Catholic intransigence as a response to the modern world

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Introduction

The study of the modern and contemporary Catholic Church as well as the various manifestations of Catholicism in secular societies involves a conceptual debate that, for some decades, has sought to account for the complexity represented by the relationships between religion and modernity. One of these concepts is that of "intransigence", which refers to one of the Church's responses to the challenges that arose after the French Revolution, an event of undeniable proportions that "[...] affected the entire world, extensively, and all men, intensively" (Koselleck, 1999, p. 10).

Since then, the advent of new conceptions of sovereignty and representation has been observed, which could now dispense with religious foundations as a criterion for the legitimacy of governments. At the same time, reason began to be assumed as a privileged form of knowledge production, subjected to experimentation and the methods of a science that, progressively, rejected the paradigms of the previous tradition, based on the truths of faith and divine enlightenment. So, with the advent of modernity, the Hebrew-Christian heritage began to be elaborated in purely worldly and secular terms, based on a vision of history as progress (Vattimo, 2002) through which the separation and autonomy of the different spheres of reality in relation to religion occurred.

In turn, the dynamism imposed by incessant changes and the resulting unpredictability implied a widespread feeling of rupture with continuity; an intention to reject tradition, given that past experiences were becoming increasingly less relevant to guide the present and project expectations for the future. Thus, a new subjective perception of time emerged as one of the main symptoms of modernity[3].

These transformations had profound impacts on religions, which needed to adjust to phenomena produced on planes that were beginning to differentiate themselves from them and that attested to the

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[3] According to Koselleck (2006, p. 314), "[...] modernity can only be conceived as a new time from the moment when expectations begin to distance themselves more and more from the experiences made so far".

loss of their normative and macrostructuring capacity of awareness. At the institutional level, the Catholic Church had to deal with the loss of its temporal power and the place it occupied in the new configuration of public spaces in Western Europe, in addition to facing conflicts of vision of wide magnitude, which still generate consequences today.

The discussion around the concept of "Catholic intransigence", therefore, makes reference to the political-cultural climate of the early 19th century, going back to the historical materiality of the birth of a liberal and positivist Europe, convulsed by qualitative transformations in the political order due to the advancement of natural sciences and the worldview that it brought with it, added to the unprecedented industrial development and means of communication. All of this led to changes in social structures, making the continent experience technological and material superiority compared to the rest of the world that caused considerable impacts on religions.

The rural exodus, for instance, led to questions among ecclesiastical authorities, which have since been pushed into a context in which the pastoral perspective should be reviewed. Some regions of Western Europe also experienced the change from an agricultural economy to an urban-industrial economy of a capitalist type, with profound impacts on morals and value systems, leading to the transformation of awareness (Thompson, 1998).

From the point of view of social subjects linked to the new order of things, the ruling classes, lulled by the bourgeois imaginary of constant and unlimited progress and civil liberties, including intellectual freedom and perspectives frankly hostile to religion, lead to a situation challenging the Roman Church. The offensive of anti-clerical secularism, which had been raging since the Revolution of 1789 (Menozzi, 1977), was aggravated by the rapid progress of disbelief among those who belonged to educated circles.

Momentarily benefited by the favorable climate during the first half of the 19th century – with the romantic current and the place of religious values that opposed the skeptical rationalism of the previous century – the Church found itself facing a new context from 1850 onwards: the entry on the scene of realism in the arts and literature and positivism and scientism in philosophy. Since then, the religious institution has been painted as a major obstacle to intellectual development, moral liberation and democratic emancipation.

The main issues affecting the Church in the period were rationalism, theological discussions about the relationship between the natural and the supernatural as well as between faith and reason, the link between Church and State, the association between Catholicism as a hegemonic religion and the emerging nationalisms. In the French case, the causes of the decadence of theology are related to the suppression of the Society of Jesus from the Catholic Church in 1773[4], and the demotion of the Holy See by jansenism[5] and galicalism[6]. A true anti-Roman spirit developed vigorously on the fringes of these movements, leading to tensions that dominated the entire 19th century[7].

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[4] The persecution of the Society of Jesus dates back to the mid-1800s, gaining strength with the secularization trends in vogue. In the case of the Iberian monarchies, the regalist tendency was affirmed within the scope of the reform programs formulated by the ministerial body organized to stem the symptoms of the crisis that was affecting them, led to the expulsion of the Jesuits by the law of expulsion of the Society of Jesus, from Portugal and its domains, of 1759, edited by the Marquês de Pombal and *Pragmática Sanción*, signed by King Carlos III in 1767 (Carvalho, 2015), respectively.

