



“Aerial view and swimmer’s view”: reflections on Catholics and Pentecostals in Census 2010

“A visão aérea e a do nadador”: reflexões sobre católicos e pentecostais no censo de 2010

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Abstract

This article aims at understanding some numerical variables exposed by the last census by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) regarding the evolution of Catholic and Pentecostal groups in the Brazilian territory. Continuing our reflections from previous papers, we focus our attention primarily on the asymmetry as for the dispersion of these two religious groups in the national territory, emphasizing the local socio-cultural conformations imbricated with the binomial Pentecostal growth/Catholic resistance. More specifically, we analyze, on one hand, the factors leading a region to be a generous ground to Pentecostals, while others constitute privileged reserves for Catholicism. In parallel, we analyze the possibilities and limitations of data from the census produced by IBGE as useful means for studying religion in Brazil. At this point, we take into account both the construction of instruments to collect data of IBGE – the creation of census categories for the religious types – and the limitations of these categories in face of the dynamics of the Brazilian religious field.

Keywords: Pentecostals; Catholics; Census by IBGE.

Resumo

Este artigo visa a compreender algumas variáveis numéricas expostas pelo último censo do Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE) referentes à evolução de grupos pentecostais e católicos no território brasileiro. Dando continuidade a reflexões de trabalhos anteriores, concentramos nossa atenção primordialmente na assimetria quanto à dispersão desses dois grupos religiosos pelo território nacional, enfatizando as conformações socioculturais locais imbricadas no binômio crescimento pentecostal/resistência católica. Mais especificamente, analisamos, de um lado, os fatores que levam uma região a ser uma seara generosa para os pentecostais, ao passo que outros constituem reservas privilegiadas do catolicismo. Paralelamente, analisamos as possibilidades e os limites dos dados censitários produzidos pelo IBGE como meios úteis para o estudo da religião no Brasil. Nesse ponto, levamos em conta tanto a construção dos instrumentos de coleta de dados do IBGE – a criação de categorias censitárias para os tipos religiosos – quanto os limites dessas categorias diante da dinâmica do campo religioso brasileiro.

Palavras-chave: Pentecostais; Católicos; Censo do IBGE.

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Introduction

This article aims to understand some numerical variables exposed by the last census by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) with regard to the evolution of Pentecostal and Catholic groups in the Brazilian territory. Continuing reflections from previous papers, we focus our attention primarily on the asymmetry concerning the dispersion of these two religious groups throughout the national territory, emphasizing local sociocultural conformations imbricated with the binomial Pentecostal growth/Catholic resistance. More specifically, we analyze, on the one hand, the factors leading a region to be a generous ground to Pentecostals, while others constitute privileged reserves for Catholicism.

In parallel, we analyze the possibilities and limitations of census data produced by IBGE as useful tools for studying religion in Brazil. At this point, we take into account both the construction of instruments for collecting data of IBGE – the creation of census categories for the religious types – and the limitations of these categories in face of the dynamics of the Brazilian religious field.

1 Some methodological issues

In the last census (1981, 1991, 2000, and 2010), the category of religion was measured by what IBGE named *Household Sample Survey*, which covers 20% of households in towns with up to 15,000 inhabitants and 10% in the others. Contrary to what occurs in some countries, such as Portugal, where the respondent is presented to a closed set of predetermined options, in Brazil, the question on religion has a free answer and it is measured by means of the following question: “What is your religion or worship?”. The answer is registered by the census agent on her/his laptop computer, and there is not, in the questionnaire or even in *Manual do recenseador* (IBGE, 2010), any restriction to the number of religions to be declared. However, there are clear instructions both in *Manual do recenseador*

(IBGE, 2010) and *Manual do instrutor recenseador* (IBGE, 2009), so that generic expressions were not registered:

The record must identify the sect, worship, or branch of the religion professed such as, for instance: Apostolic Roman Catholic, Brazilian Apostolic Catholic, Pentecostal Lutheran, Baptist, Assembly of God, Universal Church of the Kingdom of God [...] Do not register generic expressions such as Catholic, Protestant, Spiritualist, Believer, Evangelical, etc. (IBGE, 2009, p. 194-195).

After collecting data, the plethora of answers is sorted and grouped into categories. It is worth noticing that, in the last censuses, IBGE has sought, with the help of social scientists (MAFRA, 2004), to extend the range of classification categories as for the religions, even discriminating in the censuses for 1991, 2000, 2010, the most important Pentecostal denominations from the demographic viewpoint.

Despite these advances, some scholars have methodological reservations about the Brazilian census, highlighting a fruitless dialogue with specialists in the studies of religion, excessive bureaucracy and especially an inability to create categories that can accurately capture the *fluidity* of religious belongings today (ANTONIAZZI, 2003). One of the most justifiable pieces of criticism is that which has been done on the category of those “without religion”. Researchers have shown that under such a nickname there are not only irreligious people – Atheists or Agnostics –, but a whole range of individuals, which comprises from Atheists and Agnostics to people who believe in a deity, but are not identified with a religious institution (FERNANDES, 2006). It is worth emphasizing that IBGE partially bridged this gap, subdividing the group of those “without religion”, in the categories Agnostics and Atheists and irreligious people – without religion, i.e. with no religious belonging.

