

The Brazilians' religion*

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Seventy years ago an expression like “the Brazilians’ religion” would point almost inevitably to Catholicism. This has changed. Currently, Catholicism is becoming only one amongst Brazilians’ religions, as the outcome of an increasing movement towards diversification. This trend is not just about figures (already well known and to which I will allude below), but about something qualitative, an identitarian problem. The Brazilian “ethnic group”, the “nation”, when asked: “In terms of religion, who are you?”, “What is your name?” does not answer univocally: “Catholic!” The atmosphere prevailing in its social space has changed. A lady in her eighties from Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais state capital), a former Methodist pastor, told me how she felt for many years like a “stranger” in her own city, a “foreign body” in local culture – her own! Conversely, in today’s Belo Horizonte two large collective manifestations mark Holy Week (The “*Minas Gerais* Holy Week”!), disturbing the traffic, mobilizing the police, imposing their presence in the city’s daily life: the Holy Oils Consecration Mass in the *Mineirão* Soccer Stadium, on Holy Thursday; and, on Good Friday, the Evangelical Concentration (ironically, held at the Pope Square). Such coexistence is felt as “natural” by public opinion.

From the standpoint of cultural atmosphere, Brazilian religious identity has thus become, in a “modern way”, manifold. But this phenomenon is translated (and/or is rooted) into two fundamental levels: the statistical and the political.

Statistics reveal a constant slippage towards an irresistible institutional decline of catholicism. In overall terms, 88% of the Brazilian population in 1980 still declared to be “catholic”. In 1991, this figure dropped to 80% and, in 1994, to 74.9%.

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This reflects a national average. But certain regional specificities are even more impressive. Let us mention only Rio de Janeiro, the “less catholic” city in Brazil, where no more than 59.3% of the population declared to be catholic.

At the political level, this means the winding down of a hegemony; not only of a religious hegemony, but of one prevailing in the field of *politics carried out in the name of religion*. The already traditional relationships between politics and religions are themselves changing. Such relationships, following Church and State separation and the logic of modern secularization of social life’s regulatory instances, had become tacit, albeit quite real. Now these are again visibly and explicitly manifest, this time from another religious pole: the massive and overt electoral onslaught by pentecostal churches, the constitution of Legislative caucuses (the “evangelical caucus” formed by both state assemblymen and federal congressmen), the bargaining of denominational votes at state and national level of the Executive Branch, the project of founding confessional parties – in sum, the increasingly frequent evocation, in meeting, cults, radio and TV shows, of the horizon of a politically “evangelical” Brazil. (This is a recent counterpart to a “intrinsically catholic Brazil” ideology politically held by the Church from early twentieth century until quite recently.) All this resonates within the plural field of evangelical denominations, causing, with the fatality of a vital process, a battle for internal hegemony: after all, which denomination will succeed in leading the construction of this new Brazilian identity? Religion in the political field, politics in the religious field. Simultaneously and symmetrically, within the hitherto hegemonic Church, the very institutional authority is undermined, or is at least being reshaped. A certain institutional monolithism had heretofore prevailed, allowing for the endurance of a single fundamental cut between popular and official catholicism. But today, the relationship of catholic groups with their Church’s institutional frame diversifies, and internal conflicts between tendencies and movements pave the way, also here, for the building up of a dynamic hegemony – even if the institutional hierarchy is willing to manage it on behalf of the structural continuity of the institution as a whole. The very “catholic identity” diversifies. One only has to think (besides the persistence of a devotional Catholicism whose routinized character not necessarily deprives it of the thickness of a significant personal experience¹) not only in comparatively more recent lay-dominated movements such as *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base* (Ecclesiastic Grassroots Communities) and the Charismatics, but also in much older lay movements such as the *Vicentinos* and *Cursillos* in

¹ “On the other hand, what one sees is a renewed explication for a universally consecrated way of being catholic, which is (as we have seen) an individualization of experience and of the picture through which the individual sees himself/herself and lives his/her catholicism. It is odd that studies and writings on the Catholic Church in Brazil frequently ignore the role and importance of such ‘catholic body’. This is a presence indeed much greater than the small militant fractions which it justly addresses.” (BRANDAO 1992: 61)

Christianity, in dioceses as paradigmatically diverse as those in Campos (Rio de Janeiro state) and Goiás (Goiás state), the Afro Masses and “spectacular” showcase Masses by Father Rossi. Not to mention sedimentations and networks within the very National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB), expressed by the votes counted and contested in its plenary meetings and by the relationships of unequal communion density and hues these groups engage with the Vatican itself.

On the other hand – and maybe today it could be said, chiefly – the same diversification grid imposes itself as a tool for understanding when the analysis is displaced to the individual field: inner diversification and pluralism in the acknowledgement and construction of identities, paths and eventual slippages. Moreover, in the relationship between each subject with his/her own group, movement, denomination, current or Church: there are various ways of adhering to institutionally created consensus, of conceiving belonging to such collectives, of sharing such world-views and making these ethos’ guidelines one’s own. Many are the modalities of belief in these meanings and powers; the ways, exclusive or multiple, of affirming, distinguishing and/or combining these identities differ, and may even oppose one another. Many are the ways of playing with this very typical diversity, be it by unequivocally taking a stable stance, by probing a single itinerary, or yet, by simply searching a thousand successive or simultaneous avenues, a horizon... Manifold levels of diversity which reduplicate and traverse each other. How to still speak of one “religion” of the Brazilians?

From all these findings, one solid piece of evidence stands out: the Brazilian field is currently made up of numerous religions. That much fragmented and that many religions? Institutional references indeed abound. But maybe it is possible to cluster them into sub-fields, or dynamic currents bearing specific logics, at times converging, at times diverging. What are these?

Two of them make up the most traditional and almost substantive strain of Brazil’s religious history: christianity – if not more particularly catholicism – and the realm generically referred to as “Afro”, encompassing experiences and traditions rhythmically accompanying slave flows as their only good, their until now sole unalienable treasure. As was already noted, christianity in Brazil is from now on plural. I have already spoken of catholicism, a modulated but yet massive presence. Standing next to it, the diversity (and traditionally low-profile) of the protestant world called “historical”, often overshadowed by pentecostal noisy fuss, should be stressed. Its presence provides an effective contrast, especially for some of its denominations and population strata more akin to the autonomous play of reason, for whom catholic institutional dogmatism generates religious discontent. No doubt the most common representation of historical protestant universe is of an almost mummified stagnation (perhaps not so much in areas of Swiss or German settlement, where calvinism and lutheranism are almost “ethnic” religions). Only two alternatives would then be

available for it: either to be part of the general revitalization and “renew” itself, or to disappear. But such representation is wrong, or at least outdated. Recent research in Rio de Janeiro showed that, after having indeed remained close to stagnation until a decade ago, traditional protestant churches (not to mention those who joined the pentecostal renovation movement) are live ones, recruiting their followers even amongst youth. In certain areas, their vitality is today tantamount to that of the baptists and the Assembly of God.

But no doubt the most visible phenomenon within Brazilian *christian* field is the massive penetration of pentecostal churches. This happens not only in the religious arena as a whole, but also across-the-board in its sites of higher visibility, especially the more popular ones.

The phenomenon's density. The much discussed findings of recent investigations by ISER (Institute of Religious Studies) (FERNANDES et al. 1995 and FERNANDES et al. 1998) showed that in Rio's Metropolitan Region, between 1990 and 1993, five new evangelical temples were created every week, that is, one every working day. The growing number of followers (accounting today for between 10 and 15% of total population) seems to follow such rhythm. But it is specially the density of weekly participation at cult meetings (85% of pentecostal faithful; monthly frequency reaches 94%) that makes the phenomenon such a novelty in our field. It can thus be asserted that, in Rio, amongst the devotees who at least once a week are active players in religious meetings, most of them are pentecostal. And Rio seems to be no exception.

