

# God Rules the Kingdom of the World Through Human Reason: Relations and Distinctions between Faith and Politics

## 6.1 Introduction

At present the relation between religion and power is being intensively discussed in Brazilian politics. Especially, evangelical groups of Pentecostal tradition from almost all currents participated in the presidential campaign of 2018 and were represented, in some way, by several candidates. The main topics of debate were issues that are dear to the Catholic and Pentecostal traditions, viz. sexual morality and the preservation of the family in the traditional sense of Christian culture in Brazil. As a result, the main topics of discussion were not focused on political and economic issues but highlighted Christian values in Brazilian society. Topics of polemics against and in favor of the rights of women, blacks and minorities such as indigenous people and LGBT groups were at the center of discussions.

As seen in a previous chapter, there have been moments in history and there are sectors of society that deny the theological foundation of culture and the modern state. On the other hand, there is a large part of the population that claims that politics, culture and education must be determined by concerns and values of the Christian tradition. In this way, religion and politics are united in an explosive relation as church interests are imposed on state policies. Consequently, the criteria adopted for state policies are the confession of faith and the moral values of Christian sectors of the population. There is a longing among broad sectors that society be submitted to a process of Christianization through the power exerted by the state. For the fulfilment of this project the phrase “God above everything” is invoked. Thus, the invocation of God becomes an integral part of the government program of a modern state (Watson, 2018). Other countries besides Brazil follow a similar line of thinking. The most notorious case could be seen in Donald Trump’s election to the American presidency (Araújo 2017, 323-357). Just as Brazilian politicians and churches try to mix and amalgamate religion and the state, Trump’s project has this goal too. In his comment on a speech given by Trump in Warsaw on July 6, 2017, the Brazilian diplomat Ernesto Henrique Fraga Araújo (2017, 351) argues that

In calling for God, at Warsaw Square, Trump was attacking the very heart of post-modernism. Trump should not be read in terms of keys to international relations or political science, but in terms of a colossal struggle between faith and its absence, between a world built on faith and a world being destroyed by “values.”

There is another posture defended by sectors of parties of the Marxist tradition that is called left-wing. Although these sectors also defend the secular state, they in fact use religious discourse for political purposes. One can see this in the following words of the Brazilian theologian, Leonardo Boff, who published a text about the then newly elected president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in 2002:

The balance between tenderness and vigor made the great to be great, such as Gandhi, Chico Mendes, Betinho, Francis of Assisi and, last but not least, the man of Nazareth. You, Lula, by the work and grace of the Mystery, are a potency of tenderness channeled in a living torrent of vigor. This is where your charisma, that speaks to the profundity of people, where ancestral archetypes live, is born and nourished (Boff 2002).

We see that the idea of a sacramental thinking, according to which God's history of salvation is diluted in human history, makes it possible to hold that God's redemption takes place in the historical processes of social and political liberation. Also according to this line of thinking, God's redemption is present in revolutionary representatives in human history. Consequently, characters such as Francis of Assisi, Gandhi and others are bearers of messianic structures like Jesus, the man of Nazareth (Westphal, 2007, 55; 2010, 145-168). The same idea was also expressed by former president Lula when he spoke to the people at an ecumenical ceremony. He said, “I am no longer a human being, I am an idea mixed with your ideas. My ideas are already in the air and nobody can shut them in. Now you are millions of Lulas” (Cruz 2018). This statement contains the view that the presence of Christ is spread through the communion of ideas between a leader and the people as formulated by Boff. Both currents, the one called conservative and the one called left-wing, mix and confuse religion and politics, church and state. Both discourses are pervaded by messianic and eschatological elements directed at present life, in the expectation of a world without evils.

Notwithstanding their differences, both currents affirm a political messianism in different forms. In liberation theology, particularly in Boff, there is an unceasing search for God to be God in society and for people, especially the poor, to have the experience of God.

The concern with the circularity between revelation and reality, in the method of Leonardo Boff and of liberation theology, aims at the assertion that God is God in the present of historical reality. In this way, historical transformations happen