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DO MODERN RELIGIONS UNITE OR DIVIDE OUR SOCIETIES?

The evolution of modern contemporary societies is influenced by many internal and external factors. Internally, societies are structured on cultural and historical components, being influenced directly by the linguistic, ethnical and moral-religious identities.

On the outside, contemporary societies are mainly influenced by the political and geo-regional contexts, by the stability or not of the neighborhood, but also by less socially shaped factors, such as the modernity phenomenon, the globalization one or the religious secularization element. When the internal factors meet the external ones, different types of pressure occur inside our societies, pressures that lead in extremist, violent or irrational behaviors.

In our studies, we tried to notice and explain how these factors that influence the evolution of modern societies can be defined. What external social influences are specific to modernity? How are social influences expressed in the context of external factors, but of local specificity? What kind of extremism and social violence result from the evolution of contemporary societies? Our analysis is based on a careful view over the modern societies, especially regarding the research field specific to sociology, mainly the one of religious sociology.

Key words: *Romania, violence, modernity, pluralism, contemporary society, religious extremism, secularization.*

Our analysis is based on a thorough sociological observation of the contemporary religious life, and it has two main approaches and great doubt:

The two main analysis directions are represented by:

- modern religions, on the one hand, along with everything that represents the expression of modernity in religious life;

- contemporary societies, on the other hand, societies, in the plural, define concepts of analysis of what represents a human community. All of the human communities are influenced by culture, region and geographical area, historical age, relation systems and both protocol and military-economic agreements, all of these determining us to discuss about contemporary societies and not only about contemporary society.

My fundamental doubt, in the context of the two study directions, is if their relating to each other will influence either an advantageous path for social unity or social division?

Therefore, for now I have a doubt and not a certainty when talking about modern religions and contemporary societies. Very much was written on this subject in sociology, and especially in sociology of religions and political sciences, about how religions influence or change the structure of social behavior. Moreover it has been carefully reviewed the way in which religion can generate economic wellbeing and financial capital, Max Weber considering the religious ethic of Calvinist Protestants believers as one of the main explanations that might be found at the basis of the core of modern capitalism.

Modern Religions features from a sociological perspective

I do not intend to make an exhaustive presentation on the characteristics of modern religions and contemporary societies, it would far exceed our debates, but it is at least imperative to highlight the most important ones.

Talking nowadays about modern religions it means to account, necessarily, the historical evolution of the contemporary societies. Specifically, all religions have as main dogma, a teaching unchanged over time, regarded as the Truth revealed, transmitted directly from God - whatever His name, and I'm not referring here only to the Christian religion but all religions revealed, whether they are mono-theistic or multi-theistic. Modern religions base their activity on a strong canonical interpretation (legal codes), and a dominant religious moral transmitted

to the followers as the only form of understanding and interpreting the realities of modernity.

However, their social behavior is different from one historical era to another, meaning attitudes, behavior or social institutions directly aligned with the sociological and historical moment in which they happen. For example, for our meeting today we communicated intentions of organization and participation through electronic messages, by mail, we came here by plane, in only a few hours from different corners of Europe, and we watched on television a few days ago, the Vatican Easter service, broadcasted live, meaning in real time. Well, all of these would not have been possible 75 or 100 years ago. Specifically, contemporary religions today are influenced by all the benefits and the immense technical and cultural possibilities of the society in which we live.

That is why some analysts define the contemporary period as hypermodern, others consider it post-modern or ultra modern, or they simply consider it as the expression of a modernity characterized by the highest historical evolution. A phase of higher evolvement than the actual one is not yet known, which states the fact that human kind has just evolved among its existence and has not faced periods of involution. In this context and in this logic interpretation, we have decided to talk about modern religions, thus defining the religions and the religious behavior that we encounter nowadays in the contemporary societies. But what do we really mean by the notion of contemporary societies? Obviously, these too may be called moderns societies, just that social modernity is more complex and more powerfully charged by a scientific meaning than the syntagma of modern societies – our societies. Using such a general expression in defining contemporary societies, allows me to highlight the scientific dimension of the syntagma which defines modern religions.

The characteristics of contemporary societies from a sociological perspective

To define contemporary societies from the perspective of the sociological analysis and especially of the sociology of religions, it is necessary to emphasize that the evolution of the modern societies is extremely complex being influenced by some extensive phenomena, which are generated by economical, technological and military influence on structure, mentalities and social institutions. These kind of social phenomena, specific for nowadays societies, are affecting in different

ways the societies which are on various stages of development. Whether we talk about globalization or about the secularization or about the migration or digital revolution, all these social phenomena have in their composition an important religious part too. Therefore we consider that modern religions, having influence in structuring contemporary behaviors and social institutions it may influence coagulant or by separation.