However, another category promises to be the subject of intense controversies on the data emerging from Census 2010: the category “Non-

Determined Evangelical Religion”. In Census 2010, 9.2 million people were classified in this category, totaling 21.8% of the entire group of Evangelicals, surpassing the percentage of missionary Evangelicals (18.2%) and they reach almost 5% of the wider population. As we will see, this category obscures the analysis and the distinction between missionary and Pentecostal Evangelicals, as well as the meaning of the slowdown in the growth of the Pentecostal group in face of the Brazilian population and relative retraction, both of missionary Evangelicals and Pentecostals, regarding the Evangelical group.

In a study to be published, we conducted a series of consultations to technicians at IBGE, who were responsible for training and tabulating the answers, in order to clarify this category. According to what we investigated, although the surveying protocol of IBGE (2010) explicitly advises to avoid registering generic expressions, something which happened in practice was that the census agents were instructed not to rephrase the question “what is your religion or worship”, i.e. although they could repeat the question, they could not add any additional question like “what is the church?” or “What is the denomination?”. The census agent should literally embrace the respondents’ answer. Therefore, if they said “I am Evangelical, but I have no denomination”, the census agent should register this answer. However, as we noticed in that study, it is noteworthy that the question “what is your religion or worship?” does not necessarily refer the respondent to an answer concerning her/his belonging to a church or denomination and, even if the census agent repeated the question, an Evangelical respondent, for instance, could not understand what she/he was expected to mention her/his church or denomination. Thus, at the time of analyzing and regrouping these answers, the technicians at IBGE understood that, before a generic answer, such as “I am Evangelical” or “believer”, could be categorized only as “Non-Determined Evangelical Religion”, creating a new category.

In our view, the introduction of this category greatly clouds the analysis of data concerning the growth or retraction of the denominations in the Evangelical field, considerably damaging an analysis of historical series. For instance: the churches may have grown at a higher proportion than pointed out by the figures revealed by the census; we will return to this theme below, when analyzing the Pentecostal growth.

Although these misconceptions can provide a distorted view of the Brazilian religious field, such as in the cited case of those “without religion” or “non-determined evangelicals”, this classificatory ambivalence seems justifiable, especially if we take into account, besides the intense mutation of the religious field, the temporariness inherent to all classification categories wrong-footing social scientists at least since Durkheim. In the words of Bauman (1999, p. 9): “Ambivalence is, therefore, the *alter ego* of language”. If it were not, we would not be still discussing, today, the validity of categories such as “classical Pentecostalism” or “divine healing” (MENDONÇA, 1989), “first wave”, “second wave”, or “third wave” (FREESTON, 1994), “neo” or “post-Pentecostalism”. Otherwise, here, we are between the rigid classification, which does not include the metamorphic nature of the field and Funes’s dilemma, who, due to his inability to forget differences, generalize, and form concepts, was suspected, in the words of Borges, to lack the ability to think.

Thus, it is precisely in the qualitative studies that we notice the synchronic complexity of the field, which, to be captured by quantitative analyzes, must inevitably be reduced to categories. For instance, how could we *classify* a female respondent who, after twenty years attending the Assembly of God and observing publicly the doctrinal precepts of this denomination, still declares herself as Catholic? Or the thousands of nominal Catholics who stand for abortion or the use of condoms and sex before marriage? The field becomes more complex when we take seriously what was taught by Weber (1992) on the role *per se* of sociology: first

of all, grasp the way how religious affiliation significantly guides the public behavior of human beings. In face of the advice of Weber (1992), how would we act in these cases? Would we assume that religion, as a motivator of the public action of individuals, is no longer a sociologically relevant object? On the contrary, even knowing it by historians such as Georges Duby (1982) and, even earlier, by poets such as Gil Vicente, in his *Auto da Barca do Inferno*, that ironic attitudes towards religious precepts are not, in any way, a privilege of our times; we did not stop doing sociology of religion and, much less, thinking through religion as an important element for ethics, politics, and economics. Of course, we do not deny the progressive autonomy of the social spheres and the resulting individual freedoms, but we want to emphasize that, today, the flows are more intense and the borders are more porous and, especially, we are more aware that the real experience often overflows the verbal circles where we would like to retain it. Returning to Bauman (1999), we will never find such a spacious file containing all folders containing all items of the world; unlike, the impossibility of such a file is what makes ambivalence inevitable in a classificatory action.

Thus, setting apart the problems inherent to all and any classification, we consider the study by IBGE through what it seems to want to be with regard to the issue religion: a panoramic picture, which presents a whole and obfuscates the details that cannot be captured by the lens. Similarly, it is worth emphasizing that these data constitute guides for hypotheses requiring a qualitative approach or, in the words of Elias (1992), aerial view and swimmer's view show us the framework with some simplification, only together they provide a more balanced overview.

2 Mapping religious plurality in Brazil: an approach

In this topic, we discuss the main indicators of religious diversity in Brazil, especially the figures referring to religious institutional diversification, undertaken

through the growth of Protestant Pentecostalism, and to the areas where Catholicism shows to be resistant.

Some authors, such as Pierucci (2006), have put into question the alleged Brazilian religious plurality, using as argument the predominance of Christian institutions on the national scenario. In fact, when we look at the data that was brought by the last census (IBGE, 2010), it becomes difficult to refute the arguments of Pierucci (2006), mainly because the non-Christian groups are statistically insignificant, as we will briefly see below.

