

## Inventing Order Catholic Intellectuals in Brazil

Fernando Antonio Pinheiro Filho

*I want to call you by your earthly name, but have forgotten it.*

JORGE DE LIMA, *Anunciação e encontro de Mira-Celi*

Given the transmission of the colonial legacy that made Catholicism the nation's dominant religion, the contingent of artists, writers, philosophers and other producers from the intellectual domain with a Catholic education multiplied and came to pervade each and every stage in the formation of spheres of symbolic production. Many of these individuals located their work within this field of influence and assumed their religious affiliations as an important aspect of their intellectual and artistic identities. Others, however, went further still, making Catholicism the main generator of their work and motivation for interceding in aesthetic and political debates. Unlike the first-mentioned category, the latter's presence in space and time was not diffuse, but rather constituted a group properly speaking, that is, a number of individuals endowed with a collective charisma that allowed reciprocal recognition, and who acted in a programmatic manner based on a set of shared beliefs and values. It is in precisely this stricter acceptance that the present text refers to the Catholic intellectuals who emerged on the Brazilian cultural scene in the late 20s and whose relevant impact resonated therein until the late 40s.

In order to better qualify this group we can divide it into two factions, both based in Rio de Janeiro. First is that galvanized by Jackson de Figueiredo and Alceu Amoroso Lima around the Dom Vital Centre and the magazine *A Ordem*; a group of a more political bent, for whom religion features as the desired foundation for social organization under the banner of order, the precise meaning of which we shall trace forthwith. Second, the triad composed by the artist Ismael Nery and the poets Murilo Mendes and Jorge de Lima, who would make of Catholicism their artistic-literary theme and form, thus garnering support for a positioning in the artistic field. The aim of this paper is to characterize morphologically these two factions and the socio-historical conditions that enabled their development, and to analyze the symbolic bases of their approximation, which, as we shall see, is somewhat surprising given the differences between their individual aesthetic frameworks and forms of artistic practice. The argument will strive to show that "order" – in all the semantic plasticity that implies – had its prophets and its

aesthetes, confronting the respective contradictions these designations entail (prophets who, far from brandishing a counter-establishment heresy, wove together a religious discourse delivered by and to the layman with a view to reinforcing the orthodoxy; people who, like magicians, transmogrified the theme of order into that of eternity, incorporating it into a formally inventive language with no direct allegiance to the tradition, at least as understood and used by its first exponents) and the social arrangement that not only allowed it to emerge, but which also prescribed the limits of its impact.

## The prophets of order

In his entry on Catholicism in Brazil for the *Enciclopédia Delta-Larousse* (cf. Lima, 1967, pp. 1848-1873), Alceu Amoroso Lima divided its history into three periods: first, the catechesis and formation of Christian consciousness, which lasted until Independence; second, an intermediary period marked by regalism and the decadence of the Christian spirit, with the subordination of the Church to the State; and, third, beginning in the early decades of the 20th Century, a phase of revitalization of Christian precepts among the elite and the struggle to spread Church orthodoxy, riven from the State, throughout the various social classes. From 1922 on, there would be a “growing flurry of Catholic expansion among the intellectual elites” (*Idem*, p. 1871), the biggest in history, such that “it would be impossible to identify, at any prior time, a similar number of Catholics among top-ranking thinkers, writers, historians, professors, etc.” (*Idem*, p. 1871). By way of corroborating his thesis, he enumerates a cast that helps map the field. We shall follow his original classification:

- *Theology and Philosophy*: Fr. Leonel Franca, Jackson de Figueiredo, Alexandre Correia, Fr. Teixeira Leite Penido, Almeida Magalhães, Ubaldo Puppi, *dom* Estevão Bittencourt, Friar Pedro Secondi, Friar Boaventura, Fr. Ávila, Henrique Hargreaves.
- *History and Journalism*: Felício dos Santos, Perilo Gomes, Jônatas Serrano, Oliveira Viana, Hamilton Nogueira, Pedro Calmon, Francisco Sá Filho, Vilhena de Moraes, Juarez Távora, Luiz Delgado, Hildebrando Leal, Almir Madeira, Américo Lacombe, Hélio Viana, Edgard da Mata Machado, Nilo Pereira, Fernando Carneiro, Daniel de Carvalho, Heráclito Sobral Pinto, Hildebrando Accioly, Affonso Pena Júnior, Alfredo Valadão, Hélio Tornaghi, Francisco Mangabeira, Celestino Basílio, Altino Arantes.
- *Literature and the Humanities*: Antônio de Alcântara Machado, Durval de Moraes, Jorge de Lima, Paulo Setúbal, Tasso da Silveira, Augusto Frederico Schmidt, Gustavo Corção, Cassiano Ricardo, Plínio Salgado, Murilo Araújo, José Américo de Almeida, José Lins do Rêgo, Andrade Muricy, Murilo Mendes, Otávio de Faria, Alphonsus de Guimarães Filho, Peregrino Júnior, Carlos Lacerda, Carolina Nabuco, Adalgisa Nery, Lúcia Benedetti, Henriqueta Lisboa, Roberto Alvim Correia, *dom* Marcos de Araújo Barbosa, *dom* Helder Câmara, Antônio Calado, Mário Matos, Adonias Filho, Odilo Costa Filho, Osman Lins,

Gladstone Chaves de Mello, Sílvio Elia, Clóvis Monteiro, Fr. Augusto Magne, Fr. João Mohana, José Rafael de Meneses, João Etienne Filho, José Paulo Moreira da Fonseca.

