



**THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, ELECTIONS
AND DEMOCRACY IN COLOMBIA, 1830–1930***

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ABSTRACT

By focusing on its electoral role, this paper revises some of the prevailing views regarding the Catholic Church's impact on the politics of Colombia between 1830 and 1930. To this aim, the paper offers a brief general overview of the Church during the period, in an attempt to locate its sources of power. Then, I look at the place the religious cleavage had in the formation of the party system that emerged in the republic by the mid-nineteenth century. Next, I examine the various ways in which the Church was involved in the electoral process both before and after the emergence of the party system. Finally, the concluding section considers the wider implications that such involvement might have represented for the history of democracy in Colombia. Overall, the paper addresses the following questions: What had the historical role of the Catholic Church been in the politics of Colombia since independence? How did the Church—the hierarchy, the clergy and the laity—relate to the electoral history and partisan divisions of the country? And to what extent did the involvement of the Church in electioneering enhance or hinder the process of democratization over this century?

RESUMEN

Este ensayo reexamina el impacto de la Iglesia Católica en la política colombiana entre 1830 y 1930, con especial atención a su papel en la historia electoral del país. Para este propósito, el ensayo ofrece un breve panorama general de la Iglesia durante el período, con el fin de localizar sus fuentes de poder. Paso seguido, analiza el factor religioso en la formación del sistema de partidos que surgió en la república a mediados del siglo diecinueve. A continuación, estudia las distintas formas en que la Iglesia se involucró en el proceso electoral, antes y después del surgimiento del sistema partidista. Finalmente, en la sección de conclusiones, considera las repercusiones más amplias que dicho involucramiento pudo haber tenido para la historia de la democracia en Colombia. En su conjunto, el ensayo examina los siguientes interrogantes: ¿Cuál fue el papel histórico de la Iglesia Católica en la política colombiana desde la independencia? ¿Cómo se relacionaba la Iglesia —la jerarquía, el clero, y los laicos— con la historia electoral y las divisiones partidistas del país? ¿Y hasta qué punto la participación de la Iglesia en las elecciones sirvió al proceso de democratización en Colombia a lo largo del siglo bajo estudio?

Described as the “elector of electors” by contemporary observers in 1930, the archbishop of Bogotá was supposed to be the kingmaker in Colombia.¹ That year, however, Colombians elected the Liberal Enrique Olaya Herrera as their new president, not the choice of archbishop Ismael Perdomo. Throughout the campaign, the prelate hesitated between two Conservative candidates, a partisan division that split the Conservative vote, clearing the way for Olaya Herrera’s victory. What happened then to the power of the “elector of electors”? Was the Conservative defeat merely the result of the failures of a hesitant archbishop? Or was it a sign of a declining influence of the Catholic Church in Colombian politics by 1930? Or had the Church’s power been exaggerated by contemporary observers like Alcides Arguedas, the Bolivian ambassador in Bogotá at the time? The 1930 electoral outcome serves as an introduction to the wider subject that I would like to address here: What had the historical role of the Catholic Church been in the politics of Colombia since independence? How did the Church—the hierarchy, the clergy and the laity—relate to the electoral history and partisan divisions of the country? And to what extent did the involvement of the Church in electioneering enhance or hinder the process of democratization over this century?

“The Catholic Church,” Lloyd Mehan tells us in his classic book, “has been more tenacious in its hold upon national and civil life in Colombia than in any other Latin American country.”² Its grip on power was most evident during the so-called Conservative Hegemony (1880–1930), when a new constitution explicitly recognized Catholicism as the official religion of Colombians and conferred on the Church a central role in various aspects of their life, including education. According to Christopher Abel: “The Church was probably more powerful during that age than under an absolutist Monarchy.” When it came to selecting presidential candidates in the Conservative party, Abel suggests, the executive played a secondary role since the Church was “in control of the national drama”; thus the Church was not just closely allied to the Conservative

¹ Alcides Arguedas, *La danza de las sombras* (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1983). All the translations from the Spanish texts are mine.

² J. Lloyd Mehan, *Church and State in Latin America: A History of Politico-Ecclesiastical Relations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 115.

regime but, regarding political power, it kept the upper hand.³ The picture for the earlier period, however, seems more complex, since the Church was mostly on the defensive and at times suffering actual persecution from the state—particularly under the Liberal and Radical governments during 1849–55 and 1861–80.⁴ Yet for Carey Shaw Jr., from 1830 to 1849 the Church (together with landowners and the military) “held sway over the destinies of the people,” the authority of the Church increasing during this period. For Gilberto Loaiza Cano, by mid-nineteenth century the Catholic clergy felt confident about their “tutorial role over the people”; Conservative social life was based on the traditional influence that the village priest had over his flock.⁵

Thus at first glance, the historiography would seem to portray a Church that exercised a dominant, overwhelming social role, either in opposition or in power, in close alliance with the Conservative party in a constant struggle with their enemies, the Liberals. A closer look, however, would offer a few caveats to an otherwise oversimplified picture. There were significant regional variations regarding the spiritual and social power of the Church.⁶ In addition, the social and political power of the Church did not go hand in hand. Before 1886, as suggested above, the Church’s relation with the

³ Christopher Abel, *Política, iglesia y partidos en Colombia* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional, 1987), p. 34. Similarly for Michael J. LaRosa, during 1886–1930 the Church exercised a “strong and efficacious social control for almost 50 years”; see his *De la derecha a la izquierda. La Iglesia Católica en la Colombia contemporánea* (Bogotá: Planeta, 2000), p. 62; see also *ibid.*, pp. 42, 46–48, 58–62.

⁴ See Fernán E. González, “Iglesia y estado desde la convención de Ríonegro hasta el Olimpo Radical, 1863–1878,” *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura*, 15 (1988), pp. 91–163; González, *Poderes enfrentados. Iglesia y estado en Colombia* (Bogotá: CINEP, 1997); and González, *Partidos, guerras e Iglesia en la construcción del Estado Nación en Colombia, 1830–1900* (Medellín: La Carreta Histórica, 2006).

⁵ Carey Shaw Jr., “Church and State in Colombia as Observed by American Diplomats, 1834–1906,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 21:4 (November 1941), p. 581; Gilberto Loaiza Cano, *Sociabilidad, religión y política en la definición de la nación. Colombia, 1820–1886* (Bogotá: Universidad Externado, 2011), p. 215.

⁶ This is indeed acknowledged by most studies on the Church in Colombia, including Abel, *Política, iglesia y partidos*. For a recent explanation of regional variations in the Church’s presence and influence, see Luis Javier Ortiz Mesa, *Obispos, clérigos y fieles en pie de guerra. Antioquia, 1870–1880* (Medellín: Clío, 2010), pp. xxxii–xxxviii. Regional studies have greatly contributed to the historiography of the Church in Colombia. In addition to Ortiz Mesa, just cited, see, for example, Patricia Londoño, *Religion, Culture, and Society in Colombia: Medellín and Antioquia, 1850–1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), and José David Cortés Guerrero, *Curas y políticos. Mentalidad religiosa e intransigencia en la diócesis de Tunja* (Bogotá: Ministerio de Cultura, 1998).

state was rather confrontational, its power over governmental affairs being particularly curtailed after 1850. The relationship between the Church and its traditional political ally, the Conservative party, also needs to be further explored. Even at the zenith of the Church's power, between 1886 and 1930, its bonds with the Conservatives did not mean that it was in control of the party. Carlos H. Urán has suggested that the Church was in fact "at the mercy" of political power, instrumentally used by the party that had come to its rescue.⁷

In the last few decades, the modern historiography of the Catholic Church in Colombia has made significant inroads. Particularly relevant to this paper, scholars have shed light on important aspects of the Church's involvement in the politics of the country—including the state conflicts with the Church following the Liberal reforms of mid-nineteenth century, the role of the clergy in civil wars, the relationship between the Church and political parties, and the ideas of the episcopate.⁸ With notable exceptions, however, the role of the Church in electoral politics between 1830 and 1930 have received little systematic attention.⁹ In this paper, I build upon the existing valuable

⁷ Carlos H. Urán, *Participación política de la iglesia en el proceso histórico de Colombia* (Lima: MIEC, JECI, Secretariado Latinoamericano, 1974), pp. 84–85. Cortés Guerrero sees the relationship between the Conservative regime and the Church as one of mutual interest but suggests that the lay leadership had the upper hand in the process; see his *Curas y políticos*, p. 39.

⁸ In addition to the works already cited, see, for example, Terrence B. Horgan, *El arzobispo Manuel José Mosquera. Reformista y pragmático* (Bogotá: Kelly, 1977); Ricardo Arias, *El episcopado colombiano. Intransigencia y laicidad, 1850–2000* (Bogotá: Uniandes, 2003); Luis Javier Ortiz Mesa, ed., *Ganarse el cielo defendiendo la religión, 1840–1902* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional, 2005); Eduardo Guevara Cobos and Esther Parra Ramírez, *Resistencia eclesiástica en el estado soberano de Santander, 1860–1886* (Bucaramanga: UIS, 2004); Helen Delpar, "Colombian Liberalism and the Roman Catholic Church, 1863–1886," *Journal of Church and State*, 22:2 (1980), pp. 271–93. For a useful historiographical assessment, see José David Cortés Guerrero, "Balance bibliográfico sobre la historia de la Iglesia Católica en Colombia, 1945–1995," in *Historia Crítica*, 12 (January–June, 1996), pp. 17–27. For an essay that looks at the history of the Church in Latin America during the period covered in this essay, see John Lynch, "The Catholic Church in Latin America, 1830–1930," in Leslie Bethell, ed., *The Cambridge History of Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), vol. 4, pp. 527–95. See also his recent book, *New Worlds: A Religious History of Latin America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), chapters 4–8, pp. 106–253.

⁹ While some of the titles mentioned above of course include references to the clergy's involvement in elections, these do not constitute the center of attention in their analyses. For a notable exception, see Malcolm Deas, "The Role of the Church, the Army and the Police in Colombian Elections, c.1850–1930," in Eduardo Posada-Carbó, ed., *Elections Before Democracy: The History of Elections in Europe and Latin America* (London and Basingstoke: ILAS/McMillan, 1996), pp. 163–80.

literature to offer an additional perspective, which partly draws from recent studies on the Catholic Church in some Latin American and European countries.¹⁰

By focusing on its electoral role, this paper revises some of the prevailing views regarding the Church's impact on the politics of the republic. To this aim, I will look, firstly, at the place the religious cleavage had in the formation of the party system that emerged by the mid-nineteenth century. Secondly, I will then examine the various ways the Church was involved in the electoral process both before and after 1886. Finally, in the concluding section, I will briefly consider the wider implications that such involvement might have represented for the history of democracy in Colombia. Before proceeding into the subject proper, the following section offers a brief general overview of the Church during the period in an attempt to locate its sources of power.

“CAN AN ARCHBISHOP BE OF ANY USE?”

The election by Congress of Manuel José Mosquera as the new archbishop of New Granada¹¹ in 1834, followed months later by the acceptance of his appointment by Pope Gregory XVI, seemed to secure the place of the Church in the republic. Soon afterwards, on 25 November 1835, the Vatican formally recognized the independence of the country,

¹⁰ Margaret Lavinia Anderson, *Practicing Democracy: Elections and Political Culture in Imperial Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Anderson, “Voter, Junker, Landrat, Priest: The Old Authorities and the New Franchise in Germany,” *American Historical Review*, 98:5 (December 1993), pp. 1448–74; Anderson, “The Divisions of the Pope: The Catholic Revival and Europe’s Transition to Democracy,” in Austen Ivereigh, ed., *The Politics of Religion in an Age of Revival* (London: ILAS, 2000), pp. 22–42; and Anderson’s chapter “Clerical Election Influence and Communal Solidarity: Catholic Political Culture in the German Empire, 1871–1914,” in Posada-Carbó, ed., *Elections Before Democracy*, pp. 139–62; Andrew C. Gould, *Origins of Liberal Dominance: State, Church, and Party in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); J. H. Whyte, “The Influence of the Catholic Clergy on Elections in Nineteenth-Century Ireland,” *English Historical Review*, 75 (1960), pp. 239–59; Matthew Cragoe, “Conscience or Coercion? Clerical Influence at the General Election of 1868 in Wales,” *Past and Present*, 149 (November 1995), pp. 140–69; K. Theodore Hoppen, “Priests at the Hustings: Ecclesiastical Electioneering in Nineteenth-Century Ireland,” in Posada-Carbó, ed., *Elections Before Democracy*; J. Samuel Valenzuela and Erika Maza Valenzuela, “The Politics of Religion in a Catholic Country: Republican Democracy, *Cristianismo Social* and the Conservative Party in Chile, 1850–1925,” in Ivereigh, ed., *The Politics of Religion*, pp. 188–223.

