

May 2021

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Recommended Citation

Mariz, Cecilia L.; Mesquita, Wânia Amélia Belchior; and Araújo, Michelle Piraciaba (2021) "Young Brazilian Catholics Reaffiliating: A Case Study in the City of Campos, RJ, Brazil," *Journal of Global Catholicism: Vol. 5: Iss. 2, Article 4.* p.60-87.

DOI: 10.32436/2475-6423.1095

Available at: <https://crossworks.holycross.edu/jgc/vol5/iss2/4>

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Cover Page Footnote

The data analyzed in this article was collected in different research projects supported by the following funding agencies: FAPERJ (2013 thematic competition), CNPq (productivity award), Prociência UERJ, and Brazil's Coordination for Higher Education Staff Development (CAPES) – Funding Code 001 / MA grant.

TRANSFORMATIONS in BRAZILIAN CATHOLICISM

ARTICLES

- Marc Roscoe Loustau / Editor's Introduction
- Carlos Alberto Steil and Rodrigo Toniol / Strong Church, Weak Catholicism: Transformations in Brazilian Catholicism
- Juliano F. Almeida / Contemporary Brazilian Catholicism and Healing Practices: Notes on Environmentalism and Medicalization
- Cecilia L. Mariz, Wânia Amélia Belchior Mesquita, and Michelle Piraciaba Araújo / Young Brazilian Catholics Reaffiliating: A Case Study in the City of Campos, RJ, Brazil
- José Rogério Lopes and André Luiz da Silva / Religious Mega-Events and Their Assemblages in Devotional Pilgrimages: The Case of Círio de Nazaré in Belém, Pará State, Brazil



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Young Brazilian Catholics Reaffiliating: A Case Study in the City of Campos, RJ, Brazil



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INTRODUCTION

Although its meaning has varied throughout history within distinct cultures and according to economic and social contexts, the term “youth” can be understood to be a category comprising individuals who are no longer children but not yet fully integrated into society as adults.¹ All peoples and societies need to socialize children to maintain the social community and facilitate cultural reproduction. On the other hand, inevitably, new adults do not incorporate everything that previous generations try to transmit. Some practices and values will be abandoned by new generations, while rising adults will also inevitably engage in creation and innovation. Knowing more about the prevailing trends among youth can provide some idea of their societies’ possible futures. This type of knowledge can help social scientists understand the dynamics of changing societies; in addition, this research can aid the leaders of religious movements in societies undergoing rapid change, especially since these leaders increasingly state a desire to establish relationships with the younger sections of their faith communities that are fomenting this change.

Sociological literature on contemporary European young people’s religious lives identifies autonomy in relation to their churches’ teachings as this group’s defining characteristic and value. Young people are described as flexible and plural in relation to religious values and practices. Social scientists have argued that a process of deregulation or deinstitutionalization of the religious—evident in subjects’ increasingly loose ties with religious institutions—is growing apace in contemporary European society, including among European young people.² The weakening of the institutions has led to diversity in the field of religious practice, and authors such as Danièle Hervieu-Léger, Grace Davie, and Enzo Pace have argued that individuals’ preferences determine participation in rituals.³ Describing the European religious

1 Philippe Ariès, *História Social da Criança e da Família* (São Paulo: LTC, 1981); Pierre Bourdieu, *Questões de Sociologia* (Rio de Janeiro: Marco Zero, 1983), 112-121.

2 Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *O Peregrino e o Convertido* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2008).

3 Hervieu-Léger, *O Peregrino*; Grace Davie, “Believing Without Belonging: Is This the Future of Religion in Britain?” *Social Compass* 37, no. 4 (December 1990): 455-469; Enzo Pace, “Religião e Globalização,” in *Globalização e Religião*, ed. Ari Pedro Oro and Carlos Alberto Steil (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1997), 25-42.

milieu with respect to Christian churches, these authors call attention to the predominance of a so-called “religion à la carte,” arguing that individuals increasingly choose what to believe and/or to practice independent of institutional rules and regulations.⁴

A growing body of research about emerging religious orientations among Brazilian young people is drawing similar conclusions.⁵ These authors point out that when young identify themselves as religious, they tend to have looser ties to institutions and more diverse beliefs and practices than their parents’ or grandparents’ generations. Their conclusions were drawn mostly from qualitative research or survey data about specific groups, like university students, so they do not offer evidence that these conclusions apply to the whole population. Indeed, data on young people’s religious identities reveals a growing group of “nones” (those with no religion). The 2010 Brazilian census indicates that the proportion of young people (15-29) without religion (9.8%) is higher than in the Brazilian population as a whole (8.0%).⁶ But data also shows a higher number of Protestant/Evangelical young people. A more recent survey (2013) found that 11.5% of the young people interviewed (16-24) said they did not have a religion, 37.6% said they were Protestant/Evangelical, 44.2% Catholic, and 6.7% said “other religions.”⁷ This research, however, did not provide data on young people’s religious practices. A 2016 DataFolha study is the only to offer statistics on this topic, and revealed that people aged 16-24 attended Church religious services the most. Since this study did not provide a table that

4 Davie, “Believing Without Belonging.”

5 See, among others, in Regina Novaes, “Juventude, Religião e Espaço Público: Exemplos ‘Bons para Pensar’ Tempos e Sinais,” *Religião e Sociedade*, no. 32 (2012): 184-208, <https://www.scielo.br/pdf/rs/v32n1/a09v32n1.pdf>; Solange Rodrigues, “Como a Juventude Brasileira se Relaciona com a Religião?” Observatório Jovem UFF, last modified June 12, 2007. Accessed September 1, 2020, <http://www.observatoriojovem.uff.br/?q=materia/como-juventude-brasileira-se-relaciona-com-religião>; Jorge Cláudio Ribeiro Jr., “Os Universitários e a Transcendência: Visão Geral, Visão Local,” *REVER - Revista de Estudos da Religião*, no. 2 (2004): 79-119. https://www.pucsp.br/rever/rv2_2004/p_ribeiro.pdf; Regina Novaes, “Os Jovens ‘Sem Religião’: Ventos Secularizantes, ‘Espírito de Época’ e Novos Sincretismos: Notas Preliminares,” *Estudos Avançados* 18, no. 52 (2004): 321-330, <https://www.scielo.br/pdf/ea/v18n52/a20v1852.pdf>

6 Regina Novaes, “Jovens Sem Religião: Sinais de Outros Tempos,” in *Religiões em Movimento: O Censo de 2010*, ed. Faustino Teixeira and Renata Meneze (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2013), 175-190.

