

AN EXAMINATION OF THE *CENTER FOR STUDY ON
RELIGION, CULTURE AND SOCIETY* IN THE
POSTGRADUATE PROGRAM OF SCIENCE OF RELIGION
AT THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF JUIZ DE FORA:
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL SCIENCES
AND SCIENCES OF RELIGION

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Abstract: This article will summarize the activities of the *Center for Study on Religion, Culture and Society* at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF) and its connection with the *Social Sciences of Religion* area of concentration, which is part of the postgraduate program in Science of Religion (PPCIR). It will examine the changes that occurred in the area of concentration and in the research center – changes in structure, curriculum and line of research – leading to its present configuration, in light of the trends and debates involving the fields of sociology and anthropology as related to the religious phenomenon in Brazil in its relationship to the interdisciplinary field of Science of Religion.

Keywords: research, sciences of religion, sociology of religion, anthropology of religion, Brazilian religious field.

The research group named *Center for Study on Religion, Culture and Society* (NERCS) of the Postgraduate Program in Science of Religion (PPCIR) at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF) is *unique* with relation to the others in this publication – research groups on the topic of religion housed in departments of and postgraduate programs in sociology, anthropology and social sciences – for being a research center for religion in a postgraduate program also *exclusively* dedicated to the theme of religion.

As our postgraduate program has a *multidisciplinary* character involving three different fields of the humanities that focus on the theme of religion (i.e. social sciences, philosophy and theology/comparative religion), the

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research center linked to the program, which was created in 1993 and formerly called *Center for Study and Research on Religion* (NEPREL), also has a multidisciplinary character.

The path towards the profile that NERCS assumes today – including reorganization and expansion – corresponds to the affirmation of an area of concentration in the program that will be called *Social Sciences of Religion*. In this area of concentration an attempt is being made to draw up a proper methodology, with empirical research of a qualitative and ethnographic nature, though within an interdisciplinary structure.

The following report concerns several factors – course structure, curriculum, the hiring of faculty, and academic production of theses and dissertations – that decisively influenced, through the process of transformation and improvement within the program, the present configuration of our research group.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE AREAS OF CONCENTRATION, CURRICULAR SUBJECTS, LINES OF RESEARCH AND RESEARCH PROJECTS IN THE POSTGRADUATE PROGRAM IN SCIENCE OF RELIGION (PPCIR-UFJF) AND THEIR ASSOCIATION WITH THE RESEARCH GROUP DISCUSSED HERE

With the creation in 1993 of the master's degree in sciences of religion at UFJF and its accreditation by CAPES in the subcategory of theology/science of religion, the course was divided into two great areas of concentration: *Reason and Religion* and *Inter-Religious Dialogue*. The first circumscribed more analytic and remote approaches to philosophy and the social sciences, while the latter, although ruled by academic impartiality, was committed to promoting the inter-religious dialogue and the ecumenism proceeding from the so called theology of religions (Teixeira, 1993).

Focusing on the expansions that took place, the subject *Social Science of Religion* was created in the first area, under the direction of Professor Pedro Ribeiro de Oliveira, a sociologist. This discipline combined sociological and anthropological approaches to the religious phenomenon. After some years

of experience in this subject, the need was felt to divide it in two: *Sociology of Religion* and *Anthropology of Religion*. At the time, in 1995, the anthropologist Marcelo Camurça joined the program in order to take on the second subject, leaving Pedro Ribeiro with the first.

In 1997, despite the gap left by the retirement of Pedro Ribeiro, the program continued to reform the curriculum. This process sought to define in more detail the syllabuses for its disciplines whenever the contents of obligatory and specific subjects were reorganized. In the chair *Sociology of Religion*, an approach to the religious phenomenon based on classic authors (Durkheim, Weber and Marx) and, as a derivation of these, on contemporary theories such as those of Peter Berger (secularization and “market of symbolic goods”), and those of Pierre Bourdieu (the religious field).

