

## **A STATE OF CRISIS OR SOMETHING ELSE...?**

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*After the collapse of the communist regime and the dissolution of the totalitarian government the Bulgarian country has fallen into deep a crisis. The spiritual vacuum, anomie and uncertainty have generated a situation of searching for a sense. The whole of the religious answers constitutes 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".*

Many years ago Herman Kan and Anthony Weaner from the Hudson Institute, claimed that the civilization of the XX-the century would be a more "sensitive" one. They were foretelling a world without surprises, an empirical, pragmatic, utilitarian, secular, materialistic, epicurean, hedonistic world, focused on the earthly. However, history would be extremely boring if it did not bear "surprises" incessantly.

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, because they come "from above" - transcendence based on social connections and "pre" - mythical past and valuable.

The modern man of the XXI-the century chooses his preferred beliefs and values in a pluralistic world, where conflicting values co-exist and are subject to the critique of reason. The past is no longer a perfect world, which regulates things. It is an imperfect world and the subject of dispute.

Perhaps one of the greatest ironies of our postmodern world is that we have more capacity for communication than 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 being imbued with a stark feeling of loneliness.

In the postmodern culture, individuals look for 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, ascertainments like - "God is dead", "Post-Christianity", "The end of dreams" unexpectedly turn out to be accompanied by a certain "invisible" religiosity,



which penetrates throughout the so-called secular societies. Because of this the existence of societies is impossible without religions – neither authentic, nor the so-called “earthly”, civil or laic religions.

The rapid race 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 any sense of meaning or purpose to their lives. They are 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 them live skillfully.

The religious man is more like a nomad, that hardly defines his time travelling and because they change the places where they live more often. Everyone is free to adopt and abandon the symbolic content of religious systems that they like.

This is the transition from world religions to something that can be defined as "personal religion", to this type of religiosity, in which individuals construct their own conceptual system. Such kind of belief seems to be the hallmark of modern societies in which there is a Copernican turn in the religious consciousness.

A person is a legislator of his life and takes place according to their contribution to society, to which it belongs. It is no longer subject to the norms of the group and does not receive *commandments* about what they must believe and do by institutional brokerage. They construct their meaningful dispositive for themselves and are free to choose any religion or religious group to belong.

The religious “explosion” of the East, the development of Islam, the “new religious movements”, the vitality of the “new communities”, attracts the sociological interest and brings up many questions.

*The sociology of religion* is primarily the study of the practices, social structures, historical backgrounds, development, universal themes, and roles of religion in society. There is 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.

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.

Specifically, the data of religious study include the literature, stories, myths, histories, doctrines, rituals, ethical prescriptions, and institutional forms of the many and diverse traditions, past and present. The academic study of religion is non-sectarian, it does not seek to evangelize or propagate a particular religion.

In my opinion, there can be no substantive definition of religion. If the notion of religion is desubstantialized, what remains of it is, as far as possible a way of believing that 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, dissipates, moved to the "critical times" - the task of sociologists is to track and analyze these transformations.

The specifics of every religion can be read and interpreted sociologically. Sociologists of religion study religious facts, be they past or present, and these objective phenomena must be also treated as social facts, explainable by other social facts. In other words - to construct them, classify them, compare them, treat them within the relationship and conflicts of 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.

*What is the field of sociology of religion? What are its chief goals?* This discipline must always try to define problems carefully, to formulate them methodically, to discuss, to develop and to respond.

The classical, seminal sociological theorists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were greatly interested in religion and its effects on society. These theorists include Emil Durkheim, Max Weber and Karl Marx.

Like Plato and Aristotle from Ancient Greece, and like Enlightenment philosophers from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, the ideas posited by these sociologists continue to be addressed today.

August Comte had a novel perspective on religion and sociology. Emil Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber had very complex and developed theories about the nature and effects of religion.

However, many others continue to study the role of religion, particularly New



Religious Movements, both for the individual and as it affects our increasingly multi-cultural society.

The study of New Religions emerged in Japan after an increase in religious innovation following the Second World War. "New religions" is a calqued (word-for-word translation) of *shinshūkyō*, which Japanese sociologists coined to refer to this phenomenon. This term, amongst others, was adopted by Western scholars as an alternative to cult.

"Cult" had emerged in the 1890-s, but by the 1970-s it had acquired a pejorative connotation, and was subsequently used indiscriminately by lay critics to disparage groups whose doctrines they opposed.

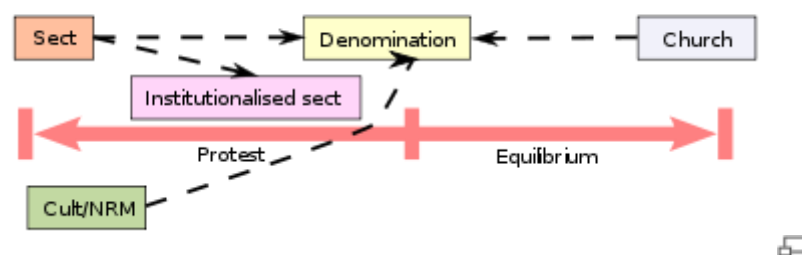
According to one common typology among sociologists, religious groups are classified as ecclesia, denominations, cults, or sects. Note that sociologists give these words precise definitions, which are different from how their common use.

Particularly, the words "cult" and "sect" are used free from negative connotations by sociologists, even though the popular use of these words is often pejorative.

*The Church-Sect Typology* is one of the most common classification schemes employed in **sociology** for differentiating between different types of religions. This scheme has its origins in the work of Max Weber. The basic idea is that there is a continuum along which religions fall, ranging from the protest-like orientation of *sects* to the equilibrium-maintaining *churches*. Along this continuum are several additional types, each of which will be discussed in turn.