7 From Data Popular available at G1 Globo Portal, <http://g1.globo.com/jornada-mundial-da-juventude/2013/noticia/2013/07/442-dos-jovens-entre-16-e-24-anos-sao-catolicos-diz-data-popular.html>.



cross-matched age, religious practice, and religious identity, we cannot evaluate how religious identity affected young people's practice. This research shows that Protestant/Evangelicals are more likely (87%) than Catholics (54%) to declare that they attend church once a week or more. Despite being lower than Protestant/Evangelical church attendance, this proportion of Catholic church attendance in Brazil is much higher than it used to be in the last century.⁸

Over the last century, data about Brazilian Catholics in general, both adults and young people, has indicated low rates of participation in weekly Mass and the sacraments. Twentieth century socio-anthropological literature on Catholicism in Brazil described Brazilian Catholics as more focused on devotion to the saints, making vows, and going on pilgrimages (journeys, for instance, to shrines at Aparecida and Juazeiro do Norte) and special occasions of festivals and processions (such as the Círio of Nazaré procession in Pará State). In contrast, they were less interested in institutionally controlled rites and practices, leading to the conclusion that Brazilian Catholicism is syncretic and flexible, especially when compared to European and North American Catholicism.⁹ This characteristic has been changing as the number of Brazilian Catholics falls, with some sociologists of religion developing survey data that shows growing Mass attendance among those who identify as Catholics.¹⁰ Our research, based on ethnographic and statistical data collected during World Youth Day (WYD) 2013 in Rio de Janeiro, not only draws similar conclusions but also provides greater texture and detail to accounts of changing attitudes among young Brazilian Catholics.¹¹

8 From DataFolha, available at <https://datafolha.folha.uol.com.br/opiniaopublica/2016/12/1845231-44-dos-evangelicos-sao-ex-catolicos.shtml>

9 Faustino Teixeira discusses this literature in "Fases do Catolicismo Brasileiro Contemporâneo," *Revista USP*, no. 67 (Setembro/Novembro 2005): 14-23. <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2316-9036.v0i67p14-23>. Pierre Sanchis, "As Religiões dos Brasileiros," *Horizonte Revista de Estudos Teológicos e Ciência da Religião*, 1, no. 2 (1997): 28-43, <http://periodicos.pucminas.br/index.php/horizonte/article/view/412/398>

10 Cecilia Mariz, "Catolicismo No Brasil Contemporâneo, Reavivamento e Diversidade," in *As Religiões No Brasil: Continuidade e Rupturas*, ed. Faustino Teixeira and Renata Menezes (Petrópolis: Vozes 2006), 53-68; Carlos Alberto Steil and Rodrigo Toniol, "Strong Church, Weakened Catholicism: Transformations in Brazilian Catholicism," *Journal of Global Catholicism* 5, no. 2 (Spring 2021): 4-29..

11 Cecília Mariz and Paulo Gracino Jr., "Novas Configurações da Religião no Século XXI: Um Inventário Sobre Jovens Participantes em Eventos Religiosos de Massa," Final Research Report:

During her 11 months of participant observation among Rio 2013 WYD volunteers (people that worked organizing the event months in advance), Luciana Gonzalez observed that young Brazilian volunteers were much more attached to official Catholic teaching, rites and doctrine than foreign WYD volunteers, mainly Europeans.¹² A substantial portion of this Brazilian volunteer group claimed that they participate in Mass every day while the foreign volunteers never made such a claim. Gonzalez interviewed both groups and noticed that foreign volunteers were older and more educated than the Brazilian group, and less attached to ritual practice.

When comparing Brazilian WYD ordinary participants, also called “pilgrims,” with foreigners, survey data revealed that 74.5% of the Brazilians stated that they go to church more than once a week.¹³ Among foreign participants this proportion falls to 48.7% and it would fall even further were we to exclude the Latin American respondents. The percentage of non-Brazilian Latin American young people that go to church two or more times in a week was lower than those of Brazilians, but higher than those from Europe, the United States, and Canada. This does not mean that the latter do not actively practice, since most of them go to Mass weekly: indeed, when we analyzed all together the frequency of once a week and more, the percentages are closer. Even so, Brazilians still stand out for their greater assiduousness: 93.6%, compared to 88.3% among foreign participants. These data pointed to an opposite reality contrasting to what was described for most of the 20th century. As mentioned above, researchers on Catholicism pointed out lower participating rates among Brazilian Catholics when comparing with Europeans and North Americans. Also, it surprised us because previous WYD data collected, such as Singleton’s study that we discuss below, revealed that host country pilgrims stated that they go to church less than those who came from abroad.

Fundação de Apoio à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro/FAPERJ, 2018 (not published); Marcelo Camurça, “Autonomia ou Identificação Orgânica Entre Juventude Católica e Instituição Igreja? Uma Comparação Entre Estudos Sobre as Juventudes Católicas no Brasil e na França,” *Polifonia do Sagrado*, ed. Péricles Andrade (São Cristóvão: Editora da Universidade Federal de Sergipe, 2015), 15-29.