[5] Doctrine that proposed an interpretation of the doctrine of grace and morality based on the work Augustinus (1640), by Jansenius, bishop of Ypres, in Flanders. Since it was close to the Augustinian theses on predestination that inspired the Protestant reform, the work was condemned by Rome, under suspicion of heresy. According to Maire (2007, p. 14), It was through the Jansenists of Port-Royal – more precisely the January 1759 editorial of *Nouvelles Ecclésiastiques*, written by Jansenist Louis-Adrien, who orchestrated a true campaign against the Jesuits – that the term "Jesuitism" appeared for the first time. In an accusatory sense, the Society of Jesus was accused of true "heresy" when it was related to a supposed "common system", which would form "[...] *le corps d'une nouvelle Religion: la religion de la politique qui fait de la Compagnie de Jésus une 'nation' parmi les nations extrêmement puissante et dangereuse*".

[6] Galicalism was a reaction that emerged in France, with the Four Gallican Articles (1682), which declared that the pope was subordinate to the council and limited by the customary laws and rights of the universal church and particular churches.

[7] According to Maire (2007, p. 6): "*Les mouvements jansénistes et gallicans traduiraient ainsi un même paradoxe bien français que l'on peut schématiquement caractériser comme le développement de la liberté et de l'autonomie dans la recherche du maintien de la hiérarchie et de la subordination, l'effet paradoxal de cet idéal de modération étant d'encourager l'apparition d' 'extrémismes de la modération', si l'on ose dire*".

Against these tendencies, the Church oriented its emphasis on the principle of authority and the values of tradition (Aubert, 1976). Therefore, one of the main consequences of the ecclesiastical situation in the period will be the predominance of an apologetic theology, whose central scope will be to rise up against rationalism, claiming the rights of the Holy See against its external and internal enemies. Issues that generated two positions that were condemned by Rome: a semi-rationalism and traditionalism. The problem posed by rationalism, i.e., the relationship between reason and faith, covered the question of the relationship between the Holy See and intellectuals, in addition to the relationship between Church and State (Thibault, 1972).

Simultaneously with this reactive behavior to the trends of modernity, the dynamics of permanent universalization of Catholicism forced the Roman Church itself to shape its legal and institutional relations with nation-states and their respective national churches. According to Fantappiè, this objective required that, in addition to standardization – implemented through specific informative figures and instruments, represented by nunciatures and nuncios as well as bulls, encyclical letters, etc. – the pontifical curia used "flexibilization" strategies –, which included "adaptation" and "disciplining" – in order to contain tensions between different contexts and their central and normative structure (Fantappiè, 2012, p. 332) –, allowing us to agree that,

> [...] In the confrontation with revolutionary movements and advances in secularization, the Catholic Church was forced to change its methods, strategies and content, leading its representatives to share many of the characteristics and tools of their opponents [...] (Martínez; Santirocchi, 2020, p. 4, our translation)[8].

Therefore, defined within this general framework of effectively revolutionary experiences in various aspects, Catholic intransigence does not occur in a historical vacuum. On the contrary, it presents itself as a perspective of action of the ecclesiastical institution deeply connected to the Zeitgeist of the period, marked by the march of secularization, which occurs "[...] in the social confrontation between the totalizing ambition of religion as a horizon of understanding integrality of life and the unifying project" embraced by reason (Coelho, 2016, p. 86, our translation)[9]. It is a complex, non-linear process, which results "from the evolution of power relations between current trends and traditions" and which "has continued to vary over time, from one country to another, and depending on the stakes" (Rémond, 2001, p. 107, our translation)[10].

It is in this sense that understanding religion's responses to phenomena produced on planes that began to differentiate from it and that attested to the loss of its influence not only at the level of States, but also of consciousness, imposes a critical distance in relation to the logic dichotomous approach that tended to conceive this dynamic based on the dialectic between clericalism and anti-clericalism, Church and society, temporal power and spiritual power, reason and faith. These approaches, as problematized by the recent historiography of religions, in addition to obfuscating the "hybrid phenomena" that resulted – "[...] such as the religious origins of the French Revolution, revolutionary Catholicism or Catholic liberalism" (Solans, 2016, p. 2, our translation)[11] –, ended up coining the image of Catholicism

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[8] Originally: [...] *en la confrontación, los movimientos contrarrevolucionarios y conservadores se vieron obligados a cambiar en sus métodos y contenidos, y ello los llevó a compartir muchas de las características y herramientas de sus contrincantes* [...].

