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THE CRISIS BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE

Nationhood did not come easily to Argentina. After the wars of independence, the struggle to consolidate the new nation led to competition between the regional caudillos and the *porteño* elites of Buenos Aires. Their polarization over forms of national polity reflected their respective cultural differences. In the provinces federalism, which would allow the enhancement of local autonomy, the preservation of a traditional way of life, and the supremacy of the Spanish Creole elite, was preferred. In contrast, the *porteño*-based unitarians favored European trends in philosophy, science, and economics. These disparities would set their mark on the nation.

Argentina's *porteño* liberals—like their counterparts throughout Latin America—had embraced the central tenets of positivism. They wanted to modernize the country politically and economically, socially and culturally, which included a rejection of their Spanish Creole past, a derision of the mixed blood peoples of the provinces, and a contempt for the undeveloped lands of the pampas. By the 1880s, Argentine liberals had passed a slate of anticlerical laws that allowed the civil government to expand its bureaucratic control over domains previously held by the Catholic Church. Argentine anticlericalism, however, was not as severe or as violent as was found in other Latin American countries. Nevertheless, it affected Catholic attitudes towards the state and its encroachments on the rights of the church.

The anticlerical period of the 1880s became a defining moment for the Argentine Catholic Church because its colonial privileges (*fueros*) were jettisoned by the government, bringing about a new era in church-state relations. Church elites identified liberalism in its myriad of forms as the enemy, and they understood their loss of traditional *fueros* as the direct result of the pervasiveness of liberalism in Argentine society. The church's response to liberalism reflected not only the immediate events and cultural milieu of the country but mirrored as well the Vatican's attempt to counter modernism throughout Europe.

Argentine religious elites countered the persecution of the church by founding newspapers and journals, establishing schools, and by forming their own political party. The political and religious changes of this period, however, produced a deep and lasting breach in church-state relations. The inability of church and political elites to find a suitable coexistence—one that was preferable to the interests of the church—established the conditions for the eventual alignment of some religious elites with political groups in opposition to the state.

Catholics were not alone in their hostility towards liberalism. During this period, cultural and economic forms of nationalism were beginning to develop, a nationalism that saw liberalism forfeiting Argentina's cultural heritage to the fashionable intellectual trends in Europe and surrendering the country's natural resources to foreign investment and exploitation.

The philosophical debates between Argentine liberals and their nationalist counterparts represented the struggles to define the new nation. Additional factors shaped the intellectual discussion and subsequent political coalitions as well. The new immigration policies implemented by the government radically transformed the country as thousands of southern European immigrants arrived to begin a better life. Also, Argentine politics changed under the pressure of a rising middle class, represented by the Radical Civic Union party (*Unión Cívica Radical*, or UCR). The elites of the old system—best described as oligarchic democrats with their legitimate and illegitimate means of retaining political and economic power—had relinquished absolute control over the government by legislating universal male suffrage in 1912. With this political opening, the UCR won the presidency in 1916.

The experiment in democracy was short lived, however. Political patronage and corruption flourished in the successive, Radical-dominated governments, and fluctuating economic cycles exacerbated labor discontent. In the 1920s a number of opposition groups formed in reaction to the prevailing trends in government and the threat of a second Bolshevik revolution. Inspired by the successes of European

fascism, these groups, with their paramilitary components, gained a large audience in the urban areas and called for new forms of polity.

Within this volatile mix of political and social forces seeking to define the nation, Catholic elites attempted to expand and strengthen the church's role in society. Their hostility towards liberalism was shared by others with a fervent sense of nationalism that was expressed in the arts as well as politics and economic theory. Within this milieu the intellectual revitalization of Catholicism took place. Indeed, the eventual synthesis of religion and nationalism engendered a powerful coalition of social groups in Argentina that came to be known as Catholic Nationalists.¹

Because an understanding of the emergence of Argentina as a modern nation-state is essential for explaining the conflict between church and state, the intent of this chapter is to trace the key political and social developments of the country from the mid-nineteenth century to the election of Juan Perón in 1946. Theoretically, the first of three critical junctures in church-state relations is developed within the larger context of the historical forces at play at the turn of the century. The use of Turner's fourfold schema allows us to understand the dynamics operating among the several Argentine Catholic groups whose leaders all vied for some sort of redress to the onslaught of liberalism in Argentina.

Argentina's anticlericalism culminated in the slate of laws passed in the 1880s. The ensuing crisis between church and state led to a breach in social relations among Catholic and secular elites at the political level. This breach was the basis for new alignments and coalitions that took place among those persons and groups who found common ground in their attempts to respond to problematic social and political issues of the day, such as the open-door immigration policies. This policy, when combined with an export-driven economy that produced high-levels of urban concentration within Argentina, resulted in social problems of assimilation, education, welfare, as well as the occasional labor unrest among the immigrants. In response to these problems, social Catholic groups formed; some of the groups represented cultural and class-base alliances like the Argentine Social League (*Liga Social Argentina*). Others, specifically secondary organizations of the institutional church, represented the interests of church elites.

These redressive actions were notably successful in that they allowed for important alliances to develop between religious and secular elites who found common cause in addressing the social problems of the day. Other redressive actions, such as the establishment of newspapers and journals, proved to be equally viable because

they disseminated the Catholic viewpoint to a broader audience in Argentine society. Likewise, the formation of groups that met specific social problems but without overt political involvement, such as the Worker's Circle (*Círculos de Obreros*), showed the positive contribution Catholicism could make to the country. However, the attempt to establish a Catholic political party that would compete successfully in the elections failed quickly.

