

ARTIGOS

Connections between Marxism and religion

Conexões entre Marxismo e religião

Conexiones entre el Marxismo y las religiones

Dr. Fábio Régio Bento¹

Abstract

In this research we shall verify the influence of Nicaraguan experience on breaking the paradigm under which religion and religious actors would be more associated to status quo preservation rather than its rupture. According to our work hypothesis, in Nicaragua religion was not the opium of the people, used for its social anesthesia, but the promoter of social changes, and through international diffusion of this experience, mainly in the context of socialist countries, the alliance between laic and Christian socialists in Nicaragua promoted also a shift in the traditional hermeneutic paradigm which reduced religion to the permanent condition of opium of the people.

Keywords: Marxism, Religion, Liberation Theology.

Resumo

Nessa pesquisa verificaremos a influência da experiência nicaraguense na quebra do paradigma segundo o qual a religião e os atores religiosos estariam associados mais à conservação do *status quo* do que à sua ruptura. Segundo nossa hipótese de trabalho, na Nicarágua a religião não foi ópio do povo, usada para a sua anestesia social, mas promotora de mudanças sociais, e, pela difusão internacional dessa experiência, sobretudo, no âmbito de países socialistas, a aliança entre socialistas leigos e cristãos na Nicarágua, promoveu, também, a quebra do paradigma hermenêutico tradicional que reduzia a religião à condição permanente de ópio do povo.

Palavras-chave: Marxismo, Religião, Teologia da Libertação

Resumen

En esa pesquisa verificaremos la influencia de la experiencia nicaragüense en la quiebra del paradigma según el cual la religión y los actores religiosos estarían asociados más a la conservación del *status quo* de lo que a la suya ruptura. Según nuestra hipótesis de trabajo, en Nicaragua la religión no era opio del pueblo, usada para la suya anestesia social, más promotora de mudanzas sociales, y, por la difusión internacional de esa experiencia, sobretudo, en el ámbito de los países socialistas, la alianza entre los socialistas legos y cristianos en la Nicaragua, promovió, también, la quiebra del paradigma hermenéutico tradicional que reducía la religión a la condicione permanente de opio del pueblo.

Palabras-clave: Marxismo, Religión, Teología de la liberación.

In Nicaragua, religion was not the opium of the people, used for its conservative social anesthesia, but a “revolutionary nettle”, expression I heard in April 2014, in Managuá, and a driving force also able to sustain, from the theological point of view, the popular liberation struggles.

¹ Doutor em Ciências Sociais, Universidade Federal do Pampa - Brasil, frbento@hotmail.com.

In this historical-descriptive-interpretative research, we shall use bibliographical sources and semi-structured interviews with religious actors directly involved in the above mentioned revolutionary processes. The visit *in loco*, together with the interviews, was made in April 2014, during a period of two weeks, in the cities of San Salvador (El Salvador) and Managua (Nicaragua), where it was also possible to collect bibliographical material.

In the first chapter we present the guiding premises of our research; in the second, we identify specifically the connections between Marxism and religion in this process of rupture of the “religion as opium of the people” paradigm, achieved through the experience of the Liberation theology movement in general, and with the distinctive contribution of the Sandinista Revolution (1979).

1.Guiding premises of research

1.1.Political critique of the interpretation of religion as opium of the people

In his “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right – Introduction”, written between December 1843, and January 1844, published in the *Franco-Germanic Annals* of 1844, Karl Marx affirmed that

Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.

In the essay entitled “Marx and Engels as sociologists of religion”, Michael Löwy claimed that the phrase “religion is the opium of the people” is not of Marx’s creation. Such assertion is previous to Marx, with different gradations in “Kant, Herder, Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer, and many others” (1998, p. 157). Löwy observes that the phrase needs to be understood in its complexity, highlighting the fact that Marx regards religion in its “dual character”, contradictory, dialectical, “sometimes as legitimation of existing society, at other times as protest against that society” (ibidem, p. 158).