- *Sciences*: Raimundo Bandeira, Nerval de Gouveia, Carlos Chagas Filho, Joaquim da Costa Ribeiro, Paulo Sá, Francisco Magalhães Gomes, Brito Velho, Luís Cintra do Prado, Rui Coutinho, Fernando Carneiro (cf. *Idem*, pp. 1871-72).

The reader will note that the list far exceeds the group we intend to address here. Compiled in the late 60s by one of its founding figures, it is not exempt from a certain retrospective illusion and desire to prolong the movement's prime by some decades. It includes names that do not fit the definition to which I referred. What really matters for the purposes of this paper is the inaugural moment of this movement, attributed to Jackson de Figueiredo's conversion to Catholicism in 1916. Figueiredo was the leader of the conservative Catholic reaction inspired by 19<sup>th</sup>-century European anti-revolutionary thought, the founder of *A Ordem* magazine and the Dom Vital Centre, pivotal institutions in the development and dissemination of his message and at the helm of which he was succeeded by Alceu Amoroso Lima after his death in 1928. We shall endeavour to trace the careers of these two figures, the meaning of their decisive works during the period and the place this select group had within a society undergoing socio-political reorganization and marked by the new cultural dealings of the leading groups.

### A reasoned sentimental summa

It was in these terms that Jackson de Figueiredo (1891-1928) referred to his legacy shortly before his death. Expressive terms in more ways than one, recalling at once the synthesis he attributed to the Catholic doctrine and his own oeuvre and militancy, whilst bequeathing to his disciples clues as to the paths they should take on behalf of one who had nurtured a keen awareness of the implications of his position as an exemplary leader, in which capacity he strove for the conversion of souls to religion and its cause. His own experience as a convert gave him sufficient authority on the matter: many are the passages (either in his letters or in the recollections of friends) in which Jackson recalled his bohemian years as a law student in Bahia, a time when he boasted a disbelief fostered by an education in a Protestant school in his native Aracaju, where he would be initiated into a materialism and evolutionism later conjoined with the "scientific positivism" of the Recife School, converging upon his first intellectual guide, Nietzsche. In what follows we shall see how these are some of the doctrines subsumed under the tag of "naturalism", which Alceu Amoroso Lima saw as a synthesis of the modern intellectual trends to be combated.

Yet the young man who arrived in Rio de Janeiro in 1914, already the author of two books of poetry, published in Sergipe and Bahia (in which he declared himself an atheist whose only religion was friendship), was on-course for a spiritual crisis that would lead him to religion, a development to some degree instigated by his friendship with Farias Brito, his readings of Pascal and contact with the Pastoral letter of the Archbishop Sebastião Leme (1916).<sup>1</sup> With no

means of his own, patronage by an admiral uncle and Dias de Barros, congressman for Sergipe, assured him a job as debate reviewer at the Federal Congress that would tide him over while he looked for a position in the press, which would eventually become the main outlet for the ideas already forming in his mind. As his political position is not entirely intelligible without recourse to the metaphysical/religious speculation upon which it was based, it would be useful to outline the system developed in his two studies on Farias Brito (*Algumas reflexões sobre a filosofia de Farias Brito* [Some reflections on the philosophy of Farias Brito], 1916, and *A questão social na filosofia de Farias Brito* [The social question in the philosophy of Farias Brito], 1919) and in the book that would prove the theological cornerstone of his entire doctrine, *Pascal e a inquietação moderna* ([Pascal and modern disquietude] 1922)<sup>2</sup>. Another reason for doing so lies in the fact that, as I see it, the consistency of this grounding as a discourse well-adapted to its diffuse social demand was fundamental to the consolidation of his leadership – not to mention its resonance with the aesthetic problems with which the Catholic artists were then grappling.

The works of Farias Brito served Jackson as a sort of spiritualist apprenticeship in Roman Catholicism. What immediately appeals is the criticism of Bergsonian rationalism, opening space for intuition and inner life as an antidote to the ideas of the 1870s generation, immediately associated with Tobias Barreto, Sylvio Romero and the “Recife School”, all of whom degenerated into agnosticism and scepticism. This new spiritualist feeling was already present in his symbolist poetry (it is worth remembering that the poet Pedro Kilkerry was a classmate of Jackson’s on his law course in Bahia), but it was the systemization represented by Farias Brito that best served as a guide on his intellectual journey toward Truth and Being. Spiritualist philosophy teaches that no access to Being (absolute unity) is to be gained from the fragmented notions of reason; only the experience of suffering can restore this totality - unattainable through concepts - to the interiority of consciousness. Knowledge begins with pain and only later avails of the operations of intelligence, and whilst authentic truth should be rational in form, it derives from intimate contact with the self through the agency of suffering. It was on this particular point that Catholic theology came to the fore, providing the very template of suffering: God incarnate and suffering on the cross is the true source of access to the self. If the Calvary of Christ becomes a mirror of human life, as the life of reason, valorised by the quest for truth, existential angst and tragic freedom become the nostalgic reflection of a state of plenitude lost in the Fall.

