Defending tradition and confronting secularity
The Catholic Buen Pastor Institute

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Introduction

Despite the fact that traditionalist Catholics criticize Vatican II, they demonstrate how the Catholic Church after Vatican II has reconfigured the relationship between clergy and laity. Unlike the First Vatican Council (1869–1870) where ‘clergy governed the laity within the life of the church and lay members did not have their own distinctive mission’ (Pope 2004), lay members of the Instituto Buen Pastor (IBP) have their own political agenda not under direction of the clergy. This agenda includes participating and intervening in secular debates through religious means and practices. The ways in which traditionalist Catholics become visible in the public sphere include the political use of Catholic rituals (such as traditionalist liturgy and processions) in public spaces, as well as the participation in prayer chains such as ‘40 Days for Life’ in which they converge with Christians from other religious denominations. Although traditionalist Catholics criticize the ‘false ecumenism’ promoted by the Church since Vatican II, in their political practices Catholics deploy a ‘practical ecumenism’ that produces alliances with other Christian churches and political parties, leaving aside any kind of doctrinal differences.

The politics of religion deployed by lay members of the IBP question clear-cut divisions between politics and religion, revealing how the secular may be confronted and inhabited through the defense of specific religious traditions. Religious practices can constitute specific forms of political participation and expression that by no means follow liberal conceptions of politics as a sphere separate from religion (Mahmood 2005, p. 4).

A public ritual

On October 18, 2015, the celebration of Christ the King at the IBP chapel began with a procession on the streets of a neighborhood in Bogota called La Soledad. The procession was led by young acolytes who held the flags of Colombia and the Vatican. They were followed by the military police’s marching band (which guarded the little girls wearing veils), the priest representing the Holy Power, and the nuns walking behind the marching band. The
priest stood under a small canopy marking his political status and held in his hands a monstrance with a large host at its center. The host in the Holy Sacraments incarnates Christ the King, which accounts for the solemn nature of the procession and the presence of the military as escort. Behind the priest and the nuns were the laymen and women of the chapel. Laymen wore formal suits and ties, while the female members of the chapel were dressed in long skirts and old-fashioned attire with white veils covering their faces. The procession arrived at the statue of José Prudencio Padilla, an Afro-Colombian military and navy leader who fought in the Spanish-American wars of independence. An altar was installed before the statue of Padilla and the monstrance was placed on it by the priest.

The sermons delivered in public liturgies like this have strong political connotations and commemorate different martyrs killed while defending the Christian faith against secular persecution. In this sermon, the priest quoted the Book of John 18:33–38, which narrates the story of the judgment of Christ at the hands of Pontius Pilate. During his sermon the priest recalled how in the judgment of Christ, Pontius Pilate refused to recognize the fact that Christ’s kingdom ‘was not of this world.’ The priest claimed that the transcendental character of the Church and Christ was not recognized in this world, given that the ‘global government’ was behaving in a manner similar to that of the Jews who had chosen to save Barabbas instead of the truth represented by Christ. This interpretation focused on the fact that the people of God had the chance to choose between the truth of Christ or the material salvation of modern Barabbas, whom the priest also named as the ‘guerrilla insurgent leader’ standing against the Romans.

Although the procession of Christ the King and the appropriation of public streets in Bogota by members of the IBP are often not considered to be political acts, because the final objective is to pledge allegiance to the transcendence of Christ the King, this is not what we observed. At the climax of the Mass, the priest raised the Holy Sacrament, while the choir, along with the military and lay members, rang bells before the presence of Christ. But during the celebration of Christ the King in 2015, a demonstration interrupted the normal ending of the Mass. Lay members began to cry out: ‘Viva Cristo Rey! Viva Cristo Rey!’ [Long live Christ the King]. This happened even if the prescribed practice was to pray and meditate after consumption of the host. This disruption of the sacramental order was described to us by the acolytes as being part of a ‘holy war,’ like that of the Cristeros War in Mexico (1926–1929) when the end of every Mass was followed by shouts among the laity who had participated in the Mass.