In the aftermath of the anticlerical period, the church struggled to renew its credibility in a society increasingly secularized. New social alignments were made and an intellectual reawakening occurred that fostered a more militant church. But the breach between church and state remained in tact. This changed, however, with the accession to power of Juan Perón.

A NEW ARGENTINA

Argentina entered the twentieth century in the throes of forming a new society. Rich in natural resources, but lacking a predominant indigenous people or a mestizo race, Argentina was a country full of latent possibilities to be exploited by its elites and to be populated by an influx of European immigrants.² Since the 1850s, British demands for agricultural exports helped to shape the Argentine economy. British investments provided the necessary technology for production, processing, and shipping, which led to the formation of an agro-export economy. The government responded to an urgent labor shortage and high land-labor ratio by implementing an open immigration policy.

Argentina's open immigration policy supplied the necessary labor for economic expansion. In 1869 the government established the *Comisión Central de Inmigración*, and by 1876 was sending agents to Europe to recruit new settlers. The government offered economic incentives to those willing to emigrate to Argentina. Along side the influx of European immigrants came migrants from the interior of the country seeking economic opportunities. During this period, waves of immigrants inundated the rural areas and urban centers. The success of the immigration recruitment resulted in a dramatic change in the demography of the nation.

Indeed, Argentina underwent a transformation similar to other "new" countries at the time, such as Canada and Australia. In an eighty-year period beginning in 1870, the population of Argentina increased tenfold, whereas in the United States during the same period, the increase was only fourfold.³ By the 1880s the average

annual balance of immigrant arrivals to over departures from Argentina was 50,000, peaking to 200,000 in 1889. Moreover, the population of Buenos Aires sextupled during the years between the official census of 1854 and the census of 1895.⁴ The growth in Buenos Aires reflected the patterns of immigration as well as the restrictive land settlement policies. From 1893 to 1914, urban sectors increased from 1.6 million to 4.4 million, rural sectors during that same period increased from 2.3 million to 3.3 million.

The immigrants were frustrated, however, by the lack of real opportunities and the harsh working conditions. The concentration of immigrants in the urban areas gave rise to a myriad of social problems and labor unrest. Only a small number of immigrants actually became landowners. In fact, *latifundismo* prospered in Argentina. The landed elites consolidated their landholdings by blocking colonization and homesteading schemes. The resulting social question exacerbated the extant divisions among the political and cultural elites of the country.

For church leaders the influx of immigrants offered them an opportunity to expand the church's leadership at the local level. Innovative programs influenced by Social Catholicism sought to counter the growing social problems and thwart labor unrest. By creating mutual-aid societies, labor unions, and educational programs, the church wittingly became a vehicle for the socialization and acculturation of the immigrants. The success of the church's programs also brought prominence to several local bishops. After being divested of many of its traditional privileges in the 1880s, the Catholic Church had, by the 1920s, regained some of its previous stature by its response to the problems brought about by immigration.

The open immigration policy represented one of the prevailing ideas of Argentina's political and cultural elites who had embraced the tenets of logical positivism, an intellectual position that became the dominant philosophy in the new order, replacing the Spanish colonial legacy of scholasticism.⁵ Argentine positivists stressed material progress, a scientific approach to man and society, and visions of impending greatness for the country based on material accomplishments. But it had its opponents as well. A countervailing movement—initially known as traditionalism and later as nationalism—arose in response.

Traditionalists romanticized the native values of the country and praised the gaucho who worked the land. They also claimed there was a national soul or essence (*la argentinidad* or *el ser nacional*) that must be preserved, especially from the taint of European trends. Nestor Auza writes of this dichotomy: "It would be two schools, two purely differentiated currents and both identified with two exclusive and counterpoising philosophies, creating two distinct forms of interpreta-

tion of reality and therefore deducing distinct forms of government."⁶ Proponents of each position debased the other and vied for the right to determine the destiny of the nation.

The positivist, or modernist, school saw Argentina as the Europe of the Americas and Buenos Aires the Paris of South America.⁷ Immigration and education would eradicate the Spanish colonial past and augment the existing population, even improve bloodlines. The Indian wars of the early-nineteenth century had ensured the virtual annihilation of the Indian, freeing Argentina from the potential woes of miscegenation. As they identified Buenos Aires with European civilization and culture, so too did they view the undeveloped interior of the country as a land of stagnation, lawlessness, and barbarity. In this way, the positivists readily promoted a dualistic conception of reality: that which was European was good and civilized, all else was barbarism. As nineteenth-century writers such as Domingo F. Sarmiento phrased it, "The struggle [is] between European civilization and native barbarism, between mind and matter." Indeed, wrote Juan B. Alberdi, continuing the polemic, "In America everything that is not European is barbarian."

