Chapter 3

Sociology of Religion and Religious Education

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Insofar as religion is re-produced in society, it has a social function: to ensure successful communication and thereby secure or make feasible any civilizing endeavor.

Marco Ornelas

Introduction

It has always been said that culture is not an individual construction, but rather the work of human collectives who shape their own lifestyle. Therefore, culture as a human environment, typical of a society at a specific moment in history, is the result of the long journey of humanity that began when a generation was capable of adding something to the experience of its ancestors and transmitting it to future ones.

In this collective construction, both meaningful and contradictory elements shape society. One of them is the religious phenomenon, as a social and cultural fact. It is based on nature, which is the realm of the given, and it follows a path common to all religions: trying to integrate the human collective in the search for the meaning of life by showing how it is expressed in society. Accordingly, the religious phenomenon can be addressed by means of the sociology of religion, since it will make it possible to discover the role of the religious in society, as well as the meaning of substantial elements such as worship, the supernatural, the invisible, the symbolic, etc.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the sociology of religion based on its object of study. It includes a historical overview of the field and introduces some of its representatives. Finally, it discusses the contributions of the sociology of religion to Religious Education in Schools.

Object of Study of the Sociology of Religion

We are currently experiencing an awakening with respect to the religious. Postmodernity has fostered the emergence of many currents that are religious in nature. This stems from the desire to trace a life path based on the search for transcendence, which is not restricted to tradition, but rather constitutes a search for new Areopagi. These new religious manifestations give rise to new beliefs, modes, forms, practices, and lifestyles of the faithful in society.

The sociology of religion studies the religious phenomenon from the perspective of its process, behavior and structure in society, by means of observation and using an inductive approach. The idea is that every religion is materialized and externalized in a given culture and that it is influenced by family, societal, economic, political, and cultural institutions. This makes it possible to affirm that the religious aspect is a human fact clearly attested to in the history of humanity. This social and anthropological dimension of religion is assumed as a social and cultural creation, as a projection of human desires.

The Sociology of Religion delves into the complexity of the phenomenon and into the differentiation of humans' manifestations as social beings. It involves conceptions that range from religious to demystified ones, from the finite to the infinite. On the basis of these elements, the Sociology of Religion traces transcendence, based on the human condition¹ when it is experienced at all levels and within

1 The human condition, assumed as finite and open to infinity, becomes a datum of the collective experience, but it is not the only reality exclusive of other realities. In other words, finitude is inherent to the human condition, as well as the desire to overcome it.

society. It encompasses the religious aspect based on the person in interaction with society.

Given that the object of study of the Sociology of Religion is quite broad, it allows for bidirectional study between religion and culture as concomitant aspects that affect and condition each other mutually.

Historical Overview of the Sociology of Religion and Its Elements

Historically, the sociology of religion arose from anthropological studies and progressively become an independent discipline. For instance, authors such as Malinowski and Durkheim are referents for both the Sociology of Religion and the Anthropology of Religion. Notwithstanding, sociological theoretical developments in the strict sense are found at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Some Classical Authors

In this book, we trace the historical development of the sociology of religion in a comprehensive, chronological manner, referring to the orientations and tendencies of each period and author. This section deals mainly with Durkheim, Weber, Luckmann, and Luhmann.

According to Emile Durkheim, religion is a fundamental part of social life, since other elements that give form and structure to society emerge from it: kinship relations, property, heritage, family, sense of belonging and rootedness in a specific human group. From this perspective: “the religious nature of man [is] an essential and permanent aspect of humanity” (Durkheim, 1995 p. 76)

Society, as the religion of Man, makes it possible to unravel the dialectics between the sacred and the profane, because each one acquires its sense by contrast with the other. That is to say, if the profane cannot come into contact with the sacred, the latter would lose its efficacy. Nevertheless, the contact between these two categories in society causes each one to lose part of its nature. To sum up, the religious plays a decisive role in society, because religious beliefs and practices are symbols of society. Thus, the totem, a fundamental concept for

Durkheim, functions as a symbol or representation of what society worships or holds as divine.

