



The Controversies Over Maritain in Chile and Argentina. Precursors of Different Progressive and Conservative Catholicisms

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Abstract

This work analyzes the controversies over Maritain in Argentina and Chile to read them comparatively, which leads to a medium-term interpretation of these debates as precursors, as trailblazers for different progressive and conservative Catholicisms. These different expressions of Catholicism, forged around the controversies over Maritain, had lasting and profound effects on the historical development of the Catholic Church and its positions on politics in both countries. Thus, our research intends to provide an explanation for both the different expressions of progressive Catholicism, which developed in the two countries in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the different majority reactions on the part of the Catholic Church during the last military dictatorships in Chile and Argentina. We do not seek to impose a single explanation with this idea, but rather to highlight certain aspects of Catholicism in Argentina and Chile that help to explain the Church's attitude to politics in both countries and which can be seen more clearly in a comparative analysis. In line with Reinhart Koselleck, we argue that the debates on Maritain opened different “expectation horizons” that outlined the possibilities of thinking the political expressions of conservative and progressive Catholicisms in both countries. As medium-term structural factors, these “expectation horizons” help to understand the Catholic Church's reactions to the last military dictatorships in Chile and Argentina.

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“I do not think any European intellectual since 1925 has received as many references, commentaries, books published in favor of and against his ideas, special newspaper and magazine supplements in the Americas [as Maritain], in addition to research centers bearing his name.”¹ These were the words that the Brazilian writer and philosopher Alceu Amoroso Lima used in 1948 to describe the influence of the French philosopher Jacques Maritain in Latin America. The impact of the Christian humanist thinker was enormous, especially in Catholic circles in countries such as Brazil, Argentina, and Chile. However, Maritain’s ideas were not just met with sympathy, as is the case with Amoroso Lima, but they also elicited powerful rejection and, in general, triggered great controversy among Catholics in the continent. Olivier Compagnon, whose study is fundamental to understanding Maritain’s influence in Latin America, has identified the cycle of major controversies around the ideas of the French thinker between the mid-1930s and about 1950 (Compagnon 2003).

These controversies had a very powerful impact in Argentine and Chilean Catholic circles in particular, laying the foundations of the subsequent historical development of Catholicism in both countries. Research on Catholicism in both Argentina and Chile has underscored the importance of controversies over Maritain in opening paths to the different political expressions of Catholicism (Rilla 2020; Pattin 2019; Botto 2018; Lida 2015a and 2015b; Orbe 2006; Zanca 2014, Zanatta 1996). Now, these studies have in general been devoted to a national analysis and to Catholicism’s breakdown into pro- and anti-Maritain camps, analyzing these positions regarding the French master’s doctrines. The only exception is the comprehensive study by Compagnon, which analyzes Maritain’s influence in all South America and whose detailed research in many cases serves as a basis for this work. It also gives account of Maritain’s doctrinal influence over Latin American Catholics, especially the different Christian Democratic parties in the continent (Compagnon 2003).

This work seeks to return to the controversies over Maritain in Argentina and Chile, not to identify the adaptation or rejection of Maritain’s positions, but rather to read them comparatively analyzing the discourses, which leads to a medium-term interpretation of these debates as precursors, as trailblazers for different progressive and conservative Catholicisms. These different expressions of Catholicism, forged around the controversies over Maritain, had lasting and profound effects on the historical development of the Catholic Church and its positions on politics in both countries. In line with Rilla’s argument, we believe that Maritain’s influence is a good opportunity to appreciate and analyze ideas on key Catholic concepts, their continuities, and their mutations (Rilla 2020).

Thus, our research intends to provide an explanation for both the different expressions of progressive Catholicism, which developed in the two countries in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the different majority reactions on the part of the Catholic Church during the last military dictatorships in Chile and Argentina. We do not seek to impose a single explanation with this idea, but rather to highlight certain aspects of Catholicism in Argentina and Chile that help to explain the Church’s attitude to politics in both countries and which can be seen more clearly in a comparative

¹ Tristán de Athayde [Alceu Amoroso Lima’s pseudonym]: Maritain y la América Latina, in: *Revue Thomiste* 48, (1948), No. 1–2, p. 16.

analysis. In line with Reinhart Koselleck (2010), we argue that the debates on Maritain opened different “expectation horizons” that outlined the possibilities of thinking the political expressions of conservative and progressive Catholicisms in both countries. As medium-term structural factors, these “expectation horizons” help to understand the Catholic Church’s reactions to the last military dictatorships in Chile and Argentina.

Thus, we argue that the debates on Maritain analyzed below opened frameworks in both countries for thinking about and conceiving the role of Catholicism in politics, which, among many other factors, play a role in understanding the hierarchical Catholic Church’s different reactions to the intra- and extra-ecclesiastical conflicts in the 1960s and 1970s and to the violence of the last dictatorships. We do not claim that the elements discussed below remained stable and unchanged over the course of the century or that the actors who gave opinions in the debates on Maritain did not change their positions on politics. What is important to highlight here is that the detailed comparison of these debates in Chile and Argentina helps to identify certain elements of the Catholic discourse in both countries that help to understand the attitudes of Catholic Churches, including in the years following the Vatican Council II, — and that these elements are not clearly perceived in a purely national analysis. For this reason, this article focuses again on the debates on Maritain in the 1930s and 1940s, but with a comparative and medium-term approach that attempts to underscore factors that help explain different attitudes in very similar churches. In this sense, the sources cited do not differ much from what Compagnon has already analyzed (though several parts are cited that we considered more important for the focus of this article that are not cited in Compagnon’s essential book), but a different analysis is given due to the medium-term approach that attempts to identify structural factors to interpret the role played by the Argentine and Chilean Churches in the second half of the twentieth century. For this task, we believed it important to return to the debates on Maritain in the first half of the century to detail the differences in the Catholic discourses in the two countries. The possible consequences of the “expectation horizons” these debates opened for the 1960s and 1970s are outlined in the conclusions, without being able to go into too much detail on the ecclesiastical conflicts of the time. For our purpose, a detailed description of the events in those years is not necessary, given the large amount of existing literature on the subject (which shall be cited); the central focus will be on highlighting the different elements of Catholic discourses that opened different possibilities for conceiving progressive and conservative Catholicisms.

For these reasons, we begin with a summary of the controversies over Maritain in Argentina and Chile and their transnational effects between 1930 and 1950, which marked the peak in the debate about Maritain. Next, the central section engages in a discursive analysis of the main arguments of Maritain’s critics as well as his defenders, in particular taking into account the major debates in both countries, which at the same time mark the beginning and the end of the Catholic controversies over Maritain in the region, that is, the controversies in Argentina in 1936–1937 and

the debates in Chile in 1948–49.² We attempt to read the arguments of the Frenchman’s enemies and supporters in a medium-term perspective and with a comparative vision to outline the argumentative structures and political paths of the different Catholicisms in the two countries. We are aware that this does not address all aspects of these debates, but nor is it the goal of this research to add new explanations on the Maritain-related discourses in and of themselves, but rather to interpret these debates as the precursors of different paths of Catholicism in Chile and Argentina in the second half of the twentieth century. The conclusion outlines these different paths in the 1960s and 1970s in general terms, with references to the literature, to relate them with the discursive channels opened (or not) in debates about Maritain.