Sarmiento typifies the modernists of this period. As a journalist, educator and president of Argentina from 1868–1874, Sarmiento endorsed the modernists' quest to build a new country. He believed that the Spanish heritage and the miscegenation with the Indians were two problematic areas for South America.⁸ He viewed the Spanish colonial legacy as a barrier to progress. "The Spanish race," he argued, "has not shown itself more energetic than the aborigines, when it has been left to its own instincts in the wilds of America."⁹ Whereas in Córdoba and Buenos Aires, civilization had indeed arrived: "The inhabitants of the city wear the European dress, live in a civilized manner, and possess laws, ideas of progress, means of instruction, some municipal organization, regular forms of government, etc."¹⁰ In contrast, the inhabitants of the hinterlands, given their sparse population and minimal number of schools, would languish. "Thus civilization can in no way be brought about. Barbarism is the normal condition, and it is fortunate if domestic customs preserve a small germ of morality."¹¹ For Sarmiento, as for the modernist school in general, civilization could at least be found in the urban centers of the country.

Sarmiento was a member of the "Generation of the 1880s," a generation that wielded enormous cultural influence and political power. These elites controlled public administration, business, and education: they were the bourgeoisie in whose hands Argentina would become civilized.¹² Although the Argentine positivists conceived of

civilization as the freedom and triumph of personal effort expressed in wealth through industrial expansion, they did not endorse either economic or political egalitarianism. In fact, they consolidated their power while at the same time reforming the country along liberal economic principles, thereby producing an oligarchic rule. To ensure their power base and limit any encroachment upon it, oligarchic politicians used electoral fraud and repression among other means. They legislated the *unicato* (one-party rule) and centralized power in the executive branch. They had little use for universal suffrage. As one writer declared, "It is the triumph of universal ignorance."¹³

For the modernists, immigration, education, and an elite democracy were the essential ingredients for reconstituting the Argentine republic. Any vestige of the Spanish colonial past was seen as an hindrance to progress and civilization. The liberal politicians modified the colonial form of the state—for example, abolishing the *cabildos* and reigning in the *caudillos*—and implemented new juridical principles. Both were necessary, so it was argued, to bring Argentina to the level of the progressive nations.¹⁴

From the salons to the Chamber of Deputies, liberal positivists remade the old Argentine order. And church-state relations were likewise redefined as legislators wrested away from the church the bureaucratic control of birth registries, education, marriages, and cemeteries, placing them under civil jurisdiction. The church's historic privileges had fallen victim to the liberals' quest to modernize Argentina.

In reaction to the pervasiveness of nineteenth-century liberalism there appeared an equally formidable current of thought known as nationalism. However, nineteenth-century nationalism was an ill-defined—and often contradictory—collection of nativistic sentiments. Nonetheless, Nicholas Shumway extrapolates five themes that shed light on the values and myths of those early nationalists. Argentina, claimed the nationalists, is a nation divided economically between the wealthy *porteño* elites and the impoverished interior provinces; moreover, the provincial *caudillos*, who were dismissed as barbaric, were in fact popular leaders, while the rural poor, as typified by the *gaucho*, embodied authentic Argentine values. Likewise, liberalism's enchantment with European trends in politics, philosophy and economics meant an explicit rejection of the continent's Spanish heritage. Finally, whereas the liberals obliquely overlooked their fellow Latin Americans, the nationalists acknowledged them in common cause.¹⁵ These early nationalists were severely at odds with liberalism over the future of the country.

By the turn of the century, a literary movement known as

traditionalism (*tradicionalismo*) began to express many of the themes of the early nationalists. These poets and essayists embarked on a nativistic vision for the nation, one based on loathing the immigrant whose presence—along with the increasing urbanization—had eroded traditional Argentine values. As they argued, only in the country's Spanish Creole past and the vindication of the provincial caudillo who struggled against the *porteños* could the nation reclaim its true heritage. Writers such as Ricardo Rojas and Manuel Gálvez represented the literary traditionalists and were later to be known as the "Generation of the Centenary."¹⁶

Ricardo Rojas, a prolific writer, continued the dualistic conception of Argentine society begun by the liberals. But he inverted the civilization-barbarity dualism of Sarmiento and proposed that anything emanating from Europe should be viewed as exotic (*exotismo*) and hence alien. For Rojas, that which was truly absolute was land: the interior of the country was genuine and real and only the Creole culture could be considered authentic. In his book *La Argentinidad* (1916), Rojas wrote: "The soul of the Argentine vibrates then by instinct, and even illiterate gauchos and violent caudillos, though they do not discern the doctrines well, they are those that serve the essential destiny of our nationality."¹⁷ In contrast to the liberals who viewed the unspoiled lands of the pampas as the source of stagnation and barbarism, the land for Rojas was the source of transformation or "nationalization" of the language, customs, and peoples whose origins were European.¹⁸ Although his ideas were often ill-conceived and controversial, Rojas's attempt to reclaim Argentina's Spanish heritage was well received.

