Chapter 2

Anthropology of Religion and Religious Education in Schools

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But to speak of “the religious perspective” is, by implication, to speak of one perspective among others. A perspective is a mode of seeing, in that extended sense of “see” in which it means “discern,” “apprehend,” “understand,” or “grasp.” It is a particular way of looking at life, a particular manner of construing the world, as when we speak of an historical perspective, a scientific perspective, an aesthetic perspective, a common-sense perspective, or even the bizarre perspective embodied in dreams and in hallucinations.

Clifford Geertz

Introduction

The immense diversity of ideas, languages, symbols and, mainly, ways of living religion has turned the study of religion into something which is not only complex but also heterogeneous. Besides, it has also generated a history that, despite being short, is also prolific and broad in proposals and positions. The studies in the field of anthropology are not incompatible with this profuse nature of the discipline. In this scenario, all conceptions, developments, and definitions of the anthropology of religion are conditioned by both theoretical approaches and the period in which they emerged; in some cases, they appear as ideological elements.

Anthropology, like other studies of religion, emerges as a modern fact that is only possible when we can to speak of the religious phenomenon from a scientific perspective; that is, with a more epistemological than religious or theological focus. In other words, for the anthropology of religion to be possible, it is necessary to account for religion beyond theology. This is clear if one considers that studies on religion were restricted to theology, in other words, they were carried out exclusively within each religious system, not with the aim of understanding, analyzing, or studying those systems, but rather to justify and defend them, whether argumentatively or doctrinally. In fact, the second half of the 19th century saw the appearance of publications, academic events, and religious studies courses carried out independently of theology.

In its early stages, the anthropology of religion dedicated itself to the search for the origin of religious beliefs and practices. Therefore, it studied native cultures, since due to their status of conservation and cultural homogeneity, it was possible to find in them basically all of the cultural manifestations, especially religion. But that has not been the only concern of this discipline. Simultaneously, it reviewed the religious world of these cultures, which was denied the possibility of constituting a valid understanding of reality. Thus, the meaning of the religious was explored and the study of the nature and meaning of belief systems and religious practices began. All this, in a trajectory that, first and foremost, placed a special emphasis on the evolving nature of culture (which gave rise to the idea that religion emerged in an era of innocence, an idea that has been partly overcome). This position was abandoned when the role of religion in the constitution and survival of native societies was revised.

Later in the twentieth century, new perspectives emerged seeking to provide an explanation, based on scientific and interdisciplinary trends, of religious practices and beliefs, and of the confrontation with and denial of the religious aspect. Thus, it can be assumed that the anthropology of religion is *the study of the origins* (and evolution), *nature, meaning, and validity* of religious beliefs and practices, individually and in social groups. This chapter deals with these elements, both in their historical development and in some structural

and relational elements in order to arrive at the position each aspect has within religious education in schools.

Object of study of the anthropology of religion

Although the history of this discipline is not very long, there are, however, many conceptions concerning its object of study. Anthropology, as a science, can define its object with greater precision, while the anthropology of religion, as a derivative study, follows the lead from science. In addition to this difficulty, there are a large number of phenomena, practices, conceptions, regarding the religious aspect, which are evident in realities such as the religiosity of homogeneous peoples (natives), sacred text religions (ancient and modern), and modern trends such as syncretism, ecumenism, and secularization. Despite this, some perspectives can be identified. The first one favors the notion of *homo religiosus*, and is dedicated to tracing what causes human beings to seek (by their very nature according to that conception) or tend to relate with the sacred. Another perspective considers the sacred as an object of study of the anthropology of religion, and deals with the place that this notion occupies in the human being in different cultures and ages.

However, this study (which intends to give an account of the epistemological foundation of religion considers that in order to address the religious aspect of the human being, the object of study must be conceived of in the broadest possible way, i.e., as the experience of the human being associated with the religious element, both individually as well as in the social relationships involved.

Historical Approach. Stages, Types of Theories and Approaches

Studies regarding religion can be found throughout the history of thought. However, strictly speaking, works having to do with the anthropology of religion, as a science or independent discipline, date back to the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Only from that point on, have different methods and orientations appeared, which in some cases complement one another and, in others, appear as mutually

exclusive options. As we shall see, the evolution of the anthropology of religion does not necessarily imply theoretical or conceptual progress. Rather, we have a heterogeneous scenario of theories, methods, and positions which are presented here, classified by approaches that correspond to their historical moment; therefore, they are presented as stages/approaches.