The religious, inherent to man and society, does not tend to disappear. Yet, as Durkheim claims, (Durkheim, 2012, p.96), it does tend to transform, and the religious way of life is assumed personally and internally². That is to say, religion possesses something that is able to survive in society and characterizes it based on individualization and unity.

Durkheim understands human actions on the basis of religious identity. According to his perspective, the mechanisms of social integration work more cohesively in social environments permeated by the influence of the Catholic communities more than in Protestant environments, where there is a higher degree of individualism. Durkheim, in his work *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (2012), presents two elementary forms of social configuration, which support the idea of how religion as a social fact influences the structuring of societies. These two forms are: a) “mechanical solidarity” that exists in societies in which a community of similar, undifferentiated fellow men prevails; in other words, a society whose subjects differ very little amongst themselves; and b) “organic solidarity” that arises in an environment in which the subjects, following a process of differentiation, reach a consensus. This type of solidarity is grounded analogically on complex social structures. This type of complex form is similar to the biological function, in which each component is different and fulfills its function, but does not exclude others.

Another element that Durkheim contributes to the comprehension of religion as a component that generates social order is the scrutiny of religious experiences that congregate individuals in a set of practices that surpass or transcend them. The understanding reached on the basis of religious experiences belongs to the realm of the sacred, which breaks with everyday life. This is so because, as something determined by the community, the sacred becomes the element that safeguards religious

2 Luckman will delve deeper into this concept, with his conception of ‘invisible religion’.

institutions in order to integrate society (the faithful) in a movement that prevents social dissolution (Durkheim, 2012).

Another classical author who reflected on religion was Max Weber. He carried out a great part of his research in the comparative field of the great religions, especially, Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism.

Weber argued that religion is connected, to some extent, to the economic development of societies, and therefore, to the accumulation of capital. The religious relationship of in society is expressed through a discourse that predisposes human beings to place themselves within in it; this was called predestination. According to this postulate, the religious man participates in society with his work and his occupations that allow for progress in the social collective. According to this perspective, the religious phenomenon acquires a singular social importance, since its procedures and discourse allow for the formation of structures that lead to a new social order.

In order to delve more deeply into the previous idea, Weber (1983) researches the historical evolution of Western societies, where the phenomenon called “modernity” arose. In his reflections, Weber describes the Protestant postulates, especially the Calvinist tenets from northern Europe, as those that give rise to the development of capitalism and industry:

As far as the influence of the Puritan outlook extended, under all circumstances — and this is, of course, much more important than the mere encouragement of capital accumulation — it favoured the development of a rational bourgeois economic life; it was the most important, and above all the only consistent influence in the development of that life. It stood at the cradle of the modern economic man. To be sure, these Puritanical ideals tended to give way under excessive pressure from the temptations of wealth, as the Puritan themselves knew very well. (Weber 1991, p.123)

Thus, he concludes that religion is an organ that significantly contributes to the preservation of classical social structures by means of rites, cults, and dogmas. Furthermore, it can generate social movements that allow for change and the emergence of new systems. According to this, on the basis of its ideological and doctrinal positions, religion

exerts an important influence on the group of people or the faithful that ascribe to it: thus, it allows for movement from belief to social action.

On the other hand, and in tune with Weber's thinking, an element that generates social cohesion, based on religion, is the so-called charismatic leadership. According to Weber, this concept is assumed as one of the forms of domination within a religious structure since the charismatic man establishes himself over and above the rest of the human group with the power of maintaining, creating and setting customs. For this purpose, the leader must be recognized and accepted by the group; in other words, his or her function or acknowledgment will be given according to the followers he or she has. Once this recognition is achieved, the leader will be able to influence people in order to generate change, not only in religious groups but in social groups as well.

Finally, the distinction made by Weber between church and sect is worth highlighting.

