

## Chapter 6

# Phenomenology of Religion and Religious Education

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*The phenomenology of religion is an attempt to know what religion is, on the basis of the testimonies provided by the almost countless religions in human history.*

Juan Martin Velasco

### Introduction

This chapter analyzes the contributions of phenomenological studies to Religious Education in Schools. These contributions are the epistemological grounds for this work. Considering that since the 20th century, the studies of religion have emerged as a response to religious pluralism, it is imperative to place them in the school context. This has allowed society to appreciate and understand multiculturalism and interculturalism, which require a broad view, open to the existing diversity, which in our case is religious diversity.

Thus, the study of the phenomenology of religion will help understand the pedagogical practice that is natural to Religious Education in Schools. This chapter is structured as follows: first, we discuss the identity of the phenomenology of religion, in the context of religious sciences and studies, in order to understand its object of study. Then we review its history as well as its significant contributions and dialogue with the other religious sciences. Secondly, we interrelate the definition and the elements or categories which constitute it and

present phenomenology as a method. We also highlight some of the tensions existing within this field of study, and we conclude with some contributions to the problem of the nature and identity of RES.

## Identity of the Phenomenology of Religion

Within the field of philosophy, phenomenology, in its fullest meaning, emerges as a way of thinking and addressing knowledge, focusing on what it is observed, taking up its features and characteristics, and contributing elements to define and conceptualize. When Edmund Husserl suggested it as a method, he did so based on description - interpretation to reach the *Dasein*, the essence of what is observed. The phenomenology of religion seeks to establish similarities among the diverse religions. This task is carried out based on the history of religions, trying to understand the relationships established among them, that which is common to them, grasping their profound meaning, and taking into account human peculiarity and reality. Within this framework of ideas, the phenomenology of religion is presented beginning with its identity, its specificity, based on the religious and transcendental element of human beings and the culture in which they are immersed. We can start out by discussing what has been stated regarding the phenomenology of religion, that which has framed it as a study of religion derived from the philosophy of religion, but, definitely, with its own characteristic features.

Within the definition of the phenomenology of religion, it is imperative to understand its object of study, whose scope and boundaries are contained within the religious framework, and become evident in the historical progression of its epistemological development, which is crucial for this study. In the same manner, it is essential to analyze the dialogue between phenomenology and other studies of religion. This is both the starting and end point of the topics developed below.

### *Object of Study of the Phenomenology of Religion*

The phenomenology of religion contributes to the understanding of the religious phenomenon. This study reflects on the religious element as

a universal, historical, cultural and personal fact in which the subject of the action is the human being and the object of study is human beings' religious dimension, expressed in a multitude of forms and fields. In this religious dimension, we find experiences that significantly mark personal and community life and are addressed by the phenomenology of religion, which attempts to understand them based on the complex sense of science. Furthermore, it provides them with a structure and contents that help explain how humans have dealt with these experiences since ancient times, as part of themselves, and whose future trends are reflected in the present. The phenomenology of religion is not guilty of reductionism, because, although it attempts to arrive at the essence of the religious as such and its relationship to humanity, it extends the horizon in this regard and reveals elements that complement and enrich, such as the meaning of life and transcendence. This shows why the purpose of the phenomenological study of the religious is important. At the same time, it breaks with the established paradigm of limiting the religious element to a specific style or approach, by understanding it in a broader and more humanistic sense.

Thus, the object of phenomenology is the religious element as such, the religious phenomenon in itself, as a universal characteristic of the person, culture, society, and history. Therefore, in order to determine the fundamental categories of the phenomenology of religion it is important to adjust them to each existing understanding of religion, because these categories are what compose it and define it as such. Hence, the object of the phenomenology of religion is "to understand the nature of the religious phenomenon, its particular specificity, on the basis of the analysis of individual and collective historical expressions" (Cabrera, 2002, page 338). And the object of human religiosity is not the sacred aspect of its essence, but rather its manifestations and expressions, the diverse hierophanies, among which rites, cult, symbols, and images stand out as components of the religious phenomenon.

Within this comprehension, set forth by Isabel Cabrera, which already includes several concrete expressions of religious life, it is necessary to underscore that the different meanings of religion as an object of study try to be as clear as possible, due to the delicate territory

in which the diverse religions are inscribed: “it seeks to construct a satisfactory theory of knowledge (and perception)... to put to the test any theory that intends to distinguish truth from error, illusion from reality, or even one that attempts to impede the possibility of arriving at some new vantage point by making use of such concepts” (Diez de Velasco, 2006, p. 61). Thus, the purpose of exploring this territory of religions and religion as such is not only to determine their specificities, but also their points of convergence.

Therefore, the phenomenology of religion differs from the other fields that study religion: history of religions, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and geography of religion, among others, due to its object of study and the way of addressing it. This topic will be addressed later. Thus, in understanding the object of study of phenomenology, Velasco shows the neutral character of this study, because, although it focuses on the subject’s expressions, it does not address the transcendental aspect of its essence, the deity as such, its origin, veracity, etc., nor the veracity of each religion. It focuses on human action and reaction to this phenomenon. This aspect is fundamental because it marks the difference among different types of theodicy, the theologies which address this issue. Also, it is worth clarifying that its task is not to contribute to the consolidation, defense, or rejection of any religious style, but rather to study the different human expressions and manifestations in this regard. Thus, the author affirms

The object of the phenomenology of religion is the religious phenomenon, that is to say, that part of the human phenomenon attested to in the religious history of humanity [...] The center of attention of the phenomenology of religion is not the “object” of religion, the reality to which its symbols refer, or the reality with which humans enter into communication, that is to say God, the gods, or the divine [...] Rather, it focuses on the religious phenomenon in its variety of forms and in the complexity of the elements involved. (Velasco, 1994, p. 12)

The phenomenology of religion is a systematic and evaluative study of the attitudinal aspect. It explains the encounter between the human and the divine, which is determined by the experience of the sacred,

which, in turn, determines the lives of those involved. In this encounter, the symbolic aspect, language, bodily expressions provide identity within the context in which a person lives and develops. This relationship from which religious pluralism emerges impels the phenomenologist to address it from the broad horizon established by the religious, with an objective perspective, aimed at explaining its emergence, its consolidation, and affirmation. In this manner, it expresses the elements which have marked religious man, who goes out of himself in search of something higher, which addresses him and regarding whom he does not feel ignored.

