



1. Roman Catholicism lived in Latin America and in Rome. The methodology employed

Verónica Roldán *

Abstracts

The Author presents the constituent milestones of the methodological cycle of an international research survey called *The transformation of lived religion in urban Latin America: a study of the contemporary Latin Americans' experience of the transcendent (in comparison with Southern Europe)*, carried out and which involved the collaboration, in a comparative study, of six universities from six different countries of which three Latin American (Argentina, Peru, Uruguay), two European (Italy, Spain) and one North American (Usa). In particular, the aim of the qualitative method used here was an understanding of *the subjective sense and the point of view* of social actors with the intension of bringing to light the "sociological views".

Keywords: qualitative methodology, comparative research, [Roman] Catholicism, Lived Religion

La Autora presenta las etapas constitutivas del ciclo metodológico de la investigación internacional *La transformación de la religión vivida en América Latina: un estudio de la experiencia de lo trascendente de los latinoamericanos contemporáneos (en comparación con el Sur de Europa)*, en donde han colaborado, en un estudio comparativo, seis universidades de diferentes Países: tres latinoamericanos (Argentina, Perú, Uruguay), dos europeos (Italia, España) y uno norteamericano (Usa). El objetivo ha sido comprender, a través del método cualitativo, el *significado subjetivo y el punto de vista* del actor sobre los diferentes aspectos de su vida religiosa.

Palabras claves: religión vivida, catolicismo, América Latina, Roma, metodología cualitativa

L'Autrice presenta le tappe costitutive del ciclo metodologico della ricerca internazionale *La trasformazione della pratica religiosa in America Latina: uno studio sull'esperienza del trascendente dei latinoamericani contemporanei (in comparazione con il Sud Europa)*, che ha visto collaborare, in uno studio comparativo, sei università di sei differenti Paesi: tre latinoamericani (Argentina, Perù, Uruguay), due europei (Italia, Spagna) e uno nordamericano (Usa). L'obiettivo,

* Università degli studi di Roma Tre (Italy); e-mail: veronica.roldan@uniroma3.it.



è stato quello di comprendere, attraverso il metodo qualitativo, *il senso soggettivo* e il *punto di vista* dell'attore circa i diversi aspetti del suo vissuto religioso.

Parole chiave: *lived religion*, cattolicesimo, America Latina, Roma, metodologia qualitativa

Premise

The present issue of the *Visioni LatinoAmericane* journal is dedicated to the results of an international survey entitled *The transformation of lived religion in urban Latin America: a study of contemporary Latin Americans' experience of the transcendent (in comparison with Southern Europe)*, funded by the Templeton Foundation for the years 2015-2018, and which saw six teams from six universities from three Latin-American and two European countries engaged in a collaborative comparative study under the direction of Gustavo Morello from Boston College, Massachusetts, Usa.

The Latin-American research groups were from the Pontificia Università di Lima, Perù, led by Catalina Romero; the Universidad Católica de Córdoba, Argentina, coordinated by Hugo Rabbia; the Universidad Católica de Montevideo, Uruguay, under the guidance of Néstor Da Costa; the European groups came from the Universidad del Deusto, Bilbao, Spain directed by Miren Iziar Basterretxea and the Università degli studi di Roma Tre, Rome, Italy, coordinated by the Author of the present article. The scholars who took part in the various teams were Valentina Pereira Arena and Camila Brusoni for Montevideo; Lucas Gatica and David Avilés for Córdoba; Veronique Gauthier and Rolando Pérez for Lima; Cecilia Costa, Monica Simeoni, Simona Scotti, Katuscia Carnà and Jenn Lindsay for Rome. Some of these are Authors of the articles presented here.

The survey followed the research model designed by Nancy T. Ammerman and her collaborators, and the results of which appeared in *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes. Finding Religion in Everyday Life* (2014). The Ammerman-*et-al.* study was carried out in two cities of the Usa, different and antithetical from a religious point of view: Boston, Massachusetts and Atlanta, Georgia. The survey collected the life-stories of 95 peoples residing in the two above-mentioned urban areas, in the conviction that biographies, be they long or short, provide a



mechanism by means of which the world is perceived socially and constructed by social actors. As the Boston University scholar claims, it is possible to obtain «a great deal about the social shape of religion by listening for how everyday stories are told» (Ammerman, 2014: 9).

