

# THE MARRIAGE BETWEEN THE TRADE UNION AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN BRAZIL

Wander Amaral Camargo<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** This article intends to contribute for the interpretation of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the worker union in Brazil. It is a theoretical approach, through which the place and the role of the trade unions in social movements are defined. We start from assuming that the idea of intervention emerged from the fields of tension that came up with the worker union, where State and civil society oppose. It is also supposed here that the question of intervention is an object of contest among State, unions and organized civil society. Hence, two huge approaches linked to the relationships between social movements and worker unions come to exist: while the former emphasizes a political dimension, the latter reinforces a social dimension. So, in order to carry out this paper, we split it in three parts. The first one offers space to a historical approach, where we seek to define the foundation milestones of CNBB. The second one, aiming to define which agents create the idea of intervention, draws the frame of the current debate on this matter. Finally, in part three, in order to specifically consider CUT – *Central Única dos Trabalhadores*, or Unique Syndicate of Workers – by an ideological perspective, we point out the need to recreate society and politics. The conclusion, then, is that the relationships between the Catholic Church and the worker unions are essentially anti-systemic and their main flagships are the movements that recreate civil society.

**KEYWORDS:** Catholic Church; union organization; CUT.

# THE MARRIAGE BETWEEN THE TRADE UNION AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN BRAZIL

**RESUMO:** Esse artigo tem como perspectiva contribuir para a interpretação das relações entre a Igreja Católica no Brasil e os sindicatos de trabalhadores. Trata-se de uma abordagem teórica através da qual é definido o lugar e o papel dos sindicatos nos movimentos sociais. Parte-se do pressuposto que a ideia de intervenção emergiu do campo de tensões que forjaram o movimento sindical, onde se opõem Estado e sociedade civil; supõe-se também que a questão da intervenção é objeto de uma disputa entre Estado, sindicatos e sociedade civil organizada. Desse quadro, emergem duas grandes abordagens a respeito das relações entre movimentos sociais e sindicatos: enquanto a primeira enfatiza a dimensão política, a segunda reforça a dimensão social. Para a realização do artigo, houve a estruturação em três momentos. No primeiro, numa abordagem histórica, definem-se os marcos da fundação da CNBB. No segundo, com o propósito de definir que agentes elaboram a ideia de intervenção, tece-se o quadro do debate atual a respeito do tema. Finalmente, na terceira parte, com o objetivo de pensar especificamente a CUT em uma perspectiva ideológica, aponta-se para a necessidade de recriar a sociedade e a política. Conclui-se, enfim, que as relações entre a Igreja Católica e os sindicatos são essencialmente anti-sistêmicas e que elas tem como agente principal os movimentos que recriam a sociedade civil.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Igreja Católica, Organização dos trabalhadores, CUT.

---

<sup>1</sup> - Wander Amaral CAMARGO – Professor of the Masters Program in Arts Strictly speaking, area of concentration: Language and Society, State University of Western Paraná, UNIOESTE, (Campus Cascavel - PR). Ph.D. in Sociology from Unesp Araraquara (SP), Postdoctoral in Applied Linguistics from PUC São Paulo.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

On August 28<sup>th</sup>, 1983, an organization called Central Única dos Trabalhadores (Unique Syndicate of Workers), CUT, was created. There arose a new perspective in creating a syndical and strategic conception that would be able to operate a profound transformation in syndical structure and in work organization, allowing a new political culture, and opposing itself to the terrible inheritance of an authoritarian structure.

By analyzing the surge of the Unique Syndicate of Workers, we come across several interpretations about its inspiration source. However, whichever the adopted posture is, it is important to highlight that the Church performed a fundamental role in consolidating the USW (that is how we will refer to the Unique Syndicate of Workers from now on). According to Rodrigues (1990), the USW was born from the need of the *authentic* syndical headmasters to confront the authoritarian regime. Stein (1997), on the other hand, points that the USW may be a continuation of the syndical policy adopted in Brazil by the Catholic Church – more precisely between the ending of the forties and the beginning of the sixties, a period that is immediately previous to the regime of exception (dictatorship) started in 1964 – in order to confront the vertiginous increase of the left communism and its influence upon the unions (syndicates).

## 2 IN THE BEGINNING

The entry process of the Catholic Church into the syndical world started with the Workman Circles (*círculos operários*) or the *Movimento Circulista* in the years of 1930 and ended up with the Catholic Workmen Youth (JOC, in the Portuguese acronyms) in 1948. At that time, the restructuring of the Catholic Brazilian Action (ACB) happened, and that entry process was looking forward to applying the Cardijn method of “see, judge and act” onto an elite group of activist catholic workmen that would use this method in converting their partners to Christianity. According to this methodology, the man is the result of the environment and there would not be conditions for a spiritual reformation of men without a reformation of the place where they work and live. In order to achieve it, it was necessary that the young activists grasped reality in an adequate way, so that they could then identify the problems (see), carry out a judgment (judge) tuned with Christian values and thus work (act) so that solutions occurred in such a way to make the Brazilian society more just.

In 1950, during the Fourth National Week of Catholic Action, the Episcopal Commission of the Brazilian Catholic Action (ACB), constituted by the archbishops from Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, São Paulo and Belo Horizonte, and by the bishop of Niteroi, accepted and approved of the specialized movements, that is, the ones in which laymen should work: the student, field, worker and independent movements. There came, then, the Catholic Student Youth (JEC), whose action fell upon students and second-years; Undergraduate Catholic Youth (JUC); Field Catholic Youth (JAC) and the Independent Catholic Youth (JIC). All acronyms were left in Portuguese, in order to maintain the proper name of the mentioned institutions.