[9] Originally: ocorre "[...] *no confronto social entre a ambição totalizadora da religião como horizonte de compreensão da integralidade da vida e o projeto unificador*" encampado pela razão.

[10] Originally: "*Elle a été la resultante de l'évolution des rapports de force entre courant et traditions [...]. Entre ces courant, ces forces et ces valeurs, les rapports n'on cessé de varier selon le temps, d'un pays a l'autre, et em fonction des enjeux*". According to Rémond, this complexity is the counterpart of the philosophical and spiritual dimension of the debate that engenders the diversity of points of view that must be considered.

[11] Originally: "[...] *comme les origines religieuses de la Révolution française, le catholicisme révolutionnaire ou le libéralisme catholique*".

as an atavistic element in the process of building modern and secular societies[12] and the Church, "[...] represented under the appearance of immobility, whether as guardian of tradition or as an 'anachronistic' obstacle to progress". According to Solans (2016, p. 2, our translation)[13]:

> We reserve for him, in the best of cases, the possibility of reacting mechanically, as if by instinct, against the Revolution. However, under this same appearance of immobility, religion changes, restructures, adapts, takes the initiative and faces the trials of modernity. It is in this sense that it is modern.

Therefore, if as a broad reaction to the state of affairs, triggered or accentuated by the French Revolution, intransigence can be understood as "conservative opposition" to the nascent modern world – the locus of fermentation of a thought and an institutional constitution that legitimizes the Old Regime and one of its main pillars (Mannheim, 1982) –. Simultaneously, it was configured as the expression of a way of rebuilding and reinforcing the Church, in response to the changes promoted by the ongoing revolutionary wave itself. It is in this clash that your "ecclesiastical self-understanding" is redefined: that is, the way in which the ecclesiastical hierarchy "[...] defines a concept of the Church, establishes its tasks and action strategies and reorders its internal policy in function of its external political and pastoral project" (Manoel, 2004, p. 10, our translation).

During the 19th century, the uncompromising orientation of the reforms undertaken by the Holy See and directed towards the entire Catholic world at the time was conceived based on what historian Paolo Prodi (2010) calls the "Tridentine paradigm": a kind of long-term project in ecclesiastical history, which would have marked the history of the Church since the Medieval crisis, until the second half of the 20th century, through which the magisterium sought to establish and strengthen a parallel and universal sovereignty through a supranational and supra-state ecclesiastical body, in competition with other modernity projects in vogue. This paradigm reached its peak during the pontificate of Pius IX (1848-1878), guiding two documents he published in December 1864: the encyclical *Quanta Cura* and its annex, the Syllabus, which listed 80 supposed "errors" of modernity (Silva; Costa, 2021).

However, despite representing the Catholic Church's orthodox response to contemporary society, Catholic intransigence was not limited to a series of battles against its external enemies, but represented a profound recomposition of the institution after the marginalization of the institutional framework of modern societies. Thus, supported by a tradition of unconditional fidelity to the Church, the dogma of papal infallibility, as well as the defense of the Church's institutional autonomy in the face of temporal power, "[...] the Church operates its transition from the Old Regime to Modern Times" (Solans, 2016, p. 2, our translation)[14].

In the 19th century, this conception found "[...] a systematic expression in Catholic intransigentism and obtained an incomparable dynamism in ultramontanism" (Rémond, 2001, p. 107, our translation)[15], whose defense of the papal Roman character was linked to "the order and stability" shaken by the French Revolution.

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[12]This bias, to a large extent, comes from models inherited from the classical theories of modernity and secularization which, in the case of social sciences in Brazil, reveals itself to be particularly influenced by the Weberian paradigm, through which studies tended to reproduce the image of the State as tending to secularize and the Church and its agents as resistant to this process (Steil; Herrera, 2010).