Even if not being Marx’s creation, and not even being Marx’s most important claim concerning religion, it has become indeed popular, sounding as a paradigmatic political condemnation of religion, used as justification of that leftist political atheism according to which there would be no possibility of conciliation between religion and social revolution. As such, to be revolutionary, religious values ought to be abandoned; and, to be religious,

revolutionary values ought also to be abandoned. The political-religious atheism adopted by leftist groups and states that highlight this supposedly philosophical incompatibility, essential between social revolution and religion, certainly derives from this reductive interpretation of religion whose creative responsibility is often attributed to Mark.

According to Löwy, however, we find ourselves facing a hermeneutic mistake. For him it is in “The German Ideology” (1846) that will emerge the Marxist notion of religion as reflection of structural relations of production. “Reflex religion”, together with other ideological productions, such as Law, Moral, Politics, Metaphysics, “conditioned by material production and by the corresponding social relations” (ibidem, p. 158). This means already more than the mere anathema of “opium religion”. Besides this point, Löwy sustains in his essay on Marx and Engels as sociologists of religion that, for them, religion, as well as conditioned, can also condition, influence. He supports the thesis of the connection between “reflex and cause”. At his notice, what Marx and Engels make evident is the “intimate and efficacious connection between both phenomenon” (ibidem, p. 160).

In his video-lecture about “Karl Marx as a Sociologist of Religion”, Löwy highlighted, in brief, that the renowned claim that “religion is the opium of the people”, specific to a more metaphysical than historical, political-materialist debate about religions, was not invented by Marx; it was quoted by him and, above all, it is not a Marxist claim, even if it is a quote from Marx, but it is pre-Marxist because in that time Marx himself was not a Marxist (Löwy 2014). Such a claim, therefore, does not manifest what is central in Marxism about religion, which will only emerge in later texts of Marx about the connections between the material relations of production and the production of ideas (where religions are situated) to the maintenance or modification of these material relations of production (ibidem). What is indeed central in Marxism about religions is exactly what is central in Marxism about other forms of spiritual production (ideology) used by the dominant class for the reproduction of material relations of production.

In fact, in The German Ideology we read that

The ideas of the dominant class are, in each epoch, the dominant ideas, that is, the class which is the dominant material force of society is at the same time its dominant spiritual force. The class that has at its disposal the means of material production also disposes the means of spiritual production, in such a way that they are submitted to it approximately at the same time the thoughts of those whom lack the means of spiritual production (MARX; ENGELS 2007, p. 47).

Ideology is not a metaphysical production, but a militant thought, attached (connection) to intra-physical relations of production. We thus have the conservative militant thought of the dominant class that conquered its class hegemony (conservative ideology), and the ideology of the dominated classes, attached to the material interests of the majority in the sphere of the capitalist mode of production. In this sense, religion is the confessional version of the conservative ideology of dominant classes that possesses a religious creed, but it can also be the confessional version of the revolutionary ideology of subjugated classes that professes a particular religious creed.

Religions, therefore, are confessional ideologies of hermeneutic communities (also confessionals) which, from a political-Marxist point of view, serve to the maintenance of a specific class hegemony, along with Law, Moral, or for its overthrow, in accordance to the political interpretation produced by these confessional hermeneutic communities. Social classes that conquered political hegemony also rule political religious thought as a way of maintaining domination over its material production. And the dominated classes that acquire awareness of this domination produce political, lay, or confessional (when religious) interpretations turned towards contestation of this hegemony.

1.2.Liberation Theology

The expression Liberation Theology was used by Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, in July, 1968, when he lectured a conference with this title in Chimbote, Peru, later published in the capital Lima, and afterwards in Montevideo (GUTIÉRREZ 200, p. 12). This event occurred few weeks before the Second General Latin American Episcopate Conference, in the city of Medellín, Colombia, at the end of August and start of September, in 1968. Only in 1972, however, will Gutiérrez's book be translated, entitled "Liberation Theology – Perspectives".

What does Liberation Theology mean? Is it a new political-religious hermeneutics that contests present social order? In the introduction to the new edition of his book in 1972, Gutiérrez explained that "when we speak of liberation theology, we are referring to a vast movement" (2000, p. 47).

