

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307548490>

Tradition, Family and Property (TFP) and the Heralds of The Gospel in advance: The Religious Economy of Brazilian Conservative Catholicism

Article in *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review* · January 2016

DOI: 10.5840/asrr201683124

CITATIONS

3

READS

764

1 author:



Massimo Introvigne

CESNUR

105 PUBLICATIONS 421 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:

Project

Exploring The Church of Almighty God [View project](#)

Tradition, Family and Property (TFP) and the Heralds of The Gospel: The Religious Economy of Brazilian Conservative Catholicism

Massimo Introvigne

CESNUR

ABSTRACT: Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira (1908–1995) was a leading figure in Latin American conservative Catholicism. In 1960, he founded the Brazilian Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property (TFP), which quickly expanded internationally and played a significant role in conservative Catholicism during and after the Second Vatican Council. In the 1970s and 1980s, TFP was often in conflict with liberal Brazilian bishops, while it struggled to define its internal nature and chose between the ecclesial models of either a quasi-religious order or of a secular lay association mostly devoted to political issues. This struggle, after Corrêa de Oliveira's death in 1995, led to a bitter separation between its two main branches. The Heralds of the Gospel were reorganized as a religious order recognized by the Holy See. The *Fundadores* (Founders) of the TFP continued as a lay association with a special interest in conservative politics. The pontificate of Pope Francis has led the *Fundadores* in a direction increasingly critical of the Vatican, while the Heralds of the Gospel remain a religious order within the Catholic Church and have tried to adapt to the agenda and style of the new Pope. This article reconstructs the history of the different organizations tracing their origins to the activities of Corrêa de Oliveira, including the developments after his death, utilizing the framework of the sociological theory of religious economy and of different “niches” in the intra-Catholic religious market.

KEYWORDS: TFP, Heralds of the Gospel, Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira, João Clá Dias, religion in Brazil, Catholic traditionalism

Introduction

This article is a case study of a family of conservative Catholic organizations and movements, with a common origin in the thought and action of Brazilian academic Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira (1908–1995). The different contemporary developments within this family of movements are analysed through the lens of the sociological theory of religious economy. One of the principal tenets of this theory is that “to the degree that religious economies are unregulated and competitive, overall levels of religious commitment will be high. (Conversely, lacking competition, the dominant firm[s] will be too inefficient to sustain vigorous marketing efforts, and the result will be a low overall level of religious commitment, with the average person minimizing and delaying payment of religious costs).”¹ The theory predicts that levels of religiosity will be higher, and religious organizations will be stronger, where pluralism is greater. Of course, classic secularization theories maintained just the opposite.

Religious competition, as competition in other fields, may be either interbrand or intrabrand. Competition, for example, shows its healthy effects in the car market not only when several car manufacturers compete in the same market, but also when a semi-monopolistic car company is able to differentiate between very different product lines and models, thus creating intrabrand alternatives where little interbrand competition exists. This may also be true for religion. Outside the religious economy field, sociologist Niklas Luhmann (1927–1988) analyzed large churches as conglomerates of several different sub-churches or micro-churches (congregations, movements, religious orders), each with a very large degree of internal autonomy and at times pursuing competing agendas.²

‘Differentiation’ was long perceived by sociologists as a key feature of Roman Catholicism in predominantly Catholic countries such as Brazil or Italy. In Italy, largely autonomous movements, fraternities, and similar organizations, with very different theological and political opinions, account for the vast majority of churchgoers. In short, Roman Catholicism is so large that what appears at first sight as a Catholic monopoly in fact hides a vibrant intrabrand religious market, where semi-independent Catholic firms compete for the allegiance of the Roman Catholic population. This intrabrand competition is, of course, not identical to its interbrand counterpart, where Catholics compete with Protestants and others. It may, however, cause similar effects, particularly when one considers that in the market on which religious economy theory was originally based, the United States, the most visible competition is intra-Protestant, with the different Protestant ‘firms’ largely recognizing the other ‘firms’ as legitimate participants

¹Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 201.

²Niklas Luhmann, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000).

in a common Christian enterprise. Competing Roman Catholic ‘firms’ would claim just the same.³

Religious economy focuses on supply. It postulates that demand remains comparatively stable, even over long periods. This happens, the theory argues, because consumers, including consumers of religion, tend to distribute themselves in market niches according to their demographics, financial capabilities, and preferences. As Gary Becker (1930–2014) argued, preferences are the most important factor in markets of symbolic goods.⁴ He also argued that niches tend to remain stable, i.e., consumers moved very slowly from one niche to the other.

