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SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF RELIGION AND CONFLICTS IN EUROPE

ABSTRACT: Today, Europe is faced with a crisis of moral, religious and even civilization-al values. Many have talked about the moral decadence of Europe. Furthermore, European countries are constantly faced with political crises. The European Union has not fully fulfilled the expectations of its member states. The ethno-religious mobilization of citizens and political parties in the states in the Western Balkans is still present. In that sense, the role of religion and religious is realized in several directions. If the religious feelings of believers are abused or if religious teachings are brutally perverted, then religion is placed in the role of an amplifier of ethnic and political conflicts. Globalization imposes situations in which confessions, ethnic groups, countries, and civilizations affect each other inevitably, unlike in the past when they were more or less isolated from each other. All of this has two opposing social effects. On the one hand, there is a risk of an outbreak of clashes between different religions, which are present within a social community. On the other hand, these close contacts among different religions may diminish differences among them, and thus reduce the tensions and conflicts. Global society, among other things, is characterized by the conflict between particularism and universalism. The particularism emphasizes the importance of the characteristics of particular social groups. Those differences may be ethnic, cultural, religious, and regional. Unlike particularism, universalism emphasizes the importance of similarities among people and systems of values in individual societies.

KEYWORDS: ethnoreligious mobilization, conflicts, particularism, universalism.

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INTRODUCTION

Religious tolerance among believers from different confessions, mutual understanding, respect of the differences, mutual dialogue and non-discrimination of people on a religious basis and affiliation are the essential components of religious pluralism. Religious pluralism should be considered a mosaic of our cultural wealth, of civilization achievements, customs and traditions, and all this should serve as a basis for progress rather than a motivation for non-tolerance, discrimination, mutual conflict and mutual destruction. On the one hand, it is very peculiar how so many people today, in contemporary society, are prepared to lose their lives for the sake of their religion and, on the other hand, they are not prepared to live in accordance with the principles and values of other religions. Basically, the principles implicated by different religions are not as contradicted as they may seem to be. According to the aspect of the development of civil society, there is an absolute necessity for institutionalizing the pastor care for peace, human values, as well as interreligious and intercultural respect. Civil society can find an answer to these issues with the aid of dialogues between different religions and cultures.

Tolerance is the model of behaviour that allows for validity of other principles. Tolerance means patience and relevance and it allows people to step back from the usual rule. Interpreted in a sociological manner, tolerance is patience, respecting the beliefs of others, ensuring the validity of other principles, which are not our own but still must be respected in the spirit of civil freedom and the public opinion. Briefly, tolerance can allow a person to step back from his or her own beliefs and the best method to introduce religious and ethnic tolerance is through civic society, which is a supra-national society. In the frameworks of this type of society, basic human values become more general. Generalization of the values and norms goes towards the level of creation of universal human rights and values. With this, inherited ethnic rights and linked habits, moral and legal norms drop. Universal values and norms followed by human rights and freedom are broader than the values of special ethnic communities. However, the system of norms and values has to rise at a universal level; just as there is separation of the state and church, there is also separation of state identity from national identity.

One of the key issues that contemporary sociology is faced with are what the roles of different religions are when conflicts emerge between civilizations, ethnic groups and states. How do religious individuals and groups use their power in spreading either peace or conflict? Sociological, philosophical, anthropological, historical, psychological and theological approaches will be considered in an attempt to answer these issues. We will also search to answer whether Orthodox churches, Catholic churches, Islamic religious communities etc. have weakened or sharpened ethnic conflicts and problems. Since they are separated from the state, it is clear that they cannot assume primary guilt for inter-ethnic problems in Europe. However, they are not completely free of responsibility either. If they are not responsible for what they say, they are responsible for concealing some matters. It gives the impression that religious organizations in Europe do not have enough power to speak in their own religious language, but in certain social-political

moments they speak in a somewhat collective language, where ethnocentrism becomes the ideology of modern times.

In regard to the religious situation in Europe, the following dilemmas and questions arise:

Does religion have a positive or negative role in Europe?

