

Chapter 5

'Magico-popular religion' in Contemporary Society: Towards a Post-Western Sociology of Religion¹

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The main argument of this chapter is that new forms of religious expression are breathing new life into magical or popular practices which, according to 'scientific' opinion, should have disappeared by the middle of the last century. These new extra-institutional and/or anti-institutional forms of 'magico-popular religious' expression require adequate interpretation; and they challenge us to transcend the conceptual limits of Western rationalism and the bias towards Churches that we find in the theoretical and analytical contributions of four classical sociologists, namely, Ernst Troeltsch, Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, and Marcel Mauss.² Moreover, Western Church-oriented religion – Christianity in particular – continues to be a privileged form of institutionalised religion and continues to provide the dominant theoretical frame of reference for sociologists of religion today. Nevertheless, this chapter will argue the case for a new, post-Western approach to the sociology of religion.

I. Changes in the Religious Panorama: A Call for a Revision of Church-Oriented Concepts

The sociology of religion has been finding it increasingly difficult to analyse and to measure religious phenomena by means of quantitative indicators. Fewer religious people fall neatly into categories such as 'Catholic', 'Protestant', 'Muslim' or 'Atheist'. These difficulties were apparent in the Eastern Bloc states where religious statistics were prohibited but they also emerged even in Catholic countries like those of Latin America. It is obvious that these problems were not simply due to defective or non-existent 'religious statistics'. Indeed, these forms of Cartesian classification were derived from Western – and principally European – forms of religiosity that reflected the kind of strong Church apparatus inherited from Medieval Christianity.

It is common for Latin American 'Catholics', however, to talk about their religious affiliation in terms such as: 'All religions are the same to me: what is important is to believe in God – life depends on this.' 'I believe in God, in Jesus Christ, in Reincarnation, and in the Tarot.' 'I am a Catholic in my own way – I get fed up when they impose things on me.'

These statements point to some of the reasons why sociologists of religion have come to question the appropriateness of the classical categories for interpreting these new religious phenomena (see also Parker, 1996, 1998, 2002, 2004). The most cogent argument is that the sociological categories that have conventionally explained religious phenomena – namely, sacred/profane, priest/magician, Church/Sect – are questionable because of their explicit or implicit bias towards Church-type organisations.

The 'de-Westernisation' of certain religious phenomena can be understood as part of the process of 'globalisation'; but in opposition to the ethnocentric thesis which claims that globalisation is an entirely positive process it is essential to stress its dialectical character. While globalisation generates a certain degree of inter-religious convergence that draws diverse cultural forms together, it also accentuates religious fundamentalism (Pace, 1997). This is partly a response to the hegemonisation of values that are not religiously inspired and partly a response to the tendencies towards fragmentation. We also need to take account of the extent to which beliefs are syncretised and re-combined in complex forms. Uncritical theories of globalisation are blind to the increasing complexity of the religious sphere where tensions obliterate traditional dichotomies such as clergy/laity or sacred/profane.

We believe that the new magico-religious currents that are restructuring the religious field at the beginning of the twenty-first century call for the replacement of the concepts that have traditionally been deployed by Western sociology in its efforts to analyse and classify religious phenomena. Spickard's (1998, 2001) attempt to develop a 'non-Western' sociology of religion emphasises the 'ecclesiocentric' bias of most sociological studies of religion. His claim is that the Church is still the norm against which other forms of religiosity are compared. Long ago Matthes (1971, p. 13) also pointed out that the old functionalist sociology of religion had formulated a general concept of religion but 'from the specific perspective of the history of Christianity'. The concept of religion was developed in and through the history of Christianity. Moreover, the process of abstraction and the search for analytical clarity inevitably tended to identify religion with those forms of religiosity that had a Church-like structure. This is evident in Troeltsch's and Weber's analyses of religious phenomena, but it is also present in Durkheim's writings and in Mauss's analysis of religious and magical mindsets.