According to Pascal, the Fall, as essentially inexplicable, is precisely the dogma that ought to be accepted without discussion, as to deny it renders everything else inexplicable. If, up to this point, Jackson is a commentator whose philosophical erudition is beyond dispute, his most personal contribution – and central to his political conceptions – consists in assimilating this Adamic pre-Fall state into a vertically hierarchised order (God/Man; the self-sufficient and the dependent, according to Pascal) whose only possible historical transposition is the Church/Society relationship. In other words, the structure of the church is the earthly reflection of the celestial order and hierarchical balance between this institution and the rest of society is

the mode of life-organization that corresponds to the true being of man and things (including social things). Curbing the anarchy of modern-day life therefore depends on one's capacity to live the inner life as a person, not just as an individual – a purely biological entity, and therefore one condemned to slavish determinism by the carnal passions. A new sociability needs to resume the formation of people who are free to want order (and the good as its consequence) and capable of experiencing deep within a pain analogous to that of Christ.

Jackson de Figueiredo's political platform therefore consisted in organizing this spiritual elite encumbered with the (theo)logical right to conduct the national life. His express goal was to create institutions after the cult of order [and its correlates in hierarchy and authority] that could prepare a new front-line equipped to intervene, in the name of Catholicism and in absolute consonance with the directives of Church, on all levels of Brazilian life. It is symptomatic that the atheist who declared friendship his only religion should now refer to his group as "my little church", an ecumenical community of men free to submit to the order whence irradiates that same imperative toward submission. This intent came to concrete fruition in the foundation of the magazine *A Ordem* in 1921 and of the Centro Dom Vital the following year, two vehicles for the formation and divulgation of the group's message and from whose nucleus would derive political actions considered more urgent by the minute if the real order of society were to be brought in-line with that lost order, the only historical equivalent of which was the idealized vision of a Brazilian tradition that places all its emphasis on the role of the Catholic religion as a constitutor of national unity. Jackson's theses are faithful renditions of the conservative anti-revolutionary European thought of the 19th Century (of whose exponents Joseph de Maistre is perhaps the most often cited by Jackson) and was in full consonance with the more right-leaning political movements of the early decades of the 20th, which railed against everything "revolutionary", in other words, against the modern social configuration that destroyed the erstwhile harmony. Restoring order therefore meant restoring the natural distance (and inequality) between men, which entailed reinforcing its keystone ideas of authority and hierarchy, a latent evocation of a medieval nostalgia, but one that fed the social mindset with the staple foods of family values, chivalric nobility, the small land holding, the non-urban rhythms of life and of community living, to use the terms of Francisco Iglesias<sup>3</sup>.

It should come as no surprise that, for Figueiredo, the revolutionary enemies spanned both the liberals and the communists; whether in the Europe of his inspiration or in the Brazil before his very eyes. His impassioned discourse set forth in articles in the magazine, in lectures and courses at the Centre, in his books and journal papers, identified and vigorously attacked the seeds of revolt. *Tenentismo* (a political movement that sought to deliver civil administrative posts into the hands of young military officers) was fingered because it subverted the hierarchy of the military (the institution that was supposed to safeguard it), influenced by the positivism that prevailed at the Military Academy, and because it threatened to upset the balance between the social classes. The same charge was levelled against working class demands, while the industrial elite was frowned upon for the materialism that distanced it from the Catholic project. His defence of the regimes of Bernardes and Epitácio Pessoa does not imply any enthusiasm for

the accord among the elites of the Old Republic, but merely a defence of the prevailing political order, which, far from ideal, but at least preferable to disorder, deserved tacit support. Viewing the political movement of the period as a mere challenge to authority, the Catholic reaction seems to have offered some relief to the petit bourgeoisie in the face of the unrest caused by rising social groups. The clamour for order reawakened that social mindset to which I referred earlier, a symbolic substratum for the social existence of sectors that felt threatened by the growth of the working class and the bourgeoisie that had hijacked the internal market then gathering momentum.

The scope and force of the Catholic reaction commanded by Jackson at this time can be explained by the powerful repercussions of a discourse that rallied latent demands for social legitimization on behalf of certain sectors, even if (and to the extent of which) they were unconscious of this distinction. In fact, the diffusion of a Catholic thought that spoke in its own name had no precedent in the history of the nation, corroborating, in political terms, Leme's diagnosis. The Catholicism revived by the coordination of the Dom Vital Centre was not organized into a political party (by orientation of the Church and against Jackson's own wishes). The direct taking of power mattered less than ensuring that the organization of the State and society in all sectors of life should occur in compliance with Catholic precepts as understood by the new elite then being schooled<sup>4</sup>. Yet their sphere of action was no longer limited to the preparation of these burgeoning elites. It was necessary to convince society in general that the nation, as a Catholic nation, could not be governed by non-Catholics. The Centre's message had to reach the masses, and this was precisely the intent behind the institutional initiatives listed in the last text note, the Eucharistic Congresses of the day and other key initiatives, such as the construction of the Christ the Redeemer Statue (inaugurated in 1931) and the adoption of Our Lady of Aparecida as the patron saint of Brazil (that same year).

