Religion, Institutionalization and Legitimation of the Creed: Beyond Institutional Fundamentalism

Religião, Institucionalização e Legitimação do Credo: para além do Fundamentalismo Institucional[1]

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that the association between institutionalization and strong epistemological, political, anthropological and ontological objectivity leads to institutional fundamentalism in three basic and problematic aspects for societal-cultural-institutional current dynamics: first, the institution's centralization and monopolization of the constitution, legitimation and public foment of the creed, so that the institution becomes self-referential, self-subsisting and autonomous regarding common sense and common people, as opposed to other religious institutions; second, the institution's vertical and direct affirmation and imposition on believers and non-believers of essentialist and naturalized foundations which do not seriously consider the differences as epistemological-political subjects, practices and codes; third, the institution's self-affirmation of its special core-role in terms of linking Earth and Heaven, people and God, so that it becomes the one and supreme institution representing God on Earth, delegitimizing other religious institutions and popular practices as alternative ways to God, alternative ways of life and epistemological, political, anthropological and ontological grounding. From that point, the article advocates that only the weakening of the essentialist and naturalized foundations, the moderation or even the abandonment of their problematic parts, as the deconstruction of institutional self-referentiality, self-subsistence and autonomy regarding common sense and common people, as well as of the opposition between religious institutions one to each other, can tackle the problem of fundamentalism, enabling the valuing of differences as epistemological-political subjects and the performance of an ecumenical and pluralistic dialog-*praxis* which assembles all peoples into a same minimal project of global peace, justice and solidarity.

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Key-Words: Religion; Institutionalization; Spontaneity; Essentialist and Naturalized Foundations; Weakening.

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Introduction

This paper begins with a conceptual distinction. When we talk about *religion*, we are referring to its two meanings, which are not necessarily imbricated or mutually-supported: on the one hand, religion means *religious institution*; on the other hand, religion means *spirituality*. The first of them implies the institutional centralization and monopolization of the religious creed by a religious institution. Such an institution publicly guards, streamlines, interprets and foments its specific creed from an essentialist and naturalized foundation, from a *strong objectivity in metaphysical, epistemological, political and anthropological terms* regarding the understanding and the experiencing of the basic presuppositions, codes, practices, ways of life and authorities which appear in the creed, which are determined-legitimized by this creed. Here, the institution, from the use and legitimation of theology by a clerical community, is the only arbiter between common people and God, as the only epistemological-political platform and epistemological-political subject of the interpretation, constitution and social boosting of the creed. As theological arbiter and epistemological-political subject, it has the last word about the creed; it correlates and links, using a biblical idea, Heaven and Earth, common people with God, and it interrupts such correlation and link when necessary. From the perspective of religious institutions, it is the fundamental core-role in relation to the objectivity and living of the creed, which means two things: first, *spirituality is only possible into the general context supplied by institutional religion and its objective grounding of the creed to the community* of believers (and non-believers); second, common people and, in particular, religious believers must adequate themselves to institutional staff, rules, practices and ways of legitimation and of living the religious creed; so, spirituality, which is a characteristic of common believers, must be lived from the institution's strongly objective grounding of the creed—in other words, spirituality is only well-lived from the theological grounding and guard and leadership of the creed, which implies the institutional centralization and monopolization of the comprehension, legitimation and social foment of the creed.

The second implies the fact that *common* people (that is, *non-institutionalized* individuals and social-cultural groups) understand, legitimize and live the religious creed from the spontaneity of current life, sometimes performing a soft version of it, sometimes abandoning some problematic parts of it, sometimes adapting the creed according to the contingencies of everyday life. What is important, here, is the fact that spirituality is not directly associated with institutionalization, although religious institutions remain important, in epistemological-political terms, to common people. In this case, common people read, interpret and live religious creeds in a selective way that allows the weakening of essentialist and naturalized foundations established, legitimized and fomented by religious institutions. In other words, if religious institutions must defend a very strong objectivity of the religious creed in ontological, epistemological, political, cultural and anthropological terms, directly assuming essentialist and naturalized foundations as the basis of institutional, societal and existential lives, common people, from this selective comprehension-choice-use of religious values, codes and practices, which are important for life, can live well without such a need of strong objectivity, of very objective essentialist and naturalized foundations. As a

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consequence, spirituality is assumed by common people *as an emancipation* (although partial in many cases) regarding religious institutions and their essentialist and naturalized foundations and the strong objectivity of the socially and individually binding values and practices. Here, spirituality is very independent in relation to religious institutions and presupposes only the individual or even communal rational attitudes and practices which adapt themselves to current contingencies of life. By this selective posture concerning the religious institutions' essentialist and naturalized foundations, concerning the institutions' strong objectivity, common people—it is our argument—allow the gradual weakening of these essentialist and naturalized foundations, deconstructing such a need for strong objectivity of the values, practices and ways of life legitimized, imposed and fomented by religious institutions.

The first central argument of this article is that contemporary times, especially in the Western democratic societies based on cultural rationalization, secularism and individualism (but sometimes beyond Western modernity, too), are characterized by a very salutary dialectics between institutionalization and spontaneity, between religious institutions and common people, between essentialist and naturalized foundations (or strong objectivity) *versus* the selective and partial use of religious creed. Such a dialectics enables the institutional correction from outside to inside, from common people and common sense to institutional self-authorized theological community, as it allows the gradual and permanent popular criticism and deconstruction of the essentialist and naturalized foundations, of the strong ontological, epistemological, political, cultural and anthropological objectivity of the values, practices and ways of life legitimized by religious institutions. In this sense, common people can democratically confront the theological communities in order to propose a gradual weakening of the essentialist and naturalized foundations with the purpose of protecting and promoting the differences and the contingencies which are denied or even silenced by religious institutions' strong objectivity in terms of creed in all spheres of human existence and societal constitution, as the centralization and monopolization, by religious institutions, of the interpretation-legitimation of the creed by closed and autonomized theological communities in relation to common people. Indeed, common people's selective use of the religious creed resulting from the weakening of the essentialist and naturalized foundations has a very important reason, which is the fact that the differences are not always legitimized and promoted from the institutional strong objectivity of the religious creed. That is the very reason that justifies the weakening of essentialist and naturalized foundations and, as a consequence, justifies as well the dialog between institutions and common people about the objectivity of religious creed, about what matters and what does not matter in terms of constitution, legitimation, foment and living of this religious creed.

Here, the second central argument of this paper appears, which is the idea that religious institutions should weaken or even abandon some parts of the theological creed that are based on and streamlined by essentialist and naturalized foundations in order to protect, foment and promote the differences. Indeed, one of the most conflictive bases of contemporary life is the (sometimes hard and violent) tension between these essentialist and naturalized foundations, grounded on a very strong and objective institutional constitution, legitimation and foment of the creed, *versus* the struggles of differences for recognition, which attack such institutional ontological, epistemological, political, cultural and anthropological core-role. That is the central normative-political-epistemological basis of nowadays dynamics of living-grounding, and taking it seriously means to perform a very acute and democratic dialog between institutions and these differences, between the theological

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community and common people. We think that the great challenge posed by contemporary times is directed to religious institutions and their epistemological-political-normative core-role concerning these differences: can religious institutions deconstruct, weaken or even abandon a kind of essentialist and naturalized foundation which have a totalizing framing, control and orientation of all aspects of social and individual life? For example, can they become focused only on spirituality, eliminating a naturalized and ontological understanding and imposition of gender and sexual subjects, behaviors and values, minimizing or abandoning a very strong and objective notion of human nature for all? We argue that there are two important epistemological-political challenges to institutionalized religions in contemporary times: first, as was said above, the gender and sexual differences and their confrontation of the essentialist and naturalized foundations, the very strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity assumed by religious institutions as the basis of institutional self-constitution, self-comprehension, functioning and social-political role; second, the ecumenical and pluralistic dialog and *praxis* among religious institutions, their believers and also the non-believers in order to pacify and integrate a very unequal and unfair world from mutual minimal practices and duties, which means that each religious institution should renounce assuming itself as the only and exclusive subject, basis and pathway to God.