The specific chairs *Sociological Theories of Religion* and *Special Topics in Sociology of Religion* focus on the discussion of current themes: religion, modernity, post-modernity, secularization and re-enchantment, religion and globalization, politics and fundamentalism, media and market. The chair *Anthropology of Religion* and its elective *Theoretical Foundations of the Anthropology of Religion* were created with the aim of relativising and “denaturalizing” (in the anthropological manner) religion as something “given”, breaking it down within the main interpretive keys of anthropology, which are: *myth, ritual and magic*². Through these three dimensions of anthropological understanding – developed throughout the history of anthropology in a constant dialog between “native theory” and anthropological theory – we sought to present the principal theoretical tendencies in anthropology (evolutionism, culture, functionalism, structuralism and interpretativism) which hover over those dimensions, each with its own analytic and interpretative focus. In this sense, we intended to study anthropological theory as applied to religion, but with religion itself (de)constructed by the “anthropological view” that interprets it.

² The notion of “kinship”, also classic in anthropology, is not included in this classification and is the only one not directly related with the theme of religion (Lienhardt, 1973).

Besides these disciplines, another obligatory one was created: *Brazilian Religious Field*. It emerged from content that was found inserted as a final topic in the programs of the more *theoretical* courses Anthropology of Religion and Sociology of Religion, corresponding to an *empirical* aspect of these courses. It also came to fulfill the needs of students (in their dissertation research) for analysis that would help understand the dynamics that involve the relationships among the existing religions in Brazil, as well as the position of each religion *per se* with regard to the society and culture of the country. Within this perspective, preference was given to a systemized vision of the interactions and relationships between established and emergent religions in the Brazilian context, ascertaining, on the one hand, phenomena of communication, exchange and interpenetration and, on the other, those of competition and confrontation among these interactions and relationships, expressed by the concepts already established as “syncretism”, “market of religious goods” and “religious war”.³

In order to complement students’ training in an anthropological and sociological approach to the religious phenomenon, the master’s degree program invests in the hiring of visiting professors with expert knowledge and qualifications in this field through the Program PREVI (Special Program for Visiting Professors) promoted by the central administration of UFJF. In 1997, Otávio Velho taught here, as did Pierre Sanchis in 1998 and Regina Novaes in 1999.

In this same perspective, two seminars were offered: the “*First Seminar on the Brazilian Religious Field*” in 1999, with the participation of professors Pierre Sanchis (UFMG), Regina Novaes (UFRJ), Cecília Mariz (UERJ),

³ The idea of a Brazilian religious field became central to researches and dissertation projects developed around the subjects Sociology and Anthropology of Religion, as well as the newly created subject that bears the same name. As an evidence of this centrality, the Research Project of Professor Marcelo Camurça (who was responsible for this set of subjects) was called “*Campo Religioso Brasileiro, um espaço de interações simbólicas*” (Brazilian Religious Field, a Space of Symbolic Interactions). This “umbrella-like” project welcomed dissertation researches of Camurça’s advisees, for that reason the two Seminars organized by him in the Master had this same name (see text in the following pages).

Maria das Dores Campos Machado (UFRJ), Leila Amaral (Department of Social Sciences, UFJF) and Fátima Tavares (visiting professor in the master's program), who lectured and gave opinions on papers and research projects by master's degree students. As part of the event, a new periodical was launched: *Numen – Journal for Religious Studies and Research*, edited by people from the master's degree program and its *Center for Study and Research on Religion* (NEPREL). The "*Second Seminar on the Brazilian Religious Field*" was held in 2000, with the participation of Professors Emerson Giumbelli (PUC-RJ), Clara Mafra (UERJ) and Pierre Sanchis (Emeritus Professor from UFMG), who lectured and formed board of examiners for our master's dissertations on that occasion.

In 2000, anthropologist Fátima Tavares joined the Program, after serving as a visiting Professor in 1999. From then on she shared the subjects described above with the senior Professor. She was responsible for subjects in the field of sociology of religion, as her doctorate qualified her to teach anthropology and sociology.