It should not be surprising that Ernst Troeltsch's (1931) contributions to the sociology of religion had a strong institutional bias. After all, he wrote a history of the social teachings of the Christian Churches in Europe; and he is best known for his Church/Sect typology. Troeltsch was particularly aware of the theoretical difficulties of using the term 'Sect' in order to designate a type of voluntary association that was opposed to the institutionalised Church. And, although he

warned of the dangers, he could not in the final analysis escape the historical limitations of the typology. He believed that the Church/Sect typology was useful only when applied to the history of Christianity – especially those periods prior to secularisation. He argued that private and individual mysticism was replacing Church/Sect concepts in modern capitalism. As a result, the Troeltschian concepts have an analytico-descriptive purpose. It is only with extreme caution, however, that his typology can be applied to other historical non-Western realities in, for example, Latin America, Asia, Africa and Oceania.

As is well-known, Max Weber's sociology was driven by the attempt to explain how processes of rationalisation culminated in the development of Western capitalism. Weber's prolific and nuanced contribution to the sociology of religion provides us with an analysis of religious institutions (which is inseparable from his theory of charismatic domination and hierocracy) and an analysis of the forms of religious life associated with economic ethics. The latter were shown to be objectified in the form of doctrines and rationalised practices. It is important to add that the epitome of rationalisation was the bureaucratic institution. Weber's categories of charismatic domination and the various processes of institutionalised, hierocratic domination (Weber, 1974, pp. 847-938) are based exclusively on the Roman Church of the West, the most rationalised form of hierocracy, according to Weber (Weber, 1974, p. 915).

Weber argued that the dialectic of religion and magic was a historical process of conquest. His idea was that the conquering religion denigrates the religion of the conquered, thereby labelling former priests as 'magicians' or 'sorcerers'. Weber's understanding of magic was therefore invariably as a traditional practice that tended to lead towards irrational behaviour in the centuries prior to Western rationalisation.

The Weberian interpretive sociology of religion was not driven by an understanding of the structures of collective meaning but, rather, by an understanding of the meaning of action. Indeed, by giving priority to religiously oriented social interaction Weber inevitably presented a biased picture of social actors. In order to apply the method of '*Verstehen*' and its typologies, Weberian analysis inevitably focused on the most noteworthy religious actors such as magicians, priests and prophets. He did not overlook the actions of ordinary, everyday social actors – the so-called 'faithful' – but their religiously oriented actions, beliefs and rituals were only analysed in relation to institutionalised religious actors or religious specialists.

Weber's interpretive sociology of religion is still relevant to the study of popular religion, but, in spite of his attempts to understand the varieties of religious action and types of religious agents, he was primarily concerned with the problem that he articulated in his most celebrated work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1969 [1905]).

Given Weber's interest in the analysis of the processes of rationalisation, his approach to magico-religious phenomena had a clear perspective: he attempted to identify the conditions under which more or less irrational primitive cults underwent a process of systematisation – the conversion of magic into doctrines of redemption with an emphasis on sacrifice over and against magic. In fact, Weber

went to greater lengths than any other scholar to analyse in detail the characteristics and types of religion and religiosity in terms of their different historical epochs, social strata, and geographical regions of the world. His studies of ancient Judaism, Confucianism, Hinduism and Buddhism were surprisingly erudite, but overall his focus had a Eurocentric bias.

The 'ecclesiocentric' bias of the sociology of religion can also be seen in the work of Emile Durkheim, who was more interested in developing a sociology of knowledge than a sociology of Churches. But having thoroughly analysed and refuted the different theories claiming that religion had its roots in beliefs, Durkheim's seminal work *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1968 [1912]) argued that ritual was at the very centre of religion. He began by studying the diversity of theories regarding the emergence of religion and came to the conclusion that totemism – the cult developed around the ancestors of the clan – constituted the elementary form of religious life. His argument was that the most fundamental component of all religious phenomena was the division of the world into two realms – the sacred and the profane. This was the source not only of the principle of prohibition or the 'taboo' protecting sacred things but also of the necessity for rituals that bound people together.

