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The Catholic Church in Fragile Democracies: An Influencer, a Moral Guide, or a Judge? A Case Study from the Peruvian Catholic Church

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Abstract: This paper navigates the complex roles that the Catholic Church assumes in fragile democracies, exploring whether it functions as an influencer, a moral guide, or a judge in shaping public policies and societal values using the Peruvian context as a focal reference. The authors begin by providing an overview of the global religious landscape, highlighting the diverse and polarized trends within the ecclesial institution. In the second part of this paper, this study delves into the homilies of two influential Peruvian prelates, Mgr. Cipriani and Mgr. Castillo, representing opposing theological currents within the Catholic Church, offering a pertinent exploration of how religious institutions engage with evolving international and local trends in the context of democracy.

Keywords: Catholic Church; Peru; religion and politics; family institution; liberation theology



Citation: Piccone-Camere, Carlos, and Véronique Lecaros. 2024. The Catholic Church in Fragile Democracies: An Influencer, a Moral Guide, or a Judge? A Case Study from the Peruvian Catholic Church. *Religions* 15: 323. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15030323>

Academic Editor: WJ. Torrance Kirby

Received: 31 December 2023

Revised: 11 February 2024

Accepted: 28 February 2024

Published: 7 March 2024



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1. Introduction

The Second Vatican Council stands as a pivotal event in the Church's contemporary history, marking a dynamic shift in its organizational structures and pastoral strategies. The examination of the relationship between the Catholic Church and states emerged as a salient aspect during this transformative period. The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* affirms that "The Church and the political community in their own fields are autonomous and independent from each other" (Vatican Council II 1965, n. 76). This perspective represented a turning point, particularly in Latin American countries, where the Catholic Church had upheld a religious monopoly for centuries. In the legal frame of the Patronage in force since the colonial period, the interests of the Church and the states intermingled. Governments were charged with the responsibility of safeguarding, supporting, and providing financial sustenance to the Church. In return, civil and political authorities were engaged in the selection of bishops and members of the clergy at large. This paradigmatic shift entailed that, following the Council, Concordats were established between the Holy See and the majority of Latin American states. These international treaties preserved the independence of the Church while sustaining avenues of collaboration in social projects (Lecaros and Taussig 2023; Ruda Santolaria 2010).

Nonetheless, even as roles were redefined and autonomy became the official norm, the Church continued to be an influential institution and a powerful actor in the public arena. Indeed, considering itself an "expert in humanity", a phrase coined by (Paul VI 1967) in *Populorum Progressio*, the Church remains engaged in ethical issues, particularly those focused on the protection of life and human dignity, with the recent addition of environmental challenges. While it is true that sexual matters have perennially been a part of the discourse, albeit approached from diverse perspectives, the moral agenda, as commonly acknowledged, has gained prominence in recent times with increased vigor (Lecaros and Suárez 2023a).

The moral debate has flared into an acrimonious quarrel in some countries; among them, the USA, where the position of the Episcopal Conference, similar to the evangelical position, has become the rallying standpoint of the right wing of the Republican Party (Gagné 2020). In November 2023, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, in keeping with a document adopted in 2007, affirmed that fighting abortion remains “our pre-eminent priority.” In addition to expressing their preoccupation with the expansion of criminalization, the document mentions other plights, emphasizing “the redefinition of marriage and gender” (USCCB 2023). Undoubtedly, it represents a clear reference to its fight against homosexual marriage and transgender identities.

Abundant literature deals with the presence/absence of religious actors coming from diverse backgrounds in the public and political scenery of the Northern Hemisphere (Gagné 2020; Casanova 1994, 2018; Dillon 2018; Hervieu-Léger and Schlegel 2022). On the contrary, analyses on the Southern Hemisphere, where secularization does not generally impregnate the cultural worldview, are relatively scarce. For this reason, our research focuses on a Peruvian case study: the homilies given by two Peruvian Prelates on the occasion of the *Te Deum* celebrated each year on the national anniversary, the 28th of July, in the cathedral. According to the protocol, the president attends the mass, accompanied by their cabinet, as well as parliamentarians and high officials. The *Te Deum* marks the beginning of the national celebration. It is immediately followed by a presidential speech given in the Congress that presents a review of the previous year and plans for the forthcoming one. The *Te Deum*, a remnant from colonial times, represents a unique opportunity for the Prelate to influence political decisions and to reach a broad audience.

In this study, we examined the homilies of Cardinal Juan Luis Cipriani Thorne, who held the episcopal seat in Lima for two decades (1999–2019), and those of Archbishop Carlos Castillo Mattasoglio, his successor in charge to the present day.¹ Mgr. Cipriani and Mgr. Castillo delivered their homilies to different government administrations. Cardinal Cipriani’s homilies coincided with the presidencies of Alberto Fujimori (1990–2000), Valentín Paniagua (2000–2001), Alejandro Toledo (2001–2006), Alan García (2006–2011), Ollanta Humala (2011–2016), Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (2016–2018), and Martín Vizcarra (2018–2020). Fujimori presided over an authoritarian, neoliberal, and extreme right government, whereas the other presidents can be located on the political spectrum between the center (Paniagua, Toledo, and Humala) and the right wing (García, Kuczynski, and Vizcarra). During this period, the economic policies did not vary substantially. The moral agenda was not part of the public debate, except for the period of President Kuczynski, who had a more liberal attitude toward the issue (Ray 2022). Archbishop Castillo’s homilies covered the administrations of Martín Vizcarra (2018–2020), Francisco Sagasti (2020–2021), Pedro Castillo (2021–2022), and Dina Boluarte (2022–), the current president and first woman to assume such a position in the history of Peru (Miró Quesada and Ñopo 2021).

Political instability associated with a weakening of institutions is the hallmark of Mgr. Castillo’s period (Perdomo 2023), during which precariousness and corruption prevailed. Violent political turmoil reached a climax in December 2022 and January 2023, just after the failed coup of President Castillo and the assumption of President Boluarte. Politicians have lost credibility. Pessimism has become prevalent, especially among young people, and the number of Peruvian emigrants has been rising (Giraldo 2023). Except for President Castillo’s self-presentation as a communist candidate, President Sagasti may be considered as a centrist and President Boluarte as pragmatically right-wing (Barrenechea and Vergara 2023). Moral issues have not been on the recent political agenda. Faced with such different and challenging situations, the archbishops, without referring to the day-to-day affairs, intended to provide spiritual orientations.

The decision to analyze the homilies of the last two archbishops of Lima is substantiated by the fact that each of these prelates embodies, to some extent, two contrasting viewpoints regarding the conception and interpretation of society and the Church’s role within it. Juan Luis Cipriani, the first cardinal from Opus Dei, belongs to the Church’s conservative wing (Pásara and Indacochea 2014). He earned a degree in industrial engineering

from the Universidad Nacional de Ingeniería (UNI) and a doctorate in theology from the University of Navarra. He was ordained as a priest in Madrid in 1977 and, meteorically, he soon became one of the most representative Latin American figures of Opus Dei, a conservative religious institution that earned accolades from Pope John Paul II at the time (Casey-Pariseault 2022; Aragón 2016). Cipriani was appointed auxiliary bishop in Ayacucho (1988), and then he became Archbishop of Ayacucho in the central Peruvian highlands during the most violent years of the terrorist group Sendero Luminoso, garnering both praise for his charitable commitment and criticism for an alleged disregard of human rights violations. Later, in 1999, he was promoted to the Archbishopric of Lima. He opposed the cultural currents of postmodernity by advocating for the Church to go against the tide, especially in relation to sexual morals.