Maritain in Chile and Argentina Between 1936 and 1950

This is not the place to engage in an exegesis of the philosophy and books of Jacques Maritain (Burgos 2006; Compagnon 2003; McNerny 2003). The Frenchman’s impact in Latin America is because he was considered one of the clearest and most extraordinary interpreters of Thomas Aquinas, a reputation that made him a world-class Christian philosopher. To understand the controversies in Chile and Argentina, it should be recalled that at first, between the 1920s and his visit to Argentina in 1936, the French philosopher was read by his South American disciples as a conservative Catholic close to the intransigent positions defending Catholicism from modernity (Zanca 2014). This interpretation, which is due to the first Maritain texts received in the region, changes with a change in the position of Maritain himself. Maritain’s position becomes much more “progressive” between the publication of his *Letter on Independence* and his book *Integral Humanism* in 1935, which is reflected in an acceptance of modernity and political pluralism, the defense of religious freedom and democracy, the importance of the role played by the Christian individual, and the development of a Christian humanism. These ideas allow him to propose the path of a third Catholic-inspired party that distances itself equally from communism, fascism, and liberal capitalism and make him one of the main inspirations for Christian Democratic parties in the continent (Compagnon 2003). In Rilla’s words, Maritain became a “democratic Thomist, with all the extravagant and

² This work was carried out during the first half of 2021, when the global COVID-19 pandemic made access to archives and libraries impossible. For this reason, we base the analysis below on the debates in the Argentine magazine *Cristerio* in 1936–1937 (provided to us by our Argentine colleague Lucas Bilbao, whom we wish to thank) and in the Chilean magazine *Política y Espíritu* in 1949, which we could access at the library of theology at the *Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile*. This means that we were unable to review the 1944 controversy in Chile (Gumucio 1944) or the debates in Chile’s *Diario Ilustrado*, where Maritain’s critics in particular were published. For their views, we base ourselves on the two important books by Luis Arturo Pérez against Maritain, which we did have access to. Nor were we able to include Meinvielle’s books and some of the debates in other Argentine magazines, but a comparison with Compagnon’s analysis, which includes practically all disputes over Maritain in the two countries, gives us the certainty of being able to substantiate our interpretation with the sources reviewed. Nor will we refer to the writings of Maritain himself, who participated significantly in Latin American debates, because the main goal of the analysis is to chart the discursive lines of the Chilean and Argentine actors. However, it is important to note that Maritain himself participated in the defense of his positions.

controversial implications that this definition had – for many – at the time” (Rilla 2020: 40). While his ideas seemed very progressive and even borderline heretical in the eyes of the Vatican in the 1930s, during the Spanish Civil War and the rise of fascism in Europe, fascism’s defeat and global acceptance of democracy after World War II made his positions increasingly dominant within Catholic circles and served as precursors and inspiration for the Second Vatican Council (Compagnon 2003; McInerny 2003).

Now, for the purposes of this work, it does not matter so much whether this brief review, necessarily very superficial, is right or not, but rather what matters is to understand that, from the first debates in Argentina in 1936, Catholics in the region interpreted Maritain according to this code. For both his supporters and detractors, Maritain becomes the main figure of a progressive Catholicism that accepts the modern and pluralistic world as a challenge that Catholics must adapt to, not a mistake that must be rejected. In this context, it must be understood that the participants in the debates on Maritain come from the same root of fundamentalist Catholicism in the first decades of the twentieth century but, precisely because of their different interpretations of Maritain, they take different paths that are channeled into a conservative and intransigent Catholicism and a progressive Catholicism (Zanca 2012).³ To understand the arguments in these debates, Maritain’s “presence” in both countries and the controversies that his ideas prompted must be briefly summarized.

When the major debates on Maritain between 1936 and 1950 are reviewed, the transnational ties that emerged between Chile and Argentina stand out. The reception of Maritain in the other country was followed very closely on both sides of the Andes, and several national Catholic figures became intellectual references in the neighboring country. In this sense, the Argentine scenario emerges as the dominant one, especially due to the magazine *Criterio*’s dissemination in transnational intellectual circles (Caiceo 1991), as well as figures like the priest Julio Meinvielle, who became Maritain’s most radical critic and whose ideas were widely received in Chile (Cersósimo 2019). But the correspondence on Maritain flowed between Catholic intellectuals and priests in both countries, demonstrating the interest in the debates on these Christian issues in the neighboring country. Another point that stands out in an overview of the controversies on Maritain is the importance of the historical context, as especially in Chile the political moment and Catholic political forces had significant influence on the reception of the French philosopher’s doctrines.

The rise of Maritain’s influence in Latin America begins with his visit to Argentina between August and October 1936, invited by Tomás Casares, organizer of the *Catholic Culture Courses*. This trip, in which Maritain gave several presentations and elicited significant interest in both the Argentine as well as Chilean press,⁴ emerges as an omen of the debates to come. Invited as the great Aquinian philosopher of conservative Catholicism, upon his arrival in Buenos Aires, there were already rumors of his supposed shift to the left. These rumors come in the historical

³ It is also clear to us that this dual interpretation in two different Catholicisms is a simplification, as the nuances between conservative and progressive positions are expressed in many ways throughout the twentieth century and that there were many actors moving from one position to the other and vice-versa.

⁴ *El Mercurio* in Chile published several summaries of his presentations in Argentina (Compagnon 2003. Chap. III). For the debate on this trip in non-Catholic Argentine magazines, see Zanca 2014.

context of the Spanish Civil War, an important backdrop for the controversies on Maritain in Argentina. Thus, the magazine *Criterio*, a mouthpiece of conservative Catholicism at the time, had to come out and rectify the information that Maritain had saluted a protest by the Popular Front in France with his fist raised and that he was in favor of the socialist government in the Spanish conflict (Lida 2015a and 2015b). At the same time, Maritain also arrived in Argentina as a guest of the PEN-Club in Buenos Aires, a secular leftist organization, and he gave a conference at the magazine *Sur*, run by Victoria Ocampo, which Catholic conservatives also considered very leftist. These contradictions between his conservative admirers and his newer and more progressive stances came to light in this trip without yet causing the major controversies of the coming year. This trip ultimately had two important effects: on the one hand, Maritain's works and ideas became known in the region, as his conferences were also widely replicated in countries like Chile or Brazil (Compagnon 2003). On the other hand, the philosopher's stay was already beginning to cause irritation in the more conservative circles of the *Catholic Culture Courses*, which became significant cracks a year later, when the controversy over Maritain's position regarding the Spanish Civil War erupted (Zanatta 1996). The first traces of this initial great debate in Latin America emerged toward the end of his trip to Argentina, when his defense of the Jews and his position on a third party distanced from both communism and fascism led Argentine Catholics to react, deeply imbued as they were with Antisemitism and close to European fascism (Lida 2015a; Zanca 2014; Romero 2011; Orbe 2006).

Attacks against Maritain intensified in mid-1937, when news reached Argentina of his condemnation of the bombing of Guernica and his text rejecting the idea that the Spanish Civil War being waged by Franco's troops could be interpreted as a holy war (Compagnon 2003). This was when the first major controversy over Maritain arose, especially in the magazine *Criterio*, where the conservative Catholics Gregorio Maldonado and César Pico opened fire against the Frenchmen and defended a potential union between Catholics and fascism. His position on the Spanish Civil War was what elicited powerful rejection from conservative Catholic intellectuals in Argentina, to the extent that even Gustavo Franceschi, editor of *Criterio*, who had a personal and respectful relationship with Maritain, harshly criticized his call for peace because he saw Franco's fight against the Socialist government of Spain as an example to be followed by Argentine Catholics. Maritain's disciple Rafael Pividal (Zanca 2014); Manuel Ordóñez, future founder of the Argentine Christian Democracy; and Augusto Durelli (Zanatta 1996) defended him from these attacks, which was followed by another offensive against the Frenchman on the part of his fiercest critic, the priest Julio Meinvielle, who in *Criterio* defended interpreting the Spanish Civil War with the characteristic of a holy war and attacked Maritain's position with insults and libel (Compagnon 2003; Lida 2015a).

