



Evangelicals in Brazil: the relationship between religion and politics in the public sphere

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Abstract

The evangelical movement (wave) has shown a significant growth among the Brazilian population in recent decades, which has also manifested itself in political representation and, consequently, draws the attention for the political projects that this group raises. For this reason, studies in this area are extremely relevant to understand how this relationship between religious and seculars should take place in the public space. After analysis based on the hypothetical-deductive methodology, it was found that both religious and people with different worldviews should act in the public space with respect and tolerance. Imposing a way of looking at the world goes against the

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essence of liberalism and the democratic rule of law, as it violates basic issues such as the right to free consciousness and religion freedom itself.

Keywords

Evangelicals in Brazil, Religion, Politics, Secular State, Public sphere.

Evangélicos en Brasil: la relación entre religión y política en la esfera pública

Resumen

El movimiento evangélico ha mostrado un crecimiento significativo entre la población brasileña en las últimas décadas, lo que también se manifiesta en la representación política y, como consecuencia, despierta la atención por proyectos políticos que este grupo plantea. Por esta razón, los estudios en este ámbito son de gran relevancia para comprender cómo esta relación entre religiosos y seculares debe darse en el espacio público. Luego un análisis basado en la metodología hipotético-deductiva, se constató que tanto los religiosos como las personas con diferentes visiones del mundo deben actuar en el espacio público con respeto y tolerancia. Imponer una forma de ver el mundo va en contra de la esencia del liberalismo y del Estado de derecho democrático, ya que viola cuestiones básicas como el derecho a la libertad de conciencia y la propia libertad de religión.

Palabras clave

Evangélicos en Brasil, Religión, Política, Estado laico, Esfera pública.



Introduction

The religiousness is part of many people's lives, even of those who don't profess any faith, because the arguments to refute faith deal with the issue of religion. The religious person (actor) doesn't express his/her faith just in private, but also in public, considering it frames his/her way of seeing and interpreting the world, is printed in the reason of his/her identity. According to the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, the religious citizens are not only citizens, but religious-citizens, having in mind this separation is unenforceable, that is, these citizens can't tear these characteristics apart depending on where they will act out.

Brazil is deeply linked to religion historically speaking, since the colonization process took place with the support and even partnership of the Catholic Church. During all the colonial period the only religion allowed was the Catholicism, and other faith expressions were under persecution. During the imperial period, the 1824 Constitution guaranteed freedoms to practice other religions, but Catholicism remained as the official state religion, which was even a requirement for full citizenship.

Republicanism presented an important division between Church and State, which fostered the growth, albeit slowly, of other faiths, such as Afro religions, Islamism and Protestantism. However, it was only in the last decades that Brazil showed a dizzying growth of the evangelical movement¹, which meant a greater representation in the political field, reaching the 2018

1 The term evangelical or evangelicalism comes from the word gospel, which in Greek means good news or good news and is used to name the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John that relate the life and work of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. This expression is used in Brazil in a generalized way by churches of Protestant theology. More traditional and historic churches in Brazil tend to call themselves simply by the Protestant term, as in the case of Lutherans and Presbyterians, but this is not a rule. In this way, the terms Protestantism and Evangelicalism are extremely close, and can be considered synonymous in the Brazilian religious context to refer to both historical, Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches.

elections in which 196² elected federal deputies who called themselves evangelicals.

Another example of this growth is the President himself who highlights the practice of faith from time to time, who so far has already appointed three top ministers who act as pastors and appointed a minister to the Brazilian Federal Supreme Court who was «dreadfully evangelical»³. André Mendonça is an evangelical pastor of the Presbyterian Church and was also Attorney General (Minister of Justice) and Federal General Attorney during Bolsonaro's government, being appointed by the president in July 2021 and has taken office in December 2021 to occupy the position of Justice of the Federal Supreme Court⁴. At first, none of these issues appear to be negative, but this growth draws attention to the political projects that this group raises. For this reason, studies in this area are extremely relevant to understand how this relationship between religious, secular and the State itself should take place.

Bearing in mind this scenario, the present work proposes to discuss what would be the boundaries of religious freedom in a democratic state of law according to the thinking of Jürgen Habermas and has as specific goals to characterize the concepts of post-secular society, of communicative reason and public space, as well as compare how the philosopher helps us to understand the way the relations between religious and the liberal State should be. The methodology used was hypothetical-deductive through the analysis of works by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas that deal with the relationship between Religion and State, as well as secondary sources that manage the subject according to the Habermasian perspective.

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2 «Frente Parlamentar Evangélica do Congresso Nacional» Câmara dos Deputados, 2022, consultado em janeiro 13, 2022, <https://www.camara.leg.br/internet/deputado/frenteDetalhe.asp?id=54010>.

3 «Bolsonaro diz que vai indicar ministro 'terrivelmente evangélico' para o STF», G1 Política, 2019, consultado em dezembro 8, 2020, <https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2019/07/10/bolsonaro-diz-que-vai-indicar-ministro-terrivelmente-evangelico-para-o-stf.ghtml>.

4 João de Mari, «André Mendonça toma posse como ministro do STF». CNN Brasil, 2021, consultado em janeiro 14, 2022, <https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/politica/andre-mendonca-toma-posse-como-ministro-do-stf/v>.



The current paper aims to analyze and discuss the issues raised above. In the last two centuries, a dizzying growth in the Evangelicals has been observed in Brazil.

1. The relevance of the evangelical movement in the current political scenario

In the last two centuries, a dizzying growth in the Evangelicals has been observed in Brazil. According to the Census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistic (IBGE), in 2010 Brazil had an Evangelical population of 42,3 million people, which corresponds to 22,2% of the whole population and represents an increase of 16 million if compared to the year of 2000⁵. Whereas the research published in the end of 2016 by the Institute of Research *Datafolha*, shows that «three out of ten (29%) of Brazilians aged 16 or over are currently Evangelicals»⁶.

