

Brazilian Christianity: An Exploitable Tool of Unity

The *Manifesto de Outubro*, written by Plínio Salgado in 1932, marked the official formation of what would become the most successful fascist movement in all Latin America: the Brazilian Integralist Action (AIB).¹ Providing readers with the movement's essential values, objectives, and policies, Salgado sets out to define the Integralist platform through an exploration of an ideology "unrelated to any other politician or writer."² However, as is common across fascist movements, the ideology spouted in Salgado's doctrine is far from original.³ In fact, analysis of the doctrine's messaging reveals Integralist ideology as one which appeals almost entirely – and at times seemingly solely – to popular Brazilian sentiments and culture. As a result, the *Manifesto de Outubro* depicts Integralist ideology as centered not around hardline political convictions and solutions but an attempt to appeal to Brazilians en masse through a messy conglomeration of cultural references and idealistic promises rooted in Catholicism and Catholic identity. The following essay sets out to substantiate this argument by reviewing the historical context which led to the manifesto's creation and its introductory paragraph first and then analyzing its three core tenants: nationalism, corporatism, and family and gender.

Background

Before analyzing the ideology laden in the *Manifesto de Outubro*, it's critical to explore the philosophy behind its conception and the historical events leading up to its creation. Two years before writing the document, Salgado spent time abroad in Italy studying the Italo-fascist

¹ Gonçalves, Leandro Pereira. "Transnational Fascism: Portugal and the Brazilian Integralism of Plínio Salgado." *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 29, no. 2 (2023): 273–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14701847.2023.2226977>.

² Leandro Pereira Gonçalves and Odilon Caldeira Leto, "The Formation of the Sigma: The Brazilian Integralist Action." in *Fascism in Brazil from Integralism to Bolsonaroism*, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2022), 1–42.

³ Gonçalves and Leto, "The Formation of the Sigma," 1–42.

accomplishments of Mussolini.⁴ It was during this visit that Salgado formed his first political ideas – ideas that would become so deeply entrenched in Integralist ideology that the Italian charge d'affaires in Rio de Janeiro, Enrico di Preisenthal Menzinger, would identify the only difference between Brazilian and Italian fascism as “its conception [of gaining power] in regional legislatures.”⁵ This context may, at first, seem relatively inconspicuous given many think of Italy as quite different from Brazil. However, when we combine this context with the fact that the early 1900s Italian Catholic party *Popolari* was the second largest party in parliament in 1919⁶ and that it was only after Mussolini switched from an anti-clerical platform pre-1921⁷ to pro-catholic in 1921⁸ that he'd see any real electoral success – the Italo-fascist party went from winning only 1,000 votes in the Ferrara region of Italy to 50,000 votes in two years⁹ – we begin to extrapolate understandings regarding the motivations behind Integralist adoption of Catholicism.

However, this doesn't directly tell us *why* Salgado was so inspired by the Catholic and other culture-focused elements of Italo-fascism. To do that, we must look to the demographics of Brazil during the Integralist period (1930-1937). Like Italy, Brazil was, and still is, a majority Christian/Catholic nation.¹⁰ The percentage of Catholics in Brazil during this time ranged between 98.9% and 95%¹¹ and Brazil is still often referred to as “one of the most the most

⁴ Seitenfus, Ricardo Silva. “Ideology and Diplomacy: Italian Fascism and Brazil (1935-38).” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 64, no. 3 (1984): 503–34. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2514937>.

⁵ Seitenfus, “Ideology and Diplomacy”

⁶ Radcliff, Pamela, “Fascist Revolution in Italy.” Lecture (*Fascism, Communism and the Crisis of Liberal Democracy: Europe, 1919-1945*). University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA. 31 January 2023.

⁷ Delzell, Charles F., and Benito Mussolini. “Program of the Italian Fascist Movement.” Essay. In *Mediterranean Fascism*, 13. Walker and Company, 1971.

⁸ Delzell, Charles F., and Benito Mussolini. “Postulates of the Fascist Program.” Essay. In *Mediterranean Fascism*, 14–18. New York: Walker and Company, 1971.

⁹ Radcliff, “Fascist Revolution in Italy.” 31 January 2023.