The term "church" does not necessarily apply to a Christian church, but is intended to signify a well-organized, centralized religion in general.

#### The Church-sect continuum



Consequently, scholars like Eileen Barker, James Tom Richardson, Timothy Miller and Catherine Wessinger argued that the term *cult* had become too laden with negative connotations, and *advocated dropping its use in academia*.

Instead, especially in the sociology of religion, (but also in religious studies), scholars use *new religious movement*. Some still use the term *cult* for groups they believe to be



extremely manipulative and exploitative.

A number of alternatives to the term *new religious movement* are used by some scholars. These include *alternative religious movements*, emergent religions, and marginal religious movements.

New religions studies is the interdisciplinary study of new religious movements (the so called cults) that emerged as a discipline in the 1970s.

The term was coined by J. Gordon Melton in a 1999 paper presented at CESNUR conference in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania.

David G. Bromley used its perspectives for a piece in *Nova Religio* and later as a Editor of *Teaching New Religious Movements* in The American Academy of Religion's *Teaching Religious Studies Series*. The term has been used by James R. Lewis, Jean-François Mayer.

The study draws from the disciplines of anthropology, psychiatry, history, psychology, sociology, religious studies, and theology.<sup>1</sup>

In order to establish a world of peace, harmony among religions is essential. Sociology of religion is a field that should have much to contribute to the understanding, necessary to advance such a world. Historically, sociology of religion was of central importance to sociology, with early seminal figures writing extensively on the role of religion in society.

### ***THE LABYRINTH OF HUMAN RELATIONS WITH THE SACRED***

The labyrinth of human relations with the sacred is incredibly complex and impassable. Sacred places connect very different and important realities.

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.

Examining the world of the profane and the world of the sacred and the relations between them, Durkheim reveals the important role that religion has in the formation and development of societies.

The sacred place is a place set apart from all other places in the world, and there we encounter God and we are encountered by God. It is a place that evokes our communion and worship.

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

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eileen\\_Barker](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eileen_Barker)



things from the one world to the other is possible only through "true metamorphosis".

It is ambiguously perceived as a blessing and a curse at the same time. On one hand, it is considered as "mighty" and fascinating, but on the other - as vulnerable to the attacks of the worldly.

Despite an occasional dalliance with the ritual theory of myth, Durkheim's most consistent position was that the cult depends upon the beliefs. Nevertheless, he also insisted that beliefs and rites are inseparable not only because the rites are often the sole manifestation of otherwise imperceptible ideas, but also because they react upon and thus alter the nature of the ideas themselves.

Having completed his extensive analysis of the nature, causes, and consequences of totemic beliefs, therefore, Durkheim turned to a somewhat shorter discussion of the "principal ritual attitudes" of totemism.

Sacred things, as we have seen, are those rather dramatically separated from their profane counterparts and a substantial group of totemic rites has as its object the realization of this essential state of separation. As far as these rites merely prohibit certain actions or impose certain abstentions, they consist entirely of interdictions or "taboos" and thus Durkheim described the system formed by these rites as the "negative cult."

The interdictions characterizing these rites were in turn divided into two classes: those separating the sacred from the profane, and those separating sacred things from one another according to their *degree of sacredness* and even the first class alone assumes a variety of forms - certain foods are forbidden to profane persons because they are sacred, while others are forbidden to sacred persons because they are profane.

For all their diversity, however, Durkheim argued that all these forms are reducible to two fundamental interdictions: *the religious life and the profane life cannot coexist in the same place, and they cannot coexist in the same unit of time.*

For Durkheim, however, the clearest refutation of the animistic hypothesis lay in one of its un started, but implied, consequences. If it were true, not only would it mean that religious symbols provide only an inexact expression of the realities on which they are based.

It would imply that religious symbols are products of the vague, ill-conceived hallucinations of our dream-experience, and thus have no foundation in reality at all.

Law, morals, even scientific thought itself, Durkheim observed, were born of religion, long remained confounded with it, and are still somewhat imbued with its spirit. It is simply inconceivable, therefore, that religions, which have held so considerable a place in history,



and to which, in all times, men have to receive the energy which they must have to live, should be made up of a tissue of illusions.

Indeed, the animistic hypothesis is inconsistent with the scientific study of religion itself; for a science is always a discipline applied to the study of some real phenomenon of nature, while animism reduces religion to a mere hallucination.

What sort of science is it, Durkheim asked, whose principle discovery is that the subject of which it treats does not exist?

Even the manner in which the two are formed results in differentiating them. 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.

Religious representations are collective representations which express collective realities. The rites are a manner of acting which take rise in the midst of the assembled groups and which are destined to excite, maintain or recreate certain mental states in these groups. So if the categories are of religious origin, they ought to participate in this nature common to all religious facts; they too should be social affairs and the product of collective thought.

The sacred is ambivalently perceived as a blessing and a curse at the same time, as "mighty" and fascinating, but, on the other hand, as vulnerable to the attacks of the worldly. It exists in a separate space and time and is enveloped in rituals. Ceremonies open the gates to the world of gods.

Sacred places function as a fixed reference points in the secular world. They offer a potential avenue for bridging the gap between the secular and the spiritual.

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.

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, but is instead a personal "power" coming forth from God. This "awesome power" brings "mystery and majesty" to our secular lives, thus having the potential to make them sacred.

The Holy One, that is, the infinite presence of the "wholly other," encounters the finite human with the sacred and thus brings transcendence to the human world.

In his chapter on *Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred*, Eliade presents the



three building blocks of every sacred place: disruption, orientation, and communication. These categories not only because they are important for understanding 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 profane space which, of course, is a world of chaos, confusion, and relativity.