The rhythm of its History. As a revivalist branch of protestantism, pentecostalism arrived in Brazil from abroad early in the twentieth century. At first, its character of rupture *vis-à-vis* Brazilian religious traditions marked its visibility. Contained for a long period, pentecostal explosion took place during the 50's and 60's through intensive missions, veritable “Evangelization Crusades” organized from within Brazil. Today we witness a third, very Brazilian pentecostal wave which seems to unfold in consonance (although a tense one) with deep traits of traditional popular religious culture. The social layers most densely implicated are, from the beginning, the popular ones. Still today, regardless of its evident presence in other layers and of a certain social ascension of primitive pentecostal groups, the most common pentecostal pattern, although corresponding to the overall Brazilian profile of middle-lower income population (between 2 and 5 minimum wages), reverses its pyramid when the two extreme poles are at stake: low and high income. Outcomes would be similar when education and color are considered. It is a religion of poor people.

Further below I will tackle the issue of what such preferential option *by* the poor could mean. In fact, the apparent passage from catholicism to pentecostalism – at least in many popular social segments – tends to be articulated with an *ambivalent* transit between two cultures: the traditional catholic-Afro-Brazilian, and a modern culture of individual choice.

The game gains complexity – at least, I repeat, in terms of broad, paradigmatic segments of Brazilian society – with the presence of an Afro religious universe, whose threads are so far closely intertwined with the experience of catholicism in the popular realm of “religion”. It is precisely to this realm that pentecostalism (in this regard, consonant with protestant tradition) opposes the world of “faith”.

Candomble and umbanda. These are two modes of creative – and ‘Brazilian’, which also means ‘catholic’ – loyalty to traditions rooted in another world which managed to, when ripped off their original geographical and socio-political matrix (a “topological” matrix, with all determinations the term has for contemporary sociology of religion), re-elaborate in Brazil their original symbolic universe, and later on their communitarian organizations. It became a universal religious proposal, irrespective of nation, ethnicity, race, or color. This is a rough sketch of the three phases making up the historical trajectory of the process Roger Bastide used to describe as the detachment of a superstructure from the infrastructure which had originally shaped it, its migrating autonomization across the ocean, and its re-implantation on another socio-economic foundation where it was able to segregate spaces and chart new, ever-changing forms.

Against this folclorizing view, Afro religious world in Brazil is not only made of permanence, copy or repetition. It is also alive, that is, in constant, dynamic and tense recreation around a complex identitarian representation axis which, at times, leads to claims for the authenticity of its traditional “foundations” and, at other times, shifts it towards assimilating other influences, latent or actively present in Brazilian religious space.

For instance, both in umbanda and in numerous compound, encroached groups established around its self-representation of science and religion (in terms of which the problem of cure is paramount), these traditions articulate with yet another religious strain. This third symbolic universe, a late comer in Brazil, reactivated ancient latencies, and articulated with them to mark the field in such a deep way that some students (CARVALHO 1999, for instance) even ask whether the fundamental Brazilian religious culture should not be acknowledged as having been shaped by it more than by the catholic: spiritism. Be it as it may, this is indeed a great articulator, a multifarious presence in the national religious field. It suffices to assert that, to a great extent, it is through the mediation of spiritism turned into religion – and a highly ethic one in Brazil (a trend not necessarily shared by its original formula, an ethic version of modern scientificism) – that charity, an evangelical value, became part of umbanda’s constitution (NEGRÃO 1996).

A fourth strain and family, even more recently introduced but already assimilated, in a “Brazilian way”, to certain umbanda currents, comprise cults of Eastern origin. These are Buddhism

in its several obediences, Krishna's hinduism, Japanese groups of *Seicho no Iê*, Perfect Liberty or Messianic Church, and so forth.

Finally, there are the less institutionalized, capillary currents which make up the fifth symbolic universe I wish to mention: the typically contemporary realm of the New Era. Its proliferation of branchings, meetings, fusions and overlapping juxtapositions, particular traditions and universal sedimentations is exuberant. New Era – an esoteric tradition, visibly present in Brazil since the nineteenth century, with which it re-encounters and crosses – is at once the striking affirmation and radical negation of an individualistic, rational and de-sacralizing modernity. It is an attempt to rescue the global (spiritual, carnal and cosmic) aspect of man's path towards a never-attained (because never concluded) entirety, spiritual and supernatural only because aiming at being totally and fully “natural”. This path is made up of experiences and discoveries, and the individual's relapses are a delay in the enlightening transformation rather than a guilt urging for a redeemer. If, therefore, Christ is present, it is not as a redeemer, but as the – eventually supreme – enlightener.

A thousand forms, a thousand ways, a thousand instruments, self-reflexive or external, a thousand historical references (LUZ 1998) – some of them even self-interpreted as a negation of christianity. This makes some christian currents judge New Era as a return harking back to a guilt-removing “heathenism” (a stance tempered in LIBÂNIO 1998: 1416). The Mystical Fair indeed poses contemporary man as an approximate image of his own face: the multiplicity of regards and perspectives, equipping himself with tools which are “technical”, interchangeable and susceptible to being added up (the law of magic...) in order to be fulfilled. Together, they make up the atmosphere of a spiritual magic capable of unveiling the mystery of the future (tarot, *Yi Ching*, *buzios*), of curing the body and turning it into mind's ally, of re-enchanting the world and building a destiny in it. “Neo-heathenism”? Probably, but only if this category's meaning is refined².

Finally, following the trail of this “Novelty” of redesccovering the old, it is necessary to introduce what is intended as a contemporary re-emergence of the most ancient Brazilian religious root, the Santo Daime Doctrine. Today less visibly appealing to our Southern mood, it had once performed the task of conflating in a single intense and continuous spiritual experience segments from the most representative social layers of modernity – intellectuals and artists – and the most radical stratum of historically primeval Brazil, topologically deep and vegetal: the indigenous. Good investigators report, in the northwestern state of Acre, a unique religious ferment around dozens of groups springing from classic Daimist matrixes.

² Cf some of the debate's terms in *Nova Era e Cristianismo* (A. d'Andrea, P. Weill and P. Jesus Hortal), *Magis*, n° 29, 1998, 79-128.

I said: “finally”. But there is still a last category forming Brazil’s religious field: those declaring to have no religion. These comprise almost 5% of the country as a whole, a little more than 5% in Belo Horizonte, over 11% in Rio de Janeiro city (9.4% in the state), but only 6.2% in São Paulo city and 4.9% in São Paulo state. This shows that the rise of such category not necessarily follows the most “modern” lines. Hence, a fair amount of Brazilians search for a meaning for their lives outside religions, although – in Belo Horizonte, for instance – 91.2% of persons “without religion” do believe in God. This is a complex problem of epistemological coherence – or of reviewing these categories – to which I shall return below.

Thus, even if one remains at the nearly ideal-typical level of general trends without properly classifying the numerous emergent groups, one is still far from a religious monolithism. “The Brazilians’ religions” differ, and, in some cases, deeply oppose each other. However, we can already realize they do not constitute stagnant blocks. There are bridges, relationships, transfers of meaning. In this sense, the use of the singular in the title chosen for this conference should be taken as a valid instrument for scrutiny.

I do not regard such unified meaning as a common denominator, an assemblage of “basic elements” shared by all religious currents (even if providing them with different organizations) deriving from the simple fact that they are all situated within the Brazilian space (FERNANDES 1982: 135)³.

Neither does this mean a “civil religion” able to create, below all denominations and outside them, a bundle of values allowing all Brazilian citizens to invest their religious energies into a single target: the construction of a political being, of a politically feasible nation (AZEVEDO 1982).

Nor is this a “minimal religion”, composed of a few principles systematically displayed in public places and the mass media, like a basic “attitude” independent both of the Churches and of the State; something like a culture, imposing itself in practice in order that communication within national society be possible (DROOGERS 1987).

I am not denying the existence of such processes or instances. But they are not the ones I wish to describe or analyze here.