The idea of the division of the world into two realms that cannot coexist in the same space or time led Durkheim (a) to relate the profane to everyday life and work and (b) to relate the sacred to extraordinary ritualistic moments. He added that it was precisely in the course of religious festivals, in those collective moments par excellence, that the collective sentiments come out in full force and that those impersonal forces – the social – manifest themselves with greatest clarity, as transfigured into gods and religious rituals. Religion was therefore grounded, according to Durkheim, in collective consciousness, that is, a rational transcendental entity that was imposed on groups. It followed that totemism in Australian tribes was the elementary form of religion precisely because it reflected elementary social structures.

In short, Durkheim attempted to push beyond the Western definition of religion by moving towards 'the elementary forms of the religious life' among the native peoples of Australia. The main difference between religion and magic was, according to Durkheim, the fact that religion was *always organised around a Church*, whereas, by contrast, magic did not need a Church and even repudiated it. Durkheim was aware of the interrelationship between magic and religion in practical life, but he rejected the notion that it was impossible to distinguish between the two. This was because of 'religion's aversion to magic, and, moreover, the hostility of magic for religion' (Durkheim, 1968, p. 59). Religion, by contrast, was 'inseparable from the idea of the Church (Durkheim, 1968, p. 62). Durkheim's sociological elucidation of the elementary forms of religion could not escape from its paradigmatic, historical and cultural frame of reference, that is, the basic form of the religion of his time that had been shaped by the historical and institutional experience of Western Judaeo-Christianity.

Marcel Mauss (1980), in his turn, wrote with Durkheim about the primitive forms of classification; and his theory of magic was inspirational for Durkheim. Indeed, Mauss made sense of both magic and religion in terms of the 'total social

facts', understanding culture as a multidimensional, structured and structuring field. Magic and religion functioned like classificatory systems that 'ordered' the world. But what is germane for our analysis is the way in which Mauss differentiated between magic and religion. He argued that it was magic, in its attempt to be 'anti-religious', that separated itself from religion.

Consequently, Mauss did not define magic according to the form of its rituals but, rather, in terms of the conditions in which it was carried out. This meant that magic was conducted 'extra-ecclesial, in private form, secretly and mysteriously' (Mauss, 1980, p. 15). In short, although Mauss' definition of magic acknowledged the relationship between religious and magical rituals, he ended up defining magical ritual as a secondary and inferior derivative of religious ritual. Religion was thus, for Mauss, *an organised activity in Churches* (1980, pp. 15-16) that was implicitly modelled on the form of the Christian Churches of the West.

Although Mauss understood magic to be a collective representation, he ended up emphasising the social production of specialists such as magicians and schools of magicians (1980, pp. 17-37). This was in recognition of magic's individualising approach to practice. In other words, he presented magic as a technique, a primitive science that had stronger links to everyday life than did religion with its pretension towards metaphysics (Mauss, 1980, pp. 134-7). Nevertheless, the heterodox and syncretistic type of magic produced by lay people these days cannot be adequately analysed by using Mauss's approach.

II. The Limits of the Western Church-Oriented Perspective

The problem with perspectives that have bias towards Churches is that today's complex and diversified religious reality in societies at the centre and the periphery of the world-system – with all of its alternative and heterodox forms of religiosity – can no longer have the Western Church as their sole frame of reference. There are three main reasons for this.

First, this is because our critical analysis of four classical authors has shown that dichotomous categories such as sacred/profane, religion/magic, and Church/Sect are grounded in a style of thought that gives pride of place to the institutionalised form of religion in Western Europe – that is, the Christian Church. Yet, today a different type of dynamic is generating innovations in religious forms in the changing religious field of 'information' and 'globalised' societies.

A second problem is that writers such as Durkheim and Weber analysed non-Western religions from a Western perspective. Theoretical and conceptual frames of reference that were developed in the context of the cultural experiences of the Catholic Church of Italy, France, Spain or Portugal, the Anglican Church of England, the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, or the Lutheran Church in Germany are unable to make sense of such profound changes as the emergence of, for example, Buddhism in countries like Thailand or Vietnam, traditional religions in mainland China (Goossaert, 2002), the diverse ethnic religions of sub-Saharan Africa or the multiple expressions of indigenous religion in their interaction with

official Christianity, Islam or Buddhism. Indeed, this is the case even with the popular and indigenous religions of secular 'Catholic' Latin America.