Without sacred places in a world of relativity and sameness, we are left with no way of orienting ourselves. Another way of saying this is that in our postmodern culture individuals look to themselves to orient their worlds. Yet we need more than ourselves to bring meaning to our worlds; we are in need of a God who will meet us and guide us along the way. Nevertheless, the sacred in its' classical form seems to be losing ground.

Think of your own sacred places. "What are your sacred places?"

I have heard everything from being alone in a car, to spending time in a certain place in the desert, a barn, or a field, to a particular table in a coffee shop.

Do you not return either in memory or in reality to make sense of our world?

To go there, reflect, and try to answer the good questions?

To have a place where you can meet God and move on from there? There are many days when I cannot wait to get back to my sacred place, for it is the break affected in space that allows the world to be constituted, it reveals the fixed point, the central axis for all future orientation.

"When the sacred manifests itself in any *hierophany* (revelation of God), there is not only a break in the homogeneity (sameness) of space; there is also revelation of an absolute reality.

Eliade reminds us that we yearn for sacred place so we can find a fixed point in an otherwise relative world.

Our sacred places function as a fixed reference point, a tangible north star to navigate our way through our secular worlds. And by giving us a fixed reference point, sacred place makes sense of our lives.

Sacred places bring difference and orientation to our lives. In this final concept, we need to understand the goal of orienting our lives around the sacred: communication with



God.

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.

Religion, for Durkheim, is not "imaginary," although he does strip it of what many believers find essential. Religion is very real, because it is an expression of society itself, and indeed, there is no society that does not have religion.

People perceive as individuals a force greater than themselves, which is social life, and give that perception a supernatural face. Humans then express themselves religiously in groups, which for Durkheim makes the symbolic power greater.

In fact, 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 reference to this focus of thought, it is worth turning to the ideas of Emile Durkheim. In his view, rituals belong to the domain of the sacred and present behavior guidelines directing people in their experience of the divine.

Emile Durkheim used his own terms to describe the differences in groups and the way they think and act. He defined mechanical solidarity as members of a society being more devoted to the common good when individual differences are minimized. Organic solidarity, he said, was a product of a division of labor they developed because of differences in a group.

Durkheim presented his answer by developing the concept of solidarity. This is a force that integrates the separate segments of a society. It is the result of a shared system of beliefs and values that unites members of the society and controls individuals' behavior. Because of this homogeneity, each individual is directly and equally attached to the society.

Durkheim made comparisons between many societies in the world and concluded there were two different types of force integrating the separate segments of a society. He called these two patterns 'mechanical solidarity' and 'organic solidarity'.

Mechanical solidarity applies to societies in which all members have common and shared social experiences, and where special subdivisions within the society are either weak or entirely absent.



Organic solidarity societies, on the other hand, are formed by a system of different organs, each of which plays a specific role. Members of such societies belong to some of these organs and fulfil specific tasks in them. Because the tasks of individuals do not cover all aspects of the effort for survival, they need to depend on each other and live in a society. They are held together by one central organ, which controls the whole organism.

Durkheim extended this analysis to the evolution of societies. In mechanical (relatively primitive) societies, cohesion is achieved through to the minimization of individual differences. In organic (modern) societies differences resulting from a division of labor lead to integrated activities and, thus, to the cohesion of society.

The distinctions between mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity are so clear that a society cannot possess both aspects simultaneously. This means that only after mechanical solidarity has declined can an organic solidarity develop as a new system.

The great French sociologist argued that religion is eminently social, providing a source of solidarity and social control. Each institution, such as the corporation, marriage, the family, non-profit organizations, and political offices, is separate and different.

However, all institutions are subordinate to the rule of law, which keeps them functioning in harmony. Law serves as an indicator of social solidarity and, specifically, of the passage from mechanical to organic solidarity, which can be observed in the evolution of law from a repressive to a restitutive system.

Durkheim's concept of justice is defined and explored in the context of his quest for establishing a "science of moral facts." Justice is taken as being the basis of moral order in modern societies.

Religious practices, and even the most intimate religious acts, have a social meaning and a social context. Religious activity helps make individuals aware of their community, enables them to symbolically express the social order and gain an objective awareness of society.

Rituals and ceremonies make it possible to experience collective emotions and to express the sense of social unity. Thus, religion is a support for social solidarity. When people gather on solemn occasions, they achieve a deep sense of themselves and of the legitimacy of their social organization.

Differentiation affords the opportunity to define who we are in the presence of God and other people, to distinguish ourselves in the midst of sameness. Orientation provides a place to move out of and a north star to head for. To this day, I draw encouragement by



remembering the willow tree, because it was there that God met me. When God is most silent in my life, remembering the place beneath the tree gives me the hope that he will meet me again.

Because of the fall, we no longer live in a sacred world, and so we are disconnected from God and those with who we are in relationship. One of the great sins of the secular world is alienation or disconnection. Sacred place can be an avenue to repair alienated relationship; it evokes speech and conversation where there once was only a deafening silence and confusion. This is the irony of sacred place. In the end, it is not about place but relationship.

Difference, orientation, and communication are essential categories in sacred space to bring us into relationship with God and others. In the most basic terms, sacred place is the context for relationship. Our sacred places are places where we commune with God, where we connect with the sacred world.

Regardless of the logic of profanization 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”.

Religion could help to legitimate the purposes and actions of the society, to strengthen the determination of the people, to help build up the sense of identity.

A number of researchers distinguish ritual on one hand from ceremony and etiquette on the other, on the basis of whether these are accompanied by, respectively, sacral or secular symbols.

### ***POLITICAL RITUALISM***

The notion of political ritualism refers to those political activities that aim at mythicizing political power, at increasing its authority beyond rational boundaries. It involves a reference to the emotions of a community. Therefore, it should be noted that any ritual is bound to an objective pattern consisting of a set of guidelines for behavior. In this way, it protects a defined canon of values against the risk of devaluation. Thus, participation in a ritual teaches a person about his/her role in an ordered system.