Stark and Finke have created several models of religious demand, which distinguish between market niches according to the concepts of strictness and costs.⁵ Religion is stricter when its symbolic costs are higher and when its members are expected to believe and behave in a more traditional and conservative way than society at large. Religious consumers distribute themselves in niches of different strictness. By simplifying more complex models, we may distinguish between five niches: ultra-strict, strict, moderate-conservative, liberal, and ultra-liberal. The liberal niche includes those consumers that are prepared to accept the liberal values prevailing in the modern society; the ultra-liberal niche, those who enthusiastically embrace these values and are willing to give them a religious sanction. By contrast, consumers in the strict niche see the prevailing liberal values as negative and dangerous, and those in the ultra-strict niche require absolute separation from these values, which they perceive as truly perverse and even demonic. Consumers in the moderate-conservative niche do not utterly reject modern values, but feel free to re-interpret them based on religious tradition, while in turn re-interpreting religion in order to make it relevant to the modern world.

Religious consumers also occupy different niches according to their ideas and aspirations about the relationship between religion, culture, and politics. Ultra-strict religious consumers identify religion and culture (and religion and politics), and would not admit any distinction. Those in the strict niche regard the identification as desirable, but realize that it is not always possible, and leave room for some pragmatic compromise. Liberals accept, and ultra-liberals promote, the modern separation between religion and culture—and above all, between religion and politics. Moderate-conservative appreciate that there is, and should

³On Catholic intrabrand competition in the United States, see Stark and Finke, “Catholic Religious Vocation: Decline and Revival,” *Review of Religious Research* 42.2 (2000): 125–145.

⁴Gary Becker, *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

⁵Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 197.

be, a distinction between religion, culture and politics, but would like religion to remain a relevant factor in the public arena.⁶

One of the conclusions of the religious economy theory most supported by empirical data is that niches are not equal in dimensions. There are, indeed, more consumers in the central moderate-conservative niche than in the others; and the strict niche is larger than its liberal and ultra-liberal counterparts are. Religious economy theory confirmed what Dean M. Kelley (1927–1997) argued in his *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*, and answered Kelley's many critics.⁷ American data (which, of course, is somewhat different from that collected in Europe) has confirmed, in a quite spectacular way, the growth of conservative and moderately conservative churches, and the decline of liberal denominations. Religious economy, particularly through the works of Laurence Iannaccone, contributed an explanation based on the free rider theory. A religious group plagued by a high number of free riders would offer to its members boring and unsatisfying religious experiences and many would simply walk away. Conservative and (moderately) strict groups, by raising costs, successfully reduce the number of free riders, thus enjoying more success than their liberal counterparts.⁸

It is also the case that the liberal and ultra-liberal *religious* niches are smaller because consumers interested in the symbolic goods offered in these niches have a great number of *secular* alternatives, which is not true for the other niches. Consumers who wish to express their support for modern liberal values may do so in dozens of non-religious organizations, without having to pay the specific costs associated even with the most liberal forms of religion. Religious consumers, thus, are willing to pay reasonably high costs for obtaining the benefits associated with intense and satisfying religious experiences, offered by groups where the number of free riders is limited.⁹

These costs, however, should remain reasonable. If costs are too high, only a handful of radicals will be prepared to pay them, as evidenced by the small number of members attracted by high-demand communal new religious movements. This explains why the ultra-strict niche remains smaller than the strict one, and much

⁶See *ibid.*; Stark and Introvigne, *Dio è tornato. Indagine sulla rivincita delle religioni in Occidente* (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 2003); Introvigne, *Fondamentalismi. I diversi volti dell'intransigenza religiosa* (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 2004).

⁷Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

⁸Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Sacrifice and Stigma: Reducing Free-Riding in Cults, Communes, and Other Collectives," *Journal of Political Economy* 100.2 (1992): 271–292; Iannaccone, "Why Strict Churches are Strong," *American Journal of Sociology* 99.5 (1994): 1180–1211.

⁹*Ibid.*

smaller than the moderate-conservative.¹⁰ It is also the case that, while niches normally remain stable, religious organizations move from niche to niche. Many organizations start in the ultra-strict niche but, as their foundational charisma becomes routinized, gradually move towards the mainline, first to the strict and then to the moderate-conservative niche. They may also go on and move further left to the liberal and ultra-liberal niches, but in this case their membership would normally decline, as happened in the case of several Northern European liberal Protestant churches. Very few extremist groups remain forever in the ultra-strict niche, where they end up declining or turning to violence. Most move on. This is, of course, a religious economic way of revisiting the classic ‘sect to church’ model elaborated by H. Richard Niebuhr (1894–1962).¹¹ With the difference, however, that there is nothing unavoidable in the process,¹² and that confronted with the decline experienced when they reach the liberal niche, some organizations may pass through conservative revivals, and in fact go back ‘from church to sect.’

Brazil, Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira and TFP

Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira was born in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1908, the scion of two prominent aristocratic Brazilian families. His grandfather’s brother, João Alfredo Corrêa de Oliveira (1835–1915), had been the prime minister of Imperial Brazil responsible for the ‘Golden Law’ that abolished slavery in 1888.¹³ In 1908, Brazil was largely a monopolistic religious market, dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, although in the larger marketplace of ideas a vigorous anticlerical and secularist movement challenged Catholicism. The aristocratic families were divided among themselves: the same João Alfredo Corrêa de Oliveira was also a Grand Master-elect of the very anticlerical Brazilian Freemasonry, although he

¹⁰Iannaccone, “Toward an Economic Theory of ‘Fundamentalism,’” *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics* 153 (1997): 100–116; Iannaccone, “Religious Extremism: Origins and Consequences,” *Contemporary Jewry* 21 (2000): 8–29; Iannaccone and Introvigne, *Il mercato dei martiri. L’industria del terrorismo suicida* (Torino: Lindau, 2004).