Third, as we have suggested, to the extent that our four classical writers gave pride of place to the religious specialists in Churches, they logically favoured the dynamic of religious production relative to these agents and their struggle to legitimate their productions. This perspective ranges from the rationalisation of religious discourse and ritual to the de-legitimation of competitors who are categorised as 'magicians' or 'sorcerers' and relegated to an inferior class. The logical consequence of the analysis of 'religion' conducted in a Weberian or Durkheimian mode resembles the way in which Mauss understood magic. In his view, the producing agent is most relevant, while 'the faithful' and followers are rendered subordinate. It is as if the 'consumers' of salvation goods or magic do nothing but submit themselves to whatever is on offer from the various producers of religious meaning. Indeed, the main problem with this interpretative scheme is that it depicts the faithful and the laity as passive actors who lack agency.

III. Elements of a Theoretical Approach to Present-day Popular Religion

We have briefly argued that Troeltsch, Weber, Durkheim and Mauss worked with definitions of religion and magic that displayed an institutional bias historically rooted in the Catholic and Protestant Churches of Europe as the normative types of religious organisation in Western culture. It is not surprising, then, that the focus on religious institutions that is evident in the basic concepts of the sociology of religion is incapable of explaining phenomena such as new forms of magic and esotericism as well as the currently popular religions which, although they interact with Church institutions, also have diffuse, syncretistic rituals and symbols which are not those of Western-oriented Churches.

The following four arguments will outline a new 'post-Western' theoretical framework for the analysis of contemporary religion and magic.

1. *Transcending 'Ecclesiocentrism' and Considering Communal Mysticism*

A theoretical perspective that is Church-oriented has two main consequences. First, although such a perspective is centred on religious practices, they are made synonymous with the official practices that are sanctioned and consecrated by Churches. Eventually, with the advent of 'secularisation' – indeed the de-Christianisation of Christian countries – new religions proliferate. Popular alternative practices that take place on the fringes of Churches come into public view again when conditions are favourable. The focus needs to be placed on these 'heterodox' practices in respect of actors' existential situations: not just the situation of institutions.

Second, Church-oriented analysis tends to centre on official beliefs with the result that the syncretistic beliefs that constitute the majority of the 'do-it-yourself' ideas that become popular in 'the information society' are discarded. This leaves us with the question of how to categorise believers who claim that they believe in

Jesus Christ and Reincarnation. What are we to make of belief in the Virgin, Orixas and sorcerers? It is more than ever necessary today to show empathy in our studies of the ideas, representations and symbolisms involved in new forms and patterns of syncretistic cosmologies.

Of course, Churches – like other ‘respectable’ institutions – remain powerful, and their leaders have an important role to play in the world. But the information society and globalisation are starting to surpass Churches and states whose powers and influence are on the decline. Indeed, it is understandable that Churches are among what Giddens has called ‘shell institutions’ (Giddens, 2000).

Weberian sociology focused on hierocracy and charismatic domination; and the concepts of religious agents and the division of religious labour, such as they appear in neo-Weberian theories (Bourdieu, 1971), continue to be pertinent to the extent that the religious field continues to exist – albeit in crisis. Durkheim’s definition of the sacred and the profane, and Troeltsch’s definition of Church, Sect, and mysticism also continue to provide an important – albeit insufficient – understanding of the sociological dynamics at work behind many institutions and expressions of religion today. Nevertheless, the analysis of religious phenomena should be guided by a dialectical understanding of the relationship between, on the one hand, the production of official beliefs and practices and, on the other, the heterodox ideas and practices produced by ordinary people. This type of understanding can go beyond a one-dimensional analysis that focuses exclusively on official practices and eclipses the non-official ones.