¹⁰ Gonçalves and Leto, “The Formation of the Sigma,” 1–42.

¹¹ Seitenfus, “Ideology and Diplomacy”

Catholic countries in the world.”¹² Furthermore, little difference exists between the political participation rates of active and inactive Catholics in Brazil.¹³ This basic demographic similarity between 1930s Italy and Brazil is particularly important given support for clericalism is unique among fascist ideologies,¹⁴ and as such likely signals that, like Mussolini in Italy, Salgado saw Brazil’s vast majority subscription to Catholicism as an exploitable trait to build a fascist mass movement out of just like Mussolini did throughout the 1920s.

Aside from the historical and comparative context behind the manifesto, we should also consider the manifesto’s introduction before delving into its tenants. Unsurprisingly, off the bat, it’s clear just how important Catholicism will be for Integralism given the first line of the doctrine: “God leads the destinies of people.”¹⁵ Aside from centralizing religion in the integralist philosophy, this first line also exposes what historians have come to call the “messianic character” of the movement embodied in the “prophet” Salgado.¹⁶ This first section, titled “Conception of Man and the Universe” is laden with allusions to religion and the values of the Catholic church outside of just its first line: “... Family, of Fatherland, and of Society,” “Man must practice... virtues that elevate and enhance [God],” “respecting and cherishing each other,” “all superiority comes from one superiority that exists above men,” etc.¹⁷ Furthermore, the doctrine outright calls out “The Christian roots of [Brazilian] history” as central to the Integralist

¹² Oosterbaan, Martijn, and Adriano Santos Godoy. “Samba Struggles: Carnaval Parades, Race and Religious Nationalism in Brazil.” Essay. In *The Secular Sacred Emotions of Belonging and the Perils of Nation and Religion*, edited by Markus Balkenhol, Ernst van den Hemel, and Irene Stengs, 107–25. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020.

¹³ Patterson, Eric. “Religious Activity and Political Participation: The Brazilian and Chilean Cases.” *Latin American Politics and Society* 47, no. 1 (2005): 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-2456.2005.tb00299.x>.

¹⁴ Radcliff, Pamela, “The Emergence of Fascism.” Lecture (Fascism, Communism and the Crisis of Liberal Democracy: Europe, 1919-1945). University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA. 26 January 2023.

¹⁵ Salgado, Plínio, “Integralist Manifesto of 1932,” Internet Archive, 1, accessed November 9, 2023, <https://archive.org/details/integralist-manifesto-of-1932/mode/1up>.

¹⁶ Gonçalves and Leto, “The Formation of the Sigma,” 1–42.

¹⁷ Salgado, “Integralist Manifesto of 1932,” 1.

philosophy.¹⁸ These first paragraph allusions give us our first insight into the kind of superficial relationship Integralism has with Catholicism. After all, to devote the entire introduction of your political platform solely to allusions to Christ and other pro-Catholic rhetoric, providing not even a single line of proposed solutions to the issues in Brazil heavily implies just how superficial the rest of this program will be.

Nationalism

As is common across fascist movements, Integralism adopts an ardent nationalism which stands out as a core, underlying tenant of the overall program. For example, when discussing “How we understand the Brazilian Nation,” Salgado advocates for abolition of classes, “States within the State,” political parties, individualism, and “ultimately each and every process of division of the Brazilian people.”¹⁹ He goes on to articulate these ideas further under the section “Our Nationalism,” in which he advocates against cosmopolitanism, “foreignness,” and immorality and instead for a common culture based on “tradition” and the understandings of race and history inspired by Gilberto Freyre, Oswaldo Aranha, and the myth of racial democracy.²⁰ These beliefs are not unique to Integralism, however. Fascists around the world have held the common idea that “immorality” during the interwar period resulted from modernization,²¹ which, as Benjamin Cowan points out, also infiltrated Brazil and led Integralism to parallel the belief that it must also address a “crisis of morality.”²² To do so, the manifesto asserts Integralism seeks to affirm “the Brazilian character and customs” which – as you may recall – comes from “the

¹⁸ Salgado, “Integralist Manifesto of 1932,” 1.

¹⁹ Salgado, “Integralist Manifesto of 1932,” 1.

²⁰ Salgado, “Integralist Manifesto of 1932,” 2.