¹¹Helmut Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1929).

¹²Finke and Stark, *The Churaching of America, 1776–1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

¹³For a biography of Corrêa de Oliveira and a bibliography see Introvigne, *Una battaglia nella notte. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira e la crisi del XX secolo nella Chiesa* (Milano: Sugarco, 1998). The point of view of one of the branches of Corrêa de Oliveira’s movement, the *Fundadores* (see below), is expressed in the apologetic biography by the Italian historian Roberto de Mattei, *The Crusader of the 20th Century: Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira* (Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 1998). Older studies such as Thomas Niehaus and Brady Tyson, “The Catholic Right in Contemporary Brazil: The Case of the Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family, and Property (TFP)” (in *Religion in Latin American Life and Literature*, ed. Lyle C. Brown [Waco: Baylor University Press, 1980], 394–409), have been rendered somewhat outdated by subsequent developments.

never assumed the role, being too busy with his political affairs. He eventually abandoned his anticlericalism and died a pious Catholic. On Plinio's mother's side, there were also both liberal anticlerical figures, such as General Antônio Cândido Rodrigues (1850–1934), a cousin of both parents of Plinio's mother, and saintly Catholic figures. The latter included Sister Dulce Rodrigues dos Santos (1901–1972), a cousin of Plinio's mother whose process of beatification was commenced in 1997. Pope Francis declared her a venerable on April 3, 2014.

Plinio's mother herself, Lucilia Ribeiro dos Santos Corrêa de Oliveira (1876–1968), was extremely pious, and exerted a notable influence on her son. Lucilia's mother, Gabriela Rodrigues Ribeiro dos Santos (1852–1934), was a monarchist activist, and introduced Plinio at a very young age to the circles gravitating around the exiled Imperial family (Brazil had become a republic in 1889). Plinio attended a Jesuit high school in São Paulo before earning a doctorate in Law at that city's university. He joined the Jesuit-led Marian Congregations in 1925, founded his university's Catholic Action group in 1929, and quickly emerged as a leading figure among São Paulo's Catholic activists. He was also active as a monarchist, and co-operated with the African Brazilian poet Arlindo José da Veiga Cabral dos Santos (1902–1978), a member of the Marian Congregations and the founder of Brazil's largest monarchist movement, known as Patrianovism.

In 1932, Corrêa de Oliveira was one of the founders of Brazil's Catholic Electoral League (LEC): not a political party but a group selecting and supporting Catholic candidates in various parties. Although LEC leaders were normally not candidates themselves, the peculiar electoral system in the State of São Paulo persuaded the LEC to ask Corrêa de Oliveira to run in the 1933 elections for the National Assembly, which would go on to draft a new Constitution. He ended up, at age 24, being the candidate elected with the highest vote in the whole of Brazil. The dictatorship of Getúlio Dornelles Vargas (1882–1954)—which Corrêa de Oliveira strongly opposed—put an end to his political career. He continued his activity as a lawyer and university professor and in 1940 became president of São Paulo's Catholic Action.¹⁴

Intrabrand competition within Brazilian Catholicism was almost absent before the 1930s. Modernism, the liberal dissent against the Vatican that had been popular in Europe and the United States at the beginnings of the twentieth century, had been almost completely absent from Brazil. In the 1930s, however, political divisions emerged. The most liberal Catholics were in favour of Vargas, since they considered his social programme as quite progressive. A sizeable number of Catholics joined the right-wing Integralist opposition party of Plínio Salgado (1895–1975), whose members, the 'green shirts,' were often described as the 'Brazilian fascists.' The general secretary of the Integralist party in 1934

¹⁴See Introvigne, *Una battaglia nella note*, 13–50.

was himself a priest, Father Hélder Câmara (1909–1999), who after World War II would become an influential and liberal bishop.¹⁵ Traditional conservatives such as Corrêa de Oliveira, most of them monarchists, disliked both Vargas and Salgado, whom they regarded as different incarnations of the struggle for a modern, centralist, populist and anti-traditional system of government. The political division created an effective intrabrand and intra-Catholic competition, the more so since theological issues were soon added to politics. Those favoring either Vargas or Salgado often espoused a more liberal theology imported from Continental Europe from authors such as Jacques Maritain (1882–1973), which penetrated the Catholic Action and gained the cautious support of some bishops.

Corrêa de Oliveira strongly opposed the new theology, as evidenced by his book *Em defesa de Ação Católica* (1943),¹⁶ which was both successful and controversial. The Archbishop of São Paulo, Carlos Carmelo de Vasconcelos Motta (1890–1982), reacted to the book by excluding Corrêa de Oliveira from all official positions within the Archdioceses. Motta also tried to marginalize the two priests who had offered the most open support to Corrêa de Oliveira, Father Antonio de Castro Mayer (1904–1991) and Father Geraldo de Proença Sigaud S.V.D. (1909–1999). The Vatican, however, later both praised the book and consecrated Mayer and Sigaud as bishops.