Liberation Theology as a "vast movement", intra and international (South and Central-America), endowed with a proper political-theological thought. In his *The Historical Power of the Poor*, Gustavo Gutiérrez highlighted that such a "vast movement" (Liberation Theology) "has its roots in a revolutionary militancy" (1977, p. 301). Liberation Theology, then, as a "vast movement" founded upon a "revolutionary militancy". A vast movement situated in

Central and Meridional America, a sort of Central and South-American “International” of the revolutionary Catholic left, with its origins in the 1960’s, in the popular political emancipation experiences. In the phenomena of Liberation Theology, we see these two elements: popular movements of social liberation and their political-theological hermeneutics. The expression Liberation Theology, therefore, although suggesting a reduction of its comprehension to the academic domain of theological hermeneutics on the Latin-American social struggles of liberation, is actually a broader phenomenon than the professional intellectual activity suggested explicitly by the expression.

Michael Löwy, in his studies about Liberation Theology, stressed Gutiérrez’s claim that it is not only about one stream of political-theological thought (Löwy 1989; 1991;2000;2013a; 2013b).

In “The Contribution of Liberation Theology”, an interview Löwy conceded in January 8, 2013, he asserted that

The Christianity of liberation is a vast social movement that appears in Brazil since the start of the 1960s – well before the appearance of the first books of Liberation Theology. This movement includes significant sectors of the clergy – priests, nuns, religious orders, bishops –, of religious movements like Ação Católica, JUC, JOC, ACO, of pastoral commissions such as Justiça e Paz, Pastoral da Terra, Pastoral Operária, and of the Ecclesiastical Base Communities. It is a broad and complex network that overcomes the limits of the church as institution and that unites, since the 1970s, millions of Christians that share the priority option towards the poor (Löwy, 2013a).

A “vast social movement” situated in South and Central-America, endowed with its own critical political theology in what concerns poverty and social inequality, which is subordinated to the social movement of emancipation. In sum, we see thought subordinated to the movement.

Liberation theology functions like a “critical reflection of historical praxis in light of the Word” (GUTIÉRREZ, 2000, p. 71), but what is the main political characteristic of this critical reflection? Through intellectual confrontation between the analysis of reality and interpretation of the biblical revelation (the “Word”), from within social movements of emancipation, Gutiérrez concluded that

Only a radical break with the present state of affairs, a profound transformation of the property system, the access to power of the exploited class, a social revolution that breaks with such dependency, can allow the passage of a different society, a socialist society. Or, at least, to make it possible (ibidem, 82).

The word liberation, therefore, from a political point of view is understood as rupture, social change from the roots (social revolution), different from the reformist perspective presented by the reformist Catholic left, oriented towards the Social Doctrine of the Church. “Only then”, concludes Gutiérrez, “in the context of this process, a politics of development can be done effectively, acquire meaning and avoid misleading formulations” (ibidem, p. 82). In other words, revolution, liberation, and rupture as assumption of social development politics. It is an anti-systemic political perspective the one adopted by Liberation Theology.

2.Paradigm Rupture in Nicaragua

The Nicaraguan Revolution of July 19, 1979, with the victory of the Frente Sandinista de Libertación Nacional (FSLN) over the Somoza dictatorship was more of a political rather than a socialist revolution, and a revolution characterized by the intimate political collaboration, in both its achievement and management, between the lay left and the Catholic left, which shared the same goal: to fight social inequality in the countryside and in the city, which was reproduced by the domination of rural and urban aristocratic oligarchies which had the USA as allies (PIVA, 1986; SANTOS, 1987; ZIMMERMANN, 2002).

Influenced by the Cuban revolution 20 years earlier, which defeated dictator Fulgêncio Batista, also in Nicaragua the guerrilla fighters were able to defeat a dictator and take on the political management of the state. In Cuba, the revolutionaries continue in power up to date (2015). In Nicaragua, the FSLN, after conquering power in 1979 through a political revolution, lost the elections in 1990, 1996, and 2001, returning to power through electing Daniel Ortega in 2006, who was reelected again in 2011.