Evolutionary Stage/Approach

Among the early studies of the anthropology of religion are works such as: *Primitive Culture* (E. Tylor) in 1871 and *The Golden Branch* (J. Frazer) in 1890, which evidence the spirit of the anthropology of the times. They represent the first step of the anthropology of religion to establish its grounds as a science, and therefore, it seeks to follow the structure and methods of the natural sciences, which had already acquired a certain prestige and epistemological hegemony. At that time, anthropologists analyzed the religious phenomenon based on the evolutionary model of biology and the positivist philosophy of Comte. They dealt mainly with mythical-religious thought in native cultures, because they considered that the origins of religion could be found in the simplest, most homogeneous peoples who had had the least contact possible with Western culture¹. They studies native peoples from different places that were only just being explored and to which anthropologists had access only by means of other studies, or through data collected by the military, traders, missionaries and other travelers who had ventured into distant and little explored lands². It is a stage

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- 1 The inferences which allow for the observation of these cultures become hypotheses regarding the origins of religion, not only within those contexts but also more generally. According to Durkheim, for example, the data provided by the revision of totemism in Australian peoples, suggest that religion is a fundamental factor in the construction of any society.
 - 2 Some authors recognize signs of religious practices and conceptions in earlier periods; however, traces from the Paleolithic and Neolithic eras can be considered only as antecedents of religion. Therefore, they have been described as a concept of religiosity, thus emphasizing that they are aspects that can be studied on the basis of archeology and traced in subsequent religious systems.

in which alterity is studied and seen as something alien and strange, and, therefore, incomprehensible.

These cultures were neither viewed nor treated on the basis of understanding or recognition; rather they were considered as inferior (compared to modern Western man). Their simple and natural life forms were considered to be uneducated and uncivilized. In terms of the construction of knowledge, those cultures were viewed as a naive and incipient stage; therefore, in the texts of that period (and subsequent ones), there is no mention of original cultures or native peoples, but rather of primitive man, of savages, or barbarians, where magic, witchcraft, myth and religion or religiosity are only the first naive and basic steps on the long road to rational knowledge. In the scientific spirit of that era, cultural evolution is presented as a natural and necessary progressive process which goes from magic to religion to science, which coincides with Comte's theological or fictional, abstract and metaphysical, or scientific or positive stages.

Thus, Edward B. Tylor finds the origins of religion in the concept of animism. This scholar conceives religious thought as the result of illusory processes because concepts such as soul and spirit, arise, he says, from errors in the interpretation of dreams and from altered states of consciousness. In the dream experience, primitive man discovers that he is a dual being, that he has a double nature: one that is limited and tied to the material in wakefulness, and another that is free and ethereal in sleep. Thus, for Tylor, the idea of the existence of the soul emerges naively, and is later applied, by extension, to other living beings and is conceived of as something that can survive after death, thus giving rise to the notion of spirit. According to the author, that is how the religious practices and beliefs of the original worldviews originate. Therefore, it is possible to say that the origins of religion are found in pre-rational, pre-logical or pre-scientific aspects, in a sort of infancy of humanity that later will be surpassed by philosophical or scientific rational thought.

The ideological background of these conceptions stems from the interest, motivation, and enthusiasm generated by the developments of modern science and technology. In this same line of thought, Lewis Morgan has his own version of the existence of a progressive

evolutionary line in humanity: “It can now be asserted upon convincing evidence that savagery preceded barbarism in all the tribes of mankind, as barbarism is known to have preceded civilization. The history of the human race is one in source, one in experience, one in progress” (Morgan, 1972, p.15). Later, he emphasizes his position with regard to the peoples he calls savages and barbarians, when he affirms that what remains of these peoples in America is disappearing with their art, inventions, and institutions; but his only concern is that it will not be possible to collect data easily to study the past³. This attitude will have implications regarding the comprehension of religion and myth, which will be discussed later.

This also indicates that, at this stage, anthropological studies were carried out as instruments of imperialist policies, to scientifically justify processes of colonization. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the criticism set forth by P. Feyerabend, on the basis of a philosophical reflection that complements this argument with the emphasis he places on the modern elements that determined this stage in anthropology:

When one considers that the missionaries who supplied Frazer and Tylor with reports often were enthusiastic supporters of the evolutionist theory. The theory entirely determined the questions they asked, the questionnaires they put together, and the choice of material to be collected. In addition, they stipulated an evolutionary stage at which humans were still entirely natural beings untouched by the blessings of culture (Feyerabend, 2015, p.40).

At the same time, biological determinism allows for ideological constructs, based on the assumptions of a possible distinction between backward and advanced races, where the latter can conquer, dominate, and exploit the former. According to that argument, from

3 This concern reappears when in his own context, Carlos Castaneda (2001) mentions that the reason he undertook his ethnographic work so quickly was the recommendation of his professor, Clemente Meigham, who warned him regarding an upcoming crisis in the acquisition of information about indigenous cultures, given the acceleration of technology and the influence of modern and modernizing trends in the world of knowledge.

the evolutionary perspective, advanced races were at a higher level, just like human beings when compared to animals, men compared to women, or modern European culture, with respect to non-Western peoples. All of this was based on the epistemological conviction that anthropology can be constituted as a science according to the model of the natural sciences.

