
СОЦИОЛОГИЯ

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RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM AND THE MANIFESTATIONS OF THE SACRED IN AN AGE OF GLOBALISATION***I. Skamperle***

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The lecture treatment some aspects of the new forms of religious syncretism and the new social paradigm. The lecture analysis the consequences in the field of religions of the transformation of Europe (the fall of the Berlin Wall, dissolution of the Soviet Union, disintegration of Yugoslavia) and the reconstruction of Europe, escorted with strong technological development. The religious field itself become globalistic and its characteristic is hard syncretism. In the forms of religious beliefs reemerge new form of gnosis, strong individualism, theological questions of God's incarnation and considerable large distance from Church. The western society in the age of globalism is also moving away from historical context of time and has much fewer links with tradition. The lecture attempts to evidence a typological classification of some post-modern religious categories, like personal experience, subjective spirituality, deterritorialism and the manifestations of the sacred in the form of individual gnosis.

Key words: sacred; syncretism; subjective spirituality; gnosis; new communitarism; church

I. New social paradigm

In the last fifteen years, from about the middle of the 1990s, we have been witness to an intense social development, encompassing practically all the fields of life, from economy and politics to culture, social relations, forms of communication, sociability, morality, intimacy, partner relationships, sexuality, happiness, questions of identity and self-image. The same can be said also for the field of religion, which is going through certain expressive changes. In his last work, *Le Pacte du lucidite ou l'intelligence du Mal* (Baudrillard 2004), sociologist Jean Baudrillard introduced the concept of integral reality since everything is supposed to be present or included in it. It is characteristic of contemporary society that it "possesses" everything, a

profusion of both the factual and the informational, where there is "no longer anything we could not say something about". (Baudrillard 2004) This reality indistinguishably overlaps with the so-called virtual reality, while the procedure itself is based on the principle of the deregulation of institutional elements, identities and (the traditionally understood) reality itself (Beck 2003). Objects do not refer to something else, something transcendent, everything is integrated and virtually accessible. Reality no longer has its constitutive transcendental foundations beyond what is known, but is "all" present and integrated. According to the author, we are becoming increasingly more trapped in the abundance of communication reality, which we cannot escape from. The negation or denial and the

consequent death of the imaginary which we no longer believe, therefore, seems an understandable consequence. This brings with it the death of symbolic language and an implicit slide into signalling, which erases all the ambiguous and suggestive meanings, which were the foundation of human culture, imagination and, after all, social relations. To a particular extent, this holds true for religion. In short, it is a matter of a particular abolition of the reality of objects and their suggestive imaginary status or the abolition of that level contained in the Slovenian phrase "the naked truth" which presupposes that, behind the veil, the real, naked truth is hiding. But, in the new global network paradigm, it seems that we no longer believe that there is anything behind the veil. The veils are integral reality, they are all there is. There is nothing behind them that would escape communication and the game of signs or simulacra in the global network. The expectations of the unknown, the premonition of inaccessibility and its imaginary, which we translate into the integral and currently present reality, are erased.

Baudrillard's analysis of contemporary society is an acute but sufficiently pertinent and daring reflection on transformation processes created by political and cultural globalisation. His book *Perfect Crime* (Baudrillard, 1995) was already a great success. I use his terms and theses in as much as they are useful for the consideration and assessment of those forms of religiosity that seem new or typical of the global syncretism framework and the transformation changing contemporary developed society.

For a sociologist and a religious studies scholar, contemporary time seems privileged since we can follow, firsthand, the social change of paradigm and the related transformation of mentalities and the complex field of cultural production. We can say that the process of the great transformation of Western societies began in the beginning of the 1990s, which coincides with concrete social happenings that swiftly changed the map of

the world and which we, for the most part, consciously followed up-close: the fall of the Berlin Wall, which will remain a metaphor for the end of ideological polarity and political division between European countries after WWII, but also world countries; dissolution of the Soviet Union; disintegration of Yugoslavia and Balkan conflicts; the reconstruction of Europe and its ambitious development project in the framework of the monetarily, economically, politically and culturally united community; strong technological development, establishment of the internet as the new *agora*, which is becoming a basic form of communication; liberalization of the economy and the deinvestment of the laic social state; control of oil sources in the Middle East ensured by the strategic connection between the Wahhabi house in Saudi Arabia and the USA. The interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq can be read in this context, with the effective event of September 11 and the complex problem of the relations between Israel and Arab countries.