The life-stories which the American research team investigated were not purely spiritual, sacred or ultra-mundane, nor were they simply mundane or intra-mundane. They were stories of lives from which it emerged that to be “truly religious” did not imply the existence of a “sacred” environment separate from everyday life and devoted exclusively to spiritual events. Ammerman calls the “spiritual narratives” stories which concern the life of the spirit and the dialogical communities where spiritual traditions are lived. «The spirituality we are listening for is neither a quest for a sacred center that will orient all of life (as Pargament [2011] suggests) nor a supernatural force that will provide assistance or salvation (as Riesebrodt [2010] theorizes). It is a more modest, but nonetheless profound recognition that the world is not wholly a story that can be empirically told. There is another layer of consciousness that can weave, more or less pervasively, in and out of ordinary events. As philosopher Charles Taylor (2007) would put it, not everything can fit within the “immanent frame” of objective science. Or, to use Bellah’s (2011) notion, both ordinary and nonordinary reality can exist together» (*Idem*).

As already pointed out by Gustavo Morello in the *Introduction* to this number, the Latin American researchers involved in the project collected 80 in-depth interviews from self-styled Roman Catholics, Protestants, members of others creeds as well as agnostics, atheists and *nones*, obtaining data to be compared with the findings of the Rome team.

This issue dwells, in particular, on the outcome of analyses of the data obtained from self-styled Catholics residing in four cities, three Latin-American and one Italian: Córdoba (Argentina), Lima (Peru), Montevideo (Uruguay) and Rome (Italy). In this case too, as in the study coordinated by Ammerman, the project availed itself of qualitative methods and used as its empirical basis a *corpus* of discursive interviews, that is, life stories, gathered upon two different occasions as far as the Latin-Americans are concerned, in a sole sitting as far as the Roman residents are concerned. This empirical work began at the end of 2015 and continued for the whole of 2016.



1. The aim of the research

As Luca Ricolfi (1998) holds, in keeping with Raymond Boudon (1984), empirical research is a succession of operations carried out to find answers to questions regarding the reality. This characterisation follows in the footsteps of Weber's thinking (1922) and contests, first of all, an excessively optimistic –or ingenuous – view of the cognitive capabilities of the social sciences, seeing that the social reality as such is “unknowable”. In actual fact, these scholars claim with conviction that the idea of grasping social “objects” in their entirety, in their essence or in their ultimate intimate meaning, is totally chimeric. Scientific action – contrary to a rather widespread notion – does not aim at explaining the real which, as such, is unknowable, or, at least knowable only in metaphysical terms (Boudon, 1984). Social research, instead, is a “finite section” which the observer selects from that infinity devoid of meaning which is the world's becoming (Weber, 1922) and on the basis of criteria of relevance. As a result, all we scholars can do is formulate specific questions about the reality and try to produce plausible answers.

The aim of Ammerman's study was to draw up models of the presence or absence of the religious dimension in the daily lives of present-day social actors. Her questions were, «In what ways do people experience and invoke transcendence and how does that occur in the many different social spheres of their lives? What kinds of situations call for the spiritual realities have? By systematically exploring the stories people tell about their everyday lives, we will trace the patterns of religious presence and absence in the social world. Where and how do spiritual characters, relationships, activities, moral imperatives, and emotions find their way into everyday stories?» (Ammermann, 2014: 9-10).

With regard to our survey, the aim was that of exploring the *lived religion* of Roman Catholics belonging to four different socio-economic contexts the majority of whose populations were, however, Roman Catholic: Argentina, Peru, even Latin-America's the most secularised country, Uruguay, and Italy. The purpose was that of investigating how the people there relate to the transcendent and how they express and experience their religious beliefs in their ordinary everyday lives.



This research provided a particularly relevant opportunity to «verify, using an international sample, one of the basic claims of the theory itself, that is, whether, in actual fact, religiosity, beyond individual and socio-cultural differences, is a universal phenomenon and whether, therefore, it is possible to study it availing oneself of social-research methods and techniques» (Martelli 2002: 199).

Our initial questions were:

- How are Latin Americans experiencing transcendence in the midst of a changing religious scenario? Is there a Latin American way of experiencing transcendence?

- How do Latin Americans articulate their creativity and free will with religious traditions in religious pluralised cities?

- Does the experience by Latin Americans of the transcendence change across generations, gender and social classes?

- What can Latin Americans teach humanity about the sacred?

To these questions for Latin America were added specific comparative ones for Rome.

The aim of this study was to investigate matters at the level of individual and ordinary life because it is at this level that change occurs. We assume that when we explore religion from the ‘bottom up’, we are able to discover transformation, not decline. Religion/spirituality is assuredly different today, but it has not disappeared. In everyday practice, we may not witness a ‘cultural war’ between the religious and the secular, but simply people making sense of their lives by resorting to religion as well as to secular institutions and ideas. The aim was to discover the strength or decline of religion by paying attention to everyday situations.

