

Chapter 5

Philosophy of Religion and Religious Education in Schools

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Religion proposes the strongest, oldest, and most vivid answers to the issue of the meaning of life. For this reason, the pursuit of knowledge undertaken by religion cannot be of interest to philosophy.

J. Grondin

Introduction

Both philosophy and religion originate in human daily life, in which the human being constantly faces amazement, astonishment, mystery, the experience of living in pursuit of meaning. This disposition profoundly links being with the power of interrogation, which emerges in daily experience and acquires force in everything that goes beyond everyday life. Thus, it becomes a guiding search for the meaning of life through reflection. The difference lies in the fact that while philosophy attempts to ground the meaning of evident realities in reason, by asking “what”, religion, in its search for meaning, delves into the same realities on the basis of the understanding and projection of the spiritual dimension.

Thus, philosophy of religion arises. Indeed, thanks to modern thinking and the newest trends in analytic philosophy, a critical reflection emerges on the rationality of religion’s proposal for understanding the

world through the spiritual dimension. For this reason, the objective of this paper is to discuss the identity, delimitation, strength, and novelty of the philosophy of religion.

These are constitutive elements of the epistemological foundation of religious education. This type of education intends to account for the meaning of life inherent to human nature through the understanding of the transcendental dimension. This task must be carried out in the context of schools, which are the appropriate scenario for comprehensive education and the place where knowledge and experience can be enriched through the philosophical understanding of religion in the human being.

In order to accomplish this task, this paper is divided into three sections: the first one answers the question concerning the identity of this philosophical reflection on religion, which, in turn, contributes to the epistemological grounding of religious education. The second is a critical reflection on the structure of the philosophy of religion, discussing its elements and principal features. The third presents the contributions of this study to the pedagogical task of teaching Religious Education in the Colombian educational context.

Identity of Philosophy of Religion

To understand the identity of the philosophy of religion, it is necessary to start by identifying its object of study. This task must be developed by understanding its historical development, the different trends, perspectives and tensions that have generated schools and thinkers throughout the development of humanity. Furthermore, it is necessary to differentiate its epistemological and pragmatic purpose from the research activity of other studies, with which it must foster an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary dialogue.

Object of Study of the Philosophy of Religion

The philosophy of religion originates from human beings' astonishment in the face of mystery, from that deep interest in answering the transcendental question which impels him to find an answer for

meaning, based on the experience of the spiritual dimension. For this reason, the common denominator generated by the controversy over religion, in the light of reason, is summarized in the following questions: “Is religion rational? Can people who seek to guide their life by reason keep on believing or does religion require them to believe?” (Díaz, 2015, p. 13).

This movement is not only conceptual, but also experiential. Human beings attempt to understand the world, motivated by the desire to understand their environment, based on the foundation provided by their spiritual dimension. In this sense, it is the rational reflection regarding a concrete human fact: the religious lived as *homo religiosus*; that is to say, the lived experience of a personal decision that connects one with the absolute and transcendental, which is, in principle, a complete mystery, but which people want to learn about in order to construct meaning, through reconnection with the sacred. This is the object of study of the philosophy of religion. The possibility of finding this object in daily human life lies in the symbolic meaning that religion has for humans, as beings who resort to the symbol not only for communicative action, but also to frame their understanding of the world:

It is the expression of this symbolic dimension of the real and of life: the real is more than what appears at first sight, it has meaning. The articulation of this meaning, in both forms of worship and creeds, is religion. (Grondin, 2010, p. 53)

To consider religion as the articulation of the symbol with the search for meaning introduces a setting of praxis, based on the spiritual dimension of human beings. Religion, as lived by the *homo religiosus*, now becomes the center of reasoning of the philosophy of religion. Because human beings, together with their sacred, ritualized, symbolized, axiological environment, framed by an acquired meaning of life, are the sources to understand *religio*, based on the categories of reason.

Historical Approach to the Philosophy of Religion

Reflecting on religion has been carried out in different forms and with diverse criteria and interests throughout history. Exploring this historical

path allows us to understand the different nuances of the philosophy of religion in the course of human development. In view of this reality, it is necessary to: a) reconstruct the historical - ancestral understanding of religion in native cultures; b) discuss the emergence of a genuinely philosophical meditation in Ancient Greece, cradle of philosophy; c) analyze the Middle Ages, as period of flourishing of metaphysical foundations; d) study the Renaissance as a return to humanism. e) reflect on modernity and its desire for enlightenment; f) consider the contemporary period with its new existential reflections and current efforts to structure analysis, based on recent categories.

