

# RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND POLITICAL SYSTEMS IN LATIN AMERICA (2000-2015)

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To quote this article:

Uribe Cortez, J. (2021). Diversidad religiosa y sistemas políticos en América Latina (2000-2015). *Espacio I+D: Innovación más Desarrollo*, 10(27). <https://doi.org/10.31644/IMASD.27.2021.a10>

## RESUMEN

The objective of this manuscript is to share the emergence and appearance of non-Catholic religious creeds in Latin American territory from 2000 to 2015. In the absence of studies on the subject, a general outline of a project is drawn up to be developed in the future. The main research question defines the process of establishment in countries with political systems of the right, of the left, or with systems of social democracy. An important aspect refers to the fact that the increasing presence of new creeds has influenced the re-constitution of the notions of culture and religion.

### Keywords:

*Religion; Diversity; Latin America.*

## POLITICAL SYSTEMS IN LATIN AMERICA. A SHORT WALK, 2000-2015

This document presents a brief historical analysis around the panorama of religious diversity and the condition in which it develops in countries with political origins of different spheres: Left, Right, social-democratic, center-left, center-right, among others, during this century and the previous century and since the 1950s at least.

Historically, transcendental documentary contributions have been constituted that dictate that Latin America, including Mexico, is undergoing a re-configuration of the religious panorama characterized by the increasingly strong presence of a population not ascribed to Catholicism, but to other denominations that over time have captured the sympathy of the population. Over the past fifty years, the Catholic religion has experienced a considerable loss of parishioners, in addition to solid increases in non-Catholic associations.

This is demonstrated by the research of the *Pew Research Center* taken up by Berdejo (2014) for whom, in 2014, the non-Catholic population figures had increased significantly. It indicates the following:

...that until 1960, 90 percent of Latin Americans considered themselves Catholic, however, this percentage has decreased. Currently, in 2014, even though 84 percent of adults grew up in a Catholic home, only 69 percent say they continue to belong to the Church. Of the entire region, Colombia has the highest percentage of Catholics who converted to Protestantism (74 percent), and Panama the lowest with 15 percent. In contrast, Protestants increased from 9 to 19 percent, and "unaffiliated" (agnostics, atheists, etc.) increased from 4 to 8 percent. In Uruguay, the latter sector is made up of 37 percent of the population.

The rates of decline in the Catholic population are striking. According to the *Pew Research Center* (2014: 10), "the scale of this exodus is roughly on par with that of several Latin American countries that have also suffered sharp declines in the proportion of adults who identify as Catholic, among which are Nicaragua (25 percentage points less), Uruguay (22 points less), Brazil (20 less) and El Salvador (19 less)".

In Mexico, at least at the municipal level, according to the text of *La diversidad religiosa en México*, whose author is INEGI (2005), argues that:

Pentecostalism was registered in 2,213 of the 2,443 municipalities in the country. Its presence is significant (more than 20%) in 18 municipalities of Oaxaca and in 2 of Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave; in one of them (San Juan Bautista Tlacoatzintepec, Oaxaca), little more than 52% of its population declared to

profess this doctrine; of the 94 municipalities where the percentage fluctuates between 10% and 20%, 70 belong to Oaxaca, Chiapas and Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave.

It is vital to put the aforementioned figures in context. The growth of non-Catholic religious groups in the country is a real question and not an anecdote. It is assumed - as a hypothesis - that the type of political system that prevails in each country is vital to understand the rise of various (non-Catholic) creeds. Therefore, the following question has been generated that throughout the investigation is intended to answer: What factors explain the growth of the ecclesial supply in Latin America with diverse political systems? In this sense, Norberto Bobbio (cited in Rovira Kaltwasser, 2014) establishes that each of the political tendencies has a particular meaning. The right conceives that inequalities are natural and difficult to eradicate; the left assumes that inequalities are socially constructed and, therefore, are the result of scenarios that must be reconstituted. Right-wing political systems such as Mexico, Chile, and Colombia, among others, in the vision of Mudde (2007), would define inequalities as natural, difficult to eradicate by the State, while in the case of left-wing countries such as Bolivia, Venezuela, and Ecuador would assume the inequalities as artificial, and therefore, solvable through the application of national policies.