Is secularization in Europe a myth or reality?

Is the process of de-secularization, or even sacralization, taking place in contemporary European society?

Are religious organizations becoming more and more profane in their activities?

Is the process of ethno-religious mobilization taking place in Europe?

Why does religious fundamentalism reject the practical implementation of the principles of secularization and religious tolerance?

Is the process of religious universalism taking place in Europe through the ideas of ecumenism and neo-ecumenism, and if yes, to what extent?

What is the role of religious tolerance as a principle between religious particularism and religious universalism in Europe?

To what extent are the religious organizations in Europe practically implementing the principles of religious tolerance? (Matevski, 2021).

RELIGION AND GLOBALIZATION

As a result of industrialization and modernization, modern European societies are fragmented by numerous cultural and religious groups. In conditions of religious pluralism, the states can no longer support only one religion without causing conflict in society. Religious pluralism allows individuals to make their religion a personal choice rather than an integral part of their membership in society. Religious pluralism in modern societies mainly comes from two sources: the existence of different ethnic groups that nurture their own religious traditions, and the increasing number of sects and cults. In such societies, religion will remain particularly important because it usually fulfils one of two important functions for ethnic groups: the protection of their own culture and cultural transition (Beyer, 2000).

Religion assumes the role of protecting culture when there are two (or more) conflicting communities of different religions; for example, the relationship between Protestants and Catholics in the Ulster area of Northern Ireland, or the relationship between Serbs (Orthodox), Croats (Roman Catholics) and Bosniaks (Muslims) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In such conditions, the sense of religious identity of each community may encourage a need for new loyalty to one's own community. Religion can become

very significant because of the help it can provide to people in the process of transition from one world to another. Here we are speaking about people who have migrated to another country or continued living in the same place that has radically changed.

The theory of postmodernism claims that the state has again occurred when society begins to reject the scientific rationality typical of modernism. The reason for this is that people are starting to become sceptical of science. They perceive the failures of science and especially due to the perception of the negative consequences of the development of science and technology. Examples of this can be global warming, air pollution, more frequent occurrence of cancer, creation of ozone holes, etc. In such circumstances, people turn to some form of religion. The role and strength of religion in modern societies is determined by a series of factors (David, 2016).

One of the most important factors is the degree of religious pluralism and the strength of the dominant religion. Societies in which the Roman Catholic Church claims a monopoly over religious truth are usually very different from societies in which both Protestantism and Catholicism have a strong foothold, and from societies in which there is a plurality of denominations and churches. The political system of society and the relationship between Church and State have a strong influence on the degree of importance of religion in a particular society. The third important factor is the extent to which religion helps create national, regional or ethnic identity.

In the United States, the degree of religious pluralism is high and there is no official relationship between the Church and the state. There is a number of migrant groups of different ethnic origins. Religious pluralism is flourishing as ethnic minorities strive to maintain their own identity. Although the degree of participation in religious rituals is high, religion does not play an important role in the functioning of society. Social solidarity is achieved more by a sense of patriotism and belief in the values of the American way of life, and less by shared religious beliefs.

In Catholic countries such as France, Spain, Italy or Portugal, the church still plays a major role in society and influences government policy in the area of education and legislation governing marriage, divorce, contraception and abortion. Church attendance is high and Martin believes that Catholic societies are less secular than Protestant ones. Where Catholicism dominates, there is very little religious pluralism (David, 2016).

In other countries such as the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland, the division between the Protestant majority and the strong Catholic minority is clear. The Catholic minority usually belongs to the lower social strata. Participation in religious rituals is very high because it offers the two most important subcultures a sense of identity. Religion also plays an important role in education, so there are separate Protestant and Catholic schools. The claims of universalist religions that the world was created by one God do not lead us to the conclusion that God is the primary long-term driving force in globalization. It leads to proving that humanity constitutes a single community regardless of geographical space and political territories. Among the universalist religions, Christianity

and Islam have proven to be the most effective globalizers because of their conversion missions. It is most explicit in Islam. The world goal of Islam is the establishment of a community of believers (Ummah) in which the practices outlined in the Qur'an will be followed literally and which will engage in a holy war (Jihad) against the infidels.

