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Liberalism and nationalism: An analytical perspective on their relationship with Christianity

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to carry out a conceptual analysis of liberalism and nationalism and their relationship with Christianity. To this end, we employ a qualitative methodology, a theoretical-reflexive approach a documentary analysis, to determine why and how liberalism and nationalism have influenced Christianity. We conclude that nationalism, in addition to shaping secularization, has caused a rupture with Christian principles and values by elevating the national interest above other ideals, thus validating wars. Liberalism, meanwhile, has also shaped secularization, emphasizing the principle of subsidiarity and the value of democracy. For its part, the Catholic Church has rejected waging war and violating people's essential rights in the name of nationalism. It has been flexible regarding the principle of subsidiarity, considering the role of democracy as a form of government and constituting the Vatican City State to escape from an exacerbated nationalism as in the case of fascism.

Keywords: Liberalism; nationalism; Christianity; reflection; discussion.

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Liberalismo y nacionalismo: una perspectiva de análisis sobre la relación con el cristianismo

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es el de realizar un análisis conceptual respecto del liberalismo y del nacionalismo y su relación con el cristianismo. Para este fin se trabaja con una metodología de corte cualitativo a través de un acercamiento teórico-reflexivo, llevado a cabo mediante un análisis documental que permite indagar respecto a por qué y cómo el liberalismo y el nacionalismo han influenciado sobre el cristianismo. A partir del estudio llevado a cabo se puede concluir en que: el nacionalismo junto con influir en la secularización, ha generado una ruptura con los principios y valores cristianos al poner a la nación como un fin, validando las guerras. El liberalismo, en tanto, ha incidido en la secularización y ha aportado la perspectiva del principio de subsidiaridad y el valor de la democracia. A su vez, la Iglesia Católica ha rechazado los conflictos bélicos y la vulneración de derechos esenciales de las personas, que pueden hacerse en el nombre de una nación, siendo flexible, ante el principio de subsidiaridad del liberalismo, considerando el rol de la democracia como forma de gobierno y constituyendo el Estado de la Ciudad del Vaticano para escapar de un nacionalismo exacerbado como es el caso del fascismo.

Palabras clave: Liberalismo; nacionalismo; cristianismo; reflexión; discusión.

Introduction

The Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries were shaped by revolutionary changes in the Eighteenth century and the emergence and development of new currents of thought. Marxism, anarchism, nationalism, liberalism, and the deepening of Church doctrine regarding social matters have been central to this period.

The Twentieth century was broad and decisive from the perspective of major social and political upheavals and transformations. Some examples include revolutionary changes in transportation, communication, food production, the treatment of disease and the ability to engage in catastrophic wars, the liberalism, communism, fascism and other revolutions and totalitarian forms of government, genocide, the world wars, the development of nuclear weapons and the Cold War, the population explosion, and the crisis of communism, to name just a handful.

Throughout this period, liberalism and nationalism have been among the most

consequential competing philosophies of government and social organization a priori. We ask how they have influenced Christianity. This conceptual review seeks to carry out a documentary analysis of liberalism and nationalism and their influence on Christianity.

For this purpose, a qualitative study will be carried out and under this logic the questions that emerge are: How and why liberalism and nationalism have influenced Christianity. Next, a review will be provided that gives an account of essential aspects of liberalism and nationalism, as well as their influence or eventual relationship with Christianity.

1. Methodology

1.1. Research approach and type of research

A qualitative approach is chosen to accomplish the research objective (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach is selected, since it is the most appropriate for elaborating

an analysis in the context of theory-building and, in this way, providing answers to the questions addressed by the research, which is of a social nature (Punch, 2014).

This qualitative approach is utilized for the additional reason that, under this methodological modality, data collection and analysis are used to refine the research questions or reveal new conundrums in the process of interpretation (Hernández, Fernández & Baptista, 2014).

1.2. Research method

The method chosen to conduct the research is documentary analysis (Punch, 2014). This way is beneficial when the research is one of the first to be carried out from a qualitative perspective.

1.3. Data collection method

The work is carried out by reviewing sources of information such as journal articles or journals indexed in the WoS and Scopus databases. Texts were used, which emerged from a preliminary review of the literature contributing to the formulation of the research questions.

