Religious belonging/disaffection: resuming an old concept to understand Catholicism today

Pertença/desafeição religiosa: recuperando um antigo conceito para entender o catolicismo hoje

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Abstract

This article resumes the conceptual binomial religious belonging/disaffection, used in researches on "religious sociology" in the 1950s and 60s, to analyze the factors of the loss of believers in the Catholic Church, as shown by Census 2010. It is grounded in data from a survey conducted in the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte in 2012. Based on this survey, this article shows that the decreased number of believers is not due to conversion, but to the mere *passage* from Catholicism to another religion. The root of *religious disaffection* lies on the loss of faith in the need of sacramental mediation of the Church for eternal salvation and in the sacrificial nature of the mass. It may be counterbalanced by the family ties of belonging, but they also show signs of weakening. We conclude that, in the case of Catholicism, religious belonging assumes affective and faithful bonds, as well as those of personal commitment of the believer to the Church. When the three bonds get weaker, religious disaffection itself takes place.

Keywords: Religious belonging. Religious disaffection. Census 2010. Religious sociology.

Resumo

Este artigo recupera o binômio conceitual pertença/desafeição religiosa, utilizado nas pesquisas de "sociologia religiosa" nas décadas de 1950 e 60, para analisar os fatores da perda de fiéis da Igreja Católica, como demonstra o Censo de 2010. Toma como referência dados de uma pesquisa realizada na Região Metropolitana de Belo Horizonte em 2012. Com base nessa pesquisa, este artigo demonstra que a diminuição de fiéis não se deve a conversão, mas ao simples *trânsito* do catolicismo para outra religião. A raiz da *desafeição religiosa* está na perda da fé na necessidade da mediação sacramental da Igreja para a salvação eterna e no caráter sacrificial da missa. Ela pode ser contrabalançada pelos laços familiares de pertença, mas estes também apresentam sinais de enfraquecimento. Conclui-se que, no caso do catolicismo, a pertença religiosa supõe laços afetivos e de fé, assim como os de compromisso pessoal do fiel com a Igreja. Quando os três laços se enfraquecem, ocorre a desafeição religiosa propriamente dita.

Palavras-chave: Pertença religiosa. Desafeição religiosa. Censo de 2010. Sociologia religiosa.

Introduction

For providing the real with intelligibility, scientific research renounces the claim to explain it regarding its complexity and reduces it to what theoretical categories are able to notice. By opting for a concept as key to read the real, the researcher does not do that as a mere matter of taste, but because he admits that it, better than anyone else, will reveal relevant dimensions of the real. Thus, by adopting the conceptual binomial *religious belonging/disaffection* as a key to read data on religion in Brazil, we favor a dimension of the real: the relationship between those who declare to adhere to a religion and the institution that defines itself as its official carrier. Clearly, this is not the only possible sociological interpretation, but this is the one that shows to be more suitable to describe the dominant trend in the Roman Catholicism professed nowadays in Brazil.

After a brief examination of the concepts *religious belonging/disaffection* and their virtual abandonment by Sociology of Religion, we will examine the quantitative dimension of disaffection revealed in data from the Census conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) and in the survey *Values and Religion within the Archdiocese of Belo Horizonte*, conducted by Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais (PUC Minas), under the responsibility of Malco Camargos[1]. In the second part, we will address the various dimensions of religious belonging/disaffection, based on the interviews with focus groups, which complete that survey, by providing much information on the relationships between those who declare themselves to be Catholic and the Church within the Archdiocese of Belo Horizonte. There lies the most relevant contribution by this study: the strength and frailty of the ties of belonging to the Roman Catholic Church. The article concludes with the sociological evaluation of the concepts

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[1] Both the sample survey and the qualitative survey with focus groups were conducted under the responsibility of Ph.D Prof. Malco Camargos, supported by father Aureo Freitas, Ph.D Izabella Carvalho, Ph.D Prof. Willian Castilho, Ph.D Prof. Ana Marçolla, and Vertex Research (for data collection). Their reports were preliminarily disclosed only within the Archdiocese of Belo Horizonte and to people invited to read the data. We quote here the general report (CAMARGOS, 2012a) and an offprint referring to those who declared themselves as Catholics (CAMARGOS, 2012b). The transcript of interviews, conducted via focus groups, was not released in print; thus, we did not point out page numbers.

religious belonging/disaffection, which may be improved to describe with scientific rigor the strength that the Church has in society.

1 Brief examination of the concept

The conceptual binomial formed by religious belonging and disaffection was widely used by Religious Psychosociology in the 1950s and 60s, when the application of social research techniques – questionnaires, interviews, surveys, feelers, statistical samples, and others – to the study of religious practices and beliefs gave rise to "Religious Sociology"[2]. Its early days date back to the 1940s, in France: by applying questionnaire to all persons attending the Sunday mass and comparing the results to census data, canon Gabriel Le Bras created a research technique that allowed detecting, with certain mathematical accuracy, which social segments attended the mass on a more frequent basis – this is the primary indicator of the Catholic believer's binding to the Church. Several comparisons – according to rural and urban area, men and women, young and old individuals, literate or not – allowed drawing an empirically grounded framework of the reality of Catholicism in the region under study.

