

Active Catholic intellectuals in Brazil in the 1930s

Os ativos intelectuais católicos no Brasil dos anos 1930

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RESUMO

A Igreja Católica no Brasil, no período de 1930-1940, vinha se organizando no sentido de reivindicar a ampliação de seu espaço na sociedade brasileira – não como fé ou devoção, que era forte –, estimulando a organização de católicos ativos para intervir na sociedade fortalecendo as demandas políticas da Igreja diante do Estado. Em resposta, uma significativa parcela militante do laicato católico se organizou e desempenhou papel importante no período: os intelectuais católicos que são o objeto de estudo do presente artigo.

Palavras-chave: história intelectual; intelectuais católicos; história política; Igreja e Estado.

ABSTRACT

The Catholic Church in Brazil between 1930 and 1940 was in the process of reorganization with the aim of reaffirming its position in Brazilian society. The aim was not only to promote the expansion of the Catholic faith, but also to stimulate the organization of active Catholics to strengthen the political influence of the Church. The response was the organization of militant lay Catholics that played an important role during the above period: the so-called Catholic Intellectuals who are the object of this paper.

Keywords: intellectual history; Catholic intellectuals; political history; Church and state.

I wish to begin this article with a quote by Cornelius Castoriadis¹ which expresses the common thread of my reflections on Catholic intellectuals in Brazil in the 1930s:

In this respect [the extension of heteronomy] *religion* plays a central *role*. It supplies a representation of this *source* and of *its attributes*; it ensures that *that* all significations — *those pertaining to the world, as well as those pertaining to human affairs* – spring from the same origin, it cements the whole by means of a belief that musters the support of essential tendencies of the psyche. (p.77)

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In this attempt, “the political” is presented as that which generates the relations of humans among themselves and with the world, the representation of nature and time, the mutual positions of religion and power. (p.73)

Castoriadis highlights the institutional role of religion in maintaining heteronomy, as opposed to autonomy, an activity which involves questioning and reflecting on society and the interrogation of its laws and their foundation: for example, who makes the laws and who are they made for; what laws do we want? According to Castoriadis, it is the discussion of these questions by society that marks the exercise of political power, putting into question the state of heteronomy, an essential constituent of which is the transfer of decision-making power from society as a whole to an instance which is separated from the collectivity. In this state, the exercise of political power as the locus of discussion of questions pertaining to everyday social life – the division of social concerns between those who have the right to a part of the whole – is nullified. Political power is exercised to explain and control social tensions and strengthen the instances of power in the articulation and organization of society’s demands, putting them “in their place”. Religion, or rather its institutional arm, the Church, plays a significant role in the disciplinization of social tensions. Thus, power and politics – two sides of the same coin – are central to my reflections on the relationship between the Church and the state in Brazil during the 1930s.

First, I propose a brief discussion of the notion of intellectual.² Referring to the term intellectual in his work “Intellectuals and History”, Castoriadis (2002, p.112) states the following: “I have never liked it or accepted it. For reasons that are at once aesthetic: the miserable and defensive arrogance implied therein – and at the same time logical – who is not intellectual?”. He highlights the relationship between the “philosopher” and the “political community” in Ancient Greece, and particularly the difference between Socrates, the ‘philosopher from the city-state’, and Plato, the philosopher who places himself outside the city-state. When Castoriadis thinks of *polis* he thinks of the city-state, the citizen. It is therefore easy to understand the emphasis that he gives to Socrates and other thinkers that discussed questions related to *polis*, that is to say, those that exercised power. According to Castoriadis, Socrates widely exercised his citizenship and was judged and condemned for the exercise of political power in the most profound sense: constructing autonomy in the creation of the laws that govern the city.

Conversely, Castoriadis emphasizes, Plato was withdrawn from the city-state and therefore viewed it from outside, thus instituting heteronomy in

philosophy and leading to what he calls the “deplorable activity of intellectuals when confronted with history: the rationalization of the powers”. Castoriadis suggests that the intellectuals of our time should restore, restitute and reinstate their authentic activity in history, that is to say, their essential function:

[the intellectual] can abide in this space [history], only by recognizing the limits of that which his supposed objectivity and universality permit of him; he should recognize, and not just through lip service, that what he is trying to get people to listen to is still a *doxa*, an opinion, not an *episteme*, a science. Above all, he should recognize that history is the domain in which there unfolds the creativity of all people, both men and women, the learned and the illiterate, a humanity in which he is only one atom. (Castoriadis, 2002, p.119)