Native cultures should not be read on the basis of Western interpretations, using current conceptual categories that are not concerned with the logical structuring of religious facts. The interest of those cultures focuses on the expression, experience, and refining of the spiritual dimension through myth, magic, and ritual. This fact is based on anthropological findings resulting from research and excavations, such as painting, metalwork, ceramics, and even bone relics. Thus, the way to understand the religious phenomenon must be to describe the importance of this religious factor in everyday life.

In magic man depends on his own strength to meet the difficulties and dangers that beset him on every side. He believes in a certain established order of nature on which he can surely count, and which he can manipulate for his own ends. When he discovers his mistake, when he recognises sadly that both the order of nature which he had assumed and the control which he had believed himself to exercise over it were purely imaginary, he ceases to rely on his own intelligence and his own unaided efforts, and throws himself humbly on the mercy of certain great invisible beings behind the veil of nature, to whom he now ascribes all those far-reaching powers which he once arrogated to himself. Thus in the acuter minds magic is gradually superseded by religion (Frazer, 1944, p. 797)

This interpretation has been criticized for several reasons, particularly due to its evolutionistic generalization, since it shows a tendency to overcome stages. The important aspect that we wish to highlight in this

paper is the primary relationship between the religious and everydayness in native cultures. The effort to understand reality, as well as the intention to manipulate it, is inherent to these cultures, first, on their own merits, through repetition, ritualization, and sacralization; then, through the confidence which human beings builds up in transcendence which they discover as an absolute reality that envelops them and provides meaning to life. This is, ultimately the experience of the spiritual dimension of the human being.

In Ancient Greece, the term “religion” was not used in philosophical reflection. And the word “piety” was used in order to refer to the cultural aspect. This is attested to by Cicero (1999), who, in reference to Epicurus, states: “Piety is justice towards the gods”(p.155). Actually, there is no detailed rational reflection on religion in Ancient Greece, but some elements of judgment and reflection are found concerning their mythology, the soul, human beings, and the gods. In these reflections, we can observe a teleological understanding of reality, a projection of the meaning of life which philosophy intends to find through its dissertations, projecting its interpretation of daily life through piety.

The Latin tradition introduces new elements for the construction of philosophical discourse. It starts by reflecting on the etymology of the word religion, with Cicero, who talks about *relegere*, as a second reading of reality which allows us to see the transcendental and the absolute. Then, we have Lactantius who defined *religare* as a link or commitment to this supernatural reality. Finally, Augustine of Hippo undertook a structuring of the religious system based on the postulates of Platonic philosophy. In this sense, “religion is also understood as a philosophy” (Grondin,2010, p. 106), since it is possible to observe a subordination of philosophy in order to respond to the questions posed by religion, while at the same time justifying its postulates.

With the passing of the centuries, this point of view regarding religion is perpetuated by philosophy: Christianity, Islamism, and Judaism, with authors such as Al Farabi, Avicenna, Averroes, Maimonides, and Thomas Aquinas. They reassessed the rational knowledge of religion in a more structured and organized way, because they attempted to understand their religious systems on the basis of rationality. “All these authors attempt to demonstrate

that their religion [...] concurs with philosophy, understood on the basis of its basic disciplines such as logic, ethics, or metaphysics, also considered teleologically” (Grondin, 2010, p. 108). They address philosophy systematically, in the service of the rational grounding of their religious convictions. For example, Aristotle presents his guidelines as a connecting point between being and transcendence.

Thus, a spirit of renewal is beginning to emerge in the history of humanity. It has to do with a notorious change which allowed human beings to turn inward, to stop observing the vast metaphysical world which was the focus of reflection for centuries, in order to focus on perfecting their understanding. The Renaissance brought about a liberation from the theocentric yoke of the Middle Ages and a return to a more human approach. “The humanists of the Renaissance wanted to reform and renovate religious life based on the lights provided by culture and literature, [...] reducing religion to an intellectual activity only for scholars”. (Roper, 1999, p. 307). Thus, profound changes emerge in both the pragmatic and intellectual contents of religion. There is talk of reformation, counter-reformation, theism, enlightened religion, etc. as elements of a new vision, in which the humanist finds new categories for understanding the world on the basis of culture, history, philosophy, mathematics, and art.