In some regards, what I aim at here stands perhaps closer to the concept of “Brazilian religion” by Pedro Ribeiro de Oliveira (OLIVEIRA & FERNANDES 1983) and to the “minimal

³ “The main elements are widely known: nature, human beings, spirits of the dead, positive and negative divinities, a supreme God. A common world is constituted by all these basic elements. But the relationships between the parts differ according to the various views, each of them claiming the privilege to reduce the others to its own terms”.

elements present in Brazilian religiosity” used by Lísias Nogueira Negrão⁴ – although these still differ from the level I wish to dwell on.

In effect, I do not speak of the *content* of such “Brazilians’ religion”; rather, I ask whether its manifestations, taken as a whole, would not unveil, in their constituting modalities, analogies and oppositions, complementarities preferably activated at the periphery of institutions. Such assemblage would thus constitute a true religious “field” made up of mutually-referred component parts; thus, a recognizable religious field, because determined and particular.

Amongst all possible modalities, I chose here six of them.

The first is – at least as a hypothesis – the existence of a generalized reference to christianity, but perhaps even more to catholicism. Such reference is no doubt the offspring of a history, and does not stand, in my view, for reverence or adhesion. Some speak of a “matrix” – a probably meaningful category through which to frame such phenomenon⁵, provided it is understood as a symbolic universe whose stamp is everywhere perceivable because it is inside it, from it, along it, in its shadows but also in its face that religious identities, even when coming from abroad, define themselves in Brazil. It often happens that researchers are impressed with such continuous presence, indeed polyvalent in terms of social and geographical regions, and of a pervasiveness from which religious problematic in Brazil is only now beginning to escape.

It is impossible – in fact, if not by right (at least a self-proclaimed right) – to think for instance of Afro religious world in Brazil as being “purely” African; it is rather Afro-Brazilian, interwoven as it is with the original Brazilian religion, christianity. I will limit myself to three of its evocations.

The first cosmovision was spontaneously expressed during an outdoors cult held by a Son of Saint from one of the oldest *terreiros* (candomble religious centers) in Belo Horizonte. He is a young adult who was adopted as a son by his Mother of Saint, and who dwells in the very candomble space. It is not that his conscious identitarian reference includes an eventual belonging to the Catholic Church, as happens with many of his pairs (recall, for instance, Mãe Menininha’s famous declarations). What makes his case significant is the fact that, although clearly setting himself apart from catholics (“We are all like brothers who do not inhabit the same house. [...] Everyone is a child of a single God. We act like this. And I think the catholics are also getting there

⁴ “Belief in Gods and ghosts, the manipulation of the latter and of other holy characters standing in-between Him and men, within a christian moral context – these are therefore the minimal elements present in Brazilian religiosity” (NEGRÃO 1997: 72).

⁵ “The more I delve deeper in my investigations, the more it seems that the great Brazilian religious matrix is catholicism” (Anaísa Virgolino, oral interview, Belém, 1997). For others, the “Brazilian religious matrix” is a “religious-cultural substract” broader than christianity (BITTENCOURT Fº 1996: 45).

too. Ultimately, by the end of our earthly commitment, there will be no catholic, no spiritist, no nothing. There will be only one God's son"), his religious *habitus* (cosmovision and ethos) manifests an unmistakable catholic reference: "Zambi, good God, Zambi my Father, Father of mine, mine, [...] a person who made heaven and earth, and this world, the marvelous universe [...] we are in. For having given it to us all, with love. [So far, these are indeed not very "African" statements, but they are still quite generic. However, the speech goes on, addressing – shall we not forget – Zambi] And for all that, he paid much, died in a cross. Thanks to him we go on living". The researcher then tries twice to verify the degree of clarity of the presence of such christian fact in a theoretically "African" religious universe. When he first asks: "Zambi? But Zambi does not descent, does he?", the discourse naturally slips from ritual trance "descents" to the cosmic "arrival" in the evangelical scatology lesson – as if the historical and daily series of the former were a rehearsal for the totalizing actualization of the latter: "He will come one day, no one knows when. When the Signs of the Times... He who sees the angels playing the trumpets in the world's four corners, the day of reckoning, judgment day, doom's day. This is the day when the earth will have to account for to God the peoples she has provided". "But this is from the Bible!", the researcher insists, as if trying to elicit the confirmation of a distinction between the two identities. Contrary to such an answer, over the sonorous background of the *atabaques* (ritual drums) and the visual picture of ritual dances:

- *Compadre*, but if we do not live according to the Bible, we are [...] atheists. Atheists. Heretic.
- So you do have the Bible as a holy book?
- The Bible has always been a holy book. The Bible is the first book, *uai*. There is no other way. The Bible is the first book. We walk, we move, we judge someone and ourselves through the Bible. Without it, nobody ain't no one.

I would like to retain the last sentence uttered by a Son of Saint in the middle of ritual action, a sentence which speaks of identity, as paradigmatic of what I have in mind here: "Without the Bible, nobody ain't no one".

Would this be, then, a generic christianity, simply manifest by reference to the christians' Holy Text? Not just that. It is about the priest, about asking for a mass to be celebrated, about participating in *romarias* (catholic pilgrimages): "I go to many *romarias*. In fact tomorrow I'll attend Our Lady of Piety, on the Piety Mountains. [...] I have been to Congonhas [...], I always do. [...] Catholic *romaria* has more strength, more light, and more understanding than us, and it is an opportunity to get along with the catholic people".

The Bible as a way of defining identity; the catholic *romaria* as a way for People of Saint knowing themselves better.

As a second index, it is enough to recall the importance “charity” has in umbanda – such a core role for a christian value which certainly was not so pivotal in the rank of traditionally African values. Moreover, as a recent work has remarked, it “shocks directly with two traditional practices from the magical universe in which it was originally constituted: payment for religious services, and demanding magic battle against enemies or foes. [...] Re-interpretation is pressing” (NEGRÃO 1996: 307-371). Indeed, as I have already suggested, it is very likely that the mediation of spiritism is operating.

As for the notion of “sin” and its correlate, “salvation” – our third evocation –, they disclose the aforementioned double vein of the relationship with the catholic matrix. In effect, at least in some cases, such shroud is rejected by candomblé in order to make up an explicitly contrastive identity *vis-à-vis* Catholicism. According to the logic esteemed by Mothers of Saint as the most genuinely African (from Africa) theological synthesis: “- They are two religions. Wanna see it? To them [catholics], sin is important. To us, there is no sin. Religion has nothing to do with private life”. In numerous cases, however, the catholic reference is evident, such as in this answer by another Mother of Saint: “- Of course there is evil. And also sin! [...] Yes, there is sin. There is Heaven and Hell”.

If we move from the Afro field into a more typically contemporary realm as the New Era, the same milestones of sin and salvation raise doubts against the generality and permanence of such state of reference to catholicism. I leave to those who know more than I the question: “By developing a cosmovision which, in general, excludes the notions of sin and outwardly salvation, are New Era adherents aware that this sets them in direct contrast with the more classical version of catholicism? Or is such reference is no longer remarked by them?”

I am tempted to think that for both New Era and Oriental religions (Japanese religions, Hare Krishna), even when the theoretical construction of their respective symbolic universes does not address catholicism, the individual experience of their Brazilian followers keeps unfolding (along a gradient of positivity and negativity⁶) with reference to such matrix. This permits to think simultaneously of the middle-ground persistence of a certain amplified contamination of the total field by the reference to catholicism⁷, and a stiffening of increasingly opposed autonomous poles.

⁶ There is also a gradient of intensity, since referential alterity is unequally present in these Religious Movements (Cf. PAIVA 1998).

⁷ A remark: in the research on religion and the 1994 presidential elections carried out by A.F. Pierucci and R. Prandi, followers of each religion were showed to have in fact their own (more precisely, preferential) candidate. But the overall

Such seems to be true for an instance outside any institutionally religious site: the attitude towards religion of scientists studied by a social psychologist from the University of Sao Paulo (USP). Religion was meaningful to them through the memory of their biographical – catholic – experience (PAIVA 1993).

The second modality which seems to mark religious field in Brazil is nor related to this “catholic” penetrating presence.

We distinguish institutional families, strains, identities. Now we should assert that such differences are often experienced as indecisions, inter-crossings, porosities and as a double, mutually contaminating presence. And this trait should be explained historically.