¹¹ The country was named the Republic of New Granada after the disintegration of “Gran Colombia” (the union with Venezuela and Ecuador) in 1830. The name was later changed to the Confederación Neogranadina (1858) and then the Estados Unidos de Colombia (1863), before its current name, the Republic of Colombia, was adopted in 1886.

closing a long chapter of doubts, hostility, and negotiations in which Rome risked alienating Catholics in its insistence on supporting Spanish continuing claims to rule America.¹² According to the 1832 constitution, the government had the “duty” to protect *Granadinos* in the exercise of their religion, “Catholic, apostolic and Roman.”¹³ Mosquera’s appointment appeared to symbolize the power of the Church in close alliance with the state, now with papal consecration. He was a scion of a notable family of colonial lineage in Popayán; one of his brothers, Joaquín, had been acting-president of New Granada while another, Tomás Cipriano, was a member of Congress at the time of his election. However, easy inferences about the politics of the Church, including the weight and sources of its power, should be avoided. Mosquera’s election was favored neither by president Santander nor by significant sections of the clergy. Once in Bogotá, he faced the challenge of leading a poorly endowed Church whose clergy Mosquera did not find of much value, its convents of friars being “moral deserts.”¹⁴ Unresolved questions since the emancipation regarding the relationship between the Church and the state continued to be the source of serious conflict until the adoption of the 1886 constitution, followed by the concordat signed between the Colombian state and the Vatican in 1887.

By the time Mosquera took up his see, in 1835, the Church had been undergoing over two decades of decline as a consequence of the wars of independence.¹⁵ The number

¹² On the early problems raised by the *patronato*—the privilege that state authorities had over ecclesiastical appointments under the Spanish empire which continued to be claimed by the newly formed governments—and the process leading to the recognition of independence by the Vatican, see David Bushnell, *The Santander Regime of Gran Colombia* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1954), pp. 229–37; Mehan, *Church and State in Latin America*, pp. 61–87; Alfonso Pinilla Cote, *Del Vaticano a la Nueva Granada. La internunciatura del Monseñor Cayetano Baluffi en Bogotá, 1837–1842* (Bogotá: Presidencia, 1988), pp. 49–80. See also Mary Watters, “Bolivar and the Church,” *Catholic Historical Review*, 21 (1935–36), pp. 229–313. On Mosquera’s election and appointment, see Horgan, *El arzobispo Manuel José Mosquera*, pp. 15–31.

¹³ Republic of New Granada, *Constitución del Estado de la Nueva Granada* (Cartagena: José Casanova, 1832), art. 15, p. 5.

¹⁴ Archbishop Mosquera to Tomás Cipriano Mosquera, Bogotá, 7 October 1835, in *Mitra y sable. Correspondencia del Arzobispo Manuel José Mosquera con su hermano el General Tomás Cipriano, 1817–1853*, edited by Luis C. Mantilla (Bogotá: Academia Colombiana de Historia), pp. 216–17. Horgan, *El arzobispo Manuel José Mosquera*, pp. 25–26.

¹⁵ Bushnell suggests that the political influence of the clergy increased with independence. See his *The Santander Regime*, p. 196. However, the clergy’s influence over the population had been

of clerics had diminished, a problem that persisted throughout the nineteenth century. From an estimated 1,177 in 1810, the numbers went down to 955 in 1825. The gross figure increased over the next two decades, but while there was one priest per 611 inhabitants in 1810, by 1850 the ratio more than doubled—one per 1,248—and there it seems to have stagnated: by 1900 there was one priest per 1,300 Colombians.¹⁶ Conditions improved after the turn of the century (see table 1), partly as a result of an influx of foreign priests.¹⁷ Yet in 1924, a collective pastoral from the episcopate proposed to reduce the number of pious females' association in order to use “the energy of the priests...in the formation of pious males' associations,” because of the lack of “numerous clergy.”¹⁸ Priests were not only relatively scarce but sparse in a large and rugged territory. By 1848, for example, more than half of the secular clergy was concentrated in one diocese, Bogotá; together with Antioquia and Popayán, these three dioceses concentrated over 80 percent of the secular clergy.

severely diminished by the mere decline of its presence. After his first visit to his diocese in 1838, the archbishop of Cartagena noted that a significant number of parishes had “not known their bishop or their Pastor” since 1779. See *Carta Pastoral que el ilustrísimo Sr. obispo de la diócesis de Cartagena dirige a los venerables párrocos y fieles* (Cartagena: Imprenta de Ruiza, 1838), p. 3.

¹⁶ These figures would be better appreciated in comparison with those of other countries. Unfortunately I have not been able to identify sufficient data for a systematic exercise. It seems, however, that by 1900 Colombia was above the Latin American average, but the number of priests in the region was relatively low compared to that of other regions in the world. See Eduardo Cárdenas, *América Latina: La Iglesia en el siglo liberal* (Bogotá: Oficina de Publicaciones Pontificia Universidad Javeriana), p. 112. In 1875, the ratio in Chile was 1: 1,302. See Sol Serrano, *¿Qué hacer con Dios en la república? Política y secularización en Chile* (Santiago: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2008), p. 218. In Germany, there were about 18,000 priests in the 1880s or one priest per 830 Catholics approximately. I thank Margaret Lavinia Anderson for having provided me with some useful information on this. See Anderson, *Practicing Democracy*, p. 81.

¹⁷ See Frank Safford and Marco Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 247. According to Safford and Palacios, this wave of foreign priests “had a decisive influence in defining the political profile of the Church,” *ibid.*

¹⁸ *Pastoral colectiva de los preladados congregados en la cuarta conferencia episcopal colombiana* (Bogotá: Imprenta de San Bernardo, 1924), p. 3.

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF CLERGYMEN IN COLOMBIA, 1810–1938

Year	Secular Clergy	Regular Clergy	Total	Clergy/population
1810 (*)			1,691	1: 611
1848 (*)	1,088	603	1,745	1: 1,248
1851 (**)	1,393	352	1,377	1: 1,523
1870 (**)			1,403	1: 1,634
1912 (***)			2,138	1: 2,372
1938 (****)			2,257	
	1,397	860		

Sources: (*) Jorge Salcedo, “The History of the Jesuits in Colombia, 1844–1861,” unpublished D. Phil., University of Oxford, 2012; (**) Loaiza Cano, *Sociabilidad, religión y política*, p. 220; (***) ; Londoño, *Religion, Culture, and Society*, p. 65; (****) Safford and Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society*, p. 285.

From Bogotá the archbishop, in communication with Rome—directly or through the complex relationship with the papal nuncios—led the Colombian Church, together with the bishops in the various dioceses: five by 1848, seven by 1860, sixteen by 1906, twenty-two by 1918. Indeed the long continuity of some archbishops in their posts seems remarkable, a paradoxical sign of institutional stability against all odds. Between 1835 and 1930, there were eight archbishops in Bogotá who dealt with thirty-seven changes in the presidency (see Table 2). Three archbishops lasted together in their sees for sixty-six out of the hundred years covered in this paper, either in times of uneasy accommodation or conflict with state authorities or of domination by them. Continuity did not necessarily mean influence. Archbishop Mosquera’s correspondence, even at the time when his brother General Tomás Cipriano was president of the republic (1845–49), conveys the image of a powerless prelate, cornered by a hostile political and social atmosphere. “I am on my own,” he wrote on 18 August 1848, “the two clergies are opposed to me, with very few exceptions.” He also felt “detested by the political parties, since very few like the

TABLE 2

ARCHBISHOPS OF BOGOTÁ, 1827–1930	
Francisco Caicedo y Florez	1827–32
See Vacant	1832–35
Manuel José Mosquera	1832–52
Mosquera in Exile	1852–55
Antonio Herran y Zaldua	1858–68
Vicente Arbelaez	1868–84
Telesfolo Paul	1884–89
Ignacio Leon Velasco	1889–91
Bernardo Herrera Restrepo	1891–1928
Ismael Perdomo	1928–50

Sources: José Restrepo Posada, *Arquidiócesis de Bogotá. Datos biográficos de sus preladados*, vols. 2 and 3 (Bogotá: Lumen Christi, 1963 and 1966), and *La iglesia en dos momentos difíciles de su historia* (Bogotá: Kelly, 1971).

Church.” The press often launched “violent attacks” against him, “and there has never been a single cleric” who came out in his defense. In these circumstances, archbishop Mosquera questioned his own role: “Can an archbishop who has about 500 clerics and seven convents with friars but cannot count among them a single source of support be of any use?”¹⁹

In the dioceses outside the capital, the Bogotá archbishop of course carried weight, but the influential voices of the hierarchy were those of the bishops, who “alone possess jurisdictional power” in their respective dioceses.²⁰ As Abel has noted, the degree of independence of bishops has often been underestimated.²¹ Bishops differed not only in their origins and education but also in their views. As the church-state conflict mounted after the mid-nineteenth century, the hierarchy split over how to react to a series of

¹⁹ Archbishop Mosquera to Manuel María Mosquera, Bogotá, 18 August 1848, in José María Arboleda Llorente, *Vida del Illmo. Señor Manuel María Mosquera Arzobispo de Sta Fe de Bogota*, 2 vols. (Bogotá: ABC, 1956), vol. II, p. 253.

²⁰ See John L. McKenzie, S.J., *The Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), p. 40.

²¹ Abel, *Política, iglesia y partidos*, p. 39.

anticlerical measures. In the 1870s, a threat of a schism became serious, when several intransigent bishops opposed the conciliatory attitude of archbishop Vicente Arbeláez towards the Radical regime. Most bishops refused to attend the Second Provincial Council convened in Bogotá in late 1873, and some were actively involved in the 1876 failed revolution against the government.²² These divisions were only muted under the Conservative Hegemony, although the issue of clerical involvement in politics remained divisive. However, archbishop Bernardo Herrera Restrepo (1891–1928) seems to have played an important role in maintaining and reinforcing the unity of the Church, particularly through the Episcopal Conferences that took place since 1908, in a sustained effort to “impose greater control over the clergy.”²³

Imposing “control over the clergy” above all meant disciplining the “parish priest,” so often identified as a truly “political force,” a “phenomenon” that, according to Anderson, was “remarkably similar across national—and denominational—boundaries.”²⁴ Concerns about the priests’ participation in politics were expressed early in the republic. In 1833, an anonymous group of “friends of the general wellbeing,” lamenting that some priests had forgotten their “divine mission,” reprinted in Bogotá a pamphlet by Alphonse de Lamartine to remind them of their duties: “The *cura*” (priest), in Lamartine words, was “the only citizen for whom neutrality in partisan struggles” was both “a duty and a right.”²⁵ Priests’ apparent lack of neutrality ignited the ire of the likes of José María Samper, who in 1857 wrote a vitriolic attack against the “*curas*,” the “*gangrena del pueblo granadino*” (gangrene of the Grenadine people) for “the powerful

²² See González, “Iglesia y estado desde la convención de Ríonegro,” pp. 128–41; Delpar, “Colombian Liberalism”; Ortiz Mesa, *Obispos, clérigos y fieles*, pp. 155–86, and “Manuel Canuto Restrepo y Villegas, 1825–1891. Un obispo en guerras civiles colombianas, entre la Comuna de París y la Comuna de Pasto” (unpublished essay, n.d.). See also Restrepo Posada, *Arquidiócesis de Bogotá*, vol. 3, pp. 134–254.