After World War II, these researches were multiplied, especially in the USA, France, Belgium, and Canada[3], and they were also extended to the Protestant world. Having a solid empirical grounding and favoring the comparisons between different regions, cultures, religions, and countries, the data accumulated by these researches deserved a theoretical approach that could allow some generalization. That was what the Jesuit Hervé Carrier (1965) provided in the thesis defended in

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[2] It is noteworthy that "Religious Sociology" was born within "Religious Geography" precisely due to the importance of the parish as a study field. G. Le Bras (1958), its initiator, in an article published in the journal of the Catholic Centre of French Intellectuals, takes stock of the results that were achieved and justifies their particular nature, as they do not apply to any religion.

[3] It is curious to notice that in Italy, Spain, and Portugal these researches were not appreciated because they indicate the "defeat" of the Church by its enemies. Pérez Tablada (2010, p. 75) transcribes the account of F. Houtart about his unsuccessful visit to the Vatican, in 1957, to raise funds for a socio-religious research in Latin America. "Talking about studies and sociology applied to religion was almost sacrilegious. In the Vatican it was as if theology had all the answers". When the funding needed was obtained, he got in touch with D. Helder Câmara, who already knew him, and he was sincere enough to tell him that there was a letter from the Holy See to all Latin American dioceses warning "against Houtart's studies". People feared that Sociology could become an instrument to discredit the Church as an institution (PÉREZ TABLADA, 2010, p. 79).

1960, soon published in French and then in English. The advance of ecumenism and the context of changes inaugurated by the pontificate of John XXIII promoted the development of these researches. Their results showed to be useful to the pastoral renewal process of the Catholic Church after the Ecumenical Council of 1962-65. And thus "Religious Sociology" spread rapidly across the Catholic and Protestant worlds until, in the late 1960s, their theoretical potential came to an end: by taking the viewpoint of the religious institutions – and not that of the social system – for studying the religious phenomena, their explanatory power was subject to thresholds established by Theology. Since then, "Religious Sociology" gave way to the Sociology of Religion inspired by classical theories, which studies religion as a social fact to be explained by its relations to other social facts, without depending on theological assumptions.

By losing ground in universities and scientific journals, "Religious Sociology" fell into almost total oblivion of the social scientists of religion and took along with it the concept of religious belonging/disaffection. It was replaced by concepts having greater theoretical scope, such as *secularization* and *disenchantment of the world*. In fact, by being descriptive – i.e. unable to explain the genesis, structure, and functions of the phenomenon being referred to – this concept could not claim a scientific status equivalent to the concepts of secularization and disenchantment of the world, which should not be addressed as synonyms[4]. Despite this theoretical deficiency, the concept of belonging/disaffection remains very useful to describe the process and the factors due to which certain individuals, more than others, deviate from the ritual practices and beliefs that identify their church or religious group. For this reason, it was used in the interpretation of data from Census 2010 (IBGE, 2010) and the survey conducted for the Archdiocese of Belo Horizonte. It will up to the reader to evaluate its descriptive capacity and heuristic value.

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[4] Although they may occur together, as happened in Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries, these processes are not, necessarily, related to each other. Just remember the separation between Church and State in Brazil and Mexico, where the political *secularization* was not accompanied by religious *disaffection* or *disenchantment* of the world. An excellent explanation on the concepts of *secularization* and *disenchantment* is provided by the long article by Pierucci (1998).

2 Quantitative dimension of religious belonging/disaffection

The comparison between data from the censuses 1991, 2000, and 2010 shows loss of members by the Catholic Church. Keeping to the scope of this paper, we will not, here, compare them to data from other religious affiliations, but take into account only the changes concerning the number of Catholics in the last twenty years. The numbers have been highly publicized and we will not reproduce them here. Just remember that in 1991 the Catholics accounted for 83.3%, they were 73.9% in 2000, and reached 64.6% in Census 2010 (IBGE, 2010). Notice that these losses were not linear, but reached certain social sectors more than others. The decreased number of people under 30 years of age who declare themselves – or are rather declared – as Catholic draws attention. This is shown in Table 1, in absolute and rounded figures for readability purposes.

Table 1 – Catholic population, by age group

Age	2000 (x 1,000)	2010 (x 1,000)
0 - 4 years	11,500	8,530
5 - 9 years	12,000	9,300
10 - 14 years	12,800	10,750
15 - 19 years	13,300	10,810
20 - 24 years	11,800	10,990
25 - 29 years	10,000	10,750

Source: Prepared by the author.

There is a clear decrease in the Catholic population in the younger age groups, while the population aged 25 years or over increased (though less than the rate of the total population). Given that the generational factor influences the

adherence to religious values and practices, as we will see below, this context points out a significant decrease in the Catholic population for the next generations.