The place and role of religions and the United Europe

Now I will try to present the connections that exist and those that may exist between the two axes of research, announced at the beginning of our analysis, but focusing our attention on the realities of European society. Therefore, I will try to emphasize the actual relations between modern religions and social structures of the European Union, in order to understand how they both influence each other.

Nowadays relations between religion and European Union seem tense, an institutional tension which expresses itself through an attitude of indifference between the two entities. But although they are in a tension, therefore competing, because tension appears only when there is a dispute over a common interest, regarding the relation between religions and The European Union, as a paradox, the institutional purpose is the same for both.

The entire construction project of the European Union but also the direct targets of Religions concern human life, individual and community life, so that man might have a higher social comfort and a standard of living more important than in the past.

And then there is the question: where are all these tensions coming from and what does supply a mistrust, tensioned state between the two entities, religions and the European society, if their objectives are one and the same?

The mistrust of the European institutions in the influence which religion has on the behavior of individuals is fueled by the numerous conflicts which Europe has witnessed over its historical existence. This is why, politicians have encouraged, over the last century, at least, a clear distinction between the State and Church inside the European borders.

Moreover, to highlight this distinction, the message of the Christian religion, that in the preamble of the Constitutional Treaty of the European Union it needs to be mentioned the explicit role of Christianity in structuring the mentalities and the historical European conscience, has been constantly refused.

And if the decision of the European Union is based on the mistrust in religions, because of the bloody conflicts, which have been fueled, over the years, by religious factors, neither do the religions in Europe manifest any trust in the European institutions from many points of view.

First of all, – religions consider that what triggers an important state of mistrust is the laity policy, sometimes called secular-humanist, promoted more and more by many European states.

Equally, it triggers the mistrust of Religions in the European Institutions, the modern approach – but too different from the traditional forms – of the sets of moral values on marriage relationships, consensual families, and gay marriages and same-sex relationships or approaches increasingly more insistent on the right to live by adopting mentalities that encourage euthanasia.

By the insistence of the European institutions to apply and develop legislation behavior that promotes a European civil morality – conflicting with the religious morality, regardless of their identity expression, it fuels the danger of the social and cultural European uniformity which obviously increases the mistrust between religions and the European Union, equally increasing the degree of social tension.

To all these tense situations described above, there are ethnic and cultural tensions, generated by a chaotic application of a policy of encouraging multiculturalism, without taking into account the cultural and ethnic specificity of the different people from the European space, but also the context and the European specificity in its historical whole.

Also, European social tensions are fueled by the economic crisis and the increasing inequalities between different social classes and also by the capitalist competitive environment, more and more wild and without generally valid rules.

In this European context, a question arises, where the Place and Role of Religions is today? Do modern religions unite or separate the common European space?

Of course, religions cannot occupy a place in the common European space, by force, as it apparently tries lately, whether we refer to the attacks on Charlie Hebdo, the Bataclan in France by the end of 2015 or the attacks in March 2016 in Brussels.

This must not be the way! Religions should not encourage violence, enmity, hatred and death. Religions should encourage life, happiness, peace and the future of Europe and humanity.

Dialogue, communication, understanding and religious pluralism

Therefore, the relations between the different religious identities and also between religions and the united Europe must be based on dialogue, communication, understanding and mutual help. The responsibility for the future Europe is shared by both the European institutions and the Religions – and the main beneficiary of this shared responsibility must be the European «man», no matter his country or his identity, ethnic or cultural religious.

However, reporting the modern religions to a cultural space which is based on a social and political organization different from religious morality, a civic environment where fundamental human rights are considered a foundation of the organization and social development, there are conflicting states becoming more numerous between individual civil liberties and religious constraints imposed by a religious tradition often frozen in historical eras unable to understand social progress. Moreover, religious norms, when taken out of their historical and geographical context and often interpreted biased or manipulative to justify actions of propaganda or social pressure, are real weapons of ideological struggle. When interpreted and lived in this way, religion loses its transcendental dimension and it's being transformed into a genuine political propaganda strategy. It is the case of the prayer «Allah Akbar», God is great! which became the slogan of struggle used as a religious mark for identifying and committing the most heinous crimes and terrorist attacks, directed towards the vulnerable civil society. During these crimes also followers of Islamic religion with no other fault than being near where a militant suicide bomber has detonated explosives belt die, in the subway station or in the public square. After the bombing of the Paris newspaper editorial Charlie Hebdo, on 7 January 2015, the civil society and politicians joined in a peaceful public protest attended by over one million people, wishing to send to the world the message that civil society disapprove and reject such acts of cruelty directed against humanity. But what really happened at Charlie Hebdo? A fundamental right of freedom of public expression, specific to the press, came into conflict with another right, but this time of the Islamic religion, to defend Allah of the defamation and mockery. In imposing this religious requirement, by force of arms, the newspaper editorial attacker stressed that his personal religion, interpreted on its subjectivity, it is in conflict with the structured rules of the civil society.