A sect in the sociological sense of the word is not a small group [...]. Moreover, the sect is not a group that is split off from another that does not recognize it or persecutes it and condemns it as heretical. [...] The sect does not want to be an institution dispensing grace, like a church, which includes the righteous and the unrighteous and is especially concerned with subjecting the sinner to Divine law. The sect adheres to the idea of the *ecclesia pura* (hence the name "Puritans"), the visible community of saints, from whose midst the black sheep are removed so that they will not offend God's eyes (Max Weber, 1964, p. 932)

In that order of ideas, it is possible to claim that Weber's distinction shows the universal character of churches: a certain level of bureaucratic institutionalization and organization, and an open structure, that interweaves relationships with other social systems. Sects, on the other hand, are the opposite of the universal, since their members join after a process of conversion that generates an exclusionary, self-absorbed movement that demands the absolute adherence of its members and the rapport of the religious subject with the institution.

According to a more contemporary approach, Thomas Luckmann defines the role of religion as demarcating the individual's place in society, based on the reflection that the religious is in decadence, mainly with respect to the ecclesiastical institutions. This means that in postmodern times, the sociology of religion is framed within a new system called "the private sphere". This approach decentralizes the religious experience from the collective and leaves it to the person. However, the reality that we see today in society through the manifestation of novel religious experiences shows us that the person moves between the personal and the collective.

Based on the above and following Luckmann's thinking, religion is constructed socially. This statement is based on the verifiability of knowledge in the social environment. That is to say, knowledge, as a social product, is actualized only in the sociocultural environment where its postulates have been validated. Thus, religious dogmas that participate in knowledge, in any determined context, make it possible to define the religious as a social construction.

Furthermore, according to Luckmann, as social collectives grow, organize themselves, or modernize, the influence of religion, as an institution, will gradually disappear to the point of going from the macro — the institution — to the private sphere — the person —. In his book *Invisible Religion* (1973), Luckmann develops the idea of a religion that loses its collective community character and becomes something more subjective and personal. In other words, there is a collective loss of the sacred (if we recall, Weber considered the sacred as a core element of society), which becomes private, as a fundamental element of meaning in the religious experience of the individual. This thesis is interesting, yet, — according to the evolution of world societies, with the exception of Europe — a religious birth or awakening can be observed, which generates movement within societies despite not being framed within traditional institutions.

According to Luhmann, society is a system that contains a series of subsystems such as politics, law, and religion. Based on this, religion becomes a function within society; that is to say, religion, as a social subsystem, restricts the meaning or provides its answer to what happens in the world, based on its premises or religious ideas. In other words,

religion does not have a central function, because it is a part of a whole. It will only provide an answer or meaning to a part of the social whole. That is to say, religion gives meaning, but a limited one. Thus, religion would be responsible for representing, in the social system, the unrepresentable and undeterminable.

In other words, on the basis of his analysis of social evolution, Luhmann discovers that as societies become specialized into systems and subsystems in a more complex way, the religious gradually loses the capacity to relate with them, since it seems that the sacred and the religious no longer have a place in the world. This generates the need to transcend it, seeking the generalization of faith and the divine.

Luhmann calls this process differentiation, given that the transformations experienced by religion have triggered the emergence of what is known as modern society. This gradual process generates specialized social systems that relegate religion to a part of the whole. In other words, that which in pre-modern societies had guaranteed unity and social communication has been replaced today by other systems:

The process of differentiation involves giving up redundancy. Today, religion does not provide assurance against inflation, an undesired change in government, the outcome of a passion, or the scientific refutation of particular theories. It cannot interfere in other systems of functions (Luhmann, 2009, p.195)

It is interesting to see how Luhmann sets himself apart from Durkheim's conception regarding the religious. By considering it a subsystem within a greater system (society), he deprives it of an absolute character. In contrast, Durkheim observes and claims that society originates with religion, thus giving it an inherent and integrating character. Luhmann's conception also differs from Weber's, since he conceives religion as a subsystem that, in modern societies, is not a motive for action.