We are aware that the construction of religious identity in Latin America is dynamic and flexible in its own cultural way (e.g. enchantment of ordinary life, popular religiosity, de-institutionalisation, religious migration, multiple affiliations, new age spiritualities) (Romero, 2014). The relationship between religion and society is culturally shaped, and, therefore, cannot be described solely according to north-Atlantic parameters (Levine, 2012; Casanova, 1994). Theories of secularisation do not explain in a satisfactory manner the religious phenomena experienced today in Latin America, among other things, because analyses are conducted principally from a Eurocentric



viewpoint, with the French model of *laïcité* in mind. If we examined other ambits where religion is lived, we might discover a different Christianity, the kind that today's sociological literature calls «southern global Christianity» (Adeney, 2009) or the «Third Church» (Jenkins, 2004). To compare the characteristics of this kind of Catholicism with those of Rome was the main focus of this study.

2. The qualitative methodology. Life stories and “spiritual narratives”

Those who carry out sociological research are aware of the plurality of the theoretical approaches and the objects of analysis; the same holds for research methodologies and techniques. In the social sciences, qualitative research presupposes a humanistic paradigm. This means giving importance to the intersubjective relationship established between the researcher and the “object” of his/her investigation, which, in the social sciences is precisely the “subject”, that is, the social actor. It is believed, and with conviction, that the contribution made by social actors to knowledge of real situations that are investigated, is of the utmost importance (Roldán, 2003; 2009).

With specific reference to the qualitative method used here, the aim was to *understand the subjective meaning and point of view of the actor* without any rigid reconstituted hypotheses, in order to bring to light the “sociological view” of the social actors and their definitions of diverse aspects of their lived religion.

Harking back to Alan Bryman (1988) on this point, we can say that the qualitative method assumes the function of tool for the exploration of interpretations provided by social actors. The rapport between the researcher and the subject permits the joint construction of the data.

With this in mind, the teams availed themselves of techniques for the collection of biographical data such as in-depth interviews, life stories, participant observation and visual sociological tools, that is, photographs and audio-visual material like video recordings of some of the interviews considered exemplary.

The research strategy was procedural and the purpose of the results *idiographic*; this means that the image of the social reality emerging was that built socially by the actors. The nature of the data collected is, therefore, rich and profound and although qualitative research avails



itself of a micro-sociological approach, this does not mean that it is less worthy of scientific attention.

The value of the biographical data lies in the fact that not only is it of a personal nature, but is linked to the community, both local and general, to which the subject belongs. This is why an analysis of various individual diversifications can provide interpretative keys related to social *change*.

At the same time, it is necessary to make it clear that the use of qualitative techniques in social research makes no claim to the achievement of levels of generalisation. As Bachelard (1934; 1967) states, biographical methods offer useful indications and clues the value of which is, above all, *regional*. It is for this reason that every time this methodology is used, the boundaries of the regionality in question need to be defined. The unequalled uniqueness of a *life story* remains, nevertheless, as evidence of the particular character of the individual person, who, is at the same time linked to the sociological dimensions of his/her presence, his/her action, and his/her thinking. This leads to an indirect kind of knowledge of general data regarding a community or society (Cipriani, 2012).

Furthermore, the production of sociological knowledge must permit processes of comparison with other areas of sociological knowledge and measurements of the states of single properties of specific social "phenomena", in this case, *lived religion* in the social contexts of three Latin American cities and Rome. To this end, you need to dispose of valid tools for the collection of data.

3. The sample

As mentioned above, the total sample for each city was 80 life stories of people residing in urban areas and who were self-styled Roman Catholics or believers in other creeds (for example Pentecostals, Afro-Brazilians and other religions in Latin America; Moslems, Orthodox Christians and Jews in Rome). The sample also included self-declared "atheists", "agnostics" and "nones" (that is, believers who do not identify with any religion, that is, «unaffiliated, yet religious subjects» (Zurlo, Johnson, 2016)



The groups of Roman Catholic interviewees analysed here numbered 42 in Córdoba, 45 in Lima, 32, in Montevideo and, in the city of Rome, 29.

The selection of the interviewees was carried out deliberately with a view to creating variety of gender, age, area of residence, educational level and type of religious identification. In actual fact, the main structural variables considered were gender (female-male), age (18/29; 30/59; +60), socio-economic status (low; middling/high for Latin America; low, middling and high for Rome), residential area (peripheral; near-central, central /well-to-do areas), educational level and religious membership and/or identification.

In Rome, to define people's socio-economic status the selection criterion chosen differed from that used in the three Latin American countries where the socio-economic indicator chosen was educational level. In the Italian capital the indicator chosen was the interviewees' residential areas, seeing that, in Italy, even people belonging to the lower classes can be well-educated.