This reformation process the Catholic Church was passing by led to the foundation, on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1952, of the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB). Among its laws, CNBB proposes to:

Counter-balance, intelligently, the conspiracy of silence, prohibiting the vehicles of public opinion to continue in rendering the impression of an absence of the Church or of a secondary role of the Church in the life of the country and of the world (...); to fill the Brazilian homes with a Christian spirit (...); to warn (in time) the Catholics about parties and candidates that refused to compromise in defending Christian postulates when it came to politics. (...) It was a systematic, organized, efficient influence, one that truly imposes itself (Piletti et alii, 1997: 196).

CNBB then enabled the control of ACB to “renewed” bishops or “progress men”, extracting the ways to counteract specialized movements like JOC, JUC and other from the more conservative diocesan bishops.

The Church and the Catholic Action, in general and at the same time, continued to prioritize the action of clergy on the richer layers of the Brazilian society, aiming to its own formation. CNBB, a political arm of the Catholic Church, in realizing that the country was passing by a modernization process that used to lead wide layers of urban and rural workers to an ever-growing life in poverty, started to work in promoting changes in the structure of society, so that unfair acts would be less present.

For monsignor Helder Câmara (apud Piletti et alii, 1997: 257), the general secretary of CNBB, the time was come to promote a few changes, and he warned that the poor population was abandoned:

The wrong-doers are reaching the fields. If they act with intelligence, they won't even need to invent something. It will be enough that they comment on reality, that they exhibit in the whole the situation in which the rural workers live, or vegetate. (...) Act before the revolution. By your Christian will, do as the guidelines of the Church point out.

Thus, CNBB started to act aside the workers' movement on the fields, their fight for land and for the recognition of their rights by the Brazilian government. The big fear of the

Church was to lose its already traditional political influence for the communists, because a scrutiny could reveal that the urban workers had already been misguided, and the point was to not lose track of the rural workmen as well. The reason for so much fear was confirmed when, in 1954, there surged the Farmer Leagues under the command of Francisco Julião, in the Galiléia Mill, in Vitória de Antão. As the Leagues surged, the Church started to act more actively around the rural syndicate scenery, proposing radical transformations on social structure and looking forward to better organize the workers. But in order to make that happen, it was necessary that, in the inside, there was a tendency to create a fair social order and that Church looked forward to, according to Piletti (1997:258) “avoid a break between the Christian Faith and the execution of a *social mission* that went toward an overcome or relief of poverty”.

Therefore, the help of laymen and a few priests was not enough. The way-out found by CNBB was to promote a bigger economical integration in Brazil, specially in the miserable northwest, aiming to evangelize the northwestern workers, counting with the help of the Church for that through the South American Episcopal Counsel (CELAM, in the Portuguese acronym).

CNBB defended a strict cooperation among the rural unions, the State and the Church, to find solutions that led to basic social reformations. In order to achieve that, the Church placed many of its lay assessors in touch with the technicians of the National Bank of Economical Development (BNDE), to carry out long searches that would orientate the bishops in questions related to society and economy.

President Juscelino Kubitsckek himself promoted an immediate release of money to the northwest, in meetings with CNBB representatives. That same president created, in 1959, the Superintendence for the Development of the Southwest (SUDENE), with Celso Furtado as chairman. This strict understanding of interests between the Catholic Church and the Brazilian State was favorable and advantageous for both parts. The State would gain political blessings and the Church would start to count on public finances to make its assistance activities happen and for the propagation of its doctrine, thus blocking the expansion of the left. It would also count on financial help from the U.S. Department of State, that saw the Farmer Leagues as a revolutionary threat for Latin America. The solution found by the Church was then to strengthen the unions that existed within the Christian line promoted by the worker circles and create others, now with a close-centered (*circulista*) proposal that would stop any attempts of the left.

The fruit of that union resulted, according to Stein (1997), in the Church's call for the ruling of other demands, especially in education, where it held in 1960 the control 60% of secondary schools and 30% of schools of higher education in the country. At that time, it was prime that the Catholic Church should influence, in a concrete way, in content and form, the Law of Directives and Bases of Education (LDB), which had been in discussion in Congress since 1948. By the point of view of the Church, LDB would provide beforehand knowledge of where the state would apply the resources available for education, as well as its major educational goals and priorities: the educational offering was strategic to the church for two main reasons: formation of: a) a Catholic elite group, and b) it made it feasible for faith schools to recover public funds and enabled certain family members to educate of future generations.

Simultaneously, the Church tried to serve a clientele in education which formed the Brazilian elite and strategically this institution would occupy all available space to create the Rural Education Radio Station in Natal, under the inspiration of Bishop Eugenio Sales and of the Brazilian Catholic Action. The intention was to provide rural workers a basic education through radio.

With the success achieved by this initiative of the Church, then-President Quadros in 1961 supported the creation of a worker staff that would work to boost its whole extension of popular education. MEB was established, the Base Education Movement, an entity linked to CNBB. According to the CNBB, the main objective of the MEB was to provide a comprehensive education and not simply to provide the rural worker with literacy. For CNBB, the MEB should develop a program that would allow a significant gain in increasing political, social and religious awareness of the workers. Therefore, training of workers:

Should be a process of 'awareness' that started with adult literacy by enhancing the oral code and popular culture. Simultaneously, the participants would interpret their living conditions as a result of the injustices that existed in the structure of Brazilian society. The next step would be to fight for the transformation of society with help from community workers (...) (Piletti *et al*, 1997: 271).

