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Religion, time and memory: interfaces for studying the History of the Present Time

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Abstract

This article reflects on religions and religiosities as issues concerning historical studies based on concepts and categories belonging to the History of the Present Time. To do this, it starts from the verification of the presence of religion in our present time and the expansion of this presence, particularly in the contemporary political field. It presents, as an introduction, a brief overview of the studies on religions and religiosities, highlighting etymological and epistemological elements that delimit the field at stake. Also, it discusses the place of memory in the frame of religions – more specifically, in Christian denominations – based on the analytical tools proposed by Danièle Hervieu-Léger. And, finally, it addresses the reflection on memory through a brief analysis of data regarding religious conversion in Brazil, also referring to Christian denominations, during the last 20 years.

Keywords: religion; memory; history of the present time.

Religião, tempo e memória: interfaces para o estudo da História do Tempo Presente

Resumo

Este artigo reflete sobre as religiões e religiosidades como problemáticas concernentes aos estudos históricos a partir de conceitos e categorias da História do Tempo Presente. Para tanto, parte da constatação da presença da religião em nosso presente e da ampliação dessa presença, particularmente, no campo político contemporâneo. Apresenta, a título introdutório, um breve panorama dos estudos sobre as religiões e religiosidades, ressaltando elementos etimológicos e epistemológicos que demarcam o campo em questão. Além disso, disserta sobre o lugar da memória na conformação das religiões – mais especificamente, das denominações de cunho cristão – a partir das ferramentas analíticas propostas por Danièle Hervieu-Léger. E, por fim, problematiza a reflexão sobre a memória mediante uma breve análise de dados referentes à conversão religiosa no Brasil, referentes igualmente às denominações de cunho cristão, durante os últimos 20 anos.

Palavras-chave: religião; memória; história do tempo presente.

“Religion does not live in heaven, but here on earth”
 (MARX *apud* HERMANN, 1997, p. 482)

1. The presence of religion

The sentence that serves as an epigraph to this text was coined in 1842, and it is attributed to Karl Marx. He aimed, according to some of his commentators¹, to highlight the political and social elements that shaped religious ideas. Although the purpose of this text is not introducing or even engaging in a materialist-historical perspective for the analysis of religions and religiosities, I believe that this maxim brings with it premises that meet the propositions to which we commit ourselves throughout the text.

When evoking the idea that religion does not live in heaven, but here on earth, perhaps a small intervention in the sentence is needed, after all, our gaze will be turned to the religion that does not live in heaven, but here on earth. The conjunction ‘that’ gains relevance, as it brings with it, in an under-announced manner, the idea that religion takes place in heaven and on earth. This is perhaps one of the greatest challenges for those who are devoted to this particular object of research and reflection. In this sentence, ‘heaven’ becomes, despite its Christian origin, related to the element we name as ‘metaphysical,’ which shapes religious phenomena (those elements that, in a simplistic way, we could classify as ‘faith matters’).

This metaphysical element concerns issues that exist for those who believe in them, regardless of the researcher’s institutional affiliation, personal belief, agnosticism, or even atheism. Although these elements are materially inaccessible to us, their existence should not be disregarded. Methodologically, as historians, we insist on the classic proposition by Marc Bloch, according to whom “the good historian looks like the ogres of legend. Wherever he sniffs out human flesh, there he knows he has found his prey” (BLOCH, 2001, p. 54). We see that, even though the religious phenomenon is shaped by ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’, our access, through sources and research, takes place through ‘earth’ and what

¹ I am specifically referring to Jaqueline Hermann (1997) and Silvio Fausto Gil Filho (2002).

comes from it. In analytical terms, however, this perception cannot be rushed into. Here we evoke Michel de Certeau in the face of the question “what is religious?” The author does not provide us with an answer, but thinks through the issue of the relationship between the meaning experienced and the fact observed. Just as we cannot content ourselves with describing a fact by giving it an ‘external’ meaning, Certeau tells us, we equally cannot accept a meaning as unknowable, just because it comes from an expression to which we have no access. Therefore, we need to pay attention to the relationship between a religious fact and its meaning, assuming that the latter (the meaning) provides the first with a sense of meaning, even though the latter cannot be accessed in the same way as the first (the fact) (CERTEAU, 2002, p. 145).