Structural Stage/Approach

Apart from the previous anthropological conceptions, divergent positions arose that recognized the different roles played by myths and religion. These are important aspects in the creation and survival of original and modern cultures. This grants legitimacy to worldviews and daily practices related to or conditioned by mythical, magical, or religious elements in general. These new perspectives can be explained by contrasting some problematic (many of them rebutted) aspects of the evolutionist conception, in order to characterize the structural and functionalist stages. Those aspects that involved the change of focus also imply some criticisms of evolutionism, both of its content and its methodology. The first critique was formulated by Durkheim's structuralism and the other three appear in Malinowski's functionalism.

Emile Durkheim (1993) introduces into anthropological studies the concept of structure as a logical or linguistic, non-observable construct. He considers that this makes it possible to carry out studies that reveal structures of the human spirit that can be considered universally valid. In other words, the conclusions reached by studies of some peoples can be generalized to apply to all cultures. Therefore, the analysis of totemism (in Australian peoples) makes it possible to extend the importance of community identity (totemic) to all social organizations, where the religious aspect can be understood only by reference to social structures. The first criticism to evolutionism is the rejection of Müller's prejudiced, evolutionist idea that native peoples arrived at the concepts of transcendence or the sacred due to a sort of fear and uncertainty when faced with the unknown or the mysterious. Durkheim's reply is that the ideas of order, chaos, and mystery are modern categories. Mystery does not exist for native peoples; everything is understood

as the natural course of things, so that there is a line of continuity between the sacred and the profane, the natural and the supernatural.

That is why Durkheim raises another objection to Müller's idea, according to which the myths (and religion) originate as diseases of language and thought, which arise, for example, from errors in the interpretation of the names of ancestors or when forcing words to try to make them coincide with thought and reality. He explains that in their attempt to apprehend natural reality, primitive humans give names to things; but in this process, they end up assigning words that do not correspond naturally to those things. Thus, expressions arise, such as the wind blows or the air moans.

This leads Durkheim to affirm that the origins of religion go beyond fantasy (the animism of Taylor), as well as beyond the arbitrary interpretations of natural phenomena and the ambiguities of language (as in the case of Müller's naturalism). Durkheim thus overcomes the evolutionist versions and advances on the road to the understanding of the religious element as a primarily social phenomenon. Therefore, he concludes that *totemism* is the fundamental religious form of worship, while *animism* and *naturalism* are only derived forms or particular expressions of totemism.

Functional Stage/Approach

The nature of the evolutionist conception, derived from positivism, is questioned by the way Bronislaw Malinowski conducted his anthropological studies. The author questions the idea that there is a continuous line among religion, metaphysics, and science, and proposes an interpretation that begins with magic, continues with science, and ends with religion. In this sense, it is necessary to keep in mind that magic and religion can only be separated methodologically, because in practice, they are experienced together (here we have the second criticism of evolutionism). If distinctions can be made between these two phenomena (e.g. that magic tends toward the individual, while the religious aspect pertains more to the community), it is not possible to affirm that one came first and then the other in time. These are practices and experiences that occur at the same time, they coexist.

This conception is later taken up by Charles Taylor, who finds in the contemporary world a strong connection between sacramental practices and magic. With regard to the sacraments he affirms:

These are meant to serve the salvation of the faithful. But they also are the very heart of white magic, by which ordinary human flourishing is defended against threats, and enhanced. So the blessed sacrament will be part of the procession around the boundaries of the parish. And 'sacramentals', like blessed candles will be used to conjure evil spells, and ward off sickness. (Taylor, 2014, p. 84).

This gives rise, then, to another understanding of religion that also deals with native peoples, but from a new perspective. Mythical-religious practices are not conceived of as fanciful, naive or pre-rational, but rather they are given a different place as they are understood as cultural elements, as parts of a complete and complex social phenomena.

The third criticism has to do with evolutionism's tendency to provide individualist explanations, that is, it does not take into account the social implications of the religious aspect, but rather limits itself to particular and independent situations, and considers religious expressions in an isolated manner, within the framework of other cultural manifestations. Malinowski's intention in this sense is to identify causal relationships among the elements involved in society as a collective.

The last criticism has to do with the fact that anthropology did not initially emphasize ethnography (understood as the direct study of cultures), but collected data from missionaries, travelers, military, traders, etc. that is, people who arrive with the intention of conquering new territories and peoples and in complete ignorance regarding those they encountered. Thus, there was not enough input to make hypotheses regarding any phenomenon that the anthropologist faced. In part, the versions taken by travelers (sources of information) to Europe and the United States are versions regarding the enemy or strange beings (savages or barbarians), whose nature and everyday practices are not understood or recognized as cultural forms. Therefore, it is necessary to move from ethnology to ethnography, that is, to stop using only indirect sources of information as a basis. It is necessary to visit the

communities studied in order to have a more direct contact and a deeper knowledge of their practices and worldviews. Thus, a clearer and deeper understanding of different cultures becomes possible. In fact, pioneers like Malinowski and Eliade, among others, carried out ethnographic practices that allowed them to reconsider the methods and the nature of the anthropology of religion.