Phenomenology, in the religious field, is a response to that reality which humans are faced with: multi-religiousness. In sum, the essence of the phenomenology of religion is the concern of humans who assume certain religious conditions, according to their context and time, that is, religious man's search for meaning and purpose in the world. This explanation, which provides epistemological grounds to religious man necessarily has to be analyzed historically, in order to observe the development, progress, and changes in understanding. And it must be carried out in accord with the places, the main currents of thought, and those realities that become challenges when they seek to overcome the role of the religious element. In other words, phenomenology plays a key role in these circumstances.

### *Historical Review of the Phenomenology of Religion*

Since ancient times, many thinkers have tried to find an explanation for supernatural phenomena, trying to justify them and situate them within the very being of man. In fact, the great philosophical schools of Ancient Greece started out from the interest in knowing what there was beyond the human, for which reason they analyzed what their senses would perceive. Thus, Greek mythology was born, theogonies, such as Homer's and Hesiod's. A similar interest is found in Roman mythology; however, it focused especially on searching for the cause of being in a divine reality, which they found in a divine principle.

For Thales of Miletus, water is the cause; for Anaximander, the undetermined element; for Anaximenes, air, while Pythagoras focused

on the quest for God, “the principle from which all things proceed” (Sánchez, 2003, Page 48). These explanations arise given the impossibility of understanding those superhuman manifestations in an absolute manner. Therefore, they assumed a series of rites which facilitated their understanding, though this understanding was not complete. For this reason, beliefs materialized in personal and cultural expressions. Later, with the appearance of Judaism and then Christianity, of monotheistic and polytheistic religions, human beings began to strengthen and justify what they felt to be greater than themselves through beings with divine attributes,. Thus, the sciences and/or studies of religion had to specify, delimit, and define their object, as other sciences had already done. Historically, the objects of study of religion have not been defined or predetermined. Epistemological reflection and each historical moment offered a new orientation regarding these objects of study.

In the nineteenth century, the context in which the phenomenology of religion emerged, was marked by skepticism regarding the religious. There was a change of epoch and the vertiginous growth of diverse religious conceptions became evident in large and small cities. The phenomenology of religion appeared at a time in which there was an attempt to know and consider the existing religions and that, as has been the case in other moments, definitely and clearly marked the course of society. In the *Treatise on the History of Religions*, Mircea Eliade Leeuw, points out that Chantepie was the one who promoted this in a conscious manner, through the comparative study of religions. In 1867, Max Müller, in his *Introduction to the Sciences of Religion*, used the name “sciences of religion” to refer to the study and understanding of the religious, rooted in its diversity: beliefs, moral and ritual behaviors, among others. From the beginnings of the phenomenology of religion, it was made clear that this study did not center on God or gods as such, but on the religious dimension of human beings, independently of divine existence.

The history of phenomenology as a science or study of religion is framed particularly in modern and contemporary history. In the historical synthesis of the phenomenology of religion provided by Juan de Sahagún Lucas, based on Van der Leeuw, points out five stages: Enlightenment, Romanticism, Romantic philology, Romantic positivism,

and current philosophy. Our study starts out with these five stages that help us understand the development of the conception of religion and its vital importance in the history of cultures and societies.

The Enlightenment is characterized by the rise of ideas centered on reason, which downplays the role of faith. The dialogue between religion and science is taken up by the phenomenology of the religion when it appears on the world stage, thanks to the emerging sociocultural features. In this first stage, the religion is addressed on the basis of disciplines like sociology, ethnology, and ethnography, rather than on the strictly phenomenological. Religious cultures and beliefs of different primitive peoples are compared, observing similarities and identity, and arriving at the conclusion that the different religions are manifestations of a single natural religion. Two researchers stand out in this respect: C. Mainers and Benjamin Constant. The former classifies religions and discovers their common structure, while the latter determines the specificity of each one and is concerned with the nature of phenomena and revealing their essence. Thus, it can be said that, at that time, what stands out in the contribution made by the phenomenology of religion is the description and analysis of its repercussions on people and society.

The second stage arises in the age of Romanticism (18th Century). Due to the original way of feeling and conceiving the context, the phenomenology of religion emphasized the understanding of the history of religion, on the basis of the diverse religious expressions (G. van deer Leeuw, 1964). The following authors stand out: Creuzer, who promoted it and delved deeply into historical data; Hegel, who defined religion as the relationship between finite spirit and the Absolute; and Schleiermacher, who situates it with respect to ethics and metaphysics. The contributions of those studies are a) addressing religions from the perspective of history and notably influencing it; b) presenting religious diversity for the first time in that society; thus, other religious ideologies were taken into account despite privileging the prevailing religion.

The third stage is the study of Romantic Philology, understood as a critical analysis of original texts in order to reconstruct them. Romantic philology, based on the phenomenology of religion, aimed at understanding religion as an expression of universal human thought, as a general characteristic that has been present throughout

history. Its most significant contribution was the comparative studies of religions. In addition, in this period, broader fields of study are discovered, which decentralize the phenomenology of religion from a small group of society and cause it to be addressed from different points of view. At the same time, symbols are analyzed on the basis of linguistic methods in order to show the unified meaning of religious symbols. The main representatives of this school of thought were Müller and Kuhn.

The fourth stage in the reflection of the phenomenology of religion is framed by Romantic positivism. This marks a turning point in the conception of religion, since there is an attempt to “deify” science, by considering religion the “language of humanity”. In 1887, Chantepie de la Saussaye made a valuable contribution: the understanding of the external manifestations of religion on the basis of inner events, thus broadening the scope of the psychology of religion. The factual and experiential aspects of religion are underscored, without ignoring the deep meaning of proven data. Given the great contributions to the history of religion made by figures like Hermann Usener, A. Dieterich, and Chantepie de la Saussaye, this period marks the flowering of phenomenology.

Finally, in contemporary philosophy, the phenomenology of religion is affirmed as a separate and complementary study, centered on the manifestation of the religious. Dilthey and Husserl -methodically and consciously- sought to understand religious phenomena, the manner in which they appear to the observer, according to the laws of the phenomenological method: phenomenological and transcendental constitutive eidetic reduction.