2. Theoretical foundation

A literature review is carried out under a theoretical perspective (Hernández et al., 2014) to answer the questions generated. According to Morgan (2022), the documentary analysis begins with liberalism and the main contributions discussed regarding this dimension. Subsequently, the influence of liberalism on Christianity is analyzed. Using the same type of analysis, nationalism and its influence on Christianity is studied.

2.1. Liberalism

This ideology recognizes the existence of a state of freedom in which people have equal rights. Therefore, civil society, as Locke maintains, is a voluntary creation to achieve, through consensus, social purposes that do not harm others (Hinkelammert, 2000). This idea of political freedom is supported by classical authors such as Humboldt, who maintains that humans achieve their ends through individual freedom, not by having them imposed by the State (Cuéllar & Bolívar, 2003).

Liberalism is an ideology (Fazio, 2007) that proposes the primacy of individual freedom as the guiding principle of society, along with advocating a minimal intervention of the State in people's lives, separating the public from the private (Walzer, 1984). Specifically, liberalism proposes that individual freedom is an inalienable right, and this value implies tolerance and dialogue. Liberal tolerance is respect even for those beliefs and practices considered wrong (Gray, 2000). Thus, it is necessary to ensure the State's neutrality regarding religious beliefs concerning individuals' private activities (Fazio, 2007).

The idea of freedom includes: religious freedom, which implies a sphere of irreducible personal immunity, in which each individual may or may not pursue higher spiritual goals (Barrero, 2002); political freedom, meaning that the State cannot violate individual rights, necessitating the political representation of citizens, the separation and reciprocal limitation of political powers and the establishment of the rule of law (Fazio, 2007); and economic freedom, which entails leaving economic decisions in the hands of the market, i.e., without state intervention, to achieve maximum social welfare (Czeglédi, 2019).

Freedom includes the right to own property, as a pillar of political rights, and includes freedom in all spheres, including religious freedom (Coello, 2010). There is an interpretation of liberalism that emphasizes individual autonomy and human rights (Wittrock, 2021). Even though, in the context

of the term democracy, liberalism is associated with an area of security, as in the case of Thailand (Connors, 2019). The same situation is perceived in Cambodia (Norén-Nilsson, 2022).

In any case, beyond the precarious liberalism and its application in Southeast Asia (Claudio, 2021) and in authoritarian regimes, more consideration and attention should be given to how liberalism has been used to promote democracy worldwide.

Meanwhile, political freedom is indissolubly related to religious freedom, and both, central axes of liberalism, lead to secularization. In this regard, Ratzinger & Habermas (2006) have pointed out: “Pluralist societies have endowed themselves with a state that is neutral towards the different worldviews to which its citizens adhere” (p.8). This line of reasoning implies that: “In debates that affect the religious beliefs of a sector of the citizenry, the State will have to remain equidistant, without prejudging in favor of one side or the other” (Fazio, 2007, p.9).

Next, economic freedom, as discussed by Adam Smith, holds that benevolent people are not required to achieve social welfare; according to this point of view, selfishness and the pursuit of self-interest lead to such welfare, through the invisible hand, in a natural way (Del Hierro, 2019). The market alone, without any intervention, through the mechanisms of exchanges and prices, reaches such optimum (Pfefferkorn, 2008).

In this philosophy, selfishness and striving for wealth, unlike what Christianity proposes, lead to the attainment of greater social welfare and general utility. John Stuart Mill stresses the importance of freedom of choice and free competition to ensure the progress of society and opposes Bentham’s quantitative reductionism, stating that what allows the development of human potentialities and contributes to the spiritual perfection of man is qualitatively superior from the point of view of the utility it provides (Vergara, 2003; Fazio, 2007), providing a conceptual space for non-material and spiritual nurturing.

Fukuyama (1990) observes that

two adversaries of political and economic liberalism can be discerned: Nationalism, given that in the nineteenth century, there was a perceived demand for local claims and a strong growth of dogmatic religions, particularly Islam, which, he says, does not constitute a liberal ideology.

It is argued that the preceding contradicts are liberal ideas. But, Fukuyama (2022) contends, both nationalism and dogmatic religions fail to develop a universal philosophy, as they tend to be localized phenomena.

