

## Chapter 5

# The Role of Religion in Society, and Its Relation to the Attitudes Towards Human Rights in Chile

Joaquín Silva and Jorge Manzi

**Abstract** Among the various issues involved in the relationship between religion and human rights, there is one that seems essential to the relationship between religion and politics; and more specifically, to the understanding of the role of religion in the public sphere. In this study, we investigate Chilean youth's perception of the role of religion in the public sphere, as well as the possible relation between this perception and the practices of and attitudes shown towards human rights. We will also look at the variations this relationship might have, depending on the religious identities of the youth who participated in our survey. Incorporating exploratory research, our aim is to analyse the empirical data that we collect in order to raise questions and theoretical proposals that can be used in comparative studies, within the framework of the Research Project 'Religion and Human Rights'.

This article is structured as follows: (1) Exploration of the problem: brief theoretical discussions are presented of religion and the public sphere, and of the current Chilean context regarding this subject. (2) Presentation of the research questions and the conceptual model that will be used for data analysis. (3) Explaining the methodology used for data collection. (4) Presenting the overall empirical data. (5) Presenting the empirical data as it relates to each of the research questions. (6) Finally, offering some interpretative reflections and general conclusions based on the results.

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J. Silva (✉) • J. Manzi  
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago, Chile  
e-mail: [jsilvas@uc.cl](mailto:jsilvas@uc.cl); [jmanzi@uc.cl](mailto:jmanzi@uc.cl)

## Exploration of the Problem

The relationship between religion and human rights is one of the main expressions of the more general question about the role of religion in the public sphere. This relationship depends partially on the comprehension that any religion has of itself, and of its role and functions in society. Some religions promote more involvement in the public sphere, making human rights issues more salient, whereas other religions distance themselves from society. At the same time, this relationship is also shaped by historical context, and by the way the public sphere is organised. Under some historical circumstances, religions have faced more pressure to get involved in society and in the protection of human rights.

Following this general view, we first present some theoretical approaches to the relationship between religion and the public sphere. We then present the historical context for this relationship in the case of Chile, where the breakdown of the democratic regime prompted religions to assume a new role in the protection of human rights.

### *Religion and the Public Sphere in Current Theoretical Debate*

A large part of Western history is the result of a deep symbiosis between the areas of religion and politics – at some points even resulting in a merger of the two, as was the case in the relationship between the ecclesiastical and civil powers during the Roman Empire, after its conversion to Christianity (Van der Ven 2010). The situation began to change with the emergence of the modern European state, given that it assumed a certain functional differentiation of society: the emergence of the economy based on a free market, and the emergence of the democratic legitimisation of political authority (no longer based on transcendent grounds), implied a process of secularisation of politics (Habermas and Taylor 2011).

The current liberal political philosophy – whose greatest exponent has without doubt been John Rawls, in his earlier work – understands religion as a purely private matter. Each person is free to believe, celebrate and live his faith as he or she wants; but as soon as this person participates in the public sphere, he or she should leave all beliefs out of the picture, debating and arguing from what Rawls (1996) calls a “rational secularity”. This is because mutual understanding between participants in the public sphere can only be achieved by avoiding religious beliefs, thereby also avoiding any hint of imposing non-political reasoning on an eminently rational discussion (Habermas 2006; Habermas and Taylor 2011).

In turn, Charles Taylor focuses on plurality, which should be maintained and encouraged in our liberal societies provided that it does not contradict the founding principles of these societies: liberty, equality and fraternity. Liberal democracies based on this triad, the author reminds us, not only protect the liberty and the individual faith of every person, but also ensure that everybody will be treated

equally. Furthermore – and specifically supporting the topic at hand – to assure fraternity in a plural context in the public sphere, societies should foster valuing each worldview as different and complementary, without imposing any extraordinary requirements on religious worldviews; which would occur if they were to be asked to translate their public discourse into categories of secular rationality (Habermas and Taylor 2011).

From another perspective, Niklas Luhmann calls attention to the configuration of our modern societies, recognising that they have achieved a high level of complexity that has resulted in what is known as *functional differentiation*. The author theorises that our societies consist of diverse subsystems with their own means of communication: the economy, politics, the judicial order, ethics and religion, among others. These subsystems meet and interact incidentally, but they cannot influence each other because they are based on their own logic and make use of specific codes. Hence, Luhmann denies the claim – despite it being held by many religions themselves (e.g. Christianity) – that religion will be able to maintain a strong influence outside its own religious system, i.e. on other subsystems (Luhmann 2007, 2009).