The representation of the laity as soldiers of God allows the laity of the IBP to articulate their political agency as defenders of sacramental duties and Catholic traditions. The wider debates in the public sphere in which they engage include issues such as gay marriage, adoption of children by gay couples and abortion. While the liturgical reforms of Vatican II were predicated on the idea of ‘lay passivity’ in the Tridentine Mass, which led to the Sacrosanctum Concilium calling for ‘full and active participation by all the people’ present at Mass and the use of vernacular languages instead of Latin (Dinges 1987, p. 144), the active political participation of lay members of the IBP in the public sphere defies this charge of passivity.

The Instituto Buen Pastor

The IBP was established in November 2009 in Bogota, following the creation of the Institut du Bon-Pasteur in Bordeaux in 2006 by the Catholic priest Phillipe Laguérie. In 2005, Pope Benedict XVI reestablished the Tridentine Mass and permitted its use as an ‘extraordinary
ritual,’ along with the new ritual of the Mass that had been institutionalized with Vatican II. The purpose was to achieve reconciliation with the members of the Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX), created in 1970 in opposition to the changes brought to the liturgy and the Catholic Church by Vatican II. In 1969, Cardinals Alfredo Ottaviani and Antonio Bacci, with the support of French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, wrote *A Brief Critical Study of the New Order of the Mass* (Ottaviani and Bacci 1996), in which they argued that the structure and order of the new Mass had taken out of the liturgy the mystery of the real presence of Christ, and suggested that the liturgical reform of Vatican II disrupted the religious authority of the clergy in the ritual.

Ironically, the politics of religion promoted by lay members of the IBP in the public sphere take place in a society where Catholicism has lost its status as the national religion and the Church has lost its hegemonic control over institutions such as public schools and social care. Until 1991 Colombia was formally a Catholic nation, at which point a new Political Constitution was issued approving ‘religious freedom’ and the separation of church and state, marking the end of the old Concordat signed in 1887. From the end of the nineteenth century, the national government had close ties with the Vatican and this made Catholicism the national public religion *par excellence*. This new Political Constitution opened the door to a new kind of Christian politics, developed mostly by Pentecostal churches with the creation of Christian political parties and the reevaluation of Colombia as a Catholic nation. Lay members of the IBP interpret the constitutional reforms of 1991 as a threat to the Catholic foundations of society and a conspiracy against the moral authority of the Church over the nation. The reforms are seen as the attempt by secular powers to undermine the Catholic faith. Lefebvre, who founded SSPX in 1970 in France, conceived Vatican II ecumenism as dangerous, given that the Catholic Church was ‘recognizing other faiths not as false doctrines but as perfectly legitimate religions offering equally valid access to God’ (Stoekl 2006, p. 94). In 1976, Pope Paul VI suspended Lefebvre *a divinis* after he ordained thirteen priests of the SSPX on the day of St. Peter and St. Paul, without the permission of the Pope.

**Liturgal reform, politics and the secular**

Vatican II (1963–1965) initiated a modernization of the Church and the adaptation of its doctrines and practices to the age (González 1987, p. 7). In the *Sacrosanctum Concilium* the Church is recognized as a historical institution subject to change, emphasizing the need to adapt liturgical practice (or Roman rite) to the spiritual needs of the current laity. Among the most important changes in liturgy promoted by the *Sacrosanctum Concilium* are the use of vernacular language in church, as well as congregational responses to the priest’s prayers, receiving the host with the hands without kneeling, singing contemporary hymns, and the priest’s celebration of Mass from an altar facing the people (Dinges 1987, p. 141).

*Sacrosanctum Concilium* attempted to ‘overcome the tendency of laity to regard Mass attendance as a form of duty parade,’ and to address a concern that the ‘laity were not properly participating in the liturgical action which was taking place but had accepted the standing of spectators’ (Rowland 2008, p. 123). The active participation of laity in the Sacred Liturgy was thought to have an ‘effect on a person’s subjective response to God’s gift of grace, which is difficult to achieve if his or her spiritual disposition is that of the merely passive spectator’ (Rowland 2008, 124).

