

RELIGION AND POLITICS.

Three Possible Relationships¹

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Resumo

O presente ensaio analisa três possíveis relações entre religião e política: i) a religião como poderoso instrumento de governo (*instrumentum regni*), em dois sentidos: a religião que utiliza a política e vice-versa, uma política que utiliza a religião; ii) a religião “contra” a política, que é incompatível e crítica da política, e se propõe a transformar radicalmente a política; iii) a política como religião, a política que cria uma religião própria, em duas possíveis modalidades: uma religião civil de tipo democrático, uma religião política de tipo autoritário ou totalitário. Para a definição dessas relações recorreremos a autores clássicos como Maquiavel e Rousseau e contemporâneos. No fim do ensaio, procuramos relacionar essas alternativas com a situação política brasileira, analisando sobretudo o fenômeno do fundamentalismo religioso como uma nova forma de fazer da religião um *instrumentum regni* perigosa para a democracia e os direitos humanos.

Palavras-chave: Religião; Política; Religião Civil; Religião Política; Fundamentalismo.

Abstract

The present essay analyzes three possible relations between religion and politics: (i) religion as a powerful instrument of government (*instrumentum regni*), in two senses: the religion that uses politics and vice versa, a policy that uses religion; ii) religion "against" politics, which is incompatible and critical of politics, and proposes to radically transform politics; iii) politics as religion, politics that creates a religion of its own, in two possible modalities: a democratic civil religion, an authoritarian or totalitarian political religion. For the definition of these relations we resort to classical authors such as Machiavelli and Rousseau and contemporaries. At the end of the essay, we sought to relate these alternatives to the Brazilian political situation, analyzing above all the phenomenon of religious fundamentalism as a new way of making religion an *instrumentum regni* dangerous for democracy and human rights.

Keywords: Religion; Politics; Civil Religion; Political Religion; Fundamentalism.

*"States are not governed with the pater noster,
and with a rosary in their hands"*
Cosimo de Medici, il vecchio (1389-1464).

This famous phrase by the lord of Florence, Cosimo de Medici, was repeated with approval by Machiavelli and with disapproval by Savonarola.^[2] It represents one side of the relationship between religion and politics: the incompatibility of religion (the Christian religion) with politics. But the opposite could also be said: "States cannot be governed without the *pater noster*", in other words, as Machiavelli himself states, religion is a powerful instrument of government (*instrumentum regni*), without which peoples cannot be

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governed; among other reasons, because it instills the fear more than love of God. And this relationship is reciprocal: both religion uses politics and politics uses religion.

There is a second position: religion against politics; a religion which distrusts politics, which distances itself from it through radical criticism, but which ends up proposing a profound reform of politics, no longer understood as power, but as service; which is, in essence, Savonarola's position, with a significant difference between the "armed" prophets and the "unarmed" ones, as we will see in Machiavelli.

There is a third position on the relationship between religion and politics: politics as religion, politics replacing religion, in two forms: a democratic "civil religion" and an authoritarian or totalitarian "political religion".

We will analyze these three relationships and their consequences, including for the Brazilian political situation, below.

1 Religion as an *instrumentum regni*.

In this case, we have two distinct subjects that relate to each other: religion, which uses politics and vice versa, a politics that uses religion. The example that immediately comes to mind is Constantine's Edict of Milan (313 AD), which legalized Christian worship, intuiting its usefulness for the survival of the Roman Empire in crisis. From this decree onwards, Christianity received great advantages: until then a persecuted religion, it became a permitted religion, and later an official and unique religion, which persecuted all others. Thus began a conflictual but lasting relationship between the Christian religion and imperial politics: the Holy Roman Empire. This would be the great dichotomy that would permeate all politics in the Middle Ages with its conflicts and ruptures between the two institutions represented at the highest level by the Pope and the Emperor (DE BONI, 1996; ARNAS, 2010).

But even on the threshold of the Modern Age, this alliance continued, although no longer as strong as before, because the Protestant reformation and the emergence of national States broke the unity of the *Respublica Christiana*. For example, the Patronage of the Kings of Spain and Portugal over the Church of the New World is a close alliance between the sovereign State and the Church. The State assumed all the burdens of evangelization, the "spiritual conquest", in exchange for almost total control of the Church in the New World, including the appointment of bishops. In return, the Church provided the ideological, theological, and legal justification for the "material conquest", as well as the military protection and economic benefits it received: an alliance between the sword and the cross that lasted for centuries (DUSSEL, 1992; 1993).

It's not hard to imagine how powerful this alliance was for both religion and politics, because there's nothing more powerful than speaking in the name of God: the crusades, the inquisition, the orders of chivalry are just a few examples of how powerful this alliance was. There is nothing more powerful than a holy war (*bellum sacrum*): from the first persecutions against heretics, justified by Saint Augustine in the 5th century and which continued throughout the Middle Ages, to the wars against the perpetual enemies (*perpetui hostes*), Islam, the Muslim infidels, who in turn responded with an equally ferocious holy war, which today's Islamic *jihad* wants to re-establish (CASSI, 2015; TOSI, 2006; ZOLO, 2006).

It should be noted, however, that before Christianity we could not really talk about an alliance between religion and politics, because they were both one thing, there was no clear distinction. The problem of the relationship between religion and power, between Church and State (which will also give rise to the problem of the relationship between

ethics and politics) arises because Christianity introduces a rupture in the identity between religion and politics typical of pre-Christian times.

Bobbio says on this subject:

The dualism between ethics and politics is one of the aspects of the great opposition between Church and State, a dualism that could only arise from the opposition between an institution whose mission is to teach, pray, recommend universal laws of conduct, which have been revealed by God, and an earthly institution whose task is to ensure temporal order in the relations of men among themselves. The opposition between ethics and politics in the modern era consists, from the outset, of the opposition between Christian morality and the praxis of those who carry out political action (BOBBIO, 2000, p. 182).

Christianity introduces a new element: the dimension of the City of God, which must coexist with the City of Man and, for centuries, was proposed as an alternative to the earthly city, to temporal power, in the name of a greater power, spiritual power: it is more just to obey God than man. The fear of God, much more than love, is an extremely powerful force in politics (SOUZA, 1997).

In pre-Christian times, this distinction was less obvious,^[3] because religion was a constitutive part of political power, both in autocratic regimes such as the Eastern Empires (Egypt deified Pharaoh) or in Israel (Yahweh was the God of the chosen people) and in the Athenian democratic regime (where Athens was the Goddess of the city), or in the Roman Republic when, as Machiavelli points out, the second king of Rome, Numa Pompilius, laid the foundations of the new city's greatness on religion, as we shall see later.

The great and significant difference between the Greek democratic and Roman republican experiences and the autocratic ones is that, in the latter, religion was administered by a caste of scribes and priests who monopolized it and had great ideological and political power. In the case of Greek democracy and the Roman republic, religion had a strong political connotation, but was not exercised by a caste, but by the citizens themselves.

It was in these spaces of relative freedom that politics emerged with greater or lesser autonomy, depending on the case. Despite this, Anaxagoras was forced to leave Athens and Socrates was condemned to death by the democracy, accused of impiety for "not respecting the gods of the city" and "leading the young astray", an accusation that was both political and religious, since the gods of the city were the patrons of Athens' political regime, democracy, which Socrates criticized.

Another significant difference with Christianity is that the Greek and Roman religions, like all the others (except for Judaism), were polytheistic religions and therefore relatively more tolerant of other faiths. The Greeks would leave an altar dedicated to a new, yet unknown God, as Paul noted in his famous speech at the Areopagus in Athens^[4]. This is no small difference from the monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), which were much more intransigent and intolerant.

Religious identity was so strong that for millennia it provided the foundations of social and political life in societies where there was a State. Even the heirs of Greek democracy and the Roman republic, Alexander the Great and Roman emperors such as Hadrian, ended up being divinized; and the sacred character was one of the attributes of medieval kings.

It is important to say that we are not dealing here with the theological value of religions, their transcendence or immanence, the relationship between faith and reason,

but with the social or sociological weight of religion. From this point of view, as far as some or many people believe that God exists, he comes to exist and has a very real and very powerful existence. God becomes a "social fact", as Durkheim would say, and the more people believe in him, the more powerful God becomes.

