

NEW PARADIGMS AND THE STUDY OF RELIGION: AN ANTI-ESSENTIALIST REFLECTION¹

Joanildo A. Burity

Abstract:

Over the last few years, there has been a heated debate among social scientists of religion whether we are going through a return of the sacred or an even deeper process of secularization. But this dilemma cannot be approached properly without a new gaze into religion, which may give more room to the internal logic of groups and to the disseminative character of religious-based imaginary and ethical elements across the social scenario. One must question integrationist and class-centred views, as well as their more encompassing paradigm - modernization and secularization theory. A new gaze that will not simply abandon or replace those theories, but will place itself at the margins, sometimes confronting, sometimes articulating modified versions of those more traditional views, so as to supplement them and not leave them untouched. It is a question of an inter- or perhaps post-disciplinary approach, which explores the frontiers of dominant narratives, thus defining new and old

¹ Revised version of the paper originally presented at the round table "New Religious Expressions: Beyond Classical Dualities", in the V Conference of the Brazilian Studies Association (BRASA), Recife, Brasil, 6/19-6/21/2000; and at the symposium "Filosofía y Religión", at the VIII Latin American Conference about Religion and Ethnicity/VIII International Conference of Socio-Religious Studies, Padua, Italy, 6/30-7/5/2000. The author would like to thank the participants of the two panels for the stimulating discussion that led to some changes and additions, especially in the last part of the text, as well as Emerson Giumbelli, for final suggestions that certainly allowed for improving the argument. The responsibility for such changes, which goes without saying, is the author's.

practitioners of the academic study of religion, hybrid zones between secularization and the theories of difference and multiculturalism, for example. This article discusses the emergence of new "paradigms" in the study of contemporary religion, through a dialogue between the recent Brazilian experience and the broader background of analyses produced in other social contexts.

Is religion back? Going where? From where? How can we be sure it is still the same? What guarantees that it will behave as before? Could we justifiably drop the precautions against a return of "fundamentalism", that is, such a claim to religious ascendancy over the secular sphere based on a self-attributed function of guardian of truth, morality and meaning? But wouldn't it be a question of contesting this definition of fundamentalism? Wouldn't religion rather be ever more clearly destined to retreat to the background, losing its role as it becomes redundant in making the world go round, giving way to the logic of scientific explanations, to the efficiency of the market rules, to the sophistication of new technologies? Or still, wouldn't religion be the last bastion of this inflexible – and for the epigones of the ideology of progress and human perfectibility regrettable – attitude of discontentment with the accomplishments of modernity, which could be called "the malaise in civilization"²? In other words: facing the erosion of so many certainties and the failure of so many alternatives,

² Note that Freud himself would never make the association suggested in this sentence (knowingly one of his books' titles). Being one of those who considered religion an obstacle to the truth of/about the subject, an obsessive neurosis of humanity, the malaise of which Freud speaks would find one of its components, and not

wouldn't it be once again in religion that people could find a safe haven for their search for meaning and for a more integrated relation between the ends and the means?

The last thirty years have provided ambiguous answers to such questions, except for one, which has the strength of proof: religion has not disappeared, it has shown itself to be capable of recycling some of its practices and some of its principles and, every now and then, exhibits its enigma for public consideration. And this continuity, survival, rebirth or reinvention is concomitant to (i) an accentuation of scientific reflexivity (that is, science's concern with its own conditions of possibility and existence, symptomatic of the aporias of twentieth-century scientific objectivism); (ii) the development of a schizophrenic love-hate relationship with the products of science – the technology applied to production and to life, governmentality³, the conjunction between knowledge and the market; (iii) the sprouting of new regimens of knowledge that are nourished by a critique of the totalizing thrust of the 19th-century model of science; (iv) a crisis of the social and political models predicated on scientific interpretations of the “social mechanics”.

exactly an exit, in religion. An irony that displays well the curious ways of this age-old cultural and political arena of human societies.

³ It is known that Foucault dedicated several of his studies to the articulation arising around the XVIII century between a science of population, with its statistics and surveys, and the old doctrine of the good government (the “art of governing”), as fundamental elements of this change in focus of the theory of sovereignty through which the reference of power is a territory, toward the modern art of governing, whose focus is the people and their bodies. This articulation produces a new configuration of the relationship between the state, government and society that Foucault called governmentality. Through it, knowledge and power join in an ambitious project of attending to the necessities of the people in order to assure the social equilibrium and so strengthen the power of the state (cf. Foucault 1985: 277-93; 1990).

The conjuncture of the past few decades has suggested the need for a new glance at religion. A new glance that may, simultaneously, confer greater attention to the motivations of religious groups⁴ and take a greater distance from the normative models of modernization and secularization. Beyond the classist approach, which situates religion in a superstructure of a mode of production, culture is valued; beyond the integrationist emphases, which highlighted the social legitimating function of religion, the interface between religiosity and the market or the conflictive potential of religion stands out.

This is a glance that does not entirely replace the previous ones, now remaining at their margins, confronting them, now articulating modified versions of them, now supplementing them. The new glance adds what had been excluded from the economy of historical and sociological explanations, but which, in being recuperated, puts the integrity of the old paradigms at risk. Thus, there are still boundaries separating the more traditional perspectives (with their emphasis on the integrationist character of religion, or on the opposition between religion and modernity/secularization) from the more recent ones (with

⁴ The implications of this recommendation are not univocal. Normally, they would be expressed in a “return to the agents”, in order to hear their voice, and in the concern for giving them a voice in the analytical text. The conception of subjectivity that accompanies such a procedure, however, is varied: from a naive romanticization of the agents, as if the knowledge that they have of themselves and their experience conferred them with an epistemological privilege; passing through a view in which the agents’ speech, as well as the analyst’s, could have a higher or lower degree of reflexivity and consciousness of historicity; culminating in a kind of psychoanalytic reading, which is not seduced by the authority of the agents’ speech, but also admits that it is in the space of the relationship between agents and analysts that the meaning of the motivations for action is constructed, beyond what would at first prompt each of the parts’ actions. Thus, greater attention to the motivations for action does not need to be understood in a psychologistic sense that would give priority to intentionality over contextual conditioning in social action. Rather, it refers to a certain ethical-political injunction to respect the singularity of the other, to better make sense of their actions, even to criticize them.

their emphasis on the multiplicity of arrangements and overlappings between religion and society, from consensus to conflict, from the “sacred” to the “profane”). Such boundaries distinguish new and old practitioners of the sociology of religion, housing hegemonic fights within it. There are also gray zones of hybridization of variable consistency between the theories of secularization and the new theories of difference and of multiculturalism. In common, they share the effort to grasp the permanence, resurgence or transfiguration of this object for which a respectable lineage of classic social theory predicted a progressive wane and loss of plausibility/legitimacy.

We could say with reasonable accuracy that this change in focus, or sensibility, is articulated with a change in the framing of the religion question. This change takes place amidst a transition that announces a new modality of knowledge about social objects – a novelty that is difficult to define with precision because it is a moment of transition, passage, even rupture⁵. Some call this transition a crisis of the paradigms, others crisis of modernity, still others crisis of western civilization (cf. Heller et al. 1999). Whether those more or less alarmists or even the skeptics share the view that we live in the middle of a dialectic between old and new, without foreseeable or possible overcoming (depending on how modernist or

⁵ Admittedly, this image of “transition” or of “passage” is self-referential; it is part of the same discourse that seeks to describe the “objectively verifiable” tendencies. This means that speaking of the transition is already taking a position in relation to the idea of whether or not there exists a way of confronting the impasses of the religion/society relationship that is not one of rupture or of confront between incommensurable languages. It is to taking a position towards whether or not it is desirable that it happens this way. Clearly, the transition discourse is one of the forms of reading the contemporary reality, as well as the paradigms that seek to make sense of it, and it is not a given that all accept this form of reading. Conflict of interpretations.

post-modernist we are), in which the integral and unrestricted adhesion to models of analysis or action seems uninteresting, naïve, simplistic and even reckless. It is a time of experimentation, mixture, review, articulation. And although the rule prevails that it is necessary to know from where and to where something is taken, the “boundary police” of each discipline will not be able to allege inviolability of the boundaries: to its default, long ago the boundaries became porous, frayed, plastic. There is war at the boundaries, as there is boundary police, seeking to safeguard – or better, recompose – the (violated) unity of the territory. For those who got used to crossing such boundaries, there is a feeling that it is no longer a question of moving across them, but of reconstructing them in new spaces and jurisdictions, of defining new territories. For there have to be boundaries...