²³ Londoño, *Religion, Culture, and Society in Colombia*, p. 48; Abel, *Política, iglesia y partidos*, 38–40; Arias, *El episcopado colombiano*, pp. 70–71.

²⁴ Anderson, *Practicing Democracy*, pp. 72–73.

²⁵ *Deberes del cura. Escrito por el señor Alfonso Lamartine, i publicado por unos amigos del bien jeneral, amantes de la buena reputación del clero granadino* (Bogotá: Imp. De Lora, 1833), pp. 6–7.

influence” they exercised over “the popular masses.”²⁶ Some priests kept their posts for extraordinarily long periods. During the nineteenth century in Antioquia, as listed by Luis Javier Ortiz Mesa, there were at least twenty-five *curas* who remained in charge of their parishes for between twenty-five and fifty-eight years: Juan José Henao, for example, was the *cura* of Guarne from 1827 to 1880.²⁷ The conspicuous presence of the parish priest captured the literary imagination of contemporaries. In “Mi compadre Facundo” (1866), Emiro Kastos offered a portrait of “that terrible league between the spiritual and temporal powers,” the *gamonal del pueblo* (local boss man) intimately linked to the *cura*, a league formed by “the pope and the emperor, against which no one can resist.”²⁸ Not all priests conformed to a picture that has now become legend. Some were commissioned to hostile villages. Religious parishioners could often be demanding.²⁹ A successful priesthood required some conditions, outlined by Juan Nepomoceno Rueda after his ten years of service as the *cura* of Sogamoso in 1875: It was required to be “somewhat learned, active and executive.” Above all, the priest “must have plenty of social tact: if imprudent he will be lost without remedy.” There was “mental movement” in Sogamoso, a town of 12,000: “enlightened medics, lawyers, and men of letters”; people read “the newspapers of the country, they discuss and form judgement, and it is necessary that the *cura* be up to the movement of the times.” Rueda’s final warning was clear and in capital letters: “Anyone who goes to Sogamoso without those conditions will not face an uncertain destiny: HE WILL NOT LIVE MUCH LONGER IN SOGAMOSO.”³⁰

Next to the parish priests, perhaps no other members of the clergy were feared more as a “political force” than the Jesuits—another “phenomenon” that cut across

²⁶ José María Samper, *El clero ultramontano* (Bogotá: El Neogranadino, 1857), p. 49, in Biblioteca Luis Angel Arango, Digital Collection (BLAAD). Samper moderated his political views in later years and supported the movement that inaugurated the Conservative Hegemony. Yet during the discussions of the 1886 constitution, as delegate at the convention, Samper opposed male universal suffrage on the grounds that “given the conditions of the people” the *curas* would decide the elections in the small villages; see *Antecedentes de la constitución colombiana de 1886* (Bogotá, 1983), p. 264.

²⁷ Ortiz Mesa, *Obispos, clérigos y fieles*, pp. 217–18.

²⁸ Emiro Kastos (Juan de Dios Restrepo), “Mi compadre Facundo” (1866), in *Cuadros de costumbres por los mejores cronistas de la época* (Bogotá: Ed. Colombia, 1925), p. 106.

²⁹ See Gloria Mercedes Arango, *La mentalidad religiosa en Antioquia. Prácticas y discursos, 1828–1885* (Medellín: Universidad Nacional, 1993), pp. 126–27.

³⁰ Juan Nepomuceno Rueda, *Informe que el cura de Sogamoso dirige al ilustrísimo y reverendísimo señor Arzobispo* (Bogotá: Candido Pontón, 1875), p. 30, in BLAAD.

national boundaries.³¹ After their expulsion in the late colonial period, they were invited to return by the government of New Granada in 1842. Soon after their arrival, in 1844, their mission was the subject of passionate controversy. Their critics sounded alarmed: “*Jesuitismo*, frightening name to any good citizen,” *El Amigo del País* stated in 1846.³² For Julio Arboleda, their doctrines were stuck in the seventeenth century and were not appropriate for New Granada. It was their skills as educators to which Arboleda seemed to object most, for “each Jesuit in virtue of his education” had “the very powerful means to triumph over a weak and backward society like ours.”³³ At the top of the anticlerical agenda of the Liberals who came to power in 1849 was the expulsion of the Jesuits, which they carried out in 1850. The Jesuits were invited back by the conservative government of Mariano Ospina Rodríguez in 1858, only to be expelled again by Tomás Cipriano Mosquera three years later. The controversies surrounding the Jesuits and their repeated persecution during these years serve to further illustrate a point suggested earlier in this section: the perceived power of the Church was hardly related to clerical numbers. Whatever threat the Jesuits might have then posed, it could not have been based on their extensive presence: seventy-six and fifty-two Jesuits were expelled in 1850 and 1861 respectively.³⁴

To the extent that bishops and priests exercised influence, their ability to do so largely depended on the Catholic beliefs of the population. The extent of these beliefs is not easy to measure. Observers, foreigners and national alike, were quick to note the people’s religiosity. “At each stage,” the Chilean priest José Ignacio Victor Eyzaguirre wrote in 1859, “the traveller in New Granada is offered conclusive demonstrations of the faith and deep piety of its citizens.”³⁵ Claims, like that of a 1863 leaflet, that almost one

³¹ Anderson, *Practicing Democracy*, pp. 80–81.

³² “Jesuitas,” *El Amigo del País*, Medellín, 15 January 1848, in BLAAD. For a recent study that examines the expulsions of the Jesuits, see Salcedo, “The History of the Jesuits in Colombia.”

³³ Julio Arboleda, *Los jesuitas* (Bogotá: Imprenta de M. Sánchez Caicedo, 1848), in Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia, Digital Collection (BNCD).

³⁴ Salcedo, “The History of the Jesuits in Colombia.”

³⁵ José Ignacio Victor Eyzaguirre, *Los intereses Católicos en América* (Paris: Garnier Hermanos, 1859), vol. 2, p. 80. For an examination of the religiosity of the population by 1820, see Eduardo Cárdenas G., *Pueblo y religión en Colombia, 1780–1820* (Bogotá: Universidad Javeriana, 2004). For religiosity in Antioquia, see Arango, *La mentalidad religiosa en Antioquia*, and Londoño, *Religion, Culture, and Society*.

hundred percent of Colombians were “Catholics, apostolic and Romans”³⁶ were common but surely exaggerated. Even if the vast majority of Colombians nominally adhered to Catholicism, the nature and strength of beliefs varied across regions and municipalities. It probably varied across social classes as well. “If the lower people are very religious,” the papal nuncio Mgr. Baluffi reported to the Vatican in 1837, “the rest are decidedly unbelievers.”³⁷ Changes over time should also be taken into account. In 1868, Fray Jervacio García expressed his nostalgia for a bygone past in Bogotá, where Catholic customs and habits had once prevailed. In contrast, he lamented the general moral decay that had taken over society in his “present age.” The new generation despised Catholic beliefs, priests and Church ceremonies. Images of Christ, the Virgin Mary and the saints no longer decorated Catholic homes. In the fashionable *tertulias* (salons), “even the most ignorant” judged against the dogmas of the Christian faith.³⁸

What emerges from these and other accounts is a varied picture of religiosity. And of course being Catholic did not mean sharing a single position regarding the role of the Church. As Malcolm Deas has observed, “Colombia was by no means a uniformly catechized country.”³⁹ Thus any historical overview should at least identify a more devout population in the highlands than in the lowlands; in rural than in urban areas; in some regions (Cundinamarca, Boyacá, Cauca, and Antioquia) than in others (the Caribbean Coast and Santander); with significant variation within regions and over time. The “fanatics” may predominate in Boyacá and Antioquia, but people in the lower Magdalena Valley were believers in “charms, incantations, and witchcraft,” while paying “little

³⁶ *El Pueblo* (Bogotá, 29 June 1863), in BNCD.

³⁷ Baluffi to Lambsurchini, 27 April 1837, cited in Pinilla Cote, *Del Vaticano a la Nueva Granada*, p. 123. “Most of the educated males,” J. Stuart observed during his visit to Bogotá “are open scoffers and atheists at heart, passing jokes upon the mummeries of the priests without taking any pains to conceal it”; see his *Bogotá, 1836–37, Being a Narrative of an Expedition to the Capital of New Grenada, and a Residence There of Eleven Months* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1838), p. 170.

³⁸ Jervacio García, *Comparación de la época pasada con la presente* (Bogotá: Nicolás Pontón, 1868), pp. 14–19. Similarly, in 1858, the archbishop of Bogotá remarked on the diminishing “fervor of the faithful.” See archbishop Antonio Herrán, *Pastoral* (Bogotá, 1858), p. 2, in BNCD. In 1864, fifty-three priests from Antioquia signed a document that referred to the “relajación jeneral de las costumbres, que se ha apoderado de la mayor parte de los pueblos, resultado necesario de las falsas i corruptoras costumbres”; see *Esposición i protesta del clero no sometido de Antioquia hace al pueblo católico* (Medellín: Imprenta de Isidori Isaza, 1864), p. 2, in BLAAD.

³⁹ Deas, “The Role of the Church, the Army and the Police,” p. 164.

attention to the Church or its requirements.”⁴⁰ The questions of how much and how did religious issues translate into party politics therefore demand further examination.

THE RELIGIOUS CLEAVAGE AND PARTY FORMATION

When archbishop Mosquera arrived in Bogotá to take charge of his see, in September 1835, political parties as such hardly existed. By the end of the 1840s, however, the Liberal and Conservative parties were organized to fight elections with their respective political platforms. Their first manifestos, published respectively in 1848 and 1849, paid special attention to religious issues, where their differences were sharp.⁴¹ This section explores the extent to which the religious cleavage was central to the formation and development of political parties in the republic and revises the idea that a bipartisan system had emerged by the mid-nineteenth century.

Religious issues had been the source of political contention since the early days of independence.⁴² But the first systematic attempt to mobilize the Catholic vote took place in 1838, with the establishment of the Sociedad Católica in Bogotá, allegedly founded with the purpose of defending Catholicism against the prevailing lack of “piety and morality.” To this aim, it openly sought to gain Catholic representation in Congress. Since the government of the republic was in the hands of the people—reasoned a leaflet published in May 1838—it was imperative to elect Catholics, “honest and learned men of good behavior,” so that the laws could protect the Catholic religion.⁴³ A similar circular

⁴⁰ William L. Scruggs, *The Colombian and Venezuelan Republics* (Boston, 1905), cited in Delpar, “Colombian Liberalism and the Roman Catholic Church,” p. 273.

⁴¹ For an account of early party formation see Safford and Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society*, pp. 134–56. See also Helen Delpar, *Rojos contra azules. El partido liberal en la política colombiana, 1863–1899* (Bogotá: Procultura, 1994), pp. 1–86. A compilation of contemporary accounts by Manuel María Madieto, José María Samper and Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera was edited by Jorge Orlando Melo under the title *Orígenes de los partidos políticos en Colombia* (Bogotá: Colcultura, 1978).

⁴² Bushnell, *The Santander Regime*, pp. 195–248. Religious issues were discussed during the 1836–37 presidential elections. Educational matters, including the use of Jeremy Bentham’s texts, had provoked reaction among Catholics. See, for example, Jerónimo Torres, *Observaciones sobre el decreto del Gobierno publicado en la Gaceta N. 212 acerca de las enseñanzas de legislación por Jeremías Bentham* (Bogotá: Imprenta por J. Ayarze, 1836).