When we pay attention, in general, to the presence of religion in our present time, a large number of references can be found. Despite the weakening of historical institutions (as evidenced by decreased numbers of self-professed believers) and changes in the way of relating to these institutions (which incite debates such as secularization, for instance), religion still remains. Particularly in Brazil, references emerge almost daily, even when they are involved in other issues, such as politics, social work, public safety, the fight for human rights, intolerance, violence, and prejudice.

Thinking, as an example, of the relationship with politics, some references seem quite significant. The election of Jair Bolsonaro, in 2018, is one of them, after all he was the first candidate with a religiously-based speech (evangelical) elected by direct vote (BETTO, 2019, p. 20). The very existence of an ‘evangelical row of seats’ in the Brazilian National Congress and of a Christian Social Party (Partido Social Cristão [PSC])² are also elements worthy of attention, particularly in a country where “the freedom of conscience and belief is inviolable and the free exercise of religious cults is guaranteed, as provided by law, as well as the protection of places of worship and their liturgies,” according to Article 5 of the 1988 Brazilian Federal Constitution (although, as its preamble reads, under the protection of God). Thus, we agree with Frei Betto (2019) when he emphasizes the antinomic nature of the idea of a Christian politics, after all – at least in non-

² Definitively registered on March 29, 1990.

theocratic States – politics should not be confessional, as it should guarantee, for believers and non-believers, the precepts of justice and equality that, in theory, characterize contemporary democracies.

These themes, beyond their mundane implications, shape religious phenomena and bring challenges along. One of them, again in dialogue with Certeau, is the need to seek to grasp issues different from those that religions aim to speak of. Thinking of religions and religiosities as possible history study fields, it is necessary to “see as a *representation* of society what, from their standpoint, *has founded* the society” (CERTEAU, 2002, p. 143). Therefore, our movement is not to put the various narratives assumed by believers into question, but to grasp – in time – the historical-social status of these narratives and, consequently, of religions.

Such social-historical statute shapes a dense and broad field, which seems even more complex when we pay attention to our present time. This is because, in modern times, the issues of ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’ seem to gain diffuse contours and, often, objectives that do not exactly coincide with what, in classical terms, characterize religions. The demands of the present time seem to reconfigure religious phenomena. In an attempt to see some elements of this announced reconfiguration, we propose to go beyond the apparent everyday presence of religion and think of some of its elements through interfaces with the study of the History of the Present Time. To do this, the relationship with memory particularly gains our attention.

2. Religions and religiosities: a historiographical digression

First, a brief digression to tackle the issue of definitions. In “Religion as an object of history”³, Francisco José Silva Gomes refers to the conceptual debate as an “endless discussion” (2002, p. 13) and seeks to introduce it in two ways: an etymological and an epistemological one.

Regarding the etymology of the Latin word *religio*, it is quite common to emphasize the polysemy of this term, whose meanings can vary according to

³ Lecture at the VIII Regional Meeting of History of the ANPUH-RJ.

cultures and mentalities. According to Cicero, it may allude to the verb *relegere* (to revolve in the spirit, meditate, care) and, referring to ancient Roman cults, implies an understanding of religion as the fulfillment of duties with the gods, through rituals. Later, based on Lactâncio's proposition, the term *religio* began to be considered as a derivative of *religare* (reconnect), in an interpretation focused on Christian practices that referred to the ties that would unite man to a single and true God. Regarding this etymological debate, Jacques Derrida draws attention to the fact that both the terms *religio* and *relegere* refer – and in a way delimit – our way of thinking of religion to a markedly Christian and Latin-Western meaning⁴. The author stated, quite forcefully and considering not only the etymological complexity, but the need to also consider geographical, theological, political, and philosophical aspects, that “there has not always been, there is still not, and there will never be everywhere (among men or elsewhere) *something*, a *single* and *identifiable* thing, identical to itself that leads religious or *irreligious* people to agree to give it the name ‘religion’” (DERRIDA, 2000, p. 52, author's italics).