In light of the above, the discussion about intellectuals and, more specifically, about the history of the intellectuals, is intimately linked to political history. For Sirinelli (2003, p.234), a discussion “undertaken along the indirect passage of the history of individual engagements, it [the history of the intellectuals] stood – double effect – at the crossroads of the biography and the political”. Within historiography, political history was ostracized for a certain period of time, and its concerns were relegated to a “lower” plane. The intellectuals belonged to a social space that did not attract the attention of historians because, for various reasons, including their posture towards society, they “belonged” to a superior plane, to the “elites”. In this way, following the thinking of Sirinelli, intellectuals were in a “blind spot”, invisible to historiography during some time and often considered part of the history of ideas, without raising the important question: how do intellectuals construct their ideas and how do they relate to the society to which they belong?

Without doubt, a large part of the responsibility for this attitude belongs to the intellectuals. By putting themselves on a pedestal above and apart from society they set themselves in a sacrosanct space; and it was only after their ‘desacralization’ that they would capture the attention of historiography. In this sense, the twentieth century saw the emergence of the humanized intellectual who started to live and participate in society, contemplating and influencing various issues. They gave opinions, and asked and answered questions: they were no longer above society, but rather on an even ground with it, and could therefore be questioned by it. Sirinelli (2003, p.240) states that “desacralized, intellectuals were able to become an object of history over which historians would no longer hesitate to cast their net”. In the same vein, Altamirano

(2005) emphasizes that the renaissance of political history instigated other ways of interrogating the past, including the history of the elites and intellectual history.

In this sense, the intellectuals are viewed based on their engagement in society, as critically conscious protagonists and witnesses, in short, as people who places their knowledge and experience in the daily life of society. Their intervention in society was not neutral, but rather related to the individual options and political postures that guided each one's intellectual activity. This was particularly the case from the early Twentieth Century onwards when the humanism inherited from the previous century set the tone of an intellectual discourse which had two essential characteristics: the defense of universal causes, detached from personal interests; and transgression of existing order.

It is evident from the above that the notion of intellectual has not evolved along a linear trajectory, which makes it difficult to come up with a single definition. Various meanings have been attached to this term along the paths of history and each epoch expressed new ideas. Sartre once said that "the intellectual is someone who meddles in what is not his business and claims to question both received truths and the accepted behavior inspired by them, in the name of a global conception of man and of society".³ In this sense, by meddling in what is not his business and through his claims, the intellectual constructs other truths and behavior which he fights for. His posture is therefore not one of passivity and observation in the face of events, but rather of action, opening a space not just for his ideas but also for their realization.

This was the type of attitude that the so-called Dreyfus-affair demanded of the "thinkers" or philosophers of the time in order to surpass the moment of reflection and move into political action by supporting or condemning those accused by the instituted power. Zola became the spokesperson for this type of attitude when he publicized a letter showing his position regarding the events, defending Dreyfus and publically calling for critical thinking, whose protagonists he called intellectuals. After the Second World War, this term gained an adjective which gave the term a rather stronger connotation. Fascism – especially Nazism and Stalinism – did not permit neutrality, or even a passive view of events, and thus the notion of *engaged intellectual* emerged.

Running the risk of overextending the term, given its specificity, I consider the Catholic intellectuals engaged intellectuals, as they went beyond passive Christian reflection and widened the realms of their religiosity to include political action. They responded to the appeals - which they affirmed were from the entire Catholic population - to strengthen Catholicism, not only as a

religious exercise, but also as an intervention in society. As intellectuals belonging to what they considered a weakened society, they proposed to do this through political action and interventions to put society on a path based on their ideals, that is, those of the Roman Catholic Church.

The beginning of the 1930s in Brazil was marked by growing support for the idea of a national project reinforced by the notion of a break with the old model symbolized by the revolution: the abandonment of a past seen as backward and representing the old, and the (re)birth of a new country founded on the idea of “national renewal”. Intellectuals from diverse cultural and political backgrounds engaged directly or indirectly in a wide-scale and multiple project to build the Brazilian nation. The construction of the notion of nation at that moment was very complex, especially due to the weaknesses in the social instances: a defined class structure and political organization that showed signs of a clearly representative democracy – still a vague notion at that time – were unheard of. This political vacuum “saw the swelling of the state machine as the historical subject par excellence in the power game” (Lenharo, 1986, p.20). The intellectuals filled this vacuum by exercising functions in the state to make up for the country’s lack of qualified personnel, especially in the newly-created ministries.