⁴³ “Invitación que hace la Sociedad Católica de Bogotá a los fieles de América” (Bogotá, 10 May 1838), in BNCD. For brief recent accounts of the Sociedad Católica and its impact, see Loaiza

was sent to priests around the country, asking them to set up a branch of the society in their parishes and to subscribe to the society's newspaper, *El Investigador Católico*. While far from consolidating a nationwide network, it did manage to open chapters in a few municipalities, such as Popayán, Cali, Pasto, Buga, and Panamá. It also reached smaller towns: a branch was established in Santa Rosa in April 1840.⁴⁴ Led and partly funded by a wealthy merchant, Ignacio Morales—who was ready to sponsor other Church-related causes⁴⁵—the society also counted on the support of some members of the Catholic hierarchy, including the recently arrived papal nuncio, Mgr. Cayetano Baluffi. The society's chapter in Popayán was openly led by the bishop.⁴⁶ However, archbishop Mosquera refused to be involved and, when approached, warned Morales that the “Society should not take part in political affairs, even less in elections.” During a tour of the provinces, Mosquera made sure that his disapproval was known: “I have just ruined that society in my visit,” he wrote from Vélez in September 1838.⁴⁷ Morales persevered in his venture, rallying in Bogotá “a noisy crowd that invoked religion at any time.” The Sociedad Católica managed to have some electoral gains in 1838 and 1839 but its fortunes faded away soon afterwards.⁴⁸

Cano, *Sociabilidad, religión y política*, pp. 22–25; Víctor Uribe-Urán, *Honorable Lives: Lawyers, Family, and Politics in Colombia, 1780–1850* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), p. 120. See also José Restrepo Posada, “La Sociedad Católica de Bogotá, 1838,” *Boletín de Historia y Antigüedades*, XLII: 499–500 (May–June 1956), pp. 310–21.

⁴⁴ Restrepo Posada, *Arquidiócesis de Bogotá*, vol. 2, pp. 112–13; Pinilla Cote, *Del Vaticano a la Nueva Granada*, p. 214; and *Acta que establece la Sociedad Católica en el cantón de Santa Rosa* (Santa Rosa, 8 April 1840), in BNCD.

⁴⁵ For example, the ceremonies that accompanied the burial of Dr. Francisco Margallo, a leading clergyman in Bogotá, were paid for by Morales. See Un bogotano, “Al Sr. Ignacio Morales” (Bogotá, 6 July 1837), in BCND. According to Restrepo Posada, Morales was a monarchist, who saw in the Sociedad Católica a way to conspire against the republic; *Arquidiócesis de Bogotá*, vol. 2, p. 120.

⁴⁶ In his own words, Mgr. Baluffi was the “secret, very secret adviser” of the society; Pinilla Cote, *Del Vaticano a la Nueva Granada*, p. 213. For the Sociedad Católica in Popayán, see “Parte política,” *El Investigador Católico*, 15 August 1839, in BLAAD.

⁴⁷ Archbishop Mosquera to Tomás Mosquera, Vélez, 1 September 1838, in *Mitra y sable*, p. 244. See also his letter from Socorro, 22 August 1838, *ibid.*, pp. 241–42.

⁴⁸ Angel and Rufino José Cuervo, “Vida de Rufino Cuervo y noticias de su época” (1892), in Rufino José Cuervo, *Obras* (Bogotá: Caro y Cuervo, 1954), vol. ii, p. 1089. Accounts of its electoral successes differ. The Cuervos suggest that the Sociedad Católica had very significant gains, particularly in 1839. José Manuel Restrepo, however, stated in his diary that it failed to elect a single person in 1838; cited in Restrepo Posada, *Arquidiócesis de Bogotá*, vol. 2, p. 114.

In as much as the religious banner motivated early party formation, it did not lead to a simple bipolar dispute. In reaction to the Sociedad Católica's electoral mobilization, former president Santander and his anti-clerical allies organized the Sociedad democrático-republicana (Democratic-Republican Society) in Bogotá in 1838.⁴⁹ In addition, as Safford and Palacios note, "neither [President] Márquez nor his moderate [Catholic] supporters were sympathetic" to the Sociedad Católica; they were political competitors.⁵⁰ Mgr. Baluffi in fact distinguished the existence of four parties in 1839, divided around the Church: the "ultra-liberals," who were against the Church; those in government, who preferred the *patronato* so as to exercise state control over the Church; those who favored the *patronato* so as to guarantee state support for the Church; and finally, those like Baluffi himself, who preferred freedom of the Church as the best way of defending Catholicism.⁵¹ This first electoral mobilization of Catholics was accompanied by another feature, which, according to Restrepo Posada, had a long-term impact: part of the clergy did not follow the leadership of the hierarchy but that of laymen, who carried the Catholic flag for political purposes.⁵²

The second significant electoral mobilization of Catholics took place in the late 1840s, but this time it was more sustained and seems to have been central to the formation of the first party system in the republic, with lasting consequences. Legislation to curtail the power of ecclesiastical courts, passed by Congress in 1845, had raised concerns among the clergy. Increasing attacks against the Jesuits provoked angry Catholic responses: "we will resist the aggressions against our religion and our moral customs," expressed a leaflet published in Bogotá in April 1846.⁵³ A few months later, in 1847, over 1,500 Antioqueños sent a petition to Congress in defense of the Jesuits and

⁴⁹ David Sowell, *The Early Colombian Labor Movement: Artisans and Politics in Bogotá, 1832–1919* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), p. 35.

⁵⁰ Safford and Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society*, p. 146.

⁵¹ Pinilla Cote, *Del Vaticano a la Nueva Granada*, pp. 186–88.

⁵² Restrepo Posada, *Arquidiócesis de Bogotá*, vol 2, pp. 120–21. According to Sowell, however, the Sociedad Católica was organized by members of the Church hierarchy; *The Early Colombian Labor Movement*, p. 34. But most sources I have seen clearly show that it was Morales who led the organization. For Loaiza Cano, the Sociedad was "mainly, a mobilization of the ecclesiastical personnel"; *Sociabilidad, religión y política*, p. 224. Uribe-Urán also acknowledges Morales's leadership role; *Honorable lives*, p. 120.

⁵³ Anonymous, "Unos canónigos, que no son ni hipócritas ni traidores," *Lo que son los hombres* (Bogotá, 7 April 1846), in BNCD.

their involvement in the education of their children, appealing to the “principles of liberty, equality and tolerance, which are the fundamental basis of the republican, popular and representative government that we have established.”⁵⁴

As the 1848 elections approached, an anonymous pamphlet was published in Bogotá instructing Catholics about their “duties” at the ballot box. Such had been the recent successful practice in France, the document stated in its opening paragraph, where public writers and the Catholic press had encouraged “religious men to take an active part in the elections” in favor of the Catholic cause.⁵⁵ From the start, the pamphlet appealed to the majority principle. Sovereignty “resided neither on the executive nor on Congress, but on the nation,” that is, the citizens: “God had deposited in our hands a portion of the sovereignty of this Catholic republic.... It is evident that each father of family, each Catholic elector, in such capacity must judge the politics and the legislation of New Granada.” The call to mobilize was repeated, listing what was at stake. If Catholics wanted to defend religion, “go to the polls and prove with your presence and action the existence of a new spirit...irrevocably decided to defend its rights.” If they wanted to keep the right to educate their children: “go to the polls and, as the price for your votes, demand from the legislators...that they give you back your children’s souls.” If they wished to preserve the independence of the Church: “go to the polls and vote for those who reclaim and sustain with energy the distinction between temporal and spiritual powers.” If they wanted a free clergy, “go to the polls to prove that it is in your interest not in the clergy’s...that the Church keep its independence.” If Catholics wanted to defend the religious communities where the youth was educated: “go to the polls” and refuse to vote for those speculators who were “undermining the religious institutions” to take over their possessions; “vote instead for citizens who respect property rights guaranteed in the constitution.”⁵⁶ The pamphlet reminded Catholics of their new task in

⁵⁴ *Honorables Senadores y Representantes en la Legislatura de 1847* (n.p.: Imprenta de J. Cualla, 1847) p. 5.

⁵⁵ Anonymous, *Deberes de los católicos en las próximas elecciones* (Bogotá: Imprenta de Jose A. Cualla, 24 May 1848). Although the pamphlet included explicit references to New Granada, it was mostly a plagiarism of Montalambert’s “Du Devoir des catholics dans les elections” (1846); *Oeuvres de M. Le Comte De Montalambert. IV. Oeuvres polémiques et diverses* (Paris: Jacques Lecoffre, 1860), vol. I, pp. 363–434. On Montalambert in the wider context of the French debate, see Gould, *Origins of Liberal Dominance*, pp. 52–53.

⁵⁶ Anonymous, *Deberes de los católicos*, pp. 1–3 and 7–9.

the republic: “to invigilate power, to intervene in its exercise.” They should therefore work to make sure that not only the president but also the legislators about to be elected were genuine representatives of their Catholic interests. “In sum,” it concluded, “let’s be well persuaded that our presence can be useful until the last instance of the electoral struggle. [Catholics should] exercise the rights directly conferred by the constitution, electoral rights above all.”⁵⁷

Catholic arguments were reinforced by the publication of what is considered to be the first platform of the Liberal party. Written by Ezequiel Rojas and published in *El Aviso* on 16 July 1848, it clearly stated Liberals’ opposition to “religion as a means of government”: governments should not adopt religion as an instrument. Furthermore, the document openly claimed that the Liberal party saw the presence of the Jesuits in the country as an “imminent threat to public liberties”; to allow its continuity in the republic was to “abdicate national sovereignty to the Compañía de Jesús.”⁵⁸ Catholics attended the call for mobilization but went split to the polls, in an extraordinarily contested election. While moderate Catholics backed Rufino Cuervo (the vice-president at the time), the intransigent sectors and the bulk of the clergy seemed to have been behind Joaquín Gori. The intensity of electioneering among the plebeian population had little precedent. Gori was said to be “the father of religion, which will perish if López (the Liberal candidate) won the presidency.”⁵⁹ López in the end won, in a controversial decision taken by Congress on 7 March 1849. Soon the new Liberal government was carrying out its program, in open confrontation with the Church. In 1850, the Jesuits were expelled. Two years later, archbishop Mosquera was forced into exile.

The “administration of March the 7th,” as it came to be known, prompted the organization of the Conservative party, under the leadership of Mariano Ospina Rodríguez and José Eusebio Caro—as member of the cabinet in 1842, the former was responsible for the invitation of the Jesuits. Both wrote the first official platform of the party, published in *La Civilización* on 8 October 1849, which committed the

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.

⁵⁸ *El Aviso*, Bogotá, 16 July 1848, cited in Gerardo Molina, *Las ideas liberales en Colombia, 1849–1914* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1971), pp., 23–24.

⁵⁹ Anonymous, *Reseña histórica de los principales acontecimientos políticos de la ciudad de Cali desde el año de 1848 hasta el de 1855 inclusive* (Bogotá: Echeverría Hermanos, 1856), pp. 14–15; Horgan, *El arzobispo Manuel José Mosquera*, p. 77.

Conservatives to defend the Catholic Church. Catholic organizations, closely linked to the emerging Conservative party, also sprang up. In December 1849, the Sociedad Popular de Instrucción Mutua i Fraternidad Cristiana was established in Bogotá, directly aimed at the artisan sector to provide for their Christian instruction and support. Its “reglamento orgánico,” however, also included political aims. Members of the society were to form a “political union” to participate in all parish elections and to vote for the lists approved by the society.⁶⁰ Similar societies were set up elsewhere in the country—some fifteen in 1850, still a short number to match the extensive network of “democratic societies” promoted by the Liberal government, according to Loaiza Cano.⁶¹

As the conflict between the Liberal government and the Church sharpened, Conservatives made special efforts to identify their cause with that of Catholics. In 1850, when the expulsion of the Jesuits was imminent, Ospina and Caro published a joint open letter “to our political friends and all the friends of the Jesuits” inviting them to keep calm: as a new electoral cycle approached (to elect the vice-president, senators and representatives), they called on their fellow partisans to avoid public unrest and try instead to defeat the government at the ballot box.⁶² Some provinces did rebel the following year, “God” figuring in their flags though next to other reasons;⁶³ and the Liberals prevailed both in the elections and the battle fields. Ospina persevered, in spite of a general atmosphere of Conservative demoralization. Liberal measures against the Church, such as the expulsion of archbishop Mosquera, seemed to provide the necessary ammunition. “To attack Catholicism at its head,” Ospina wrote to Caro in June 1852, was “a clumsy act.... the prelate being...a man entirely passive in politics, his exile does not weaken the conservative party at all, but it does produce a great exacerbation of popular

⁶⁰ *Reglamento orgánico de la Sociedad Popular de Instrucción Mutua i Fraternidad Cristiana* (Bogotá: El Día, 1849), pp. 2–4, in BNCD.