In effect, the astonishing religious diversity we spoke of in the beginning of this piece, both institutionally and subjectively articulated, may not be such a recent phenomenon in Brazil. No doubt, its contemporary richness and degree of intensity are probably unprecedented; its modalities show new and creative inflexions. But it is quite likely that its sudden emergence is partially due to a change of our own observational and analytical tools, rather than to an objective novelty.

For, in this regard, Brazil seems to me to have always been plural.

Such pluralism is however a peculiar one, overshadowed until quite recently by the encompassing and dominant character of Catholicism – although, in fact and paradoxically, catholicism itself partially accounts for it.

It would be of course necessary to unearth the historical origin of such modality of pluralism – simultaneously a modality of syncretism. But it is not possible to do so here, if only allusively⁸.

Let us speak first of Catholicism as a virtually syncretic structure.

Amongst Western versions of Christianity, catholic vein seems to be indeed especially prone to the syncretic process. Firstly because – differently for instance from protestantism, which from the onset tended to reify and isolate primitive christianity’s fundamental vector, the one which made of it a “faith” (autonomously responsible individual adhesion, within the movement of grace, to the salvific fact of Christ) – “catholicism”⁹ tends to articulate such dimension with the institutional apparatus accompanying any “religion” as anthropological phenomena. A “faith” indeed, but framed as “religion”. Therefore, its organizational structure, its view of a universe mediating the sacred, its cult loaded with bodily and cosmic presence force it to engage, within its own space and at an equivalent level, with other religions. In this relationship, mutual re-interpretations may

average of traditional catholics (i.e., non-members of CEBs or of Movements) coincides exactly – and meaningfully – with the general population’s overall average (PIERUCCI & PRANDI 1996).

⁸ Further explanations can be found in SANCHIS (1995b).

⁹ Understood here as a particular dimension within the historical christian vein, a dimension not reduced to the Catholic Church, although having in it its most evident cristalization.

naturally re-signify elements from one or the other identity. Secondly, its affinity with the mythical dimension (operating in liturgy) predisposes it to privilege symbolic expression. This, as an arrow of meaning, guides spirits towards a determined direction without necessarily (as concept would) defining an ultimate meaning. Through such semantic plurality, a wide array of meetings becomes possible.

Catholicism may inscribe in history the structural predisposition for crossings and porosity of its follower's religious experiences in many different ways. Two of them are of interest here and now. The most common and concrete for us in the Old World is Portugal. Catholicism was implanted there in a *topos* already religiously occupied (by pre-Celtic, Celtic and Roman religions), and seized from the sedimentations inside its root the cultural – and religious – elements with which it would nurture its own identity. This is undoubtedly a conscious and unified “catholic” identity, but one effectively bearer of the virtualities harbored in the religious layers which paved the way to its emergence. It is born at a particular site, it adds on to a specific past. It is a diachronic syncretism, a recapitulative identity. But another type of syncretism is possible. And it is precisely the one characterizing Brazil. Pulled out from the particular humus feeding its anthropological basis, Portuguese catholicism found itself cast into an open and endless space, where it synchronically met diverse symbolic structures through the forced approximation of three uprooted peoples' identities. This is for sure a structurally unequal encounter. But right now I do not wish to dwell on the macro-process of domination, exploration, intentional ethnocide, almost genocide. Notwithstanding them, within their gaps or even turning them inside out, micro-processes of identity games took place at the individual, group, or even collective (though never institutional) level. Correlated, crossed, juxtaposed, articulated identities – but never definitely mixed.

A systematic plurality marked socio-genesis in Brazil, which was soon translated into porosity and mutual contamination. Neither mere juxtaposition multi-culturalism, nor suppression of differences. It is enough to recall the early composite movements of indigenous “Sanctities”,¹⁰ originally supported by the social group of the *mamelucos* (mixed Indian and white ancestry), but soon encompassing indigenous leaders, Portuguese settlers and “Guinea Blacks”. Later on, African traditions already deeply syncretic before their arrival were introduced in the melting pot of a live, historically active and – at least at the level of “popular” experience – different processing matrix: catholicism. Neither pure Africa, nor a mere reproduction of European catholicism, nor an untouched continuity of “native” religions, both from a religious and cultural standpoint.

¹⁰ Cf. VAINFAS (1995) on the Jaguariba Sanctity, made known through the process aiming at its Inquisition. How many others must have existed that the dominant institutional pole's archives did not let us hear of?

This is about a beginning; a socio-genesis, Norbert Elias would say. Of course I do not imply that the onset of a social fact defines its history, but rather that it contributes to shaping a *habitus*¹¹ in the socio-cultural and psycho-social system characterizing its actors. Such *habitus* tends, on its turn, to shape the “long duration” of its own presence. I thus mean that, since its inception, Brazilian history – and not only the history of Brazil’s religious field – is marked by the presence of a structural predisposition to porosity – but not to confusion – of identities.

A great laboratory of cultural miscegenation – or, in the religious terrain, syncretism – is thus inaugurated, in a very particular pre-modern way.

Since it is a *habitus* anchored in socio-genesis, it might be fecund to return to some of the first dwellers of what would become Brazil – the Tupi Indians – and risk an explanation for the third modality which seems to characterize contemporary Brazilian religious field.

In effect, Brazilian religious milieu, chiefly but not exclusively the popular one, exists in the midst of a certain “spiritualistic” atmosphere apparently shared – and modulated – by several segmentary “mentalities” in Brazil. According to such representation, not only there is a God (99.3% in the Belo Horizonte Metropolitan Region in 1998, even with the “no religion” share being of 5.7%), but mankind is immersed within a universe populated with forces, spirits, personal influences, all engaged in relationships with men. There seems to be a perennial dialogue between these “others” and the self, built precisely during the operation of such relationship... *Orixas* for some, the dead, saints or entities for others, Our Ladies who appear and come to live amongst men, angels, spirits, cosmic forces, demons – or all these at once; the Holy Ghost, after all, for pentecostals and charismatics. The presence of this third World dimension is everywhere perceived. Harmful or beneficial, it is directly related to men’s existence, to their bodily or spiritual wholeness, to the relationships they entertain, and eventually to their ethical consciousness and spiritual destiny. This is a cosmic or corporally sensible presence: “to feel God throughout the body”. In this sense, the phenomenon of possession (“I is an Other”, said Rimbaud)¹² is no more than the most evident form of a pervasive and almost omnipresent process of complexification and multiple sedimentation of personality. It was found that for nearly half the Brazilian population, the true identity is given, or fulfilled, by means of an invasion by the other, or by the elevation of the Other onto self. An enchanted – or haunted! – world; in any case, a plural one, even within its individual atoms.

¹¹ As N. Elias used the term for the study of a certain German tradition (ELIAS 1996), deprived of all substantivistic and deterministic bias.

¹² Gilberto VELHO (1982 and 1994) long ago insisted on the diffusion of such spirit manifestation through individuals in the entire Brazilian society. Cf. also, amongst others, BIRMAN (1995), AUGRAS (1983) and SEGATO (1995).

What some of the most recent studies on the Tupinambá Indians (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO & CARNEIRO DA CUNHA 1985) underscore is a specific process of identity building which could well have, analogically and in the “long run”, provided the basis for the *habitus* whose existence I have just asserted: a “constructivist” process rooted in the future (rather than in a topic past) and devised towards not the anxiety of a finished identity, but the ever-renewed realization of the anthropophagic relationship between Subject and other. A “future-oriented” people, not defined by topologic inscription; on the contrary, marked by a congenital yearning for space “in the search for” the Land Without Evil. A soft, virtually inexistent, social structuring, coupled with an almost unique structuring principle: vengeance, translated into antropophagy. It is this principle which ceaselessly resumes the thread of a continuously rebuilt reciprocity history. Simultaneously, vengeance is the search for defining an identity: mine and the Other’s, who enters me. An identity of memory and name, completely relativistic: I am precisely because I have become an I conferred by the one I have killed and eaten. It entered me: I am it.