In particular, we need to consider a category of *communal or collective mysticism*³ that characterises popular pilgrimages, Pentecostal and African-American cults and many indigenous shamanistic rituals as well as the collective rituals of certain esoteric groups among other communal manifestations of ‘neo-magic’. They are not traditional forms of magic or official religion; they are genuinely new forms of ‘post-modern’ spirituality that weave complex relationships with the more classic expressions of religion. They do not have an exclusively individualistic or clientelistic form. In fact, they often assume communal forms.

2. *Understanding the Religion-Magic Continuum.*

The current transformation of global culture is eroding the boundaries between religion and magic. These boundaries are becoming tenuous, porous and at times non-existent.

As we have suggested elsewhere (Parker, 1996, 2002), understanding the recent changes in religion and culture in Latin America requires a revision of certain fundamental categories of the analysis of religious phenomena. A key concept for the understanding of many popular and indigenous beliefs was the continuum between healing and salvation, which refers to therapeutic actions – ritual, symbolic and practical – *vis-à-vis* the holistic well-being of the soul and the body. This holistic vision takes the analysis beyond dichotomies integral to Western thought and demands a revision of the sacred/profane dichotomy as a basic concept in the sociology of religion (Parker, 1994). Something similar is occurring in some

of the rituals of new religious movements as well as in various forms of esoteric or occult neo-magic.

Indeed, we need to transcend the classic but uncritical identification of religion with Church (with its ecclesial model of Catholicism and historical Protestantism). The relativisation of the concept 'religion' in terms of its bias towards the Church-type forces us to abandon the corresponding sociological perspectives on magic, which, just like the old evolutionist traditions in anthropology, see it as a 'primitive' form of religion or at best 'science' (Guerreiro, 2003).

In order to develop a better theoretical approach to contemporary religious phenomena we need to transcend the bias of our four classical authors regarding magic. Durkheim as well as Mauss suggested that magical practices were an 'inferior' and a 'degraded' form of religion. The danger with this perspective is that it makes a value judgment – with religion as superior and magic as inferior – as if this was an a priori sociological fact. What is required is to understand any given religious phenomenon dialectically. Indeed, we need to grant the same normative value to religion and to magic so that we can then see how this dialectical relationship takes shape in historical practice. As a consequence of its emphasis on Western rational practices, the rationalist bias of the Weberian perspective – at least from the methodological point of view – tends to subordinate magical forms to Western forms of institutionalised religion, thereby implying the normative superiority of the latter.

In order to have the conceptual tools for a proper analysis of the complex relationship between religion and magic that exists today, we should also supplement the 'objective' approach to religion and magic, which avoids normative value claims, with a focus on historical domination⁴ and the idea of a dialectical relationship. In fact, sociology should return to that relativising perspective in anthropology that, beginning with Malinowski, Evans-Prichard, and Lévi-Strauss, questioned the evolutionist approach to the study of magic. Modern social anthropology (Mercier, 1968), without doing away with the distinction between magic and religion, regards the relationship between them as merely provisional. Indeed, many sociologists and anthropologists agree that the components that are commonly found in magic can also be found in religion and *vice versa*.

The distinction between magic and religion cannot be adequately framed within the Cartesian paradigm. If, however, the magic-religion continuum is analysed in a dynamic, dialectical form it is possible to see how the modern process of secularisation has had a more detrimental effect on religion than on magic.

Moreover, this continuum between religion and magic is reinforced by the codes of post-industrial society. The rationality of industrial societies generated codes that excluded and that tended to fragment reality in spatial and symbolic terms precisely because it was centred on the circulation and flow of persons, goods and services. For this reason, the cultural ethos of industrial society shaped the religious field by reinforcing the tendencies to assert the institutional and symbolic boundaries between various expressions of religion.

By contrast, the ethos of post-industrial society and subsequently of its cultural field – 'postmodern' society in its historical and not philosophical sense –

generates many spaces and nodes where networks converge and diffuse. In this way post-industrial society reinforces the tendency to dissolve the religious field (roughly in accordance with, for example, Bourdieu's neo-Weberian theory) thereby raising the possibility of reconfiguring symbolic religious space, which then comes to function on the basis of the convergence, contradiction and diffusion of heterogeneous elements and thus to move toward syncretism.