This history makes it possible to observe how the human conception of the religious has developed, in response to the realities of each period, naturally affirming the transcendent dimension of the human and its role in the religious sphere. This historical overview also makes it possible to understand why the study of the phenomenology of religion is considered a constituent and constitutive factor in the study of religions. In fact, this study is not only based on cases drawn from the history of religions and the anthropology and sociology of religion, but also offers general and particular elements for understanding religion

from different perspectives, which expand and enrich the field, rather than reduce it. Furthermore, the history of phenomenology presents the development of this science as such and as a part of philosophy. Initially, the phenomenology of religion was construed as a history of religions that described and compared them. However, later, acquired the shape of what it is today: a science that analyzes the religious in cultural and personal expressions, interpreting them in the light of current reality in order to understand human beings in their religious dimension.

### *Dialogue between the Phenomenology of Religion and Other Studies*

In order to understand the phenomenology of religion, it is necessary to start out from the division into levels of the studies of religion. At the scientific level, we have the positive study of the religious phenomenon, which includes the history of religions, the psychology of religion, and the sociology of religion. At the phenomenological level, we have, first and foremost, the phenomenology of religion, a reflexive - speculative study, which enters into direct dialogue with the philosophy of religion and the theology of religion and religions. The phenomenology of religion is intrinsically related to the other studies, since, despite their specific characteristics, their common object is the religious. The phenomenology and the philosophy of religion are frequently associated closely because phenomenology emerges from philosophy and provides it with elements to interpret and analyze phenomena. However, philosophy focuses on objective truth and on its internal rational coherence which determines its rationality and its agreement or divergence with the laws of thought. Compared to sociology, anthropology, and psychology, considered positive sciences, philosophy of religion focuses on aspects and perspectives aimed at the justification of religion as a natural fact in the human being. Phenomenology, on the other hand, studies its essence.

The comparative study of religions and their historical aspects are the first stage in the history of phenomenology. It is a necessary and irreplaceable element in the phenomenology of religion, and its contributions are the elements that serve as the phenomenologist's

starting point for observation and description. Indeed, phenomenology has contributed to the change in paradigms in the understanding of the historical religious fact and has contributed elements to its analysis and interpretation.

On the other hand, sociology allows phenomenology to: a) analyze both the place where the religious phenomenon occurs and the context in which it is expressed and manifested; b) determine the community element as constitutive within phenomenological study; c) research social aspects to facilitate interpretation, since it focuses on the external religious behavior of the community; d) examine the interdependence with the sociopolitical sphere, and e) establish a rational reflection on the religious attitude. Thus understood, sociology is linked to the phenomenology of religion in a direct and open manner. It generates the interrelation of elements that allow phenomenology to address the religious as it is manifested. In this way, anthropology enters into the construction of the phenomenology of religion, conceiving humankind in its religious dimension: it studies the origin, development, and evolution of religious phenomena in human groups and societies. Hand in hand with the history of religions, the anthropology of religion, in its exercise of conceptualizing the religious phenomenon, lays the foundations on which it is supported and developed. In his book *Treatise on the History of Religions* (p.45), Mircea Eliade studied religion as a fact with its own, irreducible nature and uses the phenomenological method. Thus, he provides coherence to this study, in which the sacred is the main referent and the essential category of the religious.

At the same time, the psychology of religion contains phenomenological elements that have been used to study human beings in their representations and in the psychological implications deriving from the relation between the human and the sacred/divine, which can influence consciousness due to the dependence on the superior being that is generated. This influence makes evident and tangible the transformation of the person and, by extension, of groups and communities, that is to say, of society in general. Like phenomenology, the psychology of religion is based on religious language, on the mythical element, on what is symbolic and what is significant. All of this expresses the clear

repercussion that they have had in human consciousness, how they have taken root there and the way they are expressed.

José Luis Sánchez affirms that phenomenology is the bridge between the sciences of religion and the philosophy of religion. This bridge is understood by observing the findings contributed by phenomenology, which are essentially three: it determines the specificity of the phenomenon, establishes criteria for selecting the aspects characteristic of the religious, and remains open to the scientific considerations of these sciences, as well as the positive ones. Thus, the philosophy of religion particularizes and delimits the phenomenology of religion. And it includes the broad horizon provided by its object of study, based on which the relationship with the sciences of religion is established. Hence, it is possible to consider it as the point of departure and encounter among the sciences of religion.” Phenomenology, therefore, is situated halfway between the positive sciences of religion and the philosophy and theology of religion” (Sánchez, 2003, p. 333).

The relationships of the phenomenology of religion to studies in this field converge in the religious and/or transcendental dimension of the human being. This aspect is what must be analyzed to understand and generate responses to the complex process which humans undergo throughout their existence. Its complementary nature allows the study, which in our case is a phenomenological one, to acquire a meaning of its own and, in turn, permeates the others. Likewise, the radical difference of phenomenology lies in the fact that its object of study is already determined, while the other studies of religion must assume their focus and object on the basis of the religious phenomenon.

## **Structure of the Phenomenology of Religion**

The study of the phenomenology of religion has a specific role in the understanding of the religious, a fact that it addresses in its complexity and plurality, searching for the profound sense, the essence, the formal cause, of the researched fact. This has usually been done on the basis of the prevailing religious systems and institutions, and it necessarily affects the current situation of society, in which religious diversity is already evident in our classrooms. For Sánchez, the “order”, on which

the phenomenological study of religion is based was provided by G. v. der Leeuw, who proposes a four-part scheme to develop the central object of this study, with respect to the phenomenon of religion. These four elements are:

- a. The object of religion
- b. The subject of religion: the human being
- c. The relationship between subject - object: religious acts
- d. Typology of religions: culture, figures, founders

This study takes up that proposal, based on a structure that adjusts to its objectives. It takes up what is fundamental, such as the definition, the elements that compose it, and the method. These are developed in a synthetic way, because the complexity of the religious phenomenon has different perspectives. Although the delimitation of the entire field is not easy with respect to its description and understanding, this study employs a systematic and chronological order. The data, provided especially by the history of religions, is used to classify its manifestations and highlight its organization. This study, then, involves a vision of religious man, without reductionist and one-dimensional prejudices; addressing religious expressions in order to restore their meaning in history and explain current cultures.

### *Definition of Phenomenology of Religion*

The starting point of the phenomenology of religion is the studies of religion and forms part of the interpretative framework in which these studies are classified. It has been understood from the perspective of the history of religions and their manifestations, as they have appeared throughout human history. In his book *Philosophy and Phenomenology of Religion*, José Luis Sánchez cites the definition proposed by Dhavamony: “Systematic treatise on the history of religions, which consists in classifying and regrouping the numerous and divergent objective data in such a way as to achieve a general vision

of its contents and their religious implications” (Sánchez, 2003, p. 319). And G. van der Leeuw defines it as an analysis of what we observe, that is to say, discussing that which appears. Thus, he says that this study is initially an exercise of observation, in which it is possible to appropriate the object of study; in the case of the phenomenology of religion, these are the religious expressions of the human being. And, secondly, he defines phenomenology on the basis of its task within the philosophical field, since it is not limited to mere observation or description, but contributes interpretation.

