

## Pathways of the Sacred

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### The Origin of the Weft

In this article I aim to analyze some of the changing trends in the current Brazilian religious field that various researchers, myself included, have identified on the level of individual religiosity and twofold and multifold religious creeds. First off, however, I will revisit some analyses of the religious phenomenon in modernity made by an author who, despite the recognized importance of his work, is seldom mentioned and little known: Ernst Troeltsch, an eminent German historian of religion, though originally a theologian, and a contemporary and interlocutor of Max Weber. Other than some short excerpts from his better known titles, on the church and sects, published in collections and magazines, his works are not available in Portuguese translation<sup>1</sup>.

Nevertheless, I will avoid the debate on the institutional distinction between associative forms (church and sect) proposed by this author, and which he himself considered to be outmoded as a means of explaining the religious life of his time: ecclesiastical religiosity, in both of the abovementioned forms, were already in the throes of crisis at the beginning of the 20th Century, though Troeltsch did not entertain the possibility of their future disappearance. This crisis was sparked by a revolt against ecclesiastical authoritarianism in the modern Christian world, whether Catholic or Protestant, due primarily to foreglimpses of the immanent reality being ushered in by modernity and of the individualism and pluralism of ideas that reality implied. As he saw it, the modern world would be incompatible with religious absolutisms and monopolies, but before launching into a discussion of the extra-ecclesial religion that defined that contemporary world, Troeltsch dedicated a whole chapter to his concept of modernity<sup>2</sup>.

Curiously, for a self-professed theologian, the point of departure for his study of modernity did not lie in the religious, ideological or even ethical motivations behind action, given the instability and reciprocal inter-influence that made it impossible to isolate any one of these elements in a pure enough state for observation. Rather, in seeking to characterize this reality, he chose to start from what he considered to be most stable in it, namely the institutional forces - the social and economic structures - of the State and its immanent rationality, centred in mundane, secular power; the egalitarian or liberal political individualism capable of moderating

state power; capitalism, with the radical transformations it worked in the material world and in the generation of class relations; and, lastly, the hyper-accelerated pace of work and the mind-boggling rise of consumerism. Contrary to Max Weber, Troeltsch argued that it was not so much ethico-economic rationalism than political individualism that had formed the basis for the elective affinity between Protestantism and capitalism, and that institutional and structural modifications introduced by modernity had simultaneously triggered the crisis in ecclesiastical religion and paved the way for its non-clerical, individualized counterpart.

In concentrating on the relationship between modernity and religion, Troeltsch was able to conduct what might well be his most relevant analyses on the latter by introducing its third type (the first two being 'church' and 'sect'), which he called "mysticism", i.e., an anti-institutional, radically non-rationalized (being mystical rather than ascetic), but individualist religiosity with strong syncretic and pluralist tendencies and a disregard for church bounds. He considered this third strain to be the hallmark of the typical religion of modernity, with which it is entirely compatible. It would not be homogeneous, because, besides its Christian elements - namely an interiorized Christian faith anchored in the conviction of personalized Divine revelation -, it would also contain syncretized elements from spiritist, Oriental and esoteric traditions, as well as pantheistic and aesthetic content.

Unlike the adepts of a radically Enlightened secularization or the proclaimers of the death of God, Troeltsch did not believe that 20th-century transformations would signal the end of religions, even the ecclesiastic religions already in crisis. They would certainly go on changing, in-line with the already identified trends: rejection of clericalism; individualization; pluralism; syncretism. Nor did he discount the possibility of a religious revival, as history revealed a certain pendulum effect when it comes to high and low levels of religious fervour, and he even entertained the chance of there occurring a resurgence of ecclesiastic religion as a backlash against rising tides of religious individualization.

Troeltsch's analyses refer to the transition from the 19th to the 20th century and therefore deal with the presence and dilemmas of religion within modernity. So how did these issues develop over the course of the 1900s and how were they configured at the turn of the last century, already in the so-called post-modern period? Based on Troeltsch's ideas, Colin Campbell<sup>3</sup> took it upon himself to answer this very question. For Campbell, there was a radicalization of the trends identified by the German historian, with the 1960s proving the historical tidemark of this transformation, which he interprets as Easternization: "Today, the West is undergoing a process of 'Easternization', characterized by a shift away from its traditional theodicy toward another that is essentially eastern in nature" (Campbell, 1997, p. 5). In other words, the traditional western theodicy, based on belief in a transcendent Godhead and an ascetic and salvationist religious bearing (Calvinism being the most complete historical example), is being replaced by an Eastern paradigm centred on conceptions of an immanent, impersonal God and mystic, non-salvationist attitudes of self-perfection or self-deification (the pristine example being Hindu Karmic law).

