

RELIGION AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR IN BRAZIL: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE ERA OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

RELIGIÃO E SETOR PÚBLICO NO BRASIL: DESAFIOS E OPORTUNIDADES, NA ERA DA DIVERSIDADE RELIGIOSA

LA RELIGIÓN Y EL SECTOR PÚBLICO EN BRASIL: RETOS Y OPORTUNIDADES EN LA ERA DE LA DIVERSIDAD RELIGIOSA

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ABSTRACT

In Brazil, freedom of belief is a guaranteed right, although there is still discrimination motivated by stereotypes and prejudices. This study addresses the concepts of religion and religious institutions, emphasizing the importance of pluralism and religious freedom for Brazil. The relationship between religion and the public sector is marked by the secular nature of the State and, at the same time, by interference in public policies. Brazil's religious diversity is characterized as broad and dynamic, expressing its history and culture. Education and public policies must foster respect, inclusion and appreciation of the plurality of plurality. The secular nature of the State is to guarantee religious freedom and the neutrality of public space, and to face permanent and constant challenges, to create and preserve impartiality. Religious and cultural pluralism is a wealth and needs to be celebrated and defended, requiring continuous actions to strengthen tolerance and social cohesion.

Keywords: Religion. Diversity. Science. Freedom. Society.

RESUMO

No Brasil, a liberdade de crença é um direito garantido, embora ainda haja discriminação motivada por estereótipos e preconceitos. Este estudo aborda os conceitos de religião e instituições religiosas, enfatizando para o Brasil a importância do pluralismo e da liberdade religiosa. A relação entre religião e setor público é marcada pela laicidade do Estado e, ao mesmo tempo, por interferências nas políticas públicas. A diversidade religiosa do Brasil caracteriza-se como ampla e dinâmica, expressando a história e sua cultura. A educação e as políticas públicas devem fomentar o respeito, a inclusão e a valorização da pluralidade

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da pluralidade. A laicidade do Estado é garantir a liberdade religiosa e a neutralidade do espaço público, e enfrentar desafios permanentes e constantes, para criar e preservar a imparcialidade. O pluralismo religioso e cultural é uma riqueza e precisa ser celebrado e defendido, exigindo ações contínuas para fortalecer a tolerância e a coesão social.

Palavras-chave: Religião. Diversidade. Ciência. Liberdade. Sociedade.

RESUMEN

En Brasil, la libertad de pensamiento es un derecho garantizado, si bien persiste la discriminación motivada por estereotipos y prejuicios. Este estudio aborda los conceptos de religión e instituciones religiosas, enfatizando la importancia del pluralismo y la libertad religiosa para Brasil. La relación entre la religión y el sector público está marcada por el carácter laico del Estado y, a la vez, por la injerencia en las políticas públicas. La diversidad religiosa de Brasil se caracteriza por ser amplia y dinámica, y expresa su historia y cultura. La educación y las políticas públicas deben fomentar el respeto, la inclusión y la valoración de la pluralidad. El carácter laico del Estado garantiza la libertad religiosa y la neutralidad de la esfera pública, y enfrenta desafíos permanentes para crear y preservar la imparcialidad. El pluralismo religioso y cultural constituye una riqueza que debe celebrarse y defenderse, lo que requiere acciones continuas para fortalecer la tolerancia y la cohesión social.

Palabras clave: Religión. Diversidad. Ciencia. Libertad. Sociedad.

1 INTRODUCTION

After World War II, human beings had freedom of religion, as Bittencourt Filho points out⁵. The Government is prohibited from carrying out any religious political persecution, thus protecting the religious freedom of each one, even so it is not proven in a general way, the guarantee of elimination of forms of religious discrimination. The authorities, or the public, present a stereotype that a religion needs, for example: to behave, or to dress. They may not even meet the basic requirements, seeming not to fit into that category, according to religious tolerance, that is, they face accusations that they are acting under the law.

With the needs of changes in modern society, in the religious and spiritual sphere, it is surprising the consequences of the process of any social organization, prevailing social justice, personal fulfillment, self-knowledge and the application and strengthening of religion as an orientation for the positive side of life.