Taking, now, the percentage of Catholics in the population of the municipalities that make up the Archdiocese of Belo Horizonte, we find out a decrease in all of them, except the town of Rio Manso, where it grew 0.95% between 1991 and 2000. Some cases – Betim, Contagem, Esmeraldas, Ibirité, Ribeirão das Neves, São José da Lapa, and Vespasiano – draw attention for registering a loss of more than 10 percentage points in each decade. It is true that the population, in its absolute majority, is still Catholic, but there are 3 municipalities where the Catholics are slightly below half and in only 9 of them it is more than 3 /4 of the total. In most municipalities it oscillates between 1/2 and 2/3 of the total. There is no need to go into detail on these data, which show no significant differences when compared to other metropolitan regions in Brazil. We will investigate some characteristics of this Catholic population in the information gathered through the sample survey (CAMARGOS, 2012b).

3 Conversion and tradition as the basis of belonging

Personal conviction is the desired way of belonging both to the religious system and to other systems such as the politics, aesthetics, or culture of a class or social group: ideally, the person who adheres to them does that because she/he is convinced of the validity of their beliefs, values, standards of conduct, and rituals (CARRIER, 1965, p. 66-67). On the basis of personal conviction lies conversion, which is not restricted to cases of deep inner transformation in the midst of an existential crisis, but it may take the form of gradual processes of an increasingly firm adherence to the system's values and norms. Conversion provides belonging with the nature of free and voluntary decision that makes the person entirely committed and able to reach martyrdom so that her/his choice for that system of values (either religious, political, or cultural) is not denied.

The classical hypothesis of elective affinity between conversion and religious systems with *sect*-like characteristics, formulated by M. Weber (1982), has been empirically verified. In fact, conversion is much less frequent in religious systems with *church*-like characteristics (CARRIER, 1965, p. 75-78). In them, the usual way of belonging is joining the Church since childhood, becoming gradually adhered to the values and norms of the system through the various processes of religious sociability[5] and catechesis. In other words, religious systems with *church*-like characteristics have their members' belonging grounded in the tradition of their group (family, ethnic, national, or other) and the internalization of its norms and values through educational processes that must occur along their existence, especially during childhood and adolescence[6].

This theoretical parameter of belonging to *church*-like religions is fully confirmed by data from the survey: 99% of people who identify themselves as Catholic today were raised in Catholic families, while the other answer options did not reach 1% (CAMARGOS, 2012b, p. 8). That is, it is family tradition and not conversion that ensures belonging to the Catholic Church. Data also allow us to state that this family tradition has lost strength as a religious belonging factor: in the sample as a whole, 84% defined their family as Catholic during childhood. Having in mind that Catholics constitute 60% of the sample, it is clear that religious disaffection occurs (CAMARGOS, 2012a, p. 16). Before examining this point in more detail, it is worth examining closely the reasons given for changing religious belonging. This is shown in Table 2.

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[5] The technical term is "religious socialization", avoided here to prevent confusion with the same term referring to socioeconomic processes.
[6] Researches cited by H. Carrier (1965, p. 117-137) in Chapter V, dedicated to religious education, point out it is between 7 and 18 years of age that religious convictions become firmly established.

Table 2 – Reasons given for changing religion

Reason given	Answers	%
Feels better / has peace of mind	112	13
Preaches more / better knowledge	104	12
Does not know why / no reason	103	12
Knew the truth	89	10
Influence of relatives / friends	77	9
Started going and liked it	41	5
Managed to get healing in the church / got rid of vices	41	5
For disagreeing with some positions of the church	24	3
Due to the locality / location	23	3
Just believe in God	20	2
Affinity to the doctrine / adapted her/himself	18	2
Got tired of the church / lack of interest	17	2
Never attended the church again	14	2
Is against idolatry / worshiping images	13	1
Had no religion before / had not follow a religion before	12	1
Learned and understood the Word	11	1
Different view / different concepts	11	1
It is difficult to follow the doctrine / very strict	10	1
Lost faith in religion / church	10	1
The church only thinks about money	10	1
Has more praises / likes praises	10	1
Lacks time to devote	9	1
Church does not change anyone / does not save anyone	9	1
Pastors are more solicitous / provide more support	9	1
Spiritual knowledge	8	1
Explains more about the afterlife	5	1
Others (< 1%)	81	9
Total	891	100%

Source: CAMARGOS (2012a, p. 19).

For a correct appraisal of Table 2 there is a need to have in mind that the reason/s alleged for changing religion (including the abandonment of any religious belonging) is/are more than *a posteriori* justification/s for the option taken earlier, and it/they should not be confused with its/their actual motives. We must also consider that Table 2 only presents a synthesis of the summaries made by people, without allowing further explanation. Despite these imperfections, it suggests that in 14% of cases religious conversion could have taken place. That is what the reasons highlighted in bold may indicate. In all other cases, religion change just meant *religious passage* (ALMEIDA; MONTERO, 2001), where adherence to a different religion does not imply replacing the system of values and standards of reference for life. This is, therefore, the search for a religious system more convenient to the person than the previous one, where she/he felt uneasy. In such cases, the person changes her/his religion not to change the system of norms and values that guide her/his life.