As for the epistemological issues, religion can be understood from the methodological perspectives and analytical frameworks belonging to the various schools devoted to it. Jacqueline Hermann (1997) discusses this issue by means of a detailed introduction of the constitution of the history of religions as a discipline, particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries, with the marked influence of reflections coming from the fields of theology, ethnology, philosophy, and sociology. If, in principle, we notice a concern with the origins/essence of religion, this gradually gives way to comparative approaches that, over time, begin to draw attention, albeit in different ways, to social manifestations of the religious experience⁵.

In strictly historiographical terms, religion – or religious phenomena – is the target of great attention even before History consolidates as a scientific

⁴ On the etymological debate, we indicate here the dense and broad reflection developed by Jacques Derrida in “Faith and Knowledge,” a text for the seminar held on the island of Capri, in 1994.

⁵ In this sense, it is worth mentioning the works by Durkheim, Weber, Marx, Max Muller, Angelo Brelich, Rudolf Otto, Mircea Eliade.

knowledge field⁶. However, it is from the 19th century onwards that this began to undergo the methods and procedures of the new science, being fundamentally addressed through comparisons, which insisted on the search for the origins and truth of religion; in its relationship with the history of Nation-States and, finally, through institutional analyses, focused on structures, characters, dogmas, hierarchy, and canonized sanctity, being put into practice mostly by ecclesiastical historians (ALBUQUERQUE, 2007, p. 4).

In the 20th century, the approaches to the religious element went through significant changes, and it seems timely to refer here to the closeness between a comparative and historical perspective, such as that proposed in the first half of the century by Raffaele Pettazzoni, who sought, roughly, to approach religions as historical products, showing specificities conditioned by various contexts that, therefore, should be addressed through particular methods (MATTA, 2010). Changes in the way of writing about religions can also be noticed in French historiography, particularly with regard to mentalities, as we may see in the monumental “The Thaumaturge Kings,” by Marc Bloch. In the 1970s, the article by Dominique Julia published in the collection “History: new objects, new issues, new approaches” provides an inventory of the field, highlighting religion as a cultural product, made accessible through attention to social organizations. Taking the risk of unforgivable omissions, other examples of these renewed approaches can be found in Jean Delumeau, Jacques Le Goff, Georges Duby, Keith Thomas, Michel Vovelle, and Carlo Ginzburg, among others.

In the case of Brazilian historiography, in the first half of the 20th century, studies on the so-called popular religiosity gained more emphasis than institutional studies, in a noticeable recurrent attempt to analyze the sociocultural fabric of the nation. In thematic terms, we draw attention to studies on religions of African origin, often analyzed from the perspective of syncretism inspired by Roger Bastide, and on messianic movements, in a greater closeness to religious sociology. In a thematic and methodological closeness to what is conventionally called cultural history, studies like those by Laura de Mello e

⁶ We refer, as an example, to religious history, produced in the confessional sphere, which Michel de Certeau deals with in “The Writing of History.”

Souza and Ronaldo Vainfas became quite representative in the field at stake. Currently, the range of themes and approaches becomes even broader, being noticeable, for instance, through the issues of the *Brazilian Journal of History of Religions* (Revista Brasileira de História das Religiões), which had its first issue published in May 2008, as a result of the I Meeting of the Brazilian National Workgroup of History of Religions and Religiosities, held in May 2007 (ANDRADE, 2008).

We could, of course, mention so many other names and themes, after all, a generalist presentation always runs the risk of superficiality and oblivion. We only aim to introduce, albeit in a very synthetic manner, the study of religions and religiosities as a field whose constitution may be historicized and exemplifies the existence of various approaches and definitions. Regarding the approaches, the present time poses particular challenges in front of which we take beforehand the perception of the History of the Present Time as a fruitful possibility. This is so because, attentive to the present time and the experiences taking place in it, this area allows us to add thickness, amplitude, and duration to a time that seems increasingly fast and elusive (ROUSSO, 2016, p. 17).