A second writer of this generation was Manuel Gálvez, who was himself a proponent of the *hispanidad* movement. *Hispanismo* developed in the aftermath of the Spanish-American war (1898) as Spain's defeat to the United States and the loss of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Phillipines meant the end of the Spanish empire. In reaction to what was perceived to be the leveling forces of materialism and democracy of Yankee imperialism, a coalescence of elites arose to preserve the unique transatlantic Spanish culture of traditional values and a stratified social order. Spain was the mother country, whose leadership was to be emulated by her former colonies.¹⁹

In the book *El solar de la raza* (1920), Gálvez argued that the immigrant with his hedonistic desires and pursuit of economic gain had sacrificed the country's fundamental values: "The immigrant has introduced into the country a new concept of life. They offer no proposition but only to enrich themselves, and they are, by nature, contagious to the Argentines with their exclusive respect for material

values."²⁰ Gálvez appealed to the writers of his time to shoulder the burden of what he called "this work of evangelization." They must preach "the love of the fatherland and of the countryside." Only in the values of the past, he proclaimed, could the country, through its originality and spirituality, be saved without discrediting its material greatness.²¹ Contrary to many writers who spurned Spanish America's colonial heritage, Gálvez turned towards Spain to find the answers to the spiritual crisis in his homeland and to trace the roots of Argentine spirituality. "Castilla created us in her image and likeness. She is the womb of our people. She is the ancestral lineage of the race that will be born in the process."²² Argentina's indigenous values, its Hispanic heritage and its Catholic religion, Gálvez exclaimed, provided fundamental values, traditions, and the necessary institutions to assure the future greatness of the nation.

Just as land, race and the Spanish tradition were anathema to the liberals who sought the modernization of Argentina along European lines, those very same values and traditions were the sources of hope and the basis for *la argentinidad* for the traditionalists. The early traditionalists identified the problems that beset the country, but they lacked the political base necessary to dominate the government and to implement their aspirations. The eventual emergence of that political base came as a result of the shift within traditionalism away from being a literary movement to a political one. The ideas of the early writers eventually congealed into a nascent ideology under the rubric of nationalism with its concomitant economic, political, and social agendas.

CATHOLICISM AND MODERNITY

Modernity proved to be a formidable opponent to nineteenth-century Roman Catholicism. Philosophically, it embodied the intellectual currents of liberal positivism and scientism with its tenets of the perfectibility of humanity, the deification of reason, and the inevitable triumph of progress. Materially, its proponents pointed to the creation of wealth brought about by industrialization, urbanization, technological developments, and expanding world trade as Europe and North America were ample evidence of the future course of Western civilization. Likewise, in Argentina, economic success bolstered the confidence of modernists. For the Catholic Church, however, modernity was something to be stopped—and with the full weight of its religious authority.

The Roman Catholic Church acted resolutely in the wholesale

rejection of liberalism and modernism. The schism between the church and liberalism began with Pius VI's (d. 1799) condemnation of the French Revolution. Later Pope Gregory XVI (d. 1846) issued a scathing denunciation of the doctrines of liberalism in his encyclical *Mirari Vos* (1832). In 1864 Pius IX (1846–1878) published the infamous "Syllabus of Errors" and the encyclical *Quanta Cura*, both of which continued the papal attack on liberalism in the modern world. In his wholesale rejection of modernity, Pius IX condemned rationalism, naturalism, liberal capitalism, and socialism, while he vilified the freedom of religion and progress because of its heretical content.²³ As one of Rome's longest reigning popes, Pope Pius IX secured his intellectual state of siege with an ecclesial retrenchment.

The rise of the modern European states meant the loss of the church's temporal power. The Vatican in turn consolidated control over its ecclesial domain through the centralization of power in Rome. This ultramontanism emphasized Roman supremacy, papal infallibility, and the close supervision of the church's internal affairs by the Roman Curia. Conflicts between the Vatican and national episcopacies were stymied with the promulgation of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council (1869–1870) and with the expansion of the role of the papal nuncio, who represented the Holy See to the regional governments. By supervising the actions of the bishops, the nuncio also ensured local obedience to canonical law. In addition, the Vatican established national colleges in Rome with the purpose of inculcating Roman custom and promoting uniformity of ecclesial life. In 1858 the Vatican founded Colegio Pio Latinoamericano for Latin America's leading clerics, the future bishops of the region.

The centralization of religious authority was followed by the institutional expansion of the church and the strengthening of clericalism. The Vatican established religious organizations that offered social services (hospitals and orphanages), education and recreational programs, as well as the formation of Catholic labor unions and worker cooperatives. Clericalism was promoted to counter the anticlerical sentiments pervasive throughout Europe and Latin America. Liturgically, clergy were to ensure the primacy of worship and the centrality of the sacraments. They, in effect, became the sole "guardians of the sacred," and the laity reduced to clients who were offered ritualistic means to salvation.²⁴ This emphasis on clericalism combined with the church's incipient hostility towards secular society reinforced a cautious attitude towards the political events unfolding at the time. Conversely, the legislative successes of the anticlerical liberals throughout Latin America confirmed the worst fears of the Catholic Church.

In Argentina civil-ecclesiastical relations grew increasingly tense. Although the traditional rights of the church were dismantled, the state still retained its juridical dominion (*patronato*) over it. Government privileges included ecclesiastical appointments, the right to inhibit papal documents, and the ability to alter boundaries of ecclesiastical units.²⁵ The Catholic Church retained its constitutional establishment and some basic guarantees, such as laws stipulating that the nation's president and vice-president be Catholic; that state subsidies be given to the bishops, the cathedral chapters, and the episcopal sees; and that Congress ensure the missionization of the Indians.²⁶

Even so, church elites were dissatisfied with the new pattern of church-state relations, especially with the succession of anticlerical legislation. Congress passed laws that subordinated ecclesiastical tribunals to civil ones (1881); eliminated parochial registration of births, marriages, and deaths (1884); and mandated civil marriages and secular cemeteries (1888). The new legislation reflected the expansion of the civil state and the termination of the overt control of the church, thus leading to an increasingly secularized country. Although the Catholic *culto* retained its privileged constitutional status, Catholics perceived the new laws as a persecution of the church and a violation of the preferential status granted it by the 1853 Constitution.²⁷ Argentine church historians have subsequently pointed out that the anticlerical laws led to a separation between public life and the Catholic Church and thus privatizing religion.²⁸

