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Laicizare și renaștere religioasă

Rezumat

Majoritatea cercetătorilor fenomenului religios din lumea de astăzi sunt de acord că, pe termen lung, biserica tradițională a înregistrat un declin în majoritatea țărilor occidentale. Conceptul cheie folosit atunci când se analizează aceste schimbări este laicizare. Totuși în această dezbatere sunt suficiente argumente, care pot fi aduse atât în favoarea cât și împotriva laicizării. Pare a fi însă destul de evident ca laicizarea, în calitate de concept, este mai folositoare pentru a explica schimbările care intervin în cadrul bisericilor tradiționale de astăzi, atât în sensul declinului puterii și influenței cât și în ce privește procesele de laicizare internă. Forțele de modernizare existente la nivelul ansamblului societății sunt prezente (sau acționează) și în interiorul multor instituții religioase tradiționale.

Religia lumii moderne, dincolo de disputa privitoare la anumite concepte, ar trebui analizată în afara fundalului marcat de schimbări rapide, instabilitate și diversitate. Chiar dacă formele tradiționale ale religiei își pierd într-o anumită măsură din putere, religia încă rămâne o forță critică în lumea noastră socială. Interesul pentru religie,în formele sale tradiționale și în cele noi, pare să fie durabil în timp. Religia oferă multor oameni răspunsuri la întrebări complexe despre viață și destin, întrebări la care rațiunea nu poate aduce răspunsuri mulțumitoare.

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Secularization and Religious Rebirth

Summary

The majority of nowadays researchers of the religious phenomenon agree that, in the long run, the traditional church has known a decline in the majority of western countries. The key concept used when these changes are analyzed is secularization. Still, in this debate there are sufficient arguments that could either support or deny secularization. Nevertheless it seems sufficiently evident that secularization as a concept is more useful in explaining the changes that appear inside nowadays traditional church supporting both the decline of its power and influence as well as the processes of internal secularization. The modernizing forces extant on the level of the entire society are present (or act) inside many traditional religious institutions.

The modern world's religions, beyond the dispute concerning certain concepts, should be analyzed outside the background marked by rapid changes, instability, and diversity. Even if the traditional forms of religion are losing from their power, religion still remains an important force in our social world. The interest for religion both in its traditional and recent forms seems to last. Religion offers to many people answers to complex questions about life and fate, questions that reason cannot explain satisfactorily.

Secularization and Religious Rebirth

Beginning with the first approaches to the sociology of religion an idea appeared - later on taken over by many researcher - that traditional religion (namely the „consecrated" one) could become more and more marginalized in the modern world. Karl Marx, Emil Durkheim and Max Weber (the three great forerunners in the field of sociology) sustained constantly that the phenomenon of secularization had developed in the same time (parallel) with the modernization of society, since there is a direct connection between science and technology in the control and explanation of the world. Thus, secularization would represent the process in which religion diminishes its influence and its impact upon different spheres of social life.

The controversy regarding the thesis of secularization has started one of the most complex debates inside the sociology of religion. In this dispute there is mainly a discord between the promoters of the thesis of secularization and the opponents of the concept who sustain that religion remains a significant force, even if it frequently takes on new and unfamiliar forms

The gradual increase in popularity of new religious movements makes debatable the thesis of secularization. Its opponents underline the variety and dynamism of the new religious movements sustaining that religion and spirituality trace an essential coordinate of modern life. Moreover, in this dynamic that records the diminishing of the importance of traditional religions, religion does not disappear but it is oriented towards new directions. Although not all researchers in the field agree with such an approach.

The supporters of the idea of the secularization show that these movements are still peripheral, marginal as regards society as a whole, even if they have a visible impact upon the lives of their adepts. The new religious movements are divided and relatively disorganized, showing a high rate of mobility as people are attracted to a movement for a period of time, then migrate to a newer one. In comparison with a constant and profound religious implication, the participation in the new spiritual movements seems rather a behavior resulting from a life style, the attraction to something trendy, thus very modern (or fashionable).

The concept of secularization is difficult to explain also because there is no consensus in the way the process could be measured. Moreover, a number of sociologists use definitions of religion that do not coincide: while some sustain that religion is best understood in the terms of the traditional church, others consider that it is imperiously necessary for a new and larger perspective to be adopted in order to include dimensions such as personal spirituality and the strong commitment to certain values. These various perceptions would evidently influence pro or con arguments concerning secularization.

Secularization can be quantified (measured) taking into consideration a series of characteristics. Some of these have an objective character, such as, for example, the number

of the members in a religious organizations. The official statistics can indicate the number of people belonging to a church or other religious organisms and show how many of them are active in attending the services and performing the rituals or other ceremonies. Taking into consideration this factor the religious phenomenon is very strongly present in all industrialized countries (except the USA).

The case of Great Britain's model of religious decline can be found also in the other western European countries, including catholic ones such as France or Italy. Even if there are certain differences in the number of participations in the religious services in these two countries, the model of decline is similar in both cases.

Another point of reference to secularization is the variable degree in which churches and other religious organizations preserve their social influence, properties, and prestige. If some 150 years ago religious organizations were succeeding to influence in a significant measure certain decisions of governments and social institutions, imposing respect in the community, nowadays this does not happen anymore (or perhaps in a lesser degree). It was already 7-8 decades ago that religious organizations lost progressively the influence they formerly had in politics, and this tendency is universally valid.