Within the current public debate, these perspectives continue to have great influence on the understanding of our societies and the role of religion within them. This is also the case for Chile. The Chilean culture is indeed influenced by philosophical reflections originating from elsewhere, as well as by European and North American societies and politics – not least because of the globalisation of the market and the media, especially among the youth (Yaksic 2011). The debate about religion in the public sphere is not merely a theoretical issue; it lays out a framework that makes clear that the public sphere in Chile continues to be influenced and even partly determined by the ascribed role of religion. But there have been changes as well. We will elaborate on this in the next section.

### ***Religion and the Public Sphere in Chile in Recent History***

In Latin America, religion and politics were united during the conquest of the new world by the Spanish and Portuguese crowns. Throughout colonial times, political power was supported through religion, and was profoundly intertwined with Catholic evangelisation. Beginning in the nineteenth century, independent initiatives distanced themselves from the monarchical system and its transcendent foundation; but this did not involve a distancing or negation of religion itself, which has always been considered a part of Latin American national identities (Blancarte 2014; Cid 2014). The processes of independence and the emergence of new Latin American republics promoted the recognition of popular sovereignty as the base of political power, taking the first step towards distancing religion from politics. However, Catholicism continued to be the official religion of the State during the nineteenth century and part of the 20th.

In recent Chilean history, the presence of religion in the public sphere has had different expressions. In spite of the constitutional separation of Church and State in

1925, throughout much of the twentieth century Christianity has exerted major influence on politics (as well as other domains) through what may be called ‘Social Catholicism’. Chilean Christianity expressed its ideal of a more equal society, with a special option for the poor, through initiatives such as ‘Catholic Action’; the creation of numerous social institutions and even worker unions, based on the principles of equality and justice, and promoted by emblematic people such as Father Alberto Hurtado, Clotario Blest and Cardenal Raúl Silva (Silva 2014).

But perhaps the largest and most well-known expression of the presence of the church and the role it fulfilled in the Chilean public sphere in recent times has been its actions during the reign of the military government between 1973 and 1990. During this period, churches defended thousands of people who were detained, tortured and/or assassinated by the State and its repressive apparatus.

The Ecumenical Committee *Pro Paz* – in which the Catholic, Baptist, Methodist and Orthodox churches and the Jewish community and others participated (Yuraszeck Krebs 2013), and later the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad* (Precht 1998) – represented churches in the public debate, generating concrete opinions and actions in favour of respecting human rights.

However, since Chile’s return to democracy in 1990, there has been a change in the role of Chilean churches in the public sphere. In the 1980s, the military government of Augusto Pinochet introduced a liberal regime not only in economic terms, but also in socio-political terms. This led to a strengthening of the processes of privatisation and individualism, and undermined the social dimension of coexistence in Chile, strengthening these processes to have a global reach during a time of expanding globalisation.

Complementing this socio-cultural process, many churches retreated, reducing their public roles. For many Christians, even members of the clergy, the return to democracy provided the possibility that the church could finally ‘go back to its fundamentals’, decreasing the energy it expended on social matters that (from this perspective) were taken on because of the situation that the country was experiencing, but which within a democratic context should be assumed by the State or civil society (Silva 2014). During the 1970s and 1980s, in the context of the dictatorship, when asked ‘if your human rights were infringed, what institutions would you turn to?’, the majority of Chileans would have answered ‘religious institutions’; today, however, in a democratic context, only 2% state that they would turn to churches and other religious organisations (Instituto Nacional de Derechos Humanos 2013).

Of course, this does not imply that religion has disappeared entirely from the public sphere. The Catholic and Evangelical churches (mainly) have reclaimed their right to participate actively in public debates and in the legislature – especially on issues concerning the morality of life and sexuality, but also on social or economic issues, particularly in discussions about the reform of the Chilean educational system. But one could pose the following critical questions. Should churches be made aware that their opinion is increasingly perceived as just one among many others? And should churches therefore desist from any attempt to impose their worldview on society as a whole?

### *Youth, Religion and the Public Sphere in Chile Today*

Because of these circumstances, the perception that the youth have of the relationship between religion and human rights is not at all obvious. The youth of today were born and have been raised in a democracy based on a model of neo-liberalism. Therefore, they have grown up with the privatisation and individualism of social relationships, and probably with a liberal understanding of the role of different worldviews (including religious worldviews) in the public sphere.