According to Flavia Freidenberg (2003), the characteristics of the current left-wing populisms refer to the forms of inclusion and political mobilization, which are seen as part of the types of democracy that in the attempt are erected as expressions of opposition against the demonstrations of the governments that carry out programs that imply damage to the institutionality and that incur radical versions of democracy.

The premiere of governments of a social-democratic type in Brazil and Uruguay provides Jorge Lanzarote (2008) with the opportunity to coin a concept of *social democracy* based on the political nature of each government, operating in relatively institutionalized plural party systems, under an effective competition regime with organized opposition. The list of governments considered right-wing includes Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, and Panama. By 2008, eleven of the eighteen Latin American countries were ruled by center-left or left-wing presidents (Stokes, 2009).

Given the diversity of political systems and their acquired hegemony, it is considered that the growth of non-Catholic creeds, the evolution of the concept of culture, and the structure of national policies vary according to political and governmental practices and discourses; product largely of the evident religious diversity evident in the region and that the agendas of the different governments must analyze.

The importance of this manuscript lies in the fact that it describes a social phenomenon that has a global impact and that is little analyzed in terms of research projects, at least in Mexico it has been barely studied. The central reflection that is intended to be discussed is to account for why it is essential to analyze the establishment, evolution, and development of non-Catholic groups in Latin American territory, with research projects according to the themes, which allow elucidating their various features in the face of the condition and structure of each political system in each country, this is fundamental.

#### *The main objective of this manuscript*

It is shared that the primary objective is to share an argument that makes it possible to elucidate and imagine the particularities of the process of establishing non-Catholic creeds in Latin America, with the specificities of countries with governments of the left versus countries with governments of a political stamp of the right and one of social democracy such as Brazil and its comparative axis with Mexico.

Given this possibility, it is necessary to understand the conditions for the establishment of non-Catholic religious groups in countries with governments of the left versus countries with governments of the right and one of social democracy. It is interesting to think about how governments rescue the issue of the proliferation of non-Catholic groups as a topic that can become part of the public policy structure and form part of national policies. Thus, one must also reflect on the role of non-Catholic groups in shaping culture.

#### *The object of study*

A possible object of study for other projects would refer to elucidating the characteristics of religious diversification on Latin American soil in comparison with Mexico and the process of building a *Latin American culture* in the face of the presence of political systems of various origins.

#### *Hypothetically*

The hypothesis is that the evolution of culture in Latin America and Mexico is largely due to the massive establishment and constant development of non-Catholic creeds, as well as to the different norms and constitutional principles of the countries, which result in modalities of diverse political systems and the very cultural and political conjunctures that the creeds settled on Latin soil have faced. The conformation of the culture depends to

a large extent on the legal reforms made by the Latin states and on how non-Catholic groups with their ministers of worship and regional parishioners mobilize to appropriate public spaces and to be included in the configuration of new cultural concepts.

*The historical framework of the phenomenon: religious dynamics in Latin America and the supply growth*

Over the past fifty years, in the case of Mexico, the establishment of non-Catholic creeds has been accelerated. It is explained by various issues: 1) A very important one is because non-Catholic groups in Mexico emerged with the liberal Juarista State, but their presence began to acquire statistical visibility in the middle of the 20th century (Bastián, 1983; Blancarte, 2003).

It is worth mentioning that Catholicism prevailed in more than 90% of the population until before the 1990s. By the year 2000, non-Catholic affiliations made considerable progress. Casillas (2007: 138) calls this growth evolution of religious preferences in the country, located by states and municipalities. The author emphasizes that at the state level the predominant religion throughout history has been Catholic.

