

# Argentina is Deity and Juan Domingo Perón its High Priest: The POLITICS IS RELIGION Metaphor in Perón's Political Discourse, 1946-1952

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## Introduction

From before the Crusades to Liberation Theology and beyond, the interaction of politics and religion has been a constant theme for the student of Iberoamerica. Beyond Hispanists, every electoral campaign reminds a broader audience of politicians' use of religion in an attempt to gain support. This essay examines how charismatic former president of Argentina Juan Domingo Perón used the metaphor POLITICS IS RELIGION<sup>1</sup> in his political discourse. Several studies have recently been published on the gradual yet complete shift in the relationship between the Catholic Church and Perón's government from one of general mutual support to open enmity. They are summarized in the following section, but all conclude that Peronism, with Perón as highest authority and Eva as the blessed mother, challenged Catholicism as the dominant religion in Argentina in a way unacceptable to both orthodox believers and the Church hierarchy. This paper briefly describes the political, social and religious environment of Argentina just before the first Perón presidency, as well as the amorphous relationship between Perón and the Church. After outlining the cognitive linguistic approach to metaphor, the author presents metaphorical expressions of POLITICS IS RELIGION used by Perón. This study not only provides specific examples of Perón's increasing appropriation of religion for political purposes, but reveals how Perón greatly extended the *sacrifice* entailment of RELIGION, using it to dignify and sanctify *work*.

## Political, Social, and Religious Background

The 1930s and early 40s were a period of widespread electoral fraud in Argentina. Historian David Rock observes, “In various parts of the country the police confiscated the ballot tickets of known opposition supporters. . . . [I]n some jurisdictions the dead were resurrected in multitudes to cast their votes” (*Argentina, 1516-1987* 217). Groups opposing the status quo had little hope of winning through elections; they were repeatedly rigged. The wealthy and powerful were “untouchable,” although the press regularly reported their scandalous behavior. The power-holders in Buenos Aires generally ignored the residents of the great rural areas of Argentina. The rural economy fluctuated unpredictably while industrialization grew in Buenos Aires, creating a flood of migration to the city. Although many found employment, conditions were far from ideal. The factory workers of Buenos Aires had little economic and political power, and no social prestige whatsoever. The wealthy and cultured of Buenos Aires disparagingly dubbed these immigrants from the interior “cabecitas negras” (little black heads), “descamisados” (shirtless ones), and “grasitas” (little greasers).<sup>2</sup>

At this time, Argentina was a predominantly Roman Catholic country, although Argentine Catholicism was not homogeneous.<sup>3</sup> Catholicism and politics had a long history of interrelation. During the dictatorship of Rosas in the early 1800s, “government workers regularly organized ceremonies of popular devotion to the administration, during which garlanded portraits of the dictator would be placed on altars next to a crucifix” (Ivereigh 47). The Argentine Catholic church underwent the tensions of anticlericalism as did most of the rest of Latin America through the rest of the nineteenth century, but by the 1930s experienced a dramatic upsurge in participation, known as the Catholic revival. During the week-long International Eucharistic Congress of 1934, around 1,200,000 people received communion and thousands went to confession, many for the first time in years (Ivereigh 76-77).

Perón moved forcefully into this scenario, leading Argentina through dramatic political and social changes. Elected in 1946 to his first term of office in what was the first “clean” election in decades<sup>4</sup>, Perón and his wife Eva Duarte relied heavily on the support of the working class and extended them many benefits.

Historians disagree on Perón’s personal relationship with Catholicism. As a child, Perón attended Nuestra Señora de la Merced parochial school, where he studied the catechism (Caimari 114-15). Ivereigh asserts that “[t]he historian searches in vain for evidence of a Catholic background” for Perón

and notes that Perón lived openly with Eva as his mistress, appearing “unconcerned” about matrimonial sanctity (148). Pablo Marsal disagrees, however, claiming that Perón favored the Franciscan order, especially given that a Franciscan priest performed his marriage to the controversial Eva and made it possible that “se regularizara su situación” (his situation be normalized) and another Franciscan blessed this marital union in La Plata. According to Marsal, “‘Los franciscanos tienen entrada libre en la presidencia’, se decía en los primeros años del gobierno del presidente depuesto; ‘porque están en el corazón del presidente’” (132) (‘The Franciscans have free entry in the presidency,’ it was said in the first years of the government of the deposed president; ‘because they are in the president’s heart.’)