Such lines of action were clearly designed to combat popular brands of Catholicism with little time for ecclesiastical hierarchy in their devotion to the saints. Jackson's work had already rejected rites devoid of orthodox content and the gestural formalism that failed to touch the conscience. At that same time the Church was accentuating the importance of the Eucharist as a sacrament that, representing unity and communion, should be the centrepiece of the restored faith. Later we shall see how ideas of unity, essence and the flight of time, crystallized in Jackson's works as a politically effective discourse, would reverberate as expressive material among Catholic artists. For the time being, suffice it to underscore that his activity enabled a new intellectual experience, lending voice and visibility to those toiling in the name of the vision of a Catholic world. In this sense, it would perhaps be no exaggeration to attribute to his group the invention of the Catholic intellectual. Note that this experience implied a certain isolation from other initiatives in the intellectual field – such as the eagerness to found institutions of one's own -, holding stronger attraction for the occupants of positions out of step with the symbolic production. In short, the Catholic reaction led to the invention of a forum and a mode by which to take a stance on issues, even within the national sphere, that were not directly levied at competitors in the religious market (which held little weight as yet, at least in

comparison with the anarchic devotion of vernacular Catholicism). The message issued by the Dom Vital Centre was therefore a hybrid cultural product directed toward many spheres of social life, circulating a set of ideas that were tantamount to “bus” concepts. This characteristic explains its power of diffusion, reaching even the artistic and literary worlds, which would operate the transubstantiations of “order” we shall address further on. It also explains the transitory nature of its effect, as if to demonstrate the impossibility of being everywhere at once (it is worth remembering that, with the second post-war period, political conservatism was undermined by an ideological shift toward the left by the Centre’s leadership).

And so, prior to analyzing the artistic output that picked up on these emanating signals, we must first understand them more thoroughly in the context of the group’s aesthetic concepts, especially in relation to the development of modernism. Alceu Amoroso Lima, Jackson’s immediate successor, took it upon himself to broadcast these signals, establishing in his own critical work a Catholic standard of literary appraisal.

### After Availability

An overview of Jackson’s work would not be complete without mention of the conversion of Alceu Amoroso Lima in 1929. Born in Rio de Janeiro in 1893, he graduated in law in 1913, departing for Europe that same year to study under Bergson at the Collège de France. Once back in Brazil, in 1919, he took to literary criticism under the pseudonym Tristão de Athayde, writing literary columns for the Rio press. Over the course of the next ten years he achieved renown in the as yet predominantly dilettante world of literary criticism by rejecting the impressionist, off-hand style of chronicle-like commentary that approached the work less as language than as a platform for generic ramblings on the issues of the day. A key moment in this professional stance was his drubbing of one of the heavyweights of this impressionist criticism, Agripino Grieco, whose work he described as “vulgar and hollow eloquence”, “gentle conversation for cultured men”, the antidote to which would be his own “critical expressionism”, which boosted objectivity by reining in intuition, thus making space for analysis of the genuinely literary elements of the work. His criticism tended to veer toward the aesthetic; a step franchised by his intellectual edge over his competitors, and took modernism as its subject. The attention paid to this innovative new trend is a corollary to the predominance of the aesthetic dimension in his work at the time. However, becoming the critic of modernism, a role for which he – with the exception of the authors themselves – was best prepared when it came to discussing the modernist innovation on the level of language, did not mean that he adhered completely to the group’s aesthetic (and political) project. Still too tightly bound to the cultural constellation represented by a *passadista* adulation of the authors of the past to incorporate their radical break with Parnassian rhetoric, his criticism led to a “tempered modernism”, to use the expression of Antonio Candido (cf. Lafetá, 2000)<sup>5</sup>.

Upon his conversion, and therefore his wholesale adherence to the cause of “order”, his aesthetic positions underwent a smooth shift in parallel with his politico-ideological revisions.

Fundamentally, Lima found himself subordinating the aesthetic value of a literary work to its moral function, in accordance with the doctrine of Jackson de Figueiredo, who discarded the notion of beauty for beauty's sake; art only achieves true beauty by being moral – and therefore Catholic –, given that evil is incapable of producing beauty. The movement of 1922 was summarily rejected by Jackson because it subverted the principle of authority, which was cause in itself for its disqualification, as there can be no reconstruction if not founded upon order as its origin and destination. Hence, for Jackson, the modernists expressed only reckless anarchy and therefore had to be combated. Lima, who had made his name from a form of criticism that focused on literary language, which made him the right man to gauge the meaning of the movement, had to resolve a contradiction that would ultimately see him abandon criticism and relegate literature to the background. Between 1929 and 1941, only five of the twenty-three works he published dealt with literature, largely supplanted by religion in its politico-social refractions. So while he lost standing as a professional critic, he rose within the Dom Vital Centre and to the presidency of the Catholic Action, becoming leader of the movement after Jackson's death.