It is important to add that Christianity, as a Western religion shaped by patriarchal and monotheistic codes, is less prepared to confront and engage with this new cultural context. By contrast, African and Asian religions and the matrix of indigenous and African-American religions are more receptive to a mixture of elements precisely because their meaning structures are polytheistic, pantheistic and cosmological. What is more, they are more receptive to cults and rituals that are differentiated, syncretistic and diverse.

In this way the 'rationality' of the information society and of post-industrial new technologies of communication and information (NTCI) not only facilitates the diffusion of the codes of advanced modernity that favour religious and magical syncretism but also promotes the de-Westernisation of religion, Christianity in particular.

3. *Understanding the Creativity of the Religious Subject*

The analysis of religious phenomena from the point of view of the subject (social actors as producers of symbols and rituals) takes its point of departure from the assumption that the 'faithful' – although they are lay *vis-à-vis* specialised religious knowledge – are not the passive consumers of religious beliefs and rituals. They are subjects with existential anxieties arising from their everyday life who produce their religious rituals and symbols in a constant process of 'semantisation' or symbolisation and re-symbolisation. This refers to the production of religious meaning 'from their own point of view' with the tools that are dictated by their collective action (social structure, cultural and religious tradition, level of education, accessibility to NTCI and creative capacity as well). Indeed, as Gramsci (1977, p. 131) once suggested: all men are intellectuals.

What needs to be addressed, given the conditions of globalisation, is not the type of message that the Church or religious movements attempt to communicate to their followers, or what material and spiritual remedies they provide for their needs.⁵ The real problem is exactly the opposite: the questions that need to be asked concern the spiritual needs of the faithful that give rise to symbolico-religious practices and generate processes of creativity and imagination that go beyond the patterns that priests, the Church and religious movements have put in place to guide their followers in official and canonical ways.

It is not as simple as the 'pick and mix religion' theory of the 'religious market' (see Berger, 1967; Luckmann, 1967). The approach that is advocated here requires a study of the rationality of actors that transcends the theory of 'rational choice' as it applies to religion (Bruce, 2000). It is not a question of simple, rational and pragmatic options concerning 'religious consumption'. The faithful do not simply

pick and mix religious items to match their commitment and interest: they are indeed reinventing their 'own' forms of religion.⁶

At the level of the rationality of actors, the orientation towards the technico-mechanical control of reality is giving way to technico-symbolic control. In a parallel process, at the level of the religious sphere, the orientation towards symbolico-rational control (to which the main official, institutionalised religions belong with their dogmas, doctrines and rituals, etc.) is giving way to forms of symbolico-emotional-ritualistic control. They include use of the body, dance, ritual expressivity and 'rhythms' and harmonies' that are characteristic of alternative religious and magico-religious networks, which are competing, or syncretising, with official religions.

But it is important to point out that the symbolico-rational form of control exercised by official religions was structurally homologous with the technico-mechanical sway of the sciences and technologies of the industrial age. By contrast, the search for symbolico-emotional-ritual influence is structurally compatible with, and complementary to, the technico-symbolic domination associated with the new information and communication technologies.

Now that the discourse of official, institutional religion has become a grand narrative in crisis, and its rituals have become rationalised to the point where they have lost their sacrificial meaning and their original charisma, the old and new rituals of popular and syncretistic religions come to the fore. Indeed, new meaning, symbols and practices can help to re-symbolise one's 'own' religion (magico-religion) in the midst of all the uncertainty produced by a world in transition. New syncretistic narratives come to the fore (a sort of *Corpus Hermeticum Postmodernum*) as a counter-culture in opposition both to the rationalistic scientism that had already been surpassed and to the theological and ethical dogmatism of the historical Christian Churches.