We may conclude this first part by claiming that the empirical data from census and the survey by PUC Minas confirm what, less precisely, was already known: i) the number of Catholics in the population is decreasing; ii) belonging to Catholicism is not due to conversion, but to family tradition; and iii) when a person changes her/his religion, there is little evidence that conversion itself has taken place and much evidence of *religious passage*.

4 Belonging due to adherence to the system of values

Since the separation between the republican State and the Catholic Church, in 1890, there is no legal constraint to take a non-Catholic religious identity – as still occurs in some Islamic countries with a theocratic constitution. Although not all religions enjoy equal prestige in the Brazilian society (it is worth recalling that until the 1960s the Afro-Brazilian cults were in need of police permission for their yards), affiliation to religious institutions is voluntary and not compulsory. Also,

the affiliation of children due to parents' wish may be revoked at any time of life without involving any social punishment. A consequence is that, in Brazil, as in other plural societies, a religious system only ensures belonging to its members as they are convinced of its validity. Herein lies their strength and weakness: they totally depend on the personal conviction of people who adhere to them[7].

In the case of *sect*-like religions, belonging is reinforced by the cohesion of the religious group that tends to be the person's main group of reference: in them, those who leave the religion breaks the social ties to the cohesive community of believers that support it. "When a religious group is virtually coextensive with the national or human group, excluding one involves rejecting the other" (CARRIER, 1965, p. 172). However, in the case of *church*-like religions – such as the Catholic religion –, religious disaffection only involves social sanctions in families with active participation in the Church or in small isolated communities.

This theoretical introduction sheds light on the importance of personal adherence to the system of beliefs and values of the religion professed. This is what we will examine below, based on data referring to people who declare themselves as Catholic and who were the target of the survey conducted by M. Camargos (2012a).

5 Quantitative dimension of adherence to religious values

We will not address, here, the public image of the Catholic Church – which the survey shows to be very favorable – nor the adherence of Catholics to the values and sexual and family morality advocated for the Church – that the same survey shows to vary whether they come into conflict with the values enshrined in mass culture (CAMARGOS, 2012a, p. 35-71). Our focus lies on the system of beliefs and values that define the very Catholic identity. Once again, we resort to the theory of belonging by H. Carrier though, being prior to the theological changes brought

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[7] We do not consider, here, people whose religious status implies economic ties to religious institutions or those enjoying some social, political, or economic privilege by virtue of their religion.

about by the Ecumenical Council of 1962-65, it requires certain rectifications. Grounded in other researches, the author states:

> Several studies suggest that, psychologically speaking, a person does not belong the same way to a sect or to an ecclesiastical institution. We notice, in fact, that religious groups have ideas of salvation that determine particular behaviors of their believers. [...] Being the church the only dispenser of means of salvation, a person necessarily must adhere to it if she/he wishes to participate in the spiritual justification. The sect, on the contrary, rejects every liturgical and priestly mediation for grace; (thus) a person belongs to the sect as we belong to a voluntary association (CARRIER, 1965, p. 175).

By pointing out the need for mediation of the Church to eternal salvation as key for belonging to the Catholic Church, the author was attached to the theology previous to the Second Vatican. Today, the official doctrine is expressed another way, without, however, denying it, since it reaffirms the need for sacraments on the part of those who were baptized. So says the *Catechism* by Igreja Católica (2012), issued by Pope John Paul II on October 11, 1992:

> § 1129 The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the new covenant are needed for salvation [he quotes the Council of Trent]. "Sacramental grace" is the grace of the Holy Spirit given by Christ and proper to each sacrament.
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> § 1257 The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is needed for salvation. He also commanded his disciples to preach the Gospel and baptize all nations. Baptism is needed for salvation, for those to whom the Gospel has been announced and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament. The Church knows no other means than Baptism to assure entry into eternal beatitude; that is why it takes care not to neglect the mission it has received from the Lord, to make "born again from water and the Spirit" all those who may be baptized. God bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound to his sacraments.

Therefore, the claim that people who were baptized in the Catholic Church will do everything possible not to have their tie of belonging broken is still valid, as this would cause their eternal damnation. Pious believers make this tie stronger through regular and frequent religious practices, but the tie can also be kept at a minimum level of belonging, such as in the cases that J. H. Fichter named

"sleeping" Catholics or those who G. Le Bras named "seasonal" Catholics, because they almost do not attend the church, although they do not leave it (CARRIER, 1965, p. 188-190). In Brazil, we have the case of people initiated in Candomblé who define themselves as Catholic due to baptism and they require a mass in the 7th day after death. Although they probably do not know all these people rely on the definition of belonging provided by the encyclical *Mysticis corporis*, issued in 1943, which counts as a member of the Church every person who, having been baptized, was not excluded from the Church willingly nor was excluded from it by the legitimate authority (CARRIER, 1965, p. 52).