The Renaissance serves as a springboard for a new understanding of religion in the modern era. Human beings focus their reflections based on the new science, and the religious issue is relegated to a second instance: “it will not be more than a liberation from the yoke of religion, which will be replaced by science” (Grondin, 2010, p.121). Authors such as Hobbes, Hume, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud propose other ways of considering the absolute, which transform the relationship between philosophy and religion; the latter is neglected, even seen as something useless for the human context.

Hume strongly criticizes the religious conception of his time, because in the logic of empiricism, the supremacy of knowledge must lie in the experience of reality in accordance with the scientific method: “Examine the religious principles, which have, in fact, prevailed in the world. You will scarcely be persuaded, that they are any thing but sick men’s dreams” (Hume 1966, p.127) In this point of view, religion

is framed in a pre-scientific context, which, in the absence of rigor, proposes metaphysical solutions based on wonder and narrated as myths, in order to respond to the questions of daily life. Later, Hume states that it is the source of evil for human beings because it generates division and confusion among men.

This position regarding the unreliability, internalization, and reduction of religion made Kant's statement possible:

Theodicy, as has been shown here, does not have as much to do with a task in the interest of science as, rather, with a matter of faith. From the authentic theodicy we saw that in these matters, less depends on subtle reasoning than on sincerity in taking notice of the impotence of our reason, and on honesty in not distorting our thoughts in what we say, however pious our intention. (Kant, 2011, p. 49)

The above helps us understand that in Kant, faith is based on the moral law inscribed in every man's heart (Grondin, 2010, p. 129). This is another perspective in which the absolute is addressed without abandoning the level of reality, which, according to him, is what metaphysics does. On the other hand, moral law, which belongs to the essence of human beings, provides a sufficiently rational support in order to seek the answer regarding what to expect. Thus, the moral imperative leads human beings to a theological understanding of themselves, to a rational confrontation with transcendence and full self-actualization.

From another point of view, Schleiermacher, immersed in Romanticism, presents a philosophical proposal for reflection on religion, based on the intuition of the infinite and the turn toward feelings: "Why do you not regard-the religious life itself, and first those pious exaltations of the mind in which all other known activities are set aside or almost suppressed, and the whole soul is dissolved in the immediate feeling of the Infinite and Eternal?" (Schleiermacher, 1990, p. 19). Thus a profound relationship between human finitude and the infinity of transcendence is established; the former is based on humans' being as creatures, and the latter, on perfection. This interaction with the absolute is the understanding of the particularity of life through

feeling, that is, the perception of totality and the dependence which this concept entails. On the basis of a dialectic structure, Hegel analyzes religion within the framework of sublation by speculative reason, that is to say, by philosophy. In this manner, he advocates a universal religion grounded in reason.

[1] Religion must be analyzed as a phenomenon which occurs objectively in time and space, that is to say, it unfolds successively and historically [...] the different religions appear as moments in the historical development of the religious concept in its different forms [...] [2] Religion as a subjective experience of both singular and collective human consciousness [...] [3] From an absolute point of view, as one of the three great manifestations of the Idea or *logos*, together with art and philosophy. (Díaz, 2015, p. 30)

In this manner, Hegelian dialectics emphasizes the primacy of the Idea, as pure spirit. He views history as a revelation of the Absolute, a scenario where every human being can witness the development of transcendence, “consciousness of absolute essence, yet it was to be found there merely in terms of the standpoint of consciousness which is aware of the absolute essence “. (Hegel, 1985, p. 392). He introduces a universal religion based on true knowledge, and shapes it as a philosophy that responds to the needs and requirements of a time of reason and freedom. Truth is not absolutized in any concrete religious system, but understood on the basis of the categories of reason and dialectic.

The strongest criticism came later from authors like Marx, who states that religion is the opium of the people, the great dream created in order to numb people in order to control them. Then, Feuerbach will say that humans attribute to the divine features that should be human. Subsequently, Nietzsche, without any regrets, claims that God is dead. Freud says that it is a collective neurosis. Finally, (the list could continue), Comte points out that religion is a mythical stage superseded by positive science, that is, an ideological construct based on irrationality and founded on the absence of the arguments used by the scientific method, and which, due to convenience or ignorance, distracts human beings from truth.