²¹ Radcliff, Pamela, “Long Term Origins of Political Crisis.” Lecture (Fascism, Communism and the Crisis of Liberal Democracy: Europe, 1919-1945). University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA. 12 January 2023

²² Benjamin A. Cowan, *Securing Sex: Morality and Repression in the Making of Cold War Brazil* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), p. 23.

Christian roots of [Brazilian] history.” However, once again, saying your movement with affirm “the Brazilian character and customs” is not much of anything. It may sound nice, but it is no proposed solution.

Nevertheless, the decision to incorporate religiosity in its nationalism so ardently – “our campaign is... moral”²³ – sets Integralism apart from other fascist movements; unlike the Nazis and Statism, Integralists “envisioned what they called a Christian holistic state (Estado Integral), one [incorporating] corporatism, nationalism and faith....”²⁴ Such a conception of nationalism strongly denotes the kind of exploitative nature of Integralist ideology and targets an interesting intersection between strict Catholicism and Brazilian culture. As pointed out by Martijn Oosterbaan, “many of the common public manifestations and practices in Brazil present religious elements, yet many of these have become labeled as (national) culture instead of religion.”²⁵ For example, popular accounts of Samba are “regularly infused with religious tropes and experiences.”²⁶ Similarly, in response to secularization pre-1930, the Church made many efforts to “transform Our Lady Aparecida into the prime symbol of the nation, emphasizing her blackness...” which continues to influence the imagery we see in Carnival parades today.²⁷ Thus, when Salgado describes nationalism as “a profound awareness of [Brazilian] needs, of character, of trends, of aspirations of the country...,” outlines a desire for “a genuinely Brazilian way of life,” or discusses the “the *caboclo* and the black of our land,”²⁸ we see that, even in moments without direct religious allusion, Salgado draws upon religion-based concepts

²³ Salgado, “Integralist Manifesto of 1932,” 3.

²⁴ Traldi, Daniela. “Christian Political Hypermasculinity: Brazilian Fascism in the 1930s.” Wiley Online Library, March 22, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12691>.

²⁵ Oosterbaan and Godoy. “Samba Struggles.” 107–25. 2020.

²⁶ Oosterbaan and Godoy. “Samba Struggles.” 107–25. 2020.

²⁷ Oosterbaan and Godoy. “Samba Struggles.” 107–25. 2020.

²⁸ Salgado, “Integralist Manifesto of 1932,” 2.

subconsciously and braids it together with cultural references as a method of casting, again, the widest net possible and attempt to capture Brazilian consciousness.

This method of braiding cultural concepts together with religion not only comes across as ingenious inherently, but Salgado has also repeatedly asserted in addresses to his party “We, the *intellectuals*, need to take control of Brazil... We want to rule.”²⁹ This overt authoritarianism, which Salgado attempts to sell in his manifesto as somehow representative and somehow Catholic – “we do not recognize [political] parties, we recognize the nation”³⁰ – stands in contradiction to Integralist’s otherwise populist-aligned ideology. Furthermore, when looking at the strongest ideological bases for Integralism, we see a unity around the middle and upper classes of Brazil society who sport a strong presence in the Church.³¹ These elites would be key players in upholding an authoritarian regime, and as such, Salgado may feel the need to pander to them more than a broad electorate, a behavior he continues to follow throughout the 1930s as embodied in his 1935 Christmas and New Year Letter addressed “not exactly to the integralist masses, but to the integralist elites” which is filled with more religious rhetoric and allusion.³²

Corporatism

Another of the most popular policy points the two most successful fascist platforms – Nazism and Italo-fascism – stood upon in their programs was the “third-way” to the traditional economic dichotomy of Communism vs Capitalism: Corporatism.³³ Although not outright called upon in the *Manifesto de Outubro*, its presence is heavily implied throughout the doctrine:

²⁹ Gonçalves and Leto, “The Formation of the Sigma,” 1–42

³⁰ Salgado, “Integralist Manifesto of 1932,” 2.

³¹ Cowan, Benjamin, “Lula, Dilma, and Bolsonaroização.” Lecture (*History of Brazil 1889-Present*). University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA. 7 December 2023.

