

Civil and/or laic religions

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Objective. In postmodern culture, individuals explore ways to orient their worlds by a certain "invisible" religiosity, which penetrates throughout the so-called secular societies. The existence of societies is impossible without religions, neither the authentic ones, nor the so-called "earthly", civil or laic religions. This is the transition from institutional religions to something that can be defined as "personal religion", a type of religiosity in which individuals construct their own conceptual systems.

Methods. Both quantitative and qualitative methods have been used in an attempt to obtain the necessary authentic and thorough information. This means that data from a representative survey have been combined with an additional analysis of discussions within focus groups and with the results of participant observation and interviews for the purposes of the final analysis.

Results. Bulgarians have a healthy dose of skepticism. This is due to their high level of education and not least to their alertness and inquisitive nature in real life, including faith. Many people are influenced by popular culture. Originally, the main elements of human culture, including religion, are phenomena with great momentum. They change slower and more difficult than other phenomena. Most people say that the path to the temple can be found in a different way. Unfortunately, young people turn to religion only when something bad happens to them, if they suffer, or if they have a dilemma that excites them.

Conclusions. If "traditional" and "modern" are two ideal-typical poles, the present day Bulgarian society is situated somewhere in the middle between both of them. In all cases, it is a mixture that combines the pole of traditionalism, defined through continuity with the past, and the pole of modernity, defined by change, novelty and innovation.

Keywords: ecology, family, religions, sacred, profane

Introduction

Probably one of the greatest ironies of our postmodern world is that we have more capacity for communication than at any other time in the history of humanity and yet, there is a widespread feeling of disconnection. We are preoccupied with distractions while at the same time we are being bound to a stark feeling of loneliness. In postmodern culture, individuals explore ways to orient their worlds. They find themselves amidst a sea of chaotic relativity and have a greater need to bring meaning to their lives. In such a situation, an ascertainment like *God is dead* unexpectedly turn out to be accompanied by a certain "invisible" religiosity, which penetrates throughout the so-called secular societies. That is why the existence of societies is impossible without religions – neither the authentic ones, nor the so-called "earthly", civil or laic religions.

Culture

Society is a product of various human activities and is characterized by cultural originality. Any time, any age, any stage of social development has the features and characteristics of their culture and cultural developments. This essential characteristic is inevitably associated with conscious human individuals and groups that have a particular historically determined humanistic coefficient, which allows the researchers to distinguish natural from cultural reality. At the same time, researchers get into the specifics of cultural reality, remaining in the position of objective observers. The development of each culture is associated with the creation of new values, which are the benchmark of people's social activities. Culture enhances personal autonomy rights and covers knowledge, art, morality, and faith. The essence of culture is related to goal setting and action, regardless of the nature. Culture consists in emphasizing the social value of humans. As if, the difference between cultures seldom revealed for what it is – a natural phenomenon, people generally accept it as something monstrous or outrageous.

One of the main characteristics of the world is cultural diversity. People from different cultures live, work, learn together and constantly look for ways to accept and understand each other.

Problem areas of difference exist in every society, in every community, but should not be construed static, nor as a static object. Accordingly, the concept of diversity of human culture is not static. No doubt, people have created different cultures due to geographic distances, the specific characteristics of the environment and the ignorance of the rest of mankind. Furthermore, the differences are due to the isolation and the proximity.

Culture fits inside created by generations, store experiences and decisions of past eras. It is a human expression and affirmation, but also provides opportunities for the future.

Civilization

Civilization is an important matter in a category that over the past three centuries gradually accumulated and painted colourful and dramatic pictures of a diverse cultural and historical process of mankind. At the end of 18th century, it appeared that the idea of civilization contained mainly a new image for the human being and society. Civilization is an academic concept, which combines approaches of sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, and their interpenetrations from the middle of 20th century until present.

Civilization is related to education and politeness, but it includes a general overall improvement of the material and intellectual level of a group or community. It became the tradition of connecting with more countries, civilization of human life, and society. This tradition started from Immanuel Kant and reached Nikolai Berdyaev, connected the material civilization, technical and external aspects of human life activity. In their view, the advance of modern Western culture has left vast numbers of people in a state of spiritual and psychological alienation.

The rapid pace of technological change, the dominance of huge, impersonal institutions, and the bewildering complexity of modern society has left many individuals feeling adrift, isolated, and lacking a sense of meaning or purpose of their lives.

Society as a reality *sui generis* it has its own peculiar characteristics, which are not found elsewhere and which cannot be met again in the same form in the rest of the whole universe. The representations that express it have an absolutely different content from purely individual ones and we may rest assured in advance that the first adds something to the second.

Collective representations are the result of an immense cooperation, which stretches out not only into space but into time as well; to make them, a multitude of minds have associated, united and combined their ideas and sentiments; for them, long generations have accumulated their experience and their knowledge.

Religion

The sociology of religion is primarily the study of practices, social structures, historical backgrounds, development, universal themes, and roles of religion in society. There is a particular emphasis on the recurring role of religion in nearly all societies today and throughout recorded history. Sociologists of religion attempt to explain the effects of society on religion and the effects of religion on society.