This first major Latin American debate about the Aquinist philosopher, the central arguments of which we analyze below, was echoed in Chile, where at first even conservative Catholics like Father Osvaldo Lira defended Maritain, positively receiving Maritain's "new Christianity" in the magazine *Estudios*.⁵ The controversy only began to heat up when the Dominican priest Luis Palma defended the holy war thesis in the *Diario Ilustrado*, mouthpiece of the Conservative Party. This first Chilean attack on Maritain prompted an exchange of publications between Palma and several youths from La Falange Nacional, the future Christian Democracy Party, who declared themselves the French philosopher's disciples, which at the same time led to the appearance of Maritain's most tenacious critic in Chile, canon of the Santiago Cathedral Luis Arturo Pérez (Compagnon 2003). Pérez reproaches Maritain's "bad influence" over young Chilean Catholics and his scant obedience to the authority of the Pope and the bishops, who at the time and in Pérez's interpretation continued to maintain the position of condemning any rapprochement with communism and socialism and whose position on the Spanish Civil War was very different from Maritain's. The Chilean even visited Maritain in Paris to convince him to change his position and wield his influence with the Chilean hierarchy to obtain an official condemnation of Maritain's positions (Compagnon 2003).

And while this official condemnation from the Vatican or national episcopates was never forthcoming, the ecclesiastic hierarchy of both countries held clearly anti-Maritain stances that, to a certain extent, facilitated the attacks of his detractors (Compagnon 2003; Di Stefano and Zanatta 2009). In this way, attacks against Maritain were repeated regularly over the next ten years, especially from Meinvielle in Argentina and Pérez in Chile. A new controversy erupted in Chile in 1944, as Pérez accused the Frenchman of contradicting papal doctrines, which prompted a response from Maritain himself as well as his defenders in Chile's Falange (Gumucio 1944). In the same way, Meinvielle attacks again in Argentina, publishing a 400-page book in 1945 to prove "the falsehood of the new Christianity" and to position Maritain close to heresy (Meinvielle 1945). This book was widely disseminated in Latin America and Rome and lays the groundwork for all future attacks on Maritain. Meinvielle published another 400-page book against the "philo-communist philosopher" in 1948, which had an impact in Chile because it arrived together with the last surge in the controversies (Meinvielle 1948).

The debates in Chile regained strength in 1947, when Osvaldo Lira, who still defended Maritain in 1937, published a harsh philosophical critique that is channeled into a critique of his political positions. This attack gave a second wind to Pérez, who in 1948 published a book accusing the Frenchman of liberalism and misinterpretation of papal doctrines, imitating the points raised by Meinvielle. This time the Jesuit priest Julio Jiménez Berguecio came to his defense, taking pains to show Pérez's methodology as mistaken and to defend Maritain's orthodoxy. People from Chile's Falange also defended him through persons like Jaime Castillo Velasco, who published several articles defending the ideas of integral humanism in the magazine *Política y Espiritu*. The debate once again reaches transnational levels, as the

⁵ Botto says that in his early days Lira was a "priest on the vanguard" (p. 319) and that he had to leave Chile for his progressive stances in 1939. He only became a conservative Catholic after his stay in Spain (Botto 2018, pp. 319–320).

exchanges between Pérez and Jiménez are received by Meinvielle as well as the magazine *Criterio* in Argentina. While Meinvielle maintains his positions, a change can be seen in *Criterio* as this time Franceschi defends Maritain, not so much in the content on his positions, but above all because Maritain had received the blessing of Pope Pius XII when he assumed his post as French ambassador to the Holy See in 1945.⁶ A significant part of this great controversy over Maritain, which is also analyzed below, is published in a special edition of *Política y Espiritu* in 1949, which the magazine's editors published precisely on the occasion of a trip Meinvielle made to Chile and to counter the Argentine priest's influence.

The intensity of the debate on Maritain in Chile and Argentina waned considerably after 1950, especially because, on the one hand, the Frenchman himself no longer got involved in Latin American countries as before and, on the other, his positions on a third party, the acceptance of democracy and the rejection of fascism had become dominant in the post-World War II world (Compagnon 2003).

This brief chronological account of major controversies over Maritain demonstrates the importance of the transnational networks in Chilean and Argentine Catholicism and the significance of the historical context in both countries. While in Argentina, it is the Spanish Civil War that aroused the emotions of Catholics and determined their positions on a Maritain who arrived in that country precisely at the start of that war (Zanatta 1996); in Chile, the debates are far more imbued in a national political environment marked by young Catholics' separation from the Conservative Party. The first attacks against Maritain in Chile in 1937 came in a context that ultimately led to *La Falange's* split from the Conservative party a year later, as the French philosopher served as a spiritual guide for young Catholics, thus threatening — in the eyes of conservatives — the unity of Catholicism (Botto 2018). In the same way, the great controversy of 1947–1949 came at a time when Chile was voting the so-called “damned law,” which excluded communists from political life and led to a clash between the Conservative Party, which supported it, and *La Falange*, which opposed the law (Botto 2018; Huneeus 2009). These historical moments must be considered to understand the direction and the arguments of the controversies over Maritain and the differences between the two countries, which highlight the comparative analysis.

Anti-communism, Christian State, and Holy War. The Argentine Debates

In this section, we analyze the main arguments of Maritain's critics and defenders in Argentina and Chile, especially in terms of the two most important debates, which at the same time marked the beginning and the end of the great disputes over Maritain in the continent. Thus, the publications in *Criterio* in Argentina in 1937 and in *La Falange's* magazine *Política y Espiritu* in 1949 determine the main body of the

⁶ For the slow change in Franceschi's position, see Lida 2019.

analysis, which will be complemented by other writings in the years between these dates.

At the time of his visit to Argentina, Maritain was warmly welcomed, including by conservative Catholics like Octavio Derisi, future president of the Catholic University of Buenos Aires, who saluted Maritain as someone “deeply knowledgeable of modern thought in all its monstrous and deranged power.”⁷ But the attacks began when these same Catholics became aware of Maritain’s conciliatory position regarding the Spanish Civil War, as the majority of Catholics in 1930s Argentina not only defended Franco, but also the political system that the strongman inspired. Thus, César Pico inaugurated the debate with this reproach: “We have already implied a certain accidental deviation in Maritain’s thinking; we will point it out loyally. [...] Maritain seems to identify fascism [...] with a totalitarian regime.” This was incorrect in the eyes of many Argentine intellectuals, as Catholics could well cooperate with fascism: “through cooperation on the part of Catholics, and without that cooperation entailing a definitive commitment, the reality of the fascist movement will ultimately find a doctrine that safeguards the rights of the human beings and distances it from Statolatry. Maritain does not seem to consider these possibilities.”⁸ Fascism was the right political system for Catholics, which is why, “against him [Maritain] (a man mistaken in action), we endorse cooperation with fascist-type movements to save the world from social revolution and chaos,” as Julio Meinvielle commented in his harsh critique of the Frenchman in 1937. For him, “fascism is not in itself totalitarian. Rather, it is a reaction against liberal democracy and against communism.”⁹

This last quote demonstrates the relationship that Argentine conservatives drew between their defense of fascism and their profound anti-communism, which was accompanied by a powerful antisemitic sentiment. These ideas explain Argentine Catholics’ irritation with Maritain when he failed to take Franco’s side in the Spanish Civil War, as in the eyes of Argentines, this conciliatory position only served the enemies of the faith. Thus, Gregorio Maldonado made his problem with Maritain clear: “considering that some of our philosopher’s proposals have led the enemies of Catholicism – communists, Jews [...] – to try to deceive the unsuspecting by basing themselves on them.”¹⁰ Meinvielle reinforced this argument, accusing the “philosopher advocate of the Spanish reds,” whose ideas were of no use “except to give Jews and communists the arms to once again mock the Christ that lives in the Holy Church.” It is for this alleged reason that Maritain “could be heard protesting indignantly yesterday at the supposed bombing of Guernica, when throughout the long months of the Spanish Civil War he was not heard to raise his voice in protest against the inhuman acts of barbarism by the communist scourge.”¹¹ Monsignor Franceschi shares this stance, explaining to Maritain that “to a certain extent [he]

⁷ Criterio 441, August 1936, p. 348.