In his own words, embracing the Catholic cause entailed an “adieu to availability”, an expression used as the title of a letter addressed to Sérgio Buarque de Holanda in 1929, in which he explained his decision at length, adding that it would imply an “awakening from the anti-dogmatic dream” (Lima, 1969). We already know the dogma to be affirmed, and it showed no divergences from the directives established by Jackson. Lima captures its essence in the fight against naturalism (an umbrella term that spanned Marxism, psychoanalysis, evolutionary theory and every other form of materialism), which he felt was leading Brazil astray of its Catholic roots, with re-Christianization being the only alternative to revolution. Literature was to be a weapon in this battle, and it earned instrumental status: if it does not serve the goal of moral honing, it degenerates into frivolous diversion. “Art for art's sake” may serve men in a situation of availability, but it lacked religious legitimacy, and that was the only kind that mattered, so much so that it became his sole criteria for literary quality and the selection of authors deemed worthy of his attention, which would explain Lima's connection with the spiritualist poets, a group that formed around the magazines *Terra do Sol* and *Festa* throughout the 30s and which was spearheaded by the likes of Tasso da Silveira, Augusto Frederico Schmidt and Cecília Meireles, practitioners of a modernism that was somewhat attenuated in terms of linguistic innovation, but firmly present on the religious front. Indeed, it shed similar light on his regard for the Catholic novels of Octavio de Faria, Lúcio Cardoso and Cornélio Pena – authors who had links to the Dom Vital Centre and featured in literary discussions in the magazine *A Ordem*.

Connected with the Catholic reaction and its institutional organs, the group formed by the poets Jorge de Lima and Murilo Mendes and by the artist Ismael Nery occupies a special place on the horizon discussed so far, for the following reasons.

## A Catholic Aesthetic



The Catholic militancy of the Dom Vital Centre under Alceu Amoroso Lima ended up attracting Murilo Mendes and Jorge Lima, recent converts to Catholicism, who began to contribute to the magazine *A Ordem*. The conversion of the two poets was due to Ismael Nery (1900-1934)<sup>6</sup>, who practiced a mystical Catholicism whose aesthetic doctrine, essentialism, conceived as a mental discipline for transcending time and accident, would have a huge impact on the work of both, as well as underpinning Nery's own pictorial production by rendering explicit the invisible essential forms in terrestrial manifestations. Nery emerged as an analogue to the leadership exercised by Jackson (and later by Lima), assuming the structural role of prophet in the triad, even literally speaking, albeit with some important divergences from these two leaders, especially in the sense he imposed upon religious experience and its political consequences. As a result, we can safely say that the value of this group's output far exceeds anything hitherto inspired by the Catholic movement, thanks to the relative distance they kept from it, but also because they knew how to make a genuinely literary treatment of the Catholic problematic. The watershed in this sense was the 1935 volume of poetry *Tempo e eternidade* (Time and Eternity), co-written by Lima and Mendes and envisaging the "restoration of poetry in Christ". In this work, the appeals to the eternal that are echoed in the notion of Order and filtered through the bracketing of historical time in favour of the essence, as professed by Nery, gave rise to a mystical poetry composed in Modernist metre that posited a less alternative position in relation to the poles of literary consecration, thus reverting their relative disadvantage in relation to the leading lights in the artistic and literary world.

According to Roger Bastide (1997)<sup>8</sup>, Jorge de Lima's work<sup>7</sup> reveals a shift from religious to mystic poetry. The first phase refers to his incorporation of the cult of saints and other themes from popular Catholicism as elements of regional devotion; mysticism, in the strict sense (described by Bastide as the quest for supreme unity through the fusion of the soul with the divine), would only find more polished expression in his later poetry, though it was prefigured as early as the 30s, especially in *Tempo e eternidade* and *A túnica inconsútil* (The Seamless Tunic - 1938). On the other hand, the work of Murilo Mendes (1901-1975)<sup>9</sup> already tended toward mysticism right from the emergence of Catholicism in his writing, particularly in *Tempo e eternidade*. The key to understanding this work is, I propose, the authors' assimilation of the doctrine and apostolate of the recently deceased Ismael Nery, to whom the book was dedicated. In his "Recordações de Ismael Nery" (Memories of Ismael Nery), a collection of articles published in the *O Estado de S. Paulo* and em *Letras e artes* in 1948, in which Murilo Mendes celebrated his friend's memory, this influx is addressed in the following terms:

Ismael restored the notion of God to our spirit, or rather, he gave it artistic, affective and philosophical bases, especially by approaching the Church, man and everyday life as continuations of Christ's Incarnation. At the same time as the ideal of God Incarnate began to circulate with more familiarity in our daily lives, it imposed upon us all the understanding of the extra-temporal roots of the concept. Ismael would spend hours and hours recovering God from the sidelines, to which he had been consigned by

scientific intolerance and didactic concerns, whilst accentuating the eternal origins in which he moves freely. In fact, the Incarnation of Christ is the dawning of eternity in time. And Christ appears before us restored to his true stature as revealed in the New Testament; this was a powerful vitiation of the concept of Christ devised in the 19th Century - the “meek Nazarene”, the philanthropist, the social reformer, the moralist. Christ arose to us as the everyday companion of man, his guide through time and eternity. [...] Christ came to us as the highest artist, the creator of a whole style of life. Of course, the concept of religion was likewise altered: we began to sense its deep-set connections with life, rather than the fatal detachment that had hitherto prevailed in a deformed culture lost somewhere between two categories (Mendes, 1996, p. 43).