It was together with Mayer, now Bishop of Campos, that Corrêa de Oliveira launched the magazine *Catolicismo* in 1951. In 1959, the magazine published the first version of his main work, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*.¹⁷ By that time, the religious market had experienced several notable changes in Brazil. The growth of Pentecostalism had created effective interbrand competition. The new liberal theology was now firmly established in Brazil, and would eventually acquire the strong support of a new generation of bishops, including Hélder Câmara, appointed auxiliary Bishop of Rio de Janeiro in 1952. First in this position and then as Archbishop of Recife, he would go on to become a dominant influence in the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB) for more than forty years.

Gradually, the intrabrand Catholic competition shaped itself with offers catering to the different niches. The liberal niche became the main target of the CNBB under Câmara. Groups influenced by Marxism targeted the ultra-liberal niche and later produced the most radical currents of liberation theology. Several religious orders and other organizations courted the moderate-conservative niche, including Opus Dei and the Legionaries of Christ. Those ‘silent bishops’

¹⁵Margaret Todaro Williams, “Integralism and the Brazilian Catholic Church,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 54.3 (August 1974): 431–452, at 450.

¹⁶Plínio Corrêa de Oliveira, *Em defesa de Ação Católica* (São Paulo: Ave Maria, 1943).

¹⁷Corrêa de Oliveira, “Revolução e Contra-Revolução,” special issue (no. 100) of *Catolicismo* (1959).

who disapproved of the CNBB, although they did not attack it explicitly, were also regarded with sympathy by Catholics in the same niche.¹⁸ Only a small minority of bishops offered a brand of Catholic theology that was conservative enough for those in the strict niche. The Brazilian Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property (TFP), founded by Corrêa de Oliveira in 1960 with a core of celibate, full-time members proposed an offer that catered to the strict and ultra-strict niches in both its theology and structure.

At Vatican II, Brazilian bishops played an important role. Some of them were part of the conservative opposition to the Council's reforms.¹⁹ Corrêa de Oliveira traveled to Rome in order to support the efforts of these bishops. Other Brazilian bishops, according to Melissa Wilde, practiced in the Council a "mimetic isomorphism" towards Communism.²⁰ They believed that Communism was a vital and growing force in Brazil, and that Catholics should act isomorphically by both offering a believable anti-capitalist message to the poor and adopting some of the structures developed by the left-wing political organizations. This attitude after Vatican II generated the movement of the base ecclesial communities (CEBs). Anti-capitalism was at the very core of this brand of liberation theology. Although the latter came in various shapes and degrees, it became the dominant orientation of the Brazilian Catholic establishment in the 1970s and early 1980s. Some CEBs, openly Marxist, covered the ultra-liberal niche, and the CNBB repositioned itself firmly in the liberal niche. Those who still wanted to cater to the moderate-conservative centre, such as the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, experienced some hostility from the CNBB. Corrêa de Oliveira's TFP was explicitly disavowed by the CNBB through a note dated April 19, 1985, mentioning the "lack of communion" with the Brazilian bishops but also "disturbing reports" about a personality cult of the founder and his mother.²¹ A process of marginalization and amplification of deviance followed, in which the TFP moved from the strict niche to the ultra-strict.

Catholics unhappy with the CNBB did exist in that niche, and TFP recruited almost two million donors prepared to contribute more or less regularly to the campaigns carried out by some 1,000 full-time members, all male and most of

¹⁸Thomas C. Bruneau, *The Political Transformation of the Brazilian Catholic Church* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 114.

¹⁹See Rodrigo Coppe Caldeira, 'Os baluartes da tradição: a antimodernidade católica brasileira no Concílio Vaticano II' (Ph.D. Diss.; Juiz de Fora: Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora, 2009).

²⁰Melissa Wilde, "Who Wanted What and Why at the Second Vatican Council?," *Sociologica* 1, available online only at <http://www.sociologica.mulino.it/doi/10.2383/24189>. See also Wilde, *Vatican II. A Sociological Analysis of Religious Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

²¹CNBB, "Nota," *Osservatore Romano*, Spanish edition, n. 408, July 7, 1985, p. 12.

them in their twenties and thirties. Marginalized as it was by the bishops, the TFP was less able to cater to those in the strict (but not ultra-strict) and moderate-conservative niche. Both niches suffered a lack of offer between Vatican II and the 1980s.