It is interesting to note that the idea of “national reconstruction” that permeated a large part of the state’s discourse during the period 1920 to 1930 embraced the obliteration of the collective memory of a past of oppression and submission. In this sense, the real meaning of the discourse of change was permanence. Maria Helena Capelato emphasizes that this control “attempts to suppress all representations of the collective past, present and future in the social imaginary which are distinct from those which establish its legitimacy and secures its control over collective life” (Capelato, 1999, p.169).

The 1920s and 1930s were marked by interference in the national construction/renewal discourse with the founding of the Communist Party of Brazil (PCB) in 1922, which brought with it the alarming idea of revolution, and the Modern Art Week, which subverted the aesthetics of language, arts and culture. Both had inherent insecurities and a lack of firm ground in relation to the future. The creation of the Dom Vital center in 1922 and its social order project which exemplified Catholicism, together with the magazine *A Ordem*, which was the spokesperson for its ideology, acted as a counterpoint to these movements. In this way, the longstanding concerns of Brazilian intellectuality relating to the formulation, coordination and construction of a

national ideology and the search for a birthstone to make up its identity, began to take shape.

For some of Brazil's intellectuals, modernity was the path to the future – whatever the goal. For Foucault (quoted in Ternes, 2005) modernity marked a way of thinking and feeling as a voluntary choice and belonging to a task, an attitude towards the world of a subject that is constantly established and reestablished by history: a subject that, apart from exercising freedom, builds it on a daily basis towards emancipation.

Referring to Kant, Foucault purports that, more than just a period of history, modernity is an attitude: “a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation to belonging and presents itself as a task”. Without doubt close to the Greek term *ethos*. Consequently, rather than distinguish the “modern period” from the “pre” or “post-modern” epochs, I believe it would be better to analyze how the attitude of modernity conflicts with attitudes of “contramodernity”.⁴

This attitude was consubstantial with artistic and cultural renewal through an attack against the veneration of the past that acquired positive emphasis with the elaboration of a “national” culture, a “rediscovery” of Brazil by the Brazilians. This plot also included a conception of identity which expressed critical awareness and openness to diversity and to a territory where there was dialogue among different cultures and where culture could assert itself through relationship rather than exclusion. Against this backdrop, a wide-reaching debate arose in Brazil which proposed new cohesive bonds through which identities could be viewed within a national/international context, fleeing from exasperated nationalism. In the backwash of this modernizing drive and on the other end of the debate, groups were organized to combat whatever kind of positive attitude towards modernity, demanding permanence of the traditions of Brazilian society.

The debate heated up with the mobilization of the working class which was institutionalized by the creation of the Communist Party. Ever since the end of the Nineteenth Century, the struggle of the workers, most of which were European immigrants, had been guided by a strongly rooted anarchist movement, as shown by the strikes of 1917 and 1919. Despite intense mobilization, the visibility of the anarchist movement was easily concealed by official discourse that dismissed the movement disfranchising it from Brazilian society, since it was made up of immigrants and therefore ran counter to the interests

of the nation. The creation of the Communist Party in 1922 institutionalized the workers' struggle, seducing a large part of the unions that actively participated in the construction of the party as a legitimate spokesman for their interests. The mobilization behind the Communist Party had an impact on society and divided opinions – the mere mention of the word “revolution” was threatening to the conservatives and their projects based on the maintenance of Brazilian society's “true traditions”. Traditional and conservative groups, especially those related to the Catholic Church, organized themselves against any proposal that revealed an inkling of revolution.

The fact that Brazil, by definition, had always been a Catholic country – Dominican Catholic in fact – did not mean that the Church had a strong political influence. The church had a predominant influence on culture during the colonial period since education was under its guise and it ran schools and seminaries, not to mention the Jesuits who dominated the intellectual landscape in Brazil for two centuries until they were expelled in the middle of the eighteenth century. However, in political terms, the Church was subordinate to the colonial government. Catholicism was declared the official religion of the country by the 1824 Constitution and at the same time the empire determined that the Church would remain aligned with the temporal power; the newly instated Royal Patronage regime gave the emperor supreme authority over the state and the Church and even gave him the power to “arbitrate over papal laws and decrees to ensure their validity in the country (the foresaid consent)” (Cancian, 2011, p.16). The Vatican reacted to this situation and sought to establish a new relationship with the Brazilian state. The pope's position also provoked a strong response from influential sectors within the national clergy with or without links to the monarchy, who wanted to maintain the Church under their control without losing their relative autonomy in relation to Rome. However, the monarchy feared that any expression of autonomy by the Church would open the way for interference in the internal affairs of the country, obeying orders from Rome.

