

## CRITICAL THINKING AND RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

# El pensamiento crítico y las creencias religiosas

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### Abstract

The present article proposes to analyze the need to apply the critical thought at the moment of assuming a religious belief. Because the religious prescripts induce in the believer concrete behaviors, it is necessary to reflect critically in the consequences of assuming a belief in general and a religious belief in particular, to expire with this intention it becomes indispensable to consider the fundamental beginning that they sustain to the critical thought and to the contemporary critical pedagogics. A groundless or assumed way belief acritical is a source of subjectivism, of dogmatism and of fanaticism that must be avoided. There is checked briefly the function of the religious leaders and of the philosophy of the religion in the education of the beliefs, and, there decides the incidence of the critical thought in the religious beliefs in this sense is analyzed how certain religious leaders manipulate its followers by means of fanciful interpretations of the sacred books, often motivated by the Protestant prescript of the free interpretation of the Bible suggested with Lutero from the Renaissance epoch. It values the dialogue that must exist between reason and faith; he promotes the critical thought as a mechanism to educate in the religious faith. To conclude, the work proposes rules and alternatives for the comprehension of the religious beliefs. It is a bibliographical and documentary investigation that like operational strategy he contributed to the observation and the tidy and systematical reflection of the investigated topic, it is helped in the deductive - inductive, inductive - deductive methods and in the methods phenomenological hermeneutically.

### Keywords

Critical thinking, religious beliefs, philosophy, religion, manipulation.

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### Resumen

El presente artículo se propone analizar la necesidad de aplicar el pensamiento crítico en el momento de asumir una creencia religiosa. Debido a que los preceptos religiosos inducen en el creyente comportamientos concretos, es necesario reflexionar críticamente en las consecuencias de asumir una creencia en general y una creencia religiosa en particular, para cumplir con este propósito se hace indispensable considerar los principios fundamentales que sustentan al pensamiento crítico y a la pedagogía crítica contemporánea. Una creencia infundada o asumida de manera acrítica es fuente de subjetivismo, de dogmatismo y de fanatismo que deben ser evitados. Se revisa brevemente la función de los líderes religiosos y de la filosofía de la religión en la educación de las creencias, y, se determina la incidencia del pensamiento crítico en las creencias religiosas. Se analiza cómo ciertos líderes religiosos manipulan a sus seguidores mediante interpretaciones antojadizas de los libros sagrados, muchas veces motivadas por el precepto protestante de la libre interpretación de la Biblia sugerida con Lutero desde la época renacentista. Valora el diálogo que debe existir entre razón y fe; promueve el pensamiento crítico como un mecanismo para educar en la fe religiosa. Para concluir, el trabajo propone pautas y alternativas para la comprensión de las creencias religiosas. Es una investigación bibliográfica y documental que como estrategia operacional contribuyó para la observación y la reflexión ordenada y sistemática del tema investigado, se auxilia en los métodos deductivo-inductivo, inductivo-deductivo y en los métodos fenomenológico-hermenéutico.

### Palabras clave

Pensamiento crítico, creencias religiosas, filosofía, religión, manipulación.

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## Introduction

The theme Critical thinking and religious beliefs, has as its central objective to analyze the need to apply critical thinking at the moment of assuming a religious belief.

The problem analyzed in this investigation is that a religious belief assumed in an uncritical way brings with it submissive behaviors that dilute the subject that experiences it. If one starts from the idea that every religious mandate or precept involves concrete attitudes and behaviors that demand a critical review of the consequences that come with assuming a belief in general and a religious belief in particular, the idea to defend in this article is that a religious belief assumed in a critical way leads to active, constructive, proactive and coherent thoughts and behaviors.

The human being is immersed in a complex society marked by a whole set of information product of the advancement of science and technology, a situation that invites us to rethink processes of search, selection and critical processing of information that over time configure new ways of thinking and acting in the world. In every human action it is essential to exercise critical thinking as a fundamental part of individual and social progress.

Throughout history it has been proven that the progress of the human being belongs to those who think for themselves, who validate

and support their ideas. The great philosophers would not have advanced if they had not dared to think critically about the environment and everything that happened around him, Copernicus would not have generated his heliocentric theory if he dared not question and scientifically demonstrate that the geocentric theory prevailing in the ancient ages and Medieval was wrong.

Critical thinking is the fundamental engine for the advancement of the human species. However, although the moral principles on which religious creeds are based preach love and respect for others, as strategies for coexistence and social well-being, throughout history it has been found that in most religions they have become an obstacle to the progress of reason and science by implicitly or explicitly promoting the abandonment of critical thinking, an aspect evidenced in the formulation of simple answers to the great enigmas of nature that in the end truncate curiosity and permanent longing to know.

Given the above, it is important to consider the incidence of critical thinking in religious beliefs for which it is essential to rethink the role of religious leaders, philosophers of religion and educators in general who should promote a common task that tends towards a critical thinking that allows us to understand the meaning and meaning of life, which promotes the understanding of the coexistence between reason and faith. In short, critical thinking should be considered as a mechanism to educate in religious faith for which guidelines and alternatives are proposed that allow the understanding of the problem.

For its part, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, has enshrined the freedom of worship, belief and conscience and under these principles, every citizen has the freedom to choose their religion or philosophy of life without any state coercion. This, in turn, empowers him to join the religious group of his choice and receive the teachings taught there.

Until there is no problem, the inconveniences arise when religious leaders, philosophers of religion and religion educators manipulate the good faith of believers. Through precepts or mandates, often based on the sacred books, they can convince their followers to perform acts that are destructive or harmful to themselves and to society, an aspect that occurs when the believer cancels his critical capacity, when he does not oppose resistance and is limited to blindly accept everything imposed by a third party.

The aforementioned demonstrates the need to educate every citizen in the use of critical thinking since, if all people and especially those



with religious faith, had a criterion formed with respect to the truths of faith, they would also have the necessary cognitive tools to discover deceptions and not to be easy prey to manipulations. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to show how the development and use of critical thinking can help believers to better understand their faith and the precepts that guide their actions and omissions.