Consequently, the participation of Evangelicals in politics has followed the population growth of this group. «In 1990, there were 22 deputies (...); in 1998, 53 deputies; in 2002, 69 deputies (...); in 2006, 42 deputies and in 2010, 63 Evangelical deputies»⁷. In the 2014 elections, 72 deputies who were elected, self-called Evangelicals, according to the survey conducted by Sandra Duarte de Souza⁸. In the last elections, which happened in 2018, the so-called Evangelical Caucus, has increased to 196 deputies, that is, 38% of the total de 513 parliamentarians in the House of Representatives/Parliament⁹.

5 «Censo 2010: número de católicos cai e aumenta o de evangélicos, espíritas e sem religião». IBGE, 2012, consultado em outubro 24, 2020, <https://censo2010.ibge.gov.br/noticias-censo?id=3&idnoticia=2170&view=noticia>.

6 «44% dos evangélicos são ex-católicos», Folha S. Paulo, 2016, consultado em outubro 24, 2020, <https://datafolha.folha.uol.com.br/opiniaopublica/2016/12/1845231-44-dos-evangelicos-sao-ex-catolicos.shtml>.

7 Ari Pedro Oro, *Algumas interpelações do Pentecostalismo no Brasil* (Belo Horizonte: Horizonte, 2011), 390.

8 Sandra Duarte de Souza, *Mulheres evangélicas na política: tensionamentos entre o público e o privado* (Belo Horizonte: Horizonte, 2015), 1274.

9 Monica Bolle, *Democracia em Risco? 22 ensaios sobre o Brasil hoje* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2019), 84.

This growth (emergence) reveals the crescent influence of the Evangelicals in politics and, consequently in creating and vetoing the laws and public policies. This issue has drawn so much attention that, few days from the second round of the elections of 2018, the Evangelical Caucus, produced and handed in a document of 65 pages, called «Manifesto to the Nation: Brazil for Brazilians» (Manifesto à Nação: O Brasil para os brasileiros), for the current candidate to president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro. The manifest goes beyond the causes generally defended by the caucus, as the uses and customs and presents a structured agenda in four principles, namely: Modernization (Updating) of the State, Legal Security, Fiscal Security and Revolution in Education. The last topic defends a strategic planning for the implementation of the Project Non-Party School (Projeto Escola Sem Partido), because according to the document, there is a corrosion of values and principles of society which has contributed to the violence against the Christian-Jewish civilization and has hit Christianity¹⁰. The manifest suggests that the Evangelical Caucus intends to increase its influential power in the government agenda.

The Evangelical Movement (Wave) has taken increasing bigger and bigger proportions in the Brazilian scenario, being a religious group, which one third of the Brazilian population belongs to¹¹. Thus, they are no longer a minority group, and reveal a great power of influence in several areas of society. The history of the Evangelical Movement is long and rich in details, considering it accounts for five centuries of history and changes, which help us to understand the current movement. One of the men responsible for some of the expressive changes in the history of Church was Martin Luther, considered the main pioneer of the so-called nowadays Protestantism or Evangelicalism.

10 «Manifesto à nação: o Brasil para os Brasileiros». Frente Parlamentar Evangélica, Câmara dos Deputados em 24 de outubro de 2018, 53.

11 «44% dos evangélicos são ex-católicos».

The German reformer was the most notable and outstanding figure for Lutheranism, the largest Protestant movement of the Reformation. To a greater or lesser extent, this leader influenced virtually every subsequent Protestant movement. Historians such as Zinnhobler¹² and Franzen¹³ note that virtually no theological idea expressed by Luther had not been formulated previously, yet his contemporaries received it as a novelty, and with it other evangelical movements emerged.

In a way, the term Protestantism/Protestant was what its name suggests, a protest. Scholar Peter Klassen makes the following note about the term: «Gradually the term "Protestant" (...) came to be applied to most new religious bodies, although it was originally designed primarily for the followers of Martin Luther»¹⁴.

When the relationship between Church and State in Brazil is under analysis, it is clear that this union took place since the colonial period when Portugal experienced an agreement called «Padroado» and, through this system, Church and State came together in mutual support.

The State, through the benevolence of the Pope, could control the administration of the Church within the territory and, in turn, the Church supported the Portuguese Absolutist Monarchy. When the colonization of Brazil began, in the 16th century, the patronage system was extended to Portuguese America and the metropolis coordinated the Jesuit missions in indigenous tribes, the implantation of churches in the villages that were initially formed in the Northeast and appointed the bishops who would act in the regions. In addition, it administered the payment of the clergy, but also collected the tithes of the population.

12 Rudolf Zinnhobler, Josef Lenzenweger, Peter Stockmeier, Johannes Bauer, Karl Amon, *História da Igreja Católica* (São Paulo: Loyola, 2006).

13 August Franzen, *Breve História da Igreja* (Lisboa: Editorial Presença, 1996).

14 Peter Klassen, *Reformation, Protestant*. *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, Ontario, 1989, 1, consultado em outubro 24, 2020. http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Reformation,_Protestant.

During the colonial period, the Catholic Church and the Portuguese State maintained a close relationship and religious freedom was prohibited. Protestants, Jews, or adherents of African religions were prohibited from worshipping. It was only in the Constitution of 1824 that the Brazilian State, then independent, granted a small opening that gradually expanded, mainly with the entry of European immigrants in large numbers from the mid-18th century onwards.

The 1824 Constitution, granted by Dom Pedro I, restricted the worship of other religions to the home environment, proselytizing being prohibited, as stated in art. 5th: «The Roman Catholic Apostolic Religion will continue to be the Religion of the Empire. All other Religions will be permitted with their domestic worship, or privately in houses intended for this, without any form outside the Temple»¹⁵. the art. 102, item II, of the 1824 Constitution, held the State responsible for paying and appointing bishops. Over the years, people who did not profess the Catholic religion acquired more rights, such as the legalization of marriage and the civil registration of children, according to Law 3069 of 1863¹⁶.

It was only after the Proclamation of the Republic that the Constitution of 1891 declared the separation of State and Church. The letter guaranteed freedom of worship, civil marriage, the secularization of cemeteries and education. From the Proclamation of the Republic, religions obtained freedom to conquer the adherence of the population, the churches multiplied, as well as the entry of missionaries from both Catholic, Benedictine and Franciscan orders, as well as from various evangelical denominations, such as Baptists, Presbyterians, Mennonites among many others.