The objective of this article is to analyze the relationship between religion and the public sector in Brazil, highlighting the influence of modernity and the need for inclusive public policies that respect religious diversity. It is intended to understand how religion adapts to social and spiritual changes and how religious pluralism can be a powerful tool for building a more just and inclusive society. The specific objectives are: to investigate how the development of science and technology has impacted religious practices and beliefs in Brazil; to identify the challenges and opportunities generated by the coexistence of different religious traditions, and to discuss the importance of the secularity of the State, in guaranteeing religious freedom and the neutrality of public space.

This study adopts a qualitative approach, based on a literature review and critical analysis of secondary sources. The research is descriptive and exploratory, aiming to understand the complexity of the relationship between religion and the public sector in Brazil. Consult the works of authors such as Peter Berger and José Bittencourt Filho, among others, to support the theoretical analysis.

With these varieties developed by the new religions, which present scientific guidelines of today's society, they use science to achieve goals for spiritual purposes, reflecting on religious diversity, appearing as entrails or distorted, as it was in the past.

The relationship between religion and the public sector is a complex and multifaceted issue, which involves issues of religious freedom, secularity of the State, and the influence of

⁵BITTENCOURT FILHO. José. *Brazilian religious matrix: religiosity and social change*. 2. ed. Vitória: Unida, 2019, p. 30.

religious institutions on public policies. This chapter presents a series of broad quotations that explore these interactions, highlighting the importance of dialogue between the sacred and the profane in the context of public service.

2 RELIGION AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Religion for Berger encompasses two aspects: religion in the consciousness and behavior of individuals. The concept of religion compared to superstition, of "unleashing the world, while rationality swept away the old mysteries."⁶ Religion is influenced by modernity, since the development of modern social science there has been the prejudice of the Enlightenment regarding religion. Not being anti-religious in the philosophical version, but that "modernity and religion were empirically antagonistic – to put it simply: the more modernity, the less religion".⁷

The concept of religion according to Berger does not correspond to reality, "but that it is useful in that it allows us to reality, but that it is useful in that it allows us to classify real phenomena and to discover empirically where classifications fail."⁸

According to Berger "an institution is a program and behavior that, when properly internalized, makes the individual act spontaneously and without much or no reflection in the relevant sector of social life".⁹ This behavior depends on each individual, on his conduct, on his relations with society, that is, on social relations and the reality of each one, "[...] the behavior in religious practice until this behavior becomes habitual".¹⁰

Religious institutions struggle with religious freedom, especially "when they claim to possess divinely revealed truths, and even more so when they once had a monopoly position in a society," according to Berger¹¹. In the present day the Modern Catholic Church is extremely instructive, one can identify the fullness of truth.

Corroborating Bittencourt Filho, "From the perspective of the expansion of the religious field, what draws the most attention is the race of religious organizations to have a significant space in the media". For a long time with global development "the medium is the message"

⁶ BERGER, L. Peter. *The multiple altars of modernity: towards a paradigm of religion in a pluralistic era*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2017, p. 48.

⁷ BERGER, 2017, p. 50.

⁸ BERGER, 2017, p. 47.

⁹ BERGER, 2017, p. 77.

¹⁰ BERGER, 2017, p. 78.

¹¹ BERGER, 2017, p. 84.

adapting to electronic media, in fact the tendencies of the very simple, utilitarianism and exceptional seclusion of religion, a phenomenon of post-modernity¹².

At the time when we are witnessing an unprecedented effervescence in the Brazilian religious field, it is necessary to expand the theoretical collection available if the proper interpretation of the phenomena is desired. More than ever, Brazilian religious pluralism is demanding a concerted effort to be understood. We intend to situate and incorporate not the *a priori* in the religious experience, but according to the sociological nature of the work, to point out the *a priori* dimension of the religiosity of the average Brazilian and to take this dimension as an additional theoretical tool in the hermeneutic effort of the religious panorama in our country, especially in the recent past. [...] to discuss the factors that make the religiosity of the majority of Brazilians unique and original, despite the fact that the Brazilian social formation was and is subordinated to economic, political and cultural determinants common to so many other peoples and nations¹³.