Whatever his personal beliefs, Perón understood the importance of Catholicism to the voting public. The final stop in his first presidential campaign was the shrine of the Virgin of Lujan, a traditional Argentine pilgrimage site (Caimari 112). Although the “mainstream Catholic press argued that Perón sought to ‘use’ the Church and deplored the encouragement of class hostility, the use of papal encyclicals and religious imagery for electoral purposes” (Ivereigh 149), Catholics overwhelmingly supported Perón in the 1946 suffrage. Shortly after Perón became president, religious education was reinstated in public schools.

Over the course of his two presidencies, the relationship between Perón and the Catholic Church moved from mutually supportive to openly hostile. Perón increasingly co-opted religious education in Argentine schools for Peronist indoctrination. After Eva’s death, the Argentine Church did not support a campaign to beatify her, and Perón’s frequent amorous meetings with very young women scandalized the public. In late 1954 and through 1955, Perón began to publicly criticize certain priests, withdrew legal standing from Catholic organizations, pushed legislation to legalize divorce and prostitution, and ended state support of both religious education and parochial schools (Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1987* 314-315). Perón’s government then sponsored a campaign by a protestant American evangelist (Ivereigh 172). Lay Catholics, confused and angered by what they perceived as a betrayal by their Catholic leader, turned the traditional celebration of Corpus Christi in 1955 into a violent anti-Peronist demonstration. In retaliation, Catholic priests were imprisoned and churches throughout central Buenos Aires torched by groups “under police supervision”, apparently following Perón’s orders (Ivereigh 179). Against this backdrop, Perón presented his resignation from the presidency in 1955 and fled the country.

Thus, Perón's relationship with the Argentine Catholic Church moved from courtship to increasing mutual distrust and abuse, ending in an abrupt divorce. Three recent publications present various facets of their association. Austen Ivereigh's *Catholicism and Politics in Argentina, 1810-1960* examines a 150-year period, describing subgroups and tendencies within Argentine Catholicism in detail. Ivereigh writes, "The reasons for a widespread Catholic endorsement of Perón [in the 1946 election] are to be found... in Perón's remarkable capacity to echo the priorities, shaped by the Catholic revival, of Argentina's 'new classes'" (Ivereigh 150). Nevertheless, he mentions only briefly "the growing use of religious symbolism and imagery" in Perón's discourse (160). Lila Caimari's *Perón y la Iglesia Católica* examines the legislation under Perón that first favored, then limited, the Church, as well as Peronism in religious education and the role of Eva Perón and the Church. Mariano Ben Plotkin recognizes that "Peronist rhetoric... was saturated with religious elements" (79) in *Mañana es San Perón*, but focuses on multiple ways Perón redefined Argentine holidays, education, and social welfare systems, challenging the space traditionally occupied by the Church. Thus, three authoritative studies point to religious symbolism in Peronist rhetoric as being significant in both gaining support and creating conflict, but do not examine it methodically or in detail.

Indeed, one of the keys to Perón's success with the working class was his extraordinary ability to communicate—to create vision and to motivate followers. Thousands enthusiastically listened to his speeches, often made from the balcony of the Casa Rosada. Historians have long commented on Perón's style of speech. They describe Perón as "infinitely ready to talk, to explain.... direct and friendly, neither hectoring nor condescending" (Fraser and Navarro 34) and his discourse as full of "theatricality, display, and charismatic authority.... semantic legerdemain" (Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1982* 285-86). Perón's extensive use of metaphors in political speeches surely contributes to these historians' observations about his communication style, as the use of metaphor promotes both flair and ease of communication. Cognitive linguistics recognizes the utility of metaphor to politicians. Following is a brief description of its tenets and of studies on its use by politicians.