Indeed, the principle of subsidiarity implies that the State should refrain from participating in all those areas of the economy that the private sector can develop (Quintana, 2011). Its impact reached the Vatican; for example, Pope Pius XI explicitly stated that the State must leave room for intermediate associations to achieve hierarchical order, efficiency, and social effectiveness (Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno* n. 80). Pope John XXIII referred to personal initiative as a source of progress and indicated that the State must participate where there are no others who do so adequately (San Francisco, 1992).

2.2. Influence of liberalism on Christianity

Secularization is the first influence of liberalism on Christianity, that is to say, the loss in society, or at least in part of it, of the principles, values, and behaviors inherent to the Christian faith. In other words, as stated by Weber (2012), secularization is the process of rupture and emancipation of politics and social life from the authority of religion, under the tendency towards rationalization and disenchantment. Consequently, from the perspective of analytical philosophy, secularization refers to the process through which society abandons the traditional manifestations of faith (Bellolio, 2019).

It should be emphasized that the trend toward political and economic freedom has affected Christianity beyond secularization, through the principle of subsidiarity proposed

by Humboldt and underlying the market logic that favors and stimulates private entrepreneurship.

For example, it may be argued that liberalism influences Christianity (Agudelo & Garzón, 2022). Locke's work is consistent with the sacred scriptures as he suggests (Fazio, 2007), and Tocqueville, the advocate of equality and freedom, reveals that both political freedom and the ability to innovate are fused with the Christian religion, since true freedom requires a worldview that transcends earthly life (Hermosa, 2011).

The influence of liberalism on Christianity is relevant, and thus: "The Second Vatican Council laid the foundations for the construction of a Christian Modernity, which, far from clerical or theocratic attitudes, could give meaning to the secularized and nihilistic modernity of the twentieth century" (Fazio, 2007, p.391). Furthermore, Pius XII, in a radio message on the eve of Christmas 1944, accepted that democracy, as proposed by liberalism, was the best form of government to confront totalitarianism.

Consequently, secularization, although the most evident result of the influence of liberalism, is not the only one; Christianity has made its postulates more flexible and capable of facing and considering the principle of subsidiarity and accepting democracy. Likewise, the principle of subsidiarity has been nourished and vigorously reinforced by this explicit acceptance by Christianity.

2.3. Nationalism

Nationalism is: "A state of mind that considers nationality the source of all creative cultural energy and all economic well-being, while recognizing the nation-state as the ideal form of political organization" (Tirado, 2017, p.21). Nationalism, thus, positions the nation as an end and, through its various expressions, has been associated with warlike confrontations (Fazio, 2007). Indeed, nationalism replaces religion as an object of worship and emphasizes national identity

(Jara, 2020). The State is necessary to ensure internal and external security, but religious freedom, freedom of education, and the principle of subsidiarity must reign in modern societies.

Nationalism, in other words, is: "The collective manifestation of liberalism, in the sense that nationalism is identified with the claim of absolute autonomy, no longer of the individual man of the liberal worldview, but the national community" (Fazio, 2007, p.189). The nation is to nationalism what individual freedom is to liberalism, there being an influence of liberalism on nationalism; although the latter incorporates affective elements such as shared language, tradition, history, territory, and time, giving a sense of belonging to a community (Beiner, 1997).

Nationalism, in its revolutionary period, emphasizes the importance of representation and legitimacy (Vior, 2011). It also advances in a significant secularization by prioritizing the State for matters that go from religious to civic, such as the registration of births, marriages, and deaths, and by leaving no doubt that both national education and the national army, separated from religion, will be the cornerstones for the spread of revolutionary nationalism; subsequently, the States create: "National symbols, museums, art, festivals, and sports, a process of nationalization of society that continues to this day" (Köhler, 1997, p.179).

Romantic nationalism developed in Europe, taking a form in Germany, in the first half of the 19th century (Font, 2021), in which love for the homeland went hand in hand with the conception that Germany was uniquely called to carry out a universal re-foundation of society due to the supposed superiority of its language and culture; an ideology later followed by other nations, like Italy, Poland, Austria, and Russia, among others, all believing themselves to be chosen ones to re-found human culture.

There were undoubtedly religious and Christian elements in romantic nationalism; for example, there were allusions in Poland and Russia to the nation being summoned for

spiritual salvation or the preservation of true Christianity (Fazio, 2007). But, in most cases, ethnic, cultural, or religious superiority was assumed that is incompatible with Christianity.