The Western world at the turn of the twentieth century was subject to a constant process of profound change. The Industrial Revolution in Europe imposed relations of production and labor that would mold a new society full of tensions and conflicts where masters and workers clashed over the ways and rules of working at the time. New construction techniques had transformed cities which began to take on another appearance: “skyscrapers”, noise and crowds became part of everyday life. New means of transport and

communication reduced distances and speeded the pace of life. Modernity imposed itself.

Far from being oblivious to these issues, the Church, through the Supreme Pontiff, was attentive to these transformations, in the political sphere – with the rise in the number of workers' struggles and the idea of revolution and tensions between nations – and in technology and the economy, in relation to the pattern of capital accumulation. The relationships between people were transformed and broke with traditional patterns, and religiosity became diluted. As a reaction to this social “disorder”, the Catholic institution organized itself on various fronts seeking to (re)construct its internal affairs to strengthen papal powers.

One of the manifestations of this search was the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII, which addressed the relationships between capital and labor and private property and aimed to orient bishops and church congregations to be attentive with regard to the tensions which emerged together with the development of capitalism and working class movements. It urged Catholics to take watch of the world around them in order to intervene to (re)conduct it to the true path of Christian faith, under the aegis of the Vatican. In its introduction it alerts:

The momentous gravity of the state of things now obtaining fills every mind with painful apprehension; wise men are discussing it; practical men are proposing schemes; popular meetings, legislatures, and rulers of nations are all busied with it – actually there is no question which has taken deeper hold on the public mind. (*Rerum Novarum*)

The events of the early twentieth century confirmed the Vatican's fears: the First World War (1914 to 1918) and Russian Revolution (1917) radically transformed the world and led to the fragmentation of man's vision of himself and of the world in which he lived. Cubism was a particular manifestation of this fragmentation.

The Catholic Church was not content with being a spectator in the face of the worldly lay issues of the material world – and, it might be said, has never really accepted this role. Rather, it intended to intervene and, in order to do so, centralized decision making in Rome under the Pope – thus clearly not accepting the interference of nation states in its domain.

A wide range of initiatives followed which resulted in the strengthening of the organization of the Church, enabling it to achieve hegemony in the

heated ideological, cultural and religious struggle of the contemporary world. Sergio Miceli (2009, p.18), quoting Stephen Neil, emphasizes that “when it comes to the formation of new orders and congregations, especially those directed at missionary work, the nineteenth century was more fertile than any other century” to promote the expansion not only of the Catholic faith, but also, and perhaps mainly, the material and ideological basis of the institution.

In Brazil, the revitalization of the Church would take some time to take hold. The republic would create a secular state, separating the church and the state, which was made official by the 1891 Constitution. As Cancian (2011) writes, this separation and the end of the patronage distanced the Catholic Church from the public sphere. This situation was aggravated by freedom of religion which officially placed Catholicism on an even footing with other religions which were equally recognized by the state. However, two other issues deeply affected the Church: religious marriage lost its status with the introduction of civil marriage; and secular education, affecting a field which had up until that point been monopolized by the Church, not to mention the emergence of various protestant schools. The loss of this monopoly was one of the central issues of the disputes that followed between those that fought to maintain Catholic schools, which educated pupils according to the precepts of Christian – that is Catholic – tradition and religiosity, and those that fought for secular and democratic education.

The “intrusion” of the state into affairs which had previously been the unquestionable domain of the Church minimized its control and demanded that it took steps to strengthen the institution and its grassroots. In other words, it was time to respond to the passivity of Catholics – or at least a group of them – and stimulate their active participation in the country’s social and political issues.

The Church therefore reorganized itself by innovating and adopting new strategies aimed at expanding Catholicism, now free from all bonds of the State, and started to follow central guidelines established by the Vatican promoting the strengthening ties with the Roman Catholic Church, receiving in return resources and orientation. This strengthening of ties, denominated *Romanization*, was the start of a promising phase for the Church. According to Sergio Miceli (2009):

it achieved considerable success on multiple major fronts: it stabilized its income sources and recuperated its property assets, reconstructed and modernized its

training facilities and seminaries, created a considerably more dynamic territorial presence, moralized, professionalized and widened its professional staff base...