## Metaphor theory

Since the 1980 publication of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's highly influential *Metaphors We Live By*, research on the function of metaphor has grown exponentially. Zoltán Kövecses' *Metaphor: A Practical Introduc-*

tion (2002) is a helpful reference for those wishing to familiarize themselves more completely with current thinking. The cognitive linguistics approach to metaphor theory refutes the idea that metaphors are unusual poetic devices (as proposed by Aristotle). Taking spoken and written everyday language, Lakoff and his colleagues find that metaphors are present regularly and in nearly every realm of speech and thought. Furthermore, they claim that metaphors are not just decorative; they frame and inform much of human thought.

Metaphor is seen as a very frequent and common way of referring to and understanding one thing, known as the “target domain” (often an abstract concept), in terms of another (usually something tangible or part of common experience), called the “source domain.” According to metaphor theory, an examination of commonplace metaphorical expressions yields a group of basic, overarching metaphors held by members of a given society. For example, Lakoff and Turner observe that in US English, one finds expressions like “He’s really going places,” “Baby Jones came into the world at 12:10 p.m.,” and “My time to leave this place is near.” Lakoff and Turner then assert that common, basic metaphors about life and death include LIFE IS A JOURNEY, BIRTH IS ARRIVAL, and DEATH IS DEPARTURE (1-11).

Each metaphor has a set of correspondences or “mappings” from the source domain to the target domain. For example, in the LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor, all humans have experienced journeys and have a set of expectations about them such as a point of departure, a destination, and a mode of transportation. This knowledge is then used to understand metaphors, mapping *journey* onto *life* in the following ways: “The person leading a life is a traveler; his purposes are destinations; the means for achieving purposes are routes; progress is the distance traveled” (Lakoff and Turner 3).

Cognitive linguistics does not discard what were traditionally considered “metaphors,” but sees them as novel extensions of basic metaphors. For example, in the metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY, a common linguistic expression of this metaphor might be “This relationship is going too fast.” A novel extension of this metaphor is “We’re driving in the fast lane on the freeway of love” (Lakoff, “Contemporary” 8). This type of expression is understandable to those who read it precisely because it makes use of common understanding of the overarching LOVE IS A JOURNEY metaphor.

Metaphors are a powerful tool for communication, in part because they both hide and highlight aspects of the target domain (Lakoff, *Metaphor and War*). For example, US politicians often use the metaphors POLITICS IS WAR and POLITICS IS A GAME/SPORT (Howe 87). The implications of the use of one

metaphor over the other are quite dramatic. Below I suggest some mappings of both metaphors:

WAR	POLITICS
enemies	→ members of other parties
gain/defend territory	→ gain adherents, obtain political/legal ends
kill enemies	→ block opponents' objectives <sup>5</sup>
weapons	→ ideas, campaign tactics, advertising
GAME/SPORT	POLITICS
opposing team	→ members of other parties
winning the game	→ winning an election
sport equipment, ball, skill	→ ideas, campaign tactics, advertising
teamwork	→ collaboration

The POLITICS IS WAR metaphor has goals such as gaining territory and killing enemies. These high stakes require urgent action on the part of the listener. On the other hand, this same metaphor de-emphasizes some aspects of politics such as bi-partisan collaboration. The POLITICS IS A GAME/SPORT metaphor highlights a much more lighthearted activity, although some aspects of the SPORT source domain such as having fun and exercising are rarely explicitly utilized by politicians.<sup>6</sup>

RELIGION is an incredibly rich source domain; there are many rituals and variations of religious belief and practice. At the very minimum, the POLITICS IS RELIGION metaphor contains the following constituent elements:

adherents	→ members of a political party
doctrine, beliefs	→ political platform
leader (minister, priest, Pope)	→ politicians

Another constituent element of the RELIGION source domain is a deity, but the target onto which this element is mapped varies (political objectives, nation, even a politician). For Perón, the RELIGION is Roman Catholicism, although politicians in other countries have used entailments from other faiths<sup>7</sup>.