In this respect, Feuerbach's theses in *The Essence of Christianity* apply, which we can summarize, in a very simplistic way, in the inversion of the relationship between God and man in *Genesis*: it is not God who creates man in his image and likeness, but man who creates one or more gods in his image and likeness. Anthropology as the essence of theology, and theology as the essence of anthropology, which has two distinct and, to a certain extent, contrasting consequences ^[5].

On the one hand, religion turns God, this abstract but omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent entity, into an object in the hands of men, which can be manipulated by religious and political leaders. The moment we speak "in the name of God", God loses his dimension of transcendence. That is why, according to a certain reading, the Bible didn't just forbid naming God "in vain" but naming him "*tout court*" to avoid any form of anthropomorphism or manipulation of God for our own ends. This was the fear that ran through at least one strand of the Old and New Testaments, concerned not to make God, who is unique, transcendent, and absolutely other, into an idol like those of other religions. This is the true meaning of the prohibition of idolatry, which is expressed in negative theology, which States that we can only say what God is not, but never what he is. It is a rejection of any attempt to objectify God, because simply naming God makes him an object at our disposal, losing his transcendence and otherness.

On the other hand, through the phenomenon that Feuerbach and Marx defined as "religious alienation" ^[6], God becomes an object in the hands of man, but man also becomes an object in the hands of this all-powerful God that he himself created and who dominates him. And it is precisely the phenomenon of religious alienation that allows it to be used instrumentally in politics, as a powerful mechanism for projecting collective fears, anxieties, and desires: where it is fear rather than love of God that dominates. Machiavelli is one of the key authors in this regard.

2. Machiavelli: Religion and Politics ^[7]

*"It seems that [the Christian religion]
has effeminized the world and disarmed heaven".
Machiavelli, Discorsi, II, 2*

The author who, at the dawn of modernity, most clearly and forcefully debated the subject of religion and political power was Machiavelli. The Florentine secretary lived through one of the most radical experiments in identifying religion and power, which was the "Christian Republic" (SALATINI, 2015), promoted by the reformer Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola, and witnessed its downfall. He drew several considerations from this experience, the main one being that Savonarola was an "unarmed prophet" and was therefore easily deposed ^[8].

His entire oeuvre makes reference to religion, including plays like *La Mandragola*, an acid criticism of the Christian morality of his time; but the great analysis is in the *Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livius*, especially in Book I, chapters 11,12,13,14. ^[9] In this work, Machiavelli's position is quite complex. His central assumption is that religion is essential to morality and politics:

“If the observance of divine worship is the source of the greatness of Republics, its neglect is the cause of their ruin. Where the **fear of God** is lacking, the kingdom succumbs, unless it is sustained by the **fear of a prince** who fills the lack of religion” (*Discorsi*, I, 11, p, 58).

In the *Discorsi*, Machiavelli goes into this question in greater depth and demonstrates the importance of religion for civil life, political stability, and the maintenance of the Republic, recognizing that in the history of all republics, religion has never been dispensed with. This does not mean, however, that every religion is favorable to politics: there are forms of religion that strengthen the Republic, the State, and the union of citizens, and those that weaken them. The Christian religion, for example, is not suitable for these goals, for three reasons.

The **first** is of a political nature: according to Machiavelli, the presence of the Papal State in the heart of Italian territory was the greatest obstacle to its unification.

The reason why Italy is not in the same situation as those two countries [France and Spain], and does not have a single government, monarchical or republican, is exclusively the Church, which, having possessed and savored temporal power, does not, however, have sufficient strength, nor sufficient courage to take possession of the rest of the country, becoming sovereign over it (*Discorsi*, I, 12, p. 62).

The Church does not have the strength to unify Italy, but it does have the strength to keep it divided: "The Church has incessantly promoted division in this ill-fated country - and still does" (IDEM, *ibidem*).

The **second** reason is that the Roman Church is deeply corrupt and spreads corruption in society. Machiavelli blames the Church and its priests for the moral crisis in Italy; what is more, the secretary says that it's the Roman court's fault that Italians live without religion and morality. He therefore blames the Catholic Church for Italy's moral ruin.

Since there are those who claim that Italy's happiness depends on the Church, I am going to give several reasons against the Church, including two extremely powerful ones, against which, I think, there is no possible objection. The first is that the bad examples of the Roman court have extinguished devotion and religion in this country, which has led to many inconveniences and disturbances. And since everywhere where religion reigns the prevalence of good is believed, for the same reason one must suppose the presence of evil in places where it has disappeared (*Discorsi*, I, 12, p. 62).

In the first chapter of Book III of the *Discorsi*, the author notes that no institution is immune to the corruption of time and that all, in order to survive, need to renew themselves:

The best constituted entities, such as republics and religions, whose existence lasts the longest, are those whose institutions allow them to renew themselves most frequently [...]. It is obvious that when such entities cannot renew themselves, they perish. The way forward for renewal is, as I said, to bring them back to their beginnings. In fact, there is a certain virtue in the principle of religions, republics and monarchies that allows them to regain their original impulse (*Discorsi*, III, 1, p. 302).

The same path must be followed by Christianity, returning to its original sources established by the "Divine Founder", and this was the work of the reformers:

Our [Catholic] religion, if it had not been brought back to its beginnings by St. Francis and St. Dominic, would be entirely extinct. Because they, with their poverty and example of the life of Christ, reawakened the Christian spirit in men, saving it when it was already expiring. And the new rules they instituted deserved such credit that the corruption of the prelates and religious leaders could not ruin it. By the poverty of their lives and the influence they exerted over the people with their confessions and preaching, they were able to persuade them that it is a sin to curse even what is evil and that it is a merit in God's eyes to live in obedience to their leaders; they were able to convince them that they should leave it to God to punish them for the faults they had committed. [...] it was this reform that regenerated religion (*Discorsi*, III, 1, p. 303).

The third and most profound reason is in contrast to the second, because Machiavelli, while praising the reformers, accuses the Christian religion of being an impotent religion, not fit for the exercise of civic virtues. For Machiavelli, the Christian religion has made men weak, exposing them to the audacity of the *scellerati* (criminals). The tyrant can do anything in the face of these Christians who are ready to suffer, to endure outrages and not take revenge. "In the hope of conquering paradise", Christianity, aiming for salvation, "ended up diminishing worldly values and honors" (*Discorsi*, II, 2, p. 199).

To this "weak" religion, Machiavelli contrasts the religion of the Old Testament, in the figure of Moses, one of its great heroes. Through his virtues and faithfulness, Moses won God's friendship. He was successful in everything he did: "The Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to a friend" (*Exodus*, 33, 11).

In Chapter VI of *The Prince*, Machiavelli declares Moses one of the greatest (or the greatest) among princes; and in Chapter XXVI, he invokes the example of the prophet of the Hebrews: "It took the children of Israel becoming slaves in Egypt for Moses to demonstrate his power" (*The Prince*, XXVI, p. 124), concluding with the famous appeal in defense of the great cause of Italian unity.

Unlike Moses, the Christian religion seems to have:

(...) *effeminized the world and disarmed heaven*^[10], and these transformations originate in the cowardice of those who have interpreted the Christian religion according to their weakness and not according to true virtue; if one took into account that faith allows for greatness and the defense of the fatherland, one would see that it is compatible with good religion to love and honor the fatherland, and we would prepare ourselves to defend it (*Discorsi*, II, 2, p. 199-200).

According to Machiavelli, Moses practiced well-worn cruelty when he came down from Mount Sinai carrying the tablets of the Ten Commandments and found the people worshipping the golden calf and ordered the slaughter of more than 23.000 people (*Exodus*, 32, 25-29). Machiavelli comments: "If we read the Bible, interpreting it as it should, we will see that Moses, in order to be able to affirm the laws and institutions, was obliged to kill many individuals who, moved by envy, opposed his designs" (*Discorsi*, III, 30, p. 390)^[11].

But the main "model" for Machiavelli is the Roman religion. He tries to demonstrate how decisive religion was for the Roman Republic, as the most powerful agent in society, by extolling the wisdom of Numa Pompilius, the second King of Rome and successor to Romulus, the founder of the city, who knew how to make beneficial use of religion. King Numa used religion to maintain society and to found that political

community: "No other republic has ever shown greater respect for the gods, which facilitated all the undertakings of the Senate and the great men who gave birth to the State" (*Discorsi*, I, 12, p. 58).