Evangelicals grew in population and in representation in the legislation and even in the federal executive over time, with an

15 Brasil, 1824, *Constituição Política do Império do Brasil*. Brasília, DF: Presidência da República, consultado em outubro 24, 2020, http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/constituicao/constituicao24.htm.

16 Brasil, *Decreto nº 3.069*, de 17 de abril de 1863, consultado em outubro 24, 2020, <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/decret/1824-1899/decreto-3069-17-abril-1863-555008-publicacaooriginal-74026-pe.html>.

emphasis on the elections in October 2018. This historic growth (emergence) in Brazil led the group to greater exposure in public spaces, such as broadcasters of television and radio, social assistance organizations of great impact and the presence of a large contingent of people in religious events, as in the case of the March for Jesus (Marcha para Jesus) and other similar festivities. This demonstrates not only national relevance, but also power, and power seduces, as the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes says in his work *Leviathan*: «the general trend of all men is a perpetual and restless desire for power and more power, which ceases only with death»¹⁷.

A heterogeneous, plural and diversified religious group among so many denominations and theologies that, arriving in Brazil, faced prejudice, legal restrictions and that conquered its space and freedom, finds itself increasing its influence (emerging) and demonstrating, in several cases, a project of power that violates the principles of Contemporary Constitutionalism¹⁸.

On September 18, 2019, 62 parliamentarians from the evangelical caucus met with five ministers from the government of the President of Brazil, Jair Messias Bolsonaro, who at the time were Onyx Lorenzoni (Chief of Staff of the Presidency), Luiz Eduardo Ramos (Government Secretary), Sérgio Moro (Attorney General- Justice Ministry), Osmar Terra (Citizenship Ministry) and André Mendonça (Federal Government Attorney's Office). During the event, some parliamentarians defended a more articulated collaboration between the government and the evangelical caucus with the objective of advancing the customs agenda¹⁹, and to fight against court actions

17 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviatã, ou matéria, forma e poder de um Estado eclesiástico e civil* (São Paulo: Martin Claret, 2014), 72.

18 It is important to highlight that a generalization of the evangelical movement was made, because several denominations are represented in the Evangelical Caucus (Frente Parlamentar Evangélica), but it is essential to clarify that different groups demonstrate less or bigger participation in the public scenario.

19 «Bancada evangélica prega parceria com ministros de Bolsonaro contra Supremo», Folha S. Paulo, 2019, consultado em outubro 24, 2020, <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2019/09/bancada-evangelica-prega-parceria-com-ministros-de-bolsonaro-contra-supremo.shtml>.

that are contrary to the Evangelical Parliamentary Front (Evangelical Caucus)²⁰. In an interview to *Folha de S. Paulo*, parliamentarians reported the relevance of the customs agenda, such as Sóstenes Cavalcante (DEM-RJ) when he stated that the agenda will come to light «whenever we think it's convenient»²¹. Gilberto Nascimento (PSC-SP) followed the same line when he stated: «Of course we have a heavy agenda, we lack space. But as evangelicals, defenders of the family, for us this is an irrevocable clause»²².

As an example, there is the preliminary decision of the Justice of the Federal Supreme Court, Gilmar Mendes (2019), who on 10/18/2019 suspended the effects of articles 2, caput, and 3, caput, of Law 3,491, of August 28, 2015, from the Municipality of Ipatinga, MG. The reason was the exclusion from the municipal education policy of any reference to gender diversity and sexual education.

The Justice Gilmar Mendes argues that Law 3,491 violates several constitutional articles, as one of the fundamental objectives of the Federative Republic of Brazil to build a free, fair and solidary society (article 3, I), the fundamental rights to freedom, equality and non-discrimination of any nature (art. 5, caput), exclusive competence of the Union to legislate on the guidelines and bases of national education (art. 22, XXIV) and the freedom to learn, teach, research and disseminate thought, art and knowledge (art. 206, I and II).

Also, the participation of the Brazilian Secretary of State (Minister for Foreign Affairs) in an international conference organized by the government of Viktor Orban, in the city of Budapest, on November 27, 2019, is another example. At the meeting, the Secretary for National Sovereignty and Citizenship Affairs, Ambassador Fabio Marzano, presented the new government policy to authorities from several countries, stating: «One of the main changes carried out by the Bolsonaro

20 «Bancada evangélica prega parceria com ministros de Bolsonaro contra Supremo».

21 «Pauta de costumes de Bolsonaro perde espaço e empaca no Congresso», *Folha S. Paulo*, 2019, consultado em outubro 24, 2020, <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2019/09/pauta-de-costumes-de-bolsonaro-perde-espaco-e-empaca-no-congresso.shtml>.

22 «Pauta de costumes de Bolsonaro perde espaço e empaca no Congresso».

government was precisely to put religion in the process of formulating policies in Brazil»²³, a speech that echoed negatively in the Vatican, in which Pope Francis makes religious freedom one of the pillars of his diplomacy²⁴, and also in Brazil, a country with a Catholic majority and wide religious tolerance. At the same conference, Archbishop Antoine Camilleri, the Vatican's Deputy Secretary for Relations with States, warned against ambassador Fabio Marzano's speech when he warned that «even when well-intentioned, State interference can lead to a violation of religious freedom and politicize the faith, in the same way that peace or human rights were contaminated by politics»²⁵, and was emphatic in saying that «such an attitude would be a 'disservice' to Christianity, deepening the tension in society»²⁶.

Concerning the cases like these presented previously, we can see the existence of conflicts between evangelical interests and the principles of the Liberal State. For this reason, it becomes relevant to study the post-secular relationship between State and Religion from the perspective of the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who analyzes the participation of religious people within public spaces. Religious people, and more specifically evangelicals, are normal citizens with rights and guarantees, who with their worldviews have and advocate projects for society as other organized groups also do. Thus, we will see below how Habermas' thinking, his concepts of post-secular society and public space guide religious people in their relations with the State.