### POLITICS IS RELIGION in Perón's speeches

Politicians may successfully use certain metaphors as they seek to forge a common bond with the electorate (Howe 88). While Perón was not from an elite home, he had lived a life of privilege in many ways. He entered the prestigious Military Academy at age 15 and became a career military man. Perón had traveled abroad several times and seen much more of the world than

the average Argentine. He therefore needed to create some link with the working class. The metaphor POLITICS IS RELIGION was one such link; Perón understood the Roman Catholic beliefs and practices of the masses, and used the positive, virtuous associations of religious activity to explain and encourage participation in Peronism.

Throughout all but one of the examples that follow, Perón is always in a position as *high priest*. He gives *sermons*, offers *forgiveness* and encourages others to do the same, sits in judgment of people as *false apostles* or as having *sold their soul to the devil*. He establishes *doctrine* and defines both *sacred causes* and *heresy*. He did not *baptize*, but redefined the name given at baptism. Perón determined when *sacrifices* were necessary, and what they were to be. Finally, he established that the object of worship, the *deity*, was not the God worshipped by Argentine Catholics, but Argentina itself.

The similarities between a minister or priest standing before a crowd and exhorting them to certain actions and warning them against others, perhaps inspiring the listeners, and a capable and persuasive politician's speech are readily evident. In Peronist discourse, political speeches were *sermons*: "nuestra prédica política" (1 May 1952, 40) (our political preaching), and "éxito que... va coronando la prédica peronista entre los pueblos" (1 May 1952, 62) (success that... crowns the Peronist preaching among the peoples).

Early in his presidency, Perón proposed to forget political differences by offering *forgiveness*: "como buenos criollos, comencemos por perdonar a los que nos han traicionado" (17 Oct. 1946, 5)<sup>8</sup> (as good Argentines,<sup>9</sup> let us begin by forgiving those who have betrayed us). Here, the sin is understood to be having opposed Perón in his powerful roles in the military junta or during the presidential election. Perón and all "good Argentines" are good Christians because they *forgive*. Perón is seeking to establish cooperation by urging his followers to forget the past and simultaneously indicating that those who opposed him will be welcomed into his camp, or at the very least, not punished.

Perón, the high priest, urged his audience to admit past problems through the entailment of *confession*: "confesemos lealmente que ni los rectores de los pueblos ni las masas regidas, han sabido lograr el camino de la felicidad individual y colectiva" (1950, 6) (let us loyally confess that neither the rectors of the peoples nor the governed masses have known how to obtain the road to individual and collective happiness). It is possible that "rectores" here refers to religious leaders or to secular governors. In any case, Perón implicitly contrasts the failure of past leadership to guide along the path to happiness with his own headship.

Several of Perón's expressions present Argentines as *worshippers*, and he uses various religious terms to make group membership distinctions, sometimes positive, sometimes negative. For instance, Perón referred to communist and socialist elements—which would at first glance appear to have much in common with Peronism—but actually ended up losing power in his corporatist model, as *false apostles*: “los falsos apóstoles del proletariado quieren la libertad más para usarla como un arma en la lucha de clases” (1950, 7) (the false apostles of the proletariat want freedom more to use it as a weapon in the class struggle).

One of the hallmarks of early Peronism was a nationalization program that wrested ownership of important industries such as the railroad from foreign companies and placed them firmly in Argentine hands. In a ceremonious Labor Day speech, Perón referred to Argentina's hard-won economic independence, and accused those who would maintain strong foreign investment as having sold out to the devil: “no sólo deben haber vendido el alma al diablo, como en el viejo Fausto, sino también los ojos, los oídos, el corazón y hasta el nombre de argentinos que llevan sin haber hecho nada digno como para merecerlo” (1 May 1952, 40) (they must have sold not only their soul to the devil, as in old Faust, but also their eyes, ears, heart, and even the name of Argentines that they carry without having done anything worthy of deserving it). It is especially noteworthy that Perón considers the worst of these sins the transaction of the name of Argentines, the national identity or pride given up to the devil.