3. Interfaces with the History of the Present Time: the place of memory

Devoting herself to observing contemporary manifestations of the ‘religious being,’ Danièle Hervieu-Léger (2015) weighs the issue of defining religion, thus affirming the impossibility of finding a definitive answer. As a sociologist, she admits that:

[...] the religious being is not defined solely by the social objects (the ‘religions’) in which it manifests itself in a compact and concentrated manner. The religious being is bound to a transversal dimension of the human phenomenon that works, in an active and latent way, explicitly or implicitly, in the whole social, cultural, and psychological reality, according to modalities inherent to each civilization in which it tries to announce its presence (HERVIEU-LÉGER, 2015, p. 22-23).

The statement that the religious element transcends its institutionalization in religions and manifests itself, in various ways, *across the entire range of social*,

cultural and psychological reality is quite relevant. This broad perception of the religious sphere highlighted by Hervieu-Léger is in line with the aforementioned framework, about the presence of religion in our present time and, even if it does not fix the problem, this helps us to deal with the conceptual constraints pointed out by Jacques Derrida. If sociology is responsible for the inventory and analysis of the functioning of this sphere, historians are faced with another challenge: to pay attention to the various temporal strata that shape this sphere and help us to interpret, along with the conceptual apparatus of sociology, its structures and functioning in the present time.

The History of Present Time is clearly turned to a close temporality. In addition to the debates that demarcate the (in)definitions of what/when this present time could be, it seeks to analyze issues concerning societies that change much more quickly, driven by the already much-discussed extension of the present time (ROUSSO, SARLO, HARTOG, BÉDARIDA). Furthermore, the present time, thought of as historical time, cannot be reduced to a chronological dating – however relevant this may be. It is woven by the imbrication between what is experienced as the past and what emerges as a possibility for the future. Reinhart Koselleck (2006) proposes experience and expectation as categories for thinking about historical time, as they intertwine past and future. As a constituent of the past, present, and/or future, we refer here to the religious element because it announces, through the evocation of a collective memory, a clear permanence, at the same time as it is understood as a relatively autonomous sphere in relation to religious institutions, transforming, changing, and adapting itself.

Religion shapes experiences and expectations. If we take the definition proposed by Koselleck, the experience may be understood as a current past time, in which “events were incorporated and can be recalled” (2006, p. 309). When we observe different religious practices (e.g. those that have taken place in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam), this incorporation of events to a past time that is always recalled and collectivized takes place through celebrations, rites, and practices that are repeated and, thus, make these events present, turning them into an experience for those who were not there to witness them. Similarly, the expectation, shaped by the possibilities for the future, which also has its personal

and interpersonal dimensions, is linked to what has been experienced in the past (KOSELLECK, 2006, p. 311). Although religion is not a simple definition, the various manifestations, appropriations, and experiences of religiosities shape the present time and accompany, to a certain extent, the aforementioned acceleration of our time⁷. It is up to the historian devoted to the History of Present Time to “take the time that is passing by, pausing the image to observe the passage between the present and the past, slowing down the detachment and oblivion that characterize every human experience” (ROUSSO, 2016, p. 17).

Observing contemporary manifestations of religiosity, Danièle Hervieu-Léger has identified an intense movement among its features. To access it, the author has built analytical tools and personified them in the pilgrim and the convert as characters. These allow us to notice, in contemporary religious experiences, various ways of relating to time and memory.

The (modern) pilgrim is recognized by constant movement and refers to the fluidity of individual paths, in which religious practice takes place voluntarily and often temporarily. The convert, as far as she/he is concerned, has a religious identity fundamentally marked by individual choice. Both characters, according to the author, inhabit the contemporary religious scene, whose beliefs and practices are no longer identified by elements of tradition, but by individualization and subjectivation processes (HERVIEU-LÉGER, 2015). In addition to expressing features of the contemporary scene, such characters also allow us to notice possible relationships between contemporary religiosity, time and, particularly, memory. More specifically, they allow us to perceive what seems to be a change in the position occupied by memory in the process of transmitting religion.