4. *Situating the New Syncretisms in the Context of Globalising Culture*

Globalisation generates a tendency towards standardisation, although this process also encompasses a 'dialectic of difference' that works itself out in local identities and traditions. Standardisation and fragmentation thus appear as the obverse of each other. 'The identity that is lost here is recovered over there. The process of globalisation provokes a particularism, the remedy to the homogenous' (Debray, 1996, p. 65). These ideas help to explain why the proliferation of micro-communities (ethnic, cultural, religious, political) should be understood as a reaction against the sway of the transnational economy that destabilises traditional national, ethnic, cultural and religious boundaries, thereby threatening the sovereignty of local interlocutors. In his analysis of the process of globalisation, Castells (1999) argues that the construction of the 'social network' leads to a search for meaning and identity. He includes fundamentalist religious movements in the category of 'identity and resistance'.

As an example of the production of meaning that aims at universality, global and official religions generate meaning for local traditions – associative and idiosyncratic – in the new global framework. Thus, the religion of 'my parents' or

the one I was 'born into' lays down a basic identity and engrains itself in a symbolic secure 'territory'. But at the same time, this faith allows one to feel at one with a 'universal community', the global Church that counters the threats to sovereignty arising from capitalist technico-economic globalisation. By giving rise to this 'glo-cal' meaning, the process of globalisation launches the production of 'open' signs and symbols, for with the end of strong canonical censorship⁷ opportunities open up for believers to be creative about religious symbolism by means of syncretism.

And this is why we will find more and more 'do-it-yourself Christians', 'my way believers' or 'believers without belonging'. The affirmation of heterodox religious identity mediates between diverse symbolic worlds that are, at the same time, complementary to each other. For example, universal religion can serve as a point of reference for local traditions and the fruits of 'individual religious production'. They give voice to mobile, migratory and outlandish religious identity, but at the same time this type of identity is a bulwark against threats of uncertainty, fragmentation and annihilating uniformity.

This is why we need to understand the different forms of believing and the different levels of belonging *vis-à-vis* different socio-cultural, national and local contexts. It is in this context that we also need to understand that the cultural change that accompanies global society involves the emergence of several issues that challenge official religions and their religious and social programmes. From the point of view of the analysis we are proposing here, it is clear that, beyond official religions and their institutions, interaction takes place among the laity (as self-producers of their syncretistic beliefs). They deal with these issues in ways that reproduce their new identities.

What occurred with feminist interpretations of religion is an interesting example. For the most part, despite the higher level of women's participation in religion, Western and Church-oriented religion still functions as an institutional, juridical and normative expression of masculinity. Western religion continues to be the religion of priests and pastors – with some exceptions – and it retains its patriarchal characteristics in and through its symbolism and imagery. Today's religion still feeds coercive symbolic structures by stressing the hierarchies on earth and in heaven. This male religion is in sharp contrast to popular expressions, for popular religions tend to be affective and 'pneumatological'; they worship the providential and merciful God and, in some cases, the Mother God (devotion to the Virgin Mary is common in popular syncretistic Catholicism). Communal interests take precedence over hierarchies of authority.

IV. De-Westernisation and the Need for New Analytical Categories

The transformations of the Christian field have simultaneously promoted the de-Westernisation of Christianity and, paradoxically, opposed it. On the one hand, Church-oriented Catholicism has developed an official strategy of 'evangelising culture', which is nothing more than a way of resisting *and* adapting to the new conditions of global society. On the other hand, owing to its own historical

characteristics, Catholicism tends to generate greater tolerance towards various forms of popular Catholicism, including the distinctly syncretistic cults, towards indigenous religions, towards hermetic traditions and towards charismatic practices. They are some of the syncretistic expressions with which various evangelical Churches – especially Pentecostals and Adventists – tend to grapple. As a result of their schismatic tendencies these Churches diversify, boosting religious fundamentalisms that are intolerant not only of advanced modernity but also of the motley expressions of an increasingly diverse religious field.