From a broader and more contemporary point of view, Juan Martin Velasco defines it as “an approximate way of studying the phenomena that characterize religions in general, for example the types of faith, of rites corresponding to observable structures whose ultimate meaning is sought ... the phenomenologist inquires into the profound meaning of the researched fact” (Velasco, 2001, p. 34.). Therefore, that which appears has characteristics that particularize it and which influence it in such a way that they reach the essence of the object. Thus, the phenomenology of religion is not limited to certain facts or beliefs, but rather has a broad horizon in which the diversity of elements that compose it come into play.

Regarding the phenomenological understanding of religion, Diez de Velasco says that it is a task with a universal, impartial and more complex character, since it does not really focus on a meaning but rather presents it as shaped by culture: “The phenomenology of religion or of religions (in this case, it might be more correct to use the second term in plural) would be a trans-cultural system for the classification of religious phenomena” (Diez de Velasco, 2001 p. 59). Therefore, for him, culture becomes that which is observed, analyzed, and concentrates on the religious as the main factor. Therefore, from this point of view, phenomenology is shaped as the field that makes it possible to reach the essence of the object of study and it facilitates the understanding of what is analyzed, in this case, religion.

Thus, in the phenomenology of religion, the object, its characteristics and what is to be observed and analyzed are intertwined. It is the study that, through the method of observation - analysis - interpretation, addresses religion in general as its object of study and seeks to

understand the meaning of its expressions and manifestations in culture - that culture, whose elements and categories are analyzed in order to determine their effect.

From the hermeneutic point of view, the phenomenology of religion is the science of interpretation, because it goes beyond disjointed and disconnected data, and addresses them as provided by human experience; thus, they can be deciphered and understood by reason.

Phenomenology tries to descriptively comprehend facts, describe their reality as provided by experience. It does not affirm anything regarding the value of those facts. Its judgments are, in every case, descriptive of the reality that is provided by religious experience. (Sánchez, 2003, p. 320)

It is clear that the phenomenology of religion is a study that aims at giving accurate explanations regarding the religious in human beings. However, within this study, personal positions create tension. Cabrera defines this problem in terms of the distance that a phenomenologist must keep with respect to the material studied. That is to say, it implies objectivity since it does not judge or evaluate conduct, but rather seeks to “understand why what is done and believed in is done and believed in” (Cabrera, 2002, p.356). Therefore, a neutral stance must be maintained, in order to understand without prejudging or distorting.

In this same line of reasoning, it could be said that there is also a risk of establishing a closed circle between the religious man who researches and the religious man who is the object of research. In the *Phenomenology and Philosophy of Religion*, Sahagún argues that, in the method of phenomenology, the researcher, first, adheres to the empirical data and comprehends their peculiarity in order to interpret what is observed without distorting it; second, he establishes a systematic comparison of the diversity of forms of religion in history and in different contexts. To address religion in its diversity, the phenomenologist must start out from the constitutive aspect of each religion, which provides it with its own meaning. That is where empathy comes in as an essential subjective factor. This is decisive since it allows the researcher to enter into communication with the object studied and know its intention (Cf. Sahagún, p. 50). Another point of tension,

according to Cabrera, is to impose normative patterns or models on all beliefs: “phenomenology must provide inductive generalizations that as such are provisional and are subject to attunement and counterexamples.” (Cabrera, 2002, p. 358).

### *Constitutive Elements of the Phenomenology of Religion*

Categories are those components that constitute a study. In the case of the phenomenology of religion, these are determined by the object of study, the religious fact, along with all the elements that compose it and define it. In this case, the phenomenological study does not focus on a particular religious denomination, but rather concentrates on those general elements that identify them all as religion. When it comes to justifying the religious phenomenon within the school environment, these categories, constitute the essentials of teaching, of what it is covered and encompassed. It can be said that these categories clearly and openly define the object of study of Religious Education in Schools, its themes, objectives, and levels of understanding.

According to the authors who initiated this study, one of the categories that forms part of every religion and defines it as such is the sacred. This refers to that which is reserved for the divine, exclusive and separate from the mundane, and which refers individuals to a transcendent, spiritual dimension, which makes them wonder and perceive a force superior to themselves. In what follows, this category is characterized as a fundamental and foundational element of the phenomenology of religion.

- a) *The sacred* is addressed on the basis of two conceptions: individual experience and the meaning and form in which hierophanies are articulated that is to say, the common structures, forms, and essential characteristics., In his work *The Holy*, Rudolf Otto analyzes the idea of the sacred (which he calls the “totally Other”), its manifestations and transformations through the feelings and emotions that it arouses. Therefore, this impulse toward the sacred arises in the human heart. Van Der Leeuw affirms that religion is fundamentally

a relationship in which the object is the sacred and the subject, the human being. “The *homo religiosus* and the sacred partially shape each other and in order to fully understand the religious phenomenon, we must attend to the various aspects of that relationship” (Cited by Cabrera from Van Der Leeuw, in *The Study of Religion*, p. 354).

Mircea Eliade presents a morphology of the sacred, based on the hierophanies of each culture, since it does not require religious adherence, but respect for that experience. The “hierophany expresses, in its own particular way, a modality of the sacred and a moment of its history” (Eliade, cited by Cabrera, 2002, p. 348). Therefore, the sacred will be, for the phenomenology of religion, the clearest expression of the religious experience of each culture. According to Otto, the sacred is that which, over time, is moralized and rationalized until it generates a more complex idea. He applies this to the Judeo-Christian religion, in which God becomes the numen, in which the aspects of the tremendous and fascinating come into play and in which the opposition fear- confidence are constitutive.

Cabrera, on the other hand, defines the sacred as “a mystery that provides foundations and meaning, that illuminates, liberates, or saves” (Cabrera, p.353). Thus, the sacred becomes a fundamental category for the phenomenologist of religion. Velasco views it based on the order and scope of reality, in which all the elements that compose religion are inscribed. Likewise, Söderblom defines it as the relationship with the sacred and not necessarily or exclusively with God. The experience of the sacred uses religious language: symbol, myth, rite and art, to communicate.