The expansionist movement in the Catholic Church in Brazil and the rest of Latin America manifested itself in many different ways. Without abandoning the goals of Romanization and building up its asset base, the church sought to build a solid political and doctrinal alliance with sectors of the ruling classes that supported Catholic pretensions and were aware of their importance for the consolidation of social and political order in the republic. This “alliance” with certain sectors of Brazilian society deepened after 1930 with the organization of a group of laymen who played a significant role in the Catholic resistance: the so-called Catholic intellectuals. In this way, the Church strengthened its position in society and reinforced its role as organizer, disciplinarian and guide of the meaning of history. It also strengthened its relationship with the Vargas administration which confronted workers’ struggles and social demands. The Catholic intellectuals acted on both fronts, mediating between the two powers and society.

In this context, according to Villaça (1975), the Pastoral Letter⁵ of 1916 was a first warning cry with regard to the stagnation of Catholicism in Brasil. Its author, Don Leme⁶, considered it a facade, mediocre and stagnated. His letter questions whether the intellectuals had received religious instruction and what programs, propaganda and resistance they had to offer. It also calls Christian intellectuality into action in response to the apathy of the Church, proposes a reaction to secular education, which he considers unacceptable, and launches the idea of a Catholic university. In short, Don Leme’s inaugural address to the diocese of Recife appeals for union and efficacy among Catholics in relation to Brazilian society which, in his view, needs intervention: “Instead of a fading chorus, we must form a legion ready for combat; who knows how to speak then speak, who knows how to write then write” (Villaça, 1975, p.139).

Don Leme’s appeal did not fall on deaf ears. An uncontested answer came from Jackson de Figueiredo, an intellectual from Rio de Janeiro who was attracted to militant Catholicism by Don Leme’s Pastoral Letter and became the organizer and founder of the Catholic movement which gained visibility through the *Centro Dom Vital*, the periodical *A Ordem* and a group of thinkers called the *intelectuais católicos*. According to Villaça (1975, p.163), the themes addressed by Jackson were Catholicism, authority, an order constituted against the revolution, nationalism and restoration of morality. He was rigid in his conceptions and authoritarian in his actions. He died in 1928 leaving behind

an organized Catholic militancy with a strong political influence on the Vargas government, which saw Catholic intellectuals as an opportunity for dialogue and support, especially during the structuring of the new state. It could be said that this relationship constituted a two-way street between church and state, where ideas, projects and actions which strengthened both parties could flow.

During this process, the Catholic intellectuals had the prerogative to mediate its political actions. There was for a moment a discussion between Catholic leaders over the formation a political party in the same mold as the Christian Democracy party in Italy. According to Schwartzman (Schwartzman; Bomeny; Costa, 2000) the lack of such a party led to the creation of the organization of intellectuals. Dom Leme created the Catholic Electoral League (LEC, acronym in Portuguese) in 1932 to provide guidance to Catholics with respect to the electoral process. The upper echelons of the Church however showed caution in relation to the possible political exposure that a clear position could bring and the negative effects of a defeat in the elections which could weaken relations between the church and political classes.

Achieve positive results that met the demands of the church and strive for political development without exposing the institution was the main role of the Catholic intellectuals under the leadership of Alceu Amoroso Lima – or *Tristão de Ataíde*⁷ – who replaced Jackson Figueiredo after his death, initially as president of the *Centro Dom Vital* and director of the periodical *A Ordem*. For Alceu Amoroso Lima, the LEC should be closely linked to the Catholic Action which in turn should “obey the general principles that govern the activities of the laity in the work of ‘Christianizing society under the guidance of the Catholic Church’” (Rodrigues, 2005). In this sense, it should not be made up only of practicing Catholics, but also open to all those that accept its program. Thus, the subordination of the LEC to the church hierarchy would not be the same as a political party. It would act as an agency responsible for the dissemination and expansion of Catholic ideology: the explicitly political arm of Catholicism.

The name of the periodical *A Ordem* says a lot about its ideology: organize society, bring society back from the brink caused by modernity. In contrast to the motto of the Brazilian flag – *ordem e progresso* – the Church sought order, as defined by its precepts, but discarded progress. Not that the intellectuals were against material progress, which would bring Brazil closer to the image of civilized countries. The problem was in the changes which accompanied it, such as a rupture with Christian traditions and the good customs of Brazilian society, as well as liberalism, the other face of capitalism. Not to mention

communism and the Communist Party, which were gradually becoming the greatest of all evils. In this way, the Church conducted a movement in parallel to state action and addressed the Brazilian population with its most conservative and ultramontanist thinking:

the defense of order, of the hierarchy of religious authority, of education, guided by religious principles and controlled by ecclesiastical principles and the attack of the deleterious ideals of liberalism, individualism, freedom of information and thought, and also of the state when deprived of supervision of the Church. (Schwartzman; Bomeny; Costa, 2000, p.5)

