

Approaches to the Nature and Epistemological Foundations of Religious Education in Colombian Schools

Carlos Botero Flórez - Álvaro Hernández Vargas
Editors

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EDITORS



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Ediciones USTA

Bogotá, D. C., Colombia

Phone: (+571) 587 8797, ext. 2991

editorial@usantotomas.edu.co

<http://ediciones.usta.edu.co>

Sello Editorial UNICATÓLICA

Cali, Valle del Cauca

Phone: (+57) 312 0038, ext. 1120

Campus Pance

editorial.investigaciones@unicatolica.edu.co

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Prologue

Foundations of a Curricular Component

SÉRGIO ROGÉRIO AZEVEDO JUNQUEIRA¹

Shaping the identity of religious education — from a school rather than a church context — 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

1 Professor with a post-doctorate in Religious Studies from the Pontifical University of São Paulo. Doctor and Master of Learning Sciences from the Pontifical Salesian University of Rome. Director of the Institute for Research and Training in Education and Religion. Leader of the Research Education and Religion Group (GPER, according to its acronym in Spanish).

schools. These researchers studied the history and the sciences such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, and philosophy, which serve as pedagogical grounds for school disciplines.

These disciplinary studies must be based on the legal guidelines of the country. In other words, they must abide by the Constitution (1991, updated in 2009), which establishes, in its essential principles (Article 01), that Colombia is a democratic, participatory, and pluralistic social state based on the rule of law. It is a state grounded in respect for human dignity, work, and solidarity among persons that recognizes and protects the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Colombian nation. Thus, as a guarantee of religious freedom, all citizens have the right to freely practice their own religion and disseminate it, whether individually or collectively, since all religions and churches are equally free according to the law (Article 19).

Colombia is recognized as a multi-ethnic country, given the different communities that shaped the country: indigenous peoples, Europeans, especially Spaniards, and, finally, black people brought from Africa as a result of the economic model adopted. Religious affiliation was also diversified by indigenous, Afro-Colombian, Catholic, Protestant, and other individual or collective traditions, as well as by those whose personal history led them to define themselves as agnostics, atheists, or others.

Therefore, it is undeniable that this long history has left a mark on the culture of the country's inhabitants, a culture that is materialized in the buildings, artifacts, music, dance, food, clothing, and codes of conduct, among others. Clearly, one of the responsibilities of schools is to foster reading, memory, and dissemination of the country's legacy in the younger generations. Thus, knowledge of, understanding, and respect for the tangible and intangible heritage established by the different cultures that make up Colombia include reading and delving deeply into the religious cultural expressions found in the daily life of families and cities.

This book is divided into six chapters. As a reader, I construe its structure in three stages, which I compare to the tricolor Colombian flag. My analysis is based on this national symbol. First, we have the red stripe that represents the blood of those who fought for

the country's independence. In Chapter 1, "Religious Education in Colombia 1991-2015", Álvaro Andrés Hernández Vargas reviews 24 years of history, summarizing the inquiries and discussions of researchers, teachers, and leaders involved in school education in the country, who have sought to establish parameters for a curricular component which might contribute to a broader interpretation of individuals, communities, and the country itself.

The flag's second stripe, the blue one, represents the sea that brings and takes life to and from the country's coasts, just as the waters enabled community development. I understand this as one of the pillars of the union and distribution of the Colombian people. In these "waters", I include Chapter 2, Anthropology of Religion, written by Carlos Dayro Botero Flórez; Chapter 3, Sociology of Religion, by Carlos de Andres Imbachi Silva; Chapter 4, Psychology of Religion, by Natalia Cuellar Orrego, and Chapter 5, Philosophy of Religion by Ciro Guzman Moncada and Félix Hernando Barreto Junca. These chapters present a didactic sequence that fosters understanding of each of the lines making up the foundations of the nature of Religious Education. In each case, the chapters start with the object of the science (anthropology, sociology, psychology, and philosophy); examine the history and main currents of thought; and discuss the relationship between the respective areas of knowledge and Religious Education.