Traditionalist Catholics, including lay members of the IBP, criticize the ‘new Mass’ institutionalized after Vatican II on the grounds that it left behind the mystery of the
incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ. For traditionalist Catholics, the new Mass has become just a worldly commemoration of the death of Christ, similar to Protestant liturgy. It ‘lacks the dramatic tension because there is no sacrifice, there is only the reading of scripture and fellowship’ (Rowland 2008, p. 134). The use of vernacular languages in the new Mass is said to contribute to the loss of the mystery of Christ, since vernacular languages vulgarize the mystery through a simple narration of sacrifice, rendering impossible the enactment of the sacrifice of Christ as it occurs in traditionalist liturgy. For traditionalist Catholics, the invocation of Christ in the Mass is only made possible through particular uses of Latin that include specific modes of intonation, Gregorian chants and the performance of the death of Christ as a present event. Defenders of Tridentine Mass believe that the real presence of Christ in the ritual is only perceived through the mystery of actions and practices involved, leaving unnecessary and reprievable any exposition of what is secretive, as happens in the new Mass where the death of Christ is narrated during the offering.

The differentiation that traditionalist Catholics establish between the narration of the death of Christ and the real presence of Christ that is achieved in the Tridentine Mass is political as well as theological. In the traditionalist liturgy the priest and the laity always look towards the altar, not at one another—whereas in the new liturgy, the emphasis shifts from the ‘model of an individual priest standing between Christ and the community as an exclusive spiritual mediator, to that of the priesthood and ministerial character of the community’ (Dinges 1987, p. 148). The fact that in the Tridentine Mass only priests have the religious knowledge and power to invoke the presence of Christ, marks a strong hierarchical division between priests and lay members. However, these hierarchies between priests and lay members at the IBP can be contested both within liturgy and outside of it.

In the IBP, the traditionalist liturgy creates the perfect scenario for pastoral guidance and religious pedagogy, in which the young members of the congregation participate as both acolytes and students of the faith, and are considered defenders of the Tridentine Mass against the risks of the post-Conciliar Church and the secular world. The pastoral guidance of all the members of the IBP plays an important role in the chapel, because a great number of the members are newcomers to the traditionalist Mass and need guidance in order to fulfill the sacramental purification required to receive the host. Most of these newcomers are middle-class young men with technical education, looking for a religious life (as acolytes, for example) and the possibility of becoming traditional priests. Newcomers also included middle-class women with families and their children who were the main subjects of catechization. Some of the newcomers were also relatives of members of the police and the military. The sacramental purification means that the members have to recognize their sins, attend confession regularly and recover the grace required to receive the Holy Body. In the IBP, grace is not easily achieved; it is the outcome of an arduous process of learning and disciplinary practices. There is a strong correlation here between the experience of faith, knowledge and the disciplinary practices that make them possible. As Talal Asad points out, it is the power which is articulated through different practices and institutions that creates the conditions for experiencing religious truth (Asad 1993, p. 35).

In addition to the celebration of the Tridentine Mass, the IBP has also created ‘spiritual and doctrinal conferences,’ where the attending priests are holders of the knowledge of the faith, and lay members the students. In these spiritual and doctrinal conferences, lay members learn about the Church, its history and doctrines, as well as the theological foundations of traditionalist liturgy. Priests of the IBP also give advice to lay members at these conferences on how to behave in their everyday lives without losing grace. The advice given to lay members includes counseling on which individuals they should avoid, those
they must not become romantically associated with, and how to deal with issues such as feminism, atheism and liberalism.

These conferences also include lessons on secular events which have affected the religious authority of the Catholic Church or have led to the political persecution of members of the Church at different historical moments (as they believe is the present-day case with the IBP). That which might be considered a secular achievement, such as the French Revolution, the advent of human rights or reproductive rights for women, among others, are considered by members of the IBP to be part of a conspiracy to dismantle the Catholic faith worldwide. One of the historical events most frequently mentioned during the Mass and at the conferences is the Cristero War in Mexico that took place between 1926 and 1929. The Cristero War was a widespread struggle in many central-western Mexican states against the secularist, anti-Catholic and anti-clerical policies of the Mexican government under the presidency of Plutarco Elias Calles (1920–1930). Members of the IBP perceive their current situation as resembling that of the Cristero War and consider the Freemasons to be their principal enemy. The latter are believed to be part of a ‘global government’ which Jews and Protestants also participate in. The priesthood and the laity at the IBP feel they are confronting a secularizing state (led by Masons), whose ultimate aim is to destroy the family (understood as the foundation of society), the Catholic faith and the Church.