It is timely to recall Darcy RIBEIRO (1995)’s insistence that the Brazilians’ cultural matrix is indeed Tupinambá, merged and vanished in the sedimentations of natural culture, but still present in them.

By articulating these features – porosity of identities and persistence of a multiplicity of processes building up a plural Subject – a religious field is formed in which differences and eventual oppositions between symbolic universes and institutionalized cosmovisions not necessarily dovetail with individual religious experiences, segmentary and isolating. A veritable dialectics is thus instituted around the “syncretic” elements of culture. This will be my fourth point.

Two distinctions should be made in this regard. The first, which I have just evoked, is one between institutional stances (often defining identities in a strict and closed fashion) and daily communication between subjects bearing religious synthesis they experience their own way, and which they may articulate within themselves as simultaneously “this” and “that”¹³. The second accompanies the first along its history, unfolding in-between two movements dialectically stretching the Brazilian religious field in one or another direction: the flexibility of identities and even of institutional borders – or, conversely, a stiffening of identities and institutions¹⁴ stemming from attempts at extending the field of rationalization, formal logic, organization, and classificatory rigidity. This *habitus* of porosity between identities did not operate alone and unconstrained at any

¹³ Based on that, a colleague ironically proposed another title for a third conference: after “The Brazilians’ religions” and “The Brazilians’ religion”, also “The Brazilian’ religions”.

¹⁴ For instance, umbanda.

given “moment” of Brazil’s history. To make a saga of syncretisms out of this history would be rough reductionism.

In Brazilian pre-history, on the other hand, the Tupinambá were not the lone players in their social space. Standing beside and in front of them, there are the Je, displaying a much stronger collective *self*, topically rooted and articulated into a much more structured social organization. And soon, together with Portuguese settlers came the jesuits [“this prodigious rationalization Society of Jesus priests were able to attain in their missions”, as Sergio Buarque de Holanda (1976: 11) used to say], Inquisition, and, later on, Pombal and enlightenment, protestant schools, romanization, Trent seminars, catholic reformation with the Dom Vital Center, modernizing changes in Brazilian society (and Brazil’s religious field) through immigration, the establishment of Universities and the first pentecostal wave, as well as movements such as Cursillos in Christianity, Liberation theology, and so forth. All these were attempts at introducing or enforcing in Brazil, at the elite but also popular level, Kantian modernity of the rational, autonomous Subject, bearer of a self-referenced identity. Such Kantian modernity stood in stark opposition against Brazilian tradition of porous and multiple identities, symbolic truths, and ethical ambivalences (Cf. KANT 1980: 295). Perhaps “classic pentecostalism” was the first instance when, at least at the popular level, a Brazilian social movement was able to “stir up the crowds” by means of *personal* adhesions breaking away with the previous *status quo*, often ambivalent towards magic and religion. According to the radical protestant principle, it is through choice based on faith in personal surrender to Jesus – and not through the mediation of an Institution, as prescribed by catholic formula (“I believe in the Church”) – that each believer is saved, changes his/her own destiny and, with it, the world. “Modernity”, indeed; and also the (sometimes aggressive) cutting edge of an entire “anti-syncretic” trend currently traversing Brazilian religious field and fully hitting candomble, and even – paradoxically – umbanda and the Santo Daime.

Therefore, the history of Brazilian religious field is one of the struggle between these two vectors: the persistence of a traditional, flexibilizing *habitus* which, without suppressing the differences, may lead to a certain form of syncretism; and its resistance to the also quite real assault from successive “modern” rationalities – those which, as Kant used to say, secure to all the maxims “determination and solidity” by keeping away from “middle-grounds” and “ambiguities” (KANT 1980: 295). After all, the “field” I am trying to outline here – and, I should add, the field of its socio-analytical interpretations (but this is outside our scope) – is precisely made up of the contemporary outcomes of such enduring dialectics. This dialectics contributes to shuffle categories, analogies, oppositions and parallels, displaying far from simplistic relationships, and

frequently, surprises. I will now outline some examples, as minute strokes contributing to make up a more realistic overall picture than common sense would expect.

Let us start with antagonisms. The very arrangement of representations of the institutional systems in popular consciousness may recombine antagonistic spaces (“Who is with whom, facing whom?”) in a map of unexpected design. Thus, a candomblé follower and popcorn seller in Salvador (state of Bahia) evoked the archbishop’s attitude (also felt by the children of saint as aggressive) when speaking of neo-pentecostal attacks against Afro-Brazilian religions. Standing in front of the *Senhor Bom Jesus* shrine, he attributed what could be seen as an alliance of Christian forces against a certain heathenism to a mere mistake by the archbishop: “This bishop did not understand who the Church’s enemies are. It is not us. It is those sects which attack both the Church and us. We are on the same side”. On the side – if our previous analysis is exact – of “religion”.

Often, only a mobile consideration inscribed in dyacrony is able to account for the historical emergence of such paradoxes. For instance, based solely in the logic of institutional cosmologies and symbolic systems presiding over the early moments of pentecostal offensive in Brazil, who could have foreseen the emergence of a third pentecostal wave (the so-called “neo-pentecostal”, currently epitomized by the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God)? Several current studies converge in interpreting it as a progressive anthropophagic assimilation of the principles of reformation (or classic pentecostalism) by the Brazilian *habitus* of porous identities and familiarity with an enchanted (or haunted), mediating universe – for good, or for evil. Pentecostalism was thus Brazilianized.

At times, the opposite happens: odd approximations and parallels end up being disclosed. For instance, it is widely known that this same Universal Church and Afro religions wage an overt battle. As interpretive common-sense remarks, such battle implies a shared cosmology: the same entities are worshipped by one, and exorcized by the other. It is therefore curious to spot between them yet another common ground, an unexpected theological realm, which can be read in the recent statement below by a Catholic missionary in Benin...

What is the purpose of voodoo? It is to drink well, eat well, have children, have good health, have money; this, they hide from no one [...].

I asked them about *caori* because in the beginning of a liberation ceremony six *caoris* are put into the mouth, forming a line bound with palm tree fiber that they keep inside the mouth. I asked them why they put *caori* in the mouth. They answered: because *caori* is money, is wealth. This shows that only voodoo possesses wealth, only voodoo can give it to men.

Likewise, when they make scarifications over the body, especially on the shoulders, they go to a secret place, a house called “prosperity”, “wealth” house. They say it is the voodoo who gives them money, wealth. Money matters are

indeed very important. [...] Each time one goes to the *terreiro*, it is always necessary to give a small gift. [...] They are not afraid of asking for it¹⁵.

Make no mistake: such remarks – perhaps marked by prejudices, which is irrelevant here – speak of the Voodoo cult and its priests, and not, as it might seem, of the Theology of Prosperity, the so-called “Isaac Sacrifice” and the Universal Church priests!

Alternatively, when confrontation between institutional cosmovisions within the same families would logically predict drastic oppositions and domestic dramas, the daily cohabitation and crossing of each household member’s trajectory allow not only for peaceful coexistence but for a complementarity of sacred functions and magic protection, as each one’s supernatural forces are conflated, notwithstanding transits, “conversions”, “betrayals”, and passages to the side of the (theoretically) enemy¹⁶.

In an analogous but more collective sense, it seems like, surreptitiously and under the shelter of domestic intimacy, an intense and unexpected flow of inter-denominational communication is increasingly taking place. This evades the reach of an eventual institutional will for exclusive audience. In effect, a recent survey in Belo Horizonte shows a growing tendency, rooted specially in popular sectors and conveyed by radio, TV, newspapers and even magazines, of generalization of a communicative field marked by intense inter-crossing of religious fluxes in Brazilian society. In this field an *habitus* of opening to the “other’s” message is rooted and affirmed. Such opening forecasts a new type of porosity of the very religious identities, precisely when recent pentecostal expansion made us think of a rupture within this tradition’s strain (SANCHIS 1997).