According to Berger, [...] the two effects of pluralism go together – faith as based more on individual choice than on fate or the chance of birth, and faith as institutionalized in form with voluntary modernity."¹⁴ There is a broad affinity with modernity, that is, an affinity that weakens what is taken for granted in institutions, not only religious ones.

For Bittencourt Filho "We live in an intellectual climate that shows a special sympathy for the denaturalization of traditional categories, for decentralization and for a certain view that prioritizes the boundaries of cultural institutions [...]"¹⁵element. Over the years, an internal plurality of Christianity is perceived, making them more complex, or even more problematic, can generate self-reflection.

When pluralism and religious freedom coincide, a specific type of market emerges, so that economic concepts can be applicable. Religious freedom deprives religious institutions of previous monopolistic privileges. Instead, they are forced to compete without resorting to coercion. There will be pressures to control competition, which makes a degree of cooperation practical¹⁶.

Corroborating it further, Bittencourt Filho highlights.

[...] because forms, religious conducts, styles of spirituality and uniform religious conducts, evidence the influential presence of a religious-cultural substrate that we call

¹² BITTENCOURT FILHO, 2019, p. 36.

¹³ BITTENCOURT FILHO, 2019, p. 38-40.

¹⁴ BERGER, 2017, p. 104.

¹⁵ BITTENCOURT FILHO, 2019, p. 32.

¹⁶ BERGER, 2017, p. 102.

the Brazilian Religious Matrix. This expression must be understood in its broad sense, that is, as something that seeks to translate a complex interaction of religious ideas and symbols that have come together in a multi-secular course, therefore, it is not *stricto sensu* a category of definition, but an object of study. This multi-secular process had, as its main development, the gestation of an average religious mentality of Brazilians, a collective representation that goes beyond even the situation of a class in which it is found¹⁷.

With the official Roman Catholicism contributing, his papacy has diversified its strategies in relation to the guidelines, directly directing the Brazilian social space, in relation to the sacred. Roman Catholicism was a protagonist and has currently sought to achieve this position again, but it realized that the alliances of some social movements, in this case, Poles with ecclesiastics, caused confrontations with the old regime, in the cultural and political spheres¹⁸.

"The contemporary world, with few exceptions, is as intensely religious as any other in history."¹⁹

According to Bittencourt Filho "[...] the existence, in the midst of the cultural matrix, of a religious matrix, which provides a collection of characteristic religious and symbolic values, as well as providing a broad and diffuse religiosity among Brazilians".²⁰ However, this certainty reinforces the presence of cultural plurality, values and Brazilian religiosity that persist, despite the changes that occur in society, and that need to continue to be articulated and reproduced.

Thus, religious and cultural forms rejected as idolatrous and/or demonic are considered as a camouflaged religiosity, that is, adapted by itself as an instrument of resistance and preservation of identity in the face of aggression.²¹

Public services, such as health and education, must be provided in a way that respects the religious diversity of users. This includes ensuring that everyone has access to services that meet their specific needs, regardless of their religious beliefs²².

Religion and the public sector in their relationship are not unrelated to challenges and controversies. Issues such as religious education in public schools, the celebration of religious festivities in public spaces, and the participation of religious leaders in political

¹⁷ BITTENCOURT FILHO, 2019, p. 40-41.

¹⁸ BITTENCOURT FILHO, 2019, p. 32.

¹⁹ BERGER, 2017, p. 55.

²⁰ BITTENCOURT FILHO, 2019, p. 17.

²¹ BITTENCOURT FILHO, 2019, p. 57.

²² OLIVEIRA, Ana Paula. *Religious diversity and citizenship*. Brasília: University of Brasilia, 2019a, p. 104.

debates are topics that often generate controversy. It is essential that the State maintains a balance between the protection of religious freedom and the guarantee of the neutrality of public space, respecting the rights of all citizens²³.