This interest of the Church for the training of workers was related to the fact that in 1959, Cuba had made a Marxist-like revolution, where the Catholic Church had been laid off from state control and at the same time, forbidden to act politically and religiously. There was a fear that this revolution would spread to the rest of Latin America, particularly in Brazil.

Because of this, CNBB began structuring a strategic project of direct intervention in the political reality of Brazil, performing different tactics to achieve their goal. This project

was totally different from the social assistance work done so far, and it was strongly influenced by the European Church guidelines.

Thus, during the V National Conference of the Brazilian Bishops (CNBB) in April 1962, the Emergency Plan was discussed and approved by the entire episcopate, having the following important aspects: the condemnation of the new political regime in Cuba and a strong condemnation of the liberal capitalism deployed in Brazil and its consequences for the majority of workers and their families, that were left in poverty, sterilizing all the efforts of the Church catechism.

The Church, through CNBB, believed that the capitalist model adopted in Brazil was so godless as the communist model itself, and therefore Catholics should organize themselves and fight for a new type of model that reformed capitalism, i.e. one that promoted social change based on the "third way", or as used in the booklets of the journal *Synthesis*, by the PUC of Rio de Janeiro – based on a "Christian solidarism".

One must consider that the International Church and the Brazilian Church underwent profound changes during the papacy of John XXIII, with a special meaning to his encyclical *Mater et Magistra* of May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1961. With this encyclical, the pope intended to reveal that the rural problem crossed national borders and that the issue was global.

In Brazil, the wickedness of underdevelopment was much larger; and even after the country had adopted a system of industrial capitalism, populism was not able to overcome social inequalities. The modernization brought on by the entry of technology and of international industrial capital exposed the deep pool that was the process of accumulation of industrial capital (and the consequent impoverishment of the countryside). Our country had one of the highest rates of unequal development of the capitalist world.

And that is the root of CNBB interests: making the Church the most important social force, not only in the Northeast, but nationwide. Their interest in reformation aimed – in addition to the agrarian reformation – at raising the living standards of workers in the fields of education, health, housing and nutrition. To this end, they availed themselves of every possible work manner to make such an assignment, and exercised a lobby alongside the Brazilian government for the recognition of rural unions, while performing assistance work together with other workers

The main issue of this alliance between the Catholic Church and the government was the agrarian reformation, because in 1961 the government was exercised by João Goulard and by Prime Minister Tancredo Neves. For the government, there was great interest in elaborating the issue of labor policy for the urban areas.

Recebido em: 30/08/2012

Aprovado em: 30/08/2012

However, the rhetoric of agrarian reformation, describing how it would happen, as well as its form and extent, allowed the polarization between the two political trends that militated within the Church and within CNBB, that is, the "traditionalist" or "conservative" wing, the and "progressive" or "refreshing" one.

This polarization was the result of three tactics adopted by CNBB, concerning the issue of unionization of agricultural workers. Namely:

- 1) A tactic of 'union at all costs', as one can name it. This project was particularly active in the years 1961 and 1962;
- 2) The work of the Popular Action – AP, a political party of the Catholic Action and the Undergraduate Catholic Youth – JUC – had an important role in the Movement for Basic Education – MEB;
- 3) The action where the *Movimento Circulista* would make efforts and the National Confederation of Workers' Circles (Stein, 1997: 3).

However, this assistance work of the Brazilian Bishops had serious critics both inside and outside the Church. Among them was the Institute for Research and Social Studies (IPES), which in general had a harmless look, but systematically promoted – through the IBAD (Brazilian Institute for Democratic Action) –, a destabilization of the João Goulart government, finding, in its premises, important sectors of national and multinational business. Second, in further studies, they collaborated with the CIA and the U.S. Embassy in preparing the 1964 military coup.

When it comes to the issue of agrarian reformation, Brazilian workers had bitter enemies, because it was not a priority for large national and international capitalism. Large landowners would lose much of their income should their traditional agricultural model be altered, because changing it would prevent the transfer of increased income to industries and corporations.

Concerned with the social moment that was happening in Brazil, CNBB saw it with eyes of goodness when, on April 11, 1963, Pope John XXIII proclaimed the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* during the course of the Second Vatican Council, even though they knew that a simple access to land would not mean a definitive solution to the problem, considering that other issues would still need to be solved. To Beozzo (1996: 55), the biggest controversy could be detected in the “educational, technical assistance and credit” policy.

Then, CNBB, coupled with the government of João Goulart, started to bear fruit when the "Rural Worker Statute" was published that same year, enabling the rural workers to have the same rights as urban workers. However, the reaction of big landowners was again negative and caused traditionalist bishops to manifest themselves as opposed to any change in rural relationships, as this would, at most, raise funds for their parishes among the ruling elite.

This debate within the Brazilian Church chilled out a little on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1963, when Pope John XXIII dies – victim of stomach cancer – leaving his succession as an open matter. After the traditional secret ballot, the choice was for the Italian Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, proclaimed as Pope Paul VI, a follower of the ideas and actions of his predecessor. This tranquilized CNBB profoundly, as the new pope would give continuity to the Second Vatican Council.