1. Institutionalization, Strong Objectivity and Fundamentalism

If we want to define the history and the dynamics of Western philosophical, theological and scientific culture, two fundamental concepts must be established as the basis for this definition-comprehension, namely the institutionalization of the production and grounding of valid knowledge, of legitimized social-political *praxis*; and the need for a strong epistemological-political-normative objectivity for such an institutional grounding as condition to the intersubjective or universal validity of the knowledge and *praxis* constructed and fomented by philosophical-theological-scientific institutions. The *Western philosophical-theological-scientific culture*, therefore, can be very consistently defined by the *institutionalization* of the construction and grounding of the *epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity* in the sense that an institutional community of researches assumes for itself a central core-role in terms of the construction-legitimation of the objectivity of the socially binding values, practices and subjects. From the beginning, as the Platonic epistemological-political-normative heritage to Western institutional culture, there is a very intrinsic and mutually-supported correlation between philosophical-theological-scientific institution and strong objectivity, of institutional philosophical-theological-scientific community and valid knowledge and *praxis*, from the separation, differentiation and even opposition regarding common people and common sense. That is the very meaning of Plato's *allegory of the cave*, that is, it is and it represents what we call the *normative self-comprehension of Western institutional philosophical-theological-scientific thought-culture*. How is that? The *allegory of the cave* shows the gradual constitution of philosophy as an institutional *praxis* assumed by an institutional community of researchers which develops from the darkness and ignorance of common people and common sense a very objective and universalist worldview based on the scientific discovery or the scientific grounding of essentialist and naturalized foundations—which is *an institutional work* that overlaps common sense and common people, offering as alternative a very objective epistemological-political framework of judgment and action as the counterpoint to common sense and common people, which cannot think-act-ground universally, objectively and scientifically.

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Such constitution and development of institutional philosophy have three very important theoretical-political movements: first, what Plato calls the *ascendant dialectics*, whose dynamics entails the overcoming of the mere opinions of common sense and the constitution of a scientific worldview by the philosophical institutional community, which means the complete differentiation and contraposition between institutional scientific community and common sense and common people; second, the direct association, by institutional philosophy itself, between institutionalization and strong epistemological-political-ontological objectivity, of institutional philosophy and valid knowledge and *praxis*, of the institutional philosopher as the effective epistemological-political subject of any possible objective and valid way of grounding, and common sense and darkness, common people and ignorance; third, what Plato calls the *descendant dialectics*, that is, the fact that philosophical institution, which has constructed a very strong epistemological-political-ontological objectivity based on essentialist and naturalized foundations, returns to common sense and common people in order to orientate, frame and guide them educationally and politically. By doing that, philosophy as an institution, as an institutionalized community of researchers who construct and legitimize the valid and objective knowledge and *praxis* to common sense and common people, can assume from inside to outside the epistemological-political-normative centrality regarding common sense and common people, becoming their supreme judge, arbiter and guide, but at the same time becoming opposed and differentiated in relation to them, assuming a self-referential and self-subsisting institutional self-comprehension, posture and way of functioning and programming. Here, common sense and common people need the institution's epistemological-political-ontological strong objectivity, they need to be oriented and guided by the institutional community, their legal staff, but the contrary is not true, due to the self-subsistence and self-referentiality of the institution regarding common sense and common people—the institution's internal dynamics, procedures, practices, codes and legal staff are sufficient to its functioning, legitimation and programming over time, as well as for the institution's social-political rooting and role.[5]

Why was it said that Plato's allegory of the cave represents the self-comprehension of Western institutional culture, working also for the self-constitution and dynamics of theology and modern natural science? Why was the *philosophical-theological-scientific institution* mentioned with a same sense-basis-dynamics? It is due to the fact that the philosophical self-comprehension developed by Plato is the same criterion-dynamics assumed afterwards by theology and modern natural science in terms of their constitution, legitimation and evolution as scientific institutions which centralize and monopolize the construction, grounding and public foment of the objective or valid knowledge in their specific areas of actuation. Indeed, the correlation of theology as an institutional *praxis* and the objective interpretation, legitimation and public foment of the religious creed is here similar to philosophical constitution as an institutional community that grounds an objective—because scientific and institutionalized—normative paradigm in ontological, epistemological and moral terms, both of them, theology and philosophy, overcoming common sense and common people, differentiating and autonomizing themselves regarding common sense and common people, *constituting from within* an objective philosophical-theological worldview, *constituting themselves as an objective sphere and subject and worldview* and, after these steps, returning to common sense and common people in order to present and offer the light of salvation, the

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[5] See Leno Francisco Danner. "The emergence of rationality: a philosophical essay", *Conjectura*: Filos. Educ., vol. 22, n. 1 (jan./abr. 2017): 11-31.

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objective, critical, emancipatory and universal knowledge.[6] Now, even modern natural science is based on this Platonic legacy of the correlation between institutionalization and epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity, in the sense that modern philosophers-scientists search for an objective interpretation of the physical-biological-chemical-physiological world, which implies the institutionalization of the natural science in a self-assumed community of researchers that develops instruments, practices, codes and valid knowledge that can be measured, discussed, tested and legitimized by such an institutional scientific community. The criticism against traditional philosophy and medieval theology offered by modern natural science is its epistemological-normative starting point in order to reconstruct the really scientific field of knowledge—and the philosophical assumptions of modern natural science (as those of Francis Bacon, René Descartes, John Locke, David Hume and Immanuel Kant) prove this modern attempt to overcome the past institutional scientific tradition and to construct a new institutional scientific tradition of knowledge. For short, the institutionalization of the production and legitimation of valid knowledge and *praxis* in order to reach epistemological-moral objectivity is what unites philosophical, theological and scientific institutional traditions in one same dynamics.[7]

Of course, philosophy, theology and modern natural science have methodologies, procedures, codes, practices and legal staffs which follow different and particularized dynamics in relation to each other, but the central normative-epistemological intention is, we insist, the same for all of them: institutionalization and objectivity, which presupposes the differentiation between scientific institution and common sense, institutional scientific staff and common people. It should be said that our point about the constitution and functioning of institutional philosophy-theology-science has not the intention of disregarding or diminishing institutionalization and its correlation with strong objectivity, as its differentiation and even opposition regarding common sense and common people. It basically intends to evidence such methodological-normative movement of constitution of Western institutional culture, which is a mixture of philosophy, theology and natural science—all of them in search of an institutional constitution, legitimation and evolution as scientific communities, all of them committed to the epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity of their research fields-objects-methods-subjects. Here, the dialectics between institutionalization and spontaneity, philosophy-theology-science and common sense, philosopher-theologian-scientist and common people, is the main epistemological-political basis for streamlining the constitution, legitimation and evolution of Western institutional culture over time. Such a dialectics is also the epistemological-political basis to think and reformulate the tensions between the problems caused by excessive institutionalization correlated to a very strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity which centralizes and monopolizes into the institutions and by institutional self-referential and self-subsisting philosophical-theological-scientific communities all the construction, grounding and public foment of the epistemological-political-ontological objectivity. The strong institutionalism linked to strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity, as will be discussed, is our great challenge today, because it directly leads to fundamentalism, that is, to the strong objectivity of the creed, by the institutional centralization and monopolization of the creed beyond common people, in opposition to common people, and in a way that confronts and even denies the differences as fundamental

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[6] See Rubem Alves. *Filosofia da ciência*: uma introdução ao jogo e suas regras (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1981).
[7] See Richard Rorty. *Philosophy and the mirror of nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Thomas Kuhn. *A estrutura das revoluções científicas* (Rio de Janeiro: Perspectiva, 2013).

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epistemological-political subjects, practices and values.[8] The institutional fundamentalism implies in the direct institutional use-imposition of the essentialist and naturalized basis into the societal-cultural world and in relation to all differences with no mediations, moderation and sensibility, due to the creed's strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity.

Let us start from these ideas in order to discuss the question of religion-God, both in institutionalized and in non-institutionalized terms, subjects and dynamics, in Western culture in general and in terms of the correlation between institutionalization and everyday life in particular. First, as said above, religion has two meanings that are not necessarily linked or mutually-supported: religious institution and spirituality. Second, as was also said above, Western institutional culture is based on the correlation between institutionalization and epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity leading to institutional fundamentalism, from the constitution of the scientific community of researchers as an internal, self-referential and self-subsistent field-*praxis* which is autonomous and independent regarding common sense and common people, sometimes opposed to them, affirming the grounding and streamlining of an essentialist and naturalized foundation as the basis of the work of the institution and of the institutional legal staff over time. The institutional religion is a community of self-authorized legal staff hierarchically constituted, which, from the affirmation of such hierarchy, publicly establishes, legitimizes and foments the objective interpretation of the religious creed. This institutional community has multiple functions which are totally imbricated: first of them, there is the methodological-epistemological work of interpretation of the creed in order to acquire an objective understanding of it, overcoming the possibility of multiple and contradictory understandings both internal and external to the institution, in the community of believers; second of them, there are the political and educational institution's role of public foment and imposition of the creed for all, believers and even non-believers alike, which presupposes as well the fact that a religious institution is socially an epistemological-political subject which discusses and confronts itself with other social-political-institutional subjects with the purpose of protecting and imposing its institutional values, codes and practices, its institutional worldview on society as a whole; finally, in the third place, there is a strategic-political core-role of institutional religion in terms of the hegemony of its internal legal staff (for example, the Pope's succession or the Pope's choice of news cardinals and encyclical documents)—each institutional religion must evolve internally with minimal contradictions and conflicts, maintaining the same ideology or theoretical-political line of interpretation of the religious creed over time, which means the inculcation of a theoretical-political-ontological understanding of it to all of the institution's legal staff, as the succession of authorities based on the continuity of one same action-comprehension of the institutional core-role in terms of the creed's objectivity. The important point in these three dynamics of institutional constitution, programming and functioning is that religious institutions perform them from a self-referential, self-subsistent and closed dynamics which does not admit external intromission or influence, or at least that weakens external epistemological-political-normative contact.