Thus, religion has become the main instrument of civic pressure, even if the human sense of religion has been distorted by a subjective and emotional interpretation with a large dose of irrationality. The attitude of French society mainly, but also the European one, has become hostile towards Islam, dividing sympathies and interreligious collaborations through a fault steep that deepened increasingly more with each terrorist assault lived in Europe in the last two years at least. So on the one hand, religious behavior has created a rift, a rupture towards the other religions existing in Europe, but has also generated in the civil society a phenomenon of unity and solidarity unprecedented in the contemporary history of Europe. The consequences of such a confrontation between religion and European society are unimaginable in the medium and long term. From enmity between different religious identities and to social exclusion the consequences of these attitudes will feed very painful extremist reactions.

Take for example the crisis of the refugees from Syria. There are fewer and fewer political analysts who make the difference between personal suffering of a man who lived in Syria until a few months ago and his Islamic identity. To protect his life and his family and his children he decides to go into exile in the European refuge. Unfortunately, the Europeans that greets him in Greece, Hungary and Germany, doesn't see in him a man in distress but sees an extremist religious representative, unable to adapt to modern European realities. Therefore, the European instantly manifests a rejection response. «To return to his country» has been the reaction of a Romanian citizen when the first group of 15 Syrian refugees has been lodged in Romania. The rejection reaction is as brutal as it is surprising, especially considering that Romanian society is considered a tolerant and welcoming society especially considering that it is a dominant Christian society, with over 86% of believers of the Christian Church. Another example of religious intolerance and social division is the reaction of young people from Bucharest who campaigned in various forms against the Muslim community intention to build a larger mosque in Romania's capital, funded by the Turkish state, to suit the needs of specific religious rites and rituals of the Islamic religion. Although in the past 25 years, the Muslim community in Bucharest has increased considerably, making it overcrowded in a small mosque, built more than 70 years ago, it seems however that a community with fundamentalist religious accents, rejects the idea of building the mosque in Bucharest, despite the good

dialogue and relations between the Orthodox and Muslims living together in south-east of Romania, in Dobrogea, who lived and still live in peace and understanding for over 500 years. The main demand of the young protesters was the defending of the righteous Orthodox Christian faith and their strong outrage against the danger of Islamization of Romanian.

Trying to defuse tension and even conflict generated by the intentions of building a Muslim mosque in Bucharest, the Patriarch Daniel of Romania called for balance and tolerance, rejecting and condemning acts of religious extremism. Patriarch Daniel disapproved also the religious rituals committed by different priests apparently belonging to the Orthodox Church but who actually were no longer in canonical communion with the church, being defrocked or stopped from committing religious services because of some impediments.

The religious pluralism begins to play an increasingly reduced role in Romania although pluralism means a complex but necessary form of social, cultural and religious coexistence.

The pluralism as functional attribute of modern contemporary democratic societies and as an expression of balanced and fair relationship between State and Church is expressed in the logic of social development and social stability, promoting common social interests and patterns of behavior based on ethical and moral values. The pluralism does not mean the pursuit of a social purpose based on cultural or religious smoothing but cultivating and maintaining identity differences. The pluralism is thus a shared responsibility of the entire society and of all the institutions that it composes. The pluralism gives substance, balance and dynamism to a society. It creates values and objectives of social development.

Conclusions

The religious extremist slippages, presented above, show how modern religions, as I said in the beginning, religions that manifest in the context and under the influence of the specific factors of contemporary modernity, become the source of social division and they fuel enmity and religious conflicts. Religions are often found in a state of conflict, religious moral objectives being interpreted often at odds with the modern society in which we live. The unilateral and exclusive interpretation of religious dogma and imposing them on other societies structured on other cultural and religious traditions, lead to social division and to ethnic and religious exclusion.

The social tensions arising from the aggressive relationship between religions and modern contemporary societies will worsen if no genuine effort will be promoted in supporting dialogue between civilizations. The growing and understanding of religious pluralism is one of the fundamental conditions of peaceful coexistence in the European society. Now we see a worrying phenomenon in Europe, namely the European crisis is in conflict. More specifically, the European economic crisis, which resulted in the shattering of the Greek economy in recent years, plus the British crisis of distrust in European institutions and efficiency currently being discussed under the name Brexit, has clashed with a new unprecedented crisis for Europe, Syrian and Muslim refugees crisis, but also the crisis of the military conflict and territorial disputes in Ukraine. We are all standing in the face of some extremely complicated problems which are the most important challenges for Europe at the beginning of this century. For now, the conflict of the European crisis is far from having a real solution to solve the problems.