Religious institutions are very significant and relevant in society, influencing the values and morals of the city and at the same time in the elaboration of public policies. The Catholic Church in Brazil, since colonial times, has always been involved in social issues, such as education, health and social assistance. This influence can be positive, that is, promote values of solidarity and justice, but it can also, in practice, harm, when religious interests hurt secular principles of the State²⁴.

3 RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

Brazil is a country characterized by extensive cultural diversity, whose various traditions, religious beliefs, and ethnicities respect each other. Since this is one of the most important characteristics of what is part of our nation. Indigenous, African or European and Asian, all cultures have their influence in Brazil, which is a true melting pot of cuisine that reflects on: music, dance, cuisine and festivities. At the same time, this cultural richness not only enriches us in material possessions, but also compels us to make society a more inclusive and tolerant place, so that all voices can be heard and respected²⁵.

It is essential that Brazilian religious diversity be considered a complex phenomenon, reflecting the history and culture of the country. Whether through the religious mosaic of African-based terreiros and religious syncretism, or through influences from Catholicism, or rising evangelical churches, Brazilian religious diversity has been its contribution to religious myths and practices. The understanding of art itself is fundamental to foster inclusion for everyone, for everyone regarding their religious difference from society. The country, however, is religious diversity in Brazil does not remain, as it has its own trajectory and time permeates its development through social, economic and political considerations²⁶. As this approach needs to be not strict, but an all-encompassing display, to tumultuous it is clear that it is religious voices that must be followed.

²³ SOUZA, Carlos Alberto. *Religion and State: challenges and controversies*. São Paulo: Contexto, 2021, p. 90.

²⁴ PEREIRA, João Carlos. *Religion and politics in contemporary Brazil*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2018, p. 78.

²⁵ SILVA, João. *Brazilian pluralisms*. São Paulo: Brasiliis, 2018, p. 23.

²⁶ COELHO JR., A. G.; MAHFOUD, M. *The spiritual and religious dimensions of human experience: distinctions and connections*. São Paulo: Casa Amarela, 2001, p. 45.

The public sector must promote religious diversity and guarantee all citizens the right to practice their own religion and/or faith without discrimination. This can be achieved through the formulation of public policies that respect and value religious diversity, in addition to the incorporation of educational programs that present the different religious traditions existing in the national territory. Religious diversity represents a cultural richness, which must be celebrated and safeguarded²⁷.

Education exerts an essential diversion in promoting understanding and respect for religious diversification, which is why it is essential that, in a country like Brazil, characterized by religious diversity, schools and educational institutions address this issue in an inclusive and respectful way, thus involving the training of educators who have the skills very well involved to work with religious plurality and the learning of religious that value the diversity of religious and practical curricula. Education for religious diversity is not restricted to formal education, it must permeate all spheres of school life in order to promote an environment of respect and inclusion. In addition, it should also be considered that educational policies need to consider and value the contribution of different religious traditions, and the ability to be recognized and valued for the cultural and moral constitution of students²⁸.

Public policies must consider religious diversity as an essential element for the construction of inclusive citizenship. Educational and social programs that promote respect and understanding between different religious traditions are crucial for social cohesion²⁹.

Interfaith dialogue in the public sector is a powerful tool for conflict resolution and the promotion of peace. Initiatives that encourage collaboration between different religious communities can contribute to the construction of a more harmonious and just society³⁰.

Religious diversity is a reflection of human plurality and the continuous search for meaning and transcendence. In Brazil, plurality is even richer, from indigenous and Afro-Brazilian traditions, to the various Christian denominations and different world beliefs. In this sense, the Brazilian social and cultural construction is enriched and created, enabling inter-religious dialogue and the capacity for tolerance among the race. Peaceful coexistence around the different religions is a challenge and an opportunity; however, it is perhaps the

²⁷ OLIVEIRA, 2019a, p. 123.

²⁸ ABRAMOWICZ, Anete; RODRIGUEZ, Tatiane. *Religious diversity and education: challenges and opportunities*. Brasília: University of Brasilia, 2013, p. 78.

²⁹ OLIVEIRA, 2019a, p. 82.