This does not so much imply a direct influence of eastern religiosity over its western counterpart as it does an internal process of transformation within the post-modern religious field, in which religious aspects hitherto present but secondary have grown in importance thanks to their greater compatibility with the directions society has taken. These religious conceptions, which will become hegemonic in the present millennium, as Troeltsch foresaw back in the closing decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, are a monist response (postulating unity between man and nature, between the spiritual and physical, the mind and the body) to western dualism, implying “a vision that leads to the acceptance of a religious relativism toward all specific creeds and also to polymorphism, which recognizes the truth of all religions. As such, not only is there tolerance for visions fundamentally different to the central tenets of Christianity, but all forms of religion are seen as identical”. Likewise, “there is an affinity with idealist and metaphysical philosophical systems” (Campbell, 1977, p. 12). While there will be some opposition to intra-mundane materialism and rationalism, this will not lead to a condemnation of the secular, which is adhered to selectively.

This new spirituality can accommodate the most diverse concrete religious expressions, ranging from Eastern Hindu and Buddhist influences to Neopaganism (Hellenic, Druidic, Nordic and Celtic paganisms) and even the belief systems of Amerindian populations (native indian tribes, Aztec and Mayan culture), where the archaic Western past is viewed as preferable to any Eastern influx. There is also room for modern references that show some affinity with progressivist and contemporary scientific elements, and even for environmentalist and ecological movements, such as the so-called New Age philosophy. Of course, added to these elements will be new influences based on reinterpretations of Christian traditions.

Based on this platform provided by eminent scholars of modern and post-modern religions, I will now funnel the discussion into the sphere of Brazilian society. In what way have the specificities of Brazil’s historical formation moulded the national religious field? Is it going through the same processes as can be identified in modern and contemporary Europe and North America? And if so, to what extent? These are precisely the questions I aim to address in the following pages.

### Historical formation of the Brazilian religious field: from colonial Catholic monopoly to lay republican pluralism

Under the yoke of the Portuguese crown, Catholicism was imposed upon Brazil since the very onset of colonization as the official religion of the Empire and its sacraments were the only ones allowed to be practiced publicly or domestically<sup>4</sup>. This alliance between the Portuguese royalty and the Vatican enabled the Portuguese Empire to legitimize its temporal interests and modus operandi under the pretext of saving souls and spreading the Christian faith and culture. During the colonial period there was what Hoornaert (1974, pp. 31-65) called a “warlike Catholicism” intimately bound up with the conquest and preservation of a new world and the colonial enterprise.

The control the Crown wielded over the colonial Church (collecting its tithes and appointing and paying the priests and bishops) meant the clergy, practically reduced to a wing of the civil service, was dependent upon royal power and divorced from the interests of Rome. The clergy operated as economic agents, got involved in political affairs, lacked theological training and even intellectual culture, married at will and raised families. Only members of the various orders, particularly the Jesuits, remained loyal to the institutional and spiritual interests of the Roman Church, but they were concentrated along the coast and in the future state capitals of the fledgling nation, where they exercised some influence and sought to preserve the orthodoxy of the Catholic mass and control over the lives of their flock. They also ventured into remote settlements in the backlands, where they strove to convert the natives. Throughout the rest of the colony, in the small villages and sparsely populated rural hamlets, the clergy could rarely count on the support of a parish structure. The priest dropped by every now and then, perhaps once a year, to carry out the necessary rites, baptizing the young, marrying couples, hearing confessions, praying and saying mass.

This configuration as an at once colonial and catechetical venture had its consequences, and they varied depending on the degree of presence or absence of the clergy and on their relative jurisdictions, leading, as Hoornaert (1974) points out, to the formation of three different types of Catholicism: one ritualistic and formal, another patriarchal and a third inherently vernacular.

Catholicism was obligatory during colonial rule in Brazil. Those born here accepted it as a presupposition of citizenship, with the exception of the Indians, who were either exterminated or forced to convert. Those not born here also had to adopt it, even if they could not understand it: African slaves were baptized at port, either before embarking or upon arrival. The Jews, under threat of dispossession or execution by the Inquisition, preferred to become “new Christians”<sup>5</sup>. So it was more important to appear Catholic than to actually be Catholic. One had to attend mass and pray publicly, observe the holy days and name one’s businesses after the Catholic saints. In order to escape enslavement or avoid exile in the badlands, where they were hunted down by the *Bandeirante* gunmen, the Indians opted to settle in encampments, where they were christened and indoctrinated. The Negroes continued to worship their ancestral gods by identifying them with Christian saints and erecting altars for their rites, while the Jews attended mass and said all the right prayers. Hence there was a necessarily formal, outward show of religion that was never really internalized or adopted with personal conviction, something that persists to this day among many Brazilian Catholics.