Following Hervieu-Léger's reflections, memory could have a privileged position in maintaining and transmitting religions. It (through the evocation of a

⁷ Although it is not the object of this article, it is worth emphasizing that in the case of Brazil, among these manifestations, appropriations and religious experiences that shape our present, it is necessary to consider the unavoidable relevance of African-based religions, not only for quantitative reasons (number of participants), but also because of the way in which some of its elements transcend ritual uses and can be easily noticed in other spaces, with practices that are not necessarily religious (vocabulary, rhythms, instruments, aesthetics, food, ethics). In this sense, in addition to the religious presence, it is necessary to consider the problematic issues related to cultural appropriation, as pointed out by Rodney William (2019).

founding event) is/was a referent that contains/contained the meaning to be attributed to experiences of the present time. In the author's words, when thinking of religious institutions and modes of transmitting religion:

In continuing relationship with this past, believers constitute a "religious" group, raising and maintaining the belief in the continuity of the lineage of faith, at the price of a work of remembrance that is also a permanent reinterpretation of tradition in light of the issues of the present time (HERVIEU-LÉGER, 2015, p. 61).

If transmission is what constitutes religion as religion, in a continuing process of (re)elaboration over time, this way of understanding its structure as "the lineage of those who believe" (HERVIEU-LÉGER, 2015, p. 62) faces substantial challenges in the new forms of experience that emerge and characterize the contemporary scene. This scene embodies the weakening of this relationship with tradition as it is rhythmic, according to the author's words, due to the pressure of an increasingly ever-present time. Hervieu-Léger even speaks of an annihilation of collective memory and attributes to the breaking of the 'memory link' the possibility of emergence in this society of change that has innovation as a rule of conduct (HERVIEU-LÉGER, 2015, p. 62).

Not only verifying, but seeing the implications of this 'increasingly ever-present time' seem to be, therefore, a key requirement to grasp the conformation of religious relationships and experiences in contemporaneity.

We may support this interpretive exercise through the hypothesis proposed by François Hartog (2014, p. 11), when the author pays attention to the particularities of the way in which the past, present, and future are linked in modern times. He characterizes as presentist this "single present time: that of tyranny and stagnation in a perpetual present time." Presentism is not synonymous with the present time, nor is it acquiescence to its features. It is rather an interpretive hypothesis that allows us to look at various experiences of time, particularly in the Western world. It allows us to observe, at the same time, the acceleration and a certain 'stabilization' of transience. According to the author, even the perception of future is a constitutive element of the present time and, in our presentist present time, the future is perceived "no longer as a promise, but as a threat, in the form of catastrophes, of a time of catastrophes

that we do cause” (HARTOG, 2014, p. 15). Thus, the attitudes, sensitivities, and beliefs observable in this present time can be regarded as guided by the experience of time and expectations about the future.

Well, when Hervieu-Léger deals with memory and tradition as a condition for the existence of religions (historical, institutionalized religions) we may infer that the needs of the present time marked by the immediate moment, the transitory state, and an unpromising future are no longer easily met by promises of salvation anchored in the traditional modes of relationship with the past that characterized these same religions. There is certainly a destabilization. On the other hand, even though the author refers to an ‘annihilation of collective memory’ or a ‘break in the link of memory,’ religions continue to exist. They even gain ground in fields that transcend them (like the political field, for instance). In “La religion, hilo de la memoria,” Hervieu-Léger (2005, p. 202, our translation) takes a little longer on the issue, stating that “the reflection on modern changes in memory, related to the process of constituting and invoking the believing lineage that specifies religious belief, can offer an [...] equally interesting perspective for the analysis of religious modernity”⁸. We believe that this delicate relationship with memory may gain an in-depth approach based on the contributions of the History of the Present Time.

Memory is the presence of the past, as Henry Rousso (2005) defines it in a unique way, when sketching what he names as a ‘history of memory’ in relation to the studies conducted at the Institut d’Histoire du Temps Présent. The author substantiates his premise by claiming that memory is “a psychic and intellectual reconstruction that actually entails a selective representation of the past, a past time that never refers to a single individual, but to a person inserted in a family, social, national context” (p. 94). This reconstruction process is not tension free, since the way in which each one adheres to the past and builds/takes identifications is permeated with various forms of relation to memory. According to Fernando Catroga:

⁸ “Podemos pensar, sin embargo, que la reflexión sobre las mutaciones modernas de la memoria, relacionadas con el proceso de constitución e invocación del linaje creyente que especifica el creer religioso, puede ofrecer una perspectiva que, al menos, es igualmente interesante para el análisis de la modernidad religiosa.”