When we examine the spirit of Roman history, we must recognize that religion served to command the armies, bring concord to the people, ensure the safety of the just and make the wicked blush for their infamies. So, if it had to be said to whom Rome owed greater obligations, Romulus, or Numa, I think the latter would have the preference. In States where religion is all-powerful, the military spirit can easily be introduced. [...] In fact, no legislator has ever granted his people laws of an extraordinary nature without appealing to divinity, because without this they would not be accepted (*Discorsi*, I, 12, p. 58).

The secretary recognizes the greatness of the work of Romulus - the founder of Rome - but says that the people owe even more to Numa, because he consolidated Rome through religion and by this means established civil and military order: "He claimed to meet a nymph from whom he would receive advice to be passed on to the people" (*Discorsi*, I, 11, p. 58); in this way, he convinced the people and carried out his intentions. There was a need for simulation and Numa knew how to do it well, thus achieving success.

As admirers of Numa's virtues and wisdom, the Roman people committed themselves to obeying the institutions he formulated. All things considered, I conclude that the religion established by Numa in Rome was one of the main causes of the happiness of that noble city, because it introduced into its midst a useful order, which in turn led it to a happy destiny; from this came the success that crowned all its undertakings (*Discorsi*, I, 11, p. 58).

The superiority of the Roman religion can also be seen in the glorification of the active life to the detriment of the contemplative life: "Ancient religions only attributed divine honors to mortals touched by worldly glory, such as famous captains or heads of State". (*Discorsi*, II, 2, p. 199). A superiority that served the success of its imperial expansion: "When one examines the spirit of Rome's history, one must recognize that religion served to command the armies, to bring concord to the people, to watch over the safety of the just and to make the wicked blush for their infamies" (*Discorsi*, I, 11, p. 58).

The secretary declares the fundamental importance of religion in the world of politics, praises those who knew how to make good use of it, and shows that the religion of the ancient Romans is the one that fits the needs of the State because it makes men strong and ready to defend their homeland:

When you want an army to be victorious, you must inspire it with such confidence that the soldiers are convinced that nothing can stop them from defeating the enemy [...]. The Romans used religion to inspire their armies; through auspices and omens they proceeded to appoint consuls, summon troops and divide armies (*Discorsi*, III, 33, p. 399).

In chapter 2 of book II, Machiavelli takes up the difference between the Roman and Christian religions with even stronger tones:

Our religion, on the other hand, sanctifies only the humble, men inclined to contemplation, not to active life. For it, the supreme good is humility, contempt for the things of the world. The pagans, on the other hand, attached the utmost importance to

greatness of soul, to vigor of body, to everything, in short, that contributed to making men robust and courageous. [...] This new morality has made men weaker, handing the world over to the audacity of the criminals. They know that they can exercise tyranny without fear, seeing men ready to suffer every outrage without revenge, in the hope of conquering paradise (IDEM, II, 2, p. 199).

But there is a phrase of Machiavelli's, as always incisive, which gives the meaning of all his thinking on the subject and foreshadows the secularization of religion in modern times: "I love my country more than my soul" (MACHIARELLI - CAPATA, 2011, p. 977)^[12].

Machiavelli's position is quite complex^[13]: religion is clearly the *instrumentum regni* par excellence, but it is also, or should be, a powerful instrument for moralizing people, through the fear rather than the love of God: everything depends on, and is in function of, the ultimate goal of aggrandizing the State.

Despite the differences, there is a similarity between Machiavelli's position and that of Rousseau and the authors who seek a civil religion capable of strengthening civic virtues: except that this religion is closer to Monarchy (or Tyranny), in *The Prince*, and to the democratic Republic in the *Discorsi*. These are the two faces of Machiavelli which, despite all contemporary efforts to describe a "republican Machiavelli", remain the two faces of Janus (BIGNOTTO, 1991).

3. Religion and politics *ex parte populi*.

"My kingdom is not of this world"

Gv, 18, 36

"Behold, the kingdom of God is among you"

Lc 17:2021

The millennia-old history of very close relations between religion and politics, legitimizing each other, is not the only one: there have been alternatives. To use an expression much loved by Bobbio, there has been a vision "*ex parte principis*" and another "*ex parte populi*". Religion has predominantly been used as an instrument of power, whether religious or political: in ancient times, power was hierarchical in the literal sense of the term (sacred power) and theocratic. Christianity introduced a distinction and a radical critique of this power, but it was gradually assimilated by power and became one of the great powers of the world.

But the history of Christianity and other religions shows that religion has also been critical of power and of the mixture of religion and politics. Many examples could be given, but I'll limit myself to a few observations about Christianity. If we make a "political" reading of the Gospels, we will find some precious indications about the relationship between religion and politics. Jesus Christ's position on politics is complex. Jesus viewed the world of politics with suspicion, as if it were a dangerous minefield that was best avoided, as is clear from the few times Jesus deal with politics. He sends a message to Herod calling him "that fox" (Lc 13:32), tries to separate (to protect him) the religious space from the political: "For give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (Mt 22:21-23), and acknowledges before Pilate that: "My kingdom is not of this world" (Gv, 18, 36). From this comes his rejection of being considered a "revolutionary" political leader (although the word didn't exist at the time), as some of

the more radical Jewish groups wanted (and as perhaps some of his disciples hoped), who were urging him to rebel against the Roman Empire.

The ongoing conflict between Rome and the Hebrews led, a few decades after Christ's death, to the terrible Roman destruction of Jerusalem by the armies of Titus in 70 AD and the dispersion (*diaspora*) of the Hebrew people. This was one of the examples in which the polytheistic Roman religion was not tolerant of the religion of another people, in this case Jewish monotheism, which did not accept polytheism and the divinization of Roman imperial power.

If Christ should have followed this path, his message would probably have disappeared, as several Jewish sects of that time did. But we can't reduce Jesus' attitude to simple realism or political prudence. Jesus understood that the roots of the evil and violence that dominated politics were much deeper and that only an ethical-religious message could eliminate them from people's hearts. To do this, however, he needed a radical reform of religion itself, to prevent it from taking on the same logics of power and force as politics.

But if this is true, if Jesus' message remains fundamentally ethical-religious, it is also true that the Gospel is not indifferent to the world of politics and does not renounce intervening in it. Paradoxically, but not so much, Christ was condemned to death by the alliance between political and religious power, to which he was refractory, because his message and his image were perceived as politically dangerous for both. The Gospel provides some keys to reading the political world in the light of the religious message. One of the most radical and significant passages for our theme reads:

You know that the governors of nations have power over them, and the great have authority over them. It must not be like this among you: whoever of you wants to be great must become your servant (*minister/diakonos*); and whoever of you wants to be first must become your servant (*servus/doulos*)" (Mt 20:25-27).

As for you, never let yourselves be called "rabbi", because only one is your Master, and you are all brothers. On earth, don't call anyone Father, for only one is your Father, the one in heaven. Don't let others call you leader, for only one is your Leader: Christ. On the contrary, the greatest of you must be the one who serves (*minister/diakonos*) you. He who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted (Mt 23:8-12).

Here we have three very strong (im)political ideas:

- a) an egalitarian conception of human relations in the name of God's greatness: only God is father, master, doctor; in the face of God's immense and immeasurable greatness, the diversities between men become insignificant;
- b) a distrust of constituted power, whether political or religious, when it is used to dominate, oppress and exploit others;
- c) a recovery of politics when it is exercised not as domination, but as service (*ministerium/diakonia*).

These are orientations that, if they don't provide the elements for a political theology ^[14], indicate the possibility of exercising politics in an ethical key, as service to others that overcomes (or minimizes) the abyss that Weber had placed between an ethic of responsibility (*Verantwortungsetisch*) incompatible with an ethic of conviction (*Gesinnungsetisch*) (WEBER, 2004) ^[15].

This was the way in which the first Christian communities tried to break the alliance between religious and political power, in the centuries before the Edict of

Constantine, but also afterwards, when there were always (heretical or not) renewal movements that denounced the Church's betrayal of the founder's teachings and the transformation of Christianity into a new and powerful political power equal to or worse than the power that condemned its founder to death.