The rapid demographic growth of Muslim population already suggests that Islam could be the religion of globalization. On the other hand, fundamentalism is the Islamic version of globalization. However, we also find fundamentalism in other religions and not only in Islam (Protestant Christianity, Orthodox Christianity, Buddhism, etc.). Fundamentalism is only a response to the challenge of globalization. The idea is to establish a moral system, but on traditional values. What is dangerous about fundamentalism is that only one tradition is acceptable (its own, of course), and all other traditions, religions, and worldviews are unacceptable (Beyer, 2014).

CONFLICTS IN EUROPE

Europe was shaped by the ancient authentic values of Christianity and Islam. Interestingly, even though these religions in their essence are close to each other, originate from a common ancient foundation in Judaism and preach peace as an ideal, the multi-confessional regions have always been among the most conflicting regions in the Europe. Above all, it is a result of the essence of religion. The great monotheistic religions derived from the so-called Abrahamic tradition are in particular very intolerant. They have firm and unchangeable worldviews, a strict code of ethics, and they draw a clear distinction between those who are and those who are not true believers. Their dogmas and rules given by God are eternal truth. They cannot be subject to negotiations, compromises, and variances. When such a group meets another similar group, they inevitably call each other heretics and apostates. They are not in a position to recognize their share in knowing the truth. Why? Because it would cast some doubt on their dogmas. Such contacts must end up with alienation and conflict. These religions are at the same time very collectivistic. They claim that believers create a special and morally superior community. Relations with them easily become a sign of political or national loyalty. The biggest danger lies in connecting the nation and religion. Moreover, if Abrahamic religions become factors in politics, because of their uncompromising points of view they lead to constant conflict with the religious others.

The pseudo-democratic processes in Europe are a means of ruling the majority, wherein the leaders of those processes succeed in manipulating the unthinking masses using religious scriptures. Through the religious worldview, the masses are mobilized in the European societies, in which Christian and Islamic values become simple commodities in neoliberal capitalism. Does denying the right of others to be different from you means you are moving into the space of open and concealed violence? The problem is that original Islam is falsified and used by the political right in the European states. They define society as an organic national, ethnic, and racial whole, which is primarily

oriented towards national and patriarchal values. In the case of Europe, the division of people between “religious us” and “religious them”; Christians and Muslims; believers and atheists, breeds violence which is founded on a totalitarian understanding of faith. The idea that God is one, and the belief in Him differently placed in different religions, can lead some individuals, religious and political organizations to the false notion that we are “us” because we are not “them” and the only way to remain “us” is to exterminate “them”. Because of this, religious exclusivism leads to a violent ideology and religious extremism. From then on, this has been the rule, not the exception. Because of this, religious exclusivity, without undermining other forms of exclusivity, has generated the biggest problems in the world (Schmid, 2018).

When we are speaking about religious pluralism, I would like to refer to the differences between the religious varieties. They testify to the existence of many different religions. Religious pluralism means a relatively peaceful coexistence and cooperation of different religions. It is not aimed at creating a single world religion as a syncretism of different religions, nor is it a simple existence of one next to the others (following the principle “separate but equal”). Nowadays, in European countries, religious freedom is interpreted as the simple existence of one next to the others, without mutual dialogue and meetings. Meeting here would be mostly a violent meeting.

The best terrain for introducing religious and ethnic tolerance, as well as the idea of ecumenism and neo-ecumenism, is civil society. It is a supra-national society where the primary criterion is citizenship. Such kind of society generalizes basic human values. The generalization of values and norms leads to the creation of universal human rights and values. With this, inherited ethnic rights and related customs, moral and legal norms fall. Universal values and norms, accompanied by human rights and freedoms, are broader than the values of a particular ethnic community. However, the system of values and norms should and has to rise to a universal level. Processes of globalization undoubtedly lead us to the conclusion that religion in the global era is understood within the context of changes in the world in general. This is based on the assumptions that borders among societies are becoming less important and socio-cultural developments in certain societies are increasingly influenced by events from other parts of the world (Hogan and Lehrke, 2009).