Heidegger starts out from the assumption that philosophy springs from the factual experience of life, that is, the concern for the search for meaning, and affirms:

If one determines the task of the philosophy of religion entirely naively, one can say religion should be understood, grasped philosophically. Religion is to be projected into an understandable context. Thus, the position of the problem of the philosophy of religion depends upon the concept of philosophy. (Heidegger, 2006, p. 101)

Heidegger, unlike his predecessors, insists that the praxis of religion is deeply connected with being. He states that religion is a recognition of the expressions of the divine in the merely human context, which make it possible to understand that the world has a teleological horizon. The relationship between religion and being is not an aggregate, because ontology must be oriented toward understanding the meaning of human existence, and this is the same field of understanding which religion intends to encompass. Furthermore, the spiritual dimension is not an accessory to the essence of humanity; on the contrary, it belongs to its multidimensionality. However, to reach this understanding it is urgent, first of all, to understand philosophy within the context of the factual experience of life.

More recent authors present the problem concerning the object and definition of the philosophy of religion in other terms. For example, Ranher states that “it is the philosophic determination of what religion is and should be”. Dumery says that “it is a critical and comprehensive reflection on the religious attitude, as a human and historical fact, whose meaning and function is elucidated in the development of the spirit”. Kokakowski points out that “it is focused on the understanding of the sacred”. Welte studies “the rational discernment of what religion is”. Queiruga reflects on “how to deal with the religious fact”. Fraijó claims that it is a critical, open, rigorous, and non-denominational study; a philosophical reflection on the religious phenomenon, free of dogmatic links. And Juan of Sahagún states that it is “the rational discernment of man’s religious attitude” (Lucas, 1999, p.61).

This short historical overview shows the philosophical concern which several Western philosophers have manifested at different

times and in different socio-cultural contexts. For them, the spiritual dimension springs from a deep understanding of their experience and projection. In this sense, the philosophy of religion, separated from specific doctrinal purposes (as observed in the above quotes), seeks the recollection of the importance of understanding life's meaning based on the categories that religion provides in daily life, which require reflection on the sacred, myth, rituals, the power of the word, and the religious symbol, on the basis of reason.

Dialogue of the Philosophy of Religion with Other Studies

The action of the philosophy of religion must be differentiated from that of other studies. It is not the same as theology, which has a double perspective for understanding: revealed theology and natural theology: “the former appeals openly to faith. God has revealed Himself [...] the other path, intended timidly to find a place for reason [...] it intended to prove God's existence” (Fraijó, 1994, p. 18). What is at stake here is a religious system in the true sense of the word, whose object of study is transcendence or the absolute, which manifests itself as God revealed, encountering human existence. The philosophy of religion is non-denominational. It focuses on religion solely on the basis of the category of reason, and on the detailed reflection of this reality in the merely human context, without objectifying transcendence.

In the same sense, it must be differentiated from certain religious philosophies. Although the absence of the genitive and the possible pluralization seem to be insignificant at first sight, the distinction goes beyond grammatical construction. These religious philosophies focus on a concrete religious faith. They “justify specific principles, categories and religious truths” (Lucas, 1999, p.69). On the other hand, the philosophy of religion emphasizes reflection on that human attitude of opening up to the Absolute based on the spiritual dimension. It has no ties to specific religious systems, but is based on the condition of openness to transcendence.

Likewise, the objective of the phenomenology of religion is to show the clear manifestations of religiosity rooted in the cultural and daily social life of human beings. It is “a science that seeks to understand the

religious phenomenon based on its individual and collective historical manifestations.” (Lucas, 1999, p.45). That is to say, it seeks the meaning of the religious through concrete facts, by providing a description which leads to interpretation. To do phenomenology means to discern both the cultural and social categories of the phenomenon in order to present it as it is. On the other hand, the presentation of the religious phenomenon is not the end but rather the beginning in the case of the philosophy of religion. And reflection transcends data in order to find the structure and rational coherence of this phenomenon.

These preliminary proposals allow us to approach the essence of the philosophy of religion, which “seeks to be a reflection on religion, on its meaning, its rationale, [...] willing to recognize religion itself as a form of philosophy, and even as a form of rationality, that is to say, as a path to wisdom” (Grondin, 2010, p. 33). Thus, the philosophy of religion is not tied to a specific religious system and its horizon of reflection goes beyond the description of the fact. It focuses on the human relationship with the absolute, materialized in religious praxis, which is characteristic of the spiritual dimension. Furthermore, it provides human beings with a perspective on which to base the meaning of life, guided by the sacred yet based on the conditions of reason.