The article is structured in four parts: In the first one it makes a conceptual approach to critical thinking and beliefs; in the second part, he reflects on the role of religious leaders and the philosophy of religion in the education of beliefs; in the third part, it analyzes the incidence of critical thinking in the understanding of individual and social religious beliefs; and in the fourth part, he proposes alternatives for rational understanding of religious beliefs. Next, the proposed content is developed.

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## Conceptual approach to critical thinking

To reflect on critical thinking, it is necessary to explain the meaning of thought in general, for this we turn to the affirmations of Saladino (2012) for whom the term thought is:

...a noun constructed from the verb to think, which comes from the Latin *pensare*. [...] can be understood in six different ways: 1) Intellectual faculty; 2) Action and effect of thinking; 3) Set of ideas of a person or community; 4) Discursive ideas; 5) Creative self-consciousness; 6) Reflection on the basis of which to proceed (p.1).

Therefore, its semantics encompasses both the productive activity and its product and is used as a synonym respectively of intellect, reason, idea and judgment.

Speaking of critical thinking implies referring to a polysemic concept derived from the same complexity of thought, it forces us to return to what Floralba Aguilar (2012), in explaining the problematic of thought, calls the “internal structure or psychological processes that determine it” (p. 11). In this sense, it is necessary to understand the very essence of critical thinking and then determine the fundamental characteristics, their classes and their incidence in religious beliefs.

Following the exhibition by Floralba Aguilar (2012), it is necessary to consider that reflecting on thought “implies a return to the thinking subject and its multiple relationships” (p.11). The author considers that the human being is a “relational, related, situated and open to the whole,

including is influenced by internal physical-chemical reactions that allow him to act, think and be in such and such a way” (p. 12).

Effectively, thought intervenes in all human facets for what is associated with the totality of the human being involving some human dimensions such as those established by Floraba Aguilar (2012) “imagination, emotion, volition, sensation, perception, the representation, etc.” (p.12). According to Aguilar (2012) “in the exploration of the phenomenon of thought we have a diversity of problems and approaches that generate a series of edges from which it can be approached” (p.12). This author refers to three problems of thought: origin; forms, structures and moments of thought.

In general, critical thinking is understood as a *reflective* and reasonable thought centered on the ability of the human being to decide what to believe or what to do; reflective, insofar as it analyzes results and situations of the subject involved in the processes; *reasonable* since of all the dimensions of thought, the reason is the one that predominates; *evaluative* since it involves an evaluative judgment on all the actions and decisions made in life; Therefore, it is admitted that critical thinking includes problem solving and decision making.

Likewise, according to Rosa María Torres (1998), the human being with critical thinking is characterized by the following:

By having an *open mind* that allows him to investigate, examine ideas and knowledge; for his *intellectual humility* to the extent that he has managed to develop awareness of the limits of knowledge and the recognition of mistakes; for the *freedom of thought* that leads to think for itself and to be guided according to principles and precepts for human justice and dignity; for its integrity before the consequences because it is important to face with justice ideas, visions, errors and truths of the human being; for his intellectual empathy that allows to respect the points of view of others and to place himself in the place of the other to work in justice and equity; for his *intellectual integrity* that explains the need to be honest in his thinking while respecting individual convictions; for his intellectual perseverance since he recommends that the human being must have an insightful attitude that must be used when facing the irrationality of others; for their confidence in reason, valuing people who can think of themselves and others guided by the principles of clarity, coherence and logic; for his *impartiality*, for the establishment of intellectual standards; for the *motivation and willingness* to address problems with a broad disposition.

In the following section a brief conceptualization, foundation and problematization about religious beliefs is made.

## Religious beliefs

This subtopic begins with the analysis of the characteristics of the belief in general and then determines in them the incidence of critical thinking. The human being is able to observe the environment, capture information through the senses, process that information and develop a cognitive content.

Memory plays an important role in the cognitive process of the human being for the registration, storage and timely recovery of knowledge. This process of capturing, processing information and producing new knowledge is a constant process that does not stop until the moment when we cease to exist. But what about the validity of spontaneous and even scientific knowledge? Currently it is known that it is not always definitive.

Who thinks, analyzes and understands, only defines a provisional status of truth of the knowledge that until that moment has acquired or produced. Much of what the scientific community has taken for granted, when new research is done, has been proven to be false or, at least, not totally true. A clear example we have in the cosmological theories that from the geocentric theory proposed by Ptolemy and Aristotle, to the heliocentric defended by Galileo with its precedent in Copernicus have undergone a series of refutations until reaching the current universe model itself that will continue to change according to discoveries that appear in the future.

Hence, “believe” only defines the fact of “taking a proposition as certain”. Therefore, it is considered that a belief is only that which any human being takes for granted. It does not matter if the content of that proposition is true or false; the act of believing only attributes to it subjectively the status of true.

Thus, the proposition: “God exists”. If this proposition is taken for granted, it is believed that God exists. It also happens with the negative proposition: “God does not exist”, if this proposition is taken for granted, it is believed that God does not exist. Thus it is understood that beyond whether God exists or not, in this case, it is the subject who attributes to the ideas raised the status of true.

Now, if to define if something is good, valid or true, take as a basis only the personal opinion, it would be a big mistake. Experience indicates that if someone is convinced that drinking too much alcohol will

not cause any harm, we know that your personal opinion will not save you from dying if your liver develops cirrhosis. At the moment in which a person radicalizes his subjectivist position, he can annul any possibility of reflection, being able to reach dogmatism and even fanaticism.