Given the whole of anticlerical legislation, educational reform proved to be the most contentious issue between church and state. The Pedagogical Congress of 1882 set the stage for the Educational Reform Law 1420, subsequently passed in 1884. Law 1420 instituted a national administrative structure for primary education and required that all primary schools be tuition-free, obligatory, and lay—all to the consternation of the church. Not only was this a dismissal of the church's role in public education, but the yearly arrival of thousands of immigrants who required a necessary socialization or "argentinization" further exacerbated the problem of control over course content. Both liberals and conservatives agreed that education was the appropriate means to inculcate the necessary values to the immigrants. As one example of this philosophy, in a public high school in the Recoleta district of Buenos Aires a saying over the archway to the entrance of the school reads: "Here one learns to honor the Fatherland."

Catholics soon launched a counteroffensive. Although the achievements were negligible, the development of new organizations revitalized Catholic laity and enhanced the presence of the church in

Argentine society. In Córdoba, the episcopacy reacted strongly to the new education laws by issuing a pastoral letter forbidding the laity of the archdiocese to send their children to public school. The archbishop based his argument on Canon Law and the "Syllabus of Errors," claiming that education cannot be separated from religion. Clergy and laity, including cathedral chapters and Catholic professors teaching in national universities, endorsed the bishop's actions, but the government retaliated by suspending the vicar and dismissing the professors from their posts.²⁹

In defending the right of the church to teach religion in public schools, Catholic elites proclaimed that the state's capabilities as well as its moral and philosophical proclivities were either inadequate or severely deficient. In 1886 Pedro Goyena, the *Unión Católica* candidate elected to Congress, said: "To entrust exclusively to the state the formation of the school children would be to make the state a factory for producing people who were carbon copies of whatever model suited the official of the state—that is to say, its governor."³⁰ Although unsuccessful, religious elites repeatedly appealed to their moral imperative to teach religion in public schools—a request finally granted them in 1943.

A secondary consequence of the debate over public education—since much of it was conducted in the newspapers by men such as Domingo Sarmiento, Bartolomé Mitre, and Roque Sáenz Peña—was the establishment of pro-Catholic newspapers to provide the needed forum for Catholics. José Manuel Estrada founded *La Unión* (1882), and the archdiocese of Buenos Aires published its own paper, *La Voz de la Iglesia*. Additional Catholic newspapers were established in the interior provinces by both laymen and clergy.³¹

Lay Catholics also organized themselves politically to challenge the liberals' hold over government. In 1884 José Manuel Estrada, president of the *Asociación Católica de Buenos Aires*, called for the *Primero Congreso Nacional de los Católicos Argentinos*. Setting the tone for the congress, Estrada said:

Gentlemen, whether or not there is a conscious conspiracy at the highest level of the government to put into effect a Masonic program [Sarmiento was a noted Mason] of anti-Christian revolution is not a matter for discussion. We would not be here if the apostasy of those who govern us had not aroused popular indignation! Whether or not this has been a premeditated, dictatorial usurpation of the rights of God and of the nation, I can tell you the tale of a year in which an unfeeling government has trampled simultaneously upon the immunity of the Church, the honor of the teaching career, freedom of conscience, the faith of parents, the innocence of children, the

freedom of suffrage, and the independence of the provinces—all our rights as Christians and Argentines.³²

Composed of laity and clergy from throughout Argentina, the congress advocated numerous measures to counter the threat of laicism. The delegates proposed the organization of a national Catholic Association (*Asociación Católica*), the strengthening of the Catholic press, the continued dissemination of Catholic doctrine, the obligation to follow the teachings of the “Syllabus of Errors,” the promotion of Catholic education in the public schools, and the countering of laicism wherever possible. The delegates also formed *Unión Católica*, a Catholic political party to promote their cause in the national legislature. José Manuel Estrada and Pedro Goyena were nominated candidates, and in 1886 were elected deputies to the National Congress.³³ By 1890, however, the *Unión Católica* had achieved only limited political success, which diminished popular support for it; the Catholic political party was dissolved by its leadership. As a consequence, many middle-class Catholics joined the Radical Civic Union party. Moreover, the 1912 Sáenz Peña law, which mandated universal male suffrage, eliminated the need for direct clerical involvement in politics. The UCR presidential candidate, President Hipólito Yrigoyen, courted the Catholic vote and once elected in 1916 vetoed on their behalf a congressional bill legalizing divorce.

Catholics perceived the anticlerical legislation of the 1880s as a persecution of the church, resulting in a strong antiliberal mentality among Catholic leaders. The Vatican’s own battles against modernism further exacerbated local attitudes against liberalism.³⁴ Although church-state tensions diminished somewhat with the resignation of President Juárez Celman in 1890, the laws remained in tact. Furthermore, the social problems brought about by immigration, labor unrest, and periodic economic depression offered Catholic leaders the opportunity to expand the church’s influence throughout society.