The patriarchal Catholicism mentioned above was a form adapted to the patrimonial system that prevailed on the plantations, especially the sugar fields, but in other agricultural segments as well. On these plantations the priest served the local landowner, under whose orders he would not only celebrate mass publicly and domestically, but also teach the children of the house to read and write, promote harmony within the extended family and externally between the master and his slaves and servants, acting as the right-hand man and benevolent face of the landowner’s control, who had taskmasters and henchmen waiting in the wings to deal with those who failed to heed the priest. Of course the Church’s stance before social inequalities

today is much more complex, but in some more conservative sectors of Catholicism there persists a tendency to legitimize social differences on religious grounds.

Lastly, we come to vernacular Catholicism. Without the watchful gaze of the clergy, the inhabitants of villages and small rural settlements scattered about the vast landscape of the nation were free to preserve their own beliefs and practices in very specific religious blends. There was even an urban vernacular Catholicism, with the formation of brotherhoods and lay orders, especially among the Negro population, though these were subject to more ecclesiastic control. Centred on the saints, principally the local patron saints, votive rites and novenas, and the traditional Catholic litany, vernacular Catholicism was generally a joyous cult, with festivals and dances to mark the feast days of the most important saints, though there were also occasional moments of contrition, with mortifications and penitence, but always accentuating solidarity among the participants and an underlying group identity (cf. Queiroz, 1973).

Describing their practices in their songs (“a lot of prayer, little mass; a lot of saints, few priests”), the vernacular Catholics expressed their distance from the Church and its clergy. They created their own religious roles, with specialist prayer masters, festivity organizers, who arranged the feast day celebrations, the blessers and the curers, the monk (in the south) or *beato* (devout man, in the northeast), both of whom were itinerant figures. When the priest was actually present, the tension was latent or sometimes even manifest in his condemnation of the allegedly profane aspects of this type of devotion, and attempts to force-fit them into orthodox Catholicism. This type of Catholicism occasionally attained high levels of autonomy from the Church and State, as during the period of transition from the Brazilian Monarchy to the First Republic, which saw a flurry of messianic and millenarian revolts, such as those of Canudos (cf. Galvão, 2001), which flared up in the Bahian badlands and was quashed by the military in 1897, and the *Contestado* (cf. Monteiro, 1974), between 1912 and 1916, on lands disputed by the states of Paraná and Santa Catarina, also put down by the republican armed forces.

After the arrival of the Portuguese Court in Brazil in 1808, fleeing before Napoleon’s troops, and the opening of Brazilian ports to English traders, the monarch João VI permitted the practice of Protestantism within the national territory on condition that it was not done in temples and that no proselytising was conducted in its favour or against the official faith. Nevertheless, despite all this and the sympathies of the Brazilian emperors Pedro I and Pedro II toward Protestant groups, lifting the ban on Protestant church services for native Brazilians, the formation of Protestant colonies and the free activity of North-American missionaries, “at the beginning of the 20th Century, there was no trace of Protestantism in Brazil [...] the Protestant practitioners who passed through here left no mark on the religious system of society” (Ribeiro, 1973, p. 15). Yet it was the Proclamation of the Republic in 1889 and the Constitution that soon followed it that laid down the conditions for the pluralist and lay society that developed over the course of the 20th Century, with the separation of the Republican State from the Catholic Church and the institution of the principle of religious freedom.

However, the Proclamation of the Republic did not result in any loss of Catholic hegemony or its influence over Brazilian cultural and political life. Catholicism continued to cooperate

occasionally with the republican State, combat messianic heresies and impose its religious principles upon successive Constitutions, such as the prohibition of divorce and abortion. The Catholic Church availed of its newfound freedom to rebuild its ties with Vatican orthodoxy. Priests now received more serious seminary instruction, the bishopric was chosen from among the most dedicated and ultramontanist candidates, European religious orders were brought in to run the sanctuaries and other religious services, and efforts were made to instill a less magical and devotional, more Christocentric brand of Catholicism among the lower classes. Thus began the so-called Romanization (cf. Oliveira, 1976) of Brazilian Catholicism.