12 Luciana Thaís Villa Gonzalez, “Estar no Mundo, Sem Ser do Mundo: Alguns Casos da Jornada Mundial da Juventude (JMJ) Rio 2013,” Doctoral Dissertation in Social Sciences, State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) 2016.

13 Mariz and Gracino, “Novas Configurações da Religião no Século XXI.”





World Youth Day 2013
in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
Photo by Michelle
Piraciaba de Araújo.

During the 2008 WYD in Sydney, Australia, Singleton observed that young Catholics arriving from other countries declared that they frequented church more often than those from the host country.¹⁴ Singleton's explanation was that traveling abroad to a WYD undoubtedly requires more conviction than attending a WYD held in one's own country. However, this hypothesis cannot explain the higher practice among Brazilians and Latin Americans in general observed at WYD 2013. Luciana Gonzalez suggests that young people from wealthier countries have more access to educational and leisure activities and so less time to go to church as often as those from poorer countries.¹⁵ Finke, Stark, and Iannacone's "religious market theory" offers another possible explanation for Brazilian Catholics' increasing frequency of Mass attendance; Catholics are now competing in a religious market with Evangelical churches in Brazil.¹⁶ According to this theory, contexts with a higher level of religious competition result in greater religious fervor and practice among each of the competing groups. Both hypotheses above (González's and market theory) explain only part of this phenomenon because they do not take into account micro-sociological events that could explain individuals' inner

14 Andrew Singleton, "The Impact of World Youth Day on Religious Practice," *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 3232, no. 1 (May 2011): 57-68, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13617672.2011.549310>.

15 Gonzalez, "Estar no Mundo."

16 Lemuel Guerra, "As Influências da Lógica Mercadológica sobre as Recentes Transformações na Igreja Católica," *REVER Revista de Estudos da Religião* 2, no. 3 (2003): 21-23, https://www.pucsp.br/rever/rv2_2003/p_guerra.pdf.



World Youth Day 2013
in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
Photo by Michelle
Piraciaba de Araújo.

motivations for being actively engaged in Catholicism. Various questions need to be answered. How did these young Catholics become so active? Could the WYD event, including the previous years of WYD expectation and preparation in Brazil, be responsible for the young people's inclination to declare high church attendance?

When we turn to the WYD survey data on young Brazilian Catholics' religious practice, several other questions arise: Do they participate at Catholic Church activities as much as they claim? Were they always active as they are now? Surveys are not an especially useful researching tool for addressing these kinds of questions. To pursue these inquiries, we turn to qualitative data collected through a case study of a "WYD caravan" in 2013. Interviews and participant observation were conducted with a group of young people who came from a city neighboring Rio de Janeiro to participate in the WYD. This caravan, a term used in the different editions of WYD to refer to this type of pilgrims' traveling group, was organized in a parish of the diocese of Campos de Goytacazes, based in the city of the same name in the north of Rio de Janeiro state. The decision to do a case study of a caravan from this diocese was pragmatically motivated: two of the researchers involved live and work in the city of Campos. As well as traveling on this caravan and interviewing its members, one of the authors participated in and observed the distinct activities in WYD in the city of Rio de Janeiro, as well as the activities of the Days in Dioceses (DID) in the city of Campos. Our article analyses excerpts from these interviews.¹⁷

¹⁷ At WYD time, Michelle Piraciaba de Araújo was working on her dissertation for her MA in Political



Sagrado Coração de Jesus (Sacred Heart of Jesus) in the town of Campos de Goytacazes sent a caravan of young people to World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro.

CAMPOS DE GOYTACAZES: THE DIOCESE, THE CITY, AND THE WYD PARTICIPANTS

As happened in practically all Catholic parishes and schools of diverse towns and cities in Brazil, the parish of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (*Sagrado Coração de Jesus*) in the town of Campos de Goytacazes (usually known simply as Campos), organized and sent a caravan of young people to WYD in Rio de Janeiro. According to the communication coordination team of the Campos WYD Organization Diocesan Committee, approximately 1,000 young people from this diocese participated in WYD, and almost everyone traveled in groups or caravans, as informants from the diocese explained.¹⁸

Before we advance further into this study, it is important to highlight that the city of Campos of Goytacazes is known in Brazil among older Catholics as the base of operations for a traditionalist Catholic group and an excommunicated bishop. But younger generations seem not to know this, as this case study shows: young practicing Catholics in the dioceses of Campos were not aware of how the conflict occurred in the 1980s. Nevertheless, there are still in Campos today two prelaties, mutually independent, each with a bishop and each guiding its clergy and worshipers along distinct lines of Catholicism. Though both are now obedient to the Pope, it was not always so. On the one hand, there is the diocese of Campos, which was created in

Sociology from UENF in 2015 under the supervision of Wânia Belchior Mesquita. In Rio de Janeiro in 2013, as occurred in all the previous WYDs, a large proportion of the participants arrived in Brazil to take part in the activities of the DID that were supposedly held at all dioceses of the host country, so it happened at Campos de Goytacazes.

18 With a population of a little over 500,000 inhabitants, this city is in the north of Rio de Janeiro state, 275 km from the RJ state capital (the Rio de Janeiro city).

1922 and whose jurisdiction is defined territorially. The group with whom we conducted field research belongs to this diocese. On the other hand, there is the Apostolic Administration, whose jurisdiction is not linked to the geographic territory of the city of Campos. This latter group adheres to a pre-Vatican II Catholicism.