At first sight, the new features pervading contemporary society seem above all of a technological nature. But sociological analyses have pointed out that, with them, the broader social paradigm is changing. The technical and media paradigm changes the forms of social communication, individual and collective expectations, their identities, culture and thought patterns. Technological and the related social development have become so rapid that social sciences can hardly follow it with appropriately critical reflection which is a phenomenon whose consequences cannot be foreseen.

II. The religious field and hypothetical transformations

How does this social transformation influence religion? Despite the laic secularisation accompanying the development of modern society, religion remains a vital field of human society. Compared to the 1960s, when an emphasized atheism was on the rise and religion was considered a remnant of superstition or traditional forms of corporative community, it today demonstrates a new vitality

and a surprising ability of adapting to post-modern society. Secularisation, of course, remains the meta-narration of the modern world. Despite this, religion is alive and capable of creating new identification icons operating at the individual as well as the collective level. In this sense, it is precisely the Catholic Church that is the most vital. Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical entitled *God is Love* (*Deus caritas est*) is quite telling. The Pope, who with his reasonably cautious and rational first appearances successfully took over the heritage of the powerful charisma of John Paul II, at the same time, pointed to the problems that the Church has kept swept under the carpet for the last quarter of the century. With the last encyclical, the whole sphere of eros has been integrated into the sphere of love, which is God himself. This love is both spiritual and physical. The church thus rejects misogyny or an ambiguous reservation towards the female body and sexuality — which, for a long time, was a difficult and controversial topic in Catholicism. Here, we have to say that modern secularisation is, above all, a European phenomenon. In the USA, social development unfolded differently and the genesis of a secular and laic society did not have the causes that we know from the history of modern Europe.

Contemporary societies are entering a situation with new characteristics. We are in a period of globalisation and a great plurality of religious choices that take place syncretically. A substantial share of the younger population is turning to religion. They were no longer religiously formed in the traditional way as the past generations were, despite all limitations, especially in Catholic countries and Germany. In contemporary society determined by the market mechanisms of supply and demand, religion also adapts to these criteria or succumbs to them. The emphasis is no longer on the persistence of the fundamental, substantive and doctrinal patterns, i.e., on that which has, throughout the ages, remained identical and fundamental, such as the basic concepts of spiritual proclamation

and the traditions of a certain religion, what gains on value is mobility, discontinuity, openness to new connections and the capability of integrating syncretic elements and goods. It is not vertical identity or personal introspection that is in the forefront, but mobility in the horizontal network and the capacity to coordinate external plural aspects. (Filoramo 2004).

In a global society, identities, which I understand as individual and collective forms of identification, mix and dissolve. It is a matter of the principles of global society (Beck 2003), such as deterritorialization, i.e., the extraction from physical space and destabilisation of identities. These dissolve in a virtual production of the simulacra of the other, which leads to an agony of constant displacement. We can observe a similar phenomenon in the field of religion where a real dissemination of the sacred is starting to take place. I use the concept of the sacred in the sense developed by the German School of the 19th c. (Schleiermacher 2005), which became established in religious studies through the pioneering work of Rudolf Otto (Otto 1993). In the traditional understanding of religion, the sacred is a characteristic or quality of things, objects, locations and persons which is, at its core, transcendental and unknowable. Religious studies, on the other hand, started talking about the “sacred” as an independent substance with an ambivalent nature, related to the concept of the sacral, which attracts and frightens at the same time, its characteristic being the feeling of the *numinous*. In post-modern society, the sacred is constituted in a new way, while the forms of its expression remain an interesting, but undetermined and little explored object of research so far. We could make a daring hypothesis that the sacred, which, starting out as something objective, is becoming an increasingly more autonomous or substantive category, is, to an extent, breaking away from religion, reaching a level where it does not necessarily overlap with the religious. This is a risky hypothesis, a working hypothesis for now, but more detailed analyses show

that the field of religious forms is rapidly turning into something we could perhaps name post-Christian or, more precisely, post-Church and not post-religious or post-sacral society (Luckmann 2007). It is interesting to observe how the return of old Gnostic elements, which European culture had not managed to completely reject or surpass, can be seen in the forms of the so-called New Age or new spirituality. The forms of post-modern or even global gnosis appear in new clothing, but the outcome of this peculiar "sacralization" and creation of new religious forms that are manifested individually and globally cannot be foreseen (Filoramo 1994).

III. Post-modern globalised gnosis

How should we define religion today? Is religion still composed of cultic acts and the belief in supernatural beings? Are cultic acts expressed through prayer, thanks and the veneration of God? Is the foundation of religion still the belief in after-life? The belief in God's incarnation? Is it a matter of observing the forces of nature and examining the questions of the meaning of the world's existence? A matter of loyalty to one's tradition? Or is religion merely an ethical code of earthly existence? The admission that human knowledge of the ultimate things is limited? The search for a spiritual disposition ensuring inner peace, equilibrium and meaning of life? Here, we have to ask ourselves which characteristics define the new forms we call contemporary New Age spirituality.