2. The post-secular society

Jürgen Habermas argues that religion, especially in the portrait/acting of fundamentalists, has grown in action for the accomplish-

23 Itamaraty contraria Constituição e prega religião como política de Estado, UOL, 2019, consultado em junho 23, 2019, <https://noticias.uol.com.br/colunas/jamil-chade/2019/11/28/governo-bolsonaro-cristaos-hungria-diplomacia-itamaraty.htm>

24 Itamaraty contraria Constituição e prega religião como política de Estado.

25 Itamaraty contraria Constituição e prega religião como política de Estado.

26 Itamaraty contraria Constituição e prega religião como política de Estado.

ment of a project of power in recent decades and has come to have a meaningful influence on the international political scene and aroused new discussions on the relationship between State and Church. The reflections of the German scholar marked the third phase of his political-philosophical works.

The revival of the clash between science and religion, or faith and reason, as Jürgen Habermas calls it, is a problem that touches the heart of the liberal state. The process of creation of the democratic State of law brought with it the freedoms of belief and conscience, but as pointed out above, many religious people, and here more specifically the evangelicals in Brazil, have come to power and put on the agenda their society projects that often confront elementary principles of a liberal state. The phenomenon of secularization brought to light the normative foundations that direct the functioning of the State, but this State must remain neutral in the face of discussions between different entities that approach different ways of understanding the world.

Among the tasks of the liberal state is the protection of the principle of civic equality of its citizens, whether religious (gläubigen) or non-religious (ungläubigen). Thus, there must be a conviction on the part of citizens that the democratic regime is committed to the promotion of their respective ways of life²⁷.

The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas states in his book «Faith and Reason» that the term «secularization» brought the meaning of an expropriation of ecclesiastical power to the public sector; in his words «the compulsory transfer of Church assets to secular public power»²⁸. In this sense, all religiosity/religiousness, that is, the way of thinking and meaning through religion, was replaced by reason without theological support and impacted an entire culture and society.

27 Wesley Fernandes Araujo Freire, «Religião, esfera pública e pós-secularismo: o debate Rawls-Habermas acerca do papel da religião na democracia liberal», *Saberes: Revista interdisciplinar de Filosofia e Educação* 10 (2014): 116.

28 Jürgen Habermas, *Fé e Saber* (São Paulo: Unesp, 2013), 5.

But the term «secularization» has been given meanings that even conflict with each other. If, on the one hand, it brings the conception of a domestication of ecclesiastical authority by worldly power, on the other hand, it also brings an act of illicit appropriation where the modern molds of life and thought are discredited as being stolen.

If the concept of replacement is intended to bring the optimistic idea to a disenchanting audience, the concept of appropriation brings the thought of the ruin of a purposeless and unprotected modernity. But Habermas argues that these two conceptions make the same mistake, for «they regard secularization as a zero-sum game between, on the one hand, the productive forces of science and technology, liberated by capitalism, and, on the other, the conservative powers of religion and the Church»²⁹.

Within this dialectic, only one can win by relying on the destruction of the other. This is a logic that does not suit a society in which civilizing common sense acts as a third party in the polarized relations between science and religion.

It is from the permanence of religions in secularized societies that Habermas brings up the concept of post-secularization, because even in the face of the development of liberalism and the split between Church and State, bringing the concept of secular State, religions, and here mainly the Christian faith, show that they are still relevant in society, as well as guiding the actions of many political actors. Religion did not disappear or become irrelevant, but remained strong in social relations, that is, it managed to survive in the face of the secularization movement.

Post-secularization does not mean «de-secularization» (...) but a social model that «adjusts to the survival of religious communities in an increasingly secularizing environment» (...). Therefore, it is not the idea of returning to the sacred or emptying the secularization process, but the permanence of religion in secularized

29 Jürgen Habermas, *Fé e Saber*, 6.

societies contributing normative and motivational content in the public sphere³⁰.

A classical and symbolic example is the presence of religious objects in official buildings in Brazil, such as the crucifix in the Federal Supreme Court or the Bible in a prominent place on the board of directors in the House of Representatives/Parliament in Brasília.

On the relationship of religious in a post-secularized society, Habermas points out a triple reflection. First, the religious must understand that he is inserted in a community that has different confessions and religions. Second, the religious must adapt to the authority of science that holds worldly knowledge. And, lastly, it needs to conform to the foundations of a constitutional state. In view of this reflection, the religious can be inserted within the dynamics of social relationships without, therefore, tearing the bond of a political community. And it is then that from this conflict between reason and faith, as Habermas calls it, that the State, being neutral, will deal with the arguments and worldviews of this plural society to make its decisions. In this way, Habermas states that the reason of the State remains open to the possibility of learning from both parties to the conflict³¹.

Concerning the State, Habermas also argues that being neutral on ideological and faith issues, in addition to being a promoter and guarantor of equal rights, it cannot act out with a pre-formed concept that harms current religious and ideological conceptions. Therefore, the neutrality of the State is irreconcilable with the political generalization of a secularized world perspective, that is, one that does not carry religious world values.

The principle of separation between Church and State demands extreme rigor from state institutions in dealing with religious communities; parliaments and courts, government and administration

30 Edson Elias Morais y José G. A. B. Póker, «Religião, Esfera Pública e o Problema Político: Uma Contribuição Habermasiana», *Mediações - Revista de Ciências Sociais* 2, Vol. 23 (2018): 351.

31 Jürgen Habermas, *Fé e Saber*, 8.

violate the commandment of neutrality to be maintained in terms of worldviews when they privilege one side over the other. On the other hand, however, the secularist demand that the State must (in line with freedom of religion) abstain from any policy that supports or limits religion as such constitutes an overly narrow interpretation of this principle. Despite this, the rejection of secularism must not open the door to revisions that will annul the separation between Church and State³².

One of the characteristics of secularized modernity is the co-existence with the plurality. This plurality is revealed not only in the religious issue, but also in political, scientific, moral, and cultural traditions. In view of this, a homogeneous society cannot be considered considering the multiplicity of worldviews. Therefore, members of society, citizens, have fundamental constitutional rights to be able to express themselves and act in society based on their worldview. Politicians elected within the democratic system, on the other hand, have the obligation to present themselves as neutral/laic, as they also represent the State. The point is not that political representatives cannot express their faith or ideology, but that in their performance as elected politicians, by the people and for the people, their exercise on behalf of the State must be neutral in the relations of faith, the State based on neutrality, in other words, in secularism.