A third characteristic or dimension of secularization refers to beliefs and values. We could consider this a dimension of religiosity. The attendance of places of worship and the degree of social influence of churches are evidently the expression of people's beliefs and ideals. A great number of those who have strong religious beliefs do not attend public ceremonies and vice versa: the regularity of such attendances or participations does not always presuppose strong religious convictions since people may attend out of habit or because this is what the community expects from them.

Though the secularization of religious life in nowadays world can be easily observed this does not necessarily mean an abandonment of religion or its exclusion from individuals' or communities' lives. We can rather say that it shows an abandonment of traditional theologies and of the pressure these used to impose on individual experiences, on education, on social and political practices or upon culture. In this situation secularization implies not the disappearance of the religious beliefs but rather a shift in modern man's interest towards alternative forms of religion which are emptied of any sense of transcendence.

Secularization proposes another face of the symbolic conscience that recuperates the human being's inclination towards the sacred. In fact we witness a process of desacralization of the absolute principles of revelation through the installment of multiple mechanisms of recuperating the sacred. Nevertheless, in the same time, a free place is left for the pretenses of the profane to insinuate itself as an alternative to the sacred.

Those who adopt the perspective of the second orientation are the researchers who consider that the entire literature built around the theory of secularization is based upon an erroneous premise. More precisely, considering that it does not apprehend that nowadays' world is even more religious than it has ever been. The theory of secularization according to which modernization attracts necessarily after it a decline of religions in society and in people's lives can be refuted with more nuanced affirmations according to which modernity

has secularizing effects but, in the same, it has stimulated strong anti-secularization movements.

Secularization on a social level does not attract automatically the secularization on the level of individual conscience. Even though there are religious institutions which have diminished or lost their power, others have continued in their turn to have power at the level of individual practices or have been even replaced by institutions with a stronger religious dimension. In the same time, there are organisms with a well-delimited religious identity which play an important social and political role, even under circumstances in which there are very few who practice the religion they represent.

Thus, in the modern world, we realize that the religious phenomenon has another type of dynamic than a century and half ago, a much changed kinetics in that we identify a movement away from formerly privileged zones to peripheral ones or towards alternative modalities of concentrating power. In order to understand the changes the dynamic of religion produces we should underline the existence of three characteristics specific to secularization: 1.) The separation of religion from politics, science, and economy 2.) The reduction of religion in the private sphere 3.) The diminishing of the social role of religious beliefs, actions, and institutions.

There is no doubt that the relations between religion and modernity are much more complex than shown by this rather simplifying approach, but, essentially, one could sustain that secularization has left profound marks in western consciousness and in the social, political, juridical, and institutional constructions of the modern world. The imposition of these constructions in the spirit of the secularization principles has resulted in a weakening of the religious power in the structuring of the public space as well as a differentiation of the role played by the religious power. Religion does not act in an absolute, compact, unitary and immobile manner the way it manifests itself in traditional societies.

Secularization presupposes that religion is an important power but which manifests itself in the context of a plurality of powers that are exerted on people's lives in the public space. Thus, religion has a single role in a larger screenplay on the basis of which the complex spectacle of modernity is staged.

Regarding the theory of secularization as a consequence, religious communities can adopt strategies of refusal or, on the contrary, of acceptance of the new models of modernity. Nevertheless, these strategies, as it appears, had no significant results as they were based upon a wrong premise of secularization. In order that the refusal of certain ideas of modernity should have effects in the real and concrete life of people, the adoption of certain strategies consciously used by religious communities is necessary.

A first strategy would be that of a religious revolution that presupposes the structuring and imposition of an anti-modern religion to the entire society. Another strategy would be the initiation of some religious subcultures which should stop any outside influence by isolation. Such anti-modernist strategies do not necessarily aim at religion, but at groups which can offer radical solutions, either to revolution or to isolationism. They put into practice solutions resembling religious fundamentalism in a greater measure than

the ones specific to traditional religious communities. These will thus impose solutions belonging to religious extremism without constituting themselves in viable alternatives to secular modernity.

The major effect of the secularization process is the separation of institutions in the process of governing, and this implies the use of new concepts of religion, ethics, politics and of new associated imperatives. The revitalization of religions under these conditions shows that religion has still a role to play, that the irrational and intolerance are growing in everyday life despite the persuasive rationalism of modernity.

By and large, modernity sustains and imposes the institutionalization of certain principles such as: constitutionalism, democracy, human rights, moral autonomy, civic equality, industry, consumerism, free markets, and especially secularization. Beginning with this modernity initiated a new experience of the way to be in the world, through a structure of representation in that the religious and secularization mediate, each in its way, the identities, discernment, political and economic projects etc.

Regardless the position we adopt when analyzing modernity, one thing is certain: the importance of religious values in the social dynamic that led to the development of western mentality. Remarkable in the perspective of western culture is the the evolution shown by the transformation of value systems. Parallel with modernity the value hierarchies are secularized and pulled out of the sphere of the absolute transcendence so as to develop

Sărbătoarea Adormirii Maicii Domnului la Glod; foto: Florin Avram

on the basis of a transcendence regenerated under the sign of the interference between the relative and the absolute. Even if the transcending structure of values is preserved, they are filled with secularized contents, their universality blurred and strongly coupled with the experience of individual beings that manifests themselves in liberty and assume their responsibility.

Finally, we may underline that all these transformations to which religious values and religious imagery have been subjected will have visible effects on the way national ideology and the power it is endowed with will function. This could be possibly subordinated to the symbolic conscience through which the lawful government be consolidated or, on the contrary, deviate to a nationalism that slides into extreme fundamentalism associating religious claims with those induced by the exacerbation of the requirements sustained by the nationalist ideology.

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