In the lived experience, individual memory is shaped by the coexistence, tense and not always peaceful, between various memories (at the personal, family, group, regional, national levels, and so on) in permanent construction, due to the endless change from the present to the past and to the alterations taking place in the field of representations (or re-presentifications) of the past time (CATROGA, 2015, p. 11).

Starting from there, we may think – regarding the new modes of religious experience and its relationship with memory – of a need to look at this past that becomes present as an element of recognition and identification that is no longer an authority-past, allocated in a distant time (although often re-signified), safeguarded by narratives conveyed by the very religious institutions. It may be necessary to consider that memory, in these contemporary experiences, is based, according to Catroga, on a re-updated past, in constant dispute and much less stable. The ‘monopoly of faith,’ which had been exercised by those who held the symbolic capital related to the religious field, referring here to Pierre Bourdieu (2011), is now diffused and claimed in pulpits that are inaugurated, multiplied, and modified – even in the virtual environment. The idea of field, by itself, is also destabilized⁹. Perhaps we think that the memory we broke up with is what it once was (although only allegedly)¹⁰ as monopolized by institutions, as it still remains, we believe, as a key element of identity, the perception of self and others.

Also in dialogue with Catroga (2015), it is necessary to consider that “a person, even before being a self, is already, at a certain level, immersed in the placenta of some memory that socializes her/him and in the light of which she/he will define, either her/his life strategy or her/his feelings of belonging and adherence to the collective.” The relationship established with this memory, however, goes through clear changes and it is often anchored, as well as

⁹ We refer here to the text “A dissolução do religioso,” in which the sociologist affirms that “the religious field is a space in which players that need to be defined (priest, prophet, sorcerer, etc.) fight for the imposition of a legitimate definition not only of the religious being, but also of the various ways of playing the religious role” (BOURDIEU, 2004, p. 120). The dissolution of this field refers both to a weakening of the action constraints for these subjects and to the fact that the definitions of ways of being and living are now submitted to other truths and values not circumscribed to what used to be thought of as ‘religious.’

¹⁰ I reinforce here the ‘allegedly,’ since such a monopoly showed clear weaknesses, as well demonstrated by Carlo Ginzburg (1987) in “O queijo e os vermes”: GINZBURG, Carlo. *O queijo e os vermes*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1987.

expectations for the future, in this extended present time. If the representations of the past observed at a given time, marked by recurrence and concerning a particular group, still according to Rousso, “constitute the clearest manifestation of a ‘collective memory’” (CATROGA, 2015, p. 95), the same representations are now built in a multiple, tense, and diffuse way.

In this imminent present time, and recognizing that collective memory – built, claimed, supported, disputed – remains a relevant identity sign, what does it mean, in fact, to speak of “the annihilation of collective memory?” In this choice for confessions aimed much more at meeting the needs of the present time, subjective and transitory needs, wouldn’t there still be room for memory? Wouldn’t it be the case that, instead of decreeing its end, we try to grasp, in our present time, the various movements that shape it, precisely in order to see which place it occupies? Hervieu-Léger claims that modern societies are less and less societies of memory, since they are ruled by the paradigm of immediacy. The presentist analysis suggests, however, that this same paradigm coexists with a growing desire for memory. Not a founding memory transmitted from generation to generation, in relation to which there is little room for action, but, on the contrary, some memory ‘under control.’ Instead of an annihilated memory, we could think of an altered relationship. Memory is no longer validated only by the temporal distance that characterizes it, but rather by the social needs that ask for it. Memory, we believe, has its place in the conformation of religions. We notice a weakened access to it through transmission, but it is resorted to as a legitimation tool. Almost like a ‘practical past,’ it is evoked always – and only – when necessary, just as it suits (OAKESHOTT, 2003).

