

EDITORIAL

RELIGIOUS STUDIES: *an invisibilized Science?*

CIÊNCIA DA RELIGIÃO: uma ciência invisibilizada?

CIENCIA DE LA RELIGIÓN: ¿una ciencia invisibilizada?

Brasil Fernandes de Barros *

The Religious Studies field has been consolidating over the years, reaffirming, according to Passos and Usarski (2013), its disciplinary legitimacy amid other areas of knowledge. Some authors highlight the discipline's complex trajectory, which spans over 150 years in various parts of the world, although scholars of religion traced back as far as ancient Greece, such as "Herodotus (484-425), who described the religious customs of Egypt, Babylon, and Persia." (Usarski, 2013, p. 53). Over these approximately 150 years, Religious Studies have been delineating itself and taking shape as an autonomous discipline in the scientific community in relation to theology, philosophy and the other disciplines dedicated to the study of religions.

Usarski (2013) draws our attention to the specificity of the production of knowledge in Religious Studies - "[...] not provided by any other academic discipline." (Passos; Usarski, 2013, p. 52) - and locates two major trends for its constitution as an autonomous discipline: a) the increase in knowledge of new cultures and their religious expressions; b) the increase in knowledge of new cultures and their religious expressions. (Passos; Usarski, 2013, p. 52)

In the Interações editorial v. 17, n. 01. jan./ jun. 2022, Flávio Senra, at the very beginning of his considerations, recalls that "descriptor term religion is in the center of the concerns of the scientist of religion", and further on he emphasizes that "[...] we have identified that this descriptor as a term does not seem to belong only to the domains of the religiously affiliated beliefs and traditions." (Senra, 2022, p. 8). However, this often seems

* PhD and Master's in Religious Studies at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais. Scholarship holder of the Postgraduate Development Program (PDPG) - Strategic Post-Doctorate of CAPES. ORCID: 0000-0002-5285-4871. E-mail: brasil@netinfor.com.br

to me to be restricted to academic circles, with no greater repercussions beyond the circle of Religious Studies professionals.

We are currently living in an extremely troubled world, with major geopolitical issues such as the war between Ukraine and Russia, Israel's war against Hamas and the Palestinians, when environmental issues, gender issues, among others, have become extremely relevant. A time when opinions (*doxa*) have become law for many. Everyone has an opinion, which often opposes knowledge (*episteme*) based on scientific positions.

Regarding religious studies, what has been the behavior of the so-called mainstream media regarding religion? How do journalists and content providers behave when faced with information from our area? For example, on geopolitical issues, we see the press consulting political scientists and/or international relations experts in the various national media. When it comes to legal issues, lawyers and judges are demanded their opinions. In the Syrian and Turkish earthquake, a tragedy of tremendous proportions, various geologists and experts were asked to give their opinion and explain the basis of their science.

But what happens when religion is involved? In the government that ended on December 31, 2022, the issue has been raised a lot. We have seen journalists from diverse types of media voicing their opinions, and when the interpretation becomes extremely dense, we have not regularly seen an invitation to a religious studies professional to analyze it. For example, a topic that should obviously interest religious studies, also for reasons of professional positioning, was the approval of confessional education in public schools by the STF (Brazilian Supreme Court) in 2017. Instead of consulting *experts*, media professionals claim the right to express their opinions as being qualified to do so.

Why is our discipline invisible? Is it our field's " negligence " in not adequately positioning ourselves in relation to issues of social interest when it comes to the subject of our discipline? Or is the subject of religion secondary? Is this because of the popular saying that "politics, soccer and religion" can't be discussed? I do not think so, as there are many media programs dedicated to discussing football and politics on television.

The issue here, in my opinion, lies in a particular interpretation of the constitutional affirmation of the secular nature of the State, which states that "freedom of conscience and belief is inviolable, the free exercise of religious cults is assured, and the protection of places of worship and their liturgies is guaranteed by law" (Brazil, 1988, art. 5). What I understand is that everyone can express themselves and defend their ideas about their religion, and they have the right to do so. However, this is not what we are considering here, because we are

discussing issues linked to the analysis of religious phenomena performed by professionals in the discipline of religious studies.

Societies, programs, and courses could help make religious studies more visible by improving channels of communication with society. This is also a task for professionals in this field.

It is also worth explaining the profile of the approach to religion taken by religious studies professionals. There seems to be a lack of definition among professionals in the field. What about the recognition of our work as religious researchers in society? This is not clear to the general public, nor to the media, who seem to be unaware of the existence of our discipline. We need to think about this.

Associations such as ANPTECRE, SOTER, and ABHR nobly fulfill their roles within the academic sphere. The specialized position of scientists of religion does not exclude the official voices of organizations such as the Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil (National Conference of Brazilian Bishops), the Federação Espírita Brasileira (Brazilian Spiritist Federation), the Confederação Israelita (Israeli Confederation), the Federação das Associações Muçulmanas do Brasil (Federation of Brazilian Muslim Associations), the Federação Brasileira de Umbanda (Brazilian Umbanda Federation), the Associação Nacional Das Religiões Afro Brasileiras (National Association of Afro-Brazilian Religions), evangelical church organizations, among others. However, I wonder if we religious studies professionals who lack positions in the university employment market, are going to continue to depend solely on academic chairs for our sustenance. However, it is the specialized voices of scientists of religion that can offer an analytical and scientifically grounded perspective. To this aim, scientists of religion will collaborate, whether in an academic capacity or by advising and consultancy services to public authorities or the private sector.

I am looking forward to the day when it will be a common occurrence to hear the following phrase in the mainstream media: "Now let's call a religion expert who will explain to us the details of the issues related to this topic...". I feel we are still invisible from the point of view of public recognition of our discipline in the country.

If currently anyone can give an opinion on everything, the advantage of writing an editorial is that it is also a space where people can speak, a place to express opinions. And mine, in this editorial, is that if we scientists of religion remain silent, if we do not take a stand, we will continue to be invisibilized.

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