From this perspective, the concept of fraternity and the love of God (rather than fear), of human dignity, of the common good, of solidarity, are the key concepts for a Christian understanding of politics, which are at the heart of the so-called Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004). A doctrine that Pope Francis renewed with the "Theology of the People", centered on the preferential option for the poor, overcoming social inequalities, the ecological issue in defense of a more harmonious relationship with nature, the transformation of structural injustices in society in a non-violent way, conversion as a change of heart, and the practice of mercy (ALVES, 2017) ^[16].

But the main difficulty of the Christian proposal lies precisely in the ethic of fraternity, which is an ethic but not a political one, i.e. it is a "realistically" more difficult value to realize in a political world dominated by individual or collective interests, power relations, conflicts, violence in all its forms and manifestations. It is a question of taking a much bigger step, of making a much more demanding choice that must face various objections. In fact, most modern political doctrines find it difficult to accept and recognize fraternity as a political principle. Fraternity is therefore "the forgotten principle" among the triad of the French Revolution (BAGGIO, 2008, 2009; TOSI, 2014).

An Illuminist like Kant would see fraternity as a "paternalistic" concept, which hurts the principle of the autonomy of the subject who has reached his greatest age (KANT, 1990). A Marxist would define fraternity as a concept that camouflages and hides the irreducible divisions between the antagonistic classes; it would therefore be, at best, an illusion (as religion was for Marx), and at worst a deception to amortize social conflicts (MARX - ENGELS, 1998).

If for Marx fraternity is accepted, albeit with reservations and projected onto a utopian horizon of revolutionary transformation of society, for a conservative political realist like Schmitt there is absolutely no place for a universal fraternity, but only for a type of fraternity that maintains the irreducible differences between "us" and the "others", because without this distinction the "category of the political" *par excellence* would fall to the ground, i.e. the reality of friend/enemy relations that is connatural to the political (SCHMITT, 1972, p. 139).

These difficulties of a politics of fraternity are the subject of the Christian political proposal of Latin American Liberation Theology, which was born after the Second Vatican Council and which maintains continuity with the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, but also introduces elements of rupture. The Latin American Liberation Theology took up the challenge of preaching a Christian religion that was neither apolitical nor against politics, but that developed a different way of doing politics, inspired by the principles of Christianity as fraternal service to others, but also as a fight against structural social injustices in society.

The elements of rupture with respect to tradition are, among others:

i) the radical critique of the capitalist system, considered to be a profoundly and irremediably unjust system, based on the exploitation of man over man (and man over nature) and which needs to be radically transformed; a position in contrast to the reformist and class conciliation policy of the Church's traditional doctrine; ii) the option for some kind of socialism (or even communism) as an alternative for building a new society; contrary to the Church's official position of not adhering to any political doctrine (although it does admit the creation of "Christian-inspired" parties);

iii) the conception of sin not only as individual guilt, according to tradition, but as "structures of sin" that can only be overcome through political transformation; iv) the justification of some kind of violence to transform this unjust system, as opposed to the traditional politics of love and charity, including love towards one's enemies (perhaps the most "anti-political" commandment of Jesus Christ); v) the identification of the "people of God", understood as the poor, the oppressed, the excluded, the marginalized, as the main subject of a political revolution, understanding "revolution" not only as a change in hearts, an ethical change, as the Church's tradition affirms, but also and above all as a radical political change; vi) for this reason, the "option for the poor", expressed by the official documents of the Second Vatican Council and by the Latin American Bishops' Conferences of Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979), in order to be coherent, cannot be limited to an action of "charity", but must be engaged in an action of broader political transformation^[17].

In this regard, Liberation Theory can be considered an integral part of the vast world of Marxism, because it assumes its philosophy not only as a tool of analysis, but also as a worldview; obviously without accepting its militant atheism; on the contrary, showing that religion is not only the "opium of the people", (as indeed it was and continues to be in many cases), but can be an instrument of liberation and overcoming capitalism (SEMERARO, 2017)^[18].

This position is also based on an ethical-political reading of the Bible, from the interpretation of the Exodus as a path that leads from slavery (of capitalism) to the promised land (of socialism), to the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount, read not only as a set of ethical principles with which nations are not governed (as Max Weber used to say), but as promises from Christ: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be filled" (Mt 5:3-12).

From this theological-political reading of the Bible, liberation theology operates in a double register. On the one hand, it works towards a "**politicization of religion**", that is, it radicalizes the "political" reading of the Gospel, making Jesus not only a religious and moral leader, but also a political one. While it is true that Christ said that his Kingdom was not of this world, it is also true that he said that the "Kingdom of God is in your midst" (Lc 17:20-25). Therefore, we don't have to wait for it to be realized in another world, but we can, indeed we must, begin to realize it here and now, even knowing that we will never be able to realize it completely. Utopia thus becomes a necessary political category that points to the horizon of transformation. This reading promotes a secularization of religion and justifies its political action in the *saeculum*.

The other side of the coin is a "**theologization of politics**". The religious horizon, even if secularized, is maintained, and it is in the name of God and the "people of God" that history is read, as a path of liberation from this "vale of tears" to the "promised land". It is not the God of the Old Testament, the *Dominus Deus Sabaoth* (Lord God of Hosts), but the God of the New Testament, the God of love, who expresses himself politically in fraternity, in solidarity, in the fight against the structural injustices of all times and, in our case, of the capitalist system. There is therefore a political-religious messianism which is a mixture of religion and politics, this time not *ex parte principis*, but *ex parte populi*.

Liberation theology openly or implicitly seeks to overcome the gaps left by Christ's message on politics, taking up the practice of the first disciples: as Christians live in the world, they must take a stand in the face of the politics of this world, it is not possible to run away from it, not least because Christ ended up being killed by the political and religious powers of this world. For this reason, theology accepts Christ's proposal of a more fraternal, more ethical politics from a perspective not of domination, but of

service; but it recognizes that this is not enough: it is necessary to confront and overcome the structures of sin that are at the root of the unjust system in which people live.

If, as we have seen in this brief essay, a total separation between religion and politics is neither possible nor desirable, if politics cannot exist without the "political myth" and the "sacred" appeal of some political principles, if religion is not merely a private phenomenon, but a collective one, then we welcome this religious vision of politics which has as its central point giving a voice to marginalized, oppressed, exploited people, groups and classes, victims of violence; which preaches tolerance and respect for diversity; which does not promote a fundamentalist reading of the Bible; which maintains a dialog with modern rationality: in short, a religion in tune with the values of democracy. On the other hand, the "sacralization of politics" carries the dangers of the authoritarian successes that every speech in the name of an Absolute can bring.

3. Politics as religion.

There is a third way of looking at the relationship between religion and politics, namely politics as religion, which is analyzed in Emilio Gentile's book *Le religioni della politica* (2007). With the advent of modernity, something new also happened in the relationship between religion and politics. There are two phenomena that are of interest to our topic: the secularization of religion and the secularization of the State, through the separation of State and Church.

The spirit of the contemporary age, as Hegel would say, is no longer that of Antiquity, the Middle Ages or early Modernity. Comte intuited and described this phenomenon with the famous law of the three stages: the religious, the metaphysical and the scientific; considering the stages not as three chronologically distinct moments, but as three dimensions of human sociability that continue to coexist, but in different ways according to the eras. Our era is characterized precisely by the loss of the hegemony of religious and metaphysical thought and the emergence of the hegemony of technical-scientific thought.

What interests us in this complex process is that, with secularization, religion loses its monopoly on the management of the "sacred". The crisis or decline in the influence of religion on secularized societies means that it no longer has the influence on the collective imagination that was so powerful in the days of Machiavelli. It doesn't mean that the religious phenomenon is disappearing, but that it must compete with others that are just as powerful, if not more so: in the epistemological field with the affirmation of the scientific revolution, in the religious field with the affirmation of agnosticism and atheism (which were previously practically non-existent or hidden) and in the political field with the competition of "politics as religion".

The other phenomenon associated with secularization is the separation of State and church, which follows the wars of religion and the affirmation of the principle of religious tolerance. States are no longer confessional, but secular: "Free Church in a free State", was the motto of contemporary political liberalism launched by the Count of Cavour, one of the creators of Italian unity.