That said, I have announced and circumscribed the contours of my argument. I am a child of this transition and I feel fine amidst the mixed certainties regarding limits and rules on how to draw and give limits to oneself and the other, the uncanny, the uncertain, the new. But as a child of this transition I am not pressed either to announce the contours of the new territory: made out of pieces of several “*patria*” and “*fratria*”, as well as several epochs and *ethoi*, the new territory that is being formed is less defined by clear-cutness than by the enticement of being open to what is announced as coming, as emerging (cf. Burity, 1995; Derrida, 1994) – not always the entirely unknown, in many cases the long forgotten/excluded. There are old things that return and seem to have the freshness of the new; there are others that declare themselves new but cannot hide their *dejà vu*; and there are those that cannot be seen as new, because people insist on giving the small oscillations the same gaze, downplaying them as irrelevant or deformed. If the equivocation of the prefix “post” in “post-modern” is in pointing to what would come after modernity, the hyphen that connects it to “modern” has the advantage of at least showing that that which needs the prefix to define its own limits is already born divided between the old and the new, between what is its own and what is conferred/imposed by the other.

The question about what the new scientific paradigms bring to the study of religion would need, therefore, to be answered based on such coordinates: first, the new paradigms are territories of uncertain boundaries; second, what is new is not always the unknown, but

also the long forgotten, silenced, or excluded, whose return, however, is never identical to the past; third, their identity is divided between what they say about themselves and what the other (the adversary, the unconscious, culture, tradition) says in them about itself and about them.

A last preliminary remark: according to the culture of transition, drawing boundaries is a permanent task, since they are not seen as a mere legacy, as a natural given, but are admittedly necessary. This implies not only that daily action is aimed towards building, delimiting the future, the territory where we will inhabit, but also that each account that we offer about such an action draws boundaries itself. One cannot speak about everything and in general, because we do not know what “it”⁶ might be. First, let us be in agreement about what we will say and where we will do it, and start from there step by step. Such an attempt can obviously be undone by interlocutors through discussion: by refusing the agreement; questioning the general logic, the style or specific contents of the argument; by pointing out omissions, imprecisions, equivocations, sidetracks, vested interests. In this case, I suggest that we reflect initially on the configuration of the (new) paradigms in the field of social sciences and the ways in which we came to legitimize the transgression of boundaries among them or to announce their “death”. Secondly, we will look at religion as an object of study in

⁶ I let the ambiguity of “it” speak to us about several things at the same time and in no particular order of priority: “it” is the territory of the world that will come, that we can indicate, but not define with clarity; “it” is the discourse that we produce about such a world (and the world we come from), a discourse that does not know what “speaking about everything and in general” means; “it” is the unconscious, the Freudian *Id* (translated as *Ça*, in the French of Lacan), that is, in us, what and who we do not entirely know about ourselves, and what

the light of the referred paradigms, in order to highlight a blind spot in those readings that have tried to gain access to the essence of the phenomenon in a categorical way: the fleetness of the name in religion. On the one hand, in the field of religion itself, the tension between the claim to privileged access to the mysteries of transcendence, the claim to speak in its name, and the “prophetic” resistance to admit the mere identity between revelation and its institutionalized forms. On the other, between the religious field and the scientific field, the diversity of formats and religious orientations in relation to the world and to its structures – from sect to church; from sacralization to the contestation of order; from quietism to active engagement; from a moral (individual) focus to a political (collective) one; from rationalism to emotions, in many combinations. Finally, we will discuss internal possibilities for some of the paradigms for the study of religion that contemporarily vie for a discourse “proper to the object” and we propose a **politics of the sur-name**, as a strategy of reinscription of other perspectives into the hegemonic discourse of religion or on religion.

1. About the spectrality of the paradigms, which may persist despite their announced agony and death

The notion of paradigm asks, from the beginning, for a certain sense of proportionality. Because its range is not obvious. Although it is certain that it is characteristic of a paradigm to govern an undefined field of phenomena, giving them intelligibility and concatenation, according to a narrative that deploys them in space and time, it is not certain

moves us, stimulates us, and once in a while bursts in the middle of our “nicely arranged” discourse and falsifies

that all paradigms aim to account for the whole reality at every moment. We are not going to develop here, however, a typology of paradigms according to their reach and force of attraction.

The paradigms of which we speak have a precise reference in modern social theory and were formed according to the rhythm of the very expansion of modernity. Initially concerned in explaining how the “deicide” perpetrated through the rift between modernity and the medieval world could be justified and found a new order, the paradigms of social theory – and there was never only one – opposed a natural society to a civilized one, chaos to order, tradition to modernity, fixation in a hierarchical and static universe to autonomy in an open world in constant mutation.

In the context of the European colonial enterprise, while systematically facing the unknown or the radically other, social theory develops paradigms that at once (i) reinforce what the imperialist West already knew about itself, in highlighting the contrast with the negative, absent or exotic characteristics or attributes of the other, and (ii) define for the modern West a civilizing mission. During this process, concomitant to the very constitution of the social sciences, a counterpoint emerges between community and society, which reinstates the pseudo-historical speculations of 17th- and 18th-centuries social theory – giving them plausibility, through the contrast between “primitive” peoples and “modern” peoples (cf. Somers 1995b). Also, there emerges the nostalgic tone already present in one of the lines

it, and about what (whom) we can only speak retroactively (that is, as it/we will have been).

of eighteenth century social theory, the Rousseauian one (cf. Robertson 1990; 1991). In this case, it is the purity of the primitive and the organic character of the community that Europe would have lost with modernization, so that in the very act of extending the civilizing hand to the rude savage, there is a certain guilt feeling that leads to appreciate the latter's "exoticism" or to condescendingly admit that s/he would never become "one of us" (cf. Derrida 1976; Burity 1996).

It is curious how religion was inserted here by means of a double bind. On the one hand, witness to a world that was disappearing through the advance of the Enlightenment and civilization, religion was seen to be institutionalized and rationalized in the West in contrast with that of the "primitive peoples", but was progressively destined to the private domain while the latter peoples still maintained it as/in the public space and basis for daily language. On the other hand, the religion of the primitive was said to contain *in nuce* the most fundamental elements of the phenomenon, covered by layers of institutionalization or by the progressive (unnecessary?) process of becoming complex which involved the religious structures and practices. Through the double bind, therefore, religion corresponded to the civilizing pole when it was a question of the colonial relationship of Europe (and of modern social theory) with the other. However, its destiny was to join the fate of the "community" when it was a question of determining which role would be fitting for it in a civilized society: its removal from the public sphere, its confinement to the sphere of intimacy. But disputes persisted about the meaning of the phenomenon in this terrain of community – a secret of vitality and purity or an index of backwardness and superstition, which would be illuminated by the institutional, rationalized form of western religion, the church (or the sect)?

In the historical and scientific domains, the clash between Enlightenment and Romanticism added to the emergence of contradictions and resistances on the part of the colonized peoples or between different currents of modern social theory, as regards the relationship between capitalist development (imperialism) and the refusal of colonialism (local, national, ethnic, religious, cultural interests), urban growth and diversity of urban groups and cultures. Positions developed that valued constitutive functions of subjectivity and of cognitive apprehension of reality in the experience of culture. The inversion through which

it was the continuities among cultures that had to be explained in relation to the discontinuities “was equivalent to the abandonment of the idea that the material (biological) unity would have to correspond, necessarily, to spiritual unity” (Soares 1994:73).