Indeed, such a barrier between institutional theological community and common sense and common people is the epistemological-political basis from which theology comprehends and constructs itself. It is this very clear and explicit frontier between them that allows the correlation of theological institution and strong objectivity based on essentialist and naturalized foundations. Firstly, therefore, the construction, legitimation and public foment of

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[8] See: Fernando Catroga. *Entre Deuses e Césares*: Secularização, Laicidade e Religião Civil — Uma Perspectiva Histórica (Coimbra: Edições Almedina, 2006); Giácomo Marramao. *Céu e Terra*: Genealogia da Secularização (São Paulo: Editora da UNESP, 1997).

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the religious creed to the society as a whole (believers and non-believers alike) belong exclusively to the institutional community as an internal institutional subject-matter-*praxis*. It means that religious institution listens to and talks with the society in general, with the variety of societal-cultural epistemological-political-normative subjects, but from a perspective that maintains the autonomization and self-referentiality of theological institution regarding a stricter reciprocity with common sense and common people, with pluralism, with the societal-cultural-normative differences. As a consequence, the theological community becomes autonomized and overlapped with common sense and common people, so it can publicly constitute, legitimize and foment a univocal and very objective interpretation of the creed, as a very essentialist and naturalized comprehension of human life and human relations. In many terms, therefore, the pluralism, the differences and even the epistemological-political-normative relativism have no voice in relation to a closed, self-referential and self-subsistent religious institution that is based on essentialist and naturalized foundations, on a very strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity: the theological community, overlapped with differences, vertically and directly imposes such a strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity to the society as a whole, framing and problematizing the societal-cultural codes, practices, values and subjects from an essentialist and naturalized foundation which does not admit dialog, interaction or moderation. Essentialist and naturalized foundations can tolerate the differences, but they do not become softer or weaker in order to put these differences as epistemological-political-normative subjects of the institutional grounding, of the institutional constitution-changing over time.

Some examples of this institutional closure and self-referentiality regarding the objective grounding-comprehension of the creed and its vertical imposition on the society as a whole without a more extensive and radical dialogue-*praxis* with the differences will be provided, a kind of vertical and direct imposition of the essentialist and naturalized foundations that does not weaken the strong objectivity of the religious creed, which means that it does not seriously consider the epistemological-political-ontological differences as subjects, values and practices which can be alternative subjects, values and practices to institutionalized religions, societal-institutional constitution, legitimation and evolution. The 2015 final report of the XIX General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, "The vocation and the mission of the family in the Church and in the contemporary world," which has as its central epistemological-political-normative-ontological question the family in terms of gender and sex, concludes an institutional document *to the internal community* of religious believers with an epistemological-normative *proposition which embraces all* the society (truly, *all the societies*), all the social-cultural-normative subjects, values and practices regarding the family, gender and sexual matters and subjects. In other words, an essentialist and naturalized foundation which sustains a very strong epistemological-normative objectivity in terms of gender and sexuality is grounded on religion and politically used in order to frame, criticize and orientate all social-cultural matters, values and subjects, without any dialog and interaction with them, by a closed institutional theological community which aims *firstly at the internal constitution and legitimation of the creed* and *secondly its public, social, political and cultural imposition as paradigm for all* subjects, codes and practices. This is the proposition:

> Today, a very important cultural challenge is posed by "gender" ideology which denies the differences and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without gender differences, thereby removing the anthropological foundation of the family. This

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> ideology leads to educational programmes and legislative guidelines which promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female. Consequently, human identity becomes the choice of the individual, which can also change over time. According to our faith, the differences between the sexes bears in itself the image and likeness of God (*Gen* 1: 26-27).[9]

We can see here the direct association of biological differences of gender and sex with the image and likeness of God. This provides a very essentialist and naturalized basis in terms of gender and sexuality, which acquires as well a religious dimension (gender and sex were created and defined by God). That institutional self-comprehension, which is, in the first place, internal and proper to the Catholic Church, leads, in the second place, to the framing of all societal-cultural-normative subjects, practices, codes and values associated to gender and sex, even if they are different regarding such an essentialist and naturalized foundation sustained by the Catholic Church. As said above, this institutional posture is possible only through the contraposition between institutional theology and common sense and common people, so that the institutional theological community becomes overlapped, self-referential, self-subsistent and autonomous in relation to them. This allows three fundamental things to institutional theology: first, to standardize a univocal and strongly objective comprehension and practice of the religious creed with a minimal internal problematization by the institutional theological community; second, to vertically impose the creed not only on the religious community of believers, but on the society and culture as a whole, in a way that is closed to differences, to dialog and interaction with them; third, to assume, from the affirmation of essentialist and naturalized foundations, a public and political core-role which is based on the imposition of the internal institutional worldview on the entire society, all societal-cultural subjects. As a consequence of this institutional closure and overlapping regarding the current differences and multiculturalism, it is possible to speak, from an essentialist and naturalized basis, of *gender ideology* as a false and non-natural position of these differences. Likewise, as a consequence of the direct association of institutional theology and strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity, it is possible to speak, act and ground universally about a univocal and standardized human truth for all, exactly through the negation of the epistemological-political-ontological centrality of the differences, their values, norms, practices and subjects, by the constitution of a self-referential, self-subsisting and autonomous institution regarding common sense and common people, an institution which has the ability to ground and streamline a very strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity, becoming the supreme judge and guide of all social-cultural subjects, of all epistemological-political subjects.

The correlation of institutionalization and strong objectivity allows yet the institutional self-comprehension and self-affirmation as the only epistemological-political-normative basis of the linking and streamlining of the relationship between God and the people in general, despite the existence of multiple popular religions and institutional religions. It presupposes three important things: first, common people only act rightfully and in a justified manner when they are guided from an institutional legal staff that can objectively interpret, ground

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[9]   http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20151026_relazione-finale-xiv-assemblea_en.html

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and foment the religious creed; second, ecumenism is only possible from an institutional guidance and leadership which guides the believers into an agreement that does not ignore or neglect the institution's centrality, self-referentiality and self-subsistence in relation to common sense and common people, as regarding the other institutional religions, so that institutional religion can always have the last word about the kind of ecumenism that is possible, maintaining, therefore, its self-association of institutionalization and strong objectivity; third, even when we search for ecumenism, that is, one same epistemological-political-normative-ontological basis, we cannot forget that there is only one single institution that represents the universal truth, the strong objectivity of values, practices and worldview. That can be seen in the Catholic Church's Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, resulted from II Vatican Council, as it follows:

> When such actions are undertaken prudently and patiently by the Catholic faithful, *with the attentive guidance of their bishops*, they promote justice and truth, concord and collaboration, as well as the spirit of brotherly love and unity. This is the way that, when the obstacles to perfect ecclesiastical communion have been gradually overcome, all Christians will at last, in a common celebration of the Eucharist, be gathered *into the one and only Church in that unity which Christ bestowed on His Church from the beginning*. We believe that this unity subsists in the *Catholic Church* as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time (the underlined points are ours).[10]