The dynamics of non-Catholic religious groups have been complex, as was said, very broad and problematic. In this line, when establishing the dynamics of the religious population in Latin America, the perspective of *Pew Research* (2014: 3), a survey that collects data on the religious condition of the inhabitants of Latin America, which is very much in line with Stoll (2002: 15-23), emphasizes that the tendency to increase in non-Catholic creeds is real and not anecdotal, to the detriment of diocesan Catholicism itself, and even of traditional Catholicism.

Some of the lowest percentages of the evangelical population were found in the Andean countries: Venezuela (1 to 3%), Colombia (1 to 4%), Ecuador (2 to 4%), Peru (3 to 5%), and Bolivia (2 to 8%), in which Protestantism got off to a slow and difficult start. Yet since 1960 evangelical churches have grown rapidly, with one of the highest rates in the region. Expectations are also high in Paraguay (2-4%), another country where evangelicals had not thrived until recently. Evangelicals in the Caribbean are growing rapidly in other traditionally Catholic countries such as the Dominican Republic (2 to 7%), Haiti (15 to 20%), and Puerto Rico (7 to 30%).

In Latin America, the two most evangelical countries from 2010 onwards are Brazil, where Protestants claim to reach up to 18% of the population, and Chile, where they claim to have up to 25%, and in the same words of the author, twenty-two million evangelicals in Brazil account for three out of every five evangelicals in Latin America and the Caribbean. Together with the population in

Chile, they reach two out of three. The rapid growth of the Protestant population is observed, in general, in Chile, the growth rate has decreased, but in Brazil, according to the International Evangelistic Crusade, the evangelical growth has been 77%; from 1970 to 1980 it was 155%.

According to the page *NoticiaCristiana.com* (2008), in 1900 there were about 50,000 Protestants throughout Latin America; one million in 1930, 5 million 20 years later, 10 million in 1960, 20 million in 1970, 50 million a decade later. It was estimated that in 2000 Protestants/Evangelicals numbered around 100 million. During the first decade of the 21st century, Latin America and the Caribbean approached 600 million inhabitants, 20 percent of whom would be evangelicals.

Just as they were initially perceived by other Protestants and/or Evangelicals in Europe and the United States, Pentecostals in Latin America have gone from being considered outsiders, and even contrary to the Protestant family, to become its main aspect. Indeed, according to the perspective of Jean Pierre Bastián (1990; 1997), since 1950 the Latin American religious field has been transformed in the face of the appearance of a multiplicity of religious associations, among which the Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Presbyterians stand out, which has greatly influenced the cultural (and even political) transformation itself (Mendes, 2013).

From the perspective of Camargo Martínez (2019: 1), 2) the growing presence of other religious offerings was established as part of a "process of religious conversion and mobility with implications for the social structure of the countries." This entails another element. 3) The growth of the ecclesial offer has occurred due to the constant mobility of people from one religious association to another, which has affected the way of thinking, relating to others, and the way of social mobilization.

Concerning journalistic texts, especially, the *Latinobarómetro* report argues that the tendency of people to be in associations other than Catholicism is real and not anecdotal. Evangelical Christianity has grown in the last eighteen years in Latin America as Catholicism has steadily declined. This reference denotes that in total, Catholicism has lost 13 percentage points in terms of believers throughout the continent, going from 80 percent of the population in 1995 to 67 percent until 2013 (*Latinobarómetro*, 2014).

The decline in Catholic believers has been marked in countries such as Nicaragua and Honduras, where they lose presence close to 30 percent. There are also significant decreases, of 20 percent, in Costa Rica, Uruguay, Chile, Panama, and Brazil. The decline is milder, between 13 and 5 percent, in El Salvador, Peru, Colombia, Argentina, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Guatemala, and Paraguay. Only one country shows an increase in the number of Catholic believers as a percentage, it is the Dominican Republic, 1 percent (*Ibíd.*).