To turn now to the lasting influence of Durkheim's work, in *Purity and Danger* (1966), Mary Douglas is concerned with the order-producing, meaning-making and form-giving functions of classification systems and the role of rituals in creating boundaries grounded in fears and beliefs.



In *Natural Symbols* (1970), she takes on the idea of a correspondence between classification systems and social organization advanced by Durkheim and Mauss (1963[1903]).

She describes the structure of binary symbolic systems as "reflecting" that of group structures. Like Elias, she is also concerned with the moral order and centers her attention on the system of social control as expressed through the body and through the observable artifacts of everyday life (food, dirt, and material possessions). She argues that the very basis of order in social life is the presence of symbols that demarcate boundaries or lines of division.

One of Douglas's main concerns is how communities differentiate themselves from one another and how they are internally differentiated. She distinguishes groups based on their degree of social control and of the rigidity of their grid (by which she means the scope and coherent articulation of their system of classification or the extent to which it is competing with other systems).

In societies with high social control and great cultural rigidity there is a concern to preserve social boundaries, the role structure is clearly defined and formal behavior is highly valued and well-defined in publicly insulated roles. Through "the purity rule", formality screens out irrelevant organic processes, "matters out of place". Douglas suggests that the more complex the system of classification and the stronger the pressure to maintain it, the more social intercourse pretends to take place between disembodied spirits, i.e., the more the purity rule applies.

The effects of political ritualism are highly difficult to assess. However, it can be said that social tradition and imagination create and constitute imagined dynamics, which can embrace any object. Each human community, each human formation can be defined with reference to these two ideal poles.

Sigmund Bauman is right in saying that any attempt to create a community builds upon factors such as: "common blood", hereditary character, a bond with the land, common history, memory of historical victories and failures that have influenced the emergence of a nation.

Even the leaders of the French revolution referred to ritualism in creating a cult of the mind, a cult of the highest being, a cult of the decade. In fact, one could call it a revolutionary religion, which created its own symbols and emblems (tricolored knots, banners, commandments embodied in the Declaration of Rights, and ritual anthems).



In comparison with other forms of human activity, ritual is characterized by a greater symbolic and dramatic tension in expressing ideas and feelings. The term also refers to activities that constitute a customary part of various celebrations and ceremonies. Thus, ritual is order, a negation of chaos.

Nothing has greater influence on a crowd's imagination than theatrical performances. Rituals characteristic of the world of politics have been present throughout the history of mankind.

Numerous political and religious movements have proclaimed the creation of a community of beliefs or faith by converting people to ideas previously unknown to them.

Such a community needs to be supported by rituals, a series of regular events (patriotic meetings, party conventions, church liturgy) in which members participate as actors. These events enhance the feeling of membership and shared destiny.

Rituals are an inseparable element of human existence. They are most commonly connected to the sphere of religious experiences. However, as demonstrated above, they also function in other areas of our lives. In historical terms, rituals can be traced in the earliest stages of communities' formation.

The social and political activities in those times involved means such as: magic, prayer, sacrifice, omen, or mysticism. They emerged whenever an emotional clash between hope and fear took place, and rational means turned out to be insufficient.

Rituals, if seen as a sort of social actions, belong to the category of theatrics, and are taken for socially significant reasons by a given social group, or in their name. A ritual plays a crucial part in confirming and symbolically performing the social order. It allows a glimpse at the ultimate order, which is to be reflected by the reality. It belongs to the group of symbolic activities, performing communicative functions while being constant and repetitive.

There is no room for spontaneity or any departure from the acknowledged rules and canons. On the contrary, rituals are based on precisely defined rules and principles, which need to be followed unconditionally. Therefore, an important role in the ritualistic processes is played by verbal symbols, gesticulation, sounds, images, or human bodies.

In the case of secular rituals, the utilization of non-religious, metaphysical ideas can be noticed. The noteworthy ideas include patriotism, nationalism, and belief in the historic mission of a nation or social class, and other sorts of ideas derived from philosophical reflections upon history. The world of politics exploits rituals mostly when rational approach proves insufficient or ineffective.



In the scope of political life, rituals commonly cover means such as: body-language, vocabulary, prompts, colors, uniforms, and sounds, by means of which individuals try to secure their influence upon attitudes, behavior and actions of people. Political rituals take place in front of an audience. They allow understanding of what is of real value in a given society, and what represents its past and future as well as the mutual relation between the two.

It should also be observed, that political ceremonies and rituals are characterized by transferring and incorporating values originating from religious ceremonies. The above intensifies the experience of a shifting political meaning. It is often the case that secular organizations take the form of social or political movements, often cloaked by secrecy as to the rules of their operation, like in the case of masonry.

Several types of political ritualism can be distinguished, depending on the role they play in a society.

The first type covers those political rituals, which serve integrative purposes in a society, and are a means of justification, and consolidation of the society around a certain idea (e.g. ceremonies of crowning, Memorial day).

The second group is constituted by the rituals treated as conflict-generating. They include, for instance, the annual protestant parades in the catholic part of Northern Ireland, or the student protests at Tiananmen Square in Beijing in 1989.

Therefore, it can be observed, that rituals are exploited as a means of consolidating the authority, or as a way to express opposition towards the existing social order.

Political rituals manifested themselves in the twentieth century in the form of mass movements. Democracies are also influenced by rituals, which act as a unifying and legitimizing factor for the community and the authorities. Therefore, rituals play an important part in channeling tensions and resolving conflicts. This can be exemplified by rituals of rebellion, which in a symbolic form systematize actions of the people dissatisfied with the existing social order. Carnivals are a good example of rituals allowing free expression of emotions.