⁶¹ Loaiza Cano, *Sociabilidad, religión y política*, pp. 226–27.

⁶² Mariano Ospina and José Eusebio Caro, “Carta a nuestros amigos políticos y a todos los amigos de los jesuitas,” Bogotá, 14 May 1850, in *Documentos importantes sobre la expulsión de los jesuitas* (Bogotá: El Día, 1850), pp. 6, 12, and 14. Copies of the letter were posted in public places.

⁶³ In 1851 “the Antioqueño Conservatives...took up arms under the slogan of ‘Dios y la Federación’”; in Londoño, *Religion, Culture, and Society in Colombia*, pp. 33–34.

hate against the dominant party.”⁶⁴ Ospina went on to examine the four banners that could rally the conservatives: political liberties, personal security, property, and Christian religion. He discarded them one by one except the last, “the only Conservative banner that is alive. *El rojismo* (the ‘red’ party) does not have any other enemy as challenging as Catholicism.” For Ospina, the Catholic strength to fight the Liberals would not come from the clergy but from the “sincere feelings of the Catholic peoples.” They might confuse “religion, justice and liberty” in a complex idea of religion, but that idea expressed Catholicism, above all in their identification with the pope.⁶⁵

Thus, by the 1850s, it was clear that religion, while not the only cleavage, was largely responsible for the definite emergence of both the Liberal and Conservative parties. What was under discussion was not just an institutional struggle over the control of the Church. As J. Samuel Valenzuela and Erika Maza Valenzuela have argued for the case of Chile, there were fundamental differences around religious beliefs.⁶⁶ In the context of the frequent realignment of political forces since independence, for contemporaries like Rufino Cuervo two new hitherto unknown parties had appeared, a development whose consequences, with the connotations of a religious war, he feared.⁶⁷ As in the 1830s, however, the religious cleavage did not lead to a simple bipolar system. There were more than two approaches to the “religious question,” and the variety of answers often found expression in third parties, which need to be more fully recognized as such by the historiography. Ambrosio López, for example, founder of the Sociedad de Artesanos and close to the Liberals in 1847, soon broke ranks with the Liberal administration. He might have felt betrayed by the lack of protection offered to his fellow artisans, but the most notable area where he took issue with the Liberal government was in its “destruction of our religious dogmas.” This did not make him a “*godo*” (“Goth,” Colombian slang for “conservative”); in fact he listed the existence of three parties: “red

⁶⁴ Mariano Ospina to José Eusebio Caro, Medellín, 22 June 1852, in José Eusebio Caro, *Epistolario* (Bogotá: ABC, 1953), pp. 348–49.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 349–52.

⁶⁶ Valenzuela and Maza Valenzuela, “The Politics of Religion in a Catholic Country,” pp. 188–223. For Germán Colmenares, however, in Colombia the “religious question” was not about beliefs: what was at stake was the influence of the clergy in the social order. See Colmenares, *Partidos políticos y clases sociales* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo/Universidad del Valle, 1997), pp. xii, 55, and 47.

⁶⁷ Rufino Cuervo, *Defensa del arzobispo de Bogotá* (Bogotá, 1852), p. 65, in BNCD.

Liberals, moderate Liberals, and Conservatives.”⁶⁸ In the subsequent presidential elections of 1856, when the victory went to the Conservative Mariano Ospina, there was indeed a third competitor next to the Liberals, the National Party, set up by Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera who, like his Liberal opponents in 1856, blamed the clergy for the electoral defeat.⁶⁹

ELECTORAL POLITICS AND THE CLERGY

The Church conferred sanctity on the electoral process in the early republic. Symbolically, members of the electoral assemblies attended mass before gathering to vote. At the service, for example, in the town of Corozal in 1836, the priest delivered an “exhortación” (exhortation) in which he referred to the electors’ duties as a “religious obligation imposed by the law.” Since they had the difficult task of deciding among different candidates, he warned them not to neglect the enlightenment and assistance of the “Holy Spirit,” as when the Apostles elected St. Matthias to succeed Judas. The priest, in sum, asked electors in Corozal to look towards God for guidance.⁷⁰ Such symbolism was an expression of the power of the Church as much as of social unity, still a valued republican principle—but not for long.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the Church also had another visible electoral role: clerics were elected to Congress. Their numbers were not as high as in Imperial Germany,⁷¹ and their overall presence in Congress was far more significant in the Senate than in the House of Representative—usually five senators (out of twenty-

⁶⁸ Ambrosio López, *El desengaño, o confidencias de Ambrosio López, primer director de la Sociedad de Artesanos de Bogotá, denominada hoy “Sociedad Democrática.” Escrito para conocimiento de sus socios* (Bogotá: Imprenta de Espinosa, 1851), pp. 6, 18–19, 23, 30–35, 39–41, 45, 49, 53.

⁶⁹ This reinterpretation of the first party system of Colombia would make the Colombian experience similar to that of Chile. See Timothy Scully, *Rethinking the Center: Party Politics in Nineteenth-Century Chile* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 34–43; J. Samuel Valenzuela, “The Origins and Transformations of the Chilean Party System,” *Estudios Públicos*, 58 (Autumn, 1995), pp. 10–12.

⁷⁰ “Remitido,” in *Constitucional de Cartagena*, 8 September 1836. See also *Constitucional de Cundinamarca*, 7 August 1836.

⁷¹ “No fewer than 91 of the Centrum’s 483 deputies during the course of the empire were clergymen,” Anderson, *Practicing Democracy*, p. 108.

five) and two representatives (out of sixty), during the 1830s through the early 1850s.⁷² Unlike their counterparts in Germany, where Catholic clergymen were elected as members of the Centrum party, the priests who sat in the New Granadian Congress did not represent any particular party—the Conservative and Liberal parties were not formed until mid century. Nor did they represent a unified force. Some of them in fact upheld liberal views. In any case, the presence of clerics in Congress came to an end after the civil war that toppled the Ospina government in 1861. The 1863 constitutional convention banned the clergy from office, a ban that stayed in place under the Conservative Hegemony, except for posts in education and charity services.⁷³

Clerical involvement in electioneering already surfaced in the presidential elections of 1836–37, but the clergy’s influence at the ballot box only became a political issue with the intensification of electoral competition a decade later, and particularly after the adoption of male universal suffrage in 1853. Accusations abounded. In 1848, an anonymous publication described the activities of Vicente Cuesta, a Franciscan friar “very respected by the people” in Cali, who distributed a “large number of ballot papers” with the name of Gori, while the clergy followed on his footsteps with “frantic enthusiasm,” “threatening with ‘excommunication and the flames from hell’ those who voted for López.”⁷⁴ In 1856, General Tomás Cipriano Mosquera, then a presidential candidate, bitterly complained that “some ecclesiastics...are preaching that those who don’t vote for Ospina are damned.”⁷⁵ Ospina won. His victory fuelled further anticlerical animosity, often resulting in Liberals retracting their support for universal suffrage, given the apparent electoral power of the parish priest over the masses.

⁷² See, for example, Gustavo Arboleda, *Historia contemporánea de Colombia* (Bogotá: Banco Central Hipotecario, 1990), vol. iv, pp. 3–4, 60–70, 127–28 and vol. v, pp. 67–69, 196–97.

Another electoral role that needs further exploration, where the clergy might have exercised significant influence during these early decades, was their election to the electoral assemblies.

⁷³ Article 54 of the 1886 constitution stated that sacerdotal functions were not compatible with public jobs. The previous 1863 constitution had also banned the clergy from voting. The clergy regained the right to vote under the Conservative Hegemony but they could not be elected. See José María Samper, *Derecho público interno de Colombia* (Bogotá: La Luz, 1886), vol. 2, pp. 105–6. Exceptionally a priest, Rafael Carrasquilla was appointed minister of Education in the 1890s, a controversial appointment as it was considered unconstitutional. See Carlos Martínez Silva, *Capítulos de historia política de Colombia* (Bogotá: Banco Popular, 1973), p. 37.

⁷⁴ Anonymous, *Reseña histórica*, pp. 14–17.

⁷⁵ Tomás Cipriano Mosquera, *El Jeneral Mosquera al público de la Nueva Granada* (Bogotá: Imprenta de Ortiz, 1856), p. 2, in BLAAD.

Such animosity was clearly behind the measures taken against the Church, first by Mosquera in 1861–62 and then by the constituent convention of 1863.⁷⁶ Thanks to the “influence of the clergy over the ignorant populations,” reported the commission on ecclesiastical affairs to the convention, the first elections under universal male suffrage in 1853 had been mostly favorable to the conservative party. The 1856 defeat confirmed Liberal fears. “It is a notable fact,” the commission’s report added, that the clergy intervened “openly and imprudently” in “electoral matters”; that the Conservatives had “adopted religious propaganda as their major means of action”; that the Roman curia was intervening in “our internal struggles.” “The ultramontane clergy” concluded the report, “is not a sincere ally of popular sovereignty”; it went on to outline a set of proposed measures against the Church.⁷⁷ José María Rojas Garrido, a delegate at the convention close to General Mosquera, took an even harder line: “The bishops and the clerics are not citizens, [they] are...soldiers of Rome, recruited by the Conservative party against the rights and liberty of the republic.” Through the pulpit and the confessional box—the “best recruitment system”—Rojas Garrido added, the clergy “stole” the elections, depriving the Liberals of public support.⁷⁸ Instead of the measures proposed by the commission, Rojas Garrido backed the harsher bill presented by General Mosquera, provoking a discussion that exposed two fundamentally different “Liberal” approaches to the “religious question”: that of the commission, which favored the independence of the Church from the state, and that of the *Mosqueristas*, who took the regalist position that gave the state control over the Church. Although there was some compromise,⁷⁹ the *Mosquerista* line in the end prevailed, and the convention approved that clerics could not

⁷⁶ For a classic examination of these measures, from a pro-Church perspective, see Juan Pablo Restrepo, *La Iglesia y el estado en Colombia* (London: Emiliano Isaza, 1885).

⁷⁷ Salvador Camacho Roldán, Justo Arosemena, B. Herrera, “Informe de las comisiones reunidas de asuntos eclesiásticos” (1863), in José María Rojas Garrido, *Obras selectas* (Bogotá: Cámara de Representantes, 1979), pp. 295–96. Of course the discussion was not confined to the conventional debates. See, for example, the seventy-two-page pamphlet in support of Mosquera’s measures, by C.A. Echeverri, *El clero católico romano i los gobiernos políticos* (Medellín: Imprenta del Estado, 1863), in BLAAD. What was at stake, according to Echeverri, was “the struggle of the Roman Catholic clergy against popular rights,” *ibid.*, p. 61. For an examination of this debate, see also González, “Iglesia y estado desde la convención de Ríonegro.”

⁷⁸ “Discurso de Rojas Garrido en la Convención de Ríonegro” (1863), in Rojas Garrido, *Obras selectas*, pp. 304–6.

⁷⁹ González, “Iglesia y estado desde la convención,” p. 110.

elect nor be elected, that they had to swear allegiance to the constitution, and that they required permission from the civilian authorities to perform their ecclesiastical functions.