Contemporary forms of religious expression come very close to or even overlap with the questions that belong to the field of psychology, sociology, anthropology, politics, natural sciences and also ecology. Traditional religious ideas, such as hope, belief in redemption, intercession and the faith in grace are not in the forefront. Studies show that even religious people are giving up their belief in redemption and afterlife. The emphasis is on values, the meaning of life, spiritual equilibrium, self-realisation and happiness. Many of these questions should actually be seen to by the social laic

state, which is obviously not up to this task and even renounces its traditional role of a social guarantee. New religious movements with their lively dynamics thus enter this field.

We mentioned that one of the fundamental characteristics of new religious forms is a syncretic use of available goods. The deterritorialization, continuous displacement and destabilisation of identities lead to the crumbling of traditional collective religious identities instead of which the sphere of individuality and syncretic choices becomes increasingly more established (Baudrillard, 2004). Contrary to the form of religious formation passed down to an individual by tradition, with them either fulfilling their task of actively or passively preserving it or distancing themselves from it, today, religion appears as a choice. General social formation does not offer an individual religiosity; religiosity is a product of one's own choice and upgrade. From a religiosity rooted in space and time supported by collective memory (Halbwachs 2001) and sustained by a living tradition with cultural reproduction, we are moving to a religiosity where space changes according to the relevant subjects and where time is not subject to the forms of traditional liturgy nor (cosmic) time shifts and cultural or collective identifications. Personal identity, too, that used to be given once and for all is today labile and resembles a kaleidoscope. In new religious movements, there comes to a creation of new, fictitious identities when members of a certain denomination want to connect to a certain ethnos, most often to Hindu or Asian cultures to which the adopted spiritual form is supposed to correspond ethnically and culturally (e.g., Hare Krishna). But in the age of globalisation, there are no original ethnic cultures and certainly not in a big Western city which is why this is a peculiar fictive identification simulacrum. In this respect, Hindu spiritual forms are more adaptable, while Buddhism is more conservative and less prepared to adapt to Western civilization.

Two important new criteria are undoubtedly the privatisation of the religious sphere, which is connected to the possibility or even the pervading form of personal spirituality that is no longer determined in advanced, but chosen and upgraded by the individuals themselves, implying a form of a “supermarket” where I choose at will those spiritual elements that suit my own taste. The main factor of this choice is the global paradigm of the free market offer, in this case, enabled by religious pluralism. In a way, the guarantee of this plurality is, or at least is supposed to be, precisely the laic state, which, in its separation from the church, ensures the freedom of religion. Of course, the question arises whether in such a society religion still performs its role of the fundamental social bond that contributes to the common collective identification (of a region, nation, country, continent, civilisation) as proposed by the founder of the sociology of religion, Durkheim. It seems that religion is no longer based on social bonds which would be collectively acknowledged as such and even less can it today establish them, but succumbs to the so-called *rational choice*, i.e., to the individualised criteria of spiritual suitability and usefulness (Filoramo 2004).

Contemporary individualisation of religious form, which is not subject to church control nor doctrinaire tradition, but chooses spiritual contents at will, according to its own criteria, as if in a supermarket, is part of a broader transformation of mentality accompanying globalisation. Anthony Giddens wrote an excellent study on this where he focuses on forms of general self-reflection of contemporary human beings (Giddens 2000). A characteristic accompanying the transformation of cultural identity is also an emphasised orientation towards the present. The very deregulation and polyvalence of identities, which are today becoming prevalent, imply a synchrony of relations. In a religious sense, this means that spiritual concerns are not directed towards the anticipated future and redemption for which one yearns and prepares and,

in line with this, leads a moral and socially committed life, but that the concern and attention are directed towards the “now”, towards the existence here and now, which is turning into an integral reality. This, in a way, is all that exists and interests one at the moment.