However, rituals are in fact mainly a means of preserving and confirming the existing social order. In the case of some rituals, they can be treated as secular rather than religious: standing up in a courtroom or a witness taking an oath to tell the truth are good examples of the above.

In the face of globalization processes gathering pace, fears are often expressed in reference to preserving sovereignty and the existing model of state. Thus, we can witness a



return to the ritualistic forms aimed at strengthening the weakened institutions. The rebirth of tribal, ethnical, and religious bonds can be observed.

Spectacular performances take place, as for instance demonstrations demanding stopping the processes of globalization on the one hand, and the Davos summit on the other.

Religious practices and even the most intimate religious acts have a social meaning and a social context. Religious activity helps in becoming conscious of one's community, to express symbolically the social order and to gain an objective sensation about society.

When people gather on solemn occasions – reverent, they achieve a deep sense of themselves and of the legitimacy of their social organization. Religion is an expression of collective consciousness, which is the fusion of all the individual consciousnesses, which then creates a reality of its own.

In the search of a meaning in the present, there seems to be an imperative want for “enchantment” of a world, that has been “disenchanted” for so long.

#### *THE SURVEY*

Concerning the attitude towards university education the survey was conducted by a team of the *Department of “Sociology”* from the *South-West University “Neofit Rilsky”* and the *Institute of Sociology of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences*.

<b>Methods of the extract:</b>	All the cities in Bulgaria, which are regional centres (28), were selected during the first stage. Two classes of students from every regional centre have been selected during the second stage as follows: 1) Students in regular high-schools (the most popular educational institutions).  2) Students in specialized schools – foreign-language high schools, schools of mathematics and natural science, art schools, etc.
<b>Methods of the registration:</b>	Direct individual inquiry, consisting of a questionnaire of 13 questions, four of which – semi-standard.
<b>Planned extract:</b>	1400 students
<b>Realized extract<sup>2</sup>:</b>	1347 students

<sup>2</sup> The difference between the “planned” and the “realized” figures is insignificant. The reasons for that difference are two: refusal for participation in the inquiry and the initial selection of classes that result to have less than 25 students.



The survey was conducted in the year 2006 and the questions included concern the interests of the BBS. Their essence outlines the parameters of the general research effort on a representative level.

A question was included in the survey, which inquired about the type of literature that the person reads. “The Bible” was one of the possible answers in the questionnaire.

The answers to the question - *What kind of literature do you read?* – which was included in the questionnaire, are strongly related to the priority direction of our interest. Below are the answers, related to the reading of the Bible. They have been deduced out of an extract of some 3000 young people (high-school students) and parents who have been inquired.

What kind of literature do you read?	Answers	
	Number of participants	Relative quota
Fiction	761	32,9%
Scientific literature	529	22,9%
Magazines and newspapers	823	35,6%
The Bible	56	2,4%
The Koran	22	1,0%
Other	43	1,9%
I don't read	77	3,3%
General	2311	100,0%

Chart N 1: Structure of the preferred types of literature.

The fact that only 56 of the participants (or 2, 4 %) have read the Bible is very indicative. It is also indicative that the most preferred type of literature among the young is “Magazines and newspapers” which outlines their major intellectual directions and those of their parents, which is even more disturbing.

The results from a representative inquiry, conducted by the National Statistical Institute create a possibility for comparative analysis and drawing conclusions. This study included more than 5000 people. The fact that under 1,6 % have read the Bible is indicative, while the people that regularly read newspapers and magazines has increased from 34,6 % to 45, 8 %.

Also, the fact that the people reading scientific literature, shouldn't be disregarded while the people who read fiction has increased slightly – from 32,9 % to 33,5 %.



What kind of literature do you read? (select up to three answers)	Answers	
	Number of participants	Relative quota
Fiction	2892	33,5%
Scientific literature	1325	28,5%
Magazines and newspapers	3962	45,8%
The Bible	141	1,6%
The Koran	77	0,9%
Other	245	2,8%
General	8642	100,0%

Chart N 2: Structure of the preferred types of literature.

In May 2009, with permission of the Department of Education team of Department "Sociology", together with the Institute of Sociology (which made field work) conducted a second survey on the topic: *Place of the Southwestern University "Neofit Rilsky" in the minds of Bulgaria, related to higher education* (ESI after students completed their secondary education and their parents in 28 municipalities in Bulgaria).

The following data are obtained, which can serve for comparison and tracking of dynamic processes that are the subject of research interest. The following table clearly demonstrates some reduction in rates related to reading the Bible and the Koran.

Not ignore the fact that the relationship between artistic, scientific literature and newspapers and magazines is changing the direction of reducing the reading of newspapers and magazines.

*What kind of literature do you read?*

Parents	Answers	
Kind of literature	N	%
Fiction	710	36,5%
Scientific literature	437	22,5%
Magazines and newspapers	710	36,5%
The Bible	27	1,4%
The Koran	11	,6%
Other	20	1,0%
I don't read	30	1,5%
General	1945	100,0%

Chart N 3: Structure of the preferred types of literature.



Comparing the statistics clearly shows the unenviable place which religion occupies in contemporary Bulgarian society. The results of this latest survey shows lower rates of reading, especially for religious literature.

The majority of the population does not believe religion can really help them in their private life. The fact that several generations were completely deprived of religious education and access to the Bible should be taken into consideration when treating the data, which is presented above.

Naturally, the mere act of reading the Bible can never be a guarantee for true religious devotion. The opportunity to freely read the Scripture, which came with democracy, does not necessarily indicate a sincere religious motivation and orientation.

According to its program, the BBS began conducting a series of sociological surveys concerning the process of dissemination of the Holy Bible in Bulgaria.