Structure of the Philosophy of Religion

The philosophy of religion has an internal logic that structures it and provides coherence and meaning to its reflexive praxis. This organization provides it with elements or categories, as well as functions with specific fields of action; there is a purpose within its teleological order, which orients it in its daily philosophical work. It also has a methodology that projects it toward the study of the religious phenomenon on the basis of rational comprehension.

Functions of the Philosophy of Religion

The commitment of philosophy of religion to rational discernment in the process of giving meaning to human life brings about a reconnection, through the understanding the world and of existence. The starting

point is the experience of the spiritual dimension. Thus, philosophy of religion reflects on the specific functions it must carry out in order to understand the religious phenomenon on the basis of reason. It seeks “to show the constitutive receptiveness to a higher-level ontological reality, and [...] to determine the possibility of the self-manifestation of such reality” (Lucas, 1999, p. 67). This discernment is directed toward the double activity of knowledge: on one hand, that of individuals and their natural capacity for openness to the unknown which overpowers them, and on the other, the mysterious, the unknown and enormous, which can be reached through this cognitive desire and which leaves recognizable traces in the profane world, traces that the researcher will address as sacred.

In this sense, human openness to the sacred is based on the search for and construction of an understanding of the realities that are part of human daily life, the desire for truth, or the truths that ground existence. This context is not alien to religion, which is also framed within this purpose, since it aims at providing effective answers to the numerous knowledge gaps. In this manner, religious experience emerges from human beings’ capacity for wonder and amazement and provides both meaning and guidance to human life. Furthermore, it enriches and grants meaning to the context in which people are immersed.

Thus, religion is based on the desire for transcendence of the spiritual dimension of the human being. The second function of the philosophy of religion has to do with the inquiry into the self-manifestation of the sacred, which is nothing more than the capacity of the transcendent to reveal itself and allow for an encounter, without disclosing its fullness, its aperture. This is what we should reflect on: the possibility, veracity and the need for hierophanies, found in numerous written and oral narratives throughout human history, as well as in geographical remains, pictures, gold work, and even experiential testimonies.

Purpose of the Philosophy of Religion

To reflect on the objective of the philosophy of religion is to reflect on its teleological tendency, that is, on its reason for being, in order

to comprehend its contribution to the understanding of the religious phenomenon: “To logically evaluate the consciousness of depending on a being that is ontologically superior to Man, detected by the phenomenology of religion” (Lucas, 1999, p. 73). Thus, the horizon of its praxis is not limited to providing logically structured results. What arises in the specific context of this study is rather an analysis, an interpretation, and a detailed assessment of the religious phenomenon, in order to achieve an unbiased holistic vision.

Another task of the philosophy of religion has to do with the different scenarios which allow for the relationship between human beings and the divine, because the vast religious world offers several options for reconnection. This should be understood in the sense that not all of those options are contained within the appropriate boundaries of reason. The encounter between the absolute and the individual — while it is overwhelming, mysterious, even terrifying as affirmed by Eliade — is consummated in the real world, that is to say, it is anchored in the natural anthropological condition of human beings, in their historical, physical, and mental reality. In this order of ideas, it must correspond to a rationality which does not exclude the spiritual dimension.

As a third task, “it is philosophy itself that permeates the religious attitude by considering it a constitutive dimension of humans or a particular manner of being human.” (Lucas, 1999, p. 73). An attitude as natural as spirituality cannot be separated from the other human dimensions. This is not an artificial category, because, by nature, the human being is an *homo religiosus*. Human beings have a transcendental capacity to reread their daily life and find what underlies it: a reality that transcends them and at the same time connects them, thus preparing them for an encounter, for choosing their own life option to guide their actions toward the specific objective of liberation.

Ultimately, the philosophy of religion “issues an objective value judgment regarding the transcendent dimension of human beings” (Lucas, 1999, p. 73). This is its main purpose, because its endeavor should not be anchored in discourse; it must contribute to understanding the spiritual dimension, enrich the comprehension of the transcendental nature of human beings. Reflection on the religious phenomenon leads to understanding human experience, which needs to be endowed

with meaning. Thus, philosophy of religion becomes part of the transdisciplinary work involved in comprehensive education.