In stark contrast, when Carlos Castillo assumed the role of Archbishop of Lima in 2019, he did so without a prior episcopal career. Widely recognized for his close association with Gustavo Gutiérrez, a prominent initiator of liberation theology, Castillo distinguished himself through his pastoral dedication to marginalized parishes and active participation at the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru, where he made substantial contributions to socio-theological discussions. Given this background, Castillo, unlike Cipriani, advocates for a more progressive theological approach. Instead of emphasizing the moral decline of society, he emphasizes what he terms a “Theology of Regeneration” (Castillo Mattasoglio 2000, 2018). This concept signifies a fresh beginning in the individual–societal–cosmic relationship, rooted in the person of Jesus and translated into practical, coherent living.

By conducting textual analyses of their *Te Deum* homilies, this paper seeks to elucidate contrasting trends coexisting within the Catholic Church, with a specific focus on the significance of sexual morality—an issue that has prominently emerged in global religious debates. The exploration delves into how these international trends manifest when confronted with diverse societal and political circumstances in a predominantly Catholic peripheral country. Our contention is that divisions within the Church become more readily discernible at the local level.

We also aim to explore how Catholic prelates subtly express their political stance, offering caution to certain presidents while criticizing others. By analyzing homilies spanning over thirty years and directed at various presidents, we can contrast the styles of approval and disapproval. The homiletic–patriotic genre involves a mastery in concealing double meanings.

To address the outlined objectives, we resort to the methodology of case studies, which is characterized by conducting a comprehensive and intensive examination of a facet, issue, or event that takes place within a geographic framework over time. It involves a procedural, systematic, and in-depth investigation of a specific selected case (Gerring 2006). Cases are “constructed” theoretically and practically by the researchers, who select them and establish their boundaries based on the relevance to the research objectives. To analyze the contrasting positions abiding in the Peruvian Church and their relations with politics, we build a case centered on the public statements of two prominent contemporary prelates. In addition to a thorough presentation of the cultural and political context, we delve into the homilies that they prepared for the Peru National Day celebrations (1999–2023).

In the pursuit of establishing a comprehensive contextual framework, we undertook a review of the extant literature and pertinent sources. The acquisition of data from the *Te Deum* homilies of Cipriani and Castillo involved consulting a compilation of Cipriani’s homilies up to 2015 (Cipriani Thorne 2016) and accessing Castillo’s homilies via the website of the Archbishopric of Lima. Interestingly, and potentially triggering various interpretations beyond the scope of this paper, Cipriani’s homilies are no longer available on the Archbishopric’s website. In instances where homilies lacked transcripts (2016–2018), recordings were employed, complemented by the use of software tools for word counting.

Following this, a detailed examination of the homilies’ content ensued, with a discerning focus on identifying themes, arguments, rhetorical devices, and other salient elements. Our analytical endeavor encompassed a comparative study of Cipriani and Castillo’s homi-

lies, illuminating discernible similarities, disparities, and emerging patterns. The broader socio-political and cultural milieu of Peru during the temporal span of the homilies was considered to contextualize the analysis, enhancing comprehension of the messages' impact and implications.

Finally, the amassed data and findings underwent a comprehensive interpretation and discussion, culminating in the derivation of conclusions and insights aligned with our research objectives. The resultant analysis was succinctly encapsulated in the conclusion, accentuating key discoveries and their contextual significance within the ambit of the chosen case study.

In the first part, we provide some broad indications on the general situation of religion in Peru and the polarized trends at work in the ecclesial institution. In the second part, we study the homilies of Mgr. Cipriani and Mgr. Castillo, trying to understand the ways in which international trends are refracted in a concrete situation to influence political decisions.

2. Peru, an Enchanted Country with a Few Tokens of Secularization

From a sociological angle, in 1994, José Casanova confronted the almost unanimously accepted paradigm of secularization (1994). By disentangling this paradigm (Tschannen 1991), he argues that according to countries, the scope and the speed of the phenomenon differs. He distinguishes three components. The first one corresponds to the differentiation of human activities and knowledge in separate spheres, such as politics, science, religion, wisdom, and so forth. The second one deals with the decrease in institutional religious practice and beliefs. The third one has to do with the privatization of religion. According to Casanova, the first component, albeit with some nuances, represents a global phenomenon; the second component is predominantly European, or at least it was when Casanova wrote about it. As for the third component, it is undergoing a process of reversal that is occurring almost universally. He considered that since the end of the 20th century, we have been witnessing a global deprivatization of religious topics and a widening public space for religious leaders. The concept of post-secularization has become widely accepted in the scientific community to describe the role of religion in the public sphere (Habermas 2008; Dillon 2018).

Since 1891, with the encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum* by Leon XIII, societal issues have been developed in a corpus of doctrine. Since then, each pope has contributed to the Catholic social teaching (CST), actualizing it according to the renewed challenges faced by humanity. Certain issues such as the assessment of industrialization have disappeared (*Populorum Progressio* by Pope Paul VI 1967), while others, such as climate change (*Laudato Si* and *Laudate Deum* by Pope Francis 2015, 2023) and interreligious tensions (*Fratelli Tutti* by Pope Francis 2020), have become highly relevant.

Sexual matters, although not directly integrated into the social doctrine, have always been an essential part of the Church's official discourse. The assessment criteria centered on the protection of life and human dignity have remained fairly constant. Nevertheless, the meaning of those notions has been questioned by societal changes and renewed scientific perspectives. Consequently, these parameters have undergone a process of redefinition. For centuries, until the 1960s, the Church remained consistent with the worldview of most of her flock, but this situation is now long gone. In this sense, the encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae* by (Paul VI 1968) represented a milestone. The scientific progress in embryology, the elaboration of chemical contraception, safer abortion procedures, and the psychological analysis of homosexual tendencies defy the Church doctrine. On these topics, the Church doctrine is nowadays often at odds with the legal frame of most countries.

In democratic countries marked by a strong process of secularization, the Church doctrine represents just one voice in the public debate. In Peru, the situation is different. Casanova characterizes the present situation of Latin America as "a religious pluralization with a relatively mild secularization" (Casanova 2018, p. 194). In the case of Peru, both appreciations need to be qualified more precisely.

The most recent data on religious affiliation in Peru can be traced back to the 2017 national census and show the enduring presence of the Catholic Church. According to the census, Christians encompassed nearly 90% of the population, while those belonging to denominations of non-Christian origin represented a very small fraction. Individuals who self-identified as atheists, agnostics, or as having no religious affiliation accounted for approximately 6% of the population. Groups within the Christian tradition, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and Mormons, collectively made up approximately 3% of the population. Evangelicals or evangelical Christians constituted a significant minority, comprising approximately 14% to 15% of the Peruvian population. Consequently, despite its decreasing influence in Peru, approximately 77% of the population still adhered to the Catholic faith six years ago (Lecaros 2022). Among the other Latin American countries, Peru stands as one of the most prominent strongholds of Catholicism, together with Mexico, Paraguay, and Bolivia.