The need for such surveys is determined by different factors: the large percentage of people who do not take interest in the Bible; the low level of acquaintance with the Holy Writ among the majority of Christians; the lack of active presentation of the Bible via the media; the insufficient efforts of the Churches for popularization of its message.

Being the chief publisher and disseminator of copies of the Bible for all strata of Bulgarian society, the BBS must find answers to some fundamental questions:

*What is to be done so that the Word of God can reach everyone?*

*How can the neglectful attitude of people towards the Bible be overcome?*

*What is the role of the Churches in this process?*

The social and religious situation, the attitudes of people towards faith and the Church, and the overcoming of basic prejudices should be taken into account. All these require an objective analysis of the present-day conditions in which Bulgarians live.

The answers to those questions certainly will not be simple, and finding them is a very difficult task.

### *INFLUENCE OF RELIGION IN BULGARIAN SOCIETY*

In an attempt to obtain the necessary authentic and thorough information, were combined quantitative and qualitative methods. This means that for the purpose of final analysis, the data from a representative sociological survey have been combined with the additional analysis from discussions with focus groups and with the results from an observation with participation and interviews. The whole process of the survey may generally



be divided into three stages.

The results are certainly impressive that with the purpose of obtaining additional in-depth information the next step was to organize discussions with *focus groups*.

Organization of discussions with focus groups, with the purpose of obtaining additional in-depth information. These activities are interactive and it is very important to know that they tend to create new notional connections between the participants of different groups. Quite often, this reveals unexpected aspects of the previously gathered information.

The description and comparison of the focus groups allows the examination of the opinions, evaluations, and decisions of the different participants. It is not a conventional practice to include percentages and quotas in a report about a focus group. Guarantees for the representative nature of the extract or the criterion for selecting participants is not required either. This method is not based on a quantitative approach but rather on specific in-depth analysis techniques.

Six discussions of this kind were organized. The focus groups were composed out of representatives from different strata of Bulgarian society. The places where different discussions were held, were deliberately selected – the capital, a big city and a town – the cities of Sofia, Plovdiv and Blagoevgrad, respectively.

Groups with different focus, among which – a group of young people, were composed for the purpose of the project. Representatives of different strata were invited depending on their age, social, financial, educational, and intellectual status and background.

A group of believers who actively practice a certain religion was composed. The other groups were focused respectively on irreligious people, students from secular and theological faculties, manifest atheists, and experts.

All of the participants (60 persons) were between 20 and 70 years of age. The focus groups were attentively observed and recorded with a Mini DV video camera for the sake of authenticity and preserving the information. An audio-only record was simultaneously created and it is kept in MP3 format.

The place and context into which a focus-group discussion is organized has a serious effect on the nature and quality of the information that is obtained. The medium where focus group discussions were held influenced the interaction greatly and the kinds of response and feedback that was obtained.

The optimal conditions and atmosphere were created so that the participants could feel comfortable and really take part in the discussion. They were seated around a table, which



created the opportunity for direct questions and visual contact between them. It is notable that all of the focus groups went on in a spirit of mutual tolerance and sincere desire to speculate on the topical problems. The participants were calm throughout the conversation and after the initial acquaintance, all of them eagerly joined the discussion.

The most frequent kind of answer suggests that irreligious people, in general, admit that there is no God. Atheists may also believe in the inexistence of God or they merely claim that there is nothing “up there”. Irreligious persons, on the other hand, are undetermined.

They do not have a definite attitude towards the divine, while atheists have a clearly negative, even an aggressive one. Participants regard religious persons as trustworthy, they share that their soul is relaxed when they communicate with believers and they do not expect any harm from them.

Nevertheless, it is also obvious that when an essential discussion on the matter takes place, the confrontation between believers and irreligious people is inevitable. The situation depends greatly on whether the irreligious person realizes clearly, in what exactly he does not believe.

Many participants who declare themselves irreligious, turned out to be genuine but isolated believers. A person should not be definitely classified as “Irreligious” before conversation is held with him. Only in a topical discussion can a person reveal its true religious orientation.

People who declare themselves irreligious think that the modern way of life is predominantly materialistic and deprived of any kind of spirituality. They point this out as the main reason why they cannot find any time for faith and religion. Many among the irreligious show interest in religions and teachings outside Christianity.

Some consider the contents of the Bible incomprehensible. Even though they possess a Bible in their homes, they hardly ever open the book.

It appears that young people with a low level of Christian culture tend to regard the Bible as an old, retrograde and antiquated book. They often think of it as a sectarian text and are even afraid sometimes.

In the opinion of young people, the Bible is just a book, like many others, intended to develop a certain morality in a person. It is far from being a preferred reading in this kind of literature. Many youths have difficulties in understanding the biblical text. They regard the Scripture only as something holy and nothing else. Its messages are remote to their minds.

Here is the expressed opinion of one of the participants in the focus groups:



*“I’ve read enough of it, several times. Well, the Bible, literally spoken or retold, I’m sorry but, most of it, in my opinion, does not represent any religious interest, really. It isn’t something that inspires. It’s the story of a semi-nomadic people from the Bronze Age, roughly told but it is just like that. At the same time, I encounter a great number of contradictions inside it, too many facts with no connection whatsoever. If a person wants to find an integral religious doctrine, a model for living and conduct, a way to know the world, well, I personally think that they won’t find it, not without assistance. One needs interpretation and guidance on how to understand all this. I mean someone has to retell things in a different, more comprehensible way, because if a person has decent historical knowledge, you know, things look very unconvincing. In spite of gaining clarity and an insight into Christian dogma, a person becomes more and more suspicious every time they read the text and that’s a paradox. Instead of finding true faith you end up being more suspicious than before. There are many examples...”*

There is an interesting fact that in a society that is often regarded as “non-religious”, “secular”, “pagan” and religious interaction among young people is common.