What we have offered so far is a brief narrative of the historical framework of the relationships between Western modernity and its other(s), which allows us to speak of modernity as a project. A project which is intellectually expressed in the emergence of discourses about the other that took upon themselves the task of describing objectively and rigorously social structures and practices, across cultural and national boundaries, of the peoples brought into the orbit of modernity. We can thus perceive – though in a synthetic and generic form – the existing bond between the expansion of modernity and the constitution of the paradigms of the social sciences.

Such paradigms were formed together with the modern pretension of comprehending the real conceptually. **Comprehending**: to understand and master, to grasp, in the double sense of domesticating ignorance and confiscate the idiomatic, the singularity, in order to exhibit it in the museum of the universal. The discourse represents the real, according to the classic Hegelian homology between the former and reason. The program of comprehension, beyond the critical work aimed at the European society itself, included practical long term and immediate objectives: from **knowledge** of the worlds that were being “discovered” by the maritime discoveries and by colonization to the **civilizing and modernizing work** of the non-European and non-North-American peoples. Messianism of reason hand in hand – though sometimes at odds – with the messianism of capital.

What we call crisis of the paradigms and the cultural context in which new paradigms appear have a lineage longer than the conjuncture of the 1980’s and 1990’s would have us believe. As there has never been a single paradigm for understanding the social, from very early the candid claim of being the access key to reality was tangled in the dispute for which of the paradigms would most precisely represent the real. This involved clashes of similar claims, which could not see themselves as part of a single theoretical space, although, let us say it emphatically, it was no longer a question of killing or dying for the ideas of society that each one spoused (except in this marriage of theory and practice that was at the root of the

revolutionary projects of modernity, but outside of the gradually professionalized space of the social sciences). Such clashes were spaces of delimitation of the disciplines, with their own objects, theories and methods, to demand “conversion” from their practitioners, uncontested loyalty and disputes for superiority.

Let’s pick up the pace. Together with the mutual critiques – and/or subsequent self-criticisms – the perception arose that it was not possible to see everything, the paradigm being, even though the best, a point of view that did not exhaust the multiple perspectives of the real. First act of a **holistic drama** that prescribed extending the “alliances” in order to better understand, to join different perspectives in a meta-theory of the real. This effort to replace what were formerly claims of each paradigm to represent a higher level of achievement, where we would have the aggregated effect of the partial contributions of each discipline, is at the root of some kind of “theoretical ecumenism”. This began speaking of frontier dialogues between disciplines, then favored joint efforts around common “themes”, as seen from the each discipline’s own perspective – so-called multi-disciplinarity – until it reached one of the possible meanings of interdisciplinarity, namely, that which admits the existence of objects that do not lend themselves to the full interrogation of any discipline in particular, but that can be grasped (but still not constructed, since they would precisely already exist, by means of an ex-uberance that resists any mono-linguistic description) by the multidimensional lens of a scientific research strategy.

The problem became more acute when, after having looked frequently at the real “out there”, social theory looked toward itself. Reflexivity. Here, the paradigmatic logic suffered three deep interruptions: (i) the acceptance that paradigms are not disinterested and purely objective, but have a project to fulfill, as they pre-understand the reality that they would supposedly describe in its objectivity; (ii) the recognition that the paradigms are not the work of systematizing geniuses but the result of collective work in which a more or less common language is developed, in a more or less cohesive (but not homogeneous) community – intersubjectivity; and (iii) the cultural-linguistic turn, through which it is admitted that the reality described by paradigms is contingent upon the system of relations established by its concepts; the historical conditions of their emergence and development; and the conflict of

interpretations that each paradigm establishes with other systems of reference. Not only this, but also the interference, the interaction is admitted between representations of reality and its practical (re)configuration, beyond the descriptivist model in the social sciences, based on the (idealized) model of the natural sciences⁷.

Through such interruptions, a double process of relativization and disinvestment occurs. The loss of comprehensiveness, dynamism, and persuasion of the issues raised by the paradigms of each discipline (in the double sense of this possessive: of the disciplines as paradigms, and of the prevailing paradigms in each one) leads to a decentering of its explanatory power. The objects escape the orbit of the model, new objects emerge that cannot be apprehended by it, more localized knowledge shows greater connection with the demands of the new territories of the social⁸.

Therefore, the attractiveness of adhering to a paradigm loses momentum, allowing for some disinvestment through an attitude that is more curious attitude toward other knowledges and more disenchanted toward the appeal for “conversion”, loyalty and priority, that each paradigm makes.

⁷ For an instigating review of the social sciences in light of a discussion about the change of paradigms, cf. Comissão Gulbenkian (1996).

⁸ It is necessary to slightly correct this statement in the light of what was said at the end of the previous paragraph, because a new theoretical sensitivity towards the relation between language and action led, from logical positivism to post-structuralism, to a **performative** conception of the analysis of (conceptual or sociological) objects. In this case, the latter do not simply exceed the paradigms, nor do they emerge outside any discursive investment. What there is in the world, to be seen, grasped or analyzed is also created by the language that intends to describe it. Becoming paradigmatic or inscribed in a paradigm, in this sense, depends on an action in the world, on a cultural or political practice. End of science as contemplation of the world.

It is also possible that the disinvestment occurs only in relation to that paradigm which one had joined passionately, thereby transferring all expectations toward the new one(s). In this case, one does not lose faith in the paradigm as such, only in that particular one that is abandoned. In both cases, a Kuhnian warning prevails: one does not adopt a paradigm for being the one that most rationally, rigorously and objectively grasps the objects of the social world, nor does one leave it for having been definitively exhausted. Disinvestment in a paradigm may occur from conditions that are contingent and even entirely outside of it. The death of paradigms is not always natural! And thus, the outcome of the holistic drama – that is, of a multi/inter-disciplinarity that would give us ever greater access to the truth of the real, in its most diverse dimensions – would seem to point to the agony and death of the paradigms, leaving knowledge to the drift of intuitions, particular wisdoms, multiple and partial biases, fragmentation ...

But whoever thinks that we are facing an entropic process of disintegration of paradigms, of dissolution of their “great narratives”, is thoroughly mistaken. What one witnesses today may well be the death of **some** paradigms. It could be said that there is a **wish** to bury the very notion of paradigm. And to a certain extent, this is a welcome desire. But one does not see any disappearance of paradigms, nor of the idea of paradigm⁹. What is

⁹ There really is a growing visibility of a “holistic paradigm”, hybrid between a rationalist and a mystical conceptions of the real, reemergence of a proto-modern, cosmologic and esoteric science. This is, however, under the new circumstances, only a particularized holism, the holism of those who believe and endorse such paradigm. A questioned holism. Quite different from the holistic claim that, under the regimen of multi- or interdisciplinarity, tried to recover the conditions of possibility of a scientific discourse co-extensive to the truth about the real.

witnessed is a redefinition of paradigms, which become circumscribed and lose their aura of universality; they enter in dispute with others even in those domains in which they still intend to hold special validity. From gods they are turned into idols, or from a single and sovereign god, they become part of a pantheon, possibly involved in a war of interpretations, in a war of gods! Not everything there has the same dimension or quality, not everything survives very long; everything becomes composed, articulated, disfigured in contact with other competitors. But the superiority and the stability of **the** paradigm (in the singular) is no longer a given; it is, rather, **a project to build in a terrain of moving boundaries. A politics of knowledge.**

Amidst the loss of credibility of the paradigms, it is understandable that former opponents **return** with claims to revenge, as it is also understandable that, when the attitude of relativization reaches (almost) all of the existing paradigms, the pragmatic reason of bricolage and modeling recommends joining the pieces of what remained and crafting something new. Revisiting the mound of ruins in search of intelligibility or tools to face up to the new, since this does not burst forth *ex fiat*; even its novelty itself needs a parameter in comparison to what came before, it is relational. Such novelty, therefore, will be haunted by two images of the apparition, of **spectrality**¹⁰: the new constitutes itself from pieces of the old, and owes it its life; and what has died is never entirely prevented from “returning”. Spectrality warns us against any discourse about the **death** of the paradigms, as well as about

¹⁰ The idea of spectrality is taken here from two distinct contributions: Derrida (1994) and Žižek (1996). See also Burity (1995).

the **return** of the old in “flesh and blood”, indicating rather the non-contemporaneity of the present with itself, the non-linearity and non-homogeneity of the time lived by us: traditions never simply die; they are reinvented or grafted in pieces onto new discourses, even when these are not regulated by the same references as those traditions. But what returns is never the same, we cannot even be sure that the specter is not a snare, a mystification, a hasty recognition.