Through association of the local dominant class and the USA, the social emancipation struggles in Nicaragua, since the times of Sandino, had a nationalist character of national sovereign assertion in relation to the dominant classes and their international ally. The reference to Sandino by the FSLN does not refer to sophisticated political theories, which did not characterize their thought. It was the political nationalist actions of Augusto Sandino which inspired the FSLN revolutionaries, with the addition of other sources, such as the Marxist reading of local social inequalities, and the political and theological critique of these inequalities made by the Christian Sandinistas linked with the Liberation Theology movement (Santos, 1987, p. 19-21).

In Nicaragua, Christians did not switch their faith for atheism to become revolutionaries; but they discovered the political-theological meaning of their revolutionary actions in favor of popular emancipation.

The observation that there was something wrong in the interpretation according to which a “essential” (metaphysical) contradiction would separate revolution from religion was already made by Carlos Fonseca Amador (1936-1976), founder of the FSLN (murdered three years before the triumph of the revolution), during the Nicaraguan revolutionary process, as explained by Father Fernando Cardena, in April 11, 2014, in Managuá, on a Friday morning during an interview he conceded me at the head office of the Movimiento Fe y Alegria, a social promotion and integral popular education institution of which he is director. Commandant Carlos Fonseca, murdered before the Sandinista victory, speaking with Fernando and his brother Ernesto, said to them:

“Here in Nicaragua we are going to make a revolution. We need you, priests. In Moscow they don’t understand that our people is religious and revolutionary. Here we’ll make a popular revolution. A revolution with faith. And we need you, priests”. Fonseca understood the popular faith. He said that “this faith needs priests like you. The people don’t need to stop being Christians to become revolutionary”. In Nicaragua, faith was not only opium, but also a nettle, a revolutionary nettle faith. We priests didn’t go fighting directly because we were told that the young guerrilla fighters knew how to do this better than us. We acted directly in international relations, promoting the revolution. I was the only one who visited more than 80 cities in Europe explaining our revolution. Central and South-American countries that supported our revolutions helped with weapons, money, and transportation.

Fonseca certainly arrived at this conclusion by having posed an analysis of the Nicaraguan material reality above the misleading philosophical paradigm, even if real, of the incompatibility between religion and revolution, derived from the reduction of religion to unilateral, permanent, immutable, and definitive political condition of opium of the people. A hermeneutic mistake that would have also been adopted by Moscow, by which one perceives in the dialogue between Fonseca and Fernando Cardenal.

Nicaragua, with its religious and revolutionary people, according to Fernando Cardenal’s statement, made Carlos Amador break with this paradigmatic mistaken conditioning already during the revolutionary process. And the dismantling of this hermeneutic mistake will continue to be propagated even after the 1979 Revolution. In fact, in this same interview, Fernando Cardenal explained that

During the celebration of the first year of the Sandinista Revolution, in July, 1980, Fidel came to visit us. We were happy for the “alliance between Christians and Marxists in the revolutionary fight”. Then, a nun stood her arm and said that it had been not quite so. “Wow, we allowed a reactionary nun enter the meeting with Fidel”, I thought. But then she concluded: “Here there was no alliance between Christians and Marxists. We all worked together in the revolutionary struggle, without this distinction”. She was not a reactionary nun, but a more revolutionary than I thought.

What other socialist states leaders were at this celebration of the first anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution? What did they think about the material relations between religion and revolution? The Nicaraguan experience had influenced them from the hermeneutic point of view of the relation between religion and revolution? We know the Cuban leader was present in this celebration and was “corrected” by this Catholic revolutionary nun.

In Nicaragua, in this first anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution in July 19, 1980, in which Fidel Castro visited, as referred by Fernando Cardenal, another prominent figure who was present was Frei Betto, who would interview the Cuban leader a few years later, resulting in the publication of the book *Fidel and Religion* (1986).