This theological proposition offers the first key for understanding the disaffection with Catholicism: the loss of conviction in the mediation of the Church for receiving the sanctifying grace. Those who are convinced to be able to obtain salvation without the mediation of the Catholic Church will participate in it as they participate in a voluntary association, i.e. not due to need for salvation, but by feeling comfortable in it. A careful examination of data from the survey shows it in different ways. That is what we will see below.

6 Direct relation to God and religious disaffection

By taking the hypothesis that belonging to the Catholic Church requires belief in its mediation for eternal salvation, we conversely deduce that lack of belief in this principle of the Catholic faith brings along religious disaffection – although, as we will see below, this is not the only factor of disaffection. So, let us check what people who participated in the focus groups, made up only by those who declared to be Catholic, say: 2 groups of practicing Catholics and 2 groups of non-practicing Catholics, consisting, respectively, of young individuals from 18 to 34 years and adults from 35 to 55 years of age[8].

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[8] The author of this article witnessed these – and other – interviews, took notes, and then had access to texts taken from the recording (unpublished, yet).

It is a widely held conception that God is an immediate presence to the person who seeks him sincerely. Some examples[9]:

> *Me, my prayers… I do not want to hurt anyone… Me and God, I talk to him, I do not need to prove to anyone. (Non-practicing young person)*
>
> *And everyone has her/his God. I, for instance, do not need to go to the church, confess to a priest; I confess to my God. So, that is it. (Non-practicing adult person)*
>
> *I am religious because I attend on Sundays, too. On Monday there is a prayer group that I attend, and, thus, that is all! It is by means of this continuance that I am Catholic. I have a daily continuance of getting up, saying a prayer, thanking, thus… that is it! (Practicing young person)*
>
> *All day long I am calling Jesus to be with me, God to be with me, you know. I do not know you, but I am blessing you when I smack into you on the street. So I think that this, for me, is religion, you know. This is when you are always looking for that thing, which is very positive to me. They are things of the Lord! (Practicing adult person)*

Although this direct relation to God does not exhaust one's own religious practice, it is clear that this direct contact through prayer is often mentioned as the main form of religious practice. Many observations could be made on this regard. One of them, penetration of the Pentecostal religious style among the Catholic faithful, which becomes clear in the last speech referring to "I am calling Jesus to be with me", "I am blessing you", and "things of the Lord". Another one, the virtual absence of mention to the saints, figures that in the Brazilian popular Catholicism have always been the major focus of this direct and personal relationship (OLIVEIRA, 1997). Would they have been affected by the evangelical criticism to "idolatry", to which, sometimes, respondents referred to? Would they have been replaced in this devotional and protective function by a currently reduced God in his transcendence and to the direct scope of the people who call upon him? Another relevant issue is observed by Flávio Augusto Senra Ribeiro, who situates disaffection with religion in general in this dispensation from any institutional

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[9] The transcript of speeches, here, does not reproduce exactly the recording, since some have been edited to facilitate their understanding outside the context of the group, without, however, changing their meaning.

mediation, i.e. regardless of institution or system of beliefs[10]. These issues, however, are beyond the purpose of this analysis, whose focus lies on belonging/disaffection with Catholicism.

The classic indicator of belonging to Catholicism is attendance to the Sunday mass. Then, let us see what respondents say on this topic.

7 Participation in the Sunday mass

Something that draws the attention of those who followed up the survey was the amount of speeches referring to the mass as a repetitive, monotonous, or tiresome ritual. More than an expression of discomfort or dissatisfaction on the part of believers, there lies the indicator of a bottom-line theological problem, which deserves to be carefully examined. Let us see first what respondents say:

> *You attend the mass, then there is one thing, the next week this is the same thing. It never changes, it is a standard.* (Non-practicing young person)

> *You feel an odd egg from the nest when you enter the church. The only good thing, what pleases me, is the temple itself: not what is there, but the vibration coming from there. Because a place of prayer is always a place that provides many things... we receive a lot of good things.* (Non-practicing adult person)

> *When entering the church, there are the primers, everyone takes hers/his, and that sequence comes, there: one, two, three, four, five... analyzing as if it was an answer. And the priest, in front, dictates that same sequence, but without explanation. So, I attend the mass, listen to the priest, he spoke and I did not understand anything. So, I go there to look a different way, I look at God, I ask God there in prayer, because the priest conveyed me nothing.* (Non-practicing adult person)

> *Some people think it has lost a little charm, but I think it also depends on how the mass is celebrated, and on the priest, too... He must not turn people away for not liking him, but sometimes preaching becomes very monotonous, too boring, so people end up getting a little tired.* (Practicing young person)

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[10] This theme will be published in a book chapter in the first half of 2013 as a result of the seminar held in October 10, 2012, attended by researchers from the Graduate Program in Religious Sciences of PUC Minas, Program, the Center for Georeferenced, Pastoral, and Religious Information (CEGIPAR), and the Episcopal Council of the Pastoral of the Archdiocese of Belo Horizonte.