In short, the changes that have taken place on the 'boundaries' of religion – changes that are related to the tendency towards the dissolution of the 'frontiers' of the information society – transform the religious field such as it was previously understood by sociological theory. This calls for a revision of concepts. For the 'de-Westernisation' of global religious reality forces us to rethink once again those sociological categories that are grounded in the experience, tradition and structure of Western religion. Nevertheless, we should never forget that the West has always had religious countercultural currents of the popular religious kind with a diversity of syncretisms, and hermetic and occult traditions with diverse magical components.

We are currently experiencing the transition from industrial to post-industrial society. This process has repercussions for the crisis of Church institutions whose structures had already adapted to the socio-political and cultural paradigms of the pre-information, mass society. Although the theory of religious fields conceptualised in and through dichotomies such as Church/Sect and magic/religion is still at least partially valid for advanced societies at the centre of the world-system, it is more difficult to apply this theory to the non-Western societies on the periphery of the world-system that are currently in the grip of globalisation. The emergence of many different forms of religion alongside Churches and new religious movements, especially the more diffuse expressions and 'do-it-yourself', non-Western expressions of religion for or against institutions, shows that we have reached a point where magic and religion interact in fluid forms and where the symbolico-spatial limits imposed by Church institutions in the classic 'religious field' have not completely disappeared. But these forms are being overtaken, mixed and dammed up by the flows, networks and interstitial spaces of the new magico-religious environment. They are 'networked' beliefs, signs, symbols and rituals lacking a clear hierarchy or a single orthodoxy or creed. This is the 'postmodern' religion of people who choose to restructure their religious ideas without breaking with their more classical expressions of faith. This is why tradition and innovation are intertwined in different types of popular religions but always in dialectical relations with institutions, always in search of 'liberty', and open to new expressions in the search for 'healing-salvation' in this globalised society of consumers.

V. Conclusions

The paradigm that has dominated the sociology of religion since the mid-twentieth century is changing. We have moved beyond the theory of secularisation. The *increasing religious diversity* of societies whose public culture is in crisis and is disenchanted is helping to invigorate sociology. The diversity of current developments includes: anti-globalising fundamentalisms; apolitical Churches centred on preaching and pastoral programmes; non-Western religions which are rapidly increasing in the West as a result of migration; the revitalisation of ethnic, local and indigenous religions on all continents; and new movements of syncretistic beliefs and new social movements that combine spiritual legitimisation with feminisms, ecologisms, communitarianism and localisms.

But a central dynamic in all these different changes has to do with the creativity of ordinary people. They aim to create their own religious meaning systems in different socio-cultural contexts with or without the support of the Churches. By means of this creativity they seek to introduce syncretistic ritual practices and beliefs in 'do-it-yourself' religio-magical forms, thereby opposing the hegemonic modernity of the global consumer society with forms of counter-culture.

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Notes

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- ² Indeed, we are witnessing the emergence of new types of self-identification such as, for example, 'faithful in my way', 'non-practising believer', 'do-it-yourself Catholic', 'believer without belonging', as well as new syncretic forms of ties to New Religious Movements. See Fortuny and De Mola (1999), Frigerio (1999), Baigent and Leigh (1999), Parker (1999; 2002), Carozzi (2000), Inglehart and Baker (2000), Nesti (2002), Serajsadeh (2002), Cipriano (2003), Garrelli (2003), Guerreiro (2003), Hjelm (2003), Lambert (2003).
- ³ Troeltsch analysed mysticism in a historical context where the stereotype was individual mysticism.
- ⁴ According to Mejido (2002, p. 306), 'only in this way will the power dynamic that is played out in the religious field, and which, through structural homologies, extends to other social fields, be uncovered'.
- ⁵ This is what Dorraj (1999) attempts to respond to in his article on the crisis of modernity and the revival of religious movements.
- ⁶ Sometimes a syncretistic religious practice may attract participants without demanding loyalty. Many people actively take part in religious practices such as Zen, yoga and witchcraft more often than they attend Church but they may still nominally identify themselves with the religion of their parents.
- ⁷ This liberalisation of canonical control is one of the main challenges that official religious apparatuses (mainly the Judaic and Christian traditions) are attempting to handle.