Radio and TV shows led by the archbishop Dom Serafim are watched weekly by 49.1% of Kardecist spiritists, and most in such audience (56.9%) find them “good” or “excellent”. Only 22.8% of catholics watch them as frequently, but almost unanimously find them good or excellent (81%).

Comparatively, 20.2% of catholics also watch, daily or weekly, evangelical shows on TV, 29.4% listen as frequently to evangelical radio programs (plus 25.6% who listen to them occasionally, and 30.2% listen occasionally to evangelical TV shows). For both radio and TV, 50% of catholic spectators or listeners find their content “good” or “excellent”.

Likewise, for followers of “other christian religions” the audience of such programs reaches 50% (radio) or 75% (TV), getting as high as 100% for “other non-christian religions”.

As for pentecostals, 34% watch every week Dom Serafim’s show, which they like (30.4%). Even more surprising is that 33.4% of them watch *Rede Vida* (a catholic channel) *daily*, half of

¹⁵ I thank Renato Barbieri for reporting me this interview.

¹⁶ As the rich analyses of the Universal Church and traditional cults of possession by P. BIRMAN (1994) illustrate.

them listen daily to *Radio America* (a catholic radio station), and the other half tunes in “occasionally”. And they like it, a lot (63.7% of “excellent” and “good”). Almost as much as the catholics do (82.6%).

However, this is not about a fuzzy flow of indifferently “religious” waves. There are privileged fluxes following elective affinities, whereby identities recognize each other. If spiritists, for instance, are partially faithful to Dom Serafim, they do not attend pentecostal programs. Neither do followers of candomble and umbanda. But the latter do not listen to the archbishop either, nor watch TV mass or any other catholic show. When a “double belonging” exists, it is probably at the level of the rite as effectively and directly experienced, and not of the word. This is confirmed in a reverse way by the effective “double belonging” of a growing number of catholic militants. Another recent research in Belo Horizonte showed that, within a particular circle of catholics influenced by the mystique of the Black Pastoral Agents, 20.8% declared an explicit double religious belonging, and for half of them catholicism stood behind the other religion (SANCHIS 1997).

Ultimately, therefore, this articulation of changes at several levels throughout the waves and contacts of daily life may lead to a sharp instability of the imaginary and axiological frame of references.

In this case, such inter-communication between general symbolic systems may go adrift to the point of becoming a caricature of itself. It is not satisfied in fostering re-interpretations and evaluative inversions, which henceforth influence relationships within the religious field: *orixas* become saints, angels become demons, saints, and idols; the Spirit becomes an entity amongst others. It also allows for the establishment of a cultural “atmosphere”, especially in mass media, where everything is plausible – everything is possible because there will be receptivity and sympathy in advance – in terms of an enchanted/haunted world. Conversely to the growing presence of such world’s a-historical reverse, the enhanced social transmission of historical myths from the christian tradition – the cultural support of Brazilian traditional identity – tends to recede in mass media. On a recent Good Friday, in a show watched by hundreds of thousands of Brazilian children, the emcee stated: “Today is a very special day: the great celebration of Easter, day of the bunny and of eating tons of chocolate”... Meanwhile, on the very Resurrection day that same year, in one of the largest newspaper of learned culture, not a word was uttered on the celebration’s meaning – not even on the very existence of a celebration being held that day...¹⁷ Alternatively, a TV commercial invited: “Have a sensual Easter! Give out erotic gifts!”

¹⁷ Two indexes of the historical ambiguity of such cultural change: in Brasília, a “laic-entrepreneur” preschool principal, herself catholic and certain of the importance of the religious dimension in education, estimates however that the cultivation of such dimension is family responsibility. That was why, in her school, when interest was focused on Easter, “no reference was made [...] to the date’s religious meaning, but only to bunnies and Easter eggs”, and its “consumerist

This leads us, at last, to the immediately contemporary situation of the Brazilian religious field, which can be summed up in two findings.

The first pervades – even if unequally – almost the totality of religion’s social space. It is a subjectifying attitude characterizing religious (or simply social) actors: relativization of certainties, cultivation based on mutable emotions which, while simultaneously emphasizing and smoothing the diversification tackled in the beginning of this essay and re-distributing the tasks of meaning attribution, questions the intelligibility keys currently available for mapping the “Field” under study here. In fact, it is less about an “objective truth” foregrounding contemporary search for the religious meaning of life¹⁸ than about an emotion “sounding like the truth”. As one of Shree Rajneesh’s followers said: “Emotions cannot be explained. Today, I develop my energy, my dance (meditation)... one has to feel; not with the mind, but with the heart – only then, all is lighten up!” (*Apud* ABREU 1990:211).

There are three dimensions to this first aspect of the phenomenon:

First of all, the primacy of emotion over reasoning or scientific reason: an emotion leading to human plenitude (which does not mean it is deprived of epistemological consequences). “To believe”, in this sense, is an attitude of the human mind primarily contrasted with another dimension: “knowledge”. To know is to assert the truth of a proposition, an assertion to which the mind was trained through the handling of rational evidence and aiming at an objective conclusion. Conversely, when the contemporary religious subject says “I believe”, he affirms his adhesion to a proposition, an adhesion which usually sprang from persuasion inscribed in the horizon of non-strictly “rational” paths. These may be a testimony, an existential “experience” (for instance, of cure) fulfilling but perhaps provisional, a statement by someone whom one trusts, an acknowledgement of plausibility rhetorically attained, emotional and voluntary choice resonating with that of a groups with which one has deep bonds, etc. It is about assuming a subjective attitude. Not that the proposition’s character of intrinsic “truth” is unimportant; but it is not the one directly at stake. In a way, we are back – and not only in the religious sense – to the age of “Believing”.

Indeed, the second dimension is more typically “post-modern”: “truth” is more in a symbolic project than in the delimitation of closed conceptual definitions. Modern religious man seems, as the anthropologist, willing to proclaim:

aspect was stressed” (REIS, 1999: 142-144). On the other hand, the same newspaper presented, on the following year’s Easter day, two full-page articles on the celebration’s religious theme by representatives of two of Catholic Church’s internal tendencies. Editor’s self-criticism? An effect of public pressure? Only meaningless chance.

¹⁸ That is probably why today so many do not recognize themselves in the assertions restated by official Catholic Church’s texts, such as John Paul II’s *Veritatis Splendor* Encyclical (for instance, KAHN 1993).

The evocation [through symbols] is never totally determined; a considerable share of freedom is always left for the individual. Cultural symbolism casts the attention of members of a same society towards the same directions, determines parallel evocation fields similarly structured, but relinquishes to the individual the freedom to direct his own evocation as he wishes. [...] This has always disquieted men of Church and State, ideology producers, obstinate alienators of symbolism (SPERBER 1974: 147).

This is very likely to be one of the reasons why today the “religious field” is diminishingly the “field of religions” (Cf. SANCHIS 1995)¹⁹ for religious man. In his craving for building up a universe-for-himself – for sure full of meaning, but of a subjective, meaning-for-himself –, he is unwilling to bow to the definitions of the elements of his own experience proposed by the institutions. The “religious market” metaphor, often used for describing religion’s status in contemporary society, seems still too strict. For in a market the consumer purchases ready and finished products which are offered by the companies. In the open market of symbolic products, on the other hand, contemporary man tends to acquire elements from the various syntheses at his disposal so he can make up his own meaningful universe. Moreover, this is frequently a universe not definitely articulated, being rather constantly re-made and whose conclusion is always deferred²⁰.

The fact that this phenomenon, even though relatively generalized, has well-marked clusters which are socially near to us, may induce into an error of excessive generalization. Globally speaking, the phenomenon indeed follows social class or academic education lines.²¹ But it is also true that its wide extent brings up surprises. A quick interview with a client of a popular bar in Salvador attests that the reasoning’s starting point is far from what the common sense would expect from the traditional *habitus* of propensity to syncretism. One could even speak of a blend of enlightenment and Kantian modernity: “All religions enslave man. But if you are already a catholic, protestant, candomble follower – if you have already decided for that, you have to follow those rules. If you are already a slave, you have to follow it through the rest of your life. [...] So I think this should be right. [...] You can’t mix it all up. It’s got to be that way”. But soon the atonement of a sharp, post-modern-like relativization intervenes: “But I think you have to do what you feel well

¹⁹ Contemporary relativization of religious institution’s “competence” for defining their follower’s “identities” or forming their *habitus* is at stake here.

