

DECENTERING CATHOLICISM
A RE-READING OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY CATHOLIC CHURCH
FROM A LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

Moving past the more reductionist paradigms of secularisation, we view the nineteenth century as a period marked by an extraordinary religious vitality¹. The century of science, technology and progress was also witness to religious awakenings which adopted a wide range of modalities – from spiritualism to Protestant revivals, to the growth of pilgrimages within the Catholic and Orthodox worlds, to new Marian apparitions and miraculous cures, to the proliferation of organisational and editorial initiatives. The different confessions undertook intense processes of renovation, globalisation, homogenisation and centralisation which allowed them to more effectively face up to the challenges which modernity presented². They were not merely “victims” of the great political, social, cultural and economic changes which marked the nineteenth century; they were agents which contributed decisively to drive them forward and give them form³.

In this sense Catholicism constitutes a paradigmatic case. Throughout the nineteenth century the Catholic Church confronted an intense process of reorganisation, hierarchisation, centralisation and homogenisation which, among other things, reinforced the figure of the Pope, and Rome itself, as symbolic centres of Catholicism. Over the past two decades these aspects have been analysed on different levels – both local and regional, and national and transnational – which has allowed the vast mobilisation of Catholics in facing up to the challenges of the century to be brought to the fore. These transformations were so profound that it has come to be said that the Catholic Church as we know it is a nineteenth century construct, and that during that century it was not a “victim of secularisation” but was produced by it and was one of its most effective agents⁴.

¹ G. Cuchet, *Une histoire du sentiment religieux au XIX^e siècle*, Cerf, Paris 2020.

² Ch.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914*, Blackwell, Oxford 2004; J. Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2015 [2009]; and S. Conrad, *Religion in der globalen Welt*, in A. Iriye - J. Osterhammel (eds.), *Geschichte der Welt, 1750-1870. Wege zur modernen Welt*, C.H. Beck, München 2016, pp. 559-625.

³ P. Beyer, *Religions in Global Society*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2006, p. 14.

⁴ To cite but one example, R. Di Stefano, «Vino viejo en odres nuevos»: las vías de la secularización en la Argentina decimonónica, in P. Rújula - F.J. Ramón Solans (eds.), *El desa-*

In recent years the study of nineteenth century Catholicism has experienced a great renewal in the light of transnational and global history⁵. By way of example we can recall the impetus gained by research into the missions and into the development of ecclesial and associative structures which broadened the transnational connections of the Church – an institution, it goes without saying, which can be considered in many senses as unique in history as it was, at once, a confessional faith and a State which had diplomatic representation throughout the world; a confession capable of combining a strong universal vocation with an equally strong insertion within the local. It is precisely this duality which turned the Church into an extremely versatile globalising agent, equipped with a great capacity to adapt to the needs of local Churches – which it knew to endow with certain autonomous aspects and capacity for initiative – and also, although it may seem paradoxical, equipped with an extraordinary capacity for centralising decision making and homogenising discourses.

The Catholic Church in Latin America is a good example of the above, both in relation to the vitality of nineteenth century Catholicism and in reference to the reformulation of the dynamics between the centre and the periphery. In spite of this the Latin American Churches, especially during the period before the First Vatican Council, have at times been presented as inert, isolated, passive and conservative. However, the reality which new research reflects is quite different. Both the clergy and laymen – who in the second half of the century formed into a “laity” in the light of the many initiatives tending towards a defence of the “rights of the Church” – developed an intense activity in parliaments, in public debates, and in the creation of periodical publications. They established contact with their counterparts in other Latin American countries, in North America and Europe, with whom they exchanged views on the situation of their respective Churches, on the challenges they were facing, on new models and forms of organisation, on the situation of the press, and on devotional, charitable, syndicalist and political practices, etc. In addition, some travelled through Europe, North America and the Middle East, afterwards returning to their own countries enriched with the valuable knowledge gathered during their experiences.

We believe that a history of Catholicism in the nineteenth century which loses sight of Latin American contribution cannot give account of the dynamics which animated the intense process of globalisation, hierarchisation and centralisation experienced throughout the century. Latin American prelates participated in the principal historical moments of the Catholic Church in the second half of the nineteenth century: the First Vatican Council; the celebrations for the centenary of the martyrdom of Saints Peter and Paul; the Latin American Bishop’s Plenary Council of 1899, among others. Above all,

fío de la Revolución. Reaccionarios, antiliberales y contrarrevolucionarios (siglos XVIII y XIX), Comares, Granada 2017, pp. 319-335.