⁸ Criterio 452, October 1936, both citations from p. 204.

⁹ Criterio 492, August 1937, pp. 330 and 331.

¹⁰ Criterio 484, June 1937, p. 131.

¹¹ Criterio 488, July 1937, both citations from p. 227.

serves the battle standards of an anti-Christian opposition that goes far beyond the Spanish issue and directly touches upon resistance to the communist penetration. We are in full battle and his name is wielded against us.” The fear of a position that did not unconditionally support Franco is related to the Catholic fear of the advance of communism in Argentina, heavily imbued with antisemitism. This “battle” justified both cooperation with fascism as well as the attacks against a philosopher who had been received with applause only a year earlier, as in Franceschi’s words: “no Catholic in South America can hide: if the reds are victorious in Spain, our continent is in grave danger.”¹²

Conservative Argentine Catholics were involved in a struggle against Jews and communists that went beyond mere political positioning. Ultimately, the Spanish Civil War served them as an example of a “crusade” against the threats of modernity and in defense of a medieval Catholic ideal. For Meinvielle, in Franco’s Spain “the sacred medieval order [...] had therefore not disappeared, but rather was latent.”¹³ Maritain was reproached for the failing to see and to defend this idea, as Maldonado had already said: “And note well, Maritain wants to erase the ideal of medieval Christianity from our imagination and replace it with another essentially [...] different ideal.”¹⁴ The Vatican backed Argentines in this defense of the Middle Ages, having rejected the pluralism of modernity, meaning they could state that Maritain’s idea of pluralism “seems to disagree with absolutely certain pontifical rules.”¹⁵ Now, what ultimately underlies this defense of the Middle Ages is the ideal of the Catholic state in which other creeds are not accepted and all attitudes determined by pontifical doctrines. Argentine Catholics saw this ideal materialized in Franco’s aspirations, which is why the Spanish Civil War became such an important example for their ideas. This vision is made very clear in a phrase by Franceschi, who defended Spanish fascism because “General Franco has said not once but several times that he aspires to the foundation of a ‘Christian State’.”¹⁶ That “Christian State” is precisely the goal of the Argentine Catholics, and it explains their struggle against Jews and atheist communists, as to them it represents the only way to materialize the Catholic faith in this world. This is what makes Maritain’s ideas on pluralism, freedom of religion, and a third party so dangerous, as they suffocate the pillars of this intransigent Catholicism that clearly dominated in 1930s Argentina. Thus, Franceschi was probably not far off when he explained to the Frenchman that “you could say that my position is the same as the one held by the totality of Argentine Catholics.”¹⁷

¹² *Criterio* 493, August 1937, both citations from p. 350.

¹³ *Criterio* 494, August 1973, p. 381.

¹⁴ *Criterio* 484, June 1937, p. 132.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹⁶ *Criterio* 493, August 1937, p. 351.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

Other arguments are added to this defense of the Catholic state, consisting in justified violence and holy war as a characteristic of the Spanish conflict. These arguments are explained within a context of a vision of a bipolar world, where the enemies of intransigent Catholicism automatically become enemies of the faith, meaning a dehumanization of the other side that justifies any act of violence. This is a very prominent discourse in debates on the Spanish Civil War, especially in Meinvielle, and it is important due to its permanence among conservative Argentine Catholics over time. It is a discourse that is repeated, almost textually, in the proclamations by defenders of the last military dictatorship in Argentina between 1976 and 1983 (Ruderer 2016). Franceschi explains his version of the Spanish Civil War in this way: “there are no more than two opposing forces in this war: a truly demonic one that synthesizes all that is abhorrence of Christ and another that, despite the differences that still exist in the best of human works, serves God and will allow souls to rise to Him.”¹⁸ Meinvielle’s words echo this idea, declaring that “first, we must establish that a theological struggle is under way in Spain. [...] a struggle for Christ or for the Antichrist.”¹⁹ For conservative Argentines, all who opposed their version resembled the devil, the Antichrist himself. Clearly, there is no room here for pluralism, for conciliatory commitments or for political debate; it is not a political struggle but a religious and totalitarian one for the Christian state and in that sense, just one step away from justifying violence and the idea of a holy war.²⁰ As Meinvielle said: “only with the Cross and the sword is a truly Christian civilization possible.” [...] “The war being waged in Spain [...] is a war of redemption.”²¹ This means that for Catholics “this struggle is a sacred obligation. Because if you love Christ and profess his religion, if you love your homeland and your house, you must bear witness to that with your own blood should the need arise.”²² This passage referring to the Spanish conflict is clearly also aimed at the Argentine context and is a good example of the lessons that anti-Maritain Catholics sought to learn from the Spanish

¹⁸ Criterio 493, August 1937, p. 352.

¹⁹ Criterio 494, August 1937, p. 380.

²⁰ The idea of the holy war is based on the Catholic principles of the just war, developed by Augustine to differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate warfare. Thomas Aquinas and late Spanish scholastics established the general criteria of the just war in the Middle Ages and in the early Modern Age. These theologians’ texts established three requirements for a just war (*legitima auctoritas*, or the competent political authority to declare war; *iusta causa*, the just cause of war; and *intentio recta*, or the restoration of peace as the main objective of war), which were based on Christian doctrine (Graf 2008). Within the theological framework, they weighed the benefits and harms of war before going on to make it seem ethically legitimate if it serves as *ultima ratio* to avoid greater evils. For Thomas Aquinas, such a war was an act of supernatural love that could again put sinners back on the path of virtue and allow them to attain eternal salvation (Graf 2008).

Now, by invoking the sacred realm with the idea of the holy war, the sense of violence is extended to that “*more* transempirical” (Colpe 1994: 10), which goes beyond political or material reasons to justify war and rightly appeals to the profound emotional anchorage that religiosity affords. Religion imbues the act of violence with a specific motivation, whose definition, according to Dietmar Willoweit in reference to the holy war, is “the conviction of fighting for truth par excellence and, ultimately, for the benefit of society” (Willoweit 2008: 260). The following quotes from Meinvielle reflect this concept very well. To gain an understanding of Meinvielle’s view, see Pattin 2019.

²¹ Criterio 494, August 1937, p. 382.

²² Criterio 488, Julio 1937, p. 228. It should be noted that Meinvielle in particular used the idea of the holy war; not even conservative Catholics like Franceschi used it in concrete terms, though Franceschi did speak of a “crusade” (Pattin 2019).