Social Catholicism

Argentina’s rapid but uneven economic expansion, persistent political abuse, and changing demographics created increasingly greater civil unrest. Periodic depression led to unemployment, loss of real wages, increasing labor agitation, and political frustration. Electoral fraud added to the tension as the oligarchy retained its hold over the government. And by 1914, immigrants constituted three-fourths of the urban working class, with most immigrants living in substandard housing and working in degrading conditions at low wages. Many of the immigrants from southern Europe were well-versed in socialist and

anarchist ideas, but they lacked the necessary organizing capabilities to counter effectively the political and economic status quo. Nevertheless, they posed an identifiable threat to the middle and upper classes whose leadership capitalized on antileftist fears.

Within this context of a rapidly changing civil society, Catholic leaders responded to the myriad of social problems with new strategies and organizations. Their successes in public welfare assistance and collaboration with new social groups formed at the time led to a renewed appreciation for the role of the church in the public sphere. New trends in the European Catholic Church, like Social Catholicism, influenced the organizational activities of the new lay groups.

Social Catholicism began in Europe in the nineteenth century as a response to economic modernization and industrialization and its concomitant effects on the poor and working class. While a number of political philosophies—varying from country to country— influenced the respective Social Catholic groups, a mentality of intransigence characterized the leadership as the movement challenged the prevailing secular ideologies and economic liberalism. Moreover, the actions of the professionals and clergy involved in the social programs were notably paternalistic. Nevertheless, there was the expectation of greater worker control over the new organizations, which would someday be the basis for a Catholic labor movement independent of government involvement and in competition with the emerging socialist unions. Social Catholic leaders worked to expand the moral influence of the church by presenting it as the defender of the working class and by proclaiming solidarity in the face of dehumanizing economic liberalism and the threatening rise of antireligious socialism.³⁵

In Argentina, social Catholic priests and laity continued a similar agenda by organizing labor unions, rural tenancy cooperatives, and women's groups. They taught the immigrants principles of Catholic morality, respect for authority and private property—all deemed essential for their proper assimilation into Argentine society.³⁶ The ongoing organization of the workers was also an attempt by the church to defend its social ideals and to counter the secular labor unions that ardently vied for the worker's allegiance.

In 1892 Fr. Federico Grote, a German Redemptorist priest, founded the first Worker's Circle (*Círculos de Obreros*) in Argentina. Inspired by Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891), Grote's Worker's Circles were akin to medieval guilds rather than trade unions and were designed for mutual aid, education, and lobbying for social legislation. Fr. Grote qualified his pastoral work, however, by emphasizing its apostolic motivations. The worker's well-being was impor-

tant, he noted, but even more so was the task of extending the influence of the church to the working class, especially to counter the rising influence of socialism and anarchism. To quote Grote at length:

That which principally moves me to initiate the social work in favor of the workers was the conviction that direct action by the priest was not only not very common but also insufficient to attract indifferent and alienated men to the religious practice of the Church. Not only has the spirit of positivism invaded him but the active propaganda of liberalism as well, yet it is . . . the ill-fated propaganda of socialism . . . which will precipitate his present and eternal ruin. Social action in favor of the worker, that is to say, the efforts to promote . . . [his] temporal and moral welfare . . . was not . . . the ultimate aim . . . but a means to remove the threat of perdition and put him under the healthy influence of the Church.³⁷

Grote's attitude reflected the antiliberal and antisocialist values prevalent in Social Catholicism and the Catholic Church, but his accomplishments were well received by some of the once hostile political and cultural elites.

One example of the success of the Worker's Circles was their influence in the legislating of new national labor codes, such as the 1907 law that granted Sunday rest and new restrictions on women and children labor. By 1912 seventy-seven Worker's Circles, numbering over 23,000 members, had been formed throughout Argentina.³⁸

Catholics also established a number of social leagues comprising middle- and upper-class volunteers to work with the worker's organizations for labor legislation, social, and educational welfare projects. In 1908 the Argentine Social League (*Liga Social Argentina*) was formed "to sustain the Christian organization of society" and to fight against "subversive tendencies." The league boasted of having two of Argentina's leading clerics as founding members: Fathers Miguel de Andrea and Gustavo Franceschi, each man representing a different wing of Argentine Catholicism. Traditionalist writers like Manuel Gálvez also supported the social reforms advocated by the league, claiming them to be the necessary correctives to the materialism he decried. League members promoted the cause of the worker through publications and conferences, and joined their Worker's Circle counterparts to influence labor legislation. By 1914 the Argentine Social League had 184 centers throughout the country with a membership of 5,700.³⁹

Not all Argentines favored the new social reforms. Although liberals welcomed Pope Leo XIII's defense of property rights as well as the right to defend it, their attitude towards the rapidly expanding immigrant population had shifted to one of nativistic hostility. Many

saw the growing threat from labor unrest to be the result of foreign agitators. Consequently, vigilante and paramilitary groups formed during this period, attacking labor leaders and intimidating workers. Ironically, whether through coopting labor by means of limited recognition of worker's rights and self-help groups or through violence and electoral fraud, Argentina's cultural and political elites maintained the social order at whatever costs necessary.⁴⁰

The Convergence of Catholicism and Nationalism

By the 1920s a number of social and political groups found sufficient common ground in their distrust of liberalism and their growing fear of socialism to coalesce into a religio-political movement subsequently known as Catholic Nationalism. As an ultraconservative movement, Catholic Nationalism was predicated on integralist theology, *hispanismo*, and the country's literary *tradicionalismo*. Like nationalists in general, Catholic Nationalists feared the dissolution of the nation's fundamental values and cultural identity brought about by immigration, liberalism, anarchism, socialism, and the corrupt democracy of *yrigoyenismo*. In many respects, Catholic Nationalism best flourished as a mentality of opposition that occasionally coalesced into party politics, and it provided the needed civilian support for a military intervention.

