

## EDITORIAL

### RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND STUDY OF RELIGION<sup>1</sup>

#### *ESTUDOS DE RELIGIÃO E CIÊNCIA DA RELIGIÃO*

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**Flávio Senra\***

Since 1995, at PUC Minas, the religious studies are part of the university's educational and research efforts. This path has been built within the interface between disciplines such as theology, philosophy, pedagogy, history, literature and study of religion.

At first, the multidisciplinary approach in religious studies made the University a formative hub for teaching in religious education, attracting people from different parts of the country through specialized training programs such as PREPES - PUC Minas. It is worth to highlight the formation at the undergraduate level as the Deepening in Religious Teaching offered by the Department of Education, which has formed many teaching staff for Religious School Teaching with a non-confessional profile for the schools of Minas Gerais.

In the last 15 years<sup>2</sup>, the University has qualified its research efforts and production of knowledge through the Graduate Program in Religious Studies (Programa de Pós-graduação em Ciências da Religião - PPGCR PUC Minas). Currently distributed in three research lines: "Religious Pluralism, Dialogue and Languages"; "Religion and Contemporaneity" and "Religion, Education and Politics", the program's area of concentration, named "Religion and Culture", comprises the religious fact in its historical, social, psychological and cultural production.

The multi-disciplinarity which distinguishes its faculty composition, not without

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<sup>1</sup> Translation made by Brasil Fernandes de Barros, Ph.D. and Master in Religious Studies. PUC Minas. Brasil. ORCID: 0000-0002-5285-4871. E-mail: brasil@netinfor.com.br

\* Ph.D. in Philosophy. Master of Study of Religion. Graduated in Philosophy. PUC Minas. Brazil. ORCID: 0000-0001-7676-9850. E-mail: flaviosenra@pucminas.br.

<sup>2</sup> In this year of 2023, the Graduate Program in Religious Studies celebrates 15 years since the beginning of its master's program. The doctoral program started in 2016.

reason, it does justice for what a Religious Studies (*Ciências da Religião* or *Estudos de Religião* in free translation) must be. This option for the term Religious Studies reveals the multidisciplinary character with which the studies of religion have developed in the country and also in this program. This is a conscious choice of the expression's meaning as the translation of Study of Religion (*Ciência da Religião*).

This choice, however, here and in other cases, is not without controversy. Not always the use of the term *Ciências da Religião*, in Portuguese, expresses unequivocally the meaning of religious studies in our country. The proximity to the term *Ciências da Religião* confuses the field of religion studies as synonymous with the discipline of Study of Religion (*Ciência da Religião*).

We started in this way this editorial because of the known tensions between those who defend the singular and those who defend the plural in the way of naming the discipline of Study of Religion in Brazil. Oddly enough, until we attained the internationally accepted term, whether with the German *Religionswissenschaft*, or with Religious Studies or the Study of Religion in English, the ways of understanding the discipline varied according to nationalities, schools, and periods. It is useless to trace a linear and homogeneous standard for this or any academic disciplines, as Prof. Dilaine Soares Sampaio has already well reflected in the paper *Religious Studies and Theology as an autonomous area*, published in the *Horizonte* journal, in 2019. In any case, it would not be opportune here to list the various options that present themselves in the academic environment, but the reader will certainly have an example in mind when they think about the variations around the discipline. However, we should not minimize this issue and what we bring here is a brief reflection to recognize the validity of each term according to its orientation as a theoretical and methodological principle. At this point, we will not treat more than the pair Study of Religion and Religious Studies. Certainly, it is necessary to consider the complexity that the Latin radical *religio* implies for studies in our discipline, the Study of Religion, a theme on which Prof. Frederico Piepper Pires reflected masterfully, in 2019, in the article *Religion: limits and horizons of a concept*, published in the *Estudos de Religião* journal from UMESP.

Study of Religion and Religious Studies imply distinct possibilities in the account of religion studies, and this has been a point on which we understand it is necessary to reflect carefully, because such theoretical-methodological decision reveals the way we research our object. The Brazilian case inspires attention, for, as research and academic documents reveal, we live with diversity in the ways of naming Programs, Courses, Evaluation Area, apparently unreflectively. Not even the inclusion of an indicator in the evaluation form

served to a consistent confrontation with the problem. If there were a greater awareness of the methodological implications in these choices, something that I suspect is not the case, we would only dispute perspectives. However, in the absence of this awareness, different understandings are passed off as if they were similar, if not identical.

In our history, considering the first movements that took place at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora, our founding milestone that has its germ launched in the second half of the 1960s, we have seen a profusion of initiatives around religious studies or study of religion.

By keeping this debate inactive, it has sustained the use of the label for questionable purposes, although there is no shortage of confessional interests in many of our choices. To take a label to get across something other than what is intended for a discipline with a non-normative profile is no minor problem.

As if it were not enough for us to have to live with this mini Babel of overlapping nomenclatures and meanings, with its correlated problems, it is up to us, who have produced academic and scientifically grounded knowledge about religion, religions, wisdom traditions, spiritualities and knowledge regimes, almost 60 years after Newton Sucupira named the first Department in the Brazilian University, to talk openly about our differences and proposals.