Consequently, in the second half of the 19th century, the ideas of subjective and objective nationalism had formed. Subjective, or political, nationalism considers that the nation results from people wishing to be united and to continue with an ordinary existence (Zabalo, 2004). Objective, or ethnocultural, nationalism sees the nation as a cultural and material heritage of ethnicity and blood, and by enhancing the nation's identity, other races or ethnicities can be rejected (Fazio, 2007).

The underlying spirituality in the subjective vision of nationalism suggests that religion may play a significant role in the transcendence of the self as the ultimate goal. But, in real life, this subjective nationalism can lead to the existence of war at odds with the principles and values of Christianity. Meanwhile, objective nationalism is one of the primary causes of the last century's world wars.

However, there exists a liberal type of nationalism, primarily reflecting what happens in today's liberal democracies. Nevertheless, this remains relatively unpopular among theorists because nationalism has acquired a particularly bad reputation (Miller, 2021).

2.4. Nationalism and Christianity

A review of the literature reveals a nationalist trend that prevailed among young Russian intellectuals in late 19th century, among them Dostoevsky, which had a direct relationship with Christianity. In fact, this current reflected the existence of a social Christianity, which, in its essence, reflected the belief that Christian love would perfect human nature so that its union with the divine would likely be realized (Gueorguieva, 2022).

Nevertheless, Pius XII saw a clear danger when state intervention increased, attacking individual freedom on which the principle of subsidiarity is based (Gutián,

2020). In any case, the Catholic Church's rejection of this ideology has been pointed; for example, Pius XI stated that:

Only superficial spirits can fall into the error of speaking of a national God, of a national religion, and undertake the crazy task of imprisoning in the limits of a single people, in the ethnic narrowness of a single race, God, creator of the world, king and Legislator of peoples, before whose greatness nations are like droplets of water in a bucket. (Fazio, 2007, p.381).

The Church had to create the Vatican City State in 1929 to escape the fascist interventionism of Mussolini's Italy, based on an agreement that would have made it easier for the Church to get closer to the fascist ideology (Spíndola, 2021).

From the above, the Church's efforts to distance Catholicism from ethnonationalism are evident. Nevertheless, there have been ethnonationalist influences on Catholicism (and vice versa), as in Spain and Portugal, where the nationalist traditionalism of the Franco and Salazar regimes had a strong Catholic orientation, and in France, where the nationalist movement also had a Catholic flavor, for example, its suspicion of paganizing customs (Sánchez, 2022).

In any case, Spanish history from the 14th century show that there was a strong relationship between Catholicism as an official state religion and imperialist nationalism, although perhaps not so much with 20th century ethnonationalism. Moreover, nationalism can lead to imperialist wars and to totalitarianism, because a nation that is elevated above all else can deny fundamental rights to other nations and to individuals.

Nationalism can also lead to religious fundamentalism and oppression, where a particular religion is associated with the essence of national identity, and all others are rivals or enemies by definition.

Nationalism can also exist at the local or regional levels, as in Spain, where regional identities had emerged in nineteenth century developing in parallel to Spanish nationalism and whose intensity was more vigorous in regions with distinct languages, like Cataluña,

the Basque Country and Galicia (Reguero & Herrero, 2022).

In the XXI century, several measures adopted to support the existence of welfare states tend to follow a marginally more nationalist, and less liberal, dynamic in globalization issues related to the European Union and immigration, compared to more general issues of political-economic globalization (Burgoon & Schakel, 2021).

Conclusions

Nationalism, as an influence on secularization, has violated Christian principles and values by making national identity an end in itself, resulting in many of the worst wars of the last century. Except for specific cases, there is no direct relationship between nationalism and Christianity.

Liberalism has also influenced secularization and has brought the perspective of the principle of subsidiarity to the world of Christianity. In conjunction, this ideology has contributed to the value of democracy.

It is important to emphasize that the Catholic Church has rejected war and the violation of people's essential rights, which can flow from nationalism. The Church has been flexible regarding the liberal principle of subsidiarity, has supported democracy as a form of government and constituted the Vatican City State to escape from the exacerbated form of nationalism that fascism was.

Since this is a qualitative study carried out through a documentary analysis based on journal articles indexed in WoS and Scopus and seminal literature, its scope is limited. Nevertheless, the review could be extended to documents in the SciELO database and other books or book chapters in a future study.

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