As Adela Cortina (1994) correctly points out, “a dogmatic person is one who immunizes his convictions, be they theoretical or moral, against rational criticism, and does not allow others to question them, nor is he willing to do so himself. to review them” (p. 84). But what happens when a fan becomes powerful? The history of humanity reveals that this fact has always had disastrous consequences for society. The genocides: Jewish, Armenian, Guatemalan, Cambodian, in Rwandan and Bosnian, to name a few, terrorist acts in different parts of the world, etc., clearly show how destructive it is for society when power falls into the hands of leaders political or religious fanatics.

To prevent the mentioned problems, it is necessary to educate in values, it is necessary to teach to discern between what builds society and what can destroy it. This attitude of discernment should also apply to religious beliefs since every believer should learn to analyze the moral and axiological contents of the doctrines of different religions. In fact, it is important to know what is the true meaning of religion, of salvation, of the concepts of heaven, hell, etc. Many times, the ignorance of religious language leads the believer to believe things that are not coherent and to perform destructive acts.

In order to understand the religious phenomenon, we try to define what is meant by religion. In this sense, in the philosophical dictionary of José Ferrater Mora José (2001) it is said that: “religion comes from *religio*, which in turn is related to *religatio*, a term that is a substantiation of *religare* (unite, bind)” (p. 3062). From the above, it is understood that religion is a deep relationship between two or more beings.

From the perspective of the Dictionary of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language (2016), religion is a set of beliefs or dogmas about divinity, these beliefs will motivate the believer feelings of veneration, fear, etc.; they will generate moral standards, rites, prayer and sacrifices to worship him. In this second definition, the relation to whom the term *religatio* refers is between man and divinity. From the affirmed it is inferred that every religion has three fundamental elements: the human being, the mediations and the supreme Being. To study how to apply critical thinking in the field of religion, it is necessary to focus on the functions and tasks of religious leaders and the philosopher of religion as one of the main mediations predominant in all religion.



## The role of religious leaders

Of the many means that the human being has built to relate to God, one of the most important is found in religious leaders and the philosopher of religion. In every religion, the leaders have been the ones who have elaborated the beliefs and the precepts, which, according to them, God has revealed to them, we have some examples:

In animism, it was considered that the adoration of the ancestors was necessary, that “dreams are means of communication with spirits” (Torres, 2011, p. 67), and so they built rites, cults, taboos made by priests, sorcerers or shamans. That is why it is justified that among the Greeks, the Romans, the Mayans, the Aztecs, the Egyptians and others, the presence of numerous gods has been significant. These polytheistic societies worshipped a variety of clay or stone statues that represented their different gods, but according to Torres (2011) there were also kings or emperors who personified God and demanded his worship, an example of these polytheistic religions is Hinduism that still predominates in India and other regions.

In any case, in the polytheistic and monotheistic religions, the leaders act as priests; they are the ones that constitute the nexus between the sacred and the profane; they are the ones who lead men to the divine presence. Since the establishment of Christianity, the priest becomes the leader who guides the life, thought and conscience of Catholics, however, with the advent of the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church experiences a fragmentation that little by little stops side the ministerial priesthood and gives way to the lay priesthood where the religious leader is the pastor. Priests and pastors based on the Sacred Scriptures, up to the present time, use preaching as a basic instrument to guide their parishioners.

An important aspect in the theme of religious leaders is that of the founders of the different religions who gradually defined a type of belief that eventually expanded into the great regions, among them stand out: Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, etc. All of them, according to their testimony, have received the message directly from God and since then they will be in charge of revealing the word of God to all humanity, they will be responsible for transmitting to human beings, the teachings provided by the deity. In this regard, Adela Cortina focuses on two fundamental aspects of all religious revelation: “that of those who are direct recipients of the revelation and who grasp its truth as evident, and those who have to believe by tradition in a revelation that the former claim to have received” (Cortina, 1996, p. 220). That person who receives the teaching of the teacher, through a disciple, must make an act of faith and believe without having seen, either by oral or written tradition.

At the time the founder's teachings are written, these writings rise to the category of *sacred*. With time, such texts will serve to know, not only what the founder said, but also what, according to the believer, God reveals to him for his current life. To know such revelation, the sacred text must be interpreted. It is known that, in the different religions, those who have interpreted the sacred books have been the religious leaders; monks, priests, or prophets, have taught their faithful what, according to their interpretation, God wants from them. In the case of Catholic Christianity, as early as middle ages, "Scripture appears in the eyes of the whole world as a confusing, esoteric and almost unintelligible book whose interpretation can only be carried out by some initiates: the elite of canonists and theologians in service of the Pope" (Grau, 2009, p. 1). Protestant Christianity will differ radically in this aspect as will be seen later.

But, beyond the technical interpretation of the experts, because every human being has the ability to reflect and understand, we could all interpret a sacred text. But, as is logical, who does not have the technical knowledge to make an interpretation, will not get to know for sure what the original author wanted to say, will only infer what his imagination tells him. In the philosophical field, the discipline that allows a technical interpretation of any ancient text, is hermeneutics,

... an auxiliary discipline for the explanation of the Bible and the classical texts of human history,... at the end of the eighteenth century so many aporias of the explanation and interpretation of the Bible and the classical texts accumulated;... the very process of acquiring knowledge had become his main problem. This is the moment in which the interpretation needed a critical reflection around its theory and methodology, a reflection that could no longer be limited to the framework of the interpretation of the Bible and the classical texts,.. (Demon, 2013, p 39).

The studies demanded to extend to other disciplines such as literature, art, history and the human sciences in general, always having as antecedents to Schelaimacher, Dilthey and Heidegger, the philosophical hermeneutics was developed by Hans Geor Gadamer. This discipline has helped greatly in the understanding of texts, ideas and beliefs.

In the field of religion, it is very important to apply the principles of hermeneutics, since a misinterpretation of a text, event or event could well lead to death to innocent beings, as the example of the cult of God tells us. Moloch:

Carthage had Moloch as the supreme and protective god of the city. The statue of the bronze god Moloch had the body of a man and the

head of a bull with horns; in its bosom the young people who offered themselves as propitiatory victims were shut up and burned. Like every idol, Moloch asked for blood and devoured man (Herrero, 1999, p. 225).