To what extent did these drastic measures reflect the real dimensions of the clerical influence in the electoral process? What was their impact on the politics of Catholicism in the country? At first the clergy did not have a unified position regarding their role in elections. Archbishop Mosquera, as previously shown, had disapproved of the electoral pursuits of the Sociedad Católica, which was nonetheless supported by other members of the Church, including the papal nuncio and the bishop of Popayán. Mosquera's attempts to keep the Church away from partisan politics lost credibility when his own brother, Tomás Cipriano, was elected president in 1845, against the archbishop's wishes.⁸⁰ The first wave of anticlerical measures that had forced archbishop Mosquera and other prelates into exile sparked a debate about the political standing of the Church. It involved both the clergy and the laity. In 1853, Catholics in Bogotá pledged "to never allow the interests of religion to be subject to those of politics." After protesting the measures taken against the Church, they warned fellow Catholics about the harmful outcomes of "ungrateful party struggles." But they also specifically pledged "not to support any of the parties that today or later [would be hostile] to [Catholic] religious principles and interests...without failing to combat the anti-Catholic doctrines through any legal means."⁸¹ It was a fine line to be drawn. The distinction kept reappearing in Catholic responses in defense of the Church. Some insisted on the need for a "neutral" position, a neutrality that did not mean refraining from participation in public affairs. How could the clergy stay away from elections, asked the priest Juan Nepomuceno

⁸⁰ According to Lloyd Mehan, Tomás C. Mosquera was elected president "with the aid of the clergy," and rumors did circulate that the archbishop used the Jesuits to rally electoral support for his brother. But as Horgan noted, the archbishop feared that the election of his brother would be detrimental to his episcopal position. Mehan, *Church and State*, p. 120; Horgan, *El arzobispo Manuel José Mosquera*, p. 68. Recent documentary evidence serves to reinforce Horgan's view. Since 1842, the archbishop had been writing to his brother Tomás, disapproving of his candidacy; see in particular his letters dated 1 July 1842, 15 November 1843, and 15 May and 4 September 1844, in *Mitra y sable*, pp. 284, 290, 294–301. On the archbishop's disagreements with Tomás Cipriano, whom "he feared in all aspects," see his letters to another of his brothers, Manuel María, dated 15 May 1851 and 24 March 1852, in *Arboleda Llorente, Vida del Illmo. Señor Manuel María Mosquera*, pp. 262 and 304.

⁸¹ *Exposición Católica o principios i reglas de conducta de los católicos en la situación actual de la Iglesia granadina* (Bogotá: Imprenta de F. Torres Amaya, 1853), pp. 3 and 6.

Rueda in 1855, if elections were the “fountain” from which life or death could be spread on society: The clergy ought to be at the “shore of that fountain.” Where exactly? Since the clergy had “enemies in all parties,” Rueda posed the “axiom that the clergy should not belong to any party.”⁸² It should remain “neutral,” free to “attack the errors in all parties.”

Neutrality became harder to sustain after 1861. The clergy generally defied the anticlerical measures by ignoring, in particular, the requirement to seek permission from civilian authorities to carry out their ecclesiastical duties, although there were some exceptions. Churches closed down, and a large number of clerics suffered persecution—seventeen bishops were exiled or imprisoned between 1850 and 1880.⁸³ “There are no churches open in Antioquia, except in four municipalities,” a leaflet explained to fellow Catholics in 1863, “244,000 souls [are thus] affected.”⁸⁴ There were calls for restraint from both the hierarchy and the Conservative party, but there were also calls to take up arms.⁸⁵ Pius IX’s *Syllabus of Errors* (1864)—“a declaration of war against the evils of modern society,”⁸⁶ which condemned liberalism—found here more than a sympathetic audience, providing ideological support to ultramontane Catholics who favored an open and deeper involvement of the Roman Church in the politics of the country.⁸⁷ An educational reform in 1870, followed soon by the arrival of protestant educators, added further fuel to the conflict.

Archbishop Arbeláez’s attempts at remaining “neutral” within the parameters of the *Syllabus* was a balancing act that split the Church and proved in the end to be unsustainable. The subject of the “attitude of the clergy towards elections” had been the

⁸² Juan Nepomuceno Rueda, *El clero granadino con relación a la política* (Bogotá: Imprenta de Ortiz, 12 August 1855), pp. 2, 6, 9.

⁸³ Cárdenas, *América Latina: La Iglesia en el siglo liberal*, p. 95.

⁸⁴ Juan N. Cadavid, “Una explicación,” Bogotá, 4 July 1863.

⁸⁵ For a Conservative leaflet calling for restraint see Anonymous, *Necesidad de quietud* (Bogotá, 16 June 1863). See, by contrast, “For this noble cause, I would give the last drop of my blood,” Juan N. Cadavid, *Mi determinación en la actual crisis* (Colegio, 1863), in BLAAD.

⁸⁶ Damian McElrath, *The Syllabus of Pius IX: Some Reactions in England* (Lourin: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1964), pp. 4–5.

⁸⁷ “Catálogo de los principales errores de nuestra época...,” in *Actas y decretos del Concilio Primero Provincial Neogranadino* (Bogotá: Imprenta Metropolitana, 1869). See Gloria Mercedes Arango de Restrepo and Carlos Arboleda, “La constitución de Rionegro y el Syllabus como dos símbolos de nación y dos banderas en guerra,” in Ortiz Mesa, ed., *Ganarse el cielo*, pp. 87–155. For a contrasting reception of the Syllabus among Catholics in England, see McElrath, *The Syllabus of Pius IX*.

most contentious in the second Concilio Provincial Neogranadino, convened in Bogotá by Arbeláez in 1873 and boycotted by most bishops, as noted above. In May 1874, Arbeláez published a long statement addressed to the clergy to clarify his own position, urging them that “in no way” they should mix the preaching of the gospel with “anything related to politics”; the clergy should never let themselves to be “dragged by the spirit of any political party, whatever their denomination.” It did include, however, a proviso. If “combating the error” and observing the ecclesiastical and divine precepts were considered “intervention in politics, then the Catholic priest can and must exercise such intervention.”⁸⁸ The statement hardly pleased anyone, and alienated further his opponents within the Church. Arbeláez was then forced to defend himself against accusations sent to Rome by his enemies. “Far from favoring the interest of religion,” he wrote to Archbishop Marino Marini on 12 April 1875, the “direct intervention of the clergy in the politics of the country” led to the opposite result. But he explained what he meant by “politics”: He understood well the duties of the Church to combat the errors and defend the dogmas of the Catholic faith, as stated in the encyclical *Quanta Cura* and the *Syllabus*, which he had ordered to be translated and printed in Bogotá. But there was a “politics of faction, fraud, intrigue,” all unrelated to moral principles: it was from this sort of politics that he thought the “clergy must abstain.”⁸⁹

Arbeláez’s letter to Marini revealed not just the vexed question of the Church’s “political involvement” but also the existence of a divided clergy following partisan struggles. He described a clergy highly influential in elections before 1861, an influence that had been detrimental to the Church as it went hand in glove with a “spirit of division.” Such divisions had been in his view responsible for undermining the previous regime while playing into the hands of General Mosquera, hence his successful rebellion. Since 1861, Conservatives had at first kept away from the polls, but in 1869 a Conservative faction, in alliance with a Liberal faction, tried to rally the clergy behind a new presidential candidacy of Mosquera, the very enemy of the Church. Several priests

⁸⁸ “Nos Vicente Arbeláez,” in Restrepo Posada, *Arquidiócesis de Bogotá*, vol. 5, pp. 234, 243. See González, “Iglesia y estado desde la convención de Ríonegro,” pp. 128–53; Ortiz Mesa, *Obispos, clérigos y fieles*, pp. 67–70.

⁸⁹ Arbeláez to Marini, 12 April 1875, in Restrepo Posada, *Arquidiócesis de Bogotá*, vol. 5, p. 247, 248, 250.

did get involved in the campaign, causing “embarrassment to the government of this Church.”⁹⁰ Now, in 1875, when two Liberals were disputing the presidency, some priests and vicars appeared leading the endorsements published in the press in favor of one of the candidates. Arbeláez thus insisted that he had had good reasons to have instructed the clergy not to intervene in politics. The archbishop took issue specifically with the clergy who followed “blindly the inspirations of a faction of the Conservative party, which being the director in politics, pretends to direct at its will the Church and the clergy as well.”⁹¹

However, Archbishop Arbeláez failed to acknowledge the complex issue of the Catholic laity, who also felt affected by the radical measures against the Church—their faith, the education of their families, and their vision of the world were all of a sudden being put in question and severely attacked by the state.⁹² The laity also demanded a stronger political Catholic respond to the radical reforms, and their actions often clashed with the hierarchy. In a pastoral letter of 1873, Archbishop Arbeláez saw the need to remind Catholics of their fidelity to the “laws of the Church,” where he lamented the “zeal” of some Catholic writers who, “wishing to defend the Church do not hesitate” to dictate instructions to the faithful on “difficult issues unresolved by the Prelates,” subverting the “order established by Jesus Christ to govern his Church.”⁹³ By the time he published this pastoral, a new wave of Catholic mobilization was taking shape.

In the state of Cauca, where some thirty Catholic Societies were established in 1875–76, the local bishop was the leading force behind these associations. The Sociedad Católica de Artesanos of Popayán pledged that its members will “never vote...except for candidates who profess the Roman Catholic apostolic religion,” and that they will particularly oppose those who, “calling themselves Catholics,” attack the decisions of the

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 251.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 251. See also Cárdenas, *América Latina: La Iglesia en el siglo liberal*, p. 59.

⁹² This is perhaps best illustrated by the complaints of a US Catholic resident in Panama in the 1860s: “Our churches are closed and these pretended lovers of liberty, whose watchword is ‘civilization’ have plunged the country into a state, which bids fair to rival France in her wildest days of miscalled liberty and infidelity.” Jenny C. White del Bal to Abraham Lincoln, Santiago, 22 February 1864, in *Memoir and Letters of Jenny C. White del Bal*, edited by Rhoda E. White (Boston: Patrick Donahoe, 1868), p. 180

⁹³ *Carta pastoral del Ilmo. Señor arzobispo de Bogotá sobre la fidelidad a las leyes de la iglesia* (Bogotá: El Tradicionista, 1873), p. 9, in BLAAD.

ecclesiastical authority.⁹⁴ This call for unity, however, was not easy to interpret, since the bishop of Popayán and archbishop Arbeláez did not seem to share the same notion of “political involvement.” In Antioquia and Bogotá, laymen were at the forefront of Catholic mobilization. The notable leader in the former was Mariano Ospina, one of the founders of the Conservative party.⁹⁵ But in Bogotá it would be more accurate to identify the leadership of this renewed mobilization with Catholic intellectuals rather than with Conservative politicians. Here Miguel Antonio Caro, the son of the other founder of the Conservative party, stood out, promoting the establishment of the Sociedad San Vicente de Paul and Catholic Youth while editing *El Tradicionista* and publishing several books and essays in defense of Catholic doctrines. Caro pushed his Catholicism away from and above the interests of the Conservative party. Indeed he became an advocate of the need to organize a Catholic party, since he thought that the Conservatives had often betrayed the trust of Catholics. Furthermore, in Caro’s view, “many public men of the Conservative party [were] contaminated with liberal ideas.”⁹⁶ At the top of Caro’s Catholic program for his proposed party was the recognition of the Roman Pope, the infallible head of the Church, followed by the notion that in “eminently Catholic countries, the governments must be eminently Catholic.” His ten-point platform for a Catholic party also included a unique proposal of corporate representation: “the people, the clergy and the enlightened classes must be represented in the legislative bodies.”⁹⁷

There were thus significant differences in both the leadership and the nature of the call for Catholic mobilization in the 1870s. Not all Catholic activists, including of course the clergy, supported the civil war that broke out in 1876, largely motivated by religious outrage against the Liberal educational reform. There is no doubt that the efforts to mobilize Catholics in defense of the Church was sustained and wide in scope, with firm roots in popular sectors and ideologically supported by a militant press, and that the

⁹⁴ Gloria M. Arango de Restrepo, “Estado soberano del Cauca: Asociaciones católicas, sociabilidades, conflictos y discursos político-religiosos, prolegómanos de la guerra de 1876,” in Ortiz Mesa, ed., *Ganarse el cielo defendiendo la religión*, pp. 332, 351.