Habermas argues that the liberal state is subject to a profane morality, as it is not based on a theology, or more specifically, on a code of dogmas, but on neutrality in matters of worldview, therefore, secular, and secularized. It is necessary to emphasize that a secular State is not an atheist or averse to religion, but that it does not prioritize one philosophy, ideology, or belief over another, who do not act with preference. Thus, the liberal State is guided by scientific knowledge, endorsed by logic, by reason, which Habermas calls profane morality, as it is open to contributions from different people

32 Jürgen Habermas, *Entre naturalismo e religião: estudos filosóficos* (Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro, 2007), 140.

and applies to the entire community. And for this reason, religious cannot act with the objective of implementing projects that impose their worldview on the whole society, including those who do not understand the sacred text as a source of authority. Therefore, the secular State does not have the authority to transform any religious orientation into a norm without it going through public debate and that it is in accordance with the principles of a democratic State of law.

They must recognize that the principle of the exercise of power is neutral from the point of view of worldviews. Everyone needs to know and accept that, beyond the institutional threshold that separates the informal public sphere from parliaments, courts, ministries and administrations, only secular arguments count³³.

In this post-secular relationship between Religion and the secular State, religious people need to understand that their religious projects, even if recognized by them as being better than others, that contain divine authority, that are non-negotiable, as they are understood as absolute, do not enjoy privileges. and that are not previously understood as superior to other projects. As the State is neutral, it will deal with projects, discourses, worldviews, in an equivalent way, because in this way it will reveal equity.

The secular state is an important presupposition for an organized and peaceful relationship between religious and non-religious people, as well as between different religions. Considering this, religious freedom can be achieved, as there is an environment, even a legal one, for different worldviews to have space to manifest themselves both in the informal and formal public spheres. Even though it seems contradictory, it is only in a secular State that there is religious freedom and that religion has space to be authentic, as well as the religious expression of its faithful, because in a State where there is an official religion and there is no religious freedom, citizens do

33 Jürgen Habermas, *Entre naturalismo e religião: estudos filosóficos*, 147.

not have the option to follow and practice their faith, they are only given the option to practice the religious rites already established. This is negative for the religion itself, which would have a portion of unconverted followers acting religiously in a non-genuine way. It is also negative for the truly converted believers themselves, as they would be despised in the sense of being generalized, as they would not have the option of freely choosing to follow their faith. Thus, their practices would only be within the normality of social actions, and they would not be offered the option of following their religion, since the only option offered to them is to accept the already established institution.

The concept of post-secular society understands and accepts the contribution of religious traditions in the development of modern societies and more specifically in the development of the normative system that shows itself today in a democratic State of law. The liberal state, therefore, cannot deny the history that preceded it, that is, it cannot simply fail in recognizing the importance of the historical development process that established the foundations of values and principles that are now recognized as universal. For this reason, the presence of religions in contemporary societies cannot be seen simply as a threat to the existence of a liberal society, as they also contributed to this result. They must be seen within a plural society where religious and non-religious manifest their interests. Furthermore, Habermas argues that religious content is not simply irrational and that for this reason the public sphere cannot recognize non-religious arguments as superior to religious arguments, that is, «the hierarchy of scientific data over competing theological doctrines»³⁴.

The conception of tolerance of pluralist societies with a liberal constitution does not only require believers to understand, in their relations with nonbelievers and believers of other religions, that they need to reasonably count on the continuity of dissent, because

34 Wesley Fernandes Araujo Freire, «Religião, esfera pública e pós-secularismo: o debate Rawls-Habermas acerca do papel da religião na democracia liberal»: 126.

in a liberal political culture it is required the same understanding also of the unbelievers in the relationship with the religious. (...) The expectation of a continued non-convergence between faith and knowledge can only deserve the attribute of «sensible» if it is admissible that religious convictions also gain, from the perspective of secular-profane knowledge, an epistemic status that is not pure and simply irrational³⁵.

In view of this, it is relevant that religious people can use rational arguments for public debate, being even more effective if they translate their religious language so that they can achieve their interests, as well as collective interests. Habermas does not only expect the logic of post-secular relations from the religious, but also from the non-religious to act out in a self-critical way in the relation between faith and knowledge, which is why he states that «in their role as citizens of the state, secularized citizens cannot even in principle contest the truth potential of religious worldviews»³⁶.

From this, when relevant issues go to the political agenda, citizens, whether believers or not, end up colliding their convictions impregnated with different worldviews with other dissonant worldviews. Then, they deal peacefully with this public conflict, recognizing the fallibility of their worldview, then there is secular decision-making according to the conditions established by the Constitution and the learning of the profane morals of the Constitutional State³⁷.

It is in the plurality of the entities of this community that follow the dynamics of debate based on the use of rational arguments and on the State that distances itself from traditions and makes its decisions in a neutral way, avoiding favors that reveal partiality, but learning from the plurality of worldviews is that Habermas' post-secular society will show itself in practice. In other words, religious and non-religious

35 Jürgen Habermas y Joseph Ratzinger, *Dialética da secularização: sobre razão e religião* (Aparecida, SP: Ideias e Letras, 2007), 55-56.

36 Jürgen Habermas y Joseph Ratzinger, *Dialética da secularização: sobre razão e religião*, 55-57.

37 Diogo Bacha e Silva, «Laicidad e Estado democrático de direito: sobre a relação entre direito, religião e o agir prático», *Revista da Faculdade de Direito da UERJ* 31 (2017): 73.

people understand their limits within a secularized state and use rational arguments to organize the common good of liberal society.