Method of Philosophy of Religion

Throughout history, the philosophy of religion has resorted to different methods, depending on schools and authors: Patristic apologetics, the Scholastic confrontation of reason vs. faith, the explanation and formal anticipation of modern times, phenomenological understanding, and analytic and reflexive differentiation, to mention the most relevant. The last two are contemporary. For purposes of this paper, we follow the sequence proposed by Lucas (1999), according to which: “description, classification, and understanding must be completed with a critical appraisal and logical consideration of both observed and defined facts”. (p. 57). These four elements make possible an accurate reflection aimed at answering the anthropological questions raised by religion with respect to human daily life.

With regards to description, the phenomenology of religion contributes a major part of the work. It presents the religious phenomenon as it appears in daily life: a coherent and organized fact, a phenomenon with meaning, free of judgment and ideological biases. And the philosophy of religion orients it toward rational reflection. Subsequently, this initial understanding was broadened, through critical appraisal and rational consideration of observed and defined facts. As clarified above when speaking about the ultimate task, the philosophy of religion makes it possible to issue objective and critical judgments regarding openness- self-manifestation.

This methodological structure of the philosophy of religion allows it to reflect critically on the religious phenomenon lived by the *homo religiosus* and on the projection of the meaning of life. Individuals who take up this aspect can even change customs, in order to forge their daily life according to the religious paradigm chosen or involved, on the basis of the socialization processes of their context. This premise leads us to think about the human capacity for religion, that is, the openness to the absolute expressed in the spiritual dimension. This involves the anthropological condition of possibility of openness

to transcendence through the world of the sacred, which is immersed in the profane, an issue that gives meaning to daily life.

The Constitutive Elements of the Philosophy of Religion

The constitutive elements of the philosophy of religion which must be studied in order to understand and interpret it are evident in its object of study, which is religion as lived and assumed by *homo religiosus*, on the basis of the spiritual dimension. The elements which articulate its reflection are the sacred, the profane, mystery, the meaning of life, and extreme situations in the life of human beings, especially death.

It is not possible to speak of the sacred and the profane separately. Both of them are constitutive elements that give meaning to religious praxis. They are the foundation for the understanding the transcendent as a projection of the spiritual dimension of individuals. "Sacred and profane are two modes of being in the world, two existential situations assumed by man in the course of his history." (Eliade, 1998, p. 17). The profane is the natural space, the absolute non-being, ordinary temporality, man anchored in history, devoid of religious meaning and transcendence. Therefore, "the first possible definition of the sacred is that it is the opposite of the profane" (Eliade, 1998, p. 14). This provides the guidelines to interpret their interrelation and clear difference.

It is necessary to clarify that the sacred is not synonymous with the religious: "the sacred refers to a reality or a special ontological framework, an encompassing level. While the religious refers to a specific behavior of human beings, or to a concrete way of assuming existence" (Lucas, 1999, p. 96). That is to say, the sacred emerges as a new environment for understanding those realities in which human beings are immersed, on the basis of a framework that transcends everyday life without denying it, but complementing it and refining it. Thus, it projects humans toward their full actualization and the understanding of existence, by giving them a special treatment.

The following are constitutive elements of the sacred: a new ontological threshold, the fulfillment of being and reality par excellence, and, finally, mysterious reality. These features define the action of human

beings because the sacred “is presented as a supreme value for humans who are intimately affected by it and demands a personal answer from them” (Lucas, 1999, p.105). Therefore, without the intimate transformation of human beings through the understanding of the sacred as a binding reality, it would be pointless to address specific religious attitudes in everyday life: that is, the personal choices known in the Western world as conversion, adherence, commitment, search for the truth, harmonization, contemplation, salvation, etc. In this sense, identifying the sacred, with both figures and representations, emerges in religious praxis and plays a key role. Thus, one can consider the possibility, capacity and/or need for sacred irruptions or hierophanies in the history of the profane.

Man becomes aware of the sacred because it itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane [...] it expresses no more than is implicit in its etymological content, i.e., that something sacred shows itself to us. (Eliade, 1998, p. 14)

Thus, it is possible to observe diverse ways of intuiting and naming the different hierophanies found in the course of history, depending on the cultural context and the type of sacred irruption: supreme being, absolute, unity, multiplicity, dualism of fundamental principles, pantheism, the numinous, impersonal forms, personal forms, etc. These names not only denote lordly titles, but also indicate the deep understanding of the religious phenomenon. At the same time, they respond to the contextual needs, characteristic of individuals who have experienced religion as something fundamental that gives meaning to their lives. Additionally, the sacred is understood as the setting where the religious is evidenced. It is the set of elements that characterize this phenomenon, those that mark the change of level and make evident the luminous character. It could be said that mystery is the essence of the sacred.