⁹⁵ For a detailed account, see Loaiza Cano, *Sociabilidad, religión y política*, pp. 255–316.

⁹⁶ Miguel Antonio Caro, “El partido católico,” *El Tradicionista*, 21 November 1871, in Caro, *Obras. Filosofía, religión, pedagogía* (Bogotá: Caro y Cuervo), vol. 1, p. 755.

⁹⁷ Caro, *ibid.*, pp. 758–60. See also Loaiza Cano, *Sociabilidad, religión y política*, p. 316.

religious cleavage continued to be central in the political developments of the country.⁹⁸ Yet no simple bipartisan model emerged from this struggle. Catholics did not form a homogeneous, disciplined movement. Nor did the Liberals. According to *La Sociedad*, in 1875, there were four political-religious trends in Colombia: pure Catholicism, liberal Catholicism, liberals who pretended to be Catholics and pure, radical liberals.⁹⁹ The Liberal split led to the formation of the Independent party around Rafael Núñez, who had already supported a policy of reconciliation towards the Church in 1875 when he had unsuccessfully run for the presidency.

It was Núñez as president in 1886, together with members of the Independent party, who led a coalition with Caro and his fellow partisans, from which the so-called Conservative Hegemony emerged. The new constitution gave the Catholic Church a central place as the upholder of the religion of the nation, in a redefined relationship with the state whose terms were further formalized in a concordat signed with the Vatican in 1887.¹⁰⁰ After years of persecution, the Church, now in power, kept alive its anti-liberal stand, close to the spirit of Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors*.

Once again the question of the Church's participation in politics resurfaced. However, the first notable controversy regarding clerical electioneering after 1886 did not involve its traditional opponents, the Liberals. It exposed instead a clergy divided as a result of divisions within the regime. In 1897, while the Antioqueño clergy backed Caro's initial attempts to be re-elected president, most of the clergy, particularly in Boyacá and Cauca, seemed to support the candidacy of Rafael Reyes.¹⁰¹ In Tunja, a disaffected *Carista* crowd attacked the Episcopal house in reaction to the "exaggerated interference of the clergy in the electoral struggle," according to the governor of Boyacá. The archbishop in Bogotá, Bernardo Herrera Restrepo, issued a pastoral with a message of neutrality, urging the clergy to "fully abstain from political passions."¹⁰² In Pasto, the

⁹⁸ See Loaiza Cano, *Sociabilidad, religión, política*.

⁹⁹ *La Sociedad*, Medellín, 9 October 1875, cited in Loaiza Cano, *Sociabilidad, religión y política*, p. 308.

¹⁰⁰ See González, *Poderes enfrentados*, pp. 249–81. For the text of the concordat, see *Pastoral del ilustrísimo Sr. Obispo de Medellín* (Medellín, 1889), pp. 23–32, in BLAAD.

¹⁰¹ This episode is examined in José Restrepo Posada, *La Iglesia en dos momentos difíciles de su historia* (Bogotá: Kelly, 1971). See also Martínez Silva, *Capítulos de historia política*, vol. 3; and González, *Poderes enfrentados*, pp. 260–61.

¹⁰² Restrepo Posada, *La Iglesia en dos momentos difíciles*, pp. 36 and 27.

intransigent bishop Ezequiel Moreno was in despair, lamenting the division of the “Catholic party” and fearing that Caro was backed by Liberals: “it is truly a *mare magnum* [great sea] agitated by the devil so there would be no understanding.”¹⁰³ In the face of the division, Moreno instructed the parish priests of his diocese to oppose in “absolute” terms any Liberal candidate and to teach “the faithful that they cannot vote for the Liberals without offending God”; if they were approached for advice by members of the “Catholic party,” they should be told to vote with freedom of conscience for any of the wings of the divided “Catholic party”; above all, they should seek unity against the “common enemy.”¹⁰⁴

The “common enemy” was of course liberalism. Hardline positions among doctrinaire Catholics had been reinforced by Felix Sardá y Salvany’s *El liberalismo es pecado* (1884), a tract by a Spanish Carlist reprinted in Bogotá in 1886.¹⁰⁵ “Liberalism is a sin,” Sardá y Salvany stated, “either as a doctrine or as a fact.” He particularly targeted “liberal Catholicism” as “false” and “pagan,” while he defended the need for Catholic political parties to combat liberalism.¹⁰⁶ Some Colombian priests kept their distance from Sardá y Salvany’s postulates—for instance, Baltasar Vélez, who published a couple of long letters in the conservative newspaper *El Repertorio Colombiano* in 1897, which were gathered in a pamphlet that seems to have circulated widely.¹⁰⁷ Vélez distinguished philosophical from political liberalism, clarifying that the Church condemned the former but not the latter. He then noted the generalized existence of intransigent political expressions, the “spirit of party,” that blinded all Colombians, “Liberals, Conservatives, and priests” alike. Clerical intransigence was not just the product of Liberal radicalism but also of Conservative fanaticism, “imposed” on the clergy. The priest, Vélez noted, had become the “unhappy acolyte” of politicians: “he will vote for whom he is told by his

¹⁰³ Fray Ezequiel Moreno to Anita de Caro, Pasto, 16 June 1897, in Carlos Valderrama Andrade, *Un capítulo de las relaciones entre el estado y la Iglesia en Colombia* (Bogotá: Caro y Cuervo, 1986), p. 118. For a brief profile of bishop Moreno, see Malcolm Deas, “San Ezequiel Moreno: El liberalismo es pecado,” *Credencial Historia*, 46 (October 1993), available at <http://www.banrepcultural.org/blaavirtual/revistas/credencial/octubre1993/octubre2.htm>.

¹⁰⁴ Pasto, 20 November 1897, in Valderrama Andrade, *Un capítulo de las relaciones*, pp. 127–28.

¹⁰⁵ Felix Sardá y Salvany, *El liberalismo es pecado. Cuestiones candentes* (Bogotá: Imprenta de F. Torres Maya, 1886).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 27, 160–64.

¹⁰⁷ Baltazar Vélez, “Los intransigentes” (1897), in Valderrama Andrade, *Un capítulo de las relaciones*, pp. 341–92.

master and will tell the people *in which urn and for whom* they should deposit their votes.”¹⁰⁸ Velez’s mild defense of liberal Catholicism was rejected outright by bishop Moreno, for whom no conciliation was possible: there was either liberalism or Catholicism. For Moreno, liberal Catholicism, like all forms of liberalism, was condemned by the Church. There might have been some people who, while not sharing the ideas of liberalism, were “liberals in practice”; they were thus “accomplices” and therefore “responsible to God” for the harm they could inflict upon religion. These included those who voted for Liberal candidates, contributed to the finances of the Liberal party, or subscribed to Liberal newspapers.¹⁰⁹

Bishop Moreno was an intransigent to an extreme not shared by all the prelates, as Ricardo Arias notes.¹¹⁰ Yet the Colombian Catholic Church was slow to come to terms with liberalism, in spite of the moderating efforts led by archbishop Herrera during the first decades of the twentieth century. At first glance, a conciliatory tone seemed to prevail in the instructions issued by the episcopate to the clergy in 1913, regarding their role in politics.¹¹¹ They were asked to “prudently abstain” from interfering in “merely political and civil issues.” Furthermore, the clergy were “specially prohibited” from turning the pulpit into a “profane tribune,” and from belonging to “committees of a political nature”; they were also advised not to be “carried away by the passion of party.” In addition, there were moderate instructions on how to “refute the errors of liberalism,” both from the pulpit and the confessional box: it should not become a “constant theme”; it should be raised “only when required by the circumstances.” Any message of moderation, however, was cloaked in ambiguity if not actually contradicted by the continued condemnation of liberalism. When did an issue cease to be “merely political”? This was a intricate question, open to different interpretations by bishops and priests.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 366–68 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁰⁹ Ezequiel Moreno, “O con Jesucristo o contra Jesucristo” (1897) and “O catolicismo o liberalismo” (1898), in Valderrama Andrade, *Un capítulo de las relaciones*, pp. 393–451. For more detailed examinations of this polemic, see González, “La Iglesia Católica durante la Regeneración y la hegemonía conservadora, 1886-1930,” in González, *Poderes enfrentados*, pp. 263–68; Arias, *El episcopado colombiano*, pp. 63–71. For the extension of this polemic in Boyacá, see Cortés Guerrero, *Curas y políticos*, pp. 157–77.

¹¹⁰ Arias, *El episcopado colombiano*, pp. 69–70.

¹¹¹ “Reglas para el clero” (1913), in *Conferencias episcopales de Colombia* (Bogotá: Editorial El Catolicismo, 1956), pp. 138–47.

“Every political issue involves a religious problem,” the archbishop of Cartagena stated in a circular of 1918; it was therefore “logic that the clergy,” given their duty to defend religion, be involved in political affairs when these affected religion.¹¹² The extent to which “being liberal in politics” was compatible with “being Catholic in religion” thus remained an unresolved problem for the Church. Catholics were forbidden to read some Liberal newspapers, and some of the papers’ editors were excommunicated. In 1924, the Episcopal Conference referred to the National Directorate of the Liberal party as an “anti-Christian sect.”¹¹³

Since the vast majority of the Colombian population—including the Liberals—continued to adhere to Catholicism, the impact of the message of the episcopate and indeed clerical influence over the electorate was limited. “There are Catholics in all parties,” the Liberal leader Rafael Uribe Uribe remarked on an obvious reality in 1912. His book, *De cómo el liberalismo colombiano no es pecado*, was addressed to his fellow partisans, perhaps to calm down any possible anxieties arising from the Church’s condemnations: being a member of the Liberal party was not a contradiction with being a Catholic. But it was also an appeal to the Church to end its involvement in politics: to the bishops to abstain from issuing pastoral letters recommending Conservative candidates; to the priests to abstain from preaching with passion in favor of Conservatism and to abstain too from distributing Conservative voting tickets among their flock.¹¹⁴ The Church’s identification with the Conservative party became most prominent in the contested presidential election of 1922, when accusations against clerical electioneering peaked.¹¹⁵ Liberals denounced the bishop of Medellín for issuing a pastoral, read widely by the priests from their pulpits, threatening their flocks with eternal punishment if they did not vote for the official candidate. In Guateque, the parish priest had presided over a

¹¹² Archbishop Pedro Adan Brioschi, *El clero y la política* (Cartagena: Imprenta de San Pedro Claver, 1918), pp. 2–3.

¹¹³ “Exposición (1924),” in *Conferencias episcopales*, p. 361. See also “Pastoral colectiva de 1916,” in *ibid.* p. 352.

¹¹⁴ Rafael Uribe Uribe, *De cómo el liberalismo colombiano no es pecado* (Bogotá: El Liberal, 1912), p. 65.

¹¹⁵ See a publication of documents by the Liberals denouncing electoral irregularities in *Los partidos políticos en Colombia* (Bogotá: Aguila Negra, 1922). For some insightful examination of these documents in relation to clerical electioneering, see Deas, “The Role of the Church, the Army and the Police,” pp. 166–71.