²⁰ It is not easy to situate statistically such tendency on the map of Brazil’s religious field. One should probably search near those who declare themselves as having no religion, but as believing in God. In Belo Horizonte, for instance, only 1.1% of the population define themselves as such, but the crossing of both answers taken independently show that 91.2% of those declaring to have “no religion” believe in God (ie. 5.2% of total population). Moreover, there is the reverse stance: those who “do not believe in God” but “have religion”. This shows an ambiguity of the very “religion” category, between personal life and institutional belonging.

²¹ Still in Belo Horizonte, those “without religion”, accounting for 5.7% of total population, comprise 14.3% of those holding a high education degree.

about doing. [...] Law is within you. If you feel well, you have to do it". At this point the interviewer wishes to refer to Bahia's traditional syncretism, and asks: "and do you feel well mixing?" He comes up with an answer reasserting tradition, but in the name of sheer contemporary modernity: "Yes, you got to be. If you feel well mixing, you got to do it. [Here in Bahia] people feel well, very well, in general they are fulfilled. And I think it would be hard to separate these two things. Most people wouldn't accept. Because these two together are already a sort of religion. It is already mixed..." Weren't we talking of syncretism in Brazilian society as a dialectics?

Now, the second element of this religious post-modernity. It resumes, in a spiraling movement (therefore not as a mere repetition of what went on), ancient civilizational moments. This is a compelling fact in a post-modernity Maffesoli qualifies as "regressive", which tempers any surprise towards the "new" and all prognostics for the future. All evidence suggest that the movement which puts in relation, as we have seen, multiple social segments within the same synchronic religious field also establishes communications and correspondences between successive historical moments and periods. There are even some ironies. Some examples taken at random will show my point.

When focusing on New Era communities or quasi-communities, notwithstanding their elements of contingency and openness (for instance, in LUZ 1998: 26-50), it is hard not to hear the echo of a whole literature on the myriad of nineteenth century utopian movements, especially in the U.S.²², and their multiple communitarian realizations ["practiced utopia": shakers (DESROCHE 1955), quakers, cabetians, Oneida, etc.]. A set of realizations whose emphases were undoubtedly different from those of contemporary New Era, but which converge with it both historically (an exact parallelism of trajectory, for instance, between cabetian *Phalanstères* and the *Rashneshpuram*) or in terms of a common inspiration [for the last great utopian, Charles Fourier (DESROCHE 1972a), it is by means of a mutually compensatory articulation of emotions and passions – and not of their suppression or smothering – that the search for the self is undertaken in "common" life! But "official history", ultimately channeled by Marxist or liberal capitalist thought, overshadowed the memory of a reality which pervaded part of the nineteenth century – a reality from which, notwithstanding the disavowal, both currents sprang.

I have already mentioned New Era's conceptions of sin and salvation. Additionally, there is a controversy triggered by more conservative catholic tendencies who regard the Movement as a demoniac enterprise operating through man's denial of guilt. Such suppression of guilt would

²² RÉMOND (1962: 63): "The continent destined to utopia". E. H. DESROCHE (1972b: 193), speaking of the middle nineteenth century: "America became the Kingdom of an Icarian god, tempered by such syncretisms and resuming ancient W. Penn's nostalgia for an experimental social religion".

ultimately abrogate the need for redemption, thus making useless the Mystery of Christianity. It is curious to find that the problem, as put in those terms, is not new. It is enough to recall an already forgotten controversy, whose evocation has also the merit of confirming the extent to which New Era's roots stretch undoubtedly to the American soil. In effect, in 1893 a "Parliament of religions" was instituted in the United States – some shocking news for the traditional religious world²³ – but to which Cardinal Gibbons and another bishop, the President of Washington's Catholic University, adhered. Two years later (on 9/8/1895), Pope Leo XIII wrote in a letter to his representative in the U.S.: "it seems more prudent for catholics to celebrate their own congresses separately..." But the conflict was by then still mild. It gained momentum a few years later, when a successful French translation of Father Hecker's (founder of American Paulist Fathers) biography triggered a Roman reaction against what was then called "Americanism". On January 22nd, 1899, the Pope himself sent to the archbishop of Washington the letter *Testem benevolentiae*. Such letter condemned, amongst other tendencies visible in the new "Americanist" spirituality: the tendency to silence faith definitions, restrictions to Church's authority and surveillance (taken as prone to constraining devotee's initiatives), repulsion to any orientation "external" to those whose instincts are inspired by God's Spirit, disdain of institutionalized religious orders and their oaths, privilege of virtues dubbed more "active" than "passive". The details of such reprehension clearly foresaw the spiritual current which was beginning to emerge in modernity's horizon, as well as the charm to which American catholics were about to succumb – and which corroborated central catholic hierarchy's fears.

Today one speaks of "urban tribes", that is, limited groups joined by free (and often provisional) adhesion based on an emotional community, and which become source of sociability for a man who refuses to have his identitarian being handed over by structural instances of society and the State. It would be interesting to counterpoise such finding to the texts in which eighth and ninth century historians describe analogous sociability phenomena. For instance: "from politics to religion, Early Middle Ages is an intense epoch of individualities, refusal of the abstract and of great horizons, of little groups and warm affectivity communities". And the report continues through statements which contemporary gaze could as well fill with familiar images: "instinctivity is the primary value. (...) Nature sets an onslaught against culture. Animal fascinates man. The body is worshipped; mutilated or tortured. Only violence ensures survival. Death pursues each and everyone." (ROUCHE 1994:528).

Another passage, broader and similarly characteristic, seems to speak of religious post-modernity problems while it is, in fact, describing a mindset around the year one thousand...

²³ But which resonated, on its turn, Nicola de Cusa's fifteenth century utopian project.

“What attitude should then be taken so mentalities can pass from the sacred to the sacrament?” And it speaks of a “retrogression to heathen sacred”:

I understand sacred in this context (the author explains) to be an amalgam of cosmic forces encompassing world and man, and which may be used either for good or for evil, by and for the solicitant, via ritual practices effective in themselves following the principle of a strict exchange of offerings and favors.

Then the generalizing explanation follows:

Thus, eventually, christianization (...) did not succeed in casting out this set of subjective beliefs I termed heathen sacred. Pre-logic knowledge, female institutions, magical prescriptions, potions, filters and others all revolve around the same obsessions: love, death, the beyond. (...) Personal consciousness slowly emerges, thus, from the Church’s contradictory action...

And, finally: “Love and death turned, along the centuries, from heathen sacred into christian secrets, primitive mentality remaining (ROUCHE 1994: 502-527 *passim*).

From this point our final question emerges: is the contemporary religious field a – even if partial – return to “primitive mentality”?

Many thought – and think – so, within and outside official Churches. In 2000 as in 1000, the problem would be the pathway’s ambivalence: to some, a “passage”; to others, a “return” – between the heathen sacred and the christian secret, the sacred and the sacraments, external ritual consciousness and responsible inner consciousness, irrational fears and “religion within the limits set by reason”, as Kant wrote. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the text’s description of the “heathen sacred” seems to conflate with a good deal of recognizable traits of Afro religions. Finally, there are those who celebrate New Era’s contemporary revelations as the overcoming of oppressive christian sacred and the liberating rediscovery of heathenism.

How can our Brazilians’ religion’s gaze escape such a positivistic, linearly evolutionary view, with potential politically repressive overtones?