The new paradigms, therefore, do not simply leave behind, definitively, explanatory models in crisis or disuse. On the other hand, the new paradigms are not a mere continuity of what came before. Between the new and the old, the dead and the alive, the new paradigms are rounded by the specter of what is no longer and what is not clearly formed yet, what is still to come. The new paradigms can no longer rely on the imperial attitude of the classics of the modern social theory. Neither can they fulfill the expectation of being the step beyond – and out of – the contradictions and aporias that dissolved the unqualified adhesion to the disciplinary paradigms.

2. On the reserve of the name and the social sciences of religion

One of the primary consequences for the study of religion of this new attitude toward paradigms is that of the revaluation of a certain nominalism – historicist and mitigated by a dose of realism¹¹ –, for which the “essence” of the phenomenon is historically contingent

¹¹ In other words, siding with realism in the old dispute against idealism about the existence of a world independent of thought, such a nominalism abandons objectivist substantialism, which believes in the coincidence (or its necessity) of the real and the concept. Giving a name is (re)building the being of the objects –

upon the different configurations that it assumes in time and space, even when aspects from previous moments remain in later forms. The definition of religion with which each paradigm works is relativized not so much in relation to another, better and truer, one found elsewhere – whether another social theory of religion, or one of the theological or “practical” discourses of religions – but in terms of the possibility of stabilizing a universal, transcendental meaning under the term “religion”. With regard to the latter it is always essential to ask: which religion? Whose? Where? When? Relating to what?

The attention to the question of the **name** implies maintaining a distance between, on the one hand, concrete individual and collective, spontaneous and institutionalized religious expressions, and, on the other, the self-definition with which they present themselves and intend to organize the space of their validity, legality and plausibility, as well as to define the boundaries of inside and outside, of authentic and inauthentic¹². The question of the name, however, does not demand a skeptical look towards the articulation between religious experience and the discourse about it. It is not a fundamentalist purism, guarding the originary truth of the name: **there has always be a bind** between experience and discourse

though not their existence (cf. Burity 1997; Laclau 1990). As the name does not correspond naturally, biunivocally to the object, the latter changes when redescribed in the midst of the process of oscillation and dispute for the meaning of the objects that characterize a world in which no truth is final or uncontested (cf. Žižek 1992).

¹² The distance to which I am referring is never just calculated, planned. It is not always desired by the agents involved in the plot, nor is it always perceived by the analyst, who may tend to adjudicate between the competing articulations (the prevailing and the alternative ones) in terms of which would be more “appropriate” to the nature of the object. The distance cannot be calculated either, because the “unintended effects” of action surpass the classificatory systems and the attempts at normalization, hegemonization and counter-hegemonization of the theoretical or institutional field which is the object of dispute.

on it, and there are always, *ex post facto*, good reasons for this. What such a question adds is that **the articulation occurs contingently**, *vis-à-vis* a constitutive outside – an exterior, an other, an unthought, an excluded element – that is never entirely symbolized, and never entirely neutralized or removed. For this outside is the condition for the very identity of a discourse/experience. This outside cuts across the field of religious experience and/or of religious discourse, marking them as a lacking structure (Lacan), destined to be subverted by historical conditions that it cannot administrate or confront; by new antagonists that destabilize the prevailing theoretical-practical arrangement; and/or by unresolved “impasses” in relation to the elements (actors, speeches and practices) excluded throughout the constitution of the hegemonic religious structure.

In these circumstances, the bind is loosened, the normality of the association between the name and the thing proves arbitrary and, sometimes, intolerable; the neutrality with which relations were established and programs of action were put into movement is problematized. The name lacks something, it cannot be **only** this thing out there, it cannot be this thing out there **anymore**, it is not **possible** that it is this thing out there. It becomes unavoidable to denounce the name, to show its inadequacy, to question its justice. Saving the name, changing the name, supplementing the name (giving it “sur-names”): it is well known how many of these modalities of reservation against the “official”, “institutionalized” name constitute new fields of knowledge about religion or new modalities of religion. But the actual bind, in its “formalism”, does not disappear. It is necessary to remake it.

Hence, the structurality of the bind between experience and discourse again mobilizes alternative discourses, “deviating” practices, dissenting actors. Things become “clear” to them: what “could not be seen” before given the normative force of the dominant arrangement starts to be “perceived”, the justifications that once seemed to apply only to the adversaries of the discourse now in crisis appear as self-justifications, even as legitimating excuses for decisions made by the wardens of religious power or the social theory of religion under criticism.

Such is the force of this evidence that new definitions are proposed as irresistible. It is necessary to revise. It is necessary to reform the institutionalized field of the religion in

question. It is necessary to refashion discourse (that is, not speech, but the system of relations between the different elements constitutive of the meaning of religion, theoretical as well as practical, linguistic as well as non-linguistic ones). And so, there emerges an alternative discourse, an alternative experience, and perhaps a new paradigm.

Depending on the historical awareness of the proposed new arrangement, it may see itself as a return to originary truth; as a step forward demanded by new social or theoretico-epistemological conditions; as a radical break with what came before, inaugurating a new experience of religion; as a contextual, tentative response, to be worked out continuously in view of its consolidation. There are different possibilities of reconstituting the bind. What prevails is the need for relation, articulation. And the more conflictive the situation of crisis is the less such a need will be perceived. For then the parties in conflict tend to claim the urgency or the authority of a privileged access to reality as alibis of their actual fight for control of enunciation and of the institutions in which the latter takes place. The conflict obscures the contingency of criticized and criticizing positions.

The question of the name, therefore, does not recover a transcendental meaning of religion, to be preserved at all cost from the distortions imposed by the concrete forms of its manifestation or institutionalization. The **emptiness of the name** deprives religion of categorical contents, now disorganizing the historical accounts; now defying orthodoxy; now questioning objectivizing, sociologizing description; now showing an uncomfortable ambiguity toward compromising situations, which alternates positions that are unreconcilable but equally taken **in the name** of faith, God, the church, the harmony between the individual and cosmic forces, esoteric *autopoiesis*, or academic canons of the study of religion. The emptiness of the name fractures the very idea that religion can be understood as a genre from which many species are derived. It is obvious that certain religious contents or forms lend themselves to transference, grouping and repetitions in different contexts; the issue however is what each new context demands for the possibility of religion to “*aggiornare*” there (cf. Burity 1998). By indefinitely differentiating itself, nothing can prevent the “same” of religion, its “in itself” and “for itself”, to be unrecoverably lost in the historical and singularized erring of multiple paths. Who will gather and summarize them into the unit of a

name – religion, as **the** common genre of countless species – seems to us an easy question to answer, but that does little to help solve the discomfort: no one.