It exists particularly among young people who do not have a clear memory of the so-called totalitarian past. They answer without fear to questions concerning the intervention of religion in their lives and admit that it has an increasing role in the private and public life of Bulgarian citizens through the past years.

In contrast to what is often suggested, there is no return, no return to a pre-modern situation. I suggest, rather, that institutional religion may no longer presume to impose its views, its doctrine, and its morals, its rules, either in public affairs or on individuals who claim their autonomy. To be listened to, religious spokespersons have to modify their discourse and its presentation.

The religious actor has also to re-legitimize some religious dimensions, which, during modernity, were eliminated or at least reduced in order to rationalize religion. To survive or to have a chance still to play a role in society, the religious actor will offer himself as a resource for other systems - by showing its capacity to solve problems generated in other fields but not solved there.

Discussions with focus groups are interactive and it is very important to know that they tend to create new notional connections between the participants of different groups. Quite often, this reveals unexpected aspects of the previously gathered information.

The description and comparison of the focus groups allows the examination of the



opinions, evaluations, and decisions of the different participants.

It is not a conventional practice to include percentages and quotas in a report about a focus group. Guarantees for the representative nature of the extract or the criterion for selecting participants is not required either. This method is not based on a quantitative approach but rather on specific in-depth analysis techniques.

#### *OUTCOME OF THE FOCUS-GROUPS STAGE*

##### *A. First of all: What is the difference between believers and irreligious people?*

The most frequent kind of answer suggests that irreligious people, in general, admit that there is no God. Atheists may also believe in the inexistence of God or they merely claim that there is nothing “up there”. Irreligious persons, on the other hand, are undetermined. They do not have a definite attitude towards the divine, while atheists have a clearly negative, even an aggressive one.

Participants regard religious persons as trustworthy, they share that their soul is relaxed when they communicate with believers and they do not expect any harm from them. Nevertheless, it is also obvious that when an essential discussion on the matter takes place, the confrontation between believers and irreligious people is inevitable. The situation depends greatly on whether the irreligious person realizes clearly, in what exactly he does not believe.

*B. Many participants who declare themselves irreligious, turned out to be genuine but isolated believers.*

A person should not be definitely classified as “Irreligious” before conversation is held with him. Only in a topical discussion can a person reveal its true religious orientation.

*C. People who declare themselves irreligious think that the modern way of life is predominantly materialistic and deprived of any kind of spirituality. They point this out as the main reason why they cannot find any time for faith and religion.*

*D. Many among the irreligious show interest in religions and teachings outside Christianity.*

*E. Some consider the contents of the Bible incomprehensible. Even though they possess a Bible in their homes, they hardly ever open the book.*

Therefore, a person that has merely read the text of the Holy Writ is not an obvious believer. Some of the most convinced atheists are very well acquainted with the Word of God.

*F. Some of the people in this category think of God only during major religious festivities and that is the only time they actually visit a temple.*



*G. A certain proportion of the people are repulsed by the continuous confrontation inside the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC) and they declare their distrust in ecclesiastical institutions.*

*H. Some are unhappy with the educational activity of the BOC and the insufficient charity initiatives.*

They think that the Church neglects the actual problems of Bulgarian society.

*I. Some explain their own indifference towards the Bible with the lack of religious orientation in their families.*

*J. Many people are repulsed by the religious propaganda that is broadcasted by the media on different occasions. They consider it too aggressive (the movie “Jesus” for example).*

A certain proportion of the people are repulsed by the continuous confrontation inside the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC) and they declare their distrust in ecclesiastical institutions. Some are unhappy with the educational activity of the BOC and the insufficient charity initiatives. They think that the Church neglects the actual problems of Bulgarian society.

Some explain their own religious indifference with the lack of religious orientation in their families. Many people are repulsed by the religious propaganda that is broadcasted by the media on different occasions.

*Enhance the Bible’s role in the life of Orthodox believers in the country.*

- 45 % of the Christians in the country are completely unacquainted with the Bible. (This percentage refers mostly to Orthodox Christians, given that the full acquaintance with the Holy Writ is a strict regulation for Protestants). 5.5 % of all Christians often read religious literature; 20.9 rarely open religious books and 73.5 do not read such literature at all. This is indicative of how important it is to enhance the Bible’s role in the lives of this category of people.

- The weak level of acquaintance with the Bible is due to the insufficient educational activity of the BOC. A campaign of a larger scale is necessary during religious festivities in order to popularize the Bible.

- The study of the Bible might be encouraged in schools. Different forms of acquaintance with the Word of God can be examined, in relation with the age of the students.

- At present, the Bible is available for sale in very few locations – certain bookstores and churches; a larger system of distribution is necessary.



- Bible books should be available at places where people gather every day: railway stations, airports, hotels, kiosks, etc.
- Auxiliary biblical literature should be provided, also newssheets with quotes from the Bible and additional materials, sold along with books.
- Bibles of different sizes and formats should be printed, for example - an edition with a larger font size of the text or a small, portable one.
- Individual parts of the Holy Writ can be published and distributed separately.
- Interpretations, commentaries, and reference books on biblical subjects can be issued.

Some of the conclusions that we got from these researches are:

- Young people avoid reading religious literature. They do not regard it as a possible source for answers and solutions for their problems.
- In the opinion of young people, the Bible is just a book, like many others, intended to develop a certain morality in a person. It is far from being a preferred reading in this kind of literature.
- Young people are skeptical towards the purpose and effects of a religious education. For them it is more like a matter of personal choice, rather than one of public necessity.
- The family is the first small spiritual school where parents introduce their children to the Bible and the experience of the faith. Religious upbringing should be deepened at school, according to specially developed programs. Religious education can be developed on two levels:
  - Education for children and youths;
  - Education for the elderly.