3. Religion in the Brazilian public sphere

In the Brazilian case, we live in a democratic rule of law, that is, with liberal foundations. For this reason, many of Habermas' reflections can be applied to our context, since our culture, even if syncretic, presents intense Christian elements. As previously described, the History of Brazil presents a role of Catholicism that guided, and still guides in some way, national policy, but we also see a considerable increase in the role of evangelicals, both in terms of population and in legislative seats. Evangelicalism in the year 2020 has presented political capital never seen before. The example of the elections, held in October 2018, showed that the so-called evangelical caucus obtained 196 deputies' mandates, that is, 38% of the total of 513 parliamentarians in the House of Representatives/Parliament. In the executive branch, in addition to President Jair Bolsonaro, who at various times presented himself as an evangelical and was even baptized in Israel on the Jordan River to demonstrate his Protestant faith³⁸, three of his top ministers/secretaries are pastors: Damares Alves, from the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights, Milton Ribeiro, Ministry of Education and André Mendonça, former Attorney General (Ministry of Justice) and former Federal Government Attorney and currently Justice (Federal Supreme Court)³⁹.

The Evangelical Caucus, like all other groups, aims, through articulation and influence, to promote its agenda through laws and public policies. Due to the vertiginous growth (emergence) of evangelicalism in Brazil, as well as its representativeness in the Legislature, this group has great political capital and power. In this way,

38 «Jair Bolsonaro é batizado em Israel», BOL UOL, 2016, consultado em dezembro 8, 2020, <https://www.bol.uol.com.br/videos/?id=jair-bolsonaro-e-batizado-em-israel-0402CC983472D4C15326..>

39 Matheus Leitão, «Os três pastores de Bolsonaro», Veja, 2020, consultado em dezembro 8, 2020, <https://veja.abril.com.br/blog/matheus-leitao/os-tres-pastores-de-bolsonaro/>.

we see that certain Bills/Law Projects and even the «Manifest to the Nation: Brazil for Brazilians» (Manifesto à Nação: O Brasil para os brasileiros), written and handed by the Evangelical Caucus to Jair Bolsonaro, intends to put into practice rules that affront principles of the liberal State to promote interpretations of their religion as general rules for the entire civilian population.

A relevant example is the passage that addresses the topic of Non-Party School (Escola Sem Partido), an institution of a transversal way of teaching Morals in all disciplines with the objective of building moral, ethical and civic education. The document criticizes the State for promoting an alleged «gender ideology» and an «ideology of pornography» in schools. In that light, it aims at the «returning to families the right to sexual education for their children and adolescents»⁴⁰, through the prohibition of teaching about human sexuality and sexual diversity.

On October 18, 2019, the Justice of the Federal Supreme Court, Gilmar Mendes, presented an injunction suspending the effects of articles 2, caput, and 3, caput, of Law 3,491, of August 28, 2015, of the Municipality of Ipatinga, MG. The reason was the exclusion from the municipal education policy of any reference to gender diversity and sexual orientation. The law guaranteed that schools could not:

Adopt, not even in the form of guidelines, any strategy, or educational actions to promote gender diversity, as well as not be able to implement or develop any teaching or approach related to gender ideology and sexual orientation, being prohibited the insertion of any theme of the gender diversity in pedagogical practices and in the daily life of schools⁴¹.

The Justice of the Federal Supreme Court argues that Law 3,491 violates several constitutional articles, as one of the fundamental

40 «Manifesto à nação: o Brasil para os Brasileiros», 55.

41 Gilmar Mendes, *Medida Cautelar na arguição de descumprimento de preceito fundamental 467 Minas Gerais*. Supremo Tribunal Federal, 2019, 7, consultado em outubro 24, 2020, <https://redir.stf.jus.br/paginadorpub/paginador.jsp?docTP=TP&docID=753189469>.

objectives of the Federative Republic of Brazil to build a free, fair and solidary society (article 3, I), the fundamental rights to freedom, equality and non-discrimination of any nature (art. 5, caput), exclusive competence of the Union to legislate on the guidelines and bases of national education (art. 22, XXIV) and the freedom to learn, teach, research and disseminate thought, art and knowledge (art. 206, I and II). Therefore, Law would be violating a fundamental constitutional principle of equality. Thus, he argues that:

Equality must be seen not only in its negative dimension, prohibiting discrimination, but also from a positive perspective, in order to promote the inclusion of stigmatized and marginalized groups. (...) The state's duty to promote public policies of equality and non-discrimination requires the adoption of a wide range of measures, including educational, orienting, and preventive measures, such as the discussion and awareness of the different conceptions of gender and sexuality. For these reasons, I understand that the contested rules, by prohibiting the adoption of educational practices aimed at the debate and discussions on gender and sexuality issues, violate the general rules and the fundamental rights to equality and non-discrimination, provided for in international norms and in the Federal Constitution of 1988⁴².

In this way, we can see that the Manifest to the Nation: Brazil for the Brazilians, as well as Law 3,491 of the Municipality of Ipatinga, try to impose a particular vision of gender diversity on society, going so far as to characterize it as an «ideology of pornography»⁴³ in the schools, thus going against the State's duty to promote equality and non-discrimination. Justice Gilmar Mendes of the Federal Supreme Court argues very well in this matter regarding the negative and positive dimensions, as it is the school's character to disseminate educational, orienting, and preventive measures on gender and

42 Gilmar Mendes, *Medida Cautelar na arguição de descumprimento de preceito fundamental 467 Minas Gerais*, 15-17.

43 «Manifesto à nação: o Brasil para os Brasileiros», 55.

sexuality in order to fight against prejudice, inequality and, consequently, bullying.

In a clear nod to the evangelical public, President Jair Bolsonaro promised to appoint a «dreadfully evangelical»⁴⁴ Justice to a chair of the Federal Supreme Court. With the retirement of Justice Celso de Mello, President Bolsonaro appointed Kassio Nunes Marques who was sworn in November 2020, which caused indignation in some organized groups of evangelicals. But with the departure, also for reasons of retirement, of Justice Marco Aurélio Mello, President Bolsonaro appointed André Mendonça, a Presbyterian evangelical pastor who had already served in his government as Attorney General (Ministry of Justice) and as Federal Government Attorney.