The importance of the Catholic Church cannot be reduced to a quantitative matter; the Church is by far the most respected institution. The level of approbation of the Catholic Church, as has been shown by polls, is well above that of other institutions. Edward Cleary mentioned a steady level between 70 and 60% over the decades (Cleary 2009). In most countries in the region, this trend has continued until recently, as indicated by the *Latinobarómetro* (2021) poll. In Peru, the level of confidence in the Church reaches 63%, whereas it is below the double digits for political institutions (government, parties, congress). It is noteworthy that Peru exhibits the lowest popularity rates for its political institutions across the entire region. Interestingly, the ecclesiastical institution stands out as a beacon of trust, boasting significantly higher popularity compared to discredited institutions deemed inefficient and corrupt (Lecaros 2020b).

As an institution apparently independent from political power, the Church is considered to be fairly immune to corruption. Moreover, her great popularity stems from her successful social projects which are highly appreciated by the public. These projects compensate for some of the State's deficiencies, being, in some remote places, the only institution attending to the population.

Moreover, the widespread respect enjoyed by the Church has to be understood as a consequence of the religious worldview. To describe the situation, most authors refuse to apply the notion of secularization forged in the Northern Hemisphere and prefer that of enchantment (Lecaros 2020b). Using an expression of Max Weber, they characterize this situation as "enchanted" (Taylor 2015), "enchanted modernity" (Morello et al. 2017), and an "enchanted world" (Marzal 2002). In Latin America, the impact of the differentiation into spheres remains limited and with nuances. According to the expression of Eloisa Martín (2009), the sacred is "like a differentiated texture of the inhabited world". As Charles Taylor remarks, the enchanted world is constantly agitated by various forces, by powerful entities, good or bad spirits, energies that are concentrated in amulets, statues, and pious images (Taylor 2007). In this universe, God acts as a kind of counterweight to the devil. The enchanted world is plagued by conflicts in which human beings are involved. From this perspective, priests are considered as being impregnated by an aura of sacredness and therefore of benevolence and goodness. The extension of sacredness over their whole self ("ontological transformation") deifies them and therefore transform them in a kind of *Alter Deus*.

In numerous Latin American nations where sacraments, notably the Eucharist, have not been widely practiced due to diverse factors, the clergy's power of sacralization tends to grow significantly. In the context of popular piety, the sacramentals, such as blessings, feasts of patron saints, pilgrimages, and processions, among others, are acquiring increasing importance. There is no blessing, or rather no efficient blessing, without a priest. Everything (and of course, everyone) has to be blessed to be protected against the attack of evil spirits: cars, animals, houses, businesses, and so on (Marzal 2002; Lecaros and Suárez 2023a).

In addition to her prestige and her recognized supernatural capacities, the public influence of the Church stems from her relationship with the political world. From the

state religion of the colonial period to now, an official process of secularization has been underway in state institutions (Klaiber 1988). As noted by Roberto Blancarte, with decolonization, all of the countries in Latin America adopted republican and liberal regimes. A process of secularization of institutions gradually took hold (Blancarte 2016, p. 331). The movement was assumed and promoted by the Church after the Vatican II Council. After terminating the patronage system definitively in 1979, the Peruvian state, through the signing of the Concordat, became non-confessional (Lecaros and Taussig 2023). In the constitutional realm, the perspective of secularization and the differentiation of spheres reflects a process that culminated at the end of the 20th century. “The locus of political authority shifts from a Catholic regime [during the colony] to secular regimes” (Blancarte 2016, p. 331). With the stabilization of democratic regimes, the choice of leaders and their legitimacy is based on popular will, as is expressed in regular national elections (Morello et al. 2017).

However, apart from the legal and official process of secularization, a confusion of political and religious spheres emerges at another level. The Church continues, willingly or unwillingly, to play a legitimizing role, but at new costs, in a changed context. It is not, as Marcel Gauchet analyzes, a justification of the social order. The sacred power, he writes, is the “cornerstone” that wields and justifies an ultimately unequal society founded on the superiority of the beyond (Gauchet 1985, p. 46; Morello et al. 2017, p. 318). It is not what Peter Berger described in other terms as a sacred canopy (Berger 1967) either. The legitimization process is rather of a moral type, as Blancarte (2016, p. 334) argues. This phenomenon takes on new significance in the current situation. The Church plays a role as a moral guarantor. In the context of corruption, with the discrediting of politicians and institutions co-opted by lobbies, religious figures serve as secure and positive references. Peruvian authorities, from the President to mayors, appear in public accompanied by religious figures or pepper their speeches with biblical references, especially when facing criticism (Lecaros 2020b). The Church and religion, in general, do not legitimize the social order as in the pre-modern societies described by Gauchet, Berger, and Taylor, but rather the respectability of individuals. In the enchanted world in which their voters move, politicians seek a form of anointment from religious figures. On their part, religious leaders often engage in clientelist relationships, allowing them to maintain a significant quota of power and oversight of decisions, which in turn allows them to be more effective as influencers (Blancarte 2016, p. 343).

This context helps us to understand the special weight of the Church’s authorized voice. Peru stands out as a country where the Church wields significant influence, as evidenced by legislation pivotal to the Catholic Church, such as laws concerning abortion and same-sex marriage, which are notably stricter compared to other countries in the region. While most Latin American nations, except for Central American and Caribbean countries, have implemented some form of recognition for same-sex couples and regulations regarding abortion, Peru’s legislation on these issues has remained unchanged for several decades. The Church’s effectiveness in this regard can also be attributed to its alignment with certain cultural aspects of the prevailing *macho* mentality (Fuller 2012). In this scenario, the interpretation of several biblical references by the Catholic Church and other Christian denominations has contributed to justifying what is deemed a divine decree (Lecaros 2020a).

Peruvians may not unanimously and strictly follow the Church norms, but for most of them, they remain an ideal (Lecaros 2020b). This situation explains why prelates, in their *Te Deum* homilies, feel empowered and dare to confront the government. They are actually expected to do so. Those homilies represent the Church’s evaluation of a government, and they are designed to influence and help rectify political decisions, although in practice, the effectiveness of homiletic exhortations cannot be quantitatively assessed, and it is evident that acts of corruption have continued to proliferate in public administration. The angles of approach of Mgr. Cipriani and of Mgr. Castillo may be different, but both have been

aware that by virtue of their spiritual mission, they are granted the credentials necessary to intervene in the political realm.