However, other things happened in Brazil in 1964, with the seizure of power by a national military coup. The intent of the ruling bourgeoisie class was to prevent workers from having a political ascent because of the basic reforms undertaken by the government of João Goulart. The working class organization was struck by the military, whether in unions, whether in political parties, and the activists of unions and parties were chased and arrested.

There began a period of great uncertainty for the working class, because the military government initiated a series of "fundamental reformations" in many sectors –administrative, fiscal, educational, economic and political – preventing any direct participation of employees in government decisions and providing the dominant class with an increasing economic integration with the United States of America, Western Europe and Japan.

At the same time, our economy became increasingly tied to foreign interests and our dependence on multinational capitalism grew even more. In this context, in 1964 there was the development of the "Land Statute", proposing a modernization of field relations and an agriculture model based on intensive use of technology that, by the way, would basically serve the foreign market.

The Church position regarding the military coup was supported by the traditionalist and increasingly distant industries at first, by the progressive sector of the Brazilian Bishops. This meant that the Church distanced itself from scrimmage, focusing on internal tasks and reformations inherited from the Council.

Repression, including physical elimination of several leaders, was highly used by the military to silence any form of opposition to the project of including Brazil in a more inclusive capitalist universe. Several leaders, belonging to the union and to JUC, MEB and PA were arrested, interrogated and some were tortured to reveal possible links with Communists.

The effects of this forced modernization in the field was soon felt among rural workers by an increased sacking of old settlers and squatters, who then moved to urban areas, what was a relentless pursuit of the rural labor leaders, who were opposed to the process of expanding agricultural frontiers.

Recebido em: 30/08/2012

Aprovado em: 30/08/2012

This policy, supported by government tax incentives, has left in absolute impunity those who practiced the violent occupation of areas, in cases of land stealing, forgery of documents and bribery of judges, notaries and government agencies. The population grew resistant against this particular policy, what led the Church to indulge in a new direct engagement with the popular layers of the population (Beozzo, 1996: 58).

The incentive that would make the Brazilian Church become more critical about the state of poverty and political repression faced by the working class came from the Second Conference of Latin American Bishops in Medellin, Colombia, from August 24<sup>th</sup> to September 6<sup>th</sup>, 1968. The meeting in Medellín:

Under the direct guidance of Paul VI, the meeting would reaffirm various theses of Vatican II and of the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, written in 1967, as, for example, the idea of a church engaged on finding solutions to social problems of the continent, opening up space for the consolidation of the growing Christian Base Communities, guided by a theology oriented toward the 'liberation of the People of God' (Piletti et al, 1997: 350 / 1).

During this time, the AI-5 was in full throttle, and every manifestation of the Church in support to worker projects would suffer severe repression by the military government. And the word "worker" had, for the military ideologues, the connotation of liberalism. The alternative adopted by the progressive clergy was to encourage future projects as not belonging to workers any longer, but as "popular projects", which would display a more comprehensive and less ideological sense.

To consolidate this tactic, there was a certain implantation of what is called "critical awareness of the Gospel", that is, members of an assistance church group encouraged the surging of small groups of residents that would discuss the Christian doctrine and deepen the debate on community issues. In a multiplying effect, these new groups formed yet other groups, and so on, and that would help finding solutions to everyday problems. In Vitória (ES), on days 6, 7 and 8 of January, 1975 (Beozzo, 1993: 130), the Basic Ecclesial Communities (CEBs) were thus born.

For the Church, the CEBs are like real alternatives to counteract the crunch represented by the military dictatorship. The CEB's represented the result of a journey initiated in Medellin and they pointed Puebla as the next destination. For the church, CEB groups are those born from the poorest strata of the population, and that includes urban and rural areas. The intent used to be, and still is, to act in the neighborhoods of poor and marginalized workers, seeking to leverage the assistance work and get ahold of the space left by the leftwing that was persecuted during the military dictatorship. According to Beozzo (1996), unlike the Land Assistance Group and the Assistance Group for Indigenous, which

already have an institutional valuation in CNBB, the base communities (CEBs), because of their more spontaneous and popular character, would not create a national representative body, even though they had over 50,000 communities across the country.

While preaching a “liberating” evangelization, the Brazilian Church made a clear choice for the poor and oppressed, i.e. the working class. The church speech developed to have an increasingly ideological and political character:

May the Church participate in the struggle to set the people free, helping them to discover the causes of oppression in which they live, denouncing all forms of injustice (against the individual or the system) offering a barrier-free society, which eliminated the privileges and the monopoly of the means of production and services and collective facilities concentrated in the hands of a minority. (...) So that the setting-free process of the people is real, it is necessary that we enter, we ourselves, in a process of conversion and class switching (Beozzo, 1996: 131).

However, the political situation in Brazil was undergoing difficult times in terms of human rights, and the Church then started denouncing the torture of political prisoners. It acted particularly against the imprisonment of priests, seminarians, Christian activists and social movement activists.

The defense of human rights would thereafter be the new field of activity of the Church, with the creation of a Pontifical Commission called ‘Justice and Peace’. And alongside other corporate bodies, that religious institution achieves a more elaborate insertion in society. Due to this, there emerged groups and institutions with clearly defined proposals, i.e. the Unions, the Press, Universities, the Brazilian Association of Lawyers, student and professional corporations and non-violence movements.

From this insertion and fighting, and so that there was a greater respect for the rights of the poorest Brazilians, in 1978 the Church chose a more progressive position, creating the campaign “The Cost of Living Movement”, and faced many problems concerning working people.