The new Justice of the Federal Supreme Court, André Mendonça, assumed the position of reporter of a process that debates the teaching of gender issues in education. The Argument of Noncompliance with a Fundamental Precept (ADPF) 522 was filed by the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL) and calls for the overthrow of two municipal laws, 2,985/2017 of Petrolina (PE) and 4,432/2017 of Garanhuns (PE), which exclude any kind of approach to gender or sexual orientation issues in schools. If Justice André Mendonça diverges from his colleagues, who have already established an understanding and jurisprudence in the house in previous actions, he will open a debate on the extent to which his religiosity conflicts with the principles of a democratic State of law, even more so after the nickname of «dreadfully evangelical» awarded by the President of Brazil.

The right that the liberal State grants to religions to act out in public spaces and to influence the whole of society is often antagonized with the liberal understanding itself, which predicts that religions can act in public spaces if they follow a logic of public action. But for Habermas, it cannot be accepted that a liberal state that protects religious freedoms imposes those religious citizens

44 «Bolsonaro diz que vai indicar ministro (terrivelmente evangélico) para o STF».

completely abstain from their cosmovision and, consequently, from their religious arguments in public debate. «In their role as citizens of the State, secular citizens cannot (...) deny religious citizens the right to contribute to public debates using religious language»⁴⁵. In view of this, the liberal State cannot determine that religious citizens to separate their religious arguments from their secular ones, as this would hurt the identity of the religious and would establish a partiality of the State that would tend to harm the religious. «The liberal State cannot force religious citizens to renounce their identities, and at the same time, the State is secular, therefore, neutral in the face of religious worldviews»⁴⁶. Habermas also makes it clear on this issue that religious arguments in religious language can only be used in the informal public sphere, because in the formal public sphere arguments need to be translated on the understanding that this sphere, by using neutrality, accepts only the formal arguments as decisive arguments. s. In this way, the religious actors:

can manifest themselves in a religious language only under the condition of recognizing the 'provision of an institutional translation', they can, supported by the reliability of the cooperative translations of their fellow citizens, understand themselves as participants in the process of legislation, even if the decisive arguments in this process are secular⁴⁷

It is important to highlight that there is a differentiation in the Habermasian proposition that separates and differentiates the public spheres into formal and informal. In this sense, the informal public sphere is where relations between religious and non-religious take place, whereas the formal public sphere is where relations with the State take place, whether in the Legislative, Judiciary or Executive, which are subject to a constitution. It is in the formal and informal

45 Jürgen Habermas y Joseph Ratzinger, *Dialética da secularização: sobre razão e religião*, 57.

46 Edson Elias Morais y José G. A. B. Poker, «Religião, Esfera Pública e o Problema Político: Uma Contribuição Habermasiana»: 345-346.

47 Jürgen Habermas, *Entre naturalismo e religião: estudos filosóficos*, 148.

public spheres that Habermas argues that rational communication must exist, and that mutual learning must take place peacefully and without tearing, therefore, the bond of a political community⁴⁸.

Habermas's concept of the public sphere in a post-secular society is important to understand how the relationships between individuals should be, and in this case, the relationship between religious and non-religious actors pertaining to public affairs, that is, to the State. These relationships must be based on a communicative rationality, because in this way the knowledge produced will be validated through the dynamics of the dialogue within the spaces of speech.

Individual positions or statements are, in principle, fallible and need to be screened by externalization and criticism. Communicative rationality is guaranteed by intersubjective criticism and presupposes the possibility of the utterance being wrong, even if the subject who utters it has not perceived such a mistake⁴⁹.

For this reason, religious and non-religious entities need to understand that their ideas will be subjected to rational validation in the debate within the public sphere and that ideas or proposals will be accepted, reformulated, or even rejected. Therefore, the communicative reason defended by Habermas points to the construction of collective and plural knowledge that will define the actions of the community. It is clear that this type of relationship requires good intentions from both parties so that they can listen and discuss in a more rational than emotional way, as well as a willingness so that, given the understanding that the other party's argument has more reason and logic, it is possible to expand and improve such proposals. For this reason, Habermas argues that:

This concept of communicative rationality brings in it, connotations that, deep down, go back to the central experience of the

48 Jürgen Habermas, *Fé e Saber*, 7.

49 José Luciano Gabriel, *Liberdade religiosa e estado laico brasileiro: uma abordagem à luz de Habermas e do direito* (Rio de Janeiro: Gramma, 2018), 70.

spontaneously unitive force that generates the consensus proper to argumentative speech, in which several participants overcome their initially subjective conceptions for then, thanks to the agreement of rationally motivated convictions, to ensure at the same time the unity of the objective world and the intersubjectivity of its vital context⁵⁰.

In the public space, the religious worldview must be submitted to debate and the rules of debate, that is, they must be willing to discuss and debate ideas following the formalities foreseen. They must also understand that their role in the public debate is not superior and therefore deserves a differentiated order not applicable to the other members of the debate. Therefore, the rules that apply to everyone also apply to religious people, and if any rule applies to religious people, it must apply to others in the same way. It is an elementary principle of equity in participation in the public sphere, of equality in speech spaces.

The communicative reason defended by Habermas argues that community actions must be built through collective and plural knowledge, so religious people need to understand that in the face of the debate their projects will undergo changes, and this is totally normal in the face of the dynamics in the elaboration of public policies, for example. For this reason, the religious who participate in public debate need to have democratic values.

The different actors belonging to this post-secular society must oppose their ideas, understandings, worldviews no longer through war artifices, but through rational arguments. It is important to highlight that differences are not neglected by Habermas, as these differences reveal the singularities of each entity. It would be naive to think that in the absence of dissent, that a community with members belonging to different social classes, such as values, preferences,

50 Jürgen Habermas, *Teoria do agir comunicativo: racionalidade da ação e racionalização social* (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2012), 35.

expectations, philosophies, and different religions, would present themselves in a harmonious way and without specificities, even more in themes relevant to society, as a whole. In this sense, it is inevitable that there will be debate, the confrontation of ideals, the comparison of proposals and the clash of perspectives on the most varied themes. This scenario presented is not easy, «every dissent presents a challenge»⁵¹.

The possibility of considering dissent during action is not synonymous with giving up the search for consensus, much less a sign that an individual can simply act according to his or her opinion; it is not a question of returning to the force of a subjective reason that guarantees individuality the legitimacy to attest to its own truth and persons. The possibility of dissent is Habermas' perception of the existence of themes that, while remaining open, do not disregard the complexity and legitimacy of views that will still reach consensus⁵².