Contemporary authors find that Western society is moving away from linear historical time of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, which is based on the continuity and successiveness of the timeline extending from the origin to the expected messianic or utopian time, the last hour and redemption beyond time and space. Linear time is also the historical time of recording events and giving meaning. But it also includes an implicit exclusiveness characteristic of Abrahamic religions, excluding those who do not follow the “right path”. It is precisely this scheme that is today collapsing in the Western world, taking on forms that are temporally unbound and synchronously inclusive. Beck uses a felicitous concept of *uchronia* (Beck 2003), denoting existence outside temporal and natural determinants, on a virtual replaceable or reversible net freed of successive time and its determinants. Such religion is extracted from the physical and historical context and is therefore, in a way, dematerialised. It is based on a homogenisation of goods whose only reality is personal perception. It is, of course, a matter of the concept of reality close to the concept of integral reality as developed by Baudrillard and mentioned at the beginning of this paper. This reality is, mostly, if not exclusively, based on sensory perception. The concept of Narcissus, which we used years ago, is today changing. Narcissus is no longer fixated on his, such or other, perhaps even pathological image, but takes on a collective form that is deterritorialised and de-substantialised, its characteristics being indifference and allurements. This leads to a dissolution of the ‘I’ where the consciousness finds itself in a constant displacement filled by a game of allurements performed by unstable and amplificatory icons and TV images. The effect of such an agony

of displacement is a special form of agitation, which is becoming a form of hysteria of contemporary society, indifference and a certain lack of identity. Gilles Lipovetsky (Lipovetsky 1993) writes about this.

So, what is characteristic of new religious forms of syncretism is the free choice of spiritual elements, freed of a priori determinations and institutional norms in general, their basic criterion being their usefulness and immediate affirmation.

The primacy of individuality, which is taking hold also of the religious field, is part of the transformation of forms that were first manifested in the literary field when, in the 1980s, parallel to deconstructivism, people started talking about post-modernism and auto-poetics. The phenomenon of religion is part of the same cultural and social context. Next, we list a few properties characteristic of the new spiritual movements from which it should be evident how the forms of modern gnosis, which are one of the possible forms of expressing the sacred (Filoramo 1994), are latently or explicitly manifested. In part, we draw on the excellent studies developed by Thomas Luckmann (Luckmann 1997).

An attempt at a typological classification

1) An important criterion in grasping religious form is *personal experience*. In order to be spiritual, it is not enough to belong to a church or religion. External expressions of religiosity are often redundant or even wrong. They are not genuine and do not express real spiritual intentionality. Participation in rituals and traditional prayer are not the right criteria. One has to have a personal experience. Most Sunday believers thus do not come into consideration and members of New Age movements think that they do not know real spirituality. The imperative is an unmediated personal experience that one experiences in practice, mentally and psychophysically.

2) This means that a subjective spiritual experience has an important role. This is what the charisma of a leader of a certain sect or community

rests on, but it seems that this aspect was especially present twenty or thirty years ago, while it is no longer important today, at a time of a global network and rapid displacement. Despite this, the charisma of a community leader, who is assumed to really know spirituality due to his/her personal spiritual experience, is an important factor that sustains the transference between group members and their rejection of traditional religious institutions. This rejection of traditional institutions is a precondition for their mutual connectedness. And the subjective experience is the one connecting the members to their leader. The sect members are convinced that only they are really initiated into the spirituality that is, for them, the only right one. Within a certain collective identity, everyone acts with the intention to awaken the divine spark they carry inside.

3) The divine spark that we carry inside and that waits for us to awaken it is our real spiritual essence. It is identical to well-being, psychophysical equilibrium and self-realisation. Here, we are far from traditional Christian negative denotations of worldliness, the instructions for patience, devotion and expectation of the beyond. The imperative demands that I feel well in my body and am satisfied with it, here and now. It has to suit my person, which is why we talk of the privatisation of religious experience. Personal well-being that tends to self-realisation carries with it a series of practices that predominate in many spiritual movements and thus overshadow religious elements in the narrower sense. In new forms, the body has an important role. This is a trademark of New Age movements. Parts of this framework are yoga, breathing exercises, ritual dances, select food, meditative practices, headstand and other physical exercises, music rituals, also magical ritual sexuality, energy awakening, activating chakras and the ecological type of the believer. Instead of redemption in the afterworld, full self-realisation here and now. Possible is also a cyclically spiral path of advancing through the reincarnations of the spirit.

Such a religious selection of formations shows us two faces: on the one hand, there is the loosening of social bonds and collective identities, with an individual becoming one's own church, torn out of the traditional *habitus*, which is why such forms do not tie themselves to any defined confession and pass freely along the spiritual field. The beliefs in Muhammad, Christ or Buddha are established at the same level and are interchangeable. The criterion is personal well-being, which dictates a subjective selection of spiritual elements. On the other hand, there is the reverse current when a new form encourages an entry to the global *network*, a capillary network of new movements. Because of the transference relations, which are constitutive for them, they are restrictive, to an extent, sometimes authoritarian and institutionalised. In this, we could perhaps see an attempt at a new religious communitarianism.