Despite being the target of cultural policies typical of a time of seduction by memory (HUYSEN, 2000), resulting from a fear of "collective amnesia" (SANTOS, 1993), Candomblé – a major current with a non-Christian matrix among the Brazilian religions – still has on its shoulders the weight of the stigma of being a black religion, which deals with the evil forces (BRANDÃO, 1987; MAGGIE, 1992), and it is usual, today, in the "secular" news, to relate macabre rituals, saintly fathers, and religions of African origin. Such imaginary, which seemed to have cooled in the 1960s and 70s, after some intellectuals and artists joined the Afro cause (SANSONE, 2002), came up again quite vigorously after the advance of Pentecostals, especially the Neopentecostalism of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, mainly since the 1990s.

If, on the one hand, a negative public visibility for decades seems to have contributed in a preponderant way to the numerical decline of those who declare themselves as Candomblé practitioners, on the other hand, the recent positive public visibility, carried forward by the recognition on the part of public officials of demands from the "Afro-descent" population, cannot have a numerical effect on the Afro-Brazilian cults. We believe that actions related to government agencies at the three levels – which have been moving towards a patrimonialization of the African culture *lato sensu*, particularly of Candomblé¹ – may both provide

Candomblé with more legitimacy as a religion, reducing the stigma and franchising the public declaration of belonging, and lead the cult to slide to a folklorization, being seen as an ancestral culture. In this regard, we notice that including the discipline “History of Africa” into the curriculum in Primary and High School Education has frankly followed this line or, put more bluntly, the religions from an African matrix are addressed from the same perspective that Greek mythology. In this sense, the latest figures from census show that Candomblé has 0.09% of adherents, against 0.08% in 2000, do not seem to reflect the increased public visibility noticed in the last decade, something which seems to confirm the hypothesis that public exposure leads Candomblé to migrate from the pole of religion to that of “culture from an African matrix”, as in the case of capoeira and samba. However, we will have to wait a few more decades to confirm this prospect.

Returning to the figures, we see that, besides Candomblé, we have negligible numbers for the Jewish (0.06%) and Muslim (no record in the sample) populations, among others. In turn, Buddhism, which does a bit better, either in numerical terms (0.13%) or in terms of public visibility, since it has been benefited by a cooling in the Western discourse (CAMPBELL, 1997), ends up being displaced from the pole of religion to a kind of “philosophy of life”, much to the taste of the vague New Age, something which does not yield fruits from the quantitative viewpoint (USARSKI, 2004).

In this sense, our religious diversity is primarily institutional, Catholics (64.6%) stand on one side, with their whole inner diversity, and Evangelicals (22.1%) stand on the other side, with their countless denominations, which range from the so-called “missionary Evangelicals” (4%) to “Pentecostals” (13.3%).

Having this said, we will start considering the Pentecostal dispersion and the locations of Catholic resistance in the Brazilian territory.

¹ Among the most prodigal examples, we have yards in the state of Bahia that were declared as municipal heritage in 2007 (Casa Branca do Engenho Velho, Gantois, and Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá) or the declaration of Camdombé as heritage of the state of Rio de Janeiro, in 2009.

3 From Sertão to Grande Rio: resistance and decline of Catholicism in Brazil

In Brazil, the areas of older population occupation and those with lower population dynamics seem to resist more to the penetration of Pentecostal groups and, hence, they constitute important trenches of Catholic resistance. This observation applies not only when dealing with regions within the country or states, but especially when we consider neighborhoods within the same city. This is the scenario we see when looking at the work done on census data for 2000 (JACOB et al., 2006)², where, even in metropolitan regions in which Evangelicals have a significant reception, as Rio de Janeiro (14.5%) or Belo Horizonte (12.8%), the neighborhoods of older occupation, such as the region of Tijuca and Vila Isabel, Santa Teresa, Glória and parts of Downtown, in Rio de Janeiro; or Floresta, Santa Tereza, and Barro Preto, in Belo Horizonte, Pentecostals reached rather shy figures, not reaching about 6% in any of these cases.

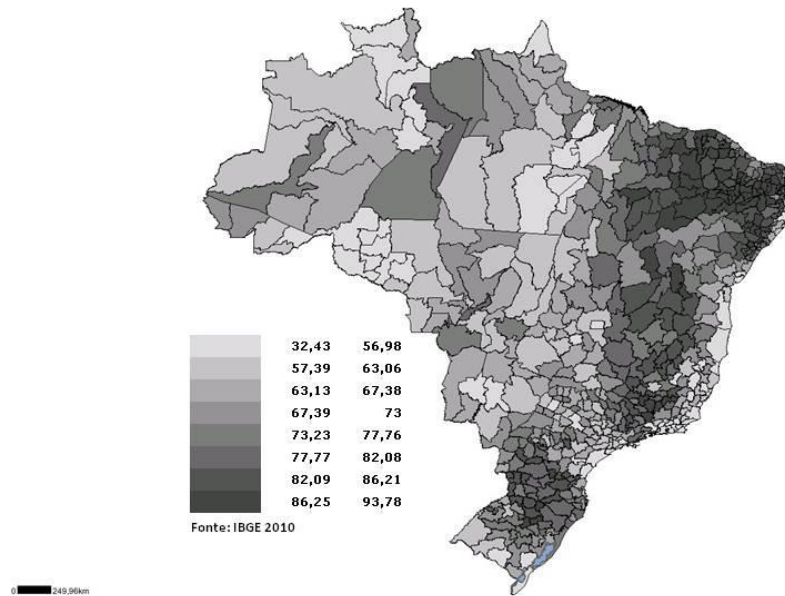
In our view, such a situation is dependent on the intensity of social ties established in the regions, which hinder or make not viable the passage to a different religion from that traditionally established. In many cases, this is not a population we would name practicing Catholic, but a population having identity ties to Catholicism (GRACINO JÚNIOR, 2010). In many situations, places of memory within the neighborhood and even family history are closely related to parties and Catholic cults. As shown by Grace Davie (2006a), under the concepts of *belief without belonging* and *vicarious religion*, events such as birth and death – in spite of the secularization process in other spheres – are still marked by the rites of “traditional religion”, in our case, of Catholicism.