In this sense, grace as conceived of within the IBP entails a particular engagement with the world and a particular way of performing Catholic faith both in public spaces and in everyday life. Laity and priests consider participation in the Tridentine Mass to be a way of defending and spreading grace throughout society and the Church. In their sermons and conferences, priests criticize the ecumenical approach of the Catholic Church and the current pope Francis I. For example, priests at the IBP frequently criticize the Encyclical Letter Laudato Si’ of the Holy Father Francis on Care for our Common Home (2015), because they consider it to be a deviation from the mission attributed to the Church that has historically consisted of ‘saving souls’ and preparing for the second coming of Jesus Christ. According to the members of the IBP, the publication of this encyclical letter by the Vatican in 2015 shows that the current Church is concerned with secular politics and issues such as the environment or the critique of capitalism, while leaving behind the grace that should fuel pastoral action in the world. Priests of the IBP criticize the position of the new pastoral model, pointing out the Church’s lack of clarity regarding the true means of salvation. This critique of Pope Francis’s encyclical letter on Care for our Common Home goes hand in hand with the critique of the ‘modern clergy’ who seem to confuse what is gracious with what is not, as happens for example with the masses that are carried out in order to bless pets such as dogs, who are not considered to be subjects for salvation.

Thus lay members of the IBP criticize the current Holy See because they consider it to be under the influence of liberal, modern and, in some cases, leftist ideologies, which discard Catholic doctrine. Lay members of the IBP also criticize the influence of Liberation Theology on the priesthood in Colombia during the 1960s and its principal representative Camilo Torres who was killed in 1965 fighting alongside the leftist guerrilla ELN (National Liberation National Army). National clergy are criticized for transitioning from being in charge of national education and morality, to becoming one of the main negotiators between the leftist guerrillas and the national government, as has occurred during the twenty-first century.

While Vatican II proposed that the Church should adapt to the changes brought by secularism and modernity, priests and lay members at the IBP consider secularism and modernity to be the historical enemies of the Church, requiring confrontation through
different means. Specifically, they criticize the dogmatic constitution of Vatican II as it appears in the *Lumen Gentium*. The fact that the *Lumen Gentium* includes in the *people of God* not just those who have been baptized, but also those that ‘do not profess the faith in its entirety or do not preserve unity of communion with the successor of Peter,’ is seen by members of the IBP as a false ecumenism. Traditionalist Catholics of the IBP see themselves as soldiers of Christ the King and the continuation of the long history of struggle of the holy Church against its enemies. In this sense, members of the IBP hold a restricted notion of the *people of God*, one which includes only those who like themselves are willing to defend the Church as soldiers of Christ. Therefore, all of the members of the IBP celebrate the day of Christ the King as a recognition of the ultimate authority of Christ on earth, which is interpreted differently depending on the country where it is celebrated. For instance, traditionalist Catholics in Spain associate the celebration of Christ the King with the assertion of Spain as a Catholic nation, also commemorating Francisco Franco’s ascension to government in 1939 (Gonzalez 2014). In the case of the IBP, as we demonstrated at the beginning of the chapter, the celebration of Christ the King is used as a public display of Catholic faith as standing against secular institutions and the marginalization of Catholicism in society.

**Political causes and alliances**

Despite the fact that lay members of the IBP criticize the new notions of the ‘people of God’ devised by Vatican II as false ecumenism, in their political actions they establish alliances with Pentecostal and Christian churches through movements such as ‘40 Days for Life.’ This organization was originally initiated in 2004 by David Bereit in Texas and currently enjoys a global reach. In Colombia, ‘40 Days for Life’ is supported by the Church and led by lay members of various churches. The anti-abortion campaigns organized by ‘40 Days for Life’ consist of forty days of prayer and fasting that start on Ash Wednesday and include shifts where members stand outside foundations or organizations that perform abortions or give assistance to women in relation to reproductive health. In 2006, The Constitutional Court in Colombia approved abortion in three specific cases: when the health of the mother is at risk, where fetus malformation is detected, and when pregnancy is the outcome of rape. These campaigns are usually carried out simultaneously in various places in Colombia and worldwide.