The participants in the focus group discussions unanimously affirm that religious education would be greatly beneficial to a child's development. Some of them even made specific recommendations:

A deep spiritual transition is happening in Bulgaria, along with the political and economical changes. Thousands of Bulgarians seek for and read all kinds of religious literature, which is abundant on our market. In general, we can affirm that the majority of Bulgarians are returning into the bosom of traditional Christian denominations. This process compels the churches to deal with the challenges of the newly created situation, one of which



is the adequate provision of Bible books to the new members.

Reading the Bible and the search of God are complex psychological processes which are influenced by external factors such as the faith in God, Christian family traditions, personal spiritual and moral culture, the challenges in a person's life, the attitude of Churches towards the people, the interrelations inside the ecclesiastical structures, the personal example of bishops, priests and clergymen.

The next step in the research was *interviews with forty respondents completed the "picture" of religion in Bulgarian society.*

Respondents were young people with different religious orientations, different outlook, business, artistic and scientific intelligentsia. Without exaggeration, it can be argued that this is a very interesting and effective research effort.

Discussed problems can be grouped into several problem rounds that are expressive enough to confirm, complement or bring out a new emphasis on issues that were investigated.

#### ■ ***Bulgarian society and the "spiritual coma"***

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

- The institutions of church self-discrediting, this is a total coma, no landmarks, no spiritual reference points.

- 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.

#### ■ ***Influence of religion in Bulgarian society***

- The Bulgarian has a healthy dose of skepticism, it is due to his intelligence and not least for his alertness and his quest creature in real life, including faith.

- Many people are influenced by popular culture, but it is different, and her motto is absolute chaos of information, but it seems basic, necessary for building a complete person.

- Originally the main elements of human culture, including and religion are phenomena with great momentum. They change more slowly and more difficult than other items.



- The main thing that has changed is the massive sense of freedom of expression and prestige of formal religion as a phenomenon.
- In general, according to respondents, there can be no society without religion. It has its place in social space, but is something very individual.
- Most say that everyone in modern society "*believe in their own thing*".
- Some time ago the belief was associated with some ideas, but now - with others.
- Most say the way 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 have a dilemma that excites them.

## CONCLUSIONS

- ❖ Some people think of God only during major religious festivities and that is the only time they actually visit a temple.
- ❖ Others are unhappy with the educational activity of the BOC and the insufficient charity initiatives. They think that the Church neglects the actual problems of Bulgarian society.
- ❖ Most of the respondents explain their own indifference towards the Bible with the lack of religious orientation in their families.
- ❖ Many people are repulsed by the religious propaganda that is broadcasted by the media on different occasions. They consider it too aggressive (the movie "Jesus" for example).
- ❖ Religious ignorance has a destructive effect on efforts to reveal the Bible and its message.
- ❖ Young people do not regard the Bible as a possible source for answers and solutions for their problems.
- ❖ In the opinion of young people, the Bible is far from being a preferred reading.
- ❖ Young people are skeptical towards the purpose and effects of a religious



education. For them it is more like a matter of personal choice, rather than one of public necessity.

The notions of the young generation can be classified in several categories: according to their opinions on the way of life, values, religious identity and observance of traditions.

By means of a peculiar *bricolage*, attempts are being made in the Bulgarian society to create a modern sacred, in order to give an answer to the question: “*how is it possible for what is, to no longer be what is*”.

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 secondary problems.

The effect of modern mass culture in all of its forms serves as an addition to the traditionally neglectful attitude of Bulgarians towards the faith. The invading secularism of the West mingles itself with the atheistic heritage of the Communist era.

The direct consequence of this interaction is an even deeper alienation from the values of religion. In terms of religiosity and interest in the sacred, Bulgarians fall behind most nations of Western and even of Eastern Europe.

The common person has the need to light a candle, to pray to God, to battle the feeling of loneliness and to regain the belief in themselves. It is unimportant whether this is performed in a big church, which is in one of the “attractive centers” of a city or in the chapel of a small village. Regardless of the size and location of the temple, it is still the link between man and God.

Most of the Bulgarians do not regard religion as a source for moral support. The majority of the population does not believe religion can really help in their private lives.

Things like morality, faith or knowing the Bible seem like secondary problems.

Unfortunately, in the years of democracy, Bulgarian families, politics, the clergy and the laity have been consumed by their own, egocentric passions and have forgotten that young people have the need to share and seek solution for their problems.

"A new religious sensibility" is added to it. Nevertheless the problem about the limits of the state intervention in religious affairs is standing. Political pluralism, freedom of speech and religion and other basic features of democracy seem to be realizable.

We see unexpected connections and views, new mixed types, in which the boundary of the sacred, in Durkheim’s terms, expands.

There are some respondents who fully accept, or totally reject traditions, religious



affiliation, the testimony of collective memory, which has served as a collective code for many generations.

An analogy naturally comes to mind with the reasoning of Jean Fourastie in his book entitled *What I believe in?*

In general, Fourastie uses very original means in his argumentation: a new synthesis between emotions and rationality, belief and knowledge that he hopes will serve to revive the spiritual side of modern society.

There is a rather interesting feature in the typological divisions of people in modern societies.

According to the typology offered by Fourastie, human types in a given society are divided in two types.

Attala is the young heroine of Chateaubriand's famous novel.

Citroen is the no less-famous automobile constructor. The first of these two types embodies the sentimental, affective, intuitive faculties and needs, while the latter signifies the rational, technical, scientific needs.

Of course, this distinction is a very rough one. It only points to the fact that people and human groups are different, that there is polarity among them. Extremes are usually rejected. Every person, every society are mixture of Attala and Citroen, but also of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.

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