> *I have no need to attend the mass every Sunday, indeed. I attend the rosary on Mondays and Wednesdays. In our neighborhood, there is men's rosary, and it celebrates two years now. Yesterday... Yes. Yesterday was Wednesday. Yes. Yesterday men's rosary celebrated two years, so, yourselves, if any of you wants, it is possible to deploy this in your neighborhoods, too. (*Practicing adult person)

All these speeches indicate that attendance – regular or not – to the Church is not necessarily bound to the celebration of Sunday mass, but rather a ritual able to bring comfort or spiritual food, regardless of being it the mass or other ritual. Well, for the Catholic theology, the mass is not only a time for prayer and praise of believers, since it has a sacrificial nature. So says, in its "Instructions", the *Roman Missal* (SECRETARIADO NACIONAL DE LITURGIA, 2012, p. 25):

> The sacrificial nature of the Mass, solemnly affirmed by the Council of Trent, in accordance with the whole tradition of the Church, was once again prepared by the Second Vatican Council, when, regarding the Mass, uttered these significant words: "Our Savior, in the last Supper, established the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood, in order to perpetuate over the centuries until his coming, the sacrifice of the cross and thus entrust the Church, his beloved Wife, the memorial of his Death and Resurrection".

Among all speeches recorded, only one person draws the group's attention to this sacrificial dimension of the mass, although not making it explicit:

> *So, praise the Eucharist is very important. I guess it all enchants in the religion. And most Catholics, I do not know about you, but most I know do not know the meaning of a mass. That is... That celebrates Christ's birth, passion, and death. Everyone says this: "Oh, what a traditional mass". When, in fact, it is celebrating Christ's life, that is why I think there is a need to have it... It actually has to follow a routine. That is what Jesus left for us to follow. Okay, it has to change... There is no need to be that traditional thing. To be a more flexible thing, but I think it cannot escape this!* (Practicing young person)

This speech is significant as a whole, because, at the same time it brings the wish for more attractive masses, it acknowledges that its sacrificial nature poses restrictions regarding changes. It is also indicative of a restricted theological conception, as it reminds "Christ's birth, passion, and death", but not his

resurrection... And it is worth observing that the same person – a young woman – repeated later the same expression and omitted the resurrection again: *"Oh, it's like I said, it is celebrating Christ's life, passion, and death. It is reminding you that he died to save us"*. Herein lies a problem that is far from trivial, because the sacrificial nature of the mass necessarily implies the intervention of the priest as celebrant. Indeed, only those who have received priestly ordination can validly celebrate a mass within the Roman Catholic Church. This is a hotly debated topic, due to the large amount of Sunday celebrations conducted by laypeople, but in which the papal magisterium admits no defense: in the absence of the priest, various forms of Sunday celebration are allowed, provided that they do not make the Eucharistic consecration. Thus, disregarding the sacrificial dimension could mean making the mass equal to other rituals, removing it from the central position it occupies within Roman Catholicism. Therefore, it is worth going deeper into data analysis.

A stimulating text by J.-C. Guillebaud (2012) refers to overcoming guilt as a characteristic of modern society, where the Enlightenment thought in the 18th century proclaimed the innocence of primitive man and led guilt to lose its place. Contemporary culture has eliminated the notion of original sin, only admitting guilt due to individual responsibility. Those who go through a "vertigo of innocence" do not feel in need of the atoning sacrifice. If this claim, in fact, corresponds to the reality of our time, everything indicates that the sacrificial nature of the mass has been losing its plausibility, even having been reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council.

Other speeches are aimed at this direction, especially those by people who claim leaving the mass feeling good, enjoying peace of mind, satisfied about the ritual. As we can see, in practice, the mass is situated on an equal footing with other religious rituals – Catholic or not – aimed at providing participants with spiritual or even psychological comfort.

What pleases me most during the Mass is the part of peace, when we greet each other, sharing Christ's peace. (Another person replies): But this is such a false peace, sorry. (Answer): That is what you get. What you give, is not. (Non-practicing adult person)

Nowadays, I think this is praise. It improved a lot! The Catholic Church was colder. Nowadays, as they have lost a lot of space for Evangelicals, then at least in my community, the search for young people is now bigger. And, in this regard, songs, praise are more lively, they are more energetic. This is no longer equal to what it has once been; thus, I like praise a lot! (Practicing young person)

There is nothing better when you arrive… and you feel that relief, because you often comes with that heavy heart, and by the time the music starts you feel it alleviates, relieves, and at the time of leaving you say: thanks God! I was blessed, because I no longer feel what I felt before! So, if we have the practice of attending the Mass every evening, and every Sunday, especially, of course, my children, you are going to leave there in awe! (Practicing adult person)

Such speeches are indicative of the frail system of beliefs among many Catholics: if the Sunday mass is equivalent to other rituals, fall down two identifying principles of the Roman Catholicism: the mediation required by the sacraments of the Church and the sacrificial nature of the mass.