³² Salgado, Plínio. “Christmas and New Year Letter.” *A Offensiva*, 1935.

³³ Radcliff, Pamela, “The Emergence of Fascism.” Lecture (*Fascism, Communism and the Crisis of Liberal Democracy: Europe, 1919-1945*). University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA. 26 January 2023.

“Communism... destroys religion to further enslave man to the instincts,”³⁴ “transfigure the worker, hero of the new country, the superior man,” “[workers should be] taking part in the decisions of the government,” and “free the workers... of liberal governments.”³⁵ On the surface, this has seemingly little to nothing to do with Catholicism. However, “Catholic social teachings have never fit neatly with capitalist social relations.”³⁶ the Catholic “ethic of brotherliness” emphasizes interpersonal relations and Catholic Popes throughout the 20th century have “intermittently warned of the materialism and individualism that dominate capitalist industrialization and their danger for the Catholic faith.”³⁷ On the other hand, the *Communist Manifesto* asserts “[Communism] abolishes all religion, and all morality.”³⁸ As such, it’s obvious why Catholicism stands also stands in opposition to Communism. Moreover, Catholics outside Brazil and prior to Integralism, possessed pro-corporatist ideals based on anti-Marxism.³⁹ The Integralist decision to advocate for corporatism is, thus, another way for them to target a majority Catholic audience beyond just appealing to them through claims of morals and ethics.

However, as has been pointed out countless times regarding Italo-fascist corporatist rhetoric, “[corporatism is] a process designed to win employers over to fascism” through weightless affirmations of anti-labor organization⁴⁰ and, moreover, was never meant to be taken as a serious policy; corporatism is performative, discussed only as a means of gaining

³⁴ Salgado, “Integralist Manifesto of 1932,” 3.

³⁵ Salgado, “Integralist Manifesto of 1932,” 4.

³⁶ Neuhouser, Kevin. “The Radicalization of the Brazilian Catholic Church in Comparative Perspective.” *American Sociological Review* 54, no. 2 (1989): 233–44. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095792>.

³⁷ Neuhouser. “The Radicalization of the Brazilian Catholic Church.” (1989): 233–44.

³⁸ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin Books, 2015). 47.

³⁹ Radcliff, Pamela, “The Spanish Republic and Civil War: Ideological Battlefield, 1931-1939.” Lecture (*Fascism, Communism and the Crisis of Liberal Democracy: Europe, 1919-1945*). University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA. 23 February 2023

⁴⁰ Delzell, Charles F. “The Corporative State.” Essay. In *Mediterranean Fascism*, 107. Walker and Company, 1971.

widespread support for an ideology or program through what is effectively virtue signaling.⁴¹

The obvious reasons to include such a policy in the Integralist platform would be how easily it panders to the elites on an economic front, Catholics on a moral front, and the impoverished on an empowerment and pro-equality front. Even more, the Catholics in that first group, specifically the bishops in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, have traditionally been “the most prominent in Brazil, because of their proximity to the centers of wealth [and] government,”⁴² let alone the fact that “for most of Brazilian political history, being a Catholic was given among political leaders”⁴³ and during the Vargas regime, the “profound political vacuum” which followed the Revolution of 1930 only further increased that power the Church possessed, making it effectively “indispensable to the political process.”⁴⁴ Thus, it’s no surprise to see fascism electing to pander to Catholicism in Brazil where such relations between government and the Church are absent in other countries and consequently absent in their fascist movements. Similarly, as a massive section of the electorate, “the poor... [possess an] ardent religiosity” even though they “have remained at the margins of institutional Catholic life.” Thus, this decision to incorporate corporatism into the Integralist platform serves as further evidence towards the claim that a key point in Integralist thought centers around exploiting Catholic identity for political gain; there is no *real* solution being offered here, just empty promises that a third economic way exists and would somehow fit the needs of Brazil.

Family and Gender

⁴¹ Radcliff, Pamela, “Italy: Fascism in Power?” Lecture (*Fascism, Communism and the Crisis of Liberal Democracy: Europe, 1919-1945*). University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA. 16 February 2023

⁴² Neuhouser. “The Radicalization of the Brazilian Catholic Church.” (1989): 233–44.