For Mallimaci (2017: 4), 4) the appearance of a greater ecclesial offer has occurred because religious beliefs and affiliations have "mutated", "pluralized" or "recomposed", which is an unequivocal symptom that it has a break in the Catholic monopoly of previous centuries made its appearance, relative deregulation of what has been called the field, arena or religious sphere; it has fewer ascriptions compared to some fifty or sixty years ago that it presented, say in 1940, one hundred percent of the affiliations, all of which have configured, in a similar way to the religious scene, the environment or the cultural scene.

*More and more evidence: The modification of the concept of culture and the appearance of more non-Catholic creeds*

The appearance of innumerable non-Catholic creeds is also explained by the following aspects. Ochoa (2012) points out that the idea of culture that has undergone readjustments over time has been very important concerning cultural heritage, to the protection of tradition in situations of religious conflict, together with all the expressions that are of an immaterial and ritual nature, elements that allow us to better understand the emergence of different creeds.

6) A fundamental aspect is the introduction of the linguistic element that performs a differentiation function. They construct discourses that distinguish between what is not "Christian", "Evangelical", "Pentecostal" or "Presbyterian" and what is. This is following what Grimson (2008) deduces about the differentiation between the so-called "educated" versus the "uneducated" people, emphasizing the set of knowledge, traditions, and customs that they possess when belonging to a society, a field, or any religious field.

With the inclusion of non-Catholic creeds in urban contexts, following the analysis of Barrera Luna (2013: 22), 7) culture has achieved a certain evolution of the ecclesial offer thanks to the search for shared meaning, it is in the unity of culture and religion that new religious and common meanings are constructed, almost in the style that Harris, Geertz, and Lévi-Strauss himself would have liked, in the sense of achieving an adequate interpretation of the ascription of people to a scene in that identity is built by feeling that they belong, in this case, to the ecclesial sphere.

Religious associations with their processes of ascription to ecclesial activities promote the feeling of belonging among people of different congregations. For Molano (2007), the same appearance of other religious associations other than the Catholic one produced an almost inseparable link with the cultural heritage and with the irremediable territorial affiliation.

Due to the very cultural characteristics of the Latin region, religion exerts a special influence on all cultures. For example, Harvey (1990), when



constructing his idea of culture, tried to look at the construction of cultural policies, which are in the sights of the reconfigurations that creeds make with their discourses and practices. The idea of Najenson (1982) is very suggestive about culture as a civilization or as a metaphor that describes the levels of socio-economic development that also provide life and legitimacy to non-Catholic creeds in the different existing contexts.

Buildings such as national libraries, national museums, national theaters, churches, and archives would have a fundamental place in the conceptual logic of author Najenson. For his part, for Stavenhagen (1986), in his effort, together with other thinkers, to construct the concepts of *culture* and *identity* for Latin America, he has held a debate regarding the notion of national culture and that in reality has not given credit to the existence of native cultures, or others of a religious nature, or that if they exist, they have little to do with national culture. Therefore, the same idea or notion of Latin America must contain the affirmation of indigenous cultures and ecclesiastical diversity with multiple non-Catholic creeds, especially their material and spiritual development.

Faced with this insufficient concept of *culture* for the Latin American region, we take up what Restrepo (s/f) dictates regarding the fact that the idea of "Latin Americanism" must be distinguished from the place that cultural studies occupy when it comes to defining the own concept. Cultural identity for the author is a project that contains the specificity of the Latin American peoples with everything and their multiple ecclesiastical meanings, in the way that Stuart Hall himself pointed out for some time (quoted from Restrepo, nd), with the conceptual tools and the resources that people will have at their disposal to understand the world of life around them.