Furthermore, today's youth did not witness the rich historical and social collaboration of churches that characterised the decades prior to the 1990s as described above. Additionally, in the last few years the Chilean Catholic Church has been affected by a serious commitment and credibility crisis, largely due to sexual abuse scandals involving clergy members. While these scandals have been notable elsewhere as well, they have particularly affected the Chilean church. In fact, overall trust in the church is over 60% in all Latin American countries except in Uruguay and Chile – with Chile being the country with the least trust in the church, registering just 44% (Latinobarómetro 2014).

Alongside this, over the last few decades in Latin America (and specifically in Chile) there has been a process of transformation in the religious spectrum. Historical data show that for a large part of the twentieth century, from 1900 until the 1960s, at least 90% of the population of Latin America was Catholic; currently, only 69% of adults in the whole region identify themselves as Catholic. Close to 40% of the world's Catholic population lives in Latin America (425 million Catholics); however, identification with Catholicism has decreased in the whole region. Some countries continue to be predominantly Catholic (more than 70% of the population declaring themselves Catholic), such as Paraguay, Mexico and Colombia; others have a majority of Catholics, such as Chile, Costa Rica and Brazil; and some have half of their population being Catholic, such as El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. But there are others where Catholicism now represents less than half of the population, such as in Honduras and Uruguay. The latter registers the highest percentage (37%) of people who declare that they do not have any religious affiliation (Pew Research Center 2014).

In the last 10 years, religious disaffiliation among Chilean youth has almost doubled, increasing from 12% to 22%; one out of every four youth state that they do not have any religion; clearly, at least among the youth, a pattern of religious disbelief is emerging (Universidad Católica and Adimark 2014). This last fact is particularly surprising, given that Chile did not have a tradition of agnosticism until two decades ago. It should be stated that other religions, such as Islam, Hinduism and Judaism, are not (yet) significant in terms of numbers in Chile, or in the rest of Latin America.

Additionally, for some time the privatisation and de-institutionalisation of religion has been observed in the country (PNUD 2002), which is indicated by a high rate of belief (83% say that they believe in God), but dissimilar levels of religious practice: Evangelicals attend worship more regularly (41% attend once a week), while hardly 9% of those who classify themselves as Catholic do. On the other

hand, the number of Catholics who never attend or almost never attend has reached 42%, as opposed to only 26% of their Evangelical counterparts (Universidad Católica and Adimark 2014).

Regarding the role of the Catholic Church in public decisions, there is a downward trend of devaluation by Chileans of what could be called the ‘public role’ of the church: in 2006, 47% of Chileans were in agreement that the church should be taken into consideration; in surveys from 2013, this percentage had dropped to 32% (Universidad Católica and Adimark 2014).

Finally – and in accordance with the last National Survey of Human Rights in Chile – today, in our current cultural and political context, religion and human rights appear to move along separate tracks, or at least independently: 39% of the population considers the State to be responsible for guaranteeing human rights, representing by far the most named institution among the alternatives. Barely 1% of the people considered that the church should be responsible for guaranteeing human rights (Instituto Nacional de Derechos Humanos 2013).

The data presented up to now have shown the importance of investigating the role that Chilean youth assign to religion in society today. As mentioned, it is possible to assume some privatisation of this role, given the liberal cultural context and the institutional strength of Chilean democracy. That said, it is necessary to gather more data to understand the relationship between religion and human rights in Chile. New data will not only provide the gateway to a whole range of research questions, but will also offer suggestions for concrete actions that churches can take, through education, pastoral work and participation in the public sphere, to strengthen their contributions to a culture of human rights.

## Research Questions and the Model of Analysis

In light of the issues discussed above, this research seeks to clarify the value of religion among contemporary Chilean youth, and analyses the role of religion in relation to their attitudes to human rights. We will analyse each of the four main groups of religious affiliation in Chile (Catholics, Protestants,<sup>1</sup> generally religious and not-religious), to ascertain the differences among them.

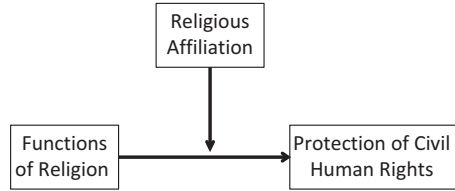
### *Research Questions*

The specific questions for guiding the investigation, and the configuration of the data analysis model that follows, were:

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<sup>1</sup>The category “Protestants” includes all denominations of the Reformed Church and their posterior referrals. In terms of the questionnaire, it combines the answer categories ‘Lutheran’, ‘Pentecostal’, ‘Evangelical’ and ‘other Christian traditions’.