3. Polarization in the Catholic Church: Unity with or in Spite of Diversity

The debate about the position of the Church in a secularized democracy mirrors an ongoing debate within the Church that has also entailed a growing rift between trends. The meaning and the reception of the Vatican II Council represent the dividing line between factions. This polarization has reached the Church itself, dividing, roughly speaking, those who refuse to consider the possibility of an actualization and those who want to open spaces for respectful dialogues with the growing number of the Church's contemporaries who feel estranged by a doctrine they do not fully understand anymore. The first group, closer to the position of the previous popes, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, are usually referred to as conservative, whereas the second group, in certain aspects closer to Pope Francis, are labeled as liberal or progressive (Carter 2018). This terminology has been adopted by many members of the hierarchy in public, among them Cardinal Hollerich (2023). These categories may help to organize a study on the dynamic of Church trends, but individual positions are not always clearly delineated.

On the conservative side, which includes theologians who were active in the Council, such as Hans Urs Von Balthasar, Jean Danielou, Henri de Lubac, and Joseph Ratzinger, the Council is reinterpreted as a continuation of tradition. This faction regards the journal *Communio*, founded by Von Balthasar in 1972 in response to the progressive trend, as one of its prominent mediums of expression. On the other hand, the progressive or liberal trend views the Council as a potential renewal for Catholicism and the Church in general. The preferred journal of this group is *Concilium*, founded during the Council in 1965, with the involvement of members of the *Nouvelle Théologie*, liberation theology, feminist theology, and ecotheology, such as Yves Congar, Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, and, more recently, Leonardo Boff and Cristoph Theobald, among many others. Needless to say, these theological trends encompass a wide range of nuances.

In this article, in keeping with the journal's special theme, we focus mainly on the way sexual issues are addressed by both trends. As Carlos Schickendantz has analyzed, the conservative trend proceeds in a deductive way from revealed eternal truth, and as such, believes that the Church doctrine is always valid (Schickendantz 2013). On the contrary, the liberal trend, in search of a constant actualization of Catholicism, as Pope John XXIII phrased it, views revelation as incarnated, i.e., as an inspiration expressed through cultural and linguistic parameters.

Prior to the publication of the Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, at the beginning of 2015, in the middle of the synod on the family, *Communio* released an issue on The Family. At the time, rumors were circulating that the synod was paving the way for admitting remarried couples to communion and eventually to accept some sort of divorce. Moreover, the issue of homosexuality, considered to be sinful by the Catechism of the Catholic Church, was also to be discussed. As predicted, the authors of *Communio* pondered the indissolubility of marriage, referring to John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

In the article "The Merciful Gift of Indissolubility and the Question of Pastoral Care for Civilly Divorced and Remarried Catholics", Nicholas Healy (2014), the North American editor of *Communio*, categorically states that "The Church does not have the authority to change Christ's teaching on the indissolubility of marriage", supporting his position with an excerpt of the speech given by John Paul II to the Tribunal of the Roman Rota on the 21st of January 2000 (p. 324): "In this context it would also be appropriate to quote the Catechism of the Catholic Church, [...] we read there: "Thus the marriage bond has been established by God himself in such a way that a marriage concluded and consummated between baptized persons can never be dissolved". [...] The Roman Pontiff in fact has the "sacra potestas" to teach the truth of the Gospel, administer the sacraments and pastorally govern the Church in the name and with the authority of Christ, but this power does not include per se any power over the divine law, natural or positive". By placing in God the

origin of marriage, the institution appears unalterable. Marriage as God's project represents the model used to guide families and evaluate cultural habits.

In the same issue (French edition), in the article "Popes and the Family, from *Casti Connubii* to *Familiaris Consortio*", Jean Laffitte (2015), delving into John Paul II's Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), ponders the place of the family in society. According to Laffitte, one of the main contributions of the Exhortation is to consider the family institution as playing an essential role in the "development of society" and as such, in the promotion of a "new international order" (p. 25). If families are fundamental for the building of a healthy and holy society, they should therefore be protected and helped by the government. According to this family frame, roles must be clearly distributed among members and assumed as part of "God's plan" (an expression used by John Paul II in the exhortation). Sexual issues have to be comprehended exclusively as an element of the family dynamic. A failure to do so would imply a conflict with God's will, and therefore, it would be a sin. From this perspective, the relevance of sexual issues exceeds individual deeds and has repercussions for all of humanity.

The Church's progressive sector uses a different angle of approach, relying on an inductive method (Schickendantz 2017). They start from an empirical analysis of people's experiences. Progressives prefer to approach reality through the "see, judge, and act" method, inspired by European Catholic movements and liberation theology (and Theology of the People) (Lecaros 2022). This method was applied in the General Conferences of the Latin American Bishops, from Medellín to Aparecida (§19).

The Catholic theologian Bertrand Dumas, an advisor for couples and families, in a recent article on the Catholic idealization of marriage (Dumas 2019), contrasts these two perspectives. Some clergy and theologians present the perfect marriage, the spouses, as a model to follow and address sexual relationships in a sublimated way, sometimes causing suffering in couples who cannot conform to the ideal. On the other hand, Dumas appreciates the more realistic and concrete tone of Pope Francis's exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, which considers the challenges, successes, and failures of every family. Dumas chose a suggestive title for his article on the Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*: "Once upon a time' . . . The Idealization of Marriage, a Threat for Hope". For Dumas, many families around the globe are facing dire challenges that ward them off the idealized Catholic version. As Robin Cavagnoud shows in a recent study (Cavagnoud 2023), the configuration of Peruvian families has changed drastically in the last ten years, drifting away from the Catholic ideal and thus creating an ever-growing schism between ideal and real families. Couples do not marry and birth control methods are widely used.

It is also worth noting that the progressive trend favoring the historical and critical reading of the Bible questions some of the features of the Catholic doctrine and the existence of a universal natural law. In terms of sexual issues, this method has pinpointed the centuries-old misinterpretation of the destruction of Sodom and Gomora. The sin of the inhabitants of Sodom was not related to homosexuality, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church still claims, but to the disobedience of the most sacred rules of hospitality (Römer and Bonjour 2016). Moreover, the Bible does not directly condemn homosexuality because the concept of individual sexual identity was foreign to the ancient world.

More than arguments, methods, or positions, the trends differ on matters of priorities and pastoral purposes (Dillon 2018, p. 79). Silences and oblivions are particularly noteworthy. The conservative position tends to focus on sexual morality in the broad sense of the term, whereas the progressive one is centered on collective challenges (Pásara 2021; Lecaros 2022). Progressives prioritize humanitarian debates, including environmental destruction and attention to the excluded, discarded, or disposable (terms frequently used by Pope (Francis 2015) in *Laudato Sí*, *Querida Amazonia*, etc.). Following the model of the good Samaritan, as analyzed by Pope (Francis 2020) in the encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti*, they invite Christians to go out of their way to attend to their neighbors' necessities.

The sexual moral agenda and the defense of humanitarian collective values are both deep sources of opposition. Nolens volens, the Church has become engulfed in tense and

polarized political controversies that have spread internally and fostered differences among the clergy. The quarrel has garnered public attention from the disagreement of high-level figures, a few conservative cardinals and bishops with recognized career experience, opposing Pope Francis' position. These prelates have been questioning his attitude through "Dubia" (doubts in Latin), a formal request for clarification on specific points of doctrine (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith 2023). Moreover, Pope Francis, in keeping with the progressive trend, has minimized the importance of the sexual debate. Just after his election, in one of his first formal interviews with Antonio Spadaro (2013), he refused to prioritize the topic: "we cannot insist only on issues related to abortion, gay marriage and the use of contraceptive methods. [...] it is not necessary to talk about these issues all the time" (Spadaro 2013). While our research does not specifically address this aspect, a historical lens could provide valuable insights into the true extent of the conflict's escalation.