From the state's perspective, the Vargas government had to deal with the ambiguities of modernizing the country, building the bases for the growth of capitalism, and widening horizons so that new ideas could stimulate Brazilian culture, without however, abandoning conservatism: excess of any sort was to be contained. It comprised a hegemonic project which covered up dissent and disguised conflict. In this respect, it is worth remembering that in the first decades of the twentieth century, particularly from 1920 to the middle of the 1930s, the working classes systematically created and recreated the political space. The anarchistic, communist, Trotskyite and other sides of the workers' movement made their voices heard loud and clear and gained significant visibility. The state therefore proposed to drown out these voices through an educational project which would "teach" these social actors their "real" place in society and therefore the "true" discourse: that which impeded the particularistic interests of the oppressed classes from exceeding dominant interests which would ensure the success of the project of a "caring nation" without conflicts.

During this period there was a tendency to "naturalize" the power of the state, which influenced the construction of a particular type of intellectual that saw himself, his place, function and relationship with society as being permeated by the state. In this context, it was up to the state to make history: individuals, especially the intellectuals, became historical as they participated in the state, as employees, or in some state project. However, intellectuals sometimes became entangled in this web, compromising their autonomy as historical subjects.

The Vargas government called on a wide range of intellectuals who saw an open opportunity for putting their projects into practice: Villa Lobos developed choir singing in schools; Mário de Andrade foresaw the possibility of

building an archive of Brazilian culture in the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Service (Sphan, acronym in Portuguese), but was disappointed by bureaucracy; Lúcio Costa developed architectural projects, including the impressive headquarters of the Ministry of Education and Health (the current Palace of Culture) in Rio de Janeiro⁸. Maybe the most famous “employee” was Carlos Drummond de Andrade who worked in the Ministry of Education and Health for a number of years, including during the long lasting administration of the minister Gustavo Capanema.

Education received particular attention from the Vargas government, especially the construction of universities in Brazil. It must not be forgotten that Capanema was one of the intellectual builders of the new state, and his idea of university envisaged the elaboration of a single project to format Brazilian universities as a whole. The ministry worked on this project for a long time based on the experiences with the universities that already existed in Rio de Janeiro. However, Catholic intellectuals had created a proposal to build a university connected to the Catholic Church, imitating the hegemony of existing congregations in various states of the federation of which the Jesuits and the Marist Brothers were the most important. These two projects were not exclusive, but rather complementary, particularly due to the relationship weaved by Alceu Amoroso Lima, who was a virile exponent of Catholic intellectuality. The state would be left to run public universities, while the Church would run the Catholic university, thus reoccupying its space in the Brazilian education project.

Two projects however escaped the control of the federal government. The first was the University of São Paulo (USP), founded in 1934 by the government of São Paulo with the support of Júlio de Mesquita, then director of the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo*, which was a centre of resistance to the Vargas government directed at forming political leaders based on the ideas of the 1932 revolution.

The second was the University of the Federal District (UDF, acronym in Portuguese) proposed by Anísio Teixeira which began to take shape on the back of the success of the USP, and was founded in 1935 with five schools: Sciences, Education, Economics, Law, Philosophy, and Arts. Although it had a short life due to political reasons it was “a decisive instrument which breathed culture and sought new forms of elaboration, being the last straw for more conservative groups, including the Catholics” (Nunes, 2000, p.135).

Anísio Teixeira envisaged that the university would implode the petty and individualistic struggles that spilled over into political and mental

anthropophagy which antagonized solidarity and the country's scientific, literary and philosophical capacity. Clarice Nunes proposed the following:

Not only the production of knowledge, but also intellectual coordination and the formation of regular frameworks. The regulation of culture would be prohibited. The audacity to allow anything which is indeterminate and unpredictable! What good fairies dancing around the crib. (Nunes, 2000, p.315)

It is apparent that for Anísio Teixeira the university had a unique and exclusive function which went beyond spreading knowledge, the human experience and the education and training of professionals and researchers:

It is about maintaining an atmosphere of knowledge for knowledge to prepare the man that serves and develops it.

It is about conserving live knowledge and not dead knowledge, in books or in empiricism of non-intellectualized practices. It is about intellectually formulating the human experience, always renewed, such that it can become conscious and progressive.

It is about spreading human culture, but doing so using inspiration, enriching and vitalizing the knowledge of the past with the seduction, attraction and impetus of the present. (Teixeira, 1968)

The UDF's academic proposal differentiated it from other universities. In contrast to the official project which proposed a Brazilian university to train elites, Anísio wanted to, "intellectually formulate the human experience... such that it can become conscious" through stimulating research.