Fig. 5.1 Conceptual model



- (a) *What is the perception that the youth have of the role of religion in society?*
- (b) *What is the relationship between the role(s) attributed to religion and the attitudes of the youth to civil human rights?*
- (c) *Are there differences in the relationship between religion and civil rights attitudes among the four main groups of religious affiliation in Chile (Catholics, Protestants, generally religious respondents and non-religious respondents)?*

### ***Conceptual Model***

Consequently, the conceptual model used (see Fig. 5.1) aims to analyse the relationship between the (attributed) roles of religion among Chilean youth and their attitudes to civil human rights. Furthermore, we will describe and comment on differences between groups based on religious affiliation.

## **Methodology**

### ***Procedure***

Data collection was carried out between May and July 2014. The sampling took place in seven middle-sized cities in Chile, selected because they all have a population between 100 and 200 thousand: Concepción, Copiapó, Iquique, La Serena, Melipilla, Quilpué, Talcahuano, Temuco and Villa Alemana.

To increase the likelihood of reaching youth from different social contexts and from different religious affiliations, between three and five schools were selected in each city, distributed as evenly as possible according to type (municipal, charter or private school)<sup>2</sup> and religious denomination (Christian, Catholic, Protestant or Lay), with a total of 36 institutions.

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<sup>2</sup>In Chile currently there is a system of mixed provision of education, with three types of education establishment in primary and secondary education: municipal schools (financed in full by the State, and managed by municipalities); private charter schools (financed by the state, but privately managed); and privately-paid schools (financed in full by the families of students). The distribution of enrolment, at the national level, is around 38% in municipal schools, 54% in charter schools, and 8% in private schools.

The questionnaires were distributed among one or two grades of high-school upperclassmen (16 to 18 years old) in each school, allowing students to participate on a voluntary basis, in their own classroom, supervised by a person trained by the research team. Beforehand, a consent form was signed by the principal of each school and by the legal guardians of the underage participants.

Overall, the sample consisted of 1307 youth. Regarding the religious conviction of the institutions at which they study, 30.2% attended a Catholic school, 23% attended a Protestant school, 5.5% attended a Christian-oriented school (without any specific denomination) and 38.1% attended a non-religiously-oriented school. At the same time, 21.1% of the participants belonged to a municipal school, 55.8% belonged to a charter school and 20% attended a private school. The average age of the participants was 16.6 years ( $DS = 0.83$ ); 62.2% were in 11th grade (the penultimate year of secondary education), and the remaining 37.7% in 12th grade (final year). Distribution by gender was 49.3% females and 50.7% males.

### ***Instruments***

The survey was developed within the framework of the international 'Religion and Human Rights' research project and translated and adapted to the national context by the Chilean research team. The survey was self-reported, and the majority of the items were answered by using a five-point Likert scale, from 1 (complete disagreement) to 5 (complete agreement). Among other items, the survey incorporated various measurements of the psychological, social, moral and religious aspects of the students.

### ***Measurements***

The concepts included in the conceptual model were measured with the help of items that referred to various different scales:

#### **Roles of Religion**

The participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with 10 items that referred to five possible roles of religion (2 items each). The items assessed the roles of the referred religions regarding: (1) 'Influence over public opinion', (2) 'Public prophetic voice', (3) 'Spiritual service', (4) 'National culture' and (5) 'Cultural conformity'.



## Human Rights

The participants indicated their level of agreement with 16 items to do with civil human rights. During the analyses (explained in section “[Empirical results related to factor analysis](#)”), four additional items were added, because they were also conceptually connected with civil rights. All items were answered using a five-point Likert-type agreement scale.

## Religious Affiliation

This variable was assessed by a single item in which participants reported their religious affiliation, given a list of 20 possibilities. Among these were different Catholic, Protestant and Islamic traditions and other world religions, as well as the possibility of identifying oneself as generally religious (‘believing without any specific religion’) or as non-religious. The following four majority groups in the sample (and in Chile) were used: Catholic (N = 497), Protestant (including diverse Christian denominations that are neither Catholic nor Anglican; N = 272), generally religious (N = 141) and non-religious (N = 269).

The items under ‘Roles of Religion’ and ‘Human Rights’ were grouped based on the results of a factor analysis. We will elaborate on this in the presentation of the empirical results (section “[Empirical results related to factor analysis](#)”).

## Analysis

To analyse the data, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was used, with Varimax rotation, to generate factors based on the observed variables. Later, the reliability of each factor was calculated, using Cronbach’s alpha.