Hence, given its transcendental component, the sacred responds, first, to the search for the meaning of life of human beings. It not only provides tools for their present, but also launches them definitively into a future with a more hopeful vision. The sacred is, perhaps, what allows man to begin to go beyond himself and transcend in a more meaningful way.

- b) *Mystery*: Another fundamental category in this study is the mystery, a central and essential element in various religions and conceptions. In *The Idea of Holy*, Otto explains it as follows: “it designates that totally other reality that the different religions try to express through ideograms and schemas”. For Velasco, it is the determining reality in the appearance of the sacred. It is the interpretive category that forms of divinity have in common, “it is the name for the divinity in which all of its forms coincide. Presence of the Absolute transcendence in reality and in the whole person”.

Cabrera presents the conception that various authors have of mystery, relating it to the sacred: *Valor*, for Otto; *Absolute Power*, for Van der Leew; *Transcendent Reality*, for Eliade; *Different Reality*, for Velasco; *Hidden Reality*, for Meslin, according to Ries, among others. This makes evident that when human beings relate to the sacred or to mystery, they assume that it is something real, true, convincing, that presents or reveals itself to them, and faced with which humans feel attracted, overwhelmed, and even needy.

- c) *Mediations*: In human contact with the sacred and with mystery, mediations arise as a constitutive category of the phenomenology of religion. Mediations refer to those situations, people, elements, and places in which human beings communicate with the sacred and mystery. This category is common to all religions, those which — by means of symbols, rites, signs, places — enter into a relationship of reciprocity with their divinity. Cabrera says that these intermediaries are found in all religions, to achieve the bond between the believer and the sacred. These intermediaries are, precisely, the hierophanies, which, in some religions, are personified in gods, images, or as the supreme value of life.

Considering the definitions and the understanding of the sacred, the mystery, and the mediations, one can get an idea of what constitutes the object of RES. These are categories that are found in all ancestral,

monotheistic and polytheistic religions that make it possible to determine a common object that is not exclusive of a particular denomination or religion, but that comprises the wide range of religions. In this way, Religious Education in Schools, as an academic field, acquires a deeper and more meaningful foundation in the classroom, for both teachers and students. In fact, it obliges them to direct their attention away from their own positions and to understand religious experience and its diverse manifestations throughout history.

### *Method of Phenomenology of Religion*

Sahagún states in his *Phenomenology and Philosophy of Religion* (page 44) that Husserl established phenomenology as a method. And he presents it in two moments: the description of the fact and the interpretation of the same. This description is based on the observation by the subject and aims to interpret what is observed. It provides tools for the observation and understanding of the phenomenon, thus going beyond the minimum explanation to which it can be reduced. However, this understanding could fall into a subjective and minimalist perception, which has generated discussion concerning the position assumed by the phenomenology of religion regarding the religious fact. This tension will be addressed later.

When approaching the phenomenological method based on the description-interpretation binomial, the phenomenon is understood as it presents itself, with all its implications, symbols, and signs. In the words of G. Van Der Leeuw: the phenomenon “is that which shows itself. This means three things: 1) it is something, 2) this something shows itself, 3) it is a phenomenon precisely because it shows itself” (p. 642). In this manner, the phenomenon is understood as an object, in relation to a subject; this relationship is determined by the way it is apprehended and by the established goal. The religious phenomenon, in this sense, is understood on the basis of what is perceived, and it determines the behavior and development of the different peoples: its assimilation process in cultures, which has influenced and, to a great extent, continues to exercise influence today.

At this level, the phenomenology of religion, as part of the framework for the study of religion and religions, states that it is correctly situated given its dual dimension of study and method, since it is a study that focuses on an object and includes a series of steps or an itinerary. This does not mean that it is autonomous, since it goes hand in hand with other studies, as stated previously. It provides its own feedback, description - interpretation, and understanding of what is observed. From the methodological point of view, within the construction of the broadest and most pluralistic knowledge of the religious aspect, the phenomenology of religion, when it is configured as a method, establishes guidelines and criteria that go beyond the conventional: it prioritizes general categories that include religious understanding and generates possibilities for new contributions to the pedagogical and social endeavor of religion.

An essential part of the phenomenology of religion in terms of method is intentionality, which characterizes the relationships between phenomenon-object and consciousness-subject, because “intention is the way consciousness has access to the real, to the essence of things.” (Sánchez, 2003, p. 324). Thus, the understanding of the religious as a phenomenon is determined by the relationship established with the subject, from which the expressions and manifestations of religious fact emerge, as expressed in different cultures. In this way, these relationships allow the phenomenologist of religion to observe them critically and interpret them in order to define and determine what constitutes the religious as such.

Finally, it is important to clarify that the phenomenology of religion does not focus on elements, that is to say, it does not seek to justify or account for the use of signs, symbols, styles in different religions, but rather it understands them and situates them within the complexity of individuals immersed and participating in a culture, within their implications and meanings, their feelings and ability to find a rationale for their beliefs. In the words of Velasco: “it studies the religious phenomenon *qua talis*” (Velasco, 2006, p. 555), or as it is and as it shows itself. At this point its dialogue with other sciences is nurtured and facilitates the necessary elements to generate broad and objective

ideas concerning religious manifestations and their mechanisms for dialogue with other reflections and knowledge in this regard.

## **Contributions of the Phenomenology of Religion to Religious Education in Schools**

This research project, which seeks to establish the object of study of Religious Education in Schools and its epistemological foundations, is based on the constitutive element of the definition of RES, which is marked decisively by the phenomenology of religion. Conceiving RES as the study that reflects on and understands the relationship between the subject and the religious, its manifestations and expressions throughout history and in the diversity of cultures determines religious education as an academic discipline and puts it in dialogue with the other sciences or studies of religion. That is to say, it is not only the study of expressions (phenomenology); it addresses the religious-transcendent human being (anthropology) and places him in a context (sociology); it analyzes the psychic implications of the practice of religion (psychology) and analyzes it as a way of thinking (philosophy).

Therefore, this research project, which started out by asking what RES is, finds an answer in phenomenology, an answer that not only grounds it provides it with constitutive elements, but also shows it the broad horizon of religious understanding throughout history and in the world. It immerses it in the study of the sacred and in the intentionality of diverse worldviews, theogonies, and hierophanies. Phenomenology contributes to RES the fact that “ it starts out from religious phenomena (facts, testimonies, documents), but goes on to explore their meaning, their significance for the concrete human being, who has expressed them either in the past or in the present” (Severino, 2002, p. 25). Based on this postulate, RES should not be limited to one of those cultural expressions of the religiosity of man, but rather it must take them all into account, since religious plurality which has always existed, cannot be ignored or underestimated.