In Perón's discourse his political platform was a *doctrine*, a set of beliefs, a necessary element for any religion. For example, in his Labor Day speech, he refers to the “doctrina peronista que he inculcado en el alma de todos los trabajadores de esta tierra y que, como una siembra prodigiosa, prolifera entre los trabajadores de América y del mundo” (1 May 1952, 75) (Peronist doctrine that I have inculcated in the soul of all the workers of this land and that, like a prodigious sowing, proliferates among the workers of America and the world). Perón is the priest who indoctrinates and the workers of Argentina and beyond are the disciples. Here, Perón mixes metaphors and uses COMPLEX SYSTEMS (such as IDEAS) ARE PLANTS and its submetaphor A COMPLEX SYSTEM BECOMING LARGER IS A PLANT GROWING BIGGER (Kövecses 99)<sup>10</sup>. He may even be alluding to the biblical Parable of the Sower.

The objectives set out in Perón's doctrine were *sacred causes*: “¡Que cada descamisado sea un centinela alerta de su misión en la sociedad argentina, y vigile la sagrada causa de todos!” (17 Oct. 1946, 5) (Let every shirtless one be

a sentinel alert to his mission in Argentine society and vigilant to the sacred cause of all!). This expression mixes the POLITICS IS WAR metaphor with the POLITICS IS RELIGION METAPHOR. Perón, the military leader, has promoted the shirtless ones to sentinels with a mission. In the same speech, he praised himself and his supporters, saying: “hemos hecho algo por defender esta nuestra sagrada causa del pueblo” (17 Oct. 1946, 5) (we have done something to defend this our sacred cause of the people). Both phrases emphasize that the sacred cause is something held in common, not just important to Perón. In the context of this speech, given on the first anniversary of Perón’s triumphant release as a result of mass demonstrations by the workers, the sacred cause is implied to be the rights of the working class.

Perón recognized that some of his methods were new and unorthodox and that his doctrine seemed *heretical* to traditional politicians. At the midpoint of his first term, he contrasted the previous corrupt political system to his presidency: “Alrededor de esa politiquería habían creado una técnica fuera de la cual...no había nada que no fuera una herejía” (25 July 1949, 10) (Around that politicking they had created a technique outside of which...there was nothing that was not heresy). When announcing his 1952 Plan for Economic Growth and Crop Prices, he admitted that “les suene [el plan económico] a desplante de herejía” (1 May 1952, 53) ([the economic plan] may sound to them like the effrontery of heresy). By this time, the economy of Argentina was in trouble and Perón was desperately searching for ways to strengthen it, so his economic policies could be seen as heretical.

In one unusual instance, Perón specifically referred to others as priests performing the religious ceremony of *baptism* (to refer to naming): “a los sectores más humildes de la Nación, a quienes la vieja clase dirigente bautizó con el insulto glorioso de ‘descamisados’” (1 May 1952, 20) (the poorest sectors of the Nation, whom the old ruling class baptized with the glorious insult of “shirtless ones”). The old ruling class are priests and the lower classes, the religious faithful in this metaphorical expression. This is a rather negative connotation for priests, but by this time Perón’s relationship with the Catholic clergy was becoming strained. In this phrase, Perón still retains ultimate power by defining the meaning of words. He re-classified the epithet of *descamisados* as something positive, “glorious,” in part by linking it with a respected religious rite.