In the introduction to his book, Betto highlighted that, if, on the one hand, religious organizations or sectors of these organizations position themselves in a conservative and anti-revolutionary way towards Latin-American struggles of social emancipation, on the other, the mismatch between Christians and Marxists, or between Christian and lay revolutionaries also occurred because “many communists parties had failed for professing an academicist atheism which moved themselves away from the poor people impregnated with faith”(1986, p. 18).

The nettle religion of Nicaraguan Christian revolutionaries challenged this mistake which reduced religion to opium, even without rejecting such possibility of the conservative use of religion in the connections between ideology and production relations.

According to Betto, the Sandinista Revolution, achieved by a religious and revolutionary people, surprised Fidel Castro, for it was

The first time in history that Christians were actively part of an insurreccional process, motivated by their own faith, supported by their pastors. It was not a strategic alliance, the religious Nicaraguan stressed. There was a unity between Christians and Marxists among all people (*ibidem*, p. 19).

At this meeting in July, 1980, in Managua, Fidel manifested his “impression that the Biblical content is a highly revolutionary one; I believe that the teachings of Christ are highly revolutionary and coincide completely with a socialist’s objective, with a Marxist-Leninist’s” (*ibidem*, p. 19).

Certainly, the opinions of the Cuban leader, influenced by the experiences of the liberation Christians, also echoed, impacting the Marxist academics and government circles that reproduced the reductive hermeneutic of religion as opium, as it were a sort of a specific Marxist philosophical tradition about religion.

In fact, as highlighted by Löwy, “the predominant idea between Marxists”, referring to the Communist International, “was that a Christian who became a socialist or a communist had necessarily abandoned his/her old religious faiths, considered to be anti-scientific’ and idealist”(2000, p. 24).

Frei Betto, on the contrary, affirmed that “when Christians, endorsed by their Faith, are able to respond to the needs of the people and of history, their own religious convictions take them to the revolutionary militancy”, demonstrating “that one can be a Christian and at the same time a consequential revolutionary, and that there is no irresolvable contradiction between the two things”, thus contesting “the definite, absolute, metaphysical dogma, above any dialectics”, according to which religion would always be the opium of the people (1986, p. 330-331).

In the 1985 interview with Frei Betto in Cuba, Fidel Castro considered, however, that the expression “religion is the opium of the people” could have been “fair in a particular moment”, and still count in some situations, but

under no circumstances that phrase has or could have the character of a dogma or absolute truth. It is a truth adjusted to certain concrete historical conditions. I believe that it is absolutely dialectical and Marxist to arrive at this conclusion. In my opinion, religion, under the political view, is not in itself opium or miracle medicine. It can be either opium or wonderful medicine to the extent that it serves to defend the oppressors and the explorers or the oppressed and the exploited (ibidem, p. 332).

In another publication, Frei Betto stated that he had asked Fidel Castro, in 1980, when he met him in Managuá,

Why the Cuban state was confessional. He got a fright. ‘How confessional? We are atheists!’ I reacted: ‘to profess or reject the existence of God is confessionality, Commandant. Modernity requires laic parties and states’. He after all agreed. Shortly after, the Cuban Communist Party Statute and the country’s constitution were modified to give a laic character to both institutions (BETTO, 2014).

Whether or not influenced by the Sandinista Revolution and by the dialogue with the Christian revolutionaries, it is a fact that the Cuban leader acknowledged the political irrelevance of academicist atheism, derived from the reductive interpretation of religion as opium, to which Carlos Fonseca had recognized throughout the process before July 19, 1979, by the teachings of his own Nicaraguan people, simultaneously religious and revolutionary.

In Fidel’s assessment, in sum,

There are many Marxists who are doctrinaires. And I believe that to be doctrinaire in this issue hampers the main question. I believe we should think about the kingdom of this world, you and us, and we should precisely avoid the issues that refer to the kingdom of the other world. I see that there still are doctrinaires, it is not easy for us, but our relations with the church are getting progressively better (1986, p. 19).