In 2001, the Program went through another crucial change following on the creation of the doctoral program in 2000. This change resulted from efforts to better define and confer greater autonomy (both methodological and epistemological) on faculty and its supervision related to Anthropology and Sociology of Religion (resulting from the reorganization of *Reason and Religion* area of concentration). Thus, a new area of concentration was created: *Religion, Culture and Society*, housing the disciplines Anthropology of Religion, Sociology of Religion and Brazilian Religious Field, as well as other specific disciplines.

Two lines of research were created within this new area of concentration: *Brazilian Religious Field* and *Social History of Religion*. The difference between these two lines of research is that the first has a respectively anthropological and sociological synchronic cross section of the "ethnographic present" and the problem of "modernity", and the second, through the perspective of "historical responsibility", something like the study of the Brazilian religious field in a diachronic dimension. Led by the professors linked to the new area of concentration, the formation of these lines, together with the *research*

projects aligned to them, was carried out after the completion of approximately 19 master's dissertations related to themes of the project.

In the spirit of these changes, in September 2001 a seminar was held under the supervision of Fátima Tavares and Marcelo Camurça and was named "*Religion, Culture and Society: religious experiences in modern times*" after this new area of concentration, with the participation of Otávio Velho (National Museum – UFRJ), Carlos Alberto Afonso (University of Coimbra – Portugal) and Pablo Semán (Universidad Nacional General San Martín – Argentina). Also, a book entitled "*Minas das Devoções: diversidade religiosa em Juiz de Fora*" (Minas of Devotions: Religious Diversity in the city of Juiz de Fora) was published in 2003 under the editorship of both professors in this area, with articles written by them and their students, as well as abstracts and vulgates of their recently defended master's degree dissertations.

Interestingly, three fellow theologians from the area of concentration *Inter-religious Dialogue* participated by collaborating with their colleagues from *Religion, Culture and Society*, sharing advisory work on dissertations when the themes involved Catholicism, Protestantism/Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian religions. These theologians are Faustino Teixeira, Zwinglio Mota Dias and Volney Berkenbrock, respectively. The multidisciplinary aspect of PPCIR made this collaboration possible: all of these scholars had committed a considerable amount of their academic lives to the study of religions and had become experts in the area.

Nevertheless, on a larger scale, the "adaptation" of these theologians to the social sciences is explained by the use they have made of it as a tool in their church-related community work, in ecumenical organizations and in NGOs. All of this took place amidst the strong influence exerted by sociology on the 70's and 80's, especially the Marxist sociology inherent in the *Theology of Liberation*, which was the reflective horizon that this generation of theologians had before them during their education.

Later in the 90's, owing to the influence of *inculturation* category in the new experiments in theology, which was "engaged" in the public sphere and faced with the "Marxist paradigm" crisis, this concept derived from anthropology created the opportunity for a new kind of theological reflection

on the transformation of reality, no longer fixed on the sociological paradigm of “class”, but on its inclusion in the cultural diversity of gender groups, such as women, and ethnic groups, such as Native-Americans and Afro-descendants.⁴

Vitória Peres de Oliveira,⁵ a graduate in anthropology and philosophy of science and an expert in Islamic studies, who also belongs to the *Inter-religious Dialogue* area of concentration but not to the area of theology, lent assistance by supervising dissertations on the inclusion of Islam in the Brazilian religious field and society, as well as those on the interface of religion and ecology and on religions involved in these ideas, such as Saint Daime.

Besides the permanent professors in PPCIR housed in another area of concentration, the *Religion, Culture and Society* area of concentration had the participation of teachers from other departments in the university who did not yet have their postgraduate degrees. These teachers, who gave courses and supervised dissertations, are Beatriz Domingues and Célia Borges, from the Department of History, and Raul Magalhães, from the Department of Social Sciences.