However, beyond the aforementioned differences that are highly mediatized by the sensationalist press and internet forums, we are bound to wonder if deep down, both trends are not rooted in a similar conception of the Church mission and her unique authority over mankind. In other words, for both trends, the Church is an "expert in humanity", as Paul VI stated, although there may be differing interpretations of what expertise and humanity entail. In the dialogue on secularization between Junger Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI), Habermas considers that in a democracy, the Church occupies one position among many others that enters the global conversation with her own arguments. On the contrary, for Ratzinger, the Church-inspired position on human life and dignity corresponds to the transcendental revealed Truth and thus should prevail. This perspective is somewhat common and implicit in both trends. Although their priorities may differ, they both feel entitled and consider that they are entrusted with a special authority to raise their voices.

4. Te Deum Celebration: A Micro Hierarchical Setting of the Universe

While both its authorship and the precise place and date of its origin remain veiled, a widely circulated tradition suggests that the liturgical hymn *Te Deum* (Latin for 'Thee, O God', initial words of the prayer) was composed by Ambrose of Milan and was sung during the baptism of Augustine as an expression of gratitude to God for his conversion. However, more contentious than its historical roots are the diverse array of applications that this poetic piece has undergone. It has been performed notably following military victories, the signing of peace treaties, the coronations of sovereigns, and the healing of authorities, but also during significant national anniversaries that can evoke a fierce combat between Christian nations, as will be illustrated.

On 28 July 1821, General José de San Martín proclaimed the independence of Peru. The following day, Bartolomé de las Heras, Archbishop of Lima, concluded the Mass celebration with the singing of *Te Deum*. The separation from the Spanish Crown was thus ritualized (Piccone Camere 2018). At present, the Mass and *Te Deum* continue to mark the first official act of the annual commemoration of Peru's independence. Thus, regardless of the creed that is professed, the ceremony is attended by the highest-ranking authorities from the three branches of the State, autonomous constitutional bodies, and Diplomatic Corps.

To some extent, the Mass and *Te Deum* of 28 July allude to the persistence of a certain spirit of the colonial regime in which the boundary between the political and religious spheres was highly permeable. The *Te Deum* celebration thus unveils the shallow impact of the legal and political secularization process. Hence, notwithstanding the potential discomfort experienced by various political and judicial officials when exposed to a sermon that typically promotes the strengthening of values and criticizes inadequate public governance, refraining from attending the cathedral on this solemn day would be deemed an objectionable diplomatic gesture. Although Peru has become officially a non-confessional and more pluralistic country, the *Te Deum* celebration protocol has remained unchanged. The only concession to the growing number of protestants was the introduction in 2006 of a "Thanksgiving Ceremony for Peru" organized by the Evangelical Churches (Lecaros and

Taussig 2023). While this event receives less attention from the press, it has been included in the official activities for National Holidays in Peru since 2010. Furthermore, since 2018, the mandatory attendance of the President of the Republic on the day following the Te Deum celebration has been established.

The Te Deum ritual remains deeply entrenched in traditional hierarchical structures of authority (Romero 2014). In nations that continue to observe this ceremony, the power dynamics and symbolic roles portrayed during the Te Deum celebration are remarkable. Despite being adorned with the presidential sash and accompanied by high-ranking state ministers and military officials, the president is brought to the boundary of their power during the homily. In a passive role, they listen to the sermon, positioned as a mere recipient with no opportunity for response. Conversely, from the pulpit, the archbishop embodies a superior moral position, casting their gaze over the silent political authorities, thereby symbolizing the precedence of spiritual authority over any temporality. When the president receives the communion host, he symbolizes the nation, and, in a peculiar manner, the reception of communion during the Te Deum ceremony is a visual enactment of the catholicity of the Peruvian nation. Moreover, in a country where ethics and moral values are intrinsically associated with religious beliefs, public communion could stand for a good behavior certificate, a great token considering the discrediting of politicians accused of corruption (Lecaros 2020b).

Defined by passive and predominantly silent engagement, every gesture within a liturgical ceremony assumes the role of eloquent non-verbal communication. In this symbolic framework, despite grappling with widespread rumors of adultery and corruption during his second presidency (2006–2011), President Alan Garcia would kneel to receive communion in the mouth, aligning with the norms of the conservative position within the Church. Before the massive television audience, at first glance, the entire scene could symbolize the nation's submission to Christian values and the president's impeccable moral conduct. This public adherence to catholic values redounded to his credit. Rumors were thus denied, and the president appeared legitimate. Beyond appearances, the celebration may be instrumentalized by both religious and political authorities.

Although the Te Deum ritual is strictly regulated by the liturgy, the celebrations by Mgr. Cipriani and Mgr. Castillo differed in style. During Cipriani's tenure, the cathedral's ambiance closely adhered to the rubrics of liturgical ceremonies. Meticulous attention to details, perhaps bordering on ostentation, was evident in the decoration of the altar, the floral arrangements, the musical selections, the hieratic gestures of the celebrant bishops, and the stipulation for receiving communion while kneeling. This somehow magnificent style was attuned to Pope Benedict XVI's liturgical restoration. On the other hand, Mgr. Castillo's celebrations are characterized by a shift towards a more austere and simplified atmosphere, in accordance with liberation theology and the Latin American Bishops Conferences (notably the recommendations of the bishops in Medellín) and close to Pope Francis' style.

5. Homiletic–Patriotic Gender: Subtle Criticisms in a Cryptic Manner

In keeping with the autonomy between the religious and political spheres, as expressed by the Second Vatican Council, archbishops offer guidance and tend to steer clear of direct involvement in day-to-day politics. Their homilies tend to focus on providing a spiritual perspective on the state of the nation and assisting the government in prioritizing the common good.

The field of homiletics constitutes a distinct literary genre with unique dynamics. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, one of the Constitutions of the Second Vatican Council, stated that “by means of the homily the mysteries of the faith and the guiding principles of the Christian life are expounded from the sacred text”. According to the Canon Law, the homily is reserved to a priest or deacon (Can. 767 §1). The readings for the Thanksgiving Mass and Te Deum on 28 July are taken from Isaiah 9: 1–6, Philippians 4: 4–9, and Luke 1: 39–56. The Gospel reading relates the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth and includes the Magnificat.

However, liturgical norms also allow the use of some other schemes from the Missal to give thanks to God.

Certain features of the messages delivered from the cathedral pulpit actually belong to the genre of homiletic–patriotic speeches, and this is a shared characteristic of both archbishops. While the tone may at times be critical, the archbishop consistently upholds a respectful stance and abstains from direct and overt attacks, aligning with the principle of autonomy between spheres as outlined in the Second Vatican Council Documents. Similarly, while archbishops do address the prominent aspects of the social and political landscape, they refrain from making direct mentions of politicians or specific circumstances. Nevertheless, cryptic messages criticizing the government can be deciphered. Some of these messages are quite evident, while others are more subtly concealed.