Symbolic Stage/Approach

Just as functionalism and structuralism start out from critiques of the evolutionary conception, the symbolic or interpretive anthropology approach initiated by C. Geertz objects to functionalism's ahistorical character; that is to say, the ignorance of the social change fostered by religion. This error is attributed to functionalism because it does not clearly identify the notions of culture and social structure; moreover, it tends to separate them or subordinate them to each other, when the fact is that they have a co-dependent, direct relationship. Therefore, to understand the place of religion in culture and society, it is necessary to identify the place occupied by symbolic representations, ritual practices, and other religious elements in its historical development and in each specific context. This is important because although religious systems tend toward the conservation of tradition, in many cultures syncretism is inevitable and there is a great diversity of positions regarding the influence of political and religious elements, and even of external material production factors, which determine and produce significant cultural changes in heterogeneous cultures.

This review of religion, based on the study of the meaning of its symbols, has positioned interpretive anthropology as one of the most important and relevant current trends in the studies of religion. Geertz's version (2000) changes the orientation, methods, and nature of anthropological studies. One of these changes has to do with considering that although it is a scientific study, anthropology's interpretative character indicates that it is not an experimental science that seeks regularities or social laws (in the way that the factual sciences seek universal patterns in nature), but rather one that aims to discover the structures of meanings present in each culture. Therefore, this approach

is based on the definition of culture as a web of meanings contained in symbolic representations.

Here, religion is conceived from a perspective that is not primarily concerned with the origin and evolution or the social functions of religious manifestations, but rather, from one that emphasizes the interpretation of such expressions as systems of symbols. This idea entails several consequences, among which it is paramount to highlight the importance of religion when facing (and even solving) the question regarding the meaning of life. Marzal shows how, according to interpretive anthropology, religion has a social function and is essential for the explanation of other fundamental aspects of existence: “it examines how religion serves to transform the *chaos* that threatens each and every day, that is to say, whatever is not understood, supported, or believed to be unjust, into *cosmos*” (Marzal, 2002, p. 137). The correct understanding of this order (cosmos) has to do with the comprehension, preparation for, and ways of assuming and giving meaning to situations such as suffering, uncertainty, and injustice.

Among the issues addressed by this approach, three deserve to be highlighted and developed following Geertz: the inquiry into and definition of the concept of religion; the distinction among several perspectives involved in our vision of reality; and the relationship established between *ethos* and *worldview*, within the complex of symbols which make up religion.

On the basis of the notion of culture as a structure of meanings transmitted through symbolic representations, Geertz defines religion as a system of symbols that establishes motivations and states of mind and formulates a general order of existence that is considered real within a culture. Several elements stand out in this definition. As a system of symbols (linguistic, pictorial, rituals, natural), religion is the human need to approach reality on the basis of patterns or models, in order to interpret the processes in which humans are immersed, that is, to go beyond mere information and provide meaning.

Regarding the general order of existence provided by religion, there is a symbolic fusion of *ethos* (states of mind and motivations), *worldview* (image of the cosmic order) and *ritual* (series of symbols which shape the spiritual consciousness of a specific people). The motivations and states

of mind fostered by religion include cases such as fasting, confession in private or in public, the incursion into an enemy camp, keeping promises, and complete or temporary devotion to contemplation, among others. The symbolic approach does not consider such states and motivations in terms of the acts themselves, but rather in terms of the inclination and preparation to attain them. They are not always present nor have to be carried out, but people should be open to them, if they belong to a specific religious system.

On the other hand, concerning the worldview, there is a characterization of four perspectives, on the basis of which one can conceive reality: common sense, which is pragmatic; the scientific perspective, which is a disinterested vision; the aesthetic perspective, which goes beyond common sense and does not seek to generate commitment to any particular belief; and the religious perspective which moves beyond everyday life:

It differs from the scientific perspective in that it questions the realities of everyday life not out of an institutionalized scepticism which dissolves the world's givenness into a swirl of probabilistic hypotheses, but in terms of what it takes to be wider, nonhypothetical truths. Rather than detachment, its watchword is commitment; rather than analysis, encounter. And it differs from art in that instead of effecting a disengagement from the whole question of factuality, deliberately manufacturing an air of semblance and illusion, it deepens the concern with fact and seeks to create an aura of utter actuality. (Geertz, 2000, p. 107)

There is neither dispute nor mutual exclusion among these perspectives. It is true that human beings live mainly in the reality of common sense, but they also have the capacity to move on to other perspectives, in a relationship of continuity. Only some moments are lived in religious reality, but within the religious system, both perspectives are considered real. So what is important is not to identify which of them is the true one, but rather to distinguish what is particular to them and how one comes to believe in each one and adopt it.