Leila Amaral also offered special help. Originally from the Department of Social Sciences, a scholar and author whose writings are known nationwide, she has done important research on the religious phenomenon in popular religiosity in the state of Minas Gerais, and later on the new religious

⁴ The question of “inculturation” in “progressist” catholic Theology emerged during the Episcopal Conference for Latin America (CELAM) in Santo Domingo, 1990, around debates about the character of the event of “500 year since ‘finding’/domination’ (?) of Americas”. Among the reference works that spread this concept we may cite: Azevedo (1982 e 1986) e Suess (1994a e 1994b)

⁵ Vitória Peres de Oliveira was a visiting professor on the Program in 2000/2001 and became associate professor in 2002. Linked to the *inter-religious dialogue* area of concentration, later called *Compared Religions and Dialogue Perspectives*, she was dedicated to research and supervision within the study theme *Islamic mysticism*, and to comparative studies of religions through a phenomenological approach, teaching the subject Phenomenology of Religion at the Program. She used to contribute to the “Social Sciences of Religion” Area, because of her background in anthropology and whenever the theme under study touched the social and cultural dimensions. She died precociously in a car crash in 2006, leaving a hard-to-complete lacuna in her Area and in the Program.

movements and the “New Age” in Brazil and elsewhere in the world (Amaral, 2000; 2003). She initially helped the program and the area as a member of boards of examiners for dissertations. After her retirement in 2000, she entered the PPCIR as an assistant professor teaching courses and supervising students. She is currently involved in the area and the research center conducting research on aesthetics, art and the sacred.

In 2003, a partnership with *Center for Studies on Religion – Pierre Sanchis (CER)* at UFMG was established under the supervision of Professor Léa Freitas Perez through her and her students’ integration into the research project “*Religion, politics and culture in the youth of Minas Gerais*”. This group was responsible for investigating in the city of Belo Horizonte’s area. The research results were all presented at various academic congresses in this area.

In 2004, anthropologist Francisco Pereira Neto entered the program, and from then on the team of *permanent professors* in the area of concentration (not including the theologians from the other area of the program and colleagues from other departments) has established the format it has today. The presence of one more professor allowed for more improvement in course content through a greater precision in research methods and techniques specific to the area and important for dissertations and theses. This took place in the chairs related to Anthropology of Religion, which went beyond the anthropological theories approach (applied to religion) and began to focus on the crucial question of *ethnography*, according to which anthropology is configured as a discipline.

The area now has the collaboration of Professor Vilmar do Vale Barbosa, a philosopher transferred from UFRJ to the PPCIR in 2005 and assigned to the *Inter-religious Dialogue* area of concentration. His work in this area covers the theme of *religion and politics*, in the *Religion and Public Space* line of research.

In the second semester of 2005 and the first semester of 2006, the program and the area benefited from hiring a visiting professor in the field of social and cultural history of religion, due to the increased demand by the students for dissertation supervision. Professor Patrícia Santos Schermann occupied this position by teaching courses such as *History and Religion*, among others, where she sharpened the focus on the History-Religion relationship in Brazilian historiography, showing aspects such as body control and

submission to Christian morals, meanings of the sacred royalty in colonial Brazil, experiences with Catholicism by the Afro-Brazilian and Native-American populations, missionary insights and festive and funeral rites in Catholicism. During 2006 and 2007, visiting Professor Fabiano Fernandes taught *History and Religion*, presenting a reflection on the historian and his/her occupation, the new religious history and the relations between construction of the object, methodology and historiography. In addition to their teaching activities, these professors were also members of the board of examiners and assisted in the supervision of dissertations.

Following this, in line with a more epistemological definition of the area of concentration, the title *Religion, Culture and Society* changed to *Social Science of Religion*. The intention was to shift from bestowing names based on *thematic* bias – although culture referred to anthropology and society to sociology – to a different one, where the reference would explicitly be its *epistemological* aspect: social sciences. As a result of these changes another line of research called *Religion and Public Space* was created in order to augment the two existing lines with a look into the religious phenomenon beyond its institutional borders by considering the processes of transversality of this phenomenon in the ambience of public space. Adopting a new perspective of how sociology and anthropology approach the phenomenon of religion in this line of research, beyond the boundaries of a “religious field”, resulted in a tendency expressed in authoritative works published in this field of study and also presented at academic congresses,⁶ as well as in recent dissertations in this area of concentration which, nevertheless, did not fit into the Brazilian religious field model. Around the three current lines of research (*Brazilian Religious Field*, *Social and Cultural History of Religion* and *Religion and Public Space*) a number of research projects⁷ form a nucleus for research registered

⁶ The book *Religião e Espaço Público* (Religion and Public Space) was organized by Patrícia Birman and has articles by several researchers. It was published by Attar Editorial, financed by CNPQ/Pronex, in 2003.