But in addition to seeing differences as problems to be resolved, one can also evaluate disagreements as enriching, as fostering ingredients for growth, improvement, and better problem solving. The plurality of ideas and worldviews has the potential to be used in ways that benefit the wider community. But the greater the differences, the greater the feelings involved. Therefore, Habermas proposes that reason must be the limit, as the use of force is no longer accepted. «I intend to propose that cultural and social secularization be understood as a double learning process that forces both Enlightenment traditions and religious doctrines to reflect on their respective limits»⁵³.

From the logic of the public use of reason, the State will deal with the political community, understanding each citizen as the bearer of symmetrical rights within pre-established rules. That is, the entities in

51 Jürgen Habermas, *Teoria do agir comunicativo: racionalidade da ação e racionalização social*, 41.

52 José Luciano Gabriel, *Liberdade religiosa e estado laico brasileiro: uma abordagem à luz de Habermas e do direito*, 75.

53 Jürgen Habermas y Joseph Ratzinger, *Dialética da secularização: sobre razão e religião*, 25.

conflict need to recognize that their weapons are rational arguments and the pre-established norms within the democratic rule of law are the same for both and must be followed. Thus, Habermas argues that:

citizens must reciprocally respect each other as members of their respective political community, endowed with equal rights, despite their dissent on issues involving religious convictions and worldviews; on this basis of a solidarity of citizens of the State, they must seek, when it comes to disputed issues, a rationally motivated mutual understanding, that is, they are obliged to present to each other good arguments⁵⁴.

Consequently, public use of reason, by these different political actors, who justify their understanding of social dynamics through rationality, is that the State can base, through symmetrical bases, the discussion to establish decisions based on artifices that are valid for both the groups. In other words, it is using reason that religious and non-religious groups will be able to discuss their positions with the secular State as a mediator. A State that guarantees freedom of religion and conscience and that, for that reason, guarantees to different subjects the possibility of discussing the best for the community in the public sphere. «The fundamental right to freedom of conscience and religion constitutes the appropriate political response to the challenges of religious pluralism»⁵⁵.

In the secularized State, religion is no longer the foundation of the norm, but the constitution becomes the authority that will guide the entire exercise of power. The State through the constitution shows itself neutral in matters of faith because it no longer governs it, but the criterion of neutrality. For this reason, the State will interact with different religiosities in an egalitarian way without showing partisanship, without acting with unequal favoritism that benefits one group over another due to belief or disbelief.

54 Jürgen Habermas, *Entre naturalismo e religião: estudos filosóficos*, 137

55 Jürgen Habermas, *Entre naturalismo e religião: estudos filosóficos*, 136.

Conclusion

In a democratic State of law, we assume that all citizens are free to choose their professions of faith, follow and act according to the worldviews that best represent them. In this liberal state, free association and freedom of worship are essential foundations and should not entail burdens or bonuses for citizens. In view of this, understanding the concept of secular State is extremely relevant so that social relations can be carried out in a democratic way.

Habermas shows us that through communicative reason society can build, making use of collective and plural knowledge, projects that contain liberal values and that benefit the entire community. In this sense, the public use of reason allows the relationship between secular and religious, it also allows religious to exercise their citizenship by expressing their way of understanding things and contributing to a democratic debate within a neutral State that does not privilege either believers or non-believers. Because the secular State defines itself as not having a religion, at the same time it does not embrace atheism, thus, it is neutral and impartial regarding these issues.

For this reason, the religious who participate in public debate, whether formal or informal, need to have values of a democratic rule of law. This democratic rule of law must guarantee that everyone can express their religiosity, as well as atheism or other philosophical ways of understanding things. In a secular state, theistic and atheistic values can be related through communicative reason with the aim of mutual good. What comes into conflict is when a specific group, and here we call evangelicals into question, seeks to impose its worldview, or its religious vision, on an entire society, as in the case exemplified above about teaching policies that address gender diversity, and sexual orientation. In these cases, the «Manifesto to the Nation: Brazil for Brazilians» and laws such as 3,491/2015, 2,985/2017 and 4,432/2017 defended by evangelical groups, such as ANAJURE



(National Association of Evangelical Jurists), try to suppress from society the plurality characteristic of a democratic community. This type of action violates several constitutional articles, such as the fundamental objectives of the Federative Republic of Brazil to build a free, fair and solidary society (article 3, I), the fundamental rights to freedom, equality and non-discrimination of any nature (article 5, caput) and the freedom to learn, teach, research and disseminate thought, art and knowledge (article 206, I and II).

The issue proves to be complex, since the religious person has his set of dogmas, his theology that shapes his worldview and what Habermas shows us is that this religious does not necessarily need to put aside his convictions and beliefs, but that he must not impose on the society a view of the world that is particular to it as it understands it to be a sacred doctrine and of greater value than other world views. Evangelicals are no longer a minority group in society, they are a relevant group, with considerable expression in the National Congress, in the Executive Branch and now more recently in the Federal Supreme Court, but they need to understand that their performance in the public space must follow the logic of public reason.

In a post-secularized society, Habermas points to a triple reflection on the relationship of religious in public space. First, the religious must understand that he is inserted in a community that has different confessions and religions. Second, the religious must adapt to the authority of science that holds worldly knowledge. And, lastly, it needs to conform to the foundations of a constitutional state. For this reason, the religious is not authorized to impose their religion or cosmovision on the entire community, as this is shown to be plural, and many do not recognize the sacred texts of a specific religion as authority. Imposing a way of seeing the world goes against the essence of liberalism and the democratic rule of law, as it violates basic issues such as the right to free conscience and freedom of religion itself.

The German philosopher understands the secularized State as something primordial, however he analyzes it as an insufficient issue to guarantee religious freedom, as this depends not only on religious people respecting and tolerating the different, but also on atheists or holders of different cosmovision also act out in public space with respect and tolerance. This assumption is fundamental for communicative reason to manifest itself. The liberal state does not have the authority to prohibit or limit the action of evangelicals in the public spheres but based on communicative reason it must value only the best argument.

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