In my opinion, there can be no substantive definition of religion. If the notion of religion is de-substantialized, what remains of it is, as far as possible, a way of believing which is compatible with the idea of tradition. Its contents are not defined *a priori* and they refer to the way of validating a given collective memory. The object of religion is alive, reborn, spreads, and dissipates, moved to the "critical times". The task of sociologists is to track and analyse these transformations.

The specific features of every religion can be read and interpreted sociologically. Sociologists of religion study religious facts, both past and present. These objective phenomena must also be treated as social facts, which can be explained by other social facts. In other words – to construct them, classify them, compare them, treat them within the relationship and conflicts in a society, recessed community in certain groups. In the study of religion, sociologists are interested in social context, social impact, social significance, role, nature and functions of a religion in society, the interaction of religion with other spheres of social life. Religion may be broadly defined as, the human quest for *the Holy* or *Sacred*, the experience of it, and the response to it. This universal human activity expresses itself in at least three ways: in thought (the intellectual expression), in action (the practical expression), and in fellowship (the communal expression). These complex religious expressions comprise the subject-matter of the academic study of religion.

The sacred and the profane

Sacred places function as some fixed reference points in the secular world. They offer a potential avenue for bridging the gap between the secular and the spiritual. The labyrinth of human relations with the sacred is incredibly complex and impassable. Sacred places connect very different and important realities.

According to Emile Durkheim, the human conscience regards the sacred and the profane as two different kinds, two worlds that have nothing in common.

Durkheim defines society by its symbolic boundaries: it is the sharing of a common definition of the sacred and the profane, of similar rules of conducts and a common compliance to rituals and interdictions that defines the internal bonds within a community. He posits that the boundaries of the group coincide with those delimitating the sacred from the profane.

In *The Sacred and Profane*, Mircea Eliade begins his discussion of sacred place as it relates to the idea of the "holy" in Rudolph Otto's work *The Holy*. He agrees with Otto that the sacred is not some abstraction that has very little to do with our everyday lives.

Eliade presents the three building blocks of every sacred place: disruption, orientation, and communication. These categories are important not only for understanding the sacred place. Sacred place then, in Eliade's thinking, "breaks upon" a profane world – a world in which there is no

difference. As opposed to so much of modern or new age thinking, a sacred place is a place of disruption and difference.

Profane space or chaotic space would be a world where there are no differences, where place is the same in that one place and is no more significant than another. Creation without difference would be a creation without sacred place. The whole world then would be a profane space, which, of course, is a world of chaos, confusion, and relativity.

Another way of saying this is that in our postmodern culture individuals' look at themselves in order to orient their worlds. Yet we need more than ourselves to bring meaning to our worlds. Nevertheless, the sacred in its' classical form seems to be losing ground. *What are your sacred places?* One can say everything – from being alone in a car, to spending time in the desert, a barn, or a field, to a particular table in a coffee shop.

No doubt, sacred space exists for the primary purpose of placing us in communion with the sacred world. Because we live in a secular world, because we no longer live in the garden, we experience great alienation, and it is here that sacred place offers the potential avenue to bridge the gap between the secular and the sacred. Eliade reminds us that we yearn for sacred place so we can find a fixed point in an otherwise relative world.

All of the religious answers constitute the sacred universe of traditional societies, but it could be included in the creation of a modern sacred. In a condition, that “sacred” doesn't mean only “religious”, religion could help to legitimate the purposes and actions of society, to strengthen the determination of people, to help build up a sense of identity. Religion could help to legitimate the purposes and actions of society, to strengthen the determination of the people, to help build up the sense of identity.

This is the transition from institutional religions to something that can be defined as *personal religion*, a type of religiosity, in which individuals construct their own conceptual system. People construct their meaningful dispositive for themselves and are free to choose any religion or religious group to belong.

Deep ecology

In traditional societies, the individual exists only as far as taking its place in a group, a place that is often destined from birth in a social hierarchy. It is governed by the collective beliefs, rules and norms shared by all present that are not in dispute - transcendence based on social connections and "pre"-mythical past and valuable. The past is no longer an idyllic world, which stands as reference. It is an imperfect world and a subject of dispute.

The modern man of the 21st century chooses his preferred beliefs and values in a pluralistic world, where conflicting values co-exist and are subject to the critique of reason. He is surrounded with satellite television, radio, e-mail, computer networking, fax machines, and of course the Internet. There is a profusion of *data*, but very little *knowledge* that connects people. There is a deluge of *information*, but very little *wisdom* that helps him live skilfully. The religious man is more like a nomad, that hardly defines his time travelling and because he changes the places where he lives more often. Everyone is free to adopt and abandon the symbolic content of religious systems that they like.

The dialogue between religions and ecology promises to be one of the most effective, because in practice the belief, religious values can oppose the inexorable forces of aggression, destruction and poor spirits.