This theological-institutional decree thematizes ecumenism and allows us to perceive these three points of the correlation of institutionalization and strong objectivity, of the institutions' self-referentiality and self-subsistence and its centralization and monopolization of any possible comprehension-*praxis*-grounding of the creed, *as well as of the dialog-interaction of different versions of the creed*, of different religious institutions and finally of the society's multiple epistemological-political-normative subjects. An institutional theological community, from the differentiation and autonomization regarding common sense and common people, from its centralization and monopolization of the constitution, legitimation and social foment of the creed based on essentialist and naturalized foundations, can correlatively (a) become the only *medium* from which objectivity is possible, so that people can only act, comprehend and ground from the institutional pathway and by the centrality of the institution as the only epistemological-political subject that can interpret, streamline and constitute the religious creed, which can guide common sense and common people in the way of truth and salvation; (b) become the only institutional basis of objectivity and salvation, so that no other institution or social-cultural subject can assume this core-role; and (c), ultimately, strongly refuse or minimize the legitimacy of other religious institutions and epistemological-political subjects in offering alternative interpretations of the same creed, alternative creeds and even alternative ways (non-institutionalized ones) to common sense and common people. The existence of multiple institutions, religions and epistemological-political subjects is of no great importance to an institution that comprehends and constitutes itself from an essentialist and naturalized

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[10]http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vatii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html

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foundation which allows the intrinsic link of institutionalization and strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity. Likewise, the existence of common sense and common people does not lead to a sensitization of an institutional religion which comprehends and constitutes itself from the overlapping, autonomization and differentiation regarding common sense and common people, which means the institutional negation of the ability of the common man and woman to live, interpret and ground the creed according to their own consciousness. In all of these points, the theological institution is necessary to provide the objective understanding, application and living of the creed, as of the guidance of common people and orientation-depuration of common sense.

More attention should be paid now to the fact of ecumenism. It originally means an attempt of unification and dialog-cooperation between the Christian churches. But it could mean, in the second place, as we want to emphasize here, a universal normative basis for the dialog-cooperation between different religions, institutionalized and non-institutionalized. Indeed, it is our opinion that this is a very important institutional movement in global terms—the dialog and cooperation between institutional religions with the aim of pacifying and integrating a very violent and unequal world under fair, peaceful and solidary practices and codes. In this case, religious institutions are very different from national governments and international agencies (the International Monetary Fund, Mundial Bank, NATO etc.): they do not always aim at political, economic and military hegemony—as governments do—, political, economic and military hegemony which is pursued through strategic actions and ideas, violence and political, cultural and economic destabilization. Religions aim to touch peoples' heart, as they are interested in love, charity and union. So, it is our opinion that religions sometimes have a more impacting and effective core-role in terms of formulating, searching for and reaching world peace, justice and cooperation than governments. In effect, the institutional religions have a more universal impact than particular governments—there is only one Brazilian people, but many peoples are Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists or others. In this sense, firstly, ecumenism must be an epistemological-political *praxis* that assembles all religions into a united global project of peace, justice and solidarity. Secondly, such an ecumenical ideal must be achieved from the institutional refusal or institutional weakening of its exclusive, central and fundamental core-role in terms of constitution, grounding and fomenting the only epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity for all, believers and non-believers. Ecumenism needs institutional moderation, weakening or even refusal of the correlation between one institution and the strong objectivity in epistemological-moral-ontological terms. If there are many religious institutions and many non-institutional religions and subjects, then all of them can lead to God, all of them have something important to say and teach to the others, and vice-versa. In other words, as we think, ecumenism is incompatible with essentialist and naturalized foundations, with strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity: the association of institutionalization and strong objectivity makes it impossible, because such an association leads to the centrality and monopoly of one self-elected religious institution in terms of this strong objectivity, salvation and truth.

Indeed, institutional philosophy-theology-science has an absolutely internal dynamics of functioning and programming that uses essentialist and naturalized foundations as the basis not only for the strong objectivity of the valid knowledge and *praxis*, but also, and even more importantly, for institutional differentiation and overlapping in relation to common sense and common people, as to other institutions. It can be seen in Catholic Theology, our main example here, especially in the question of ecumenism. Speaking about Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Islamism, the Catholic Church's Declaration of the Relation of the Church to

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Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate* says: "Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles. Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ, Our Peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles, making both one in Himself."[11] The comparison between the "well-cultivated olive tree" and the "wild shoots" and the insertion of the "wild shoots" into the "well-cultivated olive tree" show an impossible ecumenical-multicultural dialog-*praxis*, because once more it is based on the separation between the one church and the other religions, the one epistemological-moral-ontological strong objectivity and the rest of the worldviews, the true prophets and the religious men. In other words, even recognizing the specificity and dignity of the non-Christian religions, and therefore affirming the importance of the dialog-cooperation among them, the Catholic Church situates such an epistemological-political possibility in itself as the main basis-subject of salvation and objective truth. Now, in the first place, we are using the Catholic Church's theological texts in order to prove our argument about the correlation between institutionalization, strong objectivity and the fundamentalist opposition of institutions to common sense and common people. But the same can be said about Islam's internal divisions and conflicts between Sunni and Shi'ite, about the religious-political conflict between Israel and Palestine, the oriental religions' legitimation of a society of castes and others. Institutional religions, in the moment that they associate themselves with the strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity based on essentialist and naturalized foundations, close and autonomize themselves regarding common sense and common people, firmly denying the legitimacy of other religious institutions, common sense and common people, popular cultures, religions, symbols, practices and epistemological-political subjects, naturalizing society-culture and nowadays social-cultural groups and individuals, their relations over time.[12]

The correlation of institutionalization and strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity leads to fundamentalism, that is, to the affirmation of an essentialist and naturalized foundation as the basis not only for institutional internal constitution and legitimation of the creed, but also for its imposition to all the society and cultures. The term *fundamentalism* means three things: first, the strong objectivity of the creed in epistemological, political, anthropological and ontological terms, which makes it the only normative basis for all social-cultural differences and epistemological-political subjects; second, the institutional centralization and monopolization of the constitution, legitimation and public foment of the creed, which makes it self-referential, self-subsisting and autonomous regarding common sense and common people, so that only the institutional theological community has the absolute legitimacy to ground and streamline the religious creed for all; third, the contraposition between religious institutions, which renders their relationship conflictive, leading to the social-religious struggles between the peoples of each creed. Institutional fundamentalism has its roots in the correlation between institutionalization and strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity and it leads to the opposition (a) between institutions and common people, (b) between institutions' essentialist and naturalized foundations and common sense, and (c) between religious institutions among themselves. As we think, the association between

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[11]   http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vatii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html

[12] See, for example: Guy Ben-Porat. *Between State and Synagogue*: the secularization of contemporary Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Birgit Kravietz & Helmut Reifeld. *Islam and the rule of law*: between sharia and secularization (Berlin: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2008); David Smith. *Hinduism and modernity* (London: Basil-Blackwell, 2003).

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strong institutionalism, strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity and fundamentalism is the most problematic challenge of institutional religions in the 21st century, and its resolution is only possible from the institutional weakening of the essentialist and naturalized foundations as the basis of all social-cultural-individual lives, as well as from the moderation or even abandonment of the institution's self-referentiality, self-subsistence, autonomy and even opposition both to common sense and common people and to other institutional religions and social-political subjects as well. That is our argument in the next chapter of this paper.

2. Beyond Institutional Fundamentalism: Life, Creed and God in Many Ways and Senses by Many Epistemological-Political Subjects

The dialectics between institutionalization and spontaneity, institution and differences, institution and common sense, institutional legal staffs and common people is very pungent, and it is the intensity and the way of performing it that will define the extent to which institutions can moderate their strong institutionalism, their association of institutionalization and strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity from the use of essentialist and naturalized foundations. It is our opinion that institutional religions should weaken or even abandon some parts of the creed based on essentialist and naturalized foundations, especially sexual and gender matters and values, as ecumenical-pluralistic epistemological-political proposals and practices which presuppose the affirmation-imposition of a communitarian worldview grounded on a specific religious creed and its correlative institution. As said above, immoderate, unreasonable and strong essentialist and naturalized foundations are incompatible with the differences' epistemological-political-ontological existence, conditions, values and subjects. Of course, they are not totally incompatible, but the strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity grounded on a univocal and universal essentialist and naturalized basis denies and effaces these differences as political-normative subjects, values and practices which can frame and orientate the institutions' internal constitution, legitimation and evolution, as the institutional social-political-cultural core-role both to believers and non-believers. Indeed, the first very basic condition of the differences' existence and promotion is exactly the weakening and even the abandonment of some essentialist and naturalized codes, practices and subjects, which also means the weakening of strong institutionalism regarding the constitution, legitimation and public foment of the religious creed to the whole of society-culture.

