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## **Postface to the Special Section: Socialization and Religion** *Roberto Cipriani\**

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## **Postface to the Special Section: Socialization and Religion**

*Roberto Cipriani\**

### **Introduction**

The passing on of ideals, norms and values from one generation to another in the same society assumes the character of a hereditary process which does not take place with the death of predecessors but comes about much earlier in the course of years and decades, very slowly, minute by minute, and step by step. This transition, moreover, has a typical connotation in that it is global, not fragmented and, at least tendentially, systemic in its organic unity and completeness. Parents pass on to their children what they in turn have been taught by those who are the grandparents of those children and the generators of contemporary educators and inculcators of culture.

Rarely does a received inheritance remain identical in itself without undergoing decrements or increments. What's more, it is not always left in its entirety with its every detail intact but tends, within a given cultural context, to reproduce the propensities of the past, the traditions of an earlier age and, basically, the essential values.

Succession in an inheritance does not simply mean making inspiring principles and behavioural patterns work but it also implies the passing on of the means for exercising the role of inculcator of culture-educator-trainer. Therefore the passing on of the stick in a hypothetical relay race of life marks both the entrusting of a set of values and the attribution of a responsible role that concerns the future of succeeding generations.

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If we think about it each inheritance of values carries with it aspects and styles from the past from which it derives its validity. But with every generational change there can be noted an avalanche effect that gathers up what it meets in its path and transports down to the plain a much more conspicuous and varied inheritance than that with which it started out.

### **Culture, education and socialization**

The inculcation of cultural values on the part of parents in their children is based on a network of ethic, traditions, principles, values, ideas and spiritual elements which, in fact, lay the foundations of what will later be the individual in contact with a system of education; in other words he is being directed intentionally by his nearest and dearest to insert himself into and know how to move within society and hence to face the challenges of interpersonal socialization outside the family ambience and more especially with his peers as well as with adults who play the role of educators (at school, during free time, in religious practices, and in forms of communication that are increasingly globalized).

The succession of operations in the inculcation of culture has no continuous solution, not even in the case of those parents - supposed educators - who deliberately and explicitly abandon their role/task of transmitting a cultural inheritance which may or may not include religion. Indeed, even in the case of a decided refusal not to transmit ideas, that is an ideological refusal, it can be argued that there is a kind of inculcation of culture insofar as the very absence of a message is, in itself, a kind of communication that signals the non relevance of certain ideas held by others and proposes instead alternatives that are not devoid of a content that is, broadly speaking, ideological or that expresses value judgments. In other words there is always a content that is emitted so that it reaches the person to whom it is directed or rather the infant, the child, the adolescent and the young adult.

The cultural inheritance that we may transmit to our children is itself subject to interaction in that the kind of education carried out by adults is subject to the personality of the young person and his capacity for reacting to and re-examining the values he has received. In any case, we cannot ignore the fact that familiarity with the domestic relationships experienced, above all, in the early years of life, in the transmission of values means that

a young person becomes part of them right from the beginning and almost always identifies with them.

### **Religious belief**

The fact remains that, according to the increase in religious allegiance, we might almost think of a system of communicating vases whereby the increase in one religion would correspond with the decrease in another, as though the total quantity of the religiously oriented subjects should not change significantly in its totality but should simply be variously distributed within the specific connections of each of the religions. We should not underestimate the fact according to which a form of religion is, in any case, to be found almost everywhere. This is not by way of supporting the inevitability of religious faith but simply to point out a recurrent sociological element which has not, however, much possibility of being compared with other aspects of social life that are not so widespread. However, the presumed universality of religion, or in other words the idea that it is a byword in all societies, must be debunked. By now we know that there exist populations devoid of common religious connotations but, not for that, to be classified as people who have no real religious feeling. Once we have raised these questions, we must ask ourselves what makes a religion what it is and what its sociological characteristics are. It should be made clear that any reference to transcendence or the supernatural, to the existence of something before birth or after death, is not, necessarily, to be qualified, sociologically, as a religious phenomenon. There is also no law that says that any religion should observe beliefs and rites: it can observe the former and/or not the latter or vice versa. If it is also ascertainable that recourse to a divinity, to a being other than the human, is a characteristic that can be traced in the so-called “universal religions, it is not, nonetheless, outside the bounds of thought to talk about a god, in order to define as religious a form of habit or an attitude. In effect, there may well be attitudes and actions that have a religious content without the necessity of recognizing the existence of a superior being to whom we owe devotion, cultural homage, recognition of his superiority and all that the latter entails.

We could start from a simple “theoretic sensitivity” as regards religious modalities and then go on to the gathering and analyses of data.

It is not a question of trusting to a generic cognizance of the results of our research but rather to an avoidance of preconceived and unfounded labels or, in other words, to ingenuous and ill-informed stances.

Deep down, sociology did not emerge as a comfort zone for institutions and the sociology of religion nor, in particular, did it work in its own interest in keeping a paid-up book of accounts in Churches and religious congregations.

In any case, the most effective action on the part of religions and Churches has already come about both in the past and in the present by creating and favouring conditions that have led to the adhesion of millions of people to a religion. The number of those who practice their faith is, generally, much lower than the number of believers in or sympathizers of that religion. This, however, does not mean that the influence of a particular religion loses in vigour in correspondence to the numerical difference between its faithful and its more or less convinced supporters.

### **Socialization**

The future of an individual, roughly until the age of 15 or 16, depends on his social and educational formation. It is in these years that the bases of the agency of a person to form part of a society will be laid. Obviously the socializing work of the adult-parents with regard to their offspring is strategically important. But other involved people are also important: teachers and other figures in the field of education (whether religious or not), friends and groups of friends of peer groups, variously entitled educators.

All these people, both working together and separately, prepare the ground for the course that the adolescent will then have to face alone.

In different cases, there takes place during this phase the diffusion of a religion which is prevalent within a given context wide or restricted as it may be. Hence the religion, which originates in the family of origin (biological family) and proceeds through the subsequent generations, puts down roots. From one generation to the other the religious creed is passed on almost uninterruptedly except for personal modifications on the part of one or other of the parents or educators.

Without this initial phase in the transmission of religious content, it is unlikely that specialists in catechizing and religious formation could be

inserted. The seeds of the first religious socialization bear immediate fruit with the initiation of young people and their participation in public religious life. Later on there can be noted a further investigation of the parameters of reference of the religion or even a partial withdrawal from it with attitudes that are more or less accentuated. However, it will be at a much later stage that the values diffused in the family and external environment will begin to operate, representing a discrimination between one action and another, between one choice and an alternative one and between a virtuous and a non-virtuous act.

### **Conclusion**

The values concern a wider spectrum of attitudes and behaviours that may be more or less superficial in respect of the so-called official model of the religion of belonging and/or of reference. Hence, we can find orthodox forms of religion as well as forms that are more critical if not actually opposed to the credo and official rites of that religion. But the widespread effect of the religion as a whole is not exhausted within its own ambience. It also manages to influence those areas of thought and action which lie outside its more typical orientation and, indeed, distances itself from them. Here we are talking about those contexts in which can be traced a moral dimension which, although not in line with that of the pre-eminent religion, still preserves a trace of it.