4) New religious movements have no determined canon. They have no disciplined teachers who would draw on their own tradition and perform normative supervision. There is no universal proclamation that would implicitly wait to reveal itself to all. Everyone is a "church for themselves", while, at a higher level, individualism merges with general holism where everyone is connected to everything, not only people, but all beings in general. The holistic perspective makes it possible for everyone to gain access to the global network and enter integral reality composed of universal individual pluralism. These aspects are similar to the spiritual forms in the age of Hellenism and the Imperial age when the spiritual "care for oneself" formed among the Stoics and strong Gnostic elements came to life in various forms, while mystery religions gained an intellectual character. The goal of new spiritual movements is not a messianic perspective or afterlife redemption. Ethically viewed, these new movements do not presuppose a final judgement that would function as a criterion. The goal is not a redeemed or heavenly state, but psychophysical equilibrium in everyday life and the

union of one's consciousness with the sacred cosmic spirit.

We can see from the above that, with the social transformation we are witness to, certain aspects of religion are changing in an important way. The old and traditional human — divine — sacred relation is undergoing a subtle change that is difficult to characterise comprehensively. New spiritual movements reject religious forms of redemption and are not based on a creationistic God or a personal God, the live "you" in Abrahamic beliefs, which we find in traditional forms of religion, from Old Testament psalms to Catholic liturgy and literature. The new movements replace the concept of a personal God with alternative forms that are gnostic, naturalistic or deistic. Instead of transcendence, the concept of holistic immanence appears. Redemption does not concern individuals but the whole planet, which is emphasised above all by the form of ecological gnosis. The gnostic god, which is identical to the divine spark and lies dormant in an individual, is, contrary to the Christian God, impersonal and has no subjective will. This is precisely why, in the field of new religious gnosis, analogously to the old gnosis, subject, object and mediator coincide and are identical at the top level. Such religious consciousness that excludes divine will implicitly slides into a sort of necessitarianism. Divine powers are manifested in forms that transcend the anthropomorphic determination. There also comes to an abolishment of the difference in the status of the secular and the sacred, although this question would demand a more detailed analysis. This was due to the influence of Asian religions, in which we do not find this distinction, when, with "Hindo mania" at the end of the 19th century, they started making their way to the West and entered the cultural spheres of western societies. The rejection of this distinction implicitly means that every moment and every part of life is sacred and that there is nothing separated from it that would not be sacred. Or in other words, we can experience the sacred everywhere. To come

into contact with it, one does not have to go into a consecrated space, but can experience it in full anywhere. An important factor contributing to the abolishment of the status of the sacred as that which constitutively differs from the secular is undoubtedly the already mentioned new paradigm of global society based on deterritorialisation, displacement, “uchronia” and integral reality.

Contemporary global human beings preserve their spiritual intentionality, while the forms of their search and expression show that there emerges a distinction between religion and the sacred. Today, religion is undergoing a peculiar transformation, which deserves a more detailed analysis, since, on the other hand, a certain sacralization of the world has entered into an alliance with post-modern global culture. This alliance is no longer based on symbolic language giving meaning to human existence or a transcendence as the foundation of the ontological existence of the world. Instead of this, it is accompanied by a certain erasure of historical memory or a dehistoricization of culture.

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РЕЛИГИОЗНЫЙ СИНКРЕТИЗМ И МАНИФЕСТАЦИИ ДУХОВНОГО В ЭПОХУ ГЛОБАЛИЗАЦИИ

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Рассматриваются отдельные аспекты новых форм религиозного синкретизма и новой социальной парадигмы. Анализируются последствия для религиозной сферы европейских изменений (падение Берлинской стены, распад Советского Союза, дезинтеграция Югославии) и реконструкции Европы, сопровождающейся интенсивным технологическим развитием. Сфера религии сама становится глобалистичной, а синкретизм является одной из ее характеристик. В формах религиозных верований возникают новые формы гнозиса, сильный индивидуализм, теологические вопросы, касающиеся божественной инкарнации, и сравнительно большая дистанцированность от церкви. Западное общество в эпоху глобализма также движется от исторического контекста времени и имеет мало традиционных связей. Предпринимается попытка типологической классификации некоторых постмодернистских религиозных категорий, таких как личный опыт, субъективная духовность, детерриториализм и манифестация духовного в форме индивидуального гнозиса.

Ключевые слова: духовное; синкретизм; субъективная духовность; гнозис; новый коммуитаризм; церковь