To organize our discussion, we analyze, at first, a cartogram (Figure 1) representing the varying distribution of the Catholic group throughout the Brazilian territory, stressing that, due to the impossibility to closely analyze the

² Although IBGE has provided, on a preliminary basis, data from the sample of Census 2010, data allowing us to view the census sectors is not available, yet, such as that worked out for 2000 by researchers from Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (PUC-RIO) (JACOB, 2006), that is why we refer to this data whenever they are relevant to complement the analysis.

degree of religious diversity in each region – which would go quite beyond the limitations of this article –, we chose to restrict attention to the most significant areas from the statistical viewpoint.

FIGURE 1: Catholicism by geographic microregion in Census 2010



Source: IBGE (2010).

As we can see in Figure 1, the northern regions of Rio Grande do Sul, southern Santa Catarina, the countryside in Northeast and Minas Gerais are the areas where Catholicism is dominant, resisting more firmly to Pentecostal advances. In these regions, those who declare themselves as Catholics are between 78.4% and 86.1%, over the national average, 64.6%. On the opposite side stand the regions of recent occupation, as almost the whole Central-West and North, as well as the densely populated regions, where Catholicism sees its status of hegemonic

religion being threatened, as the metropolitan regions of Rio de Janeiro and Grande Vitória, where just under half of the population declares itself as Catholic: 44.6% and 46.9%, respectively. Having that said, let us conduct a brief analysis of some regions of Catholic resistance.

3.1 Rio Grande do Sul

In the case of Rio Grande do Sul, we see that the northern state is the main Catholic stronghold, particularly in the microregions of Guaporé (91.6%), Sananduva (91.3%), and Soledade (86.6%), all of them located at a region receiving Italian immigrants and, according to Oscar Beozzo (1986) and Ari Oro (1996), with stronger Catholic tradition or, in the very words of Beozzo (1986, p. 116), "privileged ground that yielded the current Brazilian church".

When we analyze works by historians such as Riolando Azzi (1993) e Paulo Possamai (2007), we see that Catholicism plays a fundamental role in the identity of Italian immigrants in Rio Grande, often occupying a place more important than their relation to homeland itself, since the first waves of immigrants arrived there in the 19th century, before the consolidation of a "national memory" (SMITH, 1997) in the newly unified Italian State. Perhaps, this closeness between the memory of Italicity (BENEDUZI, 2005), extremely imbricated with the Catholic memory, can explain the great preeminence of Catholicism, even in economically and demographically dynamic regions like Caxias do Sul.

3.2 Santa Catarina

Just like Rio Grande do Sul, the places of Catholic resistance in microregions of Santa Catarina seem to be related to the Italian migration to the region. Among the most Catholic microregions we have: São Miguel do Oeste (83.73%), Canoinhas (82.92%), and Curitibanos (82.90%).

It is worth noticing that, with the exception of São Miguel do Oeste, such regions host the modern pilgrimage routes of an “autonomous Catholicism”, which, according to Carlos Steil (2004), binds to the ancient pilgrimages of monk João Maria, a hermit of Italian origin who lived in the region in the 19th century. Also according to Steil (2004), Catholicism in the region, which he names “secular Catholicism”, is rather presented as an experience that permeates life and culture than a religious system presenting clear and institutional boundaries. For the author, being Catholic in this context does not represent an individual choice, but a condition to which everyone was, somehow, subject.

It also seems very timely for our argumentation the claim by Steil (2004) that in the region a kind of “immigration Catholicism” was formed, which, in the absence of a “stuck parson” or “village priest”, as named by the author, the immigrants found themselves imbued with the organization of Catholic rites and festivals and, for this, lay communities were organized around the chapels. In this sense, the findings of Steil (2004) seem to follow our argumentation that in locations where Catholicism was organized in a rather horizontal way, without the strong presence of the Catholic hierarchy and almost in a congregational way, the link between individual/community and Catholic faith is denser. Added to this fact, we can imagine that the rehabilitation of pilgrimage routes related to Catholicism, with its inclusion into tourist circuits, strengthens the identity between local resident and Catholic memory, now patrimonialized and arranged as a commodity.

3.3 The countryside in Northeast

When we look at the regions of Northeast where Catholicism remains virtually unscathed, no other explanation comes to mind but the model described for the coming regions. Also in these regions a typically autonomous Catholicism was formed, in which the lack of regular clergy, allied to licentiousness as for the dogmas of a secular clergy – fruit of institutional removal or training itself –,

provided individuals with direct access to the preparation of rites and beliefs that enriched Catholicism. According to Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz (1988), far away from the religious hierarchy, individuals have created sanctified, local, and regional figures, they edified sacred places and reproduced in their immediate space sites that were included in the biblical narratives.