On the other hand, this perspective does not cancel out the possibility of the **critique of religion**. Only it is no longer a question of a critique aimed at the heart of the phenomenon, since one no longer works with the hypothesis of a hard, fixed, defining center or nucleus of what that phenomenon is. Neither is critique located on another place that would be sheltered from the undoing of foundations revealed in the so-called crisis of paradigms, free from the contingency and the partiality of knowledges. Criticizing means submitting a given religious manifestation to the test of values external to it, for which one cannot help but assume full responsibility (which is not the case when trusting in ineluctable historical laws, in the certainty of the theoretical-methodological procedures of a given paradigm, or in a providence which cunningly or ironically leads history toward a certain end), without the claim to seeing what nobody could ever do or to possessing a privileged access to the most intimate truth of the phenomenon. The critique is based on a **misunderstanding** – it is, in the eyes of those criticized, a falsification, misunderstanding or challenge, but in the eye of the critics, it amounts to unveiling, demystification or rectification – which, as Rancière highlights regarding politics (1996:47-70), does not refer to lacking information, the ambiguity of the words or the bad faith of some of the interlocutors, but to the setting up of a scene, to the identification of an injury, a damage, or demand for reparation (whether epistemological, economic, or political), in which the **what**, the **who** and the **where** are in question. Critique calls for another world, another place, another reason, another arrangement of the actors involved, which produce, through misunderstanding, the possibility of reorganizing the space and the identities in question. Therefore, the contours of criticism are marked by the conditions in which it occurs and they will pass together with them.

3. From integration to exhaustion, which could well be a rebirth

Though one could group together the different paradigms of religion based on an epochal perspective, that of modernity, in its fundamental opposition to tradition, the attention to the question of the name recommends that we multiply the paths. And there is no difficulty at all in this, if we admit that modernity does not have a single source, has not produced a single form of relation with religion and did not leave untouched the religiosity and religious institutions deriving from the medieval period. Through one or another of these indicators, there are different “religions” – definitions, experiences, institutional formats, confessions. And there is not, through all of them, a common denominator; it is more a question of a series of Wittgensteinian family resemblances, which define amongst themselves a regularity of “form”, not necessarily of content¹³, although what gives them their similarity is the presence of distinctive traits that are as much in the order of form as content. This is what allows, for example, parallels, analogies, comparisons to be established – for analytical or controversial ends – between biblical prophetism and the iconoclasm of the radical Reform, between heretical gnosticism and the Johanne tradition, between primitive Christianity and Mennonite communitarianism, between Brazilian Pentecostal religiosity and popular Catholicism, between Christian mysticism and New Age religiosity. But it is also the **pragmatic** and **non-categorical** character of these approximations, which prompt the need

¹³ The very fact that the origin of the term religion is contested should warn us that we are not speaking of the same “thing” if we are in India, Tibet, Russia, Western Europe or Brazil. Etymologically, it is not beyond question that religion comes from the Latin *religare* (to bind, to reconnect), as Benveniste warns, who identifies another root for the term, *relegere* (to gather, to collect, to fulfill conscientiously) – thus referring to the observance of institutional rules or rituals. More: some civilizations have not even developed an equivalent

for identifying the rule of variation, that is, the form of marking of the difference through which each case mentioned holds its singularity and its distance in relation to the other.

It is not only a question of different relations between modernity and religion, but inside each of the existing paradigms of the study of religion in the social sciences different possibilities have been configured, as we will see.

Whether by definition, characterization or destiny, modernity houses many religions, even when we speak of only one of them. And an “ecumenical” strategy of joining the “partial” contributions into an “broader” definition will not suffice, as we have already said above. Surely, part of the work to be done is to recognize such partial contributions; what is not so sure is whether the form of this recognition is a fusion into a macro-explanation. In this case, the problem would immediately come forth of the unifying criteria, of the language that would translate the multiplicity into a set simultaneously coherent and faithful to the “original” problematic. This problem does not refer only to the availability of a certain *lingua franca*, but also its justification and ability to attract adherence and consensus. As “affiliation” to a paradigm is, at least in part, an act of identification (in the strictly psychoanalytical sense of the term), it is more sensible to explore some of the movements internal to such paradigms, whether inherited or recently emerged, than trying to join their partial perspectives together in a scrutinizing and revealing gaze of the religious “thing”.

Let us take briefly four of the main paradigms that were developed for the study of religion in the twentieth century, in the social sciences: functionalism (social integration;

term, which, at least, puts under suspicion the universality of the Western (Christian) definition of religion (cf.

model of symbolic function), structuralism (class, market, myth); the theory of modernization; and post-modernity. According to the conditions described so far, they are not radically discontinuous, but their points of continuity are not essentially formal or essentially substantive. Space does not allow us to explore such reminiscences and connections, so that we will stick to their internal (and contradictory) movements, reminding only one thing: that the internal heterogeneity of these paradigms does not refer to some originary deficiency, but to the fact that their meaning does not exist outside of a system of relations with other paradigms, or with other versions of the “same” paradigm. It is in contact (dialogue, confrontation, instrumental appropriation or incorporation) with other paradigms that not only the hegemonic, orthodoxy version appears, but the internal differentiation of each paradigm takes place, almost always from the exploration of possibilities that have been abandoned or excluded during its own history.

In the case of the functional paradigm, whose great name in sociology is Durkheim, but which possesses a respectable anthropological lineage and an indirect correspondence in political science, two paths converge. On the one hand, the idea that modernity performs a break in the order of the traditional values that, though replacing their content, cannot do without a value order as such. Thus, just like religion was an element of cohesion for the traditional order, the modern values of a civil religion would need to take place, in order to solve the problem of order in a society that got rid of the transcendent foundations of stability, legitimacy, truth and justice. On the other hand, the idea that modernization

advances through the destruction of “backward” forms of life that had hitherto not been submitted to the crisis between tradition and modernity, leads to a gradual distinction between a form of social organization based on mechanical ties and another, based on organic ties, which in German sociology was ultimately described by the society/community pair: *Gesellschaft/Gemeinschaft*.

The integrating function that religion fulfilled in the traditional order would not be specific of the latter, but represents a challenge in the conditions of modern sociability. What modernity sets off is a dislocation in the function and situation of religion: first, religion in a specific sense, is regionalized, becoming one of the institutions of the society, with the main attribution of providing meaning to the individual for his/her existence and place in the society; secondly, religion ceases to be the point of anchorage of social order and vacates the public sphere, where civil power and a plurality of values and practices come to prevail. Regionalization and loss of monopoly, therefore. However, the idea that religion would be the best example of the function of symbolization, without which a possible society does not exist, contributed to a double and scandalous Durkheimian thesis: that every religion is true, because it corresponds to concrete social needs, and that there will never cease to be religion, because the place of God was occupied in modernity by society itself.

A competing paradigm is exemplarily associated with the contribution of Marxism. Its emphasis on the structural dimension is articulated to the problematic of modernization to make way for a theory of religion as a superstructural reflection of a form of organization of material production based on private property and class division. Here there are several elements to articulate: a theory of the succession of modes of production leading to capitalism and, from there, to socialism; a theory that “ideas” and systems of representation correspond to a sphere derived from the material structure of society (holding more or less autonomy as the vector of determination is more or less unidirectional); an idea that religion exists given the need for compensation or symbolic justification of the relations of oppression and domination, and that it will become superfluous in a situation in which such relations have been abolished.

There are many Marxisms, as there are more than one Marx and more than one Engels, and although in all of them the structural principle prevails (referring to classes, the organization of the economic sphere, the differentiation of levels, or to a hermeneutic criterion assigning priority to the historico-structural over the conjunctural moment), the possibilities of thematizing religion multiply. A good part of the tradition is oriented by the proposition of a critique of the legitimating character of religion, which has assumed theoretical (in a Marxist sociology of religion) and practical contours (in the prohibition or harassing of religious practice in the former socialist countries). But there are certain more “ambiguous” orientations, such as the Gramscian or Benjaminian lineages, which combine that critique with a certain idea that structurality refers to the ineradicability of the “religious moment” (if not of the religious institutions).