But here something unexpected appears: the State realizes that it cannot do without religious symbols, that a dangerous *vacuum* has been created for political legitimacy with the masses who increasingly burst onto the political scene throughout the 19th and 20th centuries through universal suffrage, becoming a definitive part of the political game in a democratic or totalitarian way.

What to do? The State thus creates a "new State religion", no longer as it used to do by assuming an official religion, but by creating a "religion of its own, a secular religion". This phenomenon is new in history because it is not a question of two separate

instances that are related, as in the case of Christianity or the identity between religion and politics before Christianity, but of the emergence of new political ideologies that take on for themselves the characteristics that were previously the monopoly of religions.

From this perspective, following Emilio Gentile's distinction, we have two forms of religion: "civil religion" and "political religion", the former typical of democracies and the latter of totalitarianisms.

3.1 Civil religion: religion and democracy according to Rousseau.

*The dogmas of civil religion must be simple,
few in number, precisely Stated,
without explanation or comment.*

J. J. Rousseau

One of the first to dedicate an in-depth study to the question of civil religion in various writings is J. J. Rousseau: we will analyze the synthesis he makes in Book IV, Chapter VIII of *The Social Contract* (1999), in a detailed exposition on "civil religion" that begins with a historical reconstruction of theocracies:

Men at first had no kings but the gods, and no government but theocratic. [...] A long change in feelings and ideas was necessary in order to be able to accept one's fellow man as lord and delude oneself into believing that this was a good thing. By placing God at the head of every political society, there were as many gods as there were peoples. Two peoples who were strangers to each other, and almost always enemies, could not for a long time recognize a common lord; two armies engaged in combat could not obey the same leader. Thus, from national divisions came polytheism, and from polytheism came theological and civil intolerance, which of course is the same, as I will say later (ROUSSEAU, 1999, p. 137-138).

In his usual original way, Rousseau accuses polytheism and not monotheism of being intolerant. Rousseau also describes, briefly but effectively, the regime that succeeded the ancient theocracies, with the alliance between the Christian religion and political power, criticizing this alliance because: "Everywhere where the clergy constitutes a body, it is lord and legislator within the homeland, there are therefore two powers, two sovereigns, in England and Russia, as elsewhere" (ROUSSEAU, 1999, p. 62).

To avoid this dualism of powers, which he considers dangerous for the unity of the Republic, Rousseau refers approvingly to Hobbes' proposal:

The philosopher Hobbes is, of all Christian authors, the only one who saw perfectly the evil and the remedy and dared to propose the joining of the two heads of the eagle, creating political unity, without which the State and the government will never be well constituted (ROUSSEAU, 1999, p. 140).

Rousseau, however, disagrees with Hobbes, because the Anglican philosopher in the end proposes a traditional religion, the Christian religion, as the official religion of the State, which Rousseau does not consider useful for public life. He praises Christianity, which he considers to be the best religion: "Through this sacred, sublime, true religion, men, children of the same God, recognize each other as brothers, and the society that

unites them is not dissolved, not even in death" (ROUSSEAU, 1999, p. 141). However, Christianity is not a religion that can be useful for politics, as Machiavelli had already observed, because:

Christianity is an entirely spiritual religion, concerned only with the things of heaven. The Christian's homeland is not of this world. It is true that he does his duty, but he does it with a profound indifference to the success or otherwise of his endeavors. Since he has nothing to reproach him for, he cares little whether things go well or badly down here. If the State flourishes, the Christian hardly dares to enjoy public happiness; he is afraid to be proud of the glory his country enjoys; if the State perishes, he blesses the hand of God that falls on the people (ROUSSEAU, 1999, p. 142).

Rousseau then proposes a civil religion: "A purely civil profession of faith whose articles it is up to the sovereign to establish, not precisely as dogmas of religion, but as feelings of sociability, without which it is impossible to be a good citizen or a faithful subject" (ROUSSEAU, 1999, p. 142). He himself indicates the positive dogmas of this civil religion.

The dogmas of civil religion must be simple, few in number, precisely enunciated, without explanation or comment. The existence of a powerful, intelligent, beneficent, foresighted and provident Divinity, the life to come, the happiness of the just, the punishment of the wicked, the sanctity of the social contract and the laws: these are the positive dogmas (ROUSSEAU, 1999, p. 142).

The only negative dogma would be the exclusion of intolerant religions and cults: "As for the negative dogmas, I reduce them to a single one: it is intolerance, implicit in the cults we exclude" (ROUSSEAU, 1999, p. 144). In such cases, it is up to the Sovereign to intervene and banish the intolerant:

Although he cannot force anyone to believe, he [the sovereign] can banish from the State anyone who does not believe in them; he can banish him, not as impious, but as unsociable, as incapable of sincerely loving the laws, justice, and of immolating life and duty to necessity. And if anyone, after having publicly recognized these same dogmas, conducts himself as if he did not accept them, let him be punished with death, for he has committed the greatest of crimes: he has lied before the laws (ROUSSEAU, 1999, p. 143-44).

He concludes that religious tolerance has its well-defined and rigid limits:

Now that there is no longer, nor can there be, an exclusive national religion, we must tolerate all those that show themselves to be tolerant of others, provided that their dogmas have nothing contrary to the duties of citizens. However, whoever dares to say: *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the Church there is no salvation), must be banished from the State, unless the State is not the Church, and the prince is not the pontiff. Such a dogma can only be useful under a theocratic government; under any other, it is pernicious (ROUSSEAU, 1999, p. 145).

Emilio Gentile comments that these ideas permeated the American revolution and especially the French revolution, which tried to put into practice a new civil religion that would educate the people and create a new man: "The first religions of politics, therefore, were born to consecrate the legitimacy of democracies and to subordinate private interest

to the common good" (GENTILE, 2007, p. 31). Gentile dedicates a detailed analysis to the two revolutions, the American and the French, showing how the "sacralization of politics" took place differently.

After the revolution, the sacralization of politics in France followed the opposite path to that in America, and was much more uncertain, troubled and precarious in its results, developing in antagonism to traditional religion. This was the origin of a long and harsh conflict between the Catholic religion and the various civil religions that, during the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, appeared in France on the back of the revolutionary tradition (GENTILE, 2007, p. 43).

In the United States, on the other hand, the sacralization of politics was equally strong and powerful, but it took place without coming into conflict with traditional religions, especially the Puritan Protestant one; in fact, "receiving from them consensus and collaboration in the construction of a system of belief, myths, values and symbols relating to the American nation, the vast majority of which were taken in their essential structure from the Old and New Testaments". This made Tocqueville say that the spirit of religion and the spirit of liberty were incorporated into each other" (GENTILE, 2007, p. 32).

3.2 Religion and totalitarianism: political religion

Another phenomenon to which Gentile devotes his attention is what he calls "political religion", which is associated with totalitarian experiences, especially Nazism, Fascism and Soviet Communism, which promote a radicalization of the elements already present in "civic religion" through a radical *sacralization of politics*. With the institution of its own system of beliefs, myths, dogmas and commandments that involve the whole of individual and collective existence, through the imposition of an apparatus of rites and festivals, to permanently transform the collectivity into a "*liturgical mass of political worship*" (GENTILE, 2007, p. 73).

This is a direct challenge to traditional religions, in particular Christianity, in the name of the absolutization or divinization of the State, which assumes the ideologies of racism (Nazism), nationalism (Fascism) or the classless society (Communism) as its supreme value and "common good", and which develops in the heart of "learned Europe" between the two world wars ^[19].

Scholars attribute the proliferation of dictatorships in the interwar period to the masses' need for faith and myths, with the exaltation of the figure of the dictator as the "strong man", the "savior", the "one sent by Providence" and with the divinization of the State and the Nation as new forms of truth and certainty (GENTILE, 2007, p. 81).

Gentile presents totalitarianism as a new phenomenon in history and attributes to it characteristics like those that Arendt uses in her classic work on the *Origins of Totalitarianism* (without, however, quoting the philosopher), but he emphasizes the religious nature of the phenomenon much more, an aspect that Arendt had already highlighted, but which Gentile emphasizes much more.

He devotes most of his interesting book to a detailed analysis of the forms of totalitarianism and their similarities and differences, citing numerous scholars from different ideologies who analyze this worrying phenomenon.