There is a very intrinsic association and mutual dependence-support between strong institutionalism, strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity and fundamentalism: institutionalism's main epistemological-political basis is the fact that only the institution, from institutionalization and by an institutional legal staff with institutional instruments, practices and codes, has the ability to construct and to legitimize the interpretation and to perform the public foment of the valid knowledge and *praxis*. As a consequence, institutionalization becomes strong institutionalism, entailing the exclusive, self-referential, self-subsisting and autonomous institutional centralization and monopolization of the constitution, legitimation and social boosting of the valid knowledge and *praxis*, as said above. Here, the institution is the only arbiter and guide of common people and common sense, overcoming and overlapping with them based on that association of institution and scientific knowledge, institutional legal staff as the effective epistemological-political subjects. Therefore, strong institutionalism presupposes the institutional centralization and monopolization of the

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construction, grounding and public foment of the valid knowledge-*praxis* from the institution's overcoming and overlapping and autonomization concerning common sense and common people, since the affirmation of an essentialist and naturalized paradigm and worldview which is strongly objective in epistemological-political-ontological terms. It is a kind of strong institutionalism by the fact that philosophical-theological-scientific institutions are self-referential, self-subsisting and very independent regarding common sense and common people, internally centralizing and monopolizing all the dynamics, instruments, methods, values, practices and the legitimate epistemological-political subjects of any possible normative grounding.

Here appears the correlation between strong institutionalism and strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity and fundamentalism. Firstly, if there are many epistemological-moral-ontological objectivities, then there is not a single univocal and universal objective paradigm-worldview, which means that the exclusive centralization and monopolization of the construction, legitimation and social foment of the creed by a single institution is not possible. Likewise, if there is not a univocal and universal normative paradigm-worldview, then there is not a standardized way of life-thinking-acting-grounding which must be imposed on all by an institutional *praxis* assumed by an institutional community—current differences as epistemological-political-normative subjects would have the first and the last word about normative matters. Secondly, if it is possible to achieve the objective paradigm-worldview from different epistemological-political subjects, then the centrality of the institutional legal staff is no longer valid, which means that common people and the epistemological-political differences would assume epistemological-political-normative centrality in terms of the foundation of the normative-epistemological-political-ontological paradigms. Thirdly, and as a consequence, it must have a strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity as the normative basis of the existence, legitimation and promotion of the differences, an essentialist and naturalized basis which allows universalism itself, which is universalism itself, beyond the plurality of epistemological-political-ontological worldviews, subjects, values and practices. Now, fundamentalism becomes a consequence of this institutional self-affirmation as the basis-route-subject for universalism, for the integration, orientation and guidance of differences into one same epistemological-political-ontological paradigm-worldview: there is one strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity based on essentialist and naturalized foundations which constitutes itself as universalism itself, which renders the institution the only subject-way-field to objectivity, to its grounding and foment for all subjects, values, contexts and worldviews.

Now, here two problems arise, namely the effacement or minimization of the normative-epistemological-political centrality of differences, as subjects, values and practices which are at the same time singular and alternative regarding any other essentialist and naturalized basis, and the weakening of an ecumenical ethical-political project of integration which can unite cultures into a common (but not essentialist and naturalized) project of emancipation, peace and justice. In the two cases, the correlation and mutual support between institutionalism, strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity and fundamentalism put the religious institution as the fundamental basis, subject and content of the values, practices and ways of living, acting, thinking and grounding, beyond other institutions and epistemological-political subjects and ontological worldviews. Obviously, a religious institution grounded on essentialist and naturalized foundations and legitimizing-promoting a strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity can try and even perform both a model of human nature with ethical-political consequences to the society-culture in general and also an

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ecumenical project to the community of believers and non-believers as a whole, but it is very difficult to achieve a minimal consensus and an effective, inclusive and participative *praxis* with the differences, as with other religions, because such an institution understands and affirms itself always as the supreme arbiter and guide between God and the peoples in general, insofar as it standardizes and frames all the differences from a univocal epistemological-political-normative basis that erases the singularities of the differences.[13] In this case, the differences are not valid epistemological-political-normative subjects, as they are not authentic worldviews with their particularized dynamics, codes, practices and values. The strong institutionalism's messianic task appears here and defines the institutional vocation as the light of salvation for all from a standardized *praxis* and grounding which assembles and reduces the plurality of epistemological-political subjects to a univocal discourse and *praxis* centralized, monopolized and assumed by institutionalism, as it reduces the plurality or epistemological-political subjects to a single mass which can be guided and framed from the centralization and monopolization, by an institution, of the grounding and of the *praxis*—here, the institution would be the head, and the mass of people would be the body, as we can see in the normative self-understanding assumed by institutionalized religions.

Therefore, it is our opinion that institutionalized religions have four basic challenges in the 21st century: first, to renounce strong institutionalism, that is, the exclusive, self-referential, self-subsisting and autonomous internal centralization and monopolization of the interpretation, constitution, legitimation and public foment of the creed, beyond common sense and common people, beyond believers and non-believers; second, the weakening of the essentialist and naturalized basis which constitutes the creed as a very strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity, which means the abandonment of some parts of it, especially essentialist and naturalized values and practices regarding gender and sex, as the abandonment of the institutional performance of an ecumenical-multicultural project of integration and peace based on the centrality of one single religious institution in relation the others; third, the democratic openness to believers and non-believers in order to discuss possible lines of interpretation, grounding and use of the religious creed, which means that common sense and common people should be placed respectively as the normative arena of contents, values and practices and as epistemological-political subjects of the constitution, legitimation and evolution of the religious creed; fourth, the permanent, direct and pungent criticism by religious institutions of all forms of violent use of religious codes and practices by fanatic individuals and groups to frame and deny the differences from the affirmation of the strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity of the creed, from the imposition of a standardized essentialist and naturalized basis to all the differences, as condition for their existence and sense.[14]

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[13] See: John Rawls. *O liberalismo político* (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2000); Jürgen Habermas. *A inclusão do outro*: estudos de teoria política (São Paulo: Loyola, 2002); Rainer Forst. *Contextos da justiça* (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2010); John J. Collins. *A Bíblia justifica a violência?* (São Paulo: Paulinas, 2006).

[14] See: Leno Francisco Danner. "Um fundamento para o ecumenismo: a irredutibilidade do outro", *Horizonte*, Belo Horizonte, v. 12, n. 33 (jan./mar. 2014): 70-98; Leno Francisco Danner. "Pluralismo, autoridade e legitimação do credo: religiões institucionalizadas e universalistas na encruzilhada dos novos tempos", *Horizonte*, vol. 13, n°. 40 (2015): 2009-2035; Maria Corbì. "Elementos constitutivos do paradigma pós-religional", *Voices: Theological Journal of EATWOT*, vol. XXXV, n°. 1 (Jan./Mar. 2012): 255-259; Alejandro Ortiz. "Paradigma posreligional? Hacia una comprensión compleja del fenómeno religioso contemporáneo", *Voices: Theological Journal of EATWOT*, vol. XXXV, n°. 1 (Jan./Mar. 2012): 154-160; Juan Diego Ortiz. "Del teísmo al posteísmo: un cambio en la cultura religiosa", *Voices: Theological Journal of EATWOT*, vol.

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Indeed, what is very problematic today both in terms of institutional self-constitution and its relations with the society-culture and in terms of the correlation with other religious institutions is the mutual support between strong institutionalism, strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity and fundamentalism. It leads to three problematic institutional attitudes: first, the institutions' autonomization, self-referentiality, self-subsistence and independence regarding common sense and common people, so that it becomes basically internal, refusing any more profound contact with external epistemological-political subjects, values and practices—which means strong institutionalism, in other words, the institutional exclusive centralization and monopolization of the constitution, legitimation and social foment of the creed; second, the defense of a univocal and standardized and universal essentialist and naturalized basis of foundation from which all practical situations, values, actions and epistemological-political subjects, and the plurality of ontological worldviews as well, are framed, judged and oriented, which means the institutional powerful negation of the singularity of differences–here appears the strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity as the basis of social criticism, institutional structuration and political-cultural core-role; third, the opposition and minimization of the normative-epistemological-political core-role of other popular and institutional religions, cultures, subjects, values, which can supply an alternative *praxis* for living, thinking and grounding. Now, from this triple institutional *praxis* emerges fundamentalism—strong institutionalism and strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity—as a direct correlated consequence which powerfully harms both the valuing and the centrality of the differences as normative-epistemological-political subjects, values and practices, as well as of an ecumenical-multicultural dialog-*praxis* which can allow an intersubjective and universal (but not essentialist and naturalized, as said above) project of peace, justice and solidarity as an alternative to the violence of the contemporary *Realpolitik*.[15]