In the 1980s, the events surrounding the separation between the archconservative French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre (1905–1991)—called by the media ‘traditionalist,’ although the latter term has several different meanings—and the Vatican created a counter-effect. Corrêa de Oliveira refused to follow Lefebvre in his break from Rome, and this eventually led to the separation between the TFP and its main supporter among the Brazilian bishops, Mgr. Antonio de Castro Mayer, who sided with Lefebvre and was eventually excommunicated by the Vatican together with him in 1988. A significant number of followers of Mayer (who, in the latest years of his life, became Corrêa de Oliveira’s harshest foe) both created a competition in the ultra-strict niche with the TFP and caused the association to reposition itself.²² In order to differentiate itself from Bishop Mayer’s followers, the TFP slowly moved from the ultra-strict niche to the strict. However, marginalization by the CNBB continued.

The insufficient intrabrand competition may explain why in the interbrand religious market the Catholic Church lost ground to the Pentecostals, whose number in that period may have surpassed the number of active, church-going Catholics.²³ Sociological studies suggest that CEBs and liberation theology, although studied with great interest by social scientists and theologians, were always less successful than they claimed to be.²⁴ From the point of view of religious economy, their offer reached almost exclusively the liberal and ultra-liberal niche, while most Catholics are located in the other niches. While the CEBs proclaimed the Church’s preferential option for the poor, quite a few Brazilians of the poorest classes voted with their feet and expressed their preferential option for the Pentecostals.

The pontificate of John Paul II (1920–2005), and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger’s mandate as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, were characterized by Rome’s attempt to discipline the Brazilian Church and to change the prevailing state of affairs. While a different liberation theology, maintaining a ‘preferential

²²An apologetic biography of Mayer is David Allen White, *The Mouth of the Lion: Bishop Antonio de Castro Mayer & the Last Catholic Diocese*, (Kansas City: Angelus Press, 1998).

²³R. Andrew Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty* (New Brunswick, NJ/London: Rutgers University Press, 1997); Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits: Latin America’s New Religious Economy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

²⁴Clodovis M. Boff, OSM, “Teologia da Libertação e volta ao fundamento,” *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* 67, no. 268 (October 2007): 1001–1022; Malik Tahar Chaouch, *L’Actualité de la théologie de la libération en Amérique latine: déclin et héritages* (Cahiers de l’Institut Religioscope, no. 1; Fribourg: Institut Religioscope, 2008).

option for the poor' but critical of Marxism, was allowed and even promoted,²⁵ pro-Marxist liberation theology was condemned in 1984,²⁶ as were prominent individual liberation theologians, including Father Leonardo Boff O.F.M.,²⁷ who eventually left the Catholic Church. More moderate bishops were appointed. Although change was very slow and the process was never fully completed, most ultra-liberal offers were declared non-Catholic or quietly silenced. A significant number of bishops supported movements catering to the moderate-conservative niche. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal obtained a larger recognition. Other moderate-conservative groups, such as Opus Dei or the Legionaries of Christ, were also actively promoted; at least by some bishops. CEBs declined and in a number of parishes were replaced by Charismatic and other less liberal groups. As the religious economy theory may have easily predicted, this move towards niches where the demand was higher was quite successful in terms of popular reaction to the offer. The hemorrhage to Pentecostal churches, if not arrested, was significantly slowed down.²⁸

Within this context of the 1990s and the 2000s, the Vatican, in the person of Cardinal Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, and some of his key associates—following suggestions coming from some bishops in Brazil—realized (of course, without using this language) that there were quite a few Catholics in the strict and ultra-strict niches of the religious market, and that abandoning them would be a mistake. In Europe and elsewhere, initiatives were taken towards reconciliation even with those ultra-strict movements that the Vatican regarded as schismatic, such as the Society of Saint Pius X founded by Archbishop Lefebvre, although later events would confirm that such initiatives were thwart with difficulties.²⁹ In Brazil, after the death of Corrêa de Oliveira in 1995, a process that had started in his last years matured, leading to a fateful set of events.

²⁵Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation: "The Truth Makes Us Free"* (Vatican City: Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, 1986).

²⁶Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation"* (Vatican City: Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, 1984).

²⁷Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Notification on the Book "Church: Charism and Power" by Father Leonardo Boff O.F.M.* (Vatican City: Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, 1985).

²⁸The process is discussed in Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits*.

²⁹There is a large literature on the Society of St Pius X. Although popularly known for its refusal of post-Vatican II liturgy, in fact its criticism of the Second Vatican Council extends to the main architecture of the Council and its documents. Particularly, the Society regards as incompatible with Catholic traditional teachings Vatican II documents on ecumenism, inter-religious dialogue, and religious liberty.

Fundadores and Heralds of the Gospel

There had been several internal discussions during the life of Corrêa de Oliveira about the exact nature of TFP. Since it included a majority of members that were celibate and lived in communal houses, some leaders favored its evolution into a religious order or society. This was discussed several times among the leadership, and ultimately rejected since it would have submitted the TFP to the direct jurisdiction of the Brazilian bishops, the majority of whom were hostile to the movement. Additionally, Corrêa de Oliveira was not persuaded that the model of a religious society or congregation was suitable to TFP. In fact, he thought that TFP was somewhere in the middle between a religious congregation and a movement of lay Catholics active on cultural and political issues.