Although he distinguishes between civic and political religions, this distinction is not always clear in the book, because both phenomena are placed under the label of the "sacralization of politics". At the end of the book, however, we find a distinction that seems more enlightening. While "political religion" is defined as a form of sacralization of politics of an "exclusive and integralist character", "civic religion" is defined as:

A form of sacralization of a collective political entity that does not identify with the ideology of a particular political movement, that affirms the separation between State and Church and, although it postulates the existence of a supernatural being conceived deistically, coexists with traditional religions without identifying with any particular religious confession, it places itself as a *common civic belief*, supra-partisan and supra-confessional, which recognizes a broad autonomy for the individual in relation to the sanctified collectivity and generally appeals to spontaneous consensus for the observance of the commandments of public ethics and collective liturgy (GENTILE, 2007, p. 209).

This distinction is fundamental, and I would say "qualitative", because the model of civic religion cannot be the one envisioned by Rousseau or the French revolutionaries. As Gentile States, in Rousseau there is a strong ambiguity between the "primacy of freedom as the essence of republican patriotism" and "the potential dogmatism inherent in the sacralization of the body politic and the fatherland in relation to the individual" (IDEM, p. 209). This ambiguity, however, is typical of his entire oeuvre full of paradoxes, and is linked to his monolithic conception of power (specular to that of Hobbes) expressed in the doctrine of the "general will" ^[20].

Gentile is right to warn about the phenomenon of the sacralization of politics in democratic regimes, for example in American republicanism, but we cannot confuse the sacralization of politics with education in republican and democratic values that invest in the sphere of shared public ethics, without which there could not be a *minimum* of political unity.

However, we cannot ignore, and this is the greatest lesson of Gentile's book, the threat to the democratic spirit that comes from integralisms, totalitarianisms, fundamentalisms, religious and political dogmatisms that seek to "authoritatively impose a public ethic on individual consciences!" A highly topical subject for contemporary Brazil.

4. Fundamentalism as an *instrumentum regni* in Brazil.

Until a few decades ago, Brazil was, for the most part, a Catholic country and was beginning to rehearse a process of relative tolerance and peaceful coexistence between religions, after, in the 1960s and 1970s, the Catholic Church, renewed by the Second Vatican Council, recognized its past faults and opened up to a more tolerant and fraternal relationship with all other religions (ecumenism) ^[21].

Brazil was, or seemed to be, an example of religious tolerance, or at least this was the feeling and image that the country offered to the eyes of the world. ^[22] Sectors of the Churches, especially the Catholic Church and the traditional Protestant Churches, inspired by Liberation Theology, preached and practiced a Christianity engaged with social problems, which played an important role in the transition from dictatorship to democracy and in the process of consolidating democracy. We could say that religion was beginning to act in harmony with the democratic spirit, with the construction of citizenship, while respecting the secularity of the State (ARNS, 1985).

Things changed rapidly with the advance of religious fundamentalism, which is a radical response to secularization, present in the vast majority of religions ^[23] and especially in monotheistic religions: there is Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Islamic fundamentalism (AMSTRONG, 2009). It is a phenomenon that was believed to have been overcome in Modernity with the adoption of tolerance, religious pluralism and freedom of thought; it is a phenomenon that challenges philosophy and science, preaching a return to their subordination to religion, as was the case before the separation of State and

Church.

Fundamentalism is a radical form of integralism, meaning that religion offers an integral explanation of the world, that it is enough on its own to solve all human questions: faith provides all the answers that human beings need, without the need to resort to reason; indeed, rationality is seen as a danger and a threat to faith that must be combated.

Let's take the fundamentalist reading of the Bible as an example. In the Holy Book we can find religious teachings, historical documents, mythical accounts, literary and poetic texts, legal and political documents, great ethical and moral teachings, and much more. All these literary genres are subordinated to a single purpose: to convey a religious message. And this influences believers as well as sceptics: the Bible is one of the great books of humanity that has created the symbolic, ethical and political foundations of the culture of Western peoples to this day, despite secularization.

The only thing we don't find in it is science: we can't demand scientific arguments from the Bible. This was the Catholic Church's mistake in relation to Galileo, who, as a Catholic, had already warned the Church about this misreading of the Bible. To treat the Bible as a scientific text is to do it a disservice. The Bible uses the science available at that time to convey its religious message, but this science has been definitively surpassed by modern and contemporary science. That's why it makes no sense, as fundamentalists do, to look for scientific explanations in the Bible, for example, about human evolution, because before Darwin there was no concept of evolution, about the creation of the world, about the creation and evolution of the universe, etc.

But fundamentalists don't just criticize philosophy and science, they are acting to intimidate and threaten those who don't accept their ideas, against philosophy professors, against the teaching of Darwinism, against those who declare themselves atheists or agnostics. ^[24]

I'm referring above all to North American-inspired neo-Pentecostal evangelical groups, but also to sectors of the Catholic Church and Protestants who adopt this logic. These are religious groups that have no qualms about preaching a "gospel of results", centered on economic success; about promising advantages and miracles in exchange for money; about using the pulpit as a political party platform; about fighting other churches, especially Afro-Brazilian churches, with words and actions; about allying themselves with economic and political groups that preach violence and the arming of the population, who spread a message of intolerance and hatred in the public space.

In short, a real use of religion as an instrument of power, which uses the mass media as great vehicles for persuasion and proselytizing. This growing movement is frightening and worrying it is a wave of fanaticism that promises nothing good and promotes an intolerant and regressive obscurantism against science, philosophy, freedom of thought and ideological plurality.

I believe that, despite secularization and the declaration of the end of religion, there is place in contemporary times for religion as a practice and as a reflection on the mystery of the world and of life, but without losing the dialogue with rationality. The danger of fundamentalism is precisely its closure in a self-referential and self-sufficient discourse, which turns religion into a sect, an expression of fanaticism, hatred and intolerance that generates symbolic and physical violence: words are also very dangerous weapons, and those spoken in the name of God even more so. This is why, before concluding, we need to address the issue of religion and democracy.

5. Religion and democracy: Jesus versus Pilate.

Jesus: He who is of the truth listens to my voice.

Pilate said to him: What is truth?

Gv. XVIII, 34

The central thesis that I have tried to work out in this text is that it is impossible, even in our ever more secularized societies, to make religion an "outdated" subject, or to consign religion to the private sphere, because it tends to expand and project itself into the public sphere, due to its nature as a collective phenomenon.

This poses problems for democratic coexistence. Democracy, according to Gustavo Zagrebelsky - one of Italy's most respected jurists, who was a member of the Constitutional Court - does not consider itself to be the bearer of an absolute truth: it is relativistic and not absolutistic (ZAGREBELSKY, 2007, p. 15), it is founded on individuals and not on the masses (IDEM, 2007, p. 18), it means discussing and reasoning with individuals and not with the masses (IDEM, 2007, p. 18), it means discussing and reasoning together (IDEM, 2007, p. 21), it means that particular identities cannot replace equal participation in social life, i.e. openness to those with different identities (IDEM, 2007, p. 26), democracy is the common way of life of beings in solidarity with each other and with others (IDEM, 2007, p. 34).

Because of these characteristics, it is very difficult and complex to reconcile democracy and religion and make different religions coexist in the same public space; because religion tends to be absolutist and not relativist; to be a collective and mass phenomenon, in which the individual feels immersed and protected; it is not used to discussion, but to obedience, to dogma; it cherishes its identity "against" those of other religions; it strengthens the bonds of identity among the faithful, but not outside them; and I would add, because religion is one of the most influential powers in this world that acts within it with a hierarchical logic that is based on obedience to the word of God and his representative on earth: what could be more powerful than this? ^[25]

Of course, there can and do be different ways of practicing religion, but these traits exist markedly in most religions, at least the monotheistic ones we know most about. In this respect, Zagrebelsky^[26] cites as a paradigmatic example the beautiful and dense dialogue between Jesus Christ and Pontius Pilate, transcribed by the four evangelists^[27], and commented on by Hans Kelsen as an example of the contrast between "relativism" and "absolutism" (KELSEN, 2000, p. 203-20). ^[28] Jesus is arrested and taken by the Jews to the house of the High Priest Caiphas, who summons the Council (*Sinedrium*) made up of the elders, the scribes and the priests, who condemn him to death for blasphemy because he claimed to be the Son of God. But since the Jews had no authority to sentence Jesus to death, they took him to the Praetorium to be tried by Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. It was there that the dialog and interrogation between Jesus and Pilate took place, the broader account of which is given to us by the evangelist John:^[29]

Pilate went back into the praetorium, called Jesus and asked him:

Pilate: are you the king of the Jews?