Throughout the interview that was conceded in 1985 to Frei Betto, Fidel nonetheless highlighted that, in fact, the conflicts between the Catholic Church and the Cuban Revolution were of a political sort, since anti-revolutionary conspiracies were also organized inside some environments that were managed by the Catholic Church (ibidem, p. 213-215).

Yet, the philosophical “doctrinarian” issue against religion, even if outside the material reach of the historical analysis of the role of religion and religious agents in class struggles, was also present in Cuba.

As observed by the Brazilian theologian Clodovis Boff, in his visit to Cuba in September 1985, “a problematic point for the Church in Cuba” is the type of education that is ministered in schools, with the teachings of “atheist postulates”. He explained the reason of this claim with a statement:

I had in hands a book of “materialist philosophy”, used in schools, where one teaches with all the words that Jesus was a myth invented in the first centuries and which served to the poor to be comforted of their oppressed condition... We spoke of this at the Education Ministry, saying that such situation is by no means sustainable or not even simple from the standpoint of historical critique. He told us that, due to a lack of a proper educative literature, the books of ideological formation that are used in schools are, in their majority, translated from Russian and other languages (1989, p. 35).

Once again Moscow, previously questioned by Carlos Fonseca, now diffusing in Cuba school books which transmitted the metaphysical atheism and not the Marxist methodology of the material interpretation of religion in the context of class struggles. As observed in Clodovis Boff’s own statement, however, the use of these books, in Cuba, didn’t seem to be motivated by reasons of philosophical convictions, but economical. And what one also observes in this statement is that revolution with religion (Nicaragua, 1979) reverberated even in Cuba, otherwise the Minister of Education of the socialist island would have not even heard the tough critiques over the issues present by the Brazilian Catholic theologian, who was visiting the island as a liberation theologian after invitation of the Cuban socialist government.

In a recent interview, Frei Betto stated that much changed in Cuba after the publication of the book *Fidel and Religion* (BETTO, 2015). Betto stated that after the Cuban Communist

Party stopped being atheist, thus becoming laic – what had meant the “permission of Christians to join the party” –, “what mostly surprised the Cubans was that, after withdrawing the atheist character of the party, many communists confessed that they had always had faith, that they were Christians, but could not publicly admit it”(ibidem).

The book *Fidel and Religion*, which has been published in 34 countries and translated to 24 languages, continues to be current, according to Fidel Castro, who reread it in 2015. This book influenced Cuba and its revolution. What remains to be seen is whether *Fidel and Religion*, along with other publications of the Liberation Theology movement, also provoked changes in the interpretation of religion in countries such as Vietnam, the People’s Republic of China, in universities and in Marxist movements worldwide.

Either way, the anti-systemic political movements, be them laic or confessional, Marxists or of other anti-systemic matrix, with their focus in intra or international changes, have recently received an unexpected, unusual, and surprisingly intellectual support from the new Argentinian Pope, who sustains critical positions in relation to the old European centralism; a Pope turned to the peripheries of the world, who tries to push the Catholic Church to those places, and a Pope who is, above all, anti-systemic, to whom

The main cause of poverty is an economic system that displaced the person from the center and there instead placed the god of money; an economical system that excludes, always excludes; excludes the children, the elders, the young, without work... and that creates the culture of discard in which we live (POPE FRANCIS 2015).

In the year 2000, when questioning about the future of the liberation Christianity, after the neoliberal purgatory of the 1990’s, Löwy claimed that it was a difficult prediction, which depended on many “unknown variables, such as the identity of the new pope” (2000, p. 229). It seems that, depending on the new pope, there are new flourishing possibilities opened for the Liberation Theology movement.

3. Conclusion - Connections between Marxism and religion

This research starts around a scientific and academic curiosity in relation to a famous statement that we have all heard or read which is the assertion that, according to Marx, religion is the opium of the people.

In such statement we find a kind of condemnation of religion, reduced to a permanent state of drug, conservative anesthesia to keep social domination. It is a statement that

understands religion as an instrument of social conservation, to keep and reproduce a given power.