I would like to propose a different regard over the phenomenon. A regard which turns the “primitive” into the “fundamental”, “primeval” and “primordial”; which acknowledges the “permanence” of such religious dimension in the history of mankind as well as its cyclical re-emergence, ever articulated with another – increasingly rational, ethical, and transcendent – dimension. This attitude tends asymptotically towards a historical radicality, the *virtual* modality of a worldly “life experience” – rather than a conceptually articulated “world view” or the effective exercise of any “religion” – which is not to be confused with any “traditional culture”, as closest to “origins” as it may seem. Simply (or radically) a structural component which, in order to exist as an empirical historic-social reality, necessarily allows itself to be shaped and modulated by

civilizational forces, cumulated experiences, bundles of social exchange, power relations, rationalization and accumulation of knowledge, emerging thus in history in the form of “religions”.

For all religions have to respond to such fundamental background, whose presence ensures their natural and carnal – human – rooting; whose absence would mean to them vital emaciation and cerebral impoverishment through the evacuation of all mystery; finally, whose sublimation, always under different forms, modalities and degrees, constitutes religions in their particularities. Some of them are closer than others to this primeval background; none can gird on to it only and fail to process it dynamically; neither can they ignore it – it would mean to repudiate their permanent source of vitality.

Finally, at certain moments in history when drastic breaches in standardized tools for apprehending the universe and deep stirrings in meaningful layers available to various social groups create a civilization hiatus, this source may emancipate from the religious structures it hitherto nurtured. It thus emerges in a more autonomous and recognizable form, marking with its explicit presence particular historical moments. Some of these were found in the historical pieces I quoted.

Similarly, and regarding Myth, an anthropologist, friend and later on successor of Mauss – by the way, also a protestant missionary in New Caledonia – used to say: “Myth is an affective form of knowledge, parallel to our objective, method-driven form of knowledge. These two forms do not exclude one another”. Two “primitivisms” (in the negative sense) are then possible, both marked by the *exclusive* use of one or the other mode of thought: either “mythical” thought only (which, “depriving man from the balance between the two forms of thought, leads him to aberrations”), or “the form of knowledge provided by rationality”, which could lead “its logical construction to exhaustion, nausea and death” (LEENHARDT 1987:98).

Roger Bastide spoke of the existence, previously to myth as a developed narrative form, of “the background of non-yet-formulated mythical thought, as if fastened to mystical participations and elementary gestures” (BASTIDE 1974). A pre-analytical moment of an epistemological and ethical attitude geared towards the entirety of the empirical and meta-empirical universe. But why not think of (an)other moment(s), symmetrical to the first, succeeding the historical phase making explicit myths, world views, ritual meanings, evaluative injunctions – in a word, “religions”? Moment(s) of revitalization of “fundamental religion”, in this case, what is left of religions when they tend towards oblivion: a “mythical” understanding of the universe, a sacralizing attitude towards it, a globalizing (rather than conceptually elucidated) emotion, a ritual expression eventually closer to the “primordial cry”.

Such emancipation of the fundamental – and founding – religious dimension can never be fully accomplished, since the “instituent” necessarily acquires its form and limits through the

institution. However, from such perspective, both popular religion as internal modalities of a certain religious universe, and, in any tradition, emotional *revitalizations* with its ritual phenomena (for instance, glossolalia) and religious strains following the logic of myth or the presence of natural forces, or yet resorting to exotic traditions or New Era's nebula in perpetual creation, may be considered as implicit protests (HERVIEU-LEGER 1997) against an excessive rationalizing off-shot by great Western religions. Religions of the Book, of holy metaphysics, of reflexive ethics – finally, “religions within the limits set by reason”, as Kantian modernity proclaimed – as they are, they risked an effacement of the symbolic dimension, a disparaging of the “sacred”, which some of them even attempt at explicitly expelling²⁴.

Nowhere, perhaps, post-modernity, although confirming rational and autonomous individual's modernity, has made it more dialectic: in religion itself, the permanent cornerstone of emotion, the sacred and the symbolic which tends today to re-invest (while seeming to nullify it, even though aberrant examples proliferate internationally today) the domain which a sole type of reason – religious reason – meant to monopolize. By the same stroke, post-modernity seems to merely reencounter pre-modern paradigms (affectivity, participation, enchantment, magic). In fact, it does not reproduce them, but restores them in a spiraling movement of dialectical balance.

The “Brazilians' religion” field seems to be thus in permanent mutation. Not only the religions' map is changed, but, who knows, “religion” itself loses traditional meanings and functions, while simultaneously gaining new ones. However, it may be that, at a certain level, such mutations keep up following the contours of an ancient logic.

Two different but somehow overlapping dialectics seem to compete for primacy over the contemporary field of “Brazilian's religion”. The first stands between a reaffirmed institutional diversity and, at the level of practice, a certain homogeneity of problems, relationships, and articulating modalities. The other mediates between, on the one hand, traditional versions of syncretism, porosity without confusion, internal pluralism and indecision over identities, constitution of a common space for such articulation – all traditional veins today updated by post-modernity outbreaks also burgeoning in Brazil –, and on the other, also present at another level and yielding to enlightened “modernity” universalism, affirmations of definite and exclusive identities tending to partition, and accordingly cutting through the social space.

²⁴ It would be fruitful to draw closer to this interpretive line some suggestions of a less structural and more historical order put forward by Edênio VALLE (1975; 1976), resumed by A. ANTONIAZZI (1997: 8), as well as by Fernando PESSOA (1986: 133), as remarked by SEGATO (1995: 262-263). These are about a “heathenism which has always been”, the “human element” coexisting, “although obscurely”, with all religions, which does not oppose christianity as it walks side-by-side with it. This topic was, by the way, part of the Effervescent Ideas rampant in Portugal shortly before, with the poetical movement of Teixeira de Pascoais, *A Águia* magazine, and an explicit book: *Jesus e Pan* (1903), on the conjunction between christianity and the Greek gods of voluptuousness (SANCHIS 1997:15, n. 10).

In this sense, the three ideal-typically successive “phases” in Western time – pre-modern, modern and post-modern – are synchronically overlapped in Brazil.

However, amongst these three “moments” of modernity, one of them, socio-genetically grounded and constantly asserted during the unfolding of Brazilian history, enjoys – for now and notwithstanding the multiplication of adverse factors – special permanence. An enduring and constantly reinvested radicality endowed Brazil with a *habitus* (history made structure) of identity porosity and value ambivalence, a tendency – always frustrated but permanently resumed – towards conflating the multiple into a never-attained unity. Provided such porosity is clearly situated in its structural level and the particularity of the local version it represents is made explicit, I still reckon it is fecund to epistemologically call it “syncretism”.

But “syncretism” and an articulation of the diachronic in the same synchronicity do not necessarily mean tolerance²⁵. No doubt today’s modernity favors the emergent, the “contemporary”, the happening, current experience. The model inferred from the analysis I just made is also of a space trespassed by collective and institutional flows leading towards a conscious claim for identity. One speaks in this regard of “authenticity”, “spiritual affiliation”. Something similar is found in Santo Daime, catholic charismatics, the several currents within Black Movement, as in candomblé itself; paradoxically, even within New Era: all in search for fidelity to “ancestors” and the rescuing of “roots”. The moment of weakening and relativization of “religions” mastery over their followers is also, and paradoxically, one of institutional reaffirmation²⁶. And not only in Brazil. Many are the images scattered throughout contemporary world of emerging fundamentalist segments in several religions: Islam, christianity, judaism, even hinduism. Such affirmations, when associated with claims for a privileged relationship vis-à-vis a particular territory, trigger open conflicts or serious problems of coexistence between social groups.

To articulate differences and universalism, to jointly manage identities – perhaps this is one of the vital problems faced by contemporary man. It might be useful to delve into the lessons – doubtless, also ambivalent – that the “Brazilian historical model” could offer to such pool of problems²⁷. I suppose this will be, directly or indirectly, at play in our reflections during the following days. And I would like to think that the quite general propositions and hypotheses I just outlined may be to some extent valuable in this task.

²⁵ For instances in India and Sri Lanka, Cf. DE VEER (1994).

²⁶ Cecília Mariz and Maria das Dores Campos Machado argue for the empirical evidence on contemporary coexistence, in Brazil’s religious field, of these two apparently opposed tendencies.

²⁷ Including in a comparative perspective, as very thoughtfully done by R. SEGATO (1997).

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