This voluntary and subjective experience of religion seems to be quite clear when we pay attention to the modalities of belonging and religious confession in contemporary Brazil. Perhaps more than the pilgrim as a character, we believe that the convert personifies some of our reflections on the relationships between religion, transmission, and the place of memory (considering the clear distinctions between the conversions observed in the cases studied by Hervieu-Léger and those that characterize the Brazilian context). As a brief interpretive exercise

anchored in the reflections proposed, we will deal more specifically with some Christian religious denominations.

In a special report entitled “Fé ano 2000,” published as an insert in *Folha de S. Paulo* on December 26, 1999, and which proposed to provide a broad panorama of the Brazilian religious scene at the end of the millennium, Reginaldo Prandi opens the section “Caminhos do fiel” with an article entitled “A religião não é mais herança, mas opção.” In the latter, the author essays interesting reflections, which come from his extensive research experience¹¹, on the particularities of the phenomenon of conversion in Brazil at the time. He claimed that, back then, more than 1/4 of the adult population in the metropolitan region of São Paulo professed a religion different from the one in which they were born and characterized the religion of modern times as a religion “of rapid change, poor loyalty, and disposable commitment” (PRANDI, 1999, p. 1).

Further on, in “Nova fé altera a rotina do fiel,” Prandi introduces more specific elements about these conversion processes, stating that “the convert only adheres to religion when it brings some major change to her/his daily life, reordering affective, social, family, inner needs, and many other things that are far from being characterized as religious motivations” (PRANDI, 1999, p. 2). Prandi’s findings seem to fit into the frame described above, about the search for religions that meet much more immediate demands. According to the sociologist, these pragmatic aspects do lead the convert to a new religion. Over time – and strengthening the promise of immediate prosperity – new rules and obligations are incorporated. There is a collective memory here that shapes the identity of the new ‘believer’ (based many times on literal and narrow readings of the scriptures). This, however, seems to be in the background to rather ‘secular’ concerns.

When dealing with the characteristics of those ‘converted,’ Hervieu-Léger emphasizes that they fulfill a postulate of “religious modernity according to which an authentic identity has to be a chosen identity” (HERVIEU-LÉGER, 2015, p. 116). In addition, he also emphasizes the wish for a reorganized personal life that

¹¹ For a more substantive discussion of the issue, cf. PRANDI, Reginaldo; PIERUCCI, Antônio Flávio. *A realidade social da religião no Brasil*. São Paulo: Editora Hucitec, 1996.

expresses itself as a protest against the disorder of the world (HERVIEU-LÉGER, 2015, p. 125). These two points seem to be in line with what we see in Brazil, even though I believe that the wish to reorganize one's personal life gains more emphasis than the conscious possibility of choosing an identity. The growth and strengthening of evangelical churches – and particularly of neo-Pentecostal ones – in recent years meets this proposition.

According to IBGE data, in 1980 Evangelicals accounted for 6.6% of the Brazilian population. In the 2010 census, this number jumped to 22.2% – the equivalent of 42.3 million people. There are, of course, several factors that seek to explain this increase (which continues to occur). Among the most recurrent arguments there are those that attribute the 'success' of evangelical religions to the discourse that emphasizes financial prosperity and solving everyday problems through divine intervention and, on the other hand, the role played by these churches in the organization of community life, particularly in regions heavily underserved by the State¹².

It seems to be worth retaking the place of memory in the conformation of these new religions and, at the same time, the fact that this growth of evangelical, and particularly neo-Pentecostal religion, takes place right now, in our extended present time. According to anthropologist Ronaldo de Almeida, prosperity theology, originating in the United States of America, began to spread in the Brazilian evangelical universe from the 1970s onwards and strengthened in the 1980s and 1990s, concomitant with the economic recession that intensified the dynamics of informality and precariousness in labor relations (ALMEIDA, 2017). If historical Protestantism proclaimed enrichment as the result of work aimed – socially and politically – at the common good, the new proposition supported/advocated present prosperity through entrepreneurial initiatives.