If some natural catastrophe happened or they were devastated by other towns, the logical interpretation was that Moloch was angry. To appease this anger, the holocaust was carried out.

In this context, the point made by Kant (1972) regarding the veracity of the divine mandates that can be found in a sacred text is very important. In his work *Religion within the limits of mere reason*, when analyzing the authentic and false cult, indicates that:

To that judge the revelation has come to him only through men, just like his interpretation, and if it seems to him that it has also come from God himself (like the order given to Abraham to sacrifice his own son as a lamb), it is at least possible that there is an error in this (Kant, 1972, p. 190).

Here it clearly indicates that all revelation and all interpretation can have errors; the logical conclusion is that leaders and followers should analyze well what they think God reveals to them. The fact that there are pernicious extremes in religious beliefs makes it necessary to seek a limit to the actions motivated by those beliefs. These limits must be defined by critical rationality and not only by the mere belief in a “divine revelation.”

Nowadays, thanks to the emergence of positive sciences and human sciences, religious beliefs have been changing. Cosmology, biology, medicine, as well as philosophy, and in this case hermeneutics, have helped to better understand and interpret the sacred books, many of the catastrophes that in ancient times were attributed to the wrath of the gods, today it is known that they are nothing more than natural phenomena.

In this scenario, it is important to analyze the problem of interpretation of the sacred books in Protestant Christianity whose main pillar is located in the Protestant Reformation promoted by Luther with the idea about the “free interpretation of the Bible.” Beyond whether Luther was right or not, or whether his intention was good or not, the fact is that, by proclaiming a free reading and interpretation of the Bible, he laid the foundations for anyone to make his particular interpretation and elaborate your own Christian beliefs. As a consequence of this arose the Protestant historical churches - Lutheran, Anglican and Calvinist - and today the thousands of groups called Christians.

But, one thing is what writing says and another thing that any person understands or deliberately invents when reading the sacred text. To avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations, it is necessary that, the person

who is going to perform an interpretation work, have technical training, especially in hermeneutics. With the necessary philosophical knowledge, every interpreter will have the necessary bases to understand what the author really meant when writing the text. If the interpretation is taken into account: the language in which the text is written; the cultural, social, historical or political context; the contributions of science on the subject that deals with the text object of interpretation, etc., will be more likely to understand with certainty what the author said. In the opposite case, who does not have the appropriate philosophical training, cannot make a good interpretation of any text and the conclusions reached will be a mere personal opinion that can even lead to express things that the sacred text does not say.

Of course, it may be the case that some unscrupulous religious leader deliberately manipulates the interpretation of the Bible according to their personal interests and in order to obtain some benefit of their own. From biblical texts can build messages and meanings that endorse their requirements harming others to be presented as a divine mandate, this happens because there are believers who absolutely trust their leader and fully assume the mandates formulated. This types of believers nullify their critical and reflective capacity that leads them to obey blindly without analyzing whether such obedience benefits them or harms them.

Also in the political, it may be the case of the manipulation of religious beliefs and misinterpretations of the Bible. David Stoll (2002) in his work *Latin America becomes Protestant?* shows how Protestant groups have influenced the local politics of Latin American peoples. Unlike liberal Protestants and much of the Catholic Church, prominent figures like Luis Palau advised Latin Americans to focus on improving themselves instead of working for structural changes. These leaders claimed to be apolitical, but commonly supported any regime in power. For a minority that faced the hostility of the Catholic Church in an unstable political environment, aligning with a dictator seemed to be the only way to safeguard freedom of worship, as follows:

...the belief based on a fundamentalist interpretation of Romans 13: 1, that any anti-communist government was ordained by God. When a large part of the Catholic clergy turned against military regimes in the 1970s, evangelical leaders generally did not. Some preached submission to dictatorships and defended the status quo, as if it were a work of the Lord (Stoll, 2002, p. 33).

Another example of Protestant interference in Latin American politics can be found in the Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon,

a religious group that had a conspiratorial policy. Moon's disciples won a number of neophytes in Latin America, but their main vehicle was a political interest group called the Confederation of Associations for the Unification of American Societies (CAUSA); its cause was "to combat communism in America, for which purpose the group was in charge of improving the foreign image of military dictatorships and providing logistical support to the Nicaraguan contras" (Stoll, 2002, p. 28).

As we can see, religious beliefs have a great motivational power. Many of them have been forged through the personal interpretation of sacred writings. The human need to direct these interpretations and beliefs towards the building of man and not to destroy it is also exposed. This will only be possible if you are educated in critical thinking.

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## Role of philosophy of religion

To expose about the role of the philosophy of religion, it is important to consider some essential aspects related to the religious phenomenon. It is necessary to understand that to determine the foundation of the religious phenomenon it is necessary to recognize the contribution of anthropology and philosophy.

The religious phenomenon can be understood as a system of orientation of life forms linked to the field of emotions, it requires considering religious ethos, behavior and customs in their variants.

From the anthropology, according to González (2013) there are at least three theories about religion: a psychological subjective that shows that the origin of religion is found in the very nature of man who feels the need of a supreme being that has meaning and hope for your life. In this regard, from antiquity we find statements such as that of Protagoras that said that "man is the measure of all things, of what they are in what they are and what they are not, insofar as they are not". it induces us to think that even God depends on man; in this same line we find Schleiermacher who considered that religion began with a sense of dependence; Feuerbach argued that the concept of God is the image of an idealized person because the human being tends to look outside of him for what he does not find in him; Freud stated that the idea of God arises from the basic human need for a father image that finally becomes the image of God.

In this regard, Gonzalez (2013) argues that this is explained when in the Bible, "in Genesis 1 we find that we are created in the image of God with the intention that we had a relationship with him. In Romans 1:20

it says that all men have a knowledge of God engraved in their hearts” (p. 181). The foregoing confirms the thesis that God is a fundamental part of human nature.