As we have already noticed, in recent times, such intangible heritage goods were included in the list of goods to be preserved and, as a consequence, put into a tourist and commercial circuit where they are consumed by the post-modern individuals who, to remind Bauman (1998), are more than consumers of goods, they are consumers of emotions and sensations, or consumers looking for some contact to the picturesque, with an imaginary pleasure, as Campbell (2001) claims.

Along this line, in a recent paper, Maria Lúcia Bastos Alves (2009) shows how the inclusion of religious festivals in the countryside of Northeast, especially in Seridó, Rio Grande do Norte, in tourist circuits, led to their greater public visibility, despite, in the author's opinion, a deleterious change of their authenticity, deriving from a process of "commodification" of traditions. According to the author – quoting Hobsbawm, in *The invention of tradition* –, public policies for sustainable development, connected to cultural tourism, have been constructed with local peculiarities as a basis, destroying previous social standards and producing new standards with which such traditions are incompatible (ALVES, 2009).

Although agreeing in many points with the analysis by Alves (2009), it is interesting to notice, as done by John Urry (2001), in his *The tourist gaze*, which, in a sense, all cultures are invented; all of them are, in sense, inauthentic. For Urry (2001, p. 25), cultures are constantly invented, remade, and their elements reorganized, and it does not become clear why a staging intended for the tourist, apparently inauthentic, is so different from what ordinarily happens in any culture.

Without directly getting into this discussion, which would take us to a marshy land with several open fronts, we believe that, although the acceleration of commodification of popular traditions, in particular those related to religion, may at various times mean an intensification of transformations in those traditions – which, in fact, occur –, most of the times, what is observed is a strengthening of the identity link between population and Catholic rite.

Thus, if we can transcend the immeasurable distance between an “elite” producing meaning and a servile or insurgent “population”, we see that in such processes these players – elite and people – were almost always mutually constitutive. In previous papers, where we studied the patrimonialization processes for the Northern region of Portugal, we saw that, although the patrimonialization policies of the State are often guided by a market perspective, such policies are appropriated – re-semanticized and re-symbolized – by the target population, which can, at the same time, recall its traditions, celebrate, worship its deities and, if possible, profit from it. Other good examples of what we are addressing are the papers by Roger Sansi (2003) on public festivals in Bahia, or “Feijoada e *soul food* 25 anos depois”, by Peter Fry (2001).

Anyway, when looking at the figures, we see that, out of the 10 states with the highest percentages of Catholics, 7 are in the Northeast: Piauí (85.8%), Ceará (78.84%), Paraíba (76.96%), Sergipe (76.38%), Rio Grande do Norte (75.96%), Maranhão (74.52%), and Alagoas (72.33%), and the other states making up the ranking Santa Catarina (72.07%), Minas Gerais (70.43%), and Paraná (69.60%). However, even in these states, the distribution of Catholics is not uniform. In Rio Grande do Norte, to resume the example, although the regions of Serra de Santana (91.84%), Serra de São Miguel (91.51%), and Pau Ferros (88.49%) prove to be extremely Catholic, in the same state we have the regions of Natal (66.64%), Litoral Sul (71.69%), and Mossoró (70.87%), all of them around 70%, very close to the national average. In these cases, we could think, like the pioneering studies that

emerged since the 1960s (SOUZA, 1969; D'EPINAY, 1970), that such a process of flow from Catholicism to Pentecostalism is a side effect of the accelerated urbanization process, in which Pentecostal churches offered a refuge for the desperate and helpless masses in the urbanization process. However, as argued by Fry and Howe (1975, p. 84-85) with regard to the theses that were in vogue until the early 1980s:

[...] Instead of investigating the way how this integration takes place, in terms of actual effects of religious affiliation, they adduce their arguments of certain sociological stereotypes based on classic dichotomies such as folk-urban order-anomie, marginalization-integration. [...] Rural migrants do not always suffer from a deep culture shock, and they are not totally ignorant of the city's problems when arriving; they often follow kinship networks [...] we cannot accept using the concept of "integration" due to the distinctive dichotomy folk-urban and because it implies that the city is, in a sense, a homogeneous and consistent entity into which it is possible to integrate. [...] Urbanization and industrialization affect the way how any individual (whether migrant or not) relates to the society around her/him.

In addition to these assertions, we see that many rural regions, especially at the North and Central-West regions, have rates of adherence to Catholicism quite close to 50%. Logically, local processes that escape our knowledge can contribute to such figures and, certainly, do. However, we stress again the fact that, as a rule, the regions of older occupation, with a rather horizontal Catholicism, in which the lay presence is strongly felt in the organization of rites and beliefs, and with patrimonialization processes, are those having lower rates of Pentecostal growth, constituting Catholic grounds *per se*.

If we continue dissecting the figures of IBGE (2000), we will see that the regions surrounding the pilgrimage sites related to popular Catholicism in Northeast account for almost all areas of Catholic resistance. In a final example before proceeding, we have the region around Juazeiro do Norte, Ceará: in this area there are some microregions in Ceará with the highest rate of those who declare themselves as Catholics: Caririaçu (93.78%); Barro (92.87%); and Chapada do

Araripe (90.94%), except Serra do Pedreiro (93.58%), located in the region of Jaguaripe and Meruoca (93.22%), which is located in the northwestern Ceará. The phenomenon is repeated in the vicinity of the sanctuary of Frei Damião, in the city of Guarabira, Paraíba.