The strength of the ethos and the reality of the worldview, of the perspective created by religion, is also evident in three extreme cases that

human beings face: intellectual bewilderment or uncertainty, physical or emotional suffering, and ethical situations having to do with injustice and evil. In this respect, the role of religion is not to provide solutions, or ways of avoiding these problems, but rather to provide possibilities of defining them. The idea is not to avoid them but to understand them. In many cases, that understanding is not provided by any of the other perspectives. Finally, as an argument in favor of the reality of the religious perspective, it is considered that it not only describes the world but also shapes social reality. In Durkheim (1993), for example, the totem allows for the collective designation of the clan and creates a single family in the sense that the members of the clan recognize duties that are identical to those that at all times have applied to blood relatives: duties of assistance, revenge, or mourning. In addition, the progeny of one totem generate identity and social cohesion.

A problematic aspect can be pointed out regarding this symbolic perspective, Geertz's idea of social change does not take into account that indigenous peoples seek the preservation of culture, tradition and language. The notion of progress, in these peoples, is associated with maintaining the status quo, as has been done ancestrally. Many rituals are aimed not so much towards celebration but rather towards repetition, actualizing what took place at the beginning of time. And although many cultures have gone through colonization processes that affect cultural and religious aspects, some of them are involved in processes aimed at recovering ancestral elements and are trying to disassociate themselves from exogenous elements in order to strengthen their tradition, language and religion.

The Anthropology of Religion Viewed from Latin America: A Perspective of Contrasts

The approaches presented thus far evince the theoretical hegemony that the European and North-American worlds have had in this field. However, in Latin America there have also been theoretical developments concerning this subject. These developments are very specific and differ from the perspectives presented in this paper. One of these characteristic traits is that, according to Jimeno, the societies

which have been studied are not only seen as an object of study, but rather the anthropologist is involved with them:

For this reason, the sectors studied are not understood as exotic, isolated, distant, or cold worlds, but rather as partners in the construction of nationhood and democracy in these countries. Each generation of Latin American anthropologists discusses the relationship between anthropologists and the Other in their own way, and reflects on the social consequences of the studies undertaken. (Jimeno, 2005, p. 46).

According to this position, ethnographic studies are clearly not carried out from the perspective of those in power, as in the evolutionary perspective. This is evident in the 1992 compilation of Ibero-American Philosophy: the authors who discuss Nahua, Maya, and Inca cultures identify elements in them that have similarities to Western thought. They highlight the philosophical aspect of ancestral worldviews and present them from ontological and epistemological perspectives. The risk of interpreting religions and worldviews in this manner is the “Westernization” of indigenous peoples and finding homogeneous and reductionist structures; nevertheless, it contributes new possibilities for understanding the religious phenomenon in ancient cultures.

In the same geographical context, but with different implications, methods and conclusions, we find the studies carried out by Carlos Castaneda and Manuel Marzal. Castaneda carries out anthropological studies, but presents them in textual typologies which are closer to literary than to scientific production. Of course, in his literary structures, he manages to reveal the nature of the beliefs and of the worldview of the cultures he studies. In his presentation of Castaneda’s book, Octavio Paz shows the line of continuity between the literary and the scientific:

Castaneda’s books border on one extreme with ethnography and, on the other, with the phenomenology, not of religion, but of that experience which I have called the experience of otherness [...]. As a critical destruction of anthropology, the work of Castaneda touches on the opposing frontiers of philosophy and religion. Those of philosophy because, after a radical critique of reality,

he proposes, another non-scientific and non-logical knowledge; those of religion, because that knowledge requires a change of nature in the initiate: a conversion. (Castaneda, 2001, p. 12)

This revolutionary way of approaching *the Other* is evident in the process of Castaneda's conversion. In his ethnographic studies, Castaneda is able to merge with the object of study and achieves conversion; he goes through the whole process of an initiate in the worldview he studies. Initially, his account is from the observer's point of view; then he moves to the perspective of someone who is immersed in and lives the culture. The ethnographer himself follows Don Juan's path and not only describes this new vision of reality, but also shares it because he has experienced it. This is a new form of research that is inconceivable from the dominant perspectives in religious anthropology, which aspires to be scientific.

Anthropology in Ibero-America prior to the Nineteenth Century

On the other hand, Marzal evidences something that European anthropology cannot achieve - the existence of anthropological research long before the nineteenth century, both in the form of chronicles and of more systematic studies. In the documents produced at the time of the Spanish colonization in America, studies of anthropology of religion can be discerned. In them, we find the perspectives of both Spanish and indigenous authors who set forth their ideas concerning the situation they faced. Marzal calls this religious anthropology in the Spanish-colonial chronicles. He describes how in the chronicles and other documents of the time, there are aspects related to the way in which indigenous people experienced religion; for that reason, he is emphatic when he explains, in the first part of his *History of Anthropology*, that:

While it is true that the ideological framework of that period did not allow for the development of a more autonomous science, in the sense given today to the term, because scientific reflection at that time had not become independent from philosophy and theology,

it is also true that there was a description and explanation of social facts, which is a characteristic of genuine science [...]. The Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagún, author of the *General History of the Things of New Spain*, stands out for having written a careful ethnography in Nahuatl, the language of his informants, as well as in Spanish, which is a unique case in the history of this discipline. Thus, throughout the pages of this volume we shall prove that the reflections of many chroniclers regarding indigenous societies in Mexico and Peru is true anthropology, despite the mistakes in the description and interpretation of social facts, errors that were often no greater than those of evolutionary anthropologists, which are considered to be true anthropologists according to the historians of this discipline. (Marzal, 1998, p. 11)

Of course, the dominant perspective is that of the Spaniard, who sees in the religions or religiousness of indigenous Americans, perversions, or at least pagan religions which had to be exterminated, which occurred in many cases. These chronicles (which Marzal considers as the first stage of Anthropology) mainly describe the Latin American peoples and review their changes according to their contact with and reception of foreign cultures and religions.

These studies lack the scientific orientation of other perspectives, since the historical moment did not require it. The world of knowledge was still conditioned by philosophy and theology and time had yet to pass before reaching the scientific procedure of the Enlightenment. They are, rather, reflections based on theology, but whose contents have implications regarding the anthropology of religion. According to Marzal (2002), the recurrent topics of this anthropology are: the description of indigenous people's religions, their resilience and conversion, their beliefs, rituals and religious norms. Therefore, the Chronicles of the Indies contain ethnographic aspects mainly based on the representations of the conquistador, which describe what they consider to be demonic and idolatrous traits in indigenous mythologies (considered as sins, thus justifying the need for evangelization). But there are other versions that identified elements of a natural religion that implicitly made indigenous peoples believers in the Christian

God, which was demonstrated by pointing out similarities between indigenous rites and myths and Christianity.

Dialogues with Other Areas of Knowledge

As a cultural phenomenon, religion has been approached from several perspectives, sciences, and research methods. They all are separate but only methodologically, that is, they are separated for purposes of identification, but they are mixed together with respect to their contents and development of ideas. In the beginning, the anthropology of religion insisted on being able to create its own identity as a positive science, an interest that later decreased. However, there have been some ruptures in the history of the anthropology of religion, thanks to the contributions of other sciences and of internal reviews of the anthropology of religion itself. To account for the religious element as a complex phenomenon, it is necessary to have a broad perspective that is able to contain the diversity of studies, methods, and forms of interpretation. The formulations drawn from interdisciplinary studies end up in reductionist positions that only consider some aspects of the object of study.

The history of religions, which in some cases is developed as comparative history and in others as comparative mythology, represents an important contribution to the extent that it permits the identification of common elements in different cultures and in different historical periods, mainly the particularities of the experience of the religious element. But just as history in general allows for the understanding of the current state of society, the history of religions not only makes possible descriptive knowledge (historiographical) of the past or the current state of practices and beliefs, but also favors the understanding of everything that can seem unusual or simply far from the characteristic worldview.

In some cases, the purpose was to find elements which were common to all religions, including a unique religiousness that could be considered the origin of the religious. However, this goal has been refined and reduced to what Guerra (2002) has called religiousness or indications of religiosity in prehistory, to some features, expressions,

and signs provided not by anthropology but by archeology. For example, what is still preserved in cave paintings: monuments or rock constructions, tombs that attest to a telluric religiosity; or a mythology referring to superior beings associated with the power of fire, light, or the sun, which account for a celestial religiousness. The intention, in these cases, is not to reduce the explanation to some common universal elements. It is, rather, to view some elements, that regardless of how ancient they are, can be identified in current religions and contribute important aspects to their understanding.

On the other hand, within the anthropology of religion, ethnography, which has undergone several changes, was, in its beginnings, a source of information, an important bridge between anthropology and sociology. Theories such as functionalism and structuralism were made possible by the inclusion of reflections and studies that, in the case of functionalism, owe their particularity to ethnographic studies carried out by authors such as Malinowski. But both functionalism and structuralism, which emphasize the social functions of religious manifestations, demonstrate that besides the ethnographic aspect, there is a line which is difficult to draw between anthropology and sociology, at least in these cases. It is frequent to find both types of authors, among others, in studies of anthropology and sociology of religion.

Apart from the relationships with history and sociology, the anthropology of religion moves at the boundaries of philosophy. It is not only a question of philosophy of religion, but also of logical, ontological, and epistemological implications which show that the study of religion has a direct relationship with philosophical reflection. At the same time, the history of religions and of ethnography is involved in this interdependence. The studies which initially described unknown cultures to the anthropologist and his readers, in many cases show worldviews which are not only different but contradictory to the worldviews of the author. The different worldviews contain different conceptions of reality (ontological dimension) that may not coincide with the researcher's conceptual schemes. Nevertheless, the researcher is faced, whether in documental or direct studies (ethnography), with entire peoples who live in *other worlds*. As has been shown, the reactions to this are diverse: a) the rejection of the validity of these realities, which,

in some cases, even led to their elimination and, in others, to derogatory treatment; b) the attempt to explain them as metaphors for reality (Western modern); c) their justification as elements of social cohesion; d) the attempt to understand them in themselves, without trying to read them from the perspective of the researcher's world.