Following Gonzalez (2013), the other theory about the beginning of religion is an evolutionary approach that considers that religion originates with man because religion is the result of an evolutionary process of human culture that goes from the purely material up to the conceptions of spirits (of nature and ancestral) of animistic character; then appears the polytheism centered on the belief of several gods and from here the cultures evolve towards the final stage that is the monotheism.

Gonzalez himself / (2013), states that the third model for the origin of religion is the original monotheism that says that religion originates when God reveals himself to man.

Winfried Corduan, cited by González (2013), identifies nine characteristics of the first form of religion of man that considers that:

God is a personal God; it is referred to with grammar and masculine qualities; it is believed that God lives in heaven; He has great knowledge and power; he created the world; God is the author of the norms of good and evil; human beings are creatures of God and are expected to live according to their norms; human beings have been alienated from God by disobeying their norms; God has provided a method to overcome this alienation (p. 179).

It is said that the human being in his effort to survive in a world full of spiritual forces should have the power to manipulate nature and different forces so they resorted to the use of magic, myth, ritual and legend as mechanisms of explanation and control of the world and of itself until little by little it is rationalizing everything that happens in the environment in which the human being participates. This leads some scholars to establish that religion had three fundamental stages: magic, taboo and religion proper. For its part, the logos becomes a new mechanism for understanding all the problems inherent in the immediate and immediate reality that will soon find its answers through the new methods incorporated by science.

If one considers that the religious phenomenon has the function of organizing and guiding the life forms of human beings as the various anthropological studies have shown, then it must also be admitted that the sacred or divine will remain a necessity of human existence. And according to this perspective shared by several anthropologists and philosophers, religion will continue to be the best attempt to solve what oscillates

within the limits of reason and science, it is a reality expressed through feeling, which is located in the emotional dimension of the human being.

By the above stated, all religion affects the way of thinking, being and acting of the human being.

Therefore, in this scenario, *what is the role of the philosophy of religion in the education of beliefs?* In this regard, it can be argued that one of the tasks of the philosophy of religion is to rationally determine the being, the essence, the existence, the meaning and the meaning of the religious phenomenon. The philosophy of religion is called to understand the thought and action of the subject around the religious beliefs that regulate its existence.

For there to be a philosophy of religion, two necessary conditions are required: that there is a religion that becomes an object of study and that there is a philosophy that questions it consciously and critically, a philosophy that problematizes, that seeks its causes, foundations, essences and consequences.

In this sense, it corresponds to the philosophy of religion to understand the nature, possibility, origin, essence, form and truth of the religious phenomenon. The focus on the problem of truth is one of the major questions that mark the difference between philosophy and religion. In this sense, already the ancient philosophers had discovered that experiences cannot be transmitted.

Considering the aforementioned, what should the philosophy of religion do to educate in beliefs? Objectively speaking, the philosophy of religion will have to move between two truths: rational trust in belief and faith. Faith guides trust and belief can be true or false, both are individual. In this regard, Gonzalez (2013) states that the philosopher of religion is based on faith, opinion and evidence that lead him from belief to knowledge-conviction, while the only religion is based on faith-belief that leads him to knowledge based on the principle of an external authority.

Between the philosophy of religion and education has always been a close relationship is that religion and myth was not only the framework in which they generated the first explanations about the cosmic order and the place of human beings and their mutual relationships in the same, but that religion has been and continues to be the forger of basic rules of social coexistence and moral imperatives unavoidable for the human being.

In this sense, religion from a historical point of view, was one of the first educators of human groups understanding by education the subjective or intersubjective assimilation of explanatory frameworks about why reality is as it is and about what is the place of individuals and the community

in that reality. Religion also nurtured the social practices of normative referents that strongly indicated the good or bad, just or unjust character of human actions. Religion must be understood as a sociocultural construct.

Traditionally human societies were educated by religious world-views and by those who exercised authority. It was thus that first philosophy and then science, established gaps in the educational field. Hence, the philosophy of religion would have as one of its functions to generate critical awareness about the way to assume beliefs and contribute rationally to the individual and social transformation of the subject.

Historically we find that philosophy from the pre-Socratics to the present and science from the Renaissance on, do not exclude religion from educational work. Hence, the role of the philosophy of religion in education is important to generate new conceptions about man, the world and God that at the same time contributes to the development of a new vision of education, a critical education based on arguments and in real contexts that contribute to the realization of the human being as an integral and integral subject.

If science and philosophy provide the normative horizon necessary for life, the philosophy of religion must establish a critical intellectual and cultural framework that completes the formative and spiritual process of the human being. The philosophy of religion should propose rational mechanisms to strengthen religious beliefs, to defend the faith in all social areas, especially in the educational field in order to overcome the moral and spiritual crises that are experienced in the past time.

Philosophy of religion can become the space for orientation and creation of the very meaning of life; It can also become the place to overcome the various existential problems experienced by the human being.

Philosophy of religion provides the necessary rational tools that allow “recover, overcome and adapt successfully in the face of adversity, and develop social, academic and vocational competence,...” (Henderson and Milstein, 2003, pp. 26-27), aspect that Kirkin and Hoopman call resilience, understood as a psychobiological process that concerns the secret that exists in every individual; Resilience understood as the capacity to transform, to rework an unbearable event into something livable.

All religious beliefs must be understood and interpreted from the textual and contextual demands that they demand. In turn, the educational process cannot omit and worse renounce the process of intersubjective formation that leads critically to the search for truth and justice.

Following are some reflections about the incidence of critical thinking in the understanding of religious beliefs.

## Incidence of critical thinking in the understanding of individual and social religious beliefs

For the understanding of this topic, it is important to make some points about the person and its connection with the culture itself since this is what determines in some way the type of thinking in the social subject.