So, such assertion gives origin to the preparation of this article associated with an experience, which I had the opportunity to learn about directly, which is the experience of Christianity liberation, the so-called Liberation Theology, which is more of a social movement endowed with a political theology rather than a theological movement itself. Liberation theology is a theological movement of leftist Christians, a movement located, above all, mainly in South and Central America, a kind of international South and Central American Christian revolutionary left, specifically Catholic.

So, I examine this statement that religion would be the opium of the people from the prior knowledge that I had about the movement of Liberation Theology in general and about the experience of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua in particular .

So, the assertion that religion was the opium of the people, a condemnation attributed to Marx, was slightly shifted scientifically when confronted with the experience of Nicaragua in particular and the liberation theology movement in general. How can religion be reduced to the permanent ontological condition of opium of the people if, in Nicaragua, many of the people who played a crucial role in such political revolution were religious people who had not abandoned their religion to make this revolution, but gave a theological-liberating sense to it?

I started this research treating the statement "religion is the opium of the people" as if it was a Marxist paradigm to see if such paradigm would have been broken by Christian Liberation in general, particularly in the experience of Nicaragua.

The statement "religion is the opium of the people" appears as a quotation from Marx in his "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right - Introduction" from 1844. And it is interesting to observe that Marx, in this work, already presents religion in a dialectic way, as "an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering." However, what became famous was the conclusion that condemns religion to a conservative position (again, as the opium of the people), which is popularly interpreted as if it was a Marxist paradigm on religions.

Thus, I began with the hypothesis that Nicaragua, with its 1979 Revolution, would have broken the Marxist paradigm of religion as the opium of the people. However, during the development of this research, the assumption that the statement "religion is the opium of the people" would be a Marxist paradigm was challenged. In other words, to assert that religion was the opium of the people was a quotation from Marx, but it is not a Marxist paradigm on religions.

This finding emerged, especially in reading articles and books by the Marxist sociologist of religion Michael Lowy, an expert of the political part of liberation theology, for which, in 1844, Marx wasn't a Marxist yet and for which the Marxist paradigm of religion does not consist of condemning religion as the opium of the people, but to consider religion as a confessional ideology in the context of class struggles, vision that will emerge later, in *The German Ideology*, where religion is understood in the chapter on ideology, with the philosophy, the law, as conservative confessional ideology or transformative of material relations of production. Thus, religion as opium of the people is a quotation from Marx, but not a Marxist statement on religion.

So, would Nicaragua have broken the Marxist paradigm of religion as opium of the people, if it is not a Marxist paradigm? Lowy highlights that in a Marxist political sociology of religion, religious groups appear in connection with class struggles. This way, religions can indeed be opium, they can be interpreted in a conservative way, but they can also be interpreted in a revolutionary way.

However, even if not Marxist, the statement of religion as opium of the people, became internationally known as if it was a Marxist statement. It became famous, popular and influenced the local and international political debate as if it was a Marxist statement, being adopted even by Communist Parties and by States that were organized on the basis of Marxist postulates.

Indeed, considering religion as opium of the people has become something of a classic statement of Marxism about religion, even if it is the case of an incorrect classic, a classic of the hermeneutical mistake, as happened, for example, with Machiavelli, who never wrote that good ends justify the use of immoral means. Machiavelli never wrote it, but attributing that to him became celebrated, even if it was incorrect.

In the case of Marx, he cites that phrase (religion as opium), but it is simply a quotation, not a prescription, it is not a Marxist hermeneutic scheme. The Marxist thesis on religion is the connection between class struggles and ideologies, including the confessional ideologies.

The movement of liberation theology will fight, recant and disprove the thesis that religion would be ontologically the opium of the people, however, it is not about the overthrow of a Marxist scientific interpretation, but the overthrow of an hermeneutical mistake, mistakenly considered Marxist which became famous even among Marx's unsuspecting friends and opponents.

In Nicaragua, the perception that there was something wrong in the Marxist atheist thesis, derived from such a reductive interpretation of religion, already emerges in Carlos

Fonseca, founder of the Sandinista Front. Carlos Fonseca therefore rejects this misunderstanding that was being reproduced and exported by Moscow as if it was a Marxist hermeneutics.