Over the past 13 years, taking part in the political-academic management of the National Association of Research and Graduate Studies in Theology and Religious Studies (ANPTECRE) and, subsequently, in the evaluation's Coordination area of Religious Studies and Theology at CAPES, I had to live and manage this conflict with colleagues who acted with great quality and dedication. We have created commissions and encouraged reactions even through program evaluation forms for the Quadrennial Evaluation 2017-2020. We have followed with attention the contribution of researchers in the area that through translations, authorial works, collections, dictionary, theses and dissertations, articles, events, seminars, disciplines, etc. to keep the discussions active and always open. This entire process shows how alive and active our community is in this debate!

I confess I keep a certain concern for what we have advanced in this debate, despite everything, and considering so much that has been done. In this sense and with this concern, I express here my perception as a very modest contribution.

By Ciências da Religião (Sciences of Religion in free translation), in Brazil, I take, in the first place, what has been politically nominated the *evaluation area* in the National Evaluation System, as proposed by ANPTECRE, in 2012, and through subsequent

deliberation of the Superior Council of Capes, in 2014, as an evaluation area, Sciences of Religion and Theology. The area document, since the version prior to the recognition of the evaluation area as an autonomous area, already signaled that this area agglutinated two disciplines, being able to receive proposals from other disciplines of the spectrum of religion studies, that is: Religious Education, History of Religions, Sociology of Religions, Psychology of Religion, Philosophy of Religion and Theology. This plural seems to have always reflected the option for a field of Religion Studies - an option that was posed as an alternative, but which was rejected at the ANPTECRE Assembly in 2012. *Ciências da Religião* is not the national translation of Study of Religion, nor of the German *Religionswissenschaft*. It sounds more like the expression of religious studies or religion studies. It is the term to designate the different studies on the object religion, not exactly a discipline, as of the Religious Studies. From a methodological point of view, the Religious Studies more appropriately embrace the multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary method.

If we think in disciplinary terms, we will necessarily be led to the term Religious Studies or Study of Religion. The Study of Religion, taken as an autonomous discipline, is academically recognized by a non-normative approach, which is based on an empirical approach, being able, from this inventoried material, to elaborate systematic considerations. The effort for a theoretical-methodological delimitation in the study of religion means that this discipline does not allow reduction of its object to any other disciplinary spectrums. The interdisciplinary method does not exclude the disciplinarity of the Study of Religion, rather, it is its condition.

But finally, how to talk about Study of Religion in a Program of Religious Studies (*Ciências da Religião*), in an evaluation area that brings the same plural in its nomenclature?

I understand that the consolidation project for the discipline of Study of Religion will have to coexist with something that does not assume itself as a discipline, but as a field of study.

Wherever I read and hear about Religious Studies (*Ciências da Religião*), I can only understand that it is not a discipline, as Tatiane Almeida rightly pointed out in her doctoral thesis, defended in 2022. What has been created with this term was a way to name a set of disciplines that study religion, disciplines from different areas of knowledge, but not exactly a discipline with its own delimitation and methods. This would not be far or difficult to assume. What is odd is not to do so, assuming what this option represents it. There is no demerit in this option. The problem is the level of unawareness.

The multidisciplinary proposal of the Religious Studies coexists with the efforts of researchers who strive for the consolidation of the discipline Study of Religion. The multidisciplinary field, which could be identified as Religious Studies (*Estudos de Religião*), a proposal rejected in 2012 by the assembled assembly of coordinators of associated programs of ANPTECRE, brings together different approaches on the object of study. With such freedom, it can put in dialogue, theological, philosophical, sociological, anthropological, psychological approaches, etc. It is about considering different approaches to religion.

The Study of Religion, however, is not a multidisciplinary proposition. It is a disciplinary proposition. Here, it seems to me, lies, at least in part, the proposals of Study of Religion and Religious Studies in Brazil.

As a disciplinary proposal, the Study of Religion does not give up the understanding that methodologically is made up by multi, inter, or trans-disciplinarity. But the method, in this case, works on its own discipline's behalf. For the Study of Religion, knowledge about the object will not be reduced to the interests of other disciplines. The interest in the object is its sole focus of interest. Its approach will not be normative, which is why it can only deal with its object empirically. The intangible and immaterial of the analyzed experiences, that which is sacred or transcendent in religions, will only be accessible through the mediation of people, communities, institutions and their productions in images, documents, cults, reports. The Study of Religion will not produce a systematic approach of a substantialist or essentialist nature. Therefore, its systematic knowledge will be indissolubly tied to the data of observable and empirical reality manifested by the data that make up its object of study. With all these differentials, the Study of Religion distinguishes itself fundamentally from academically made-up disciplines such as Philosophy of Religion or Theology, but in other aspects also from other disciplines, equally valuable, which are also dedicated to the study of religion as a pathway to understand history, society, psyche.