To understand this situation, it is necessary to recount the conflicts that emerged following the Second Vatican Council. Dom Antônio de Castro Mayer was bishop of Campos from 1949 to 1981, and led opposition to the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II that was allied with Dom Marcel Lefebvre.¹⁹ D. Dom Mayer never accepted the changes of Vatican II and did not adopt them in his diocese. When he had to retire in 1981 and his successor began to introduce innovations from the Second Vatican Council, a conflict broke out. Some priests and laypeople preferred traditionalism and refused to obey the new bishop. These priests, who would later have to leave their former parishes following a court order, were supported by the emeritus bishop Dom Mayer, who founded and led the São João Maria Vianney Sacerdotal Union. At this time, Dom Mayer was closer to French bishop Dom Marcel Lefebvre and, along with him, would challenge Pope John Paul II in 1988. That year both were excommunicated.²⁰ In 2009, when both Lefebvre and Mayer were already dead, Pope Benedict XVI reincorporated the *São João Maria Vianney* Sacerdotal Union into the Catholic Church, transforming it into an Apostolic Administration directly dependent on the Vatican and with permission to celebrate the sacraments in accordance with a liturgical rite predating the changes of Vatican II.

The 2013 WYD event preparation seems to have helped to bring the two dioceses closer. The Apostolic Administration engaged in WYD events together with the Campos dioceses. During the Missionary Week, which took place in Campos prior to WYD in Rio and was called *Pré-Jornadas*, or Days in the Dioceses (DID), the Apostolic Administration hosted a special program: The Administrator Bishop celebrated Mass following the Pius V rite. Through observations made during this

19 Zelia Seiblit, "O Conflito na Diocese de Campos," in *Catolicismo: Modernidade e Radiação*, ed. Pierre Sanchis (São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 1992), 251-303.

20 João Geraldo dos Santos Jr., "Sociedade Brasileira de Defesa da Tradição, Família e Propriedade (TFP): Um Movimento Ultramontano na Igreja Católica do Brasil?" Master's Thesis in Science of Religion, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2008, <https://tede2.pucsp.br/handle/handle/2060>.

period, we identified that in the city there exist not just two types of Mass and two bishops, but also two types of young people, who differ through their form of dress. For the young people of the diocese, there are no restrictions on what they wear. In the Apostolic Administration, however, men should wear jeans and T-shirts, while women should wear a skirt or dress, avoiding jeans, not just in the Masses but also day to day. Our project did not intend to get data from the traditionalist group linked to the Apostolic Administration; nevertheless, it was important to speak about the existence of this group in Campos because WYD preparations and DID events in Campos created opportunities for intensive encounters between these two groups after decades during which they had moved apart.

For the 2013 WYD, the two bishops and their respective followers joined forces to organize the Missionary Week, which took place in Campos. A program involving the two Catholic bishops seems to have been a new experience for the Catholics of Campos. The young people from the Sagrado Coração parish, being part of the official diocese that accepts Vatican II, knew the existence of the Apostolic Administration in the city, but not more than that. They knew almost nothing about the conflicts nor about the traditionalist proposal. The traditionalist Catholics in Campos are not very numerous; they have 14 parishes (including quasi-parishes), while the Campos diocese has 69 parishes.²¹

THE INTERVIEWS

Despite being a wealthy oil-producing region, the city of Campos has various impoverished *favelas* (shanty towns) whose residents suffer from various structural inequalities.²² Nevertheless, the parish to which the young people who participated in this research project belong has no favelas. Most young people in this group belonged to the Campos middle class, including the lower middle class. The majority had white skin; none identified themselves as black. The group was composed of

21 Information taken from the site of the Apostolic Administration, accessed July 20, 2015, <http://www.adapostolica.org/historia/>.

22 For more information about the city of Campos on these issues, see Vanessa Ribeiro, "Ação Social Pentecostal em uma Favela de Campos dos Goytacazes: A Parceria Entre um Projeto Social Evangélico e uma Organização Não Governamental." Phd diss., Programa de Pós- Graduação em Sociologia Política Universidade Estadual do Norte Fluminense (UENF), 2009

six men and nine women between 15 and 25 years of age. They were all single and most of them were university students aged over 18, the exception being an adolescent girl of 15. The two oldest, aged 23 and 25, had already completed higher education and worked in a dental office and a pharmacy, respectively. The interviews that we discuss below were conducted some days after the WYD.

All members of the group declared themselves to be practicing Catholics. When questioned about religious life in their natal families, all of them said that their mothers and fathers were both Catholic, except for one young man, whose father did not identify as religious. Being Catholic, however, was not the same as practicing and not all the young people said that their parents practiced Catholicism. In being questioned about religion, therefore, they recognized the importance of a Catholic family upbringing, given especially by the mother, as can be perceived in the comments of Pedro,²³ Thamires, Daniel and Nina cited below:

I began to be Catholic because of my mother. Generally, people follow the religion of their parents, and my mother took me to church. [Pedro]

When I was small, I went to church because of mum. [...] So, I was baptized and received first communion more because of my mother. But a little while later I began to acquire a taste for it. [Thamires]

I was presented to the Catholic Church from early on. I gradually learned about the things of the Church, the doctrine, so I was forming my faith in what I was learning. This comes from the cradle, since it was my mother who took me. [Daniel]

I came from a Catholic base. Although my parents do not frequent the church actively, participating in the movements, pastoral work, these things, my mother would always go to church, to Masses, and always passed Catholic values on to me. So, these were things that were being cultivated since infancy. This shaped me as a Catholic. [Nina]

²³ We have opted to refer to the interviewees by fictitious names.