[13]Originally: L'*Église est ainsi représentée sous l'apparence de l'immobilité, soit en gardienne de la tradition, soit en obstacle « anachronique » au progrès. On lui réserve, dans le meilleur des cas, la possibilité de réagir mécaniquement, comme par instinct, contre la Révolution. Néanmoins, sous cette même apparence d'immobilité, la religion change, se restructure, s'adapte, prend l'initiative et fait face aux épreuves de la modernité. C'est dans ce sens qu'elle est moderne.*

[14]Originally: "[…] l'*Église opère as transition de l'Ancien Régime aux Temps modernes.*

[15]Originally: "*Cette conception a trouvé au XIXe siècle une expression systématique dans l'intransigeantisme catholique et puisse un dynamisme incomparable dans l'ultramontanisme*".

In Brazil, this trend of Catholicism would find conditions of concrete possibilities for its rise, only during the second half of the 19th century. This is because, sharing an experience common to other Latin American countries – where secularization took place from (partly as a result) of the crisis of the colonial metropolises, which triggered the process of dissolution of the Iberian regime of Christianity –, the transition to "political modernity" (Xavier-Guerra, 2009) observed there cannot do without religion as a civilizing ingredient and cohesive element essential to the formation of the nation. This, in fact, was a common point between regalist and ultramontane Catholics (Silva, 2023), who, despite competing with different models of Church – respectively, the episcopalist *versus* the curialist aspect –, they operated a relatively peaceful and consensual transition to the constitutional regime, guaranteeing, throughout the 19th century, the condition of Catholicism as the official religion of the Empire, under the patronage regime (Santirocchi, 2022).

Thus, although independence and the subsequent formation of the Brazilian national State have implied profound reconfigurations of religion in response to transformations carried out on other levels – configuring contexts of "religious modernity"[16] –, ultramontanism, in this country, would only assume a more intransigent, combative and purposeful stance in defending a model of Church supported in the dogma of the infallibility of papal power and its identity as an institution independent of civil power in the second half of the 19th century[17]. This moment was seen supported by the guidelines of the Holy See, combating State regalism, freemasonry, religious freedom and other secularization trends in vogue.

Thus, it is possible to say that, in Brazil, in the second half of the 19th century, something similar to what happened in European countries occurred. In other words: the local Church, responding to existing transformations and competing projects of modernity, sought to insert itself into the parallel and universal sovereignty represented by the pontifical power. However, while in Europe this parallel sovereignty arose because the Church was no longer able to maintain competition with the States in terms of legal systems, in the Brazilian case, where the patronage regime was in force, the strengthening of pontifical authority served to intensify its ability to compete with other projects of modernity (Silva; Santirocchi, 2020). Thus, the Brazilian experience of secularization cannot be compared without discontinuities to those of European societies. Just as in the European world itself, convulsed by the revolutionary transformations carried out since the end of the 18th century, Catholicism embraced different tendencies and needed, in different circumstances, to compromise with modernity[18]. In light of these experiences, modernity and secularization come to be understood as processes that integrate religions, at the same time that they require permanent reconfigurations.

The French Revolution is the fundamental moment that is at the genesis of this process and the entire current of philosophical-political thought that leads to it and that continues to develop subsequently. Poulat (1977) explains that the entire history of Catholicism since the French Revolution would be summed up in the opposition between two fundamental tendencies in the Church: one that defends the rights

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[16] A concept that refers to the transformations carried out in "the ways in which individuals related to the sacred and the institutions that administered it"; "functions and organization of these institutions" as well as "the links that they established until then with a civil power, whose foundations no longer referred to inherited religion", although they could not do without it (Di Stefano, 2018, p. 135, our translation).

[17] The term "ultramontane" dates back to the medieval period to refer to popes outside the Italian kingdoms, "beyond the Pyrenees". In the 18th and 19th centuries, it characterized a series of attitudes of the Catholic Church, in a reaction movement to some theological and ecclesiastical currents, to the Gallicanism of Catholic states, to the new political trends developed after the French Revolution and to the secularization of modern society, defending "[…] the strengthening of pontifical authority over local churches; reaffirmation of scholasticism; reestablishment of the Society of Jesus (1814); and the definition of the 'dangers' that plagued the Church (galicanism, jansenism, regalism, all types of liberalism, protestantism, freemasonry, deism, rationalism, socialism, civil marriage, freedom of the press and more)" (SantirocchI, 2010, our translation).