However, to an extent, the legacy of colonial and imperial Catholicism was preserved, despite the deep-set republican transformations. Regardless of the abolition of obligation, the vast majority of Brazilians continued to declare themselves Catholic, albeit only formally and superficially, never attending mass, averse to the sacraments and partial to saintly devotions and prayer. Furthermore, many descendants of the Negroes and Amerindians created syncretic cults in which Catholicism co-existed alongside otherwise incompatible creeds and practices, such as in Bahian Candomblé (and other similar Afro-Brazilian cults) and the Shamanisms of the Brazilian North and Northeast. As far back as the Empire, historical Protestant groups such as the Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Methodists had started to arrive, though not in large numbers, and they went on to garner some influence over the educational system during the republican period. Yet it was only from the end of the closing decade of the last century that the Pentecostal Protestants began to introduce themselves into the Brazilian religious panorama, which they then altered dramatically through their intense growth and presence, especially in metropolitan regions.

### Data on changes in the Brazilian religious field throughout the 20th Century and its current configuration

In the mid 20th Century, the 1940s to be precise, Catholics still accounted for 95% of all those surveyed (cf. IBGE, 2000) against a mere 2.6% for Protestants and 1.9% for other religions. Over the course of the second half of the century Catholicism remained the religion with the highest number of adherents. Even in 1991, an IBGE (Brazilian census board) study put the share of Catholics at over 80%, 83% to be exact. At this stage almost the whole religious demographic was Christian, as the Protestant groups combined accounted for a further 9%. The remainder, including Kardecist Spiritists, practitioners of Afro-Brazilian cults and others not specified in the census, comprised a paltry 2.9% of the total. Even if we factor in the traditional twofold religiosity of Kardecists and adepts of Afro-Brazilian cults, who often also adhere to Catholicism and tend to declare themselves Catholic in official surveys, though their core beliefs and practices would suggest otherwise, the Catholic percentage of the population almost certainly never dropped below 80% prior to the second-last decade of the century.

The tendencies that had already been manifesting during the latter half of the 1900s – a slight but constant decline in Catholicism and a commensurate rise in Protestant and other

groups, and the formation and consolidation of a pluralist religious field – intensified at the turn of the century. Between 1991 and 2000, Catholicism lost almost 10% of its following, slipping to 73.6% of the population. During the same period, Protestant numbers grew by a little over 6%, with its various denominations representing a combined 15.4%. Spiritism, Afro-Brazilian religions and other cults grew very little during the period (only 0.5%), practically stabilizing at 3.4%. Based on these figures we could say that the group that grew the most in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was Protestantism, growing eleven-fold from 1.4% in 1940 to 15.4% in 2000. Most surprisingly, the data shows that those largely responsible for driving this upswing were the Pentecostals, who accounted for a little over half of Protestants in 1991 (5.6% out of 9%) but just over two-thirds in 2000 (10.4% out of 15.4). Also important was that these recruits were not all defecting Catholics (though Catholicism was the main source), but also former adepts of Afro-Brazilian cults, such as Umbanda and Candomblé, which lost some of their contingents during the period in question (down to 0.3% from 0.4%).

More recently, a survey conducted by Datafolha (cf. *Folha de S. Paulo*, 2007), published on the eve of the Papal visit by Benedict VI, confirmed the trend of Catholic fall-off and growth among Protestants in general and the Pentecostals in particular. Even considering the methodological differences between this survey and the official census – the newspaper poll was conducted with a population sample and to an age minimum of 16 -, the percentage of Catholics in 2007 stood at 64%, down almost 10% in only seven years. Evangelical Christians rose to 22% (6.6% more than in 2000), of which 17% was Pentecostal (up 6.6%).

## Reinventing the old and weaving the new

In this closing segment I will analyze religious trajectories, the courses taken by religiously ‘mutant’ agents, between diverse denominations and symbolisms. I will also deal with manifold religious experience or ambivalence with regard to institutional belonging or religious tradition. We will see that the transformation in-course for at least a century within religiosity in the western world, as diagnosed by Troeltsch and Campbell, can also be detected in the present Brazilian reality.