Therefore, the resolution to strong institutionalism, strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity and fundamentalism is enabled by the weakening or even the abandonment of two important theoretical-political bases of institutionalized religions. First, the weakening or the effacement of the essentialist and naturalized foundations as the basis of institutional internal constitution, legitimation and evolution, as the basis also of the institution's social-political-cultural core-role, which means institutional openness to differences as fundamental epistemological-political subjects, values and practices. Second, the abandonment, by institutionalized religions, of the exclusive centralization and monopolization of the objective constitution, legitimation and social foment of the valid creed, which means that other institutional religions, popular cultures and the plurality of the epistemological-political subjects can manifest and perform in their multiple ways the grounding of the religious-normative creed. In this second point, the institutional dispute is substituted with a more open and effective dialog-*praxis* with all epistemological-political subjects in order to construct a softer comprehension and definition of the creed, its social-political-cultural core-role, as its relations with other creeds, values and practices. Here, as we are arguing, the differences as epistemological-political subjects and normative practices and values should have more importance, participation and centrality with the purpose of weakening and reformulating the essentialist and naturalized foundations. Above all, the institutional fundamentalism—strong institutionalism and strong epistemological-moral-ontological

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XXXV, n°. 1 (Jan./Mar. 2012): 173-184; Ivone Gebara. "Suspeitas e reflexões filosóficas em torno da crise da religião", *Voices: Theological Journal of EATWOT*, vol. XXXV, n°. 1 (Jan./Mar. 2012): 113-122.

[15] See: Gianni Vattimo. *After Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Jürgen Habermas. *An awareness of what is missing*: faith and reason in a post-secular age (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).

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objectivity—must give its place to the differences as epistemological-political subjects, values and practices that can reformulate institutional *praxis* and creed from their own normative structuration and grounding.[16]

The question of the epistemological-political-normative grounding is, according to our understanding, the more impacting and dramatic challenge to institutional religions in contemporary times, in the sense that, by the consolidation of multiculturalism, of the differences as the fundamental epistemological-political-normative subjects, arenas, practices and values, we have a direct confrontation between institutional fundamentalism and this plurality of subjects, values and practices which live side by side in our societies or even in transnational terms. This way, institutional fundamentalism can acquire an epistemological-political-normative core-role which is not always committed to democratic openness and moderation, with the differences' epistemological-political-normative centrality and pungency. Now, institutional fundamentalism—the correlation between strong institutionalism (institutional self-referentiality, self-subsistence and autonomy regarding common sense and common people, regarding the differences) and strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity (an essentialist and naturalized basis as condition to the framing, judging and orientation of differences)—is the most dramatic challenge-problem of our societies exactly because in one same movement-dynamics (a) closes and autonomizes institutions in relation to differences, assuming the epistemological-political-normative grounding as an internal matter-task-*praxis* to the institution itself and, here, to its internal self-authorized legal staff, and (b) imposes and streamlines an essentialist and naturalized epistemological-political-ontological basis which, by being legitimized exclusively from within religious institution by its self-authorized legal staff, assumes a universalist, homogeneous and standardized core-role regarding the differences, so that this essentialist and naturalized basis becomes blind and insensible to the differences' normative-epistemological-political conditions, situation, constitution and legitimation.[17]

Now, the fact is that the correlation between strong institutionalism and strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity based on essentialist and naturalized foundations blocks and obliterates the possibility of a dialog and interaction between institutions and the differences, between institutional dynamics and subjects and common sense and common people, for a threefold reason: first, the essentialist and naturalized basis is not a question which can be democratically and openly discussed between institution and its self-authorized legal staff with common people, in the sense that such an essentialist and naturalized basis is beyond democratic dialog-*praxis*—common people can discuss about all matters, but not about the institution's essentialist and naturalized basis, influencing institutional internal change and transformation; second, this essentialist and naturalized foundation is a strongly objective paradigm, and this means that pluralism and the differences are a consequence and a condition of such an essentialist and naturalized basis, and not the contrary—therefore, the essentialist and naturalized basis has all legitimacy to frame, judge and orient the constitution, legitimation and evolution of the differences as well as the evaluation of their epistemological-political-normative constitution and *praxis* by religious institutions and their believers; third, institutional self-authorized legal staff becomes the fundamental

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[16] See: Emmanuel Lévinas. *Entre nós*: ensaios sobre a alteridade (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1998); Jürgen Habermas. *Between naturalism and religion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008); John Rawls. *Justiça e democracia* (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2000).

[17] See Richard Rorty. *Uma ética laica* (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2010); Jürgen Habermas. *Pensamento pós-metafísico*: ensaios filosóficos (Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro, 1990).

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epistemological-political-normative subject of grounding, both within the institution and without, in society as a whole, as the institution (from the correlation between strong institutionalism and strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity based on an essentialist and naturalized foundation) becomes the fundamental arena-*praxis* from which the *universal* legitimation (because essentialist and naturalized) is made possible, constructed and performed over all differences, believers and non-believers.[18]

How is an institutional openness and reciprocal dialog-*praxis* with the differences as epistemological-political-normative subjects, arenas, values and practices which can teach institutional religions possible? First of all, there is a mistake which permeates institutional religions and their assumption of an essentialist and naturalized basis as the legitimation of the correlation between strong institutionalism and strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity, which is the idea that the weakening of these essentialist and naturalized foundations, or even the complete abandonment of some problematic parts of them (as naturalized and essentialist gender and sexual contents or the emphasis on religious community as a universal societal-cultural-institutional model of integration and living) could reduce the institutional power, importance and authority, as institutional values and practices, in social, political, cultural and epistemological terms, diminishing the strong objectivity of the creed. Now, reducing institutional centrality is harmful for institutions (according to their self-comprehension) and that is a definitive reason to reinforce institutional fundamentalism from the mutual support and dependence between strong institutionalism and strong epistemological-political-ontological objectivity based on an essentialist and naturalized foundation. As a consequence, the dialog-*praxis* between religious institutions and the differences, if it is possible, is determined by institutional fundamentalism and minimized by it, as a condition for the maintenance of the institutional epistemological-political-normative centrality. This also means the more radical affirmation of institutional self-referentiality, self-subsistence and autonomy regarding the differences, regarding common sense and common people, as the contraposition between them, between the Church and the world.

Second of all, there is another mistake regarding the correlation between religious institutions and the differences that minimizes both the centrality of the differences, of common sense and common people and the possibility of a fruitful dialog-*praxis* between them, which is the idea that only from an institutional constitution, legitimation and evolution the creed is objectively constituted-legitimized and in a non-contradictory way, which also means the fact that only from an institutional procedure-subject it is possible to avoid the degeneration and the individualization of the creed. This is a Platonic heritage—the necessity of institutional centralization and monopolization of grounding against the differences, against the individualization and pluralism of interpretations—, which was directly assumed by Western institutionalized religions. According to it, the constitution, legitimation and social foment of the creed need an institutional structuration and grounding which can avoid multiple and contradictory interpretations of it, which can also avoid the multiple possible epistemological-political subjects who could interpret and legitimize in many concurrent and irreconcilable (and, therefore, non-objective, because of plural, non-standardized, non-homogeneous) perspectives the understanding and living of the religious creed. For example, that was a fact and intention in the constitution of the Catholic Church as a hegemonic

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[18] See: José Amando Robles. "Cambia copernicanamente la religión, deve cambiar la teología", *Voices: Theological Journal of EATWOT*, vol. XXXV, n°. 1 (Jan./Mar. 2012): 193-200; Manuel Grácio das Nieves. "Fin de la religión o nacimiento de la espiritualidad?", *Voices: Theological Journal of EATWOT*, vol. XXXV, n°. 1 (Jan./Mar. 2012): 129-134.

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institution, arena and subject of the (to the) objective foundation of the Christian texts, codes and practices, as much as that was the pungent basis for the Protestant Reform against the centrality and monopoly of the objective constitution, legitimation and performance of the Christian religion by the Catholic Church (finally, the same can be said about the constitution of Islam in terms of the conflict between Sunnis and Shi'ites). Such a mistake, assumed by institutional religions, leads to the necessity of a kind of institutional fundamentalism which correlates strong institutionalism and strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity from the affirmation of an essentialist and naturalized basis which can only be achieved and legitimized from a self-referential, self-subsisting and autonomous institutional process of grounding. Here, as a consequence, the institution centralizes and monopolizes internally and exclusively the interpretation, the constitution, the legitimation and the social foment of the creed, centralizing and monopolizing also a political-normative core-role in the society-culture as a whole and in relation to all epistemological-political-normative subjects and differences.