Luhmann considers that religion simply fulfils its role of restricting the meaning of what happens in society, through suppositions or religious conceptions. In order to understand this statement, it is important to understand that according to Luhmann, society is an external system that seeks to regulate the internal environment. In that order of ideas, subsystems are formed within each society that control

a part of the external environment, in a dialectic aimed at better communication. This is the critical point of this theory about religion, since it eliminates religion's role of creating social cohesion by means of symbols, and rites. This function is distributed among the diverse subsystems that, together, make up the social system.

The four theorists discussed provide key elements to understand the reflection concerning religion. This does not mean that they are the only ones who have addressed this topic, but rather that their diverse positions provide input for the final purpose of the chapter: the contributions made to Religious Education in Schools.

Perspectives on the Religion-Society Relationship

The Sociology of Religion deals with the difficulties concerning the relation between religion and society. This issue can be addressed in depth from the perspective of the origin of religion and the dynamics of religion with respect to other social phenomena. On this basis, it is possible to identify two currents regarding the way of approaching the relationship with society: religion as dependent on society, and religion as independent of society.

Those who see religion as dependent on society claims that it is essentially a product of social conditions. Religion exists as a phenomenon produced by society, but it influences both personal and community changes. Cipriani includes Comte, Karl Marx, Spencer, Simmel, and Durkheim in this current, which he describes as follows:

Religious representations are collective representations that express collective realities: rites are ways of acting that originate only in the midst of assembled groups and whose objective is to evoke, maintain, or recreate certain states of mind of those groups.
(Cipriani, R. 2004, p. 99)

In this way, religion revitalizes customs, since the collective steers toward a system that allows it to behave correctly within society; hence, religious beliefs are common to a certain collective that professes its own rites. This is particularly clear for Durkheim who claims that religion is a social fact because it arises and is affirmed and developed in terms

of the group or community. In this sense, there is an inseparable link between religion and society; so much so that the social is religious and the religious is social. For Durkheim, society is Man's religion, an idea he developed on the basis of his conception of totemism as an elementary form of the religious. Following his critical analysis of animism and naturalism³, he determines that the religiosity involved in the totem contains the essence of religion:

Thus one positive conclusion is arrived at as the result of this critical examination. Since neither man nor nature have of themselves a sacred character, they must get it from another source. Aside from the human individual and the physical world, there should be some other reality, in relation to which this variety of delirium which all religion is in a sense, has a significance and an objective value. In other words, beyond those which we have called animistic and naturistic, there should be another sort of cult, more fundamental and more primitive, of which the first are only derived forms or particular aspects. In fact, this cult does exist: it is the one to which ethnologists have given the name of totemism (Durkheim, 2012, p. 140).

Thus, from the standpoint of the dependent orientation, religion begins with totemism. This notion can be extended to all religious systems, that is to say, although it starts from the analysis of small and homogeneous native peoples (Australian), the conclusions can be applied to other types of peoples or cultures.

From the standpoint of the independent orientation, religions are studied from the perspective of their dynamics and their influences on social life. According to this perspective, religion is capable of imposing on society cultural orientations that can effectively influence its development. One of the maximum representatives of this theory is Max Weber, who claims that religion plays a very important role in the process of rationalization of the world, understood as a clarification process, a systematization of ideas seen in terms of their binding force

3 They will be developed in the chapter regarding Anthropology and Religion.

(normativity), for which reason they become efficient motivations for social action. In this sense, religion represents an innovative role and it is a factor for social and economic change; in other words, it is a pretext for action.

According to Weber, the impact of religion on social reality has to do mainly with the great effort and awareness of commitment in the performance of a particular religious function in relation to the world. This comes about by what he calls worldly asceticism, which is a strong identification between profession and the concept of vocation, which allows the individual to assume ethical activity within society. In other words, Weber gives a special value to the profane, given that human beings fulfill their work in the world through their vocation or profession.

Here we observe how religion acts within society and ends up facilitating or making possible social movements linked to economic factors.