It is a sphere of reality in which a distinction arises between religious subjects with their attitudes and intentions and the objective of those attitudes or intentions, which is what we call the mystery. The sacred is what it is due to its contact with mystery, so one can

say that mystery constitutes, structures, shapes, and provides significance to what is the sphere of the Sacred (Sánchez, 2003, p. 366)

Mystery, as the essence of the sacred, is the total outpouring of knowledge, what is totally other with respect to being, the *summum bonum*. That is to say, the supreme good characterized by sanctity, purity, fascination, wisdom, perfection; the *salvator optime*, characterized by boundless plenitude, which calls for absolute dependency; the total alterity-heterogeneity that human beings evidence in their daily life. For this reason, it takes shape as the final end in the search for the spiritual dimension. In this constant inquiry, the sense of sacred is given to that which allows access to the enormous and fascinating, to active transcendence.

The encounter between the transcendent and the human, which is also a quest, is projected by the spiritual dimension onto daily life, through the combination of two more elements: the meaning of life and the meaning of death. The former, as a teleological reality, and the latter, as an extreme situation of human existence. They are both driving forces of reflection, because they provide meaning to human daily life, based on the irruption of the sacred in the profane.

Thus, an experience of life has been articulated in an infinitely varied way, which recognizes in life a path full of meaning, because it is inscribed in a complex that has a direction, a purpose, and an origin. (Grondin, 2010, p. 13)

In this manner, human daily life must be projected toward the immortal, the absolute and transcendental, toward liberation, salvation, consummation, purification, and understanding of being through reconnection. The intuition of the ultimate meaning of the human being, as an inquiry into the purpose of life and death, is a primordial necessity for religion, given that it is the way in which individuals become aware of their transitory nature as beings in the world. Simultaneously, they understand the transcendence of their spiritual dimension, and are given the chance to encounter the mysterious, absolute, and tremendous.

There are many other issues for reflection, in which the philosophy of religion could contribute to the analysis of the religious phenomena

evidenced in human daily life. Among them are the problem of evil, myth, rites, language, religious knowledge, dogmatic proclamations, the relationship between feeling and reason, religious attitudes, religious experiences, the contributions of complexity, proselytism, indoctrination, absolute liberation, the problem of being, etc. However, these topics cannot be addressed here in depth and with rigor due to limitations of space.

Contributions of the Philosophy of Religion to Religious Education in Schools

The understanding of the identity, history, and structure of the philosophy of religion — within the pedagogical context of a teacher of Religious Education — should not be reduced solely to the cognitive plane. These categories, which, in essence, seem to be conceptual, can permeate and enrich the purpose of comprehensive education which any professional teacher seeks to achieve day to day in the classroom. In fact, these categories not only provide epistemological support for the rational comprehension of religion; they are projected onto the more experiential setting of the everyday life of the students.

It is pertinent to point out that reflection concerning the philosophy of religion is based on the theoretical construction of Western categories. We inherited this rational construct from Europe. Consequently, it can be observed that the religious phenomenon transcends this structure, because not every phenomenon of this type can be interpreted on the basis of constructs to which it does not belong and to which it is not trying to respond, given its spatial or temporal nature. This can be observed in the Eastern spiritual tradition, in the legacy of the native populations of the Americas, before the arrival of the Europeans with their intentions of colonization and conquest, and even in the religious movements emerging today and respond to other logics of thinking. What the philosophy of religion does contribute to every attempt at intercultural religious understanding is critical thinking concerning these realities.

Thus, the philosophy of religion provides several components for the consolidation of the nature of Religious Education and its

pedagogical praxis, within teaching-learning processes in the classroom, which are the setting for comprehensive education in schools. In terms of its nature, it offers epistemological support, elements, and categories for reflection. In terms of pedagogy, it has a structured method, based on the concepts of logic, epistemology, and the phenomenology of religion. All of this favors the understanding of religion and its judgment by means of reason, which provides added value to its didactics.

To consider Religious Education, as a specific academic space in schools requires an explanation of the epistemological grounds that justify its presence in schools, not in the sense of contributing to processes of indoctrination, but in the sense of contributing to the comprehensive education of the students. The philosophy of religion affirms the need for RES, as a suitable scenario for the development and comprehensive education of human beings, based on the spiritual dimension. This dimension is the natural condition that projects humans towards total alterity; thus, it is a foundation of their humanity as projected beings, on the basis of the categories of reason.