Despite the Catholic identity of the parents and consequent Catholic upbringing, the interviewees always emphasized that their religious practice and identity were the outcome of a personal choice. Those who reported experiencing a move away from the Church emphatically emphasized this choice. One young man, Caio, states that until the age of 14 he practiced Catholicism in the same way as his parents: that is, he said he was Catholic but did not actually practice his faith and religion. During this period, according to his recollections, he even became "involved" with Spiritism, an Afro-Brazilian religious tradition with close historical ties to Catholicism. Another young woman, Cora, reported that her parents did not practice Catholicism, and she spent time frequenting a Spiritist site. Both young people also commented that they moved closer to Catholicism after participating in a Church-sponsored, weekend training course.²⁴ Participation in the Adolescent Youth on a Mission encounter (Jovens Adolescentes em Missão or JOAM encounter), an event aimed at the 15-17 age range, was a landmark in Caio's life, as he narrates below:²⁵

I began to be Catholic for real, to practice Catholicism, when I took part in JOAM at 16. Before I didn't care about going to church. It was then that I had my encounter with God. After the course, I began to frequent the youth group and I received the Confirmation. Now I never fail to go to the Masses [...]. It was some friends from my school class, who had done the course and have "a walk (*caminhada*) within the church" who invited me to do the course. [Caio]

Caio was invited to attend by friends his age, a common occurrence. The moment of change for Cora occurred when she participated in what they call the Camp, a course similar to JOAM but solely for those over the age of 18. Cora recounts that a female cousin invited her:

24 No interviewee talked about what happened on these courses, since one of the course rules is to keep secret what happens there. In this sense, these courses are similar to those run by other Catholic movements, like the international and very popular *Cursillos de Cristiandad* (Christianity Courses) and other similar known in Brazil as *Encontros de Jovens* (Youth Encounters) and as *Encontros de Casais* (Couple Encounters), for example.

25 There is also an International Evangelical movement with a similar name: Youth with a Mission or YWAM. In Brazil they are known as *Jovens com uma Missão* or JOCUM.

It was a cousin, who had done [the course] before and was beginning the “walk,” who called on me to participate. It was in the Camp that I had a more intimate experience with God and that I became increasingly keen on practicing my religion, on doing the things that every Catholic should do. Before the course they spoke of God to me as though He were someone very distant. It was afterwards that I had a real contact and I wanted to search and learn more. For me God was far away. It was only afterwards that I felt who this God was. [Cora]

All of those who traveled on the researched caravan had participated on courses of the "Escola de Evangelização Santo André," or the Saint Andrew Evangelization School.²⁶ Although few have experienced any distancing from Catholicism, most of them reported having undergone a process of encounter with God resulting in an intensification of the practice and what Teixeira would call "reaffiliation" to Catholicism. Their descriptions of their personal transformation are very similar to conversion accounts to a new religion.²⁷

The objective of this youth evangelization project is, therefore, to stimulate inner conversion and train evangelizing young people who can multiply this experience. Courses are therefore offered to distinct age groups and young people participated in several of them. The courses cited were Formação de Adolescentes Cristãos or FAC (Formation of Christian Adolescents) for young people between 12 and 14; Jovens Adolescentes em Missão or JOAM (Adolescent Youths on a Mission) between 15 and 17; and the Youth Camp for those over 18 years old. Despite not changing religions, these young Catholics who described experiencing an "encounter with God" went through in fact a conversion within their own religion. As in other conversion discourses, they narrate their religious trajectories with the demarcation of a "before" and an "after" participating in the course. To different

26 The Escola de Evangelização Santo André (EESA) or Saint Andrew School of Evangelization is an international project that aims to train young evangelizers. For more information for this project in Brazil see <https://eesabrasil.com.br/>

27 For instance, see the conversion accounts described by Clara Mafra, "Relatos Compartilhados: Experiências de Conversão ao Pentecostalismo Entre Brasileiros e Portugueses," *Mana* [online] 6, no.1 (April 2000): 57-86, <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-93132000000100003>.

degrees, they comment on how they became practicing Catholics. As well as participating in Masses and groups for young Catholics, they are dedicated to the sacraments, especially Confirmation (all of them were confirmed), and frequently receive the Eucharist. After the short course or camp promoted by Santo André School project, the majority would keep participating at regular encounters that stimulate the development of affective ties that extend to various spheres of life. These young people begin to do things together. They go to shopping malls, beaches, and shows and do other activities together, becoming friends and thus mutually strengthening their faith and the connection to the Church.



Screenshot from the website for Escola de Evangelização Santo André, <https://eesabrasil.com.br>.

As we have noted, following these courses and events that facilitated a personal encounter with God, those with whom we conducted research began to speak about a new life and a stronger tie to Catholicism.²⁸

Since my birth, my mother showed me the path of God. But I was always too lazy to go to church, take part in things, but my mother always convinced me to go. You know when your parents take you to church and you always slip outside and stay there chatting? So, that's what I was like. Then about three

28 According to the Canadian site of the Saint Andrew School of Evangelization (<https://sase.ca/school-history-p12.php>) this project, that has no connection to a specific movement of the Church, was "founded in 1980 in Chilpancingo, Mexico by José Prado Flores (a Catholic lay man), Bill Finke (a Pentecostal pastor) with Fathers Emiliano Tardiff and Ricardo Arganaraz." The Pentecostal charismatic spirituality has an expressive importance in this group composed by a Pentecostal pastor and Tardiff who was well known in Dominican Republic and in the whole Charismatic Catholics Renewal World for his Holy Ghost healing gift.

years ago I did JOAM, which means Adolescent Youth on a Mission. And it was there that I had my personal encounter with God. I even spoke to my mother: "Mum, it's been three years that I was reborn for Christ." It was from this personal encounter with God that I follow this life and practice my religion. [Karina]

Karina's account, like the others we analyzed, emphasizes that her practice of Catholicism is a personal choice, although she recognizes the influence of her parents in her dedication to Catholicism. Before JOAM led her to enter a new phase, her parents had motivated her to practice Catholicism while she was a child. This discourse of personal choice linked to an individual experience of contact with God and conversion appears in the speech of all those interviewed, indicating that this is what is taught on the courses.