By restricting the respondents to just one of the listed faiths – that declared –, whilst also assuming that the individuals accept the totality of the beliefs and practices that declared faith would involve, and to the exclusion of all others, the quantitative findings presented above presuppose a unicity of faith and belonging as the sole possibility for religious experience. As such, they overlook some of the most characteristic features of this field, namely the dual and even multifold nature of beliefs and adherence and the dynamicity of religious trajectories. These are precisely the phenomena will shall deal with here, focusing on a qualitative perspective that values subjectivity over institutional parameters. The main religious trunks, with their ecclesiastic institutions, continue to serve as the repositories of tradition and as a source of sacred capital, but they are in the throes of a severe crisis of authority in a plural and secularized modern world in which religion is becoming more and more subjectively relevant.

In what follows I will present some quantitative and qualitative data collated during surveys I conducted in the São Paulo capital over the course of recent years. Respondents aged 16 or over, from some five-hundred family units resident in houses, apartments, slums or room and board filled in questionnaires that enabled me to identify roughly 130 religiously mutant, twofold or multifold respondents. These people were then invited for a recorded interview, with the conversation duly transcribed. The findings showed that 399 out of the 1,064 people surveyed who claimed to be religious – or 38% of the total – said they had changed religion at least once during their lifetimes. As for non-exclusivity, 122 (11%) of those surveyed said they adhered to or cultivated beliefs from two or more religious groups of reference. In short, out of the total of 1,064 religious individuals identified by the survey, 399, or 38%, were mutants and/or non-exclusive. The fact that over a third of self-declared religious people in the sample could be thus described revealed the importance of subjecting such cases to deeper analysis.

One interesting aspect immediately comes to attention in relation to two-fold religiosities. In addition to those known since at least the beginning of the last century, or perhaps even before, such as the Catholic/Spiritist combination (forty cases, or 10% of the total) and the Catholic/Afro-Brazilian blends (nine cases, or 2%), there were other frankly unexpected combinations, such as Catholic/Protestant dualities, occurring at rates as high as, or even higher than, the traditional couplings (34 cases in all, or 9%), not to mention Oriental and esoteric binary or multifold combinations, also at a relatively high frequencies (31 cases, or 8% of the total). We could therefore say that religious combinations have not only remained stable, but actually increased and diversified.

The respondents' accounts are eloquent expressions of the dynamic singularity of the Brazilian religious field, in terms of the restricted institutional/sacramental participation of its agents, their intense circulation through different religious groups, access to old and new belief systems and practices, and, moreover, in relation to a growing individualization of religious agents, experienced through dualities or even multiplicities. However, over the course of their religious trajectories, some religious mutants found themselves returning to Catholicism (although cases in which this return was exclusive were rare) or assuming some other exclusive religion, especially within the spectrum of Protestantism. Among cases that implied 1) conversion and traditional memberships, and 2) religiosity built individually and without, or almost without, participation in organized religious groups, a whole gamut of situations could be found. The general trend is that there are neither quick nor definitive migrations to any given flock or to the symbolic repertoire around which it congregates.

Conversions tend to be gradual, but almost never definitive, laced with dual symbolic experiences and admitted attraction to - or intended incursions into - other religious spheres. The only exceptions would appear to be among converts to Protestantism. Whether direct, i.e., conversion from a bedrock Catholicism, as in most cases, or intermediated by one or more experiences with (an)other religion(s), conversion to Protestantism is usually quick, with little or no reticence. The new group and its symbolic universe tend to be adopted simultaneously and abruptly. There is no time for gradual assimilations: evidence of the power of the new faith



and the vehemence of the pastor who serves as its vehicle forces a quick-fire decision. While evangelicals rarely change their religion in itself, they do admit to switches between different denominations within the sub-camp of Protestantism.

However, there are also the undecideds, even among Catholics and Protestants – many of the interviewees, for example, found themselves struggling to choose between the Protestant Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and the charismatic Catholic movement. It would be a mistake to consider Catholic/Protestant binaries to be a slow but definitive process of conversion from the former to the latter. Though migrants moving down to São Paulo from the northeast may frequent - or have frequented - more Protestant than Catholic temples, they often justify this on the grounds of convenience: “Because it was closer to my house”. Furthermore, these individuals are not always aware of the differences between the two. The interviewee quoted above went on to add: “it was the same thing anyway, they both talked about God”.