This increased the political posture before the newly surged dilemmas, and the Church and the Brazilian Bishops prepared for the Third Conference of Latin American Bishops, held in 1979 in Puebla, Mexico, now more strengthened before the Brazilian public opinion.

The main points on which the Brazilian Catholic Church and also Latin America were ruled, since Medellin and the Church were part of the church strategy in Puebla, follow: the challenges from the complaints of the poor, the economic oppression accompanied by political and social oppression, the organization of basic ecclesial communities, the choice for

the poor, the popular reading of the Bible, and the Liberation Theology (what was the bishops' highest expectation).

However, new facts revealed that things in the Church were not exactly conducive to Liberation Theology. The rise of the new Pope John Paul II, elected on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1978, and the decisions of the Conference of Puebla reinforce a rightward turn in the work of the Latin American Church. They were also the landmark for a reverse gear in the desire to re-popularize the secular work of evangelization, which resulted in the inclusion of the Brazilian Church in the new guidelines of the Church.

The arrival of Pope John Paul II to Brazil in 1980 reinforced the Church's more conservative ideas with respect to its new axis of action, that is, from the world to itself. It was then necessary to meet the challenge of secularization that emerged from the new urban-industrial, technical, scientific culture, and also to be attentive to the complaints of the rich for having been forgotten by the church, and to give more support to middle-class movements.

The points that would make the Brazilian Church fit in the new times were basically these:

They also sought to identify the CEBs as a “popular” Church, understanding it as opposed to hierarchy; the insertion of the work of religious men and women and the theological reflection characteristic to these people, as a parallel teaching practice for the bishops; the choice for the poor, and the introduction of class struggle to within the Church, as opposite to its soul-saving mission. The choice for liberation theology and, at the same time, faith becoming politics, in a Marxist perspective; And a popular reading of the Bible as an unacceptable reductionism (*Beozzo, 1996: 225*).

The resumption of a conservative orientation on the Church's part provided extra ammo for the Brazilian conservatives. Thus, the Church began to move with greater caution and gradually became a junior performer of conservative political relations that historically arise from the Roman Curia.

This separation of the front line did not, however, extract the church from politics. It only reinforced its role as an agent of action behind the power. The country was walking in the late 70s to the so-called “transition to democracy”, which was not only in Brazil but throughout Latin America. The Justice and Peace Commission of the Diocese of São Paulo, by Cardinal Dom Paulo Evaristo Arns, began a liaison with the most "progressive" industries for a survey about living conditions of the working class. At that time, thus, there surged several analysis, such as "Sao Paulo 1975: Growth and Poverty"<sup>2</sup> (Camargo, 1976), "The

---

<sup>2</sup> - CAMARGO, Cândido Procópio Ferreira de et alii. São Paulo: Loyola, 1976.

Recebido em: 30/08/2012

Aprovado em: 30/08/2012

strike by 300,000 and commissions of the company"<sup>3</sup> (Moisés, 1977) and "São Paulo: the people on the move"<sup>4</sup> (Singer et al, 1980), that scrutinized the details of everyday working-class of São Paulo industries.

While it stimulated studies on the social organization within the Brazilian society, it also sought for subsidies in order to understand what would happen to political institutions in this transition period. A few studies are worth-mentioning: "Distrust vote: elections and political change in Brazil, 1970-1979"<sup>5</sup> (Lamounier: 1980), "Political parties and elections in Brazil"<sup>6</sup> (Lamounier et: al: s / d) and "The parties and the regime"<sup>7</sup> (Reis, 1978). These studies had an analysis core that focused on the nature and possibilities of transition to democracy, maintaining a direct linkage with policy discussions on opportunities and strategies. In light of these commitments, both internally (workers and land assistance works, CIMI, etc) and externally (fundraising for the work of evangelization, maintenance and construction of new seminaries, convents, etc) it was fundamentally important for the Brazilian Church and CNBB to turn their eyes to the relationship between social justice and citizenship.

It was the "Brazilian miracle" time, supported by the arrogance of a highly exclusionary and repressive authoritarianism that boasted an economic performance and hid its dire social consequences. The prevailing ideology was based on the idea that, with the growth of the economic pie, they would have greater amounts to be distributed. Thus, social exclusion at the time was inherent to the price of progress, that, by the way, was extremely quick and, naturally, rejected social groups would gradually be incorporated into the benefits that were being generated. (*Kowarick, 1982: 44* ).

The axis became the interrelationship between the demands of economic nature and the ones of political nature. For the Church, social justice could only come with a better distribution of income, which the military government helped only to cluster. To change this wicked duo, it was necessary to alter the relations that prevented the democratization and access to it for people. But what would be democracy in a country devastated by a politically authoritarian regime? For the Church, it meant finding (at the core, or rather on the basis, of society) mechanisms that could lead their ideology ahead in a better way, that is, toward their church communities, neighborhood associations and trade unions. These new social actors, in the years 1973-1974, would represent a landmark in political relations in Brazil.

We must bear in mind that the democratization process in Brazil was marked by a not very organized set of probabilities, auspices and faith on the part of almost all the

<sup>3</sup> - MOISÉS, José Á. São Paulo: Cedec, mimeo, 1977.

<sup>4</sup> - SINGER, Paul & Brant, Vinicius Caldeira. Petrópolis: Vozes/Cebrap, 1980.

<sup>5</sup> - LAMOUNIER, Bolivar et alii. Petrópolis, Vozes/Cebrap, 1980.

<sup>6</sup> - LAMOUNIER, Bolivar & Cardoso, Fernando Henrique. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra.