This is how observing the behavior of people, we can see that their actions and omissions are guided by the belief system that has been inculcated since childhood in their family, in their culture and in society in general. Religion, as a cultural element, also has a preponderant role in the formation of the moral conscience of the human being. Beyond the magical aspect that accompanies all religion; moral behavior is a determining element to achieve “salvation”. That is why religious institutions:

... they provide a system of rules and norms of conduct. [...] Religions are not a simple belief system; they define a way of life. In them lie rules of conduct that regulate various forms of behavior. They can govern the relationship between the sexes and determine what sexual behavior is virtuous or sinful. This also applies to the structure of the family, delineating the appropriate role of the father, mother and children (Kurtz, 2007, p. 1).

Likewise, religious institutions operate on other complex social institutions that introduce taboos and phobias, hence:

... some actions are judged an example of virtue and nobility, and are rewarded both in this life and in the next. Others are considered evil and impermissible, and perhaps they can be punished with death, excommunication, exile, physical punishment, imprisonment or disfavoring them (Kurtz, 2007, p. 1).

As is evident, religion has a great capacity to influence people. For this reason, the need to critically analyze religious beliefs remains valid; even more so when, day by day, it can be observed that religion is returning to the public sphere. This reality becomes visible because:

...the social traces of religion are detected today mainly in two different areas. On the one hand, religions take a concrete stance on political issues or take a stand in official debates. [...] But also the other religious communities - Islamist, Buddhist, Hindu, etc. - have become increasingly important actors in Western societies (Reder & Schmidt, 2009, pp. 15-16).

As indicated by the authors cited, religion is again valid in contemporary society. In spite of the great advance of the factual and theoretical sciences initiated in modernity, which to a great extent have already

explained much of what was previously attributed to God, at present, it has not stopped looking for something or someone transcendent that of sense to the existence of man.

This is the reason why, despite the fact that, since the middle of the previous century and with the influence of postmodern thought, the most well-known religions such as Christianity or Judaism, especially in Europe, have had a decrease in their followers. It is also true that a large number of people join the ranks of groups with other types of beliefs such as esotericism, occultism or shamanism, to name a few. As well expressed by Gastaldi (1995):

... however, modernity and postmodernity have not destroyed religion, but they have made possible the mass desertion of institutionalized religions, to give way to religious and para-religious movements of all kinds. We are witnessing the 'boom' of esotericism... (p. 27).

Now, both historical religions and esoteric groups, in one way or another, often influence human behavior. To achieve this influence, the different religious groups have developed methods of indoctrination to inculcate their contents of faith. We know that:

Indoctrination is intended to instill in the population a way of thinking. This objective has been paramount in various governments and administrations. The time and the place are indifferent. Indoctrination and social control have been present throughout history and have taken various forms, which are still present (Rodríguez, 2015, p. 18),

But, as has already happened in history, every doctrine can be used to manipulate and control. As an example of this manipulation we can mention the witch hunt that took place in Medieval Europe. According to Francisco Burgos "The witch embodied a spirit of subversion against the order established by the State and the Church. His figure was synonymous with conspiracy against society and its institutions allying simultaneously with the forces of evil" (Burgos, 2011, p. 2).

To counteract this danger, the patriarchal society of that time imposed certain ways of being and acting, norms that had to be fulfilled, that is how:

...in society, fear of the unknown stood out. They could not understand how they were able to cure certain diseases, how to carry out a delivery with great complications and how they gathered so much knowledge and knowledge. The indoctrination was such that they even used the children to accuse their own parents (Rodríguez, 2015, p. 18).

Something that should be analyzed in the field of indoctrination, is that the contents of such teachings are at the discretion of religious institutions, leaders or the family. This implies that believers may well be educated in values as in anti-values; everything depends on the conceptions of good and evil that the current leaders have.

The negative implication of this reality is that religious indoctrination may well be harmful to children or young people who receive it. This was one of the concerns of the French government, for example, when in May 2013, it analyzed the reforms to its education law. Briones Irene (2013) says it this way:

In addition, the increased control of family education is triggered by the fear that many children, French and foreigners, between six and sixteen years old will not attend school, being subject to the influence of sects. Children run the risk of being marginalized and unable to develop a critical spirit. These reasons were weighed during parliamentary discussions of the law (p. 78).

It is true that in democratic countries where human rights and individual liberties are respected, freedom of worship and freedom of conscience are consecrated, but such liberties do not always contribute to the well-being of citizens. Faced with the above-mentioned problems, those mentioned by Nuria Rodríguez (2015) are very relevant: “the best way to deal with manipulation is to adopt a critical sense, be informed, have a great culture and adopt different points of view” (p. 37). Ignorance is intimately related to indoctrination.

At present, the need to overcome manipulation and fear persists. As already mentioned by the author, developing a critical attitude will go a long way towards overcoming unthinking indoctrination.

Everything previously addressed leads to the necessary reflection on the *dialogue that must exist between reason and faith, mediated by critical thinking*.

According to the analysis carried out, religious faith should not be merely dogmatic. The reflective capacity of the human being must also illuminate the scope of faith that Habermas (2006) says:

The restraint of religion by reason is not a matter of philosophical autotherapy; It does not serve one's own mental hygiene, but rather the protection of the general public against two forms of dogmatism. On the one hand, the enlightened Kant would like to assert the authority of reason and individual moral conscience against an ecclesially encapsulated orthodoxy, which makes the natural principles of morality a

secondary issue. But on the other hand, the moralist Kant also attacks the defeatist skepticism of the Enlightenment. Against skepticism, Kant wanted to save the contents of faith and the obligations of religion that can be justified within the limits of mere reason (p. 218).

In this way, Habermas (2006) indicates that reason and faith, are not excluded or cancel each other, but can collaborate in favor of human growth. Rather than defending a revealed truth and infallible precepts, religious beliefs must tend to the vital realization of those who share one or another religious belief. This objective will be reached only if faith allows itself to be illuminated by reason and reason does not close on itself, denying the axiological contributions that different religious beliefs can bring.

