

## OF RITES AND WORLDS

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Robbins, with his characteristic clarity, proposes a completely original approach to the studies of religious pluralism, changing the focus of the discussion from the religious theme as a whole to the specificities of ritual. According to the author, the main characteristic of successful rituals is the full accomplishment of a single value, and it is in this sense that the ritual would be opposed to religious experiences as a whole, where several values are usually in hand, therefore resulting in a personal experience of conflict. Ritual, on the contrary, provides a feeling of relief, even if temporary, because of the solution of these conflicts. In this sense, what we usually call religious pluralism would be less religious and more ritualistic, i.e., a search for rites from other religions to solve conflicts of values intrinsic to the original religion.

Robbins uses examples from two completely different contexts to make evident what he understands as a ritual solution of the conflict between values. In our academic life, the author suggests, the values of honesty and kindness would be in conflict, because on many occasions it is not possible to be kind and honest at the same time. The ritual of applause, after a conference, would consist in a solution to the conflict, as it clearly expresses kindness without questioning honesty. Among the Urapimin, where the conflicting values are relationism, dominant in the traditional life, and individualism, dominant in the Christianity focused on salvation, the solution is found in two distinct rituals. Individual salvation is performed in the Christian ritual Spirit disco, while relational values are clearly expressed in the sacrifice of pigs to the spirits who own nature and are responsible for causing diseases. As declared Christians, the Urapmin do not value the ritual of the pigs, considered a sin by many, making this a clear example of a variety that does not imply the option for two

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different religions, the "Urapmin religion" and Christianity, but simply a ritual pluralism associated with conflicts resulting from their option for Christianity.

The clear way with which Robbins poses his arguments diverts the reader's attention from an aspect that seems problematic to me in his hypothesis: that of the relation between culture and ritual. If to Robbins (2004), religion is culture, i. e., a set of categories, values, and relations among them, so that Christianity is treated by him in several works as "Christian culture", his approach here seems to propose dissociation between culture and ritual. In other words, it would be possible to transit among rituals and still be strongly connected to a certain culture, as with the Urapmin, who do not cease to be Christian when they perform the sacrifice of pigs; and, as well, we can assume, with Brazilian Christians who can sometimes appeal to spiritist rituals searching for the action of relationalist values (continuity alive-dead) banished from Christian rites which are focused on individual salvation, without, with that, not seeing themselves as Christians.

This transit seems to me, however, to be far more complex than what the author makes us believe. Rituals are not limited to the performance of unique and purified values of a certain culture; they develop a cosmological compound that the author does not mention. In other words, a rite is not restricted to the moral domain, but is also a way of creating the ontological foundations of a culture. One does not leave a ritual simply with the relief of a solution of a conflict of values, but with the certainty of the existence of other kinds of beings and with a certain kind of relation established with them; in short, with a new world. The ritual is not a dissociable part of the culture, but is the culture itself in its premises.

In Amazônia, for example, complex collective rituals construct a world populated by human spirits with which relations of collaboration and opposition are established, in the same way as occurs in the traditional Urapmin rituals where there is a dialogue with nature owner-spirits. It is not possible to assert that these spirits exist independently of the ritual, since the relation with them is concurrent with its creation. Thereby, performing a ritual which involves this relation, necessarily implies living in a world populated not only by humans but also by this sort of spirit. Christianity, with its rituals, intends to build another kind of world, divided between

heaven and earth, populated by the individual, and controlled by a single God: another geography, another temporality and other beings.

If we consider the ethnographic reality of ritual pluralism, the question which arises is, therefore, related to the possibility of the existence of an ontological pluralism. How is it possible to inhabit different worlds at the same time? In my opinion, this is made possible precisely by some rituals, hence their success. At this moment, some exorcism rites that are so successful in some pentecostal strands, which give life to spirits of the pre-Christian world while subduing them to God's power come to mind. According to Robbins' argumentation, the success of this rite must be attributed to the final prominence of Christian values, but I think it is possible to attribute this success not to the final outcome of the ritual, but to its environment, where the culmination of the ritual action is, when the pre-Christian world of spirits is reconstituted. In other words, in my opinion, we have to take into account the possibility of wanting to live in two worlds without eliminating one of them.

Christianity has the great advantage of holding this oscillation, of having in its womb the devil's image, a blank space for other beings and worlds, besides allowing the existence of complex people through the broken image of God, whose spirit penetrates the believers' bodies and alters them. In this sense, the scientific context mentioned by Robbins, even though it has clarified the issue of the conflict of values, is in my opinion, deeply distinct from the cultural context of the Urapimin in their religious experiences. While in the first the conflicting values are associated to a single culture, or a single ontology, which encompasses shared notions of people and the humanity, in the Urapimin context the opposing is not limited to values, but to the inhabited world as a whole. We could even assume that the spirit *disko* and the sacrifice of pigs, even if they are seen as contradictory by the Urapimin, create a single whole which, like the Pentecostal rites of exorcism, allows the coexistence of these worlds.

The intense conflict that marks the Urapimin's life, so well described in Robbins' ethnography (2004), is not necessarily a mark of every Christian collectivity. In some cases the opposite happens, i. e., Christianity arises as a context that enables living traditional values inside modernity which actually tries to promote

an ontologically boring and flat world, which sees itself "re-enchanted" by religion. And by re-enchantment I do not understand only the existence of the universe of spirits and the possibility of relations that are more or less associates to them, but precisely the cohabitee of multiple notions of people and worlds.

### Reference

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