There are, still, two other forms of elaboration of the structural approach. One, in a more sociological vein, takes the situation of the market as shaping the form and content of religion, and the other, in a more anthropological vein, takes the case of myth and its transformations and repetitions in certain symbolic systems, in search of non-varying elements that would cut across the diversity of concrete forms of its manifestation. The first case is not very different from the Marxist reading, except for the value attributed to the link: while Marxism would say that by being modeled according to an image of the market, religion is a reflection of this and supports it, the market approach tends to conceive such a link as **positive** or, at least, as an inevitable result of the process of **secularization** – fed by religious conflict itself in modernity or tracing back to antiquity, in the Judaic-Christian

tradition¹⁴. The market reading becomes increasingly appealing, eager to pass from the mere use of an applied economic vocabulary to the analysis of religion – which would be a certain practice of displacement of meaning, of metaphorization – to the claim that there is in fact a market of faith, mirroring the contemporary culture of mass consumption, oscillating according to demand, keen to produce marketing strategies for religious products, etc. The market model becomes the synthesis of all social experience, through a reductionist trend that reinstates the economicism of the 1970's and intends to raise itself to the status of a new *doxa* on religion.

In the second case, religion is an index of the cultural structure of a society – occupying a central position in so-called primitive societies, and handing down a structure of myth as a heuristic principle for the analysis of modern societies themselves. The problematic of secularization only plays here a secondary role, since the emphasis on invariance and the formal configuration of the system of relations that organizes culture turns suspicious the insistence in a sequence tending towards the exhaustion of the religious element. The very idea of society is founded on myth, constitutes itself through it. The concept of religion being de-institutionalized, its “dispersion” throughout the social in the form of social practice, cultural matrix, civil religion, leads to a comprehensive concern that stops short of the evolutionism of the secularization thesis.

¹⁴ In one of its variants, associated to names like Iannaccone, Stark and Finke, for example, the market reading is offered as a critical evidence against the theory of secularization, as an indicator of the vigor of the phenomenon. The interpretative framework used, however, assumes the market form as a description of the structure of the religious phenomenon in contemporary societies (cf. Iannaccone and Finke 1993; Iannaccone, Finke and Stark 1997; Guerra 2000).

The functional and structural approaches are among the most important ones to appear under the problematic of modernization. Much of the scientific study of religion happened under the umbrella of versions of the former paradigms. If we call “mainstream” those currents that did not distance themselves significantly from the problems and ways of solving them of functionalism and structuralism, we could say that the great theme was that of modernity: (i) modernity confronting tradition (in turn, protected by religion and by the Church); (ii) modernity seeking a regimen of self-founded legitimation, without reference to principles based on heteronomous authority; (iii) modernity that, as it expanded, destroyed “backward” forms of life, but sees itself in the mirror of its own history (and anticipates, for the peoples that are being attracted into its orbit, the dilemmas and challenges already experienced by it); (iv) modernity set up as a model of civilization, promise of liberty and well-being, certainty of a glorious future; (v) modernity oscillating between the primacy of technique and instrumental rationality and the resistances of democratic participation and careful consideration of means and ends¹⁵.

The paradigm of modernization, in this case, was never contrary or alien to the former ones. But it certainly replaced them, especially in sociology and political science, where it became the main narrative of development, particularly between the 1950’s and 1960’s. The canonical form of this narrative corresponds to the transition of traditional (or pre-modern) societies to modern society, via economic development (industrialization, urbanization,

¹⁵ A more comprehensive analysis of the relation between religion and modernity, which explores different dimensions, both historical and theoretical, of the theme, can be read in Benavides (1998). See also Lawrence (1998:340-45).

introduction or expansion of a market economy and of a rational-bureaucratic political structure). Such a transition would lead to changes in social practices and cultural matrices of the traditional societies, which would correspond to a process of growing individualization, stabilization of conflicts through a controlled and efficient system of demands (inputs) and goods or public decisions (outputs), and breaks with hierarchical or hierocratic patterns of authority and power, with implications for the set of cultural traditions of those societies (cf. Taylor 1998:1-6). According to this narrative, religion appears as a structure strongly associated to the traditional order that ceases to exist and is destined to be circumscribed to the private and individual dimension of daily life, despite its institutions being legally recognized and operating publicly. In the extreme case, religion ceases to exist as a social force, being replaced by the processes of cultural integration of an ideal modern society (civic culture, solidarity determined by one's position in the social structure, individualism, cultural industry, etc.).

At the root of the modernization paradigm were two elements, one philosophical and one political, which gave it coherency and persuasive force: first, the assumption that Western European societies and the United States had defined in their historical trajectory, let us say, from the 14th to the 20th centuries, a model of universal character, which synthesized the greatest achievements of humanity and should be recapitulated by as many peoples aspired to the benefits of scientific and economic-social progress. The standards of social welfare and civility of the countries of advanced capitalism were connected to historical forms at once replicable and inevitable. The second, political element refers to the timing in which the spread of the modernization paradigm intensified: the context of post-World War II, of the capitalism-socialism emulation, which led the old colonial powers and the new hegemonic actor of world politics, the United States, to claim for themselves the mission of freeing the peripheral societies of the world then emerging from the threat of communism. In this way, whether through the "testimony of history", or through the ideological struggle against the socialist alternative, it seemed imperative that the poor and "traditional" countries committed themselves to the saga of development. In this project little else was left to religion but to occupy the sphere of providing "meaning" against the anomic tendencies of

modernization, or assuming the role of a reactionary force, bastion of an order bound to give way to the forces of change. In both cases, the narrative of secularization gained strength.

Whether this legacy were abandoned or not, new problematics have been constituted in the last three or four decades. The linguistic turn of the 1960's stabilized itself little by little as a cultural turn, although between them we have witnessed a period of great emphasis on conflict and the socially determined character of religion – which is not surprising, given that these three views appear in the structuralist tradition, even when not together. The emphasis on conflict initiated a political reading of religion or applied to religion, for example in Bourdieu (1982) and Portelli (1985), which paved the way so that the introduction of the cultural thematic would not represent a step back into the limitations of functionalist culturalism (cf. Alexander and Seidman 1995; Somers 1995a; Calhoun 1995; Williams 1983, 2000; Hall 1997). The question of language, then, appears related to the question of difference and multiculturalism, of multiplicity of identities (in the double sense of many identities and multiple identities) that maintain political relations between them. That is, beyond the biological, ethnic, national, or class essentialism that may nurture them, they are distributed and gathered together, internally and among them, through relationships of power, hierarchization and classification processes, and definitions of the frontiers, which are unable to resort to naturalistic, neutral, accepted-by-all principles so as to legitimate or impose themselves. In summary, there is an ongoing modulation, that we could provisionally call post-modern, in which integration and conflict, reason and emotion, secularization and sacralization, culture and politics, objectivism and subjectivism are intertwined, without allowing one to know any longer the limits of their drift, their dissemination (cf. Maffesoli 1996, 1997; Milbank 1992; Raschke 1992; Küng 1991; Hervieu-Léger 1997; Donegani 1995; Anjos 1996; Masuzawa 1998).

According to this post-modern sensitivity, however, one can return to a radicalized version of the former paradigms, in a clear secularizing direction, as much as one can take up such an “empathy” for the religious phenomenon that practically declines to scrutinize it. In the first case, and in way that is in blatant contradiction with the anti-essentialist drive that it seeks to represent, post-modernism frames religion as an archetype of the meta-narratives,

totalizing discourses, the substantialist logic of a hidden truth to be revealed under the appearances of the objects. Religion would be one of the first to suffer the strike of the post-modern transition, which would reduce it to ashes or shadows of spirit (cf. Berry and Wernick 1992; Jeffrey 1999). Softer versions would insist on the proliferation – and regionalization – of small discourses with unchallengeable validity claims, small essentialisms in conflict within a proliferation of spaces.