Murilo Mendes attributed to Nery the circulation of the idea of God grounded within art. We have seen the extent to which the diffusion of “Christ’s Incarnation”, prolonged in the Church, resurging from the “marginal status” imposed by “scientific intolerance”, depended on the work begun by Jackson de Figueiredo and his group, to whose magazine, as mentioned earlier, Mendes and Lima were contributors, mostly writing on Nery and essentialism<sup>10</sup>. Yet the approximation between intellectuals with more direct ties to the Dom Vital Centre and the fraction of Catholic artists that could assume that epithet thanks to the conditions they afforded them was not based on ideological adherence, but on a partial confluence of perspective that depended on the possibility of transforming the conception of politics and society posited by the Centre into a genuinely literary problem. The idea of order, with all that is most fixed within it and its appeal to perfection, when temporalized, results in the notion of eternity. On the other hand, the bracketing of time, the abandonment of accident in favour of essence, the shifting of empirical multiplicity toward the deepest unity of the all, imported from Nery’s doctrine, became fundamental references in the Catholic poetry of Murilo Mendes and Jorge de Lima. Responding in the magazine *O Jornal* in 1945 as to what he meant in *Tempo e eternidade* when he proposed “restoring poetry in Christ”, Lima said:

It was basically this: after *Poemas escolhidos*, published in 1932, I began to feel dissatisfied with my poetry and started looking for new solutions. I started leaning more toward a genre of poetry different to the one I had been practicing up till then, something with a more mystical base. As I had no ties to any school, I felt free to undertake the desired renewal, having already arrived at the conclusion that the best grounds on which to do so would be through a poetry restored in Christ, the highest Poetry, the highest truth, our very destiny, and there was a tradition to draw from, not regional or national, but the most universal of all traditions, the Biblical [tradition]. It so happened that, at a lecture with Murilo Mendes, I saw that he felt the same yearning. During another conversation, that distich simply came. We put it on the frontispiece of *Tempo e eternidade*. [...] After the book co-written with Murilo, I published *A túnica inconsútil*, which is nothing other than the tunic of Christ himself, the only one that can’t be divided (Lima, 1997, pp. 45-46).

This passage is expressive in detailing the reasons behind this exclusively literary change of course, a decision made possible by the lack of “ties to any school”, by the fact that he had already accepted the identification between Christ, poetry and truth, and, fundamentally, because he could write under the aegis of the universal, exactly at a time when the most dynamic strand of national modernism was subordinating linguistic invention to a treatment of national problems. When Lima thought in these terms in 1945, he had the benefit of a certain hindsight that positioned him as an innovator in the literary field of the 30s. Based on that, the invention of the place he and Murilo Mendes came to occupy with the publication of their jointly written book was only possible thanks to their ability to create solutions on the level of language that were equal to the conceptual repertoire they incorporated. By way of an example, one could mention the use of Catholic communion as a metaphor for unity in dispersion (the same Christ is God both fragmented and whole in each host, as Bastide so aptly reminds us), so present in Murilo Mendes; or Jorge de Lima’s explanation of the title of his next book: the tunic of God is seamless, mystical effusion transcends time and space, rendering illusory all the subdivisions experienced on the terrestrial plane.

On this note, we shall return to my main line of argument, seeking to underscore the possible unity.

### Aesthetic Form and Social Form

The consolidation of the religion-centred discourse operated by Jackson de Figueiredo and his group sought to span the totality of the social world and it attained, especially through the work of Murilo Mendes, Jorge de Lima and Ismael Nery, a very particular refraction in which it reached the sphere of the arts. Despite the largely political differences between these two factions (the ultra conservatism of the movement’s initial creed under Jackson did not carry over into the work of this trio, distanced as it was from the imperative of direct intervention in society), underpinning them is a shared perception of time and society that saw the group run counter to the growing drive toward autonomy and differentiation that beset the development of the intellectual field. It was the counter-revolutionary mindset of the writings of Louis de Bonald and Joseph de Maistre that best expressed this theologico-metaphysical backlash against science, combined with a call to faith and the glorification of the past, which implied a reassessment of the concept of society, no longer viewed as groups of interdependent individuals, but, once again – as in the period preceding the flurry of secular social theories -, as a generic totality marked by the Fall and its historical ramifications, as such dependent on Divine providence. As a consequence, the prerogative of analysis of the social world swung back to religious thought, and its goal became a hierarchised corps immersed in a static temporality whose perfection is disturbed by history. This was the perception converted into poetic language that set its exponents apart in relation to their modernist competitors.