Time and again Catholic Nationalists formed political parties but failed repeatedly to win sufficient votes in any election. Instead, Catholic Nationalist military officers led a number of successful coups against civilian governments as was the case with Generals Uriburu (1930), Lonardi (1955), and Onganía (1966). But, as Argentina's political culture changed, so too did the political alignment of Catholic Nationalists. This is seen most clearly in the case of Peronism to be discussed below.

As mentioned above, one of the forerunners to Catholic Nationalism was the literary movement *tradicionalismo*. Before 1914, traditionalism was characterized as a mix of "federalist nostalgia, *hispanismo*, ultramontane Catholicism, and literary modernism."⁴¹ International and domestic events, however, altered the political orientation of the traditionalists, leading them into formal politics. For instance, the First World War caused economic disruptions and exacerbated Argentine labor relations, especially in Buenos Aires and cities along the Littoral. The Russian revolution also inflamed fears of an international communist conspiracy and excited counterrevolutionary tendencies among some Argentine elites. Domestically, the Radical Civic Union party won the 1916 presidential election and thus ended direct oligarchic rule. But the 1919 rioting, which engulfed Buenos Aires and came

to be known as *La Semana Trágica*, brought together the various forces of opposition against President Yrigoyen and the UCR. The president's advancing age and the increasing corruption of his administration reinforced the general notion of the fundamental inadequacy of the liberal democratic experiment.

Traditionalists joined forces with sympathetic Catholics, military officers, and economic nationalists to create a new political alliance that would last more than twenty years.⁴² They savored the spirit of militarism and exalted the cult of the New Order, giving rise to paramilitary groups and pro-fascist parties throughout the country. The Argentine Patriotic League (*Liga Patriótica Argentina*), for example, exemplified the counterrevolutionary tendencies found in many of the groups at the time. Formed in 1919 in the wake of *La Semana Trágica*, the league embraced two disparate functions: brutal repression of labor unrest through its paramilitary brigades and class conciliation through its acts of practical humanitarianism. The league represented the ultra-right's most successful bid to terminate the liberal democratic experiment and to reconstruct a new matrix of civil authority.

One of the more salient examples of the new breed of nationalists was Leopoldo Lugones. Lugones, an eclectic poet noted for his changing political views—from anarchist to socialist to nationalist—in contrast to his steadfast anticlericalism, had by the early 1920s become a popular proponent of the dominant counterrevolutionary themes. He assailed the immigrant, debased democracy, and lauded the new militarism of the times. For Lugones, only the military could maintain the values and discipline necessary to prevent further dissolution of the nation, and only the military, he claimed, could propel the fatherland to its rightful destiny.⁴³ His slogan, "The hour of the sword," became a rallying cry for his generation.

Lugones's faith in the military was shared by the nationalists in general, but his anticlericalism reflected only one faction of the new movement. His worldview was predicated on order, hierarchy, and power; the antithesis of which, he argued, were democracy and Christianity. Both democracy and Christianity promoted egalitarianism, he claimed, one based on reason and the other on faith. Although his paganism disturbed many nationalists who saw the church as an indispensable element of the Argentine heritage, his popular appeal and his repeated calls for cultural superiority based on social hierarchy and grounded in militarism, nativism, and antileftism bridged the nationalists' respective religious differences.⁴⁴

Apart from these differences all nationalists shared a common antiliberal and antileftist bias. Liberalism represented an unacceptable

philosophical foundation for the public order, one imbued with laicist and anticlerical sentiments. As such liberalism was characterized as

a rejection of all norms, uncertainty, a state which does nothing . . . life divorced from tradition . . . praising of the rights of man, the French Revolution, socialism and communism . . . dominance of intelligence . . . wordiness . . . the prototype [being] the petite bourgeoisie . . . mediocre, prudent, lacking in sacrificial spirit . . . wanting a tranquil life without complications, sentimental and insipid, if not cowardly.⁴⁵

In contrast, nationalism imparted

a religious foundation for the moral and legal order, strict norms . . . certainty of revealed truth, a state which protects and exacts respect . . . life regulated by custom, history, tradition and legend . . . subordination of intelligence to the precepts of the church and to the greatness of the fatherland . . . instead of words, concrete deeds realized with ardent enthusiasms . . . the prototype is the cavalier of the crusades: daring, sacrificing, wanting to dominate and to impose his will for the greater glory, honor and power of the church and the fatherland.⁴⁶

These two worldviews—albeit ideal types—represented the competing interests for the control of the country. But the problem for Catholic Nationalists still remained: how best to attain real political power.

By the 1920s Argentine Catholicism had established itself as a viable social and intellectual force. One example of the new organizations being formed at the time was the Catholic Cultural Courses (*Cursos Cultural de Católica*) established in 1922. This school offered laymen an advanced program of study of the doctrines of the church and of the major European theologians, such as Jacques Maritain and Pierre Garrgou Lagrange.⁴⁷ The early members of the cultural courses had distanced themselves from the long-established Catholic groups, rejecting them as “arid and bourgeois.”⁴⁸ In later years, many of the members had become prominent statesmen—even as late as General Onganía’s government (1966–1970), denoting the long-standing influence of the Catholic Nationalists.