To show how faith can benefit from reason, an application exercise is presented below. A religious belief is analyzed, following the methodology summarized in ten steps, proposed by Robert Ennis (cited by ARENAS, 2013, p. 83). The belief to analyze is that which indicates that God has forbidden his faithful to have a blood transfusion. Next, each of the 10 steps indicated by Ennis (1989) is developed in the book *Critical Thinking*:

1. *Assessment of the credibility of sources*: The sources of the belief mentioned is the Bible. The quotations used to justify this practice are: Leviticus 17, 10 and in Acts 15, 28-29. By objectively analyzing citations, you cannot find an explicit prohibition of blood transfusions, ie the prohibition does not exist. We must take into account that the source comes from a culture of more than two thousand years ago, so, in order not to fall into errors, we must analyze the context in which this idea arises.

2. *Recognition of conclusions, reasons and assumptions*: Conclusion: God forbids blood transfusions. Reasons: The Bible orders it and you have to obey God. Assumption: Transfusions are against the will of God.

3. *Assessment of the quality of the argument, including the acceptability of the reasons, suppositions and facts on which it is based*: The quality of the argument is very elementary. In the absence of an explicit prohibition, through an otherwise subjective interpretation, the Bible is made to say something that does not appear in it. From the perspective of human dignity, even if the prohibition were explicit, it is unacceptable, since it violates the right to life of man.

4. *Elaboration of an own point of view on the subject, as well as its justification*: The author of this article considers that no religious precept should attempt against the life of any human being. Justification: From the perspective of the author of this article, it is stated that it is contradictory that God believes man to die, just for not obeying a particular interpretation of a biblical text.



5. *Formulation of relevant clarification propositions:* Not everything a person believes necessarily is true. If someone believes that he must die for a religious precept, he must ask himself if what he believes in is really the will of God.

6. *Conception of experiences and evaluation of experience projects:* as an experience we can see the number of deaths due to the refusal to have a blood transfusion. As a project it would be to undertake awareness campaigns to avoid the loss of human lives.

7. *Definition of terms depending on the context:* The fundamental term in the case we are analyzing is that of transfusion. In the context in which biblical quotations used to prohibit blood transfusions appear, transfusions were non-existent. The writers of the Bible had no knowledge of this medical practice. For this reason it is impossible to say that God or the Bible forbids blood transfusions.

8. *Manifestation of an open mind:* In this case, it would be desirable that those who share this belief have an open mind to avoid death. From the perspective of those who do not share that belief, an open mind does not mean letting them die without more. A sign of open-mindedness would be to dialogue with these people so that they develop critical thinking and do not die just for a religious belief.

9. *Make a constant effort to be well informed:* A person who shares that belief, should investigate more about what science says about the nature and benefits of blood transfusions. It is also important to go to impartial sources, in this way you can obtain more objective information. At the educational level, it is important that, in formal education, knowledge about the subject that concerns us be imparted. With the acquired knowledge, people will have a better criterion at the moment in which they are invited to share this belief.

10. *Formulation of conclusions when the situation justifies it:* The fact that people die justifies drawing the following conclusions: a) no religious belief should encourage, directly or indirectly, the death of its members. b) all religions must tend to training in values and defending human rights. c) all biblical interpretation must be done with philosophical rigor.

On the other hand, reflection on the human condition seems to be one of the central themes of philosophy and secular communities. As such, it is important to review how critical thinking affects the understanding of religious beliefs as a fundamental part of culture and society.

Critical thinking allows us to overcome the unidirectional criteria of pure rationalism, naturalism or mere empiricism, on the contrary, the exercise of this type of thinking affects notably the subject through the following approaches and principles:

- Constructivist approach to deconstruct, reconstruct and to actively and critically propose
- Principle of individuality that demands individual and personal characteristics (subjectivity)
- Principle of socialization/collectivity that transcends pure closed subjectivity to open up to intersubjective relationships
- Praxological focus that determines the practical function that implies admitting the operative dimension that allows the overcoming of the oppression, of the submissive tendency and of colonial dye.
- Principle of culture that is constituted in the mantle that covers being and doing human; The principle of culture that makes Ortega y Gasset's statement recognize: the human being has no nature, but culture. This is to admit that human nature is culture. The culture is determined by several factors.
- Temporary principle because the human being, his thinking and action is immersed in a specific time and space.

Critical thinking will allow us to approach religious beliefs in an objective, constructive and projective way, looking at the individual reality without discarding the reality of the other and the context. A set of alternatives for the rational understanding of religious beliefs continues.

## Alternatives for the rational understanding of religious beliefs

In this section we propose a set of alternatives for the rational understanding of religious beliefs. All the pedagogical alternatives proposed here have been derived from the principles of critical and creative thinking:

- Establish ludic and attractive scenarios that enhance the development of critical and creative thinking skills.
- Raising problems and questions guidelines that guide students to exercise their thinking clearly and accurately.
- Opening of reflection spaces that allow generating creative solutions to the formulation of simple and complex problems
- Promote the ability to argue and respect for the opinions of others and / or the formulation of divergent ideas
- Promote the main values such as freedom of thought, expression, empathy, justice, equality, honesty, responsibility and humility.

- Promote collaborative skills, cooperatives and collective participation.

The above alternatives can be complemented with the use of didactic strategies for the development of certain mental operations such as those stipulated by Floralba Aguilar (2017):

**1. Comparison through interrogation (CMI).** It allows proposing a set of examples, facts, problems or topics to look for similarities and differences and then the proposed guide to develop this operation should be followed:

- What are the differences between the examples, problems, facts, objects, cases or themes proposed?
- With what aspects do you disagree?
- What are the similarities found?
- With what aspects do you agree?

**2. Interest, expectation and meaning (IES).** Try to answer each of the following questions that guide the procedure:

Why should I know about this? (allows to determine curiosity and interest in knowledge).