Civil War for their own country. The struggle against the Antichrist, the goal of the Christian state, the ideal of medieval society all justified the alliance between the Cross and the sword, the use of military violence to eradicate perceived enemies. In this way, Meinvielle was able to conclude that “it is just, and in the case at hand and given the characteristics of the Spanish war, it is a holy thing to kill Marxists.”²³

Now, it must be kept in mind that Julio Meinvielle is probably one of the most radical voices in this dispute, but as the quotations of all Maritain’s detractors in this Argentine debate show, his position clearly represents the dominant stance within 1930s Argentine Catholicism (Zanatta 1996).²⁴ This position is summed up in a defense of fascism, imbued with a strong anticommunist and antisemitic sentiment that implies an intransigent struggle for a Catholic State that resembles the ideal of a medieval society. And violence in the name of faith is justified in this struggle, which is of a holy nature, as the enemy is turned into a dehumanized demonic being. These are the reasons for such furious attacks against Maritain, as the philosopher who was once seen as an ally has become a Catholic who accepts the other’s right to exist, which in the eyes of his critics means doubt regarding the straight doctrine and something that opposes the authority of the Church itself.

It is important to highlight these arguments in the analysis, not to determine whether they are justified or represent a mistaken interpretation of Maritain, but because these arguments open the doors to a long-lasting conservative Catholicism in Argentina. They were expressed so drastically for the first time in the debates on Maritain in 1937, but they were to have a lasting effect on the Argentine Catholic Church. This includes the ideas of the holy and just war, which some Catholics and the military returned to in 1976, despite the fact that it had ceased to be an important argument among Argentine Catholics in the 1950s. Franceschi’s more moderate position became dominant among Argentine Catholics at the time, relegating Meinvielle’s extreme stance. However, ideas like the religious justification of violence remained in force among certain intransigent Catholics even after World War Two, as can be seen in the Catholic journals *Combate*, *Cruzada*, and *Verbo*, for example (Scirica 2007, 2019; Pattin 2021). As Pattin has shown, it is precisely the idea of the holy war, first expressed in the debates on Maritain, that opens the possibility for disproportionate violence, bestowed with a sacred halo, against an enemy perceived as inhuman (Pattin 2019).

This does not mean that the Argentine arguments against Maritain remained unchanged over time. In the last great controversy over Maritain, which mainly took place in Chile in the late 1940s, but which Meinvielle participated in as the great Argentine critic of the Frenchman, one can see at once a dynamic adaptation of the arguments as well as the permanence of certain criteria that demonstrate their importance to conservative Argentine Catholicism. Thus, in 1949 Meinvielle maintains his rejection of “enemy” ideologies by defining Maritain as “infected with liberalism, socialism, individualism and leftism,” which “demonstrates his

²³ Criterio 494, August 1937, p. 383.

²⁴ This does not mean that Meinvielle maintains a dominant position until the 1960s. In fact, his position was increasingly marginalized after World War Two, though without losing his influence among intransigent Catholics and the military (Cerósimo 2019, Pattin 2019).

incompatibility with the teachings of the Holy Church.”²⁵ What no longer appears in this litany is antisemitism and the defense of fascism, both issues that lost strength after the Second World War, and even in the conservative Argentine circles where such ideas prevailed it became more complicated to express them in public (Di Stéfano and Zanatta 2009; Mallimaci 2015; Zanca 2006).

As we shall see below, the debate in Chile is more about the theological and partisan politics aspects, both phenomena that Meinvielle picked up on and to a certain extent adapted to his discourse. Thus, Meinvielle responded to the Jesuit priest Julio Jiménez’s defense of Maritain that, on the one hand, the debate was now about “examining whether Maritain defends the public observance of false cults and even atheism as an inalienable right regarding the state and the temporal community,”²⁶ and on the other, he complained that Jiménez’s defense “fails to raise the issue above the partisan passions that the Catholic media in Chile have unleashed.”²⁷ These replies clearly demonstrate the permanence of certain important points in the Argentine Catholic discourse that were to determine the course of Catholic political expressions in that country. On the one hand, Meinvielle reiterates his rejection of political and religious pluralism, as religion should not enter the debate of “partisan passions” but rather remain undiminished and above such profane matters. With these ideas, he articulates a position that also remains important in Argentine Catholic hierarchy, at least until the Second Vatican Council (Di Stéfano and Zanatta 2009; Fabris and Mauro 2020). On the other hand, and very closely related to the above, he returns to his defense of a Christian state in the form of its medieval ideal. This is where his great problem with Maritain and his defenders lies, as “the mistake that Giménez [sic] and Maritain make is that [...] they seek to deduce a total autonomy of the human being on the civil plane regarding the state. And this conclusion, in addition to containing the perverse concept of the state as a purely material reality without a spiritual mission, would make the Christian state impossible.”²⁸ This is a central point for Meinvielle and, *pars pro toto*, for the vast majority of conservative Catholics in Argentina, who maintained the utopia of a Christian state not only as a glorious past, but as something still possible to materialize in the twentieth century.²⁹ This motivates his rejection of Maritain, and, as we shall see, it constitutes one of the big differences with Chilean Catholicism and had significant consequences for the room for action both of progressive as well as conservative Catholicism in Argentina.

Now, this room for action is also reflected in the Argentine defenders of Maritain (far more timid) and the way they intervened in the main debates analyzed here. In

²⁵ *Política y Espíritu*, Year 5, No. 39–40, April–May 1949, p. 58.

²⁶ *Política y Espíritu* 39–40, 1949, p. 78.

²⁷ *Política y Espíritu* 39–40, 1949, p. 58.

²⁸ *Política y Espíritu* 39–40, 1949, p. 60.

²⁹ The idea of the “Christian state” also fell into disuse among hegemonic Catholic circles after the 1950s, to the point that it ceased to be used in *Criterio*, the most important Catholic intellectual journal (Lida 2019). However, the ecclesiastic hierarchy’s proximity to the military throughout almost the entire century demonstrates the importance of the idea of “conquering” the state for Catholicism through military support (Mallimaci 2015).

the 1937 controversy, there were above all two Catholic intellectuals who defended the French philosopher. Both pointed to a central point in the debate, which is the defense of religious pluralism and the possibility of a modern Catholicism ready to intervene in the current political world without maintaining this idea of a medieval Christian state. Thus, Rafael Pividal made it clear that the modern world must be accepted as is, because “religious division or plurality of creeds cannot be suppressed by force either.”³⁰ Rather, for Maritain’s defenders this modern world presents an opportunity for Catholics: “If there is just one Gospel and just one Church, many Christian civilizations are possible,”³¹ which is why, as Manuel Ordoñez accuses the Conservatives, “to claim that with Christianity there can be only one real concrete realization (the Middle Ages) is to say very little of the fertility and possibilities of its principles.”³² Here, one can see an acceptance of religious and political pluralism and the possibility of Catholic intervention in this world through Christian humanism. But this position failed to impose itself in Argentine Catholicism, due to the hegemonic chorus of conservatives, but also due to the scant substantiation of Maritain’s defenders’ arguments. Thus, much of Maritain’s defense by his Argentine sympathizers was based on an appeal to papal authority, in the sense of defending him as long as the Vatican has not condemned him. Ordoñez reproaches Maritain’s attackers for having accused him publicly and not before the church’s authorities first, for “only the Church can pronounce itself. We are part of the Church that obeys.”³³ As can be seen, this argument, that in an institution as hierarchical as the Catholic Church obviously makes sense and has weight, is also used by the Frenchman’s opponents, but in the case of his defense, it is not accompanied by more political or theological arguments that influence the Argentine debate. This is so much so, that not only do they fail to add powerful arguments in Maritain’s defense during the 1937 controversy, but they also fail to do so after the Second World War, when one of the most reputed authorities in the Argentine Catholic Church, Monsignor Franceschi, changed his position and began defending Maritain, but not from the perspective of religious pluralism or Catholic humanism. Here, Franceschi resorts to the Vatican’s authority because the Pope himself had found words of praise for Maritain when he took over as French ambassador to the Holy See, leading the editor of *Criterion* to say in 1949 that “as long as the Holy See’s opinion of J. Maritain’s person and doctrine is what it is, that will invariably and inalterably also be *Criterion*’s.”³⁴ Thus, in Argentina, the anticommunist and antisemitic voices that defended the Christian state, the just violence and the holy war, were not contested by a discourse that really got involved with Maritain’s positions and only timidly defended the possibility of a third Catholic party and the pluralism of the modern world.³⁵ The characteristics of these debates were to prefigure

³⁰ *Criterion* 486, June 1937, p. 179.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

³² *Criterion* 485, June 1937, p. 158.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

³⁴ *Política y Espíritu* 39–40, 1949, p. 76.