Such worldviews have particular ways to access those realities (spiritual, metaphysical, magical), that is, specific forms of knowledge and, at the same time, ways to theorize with regards to that knowledge (double aspect of the epistemological dimension). Such forms may be arbitrary for the Western observer, because they recurrently appeal to the denial of material reality and favor the knowledge of the spiritual. Once again, the reactions to baffling cases are different. In the world that authors such as Taylor (2014) have called secular (the enlightened modern world), these forms of knowledge are seen as past phenomena which have been surpassed. The notion of the *enchanted world* (applied to the mythical-religious worldviews) can account for it. But, as shown, other perspectives, such as Geertz's, see in such worldviews valid ways of representation. Thus, the religious perspective can coexist with the perspective of common sense and the scientific perspective. And contemporary trends in the study of myth have shown that it is possible to find valid explanations (true explanations, as in the case of M. Eliade) of reality. These positions demonstrate a clear awareness of the need to address the study of religion without a priori conceptions and without intending to homogenize culture or thought, that is, the need to approach the object of study simply seeking to understand it.

Structure of the Anthropology of Religion

Given the number of theories, orientations, treatments of the subject matter, and even study methods, it is difficult to define a single structure in this discipline. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify that, initially, these studies were of the ethnographic type, based on information concerning non-Western cultures that was introduced by travelers or researchers. Then came the need to undertake studies directly and to carry out rigorous ethnographic studies. Today, however, we have the possibility of combining both ways of obtaining information. For this

reason, contemporary authors account for the religious phenomenon in different cultures and traditions, based on direct contact with them, as well as on access to studies by other researchers. In other words, field studies can confirm, complete, or contradict the documentation, both the theoretical one and that found in sacred texts or in systematized oral traditions. In this way, it has been possible to account for the differences between homogeneous cultures (small ones that have not had significant influences from other cultures) and heterogeneous ones (such as modern culture that features phenomena such as syncretism, ecumenism, and other major fusions of religious systems and other cultural practices).

It is worth clarifying that there are authors who write dispassionately, that is, objectively, concealing their (cultural or religious) convictions. They speak in a balanced way regarding all conceptions. In other orientations, however, the religious apologetic slant is evident, which conditions the studies, thus moving away from the scientific and approaching theology.

However, within this multiplicity, there are some generalities that show three structural elements: a) recurrent topics of the anthropology of religion, b) several characteristics of said discipline, and c) several of the attitudes of those studies regarding the religious.

Some classical topics of the anthropology of religion are belief (and its counterpart); the origin and validity of the religious element; the relationship of religion with the social, cultural, ethical, and political; myth and secularization. These topics are not developed univocally in all of the studies, but rather, reviewed from different perspectives, orientations, and dedications.

Some of the general characteristics of the anthropology of contemporary religion are objectivity, neutrality, universality, experimentation, the comparative method, pluralism, and autonomy. The first four aspects account for a study that emphasizes the scientific approach, aimed at conducting systematic studies supported by argumentative and empirical evidence, regarding behavioral patterns that allow for generalizations and even universal laws. But this trait, which stood out in the origins of the anthropology of religion, is not universal. The discipline can also depart from the intention of presenting

a study of culture in a scientific way and produce, as in Castañeda's literary approach, narratives based on personal experience

On the other hand, pluralism and comparison indicate the possibility of different methods and understandings more open to taking on the differences (and even the contradictions) among the cultures studied. And autonomy reveals the need to carry out studies independently of the researcher's convictions or of the doctrines that may condition conclusions, as is the case with those who practice anthropology on the basis of specific theologies.

Finally, it is possible to identify two types of attitudes regarding the religious phenomenon⁴: one of rejection, denial, or hostility toward religious beliefs and practices, and another of acceptance or recognition. The attitude of rejection is characterized by denial of the worldviews of indigenous peoples, which characterized early anthropology of religion due to the influence of biological evolutionism. In this orientation, mythical religious thought is considered somewhat naive, irrational and, in some cases, absurd. Specifically, myths are presented as inventions which cannot account for anything in reality. This interpretation usually defends the idea that it is necessary to overcome mythos through logos; the ability to explain reality by means of philosophical arguments or scientific evidence, rather than with mythological narratives⁵ is presented as a sign of cultural progress and civilization. This attitude was later extended to the religious aspect in general and led to the conclusion

4 In addition to those presented, there are other attitudes notable for their apologetic orientation that seeks to justify a religious system on the basis of scientific studies. This perspective is not developed here, since it is one dealt with from the perspective of theology..