⁷ The research projects linked to the *Brazilian Religious Field* line of research are: New Religious Movements, Afro-Brazilian Religions, Ethos and Spiritualistic Identity, Catholicism and

with institutional research-oriented organizations, including both research for the students' dissertations and theses and research done by the area's permanent teaching staff.

Group discussions on this research (in different stages of development: research project, Qualification exam projects, papers prepared for academic events, etc) involving the professors in the area, students under their supervision and guests are the main activities of the *Center for Study on Religion, Culture and Society* research group.

As the culmination of an epistemological defining process which divided the science of religion post-graduate program into three areas of concentration, with their respective lines of research and projects, in 2004 the *Center for Study and Research on Religion* (NEPREL) was also divided into three parts, namely, *Center for Study on Philosophy of Religion* (NEFIR), *Center for Study on Religion and Comparative Mysticism* (NEMIC) and *Center for Study on Religion, Culture and Society* (NERCS). A historical analysis by NERCS is presented further on in this text.

As a result of this defining process, the journal *Numen*, which is a part of the Program and of the former NEPREL, also began to have each of its sections successively edited by each of the three program areas and study centers. The *Social Science of Religion* area and its study centers have already organized Volume 7 no. 1, dedicated to the Youth and Religion theme, while Volumes 8 no. 1 and Volume 9 no. 2 are both about to be published.⁸

Society, and Islam and Society. The ones linked to the *Social and Cultural History of Religion* line of research are: Social History of Catholicism, Social History of Spiritual Medium Religions, and Social History of Protestantism and Pentecostalism. Those linked to the *Religion and Public Space* line of research are: Citizenship, Philanthropy, and Religion; Health, Therapy, and Religion; and Modernity, Lifestyle, and Religion.

⁸ *Numen, Religion's Study and Research Magazine*, vol 7, n° 1, 2004. In press: volume 08, n° 1 with articles by Silas Guerriero (PUC-SP), Paulo Barrera Rivera (UMESP), Rogério Rosa (UFPEL) and Marjo de Theije (VU University Amsterdam). Volume 09, n° 2, a homage to Otávio Velho, with articles by himself and by Emerson Giumbelli (UFRJ), Marcelo Camurça (UFJF), Luís Eduardo Soares (IUPERJ), Leila Amaral (UFJF) and Moacir Palmeira (National Museum - UFRJ).

A SHORT ANALYSIS OF NERCS (CENTER FOR STUDY ON RELIGION, CULTURE AND SOCIETY)

Significant results have been achieved in the production of dissertations and theses related to the area of concentration and the research group since the master's degree program began in 1993. There have been 62 master's degree dissertations and 6 doctoral theses which, if applied retrospectively to the current format of dividing the lines of research and projects, would be divided as follows:

At the master's degree level, in the *Brazilian Religious Field* line of research: 6 dissertations on *new religious movements*, examining groups such as Saint Daime, anthroposophy, new agers, their circuits and dynamics, "native" media and the relationship between spirituality and the (para)sciences; 5 dealing with *Afro-Brazilian religions*, examining characters in the pantheon of saint-like entities such as Exu and Pomba-Gira, "*comida de santo*" (food prepared and offered to the so-called "saints" or deities belonging to the religion of Candomblé), and the Umbanda-Candomblé relationship; 4 dealing with *ethos and the spiritualistic identity*, involving themes such as identities, frontiers and syncretism between Kardecism and Umbanda, and spiritual healing; 7 on *Catholicism and society*, involving Catholic sects and institutions such as the CEBs (Ecclesiastical Communities), the Charismatic Renovation Movement, the *Pastoral da Terra* Commission, the Native-American Missionary Councils as well as popular devotions and apparitions of the Virgin Mary; 2 relating to *Islam and society*, examining Muslim communities in Brazil and gender relations in Islam. In the *Social and Cultural History of Religion* line of research: 14 dissertations dealing with the *social history of Catholicism*, examining the historical presence of Catholicism in Brazil in various periods such as that of the Inquisition in the 16th Century, gender relations in colonial and imperial society, popular devotions to the Virgin Mary in the 18th Century, Brotherhoods, the *Inconfidência Mineira* (conspiracy movement in Minas Gerais), missions in the popular religiosity context, the ultramontane (conservative) element in Catholic thinking, Army-Church relations during the Estado Novo (*The New State* – political regime in Brazil), relations with politics during the military dictatorship, popular