³⁵ In this context, the debate over Maritain reflects the hegemonic discourse in Catholicism. This does not mean that there was no Catholic current inspired in the third way and a rapprochement to democracy. For more on this current, see Mauro 2021, the articles in Mauro/Castro 2019 and Zanca 2006.

both progressive as well as conservative Argentine Catholic channels of expression. To gain a better understanding of these channels, the next point analyzes the arguments in the Chilean debates on the French master to find keys for the comparative analysis.

Lefts, Rights, Third Party, and Capitalism. The Chilean Debates

Echoes of the great Argentine debates were heard in Chile, but the discussions quickly took their own course. Thus, the first Chilean reactions against Maritain in the person of Luis Palma included a defense of the Spanish Civil War as a holy war (Compagnon 2003). Likewise, there are aspects of a certain antisemitism and a defense of Franco in the most acute Chilean critic, Luis Arturo Pérez, but with much less virulence than in Argentina. Thus, regarding Maritain's ideas on the war in Spain, Pérez complains in his 1938 book that "his views are completely different from those held by the vast majority of Catholics,"³⁶ but here he is not concerned about justified violence but rather about the confusion that Maritain's ideas cause in young Catholics. For Pérez, Maritain is "the one who has most effectively contributed to the reigning disorientation,"³⁷ as by following his ideas, "the young person who, believing in the ruin of current civilization, enlists in ranks that call themselves revolutionary to replace it with the new one, hurries up too much, like all revolutionaries, to achieve his objective."³⁸ In this way, the Frenchman's critics were very worried that in Chile "there is currently the intention to reach pacts with liberalism, socialism and sillonism"³⁹ at the same time, and the result could be even more advanced: a communizing society.⁴⁰ Here the fear of a rapprochement between Catholics and communists emerges, allegedly fostered by Maritain's doctrines, which give the Chilean youth these "mistaken ideas."

This reproach of generating confusion is accompanied by theological and philosophical criticism aimed at undermining Maritain's prestige in these areas. This is the direction Osvaldo Lira aims his comments, who defended the Frenchman in 1936 but makes it clear in 1947 that "he is not a genius" and that, in fact, "Maritain is a bad politician; he is a superficial politician because before he has shown himself to be superficial as speculative philosopher."⁴¹ In addition, Pérez's writings condemn the Frenchman for falling "into a theological error so often condemned by the Church."⁴² On this point, his Chilean critics echo the reproaches that Meinvielle had used against Maritain in the 1940s, in the sense of bringing him closer to heresy to discredit his views.

³⁶ Luis Arturo Pérez: Maritain, Santiago 1938, p. 10.

³⁷ Luis Arturo Pérez: Estudio de filosofía político-social, Santiago 1948, p. 9.

³⁸ Pérez 1938, p. 22.

³⁹ "Sillonism" was a Catholic current born in the second half of the nineteenth century to bring Catholicism closer to Republican ideals. It was considered too "modernist" and, therefore, condemned by Rome in 1910.

⁴⁰ Pérez 1948, p. 80.

⁴¹ Estudios V16, No. 174 (1947), pp. 51 and 54.

⁴² Pérez 1948, p. 33.

But the main point in the Chilean debates, both among his critics as well as his defenders (as we shall see below), was neither theological nor philosophical, but rather political. It is the fact that Maritain's ideas serve as the basis for a Catholic third party that is equally distant from the right as it is from the left that disturbed his opponents in Chile, as it automatically meant a weakening of the right, which for these conservative Chilean Catholics was the natural political place for Christians. This fear is strongly related to the political events of the time, because, as already noted, the debates on Maritain took place at a time when the Conservative Party, the Catholic party par excellence until then, had to assimilate many young people splitting off into *La Falange* (in 1938) and where the political differences between this Falange and Catholic conservatives were expressed (1947–48).

It is in this context that Pérez's lamentation of Maritain can be understood: "His political doctrine of 'neither right nor left' but of overcoming in this struggle [...] is a call for Christians to abandon their current workplaces. I imagine that, with few exceptions, Christians are enlisted in the ranks of the right; hence, the candidates to later build the party of 'overcoming rights and lefts', already outlined by Maritain in a veiled way, will come from the ranks of the right [...] therefore, all these forces invigorate those which are contrary in an equal proportion."⁴³ For Pérez, being a Catholic implies a political position associated with the right, which is why he cannot understand the distance taken from this political tradition on the part of Maritain and his disciples: "And the essential values of civilization that the right defends, despite all its flaws, are worth nothing to Maritain? [...] This contemptuous ambivalence of neither right nor left cannot pass as Christian, unless civilization is no longer worth defending."⁴⁴ The political positions for Catholics are clear and unmistakable: "Rightist and leftist are in themselves two opposite ideologies. [...] Leftism is atheism, materialism, rationalism, and secularism imposed on civic, cultural, educational, social and economic activities. Rightism is Christianity, with all the imperfections you want; but it is Christianity applied to these same activities."⁴⁵ Here the irreconcilable antagonism appears that we have already seen in the arguments of Argentine conservatives, but with some very important nuances to understand the subsequent development of Catholicism on both sides. For Pérez, a leftist political ideology is unacceptable for a Catholic, but this enmity is kept in the political arena; the left is not conceived as the "Antichrist," the fight against which justifies its violent eradication, as Meinvielle proposed. In Chile, we are not faced with an absolute, intransigent, and fundamentalist religious conception that does not accept changes in Catholic doctrine itself, much less so positions outside of Catholicism. Here, even rejection of Maritain implies — perhaps unconsciously — acceptance of religious and political pluralism.⁴⁶

⁴³ Pérez 1938, p. 31.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 26.

⁴⁵ Pérez 1948, p. 83.

⁴⁶ In this sense, we could speak of a society where modern pluralism is handled better, in Berger's (2014, p. 79) sense of regulating the relationship between the Church and state and between different religions. It might be interesting to conceive Argentine and Chilean societies in the mid-twentieth century as more or less secularized, thinking of the acceptance of pluralism (Berger 2014).