There is also the totally undecided contingent, for whom all religions are good; alternative paths leading to the same God. These people generally do not have any fixed symbology, much less any institutional definition, only a vague belief in God. When they frequent any one group more assiduously than others, they usually do so for circumstantial reasons: the place of worship is closer to home, the prayers are pretty, they go there with friends or family, etc. There are also those who can't decide between Kardecism, esotericisms and Eastern religions, both old and new. These cases can indeed be part of a shift from one experience to another, a swing between symbolic universes, though there was nothing in the interviews to corroborate that assumption. What does emerge from the tapes and transcripts is ambiguity, incapacity to distinguish between diverse symbologies, and confusion before the vast number of alternatives within the global religious sphere. Confronted with the multiple and the obscure, they often seek refuge in what appears to be an evident common denominator: on the spiritual level, God, and perhaps other spiritual entities; on the moral level, doing good, and, collaterally, condemning evil; on the functional level, well-being, flanked by cure and the resolution of existential problems.

Catholicism continues to be the major religious reference in society, even if Brazilians have come to identify with it less and less in recent decades. My research sought to demonstrate how religious pluralism has expanded, effecting modifications within Catholicism itself. Not only is the number of Catholic adepts decreasing, but those who remain are changing qualitatively, developing dualisms that could be described as both traditional (Catholicism/Afro-Brazilian religions; Catholicism/Spiritism) and innovative (Catholicism/Protestantism; Catholicism/Other religions; and multifold combinations).

In general, those who backtrack are people raised in Catholicism who, despite their incursions into other terrains of the religious field, are reluctant to shed the beliefs and practices of their childhood, adolescence or even youth, perhaps out of a sense of family tradition. They no longer attend mass and do not accept the sacraments, except, perhaps, for the baptism of their children, through which they hope to keep the family religious tradition alive. And yet, they continue to pray to the saints, especially Our Lady, and to practice an essentially Christian,

albeit streamlined morality. However, in the vast majority of cases where religious mutants declare themselves exclusively Catholic, their ties to beliefs and practices from religions other than that declared tend to be greater. Many of these respondents were more properly - in belief and/or practice - spiritists, adherents of Candomblé or Umbanda, or new Japanese religions and Protestant sects. This is not to mention those who follow their initial declaration with the line: "I make my own religion".

This brings us to what we consider to be, for all but the Protestants, the crucial point behind the current dynamic of the religious field: a shift away from ecclesial experience and sacraments toward an individualized and solitary religious experience. Curiously, those who present the highest degree of attachment to a denomination or church are the Protestants, amongst whom there is no "institutional grace". Distance is nothing new in the case of the Catholic Church. It was the formation of a truly pluralist religious field – whose origins can be traced back to the first decades of the last century and which progressively consolidated until reaching its present apex – that paved the way toward this frequent and generalized concomitant experience of beliefs and practices of two or more religions, or indeed of personal religiosities pieced together from fragments of various religious traditions. In the case of born-and-raised Catholics, there is now contact with decriminalized and somewhat legitimized Afro-Brazilian cults; with historical and Pentecostal Protestantism, the latter in all its successive offshoots; with spiritism; and with new and old strands of Oriental and esoteric thought. This contact tends to occur at an earlier stage in metropolitan regions and sizeable urban centres. Despite a strong Pentecostal presence in traditional rural areas and pioneering agricultural frontiers, rural Brazil and smaller urban centres have not been affected to the same degree.

As the data shows, 38% of those interviewed in urban areas, Catholics in the majority, changed religion at least once in their lifetimes. One thing that is for certain is that most of those Catholics returning to the fold largely do so on non-exclusive terms. Some may believe in reincarnation and read works of spiritism, even if they do not actually frequent spiritist centres. Others might still return to such places of worship in times of need, in search of magical solutions. Others still marry Catholicism to esoteric and oriental modes of thought. Lastly, some mutants are also Protestants, or adjudge Protestantism to be superior to Catholicism, and nurture intentions to return to it someday. Furthermore, those who return tend to do so with less fidelity to orthodoxy, or perhaps no dogmatic or institutional links at all. They criticize aspects of church doctrine, seen as authoritarian and dogmatic, and some harbour a certain distrust of ecclesial agents, who are suspected of having vested interests, of concealing truths, of being bad preachers or perhaps even of being lascivious.

One way or another, a return to Catholicism, or its abandonment in favour of some other religious universe, generally occurs to the detriment of ecclesial and sacramental engagement. Mutants tend to refuse any definite membership and like to select the beliefs and practices that best suit their lifestyles. Spiritists, whether exclusive or in combination with Catholicism, often see no need to attend centres, or to continue to do so if this was once their wont. Reading books, especially those by Kardec, is usually sufficient for them, or perhaps some lighter form

of literature, such as spiritist novels. Many will also be involved in charity work. The same occurs, with some exceptions in terms of percentages, among Afro-Brazilians, who resist close ties with religious centres and avoid “being brainwashed” by the *pais-de-santo* (spirit-fathers), unwilling to create restrictive bonds of commitment or dependency that might hamper their personal freedom.