In order to answer the first research question (*What is the perception that youth have of the role of religion in society?*), the procedure was carried out with all of the items under ‘Roles of religion’. To tackle the second question (*What is the relationship between the role(s) attributed to religion and the attitudes of the youth towards civil human rights?*), the Principal Component Analysis was carried out with all of the items from the ‘Civil Human Rights’ category. Conceptual analysis of items belonging to other human rights scales led to the addition of four items – two from the political rights, and two from the socioeconomic rights – as they were conceptually and empirically related to the factors that emerged from the analysis.

To respond to the third research question (*Are there differences in the relationship between religion and civil rights attitudes among the four main groups of religious affiliation?*), Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted for each scale.

## Empirical Results Related to Factor Analysis

The principal component analysis with Varimax rotation of the 10 items referring to functions of religion led to the identification of three dimensions. One was defined as the *public function* of religion. It included five items, all of which express that religion should have a public voice and influence regarding societal issues. The reliability of the scale was adequate (Cronbach's alpha  $\alpha = .81$ ).

Two items loaded in the *conformity function* scale. These items indicate that religion should adapt to current trends in society. Finally, two other items combined in the *spiritual function*. They express the expectation that religion promotes the spiritual growth of fellowship. These scales produced satisfactory reliability estimates using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha_{\text{conf}} = .80$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{spir}} = .63$ ).

In the case of civil human rights, a similar analysis was performed on the items that addressed those rights. As previously indicated, we added four items to the analysis based on their conceptual relationship with civil rights. Four factors emerged: one addressed the *rights of women*, supporting equal rights for men and women. The scale included four items. Items addressing the *rights of homosexuals, including protection from discrimination*, loaded in a second factor. Then, four items referring to the protection of *religious rights*, including the rights of religion in education, emerged as the third factor. Finally, seven items that support freedom of expression, association and reunion combined in the fourth factor. Table 5.1 includes Cronbach's alpha estimates for the four scales. They are acceptable, although in one case (expression and association rights), reliability is just above .50.

**Table 5.1** Descriptions and reliability of the civil human rights scales (number of items, mean, standard deviation and Cronbach's alpha)

Civil human rights scales	N° items	M	SD	$\alpha$
Rights of women	4	4.52	.60	.78
Rights of homosexuals	3	3.82	.89	.58
Religious rights	4	3.48	.77	.67
Expression and association rights	7	3.49	.52	.52

Descriptive information about the four scales reveals that all rights are generally supported. All means are above the midpoint of the response scale (3). The rights of women receive the highest support, whereas religious and expression rights have only mild support. Variability is higher in the case of the rights of homosexuals, which indicates that the participants in the study find this issue more contentious.

## Results

In considering the results of the factor analysis, the main results for each of the research questions that guided this investigation are presented.

### *Perception Among the Youth of the Roles of Religion in Society*

Table 5.2 shows that the participants expressed higher agreement with the spiritual function ( $M = 3.54$ ), followed by the social conformity function ( $M = 3.10$ ), with the public function receiving the lowest support ( $M = 2.69$ , slightly below the midpoint of the response scale). The relatively high degree of variability indicates that students differ in their degree of support for each function. Moreover, the public and spiritual functions are clearly correlated ( $r = 0.50$ ). This suggests that the more students support the public presence of religions, the more they also support their spiritual role. Even though these two functions are clearly different, the students do not see them as dissociated functions. In contrast, the social conformity role does not correlate with either the public or the spiritual role.

**Table 5.2** Correlations and descriptive statistics of Religious functions

	Public	Conformity	Spiritual
Public		.06*	.50**
Conformity			.02
Mean	2.69	3.10	3.54
Std. deviation	.89	1.20	.98

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

### *Relationship Between the Role(s) Attributed to Religion and the Attitudes of the Youth Towards Human Rights*

Table 5.3 depicts the bivariate correlations between the roles of religion and support for civil human rights. Overall, the three functions have significant correlations with most of the human rights scales. However, the correlations range from low to moderate. The rights of women and those of association and expression have low or null correlations with the functions of religions, suggesting that religion is not perceived as a relevant referent for those rights. By contrast, stronger relationships are observed for the other two dimensions of human rights, especially religious rights. The most interesting case is the support for the rights of homosexuals, which shows significant correlations with the public and conformity function of religion.