Nicaragua, even before the storming of Managua in 1979, starts to cause disruption in those Marxist environments that reproduced the hermeneutical misunderstanding of religion as opium as if it was a Marxist paradigm.

In this way, the Sandinista Revolution in particular, in the general context of Christian Liberation, causes a rupture, a breaking, but it is not a paradigm shift, but a breaking of this mistaken hermeneutics, wrongly considered to be Marxist, and which became famous.

However, in the same way that the diffusion of this hermeneutical misunderstanding happened between political parties and Marxist States, there was also the spread of the challenge to this incorrect interpretation by the surely decisive power of the Southern and Central American Christian Liberation, in which the revolutionary experience of Nicaragua highlights.

The spread of the denial of this hermeneutic misunderstanding would gain strength when leaders and leftist intellectuals from around the world met in July 1980 in Nicaragua to celebrate the first anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution. The Catholic writer Frei Betto was present in this same event, who, a few years later would publish a series of interviews he did with Fidel Castro in a book entitled “Fidel and Religion”. This book insists on the denial of the conviction of religion to opium of the people and it highlights the disconnection between Marxism and atheism.

The book presents an example of hermeneutics of religion different from that conservative one, within the debate between Marxism, religion and revolution. With more than 30 editions, translated into many languages, this publication certainly disturbed the interpretation of religion made by those Marxists focused more on the metaphysics of atheism, rather than on the material analysis of the historical action of religious groups in the context of class struggle.

So, the experience of the Christian Liberation not only breaks the incorrect, but yet famous and popular hermeneutics of religion as opium, but also produces the spread of the contestation of this non-Marxist thesis which was adopted and internationally widespread as if it was Marxist by those thinkers who mistakenly associated the sociological materialism of Marxism to the philosophical materialism, metaphysical of atheism.

Marx could be an atheist, but the materialism of Marxism is not of a believer nor of an atheist. It is not about a philosophical nor a theological materialism, but rather a sociological, political, economic materialism.

It is an analysis focused on the relations of production, which recognizes that such material relations are legitimized or contested respectively by conservative or revolutionary ideological reproductions, be them of lay or confessional type.

So, the Marxists that promoted atheism as if it was a Marxist theory, apart from having committed a Marxist cognition error, also made a mistake from the political-strategic point of view to exclude from the revolutionary struggle the revolutionary believers, and offered to the opponents a fight to "Marxist atheism" as a flag of anti-communist ideological propaganda.

Regarding the use of the Marxist social analysis by Christians, there was once a Catholic priest, progressive, graduated in sociology, who stated that Christians should know how to separate the sociological part of the philosophical atheist part of Marxism. The first would be wheat, the second chaff.

Now for what was found in this research, this second part would not be even Marxist, would not be part of the methodology of sociological materialism of Marxism. It would be about a kind of improper addition, prepared not by Marx, but the exotic Marxism of metaphysical Marxists. Not only the Marxist Christians should reject this second part, which is philosophical, ontological, metaphysical, but all those who interpret the materialism of Marx, being believers or atheists, as a sociological, intraphysical, historical, political and dialectical materialism.

So, the traditional mismatch between Marxists and Catholics was developed, on the one hand, by the conservative part of the Catholic Church, which stood next to the oppressors in the class struggle, and created ad hoc even a conservative confessional ideology that regarded as messianic the anticommunist struggle, and on the other hand, for those exotic Marxists who interpreted the historical and dialectical materialism of Marx in the philosophical, metaphysical and ontological sense.

Nicaragua, with its "revolution made with faith", in the words of Carlos Fonseca, not only helps the revolutionary Christians to understand the theoretical and practical relationship between Christian faith and revolution, but it helps the very Marxist analysis to finally break free from the metaphysical "to believe or not to believe", an irrelevant matter to the sociological materialism of Marxism, guiding itself to the political understanding of the historical actions of systemic and anti-systemic religious groups in the belligerent context of the material relations of production imposed by the international capitalist system.

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