A significant number of Brazilian intellectuals were seduced by the idea of being a professor at the UDF. UDF professors formed a veritable 'who's who' of Brazilian science and culture including Villa Lobos, Candido Portinari, Lucio Costa, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, Josué de Castro, Mário de Andrade, Cecília Meireles, Álvaro Pinto and José Oiticica.

For the students, the fact of not having to stick to a strict predefined curriculum based on the course chosen and the visceral nature of the relationship between professors and students was extremely seductive. The course content was impregnated with a desire for novelty, which was characteristic of the generation of intellectuals to which a large part of the professors belonged to, many of whom participated in the Brazilian modernist movement. The

relationship built between the students and knowledge was something rather visceral.

In a conservative society such as Brazil which had only recently abolished slavery, traditional par excellence, the proposal of a university that cultivated liberty as a founding principle and not just as a possibility for an uncertain future caused fear. This cultural effervescence provoked reaction from the conservative ranks of politics and society, including Catholic intellectuals. This reaction had been announced from the beginning, since the UDF was born under the symbol of politics. Not because the majority of its professors were from “the left” – not necessarily due to party affiliation but more to life commitment – but also because the act of its foundation reflected its autonomy in the face of policies defined by a centralizing government.

It was 1935, a year marked by growing tensions on both the home and international front and the ascension of specter of Communism. The conservatives were therefore predisposed to react to innovative projects seen as a threat to their hegemony. Anísio Teixeira was conscious of the tensions surrounding his project and in his inaugural address, reaffirming the political and educational ideals behind the university, he seemed to foresee what was to come:

Many judge that universities should exist in Brazil not to liberate, but to enslave. Not to march forward, but to hold back life. We know all too well this reactionary talk. It is as old as Methuselah. “This deep modern crisis is above all a moral crisis”. “Absence of discipline”. “Of stability”. “We are marching towards chaos”. “Towards revolution”. “Communism is out there”. That is what they are saying today. And that is what they have been saying for the last five hundred years. Because liberty, ladies and gentlemen, is always something that remains to be done.⁹

Later on, reinforcing the importance of the struggle for freedom, he states:

The university community celebrated today with the formal inauguration of our courses is made up of all those who have disappeared during this struggle and all those who continue to fight. Dedicated to culture and freedom, the University of the Federal District is born under a sacred sign by which it will struggle for the Brazil of tomorrow, faithful to the great liberal and human traditions of the Brazil of yesterday. (ibid.)

Groups which were against these ideals of freedom were quick to respond. Even before the official inauguration of the UDF, Alceu Amoroso Lima wrote to the then minister Capanema:

The recent foundation of a Municipal University, with the appointment of certain heads of faculty who do not hide their communist ideals and preaching, was the last straw for the unease of the Catholics.

Where does this path lead to?

Will the government give its consent, against its will but under its protection, to prepare a new generation entirely impregnated with feelings which are totally contrary to the true Brazilian tradition and the true ideals of a healthy society?¹⁰

In this letter, Amoroso Lima continues by suggesting serious measures to combat communism. It should not be forgotten that Catholic discourse defended order, the hierarchy of authority, education guided by religious principles, an attack against liberal ideals, individualism, and freedom of information and thought. It was up to the state, according to the guidelines emanating from the authority bestowed on the Church, to close the UDF, thus eliminating the danger it represented for Brazilian society, which was conceived based on the ideals of tradition and Catholicism.

In the same vein, for the federal government, the existence of the UDF represented indiscipline and disorder, since it was the Ministry of Education that should maintain order and discipline in the field of education. As can be seen, its actions were supported and inspired by the Catholic intellectuals. Alceu Amoroso Lima, at the time a fierce anticommunist and discretely enchanted by integralism, could be said to have been the main orchestrator of this battle against the UDF – principally against Anísio Teixeira. The university was closed and Anísio Teixeira, accused of being a communist, distanced himself from the public sphere for a time. Alceu became president of what was left of the UDF for a short period of time and incorporated its courses into the recently founded University of Brazil.