With the sole exception of the Evangelicals, the main tendency is to disqualify the institutions and assert the inexistence of a religious habitus. Beliefs and practices are selected from assorted religious sources in accordance with criteria of personal convenience. The individual chooses whatever makes him or her feel good, addresses their doubts or suits their socio-economic conditions and educational level. This holds true for all, regardless of declared religion, but especially so for adepts of Oriental religions or esoteric systems. Buddhists, Hindus and adepts of new messianic Japanese religions (such as *Seicho-noie* and Perfect Liberty) are more advanced in terms of religious individualization through the selection of beliefs and rituals from a range of sources.

On the flipside of institutionalized, sacramental religion, constitutive of a religious habitus, with demands for regular participation in the moulds of the Catholic church, we find not churches of this or that creed, centre or place of worship, in which there remains a minimal presence of communitarian/associative life and hierarchy between the officiate and lay public. The logic opposite is in fact those individualized religions whose officiate *is* the layperson: “I make my own religion”. This post-modern religious attitude also evokes a certain re-encounter with the primordial, a return to the DIY approach that, according to Bourdieu (1974), preceded the sacerdotal monopoly over salvation capital that took root along with the religious field. In this encounter between the post and pre-modern, one chooses what seems most plausible and practices whatever rituals one deems fit. This rejection of the institutional stems from a denial of the “ready-made” truths imposed by dogmatism and exclusive religions. Religion is seen and valued as a constant search in which the individual delves ever deeper into what seems to make most sense. What we have here is an active, but individual religious attitude.

In some cases, people still sporadically frequent certain groups whose message and symbolism may have retained some influence, but do not constitute the individual’s core beliefs. This tends to entail a certain pick-and-mix of prayers, sacred texts, mantras, incense sticks, wreaths, coloured stones, meditation. While a certain underlying Catholicism may be preserved, the individual prefers to go pray in the silence of an empty church. There will also be syncretic identifications, such as between Our Lady and the ancestral Great Mother. Magic is restored, as in WICCA rituals, where witches are repackaged as nature worshippers persecuted by a clergy to whom they refused to submit. Lastly, the equation finds completion with the introduction of a certain exaltation of the senses, by which man can attune to the cosmos, and of the aesthetics that speak to the emotions. The goal is health, harmony with nature and emotional equilibrium. It is, in a sense, a kind of self-help, a form of therapy designed to replenish our energies and assist in the struggle of life. In some cases, such religion is seen as an alternative or complement to psychoanalysis.

The religions mentioned above, which serve as sources for individual religiosity, are also those often presented by their adepts as sciences, occult or otherwise, and as philosophies geared towards people of all religions. It is the fact that they are pitched not as revealed and dogmatic truths, but as philosophical compasses for an individual behaviour that has rendered possible the emergence of both religious dualities and individualized religions. This sectarian absence of exclusivity paves the way for the construction of the most varied self-made systems as alternatives to institutionalized religions, whilst simultaneously, and paradoxically, legitimizing them with reference to their traditions. Though still present and numerically predominant, religions in Brazil are no longer restricted to churches, but rather follow the phenomenon identified a century ago by Troeltsch, and confirmed a decade ago by Campbell, as a general trend in the western world.

I believe it is the plural reality of religions itself that laid the groundwork for the development of religious dualisms, multiplicities and personalized hybrids. Today there are the most varied churches, centres, ritual grounds, and the like, through which religious mutants pass as they go about their religious development, aggregating beliefs and incorporating rituals. It is usually in the face of adversity or while wrangling with problems for which there would seem to be no solution within the institutionalized channels (assuming they have access to them in the first place) that people are taken to visit this or that local cult by relatives (parents, grandparents, uncles/aunts, siblings or spouses), partners, friends, neighbours or acquaintances. There were very few cases in which media influence had something to do with an interviewee's attraction to this or that religion or cult. Among the more educated segments of society, reading, particularly of books, serves as a point of contact with certain religions (Kardecism, Oriental religions and esoteric systems). Most past or future religious mutants accept such invitations as something natural and quite willingly and optimistically go along to experiment with new groups and spiritual treatments. There is, therefore, a favourable disposition toward knowing, participating in and submitting to varied religious experiences, as all are viewed as equally positive and as alternative paths to the same God. I also believe that this receptiveness to invitations derives from a certain vernacular tradition of considering the various religions to be functional equivalents when it comes to conferring protection and behavioural orientation.