³⁰ OLIVEIRA, 2019a, p. 128.

bedrock of a more tolerant, inclusive society. Brazil's religious diversity is not like its fetish in terms of tolerance, but of acceptance of differences, which enrich spiritual culture³¹.

4 RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND SECULARITY OF THE STATE

Religious freedom is the fundamental basis of democracy. In Brazil, the Federal Constitution of 1988 ensures the inviolability of freedom of conscience and belief, as well as the free exercise of religious cults. However, the secularity of the State imposes limits on the direct intervention of religious institutions in public policies, ensuring that the public space is neutral and inclusive for all citizens, regardless of their beliefs³². However, the secularity of the State is a fundamental principle that guarantees religious freedom for all citizens. In a secular state, no religion is privileged, and all are respected and protected³³.

The secularity of the State is fundamental to guarantee equality and religious freedom in a plural society. The public sector must act neutrally, respecting the diversity of beliefs and not privileging any particular religion³⁴.

Religious freedom is an essential human right that must be protected by the state. Secularism ensures that all individuals can practice their faith without interference or discrimination³⁵.

Education in a secular state must promote respect for religious diversity and understanding between different faiths. Educational programs that encourage interreligious dialogue are important for the formation of conscious and tolerant citizens³⁶. However, while secularism is an essential principle for religious freedom, it faces constant challenges. A continuous effort is needed to ensure that the state remains neutral and impartial in religious matters³⁷.

Thus, the secularity of the State is the basis for a healthy religious pluralism, in a pluralistic society, the diversity of beliefs is seen as a richness, and secularism then ensures that all are respected³⁸.

Brazilian religious pluralism was generated by our history of syncretism and miscegenation. From indigenous religions to the nations of Candomblé and Umbanda,

³¹ Arendt, H. *The human condition*. 8. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Polity Press, 2002, p. 120.

³² SILVA, Maria das Graças. *Law and religion in Brazil*. São Paulo: Saraiva, 2020, p. 45.

³³ OLIVEIRA, 2019a, p. 32.

³⁴ OLIVEIRA, 2019a, p. 56.

³⁵ OLIVEIRA, 2019a, p. 45.

³⁶ OLIVEIRA, 2019a, p. 68.

³⁷ OLIVEIRA, 2019a, p. 80.

³⁸ OLIVEIRA, 2019a, p. 92.

including all Christian religions and doctrines, Brazil is a mosaic of religious beliefs and practices. Diversity, however, is a wealth to be celebrated and defended. So it generates challenges, even with the application of interreligious dialogue and free worship to the entire population, even for those who have no religion. The secularity of the State is essential to ensure that all religions are respected and that none of them is favored³⁹.

The political system in Brazil is characterized by the diversity of parties and ideologies, which are reflected by the opinions and interests of society. This political pluralism is necessary for democracy and to ensure that different voices are heard and represented. However, there are major challenges for governance, where party fragmentation can hinder the formation of consensus and the execution of effective public policies. Dialogue between the different political actors must be facilitated, as a permanent effort, so that pluralism serves to cooperate with the country's growth⁴⁰.

Several cultural aspects contribute to the national formation of Brazilian identity. Cultural pluralism serves as a threat and a force that helps enrich our intangible heritage, as a society challenges us to create a more tolerant and inclusive society. From popular celebrations such as carnival and June festivals, to artistic and literary manifestations, cultural diversity exists in almost all spheres, of Brazilian human action. However, it is necessary to know that this diversity is also accompanied by challenges, thus involving social inclusion and combating discrimination. Education is one of the methods that help to overcome these differences in respect and understanding of existing cultural groups⁴¹.

On the one hand, pluralism brings with it many challenges, despite being a richness. It is an undeniable fact that sharing with other cultural, religious and political groups requires a continuous effort to develop dialogue and mutual respect. In this scenario, it is necessary to take into account public policies that value diversity and combat approaches to discrimination. Education for global citizenship, which learns tolerance and respect successively in people, is important, to build a more just and inclusive society. Brazilian pluralism offers a great opportunity to learn about differences, where everyone can achieve the right to live in harmony and equality⁴².

³⁹ SANTOS, Maria. *Religious diversity in Brazil*. Rio de Janeiro: Carioca, 2017, p. 45.