The examples presented thus far indicate that Perón regularly used many entailments of the POLITICS IS RELIGION metaphor. Of course, Perón did not invent POLITICS IS RELIGION; it was already in use in the popular press (and thus,

present in the Argentine mind) in the 1930s and 1940s. The following section takes an extended look at the time-honored *sacrifice* entailment of RELIGION. Perón used this entailment in ways similar to the press, but also in a significantly innovative way. To better understand his innovation, its use before he came to power is presented first. The author found several metaphorical expressions of *sacrifice* in her study of the Argentine publications *Caras y Caretas* and *El Mundo*<sup>11</sup>, including: “[Las Naciones Unidas] impondrá sacrificios de soberanía” (*EM* 4 Apr. 1946, 1) ([The U.N.] will impose sacrifices of sovereignty). This expression is understandable because of another metaphor, A STATE IS A PERSON. The U.N. is understood to be an authority or priest, national sovereignty the sacrifice, and world peace is implied as the deity.

Another journalist’s phrase indicating *sacrifice* is: “Si algo podemos sacrificar en aras de la concordia” (*EM* 6 June 1942, 5) (If we can sacrifice anything on the altar of agreement). This quote is in reference to the many splintered political groups in Argentine politics, which in the 1930s had come together temporarily to accomplish goals and win elections. The phrase “en aras de” is often translated “for the sake of”, but it literally refers to an altar or the communion table in a Catholic church. The entire text does not specify precisely what the sacrifice is to be, but one could presume political differences or goals of lesser importance. The worshippers making the sacrifice are politicians and political cooperation is implied as the deity.

Perón sometimes used the *sacrifice* entailment in a way similar to the press: “sin que...haya sido necesario imponer ningún sacrificio al pueblo argentino” (18 Feb. 1952, 9) (without it...having been necessary to impose any sacrifice on the Argentine people). Another example is: “no implica sacrificar lo necesario” (18 Feb. 1952, 13) (this does not imply sacrificing necessary things). These two expressions suggest all Argentines are the worshippers who would sacrifice. In the third example, the politician makes the sacrifice to the implied god of public well-being: “realizar la función pública con abnegación y sacrificio” (25 July 1949, 15) (to carry out public office with abnegation and sacrifice). In these phrases, Perón did not specify what the sacrifice is, but it is generally understood to be rights, privileges, or comforts.

In other cases Perón made both the *sacrifice* and the *deity* more explicit: “Al movimiento sacrificamos los hombres, y cuando sea necesario sacrificar el movimiento a la patria, debemos sacrificarlo, porque la patria está por sobre todo lo demás.” (25 July 1949, 21) (We sacrifice men to the movement, and when it is necessary to sacrifice the movement to the fatherland, we should sacrifice it, because the fatherland is above all else). This sentence

includes a hierarchy of gods and sacrifices: first men are the sacrifice and the Peronist movement the deity, then Peronism becomes the sacrifice made to the supreme god, Argentina, the fatherland.

While many politicians use the *sacrifice* entailment<sup>12</sup>, Perón innovatively used many metaphorical expressions mapping *work* onto *sacrifice*, thus elevating work to a sacred plane. In the speech on the anniversary of his release and triumphant return to Buenos Aires, Perón urged: “festeje el pueblo alborozado su propio éxito, reflejando en su corazón la causa de sus hermanos de trabajo y de sacrificio” (17 Oct. 1946, 5) (let the joyous people celebrate their own success, reflecting in their hearts the cause of their brothers of work and sacrifice). The work of the common person to bring Perón to power is equated with sacrifice.

At a 1949 national meeting of the Peronist Party, Perón exhorted all Peronists to work hard and sacrifice so that the Argentine people might become ever happier. The use of the second person plural indicates that he included himself in this call:

Para nosotros la elección es solamente un acto intermedio.  
El acto final es la obra, es el trabajo, es el sacrificio que  
debemos realizar los peronistas con la más alta dosis de  
abnegación para que, mediante nuestro esfuerzo, pueda  
construirse una escalera interminable por la cual ascienda  
el pueblo hacia la felicidad (25 July 1949, 9).

For us the election is only an intermediate act. The final act is the work, it is the task, it is the sacrifice that we Peronists should carry out with the highest dose of abnegation so that, through our effort, an unending ladder can be built on which the people ascend towards happiness.