First, I began to be Catholic because my parents were and later through my own choice. Living everything that you live, you know what is right and what is wrong. So, I chose to follow this religion. [Marcelo]

I already had something of a custom of going to Mass, those things. So, I spent some time not frequenting church because we moved to a new city. It was only sometime later that I looked for a church and began to form part of a pastoral group, then I did a course, the FAC (...). I was confirmed [received the sacrament of Confirmation] and I went back to frequenting church, not because of my parents, as it had been before, but because I sought it. [Rafaela]

These young people claim that Catholicism ceased to be a religion in which they were raised and became a choice; their practice is an option. As children, they were presented to the sacraments, such as baptism and first communion, and, consequently, catechesis by their parents. During adolescence, through their own choice, they participated in retreats, courses and events created by the Church for young people. Consequently, rather than being conformed to the religion of their upbringing, the young people we interviewed claim to have made their own choice

through the encounter with God. Most of them declared they received the sacrament of Confirmation at this moment of their lives.

Among these young Catholics, we did not observe syncretic practices and beliefs, such as those linked to esotericism, Kardecist or Afro-Brazilian Spiritism. They do not accept practices that are widespread in Brazil, such as the use of shell divinization, *orisha* devotion, astral maps, and card reading. They also disavow commonplace beliefs like reincarnation. In one of the conversations among the young caravan members while they were at the WYD, a young man said that, "Catholics don't read horoscopes or believe in anything else other than the Bible." In this sense, these young people diverge from a widespread tradition of synthesizing Catholicism with other religious forms, and thus they resemble Brazilian Protestants/Evangelicals or Charismatic Renewal Catholics, an intra-Church renewal movement heavily influenced by Evangelical Christianity.

In her interview, Cora remarks: "When I was a child, I frequented Spiritism with my grandmother, but I had no idea. I went [because my grandmother went, and I accompanied her]." In emphasizing that "I had no idea," Cora tells us she did not know what Spiritism was. She had not decided to go to the Spiritist Center out of any reflection on what she knew of this religious practice beforehand. This contrasts with her adherence to Catholicism today, which is the result of a personal decision based on study and research. Without rejecting the idea of a religious family heritage, the young people interviewed insist that they made a personal choice. In this sense, they match contemporary religious discourses that, as Duarte et al. (2006) have argued, valorize inner and subjective adherence, rejecting the idea of simply following a family tradition.²⁹ This position is reinforced during the conversion courses they participate in. Although the Catholic Church baptizes infant children, the Church argues that this option is confirmed in adulthood, emphasizing conversion as an ongoing experience. This is the kind of religious identity recognized as legitimate in contemporary society.³⁰

29 Luiz Fernando D. Duarte, et al., "Família, Reprodução e Ethos Religioso: Subjetivismo e Naturalismo Como Valores Estruturantes," *Família e Religião*, ed. Luiz Fernando D. Duarte et al. (Rio de Janeiro: Contra Capa Livraria, 2006), p. 89-112.

30 Novaes, "Os Jovens 'Sem Religião.'"

The repetition of the discourse on religion being a ‘personal choice and decision,’ as well as the fact that religious practice is not an obligation imposed by the institution or parents, leads us to conclude, as already highlighted above, that these are points reaffirmed and taught by Saint Andrew’s School of Evangelization courses, camps and encounters. Indeed, the young research participants adopted almost the same account for their re-affiliation, reminding us of James Beckford’s argument that accounts of conversion are often constructed according to guidelines provided by missionaries.³¹ Evaldo offers a clear exposition of the important points of this narrative:

I’m Catholic due to the influence of my parents, but as I matured, I learned about the Church, about the religion and had experiences with God, in retreats, on courses and so on. Initially it was indeed because of the family questions, but after it was from personal choice. In part because I was never forced to do anything. Not before by my parents, or now. And today I am sure about my faith, the knowledge I have. [Evaldo].

The term "obligation" is rejected in his remarks: neither the family nor the institution determines anything for this young man. He is the one who decides whether he practices his religion or not and how he will practice it. Furthermore, he declares that he does not necessarily agree immediately with everything taught by the Church. He reads, reflects, and will get informed first.³²

Evaldo argued that his certainty in his faith arises from the knowledge acquired from courses and retreats, but he reflected on what he learned and verified its reliability before accepting it. During the courses and while reading the Bible, he encountered forms of verification of what the Church claims to be true. His certainty, therefore, results from “his own verification.” The fact that these courses are offered by the Catholic Church to young laypeople and leaders does not mean that they are taught only to follow the institution blindly. According to the interviewees,

31 James Beckford, "Accounting of Conversion," *The British Journal of Sociology* 29, no. 2 (June 1978): 249-262.

32 At this point, his speech was similar to the young French Catholics analyzed by Danièle Hervieu-Léger. Hervieu-Léger, *O Peregrino*.



they teach people to reflect and to verify by themselves what constitutes the bases of the Catholic Church's teachings, liturgy, and dogmas. Having this kind of knowledge about what they believe comes to have an outsized importance for these young people. Wouldn't respondents realize that "verification" (whatever it means) of Church teachings is not always possible? Or are they acknowledging that they can leave the institution? In fact, Daniel and Evaldo declared that they had matured in their faith—experienced a reaffiliation in their adolescence through Saint Andrew School; but as the years went on, they moved away from Catholic practice. They have reported, however, that when friends invited them to volunteer preparing for the 2013 WYD, they experienced a rapprochement, their convictions were reactivated, and they returned to religious practice. For those two, the hypothesis that the preparation for WYD could stimulate Church attendance is confirmed.

For most of the young participants in the WYD caravan, going to Mass weekly was not the only indicator of Catholic practice. In addition, they declared that they engage in other activities, such as praying the rosary and reading the Bible. On the other hand, for them, Catholic practice is also a way to broaden their knowledge about religious affairs. In this aspect, too, they display similarities with the Protestants/Evangelicals, who distance themselves from a widespread Catholic traditional tendency to prefer ritual participation to didactic inquiry into faith. Also, in this respect, they differ from most young people emerging from the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR), that, at least in Brazil, tends to be suspicious of intellectual activities. Some of them, such as the *Toca de Assis*, even used to discourage pursuing a university education.³³ Nevertheless, the Saint Andrew School spirituality and teachings have several similarities with the CCR, as this school project, according to its own site already mentioned, was idealized in Mexico by CCR leaders, such as Emilio Cardiff.