Third of all, there is one more mistake concerning the correlation between religious institution and common sense and common people, religious institution and the differences, which is the differentiation and opposition between the institutional self-authorized legal staff and the common man-woman, in the sense that only the institutional self-authorized legal staff has the ability of reading and interpreting both the sacred texts and practices (institutional internal dynamic) and the *signs of the times* (social-political-cultural dynamics). As was said above, that is the result of the institutional affirmation, centralization and monopolization of an essentialist and naturalized basis which depends exclusively on the institution's internal procedure and subjects of grounding, as such an essentialist and naturalized basis basically legitimizes the institution's self-referentiality, self-subsistence and autonomy regarding common sense and common people. Now, the institutional self-authorized legal staff constructs an internal dynamics of living and grounding the systematic religion *from within the institution* and, by institutional closure, self-referentiality and self-subsistence, can maintain and streamline a kind of decision-making process of justification of the creed which is blocked to historical-cultural-normative contingencies and transformations, or at least which assimilates these contingencies and transformations without abandoning the institutional closure and self-subsistence, as institutional fundamentalism. In this sense, the institutional self-authorized legal staff can objectively interpret the sacred texts-practices from such institutional differentiation and self-referentiality and autonomy regarding common sense and common people, as, based on this internal institutional procedure, read and interpret the world's signs of the times, interacting with and framing the differences from the use of an essentialist and naturalized understanding of human life and of societal-cultural constitution that depends on institutional creed, on the objective interpretation-use of the creed sustained by institutional religion from the correlation between strong institutionalism and strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity. As a consequence, the institutional self-authorized legal staff becomes the fundamental epistemological-political subject both of institutional grounding and of societal-cultural evaluation-framing-orientation of the differences, performing a kind of social analysis, political *praxis* and religious-cultural catechization that emphasizes fundamentalism (again: the correlation between strong institutionalism and strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity based on essentialist and naturalized foundations) as the normative platform for *praxis*, framing and judging all subjects, matters, practices and values.[19]

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[19] See: Deivit Montealegre. "Cambio: significación y desafíos – una nueva visión de la religión", *Voices: Theological Journal of EATWOT*, vol. XXXV, n°. 1 (Jan./Mar. 2012): 140-144.

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For us, three epistemological-political-normative points can allow the reformulation of this correlation and mutual support between strong institutionalism, strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity and fundamentalism, enabling to institutionalized religions the valuing, promotion and sensibility with the differences from the weakening or even the abandoning of the essentialist and naturalized basis as the substratum of the institutional self-referentiality, self-subsistence and autonomy: first, the separation between institutionalization and spirituality; second, as said above, the weakening of the essentialist and naturalized foundations and even the abandonment of some of their parts (gender and sexual contents, as an ecumenical project of ethical-political integration based on the centrality of one institution and on the affirmation of a closed and standardized community of religious identity); third, the more effective and democratic correlation-dialog-cooperation between institution and common sense, institutional self-authorized legal staff and common people, institutional religion and differences. These three points—that is our understanding—can allow the overcoming of institutional fundamentalism regarding the constitution, legitimation and social foment of the creed, which is grounded on the intrinsic link between strong institutionalism and strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity. Now, in contemporary times the weakening of both strong institutionalism and strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity is very necessary if we want to emphasize the centrality and importance of the category of differences as the basis of current life and of any possible grounding in our contemporary times. Indeed, when we look at the development of the contemporary ethical-political thought and at the social struggles for recognition performed by many plural social movements, cultural groups and epistemological-political-normative subjects, we can see the affirmation of the differences as the basis of these dynamics, struggles and subjects and of the target of the differences in these social struggles for recognition, that is, the correlation between strong institutionalism, strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity and fundamentalism based on essentialist and naturalized foundations which impose a standardized and unidimensional subject, way of life-grounding and value.[20]

First of all, there are many epistemological-political-normative subjects with correlative values and practices, with their correlative dynamics of living and grounding (a vital dynamics is a dynamics of grounding, an ontological worldview). In this sense, what would be the better dynamics of living-grounding? Which one has a universal sense and range? Which epistemological-political-normative subject can centralize, monopolize and streamline such a universal worldview? The special characteristic of life and of sociability is exactly pluralism, the differences' epistemological-political-normative centrality. And that is the starting and the final point in discussing institutional constitution and epistemological-political-ontological grounding—the massive violence committed in the 20th century against differences by the correlation between strong institutionalism, strong epistemological-political-ontological objectivity and fundamentalism clearly and pungently exemplifies that the strict standardization and framing of differences and pluralism from the institutional use and imposition of essentialist and naturalized foundations (in political and cultural-religious terms) is the great problem and challenge that must be faced and deconstructed if we want to counter the violence against differences, if we intend to ground a more peaceful, fair and inclusive institution and society. Institutions are the basis of society, as recognized by prominent contemporary intellectuals (for example, Rawls's idea of basic structure of society and

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[20] See: Iris Marion Young. *Justice and the politics of difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Judith Butler. *Problemas de gênero*: feminismo e subversão da identidade (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2003); Luce Irigaray. *An ethics of sexual difference* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

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Habermas's concept of social system): here, institutions determine from inside to outside the dynamics of societal-cultural constitution, legitimation and evolution.[21] Now, according to our reflection, it is the correlation between institutionalization and spontaneity that would perform a new kind of interaction between institution and common people, between institution and differences. If the institutions constitute themselves as the core of society-culture, assuming therefore a fundamental epistemological-political-normative role beyond the democratic participation of the social movements and citizen initiatives and cultural groups, then the democratic challenge becomes more dramatic and pungent to social movements and citizen initiatives and cultural groups, because, as we are arguing throughout the paper, the correlation between strong institutionalism, strong epistemological-political-ontological objectivity and fundamentalism is the very problematic consequence of the constitution of the religious institutions in particular and of the cultural-political institutions in general from the affirmation of their self-referentiality and self-subsistence and autonomy in relation to democracy, as the 20th century has taught us—when we remember the violence against differences and their struggles for recognition, this becomes the central point of its constitution and evaluation.[22]

It is our understanding that contemporary societal-cultural-institutional dynamics of constitution, legitimation and evolution must be performed from a dialectics between institutionalization and spontaneity that is characterized by institutional moderation and openness to differences, to popular cultures and subjects in order to minimize, weaken or even abandon some parts of the institution's essentialist and naturalized basis, which consequently means the overcoming of the correlation between strong institutionalism, strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity and fundamentalism, a correlation that directly and pungently confronts the differences' epistemological-political-normative centrality, putting them as a consequence of that correlation and, therefore, of institutionalization.[23] It is our opinion that institutionalism is a consequence of the dialog-*praxis* with common sense and common people, with the differences, as an exigency of our contemporary times, as *an institutional debt* with the *traditional pathway of foundation* which was and is characterized by that correlation of strong institutionalism, strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity and fundamentalism as the condition for criticism, framing, judgment and orientation of these differences, as if they were only valid and legitimate from the affirmation of the essentialist and naturalized basis centralized and monopolized by an institution which becomes closed, self-referential and self-subsisting regarding common sense and common people, regarding the differences, making itself autonomized and overcoming them by its strong institutionalism.[24]

In this sense, a double movement is required as motto for this more open and sensitive dialog-*praxis* between institutions and popular cultures, institutions and differences. On the one hand, institutions must overcome the centralization and monopolization of the

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[21] See: John Rawls. *Justiça como equidade*: uma reformulação (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2003); Jürgen Habermas. *Teoria do agir comunicativo* (vol. I): racionalidade da ação e racionalização social (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2012a); Jürgen Habermas. *Teoria do agir comunicativo* (vol. II): sobre a crítica da razão funcionalista (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2012b).

[22] See: Axel Honneth. Luta por reconhecimento: a gramática moral dos conflitos sociais (São Paulo: Editora 34, 2003); Axel Honneth. *Reificación*: un estúdio en la teoria del reconocimiento (Buenos Aires: Katz, 2007); Seyla Benhabib. *The right of others*: aliens, residents and citizens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[23] See John J. Collins. *A Bíblia justifica a violência?*, p. 46-48; Rainer Forst. *Toleration in conflict*: past and present (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 96-137.

[24] See Jean-François Lyotard. *La Diferencia* (Barcelona: Editorial Gedisa, 1999).