A tension did exist within TFP between the two possible structures—religious congregation and lay movement. It was only resolved through the charismatic leadership of Corrêa de Oliveira. When he died, those favoring the model of a religious congregation and those maintaining the model of a lay movement separated. The separation was quite painful, and was complicated by issues of leadership, money, and whether women should also be admitted (during Corrêa de Oliveira's lifetime, they could not become members but only 'cooperators' of TFP). It led to one of the most complicated court cases in the history of Brazilian law, which started in 1997 and concluded only fifteen years later in 2012.

The short version of this history is that a majority of the Brazilian members, under the charismatic leadership of João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, did not accept the bylaws of TFP which vested all authority in a directorate of eight older 'founding members' (*Fundadores*), a circle of which Clá Dias was not part. Clá Dias's supporters sued the TFP claiming that certain provisions of the bylaws were either invalid or against the Brazilian Constitution. They lost in the first court action in 1998, but won on appeal in 2002. After a further ten-year bitter fight, the Clá Dias faction finally won before the Supreme Court in 2012.³⁰ Brazilian law allows for further recourses calling for a reconsideration of the Supreme Court verdict. The *Fundadores* did file these recourses, but their chances of success are virtually non-existent. Accordingly, Clá Dias's followers now control the name TFP in Brazil. The *Fundadores*, however, still control the trademark TFP in other countries, including the United States, France, Italy, and Australia. The original 'founding members' and those loyal to them do use the name TFP in

³⁰For a story of the conflict see Introvigne, *Una battaglia nella notte*, 219–256. For a detailed legal analysis, see Ricardo Emilio Zart, "A horizontalização na aplicação dos direitos fundamentais nas relações privadas e a democracia nos órgãos decisórios de pessoas jurídicas de direito privado: O caso TFP," *Anais eletrônicos do III Simpósio Internacional de Direito: dimensões materiais e eficácia dos direitos fundamentais, Chapecó—Santa Catarina—26 de outubro de 2012*, 105–125 (available online only at <http://editora.unoesc.edu.br/index.php/simposiointernacionaldedireito/article/view/2233>).

these countries, but cannot use it in Brazil, where their group is simply called Association of the Founders (*Fundadores*), although they also operate an Institute Plínio Corrêa de Oliveira.

Clá Dias and his friends, however, make limited use of the trademark TFP. In 1999, they founded a different organization, the Heralds of the Gospel. The latter is what they would have liked the TFP to become: a religious congregation, which was recognized by the Vatican in 2001 as an association of pontifical right. Their members practice celibacy and include women, who live in separate houses. The Heralds downplay in their publications and Web sites their historical link with Corrêa de Oliveira, although he is now mentioned more often than he was some years ago, and the older members maintain a strong private loyalty to his memory.³¹ The Heralds also publish articles and books on Corrêa de Oliveira's saintly mother, Dona Lucilia, and in 2013 managed to have one of them co-published by Libreria Editrice Vaticana, the Vatican's own publishing house.³² When compared to the similar three-volume work Clá Dias published during Corrêa de Oliveira's lifetime,³³ some passages appear to have been rewritten in a more moderate style, but the book remains substantially the same. It is no minor achievement for the Heralds to have had it co-published by the Vatican press, considering that an exaggerated and somewhat extravagant cult of Lucilia's personality was one of the main accusations launched by the Brazilian bishops against the old TFP.³⁴

On the other hand, the followers of Clá Dias still claim that the Heralds of the Gospel, an association of pontifical right, and the (Brazilian) TFP, a lay socio-political organization, are in fact different and separate. Most of the activities of those members of TFP who sided with Clá Dias in 1997, at any rate, are now carried out under the name Heralds of the Gospel. Some former members of the TFP and other Heralds have been ordained as priests, including Clá Dias. Political activism is almost completely absent from Clá Dias's organizations.

In the United States, another legal saga concerned the particular, and vaguely medieval, habit or religious costume worn by both the *Fundadores* and the Heralds, which is of great significance for both groups. In 2001, the Foundation for a Christian Civilization, connected with the *Fundadores*, filed a U.S. trademark application for the habit. In 2003, Mary Queen of the Third Millennium, Inc., an organization connected with the Heralds of the Gospel, opposed the applica-

³¹The Heralds publish a *Revista Dr Plínio* devoted to Corrêa de Oliveira and have started an edition of his *Opera Omnia* (see the first two volumes—São Paulo: Retornarei, 2008 and 2009). However, these publications are intended for internal circulation and are not sold through the Heralds' Web sites and large circulation magazines.

³²João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, *Donna Lucilia* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, and Roma: Araldi del Vangelo, 2013).

³³Clá Dias, *Dona Lucilia*, 3 voll. (São Paulo: Artpress, 1995).

³⁴The matter is discussed in Introvigne, *Una battaglia nella notte*, 195–203.

tion before the Trademark Trial and Appeal Board (TTAB) of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, claiming that Mr. (later Father) João Clá Dias created the habit, which should now belong to the Heralds for their exclusive use. Another argument of the Heralds was that, at any rate, the trademark of the habit was not inherently distinctive and was, accordingly, invalid. Mr. Clá Dias joined the case as a third party but later refused to be cross-examined in the U.S. and was excluded from the case, thus leaving only two parties, the Foundation and Mary Queen of the Third Millennium.