Otherwise put, the formation of the Catholic intellectual field throughout the 1920s and 30s resulted in the transfigured incorporation of “order” into the artistic/literary field, an operation

conducted by authors whose careers drove the Catholic movement ahead in the dispute for the specific authority in question, and for the renown they felt they deserved – one might recall Jorge de Lima’s many unsuccessful bids for membership of the Brazilian Academy of Letters -, but which distanced them from a whole host of social proprieties. We have seen how the Catholic theodicy constructed by Jackson and co. successfully transformed into a sociodicy, taking root as the legitimizing discourse of the *raison d’être* of certain social sectors whose decline was implied in the new oligarchic pact and in the general circumstances of the period’s transformations. The Catholic authors and artists worked a second transmutation of order, translating it into the language of aesthetic disputes, making Catholicism a genuinely literary language capable of plotting the coordinates for a niche of its own invention, in which its appeal to the mystical could counterbalance the tendency to plumb the historical problems related to the formation of the nation.

## Bibliographical References

- AMARAL, Aracy. (1984), *Ismael Nery 50 anos depois*. São Paulo, MAC-USP.
- ANDRADE, Fábio de Souza. (1997), *O engenheiro noturno*. São Paulo, Edusp.
- BASTIDE, Roger. (1997), *Poetas do Brasil*. São Paulo, Edusp.
- BOSI, Alfredo. (1994), *História concisa da literatura brasileira*. São Paulo, Cultrix.
- BOURDIEU, Pierre. (1991), *As regras da arte*. São Paulo, Cia. das Letras.
- CANDIDO, Antonio. (1985), *Literatura e sociedade*. São Paulo, Companhia Editora Nacional.
- CENTRO DOM VITAL. (1929), *Jackson de Figueiredo. In Memoriam*. Rio de Janeiro, Centro Dom Vital.
- CASTELLO, José Aderaldo. (1999), *A literatura brasileira, origens e unidade*. São Paulo, Edusp.
- DIAS, Romualdo. (1996), *Imagens de ordem*. São Paulo, Editora da Unesp.
- FIGUEIREDO, Jackson de. (s.d.), *Correspondência*. Rio de Janeiro, A.B.C.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1916), *Algumas reflexões sobre a filosofia de Farias Brito*. Rio de Janeiro, Revista dos Tribunais.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1919), *A questão social na filosofia de Farias Brito*. Rio de Janeiro, Revista dos Tribunais.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1922), *Pascal e a inquietação moderna*. Rio de Janeiro, Anuario do Brasil.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1929), “Dolorosas interrogações”. In: *Jackson de Figueiredo. In Memoriam*. Rio de Janeiro, Centro Dom Vital.
- HEILBRON, Johan. (2006), *Naissance de la sociologie*. Paris, Agone.
- HOLANDA, Sérgio Buarque de. (1996), *O espírito e a letra*. São Paulo, Cia. das Letras.
- IGLESIAS, Francisco. (1962), “Estudo sobre o pensamento reacionário: Jackson de Figueiredo”. *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, II (2), jul.
- LAFETÁ, João Luiz. (2000), *1930: a crítica e o modernismo*. São Paulo, Editora 34.
- LIMA, Alceu Amoroso. (1950), *Manhãs de São Lourenço*. Rio de Janeiro, Agir.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1967), “Síntese da evolução do catolicismo no Brasil”. In: *Enciclopédia Delta Larousse*. Rio de Janeiro, Editora Delta, pp. 1848-1873.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1969), *Adeus à disponibilidade e outros adeuses*. Rio de Janeiro, Agir.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1971), *Companheiros de viagem*. Rio de Janeiro, José Olympio.

- LIMA, Jorge de. (1997), *Poesia completa*. Rio de Janeiro, Nova Aguilar.
- MENDES, Murilo. (1994), *Poesia completa e prosa*. Rio de Janeiro, Nova Aguilar.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1996), *Recordações de Ismael Nery*. São Paulo, Edusp.
- MICELI, Sergio. (1988), *A elite eclesiástica brasileira*. Rio de Janeiro, Bertrand Brasil.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2001), *Intelectuais à brasileira*. São Paulo, Cia. das Letras.
- NOGUEIRA, Hamilton. (1976), *Jackson de Figueiredo*. São Paulo, Edições Loyola.
- A ORDEM. Órgão do Centro Dom Vital*. Issues: 4, Dec, 1229; 49, Mar, 1934; 50, Apr, 1934; 55, Sept, 1934; 59, Jan, 1935; 62, Apr, 1935; Jan, 1936; Feb, 1937; Apr, 1937; Jun, 1937; Jul, 1937; Jan, 1938; Nov, 1938.
- PAULINO, Ana Maria. (1995), *Jorge de Lima*. São Paulo, Edusp.
- RODRIGUES, Cândido Moreira. (2005), *A Ordem: uma revista de intelectuais católicos (1934-1945)*. São Paulo, Autêntica/Fapesp.

#### Resumo

##### *A invenção da ordem: intelectuais católicos no Brasil*

O trabalho investiga a gênese social e as características da emergência de uma experiência intelectual diretamente ligada à propagação da doutrina católica, que se configurou no Brasil entre as décadas de 1920 e 1940. A análise centra-se na atividade do Centro Dom Vital e da revista *A Ordem*, órgãos que expressam a militância política e cultural de Jackson de Figueiredo, principal líder laico do movimento. Em seguida, procura compreender como se dá a aproximação de artistas e literatos que incorporam o catolicismo como tema e forma de suas produções no interior dos círculos modernistas, a partir da análise da trajetória da tríade formada por Ismael Nery, Jorge de Lima e Murilo Mendes, que lograram inscrever sua produção no pólo mais dinâmico das realizações do período.