These professors address anthropology as a modern fact, made possible at a certain moment in history, which allows us to talk about religious phenomena from a scientific perspective, dealing with them from a more epistemological than religious or theological perspective. The enormous variety of ideas, languages, symbols, and especially, ways of living religion resulted in a complex and heterogeneous study that provides a short yet deep and prolific history of approaches and positions.

In the section on sociology, the professors analyzed how each group has developed a lifestyle. Thus, the culture and human environment of a society, at a specific moment in history are the result of humanity's long journey, from the moment when a given generation was able to add something to the experience of their predecessors and, in turn, pass it on. Indeed, the sociology of religion studies the behavior and structure

of the religious phenomenon in its process within society. This inquiry is carried out by means of observation, using an inductive approach, given that, in principle, every religion is expressed and materialized in a particular culture, influenced by the family as well as by social, economic, political, and cultural institutions. This makes it possible to say that religion is a human fact, clearly attested to in history. And these socio-anthropological dimensions of religion are construed as social and cultural expressions, as creations of a projection of human desires.

In the field of psychology, the authors examined several theories or paradigms as verified concepts. For example, they analyzed the meaning of life and transcendence, essential for the epistemological grounding of Religious Education. Additionally, they highlighted the following psychological models prevailing throughout contemporary history: objective psychology or experimental behaviorism, psychoanalysis, genetic-structuralist psychology, phenomenology, positive psychology, and multiple intelligences, as well as their influence on the teaching-learning process.

Finally, we have the debate regarding philosophy. This science, like religion, originated in the daily life of human beings and constantly faces the astonishment, wonder, mystery, and experience of the quest for meaning. In other words, it is an attitude which profoundly connects with the power of issues that arise in daily events, but, at the same time, seeks access to everything beyond the understanding of everyday life. Thus, it constitutes a search for orientation, through reflection on the meaning of life. The difference is that, while seeking to justify the meaning of evident realities, philosophy inquires into causes on the basis of reason. The other question concerns those realities having to do with comprehension and projection that the spiritual dimension brings in the search for meaning. These four pillars made it possible to establish references to ground the everyday class work of Religious Education, which will be mediated by didactic transposition, in accordance with the different segments of schooling.

I compare Chapter 6, “Phenomenology of Religion and Religious Education in Schools” written by Christian Andrey Castaño, with the yellow stripe of the Colombian flag. The final chapter by Álvaro Andrés Hernández and Dayro Carlos Botero concerns the “Nature,

Epistemological Foundations, and Future of Religious Education in Colombian Schools”. It proposes the object of the discipline and summarizes the entire path followed in order to effectively establish the “approaches” to the nature and the epistemology of Religious Education in the Colombian educational scenario.

Based on the above, it is possible to understand that the purpose of phenomenology is religion as such, the religious phenomenon per se - a universal characteristic of persons, culture, society, and history. The authors’ discussion reorganizes the paradigm according to which religion is limited to a particular style or approach, by dealing with it in a broader and more humanistic sense. Indeed, the numerous beliefs, worldviews, and conceptions of religion in the country provide a culturally rich overview, which necessarily converges in the classroom. It is clear that Religious Education is not merely a field of study or knowledge, but a discipline of intellectual pursuit that generates research, knowledge, and practices regarding the implementation of the spiritual dimension and the strengthening of spiritual intelligence.

In conclusion, the work of these authors 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.

Introduction

This book is the result of an interdisciplinary and inter-institutional research project carried out by researchers from the Universidad de Santo Tomás in Bogotá and the Fundación Universitaria Católica Lumen Gentium in Cali. It carries out a reflection regarding the nature and epistemological foundations of RES - Religious Education in Colombian Schools. This reflection involved the understanding, analysis, and interpretation of Colombia's cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, as well as of the theoretical development of religious education over the last two decades. Different authors and research projects carried out in the country were taken into account, as well as the legal regulatory framework pertaining to this field of knowledge and classroom experiences.