In the aftermath of the shocking corruption scandal during President Fujimori’s administration, Archbishop Cipriani, who had consistently shown his support for President Fujimori (Pásara and Indacochea 2014), refrained from directly implicating the president. Instead, he implicitly criticized the hidden influence of presidential advisor Vladimiro Montesinos, speaking of a “tutelary power over which the people have little control” (Cipriani Thorne 2016, Te Deum 2000).

In the Mass of 2002, Cardinal Cipriani chose different readings for the celebration: 1 Kings, Romans 8: 28, and Matthew 13: 44. This change is revealing because the first reading contains a prayer by King Solomon, a ruler archetype: “Give your servant a heart to understand how to govern your people, how to discern between good and evil. . .”. This could have been an indirect admonishment to then-President Alejandro Toledo. The disagreement and tensions between Mgr. Cipriani and President Toledo were the object of public commentaries during his entire government (2001–2006).

When deemed necessary, Mgr. Castillo’s sermons have been straightforward, eschewing euphemisms or diplomatic niceties. This shift could potentially mirror the worsening social and political landscape, signifying a perceived threat to democracy. In 2022, after just one year in power, President Pedro Castillo faced widespread criticism for inadequate leadership and multiple instances of corruption within his close circle of advisers. Many respected authorities and intellectuals called for his resignation. In response, Mgr. Castillo conveyed a similar message, citing the generous and altruistic example of General San Martín, who relinquished political power to prevent bloodshed. In 2023, amid serious doubts about the legitimacy and governing capabilities of President Dina Boluarte, avoiding the explicit mention of the decisions that should be taken, Mgr. Castillo censured the abuses of the regime: “It is my duty, with all due respect, to call upon the highest authorities of the country to place themselves, for a few minutes, in the situation of those who suffer the most, facing our mistakes and the serious wrongs we have committed, including the deaths that still await justice and reparation” (Cipriani Thorne 2016, Te Deum 2023). In both instances, the strong criticism, thinly veiled through metaphor and a general tone, prevented Presidents Castillo and Boluarte from instrumentalizing the celebration. This critique further solidified the significant opposition that both presidents encountered in the media.

As an integral component of the patriotic–homiletic genre, the incumbent archbishop systematically references the current pope, employing him as both a point of reference and a cautionary figure. This approach serves as a strategy to establish legitimacy in the distinctive Roman-Ultramontane style (Ramón Solans 2020). With his inherent personal nuances, the archbishop’s voice resonates as the voice of the pope and, consequently, the Vicar of Christ. It is worth noting that in Peru, popes are held in high prestige and reverence. In 2018, Pope Francis’s visit to Peru was a resounding success, drawing a crowd of 1.5 million people to the Sunday Mass.

6. Unity versus Uniformity; Diversity versus Divergences

Beyond the similar features related to the gender frame, the differences between the theological and social perspectives of Mgr. Cipriani and Mgr. Castillo surface clearly in their

speeches. Mgr. Cipriani's homilies often reflected only faint echoes of the biblical readings. Instead, he favored moral exhortations and a rigorous exposition of ecclesiastical doctrine from a conservative standpoint. Mgr. Cipriani's homilies stand out for their consistent emphasis on the principle of human dignity, interpreted as an unwavering advocacy for the right to life and active promotion of the significance and worth of the family. In 2003, Cipriani outlined what can be described as his own Decalogue, encompassing principles such as "[1] the defense of life from conception, [2] the family, [3] public morality, [4] truth and honesty, [5] justice, [6] respect for privacy and [7] honor, [8] concrete solidarity, [9] youth education, [10] love for the homeland" (Cipriani Thorne 2016, Te Deum 2003). All these themes closely align with the teachings of John Paul II's Magisterium, which span anthropological, social, and ecclesiological dimensions, with a special emphasis on moral and individual behavior. It is worth noting that the encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (promulgated in 1991 by John Paul II) is a near-constant presence in Mgr. Cipriani's homilies until the papal election of Cardinal Ratzinger. However, what is even more significant is that Mgr. Cipriani selectively cites *Centesimus Annus* to convey the ecclesial perspective on democracy, the right to work, and the dignity of the human person, but he avoids addressing the harsh criticism that John Paul II directed towards the capitalist system, a crucial and contentious point in the mentioned encyclical. Such an omission can only be explained by considering Cipriani's affinity with the neoliberal economic policy promoted by Alberto Fujimori.

In the aftermath of Pope John Paul II's passing, Cipriani's Te Deum homilies reflect resonances with the profound concerns expressed by Benedict XVI, particularly emphasizing the challenge of countering "the dictatorship of moral relativism" (Cipriani Thorne 2016, Te Deum 2005). It is revealing to note that Ratzinger's critique of relativism primarily pertained to the intellectual sphere, involving doctrinal deviations. Conversely, as elucidated by Cipriani, this relativism is specifically confined to the moral dimension, as he asserts that "the relativistic vision of the moral norm is a phenomenon of dramatic dimension" (Cipriani Thorne 2016, Te Deum 2005). In his last Te Deum homily, Cipriani continued to draw inspiration from the theology of John Paul II, canonized in 2014, and Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI. While making some references to Pope Francis, his emphasis was more on the pope's role as a unifying figure due to his position as the Roman pontiff, rather than delving into the specifics of his theological thinking (Cipriani Thorne 2016, Te Deum 2018).

The combination of strengthening the family and condemning abortion is one of the most prevalent themes in Cipriani's homilies. Without aiming to be exhaustive, let these sermons excerpts serve as illustrations: "It would be tragic for the country to open its doors to what is murder with all its aggravations, abortion" (Cipriani Thorne 2016, Te Deum 2000); "It is time to establish leadership that, rooted in moral values starting from the family, knows how to generate a social climate that calls upon each and every Peruvian to give their best" (Cipriani Thorne 2016, Te Deum 2001); "Let us promote, defend, and strengthen family unity first and foremost" (Cipriani Thorne 2016, Te Deum 2002); "Respect for new life from the very beginning constitutes an absolute value" (Cipriani Thorne 2016, Te Deum 2004); "Affirming the truth of marriage and defending the family should be a concern and mandate that involves us all" (Cipriani Thorne 2016, Te Deum 2005); "The Church defends what is a heritage of humanity: the family" (Cipriani Thorne 2016, Te Deum 2006).