Pastorais (Church-related community work groups), etc; 2 dealing with the *social history of spiritualist religions*, examining the genesis and the transformation of the Afro-Brazilian and Kardec-spiritualistic religions in the context of Minas Gerais; 12 relating to the *social history of Protestantism and Pentecostalism*, covering the themes of fundamentalism, the Pentecostal/Evangelical identity in relation to Brazilian society/culture through gender, politics, citizenship, money and the “Theology of Prosperity”, and also the relation of the so-called historical churches with dimensions of the national society: Methodists and education, Lutherans and immigration, etc. In the *Religion and Public Space* line of research: 2 dissertations dealing with *citizenship, philanthropy and religion*, examining the relations between religion and the state, the market, and social services; 1 on *health, therapeutics and religion*, focusing on the psychological question of emotions; and 7 dealing with *modern times, lifestyles and religion*, examining interrelations and crossover between religion and music, (bio)dance, secular rituals, Alcoholics Anonymous, historical and cultural patrimony, tourism, consumerism, etc.

At the doctoral level, in the *Brazilian Religious Field* line of research: 2 theses on *Catholicism and society*, dedicated to studying new CPT (Comissão Pastoral da Terra) paradigms involving ecology and family agriculture and the internal healing in the Charismatic Renovation Movement. In *Social and Cultural History of Religion*: 2 theses dealing with the *social history of Catholicism*, examining aspects of Jesuit thinking in the 17th Century and the religious congregational Missions in Minas Gerais in the 19th Century.

There are currently 19 master’s dissertations and 17 doctoral theses in progress, with their defenses scheduled from 2007 to 2012.

Finally, we must emphasize the presence of the Area and its Research Group, represented by its teaching staff and students, at events, symposiums, and academic congresses on scientific religious studies in a sociological, anthropological, social- and cultural-history perspective. Since 1996 our area and centers have seen increased participation in the following events: *Journeys on Religious Alternatives Latin America*, *Symposium of the Brazilian Association for History of Religions* (ABHR), *ANPOCS Annual Meetings*, *Brazilian Anthropology Meeting* (RBA), *Mercosur Anthropology Meetings* (RAM), and the *ALER Symposium*.

There is still room for improvement, especially in striving for a greater *international* presence for the program as a whole and of the area of concentration and its research group in particular. A number of initiatives are already underway, such as the partnership established with *Università di Padova* and its Department of Sociology, particularly with the research group of Professor Enzo Pace, professor of Sociology of Religions at *Università di Padova*. This partnership resulted in a visit by Professor Marcelo Camurça to deliver his lecture “*Un panorama religioso del Brasile contemporaneo*” (*A Religious Panorama of Contemporary Brazil*) at the “*Seminari sul pluralismo sócio-religioso nella realtà brasiliana*” (*Seminars on Socio-Religious Pluralism in the Brazilian Reality*) in April 2006. There is also the partnership with *VU University Amsterdam*, with the purpose of encouraging an exchange of visiting professors.⁹

Another new development is the inclusion of our Research Group in the *Paulo Freire Program* network, which we hope will help make our work more visible in a broader and more comprehensive circuit.

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⁹The coming of Professor Marjo de Theije and the leaving of Professor Vitória Peres as visiting professors of the two Programs was programmed to happen in the second semester 2006, for a 6-month period. This became unfeasible with the death of Vitória Peres.

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