5 Although this conception was quite prevalent in the late nineteenth century and has been revised from various perspectives, it is still present today. For example, in school curricula, myths are taught together with legends and literature; that is to say, they are placed on the same level as the fantasy and falseness of fiction or literary invention. Some of the criticisms of this consideration can be seen here in the perspectives of Malinowski and Durkheim; but perhaps one of the strongest critiques can be found in M. Eliade (1983) who claims that myth may well tell a true story (concerning the origin-of everything or of something in particular-or regarding any given phenomenon), with support and its own evidence.

that all religious beliefs are not only meaningless but also lacking in any content whatsoever.

Contrary to that attitude of rejection of the religious element, at the other extreme, is the attitude of acceptance or understanding, which is expressed in several ways. First, we have the idea that science has been overvalued as hegemonic knowledge since the Enlightenment.. Second, the notion that science does not solve all the riddles and questions that the human has regarding nature and existence itself. Then, there is the rejection or overcoming of the dualism between myth and logos that has been considered historically as a natural contradiction. All of this is related to the critique of the ideal of Western rationality, that is, of the hegemony of science (as conceived in the Enlightenment and in positivist tendencies). This implies a new perspective of the relation between religion and the sciences, which does not see them as contradictory, but rather as two possibilities of contributing to the knowledge of reality.

Contributions of the Anthropology of Religion to RES

This general review of anthropological studies regarding the religious element and its implications for human beings, both as individuals and as part of a culture, allows for some inferences with respect to the position of anthropology in religious education, in two senses: a) with respect to human beings as individuals, it can account for their relationship with their own existence, their idea of transcendence, and a better understanding of their own worldview; b) this discipline allows for a comprehensive and complex vision of human beings as part of a culture, both in endogenous relationships and in their relationships with other peoples. Thus, there are many aspects in which anthropology can contribute to RES, as we shall explain below.

Anthropological studies make it possible to balance or overcome the rejection (epistemological) of mythical-religious worldviews, which is a significant contribution to understanding cultural diversity (as one of the most complex aspects to be taken into account in the classroom and in legislation). That is, above and beyond the inherent respect

for intercultural relationships, the knowledge and understanding of worldviews which are different from one's own, it recognizes what is dissimilar (and in some cases contradictory) from the beliefs, practices, and concepts of the student. This aspect is particularly significant for education in the Latin American context, because the ancestral cultures present on the continent (and in the country), with different intensity and consciousness, have been relegated. In the educational processes of the school environment, this entails difficulties in the understanding of many cultures, which, in recent decades, have been present in classrooms in rural and urban areas. The cultural and religious diversity of the anthropology of religion facilitates understanding that one's concept of religion is only one among many others.

On the other hand, concerning the relationship between human beings and the sacred, Evans Pritchard (1990), whose perspective lies between functionalism and the symbolic approach, states that religion is something personal and subjective, because it has to do fundamentally with the relationship of human beings with the divine. That is, in addition to the role it plays in the social structure, religion has to do with an internal state which either contains or does not contain the subjects' relationship with their image of transcendence or of the sacred. Hence, anthropology makes it possible to identify in the religious, a dimension which, in the school environment, permits the understanding of the experiences expressed by the students and which are usually not univocal.

In another respect, anthropology, as other studies of religion, favors a more complete, complex, and objective knowledge of religious and human phenomena in general. Thus, religious education clearly addresses and overcomes the tendency to make judgments of ethical and/or aesthetic value regarding different beliefs and cultural practices. That is to say, it goes beyond the natural tendency to estimate the value of moral or aesthetic truth, and favors a broad and inclusive understanding of cultures.

When the tendency to assign values of truth and criteria of epistemological validity is balanced, a new perspective can be included in the way mythological narratives are addressed in schools. As we have seen, these myths have been equated to literary fiction, that is

to say, of fantastic invention. Yet they may be studied through other approaches that provide a more complete understanding, of both the contents of the myths and their place in the origin and survival of different peoples, as well as of the social functions they perform.

Finally, on the basis of some advances in the anthropology of religion, the teaching of religion can be understood in two senses that are usually not associated with it: the ontological and the epistemological aspects. That is to say, in the dimensions-comprehensions of the real and of its knowledge, aspects that are similar and imply each other. Scant research in this regard has been carried out in the fields of RES and the studies of religion. It has been considered that the religious element does not contribute anything cognitively speaking (epistemological aspect), because religious conceptions and practices have been studied from limited perspectives and thus reduced to the emotional, ethical or social fields. Yet the problem of reality (ontological aspect) and its knowledge (epistemological aspect) can also be explored based on the religious element. For example, the symbolic approach showed that mythical-religious worldviews are valid perspectives of reality. Although they are not the only ones or the fundamental ones, they are as legitimate as the common sense, scientific, and aesthetic approaches. The discussion concerning the epistemological status of religion and RES are involved here, and it is evident that, according to this orientation, the possibilities and scope of religious education could be expanded. Thus, the teaching of religion can be developed no longer in contradiction with the positive sciences, but rather as something influential in the construction of the worldview, due to its contributions in the ontological and epistemological dimensions.

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