Functions and Dimensions of the Sociology of Religion

Taking another perspective into account, the sociology of religion, in its historical process, reconstructs and analyzes religious behavior, especially, in relation to compliance with religious practice. Thus, religion is approached according to its function and influence in human groups. This orientation is of a reason descriptive type, focused on the quantitative aspect and delimiting the other forms of religious expression. This tendency is articulated according to various demographic and territorial parameters, from which several forms of classification are derived, showing how and in what group or category of people, a certain type of practice is more or less widespread.

Research carried out according to this approach sets aside content and method because it emphasizes reflection, especially, in religious practice, often as the sole indicator for analysis. This leads to unjustified and disproportionate deductions concerning the understanding of religious behavior.

Nevertheless, when addressing the religious phenomenon nowadays, it is not only religious practice that is taken into account, but also

the cognitive aspect and its symbolic expressions, in order to give relevance to the binding element, the community, in the processes of belonging to and identifying with religion. In this last orientation, importance is given to the ethical aspect, as a concomitant element of religion since they are parameters that define the behavior of people in their relationship with religion. Thus, we can view religion as a multidimensional phenomenon comprising beliefs, religious practices, the community aspect, and ethical implications.

- a) *Beliefs* are the set of intuitive and cognitive elements, perceived both as intellectual and experiential facts. They are found at another level of knowledge, set apart from positivism, and, are therefore unverifiable by nature. They refer to the faith of each religion and to the corresponding doctrines concerning the divine, the world, and humankind, in its transcendent dimension. Beliefs are the foundation of life within the religious system, because they convey the diversity of thoughts and ways of looking at life, through common elements that are constitutive of the community, such as rites and ethical-moral norms.
- b) *Religious practices* refer to the symbols, words, and gestures common to the community, which generate an approach to the divine. Rites can be practiced both individually and collectively, but this is not all, since religious practices and dogma must also interpret the external differentiation of the religious system. In other words, religious practices are the result of a process of differentiation and they respond to a social system, which involves individuals, based on parameters that allow them to interact in the human social group; that is to say, they convey the collective religious experience in society.
- c) *The community aspect*: A constant characteristic of the religious phenomenon is community action. It is the adhesion and commitment of the individual to the community, which is constituted on the grounds of religious bonds. Cipriani presents the definition of religion given by sociologist John Milton Yinger: a system of beliefs and practices through which persons struggle

with the ultimate problems of human existence. Thus, it is vital to be aware of social and cultural factors in the personal and community environments (Cipriani, 2004, p.213).

- d) *Ethical dimension*: It is clear that the religious phenomenon is not separate from society. Rather, there is a connection that allows us to overcome the alienation of conceiving the disconnectedness of reality. For this reason, religion always offers values and goals that constitute a global project for human beings and society, as an answer to the ultimate instances of existence. Today, a personal and social commitment is sought, which is not restricted to ritualism, but proposes forms of social transformation. Religion must encourage human beings to not remain in the “fane” (in the cultic, in the sacred sphere), but to venture into the “profane” and instill in it a dynamism that allows for a liberating structural change.

These approaches or ways of addressing the sociology of religion provide an overview that confirm that these studies continue to evolve in their positions or theses, that is to say, as a social phenomenon, which grows as society advances and creates new social paradigms. This is so because the religious phenomenon has the particularity of permeating and transcending society in all its systems and dimensions.

Contributions of the Sociology of Religion to RES

Before entering into the topic, it is necessary to highlight that the study of religion is not exhausted in the sociological field. New paths for understanding it open up from the standpoint of other areas of knowledge, such as, anthropology, theology, philosophy, psychology, and history. On the basis of these disciplines, we can achieve a holistic overview of the religious phenomenon. The sociology of religion presents two movements: one relates to its specific nucleus; the other, to the functions of religion performs with respect to society and the individual. This process has an inclusive and functional character, based on which, a horizon of meaning is opened up to delve deeply

into religion, not just as an element belonging to an ecclesial structure, but also as a fundamental part of society, which energizes and gathers human beings in a common collective.