From a cultural category and the perspective of the context of the Latin American region, styles of doing and speaking derived from many ecclesial cultures are shared, and as part of the exercise and civic discourse that is ascribed to a set of non-Catholic creeds. Perhaps the greater presence of religious creeds can be seen and reviewed as part of a social policy of the masses and the public, perhaps as a cultural activity or as part of a political culture that vindicates the ways of dressing, ways of being, or ways of speak since when conducting himself before other nations he would even be referring to a national culture of a religious nature.

Per the above, the phenomenon is interesting as part of an analysis of the knowledge of the Latin reality, in the social, cultural, and religious lines, in the area of the Latin American ecclesial views in comparison with the leftist governments of the south of the continent such as Ecuador, Venezuela, and Bolivia, right-wing neoliberal governments such as Mexico, Chile and Colombia, and one of a social-democratic type such as Brazil with the phenomenon of the emergence of non-Catholic denominations,

say Pentecostals and denominations of a historical nature such as Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Nazarenas, to understand the establishment, development and comparative evolution of the religious field comparably with the development of culture and the socio-political field itself.

## METHODOLOGY AND THEORY

Executing an analysis of a socio-religious nature such as the one that can be read and intended to elucidate in this document in the previous sections has required considering a qualitative analysis methodology based on the construction of timelines in which the periods in which non-Catholic creeds arrived at each country are analyzed. This part of the investigation is not explained in this document. However, certain elements are exposed that could be part of a theoretical-methodological axis that accounts, more broadly, for the phenomenon seen here.

In a project that seeks to carry out an analysis of a phenomenon similar to the one explained in this document, essential aspects and the same main actors involved in inclusion in the Latin American context would be highlighted, as well as all their impact on the transformation of the concept of *culture*. Through longitudinal analysis, the dynamics of the establishment of non-Catholic creeds would be observed in different decades (1970 to date) and, of course, in different contexts. The similarities and differences would be established, as well as the aspects of continuity and rupture in the national context of Mexico with the Latin contexts. Through the analysis of the timelines, it would be observed how the notion of *culture* has been modified and how the perception of the population around its ascription would be captured as a fundamental aspect.

The theoretical construct that would be the guiding axis of the project is the theory of the social actor that exposes the tension between the notion of structure, the conception of the social subject, and the aspect of the social agent (Bourdieu, P. & JD Wacquant, 1995; Giddens, 1991; Bourdieu, 1985). From the perspective of Touraine (1994), while the sociological concept of agent presents the individual rather as a reproducer of practices, the concept of actor broadens the margins of his decision and action, that is, of his autonomy. In this way, he is conceived as someone capable of becoming a creator in the field of his action. In the words of Geoffrey Pleyers "actors can direct the social organization as a whole, fight for cultural challenges seeking deep transformations of society and control of progress and society" (2006: 737).

The agent, according to Bourdieu (1988), as a transforming subject of culture and society, would develop practices that are largely consistent with the position he occupies in the social space. The social actor, on the

other hand, is recognized above all for the actions he decides to carry out. Touraine's position is contrary to Bourdieu's theoretical conception of *social reproduction*, which is akin to Poulantzas and Foucault who focused on “the present domination in all aspects of social life, in which the reproduction of society or the omnipresence of power leaves no space or autonomy to the actors and denies their ability to construct themselves as such” (Pleyers, 2006: 738).

In this sense, the theory of the actor would be chosen instead of a theory of the subject or of the social structure (Touraine, 1984, Melucci, 1996, 1999, Giménez, 2006) because the first postulate the capacity of the individual as the motor of all action. The *theory of the social actor* proposed by Touraine (1984, 1995b) is a conceptual proposal that would make it possible to observe religious groups as transformers of cultural reality. Religious groups, political and governmental groups can be conceived as actors with collective roots that, through the social action deployed, transform part of the circumstances of the region's population, due to the economic resources obtained and the political power achieved.

Non-Catholic religious groups and government entities are conceived and would be conceived, as collective actors with defined objectives, missions, and visions. The logic of Giménez (1997) establishes that they can be recognized as groups with social and ecclesial organizational structures that actively intervene in political, cultural, and social development processes (Touraine 1995a; 1995b).