It is worth remembering, however, that belonging does not take place solely due to individual belief. When religion is the factor leading to the integration of the individual to her/his social group, and vice versa, personal faith may be supplemented by group faith. That is, even if individual faith is small, her/his belonging to the religious institution will be grounded in the group. This social factor itself is the theme to be examined next.

8 Social group, belonging, and religious disaffection

In complex societies, such as that in urban Brazil today, each person may keep – and they effectively keep – various ties of belonging to different groups or institutions, such as the nation, company, school, family, neighborhood, church, club, organized crowd, union, party, NGO, and many other reference groups. It is obvious that, when two or more groups overlie each other, the respective

belongings gain strength. This is what happens in the case of the Catholic Church, when religion and family overlap and give rise both to a Catholic family and to a familiar form of Catholicism. Next, there are some testimonies collected by the survey conducted by PUC Minas.

a) Family

The family is undoubtedly the institution more affected by religion, at least in the case of Catholicism. A few examples are enough:

> *I am not a bit religious. I do not like the mass, I disagree with almost everything about the Catholic church, and I am Catholic only because of my grandmother, mother...* (Non-practicing young person)

> *My grandmother attends the church, sometimes she does not attend that much, but we see that she really follows the religion and encourages us. There are certain times when she does not attend the church, then, she says: "No, today we will have a prayer here at home". So, before dinner, she calls everyone, everyone gathers, this take place at her house and encourages everyone to participate.* (Non-practicing young person)

> *I admire my mother! Since before her, the generation of my grandmother, she has followed it: she always tries to take this to her children, the nephews. I think it is very important, too.* (Practicing young person)

> *What is religion to me, in a word? I think this is family. I think so, family is what matches it the most.* (Practicing young person)

> *I discovered later in life that my biggest religion is within home! Because if God gave me a husband and two children, I have to be practicing my religion there, so that everything that happens in there becomes religion. Because when something is asked, God is too much concerned about what he gave to us to care for. Thus, religion starts within home.* (Practicing adult person)

It is interesting to notice that the same affiliation may act towards religious disaffection when the family feels rejected by the Church:

> *I believe in God, but I am not religious. I avoided the Church a little, because I have a homosexual son and this is not well accepted in the Church. I mean, he is not homosexual, but transsexual. And, from the moment I saw that the Church did not accept my son, who is now my daughter, so I ran a little bit. Because I think the fruit of my love can only*

> *be my God's daughter. She is daughter of the God I believe in.* (Non-practicing adult person)

> *I am going to tell my example. I got married when I was 15 years old, and lived 32 years as a married woman. And my ex-husband was 17 years old. Did this marriage work or not? Of course it did. But we were two children. Today, if I want to get married again, I cannot. Then, you know, what is going to happen to me? I am going to live in concubinage. This is what my father used to say: "If not married, someone lives in concubinage".* (Non-practicing adult person)

Well, data from Census 2010 (IBGE, 2010) reveal major changes in family composition. Families based on monogamous and indissoluble marriage gradually give way to other family arrangements, such as consensual unions, which represent over 1/3 of marriages. Furthermore, survey data show that, even among people who are Catholic, the acceptance of the Catholic doctrine on family is only partial (CAMARGOS, 2012b, p. 13). These data point out a certain fraying of ties that, until the middle of the last century, bound family and Catholicism, marking the very structure of the Brazilian society as a whole – and particularly that in Minas Gerais.

b) Church groups

Despite its importance, family is not the only group able to encourage belonging to the Church by binding the adherence due to belief through social ties. The Catholic Church has within it various groups more or less specialized, which – besides performing their specific religious function as groups for prayer, worship, social or charitable work – fulfill the social function of creating ties of friendship and fellowship among their members.

Although this has not been the subject of a specific question, various speeches mention it. Some of them:

> *Meeting with young people, meeting of couples, when everybody gets together...* (Non-practicing adult person)

> *In Evangelical churches you know everybody, you do go to someone's house. And in Catholic churches, you do not! You go to the church, attend*

the mass, you are beside a person you always see, you know she/he lives in your neighborhood, you never saw her/him again and leave! That is it... (Practicing young person)

Lately I was attending Loyola, there people set up a small table outdoors, who has some time stays there, chatting, the priest comes, greets everybody, and asks you: "Are you okay?". He offers a shoulder to cry, you know. It really depends on the church itself... (Practicing young person)

Yeah! The church could be open to the community, it could be a more welcoming home and not only that mass, or that group. I know that if we seek we are going to find these groups, but I think there lacks that embracement, you know. (Practicing adult person)

If the groups promote belonging, its absence is certainly a religious disaffection factor. This fact is worsened because the Catholic Church is, in the vast majority of cases, identified with the priest or, in some cases, with other ecclesiastical authorities. If the priest does not provide the personalized care that believers wish to receive, the feeling of belonging could be provided by groups with strong ties of friendship and fellowship among members. In the absence of the priest and such groups, the result could only be religious disaffection. An indicator of this is that only one speech expressed awareness that the Catholic Church is more than the set of its ordained ministers:

The church is us, then, in fact, faith, religion, to me, is the church, and the church is us... (Practicing adult person)

Conclusion

Guided by the concept of religious belonging/disaffection, our reading of the data produced by M. Camargos concentrated its focus on three central themes for the Roman Catholicism: mediation of the Church to eternal salvation, the sacrificial nature of the mass, and the religious dimension of the Catholic family. After data analysis, now we can and must return to the conceptual reference frame to evaluate its ability to provide the real with intelligibility and improve that conceptual binomial.