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religious creed in a very internal and autonomous procedure of foundation assumed and streamlined by a clerical self-authorized community of theologians which directly assume an essentialist and naturalized basis for the creed's grounding, constitution and social foment. This also means, as we are saying throughout the article, that theological self-authorized legal staff must abandon the institutional use and imposition of essentialist and naturalized foundations regarding some parts of human life, as sexual and gender contents, practices and subjects, and ecumenical-multicultural ethical-political projects supported by a strict religious identity as well.[25] In the same way, institutional theological legal staffs must denounce and openly and radically delegitimize the use of selective and partial, sometimes decontextualized, codes, values and practices of the religious creed in order to frame, judge and deny the differences' epistemological-political-normative subjects, values and practices.[26] Even here, the weakening and perhaps the abandonment of the correlation between strong institutionalism, strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity and fundamentalism is necessary. On the other hand, popular cultures, social movements and citizen initiatives must perform a very acute dialog-*praxis* with religious institutions with the aim of improving and defining the institutional grounding, interpretation and social-cultural-political foment of the creed. Here, civil society's epistemological-political subjects must conduct a direct dialog-*praxis* which confronts that correlation and the use-imposition of essentialist and naturalized codes, values and practices to frame, judge and guide a plural society which has as its basis the differences as starting point and final point of all dynamics of living and grounding. In this sense, if religious institutions must directly and pungently condemn, deny and delegitimize the selective and partial use of essentialist and naturalized foundations for fanatic and fundamentalist cultural-political groups and individuals against the differences, the civil society's epistemological-political-normative subjects must correlatively perform an epistemological-political *praxis* which frames and politicizes the institutional correlation between strong institutionalism, strong epistemological-political-ontological objectivity and fundamentalism, as they must always face and denounce the fanaticism and fundamentalism of social-cultural groups and individuals against the differences—as we can see here, civil society's epistemological-political-normative social movements, citizen initiatives and cultural groups assume a very central core-role in terms of institutional moderation and correction.[27]

Now, as said above, the great problem-challenge of our contemporary times, *the times of differences* as starting and final point of the current dynamics of living and grounding both institutionalized and non-institutionalized, is that correlation between strong institutionalism, strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity and fundamentalism which places as the basis of societal-cultural constitution, legitimation and evolution the self-referential and self-subsisting institutions, which monopolize the grounding, interpretation and social foment of the creed for all and from the affirmation that the differences' viability and legitimacy depend on their strong institutional validation. Therefore, it is necessary to invert the traditional pathway and dynamics of the constitution, legitimation and social foment-imposition of the objective epistemological-political-normative values, practices and subjects, which is the correlation between strong institutionalism, strong epistemological-moral-ontological

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[25] See Hauke Brunkhorst. *Solidarity: from civic friendship to a global legal community* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005); Jürgen Habermas. *Identidades nacionales y postnacionales* (Madrid: Editorial Tecnos, 2002).

[26] See John J. Collins. *A Bíblia justifica a violência?*; Marc H. Ellis. *Unholy alliance: religion and atrocity in our time* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

[27] See Jürgen Habermas. *Direito e democracia* (vol. II): entre facticidade e validade (Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro, 2003).

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objectivity and fundamentalism, in that institutions become the core and assume the central role of social-cultural-institutional constitution, legitimation and evolution, establishing the differences' viability and validation as a condition of strong institutionalism. Such an epistemological-political-normative inversion of the Western traditional institutional pathway of grounding the differences' constitution and *praxis* based on the affirmation of an essentialist and naturalized framework-code-procedure by a self-assumed institutional staff entails the centrality of the differences as subjects, practices, values and dynamics which hinder strong institutionalism, strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity and fundamentalism in favor of the moderation and even renunciation of the direct, standardized and holistic application-imposition-use of a single, very objective and universalist ontological worldview and epistemological-political paradigm centralized, monopolized and streamlined by institutional legal staffs.

If possible, we should try to totally democratize institutional-societal-cultural dynamics, procedures and subjects of epistemological-political foundation, weakening or even refusing to use-impose-legitimize essentialist and naturalized bases, values, practices and subjects as the core of these institutional-societal-cultural dynamics, values and practices. The correlation between strong institutionalism, strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity and fundamentalism is no longer valid to the institutional-societal-cultural grounding and *praxis*. That is a fact for our contemporary societies, and here the differences as epistemological-political-normative subjects, values and practices appear, offering a new basis for institutional-societal-cultural grounding. In this case, the differences as epistemological-political-normative subjects, practices and values can deconstruct strong institutionalism, strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity and fundamentalism in terms of interpretation, legitimation, constitution and social imposition of the religious creed, substituting the close, self-referential and self-subsisting strong institutionalism with an inclusive, participative and open popular democratic *praxis* regarding the creed's interpretation, legitimation and constitution over time, which means that the differences assume the fundamental core-role in terms of understanding, founding and streamlining both the religious creed as a whole and institutional structuration and functioning, as its relations with the social-cultural subjects. The epistemological-political-normative centrality of the differences as the subjects, practices and values of the institutional-societal-cultural grounding directly leads to the reformulation of the religious creed from the weakening of strong institutionalism and of strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity and to the abandonment of fundamentalism based on essentialist and naturalized foundations as the platform for the direct institutional framing, criticizing and orientation of the differences as a whole.

A final argument is necessary: if we look at the Habermas-Ratzinger debate in the *Dialects of Secularization*, we can see the opposition between two epistemological-political-normative bases of the institutional-societal-cultural constitution, legitimation and evolution over time, namely Habermas's argument that democracy is totally capable to replace essentialist and naturalized bases centralized and monopolized by strong institutionalism and to supply a normative-material basis (in juridical-political-constitutional terms) for current living-grounding-acting; on the other hand, Ratzinger's argument points to the fact that there is a deeper, essential and holistic ontological worldview which serves as the basis to democratic life, and life in general, which means that only from this metaphysical and essentialist grounding it is possible to legitimize and streamline institutions in particular and pluralistic

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social-cultural life in general.[28] Now, we think that both are correct and wrong. In the first place, it is very clear that, contrarily to what Habermas thinks, democracy cannot substitute ontological worldviews in terms of grounding of our existence. If we understand democratization as social-normative rationalization both of institutional-societal-cultural grounding in particular and of life in general, then it is very clear that religion is required to a life with meaning, which cannot be completely fulfilled by social-normative rationalization. In this sense, therefore, Ratzinger is right. However, on the other hand, institutionalized religions based on essentialist and naturalized foundations, which lead to that problematic correlation between strong institutionalism, strong epistemological-moral-ontological objectivity and fundamentalism (as to the intrinsic link between institutionalized religion and spirituality), are not possible to be sustained today, because that directly leads to the effacement and negation of differences and their complete submission and framing to a univocal, standardized and totalitarian worldview assumed, centralized and streamlined by a self-referential and self-subsisting institution. Now, in this sense, Habermas is right: an immoderate and very objective essentialist and naturalized basis denies the differences, weakening the importance of democracy as institutional-social-cultural form of life and grounding adapted to the differences, promoting these differences.

From this understanding, we argue that the moderate, open and direct dialog-*praxis* between institutions and social movements and citizen initiatives and cultural groups can streamline and select the kind of legitimation, valid codes and practices which could effectively constitute a valid and intersubjective religious creed (in terms of cultural, political, educational and economic values, practices and institutions). It is the intensity of the dialog-*praxis* between institutions and social movements and citizen initiatives and cultural groups that can correlate the institution's internal proceduralism and elites with the differences' subjects, values and practices. It is the institutional openness to and recognition of differences that is the basis for institutional reconstruction of its internal dynamics of functioning and legitimation, and institutional abandonment of the exclusive monopoly and centralization of the creed's constitution, legitimation and social foment. If contemporary individuals and social-cultural groups need ontological-religious worldviews, they also need democracy as the *medium* and counterpoint to fundamentalism, a democracy which has as its basis the differences as epistemological-political-normative subjects which are central—and definitive—both to internal institutional constitution and functioning, as to societal-cultural grounding, structuration and dynamics. That is the inversion of the traditional pathway of grounding and constitution of Western institutions and culture: *from the differences to the institutions, from pluralism to the* socially and culturally binding *objective values and practices, from the differences as epistemological-political-normative subjects to the institutions' self-authorized legal staffs, from the moderation and weakening of the essentialist and naturalized foundations to institutional objective constitution, legitimation and social foment of the creed,* an institutional creed that assumes the differences as normative-political-epistemological-ontological basis of its constitution, legitimation and streamlining.

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[28] See Jürgen Habermas & Joseph Ratzinger. *Dialética da secularização*: sobre razão e religião (São Paulo: Idéias & Letras, 2007).

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