These are some of the contributions made by the sociology of religion:

1. It favors dialogue with Religious Education in Schools (RES). It contributes ideas, values and beliefs, which help students give an answer to their vital questions: that is, it provides a universe of meaning in view of the fragmentation of life and culture. In addition, it facilitates students' a) access to the ultimate meaning and foundation of their lives, and b) answer to the question concerning the meaning of culture and science, while also c) clarifying the why and what for of people's free options.
2. It examines and studies the religious social and cultural phenomena present in the expressions of social groups, mediated by religious instances. It also allows inquiry into: a) traditional transmission, its process of socialization, or its influence on different generations; b) internalization and appropriation in the personal and collective aspects; and c) institutional processes, that is, delving into religious issues based on historical processes and seeing how religion has been present in humanity, first in an incipient form that nevertheless generated social relationships, and then explicitly, as a constitutive social element.
3. It observes the cultural and intercultural situation of a particular religion and the complex problems derived from it, with respect to the religion-cultural context relationship. In fact, there are multiple active and passive relationships between religion and society; therefore, it is widely recognized that religion, as a social element, contributes to the way of living and being in the social collective. Hence, a religious education must inquire deeply into social relationships, on the basis of religious experiences and how they connect the religious subject to a particular social system. From the above, it can be affirmed

that religion has a great influence not only on social systems but also on people's lives. This is embedded in the social processes of change. "In society, religion makes it possible for the contingent to be translated into something determinable and controllable" (Mendieta, 2002, p. 116)

4. It views religion in the individual sphere whose epistemology is expressed in beliefs, symbols, and knowledge. In the social sphere, it observes behaviors, rites, customs, and tradition. In the institutional sphere, it analyzes the centers where human groups are gathered. These centers have the ability to summon and exercise certain power (Luhmann, 2009, p. 20). These three dimensions are related to one another; however, it is important to acknowledge that they are not the only ones within the social imaginary. In this field, other modes of social interaction and institutionalization coexist. This provides Religious Education in Schools with clear guidelines concerning their studies, with an open view in order to discover that religion is not exhausted in something already established, but rather, that new dimensions appear and others are transformed over time.

5. It analyzes institutions which is important given the attention provided today to secularization, a fact that must be assumed in Religious Education in Schools, taking into account the different ways of understanding it: a) as a process that has been giving life to new religious expressions, divested of their institutionalization. Thus, it has allowed for new ways of living and relating to the sacred; and b) as a crisis of institutionalism that challenges traditional religious expressions in its approach to being in society. It is necessary for RES to analyze the phenomena that society is currently experiencing because although they appear antagonistic, they are facts that are influencing social development. Today we are witnessing a spiritual rebirth and a change of religious paradigm, from the institutional to the personal. These phenomena must be critically scrutinized, since religion frames and gives meaning to the life of the

subjects and of the social collective as well. When this referent is lost or blurred, there is a risk of losing the connections of meaning and identity.

Therefore, RES must expand its vision and focus on an education that addresses this fact in a holistic manner. This is necessary in order to delve deeply into the referents of meaning of the subject and of society, religious intolerance, new fundamentalisms, and the domination and determination exerted by religion on some social strata.

6. It provides tools so that Religious Education in Schools can examine the origin of new forms of worship, characterized by totally autonomous and independent forms, or by syncretistic modalities. These new forms of worship are religious movements derived from existing religions. In fact, they have had a great reception, especially, among young people. Their rapid expansion and the radical nature of their approach has been surprising. This has helped Religious Education in Schools to open its horizons to new religious manifestations from a critical and inclusive perspective, instead of remaining in the merely confessional sphere.
7. It offers elements so that RES can carry out in-depth studies of religious models and the impact they have on societies. An example of this is magic, which seeks to destroy the circle of the sacred, delegated to a chosen few within religious macro-structures. Another example is the domination and manipulation of some religious leaders and the loss of symbolic referents that are transferred to other social environments.
8. It studies what has been called popular religiousness. For some, this is a synonym of archaism, underdevelopment, and folklore, while, for others, it is something sociologically concomitant to the human being, in massive religious acts. Currently, there are several studies that have to do with diverse popular religious manifestations, such as rites, ceremonies, feasts,

traditions, which are assumed as social facts that shape a particular society.