It is for this reason that Osvaldo Lira complains more about Maritain's positions in favor of democracy than his rejection of a Christian state, as for him "the path to salvation will not be indicated to us by a spirit who declares liberal democracy to be the expression of true natural law."⁴⁷ Thus, for Pérez, the most important thing is the defense of an economic system, capitalism and the right to property, very much in line with conservative Catholics of the time (Botto 2018). The priest declared against Maritain's disciples in *La Falange* that "the capitalist regime is a derivative and the consequence of natural laws. Hence, the capitalist regime cannot be declared nonexistent or unjust" and, therefore, "the right to property must in itself be inviolable within Catholic doctrine."⁴⁸

The main fears of Maritain's Chilean detractors are focused on the political arena. For them, the Frenchman was to blame for the division of Catholics, which led to the weakening of the Conservative Party and the emergence of *La Falange*. The philosopher allegedly sowed such confusion in Chile that young Catholics were getting dangerously close to communism. Underlying these arguments is a defense of capitalism and the right to property in line with a conservative interpretation of the Catholic social doctrine, where charity and welfare are appropriate methods to alleviate social problems. The "revolutionary" ideas of progressive Catholics are rejected, but unlike their Argentine counterparts, they fail to mention the medieval ideal of the Christian state as a utopia. The Chilean debate is far more politicized, which is also reflected in the arguments of Maritain's defenders.

A major difference with Argentina is that the Chilean defense of Maritain is much more intense, massive, and virulent. On the one hand, his orthodoxy is defended, but not in the sense of proclaiming a single acceptable truth, but precisely with the argument of religious pluralism and of the freedom of Catholic thought. In this way, the Jesuit priest Jiménez, who assumes Maritain's theological defense, responds to Pérez's reproaches that "He [Maritain] is free to have his personal opinions, as I am free to have mine, on a thousand matters that the Holy Church leaves materially entrusted to the study of its children dedicated to this kind of work, whom it protects against hasty accusations."⁴⁹ For Chileans, Catholicism is not just expressed in a traditional ideal, as it is free to adapt to modern times. For this reason, already in 1948 Jaime Castillo Velasco was reproaching critics that their ideas "not only constitute a typical example of the 'Catholic Stalinism' we speak of, but also the surest way to bury Christianity as a truly living and liberating conception."⁵⁰ For the Frenchman's Chilean disciples, "the Middle Ages is not the only way to materialize the Christian conception of life."⁵¹

This defense of a modern Catholicism that accepts the pluralism of our time is quite similar to the voices of its first Argentine defenders, but in Chile, the tone of

⁴⁷ Estudios V16, No. 174 (1947), p. 58.

⁴⁸ Pérez 1948, pp. 48 and 45 (boldface in the original).

⁴⁹ Política y Espíritu 39–40, 1949, p. 126.

⁵⁰ Política y Espíritu V3, No. 35, 1948, p. 236.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 237.

the debate became far more politicized and more substantial in the defense of a progressive Catholic position. Thus, Castillo Velasco mentions that Meinvielle only wants to “distort the flow of Christian renewal” to “criticize democracy, the same one that all Catholic hierarchs clamor for, the same one that Chilean religious authorities mention in every document. It is to cry out against freedom of conscience, the same freedom that is ‘the noblest and most sacred of human rights’ for Cardinal Caro.”⁵²

Here, he resorts to the ecclesiastical hierarchy not just to defend the option of democracy, but also to position progressive Catholicism as a valid option among Christians.

And, in contrast to the Argentine case, this option is expressed in a clearly defined anti-capitalist political position. For the editors of the magazine *Política y Espíritu*, the criticism of Maritain responded to “his [Maritain’s] categorical refusal to accept the materialistic-bourgeois chaos we live in as a Christian order.”⁵³ Castillo Velasco is far more virulent and sees Meinvielle as being the brains behind the attacks against Maritain, accusing him of preferring the dominion of the “‘oligarchy of multimillionaires’ over ‘the starving masses’ and declaring it part of the ‘divine order.’” Thus, “all inequality is justified as eternal Christian dogma.”⁵⁴ At the same time as they attack Meinvielle, Maritain’s Chilean defenders attack their country’s Conservative Party, which continues to defend liberal capitalism, and they open the way to a different, more progressive and more leftist Catholicism. Thus, for the members of *La Falange*, “it must be said that conservative Catholics have never brought forth pontifical texts for any purpose other than to attack a Catholic with anti-capitalist economic and social ideas,” as “the most superficial study shows that anti-Maritain theology is nothing but capitalist social economics.”⁵⁵

It was clear to Maritain’s Chilean supporters that acceptance of modern changes went together with a rejection of capitalism and the search for a progressive Catholicism capable of responding to the challenges of modernity: “If there is progress, through relative and vexing, capitalism and liberalism can be condemned.”⁵⁶ That is why Meinvielle was considered “the ideological cover of a regressive concept. What could be better for the ‘bourgeois multimillionaires’ than a ‘Christianity’ whose work is summed up in the idea that the anti-capitalist workers’ movement has to be stopped because contemplative life is superior to manual labor? [...] In his anti-Maritain furor, Mr. Meinvielle has reached every extreme of political reactionism. He and his group become impervious to any possible liberation of men subjected to capitalism.”⁵⁷ The interesting thing about this furious quotation is not just the anti-capitalist stance of young Chilean Catholics, but the concept of liberation,

⁵² *Política y Espíritu* 39–40, 1949, p. 55.

⁵³ *Política y Espíritu* 39–40, 1949, p. 43.

⁵⁴ *Política y Espíritu* 39–40, 1949, p. 56.

⁵⁵ *Política y Espíritu* 35, 1948, pp. 242, 243 and 245.

⁵⁶ *Política y Espíritu* 39–40, 1949, p. 55.

⁵⁷ *Política y Espíritu* 39–40, 1949, p. 57.

which appears here as a precursor of the future theology of liberation, albeit not very elaborated yet.

So, the Chilean debates on Maritain open the path to a progressive Catholicism in at least two ways. On the one hand, the arguments in favor of Maritain already contain the first brushstrokes of a more radical option of Christianity like the future liberation theology was to become.⁵⁸ On the other, the polarization of the debate outlines the possibility of a political expression for this progressive Catholicism, as already implicitly existed in *La Falange* and as was to be materialized in the creation of the Christian Democratic Party. This is the case because even Maritain's critics were already showing an acceptance — often implicit — of a political and religious pluralism, necessary for the success of a democratic Catholic party. Their defense of capitalism and the right entailed an acknowledgment of the possibility of a left-ist and anti-capitalist Catholicism, which Chilean conservatives rejected but whose existence they did not deny, something that can be deduced from the Argentine defense of a Christian state. Thus, the debate on Maritain showed different options of Catholicisms that can be seen more clearly in a transnational comparison between the two countries.

Conclusions

The idea of this analysis is born of the finding that, at first glance, the controversies over Maritain in Chile and Argentina are quite similar. The national historiography has interpreted these controversies as precursors of the growing polarization among Catholics in both countries during the twentieth century. However, the national vision does not suffice to explain why such different paths emerged from such similar debates for both conservative as well as progressive Catholics in Chile and Argentina. This is why, we considered it important to give a more detailed and, above all, comparative perspective of the discourses on Maritain in Chile and Argentina. Our analysis is not intended to explain the attitudes of Chilean and Argentine conservative and progressive Catholics in the 1960s and 1970s, as it is not possible to draw a teleological line from the 1930s and 1940s to the second half of the century. Many factors played a role in Catholic political expressions in the run-up to the last military dictatorships in both countries, including the Second Vatican Council as a major one. But we do believe that it is possible to show certain channels of expression for future Catholicisms in both countries that were forged in the debates on Maritain in the 1930s and 1940s. To a certain extent, the core arguments of these debates marked the “expectation horizons” (Koselleck 2010), or the boundaries of the possibility for conceiving political Catholicism in the two countries. And in this

⁵⁸ This does not mean that the authors of these arguments would be future liberation theologians. In fact, many Christian democratic politicians who participated in the debates analyzed here did not feel very attracted to Liberation Theology.

regard, the argumentative differences between the two countries become important, taking shape in a more detailed and comparative analysis.