4. The survey tool

The research presented here went through the following constituent stages of the methodological research cycle: co-establishment of the information; identification of the techniques to apply to the survey; processing and analysis of the data gathered; and finally, what this publication is doing: dissemination of the results of the research (Cipolla, 1993, 1997; Cremonini 2002; Diotallevi, 2002).

The collection of the series of life stories (the scientific strength of personal documents) made it possible to follow the development of several individual biographies upon a terrain largely shared at social level. That way, it was possible to obtain a set of results, otherwise unreachable within the folds of a questionnaire whose nature it is to compress and reduce data in an almost stenographical manner (Cipriani, 2012).

As far as identification of the data-collection techniques was concerned, an in-depth analysis of sociological literature regarding the



issue was carried out in order to draw up a sole protocol to apply when collecting stories within different local contexts.

In actual fact, for the groups self-defined as “Catholics”, the same protocol as that used for those belonging to other non-Catholic religions as well as for those claiming to be atheists, agnostics or *nones*, was applied.

The protocol used consisted in a first part which referred to socio-demographic characteristics and a second phase regarding the interviewee's life story, with reference to the topics of belief, practice, experience, belonging and also to the areas and ambits in which religious experience may occur: the family, circle of friends, the workplace, leisure time and civil life. The protocol, which initially involved an analysis of the religious socialisation of the interviewees, also included questions concerning people's perceptions of the Pope, the Jubilee of Mercy, leisure, politics and voluntary service.

Given the characteristics of the qualitative method used here, it was also envisaged that the interviewees provide references to other dimensions of their religious experiences not provided for by the data-collection protocol.

5. The analysis of the life stories

We were particularly interested in the use grounded theorists made of narrative techniques and analysis, more so than in structural narrative analyses (which focus on the form and function of story-telling). This means that, by collecting many stories, we inductively created conceptual groupings by allowing for emergent conceptualisation of local salient experiences, oriented by previous theoretical discussions in the field (Riessman, 2005). The focal issue of interest here consisted in the stories of experiences associated with concepts of transcendence. It is for this reason that religious and spiritual beliefs, practices and belongingness were emphasised during the coding process.

While processing and analysing the data collected, we made constant comparisons between the data and continuous reference to theoretical annotations. Coding of the information collected allowed us to identify the categories and sub-categories available for the analysis of *lived religion* in the different localities. Constant comparisons were



made between the elements applicable to each category, integrating them with their properties.

The analysis was computer-assisted using the Atlas.ti program, a software package used mostly, though not exclusively, in qualitative research or qualitative data analysis.

In the coding process, the initial codes were subsequently incorporated into more abstract categories which allowed for a more structured analysis. We cannot present all the categories here for reasons of space. However, by way of example, it is possible to present the *practice* category which incorporates the following items:

- *sacraments*
- *community celebrations*
- *prayer*
- *pilgrimages*
- *cult of images (Our Lady-Saints)*
- *reading the Bible/sacred scripture*
- *reading other material*
- *mission/evangelisation*
- *community/voluntary service*
- *inter-religious coexistence*
- *meditation/reflection*
- *disconnecting*
- *psychological therapies*
- *physical activities*
- *writing*
- *music/art*
- *nature.*

We are also in a position to present, by way of example, some of the main categories identified during the coding process:

- Proximity (having a point of view close to that of the Church)
- Anticlericalism
- But (reinterpretations)
- Education
- Community
- Beliefs
- Crisis of faith
- Distances
- Socialisation
- Emotions



- Getting/being angry with God
- Space (street / urban, home / private/domestic, de-territorialised, nature, temple, work)
- Spirituality / Religion
- Ethics
- Gender
- Institution
- Person
- Migrations / Change of residence
- Object
- Poverty
- Crucial moments / changes
- Religion-political relationships
- Practice
- Religiosity
- Sacraments
- Being a good person
- Health
- Time
- Non-believer
- Believer
- Work
- Transcendence
- Evaluation
- Values

The codes have been analyzed by all the research teams during many Skype meetings and four international workshops. This has allowed us to obtain a comparative framework.

6. Conclusion

Concluding this brief methodological introduction, it is possible to claim that in order to reflect on binomials like Individual/Institution; Spirituality/Religion; Autonomy of the individual/Influence of the community to which one belongs, the topics of religious socialisation, belief, practice, belonging and experience of the spiritual/transcendent and



the values of Catholics within diverse everyday contexts, were analysed. The analysis focused on the spheres where people declared experiencing a sense of the transcendent: at home, in the workplace, in the public domain, in contact with nature, within “non-places” (Augé, 1992) here defined as “de-territorialised spaces”.

In the various chapters that comprise this special issue of *Visione Latinoamericana*, some of the features of southern global Catholicism are presented and compared with lived religion in Rome, a city which hosts within its geographical territory the Papal State, the emblematic seat of universal Roman Catholicism.

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