9. It provides tools so that religious education can foster the development of a critical attitude in students, regarding the values, norms, and beliefs of the dominant culture. With all this, students can build an authentically human life project, given that education, as a critical process of human promotion, is a process of liberation based on the humanization of each person and of the community. RES should emphasize the meaning of life in society, focusing on the question during the process and not only as a final answer; thus, it promotes the human and social capacity of humankind.
10. It helps to promote religious education with respect to the meaning of life, and the commitment to history within the social system, given that knowledge of religion generates values and attitudes. It opens a horizon to approach the religious issue as a phenomenon that affects society, since it points to the most decisive questions regarding existence, such as being in the world, which are key elements for understanding human beings in society and history.
11. It contributes to making religious phenomenon known and understood, in order to be able to establish a dialogue with it through its expressions and language. This allows people from different religions to live in harmony with one another, and to experience differentiated otherness. In a nutshell, it recognizes the religious aspect of the multidimensional human being that contributes to social evolution.
12. One of the dimensions of the human being is the ability to seek and give meaning to existence, in this sense, it contributes to RES a peculiar way of formulating and responding to the question of the meaning of life: it opens the horizon of meaning to discover that the personal commitment, which leads to religion, does not come about apart from a specific historical

religion. This education contributes to not ignoring the most decisive and ultimate questions that unconditionally concern the human being.

13. It evidences that today there is a crisis of meaning regarding religion, which should not be understood as the end of religion, but rather as a possibility for new quests, such as those moving away from traditional religions to everyday life. This means that the encounter with the sacred does not take place only in places established for that purpose, but that the subject has the possibility of experiencing the connection with the sacred or luminous in any other environment, in an intense collective atmosphere. Hence, the crisis of meaning does not involve overcoming or abolishing religion, but rather, a process of change or of religious metamorphosis. Consequently, for many people in society, especially the younger generations, religious experiences take place in the sphere of the profane, because the religious is experienced in public life, in everydayness, and gives the individual the task of building new referents without any doctrinal monopoly. Nevertheless, this opportunity that today's society provides poses a threat that must be evidenced by RES: the generation of syncretistic societies and fundamentalist experiences that blur the quest for meaning and transcendence and create new dogmatisms.
14. It helps to revitalize the critical capacity of religion. This occurs when religion is lived more on the basis of everyday life and the link between religion and politics disappears. In this way, religion makes visible referents that are characteristic of its *raison d'être* in society. For instance, it provides human beings with tools so that they can freely undertake the search for the meaning of life, through the construction of experiences that lead to the depth of human existence and the connection with mystery. In other words, the search for humanity's unity is linked to universal and the mystic.

15. It presents a religious society, where psychological methodologies are prioritized, in which the yearning for introspection and self-knowledge are preferred. In postmodern societies- and to some extent, as a response to modernity- there is an opening to the religious; for this reason, communication with the eternal (something that has always been present in all human experience) opens up a new spiritual attitude that allows for a connection with the universe. However, there is also the danger that this can give way to way to esotericism. For this reason, in pedagogical practices, the new perspectives that appear, based on the sociology of religion, should be channeled toward an open religious education, but with clear criteria in favor of humanity.
16. Finally, in its attempt to break with the merely doctrinal and denominational aspects, RES, faces the challenge of adopting a broad view that includes the study of the different religions, not from a historical but from a sociological perspective. This will make it possible to: a) understand the influence of religion in the world throughout history, and b) challenge traditional religions to create a collective in which the religious discrepancies that play a fundamental role in current society can become a pretext for finding ways to build critical and inclusive societies engaged in dialogue.

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