In their comments, our interviewees suggest that reading the Bible is the basis of every Catholics' faith. However, some recognize that they do not always read the Bible daily; they perceive this as a personal failing:

33 Cecília L. Mariz and Paulo Victor L. Lopes, "O Reavivamento Católico no Brasil: Ocaso da Toca de Assis," in *Catolicismo Plural: Dinâmicas Contemporâneas*, ed. Faustino Teixeira and Renata Menezes (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2009), 75-108.



World Youth Day pilgrims greet the Pope with flags and rosaries. Photo by Michelle Piraciaba de Araújo.

Bible reading, for example, happens when I am more in the Church events. But this is what I am trying to review in my life, to read the Bible daily, since this is fundamental for a practicing Catholic. Due to a lack of time, sometimes I don't read the Bible. [Paloma]

I don't read the Bible every day. But I try to read frequently. I've already had phases in my life when I read a part every day. The Bible is one of the foundations of the Catholic Church. It is the Bible, tradition and the Church's teaching that are my foundations. [Pedro]

These young people are always wearing religious objects with a clear Catholic identity, like the cross or scapulars draped around the neck, or T-shirts with images of Jesus, saints or biblical phrases. Almost all of them say that they have a rosary in their pocket, on the wrist, or in their rucksack. During WYD itself, there were various moments when the young caravan participants prayed using a rosary.

It is worth emphasizing that although none of the interviewees explicitly declared themselves to be Charismatic Catholics, linked to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR), one young woman related that in the Catholic retreats and events, resting in the Holy Spirit and glossolalia, Charismatic practices par excellence, are common:

I once went to a retreat and there I also experienced resting in the spirit. It is difficult to explain resting [...] There is also speaking in tongues. These things you feel. Those with faith experience it. Resting in the spirit, as it happens, for me is a cure. Every time there is an Adoration, I surrender myself and feel cured of past things and God gives me new things. Resting is difficult to describe in words, only those who feel truly in the faith manage to experience resting in the spirit. This resting only happens to me when I am in the moment of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. There is always an adoration in the retreats. [Paloma]

During fieldwork, there were also moments when participants expressed praise with great emotion evoking the CCR style of worship. The fact that the CCR was not mentioned seems to suggest that Charismatic Catholicism, in this context, is identified with Catholicism itself and is not limited to just one movement.

As already discussed, for most of the group, a true Catholic needs to do more than just go to Mass once a week. An exception was Bianca who stresses that she never fails to go to Mass on Sundays, but “does not care about the other things.” The “other things” to which she refers are prayer groups, or taking part in some pastoral or religious group. So, in her conception, though practicing, she does not consider herself a fervent Catholic: “Look, I’m not fervent, but I do practice. I don’t participate much in groups or other events. I try to follow the right paths.” Bianca’s answer also shows that in the researched group, there were distinct levels of religious adherence and participation. Those who least participated were like Bianca, who said that they attend Sunday Mass, communion and confess regularly, make daily prayers, and also go to events like the WYD. Most of the group participated more intensely and claimed to need to “serve” the Church. This they did on various fronts, as we can see in the excerpts from the following interviews:

Before I would just go to the Masses on Sundays with my mother until one day I went to a retreat during the Carnival, and since then I felt the need to act better in church, serve, get up from the bench of the Sunday Mass and begin to serve God better. Before I was a lukewarm Catholic, now I can say that I’m

active. There I experienced many new things; I went to talks. I had never gone on a spiritual retreat. And I perceived that I was not practicing anything in church. I saw how much I needed to give more, serve more. There I experienced what it is to be a missionary in the street, to speak of God in the street. So, I felt this need to serve, to be more inside the church. So, everything contributed to this decision. And today I don't regret this, feeling the presence of God in my life. But we only feel this when we look for it. [Nina]

In these remarks, it is worth highlighting the idea of placing oneself in the service of God and the Church. These young people seek a more active role in their churches, this being a notable element attributed to their religious practice. They show themselves willing to carry out any task so long as it serves God or the Church. These activities include participation in pastoral work, coordinating the youth group, or giving talks in retreats or courses:

Today I take part in the Confirmation pastoral work. I serve there and also form part of a mission called the Calcutta Mission, which is linked to the church of the old convent. This mission seeks to distribute smiles. We visit orphanages, distribute food to the homeless. It's about helping one's neighbor, distributing smiles. [Eloá]

I'm the secretary of a Marian congregation, I'm the coordinator of a young people group of the São José Rectory, I'm the general youth coordinator for the Apostolic Administration, and I'm communications director of the diocesan center organized for the "Days in the Dioceses" (event previous to WYD). [Pedro]

I'm the deacon, the person who helps the priest in the celebrations, I belong to the young people group, I belong to JOAM, I'm beginning to be part of the Santo André Evangelization School, which is a training school whose principle is to bring other people to Jesus, just as Andrew presented Peter to Jesus, we also train to evangelize, to take other Peters to Jesus. [Caio]

I'm a member of the evangelization pastoral group. We visit homes to take the

word of God to people, and today I preach on the evangelization courses at the Santo André School. [Paloma]

Young people emphasized evangelization and the everyday search for other young people whom they can persuade to be more active in the Catholic Church. Those who experience a re-adherence or reaffiliation to Catholicism declared that they worked directly and indirectly in the process of evangelization and potential re-adherence and/or conversion of other young people. The interviewees declared that they performed this evangelizing role by participating in the courses at the Santo André School. They are the ones who organize and give lectures on these courses after taking part as listeners:

I say that I'm practicing my faith when I go to Masses and principally when I announce the Gospel. When I speak of Jesus to other people, this increases the faith. The training courses at the Santo André Evangelization School also serve for this purpose, and the Masses are very important. It is on these courses that we seek to learn more about God. These are courses founded always on the Word and on experience in which you love everything that the Bible says. I completed my first course at the age of 18, and afterwards I wanted to participate as a preacher and still today I do this. The courses are important for this, for you to know the Word and also have the opportunity to evangelize other young people [...] The preachings are nothing other than our testimony; we say how God transformed our lives, and it is this happiness that we try to pass on to those who still do not know God's love. [Cora]

Nevertheless, according to the interviewed, evangelizing is not just speaking, or “tucking the Bible under your arm and knocking from house to house to speak about Jesus,” as Caio made clear in an informal conversation.³⁴ Also indirectly, they seek to stimulate conversion through their conduct and everyday attitudes. Hence, young people seek to evangelize other young people through their example and way of living.

34 Field notes, August, 22, 2013. Michelle P. Araújo, “Jovens Católicos e a Jornada Mundial da Juventude: Religiosidade e o Catolicismo na Cidade de Campos dos Goytacazes-RJ” (master's thesis in political sociology, UENF).

This is a qualitative case study and, of course, these findings cannot be easily generalized. However, this study shows how the Santo Andre School of Evangelization was capable of strongly affecting these young people. They began to embrace Catholicism enthusiastically and participate in a style similar to their more engaged peers from the Evangelical churches. This kind of similarity is also observed among most Catholics who participate in groups inspired by the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, like the well-known Brazilian "new communities" of *Shalom* and *Canção Nova* (New Song) among others.³⁵

CONCLUSIONS

We began the present article recognizing that Brazilian Catholicism is changing. These changes are reflected in the surprising data that we collected in a survey of young people who participated in the 2013 Rio WYD. Survey data showed that Brazilian Catholic WYD participants declare higher levels of attendance at Mass and other church-related activities and rituals than WYD participants from outside Brazil. Even taking into account that higher levels of declaration of attendance may be influenced by the enthusiastic years of advance preparation of the WYD event in Brazil, the data is still surprising since it differs greatly from the trend described by the literature on Brazilian Catholicism, in general, and young Catholics in particular. These findings prompted us to analyze data from qualitative research with a group of WYD pilgrims from Campos, a city in the north of Rio de Janeiro state. The young people with whom we conducted research reported high levels of practice. As well as assiduously going to Mass, they also read the Bible, pray the rosary, pray daily, confess regularly, and also participate in prayer groups, pastoral work, retreats, and courses, as well as performing services for the church. However, it is important to stress that all of them remark that it was not always so. This greater engagement in Catholic practice occurred, for our research subjects, after their experience in short courses or retreats organized by a project named the Saint Andrew School of Evangelization in their parish.

35 Brenda Carranza et al., *Novas Comunidades Católicas: Em Busca do Espaço Pós-Moderno* (São Paulo: Ideias e Letras, 2009).

Their religious trajectories are divided, therefore, into two periods: before and after the encounter with God provided by the short courses they took. All of them narrate a process similar to conversion, experiencing a new form of adherence to their church, linked to a renewal of their faith. This has led them to opt to live Catholicism in new terms. So, they are part of what Faustino Teixeira identified as a growing category of "reaffiliated Catholics."³⁶ The accounts of these young people suggest that the course teachings create a Catholicism similar to the religious practice of Brazilian Protestant/ Evangelicals in general. As well as personal choice, we can observe a search for knowledge through Bible reading and an emphasis on evangelizing activities toward mainly other young people.

The data analyzed in this article reinforce the hypothesis raised by Carlos Steil and Rodrigo Toniol on the formation of a new kind of Catholicism in 21st century Brazil.³⁷ These data also suggested that in contemporary Brazil, the number of young Catholics is declining, but those people that remain at the start of the 21st century seem to be more integrated with the global Church and the Vatican's official doctrine than past generations were. The young people whom we studied had their faith reinforced and enhanced their ties to Catholic Church through a global project (Saint Andrew School of Evangelization). According to Marco Marzano, several other global lay movements (such as Comunione and Liberazione, Neocatecumenals, Charismatic Renewals) have also revitalized Catholicism in Italy and elsewhere, and were perceived by the two last popes as a way to overcome Europe's growing secularism.³⁸ Due to the limits of our data, we cannot say if the Saint Andrew School would have similar or different results from those mentioned above. The group from the city of Campos emphasized the autonomy of their decision to engage more with Catholicism. Though from Catholic families, they insist that their current practice is the result of a personal decision and many claim to practice more than their parents. They also underline the fact that they feel the need to learn about, study and reflect on their faith, and read the Bible so

36 Teixeira, "Fases do Catolicismo Brasileiro Contemporâneo."

37 Steil and Toniol, "Strong Church, Weakened Catholicism."

38 Marco Marzano, "The 'Sectarian' Church: Catholicism in Italy Since John Paul II," *Social Compass* 60, no. 3 (September 2013), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0037768613492401>.

that they can make their positions clear. Nevertheless, the importance of the personal dimension, individual conviction, and responsibility for one's own decisions are a mark of contemporary society, which also seems to have been presented and reinforced in these Catholic encounters and retreats. Undoubtedly, these are values that reinforce the faithful's commitment to the institution, but they also stimulate reflection, a critical spirit, the continuation of studies and readings that can, in turn, generate a diversity of views and ruptures and potentially resulting, in medium or long term, either in a move away from the rules of their original institution, in what Daniele Hervieu-Léger calls a "deregulation of the religious," as has happened with Protestant and Pentecostal churches. This is, however, a qualitative study with a very small group of young people who study (or plan to study) at University. Probably young people with another profile would not value as much their own reflections and learnings.

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