3.4 The countryside of Minas Gerais

In Minas Gerais, the scenario described above seems to repeat, although the number of Evangelicals greatly increases in some regions, such as Ipatinga, where it reaches 38.90% of the population, most cities of northern Zona da Mata and the region of Vertentes remain extremely Catholic. Microregions such as that of Viçosa, São João Del-Rei, Barbacena, and Ouro Preto present figures above 80% for Catholics. Just as the regions discussed above, these regions are spaces of older occupation in the state of Minas Gerais and they comprise the so-called “historical cities” of Minas Gerais, which were part of the first settlement nucleus in the state, back in the 17th century.

In our view, in these regions of Minas Gerais, Catholicism has become a cultural heritage, through the patrimonialization both of material culture and religious festivals, such as the Feast of the Rosary and the Holy Week. In this context, religion and its products (festivals, images, rites) were incorporated into commercial circuits that attract, every year, a greater number of tourists. This process, although it is not new and has the possibility of dating back to ancient religious movements, pilgrimages, and processions (SANCHIS, 1992), takes a new breath by being included into tourist circuits, which have a marketing planning and an ability to attract believers and tourists from the various parts of the world (ABUMANSSUR, 2003; CAMURÇA; GIOVANINI JÚNIOR, 2003).

In face of this context, it is not difficult to imagine that the Catholic Church has been, perhaps, the great beneficiary of this process of mobilization of the

historical memory of Minas Gerais, since the past of this region binds to Catholicism in an inexorable way, not only in the figure of lay organizations – brotherhoods, fellowships, etc. –, but also of its numerous and sumptuous churches. An example is the image of Minas Gerais conveyed in more than one hundred sites scattered across the computer network to promote tourism in the state: by opening a page, the image that greets us, invariably, consists of a Baroque church. Thus, the environment, which was already uninviting to religious passage, due to overlapping between family and religious memory, now makes the a-Catholic option unexciting for economic reasons (GRACINO JÚNIOR, 2008).

This way, we resume the thesis already put forward in previous papers (GRACINO JÚNIOR, 2010), namely, that religious choices are not made without knowing local cultural reasonings, instead, they depend, to a significant extent, on strong and weak ties (GRANOVETTER, 2007) among individuals. Thus, not disregarding the individualization that marks modern Western societies, noticed by authors such as Polanyi (1980) and Bourdieu (2006), we know that this is a multiple process (EISENSTADT, 2001) that does not affect homogeneously the entire society and, mainly, does not arouse identical responses at each location affected. Instead, there are numerous stays, retreats, re-workings, and inventions that recreate old identity ties on new and old bases. It is this multifaceted process that we name modernity that must be taken into account when thinking through the processes of religious passage.

4 The Catholic decline

At the opposite pole of the regions described, we have microregions in the states of Rio de Janeiro and Espírito Santo as the least Catholic in the country: Itaguaí, Rio de Janeiro (32.43%), Itapemirim, Espírito Santo (35.37%), Bacia de São João, Rio de Janeiro (35.44%), and Lagos, Rio de Janeiro (36.69%) are the top

five in the ranking, which are added to almost all the microregions of Acre, Rondônia, and Roraima.

Unlike what happens in regions of older occupation, in bordering demographic regions or those that received an intense population flow within a short period, there is no crystallized Catholic memory to refer to. In these contexts, where much of the population lives for, at most, one generation, there is no memory locations marked by Catholicism and the ancient religious practices of popular Catholicism, although they constitute a reference, cannot be reconstructed such as they were. In this new scenario, without the weight of tradition, the “religious memory” (HERVIEU-LÉGER, 2005) serves only as a fountainhead that may be mobilized both by the Catholic Church itself and by new religious agencies, which increasingly compete, on an equal footing, for the attention of believers. Amid looser social ties, high levels of religious diversity flank a significant number of people who declare themselves as having no religious belonging. Under these circumstances, individuals are freer to find in a new institution the expression of their wish for transcendence or they do not find it in any institution, as it happens with a growing wave of individuals who, by feeling stunned amid a bombardment of mismatched (religious) information, or due to other reasons, cannot join in a comfortable way any institution.

Naturally, we do not forget the preaching of Fry and Howe (1975) cited above. Undoubtedly, urban life offers to all those who share this sensation of “contrasting stimuli and rapid changes” about which Simmel (1979, p. 16) spoke in *Metrópole e a vida mental*. This is precisely the reason why, day after day, we try going back to the “warm circle” of the community, either having a religious nature or not. In other words, we continually seek to reduce this recalcitrant complexity (LUHMANN, 2007), drawing upon the available apparatus and the institutions that best meet our demands.

Let us see how these propositions do when compared to empirical data. For this purpose, we use the data exposed by Jacob et al. (2006), which, as mentioned, refer to Census 2000. For the sake of brevity, we focus our attention on the analysis of the Metropolitan Region of Grande Rio, which, besides constituting a very significant sample, since back in 2000 it appeared as the least Catholic metropolitan region in Brazil, with 54.16%³, there is an accumulation of qualitative data that allow making more reliable inferences. Added to this fact, it is important to stress that, following the data exposed by Jacob et al. (2006), who analyze the metropolitan regions of the Federal Capital and the 18 state capitals for which IBGE has made available a more detailed territorial sample, we do not observe significant variations in the pattern shown by the other metropolitan regions in relation to Rio de Janeiro.