Ecology reminds of itself. It is becoming more and more evident how vast its field of study is. Ecological motives and considerations should become a major factor when governmental

decisions are taken. The norms and recommendations of ecologists are ignored all too often, and this is caused mostly by objective reasons but also by subjective ones.

In societies that are connected with nature, not against its face to make it obey, and found it both its extension and its impact, certainly have kinship between the sacred and the political. Both categories can be defined simultaneously as the principles and the relationships that they suggest "match" each other. In the present situation of changes and transformations "things" obtain another different meaning. This creates a sense of doubt, confusion and transience.

Putting it differently, more and more people realize that we must "*live simply so that others may simply live*". (Mahatma Gandhi)

The new environmentalism, which has been termed *deep ecology or ecosophy, earth wisdom*, gives rise to potent *eco-theology and eco-psychology movements*.

The term *deep ecology* was coined by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in 1972, based on the earlier work and inspiration of persons such as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Robinson Jeffers, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, David Brower, et al. *Deep ecology* has been elaborated in numerous books and articles since then by Naess and many other voices. Naess and George Sessions articulated a deep ecology platform in 1984.

Here are the 8 points of this deep ecology platform, as posited by Naess and Sessions:

“1. The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent worth). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.

2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.

3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.

4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantially smaller human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires a smaller human population.

5. Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.

6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.

7. The ideological change will be mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between being big and being great.

8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes.” (Naess., 1995, p.68)

Environmental culture is not an independent and isolated phenomenon. It exists in certain socio-cultural context and there is a bilateral interdependence. The inherited culture is influenced by the environment – geographical, material, institutional, organizational and cultural components and at the same time it affects this background. On a personal level, environmental culture is in relation to age, education, social background, value systems, and individual life strategies.

Unfortunately, anyone who sees our horrific and pressing environmental woes and who joins with others in the great work of educating friends, colleagues and the general public is going to have a hard time saying anything without sounding like one of those “grieving greenies” or “spoil-sports.”

Within the empirical survey, carried out in the course of the project *Transformation of the national value system and its synchronization with European patterns: the development of environmental culture as an indicator of transition of European values in the Bulgarian Society* (Head Assoc. Prof. Dr. A. Mantarova and funding from National Science Fund of the Bulgarian

Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth, 2010), environmental culture was described as a complex social phenomenon, alternating historical unity of consciousness and behaviour related to the interaction society - nature in all its forms.

Furthermore, based on information gathered during the survey conducted in the Blagoevgrad region in March 2010, we will present and analyse the basic parameters of the environmental culture of the population aged 18 and more, in the area and its main dependencies.

The sociological surveys show that state of the environment is assessed as a very serious problem by 28.6 % of respondents and as a serious one - by 39.4%. A more detailed look at the information indicates the presence of inter-group differences in the assessment of the situation. Negative evaluations were given more frequently by young people - between 18 and 29 years (72.9% and in the sample – 67.4%), by highly educated people - 79.3 %. Instead, for the respondents between 50 and 59 years, a much more serious problem is unemployment (which they are much affected, and their prospects for returning to active working life are rather limited). The problem is described as less important by the low-educated groups.

Conclusions

Young people have a natural predisposition to build environmentally adapted worldview. This is the beginning of what should be followed to achieve the new thinking, new methodology, new approach, and new behaviour in today's global environmental situation.

For the average Bulgarian, faith has little importance for the general development of the country. The roles of faith and religion in Bulgaria are so very secondary, even within Eastern Europe. They can influence neither the models for public conduct, nor the personal morality of citizens.

The effect of modern mass culture in all of its forms serves as an addition to the traditionally neglectful attitude of Bulgarians towards faith before 1989. The invading secularism of the West mingles itself with the atheistic heritage from the Communist era. This process concerns the young generation most deeply. Popular culture, pseudo-folkloric music and all the new tendencies of modern day life have a dominant role in a young person's view of life. Things like morality, faith or knowing the Bible seem like a secondary problem. Many among the young are more susceptible to ideas of occultism and exorcism than to those coming from the Churches or the Word of God.

In conclusion, the atheistic period in the history of Bulgarian society is an important factor for the spiritual vacuum in Bulgarian society, but a more serious reason for it - is the period of transition leading to total carelessness - economic and spiritual carelessness.

Young people need spiritual direction and they're not the only ones, because in modern society and its dynamic rhythm, the material side of things prevails. We are witnessing not only a material crisis, but also a profound spiritual one. The spiritual is inverted to the point that kept the material and where available, can be said that there is some form of native flashes that are not organized in any process. Regardless of the logic of profanation and secularization of the modern world, there seems to be a process of reversion to the sacred – to the modern sacred. In their efforts to note at the same time the loss of influence that the institutional religions suffer, and the dispersions of the religious symbols in modern societies, a lot of researchers use the term *sacred*. Sacred things with their immunity offer the ultimate meaning of everyday life, because within the limits of the profane it is impossible to find such meaning. Because of this the existence of societies is impossible without religions – neither authentic, nor the so-called “earthly”, civil or laic religions.

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