What would happen if I knew about this? (allows to identify the expectation to know about the subject, fact or problem)

What good is this new knowledge? (determine the importance or need for new learning)

**3. Reflection, agreement, disagreement and conclusion (RADC).** It consists in proceeding critically according to what is requested:

- Process of association of the observed characteristics and the internalization of the subject, problem or object analyzed.
- Identification of the thesis, characteristics, ideas, propositions or arguments with which it shares
- Determination of ideas, propositions or arguments with which it disagrees or is not in agreement Construction of a new idea, proposal or argument on the subject, problem or object analyzed.

Likewise, Santiuste et. al (2001) give a place to the inferences within what they call the cognitive processes of critical thinking, they consider the following five fundamental processes:

*Analyze:* is to identify the parts or components of an object and discover their relationships. It implies establishing a criterion or a purpose for

the analysis, recognizing the different parts or elements, identifying the relationships between them, and identifying the integrating or regulating principle.

*Infer:* obtain information from the available data, interpreting, translating, extrapolating. It implies: establishing a purpose, analyzing the available information, relating the information with other knowledge, interpreting the data, recognizing assumptions, pointing out causes and effects, making generalizations and predictions.

*Reason:* arrive logically, deductively and inductively, to a conclusion or proposition from other premises or propositions. It involves establishing a purpose, identifying and analyzing the premises, logically deriving a conclusion, and analyzing the relationship between the premises and the conclusion.

*Solve problems:* overcome obstacles and overcome the difficulties that prevent achieving an objective. It implies establishing a purpose, identifying a problem; analyze the problem, starting point, objective, difficulties, resources; formulate ways or alternatives of solution, evaluate possible alternatives and choose, and act evaluating processes and results.

*Making decisions:* selecting an action plan to achieve an objective. It involves identifying objectives, identifying alternatives, analyzing and evaluating alternatives, taking into account values, limitations, resources, consequences and costs, evaluating and ranking alternatives according to criteria, selecting the alternative and putting it into practice, and evaluating processes and results (p. 387).

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Conceptually speaking, critical thinking can be characterized by three specific dimensions: Relevant problems; mental resources and rational responses. This evidence that critical thinking is multidimensional, because each context relevant to the person activates critical thinking to understand all kinds of realities.

Mental resources include both the knowledge and prior experiences of the subject and their skills and abilities to handle such knowledge. This includes knowledge about both the knowledge itself and the procedures and strategies to address it.

What matters is to show that a critical philosophy is a space of encounters, of tolerance, of critical examination of the ideas that make it possible to think of society as a renovating space, that is, the critical capacity is what makes the human being can renew culture, society, family, and even religion.

As it is public knowledge, although the religious phenomenon does have much to contribute in the integral formation of the human being, unfortunately there is also a lot of manipulation and lies. To try to overcome the negative that the religious phenomenon has, applying the methodology proposed by critical thinking will be useful. As a prerequi-

site it will be necessary to know the characteristics of beliefs in general and religious beliefs in particular.

## Conclusions

From the analysis carried out in the present work, it can be concluded that the analytical method called critical thinking is a very useful method to develop the understanding capacity of the people who are trained in said method.

Facione (2007) resume bien los beneficios de actuar con pensamiento crítico cuando expresa:

Teach people to make sound decisions and equip them to improve their own future and to become members who contribute to society, rather than being a burden to it. Being educated and making accurate judgments does not guarantee, at all, a happy, virtuous, or successful life in economic terms, but it certainly offers a greater chance of this being achieved. And it is definitely better than facing the consequences of making bad decisions and better than overwhelming friends, family, and the rest of us with the undesirable and avoidable consequences of those wrong decisions (Facione, 2007, p. 1).

When it is discovered that thinking critically can increase the quality of life of people and avoid pain and suffering, it is understood that it is a duty of every society to educate its members in critical thinking. Every human being has the right to be taught to think critically. At the moment in which the person develops this capacity, he understands better his social, cultural, political and religious environment. Thus, their quality of life can be increased, since a critical way of seeing life will help them to make better decisions in favor of their personal, social and economic improvement.

In the religious sphere, the person who has developed his critical capacity can better understand his beliefs. To the extent that people are able to rationally analyze their faith, they can understand if it is coherent or incoherent, uplifting or destructive. By understanding the one and the other, the member of any religion will be able to refine their beliefs by making them more human.

In education, it is vitally important that policies are designed to develop the critical capacity of the child, youth and adult. As expressed by Floralba Aguilar (2008):

Throughout history it has been possible to demonstrate that both education and ethics pursue a fundamental objective: the formation of the

moral conscience of man so that he intuitively ethical values, achieves the development and maturation of personality both in the physical, mental, affective, moral and transcendent, as well as the integration of the human being with nature, with society and with God, which proves the affirmation that man is by nature: “a being in relationship” and that moral development advances when, as Lévinas says, there is awareness of the other as a human face, a being that awaits me, a being that demands responsibility, which requires sharing the project of humanizing this world (Aguilar, 2008, p. 50).

Only with citizens trained in ethical values will a more just, peaceful and tolerant society be possible.

In the same way, in the religious sphere, the critical capacity is a very effective tool for the believer. Thanks to a trained approach, a believer can discern between truth and lies, discover deception, avoid dogmatism and fanaticism. With a trained approach, that person who professes a religious faith, will be able to avoid being closed on himself and will be able to open himself to respect and tolerance, in this way it will be possible to coexist peacefully with those who do not share their beliefs.

Finally, it is important to remember the phrase of Hans Küng: “There can be no peace among nations without peace among religions” (Küng, 1995, p. 98). And there will be no religious peace, if the believers are not educated in respect for the beliefs of others. The moment the different religious communities close on themselves and deny validity to other ways of believing, it will be impossible to forge the world of peace and justice that we all long for. Only to the extent that human beings are capable of overcoming personal, social, political and religious prejudices will we be able to form a truly human society.



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