Although it already was, in 2000, one of the least Catholic regions in Brazil, Grande Rio also had areas where Catholicism was scathing, around 80%. Looking at the data of Jacob et al. (2006), we see that the Catholic group remains vigorous in all districts within the South Zone, Barra da Tijuca, and Recreio dos Bandeirantes, in most of the downtown area, as well as in Grande Tijuca and in some neighborhoods within the North Zone, such as Penha. Catholics still show to be strong in Niterói, especially downtown and in the neighborhoods Icarai e Ingá, and in a large portion of Ilha do Governador. However, this numerical hegemony fades away as we head to the suburbs and to the metropolitan collar of the city, so that in the neighborhoods of Campo Grande and Santa Cruz (West Zone) reach values below 50% (JACOB et al., 2006).

However, given the data, we cannot claim that the strong ties – generated by greater interaction between individuals from a zone of older housing – are the only factors explaining the intensity of religious passages, especially when we have a large percentage of Catholics in areas of recent occupation, such as Barra da Tijuca.

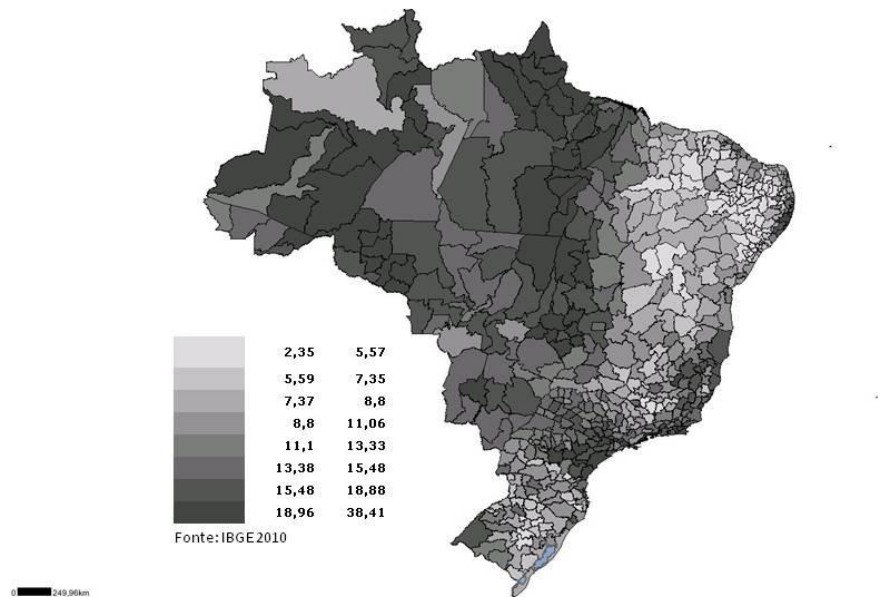
³ In Census 2010, this proportion was reduced to less than half the population of the Metropolitan Region of Rio de Janeiro, around 44%.

However, in our view, this thesis is quite plausible, especially in face of the information that in older “working men's neighborhoods”, such as Penha, Ramos, and Olaria, we still find high rates of Catholics.

We think that what complements this analysis, of course, is the thesis, which seems unavoidable in its core, that Pentecostal churches, main recipients of those who leave Catholicism, have a discursive apparatus closer to wishes of the most disadvantaged social strata, something which contributes to the understanding of lack of Catholics in peripheral regions and increased concentration in central regions or those with the highest incomes (JACOB et al., 2006).

4.1 Pentecostal dispersion and weakening of religious belonging

If we draw a map on Pentecostal dispersion in Brazil, we observed almost a negative of the Catholic map, except for some regions of Espírito Santo, Rondônia, Rio Grande do Sul, and Santa Catarina, where missionary Protestantism is actually quite blunt, reaching around 34%, such as in the microregion of Santa Teresa, Espírito Santo. However, in the other regions, the main recipient of those who leave Catholicism is, indeed, the Pentecostal cult in its various denominations. Here, the reasoning for Catholics also reverses, because Pentecostals grow in bordering demographic regions or those with intense population dynamics, while significant barriers are found in regions with less mobile population.

FIGURE 2: Pentecostalism by geographic microregion in Census 2010

Source: IBGE (2010).

Recently occupied states such as Amapá (20%), Pará (20%), and Acre (20%) are significantly above the Brazilian average for the Pentecostal population, which is around 13%, while states such as Piauí and Sergipe lie at the opposite extreme, around 6%.

Returning to data from Census 2000, worked on by Jacob et al. (2006), we see in the Metropolitan Region of Rio de Janeiro, for instance, that Pentecostals were rather concentrated in towns within Baixada Fluminense (17.1%) than in the capital city (11.3%): there were niches almost impenetrable to Pentecostals, such as the regions of Barra da Tijuca, South Zone, and Central Zone, where they ranged from 0.7 to 5.6%, while in towns within Baixada Fluminense, such as Belford Roxo,

Nova Iguaçu, and Duque de Caxias, those who declared themselves as Pentecostals achieved 30% of the population.

Also focusing on these data, we see that the distribution of the various Pentecostal denominations was not homogeneous within the territory. Observing metropolitan regions such as Belo Horizonte, São Paulo, Salvador, or Rio de Janeiro, we can notice an interesting pattern in the way how Pentecostals are geographically distributed, because, while the Assembly of God occupies the region of “far-away suburbs”, the Universal Church of the Kingdom God raises most of its adherents in the “close suburbs”. Continuing with the example of the Metropolitan Region of Rio de Janeiro, we see that, while the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD) focuses on neighborhoods within the North Zone and West Zone, reaching 7.4% of the population, the Assembly of God has its most significant growth in far-away neighborhoods in Baixada Fluminense, in which it reaches 18.8%.