Jesus answered: do you say this yourself, or did others say it about me?

Pilate said: Am I a Jew? Your people and the high priests handed you over to me. What have you done?

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my Kingdom were of this world, my subjects would certainly have fought to prevent me from being handed over to the Jews. But my Kingdom is not of this world.

Pilate then said to him, "Are you therefore a king? Jesus answered, "You say so: I am king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to bear witness to the truth. He who is of the truth listens to my voice.

Pilate said to him, "What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again and came to the Jews and said to them, "I find no crime in him. But it is customary among you that at Passover I should release a prisoner to you. Do you then want me to release the king of the Jews to you? Then they all shouted again and said, "No, not him! But Barabbas!" (Barabbas was a criminal).

Pilate then had Jesus scourged and presented to the people: "Pilate said to the Jews, 'Here is your King! They shouted, 'To death! To death! Crucify him!'" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar,' and Pilate handed him over to be crucified" (*John*, XVIII, 33-40 - XIX 1-16).

According to Kelsen, Pilate acted according to a proceduralist conception of democracy, trying to find a way to save Jesus Christ, whom he considered innocent, without disrespecting the "rules of the game". Faced with an impasse, he resorted to a last "democratic" resort, a popular plebiscite^[30] which gave the final verdict: *crucifixion*^[31]. What interests Kelsen is that the episode became the "tragic symbol of the antagonism between absolutism and relativism. Pilate, because he was a relativist skeptic, and did not know what the truth was, the absolute truth in which this man believed, opted - in a very coherent way - for a democratic procedure, submitting the decision of the case to the popular vote" (KELSEN, 2000, p. 203).

In this tragic dialogue, Jesus represents, for Kelsen, the religious fanaticism that leads to intolerance: in this case the "fanatic" is the victim, but the roles are reversed when the victim becomes the executioner. This is what happened with the Catholic Church: projecting this episode into historical time, the followers of an innocent man unjustly condemned to death had no qualms about executing thousands of other innocent people to death, based on the absolute conviction that they possessed the truth^[32].

On the other hand, claiming to possess the truth does not necessarily mean being absolutist and intolerant of other truths. Pilate didn't know what the truth was, but he knew that Christ was innocent and sacrificed him in the name of the interests of State reason and the people (the *plebs*), manipulated by demagogues, condemned an innocent man to death: "relativist" democracy as the will of the majority took precedence over truth. And so, neither relativism nor absolutism saved the life of an innocent man.

(In)conclusion.

What we have tried to do in this brief essay is to raise a discussion and draw up a map or roadmap of possibilities and questions, all of which are open and problematic. The assumption of the whole discourse is that, despite the separation of State and church, the secularization and laicization of contemporary societies, religion continues to play a political role and relevance; it is not limited to the private space, since it is an eminently collective phenomenon.

Politics, including democratic politics, is not a purely rational activity, it needs myths, feelings, collective identifications, shared values, identities, security and the management of fear, and this is what religions offer and what democracy is not always able to provide.

Attempts to replace traditional religion, such as a "civil religion" along the lines of Rousseau, have been largely unsuccessful and have failed to compete with traditional religions, or when they have, they have fallen into authoritarianism or totalitarianism, as Emilio Gentile's book shows, in relation to politics as religion, or the "sacralization of politics". So how could religion play this political role?

We present several possibilities, which are not actually alternatives, but coexist in the same space: religion is a powerful instrument of power (and will continue to be so) as well as of criticism of power, and the two positions can coexist in the same religious space: the distinction between a religion *ex parte principis* and *ex parte populi* is relative. What is essential in this relationship are the limits of religion's political activity, which are defined in a democratic and secular State of law: religion needs to exercise its public activity within these constitutionally defined limits. The danger of fundamentalism is precisely the lack of respect for these limits and the preaching of a religion that threatens human rights and the rule of law; a real danger because democracy has an Achilles' heel, it can be "democratically" overthrown by the anti-democratic, intolerant people that Rousseau spoke of, and it is not easy to get out of this dilemma.

Faced with the complexity and problematic nature of the world, democracy has the great challenge of managing conflicts and diversity, including religious diversity, without repressing them, but also without allowing itself to be destroyed by them. "Kelsenian" relativism cannot reach the foundations and presuppositions of its ethical-political and legal foundations, or else it will destroy them. For this reason, democracy must take a firm stance against dogmatism, fanaticism, intolerance and the violence of fundamentalist religions: as Rousseau said, we cannot be tolerant of the intolerant, tolerance has its limits (CARDOSO, 2003).

There are no easy solutions to this extremely complex problem, but one "lesson" seems clear. We are no longer interested in the warlike and bellicose religion defended by Machiavelli in the context of the Renaissance principalities: proclaiming holy war in the name of God (*Got mit uns!*) should be felt by all religions as a blasphemy that contradicts their own religious principles.

The *Declaration for a World Ethic*, proclaimed by the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago in 1993 and inspired by the work of some ecumenical theologians, such as Hans Küng, whose central thesis is that "there will be no peace in the world if there is no peace between religions". Religions, which have been and continue to be the cause of war and conflict, can and must contribute to the process of peacemaking and understanding between peoples (KÜNG, 1992, 1999).

We hope that this is the spirit that prevails in Brazil so that the mistakes of the past are not repeated and we can maintain and strengthen the peaceful coexistence between religions, which Brazil, *thank God*, has had in a short period of its recent history and we hope it can still have in the present and in the future, *God willing!*

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[2] This expression is historically attributed to Cosimo de Medici and commented on in opposite ways by Machiavelli and Savonarola. Machiavelli, in the *Istorie fiorentine* (VII. 6), quotes it among Cosimo's memorable words: "... that States are not maintained with the *paternostri* in their hands; words that offered a pretext to his enemies to slander him, as if he were someone who loved himself more than the fatherland, and this world more than the other" (MACHIAVELLI - CAPATA, 2011, p. 643. In a famous letter to his friend Francesco Vettori, Machiavelli attributes the same phrase to himself: "I love my country more than my soul" (MACHIAVELLI - CAPATA, 2011, p. 977). Savonarola, on the other hand, writes: "For the States of true Christians are governed by prayer and by doing good, and it is not true what the mad and the wicked say that the State is not maintained by the *paternostri*. This is the motto of tyrants and not of true

princes" (*Trattato circa el reggimento e governo della città di Firenze*, ed. by Luigi Firpo, Rome: Belardetti, 1965, p. 134).

[3] Bobbio writes about this, continuing the previous quote: "In a pre-Christian State, where there is no institutionalized morality, the opposition is less evident. This does not mean that Greek thought ignored it: it is enough to think of the opposition between the unwritten laws, to which Antigone refers, and the laws of the tyrant. [...] The problem of the relationship between morality and politics, where there are more morals with which political action can be confronted, no longer has any precise meaning" (BOBBIO, 2000, p. 182).

[4] *Acts of the Apostles*, 17, 16-34: "Citizens of Athens! I see that in every respect you are the most religious of men. For as I was going through your city and looking at your sacred monuments, I even found an altar with the inscription 'To the unknown God' (*agnostô Theô*). Well then, what you worship without knowing it, this I have come to announce to you". Portuguese translation of the Jerusalem Bible, compared with: NOVUM TESTAMENTUM. Graece et latine. Edidit Augustinus Merk S. J. Romae: Sumptibus Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 1951.

[5] FEUERBACH, 2007, p. 44: "The awareness of God is man's awareness of himself, the knowledge of God is man's knowledge of himself. Through God you know man and vice versa through man you know God, both are the same thing."

[6] FEUERBACH, 2007, p. 61: "Religion is man's split with himself: he establishes God as a being opposed to him. God is not what man is; man is not what God is. God is the infinite being, man is the finite; God is perfect, man imperfect; God is eternal, man transitory; God is plenipotent, man impotent; God is holy, man is sinful. God and man are extremes: God is uniquely positive, the core of all reality, man is uniquely negative, the core of all nullities."