The intellectuals that participated in the UDF experience were quick to respond as Mário de Andrade's letter to Capanema shows:

I refuse to bow to the reasons given by you for this: I deeply regret that the only freer, more modern, more investigative place of teaching left in Brazil, after what you did to the Faculty of Philosophy and Literature of São Paulo, has been extinguished. Even maintaining the current professors, the same spirit cannot be rekindled in the University of Brazil. Liberty is fragile. It flees from pomp and the pompous and from top-heavy bureaucracy.¹¹

With this ultraconservative and excluding stance reflected in public policies strongly influenced by the Church, one of the most significant university projects in Brazil in the first half of the twentieth century was summarily terminated. Almost 30 years later, the University of Brasília (UnB) emerged leading to the return of Anísio Teixeira to the political scene in the company of Darcy Ribeiro. Once again the project faced the opposition of the Catholic Church, which again defended the construction of a Catholic university. However, those were different times. The UnB was just one of the projects of Juscelino Kubitschek's cherished utopia— the construction of the Brazilian capital Brasília – and could not be replaced by another project. At the same time, the Catholic intellectuals had become diffuse and had therefore lost their political influence.

Anísio Teixeira's efforts to create autonomy were suffocated by the Vargas government with the precious collaboration of the Catholic intellectuals backed by the notion that everything emanates from the same root, which, without doubt, stems from Catholic religious activity. Heteronomy was necessary for the proper functioning of society.

The Catholic Church would end up transforming its internal postulates: new times require new attitudes. However, its actions alongside the state did not wane, but rather continued through its constant, albeit passive, support for state policy, and its manifestations against specific policies in crucial moments, such as in the fight for the redemocratisation of Brazil after the 1964 coup.

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NOTES

¹ CASTORIADIS, 1989: *Il ruolo della religione è, in questo senso [a extensão da heteronomia] centrale: fornisce la rappresentazione di questa sorgente e dei suoi attributi, assicura che tutte le significazioni del mondo e delle cose umane scaturiscano dalla stessa origine, cementa questa sicurezza attraverso la credenza, che gioca su delle componenti essenziali dello psichismo umano* (p.77) ... *Sarebbe così il político ad avere l'incarico di generare i rapporti degli umani tra loro e con il mondo, la rappresentazione della natura e del tempo, o il rapporto tra potere e religione* (p.73, author's translation).

² Here I seek to make a brief comment on the intellectual in historiography, without dwelling on theoretical-methodological discussions of different historiographical approaches, such as those adopted by Pocock, Skinner, La Capra and others.

³ This statement made by Sartre was taken from RODRIGUES, 2005.

⁴ Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, quoted in TERNES, 2006, p.95.

⁵ A Pastoral Letter is a letter which defines the actions of the Church and coordinates a series of activities which enable it to achieve its mission of announcing the word of God. The 1916 Pastoral Letter is Don Leme's inaugural address to the Archdiocese of Olinda.

⁶ Apart from being an important clergyman in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, Don Sebastião Leme was actively involved in politics. His inaugural address to the Archdiocese of Olinda provided the basis of the Pastoral Letter of 1916. In 1921, he returned to Rio de Janeiro, where he dedicated his time to organizing the lay movement in an attempt to intervene in the formation of the new institutional order through a combination of pressure and collaboration with the Vargas government to obtain concessions for the Church. He

was an important figure, alongside the Catholic intellectuals, in shaping the relationship between the state and the Church.

⁷ Leafing through correspondence between Mário de Andrade and Manuel Bandeira, I found an interesting reference which suggests that the idea of Mário taking up the Catholic leadership was cogitated: “Striving to assign the role of successor to the Catholic leader Jackson de Figueiredo to Tristão de Athayde, Hamilton Nogueira (1897-1981) establishes in ‘Tristão de Athayde and the spiritual route of a generation’ an ideological counterpoint, with MA on one pole: ‘If you observe his [Athayde’s] intellectual evolution a tendency towards unity, synthesis and hierarchization is always evident’. [In MA], in contrast, one can see dispersion ... a veritable atomization of reality which distances itself more and more from the truth that he seeks” (*Correspondence between Mário de Andrade & Manuel Bandeira*, org. Marcos A. de Moraes, São Paulo: IEB/Edusp, 2000, p.491). Although mere speculation on my part, I thought it interesting.

⁸ Architecture in Brazil during this period attracted the attention of internationally renowned architects such as Le Corbusier who, on a journey from Rio de Janeiro to Buenos Aires, was impressed by the work of Brazilian architects, including Lúcio Costa and the newcomer Oscar Niemeyer. Later, he said that he was fascinated with the suave features of Brazilian architecture and collaborated in the design of the Cultural Palace.

⁹ Apud SCHWARTZMAN; BOMENY; COSTA, 2000, p.227.

¹⁰ Apud NUNES, 2000, p.320.

¹¹ Apud SCHWARTZMAN; BOMENY; COSTA, 2000, p.100.

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