Religious diversity, in Colombia and Latin America, has decisively marked the history and idiosyncrasy of the various peoples. Those religious expressions that form part of culture are those that question

the “what” and “what for” of RES and its justification in the school context. Sadly, in this context, faith has been limited to the teaching of a given religion (depending on the educational institution: Jewish, Christian, Catholic, Muslim, Hindu). In the Colombian case, there is a Catholic and Christian majority. In justifying RES, there is an interest in studying religion as a cultural expression that contributes to the comprehensive education of the human being, in terms of life and transcendence. This allows persons, regardless of their religion, to identify within their own relationship with the sacred: how they interpret it and express it, and the meaning they give to life itself

The phenomenology of religion helps us understand that the object of study of RES goes beyond the reflections of a system, or their mere transmission. On the contrary, it shows that RES has to distance itself from systems to find in the phenomenon studied its purest significance and the relationship among its elements, in order to unveil the transcendental and spiritual aspects that go beyond an ideology or religious position.

This study promotes an epistemological fragmentation of RES. It does not intend to take a position, but rather to reveal and reflect on what is proper and constitutive of the transcendental or spiritual dimension, in which object, subject, and type of relationship with the religious phenomenon are related. This type of fragmentation has a high impact in schools and their development, since, by separating RES from the system and from proselytizing, we are seeking reflection on a phenomenon that is capable of transcending the different religions and has repercussions on other aspects, such as culture, society, the way man interacts with the world, among others.

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## Conclusions

# The Nature, Epistemological Foundations, and Future of Religious Education in Colombian Schools

ÁLVARO ANDRÉS HERNÁNDEZ  
CARLOS DAYRO BOTERO

The diversity of beliefs, worldviews and conceptions regarding the religious that exist in the country evince great cultural richness that necessarily converges in classrooms<sup>1</sup>. However, lacking a clear institutional framework concerning religious education in the school environment, this richness becomes a problem. Legislation has not responded to the pressing needs of either the education system or society in general. In this respect, it is pertinent to point out that Religious Education is not only a field of study or knowledge. It is a discipline of intellectual inquiry and dissertation that can generate research, knowledge, and practices having to do with the spiritual and transcendental dimension of persons; that is to say, it potentiates spiritual intelligence. Thus, religious education, as a discipline, has “an organized field of research, knowledge, and practices. It can have different levels of generalization, such as disciplinary matrixes, fields, or areas” (Bolívar, 2008, p. 17).

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1 Although many cultures have undergone processes of cultural, linguistic, political homogenization, some communities in Colombia have preserved their traditions, in some cases, more consciously than in others. Several communities have incorporated ancestral practices and elements of Christianity into their beliefs. In addition, there are diverse conceptions, churches, and practices associated with Christianity, but each one of them with their own distinguishing characteristics.

As a discipline, RES has undergone a historical process of differentiation and institutionalization within the Colombian context, which has allowed it to configure itself as such. Consequently, it is characterized by the following dimensions: a) institutionalization base, b) construction of objects of knowledge, c) communication networks, socialization, training of new members, d) regulation mechanisms, rules, and social conventions.

Regarding RES's institutional foundations, there are legal and normative frameworks pertaining to educational policy in Colombia, which have regulated the understanding and practice of RES. Among them are: Law 115 of 1994, Law 133 of 1994, Decree 1278 of 2002, Ministerial Directive 002 of 2004, Decree 4500 of 2006, and Decree 2450 of 2015. Unfortunately, these laws, decrees, agreements, and ministerial directives reveal an ambiguity and incoherence that affect their understanding. On the one hand, they say that RES is a fundamental and essential area in the education of persons. And, on the other hand, they state that it is not compulsory and they leave it to the free choice of students or their parents/legal guardians. In addition, religious freedom is promoted, but the certificate of competence of the teacher must be issued by a church entity. This demonstrates the need for the State, through the National Ministry of Education (MEN, according to its acronym in Spanish), together with the academicians and professors of RES, to promote reflection and research scenarios to clarify its institutional foundation.

RES has studied the construction of objects of knowledge, through its theoretical development, based on the Constitutional Reform of 1991 and Law 115/94. Consequently, in the 1990s, it was conceived as a process of evangelization by ecclesial institutions. Theorists, such as Peresson and Siciliani, were key figures. At the end of that decade, two groups of scholars and researchers appeared who conceive RES on the basis of other perspectives: a) José Luis Meza and his colleagues from Universidad Javeriana, who articulated RES with the theology of liberation and the sciences of religion; b) Jaime Laurence Bonilla and Elizabeth Coy, together with their team of researchers from the Universidad San Buenaventura of Bogotá, who articulated RES with the theology of religious pluralism and religious diversity. And now,

in the second decade of the 21st century, we, Andrés Hernández and Dayro Botero (researchers from the Universidad Santo Tomás and from the Universidad Católica Lumen Gentium of Cali, respectively) state that the nature of Religious Education in Schools is the spiritual dimension and intelligence. And we propose an epistemological corpus for RES, based on nuclear theories, practices, and other theories.

Understanding RES as a discipline is not an isolated action. Its praxis is grounded in the institutional character and the construction of objects of knowledge, based on a collaborative perspective, in which communication networks emerge with full meaning. REDERE, for example, seeks to unify criteria in the pedagogical concretion of RES in Catholic schools; CONACED extends the spectrum to comprehensive education, and CELAM, to Latin American reality. All these networks have points of convergence with the Ministry of National Education. This government institution - with guidelines, such as the Curricular Achievement Indicators of 1998, or the Guiding Document for Assessment of Religious Education Competencies of 2012- shows a clear interest in understanding school disciplines and in comprehensive education. In local contexts, this task is carried out by the different Secretaries of Education.

These communication networks serve as regulation mechanisms for the pedagogical actions of RES in Colombia, both for school and university education. It is a fact that the Colombian Ministry of Education shows its concern for the guidelines regarding nomination and quality in Decree 2450 of December 17, 2015 and Resolution 02041 of February 3, 2016. Likewise, it is interested in strengthening the comprehensive training of teachers, based on a holistic anthropological conception of human dimensions and intelligences. This work engages nine Colombian universities that currently offer an undergraduate degree in Religious Education. In addition, these networks are means of socializing pedagogical experiences, from which social conventions emerge that favor the teaching and learning processes of RES.