[7] I would like to thank Carlos Nunes Guimarães, a scholar of Machiavelli's work, for his suggestions, which were very useful in writing this part of the essay.

[8] MAQUIAVEL, 2001, p. 24-26: "It follows that all armed prophets win, while the unarmed are ruined. [...] In our times, this is what happened to friar Girolamo Savonarola, who ruined his new order the moment the crowd began to disbelieve in it, because he had no means either to keep those who had believed firm or to make the unbelievers believe."

[9] We will use the Brazilian translation (MAQUIAVEL, 2001), comparing it with the Italian original (MACHIARELLI, 2011, edition organized by Alessandro CAPATA) and modifying it where necessary.

[10] The Brazilian translation "men have lost their fiber, and the heavens no longer impose war" may be "politically correct", but it doesn't yield the effectiveness of Machiavelli's terms at all!

[11] It's worth remembering that among the Ten Commandments was "Thou shalt not kill".

[12] Letter to Francesco Vettori on April 16, 1527.

[13] José Luiz Ames, in concluding his essay on *Religion and Politics in Machiavelli*, points out two aspects that reinforce the idea of a secularization of religion for political purposes: "Machiavelli draws from this historical origin of religions two consequences that show his understanding of the purpose of religion. Firstly, that the opposition between revealed (Christian) and unrevealed (pagan) religion is vain. Secondly, that the idea of a divine Providence regulating worldly things is absurd. The first consequence allows him to support the political function of religion: because it is a human creation and not a divine one, religion must be judged by its effectiveness in fulfilling worldly ends, particularly that of developing "love of country" (*Discorsi II*, 2). The second consequence allows him to highlight his thesis of human determination (although not in an absolute way) of historical events: against fatalistic interpretations, which want to attribute calamities and adversities in general to *fortune* or God, Machiavelli affirms the decisive role of *virtù*, denouncing faith in a regulating Providence as flight, sloppiness and political incapacity" (AMES, 2006).

[It was the Apostle Paul who first elaborated a theology of politics and history, and for this reason he is considered the true founder of Christianity as an institution, as a Church. This essay will not deal with "political theology" as defined by Carl Schmitt, which is a different concept. See: SCHMITT, 2006]

[15] Weber's maxim is similar to that of Cosimo de Medici, which we quoted above. For Weber, the world would be worse off without the great religious prophets with their messages of an ethic of conviction, of which the Gospel of Jesus is perhaps the highest expression; but nations cannot be governed with the absolute ethics of *the Sermon on the Mount* (Mt 5:1-48). Politics, on the other hand, inevitably has to do with the force and legitimate violence of the State, which must be guided by an ethic of responsibility that measures the foreseeable consequences of its actions. This is the dilemma of the relationship between ethics and politics which, according to Weber, has not found and can never find a satisfactory solution in theory and practice (WEBER, 2004, p. 111-124).

[16] Pope Francis became acquainted with the "Theology of the People" in Argentina, which emerged at the same time as Liberation Theology (TL). The seminar held in 1973 at the Institute of Theology in Petrópolis was attended, among other theologians, by Peruvian Gustavo Gutierrez and Argentinian Lucio Gera, the main theologian of the so-called "Theology of the People". This theology differed from the TL in that it didn't use the Marxist method to analyze reality, favoring socio-cultural rather than socio-structural analysis. In addition, it values popular piety as a form of enculturation of the Christian faith, the people as a historical-cultural subject and the option for the poor (ALVES, 2017, p. 3). Not adhering to Marxism is the main difference between People's Theology and Liberation Theology.

[17] Dom Helder Câmara's words became famous: "When I help the poor and needy, they call me a saint; when I look for the causes of poverty and injustice, they call me a communist! ".

[18] The names of Gustavo Gutierrez (1998) in Peru, Leonardo Boff (1995), Frei Betto (1985), Josph Comblin in Brazil, Mauricio Beuchot (2009) for Mexico, are just some of the best known liberation theologians, without mentioning historians and philosophers such as Enrique Dussel (1995), Eduardo Hoornaert (1995) and Raúl *Fornet-Betancourt* (2007). There is also an Italian liberation theology, of which one of the main exponents were Giulio Girardi (1969) and Armido Rizzi (2013).

[19] Edmund Burke's prediction about the replacement of traditional religion by a civil religion, which he defines as a superstition, is somewhat prophetic. He criticizes the revolutionaries' attempts to replace the Christian religion with a civic religion (*à la* Rousseau), since human nature cannot withstand the void created by the destruction of religious principles. For Burke, religion is part of human nature: "We know, and it is our pride, that man is, by his nature, a religious animal; that atheism is not only against our reason, but also against our instincts, and that it cannot long prevail". If this is the case, the attempt to replace the Christian religion, which "has hitherto been our glory and our pride and the great source of civilization" will lead to some **"gross, pernicious and degrading superstition, because we know that our spirit would not know how to endure emptiness"** (BURKE, 1997, p. 112).

[20] It has already been observed by various interpreters, including Bobbio, that Rousseau's conception of sovereign power is very close to or even coincides with the characteristics of Hobbesian power: unique, indivisible, infallible, just like Rousseau's general will; the difference is that the attributes that Hobbes placed in the sovereign as "a man or an assembly of men", Rousseau places in the "people" (BOBBIO, 1996).

[21] "In the last 40 years, Brazilian society has experienced an extraordinary movement in the religious field. In this period, Catholicism has lost its gigantic figure of approximately 24 million adherents (or 27 percentage points), and the categories of Pentecostals and those with no religion have emerged and consolidated, which together now account for a third of the Brazilian population, or 60 million people". (RIBEIRO, 2017, p. 1).

[22] We should be careful with the "myth" of religious tolerance, which is similar to the "myth" of racial tolerance: it belongs more to rhetoric than reality.

[23] I used to believe that Buddhism was an exception, but after the recent episodes of persecution of the Islamic minority by the Buddhist majority in Myanmar, I have doubts.

[24] The so-called "School without Party" project is part of this fundamentalist crusade (FRIGOTTO, 2017).

[25] In *The Future of Democracy*, Bobbio observes that in order to assess the democratization process of a society, it is not enough to know how many people vote, but "where they vote", i.e. whether there are social spaces where democracy is also developed, and raises the question of how full democracy is possible in a society that allows for the existence of large non-democratic social and institutional spaces (BOBBIO, 1986, p. 28).

[26] The author developed this theme in: ZAGREBELSKY, 1996.

[27] I am using the work: *Sinossi dei quattro evangeli*, secondo la sinossi greca del P. M. J. Lagrange, O.P. Brescia: Morcelliana, 1954.

[28] Kelsen will develop the theme of democracy and religion in Chapter II of the same book and also in: KELSEN, 2015.

[29] Interpreters differ on the authenticity of the dialog. Those who doubt it claim that the dialogue has the clear intention of throwing most or all the responsibility for the death sentence onto the Jews, thus freeing Pilate; the text would thus be a late reading by a Christian community that lived in a Roman environment and wanted to somehow "please" the Roman Empire. Those who defend its authenticity claim that the episode is full of so many details and the dialogue is so dense and clear that only an eyewitness could have transcribed it so faithfully; and this witness would be John himself (or whoever wrote the Gospel of John), or an influential person (perhaps Arimathea or Nicodemus) who witnessed the debate and told it to the evangelist. On the different readings of this dialog see AGAMBEM, 2015.

[30] The etymology of the word goes back to *plebs*, i.e. what the elitists of all times considered the people, the ignorant and manipulable mass.

[31] But Pilate also acted within a realistic conception of politics, because he didn't want to confront the Jewish leaders directly, sending Jesus to another Jewish power, King Erodes. Luke's Gospel makes an observation about this episode that is impressive: **"In those days Herod and Pilate became friends with each other, for before they had been enemies"** (Lk. XXIII, 12). Schmitt must have liked this little pearl of political realism!

[32] Bobbio comments on the acceptance of the death penalty by the Christian Churches: "The imposition of the death penalty is so little of a problem that even a religion of non-violence, of *noli resistere malo*, a religion which, especially in the first centuries, raised the problem of conscientious objection to military service and the obligation to bear arms, a *religion whose divine inspirer is a man condemned to death*, has never substantively opposed the practice of capital punishment" (BOBBIO, 1992, p. 162 - my emphasis).