**Table 5.3** Matrix of correlations of roles of religion and human rights

	Public function	Conformity function	Spiritual function
Rights of women	-.08**	.12**	.16**
Rights of homosexuals	-.20**	.27**	-.04
Religious rights	.40**	-.16**	.42**
Association and expression rights	-.02	.20**	.03

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

The recognition of the public function of religion is negatively associated with the support of women's and homosexual rights. In contrast, this function is positively correlated with religious rights. This pattern of correlation reveals that the participants of the study perceive that religion (mostly Catholic, in the context of this sample) does not favour civil rights for women and homosexuals. Given that the only positive correlation under the public role of religion is with religious rights, the obvious conclusion is that participants perceive the public role to be a defensive approach in society, protecting religion.

In contrast, the conformity role functions in the opposite direction: in general terms, the more people expect that religion should adapt to societal trends, the more they support all civil rights, including association and expression rights, as well as those of women and homosexuals. Moreover, this function of religion is negatively correlated with religious rights.

As expected, the spiritual function of religion is clearly and positively correlated with religious rights ( $r = 0.42$ ). Interestingly, this function is also positively correlated with the rights of women; but this relationship is weaker ( $r = 0.16$ ) than with religious rights. The other two correlations are not significant.

### ***Differences in the Relationship Between the Roles of Religion and Attitudes Towards Human Rights, When Comparing the Four Main Groups of Religious Affiliation in Chile***

A comparison of the four groups of religious affiliation (Catholics, Protestants, generally religious and non-religious) reveals significant differences between the groups, regarding the relationship between roles of religion and attitudes toward civil human rights. The results of the analysis are presented in three sections: first, the perception of the youth regarding the roles of religion, comparing the religious affiliation groups (c. I); next, the differences in support for human rights when groups of religious affiliation are compared (C. II); and finally, we describe the relationship between the roles of religion and attitudes towards human rights, comparing groups of religious affiliation (c. III).

#### **Perception of the Youth Regarding the Roles of Religion, Compared by Groups of Religious Affiliation**

The first three rows of Table 5.4 show the differences in the importance attributed to each of the three functions of religion by the four groups of religious affiliation. The overall difference is significant in these three cases. Moreover, in the case of the public and spiritual function, all pairwise comparisons among the groups were significant, indicating that the four groups are statistically different. The public

**Table 5.4** Scale means on functions of religion and support for civil human rights based on religious condition

	F	Protestants (n = 272)							
Public function	63.88**	2.83	a	3.05	b	2.58	c	2.13	d
Conformity function	56.07**	3.23	a	2.37	b	3.34	ac	3.54	c
Spiritual function	49.60**	3.66	a	3.94	b	3.43	c	3.01	d
Rights of women	5.23**	4.52	ab	4.41	a	4.63	b	4.57	b
Rights of homosexuals	40.49**	3.93	a	3.35	b	4.03	a	4.05	a
Religious rights	87.40**	3.58	a	3.89	b	3.44	a	2.93	c
Association and expression rights	7.61**	3.49	a	3.35	b	3.53	a	3.55	a

<sup>a b c d</sup>Means sharing a common subscript in each row do not differ significantly from one another ( $p > .5$ ). Means having dissimilar subscripts differ significantly ( $p < .05$ ). All comparisons made with Bonferroni tests

\*\*The overall difference among the four groups is significant ( $p < .01$ )

function receives the largest support from the Protestant participants, followed by the Catholics, and then by the generally religious participants. However, no group expresses high support for this function, because even Protestants, the group with the highest average, is just above the midpoint of the response scale ( $M = 3.05$ ). Clearly, this is the function less supported in our sample.

The conformity function of religion receives higher support than the public one, especially among the non-religious and generally religious groups. Moreover, those who expressed the highest support for the public function (the Protestants) now express the lowest agreement with the idea that religion should adapt to the current situation of society. This group is the only one with an average below the midpoint of the scale for this function ( $M = 2.37$ ).

Finally, the spiritual function is the one receiving the highest support from all groups – except for the non-religious participants, who indicate higher support for the conformity function. As expected, religiously affiliated students (Protestants and Catholics) are the ones with the highest regard for the spiritual function.

### Differences in Attitudes Towards Human Rights When Compared by Groups of Religious Affiliation

Support for civil human rights showed significant differences among groups of religious affiliation in the four scales. However, the differences were not strong, with the exception of the attitudes toward religious rights. The rights of women received the highest support from all groups. The rights of homosexuals followed, with the religious and association rights receiving less support. Groups differed in the relative support of the last two rights, in an expected way: in comparison with non-religious and generally religious participants, Catholics and Protestants favoured religious rights more than association rights.