⁵ An overview in F.J. Ramón Solans, *Más allá de los Andes. Los orígenes ultramontanos de una Iglesia latinoamericana (1851-1910)*, Universidad del País Vasco, Bilbao 2020.

following the fall of Rome in 1870, the Latin American bishops multiplied their demonstrations of loyalty to the Holy See, promoted the veneration of the Pope, collected funds via Peter's Pence, and spread ultramontane ideas, practices and devotions. This was not done passively, but by contributing to the creative adaptation of these according to the political, religious and economic needs of their local Churches. From this arises the enormous diversity of situations which the nineteenth century Latin American context presents and in which very different, and sometimes opposing, realities co-existed on subjects such as Church-State relations, bishops' links with Rome, and the political participation of Catholics. Furthermore, this protagonism was not solely directed internally toward the Latin American region and its comprising countries: Latin American authors were translated and read in Europe while the Catholic world attentively followed a number of events which had taken place within the New Continent (suffice to recall the impact on European thought by figures such as Bishop Manuel José Mosquera of Colombia or the President of Ecuador Gabriel García Moreno). Some Latin American events and proceedings anticipated questions and offered solutions which would later be presented and adopted in Europe, as shown by the decisive influence of the Mexican model of the separation of Church and State in the French Third Republic when it came to deal with the same question.

For all of the above reasons with this monographic section we intend to contribute to overcoming the image of the Latin American Churches as simple receptacles of Roman ideas and orientations. As such we wish to place an emphasis on the enormous variety of local realities which an overall and aggregated view tends to place on the one level, and also to emphasise the active contribution of the Latin Americans to the construction of nineteenth century Catholicism. We believe that Latin American Catholicism, along with that of the United States, constitutes an exceptional laboratory for the observation of the varied and complex relations established during the nineteenth century between political modernity and religion. The absence of Legitimist movements, and the republican form of government which was – leaving aside the fleeting Mexican imperial experiments – adopted by each and every one of the ex-Spanish colonies implied, from the very time of the Restoration and throughout the century, the introduction of a novel construct on the religious-political level: the Catholic republic. This experiment – in different ways and in different historical-cultural contexts – sought to harmonise the demands of traditional religion with the new ideas of the sovereignty of the people, and with freedoms of conscience, expression, and the press. Of course, this was not always successful, as illustrated by the fact that all Latin American countries, with exception of Argentina and Costa Rica, at one point sanctioned the juridical separation of Church and State, demonstrated most dramatically by the outbreak of real civil wars in countries such as Mexico and Colombia, and which had as their axis the religious question.

As such our aim is to contribute to the formulation of a global re-reading of nineteenth century Catholicism which does not lose sight of the active

protagonism of Latin America, a region which, in 1910, was home to 25% of the world's Catholics⁶. Through this we intend to show a Catholicism which is more plural and more complex than that which some general works propose; a Catholicism whose problems and dynamics did not always coincide with European Catholicism. We hope this focus allows us to move beyond a number of long-assumed historiographical dichotomies (modernity-religion; Liberalism-Catholicism; State-Church, etc.), and that adherence to these dichotomies can be revealed as not appropriate for giving proper account of the richness of local Latin American contexts and of the plurality of solutions which were adopted in order to articulate the religious ideas of the nineteenth century and the proposals of political modernity.

As such, this monographic issue sets out three objectives:

1. To offer a panorama of the intense historiographical renewal of research referring to Latin American Catholicism.
2. To highlight the importance of this renewal's analysis in understanding the dynamics and evolution of Catholicism on a global scale.
3. To set out a more dynamic and globalised vision of the Catholic Church.

This special issue comprises articles by noted specialists from Argentina, Brazil, Spain, Mexico, and Uruguay. Its structure considers four central themes present in each of the articles: ultramontanism; Church-State relations; education; Catholic actors. The collection opens with an article by Elisa Cárdenas Ayala, reflecting on the impact of Hispanic America on Vatican politics. Three contributions follow (by Francisco Javier Ramón Solans, Sebastián Hernández Méndez, and Ana Rosa Cloet da Silva and Ítalo Santirrocchi) which concentrate on the development of ultramontanism, its centres of reference, its imaginary, and the particularities of its articulation in Latin America. These articles highlight not only the originality of these Latin American ultramontane models, but also their projection and international relevance, and their way of thinking about other Catholic spaces such as the Near East, America, and Europe.

A second collection of articles principally approach Church-State relations. Luiz Carlos Ramiro Junior and Ignacio Martínez focus on the tensions provoked by this link in Brazil and Argentine singularity. Ricardo Cubas Ramacciotti and Roberto Di Stefano approach the question of religious education from this perspective, taking the case of Chilean Catholic universities and Argentine seminaries. The authors show the singular trajectory these educational institutions had in Argentina, Chile, and Peru. Among the distinctive characteristics is highlighted the question of chronology, be that on account of persistence as in the case of the public financing of the Argentine seminaries, or its belated establishment as in the case of the pontifical uni-

⁶ *The Global Catholic Population*, in <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/02/13/the-global-catholic-population/>.

versities in Latin America. Moreover, both chapters show the important role played by local actors in their configurations, their relationship with Rome, and their perception of the socio-political contexts.

In summary, this special issue presents a collection of ideas which underline the originality of the Latin American Catholic experience and its projection towards other areas of the Catholic world, alongside its contribution to a world modelled by the processes of globalisation, centralisation, and hierarchisation which Catholicism experienced in the nineteenth century. Finally, this special issue allows us a better understanding of the centripetal-centrifugal dynamics at the heart of the contemporary Catholic Church, the growing importance of non-European clergy, their representation within the curia, and even the election of the first Latin American Pope, Pope Francis.