<sup>7</sup> - REIS, Fábio Wanderley. São Paulo: Símbolo, 1978.

Brazilians. The hope was that the authoritarian regime would restore political rights suspended by AI-5 in 1968. That particular hope was founded by a great popular movement in favor of a return to civilian rule. Notwithstanding the caution on the part of those involved in the transition process, the dissimilarities were appearing in relation to the kinds of changes that were needed.

During this period, a broad spectrum of social movements associated with the Church (the movement of residents, associations, and labor unions) played a political role of profound significance in the future of Brazil. The CEB's represented the semen of a policy proposal that resulted in the founding, in 1975, of the Workers' Party (PT) and later in 1983, of the Unique Syndicate of Workers (USW).

Lay people linked to CEB's became part of social movements, such as: movement of residents, associations and trade unions. Many were part of the Assistance Workers in São Paulo, and in 1976 they were encouraged, as trade union activists, to participate in the election for the metalworkers union in São Paulo, as a trade union opposition. These same activists, in the outbreak of strikes in the ABC region from 1978 to 1980 (which resulted in the persecution and expulsion of many union leaders by the military dictatorship) helped in organizing a logistical support of the Church to this new social movement called “new unionism”. According to an analysis by Keck (1991: 61), “the overlapping of roles between different members of these organizations was common, the links with the Church were an essential component of the networks of social movements that developed in the 70s”.

The exit to escape from the control that the military dictatorship imposed on the union movement was to organize the workers at the base. Only this type of organization could challenge the old “fighting” leaderships and attempt, through discussion groups, to get control of the unions in elections. The threshold for the organizing at the base is that it could not be parallel to the union, and the union existing law dictates that only the unions could have legitimacy. Thus, the outputs of the opposition union leaders were to take on the task of fighting for change in the institutional apparatus of the unions that harnessed the state.

When Luis Inacio da Silva, Lula, (...) and the United Metalworkers of São Bernardo, of which he was chairman, assumed a leadership position in the 'new unionism'. Many observers, both inside and outside the labor movement, demonstrated suspicion (...). They did not expect that a leader, the president of their union, were to encourage democratization and participation of the base or press for union autonomy. On the other hand, Lula believed that the most important task of the militant workers was able to win the institutional control of the unions (*Keck, 1991: 65*).

But it is necessary to state that the Brazilian church in this period, strategically, has always had – and still has – an interest in occupying all available spaces, even though that might not be so obvious to the outside observer. By occupying these spaces from the 70s on, the way chosen was the indirect route, for it was not the church's interest to create a political party, like the Christian Democrats of other countries, but to play the role of a “protection means” necessary for the emerging social movements. The continuation of these movements led to the emergence of a new ideology that would change the inside of previously established institutions, political parties, unions, neighborhood associations, etc. And that promoted the social changes desired by the Church in Brazilian society.

Unlike in other countries, including Latin American ones, the Brazilian Church adopted a discourse of radical connotation that established reservations concerning political parties and institutions that did not take into account doctrinal guidelines. To Brambatti (1994: 13), “unlike previous studies show, the progressive Church's participation in the creation of the PT was greater and more effective.”

Therefore, by studying these movements, several social scientists have found that the “grassroots policy” prevalent mainly in the CEB's would be a new form of insertion of the workers in politics. According to Brambatti (1994: 30), “the literature aimed at understanding the genesis of the PT devotes little space to a detailed analysis of the role that the Church played in the establishment of PT”.

The structure of the CEB's and other organizations connected with the Church allowed the assemblies to the choice of delegates, both at regional or national level, without having the connotation of "centralism" or of control of local group activities.

Besides engaging in the process, the church acted as an independent political force, as a tendency within the PT, launching and supporting candidates, some from the Christian Democrats, like Plínio de Arruda Sampaio (*Brambatti, 1994: 31*).

This analysis is corroborated by another scholar, Rodrigues (1990: 12), which states: “Thus, PT emerged from two strong institutions of Brazilian society: the Church and the official union structure”.

The great virtue of the CEB's in dealing with the workers, was in allowing the participation, generated by local initiative, to take place in real time, i.e., the generated idea was that the manipulation of the interests and demands of the popular classes usually came from the outside and that such manipulation always occurred in organizations located at higher levels, preventing a more active participation from the base. The same opinion on the CEB's is shared by Keck (1991: 63), who claims that they promoted “an *ethos* whose core

values were autonomy (in relation to state and party) and self-organization, and whose image prototype was the 'walking' of the long march of God's people toward a more just society”.

This characteristic of presenting two values for the same relationship between the grassroots organization and political action at higher levels stood as a distinctive feature of the PT, or as Keck (1991: 63) says, "it was a belief in the fundamental place of the local initiative".

The influence exerted by the CEB's reflected in the very paths taken by workers to organize their unions.

People from the popular environments grasp this direction through the leaderships generated and consolidated by work itself. These leaders, referred to the permanent control of the base and revocable at any time, should establish the mediation of the assistance worker with the community, preventing the agent from being, in practice, the community leader (*Betto, 1981: 34*).

Over time, the influence of CEB's on the social movement represented by the metal workers was becoming bigger, and it was time the more “combative” unions started to organize nationally. Brambatti (1994: 30 / 2) posits that in the founding of the Workers Party (PT) "the Church had the role of interiorizing the party, organically acting in the formation of directories. The PT won the countryside through the membership of social movements led by the Church in some way”.