In the second case, religion would be something that escaped the modernizing tide, the *hybris* of the Enlightened or technical-instrumental reason, and which would either withhold reserves of meaning to face the nomadism of post-modern life in a limited, provisional and tentative way, or be a form of knowledge and experience of equal worth to any other, not deserving, thus, any refusal or criticism greater than that directed to anything else one does not feel identified with. Here, there is an affirmation of religion or a condescendence towards it that takes it as pure facticity, as appearance without depth, as insurmountable plurality. In all this, post-modernism comes close to the market model mentioned above, or explores plurality as a sign of such a richness in contemporary social experience that allows one to be many things at a time, or in different moments, without the concern for reducing this experience to a concept, an institution, a stable and rigorously consequential discourse.

4. A politics of the sur-name, or why the discourses of/on religion reside in paradigms that cannot “save” them

What is tendentially noticed in the efforts to account for the new boundaries of religion is an experimentation with paradigms, which can be more instrumental or more articulatory¹⁶, and which can represent a re-flection over them by means of instruments that are not their own, but were developed somewhere else.

Bricolage becomes an enticing imaginary in this situation. Whether as a matter of principle or just while waiting for the consolidation of a new paradigm – since this possibility will never be entirely out of the question – matters little. What matters is the impatience in the face of “hard” reassertions of the objectivity of the phenomenon or, moreover, of classic explanations. In the meantime, an oscillation seems to prevail between the idea of an exuberance of the object and that of its non-essentiality seem, of its continuous construction and deconstruction, by means of remainders the “return” when least expected.

¹⁶ The distinction implied here is that an instrumental relation with the paradigms gathers the lessons of their crisis – as closed systems of explanations and classifications of the real – in an eclectic direction: whatever is most at hand or to the liking of the researcher is used, or priority is even given to the object whose complexity would suggest the usage of distinct approaches simultaneously. In any case, there is a lasting assumption here regarding the surplus of meaning or to the freedom of the object vis-à-vis the social and conceptual systems that seek to normalize and control it. The articulatory relationship, in turn, would point to working on the paradigms in such a way that, despite taking their specific differences seriously – which demands a theoretic and methodological effort in order to make them dialogue –, would not recognize the formers’ claim to closure, either in the most obvious sense of being able to explain everything, or in the sense of governing entirely the conditions of operation of their own concepts and procedures. In the articulatory relationship, it is not the real that is too rich to be captured by the lens of a single paradigm. It is the closure of the real that leaves, in each paradigm, an inassimilable, intolerable remainder, which disturbs the order achieved by the paradigmatic discourse. The remainder is not simply “out there”. It is an effect of the paradigm, of the type of relationship that is established inside it between the objects and concept that it mobilizes. Through the articulatory practice, one can, then, do something more than adding together fractions of paradigms in order to account for an exuberant object. One can question the identity of the object to itself, exploring the consequences of its “migration” from one system of relations to another. This can be done from within any paradigm, depending on the “game” that it allows for and on the researcher’s identificatory relation with it, on his/her belonging to a certain “tradition” (cf. Burity 1995).

We are not simply leaving modernity – if this means that it is disintegrating and falling behind. We are not returning to a sacralized pre-modern world. We are not advancing toward an even more radically secularized world. We are not living in a tendentially era of undistorted communication. We are not moving towards a mounting “dialogue of deafs” or a Babel of self-referential and intolerant groups and discourses. We are not living a crisis of civilization that announces some kind of “post-West”. We are not facing the culmination of the civilizing process that we call modern. There is no pure religiosity. There is no ban of the religion-form from the sociological or cognitive structures of society.

How many of such negations must we offer in order to sufficiently stress that the crisis of paradigms has not left us orphans of them, but tries to teach us that we cannot live within only one of them? How many negatives must we add to mark an experiential horizon (rational, emotional, organizational) in which we can draw at least some of the basic consequences of the “death of God” and the transvaluation of values: to receive without resentment what our times offer us; to vigorously criticize without claiming to finally having reached the Olympus of knowledge; to assume the need for values without a claim to superiority; to participate in a group or institution without being dissolved in them; to think with feeling; to act with contemplation; to articulate with distancing?

Such denials are not absolute. Their character is controversial. They are admittedly falsifiable and, maybe should at once be pronounced in view of being refuted, since their aim is not to suggest the description of a vacuum, but to deny a categorical “yes” or “no”. Behind each one of them there is an “also”, a “yes, but still ...”, a “neither/nor, but something else”. Thus, we are not saying: “there is no evidence of a crisis of modernity”; “there is no evidence of a pre-modern, intolerant and authoritarian religiosity”. We are saying: “let us take it easier: each one of these apparently so self-sufficient and self-evident descriptions is in principle under scrutiny on the part of many others, and not just those that would be their radical opposite”. It is evidence that became a problem, something to be explained and even justified.

In a word, it is advisable to maintain the reserve of the name, knowing that it is not a question of a storage place, a chest of contents always equal to each other, but a place of

resistance to definitively attributing the name, for knowing that it does not have an essential and unchanging content. An insistence in keeping the course of events open; in always recasting the questions of adequacy, usurpation, deformation, and, especially, the question of the new and its relation to the old. We do not all need to be Nietzschean to welcome the recommendation to keep dreaming knowing that we are dreaming. Maybe in our own local tradition – scientific, social or religious – there already exists a “sur-name” for this.

In the Western tradition there are at least two sur-names as regards religion: the *via negativa* and the social criticism of religion. Through different paths, and bearing some quite diverging consequences, both point to implications that are today familiar to us, and for some practitioners of the social sciences of religion, not contradictory to each other. From the *via negativa* comes a call to experiment with the limits of reason – recognizing its limits, but refusing to abandon it, to delve into pure silence or in disconnected babbling. Exploring paradox, aporia, without surrendering to the paralysis that they induce. From the social criticism of religion, in turn, comes the insistence on historicity, the arbitrariness of choices made in name of the transcendental and immemorial truth or of authority institutionalized as tradition. The refusal to accept as desirable what presents itself as a given, in view of social places whence one can imagine alternative worlds, with or without religion.

The sur-name is not the name *par excellence*, the transcendental signifier. It is **one more** name that, through the fragile refusal of the concept as a copy of the real or through the insecurity of a social position assumed at the present time, risks **giving name to**, assigning through the deceitful formula of the copula (*x is y*) the identity between a subject and a predicate of unstable and even improbable bonds. Just one more name, even if it manages to impose itself broadly and lastingly, the sur-name is however witness that there are many names, perhaps simultaneously. Names that do not simply say something in another way, but re-invent, or create something new.

The sur-name still speaks of an **affiliation** or even, as in Spanish, an **apelido**. In this sense, the contextual, familiar/familial element is reinforced, both as a weapon of criticism and as a limit of the latter: one can always accuse an objectifying description of a phenomenon or a claim to stabilizing it as true and authoritative as being partial, interested or

distorted, but such a movement is only possible from a certain place, in a determined language, with a given “accent”. The sur-name is what speaks of the name under the pretence of greater intimacy, but it is equally subject to not passing the test: it is linked to a family of meanings, it is situated, it issues from a community of reference. However, the sur-name may in this case mean that one can speak the language of intimacy with religion or of religion in spaces where the latter was prohibited – and this in many ways, from the poetic to the mystic, passing through the prophetic – and that one can speak the language of distancing from religion in spaces where the supposed familiarity with the latter fossilized the multiple possible meanings of its name.

As one more or as a closer one, we are facing a **politics of the name**, in order to unauthorize the name and struggle to re-hegemonize it through other links. We are facing a **contextualism** that does not surrender to the alleged exuberance of the object – to an essentialism of the particular – but plays with the need for naming, describing, designating, and with the impossibility of doing it once and for all or adequately, since one always does it from a place and, thus, subjecting oneself to disputes coming from other places. Challenges for the practice of social analysis in times of crisis of paradigms.