Palavras-chave: Catolicismo; Revista *Ordem*; Literatura brasileira; Poesia mística.

#### Abstract

##### *Inventing order: catholic intellectuals in Brazil*

The work investigates the social genesis and characteristics of the emergence of an intellectual experience directly linked to the propagation of the Catholic doctrine, which took shape in Brazil between the 1920s and 1940s. The analysis centres on the activity of the Dom Vital Centre and the magazine *A Ordem*, entities which expressed the political and cultural militancy of Jackson de Figueiredo, the movement's main lay leader. The text then looks to comprehend the approximation of artists and literary figures who incorporated Catholicism as both the theme and form of their productions within modernist circles, basing its analysis of the trajectory of the triad formed by Ismael Nery, Jorge de Lima and Murilo Mendes, who succeeded in including their production in the period's most dynamic pole of artistic activity.

Keywords: Catholicism; *A Ordem* magazine; Brazilian literature; Mystical poetry.

#### Notes

1. Sebastião Leme (1882- 1942), archbishop transferred from Olinda to Rio de Janeiro in 1921. His Pastoral Letter of Greetings to the Archdiocese of Olinda called upon lay Catholics to rally to the task of re-Christianizing Brazil and had a definitive impact on Jackson's transition toward Catholicism. Jackson would return to this document, published in Rio de Janeiro in 1918, in the last letter written before his death, in which he would bemoan the fact that nothing had changed in the last ten years and that Leme's diagnosis remained as apt as ever: "we are a majority that does not act, a strangled majority. The Brazil we see, the Brazil-Nation, does not belong to us, but to the minority. To us Catholics is merely granted the right to live" (*apud* Figueiredo, 1929). Leme is therefore a stark presence in Figueiredo's career from start to finish, and he followed his orientations closely.

2. Here, I am following Barreto Filho's line in his introduction to the correspondence between Jackson and Alceu (cf. Jackson, s.d.). Dated to 1938, the text has the advantage of being penned by someone close to events, which – despite resulting in a somewhat laudatory tone, significant in itself – avoided any anachronism in relation to the meanings of the concepts broached.

3. See the argument put forward by Iglesias (1962).

4. Archbishop Leme's Pastoral Action and the Church hierarchy, allied with the Catholic lay group concentrated at the Centre, would scatter their activities across the 1930s: The Catholic Electoral League was created in 1932 to support candidates in the 1933/34 elections; the Catholic University Action had been striving to concert student culture since 1929; in 1932, the Catholic Institute of Superior Studies took a step forward in combating pedagogical anarchy; that same year, the National Catholic Workers Confederation planned the organization of unions to stave off the communist threat. For more on this, see Dias (1996). All of these initiatives originated at the Dom Vital Centre, commanded during the period by Alceu Amoroso Lima.

5. Not only the suggestion by Candido cited in the preface to the book, but also the general direction of the analysis follows the indications of the author on this topic.

6. Born in Belém (PA), he moved to Rio de Janeiro in 1909. While still a boy, he joined the Third Order of Saint Francis, in whose habit he insisted on being buried. After graduating from the Escola Nacional de Belas Artes, he completed his studies in Paris during the 1920s, including a stint at the Julian Academy. Back in Rio in 1921, he was appointed draughtsman at the Architecture and Topography section of the National Heritage Department of the Treasury, where he met Murilo Mendes. He married the writer Adalgisa Noel Ferreira in 1922. Upon his return from a second European stay, during which he made contact with the surrealists, he held exhibitions in his hometown of Belém, in 1928, and, over the course of the following five years, in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

7. Born into a traditional milling family in the backlands of Alagoas, he moved to Rio de Janeiro in 1930, already a graduate in medicine, married and with political experience as a state deputy for Maceió (1915). In literature, he had completed the transition from Parnassian diction, for which he had earned the epithet "the prince of Alagoan poets", to modernism. Throughout the 1930s he consolidated a poetic language in which, according to Bastide (1997), expression mattered less than the appeal to mystical adventure, in a style that sought to translate the Divine reflection into everyday language.

8. On this topic, my analysis follows closely the argument put forward by Bastide in the second-last part of his "Estudos sobre a poesia religiosa brasileira".

9. The son of a civil servant in Juiz de Fora (MG), he debuted as a modernist poet in 1930, marrying surrealist procedures mastered the previous decade. In 1921, now based in Rio de Janeiro, he was working as an archivist at the Treasury Department when he met Ismael Nery, henceforth a pivotal figure in his life. His friend's death in 1934 sparked the religious crisis at the heart of *Tempo e eternidade*. From that point on, the

mystical Catholic theme would remain a constant in his poetry, even in work produced in Italy, where he moved in 1957 as a lecturer at the University of Rome, and remained until his death.

10. Hence the eulogy published by Jorge de Lima and the summary of essentialism penned by Murilo Mendes for the September 1935 edition of *A Ordem*.

Translated by Anthony Doyle

Translation from **Tempo Social**, São Paulo, v.19, n.1, p.33-49, June 2007.