Logistically, it is expected that the information would be collected from oral testimonies, participant observations, and semi-structured and open interviews. To complement the methodology, the collection of information, and the corresponding analysis, it is thought that it could be carried out at intervals of at least two months per country, four months maximum, during the first five years, foreseeing that the total period to complete the investigation is indefinite or maybe ten years at the most. As part of the results of this project, it is thought that it would begin to give results with a specialized article, an international congress, a specialized colloquium or seminar, and so on, as established by the research process itself.

It is worth mentioning that the compilation of the oral testimonies would be carried out in three ways: 1) The first refers to the capture of the recorded arguments through interviews, the main characters involved in the phenomenon will provide the information. 2) The second consists of recording information with notes in a notebook, noting down the details that would be considered outstanding.

Finally, the third form refers to the realization of informal talks, in many cases delimited, surely, by a couple of coffees and a cordial approach that would mean the beginning of a close approach to the main actors which

would also symbolize the beginning of friendships enduring that until the end of the periods of each fieldwork will provide us with greater access to much important information.

Oral testimonies would be obtained through exploratory interviews that would allow investigating basic aspects of the object of study. Interviews would be conducted to monitor and describe the evolution of religious groups and analyze the relationships between actors and ministers of worship, intra and extra-ecclesial forms of life, and the trajectory of creeds to identify the characteristics of the settlements. In-depth interviews would be used to gather the information that would be difficult to obtain in the first instance, to elucidate the idea of culture and religion possessed by the region's population.

### MANUSCRIPT CONTRIBUTIONS

This document has had the purpose of contributing at least briefly to the knowledge of the evolution of the socio-religious and cultural field in Mexico and to compare it with Latin America. At least briefly on what underlying the settlements of non-Catholic creeds, Pentecostal and Presbyterian congregations, in the different territories and give an account of the evolution of the cultural sphere. It is contributed that to explain the main object of analysis that is studied here, oral testimonies will be obtained through a network scheme that would reveal the connections between various actors such as ecclesial, economic, political, cultural actors, among others. It is expected that this research will contribute to the understanding of the diversification of the religious offer in Latin America in terms of the process that different churches have had for their settlement, and the different problems, tensions, strengths, public efforts, among others, as well as the influence they have had on the culture of each region.

### FINAL COMMENTS

To conclude with this manuscript, it is argued that it is necessary to analyze the dynamics of certain churches in the following countries, to round off the research: The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD), in Brazil, led by the apostle Edir Macedo. It is one of the most popular churches in Brazil and the world with about eight million parishioners. It supports 9,600 pastors, 4,700 temples installed in 172 countries. The Center for Faith, Hope, and Love (CFEA) with a presence throughout Mexico, in 26 states of the republic, and with more than 40,000 followers, spreading a social and liberation gospel that has influenced the social and cultural activities of the Mexican population.

The International Christian Church of Santiago (ICIS), in Chile, is part of a World Movement of Disciples (MMD) with the mission of evangelizing the population of Latin America. Also the Church Casa de Oración Bolivia (ICOB), of Evangelical Apostolic and Prophetic nomination (EAP), which until a couple of years ago had 5,000 parishioners only in its central headquarters and that increases the number if one takes into account that it has various venues, for example, Casa de Oración Tropical Church (ICOT), Obra Misionera "Sumuque" (OMS), Obra Misionera "Trinidad" (OMT), among others. The Iglesia Misión Carismática de Colombia (IMCC), of a Pentecostal nature, with 200 thousand members in the city of Bogotá and with more than 160 branches worldwide. Finally, the Iglesia Pentecostal Unida Internacional de Ecuador (IPUIE), in Ecuador, registering with great force in Guayaquil and Quito, in addition to having an interesting editorial ministry, in which approximately 1200 leaders make up the ministerial body of the church.

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