On the same occasion, Perón again referred to the foreign trade agreements made by previous politicians and his efforts to nationalize: “Nosotros compramos con el trabajo argentino cuanto ellos habían vendido...[P]agamos su deuda y estamos construyendo una nueva Argentina para lo cual no escatimamos ni trabajo ni sacrificios” (25 July 1949, 12). We bought with Argentine work all that they had sold...[W]e paid their debt and we are building a new Argentina for which we skimp on neither work nor sacrifice). Again, Perón included himself along with the Peronists in recognizing their sacrificial labor.

The following year, Perón said, “Mi voto...es para que trabajemos

sin tener en cuenta ningún sacrificio” (8 Mar. 1950, 7) (My vote... is that we work without taking into account any sacrifice). This speech was made at the inauguration ceremony of many public works (Perón built many schools, roads, and hospitals during his first term). The speech celebrated accomplishments of the Peronist government, but this phrase is taken from the conclusion, which looked toward the future. He was urging all (including himself) to continue “work as sacrifice”, and in the context of this speech, “work” could be literally taken to mean various types of construction labor.

On Labor Day 1952, Perón welcomed the newly elected members of Congress: “los delegados de los territorios nacionales...que llegan a la vida política nacional después de haberse ganado ese derecho trabajando, sin medir los sacrificios, por la grandeza de la Patria” (1 May 1952, 12) (the delegates from the national territories...that come to national political life after having earned that right working, without measuring sacrifices, for the greatness of the fatherland). Again, sacrifice is so linked with work as to become nearly synonymous.

In these expressions where *work* is the *sacrifice*, those participating in the new Peronist government are the devout worshippers and Argentina is the object of worship. The use of work as the target domain for sacrifice was extremely significant in light of the social climate of the time. Workers were despised by the elite of Buenos Aires, who lived off their inherited wealth or land. The discrimination against the working class was so pervasive that it even affected public streets in Buenos Aires. Historian Daniel James interviewed workers from this period, and one commented,

One thing I remember about the thirties was the way you were treated. You felt you didn't have rights to anything.... Another thing I remember...is that I always felt strange when I went to the city, downtown Buenos Aires—like you didn't belong there, which was stupid but you felt that they were looking down on you, that you weren't dressed right. (29)

Instead of continuing to reject and trample the working class, Perón recognized their tremendous potential as supporters and extended self-respect to them<sup>13</sup>. Making the previously distasteful and disdained activity of work a noble and righteous act through the metaphor WORK IS SACRIFICE is one way Perón contributed to the positive identity of the working class.

The final expression to be examined is the single longest use of the POLITICS IS RELIGION metaphor in the corpus of Perón's speeches:

A la bandera... le ofrecí, en los albores de mi lucha, todas las victorias y sacrificios de mi empresa.

Ella, como guía de mis ideales, ha señalado siempre, a lo largo de todos estos años, los rumbos de mi camino.

Ella ha permanecido siempre izada al tope de su mástil en la secreta intimidad de mi corazón presidiendo mis pensamientos, mis sentimientos y mis actos.

Muchas veces he tenido que levantar mis ojos hacia ella buscando, entre sus pliegues, los caminos de la fe y de la esperanza cuando el cerco de sus enemigos cerraba los caminos de la victoria.

Permitidme, que le entregue hoy el homenaje de mi gratitud.... (1 May 1952, 9)

To the flag... I offered, at the dawn of my struggle, all the victories and sacrifices of my undertaking. She, as the guide of my ideals, has always pointed out, throughout all these years, the direction of my path. She has always remained raised to the top of her mast in the secret intimacy of my heart presiding over my thoughts, my feelings, and my actions. Many times I've had to lift my eyes to her, searching, among her folds, the paths of faith and hope when her enemies' blockade closed off the roads to victory. Allow me to surrender to her today the homage of my gratitude....