ACTUALIZATION OF THE RELIGIOUS OTHER IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Religious otherness, that is, the alterity of modern European society, is imposed as one of the most important phenomena. Europe cannot neglect, let alone ignore, this phenomenon. The more the coordinates of the global village in which we live decrease, the more we are directed to those with whom we live, to others, regardless of their faith. However different we are from each other, which is beyond doubt, it is quite certain that we are completely directed towards each other. Our religious identity does not threaten

but only enriches the religious identities of those who live with us, as well as vice versa, of course. We all function successfully only if we do it together. The rest are prejudices, which when we do not know how to overcome them or when we emphasize them unnecessarily, inevitably provoke disagreements and conflicts.

I theorize throughout the “big world” during almost the entire twentieth century as a “constitutive category” - that is, as a problem of interaction between two persons, between two utterances or as a problem of time-space communication between two or more cultures (Levi-Strauss, 1995). In our European context, the problem of alterity is still much more practised than discussed. Unfortunately, that practice is usually negotiable, not to say conflictual. In the text, we try to elaborate the problem of the closure of small cultures (“organic cultures”). When we speak about Europe, we refer to cultures that constantly collide (face misunderstandings, and solve them through “euphoria of closure”, dividing “subjects” into “religious ours” and “religious theirs”. Such a culture, with no small amount of religious devotion, surrenders to its own hermeticity, living the desolate illusion that everything that is not “unique” (in the sense of “ours”) becomes unnatural.

We live in a time when the principles of democracy are accepted in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe under the so-called model of joint living of different communities with different cultures and religions. In Europe, there are several religious communities that show a strong interest in preserving and nurturing their cultural and historical heritage. What is worrying is that the basic feature of the study and affirmation of religious affiliation is expressed pathetically, as the avoidance or resistance to what is “someone else’s and not mine” or what belongs to “you” and not to “us”. Hence the question of developing awareness and the methodology that will increase the sharing of the religious heritage. Throughout the territory of Europe, members of all religious groups, regardless of their numbers, including the Orthodox in the category of the other, because the representation of the other, its naming and recognition in a religious group depends on the point of view and the observing subject. For example, Orthodox is different for a Muslim, a Catholic or a member of a Protestant religious community or a new religious movement.

Everything that has been created by various cultures and civilizations in the territory of Europe over the centuries should not be denied, but, on the contrary, cherished, treated objectively, studied and felt as the cultural property of all. The issue arising from this context is very serious and requires a serious elaboration. The refinement of the methodology in the approach to the problem is one reference aspect of our method. The exact way of determining and discovering the truth of a question is more valuable than what philosophizing means. By changing the way of looking at things, the life of a person changes as well (Aristotle and Williams, 2000).

Someone could tell us that the idea of the religious other has been overcome by the demise of the idea of “brotherhood and unity” of peoples and non-kinships in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. That model of cooperation of different ethnic and religious groups has failed and been overcome. Some of the radical thinkers

will also say that perhaps one of the reasons why Tito and his League of Communists suppressed religious affiliation and participation in the desire to prevent any kind of religious intolerance and hatred in the state. I believe that the current idea of religious tolerance (including ethnic tolerance, of course) is only a logical extension of the idea of “brotherhood and unity” as a kind of neo-socialism. However, today’s situation is no better than that during the period of socialism. Namely, what we are “looking for” is nothing but parallelism. If we think in this way, it means that we do not believe in moral values. Religious dialogue and cooperation are one of the capital values of civilization. The world as a whole, and Europe as a part of it, should be understood as a structural whole of different religions, cultures and systems, forming a relationship and culture towards the different as a wealth of the world and what is in it a universal human experience and meaning. This means that accepting the view that the richness of differences of human social experience is a condition for its vitality and creativity.

