dimension when they are guided or informed by intersubjective, interpersonal norms” (Casanova, 1994, p. 229). In certain contexts, public religions could highlight the need for communal forms of morality over individual interests without putting in jeopardy the rights of every person as stipulated by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Once the dictatorship ended, Catholic actors faced a new privatization push that came from within the Vatican under the leadership of Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger. However, the *laïcité* model had been opened up for discussion and revision. This was evident when, in 1987, Pope John Paul II visited Uruguay. It was the first time that a Pope visited the country and a huge mass took place in his honor in a central space



of the capital city. This mass became one of the largest and most diverse public manifestations in the history of the country. After the event, the President, openly agnostic, proposed that the 30-meter high iron cross that had been built for the occasion be left in the space where the mass took place in order to commemorate the visit of the Pope that, according to him “had united all Uruguayans in a common feeling of tolerance and respect” (cited in Da Costa, 2003, p.70). The National Parliament approved the law that established that the cross would remain where the mass for the Pope had taken place (Da Costa, 2003). In this context, the cross, a Christian symbol, became a symbol for the Uruguayan community. Furthermore, when a Peace Commission was created in 2001 by the government of Jorge Batlle to look into the disappearances, it was led by the Archbishop of Montevideo, Nicolás Cotugno and Luis Pérez Aguirre. This shows that the restructuring of the model of secularism in Uruguay not only remain, but continues. Further research could explore how the laïcité model has evolved since the dictatorship.

The secularization thesis has traditionally assumed that there has to be a fundamental tension between religious and secular worldviews when, in fact, this is not always the case. As we saw, Catholic and Protestant individuals in Uruguay advocated for the respect of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and they did so by interpreting the Bible’s messages in a new way, influenced by the Liberation Theology movement. As Casanova (1994) declares, “by crossing boundaries, by raising questions publicly about the autonomous pretensions of the differentiated spheres to function without regard to moral norms or human considerations, public religions may help to mobilize people against such pretensions, they may contribute to a redrawing of the boundaries, or, at the very least, they may force or contribute to a public debate about such

issues” (p.43). Catholic and Protestant leaders in Uruguay critiqued the Caducity Law because, according to them, impunity was not the way to foster forgiveness and reconciliation. In fact, they argued that by not judging any of the military and police officers who had actually committed acts against humanity, Uruguay was debilitating the entire security structure, which is in fact what has happened (Roniger & Sznajder, 1997). The military in Uruguay still live with the stigma of the dictatorship. Therefore, I argue that the exclusion of alternative views to those of the political parties during the transitional period resulted in the unresolved nature of the history of Human Rights abuses in the country.

The Uruguayan Episcopal Conference and the Center for the Study and Diffusion of the Christian Social Doctrine (CEDIDOSC) organized a panel in 2006 titled “Authentic Concept of *Laicidad* [Laïcité]” considering this a key discussion topic for the maintenance of true democracy (CEDIDOSC, 2006). During this conference, then Uruguayan President and representative of the Frente Amplio, Tabaré Vázquez stated that laïcité refers to the framing of social relationships in such a way that all citizens can understand each other within their diversity, making laïcité central to the maintenance of democracy. Ideally, the model of laïcité creates the space for all to be recognized as equal and worthy of respect regardless of their particular identity, especially their religious affiliations (Vázquez, 2006).

However, “establishing that laïcité is a constitutive part of the Uruguayan civil religion implies annulling its attributes of neutrality to conceptualize it as a privileged space for the emblematic representations and myths that narrate the nation” (Guigou in Da Costa, 2006, p.180). In response to the apparent limitations and lack of actual

neutrality of the laïcité model, evidenced in the exclusion of alternative perspectives to those of the political elites in the Uruguayan public sphere, a more recent model has been proposed, also originating in France, referred to as “intelligent laïcité” or “open laïcité”. This recent development stems from the perception that the model of laïcité itself needs to become more neutral and more tolerant of alternative voices in the public sphere (Monreal, 2006). The laïcité model has thus been accused of not being truly “neutral” but of functioning as a gag for social groups that are excluded from the political sphere. Therefore, the complete secularization of society may not be the way to ensure the civil liberties of all individuals.

When we understand the public sphere of civil society not as a homogenous community but a space for social interaction where common norms are constructed, discussed, and reconstructed, social integration and the notion of a “common good” can only occur through the inclusion of different perspectives in civil society (Casanova, 1994). “Intelligent laïcité” deserves further research and development. How can we structure the public sphere in order for it to be truly inclusive? How do we avoid the disregard of opinions and alternatives merely on the basis of the identity of the speaker? In other words, how do we ensure true democratic participation and representation in a laïcité?

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