In spite of these differences, we observed positive support for all civil human rights in all groups. In fact, the average was above the midpoint of the response

scale in all cases, with the slight exception of religious rights in the case of the non-religious participants.

In general terms, Protestants were the most distinctive group. As Table 5.4 shows, this group differs from all other groups in most of the comparisons. Interestingly, they differ not only from non-religious groups, but also from Catholics in most cases, with the exception of the support for women's rights.

Table 5.4 indicates that support for the rights of women, although significantly different among groups, does not differ much overall (the distance between the highest and lowest average is less than one third of a standard deviation). The generally religious and non-religious participants show the most positive attitude toward this right, whereas Protestants had the lowest average.

In the case of the rights of homosexuals, and association rights, three of the groups had statistically equivalent averages, with Protestants being the only group with a different and lower degree of support.

Finally, religious rights were associated with stronger differences. Protestants showed the greatest support (followed by Catholics), and non-religious participants the lowest. The difference between those groups was larger than one standard deviation, indicating that this is the right with the largest range among the groups.

### **Relationship Between Roles of Religion and Attitudes Towards Human Rights by Groups of Religious Affiliation**

In this last section, we address whether functions of religion and human rights had similar or different correlations when considering the religious affiliation of participants. Table 5.5 presents the results, showing that overall, most of the relationships are similar across groups. However, considering that the number of students differs between groups, the likelihood of obtaining a significant correlation was smaller for the groups with fewer participants (especially the generally religious group). We now present similarities and differences between the groups for each human right.

In the case of rights of women, the most consistent finding indicates that for three of the groups (with the exception of the non-religious), support for this right was positively correlated with the spiritual function of religion. This indicates that for all participants identified as having a religious orientation (including those identified as generally religious), the more they perceive that religion should have a spiritual function, the more they support the rights for equal treatment for women in society. No other function correlated with this right for these groups. However, in the case of non-religious participants, this right had significant but weak correlations with the other two functions.

The protection of homosexuals from discrimination correlated with the public and conformity functions in three of the groups (with the exception of the generally religious). In those three groups, the more students perceived that religion should have a public role, the less they supported the rights of homosexuals. The pattern of correlation was the opposite for the conformity function. This result suggests that participants clearly perceive a tension between religion and the rights of

**Table 5.5** Correlations between roles of religion and civil human rights, by religious affiliation

	Catholics			Protestants			Generally religious			Non religious		
	PF	CF	SF	PF	CF	SF	PF	CF	SF	PF	CF	SF
Rights of women	-.02	.07	.22**	-.02	.02	.29**	-.01	.14	.32**	-.15*	.18**	.09
Rights of homosexuals	-.11*	.12**	.09*	-.20**	.26**	-.03	-.12	.09	.00	-.13*	.17**	.07
Religious rights	.36**	-.14**	.36**	.17**	-.03	.41**	.37**	.05	.32**	.25**	.06	.29**
Association and expression rights	.07	.12**	.09*	-.09	.25**	.04	.07	.06	.16	-.05	.10	.07

p &lt; .05; \*\* p &lt; .01

homosexuals – something that is to be expected, considering the standpoint of the Catholic Church in Chile regarding gay marriage.

Religious rights show the most consistent pattern of correlations across the four groups. In all cases, the public and spiritual function of religion was positively correlated with the protection of religious rights. In comparison with the correlations observed for other rights, these were the highest values observed.

Finally, in the case of association and expression rights, correlations were consistently low, and not significant in most cases. The only exception was the positive correlations observed for the conformity function of religion in Catholics and Protestants.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

In this last section, we will comment on our results in the context of the expected pattern, considering the goals and antecedents presented in the first section. We will also consider some theoretical implications of the results.

### ***Youth Perceptions About the Functions of Religion in Society***

Our analyses suggest that a combination of actively influencing society, adapting to societal changes and offering spiritual guidance reflect our participants' perceptions of the role of religion in society. Support for these functions varies; the traditional spiritual function receives the highest approval, whereas the public function receives the lowest. This suggests that young people mostly expect religion to focus on spirituality, and that religions should attempt to adapt to society rather than change it. Interestingly, even participants who identify with a specific religion do not recognise a strong role for religion in society. This finding is consistent with the idea of secularisation, but it also reveals that new generations do not seem to recognise the important role that religion once played in Chilean society, especially in fundamental issues such as the promotion of social justice and the protection of human rights.