In Argentina, the idea of a “Christian State” prevailed in the controversies over Maritain, which implied conceiving of the Church as a perfect society that is distant from and superior to politics. This idea went together with an intransigent and fundamentalist stance⁵⁹ that included strong anticommunism and antisemitism, in addition to the defense of violence to combat the “enemies of the faith,” perceived as the Antichrist himself. The defense of religious and political pluralism was only timidly articulated and never with the chance to become a hegemonic stance within Argentine Catholicism.⁶⁰

In contrast, in Chile, the debates on Maritain turned into political discussions with different positions on capitalism and on the possibility of Catholicism approaching the political right or left. These debates entailed an acceptance — on the part of Maritain’s critics as well as his defenders — of a religious pluralism and a possible political role for religion, which more closely resembled the idea of a secularized society and the Church’s search for its role in this society (Berger 2014).

These differences had consequences for the characteristics of conservative and progressive Catholicisms in both countries that can only be outlined here. In Argentina, debates on Maritain made it clear that there was no room for a Catholic political party and much less so one with progressive ideas. There are obviously several reasons why the attempts to form a Christian Democratic party did not meet with the same success as in Chile (Di Stéfano y Zanatta 2009; Ghio 2007; Gomes 2011), but the fact that the probability of success was scant could already be foreshadowed in the controversies over Maritain. The discursive space of Catholicism left very few paths open to progressive Catholics to think about the possibility of their own political expression as part of the institutional channels of democracy.⁶¹ This is also why progressive Catholics, which existed in Argentina as well as in Chile, turned either to the Peronist Party or to more radical expressions inspired by the international revolutionary climate of the time. Groups like *Christianity and Revolution* or the *Movement of Priests for the Third World* were close to the political guerrilla of the time (Campos 2016; Donatello 2010; Touris 2005; Martin 2010; Morello 2003), which meant accepting the armed path in a way that was far more pronounced than among

⁵⁹ Zanca argues that “one of the most relevant mutations of the transition” in Argentine Catholic culture between the 1950s and 1960s was the difference between intransigence and integrality. While the Catholics who adhered to Christian humanism maintained the idea of integral vocation, they were no longer intransigent toward modernity and democracy (Zanca 2012, p. 8). We believe this to be correct for Christian humanism, but that the hegemonic current within Argentine Catholicism has always been the conservative one, which maintained both aspects analyzed. In this sense, and in our view, the debates over Maritain are an example of an argumentative structure that remained dominant in the Argentine Church until the 1980s, without denying the existence of many other Catholic discourses.

⁶⁰ This does not mean that Argentine debates on the Spanish Civil War did not have a “political” connotation. It was harder to transfer international political coordinates (such as “right” and “left,” “conservatives” and “progressives”) to the national political level in Argentina, which is perhaps also one of the reasons why the debate seems more “sacralized” than in Chile.

⁶¹ This does not mean to say that these attempts to create a political expression of progressive Catholicism did not exist in Argentina (Zanca 2014), just that these attempts have never had the same likelihood of success as in Chile. The “expectation horizon” for progressive Catholics in Argentina was clearly seen as narrower.

their Chilean counterparts (the *Christians for Socialism*) (Gomes 2011, Fernández 2017). This radicality, which was also due to the scant institutional-political escape routes that existed in Argentina for progressive Catholics, marked the final fate of many of its actors, as these Catholics were the victims of state persecution even before the last military coup, something that was often endorsed by the hierarchy of the Argentine Church (Catoggio 2016).

At the same time, the ideas of the Christian state, violence, and anti-communism, expressed in the debates on Maritain, kept conservative Argentine Catholics close to the military, with whose cooperation they believed they could materialize the idea of the medieval Christian society (Mallimaci 2015; Zanatta 2015). This is why these ideas became so important in justifying the last coup d'état and the strong repression by dictatorship (1976–1983), where antisemitism and anticommunism were mixed with Christian ideas of the just war and of the anti-Christian and demonized enemies (Osiel 2001; Ruderer 2016).⁶²

In contrast, as the debates on Maritain show, in Chile the “expectation horizon” was open to politics for progressive Catholics and that is why the foundation of the Christian Democratic Party by these same followers of Maritain in 1957 should come as no surprise.⁶³ This party's success created a political channel for the progressive Church that even led to a change in the position of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, as the bishops, most of whom had rejected Maritain's positions and those of his supporters in the 1940s and 1950s,⁶⁴ were included to support the DC in the 1960s, considering it a legitimate expression of Christianity (Botto 2018; Smith 1982; Schnoor 2019). This also meant that most of the more radical progressive Catholics inspired in the revolution and socialism (like *Christians for Socialism*, CpS) did not see the armed path as a viable alternative and instead remained within the country's democratic institutional framework (Fernández 2016; Ramminger 2019). Liberation theologians and some members of the DC, who in the past had defended Maritain by arguing for the people's liberation, spoke a similar language (despite their differences). Despite the Chilean hierarchy's ultimate rejection of CpS, there was a closeness between these priests and many bishops that was also built on the fact that they shared a similar vision of the Church's role in politics, which was already outlined in the debates on Maritain. This also meant that many of these progressive Catholics

⁶² It should be noted that the coup d'état of 1976 was also supported by certain “liberal Catholics” like Ordoñez and his group, especially due to their strong anti-Peronist sentiment. The fact that some of Maritain's defenders in the 1930s ended up supporting the coup underscores the dynamism of Argentine Catholics, and the importance of open (or not) channels of expression in the 1930s, which allowed actors to change “sides”.

⁶³ Despite the fact that *La Falange* had no intention of founding a political party in the 1940s, as Frei explains to Maritain in: Carta a Jacques Maritain. 1940, in: Eduardo Frei M.: Obras Escogidas 1931–1982. Selection and Prologue by Oscar Pinochet de la Barra, Santiago: Antártica 1993, p. 99–105, p. 101.

⁶⁴ This rejection can be seen in an anecdote that the Jesuit priest José Aldunate tells about Maritain's defender Julio Jiménez, who was reprimanded by the Chilean Bishops for his defense of Maritain and had to stay in Rome for 6 years in an attempt to save his reputation (Aldunate 2018, pp. 61, 62). It also proves that Chilean bishops were no more progressive than their Argentine counterparts in the 1940s and 1950s, but that the different historical developments impacted by the discursive channels opened with the debates about Maritain had influenced the opinions of most bishops.

were available to collaborate with the hierarchy in its Samaritan work during the dictatorship, in institutions such as the Pro Peace Committee and the Vicariate of Solidarity (Del Villar Tagle 2018; Díaz forthcoming).

Likewise, the arguments by Maritain's Chilean critics help to understand the support that conservative Catholics gave to the Pinochet dictatorship in its defense of capitalism and its fight against the left. They also help to understand why the religious justification of the Chilean dictatorship was much more pragmatic than under the Argentine dictatorship, something that also finds parallels with the arguments against Maritain on both sides of the Andes (Ruderer 2010).

Many factors must be considered to explain the attitudes of Chilean and Argentine Catholics and their relationship with politics in the 1960s and 1970s. This analysis has sought to contribute with a medium-term comparative interpretation that, through a discursive analysis of the controversies over Maritain, points to the "expectation horizons" opened in Catholicism starting in the first half of the century. These discursive channels operated as precursors to the actions of both progressive as well as conservative Catholics and had a significant impact on the role played by these Catholics in the years that followed the Second Vatican Council. The comparison helps to better understand the differences in the attitudes of neighboring and close Churches, differences that were to be decisive when it came to dealing with the last military dictatorships in both countries.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest The author declares no competing interests.

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