Mgr. Cipriani advocated for the "culture of life," opposing "ideological approaches that are 'politically correct,' prevailing in this relativistic world that wavers without firm ethical principles" (Cipriani Thorne 2016, Te Deum 2009). Consequently, he consistently called for active participation in the March for Life, a massive event organized by the Archbishopric of Lima since 2012, which reached its peak in 2018 with 800,000 participants opposing abortion and advocating for the strengthening of families. As the primary advocate for the event, he set aside doctrinal differences to prioritize the defense of pro-life culture. This led to his collaboration with the group 'Don't You Mess With My Children' (Con mis hijos no te metas) and evangelical pastors (Lecaros 2022, 2020a; Barrera 2017). The cardinal was convinced that a global agenda related to gender ideology was imposed on

Peru, and he believed it could only be rejected through the reaffirmation of moral, spiritual, and Catholic identity (Cipriani Thorne 2016, Te Deum 2010). Cipriani directed his strongest criticisms against ‘gender ideology’, which he accused “of destroying the very roots of human coexistence” (Cipriani Thorne 2016, Te Deum 2011) and of having “invaded the cultural field, attempting to impose its particular anthropological conception” (Cipriani Thorne 2016, Te Deum 2014). He described it as “outdated,” “cloaked in pseudo-democratic forms” (Cipriani Thorne 2016, Te Deum 2017), and contrary to the “natural law” (Cipriani Thorne 2016, Te Deum 2018).

Mgr. Cipriani’s pro-life stance and his advocacy for the family institution are not confined to the private sphere; rather, they are depicted as the very bedrock of Peruvian society. According to him, society is under pressure to succumb to a ‘single-minded’ way of thinking: “We see how the values of ethical tradition, especially in the field of sexual morality; of marriage, a sacred institution; and the defense of life and family, the heart of society, are turning into mere taboos” (Cipriani Thorne 2016, Te Deum 2012), hence his call to reject “the neocolonialism promoted by some institutions and organizations in materially powerful countries but spiritually ailing [. . .]; countries that today walk in the darkness of what they call modern practices, all of which are against the family, marriage, and life” (Cipriani Thorne 2016, Te Deum 2015). In 2013, Cipriani was unable to preside over the Te Deum Mass due to his participation in World Youth Day in Brazil. Nevertheless, in his stead, Adriano Tomasi, auxiliary bishop of Lima, delivered a homily that closely adhered to the cardinal’s established line, likely requiring prior approval. Citing a recent survey indicating that 87% of Peruvians do not accept abortion, the homily concluded with a plea to the attending politicians, urging them to pledge not to pass laws that endanger life and to provide support for those dealing with unwanted pregnancies or terminal illness.

Explicitly embracing the perspective of Pope Benedict XVI on Catholicism, society, and democracy (Lecaros and Suárez 2023b), Mgr. Cipriani conveyed that “the role of religion consists of aiding to purify and illuminate the application of reason to the discovery of objective moral principles” (Cipriani Thorne 2016, Te Deum 2015). The approach adopted is deductive, positing that society should be grounded in objective moral principles derived from religion, and individuals are obligated to adhere to these principles. While not explicitly articulated, the implication is that sin results from a deviation from these moral principles. This premise again became evident in his final Te Deum homily, wherein he articulated the following prayer: “Grant us the strength to always defend life, especially that of the unborn child, and to defend marriage, which, amidst difficulties, is so crucial in the development of society and the family” (Cipriani Thorne 2018). Essentially, he advocated for a society in a defensive posture, firmly rooted in a family sanctified by the sacrament of marriage and consistently open to life. This position aligns with the perspective of John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio* and resonates with the charism of Opus Dei, championing numerous families and upholding a strict adherence to sacramental practices.

On the contrary, Mgr. Castillo’s homilies have notably been more rooted in the biblical message. While Mgr. Cipriani rarely quotes biblical readings, Mgr. Castillo consistently reflects upon them in all his speeches. In his commentary of the visitation, the gospel reading of the Te Deum Mass, he invites us to contemplate Mary’s visit to her cousin, experiencing a difficult pregnancy, as a model for Christians. In this narrative, Elizabeth represents the poor, and the audience is encouraged to deviate from their individual paths to reach and care for them. This emphasis on biblical interpretation and its application to real-life situations aligns with a consistent trait among liberation theologians.

In contrast with Mgr. Cipriani’s homilies, Mgr. Castillo consistently cites the teachings of Pope Francis, without referencing the theological ideas of previous popes. Furthermore, Castillo usually avoids addressing subjects such as abortion, gender ideology, and the family institution, indicating a deliberate focus on alternative facets of Catholic social teaching. In his perspective on society, Mgr. Castillo aligns with the viewpoint of liberation theology (Gutiérrez 1975), which was endorsed by Pope Francis (Zegarra 2023). He frequently calls for special attention to be paid to the plight of the poor and advocates eagerly for the

inclusion of all citizens. Additionally, he incorporates the predicament of the Amazonia region and environmental issues, which are central topics in Francis's pontificate. In 2023, Mgr. Castillo's homily served as a meditation on the meaning of the "common good", following the path of *Fratelli Tutti*, Francis's encyclical letter (Francis 2020).

In his *Te Deum* homilies, Castillo extensively employs the concept of hope and similar words, implicitly reflecting an orientation toward the theology of regeneration that he has developed. In practical terms, despite the turbulent times in Peruvian society, Christians should nourish the conviction that a regenerated world is forthcoming. Castillo envisions a broad process unfolding globally, with a new narrative emerging from the voices of the humble, advocating for the regeneration and reconstruction of the foundations of the world through love (Castillo Mattasoglio 2021).

Without renouncing liberation theology, Mgr. Castillo considers that the theology of regeneration is a contemporary development that implies a change in focus. "This leads us to a first conclusion: the main issue is not that of liberation from, but rather that of liberation for; that is, the problem lies in the urgent need for essential guidelines to exist. Furthermore, the liberation from oppressions and injustices that still persist, even in a more accentuated and tragic manner, loses possibilities as one lacks a defined orientation towards something" (Castillo Mattasoglio 2000, p. 17).

This theology is based not only on a trust in God's powerful love, but also a trust in the capacity of humankind to receive God's grace and make it flourish. "God regenerates history in Christ to the extent that God's trust and generous love expressed by Jesus reach and flood the spirits of the people, creating a different space of trust in them. This space lifts individuals and nations in crisis from the entangling pressure of their sin and natural sense of guilt. It all comes from the generous gaze of Jesus, who looks not with distrust and reproach but with trust and generosity, appreciating the positive aspects in everyone. Without stinginess" (Castillo Mattasoglio 2000, p. 44).

The reflections on the gospel reading, particularly the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth, align with this perspective. The conception of their children, Jesus and John, symbolizes the anticipated rebirth of the universe. As Mgr. Castillo stated, "Therefore, every time He (God) is about to intervene in history, He brings about the birth of a child" (Castillo Mattasoglio 2000, p. 26). Mary and Elizabeth recognize that they are witnessing "the seeds of the fulfillment of the promise that God made to David, and which renews the promise to Abraham" (Castillo Mattasoglio 2021).

In one of his first presentations of his theology of regeneration, Castillo, a parish priest at the time, expressed that the Church should experience the regenerative process within itself and thus should undertake the mission of promoting it and work for its expansion in the world. "A theology of regeneration must be attentive to the regenerative sense of the Spirit and the regenerative process of the Church within itself to comprehend its regenerative mission in the world as well" (Castillo Mattasoglio 2000, p. 45). A few decades later, Mgr. Castillo, speaking to a deficient government representing a corruption-ridden weak democracy, criticized its mismanagement in the name of the common good (Castillo Mattasoglio 2022). However, he invited people to overtake this pessimistic diagnosis of current reality. His homily was meant to instill hope and a strong existential desire to start afresh, trusting in God's unconditional love and human capacities.