It is worth noting that this may well have been the longest case in the whole history of the TTAB. The TTAB noted in its 2009 decision that it had to do “an exercise in patience”; that it “question[ed] the need for the voluminous testimony” that “strained the limited resources of the Board”; and that it understood too well that “the parties have their differences outside of this proceeding; it would appear that this opposition merely is their fight ‘du jour’ in a series of battles.”³⁵ This also explained the extraordinary costs of the proceedings. Normally, a TTAB case should not cost more than \$50,000, while each party spent here in excess of \$500,000.

The TTAB did not examine whether Mr. Clá Dias really designed the habit (as he and his organization claimed), or whether Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira created it. This would have been a copyright rather than a trademark question. Moreover, Clá Dias preferred to leave the case rather than being cross-examined. What the TTAB did was to apply to this unusual case the usual standards for trademark cases. The TTAB did recognize that uniforms might be valid trademarks. But they should either be inherently distinctive, or should have become distinctive through a long and well-advertised use. The TTAB concluded that the habit was not inherently distinctive. It was not so much different from other religious habits, and not original enough to be inherently eligible for trademark registration. “The habit at issue does not strike us as so unique, unusual or unexpected in connection with religious garb.”³⁶

Given that the habit was not inherently unique, did it become distinctive through large, protracted and exclusive use? No, said the TTAB. The use was indeed protracted (at least from 1976). But it was not “large.” “Large” within the American legal context means *very* large, denoting something that a significant part of the American population has become aware of. This, the TTAB argued, was not the case for the habit. Accordingly, the TTAB concluded that the trademark applied for by the Foundation was not eligible for registration.

³⁵Trademark Trials and Appeal Board, United States Patent and Trademark Office, *Mary Queen of the Third Millennium, Inc. v. The Foundation for a Christian Civilization, Inc.* (Opposition no. 91157073). Opinion filed on March 25, 2009, p. 6.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 29.

Although the Heralds quickly claimed that they had “won” the case, in fact it was only a half victory. They had asked the TTAB that “the Heralds of the Gospel, represented in the United States by opposer Mary Queen of the Third Millennium, should be recognized by this Board as the owner of the habit.”³⁷ The Board, however, stated that the habit could not form the object of a legal monopoly: everybody can use it. It noted that the Heralds of the Gospel would have a lot of trouble, should they try in turn to register the habit as *their* trademark. “If the roles somehow ever were reversed, that is, if opposer were to attempt to register the mark, opposer would face some of the same hurdles experienced by applicant in obtaining a registration of the habit.”³⁸ The conclusion is that both groups, Heralds of the Gospel and *Fundadores*, are legally allowed to use the same habit in the United States.

Apart from these seemingly never-ending legal disputes, the history of the Heralds of the Gospel is somewhat extraordinary.³⁹ They grew very rapidly, and have now several thousand celibate members in seventy-eight countries. Both their Vatican recognition and the ordination of several leaders as priests was surprisingly quick. They also achieved some prominence in the activities of the Brazilian Catholic Church, best evidenced by their very public role during Pope Benedict XVI’s visit to Brazil in 2007 and the celebrations for the hundredth anniversary of the Archdiocese of São Paulo in 2008 (although in 2013, under the new pontificate of Francis, the Heralds appeared less prominently in the World Youth Day celebrated in Rio de Janeiro). As some bitter comments by liberal theologians noted, they may downplay their link with Corrêa de Oliveira but the leaders are, after all, largely the same persons who in the early 1990s were marginalized by the Brazilian bishops for their roles within the TFP.

Organizations like the Heralds of the Gospel may fare less well in Pope Francis’s Catholic Church. Some Brazilian commentators saw a reference to the Heralds when the new Pope visited Brazil and, in speaking to the Latin American Bishops, criticized on July 28, 2013 in Rio de Janeiro “the restoration of outdated manners and forms which, even on the cultural level, are no longer meaningful. In Latin America it is usually to be found in small groups, in some new religious congregations, in exaggerated tendencies toward doctrinal or disciplinary ‘safety.’ Basically it is static, although it is capable of inversion, in a process of regression. It seeks to ‘recover’ the lost past.”⁴⁰ The Heralds’ publications, on the other hand,

³⁷Ibid., 13.

³⁸Ibid., 43.

³⁹See Gizele Zanotto, “Os Arautos do Evangelho no espectro católico contemporâneo,” *Revista Brasileira de História das Religiões* 10 (2011): 279–298.

⁴⁰Pope Francis, “Address to the Leadership of the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America during the General Coordination Meeting,” Rio de Janeiro, July 28, 2013. Available from the

while maintaining their traditional outlook, do cover regularly the new Pope's documents and speeches.