FROM RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE TO RELIGIOUS TERRORISM

If we speak about the interreligious tolerance between Christians and Muslims, we see two extremes that have the same goal. For example, in the Muslim nations, societal tolerance is mainly guided by religion. If you steal, your hands will be cut off. If you commit adultery, you will be stoned to death. The Western world looks to these laws as barbaric. On the other hand, Muslim believers look to Christianity as decadent. The most important thing is the amount of tolerance that one side has for the other. While Christians and Muslim differ in their values, they still have the same aspirations and ambitions in life. Those who misinterpret the Qur’an were led towards intolerance regarding all non-Muslims. This is also true for those who misinterpret the Bible – known as Christian fundamentalists (Methenitis, 2019).

If this is already indicated in the ‘two-part composition’ of Muslim terrorism, the question is left unanswered as to whether it will remain and, if it does, which will be the leading component. This is a highly debated problem, and is largely present in the discussions of political Islam, with opposing views. Some Muslim intellectuals believe that terrorism has no connection to Islam, claiming that Islam is a religion of peace, tolerance and understanding. This view is contradictory to the many clashes between different currents in Islam, and is often connected to the antagonism towards the Western values and decadent lifestyle, and some opponents to this view equate the war against terror to the war against Islam (especially after the events of 11 September 2001). The problem is in the fact that these views, in different versions and emphasis, can be verified in past practices and current events. Muslim fundamentalism has given terrorism brutality and fanaticism, apotheosis of sacrifice with the belief of incarnation of life, which can be seen in many cases of ‘car bombs’ and ‘suicide bombers’, and in the cruelty of the suffering of innocents.

Muslims inhabit about 120 countries today. They represent the majority in 35 countries, and Islam is the state religion of 28 countries. In many Muslim countries the principles of the Muslim faith are built into the constitution. This means that no political action can be undertaken if it is not in accordance with the Muslim faith (Sharia law). In line with Muslim teachings, the duty of all Muslim countries is to perform their religious mission - Da'wah. The main goal of the Da'wah is for Islam to be preached until there is only one country - one Muslim state. In a classical sense, this means that all Muslims need to wage war, because the acceptance of Islam is the final instance and the end of autonomy of non-Muslims countries, but such an idea is unachievable in current conditions, so they need to realize this goal in a different manner (Jevtić, 2009:170-179).

We cannot speak of Islam and politics unless we explain the way Islam understands sovereignty. The widely accepted idea of national sovereignty, is completely rejected, because only God is capable of creating laws, and any human action towards creating laws is blasphemy. We must stress the fact that the idea that God is a legislator and sovereign does not exist only in Muslim teachings, but also in the Jewish and Christian past. But this theory in Islam is accepted today, unlike the same idea in Christianity, where it has been overcome by the process of secularization.

Because of this, all Muslim societies today are more or less theocratic, and this tendency to strengthen theocracy is more visible over time. As previously stated, the idea that all authority is given by God has previously existed in the frameworks of Christianity, with which the theocratic organization of society has been more or less expressed. For the Christian world, the separation of the church and the state was a necessary condition for growth. That is why the idea of the people as the holders of sovereignty is reinforced. However, Islam has remained attached to medieval traditions, according to which Allah directly rules over the Islamic state through the laws in the Qur'an. This holy book also represents the constitution and the fundamental source of law in Muslim countries. Islamic countries can be separated into 3 groups according to the analysis of their constitutions and the practices based on them. The first group consists of the Islamic countries wherein the constitution clearly states that Allah holds sovereign power. The second group consists of the countries wherein the people are the holders of sovereignty. Nevertheless, it is emphasized in the constitution that the people can realize their sovereign rights only in accordance with the laws imposed by Allah. The third group consists of the countries whose sovereignty most closely resembles that of Europe and the USA (Jevtić, 2009: 177- 205).

Modern civilization rests on secularist ideas, according to which religion is placed in the private realm of the individual. We cannot speak about elements of religious fundamentalism in a religion as long as the expression of religious feelings remains in the private realm and does not disturb normal life and the religious freedoms of the members of other confessions. A religion becomes fundamentalist when, according to the interpretation of a religious teaching, it involves establishing societal laws that do not allow basic human rights.