⁴⁰ OLIVEIRA, Carlos. *Political pluralism in Brazil*. Brasília: Capital, 2019b, p. 67.

⁴¹ PEREIRA, Ana. *Identity and pluralism in Brazil*. Salvador: Baiana, 2020, p. 89.

⁴² RIBEIRO, Luís. *Challenges of Brazilian pluralism*. Belo Horizonte: Mineira, 2016, p. 112.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The interaction between religion and the public sector is a dynamic and constantly evolving field, that is, it presents multifaceted complexities that reflect social changes. Religious freedom and the secularity of the State are fundamental principles, which must be balanced, to guarantee a just and inclusive society. Religious institutions have an important role to play, but it is very important that the public sector promotes religious diversity, respects the rights of all citizens, creates an inclusive society and poses challenges to peaceful coexistence, regardless of their beliefs.

On the other hand, modernity meant adaptation of religious institutions to the way religions are structured, as a result of social and cultural changes. Science and technology have played an important role in religious beliefs, involving people to seek new approaches to spirituality, in accordance with contemporary values. Thus, this adaptation is a condition for the survival and expenditure of religions in their current context.

People form social, political and economic institutions, because they think and act according to their ideological convictions, consolidating the thought that predominates in the development of their cultural and socio-affective formation, as well as their religious construction. The legal precepts are always remembered through their rules, or doctrines used in the religious field. The view related to religious ideology, even with the relationship of referring to the process of achieving its result, that is, integrating oneself into a Christian religion, can be highlighted: Catholics, Protestants, Evangelicals, Spiritists and Afro-Brazilian religions, thus directing the construction of morals and ethics.

With contemporaneity, the changes that have occurred in the present day, the beliefs and practices in the religious field, have become deliberative, some perhaps identical, but the faith has not changed at all. Thus, religious institutions establish "behavior in religious practice until this behavior becomes habitual, that is, taken for granted" is what Berger describes⁴³.

Therefore, the religious field in Brazil guides us that being Brazilian automatically refuses to be Catholic, but that a large part is Christian. It means the existence of controlling and boosting mobility, ecumenisms and syncretisms/hybridisms, but also religious exclusivism, divergences, ideological or political intolerance and religious racism. There is deinstitutionalization and institutionalization and, simultaneously, the non-religious. Then, he

⁴³ BERGER, 2017, p. 78.

declares that the "Brazilian religious field" is superior to a complex issue, it is a mined percentage, in which the concept itself is at permanent risk.

Religious diversity in Brazil constitutes a broad and dynamic mosaic, composed of its diversity of beliefs and practices, which reflect our culture and history. Religious plurality is a characteristic feature of Brazilian society, involving indigenous and Afro-Brazilian traditions, the various Christian denominations and the various religions of the world. However, this diversity creates challenges, particularly with regard to coexistence and mutual respect between different religious traditions. However, this context brings challenges, with regard to peaceful coexistence and respect for diversity among practitioners of the religion.

The relationship between religion and the public sector is broad, and involves the influence of religious institutions, public policies and social life. The secularity of the State is fundamental to guarantee religious freedom and the neutrality of the public space, ensuring that all beliefs are respected and protected. This study highlighted the importance of inclusive public policies that promote respect and inclusion of religious diversity, contributing to social cohesion and the construction of a more just and harmonious society.

To achieve the proposed objectives, it is essential to engage in educational strategies and public policies that emphasize the appreciation of religious diversity and that stimulate interreligious dialogue. The educational process is a fundamental instrument for the formation of conscious and tolerant citizens in relation to cultural and religious differences. Educational programs that promote dialogue and understanding between different religious traditions are indispensable for building an inclusive society.

In this way, religious diversity in Brazil is a cultural wealth, which should be celebrated and safeguarded. The secularity of the State is important, in the sense of guaranteeing religious freedom and the neutrality of the public space, to establish an environment of coexistence and inclusion. Through inclusive public policies and educational strategies that value religious diversity, we can build a more egalitarian and harmful society, where all voices are respected and heard.

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