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Thesis Prospectus
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Research Question:

European imperialism contributed many parts of Latin American culture which are still visible today, one part in particular being Catholicism. Latin America as a region has a history steeped in Catholicism. One of the region's smallest countries, Uruguay, presents a different and interesting case. My thesis will focus on the Catholic Church in Uruguay, with the overarching question being this: Is the Church disappearing altogether from Uruguayan society, or is it being replaced by something else, such as Protestantism or Agnosticism?

Background:

While its initial constitution did not call for the separation of church and state, the union of the church and state was "more fiction than fact" during Uruguay's first hundred years. Uruguay became a nation in 1830 in order to appease fighting over the territory between Argentina and Brazil, and in the process of writing a constitution Uruguay adopted the religious policy that neighboring nation Argentina was already using: that Catholicism would be the official state religion but the exercise of dissident faiths was also permitted. In this era we see the rise of two political parties, the Blancos and the Colorados. The Blancos were "luke-warm" at best defenders of the church while the Colorados were mild-natured anti-clericals. Uruguay's first president was a Colorado named Fructuoso Rivera, who provisioned the legalization of a civil marriage ceremony for couples outside of the Catholic Church in 1837. This would only be the beginning of loosening the church's grip on society. By 1861, the church lost control over the cemeteries. The 1880s

were the greatest period of anticlerical measures enacted against the church in Uruguayan history. June 1st of 1880 the church lost further control over legitimization of births, marriages, and deaths with the development of El Estado Civil (Civil State). On May 22nd of 1885, civil marriage became the only legal and compulsory form and this is still in effect today. The religious consecration ceremony is typically performed after the civil marriage is declared, but only half of all civil ceremonies receive a religious one following. The only noteworthy change to this concerning modern times would be absolute divorce.

The true separation of church and state in Uruguay became official in the Constitution of 1919. All parties present voted for separation, the only exception being the Catholic “Unión Cívica” party. The head of the Unión Cívica, Secco Illa, argued that because Uruguay was 61% catholic, separation should be opposed. Constitutional Nationalist Juan B. Rocca argued that religious sentiment would only gain prestige if the church was separated from the state. Interestingly enough, this was actually fulfilled as the church flourished after the split. Over one million dollars were raised to support the Catholic Church after the government stopped funding it.

Some of the effects of separation of church and state in Uruguay following the 1919 Constitution were:

- No taxation of Church property.
- Church possessed all buildings built or in the process of being built at the time with government funds.
- “De-Christianizing” of nation by government.
- No attempts to alter the Constitution (1934, 1951).

- No mention of religion in schools.
- Government became responsible for teaching morality in the school systems.

Rise of Protestantism:

Here are some questions concerning Protestantism that I aim to answer inside of my research: What is the appeal of Protestantism to Uruguayans? Do Uruguayans identify Protestantism with the United States? What are Protestants outside of Uruguay doing to influence the direction of faith inside the country? Does Protestantism affect political attitudes and behavior of an individual? (Along these same lines, does it promote capitalism?)

Rise of Atheism/Agnosticism:

Questions concerning Atheism and Agnosticism that I aim to answer inside of my research: What is the appeal of either Atheism or Agnosticism to Uruguayans? Is Atheism/Agnosticism identified with intellectualism in Uruguay? What figures inside and outside of Uruguay most heavily motivate Uruguayans to embrace atheism?

Politics and Religion:

The presidential elections in Uruguay will occur in a little over a month, at the end of October of 2009. It will be interesting to see if candidates such as Jose “Pepe” Mujica, Luis Alberto Lacalle, and Pedro Bordaberry consider faith (or lack thereof) to be a viable political variable in attaining votes for the presidency. El Frente Amplio, or the Broad Front, is the well-known left-wing party of which the current president Tabaré Vázquez is a representative. The FA staunchly supports *laicismo*, or the secularization of society from religious affairs. Vázquez, however, has vetoed what the Uruguayan senate has been able to pass so far for motions to permit abortions.

Gender and Religion:

Who is religious in Latin America? According to J. Lloyd Mecham's 1966 book *Church and State in Latin America*, only 15-30% of the Latin American population qualified at the time as practicing Catholics and the majority were women. Where does the rest of the population fall? Nominal Catholics, also known as Twilight Catholics, are those who infrequently attend mass or observe religious duties. Ironically, the majority would be offended if their Catholicism were to be questioned. Mecham also points out that devotion is not seen in Latin America as a way of fulfilling one's masculinity, and that most non-Catholics tend to be men. Just in the past few days we witnessed an interesting development in Montevideo as Uruguay legalized the adoption of children by gay couples. Gay marriage is still not legal in Uruguay; however, gay couples are entitled to many of the legal rights that heterosexual married couples currently possess. As one clerical official in Montevideo said, this is a step backward for the church.

Suicide and Religion

Uruguay has the highest suicide rate of any Latin American country, according to the World Health Organization website. In 2001 there were 501 recorded suicides in Uruguay, where the population is roughly equal to that of Mississippi. Male suicides to female suicides were nearly 4 to 1. Why is suicide in Uruguay so high inside such a small population? Are these suicides occurring inside Montevideo or in the Interior? Is suicide more likely in a population that professes nontheism than one that professes theism?

Data/Methodology:

The research for my thesis will consist of reading and analyzing primary and secondary sources from Uruguay. Primary sources would include copies of surveys given to the

public with questions about faith, church attendance, and other related topics; statistical data, any official documents of governmental or ecclesiastical nature. Secondary sources will include most of the information extracted from books or interviews such as the one listed below with the author who recently wrote a book about religiosity in Montevideo. At this point in time, I do not intend to use interviews or surveys that I create in order to gain evidence – everything I will use will be taken from data and articles already in circulation.

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