CONCLUSION

Religious fundamentalism is most often manifested as a politically-religious ideology that entirely or partially rejects the ideas of cultural globalism, those ideas being the phenomena of religious tolerance, ecumenism and neo-ecumenism; secularization; modern achievements in science and technology. For various reasons they are not compatible with the doctrines and practices of religious fundamentalists and extremists. Out of all the Universalist religions, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism have shown to be the strongest forces of globalization in the postmodern era. The sudden and constant demographic growth of Muslim population worldwide leads us to the assumption that Islam might become the strongest religion of globalization. On the other hand, fundamentalism represents a type of an answer to the challenge of globalization. The idea is to establish a moral system of religious and traditional cultural values. The biggest problem of religious fundamentalism and extremism is the idea that only the cultural traditions of Muslim civilization and Sharia law are acceptable. Furthermore, religious institutions, especially Christian ones, are trying to take a more universal approach towards the believers of other religions. In this regard, religious communities and groups are trying to practically implement the principles of ecumenism and neo-ecumenism in an attempt to unite believers with different confessional belongings. Instead of starting by emphasizing the differences, using this principle, religious institutions emphasize the beliefs and religious values that should become common for the entire world in the global era. Contrary to the exclusivity of fundamentalism, ecumenism suggests a plan through which religious tolerance and dialogue could be guided by universal religious values and moral norms.

The global economy and the global political system can be of very little help to the individual and social groups in the affirmation of their ethnic, religious and cultural identity. The identities are being increasingly relativized, resulting in the lack of unification in determining what people really are. All of this causes the identity crisis among individuals and social groups. In this respect, religion could help people to overcome this issue. Individuals and social groups can turn to religion in order to secure the unique, yet threatened sense of identity. However, they can simultaneously misuse religion so as to affirm their supremacy over other individuals or social groups. Religion is able to mobilize social groups that strive for power and influence in the European societies where they feel marginalized or consider the globalized society as some kind of threat. This is the reason why the identity crisis makes religious fundamentalism the most prevalent and most controversial ideology of modern times. The secular goal of Islam is establishing a community of adherents in which the practices stated in the Qur'an will be followed consistently (the militant version of which is engaging in a holy war against non-believers). It is believed that the abrupt Muslim population growth already points to the fact that Islam could potentially be the religion of globalization. However, fundamentalism is only a reaction to the challenge of globalization.

Europe is a meeting place of different religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Interestingly, despite the fact that all these religions are essentially similar to one another,

deriving from a common ancient basis in Judaism and all of them preaching peace as an ideal, Europe has always been considered among the most conflicting regions in the world. These religions are also very collectivistic. They claim that their adherents make a special and morally superior community. Connections with them easily become a sign of political or national loyalty. The greatest danger lies in the connection between nation and religion. Moreover, if the Abrahamic religions become factors in politics, they, because of their uncompromising positions, essentially lead to a constant conflict with the religious others (Kuschel, 2001).

The problem arises when mutual misunderstandings and conflicts occur within each of the above-mentioned ethnic and religious groups. For example, the Macedonians and the Albanians are essentially closed ethnic groups. Inside these groups, there are misunderstandings and problems of economic, social, political and cultural character which cannot be solved from within. Henceforth, as a rule, there is a search for a regular culprit. And who would that be? Of course, the scapegoat is being searched for among the members of the ethnic group which is closest to your own. In that way, the real reasons for the social crisis of one's own ethnic community are being very successfully concealed and its members are being distracted from the real culprits, who should be either banished or punished. Therefore, a much more acceptable maxim is that the one who cannot have a humane conversation with an adherent of one's own faith, can have it to an even smaller extent with an adherent of a different one. In this regard, Durkheim's sociological thesis is very up to date. Paraphrased, it would look like this: if in a social community, there is a negative and destructive energy which could completely disintegrate the community, then this negative energy is being directed towards the neighbouring social community. In that case, "my community" is free of destruction and internal strife. To save one's own tribe, it is best to attack the neighbouring tribe (Durkheim, 1995).

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