Conservative meeting. In Tunja, it was claimed that “the clergy...incite [parishioners] to kill Liberals.”¹¹⁶

While the evidence about clerical electioneering may be overwhelming, it is not so clear that the clergy’s involvement determined Catholic behavior at the ballot box and even less that they were in control of the political process. For one thing, the intransigence of the clergy alienated many a Catholic. As president Carlos E. Restrepo—a former Conservative who joined some Liberals to lead the formation of a new party, the Unión Republicana—observed in 1912, when the priests preached “sectarian” Conservative sermons, “those who don’t share [their] political views withdraw from the chapels.”¹¹⁷ Far from deterring Liberals, clerical politics provoked “Liberal enthusiasm.”¹¹⁸ Conservatives did win the presidential election of 1922 but, as Malcolm Deas has noted, the weight of Liberal complaints seems to suggest that they attributed their defeat far more to governmental fraud than to clerical interference. Liberals carried some departments—Atlántico, Cauca, and Valle; the results were almost tied in some others—Magdalena and Tolima; and they also won in some major cities, all evidence of the limited influence of the Church. In an increasingly urban, secularized society the power of the Church was diminishing, in spite of its official role within the regime.¹¹⁹ Indeed the language of some of the pastorals betrayed a sense of a weakened Church authority, sometimes explicitly acknowledged, as in 1930, when the episcopate recommended the “practice of obedience” to their flock, otherwise “if they turn away from their shepherds, how can they be taught by them?” The language of the pastorals also betrayed an episcopate whose authority over the clergy was often undermined by Conservative politicians. “It is not up to *directorios políticos* [political party leadership]...to direct the clergy in political affairs, but to the bishop in his own diocese,” the Episcopal Conference reminded the priests in 1930.¹²⁰ Yet the presidential elections

¹¹⁶ *Los partidos políticos*, pp. 58–61, 125, 129.

¹¹⁷ “Exposición que hace el Presidente de Colombia ante la Santa Sede sobre asuntos político-religiosos” (1912), in Restrepo, *Carlos E. Restrepo antes de la presidencia* (Medellín: Imprenta Departamental, 1982), p. 174.

¹¹⁸ Message from Manizales, 18 January 1922, in *Los partidos políticos*, p. 147. See also Deas, “The Role of the Church, the Army and the Police,” p. 171.

¹¹⁹ Safford and Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society*, pp. 286–87.

¹²⁰ “Instrucciones de la conferencia (1930),” in *Conferencias Episcopales*, p. 152.

that year, when the Church hierarchy clashed over the selection of the Conservative candidate, subverted the episcopate's instructions. For what the whole episode proved was not only that the archbishop of Bogotá was no "elector of electors" but that his open and clumsy interference in the process was the result of conflicting demands and pressures from *directorios políticos*.¹²¹

CONCLUSION: THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, AN ENEMY OF DEMOCRACY?

Clerical involvement in the electoral politics of Colombia rose together with the republic and remained a feature of the political life of the country during the century after independence. The electoral role of the Church, however, varied over time. It went through different stages, fundamentally shaped by its interactions with the liberal forces in the process of building state institutions for representative government. They were not simple interactions. It is important to reiterate the truism that "the Church is not a monolith,"¹²² a reminder of the need to take into account not only the divisions within the clergy but also in the laity. This is made more complex by the fact that the vast majority of the population was Catholic. In addition, the Liberal movement was not a monolith either. But Liberal anticlericalism, at a time of the expansion of the suffrage, did trigger an unprecedented electoral mobilization of Catholics in defense of the Church, bringing to an end, by the mid-nineteenth century, a first stage of cooperation between the Church and liberal state builders.¹²³ Such mobilization, as a result of a religious cleavage, posed serious dilemmas to the Church regarding clerical involvement in the electoral politics of the country which were never fully resolved, although from the period of radical conflict there emerged an intransigent, ultramontane clergy that tended to dominate the behavior of the Church. Throughout the century—whether cooperating, in conflict, or in coalition

¹²¹ For the contemporary account of a member of the Conservative party national directorate, see Aquilino Gaitán, *Por qué cayó el partido conservador?* (Bogotá: Mundo al Día, 1935). See also, Restrepo Posada, *La Iglesia en dos momentos difíciles*; and my essay, "Las elecciones presidenciales de 1930," *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, 7 (September, 2000).

¹²² Thomas C. Bruneau, "Power and Influence: Analysis of the Church in Latin America and the Case of Brazil," *Latin American Research Review*, 8:2 (Summer, 1973), p. 32.

¹²³ The chronology of the process in Colombia has striking similarities with that of Belgium, as examined by Gould. See his *Origins of Liberal Dominance*, chapter 2.

with those in government—the presence of the clergy in electoral politics may have been ubiquitous. Yet the extent to which the Church actually determined electoral developments requires further attention. As Theodore Hoppen has noted in reference to the Irish experience, “*clerical influence* over elections must, as a concept, remain imprecise both as to nature and degree.”¹²⁴

For a democracy, asked José María Samper in 1857, “what may be the result of such heated intervention of the clergy in its political affairs?” For Samper and some of his fellow contemporary Liberals, the question touched upon a problem whose solution left no room for compromise: “either the ruin of Catholicism or the ruin of the republic; either the triumph of the orthodox and ambitious usurper or the triumph of democratic doctrines.”¹²⁵ The Church, in Samper’s view, was opposed to all the requisites for democracy, including intellectual freedom, tolerance, equality of rights, and popular suffrage: “Democracy and the orthodox discipline of Rome are antagonistic—the ultramontane Church and the republic cannot coexist.”¹²⁶ Samper’s postulates were rejected by Manuel María Madiedo, who in 1863 published a defense of the Christian origins of democracy.¹²⁷ “Who founded Catholicism?” asked Madiedo in a tract where he confronted the Liberals, while addressing the clergy and his fellow Catholics. For Madiedo, Catholicism was “democracy’s child,” founded by people “with neither name nor power”: “was not [the birth of Christ] the purest incarnation of democracy?” Like Christ, it was born to “combat power.” His apostles preached the truth to “men of the

¹²⁴ Hoppen, “Priests at the Hustings,” p. 132. See also Cragoe, “Conscience or Coercion?” pp. 141–45; Whyte, “The Influence of the Catholic Clergy,” pp. 239–58; Bruneau, “Power and Influence,” pp. 33–37.

¹²⁵ Samper, *El clero ultramontano*, p. 71.

¹²⁶ Samper, *El clero ultramontano*, p. 94.

¹²⁷ Manuel María Madiedo, *El catolicismo i la libertad. Al clero i a todos* (Bogotá, 1863), in BLAAD. A prolific writer, Madiedo kept his distance from both Liberals and Conservatives, although his Catholicism put him closer to the latter. See Vanessa Niño de Villeros, “La crisis del republicanismo en la Nueva Granada: El cristianismo componente necesario para un buen gobierno,” *Memorias. Revista Digital de Historia y Arqueología desde el Caribe*, 7–12 (July 2010), pp. 128–49, available at www.redalyc.uaemex.mx. See also Melo, “Prólogo,” in *Orígenes de los partidos políticos*, pp. 7–12.

crowd by men of the crowd.” Catholicism was thus “democratic in its origins, in its cult open to everyone, by its symbols, images and pompous festivities.”¹²⁸

The relationship between the Catholic Church and democracy in Colombia during the period covered in this essay has not received much systematic treatment by scholars, although the dominant interpretations are perhaps closer to Samper’s views. There is of course a long tradition in the social sciences that singles out Catholicism as one of the major obstacles for democratic developments in the region. “The Roman Catholic Church in Latin America,” wrote William S. Stokes in 1955, “is hierarchical, authoritarian, and absolutist in both organization and dogma. The Church therefore conditions the individual more towards authoritarianism than toward democracy.”¹²⁹ While the role of the Church is perceived differently following its own changes after the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), its earlier political involvement remains understudied and misunderstood. Recent approaches, however, offer fruitful ways to revise the historical relationship between the Church and modern democracy. Works from various scholars, on both Europe and Latin America, and from history and the social science, call our attention to important aspects of democratization where the Catholic Church, and the religious cleavage in general, may have played a fundamental role: in mobilizing the people to the ballot box, in encouraging political party developments, and in the learning process of habituation to democratic procedures.¹³⁰ The findings of this paper corroborates the validity of these revisionist views.

The centrality of elections in modern, representative democracies is the necessary starting point. From an electoral perspective, Colombian Catholics and the clergy—that is, the Church widely conceived—contributed to the process of democratization by supporting the expansion of the suffrage and by mobilizing voters in defense of their

¹²⁸ Madiedo, *El catolicismo i la libertad*, pp. 3–6, 10, and 11. Madiedo’s text was preceded by a citation from Lammenais and referred to the “immortal O’Connell” in its closing paragraphs.

¹²⁹ William S. Stokes, “Catholicism and Democracy in Latin America,” in Angel del Río, ed., *Responsible Freedom in the Americas* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1955), pp. 361–62.

¹³⁰ See, for example, Anderson, *Practicing Democracy* and “The Divisions of the Pope”; Gould, *Origins of Liberal Dominance*; Valenzuela and Maza Valenzuela, “The Politics of Religion in a Catholic Country.” For a recent reassessment of the role of religious cleavages and political parties in the process of European democratization, see Giovanni Capoccia and Daniel Ziblatt, “The Historical Turn in Democratization Studies: A New Research Agenda for Europe and Beyond,” *Comparative Political Studies*, 43:931 (2010), pp. 946–52.

cause. This was often couched, very early on, in the language of rights and duties. Catholics were repeatedly reminded of their concrete obligation to defend their faith through the careful selection of their representatives in government. They were also reminded of their duties, as citizens, to vote, and to vote according to the legal regulations. Without being the sole cleavage, the religious conflict—which involved fundamental matters of beliefs—led to the formation of political parties, key protagonists in any democratic process. From the narrative offered here, it is noteworthy that Catholic mobilization preceded the establishment of the parties that emerged by mid-nineteenth century; that such mobilization was often led by the laity, sometimes against the wishes of the Catholic hierarchy; and that the religious cleavage did not lead to a simple two-party system.

The process of democratization in Colombia was additionally enhanced by the active electoral involvement of the Church in two ways. Firstly, in response to radical anticlerical measures, Catholics advocated over decades for a plethora of political and civil rights associated with liberal democracy—rights of association, freedom of expression, freedom of education, sometimes even freedom of religion.¹³¹ A Tocquevillian perspective on democracy—one that moves away from elections and focuses on the organization of civil society—would highlight further the role of the Church.¹³² Secondly, the very notion of authority upheld by the Church was an impediment for the consolidation of any Cesarist project. This was clearly expressed in the earlier mobilizations of the 1840s, when Catholics defended not just the division of powers but also a conception of limited state authority.¹³³ *Caudillista* and dictatorial

¹³¹ For a similar argument regarding the Chilean experience, see Sol Serrano and Ivan Jacsik, “El gobierno y las libertades. La ruta del liberalismo chileno en el siglo XIX,” in Iván Jaksic and Eduardo Posada Carbó, eds., *Liberalismo y poder. Latinoamérica en el siglo XIX* (Santiago: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2011).

¹³² See Londoño, *Religion, Culture, and Society*; and Loaiza Cano, *Sociabilidad, religión y política*. For Loaiza Cano, however, these organizational structures were also used to mobilize Catholics for war.

¹³³ As Emile Perreu-Saussine noted regarding the French experience, “by withstanding the pretensions of the ‘enlightened’ state that was persecuting them, Catholics paved the way for a limitation to the state”; see Perreu-Saussine, “French Catholic Political Thought from the Deconfessionalisation of the State to the Recognition of Religious Freedom,” in Ira Katznelson and Gareth Stedman Jones, eds., *Religion and the Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 263.

ambitions, like those of Generals Mosquera and Reyes, thus met with difficulties in an infertile intellectual ground where to liberal notions of limited state power were added those upheld by the Catholic Church.

The claim here is not that the Church was a consistent or explicit pro-democratic agent during the whole period covered by this essay. Catholics had embraced democracy and its fundamental principle of popular sovereignty by mid-nineteenth century, and they continued to support democratic values while in opposition to the subsequent waves of radical anticlericalism. But when the Church hardened its militancy against liberalism and became attached to the postulates of the *Syllabus of Errors*, its views contradicted some of the central tenets of democracy. In the long run, however, through its electoral commitments together with its adherence to a notion of limited state authority, the Catholic Church contributed to the liberal democratic order that by 1930 had taken shape in Colombia. It was more often than not an unwitting contribution, but it is nonetheless important for our better understanding of the complex and paradoxical paths that have led the way forward in the history of democracy.

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BNCD, Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia, digital collection

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