In the introduction to this chapter we indicated that the reduction of the role of religion in society is sometimes interpreted as a manifestation of the processes of privatisation and spiritualisation of religion. However, our data show that the public and spiritual functions of religion are not dissociated. The positive correlation between these functions ( $r = 0.50$ ) indicates that for our participants, the more that religions assume a spiritual role, the more they expect that religions should have a public and active role in society. On the other hand, the fact that the conformity function does not correlate with the other functions suggests that the demand for adaptation to societal trends is perceived to be independent of the spiritual and public roles of religion.



As a consequence, we could conclude that the results are consistent with the notion of secularisation, since our participants – even those who identify with specific religions – do not desire religion to have great influence in the public sphere. On the other hand, the individuation thesis is not clearly supported, because the important role assigned to the spiritual function of religion (which could be seen as a sign of reducing religion to the individual and private space) is not dissociated from the public function, as we confirmed in the positive correlation between these functions. Therefore, we did not find a direct tension between the public and private functions of religion. The dilemma seems to be between recognising or not recognising some role for religion in society.

### ***Relationship Between the Role Attributed to Religion and the Attitudes of Youth Towards Human Rights***

We have explained that since at least the 60s, Latin American Catholicism has been strongly associated with relevant social issues, such as the reduction of poverty and social justice. The protection of human rights became another part of the public agenda of the Catholic Church in many countries experiencing serious human rights violations. In this historical context, we wanted to test whether new generations of citizens establish a positive connection between the role of religion in society and the protection of human rights. Our results indicate that this relationship is at best moderate. With the exception of civil rights related to religious freedom, which is obviously connected to functions of religion, other civil rights are weakly related to religion, especially association and expression rights.

In fact, the public function of religion correlates positively with religious rights, while it correlates negatively with the protection of homosexuals from discrimination, and shows very low correlations with women's rights and with association and expression rights. Therefore, the public role of religion is perceived by new generations to be the defence of religion, rather than the expression of a wider concern about civil rights.

The spiritual function of religion is also linked to the protection of religious rights, but in this case is at the same time positively correlated with the protection of women's rights. Other civil rights are not connected to this function of religion.

Finally, the conformity role of religion is negatively correlated with religious rights and positively correlated with the other civil rights. This shows that the more young people perceive that religion should adapt to societal changes, the more they value general civil rights, and the less they value religious rights. This pattern of correlations is expressing a tension perceived by our participants between religion and society – a tension that is consistent with secularisation trends.

### *Differences Among Religious Groups*

We also addressed potential differences among groups of different religious affiliation in the relationship between roles of religion and support for civil human rights. Overall, we observed that the general pattern of correlations discussed in the previous sections holds for most groups. In the case of the public function of religion, it consistently correlates with support for religious rights in all groups, and correlates negatively with the rights of homosexuals in three of the groups (with the exception of generally religious participants). The spiritual function shows positive correlations with religious rights in all cases, and correlates positively with women's rights in three groups (excluding non-religious participants). Finally, the conformity function is less consistent, showing a positive correlation with homosexual rights in three groups, and positive correlations with association and expression rights in the Catholic and Protestant groups.

These results confirm that the tension between religion and the protection of civil rights is perceived by religiously affiliated youth, as well as by participants who consider themselves non-religious. In fact, correlations are slightly more consistent between Catholic and Protestant, showing that they experience a direct tension between the protection of general civil rights and the defence of religious rights: for them, association and expression rights, as well as homosexual rights, are positively correlated with the conformity function of religion, but not with the public function. This tension is not necessarily openly recognised, but is probably producing ambiguity and anxiety in religiously identified youth when having to deal with the growing demand for the general protection of civil rights in society.

In sum, this study offers three general conclusions: (1) the youth do not recognise a strong role for religion in society; (2) they do not see a clear and positive connection between religion and the protection of general civil human rights; and (3) the youth perceive that the main concern of religion in the public space is the protection of religious rights. This pattern holds (with small differences) for all relevant groups of religious affiliation in Chile. These findings indicate that new generations of Chileans have a significantly different perception to the older generations of the role of religion in society; which historically, during the second half of last century, was connected with the protection of human rights and social justice. As such, our results suggest that for most participants, religion has weakened its social role, and is focusing more on the protection of the rights in its own interest. This trend is not only troublesome for religious institutions, which are increasingly losing the trust of the citizens of Chile; it is also problematic for the political culture, since the narrowed interest that the youth see in the behaviour of religious institutions reduces their potential role in supporting public consciousness about the protection of general civil human rights – an essential condition for an effective human rights culture.

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