The elements and categories of reflection that the philosophy of religion contributes to Religious Education are: the sacred, the profane, mystery, the meaning of life, the meaning of death, myth, rite, symbol, religious language, its cognitive construct, dogmatic proclamations, the relationship between feeling and reason, religious experiences and attitudes, the contribution made by complexity, proselytism, indoctrination, absolute liberation and the problem of being. These components are the principles and foundations for the design of a curriculum which meets the students' contextual needs.

With respect to its functions, the philosophy of religion connects with the task of Religious Education from a double perspective; on the one hand, it manifests the need for a profound understanding of human beings' constitutive openness to a different ontological reality. Thus, it substantiates the anthropological turn that explains the search for the understanding of mystery with the total alterity of the human being. On that basis, Religious Education presents human beings in their natural condition, as a starting point. This meditation starts and is established in the vital experience of human beings. On the other hand, there is a critical discernment regarding the possibility

of self-manifestation of this transcendent reality, through rational reflection on the constructs of the various hierophanies. In this order of ideas, Religious Education guides students in the critical evaluation of these phenomena, with respect to the connection of the absolute with the spiritual dimension in human daily life.

The purposes and objectives of the philosophy of religion - as the rational evaluation of the consciousness of dependency, the definition of the conditions of a proper relationship between humans and the absolute, the interrelation between the religious attitude and the objective appraisal of the spiritual dimension - provide Religious Education with a horizon to project its reflexive praxis. In other words, it guides the daily life of humans in the search for understanding religious experience from the perspective of the categories of reasoning. Thus, this academic space should be organized teleologically, in accordance with its nature

Consequently, the pedagogical dimension of Religious Education finds a suitable context for its praxis in rational reflection which was given as the epistemological basis for the philosophy of religion, in such a way that the ritual moral, and sacred aspects of the different spiritual conceptions manifested throughout history become an object of study. Thus, RES needs to have its own method. This task is assumed on the basis of the foundations of the phenomenology of religion and grounded in the philosophical categories mentioned in this chapter.

Hence, the method of the philosophy of religion becomes a suitable pedagogical horizon for the task of Religious Education, by 1. Describing (encounter, diagnosis, presentation), 2. Characterizing (ordering, specifying, classifying), 3. Comprehending (analysis, interpretation, intellection), and 4. Evaluating critically (judgment, evaluation, projection). These steps become didactic tools that support the different teaching and learning processes used in schools for a good comprehensive Religious Education. These principles complement the pedagogical model adopted in the school context, regardless of which one is selected, and do not oppose it, given that they are grounded in a rational comprehension of religion in terms of the spiritual dimension.

All these elements that the philosophy of religion introduces into Religious Education for the enrichment of its pedagogical and

didactical praxis in schools transform the traditional paradigm, because it projects the school as an academic scenario that responds to daily life. It is geared toward the development and foundation of the spiritual dimension, which represents the general openness of human beings to total alterity. Here, the comprehension of concepts and their critical appraisal contribute to personal discernment in the search for the meaning of life. In this task, the philosophy of religion is not the only study that can contribute to Religious Education. In fact, it is part of a web of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary work clarifies the nature of its action.

It is also important to highlight that the philosophy of religion must orient RES in its opening towards the diversity that characterizes the historical moment, in order for this type of education to assume a pluralist stance, based on intercultural dialogue. Thus, it will be possible to visibilize the processes of cultural acquisition experienced throughout the history of humanity: acculturation, enculturation, interculturalization and transculturalization. Furthermore, it also makes it possible to observe the syncretism, eclecticism, fallacies, and humanizing principles emerging from the several religious, spiritual, and mystical movements that attempt to respond to the need for the comprehension and development of the spiritual dimension.

Thus, at the center of the philosophy of religion and of RES, lies the spiritual dimension, the underlying element that appears as the primary category for reflection. The Colombian government has taken this into account, in the context of comprehensive education in schools. Teachers are asked to emphasize it in a special manner for the proper development of the personalities of the students (Law 115 of 1994, Art. 5, §1). For that reason, this study is also an invitation to reflect critically and inquire into the rational foundation of the religious phenomenon, in order to holistically understand it, for the benefit of individuals' quest for the meaning of life, on the basis of diverse intercultural processes.

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