In the anti-abortion campaign of 2018, the Colombian city of Pereira’s mayor attempted to prohibit the prayer and fasting of members of the ‘40 Days for Life’ movement in front of organizations that promoted women’s reproductive rights. The mayor’s argument was that these public protests ‘undermine the fundamental rights of pregnant mothers, imposing their criteria upon abortion.’ However, representatives of ‘40 Days for Life’ challenged the mayor’s decision in a letter which argued that abortion is still characterized as a felony in the National Penal Code and quoted the article 20 of the Colombian Constitution which guarantees every person the ‘liberty to express and spread his thoughts and opinions … without censure.’

This event reveals how the political participation of lay members of Catholic Churches in Colombia is coordinated through alliances with Christian churches, while also making strategic use of secular law for religious ends. This kind of political participation was clearly present on October 2, 2016 when peace agreements with the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) were submitted to a public referendum and the electorate rejected the agreement with 50.22% of the vote. The political coalition
against the peace agreement was led by politicians such as the former attorney general Alejandro Ordoñez, who is an active member of the SSPX (which defends Tridentine Mass), and former president Alvaro Uribe. The victory of this political coalition in the referendum was attributed by analysts and the press to the active participation of Christian voters. Members of the IBP interpreted this victory as a victory of the people of God, which contradicts their initial critiques of the ‘false ecumenism’ of Vatican II. In other words, ecumenism constitutes a doctrinal problem inside the IBP as it challenges the religious authority of the Church, but ecumenism becomes a politically useful tool in order to intervene in the public sphere and secular debates.

The existing literature on recent religious change in Latin America tends to perceive Catholic and other Christian Churches as opposed to each other (Levine 1997), competing for the allegiance of believers in a market of symbolic goods where Catholicism has lost its religious monopoly and political hegemony (Bastian 1997, 2012; Beltrán 2013). The way in which lay members of the IBP articulate their political agency in the public sphere through alliances with other Christian churches and denominations leads us to rethink the opposition as doctrinal differences between them tend to disappear when common political and moral agendas emerge.

Nonetheless, there are differences in terms of how traditionalist Catholics and other Christians direct political participation in the public sphere. Since 2000 a number of the Christian churches in Colombia have begun to create political parties in order to participate in electoral politics with their own candidates. The most well-known case in Colombia is the Church of God Ministry of Jesus Christ which was created in 1972, and which in 2000 created its own political party called the Independent Movement of Absolute Renovation (MIRA). Unlike Christian churches that have created their own political parties, traditionalist Catholics mainly direct their politics of religion through rituals (such as the Tridentine Mass) and processions inside the chapel and in public places, as we described in the chapter opening. However, ideological convergences between traditionalist Catholics and other Christians are present through religious practices such as the prayer chains that take place in front of institutions promoting female reproductive rights. One of the major anti-abortion campaigns organized in Bogota by ‘40 Days for Life’ took place in September 2015, when people of different religious denominations prayed and fasted for forty days in front of Profamilia and Orientame, two well-known institutions that assist women in terms of reproductive health, as well as performing abortions. This vigil provoked conflicting reactions from the people working in the institutions and the neighbors living close by.

Conclusions

In this chapter we have analyzed how lay members of the IBP articulate forms of political participation and intervention in the public sphere through the performance of traditionalist Catholic rituals in the chapel of the IBP and public spaces of Bogota. The active political participation of lay members of the IBP in the chapel and in public spaces defies the idea that the practice of Tridentine Mass produces merely passive spectators (Rowland 2008, p. 124). Through the participation and defense of traditional liturgy and other rituals, lay members of the IBP become politically active in the public sphere, displaying religious symbols and practices in public spaces. Given that these practices constitute political manifestations through religious means, they question any clear division between the political and the religious.
One of the main critiques of Vatican II by lay members of the IBP concerns the ecumenism that it promoted, but despite this critique of the ‘false ecumenism’ of the Church, lay members of the IBP have developed a ‘practical ecumenism’ that consists of political alliances with Christian churches from other denominations. These alliances are expressed through religious practices such as prayer chains and vigils, where Catholics and other Christians converge and where doctrinal differences become irrelevant for political purposes.

Clearly, the relationship between politics and religion is not simple, especially in former Catholic nations that have recently implemented political reforms that recognize religious freedom and the separation of church and state (Vaggione and Morán 2017). Therefore, it is necessary to analyze how the relationships between politics and religion are reconfigured in the context of religious pluralism and political reforms that try to limit the power of the Catholic Church.

References