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#### Resumo

##### *Trajétórias do sagrado*

O objetivo deste artigo é analisar a dinâmica atual do campo religioso paulistano, vista não por intermédio da pluralidade de suas organizações religiosas, nem dos posicionamentos de lideranças eclesiais ou grupais. Nele focamos os agentes religiosos individuais e suas atitudes diante do pluralismo religioso crescente, que culminou na formação de um campo altamente diversificado. Para isso selecionamos indivíduos que são mutantes religiosos, isto é, que mudaram de orientação religiosa ao menos uma vez em suas vidas, ou então que são dúplices ou múltiplos religiosos, participantes de dois ou mais universos simbólico-religiosos simultaneamente. Por meio do levantamento de suas trajetórias religiosas analisaram-se suas crenças e práticas rituais, independentemente da pertença ou não a grupos organizados. Com a única exceção dos protestantes, tanto históricos quanto pentecostais – estes um tanto diferenciados pela incorporação da magia –, ainda ancorados na concepção de um Deus transcendente e numa forte eclesialidade, podem ser detectadas tendências em direção a uma religiosidade que Troeltsch chamou de mística, o que implicaria, segundo Campbell, em sua orientalização. Os adeptos de qualquer outra religião ou então os dúplices/múltiplos aproximam-se de concepções religiosas místicas e práticas mágicas vividas na privacidade, admitem a frequência a grupos religiosos diversos e repudiam o autoritarismo clerical. As velhas tramas das duplicidades religiosas tradicionais (catolicismo/espiritismo; catolicismo religiões afro-brasileiras) ampliam-se com novas formas (católica/protestante; católica/outras religiões) e com a emergência da multiplicidade, reproduzindo à brasileira as mesmas transformações vividas há muito em todo o Ocidente.

Palavras-chave: Pluralismo religioso; Trajetórias religiosas; Duplicidade religiosa; Religião individual.

#### Abstract

##### *Pathways of the sacred*

The aim of this article is to analyze the current dynamic of the São Paulo religious field, seen not through the plurality of its religious organizations, nor through the positions adopted by ecclesiastical or group leaders. Instead, I focus on the individual religious agents and their attitudes in response to a growing religious

pluralism and diversification. The work therefore looks at individuals who are ‘religious mutants:’ people who have changed their religious affiliation at least once during their lives, or who are religious in a two-fold or multi-fold way, participants of two or more symbolic-religious universes simultaneously. By studying people’s religious trajectories, we can analyze their beliefs and religious practices irrespective of their affiliation to specific organized groups. With the single exception of the Protestants, still anchored in the conception of a transcendent God and a strong ecclesiolatry (though the Pentecostals diverge slightly through their incorporation of magic), we can perceive a trend towards a kind of religiosity that Troeltsch called mystic – and which Campbell identifies as its Easternized. The followers of other religions, or the twofolders/multifolders, tend towards mystical religious ideas and magical practices lived out in private, willingly frequent a variety of religious groups and repudiate clerical authoritarianism. The old conflicts of traditional religious dualities (Catholicism/Spiritism; Catholicism/Afro-Brazilian Religions) have been amplified with new forms (Catholic/Protestant; Catholic/Other Religions) and with the emergence of multiplicity, reproducing in Brazilian style the same transformations experienced throughout the West for a long time.

Keywords: Religious Pluralism; Religious Trajectories; Religious Duality; Individual Religion.

## Notes

1. For example, “Church and sects”. *Religião e Sociedade*, 14 (3), 1987. For our purposes, the title used was *Protestantism and Progress: A Historical Study of the Relation of Protestantism to the Modern World* (1958), originally published in 1907.

2. “The meaning of ‘the modern world’”, in *op. cit.*, pp. 9-42.

3. “A orientalização do Ocidente: reflexões sobre uma nova teodicéia para um novo milênio”. *Religião e Sociedade* (1997).

4. Worried about the Vatican’s lack of resources with which to catechize the overseas colonies, in 1522 Pope Adrian granted João III the title of Grand master of the Order of Christ and, in 1551, Pope Julius III added the Orders of Saint James and Saint Bento, which gave the Portuguese kings spiritual power as well as total control of the management of Church affairs in colonial territories (cf. Hoornaert, 1977).

5. There were no Inquisitional Tribunals in colonial Brazil, but “visitors” from the Holy See did come here and accepted denunciations against “heretics”, who were then referred to the tribunals in Porto.

Translated by Anthony Doyle

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