The whole process took place amid heavy politicization of the trends that made up the union, and, in 1981, when the National Conference of the Working Class (CONCLAT) took place, the first informal groups of union leaders were replaced by very well structured trends, possessing different standpoints for each of these trends. For Keck (1991: 201), “the CONCLAT was a historic event. Performed between August 21<sup>st</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>, in 1981, in Praia Grande, São Paulo, it brought together 5,247 delegates from 1,126 unions and professional associations”.

According to an important search<sup>8</sup>, there were three tendencies that stood out in the union movement, the first of which was known as the “trade union opposition”, composed of Catholic trade unionists that were connected to the bases. Their prime assumption was the organization of workers in factory committees and they sought to work outside the official structure of the unions. The second tendency was the Trade Union Unity, which had an interest in organizing to seek the leadership of the union movement, especially in federations and confederations. Its leaders were linked to the Brazilian Communist Party. The third tendency was known as the “authentic” one, and unlike the second trend, they had no interest

---

<sup>8</sup> - MENEZES, Clarice M. et alii. *CONCLAT 1981 - a melhor expressão do movimento sindical brasileiro*. Rio de Janeiro, ILDES: 1982.

Recebido em: 30/08/2012

Aprovado em: 30/08/2012

in federations and confederations. They worked within the official structure of the unions and gave support to the industry organizations and to grassroots participation. Their priority was a union independence from the state. Its leadership was exercised by Lula and the United Metalworkers of São Bernardo and Diadema.

However, we must better distinguish the historical significance of CONCLAT in relation to the ones committed afterwards. Among the various resolutions adopted at the conference, there is the composition of the National Pro-CUT, transcribed below:

Once established, the Pro-CUT was seriously divided: on one side a group of union leaders, headed by metalworkers of São Bernardo, who wanted to promote base trade unionism and prioritized on direct action (especially the strikes); and on the other side, those who favored a more moderate approach, with the creation of a national organization that would work more from above, in the arena of political decisions rather than from below, coordinating new initiatives from the bases (*Keck, 1991: 201*).

As there was an overlapping between Pro-CUT union leaders and PT leaders, it was best to decide that the evolution of trade union and parties underwent the contest for hegemony of the bureaucratic apparatus of both the Central as the PT. For this, in 1983, there was the creation of the “Articulation of the 113”, which had the following proposal: the fight against sectors that were seeking formal institutionalization of the labor movement, and the attempt in putting a brake to those who thought the movement was like a vanguard, which would act in civil society on behalf of the working class.

A second CONCLAT or National Congress of the Working Class was held in São Bernardo do Campo in August 1983, with 5,059 delegates from 665 unions and 247 other labor organizations, and was responsible for the founding of the USW (Central Única dos Trabalhadores). The third CONCLAT or National Coordination of the Working Class was held in Praia Grande, São Paulo, in November 1983, and was supported by unions opposed to the strategy followed by the USW.

For scholars, the Articulation of the 113 was a consolidation of the leaders who had the backing of their union wing (including Lula), the members of the CEB's and intellectuals. In the proposal of founding the Articulation, according to Keck (1991: 135), there were some recommendations to its members so that they had a “participation in social, cultural and labor movement, to enhance the recruitment and activities of party organization and, finally, to give more attention to the political education of members”.

In this aspect, training began gaining ground with the creation of the Cajamar, INCA, in 1986. The Cajamar Institute (INCA) arose from the need to have a school policy formation,

not only for Workers Party (PT), but also for the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (USW) and the popular movements.

The contribution of each segment in the process creating INCA, mainly from the methodological contribution of the progressive Church, by a few organism intellectuals, such as the CEPIS (Center for Popular Education and Social Research), especially with the participation of Pedro Pontual and Fray Betto, that brought to INCA the voluntarism and methodology of View, Judge and Act (*Brambatti, 1994: 12, my italics*).

But what really is this approach? Betto (1981: 29) posits that “church base communities are guided by the see-judge-act method” (emphasis in the original). It was undoubtedly the main tool used by the coordinators of the CEB's in the process of forming militants.

The way this approach was used was very varied and, depending on where the community was installed, there was a different approach, adapting to daily life and people. In the exhibition, the problems and embarrassments were perceived, and thus one or more theses were selected and discussed. That was and is called to see.

When one finally gets to the perception of the problem or problems, it is that the community or group skip to the second step of the methodology, namely to judge. The accomplishment of this part was and is always collective and a question arises: How to act? According to Betto (1981: 30), “the second part of this method is always tied to the Gospel. Someone suggests a New Testament passage that, in his/her standpoint, illuminates the topic under discussion. All listen in silence and then make their comments. That is, the relationship of Jesus action-our action”.

The next step is planning activities and name problems in concrete terms: finally to act. According to Fray Betto, the methodology is not something that works without fuss, without complexity, but rather dialectically.

The view now intrinsically has elements to judge and requirements to act. Every moment is interrelated with the others. The evaluation of the following meeting acts is not a start all over again, but the continuity of action, taken under the critical awareness of previous faults and errors and their assistance implications (theological, biblical and political in a broad sense) (*Betto, 1981 : 31*).

For Fray Betto, the process of formation is very complex and requires a participation more grounded on theoretical framework, and which is not only spontaneous, for it requires a moment of reflection on practice. The assistance leaderships must emerge in this reflection to find out what enterprise to be carried out historically.