⁴³ Modellmog, Linsey, and Pedro A.G. dos Santos. “Religion and Political Parties in Brazil.” *The Routledge Handbook to Religion and Political Parties*, 2019, 200–212. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351012478-17>.

⁴⁴ Della Cava, Ralph. “Catholicism and Society in Twentieth-Century Brazil.” *Latin American Research Review* 11, no. 2 (1976): 7–50. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0023879100030120>.

The final core tenant found within the *Manifesto de Outubro* is one centered around hyper-masculinity and family. Tapping into the immense presence Christian hypermasculinity possessed in the political sphere during Brazil in the 1930s,⁴⁵ Salgado asserts “Man is worthy... by sacrifice in favor of Family,”⁴⁶ “[Family] is the basis of happiness on earth,” and “the family is a perpetual source of spirituality and renewal.... Take family away from a man and what stays is an animal.”⁴⁷ These quotes alone fail to fully encapsulate just how important gender and family were to the Integralist platform, however; not only does Salgado also devote two of his ten sections to this topic but the decision to braid discussion of family throughout the manifesto seems to suggest gender existed “at the very heart of [Integralist] political ambitions” and was central to creating “an ideal Brazil rooted in Christian-based notions of masculinity and femininity.”⁴⁸ This conception of family was, of course, essential in keeping pace with the political sphere as discussed earlier but it also may, in part, help explain why so many clergymen and other higher-ups in the Church became members or sympathizers of Integralism.⁴⁹ In fact, prior to Vargas’ suppression of the last vestiges of the AIB in 1938, Integralism possessed the endorsement of the Church⁵⁰ and even the direct support of the Pope Leo XIII encyclical.⁵¹

Nevertheless, this core tenant of the program suffers, once again, from the major pitfalls expressed throughout this essay for other tenants: it lacks both substance and solution, and even when Salgado seems to be close to providing one of these two things – such as when he writes “We intend... to defend the family” – he fails to deliver – from “disruption, prostitution, and

⁴⁵ Traldi. “Christian Political Hypermasculinity.” March 22, 2023

⁴⁶ Salgado, “Integralist Manifesto of 1932,” 1.

⁴⁷ Salgado, “Integralist Manifesto of 1932,” 5.

⁴⁸ Traldi. “Christian Political Hypermasculinity.” March 22, 2023

⁴⁹ Traldi. “Christian Political Hypermasculinity.” March 22, 2023

⁵⁰ Della Cava “Catholicism and Society in Twentieth-Century Brazil.” (1976): 7–50.

⁵¹ Gonçalves and Leto, “The Formation of the Sigma,” 1–42.

ruin.”⁵² Thus, this final core tenant of the Integralist program more or less seals the deal on what Integralist thought boils down to. Integralism repeatedly demonstrates itself to be an ideology centered on an axis of pandering to widespread sentiment, national culture, and religion while delivering little to nothing when it comes to solutions.

Conclusion

The culmination of this analysis of Salgado’s *Manifesto de Outubro* leads to an acute understanding of Integralism as what can be best described as a pseudo-ideology formed on virtue signaling and a deep understanding of culture and political bases of power – like the church. In the Brazilian case, this understanding of fascism helps explain why Integralism adopted such strong language when it comes to Catholicism. Moreover, it also inadvertently helps explain why Integralism found so much success in Brazil; each tenant of the manifesto finds a single broad base of appeal – almost always rooted in religiosity – but many also double in effectiveness by hitting upon political norms of the time and addressing popular discontent or other social crises such as that of morality. On the surface, such an analysis may seem relatively trivial. However, given that Jair Bolsonaro mentioned God twelve times during his inauguration speech in 2018 – more times than all inauguration speeches of the democratic era – and the rise of Evangelical politicians in contemporary Brazil,⁵³ it seems this potent combination of religion and reactionary politics has once again surfaced in Brazilian politics. If we are to combat the proto-fascist ideology embodied by Bolsonarism and centered around Catholic identity, then we must learn from the past. We must find the pitfalls of Integralism, and the *Manifesto de Outubro*’s logic is a perfect place to start.

⁵² Salgado, “Integralist Manifesto of 1932,” 5.

⁵³ Modellmog and Santos. “Religion and Political Parties in Brazil.” 2019

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