Catholic intellectuals also founded a number of publications: for example, *Convivio*, *Criterio*, *Ortodoxia*, *Numero*, and *Baluarte*, all of which provided forums for the fledgling Catholic Nationalist movement. One magazine of note, *La Nueva República*, was founded in 1927 by César Pico, Ernesto Palacio, Rodolfo and Julio Irazusta, and Juan Carulla, becoming the preeminent nationalist magazine of the era. *La Nueva República* signified the appearance of traditionalists pursuing a New Democracy based on military rule and corporatism.

The publication also indicated the transition of traditionalism to nationalism, whereby literary and cultural allusions gave way to highly politicized rhetoric.⁴⁹

With the demise of liberal democracy in Europe and the growing defection from *yrigoyenismo*, the nationalists proffered an alternative polity based on fascism.⁵⁰ Spain's Primo de Rivera and Italy's Benito Mussolini demonstrated fascism's ability to contain the communist threat and restore the proper order to civil society. A treatise written in 1935 by César Pico countered Jacques Maritain's *Integral Humanism* by stating that for Catholics fascism was an acceptable political order as long as fascist governments did not infringe upon the rights of the Catholic Church.⁵¹ These young intellectuals enthusiastically embraced the prevailing trends in Europe, writing that only a nonpartisan governing elite—one supported by the military—could effectively subordinate individual interests to those of the common good and thereby restore the country's republican tradition.

The leaders of *La Nueva República* represented Catholic Nationalism at its finest hour. However, they were a movement of cultural elites and not a political party. Although they had proposed an ideology that would save Argentine civilization from social chaos, they lacked the necessary political base to enact it. Nonetheless, they found a sympathetic audience among some military leaders. One important reader was General José Uriburu, who, as early as 1927, was invited by nationalists to lead a revolution to end democracy. Uriburu, who would subsequently carry out Argentina's first military coup in 1930, declined the initial invitation but remained in contact with the provocateurs. In the aftermath of the coup d'état, he gave credit to *La Nueva República* and *Criterio* for shaping his ideas, foremost among those his shift from antileftism to antiliberalism. In an interview published in *Criterio* he stated, "I always read *Criterio*, both its articles of doctrine and its political editorials. I am in agreement with the ideas it disseminates and defends."⁵² Catholic Nationalists celebrated Uriburu's success and welcomed his intent to install a corporatist polity. However, his experiment in corporatism was short-lived, and Catholic Nationalists found themselves again searching for a viable political means to implement their ideals. Repeatedly, they found it in the nationalist faction of the military.

Institutional Church Developments

During the 1920s, the Catholic intelligentsia gained an unprecedented credibility. In conjunction with their nationalist counterparts, they articulated a viable alternative for the nation's failing experiment in democracy. The institutional church likewise made propitious use

of this opening to further its presence in public life. During this period, the Argentine bishops established new organizations for the laity, published a pastoral letter that would become the definitive stance for Catholic voters in the years to come, and conducted a momentous public spectacle: the 1934 International Eucharistic Congress. For some commentators, this period would be seen as a restoration of the Catholic Church in the public life of the nation.⁵³

One of the new organizations formed at this time was the Argentine Catholic Action (*Acción Católica Argentina*, or ACA). In 1928 Pope Pius XI established Catholic Action in Italy, calling it the "laity's participation in the hierarchical apostolate of the Church." Several Argentine priests traveled to Rome to study the Italian Catholic Action groups and upon returning, founded the Argentine Catholic Action in 1931 with the first adviser being Fr. Antonio Caggiano (later, Cardinal Caggiano). As in Italy, the Argentine Catholic Action came to play a crucial role in the formation of lay Catholic leaders, eventually becoming the church's most important lay group. Indeed, by 1943, there were over 98,000 formal members in Argentina with several hundred thousand more adherents.⁵⁴

Lay leaders of Catholic Action were well-educated professionals who came to form the activist arm of the bishops. The intent of Catholic Action was the thorough spiritual formation of its members. But the subsequent political events in Argentina shaped the orientation of the group and forced its leaders to take an activist stance in the events that unfolded.

The by-laws of the Italian Catholic Action, signed as an accord between the Vatican and Mussolini in 1931, give insight into the prevailing political attitudes of the Vatican and intimate the conditions the visiting Argentine clergy encountered. As one section of the accord reads: "Catholic Action shall be essentially diocesan, depending directly upon the bishops, who shall choose the ecclesiastical and lay directors. Persons opposed to fascism cannot be chosen. In accordance with its religious and spiritual nature, Catholic Action cannot intervene in politics."⁵⁵ Members of ACA underwent a rigorous program of spiritual formation that carried with it an underlying political message. Fr. Geraldo Farrell describes it:

The process of the lay organizations in this period was to be conditioned by the institutional emphasis corresponding to the pastoral on laity in politics. The laity therefore aligned themselves with the hierarchy. Soon there developed a new ecclesial stratum, the *laicado*, to be distinguished from the rest of the people of God. The *laicado* constituted the militant Catholics, but militant on behalf of the institutional church and not on behalf of politics or syndicalism.