[18] As sociologist Danièle Révieu-Léger shows, from the French religious panorama it becomes impossible to understand modern forms of religiosity if it continues to assume some assumptions of modernity, including the Weberian thesis of secularization. In her view, therefore, the advent of modernity implied complex combinations between the loss of dominance of great religious systems and the reconfigurations of religion by societies that continued to claim it as a condition for thinking of themselves as autonomous in relation to the religious foundations of Sovereignty (Hérvieu-Léger , 2004).

of the Church and another that demands the right to conciliation and adaptation, which leads to the constitution of "ideologies of adaptation, assimilation, integration and counter-ideologies of refusal".

But how long would the disturbance caused by the spread of the revolutionary wave imply or justify Catholic intransigentism? What other subsequent events, directly or indirectly related to the French Revolution, reconfigured its scope? What is the relationship it establishes with other trends in Catholicism, propagated, above all, from the Second Vatican Council?

The debate surrounding the permanence of an intransigent Catholicism is complex and divides opinions. Poulat (1980) – whose work remains one of the main references for the French case – sees intransigence as the structuring model of Catholicism still in the pontificate of John Paul II and, according to the author,

> Contrary to what is commonly believed, Vatican II did not remedy the cause or substantially modify this model [that is, the one structured around Roman centralization]. Rather, he carried out rebalancing, justifying acquisitions, pruning their dry branches, the effects of which the council fathers were unable to assume. Moreover, he released energies, raised new hopes, such as in 1891, the encyclical Rerum Novarum. Much more, by his call for openness, for renewal, he seemed to legitimize and encourage directives that had always been considered suspect, if not condemnable. A period of turbulence and confusion was to follow, giving the impression that everything was changed, i.e., either permitted, or outdated, or possible (Poulat, 1980, p. 292, our translation).

On the other hand, Rémond (2001) considers that Catholicism has always been plural and, if the uncompromising model was dominant from Pius IX to Pius XII, it evolved progressively before being abandoned by the bishops during Vatican II. Therefore, attention to the reality of modernization is fundamental in its understanding.

In this regard, just as the French Revolution can be seen as the condition of Catholic intransigence in the 19th century, the Second Vatican Council, through its proposal for the *aggiornamento* of the Church, ended up reinvigorating intransigentism. This time, as a strategy reactivated by the bishops gathered in the *Coetus Internationalis Patrum*, chaired by Monsignor Lefebvre, who came to constitute the main group of opposition to the general spirit of the Council (Roy-Lysencourt, 2015) and a bastion of traditionalism which has been taken up by various Catholic movements in contemporary times (Caldeira, 2011; Zanotto, 2010).

Unlike ultramontanism – which is the most dynamic aspect of intransigentism in the 19th century –, these movements are notable for their schismatic character in relation to Holy See – both in response to the conciliar reforms and more recently to the reform program of Pope Francis – and due to the conservative content of its political alignments with far-right governments, which are rising in several countries in America and Europe, representing serious threats to the democratic rule of law. A scenario that inevitably leads to questions about the ambiguous effects of the public presence of religions in these contexts and, more specifically, places the theme of Catholic intransigence at the fore of the debate.

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It is in this sense that the proposal of this dossier is justified, whose objective is to bring together contributions willing to discuss the theme of Catholic intransigentism in light of the experience of Brazil, a country where this tendency developed during the 19th century is still present in many of its resonances.

Although this topic has become the object of studies produced in the last 50 years, essentially in France and Italy, is still incipient in Brazilian historiography, marked by the interpretative key coming from the "Liberation Church" and its "preferential option for the poor", which tended to highlight the progressive forces of Catholicism, leaving out - on purpose, perhaps – other discordant trends, sometimes designated by the concepts of ultramontanism, traditionalism, conservatism, fundamentalism, reactionaryism, etc. In such a way that, apart from some chronologically and geographically circumscribed works, no global synthesis on the topic has been produced to date.

The most direct motivation for this initiative is revealed to be a result of the activities that made up the International Colloquium "*História do Catolicismo no Brasil*: *debatendo as múltipas faces do intransigentismo*", co-organized by researchers linked to the Religious Sciences programs at PUC-Campinas, PUC-Minas and *Université Laval*, hosted by the PUC-Campinas between May 8th and 12th, 2022. The initiative involved researchers from different countries and levels of training, representing a unique opportunity for dialogue between academic propositions willing to restore the theme of Catholic intransigentism to its historical and interpretative complexity, thinking about Brazil's experience from its national and transnational connections from the 19th century to the present day.

It is hoped that the contributions gathered in this dossier represent a possibility of unfolding the discussions and inspire future studies.

Good reading!

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