In that order of ideas, Religious Education in Colombia is a mandatory and fundamental discipline for comprehensive education, to which the country's educational policy is committed. The different

epistemological, theoretical, practical, and research developments of religious Education since the 1990s have made it possible for us to propose our own corpus today, based on its object of study, namely: the unfolding of the spiritual and transcendent dimensions and the development of the spiritual intelligence of a person. The constructs included in in RES as a school discipline, are:

- Nuclear theories: spiritual dimension, spiritual intelligence, transcendent dimension.
- Practical theories: RES curriculum, didactics, and assessment.
- Other theories: Independent but closely related disciplines that make possible the development of the object of RES: anthropology of religion, sociology of religion, psychology of religion, philosophy of religion, phenomenology of religion, among others.

This corpus has a very broad horizon. In fact, it is an original proposal within the epistemological, theoretical, and conceptual constructions in Colombia. Furthermore, it is necessary and urgent to deploy each one of the theories that make RES a teaching and learning scenario that empowers people. However, it is pertinent to point out that, in this text (a research product), we have only been able to: a) affirm the object of study and the nature of RES and b) outline the contributions of the other theories, such as the studies of religion, to its epistemological construct.

## **Other Theories: Studies of Religion**

Regarding the particularity of the studies of religion, in terms of denominational and pastoral perspectives, it must be taken into account that religious systems have specific characteristics (canons, doctrines, rites, consecrated persons, books...), which can be addressed epistemologically only if they are studied with non-denominational attitudes and intentions and based on theoretical procedures, without losing sight of their experiential horizon. For this reason, if it is necessary to address religious doctrines and prescriptions from the

denominational perspective, such references should be made, in the studies of religion, in such a way that already established creeds are not defended. Since RES must account for the religious in all its amplitude and address all the dimensions it involves, it is necessary to address all of the elements that allow for a clear, complete, and comprehensive understanding of the religious.

When we say that it is necessary to resort to studies of religion, this is not done so that the student has a range of options to choose from. This broad view of religion makes it possible to know or identify religious practices and experiences, as well as to recognize, understand, and value the reality of religious and cultural diversity. In other words, the history of religions, comparative history, and the contributions of ethnology and ethnography are only inputs for the construction of a complete conception of religion.

Many different elements from the studies of religion are suitable for RES. Diez (2002) has pointed out several of them: *amplitude* and *comprehensiveness* allow us to account for religious beliefs and practices, in relation to all the aspects associated with it: politics, economics, arts, and language, as well as for the great number of perspectives and ways to approach religion: *autonomy* implies approaching religion without the conditionings of a specific religious denomination; *plurality* means taking into account all religions, religiosities, and worldviews in order to identify cultural traits or conceptions associated with the religious; *objectivity* indicates that the studies of religion and RES do not make moral or aesthetic judgments concerning belief systems or the religious practices of cultures that may not be understood, or are far removed.

Now, having identified the importance of addressing the studies of religion with the intention of epistemologically grounding RES, it is worthwhile to dwell on some considerations arising from the analysis of those disciplines that take religion as their object of interest.

All of the studies of religion, analyzed here, from anthropology to the phenomenology of religion, contribute to understanding and valuing cultural and religious diversity. In fact, the particularity of each religious conception leads to different scientific and common sense perspectives, as well as to aesthetic and historical ones. Although human groups

construct their life on the basis of social and institutional values (this is the aim of taking action), they also express themselves by means of beliefs and symbols. Therefore, the religious requires an approach based on all aspects: social, institutional, reflexive, and individual. That is why, in the reality of classrooms, where there is both religious plurality and non-commitment to a religious denomination, it is necessary to generate aperture to dialogue and respect.

On the other hand, analytical thinking regarding the religious is another contribution made by the studies of religion. This is the reflection on a concrete human event, so as to understand it, based on reason, as the constitutive openness of the human being to a higher-order reality, while, at the same time, it is evidence of a self-manifestation of this superior being. In short, what we want to make clear is that religious experiences are innate and, therefore, do not cease to express themselves. Hence, the question concerning the meaning of life arises at this point: the spiritual or transcendent dimension. When the General Law of Education makes reference to that dimension, it does not explain it; it simply mentions it because it appears to be something extremely important for the human being. And it is certainly a valuable aspect for the person since it is where all those concerns that relate to the meaning of life and transcendence are found.

In order to respond to all the problems mentioned above and given the heterogeneity of the studies of religion (both regarding its nature, as well as its methods and history), it has been necessary to identify the common elements they share, in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the religious that, as we have tried to show, are common elements present in the different types of studies considered, although with their own peculiarities. Thus, the journey through the various studies of religion, (philosophy of religion, phenomenology of religion, anthropology of religion, psychology of religion, and sociology of religion) allows us to identify the contributions that each makes to the understanding of the religious phenomenon, in favor of the epistemological grounding of RES. The categories used in this attempt were elements of cohesion such as the meaning of life, transcendence, the religious, the sacred, and cultural and religious diversity, which will be developed, below, in synergy with the studies of religion.

## Some Contributions of the Studies of Religion to RES

Due to their multidimensionality, human beings are capable of asking themselves about the meaning of existence. That is to say, they have the capacity to ask themselves what really endows their stay in the world with value and meaning. In terms of the spiritual dimension, this is what makes it possible to ask about the meaning of existence and seek plausible answers to that question.

In this search for meaning, spiritual intelligence plays a vital role: it enables human beings to have deep and intimate aspirations that allow them to achieve a view of life and of reality that integrates, connects, transcends, and gives meaning to life. All human beings are called upon to give meaning to their existence. The way they do so depends on the development of their intelligence, social interactions, and educational and cultural background.

As stated above, the quest for the meaning of life is undertaken in several ways: a) doing or producing something, b) experiencing something or loving someone, c) facing an inevitable, fatal fate with an adequately strong attitude. Human beings want to know both the “why” and the “what for” of things. Therefore, questions arise such as: Why am I in the world? What is the meaning of my existence? What can I expect after my death? What is the meaning of the world? Why suffer? Why struggle? What experiences are worth living? What is worth doing? How to make sense of my life?