Therefore, in the opinion of CEB's, it is important that leaders undergo constant training, so that they are not elitist and do not abandon the community. Amid this process

called “dialectic” by CEB's, there comes an important aspect which is fundamental to the understanding of what will be the Union Formation. According to Fray Betto (1981: 37 / 8), “the popular assistances seek to establish a dialectical relationship with the base and one of the most important aspects of this relationship is the discovery of a new pedagogy to work with the popular classes”. But, in order to arouse a greater contact between the CEB's and the popular base, there is a need for mutual re-education, and this is only possible with a methodology inspired on the book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by Paulo Freire. This book meets the needs of very “popular educators”.

The new educators pored over the books of Paulo Freire (...) his philosophical idealism and his Christian humanism and sought to absorb his methodological guidelines for the literacy of people. On the other hand, because of through Paulo Freire's method there opened up a place for the development of critical and collective experiences of individual and social life (Sader, 1995: 168).

In the case of the USW's south school, what we can point to is that a pedagogy based on the theories by Paulo Freire has been incorporated and synthesized by their teachers, and also by students of the training courses. Manfredi (1996: 181) postulates that “the works of Paulo Freire (in particular *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) have an explicitly political character, with a polysemic connotation, generating a multitude of educational practices” (emphasis from the original). This leads us, ultimately, to conclude by stating that the insertion of Christian thought around the popular movement gestated after the toughest period of military dictatorship.

According to Manfredi (1996: 181), there was a great deal of popular educators, with emphasis on the Church workers, who believed in the educational approach of Paulo Freire, because they understood it as democratic and participative. The solution then passes through the discovery of generative themes that are so called because:

Whatever the nature of their understanding or action brought by them, they contain, in themselves, the possibility to unfold in other subjects which, in turn, cause new tasks (...) (Manfredi 1996: 184).

According to the methodology based on Paulo Freire's theories, the so-called generative themes have a lot of content and ideas, which reveal a series of stories that will give a road map to be used in the classroom as research.

In summary, it is an experience where the militants are formed and form others simultaneously, in a multiplying fashion. We follow the Freire's idea of generating themes, where there are no done and finished discourses, but dialogues that in their development, make and change the group (USW, 1996 (e): 2).

It was by using this theoretical framework USW's south school, with the help of CEPIS (Center for Popular Education and Social Research), an entity linked to the Catholic Church, set up a course on Basic Multiplier Training Course (FBM).

### 3 CONSIDERATIONS

Several themes and issues – many just surfacing in this article – should be developed in subsequent research. Just to name a few examples: data on the influence of CNBB on unionism obtained during this survey are underutilized and certainly deserve a specific job; the elucidation of the reasons that led USW to accept the FBM (Basic Multiplier Training Course) as a determinant of the process of union formation. The analysis of another case where there emerges some form of cooperation between actors in the training would teach us much about the conditions for this. The performance of USW's south school and the Church in this process and its impact on relations among the actors would clarify issues not discussed here.

### REFERENCES

- BEOZZO, José Oscar. *A Igreja do Brasil - de João XXVIII a João Paulo II*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1993.
- BETTO, Frei. *O que é Comunidade Eclesial de Base*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1981.
- BRAMBATTI, Luiz Ernesto. *Para além da Educação Política - o Instituto Cajamar e o processo de formação de quadros*. Campo Grande: UFMS, mimeo, 1994.
- CAMARGO, Cândido Procópio Ferreira et alii. *São Paulo 1975 - crescimento e pobreza*. São Paulo: Loyola, 1976.
- CARDOSO, Fernando Henrique et alii. *Regime político e mudança social*. In: Revista de Cultura e Política 3, nov.-jan, 1981
- CUT. *Transformações do Mundo do Trabalho e Perspectivas de Emprego - Formação Básica Multiplicadora*. Florianópolis: CUT, 1996 (e).
- KECK, Margaret E. *PT - A Lógica da Diferença*. São Paulo: Ática, 1991.
- LAMOUNIER, Bolivar & CARDOSO, Fernando Henrique. *Os partidos políticos e as eleições no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, s/d.
- LAMOUNIER, Bolivar et alii. *Voto de desconfiança: eleições e mudança política no Brasil, 1970-1979*. Petrópolis: Vozes/Cebrap, 1980.

MANFREDI, Sílvia M. *Formação sindical no Brasil - história de uma prática cultural*. São Paulo: Escrituras, 1996.

MENEZES, Clarice M. et alii. *CONCLAT 1981 - a melhor expressão do movimento sindical brasileiro*. Rio de Janeiro, ILDES: 1982

MOISÉS, José Á. “A greve dos 300 mil e as comissões de empresa”. São Paulo: Cedec, mimeo, 1977.

PILETTI, Nelson & PRAXEDES, Walter. *Dom Hélder Câmara - entre o poder e a profecia*. São Paulo: Ática, 1997.

REIS, Fábio Wanderley. *Os partidos e o regime*. São Paulo: Símbolo, 1978.

RODRIGUES, Leôncio Martins. *CUT - os militantes e a ideologia*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1990.

SADER, Eder. *Quando novos personagens entraram em cena*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1995.

SINGER, Paul & Brant, Vinicius Caldeira. *São Paulo - o povo em movimento*. Petrópolis: Vozes/Cebrap, 1980.

STEIN, Leila de Menezes. *A Construção do Sindicato de Trabalhadores Agrícolas no Brasil - 1954 a 1964*. Campinas: IFCH, mimeo, 1997.

SUPLICY, Eduardo Matarazzo. *Da distribuição de Renda e dos Direitos à Cidadania*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1988.