In his delineation of political doctrine, Mgr. Cipriani characterizes the nation as *mestizo* (Cipriani Thorne 2016, *Te Deum* 2002), embracing the concept of *Peruanidad* (Peruvianness) introduced by Víctor Andrés Belaúnde in his work of the same name, encapsulating the nation's *mestizo* heritage grounded in the family (Belaúnde 1983, p. 13). Mgr. Cipriani's historical perspective spans an extensive chronological scope, primarily rooted in the colonial era (Cipriani Thorne 2016, *Te Deum* 2004). He posits that Catholicism stands as one of the fundamental sources of national identity, asserting an inherent connection between patriotism and Catholicism, seeing them as intertwined aspects of being both Peruvian and Catholic. Conversely, Mgr. Castillo views Peru primarily through a republican lens, emphasizing its two-century journey towards freedom or what he terms "liberation"

(Castillo Mattasoglio 2019) from the abuses committed by colonizers. While not explicitly stated, this perspective aligns with recent developments in liberation theology by authors such as Leonardo Boff and Juan José Tamayo, among others. Notably, unlike Mgr. Cipriani, Mgr. Castillo employs gender-inclusive language, cites female academics, and presents a discourse that allows for substantial ecclesial self-critique, particularly against clericalism (Castillo Mattasoglio 2020).

7. Conclusions

The Mass and Te Deum ceremony annually celebrated on Peru's Independence Day serve as a lens for examining the intricate interplay between politics and the Church in a predominantly Catholic nation that has undergone limited secularization processes. According to our research, both Archbishop Cipriani and Archbishop Castillo have assumed multifaceted roles within the country's democratic landscape. Seizing the opportunity to address a wide audience, they have sought to position themselves as influential figures and moral guides. Additionally, they have occasionally taken on the role of arbiters by expressing strong opinions on political and social issues. However, they have had to convey their views in a somewhat cryptic manner to avoid violating Church norms and the spirit of the Concordat of non-interference in political matters. Beyond praise and/or disapproval, the ceremony, as a remnant of a more theocratic time, enacts a process of legitimization of the government in power. Moreover, in a somehow disguised way, some politicians, by taking communion publicly, obtain a "certificate of good behavior," an efficient way of dissipating rumors of corruption.

Our study has disclosed some aspects of the paradoxical relationship between the Peruvian State and the Catholic Church. On the one hand, religion continues to serve, in various respects, as a sustaining force for the constitutional order and for some politicians. This process of legitimization contrasts with the perspectives of thinkers like Habermas, who argued that the liberal state can substantiate its own necessity without relying on religious or metaphysical traditions (Habermas and Ratzinger 2007). However, on the other hand, contrary to the argument of Ratzinger, the Church voices are not accepted as a divine expression of Truth. They end up reinforcing certain political and societal positions (Lecaros 2022). The different perspectives within the clergy mirror the political currents. As illustrative examples, Mgr. Cipriani, by legitimizing President García and other conservative and neoliberal politicians, promoted the moral agenda that they were sharing. On the contrary, Mgr. Castillo, by refusing to back up President Boluarte, developed a homily on the common good most welcomed by opposition forces (Castillo Mattasoglio 2023).

The international currents at work in the global Church are clearly present in the Peruvian Church. As a significant global institution, perhaps the most closely interwoven on a global scale, the Church establishes strong transnational connections through congregations, universities, and regular visits to Rome (Keenan 2018). Mgr. Cipriani supports a pro-life, moral agenda, arguing along the same line as other bishops from the conservative trend. Likewise, Mgr. Castillo holds a progressive position. From the standpoint of their theological perspectives, both archbishops interpret the prevailing political and social context in Peru. Archbishop Juan Luis Cipriani's viewpoint posits that the moral degradation caused by the pervasive influence of postmodernity lies at the root of societal crises. In his analysis, the erosion of traditional values and moral foundations in relation to the family institution stands out as a key contributor to the challenges facing modern-day Peru. In stark contrast, Archbishop Carlos Castillo, deeply influenced by liberation theology, champions a more unconventional theological approach, one that places a strong emphasis on the "Theology of Regeneration" (Castillo Mattasoglio 2000, 2018). Castillo's perspective underscores the necessity for societal transformation through a deeper engagement with principles of justice and equity.

Our analysis has provided insights into a contentious subject: the delicate balance between unity and diversity within the ecclesial institution. This unity is derived from

an unquestioned allegiance to the pope in his role. Since 2013, both Mgr. Cipriani and Mgr. Castillo consistently have incorporated quotations from Francis's texts or references to private meetings with him in their official speeches. However, a clear divergence exists in their worldviews, aligning with the aforementioned broader international trends.

As evidenced here, Mgr. Cipriani, a prominent advocate of conservative ideology, bases his evaluation of society and moral guidance on the teachings of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, emphasizing the former's legitimacy due to canonization. Conversely, Mgr. Castillo, a proponent of liberation theology, focuses his reflections on Francis's social encyclicals, interpreting them through the outlook of the theology of regeneration that he has developed. Essentially, Mgr. Cipriani's perspective conveys a relatively pessimistic view of humanity marked by sin and degradation. Mgr. Castillo, while recognizing a situation of destruction, instills hope in God's promises of a rebirth, which is already in process.

Undoubtedly, the Church plays an essential role by raising her voice and providing guidance rooted in the concerns of the people, offering perspectives aligned with the common good and transcending the day-to-day political debates and conflicts. Both Pope Francis and the proponents of liberation theology consider their proclamations as an essential part of their mission. Their speeches constitute "performative" calls—that is, a way of denouncing and encouraging the incitement of a corrective reaction. The theologian Jorge Costadot articulates this concept as follows: "Instead of inviting resignation, the liberating Christ leads to the struggle against adversity and injustice," and adds that "bringing about the Kingdom of God is the main objective of the prophet's activity" (that is, Jesus and now Christians) (Costadot 2017, p. 143). Although the voices of the Church authorities may not have a decisive influence on government legislations and may be used to legitimize certain political options, they nonetheless introduce in the public discourse different dimensions and lift up the debate to existential issues.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, V.L. and C.P.-C.; Methodology, V.L.; Formal analysis, C.P.-C. and V.L.; Investigation, V.L. and C.P.-C.; Writing—original draft, C.P.-C. and V.L.; Writing—review and editing, C.P.-C. and V.L. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The methodology employed in this research has been comprehensively described with attention to detail in the introductory section of this paper.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Note

- ¹ The Te Deum homilies of Mgr. Cipriani, from 1999 to 2015, are compiled in (Cipriani Thorne 2016) (see the References section), with the exception of the 2013 homily, which Mgr. Cipriani did not deliver due to his participation in the World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro. The analysis of the homilies from (Cipriani Thorne 2016, 2017, 2018) was conducted based on transcriptions of the Mass recordings. Conversely, Mgr. Castillo's homilies are available on the website of the Archbishopric of Lima: <https://www.arzobispadodelima.org> (accessed on 20 December 2023). When applicable, the term 'Te Deum' and the corresponding year will be cited.

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