On the other hand, the *Fundadores* seem to be increasingly disturbed by Pope Francis's attitudes and theological proclivities. They answered with a renewed emphasis on criticism of Vatican II—a theme present in Corrêa de Oliveira, but somewhat less emphasized during the pontificate of Benedict XVI—and what appears to be a retrenchment and a step back from the strict to the ultra-strict niche. A significant incident was Pope Francis's meeting on October 28, 2014 with the World Meeting of Popular Movements, convened by the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. The meeting was attended by many Latin American agro-reformist and other movements with which the old TFP had crossed swords during Corrêa de Oliveira's lifetime, denouncing them as crypto-communist. The *Fundadores* were deeply disturbed by the Vatican's co-operation with these groups, and their media openly criticized the Pope.⁴¹

There are several interesting sociological questions to be asked. During the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI there were changes within the Catholic Church, both in general and in Brazil, which made conservative authors such as Corrêa de Oliveira both more acceptable and more mainstream. Scholarly studies evidencing the fundamental orthodoxy of Corrêa de Oliveira's thought also helped. But the Heralds of the Gospel went beyond all this and, on the other hand, in their rare mentions of Corrêa de Oliveira they emphasized his spiritual rather than his political thought. Without presupposing the existence of a single conscious main strategist, we may see the emergence of the Heralds of the Gospel as part of a Catholic strategy in Brazil (and other countries) to re-modulate its offer in order to meet the demand in the moderate-conservative and strict niches. These had been left somewhat unattended in the 1980s and early 1990s, thus inadvertently favoring the growth of some Pentecostal movements. The Heralds of the Gospel catered exactly to these niches, and their success confirmed that there existed a demand in search of an offer. The fact that the Heralds of the Gospel, whose leadership is largely composed of former prominent TFP members, downplayed their relationship with Corrêa de Oliveira and thus allowed a number of Brazilian bishops to support them, without either revisiting the history of the CNBB or alienating the more liberal members of the clergy and of the episcopate itself. Charisma is often routinized in the history of the Catholic Church by sanitizing controversial aspects of a movement's founder.

Vatican's Web site, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130728_gmg-celam-rio.html.

⁴¹See, e.g., Nelson Ramos Barreto, "Incontro mondiale dei Movimenti popolari in Vaticano. Tentativo di far rivivere movimenti rivoluzionari?" <http://www.atfp.it/rivista-tfp/2014/231-dicembre-2014/1013-tentativo-di-far-rivivere-movimenti-rivoluzionari.html>.

On the other hand, those who did not follow Clá Dias, i.e., the *Fundadores*, remained active in Brazil, the United States, Australia, France, and elsewhere. Rumors of their demise were grossly exaggerated: there are still hundreds of full-time celibate members (in their case, male only, since they maintain the founder's policy excluding women from full membership). They cater to the stricter sectors of the strict niche and compete with the remaining followers of the Lefebvre-Mayer movement for the allegiance of those Catholics willing to remain in the ultra-strict niche. Both *Fundadores* and Heralds declare their submission to the Pope. The *Fundadores*, however, unlike the Heralds, do reserve the right to keep alive Corrêa de Oliveira's criticism of Vatican II, of the CNBB, and even of certain positions of the Popes. They are quite vocal in protesting whenever, in their opinion, Brazilian and other bishops deviate from the Roman orthodoxy. They also criticize what they see as dangerous trends in the pontificate of Pope Francis, and remain active in pro-life, pro-family and anti-Communist political campaigns that the Heralds of the Gospel have largely abandoned in favor of more strictly religious and spiritual endeavors.

Religious economy theory helps to explain why the *Fundadores* both did not disappear and remain smaller than the Heralds of the Gospel. Religious demand tends to remain quite stable in the long period. The strict niche is smaller than the moderate-conservative niche, but is still comparatively large. The ultra-strict niche is even smaller, although not insignificant. By operating in these niches, the *Fundadores's* offer continues to meet a specific demand. On the other hand, the demand is unevenly distributed among the niches and there are more Catholics in the moderate-conservative niche than in the strict one. By positioning themselves in the moderate-conservative niche, the Heralds of the Gospel were able to attract a larger audience than the *Fundadores*, who elected to operate in the strict niche only, and with Pope Francis's accession to the pontificate further moved towards the ultra-strict end of the spectrum.

Corrêa de Oliveira's posterity, in its two competing incarnations of the Heralds and the *Fundadores*, seems to be playing a significant role in the restructuring of the intra-Catholic Brazilian religious market. Its history confirms that, despite an almost exclusive focus by media and scholars for decades on the liberal niche of the market, CEBs and liberation theology, other niches also exist. Of course *Fundadores*, Heralds of the Gospel, Vatican officers and Brazilian bishops, in the event that they read this paper, would probably claim that, by acting as they did, they did not have in mind markets, niches or even church growth strategies but the Gospel and the truth only. Nothing in this paper is meant to deny this very legitimate claim. Yet, actions motivated by the love for the Gospel are still open to sociological analysis, which may help explaining whether some forms of missionary activity or apostolate succeed while others fail or meet with a limited success.