Therefore, the problems faced are not of a social order, but the result of a lack of individual effort. This theological proposition is quite in line with the (neo)liberal and individualist ideas that have spread with particular effectiveness among Western societies. Although the emphasis is quite clear on fixing the

¹² Cf. QUEIROZ, Christina. *Fé pública. Pesquisa FAPESP*, São Paulo, p. 286, dez. 2019.

problems of the present, the legitimacy – and identity – continues to evoke elements of the past: we recall here the building of the pompous Temple of Solomon, over 4 years, which is the headquarters of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. It claims to be a replica of the biblical temple that, according to the Hebrew Bible, became known as the First Temple, built during the reign of Solomon in IX BC, which allegedly kept within the Ark of the Covenant. In the contemporary building, in addition to appearance, a material evocation of the biblical temple came through the use of large blocks of stones brought from Israel. Such building can be thought of as an activity of re-presentification, which provides an evoked past with some feasible futures.

Here, the evocation's content cannot be separated from the materiality through which it is materialized. If presentification is a temporal experience that cannot be dissociated from its spatialization, we have in the temple a monument that refers to a past in a very particular way. According to Catroga (2015), "if the entire monument is a trace of the past, consciously or involuntarily left behind, its reading will only be retrieving memories if it is not limited to the gnosiological and cold perspective [...] and if it is cherished when shared with others." Solomon's temple is not necessarily a place of memory. On the other hand, it seems to evoke memory not as a trace or vestige of what existed, but by imposing the dialogue between the future and the past through its pomposity. Although artificially, the building seems to bring out the need to narrate, to "maintain and keep alive the presence of what happened" (CATROGA, 2015).

Changes in the ways of conveying, the possibility of voluntary choice and various arrangements with regard to religion, even though they denote the weakening of tradition, may mean, at the same time, a distinct – and personalized – relationship with constituent elements of the collective memory that supports religions. This remains a foundation, even though it presents itself through the believer's 'free access.' Those who believe have their belief reinforced by the possibility of prosperity and, at the same time, of making sense of their personal experiences based on the 'truths' of religion, constantly re-presented through monumental buildings, passionate preaching, and literal references to specific and timely biblical passages. It is not an annihilation of collective memory, but

perhaps a personalized, voluntary, and immediate appropriation of the elements that make it up. Thus, the lineage of those who believe is no longer built as a connection over a long period of time, but it takes place through adhesion, leading the past to be accessed by discontinuous and autonomous layers. Memory, as an element that underlies religions, remains. The access to memory does seem to be profoundly transformed by our experience in/of the present time.

4. Final remarks

Although the purpose of this text has been to think through the relationship of memory with the new configurations of religious experience in the present time by having the heuristic tools proposed by Daniele Hervieu-Léger as a basis, it is necessary to highlight that there are other elements that provide the aforementioned movement with a deep density. Thus, the idea of religious transit must, at least, be referenced insofar as it consists of dimensions that relate to the flow of people between religions, to the circulation of contents and practices between the religions themselves and, finally, to the experience of individuals marked by the various religions between which they transit (ALMEIDA, 2008).

The place of memory, the appeal to the past, and the emergence of the present are some of the elements that we can observe when we start to analyze religions and religiosities from a perspective anchored in the propositions of the History of the Present Time. They are not, however, the only ones. It is worth noticing that, in this present, at the same time that believers' experiences with religion change, religions themselves undergo profound changes. Reginaldo Prandi (1999) draws our attention in this regard when he claims that a Catholic who is, on average, 20 or 30 years old would not recognize her/his own religion in the way it was practiced during the years before the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

It is also possible to notice changes in the place occupied by religions in political-social organizations. The search for media visibility – practiced not only by evangelical churches – and the legislative protagonism, especially of the so-called evangelical row of seats, are also elements that require attention, as they

bring along a certain reconfiguration of Brazilian secularism (CARRANZA, 2020; MONTERO, 2012).

Although this text has highlighted the issue of religions in a way that is limited to the Christian universe, it must be said that the contemporary Brazilian scene goes far beyond Christianity. The wide visibility of some groups implies the obliteration of others. Thus, it is increasingly necessary to know/recognize the various forms of relationship with the sacred experienced by the various groups that inhabit (inhabited) the national territory. In addition, there is an urgent need to think of African-based religions not only as a relevant cultural manifestation, but also through their political and social interfaces, as a religious expression that, even today, remains subject to obstacles and restrictions (SANTOS, 2019).

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