At this point, there is a curious fact, that seems to put into question one of the key assumptions of the Rational Choice Theory (STARK; BAINBRIDGE 1985), namely, that in scenarios with higher plurality the religious belongings become stronger. Instead, we observe that precisely the regions with higher religious diversity are those having a higher rate of people who declare themselves as without religious belonging. In this sense, we may assume that, as the religious agencies are organized to correspond to the actual needs of their believers, instrumental rationalization erodes the sense of great narratives, making subjectification acute and providing the individual with the possibility of belonging to a variety of identity groups that do not even need to keep consistency to each other. Put another way, the crisis that befell the meaning-producing institutions (among them the religious ones), reflecting the rationalization and independence of social spheres, it became feasible for the individual to strongly join a group, loosely belong to many, or even do not engage in any. Versions of this theoretical reasoning

are already found in the early writings by Peter Berger (1985), reaffirmed on *Modernidade, pluralismo e crise de sentidos* (BERGER; LUCKMANN, 2005), besides the papers by Hervieu-Léger (2005) and Davie (1994; 2006b), among others.

Returning to Census 2010, we focused our attention on the variation of the weight of Pentecostal denominations among the population as a whole and the Evangelical group, without losing sight of the fact that the category "Non-Determined Evangelicals" clouds the analysis of these data. Having this in mind, we observe that all denominations have a percentage decline with regard to their weight within the large evangelical group and almost all also decline with regard to the total population and some in absolute terms. To get an idea, the Christian Congregation of Brazil, the second largest Pentecostal denomination in the country, lost believers in absolute numbers (they are almost 2.3 million compared to almost 2.5 million in 2000, therefore, around 200 thousand believers less), noticing its representativeness in the Evangelical field drop from 9.51% to 5.42%. In the same pathway went IURD and the Church of the Foursquare Gospel (IEQ). The IURD also showed a decreased absolute number of believers (falling from around 2.1 million to less than 1.9 million), something which meant less weight on their participation in the Evangelical group, dropping from 8.03% at the beginning of the last decade to 4.28% in 2010. In turn, IEQ, although it had an increased number of believers around half a million (in 2000 the church had about 1.3 million members and in 2010 it surpassed 1.8 million people), this growth in absolute terms was not enough to keep the relative growth when compared to the evangelical group, in which the presence of IEQ dropped from 5.04% to 4.28%. In the same tune, the Assembly of God – largest and most diverse denomination of the evangelical field –, which had an increase of almost 4 million members (they are more than 12.3 million vs. 8.4 million registered in Census 2000) stood back from the point of view of its percentage weight when compared to the Evangelical group, from 68.65% in 2000 to 60.01% in the last census. Surprisingly, in times of

exacerbated pluralism, not even the group “Pentecostal – Others”, which gathers under this label a myriad of denominations, escaped a decrease with regard to all Evangelicals. This group, although growing in absolute terms, enlisting in its ranks over 1.6 million members in the last decade (they are nearly 5.3 million members vs. 3.6 million members in Census 2000), noticed its share among Evangelicals drop from 13.93% to 12.46%. The data on Pentecostal churches analyzed, which, as we have said, may be underestimated due to the creation of the category “Non-Determined Evangelicals”, suggest that, although most of these denominations have grown in numerical and in percentage terms with regard to the Brazilian population, the pace of this growth has been cooled in the last decade.

Final remarks

In short, we notice that, while the Catholic Church keeps its hegemony in less dynamic areas – from the point of view of cultural, industrial, and population displacement transformations –, Pentecostals have their greatest growth in major metropolitan regions, especially in its periphery. This panorama suggests that religious denominations can be more successful when they have an institutional and liturgical apparatus closer to the demands – religious or not – of the populations which they address, being able to translate these longings into their religious discourse (BURDICK, 1998). Following this reasoning, we may understand why the “Prosperity Theology” of IURD does a relatively little echo in the ears of the population living in conditions of great poverty in Baixada Fluminense, while the “middle class” is rarely attracted by the Assembly of God, whose doctrine still has strong moral connotation and averse to consumption.

In that same sense, we observe that Catholicism seems to be more successful to mobilize social and religious demands in regions with low demographic and socio-cultural dynamics, in which the “memory wire” (HERVIEU-LÉGER, 2005) between the social group and Catholicism was not broken or can be restored,

mainly through “memory” and patrimonialization policies. The “search for foundations” in contemporary society, as classified by Robertson (1993), led to a process of exhaustive search through rehabilitation and reinvention of the local identities – life patterns, customs, and cultures hitherto regarded as archaic or endangered. Although this “rhetoric of loss” (GONÇALVES, 2002) is not recent and it has been part of the constitution of heritage on which laid the basis of nation States, it is undeniable that with the pluralization of viewpoints – carried out through the philosophical unfolding of modernity and globalization – this process becomes acute and reaches a world scale.

A quick examination of the list of goods safeguarded by UNESCO (2011) shows that the religious cultural heritage is by far the prime target of the safeguarding policies, not only in Catholic countries, such as Portugal, Poland, or Brazil, but in Protestant countries, such as England or Denmark. The linkage between heritage, religious history, and local culture reinforces the link between population and religious institution. Even in countries experiencing a major secularization, such as England or Sweden, for instance, the population still experiences a link between their “collective memory” and the heritage represented by their respective religious denominations.

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