Bibliography

- ALEXANDER, Jeffrey C. e SEIDMAN, Steven (eds.). (1995), *Culture and Society: contemporary debates*. Cambridge/New York/ Melbourne: Cambridge.
- ANJOS, Márcio Fabri dos (org.). (1996), *Teologia e Novos Paradigmas*. São Paulo: SOTER/Loyola.
- BENAVIDES, Gustavo. (1998), “Modernity”. In: M. C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- BERRY, Philippa e WERNICK, Andrew (eds.). (1992), *Shadow of Spirit – Postmodernism and Religion*. Londres: Routledge.
- BOURDIEU, Pierre. (1982), *A Economia das Trocas Simbólicas*. São Paulo: Perspectiva.
- BURITY, Joanildo A. (1995), "Pensar o Outro: Derrida e a Teoria Social". *Estudos de Sociologia*, vol. 1, no. 2, janeiro/junho.

- BURITY, Joanildo A. (1996), "Falta-a-Ser e Fascinação dos Olhares: Imaginário e Pós-modernidade ao Sul do Equador". *Revista Pernambucana de Antropologia*, Série Imaginário, vol. 1, no. 1.
- BURITY, Joanildo A. (1997), "Desconstrução, Hegemonia e Democracia: o Pós-marxismo de Ernesto Laclau". In: M. A. G. de Oliveira (org.). *Política e Contemporaneidade no Brasil*. Recife: Bagaço.
- BURITY, Joanildo A. (1998), *Religião, mercado e política: tolerância, conformismo e ativismo religioso*. Série Trabalhos para Discussão, nº. 84. Recife: Fundação Joaquim Nabuco/Instituto de Pesquisas Sociais, setembro.
- CALHOUN, Craig (org.). (1995), *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*. Cambridge, Mass./Oxford: Blackwell.
- COMISSÃO GULBENKIAN PARA REESTRUTURAÇÃO DAS CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS. (1996), *Para Abrir as Ciências Sociais*. São Paulo: Cortez.
- DERRIDA, Jacques. (1976), *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore/Londres: The Johns Hopkins University
- DERRIDA, Jacques. (1994), *Espectros de Marx: o Estado da dívida, o trabalho do luto e a nova Internacional*. Rio de Janeiro: Relume-Dumará.
- DERRIDA, Jacques. (1997), "Fé e Saber: as duas fontes da 'religião' nos limites da pura razão". In: J. Derrida et alli. *A Religião*. Lisboa: Relógio D'Água.
- DONEGANI, Jean Marie. (1995), "Religion et modernité: laïcité et sécularisation dans la crise de la modernité en Europe". *Cahiers Français*, no. 273, outubro-dezembro.
- FOUCAULT, Michel. (1985), *Microfísica do Poder*. 5ª ed. Rio de Janeiro: Graal.
- FOUCAULT, Michel. (1990), "Omnes et Singulatim: Por uma crítica da 'razão política'". *Novos Estudos CEBRAP*, no. 26, março.
- GUERRA, Lemuel Dourado. (2000), *Competição, demanda e a dinâmica da esfera da religião no Nordeste do Brasil*. Recife: Tese de doutorado em Sociologia, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco.
- HALL, Stuart. (1997), *A identidade cultural na pós-modernidade*. Rio de Janeiro: DP&A.
- HELLER, Agnes et alli. (1999), *A crise dos paradigmas em ciências sociais e os desafios para o século XXI*. Rio de Janeiro: Contraponto/Corecon-RJ.
- HERVIEU-LÉGER, Danièle. (1997), "Representam os Surtos Emocionais Contemporâneos o Fim da Secularização ou o Fim da Religião?". *Religião & Sociedade*, vol. 18, no. 1.
- IANNACCONE, Laurence R. e FINKE, Roger. (1993), "Supply-side explanations for religious change". *The Annals*, nº. 527.
- IANNACCONE, Laurence R., FINKE, Roger e STARK, Rodney. (1997), "Deregulating religion: The economics of church and state". *Economic Inquiry*, vol. 35, nº. 2, Abril.

- JEFFREY, Denis. (1999), "Religion et postmodernité: un problème d'identité". *Religiologiques*, nº. 19, primavera.
- KÜNG, Hans. (1991), *Theology for the Third Millenium. An Ecumenical View*. Londres: Harper Collins.
- LACLAU, Ernesto. (1990), *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*. Londres: Verso.
- LAMBERT, Yves. (1995), "Religion et modernité: une définition plurielle pour une réalité en mutation". *Cahiers Français*, no. 273, outubro-dezembro.
- LAWRENCE, Bruce B. (1998), "Transformation". In: M. C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- MAFFESOLI, Michel. (1996), *No Fundo das Aparências*. Petrópolis: Vozes.
- MAFFESOLI, Michel. (1997), *A Transfiguração do Político: a tribalização do mundo*. Porto Alegre: Salinas.
- MASUZAWA, Tomoko. (1998), "Cuture". In: M. C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- MILBANK, John. (1992), "Problematizing the secular: the post-postmodern agenda". In: P. Berry e A. Wernick (eds.), *Shadow of Spirit – Postmodernism and Religion*. Londres: Routledge.
- PORTELLI, Hugues. (1985), *Gramsci e a Questão Religiosa*. São Paulo: Paulinas.
- RANCIÈRE, Jacques. (1996), *O Desentendimento – Política e Filosofia*. São Paulo: 34 Letras.
- RASCHKE, Carl. (1992), "Fire and roses, or the problem of postmodern religious thinking". In: P. Berry e A. Wernick (eds.), *Shadow of Spirit – Postmodernism and Religion*. Londres: Routledge.
- ROBERTSON, Roland. (1990), "After Nostalgia? Willful Nostalgia and the Phases of Globalization". In: B. S. Turner (ed.), *Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity*. Londres/Newbury Park/Nova Deli: SAGE.
- ROBERTSON, Roland. (1991), "Social Theory, Cultural Relativism and the Problem of Globality". In: A. D. King (ed.), *Culture, Globalization, and the World-System. Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*. Basingstoke/Binghamton: Macmillan/Department of Art and Art History, State University of New York.
- SOARES, Luiz Eduardo. (1994), *O Rigor da Indisciplina*. Rio de Janeiro: Relume-Dumará.
- SMITH, Jonathan Z. (1998), "Religion, religions, religious". In: M. C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- SOMERS, Margaret R. (1995a), "What's Political or Cultural about Political Culture and the Public Sphere? Toward an Historical Sociology of Concept Formation". *Sociological Theory*, vol. 13, no. 2, julho.

SOMERS, Margaret R. (1995b), "Narrating and Naturalizing Civil Society and Citizenship Theory: The Place of Political Culture and the Public Sphere". *Sociological Theory*, vol. 13, no. 3, Novembro.

TAYLOR, Mark C. (1998), "Introduction". In: M. C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

WILLIAMS, Raymond. (1983 [1958]), *Culture & Society, 1780-1950*. Nova Iorque, Columbia University.

WILLIAMS, Raymond. (2000), *Cultura*. 2^a. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra.

ZIZEK, Slavoj. (1992), *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Londres: Verso.

ZIZEK, Slavoj. (1996), "Introdução: o espectro da ideologia". In: S. Zizek (org.), *Um Mapa da Ideologia*. Rio de Janeiro: Contraponto.

Received in October 2000.

Joanildo Burity

Researcher of the Fundação Joaquim Nabuco, where he coordinates the Culture and Identity Thematic Area (Área Temática Cultura e Identidade); professor of the Master's program in Political Science and the Graduate program in Sociology of the Universidade Federal de Pernambuco. Author of *Identidade e política no campo religioso* (EdUFPE, 1997). E-mail: joanildo@fundaj.gov.br

Translated by Amanda Marie Lyons

Translation from Religião e Sociedade. Rio de Janeiro: v.21, n.1, 2001 p41-65.