Diverse perspectives and approaches have guided the praxis of Religious Education in Schools, focused mainly on denominational paradigms related to the practice of teaching. This has created confusion within the academic community with respect to the specific nature of that space. Therefore, this research project provides an account of the gnoseological foundations of RES as a discipline with its own corpus of understanding that facilitates its praxis in schools. The objective of this book is to explain the nature of religious education, which is aimed at the comprehensive formation of the personality of the students. It discusses the understanding of the spiritual dimension and intelligence

and its epistemological foundation, from the perspective of studies of religion as supporting theories, so that the pedagogical materialization of religious education - mediated by its curriculum, didactics, and evaluation - responds to the needs of the Colombian people.

This academic effort led the researchers to structure this work according to three defined moments: a) the first one is defined in Chapter 1, “Religious Education in Colombia 1991-2015”, whose purpose is to set forth the issues dealt with in the research project; (b) the second takes into account anthropology, sociology, psychology, philosophy, and the phenomenology of religion as part of the epistemological foundation of RES; (c) the third moment is covered in the concluding chapter “Nature, Epistemological Foundations, and Future of Religious Education in Colombian Schools”.

The first chapter, “Religious Education in Colombia 1991-2015”, is a reflection regarding the complexity of the epistemological nature and foundations of religious education. Said reflection is made necessary by various gnoseological issues, such as the legal ambiguity of the Colombian regulatory framework and the diversity of approaches to RES in school praxis. The purpose of this reflection is to provide a context for this academic space.

The second chapter opens up the way toward studies of religion, beginning with the postulates provided by anthropology and showing the rigor demanded by this science in the study of religion. Thus, the chapter provides an understanding of the object of study, as well as a brief historical review that discusses different theories and approaches in this regard, such as the evolutionary, structural, functionalist, and symbolic perspectives. The chapter concludes with the Latin American approach.

The third chapter presents the sociology of religion as a separate object of study, with a historical corpus which allows for an understanding of the theoretical, conceptual and pragmatic tensions regarding its development as a science. In this section, classical authors, their functions and dimensions make significant contributions to the praxis of Religious Education in Schools, on the basis of understanding the profound relationship underlying the encounter between religion and society.

The fourth chapter addresses the psychology of religion, explaining the identity of this science as a separate object of study, which has developed throughout history, according to different paradigms of understanding. The following approaches are considered: experimental — or behaviorist — psychology, psychoanalysis, the genetic-structuralist and the phenomenological approaches, positive psychology, as well as authors like Viktor Frankl, Howard Gardner, Dahna Zohar, and Ian Marshall, experts who expand the scope of the epistemological and pedagogical understanding of Religious Education in Schools.

Chapter 5 deals with the importance of philosophy in this web of reflection. Religion can be understood on the basis of epistemological frameworks, which allow for the analysis of its corpus and praxis, for its subsequent structuring, based on the categories of reason. The section also includes a historical approach to this science, as well as interdisciplinary work, its structure, functions, purpose, method and constitutive elements, in order to provide an adequate contribution to RES, based on philosophical tenets.

Chapter 6 deals with phenomenology, a science that is not limited to the mere historical description of facts. On the basis of the comparative history of religions, the ethnology and ethnography of religion, it carries out a disciplinary work aimed at revealing the religious phenomenon as it occurs in everyday human life. The object of study of phenomenology, the main historical currents, its dialogue with other disciplines, its structure, definition, elements, and method are all discussed. The chapter closes with contributions to the work proposed with RES.

Finally, the chapter “Nature, Epistemological Foundations, and Future of Religious Education in Colombian Schools” closes the reflection on the issues involved in RES in Colombia. The nature and epistemological foundations, the gnoseological roots that allow for its comprehension as a discipline, the need for collaborative work in communication networks, and the existence of regulatory mechanisms are clarified. Likewise, it explains the three theories that sustain it: nuclear, praxis and support.

This book is a tribute to teachers involved in Religious Education in Schools, who, from their diverse contexts of comprehensive formation, whether in private or public academic communities, recognize the

need to ground this discipline, to acknowledge diversity and religious pluralism, and to provide urgent adequate training in Colombian universities.