All the above, together with what Victor Frankl has called the *spiritual unconscious*, opens up the way for discovering or becoming aware of the fact that human beings, on the basis of their anthropological being, are capable of transcendence, which empowers them to move in the realm of the unknown. This capacity is not exhausted in a religious denomination, but can also arise in cultural rootedness and other traits of social interactions.

Transcendence is also understood as the possibility of expanding the self beyond the regular confines of everyday life experiences. This category is now of great importance, since it makes it possible to go beyond the framework of the immediate and superficial, to generate

new referents and fight individualism. Seen from the psychology of religion, this enables the subject to embark on the path of maturing as a human being. When transcendence is achieved, subjects will be able to develop meditative thinking and reflection on the meaning of life and their own existential project.

The search for the transcendent involves a spirituality that is not necessarily confined to a particular creed. Thus, the spiritual or transcendent dimension obliges persons to see religion beyond a particular manifestation and rescues the fact that their existence is a faithful expression of the being of humankind. In other words, in the field of RES, it is possible to potentiate the religious experience, provided that a permanent search for the transcendent is undertaken, of that beyond which may or may not be represented in the divine.

RES has the possibility of guiding subjects towards a global vision of existence, so that they can live fully and happily. To achieve this, it is necessary to encourage the construction of a complete synthesis of the world in order to find the place that is occupied by the self. RES, based on the transcendent dimension of humankind, helps prepare this synthesis by providing global perspectives to address the question of meaning. Therefore, religious education based on the studies of religion opens up the universe to accompany human beings in the endeavor of transcending themselves and the natural world. Thus, natural objects and manufactured by humans are transformed into symbolic realities, into instruments that communicate something what lies beyond.

With regard to transcendence, religion, as a social phenomenon, describes human beings' capacity to reconnect, to join a collective, which allows them to experience the totally other; in other words, to manage to establish links with what they recognize as different from themselves and establish some form of communication. However, the crisis of religious meaning brought about by modernity situates the study of the religious not in the sacred, but in the 'profane', that is to say, in everyday life. This should not be seen as a threat or as the end of religion, but rather as an opportunity. Religion is transformed and this is where RES is essential to analyze all the implications and challenges that the religious entails for human beings.

Religion, which is present in society, even in the midst of the crisis of meaning, challenges the modern human being to create a world of referents in an axiological order. Therefore, RES needs to address this reality with a critical and open look, so that the axiological construction contemplates the reality of the other more closely, given the cultural diversity of the contemporary world.

Thanks to the studies of religion, it has become evident that the human being is a being in search of meaning. Therefore, if RES wants to be truly meaningful, in the education processes of society, it must seize this juncture. It should demonstrate that religion as a phenomenon, permeates various social spheres and is an integral part of the human being. On this basis, the door is opened to find the *raison d'être* of the human being.

Religion has an important role in the process of rationalizing the world, understood as a process of clarification and systematization of ideas viewed according to their binding force (normativity). This generates, collectively, an intentionality in social action. In this order of ideas, religion plays an innovative role and is a driver of change in various social spheres; in other words, it is a pretext for action. Beliefs, religious practices, community and social aspects, aesthetics, and economic and ethical implications converge in religion. All of this shapes the way human beings are organized within society and the ways in which religion influences the historical development of societies.

On the other hand, when one delves deeply into the religious, it becomes clear that human experience, associated with the religious, both in the individual dimension and in the social relationships it implies, can confront the (epistemological) rejection that modernity imposes on ancestral mythical-religious world-views. In this sense RES makes a significant contribution since it values what is different and opens up the possibility of holistic perspectives. This is especially significant on the American continent, where ancestral cultures with worldviews, rites, and different beliefs endure and survive, but with a broader and fuller understanding of the religious.

The category of the sacred has an important place in the study of religion. It is defined, according to some perspectives, as that which is reserved for divinity, exclusive and separate from the mundane.

So, the sacred is a concomitant part of the human being, and it consists of the transcendent and the spiritual, of the totally other. All of this is articulated on the basis of hierophanies, that is to say, the essential, common structures, forms and characteristics. In religion, the sacred is one of the clearest expressions of what is called religious experience. This happens within a creed and it is the relationship with the *fane* (contrary to the profane). This experience of the sacred, which uses religious language (symbol, myth, rite, art) to communicate, refers not only to divinity. It refers to a space that allows us to go beyond, a space that is not necessarily associated with divinity.

The sacred and the profane cannot be understood as separate categories. They must be seen as intertwined because they give meaning to religious practices and are the basis for the understanding of the transcendent. Therefore, in RES, emphasis should be placed on the spiritual dimension as a natural condition of human beings which enables them to view the world differently, to be more aware of differentiated alterity, so that new referents of interaction and tolerance can be constructed on that basis.

Finally, religious and cultural diversity, which is part of the reality of the school system and of society in general, involves a great number of conceptions, practices, and perspectives, regarding the religious. All of them have led to processes of religious syncretism, interfaith dialogue, and discussions concerning religious tolerance. The diversity, contemplated here, is not only religious; it is also cultural. That is, we take into account both the beliefs and practices clearly identified as religious and the conceptions held regarding the religious. This is necessary because, in a significantly culturally heterogeneous reality, the phenomenon of secularization should be present (in addition to religious beliefs and practices). This phenomenon developed significantly in both theoretical and personal experiences. This implies that RES must also consider the conceptions that lead to the separation of the religious from the public sphere and public administration, that is, those that move religion to the private sphere, where religious beliefs and practices are simply handled as options.

Therefore, it is essential that a proposal for RES contain: a) the deployment of the abovementioned categories and dimensions;

b) its justification and development as a discipline and, in particular, as a school discipline, c) a complete, comprehensive, and complex development, based on theories and studies of religion.

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Shaping the identity of religious education is a challenge for all countries that have included the teaching of religion in school curricula as a strategy to promote the religious affiliation of new generations. These countries have done so due to their historical links to different religious traditions. In fact, the revision of the role of each one of the components of the curricular matrix for the education of children and adolescents entailed a new discussion concerning the continued teaching of religion and its organization. The inter-institutional and interdisciplinary work carried out by researchers from the Universidad Santo Tomás in Bogotá and the Fundación Universitaria Católica Lumen Gentium in Cali made it possible to establish the epistemological foundations and contribute to the study of the nature of Religious Education in Colombian schools.

The work of these researchers proves that studies and works aimed at understanding Religious Education as a discipline are not solitary, institutional actions aimed at constructing objects of knowledge. On the contrary, it is a collaborative process of networking that will allow nationwide understanding of the pedagogical project of a school component.



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