Data from the census and the survey conducted in Belo Horizonte reveal a religious reality marked by gradual **disaffection** with the Roman Catholicism. Then, it is high time to theoretically improve this concept through its empirical application. In other words, this means making clear some of its aspects that, in the original theory by H. Carrier, were implicit or unclear, because the European and North American context of his researches highlighted the factors of **belonging** more than those of its opposite.

Religious disaffection has three complementary dimensions: i) the weakening or rupture of the **affective** tie that unites the believer to the religious institution, something which indicates affection as feeling; ii) the **disbelief** of the believer in one or more items of the faith professed by the Church; and iii) the personal **removal** from ritual practices that bind the believer to the church. Let us consider, briefly, each of them, drawing attention to their mutual implications, and, then, resume the concept of religious disaffection.

The **affective** tie that binds the believer to the Church is materialized through the mediation of other people. From the perspective of the institution, it depends on the people who represent it; from the perspective of the believer, it depends on the people who provide her/him with a reference. The Catholic family is surely the main responsible for the strength of this tie. When the family breaks down into different religious groups, or when the believers enter into family relations contrary to Catholic moral, religious disaffection emerges. Family is not, however, the only possible mediation for affective tie, since the Church groups can play – and they effectively play – an important emotional role. This is clear in the groups of adolescent and young people: they participate in the Church together and they leave it together. It is also valid to other people who, in the absence of family background, participate by means of support in groups of movements, pastorals, social action, prayer, and others. This *psychosocial* dimension of religious disaffection must be considered, although it is not the most important.

It is the tie of **faith** that binds every member to the Church, certainly the most important for belonging. By postulating the tune between personal faith and the faith professed by someone's Church, any differences in the formulation of the truths of faith indicate religious disaffection. Well, empirical data show a lack of tune between most believers interviewed and the ecclesiastical magisterium in two crucial points for the Roman Catholicism: the sacramental mediation of the Church for eternal salvation and sacrificial nature of the mass. The distance between the official profession of faith by the Church and the faith experienced in the daily life of believers indicates the very *theological* dimension of religious disaffection. When this tie is weakened or broken, the relation of the believer to the Church may become merely functional: she/he only remains in the church while feeling comfortable in it, because her/his belonging has no longer a theological basis.

In the case of the Roman Catholicism, disaffection is expressed by non-attendance to the Sunday mass. Not by chance, surveys on the Sunday practice have motivated the theory of religious belonging/disaffection: besides being a religious act, the mass confirms the commitment of the believer to the Church and it is key to the influence of religion in society, because the molecular activity of believers does provide the Church with social strength. Without it, the pronouncements by the hierarchy become mere rhetoric, but, when we combine hierarchical guidance and activity of believers in their respective living environments (that was the propelling idea of the Catholic Action, by Pius XI), the Church becomes an important social (and political) actor. This ability to influence society made religion the study object of the classical authors of Sociology – E. Durkheim, K. Marx, and M. Weber. By seeing the religious actors as producers of meaning in life, they realized their ability to influence the history of a people by forming their "moral environment", or, in a more sophisticated way, their *éthos*. In this context, Roberlei Panasiewicz, in an article also published in this dossier, suggests that:

> [...] This spirit of *God's People Church and committed to the announcement and construction of the Kingdom of God* permeates all communities of the Archdiocese of Belo Horizonte, so that clergy and lay people get involved and lead the community to take increasingly larger steps towards embracement, mutual care, and the social, political, and cultural achievements (PANASIEWICZ, 2012, p. 1276).

On this ability to form the *éthos* of a people lies the historical strength of religion and the Church. Thus, it stays on the surface of the real that evaluates the success of a religion through the number of adherents it gains or loses, as if religious belonging was equivalent to "consumption" of religious goods or services comparable to the choice of a car, soap, or sneakers brand.

Now, we come to the ultimate purpose of this analysis of data from the census and the case study conducted in Belo Horizonte. In this context, the pastoral challenge does not involve making the churches full of people for Sunday masses, but providing greater harmony between the hierarchy and the mass of believers, so as to infuse in society the ethical values that provide Catholicism with an identity. The Ecumenical Council of 1962-65 opened new routes for the Catholic Church by means of dialogue with the contemporary society, but data indicate that an active and committed participation of lay people in the Church is still small.

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