In this expression, the *deity* is the flag. Through the metonymy FLAG FOR NATION, the flag is understood to represent Argentina. Argentina has become the deity and Perón is the devout worshipper. He has experienced victories and made sacrifices for Argentina. He "lifted his eyes", reminiscent of Psalms 121 and 123, looking for direction. All the expressions of faith, hope, homage and gratitude are also commonly found in the Christian tradition.

## Conclusion

Juan Domingo Perón was a gifted communicator. His ability to connect with his audience, to say what they longed to hear in a way they could understand, was one of the cornerstones of his popularity. Perón used many expressions with the underlying metaphor POLITICS IS RELIGION, in effect making political participation moral and holy, and especially making work sacred. However, a close study of Perón's use of this metaphor indicates that he was replacing the traditional God with Argentina, church doc-

trine with the tenets of Peronism, and church leadership with his leadership, substitutions that were followed by other tactics to undermine the Catholic Church of Argentina and contributed significantly to Perón's ultimate downfall.

This study of one politician's use of religious metaphor for his own means, though long ago and far away, holds a warning for us as Christians and citizens. A politician's references to holy things does not necessarily mean that he or she holds the faith; the audience must consider thoughtfully how religious language is used.

## NOTES

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1 Major metaphors are indicated by small capital letters and metaphorical entailments are italicized in this paper, following the conventions of modern metaphor theory literature.

2 These and all subsequent translations are the author's. Ben Plotkin credits the newspaper used in this study, *El Mundo*, with the first pejorative use of the term *descamisados* (221). For more information on the condition of the working class and their treatment by the "gente decente", see James, Daniel. *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946-1979*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1988.

3 Austen Ivreigh's *Catholicism and Politics in Argentina, 1810-1960* delineates the various groups, including Integral Catholicism, Maurrasians, and the Catholicism held by Spanish and Italian immigrants.

4 Perón's first presidential period ended in 1952, and he was re-elected to begin a second six-year term, then deposed in 1955. He later returned from exile in Spain to briefly hold the presidency in the 1970s, until his death in 1974. This paper focuses on speeches made during the first presidential period, 1946-1952.

5 Sometimes, unfortunately, this loses its metaphorical meaning and becomes literal, and political opponents are killed.

6 Other articles on politicians' use of metaphor to emphasize or de-emphasize

certain facets of their programs include Geis, Rohrer, van Teeffelen, and Semino and Masci.

7 See, for example, Lakoff, George. *Moral Politics: What Conservatives Know that Liberals Don't*. Chicago: U Chicago Press, 1996.

8 This and all following quotes are metaphorical expressions taken from one of six speeches given by Perón during his first presidency, a total of approximately 16,295 words of text. I have chosen to cite these speeches using the date they were made, believing that they reveal attitudinal changes over time. Additionally, those familiar with Argentine history will recognize significant dates, such as October 17, the commemoration of Perón's victorious return to Buenos Aires in 1945, and May 1, Labor Day.

9 *criollos* literally means 'creoles', persons born in the Americas of European ancestry, as opposed to *peninsulares*, Europeans born in Europe, and *mestizos*, persons of mixed indigenous and European blood: here, however, it is an euphemism for Argentine nationality.

10 As an anonymous reviewer astutely observed, greater Buenos Aires was heavily agricultural, so this metaphor would be easily understood by Perón's audience.

11 *Caras y Caretas (CC)* was a popular Argentine magazine similar to *Life*, from 1936-1939, when publication ended. The author sampled more than 63,000 words of text from randomly-chosen issues from this time period. *El Mundo (EM)* was a newspaper aimed at the upper-middle-class of Buenos Aires. Approximately 19,700 words were examined by the author, from the front page and editorial pages of the newspaper, from 1936-1946.

12 As an anonymous reviewer pointed out, Jorge Rafael Videla used *sacrifice* during the later Argentine military dictatorship with a much more macabre sense, referring to the disappeared as sacrifices.

13 For further study of Perón's dignification of the working class, see Berhó, Deborah L. "Working Politics: Juan Domingo Perón's Creation of Positive Social Identity." *Rocky Mountain Review*. 54.2: 65-76.

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