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Department of Sociology and Social Work (Georgia)****SOCIOLOGY AND PREDICTING THE FUTURE OF RELIGION****DOI: 10.52340/isj.2022.25.01**

The question of future of religion has always been topical in sociology of religion since its founders (Durkheim and Weber). A number of current global processes taking place in modern society have added sharpness and relevance to the question of future of religion and it became one of the most debatable issues.

The purpose of sociology of religion, as the scientific discipline studying religion, is seeing its subject in its perspective and prognostication of future, especially when situation concerning religion today is rather alarming.

It is a generally approved fact and there is no novelty that mankind is in postclassical epoch and that means devaluation of classical values. Precursor of the beginning of this process was Friedrich Nietzsche. He was one of the first who proclaimed "Death of God" to the mankind. "Death of God" also meant the "Death of Man", but mankind obsessed by luxury, comfort and everyday trifles of life did not pay proper attention to it. But at the end, everything finished with "God murdered" mankind "killing the Man". If the XX century is stigmatized by "Death of God", for the XXI century such a stigma will be "Death of Man" (existing reality is so pessimistic and terrible, that even the greatest pessimist Schopenhauer would be envious of living in such an epoch). Without dramatizing of given reality, it can be said that everything this is very painfully reflected on future of religion.

Nowadays nobody argues that a new type of society, transforming society, is being developed simultaneously with globalization process, where every social institute is under alteration. For example, during the last century culture, economics, politics, system of values changed and likely religious life of society will also change. In modern society, which is based upon high technologies and scientific approach to the universe, the role of religion has been shifted into the background which made modern sociology

of religion (like classic sociology of religion) began to speak about its annihilation. In Robert Bell's words globalization caused the origin of "civil religion", which is quasi-religious loyalty, where citizenship acquires religious colouring. Everything this assists developing of post-confessional society. According to sociologists, the concept of electronic, so-called cyber-church is being arisen into the foreground in this type of society, which in the end is considered as the origin of "virtual religion" (1. p. 641-642). In this case, the main line of development of society is the way from "sacral to secular", from "divine to worldly", during which sacral society becomes weaker and weaker and finally we get desacralised society. The process of secularization is the base of everything this, which in modern sociology of religion is not so groundlessly connected with modernization process. Side by side with concept of "virtual religion", one more new term "religious innovations" has come into sociology of religion (2. p. 545).

The concept of "virtual religion" is in connection with notions of "virtual society" and "virtual man". New technologies are one of the most vital questions, which are connected with future of religion; they are from their side essential characteristic for postmodern reality, because there is a talk on importance of replacement of industrial technologies by information communication technologies, which, in itself, means the disappearance of existing reality. A new reality takes its place, which is delivered to man by means of new technologies – television (already outdated), social nets and enormously enlarged modern media means. In order to feel its own existence, the man must be in this virtual space – on the communication screen, facebook, myspace and so on. According to postmodernist Baudrillard, media means, industries of learning and entertainment are the masters of modern society, which have shifted industrial society and

the world of its values. Net society manipulates with the sign-producing systems, but they do not signify anything but themselves. Such a total virtual reality is being formed which is based upon simulation, hypocrisy and imitation. This is a new reality, so-called virtual reality – artificial copy of existing reality, which is already so important that true reality has lost its meaning. It is called the death of social in sociology (Bodrillard). Since that moment, the man is simulated – instead of real man there is his simulation (See: 3). Man exists in virtual reality in his digital form, as the only reality is a super-real, virtual space, which excludes the reality of other kind. Actually, it is this that we call “Death of a Man”.

Naturally, virtualization of a man and society has also concerned religion. Because of which sociologists became disturbed and began talking about future of religion. Discussion and debates started about the fate of religion in postclassical virtual society.

The main, central questions are: has the role of religion become weaker in modern society? If it is so, and religion really loses its importance and influence upon society, what will be the end of this process? Aren't we going to unreligious society? Should this everything finish in originating of so-called new religions in perspective? Or contrary – everything this will cause opposite reaction and traditional religions will be filled with new energies in new conditions and begin full-blooded life. These questions are real, as the accelerating rate of transformation of society is real. The main question is this: if culture has become mass culture, does not the same threaten religion? Especially – when, if we say in Bodrillard's words, modern culture has become producer of garbage and the man has nearly become garbage himself.

The answer to this question is demand of time. This is the challenge which sociology of religion faces today. These questions, which in the view of religion are blasphemy, require answers. Traditional religions have their own answers. That is another matter, what do the representatives of scientific disciplines, whose professional business is studying of religion, say about it. In this case, the fact, that the question of theoretical analysis in sociology is based on the empiric material and facts, must be taken into account.

Number of factors affects religion directly on indirectly. These are: culture, education, science, technique, moral-ethical norms, political life and economics; the processes taking place in these spheres complicate the question of future of religion more, that is why this issue in the end is one of the fundamental segments of question on future of religion. If religion does not have future, neither has society, and vice versa.

Historically the first prognosis on future of religion belongs to the father of sociology Comte. In his prognosis, religion has to be replaced by science in future society. Such idea existed in the history of thought for a long time since the end of XIX century to the middle of XX century. Ernst Mach and Bertrand Russell with other representatives of positivism were well-known followers of it in sociology. In their opinion, science would bring happiness to the mankind. But it was the time, when even Comte had doubts in the rightness of this statement. In spite of this, he as a sociologist knew that society always needs some ideal, which causes altruism and generosity in his members. And his positive religion was motivated by similar noble enthusiasm. Comte's prediction didn't materialize. Like other his similar ideas, it was having no prospects from the very beginning, because religion can not be artificially formed. It seems it is beyond the strength of ordinary mortal. Moreover, the life has shown that science not even made the man happy, but on the contrary, it brought him a lot of misfortunes and tragedies. And now desirable for everybody science has become a puzzle. Comte's idea appeared to be successful only in one point; namely, he showed society the necessity of religion. Greater representative of sociology of religion Durkheim pointed out at his mistake. He underlined that that Comte had failed to take into consideration – that religion never represents the result of man's realized, intellectual activity, that its creative powers are unknown to man. It appears by itself, as the beginning and guarantor of man's social life. The fact of rational projecting of religion had always finished unsuccessfully in history, as the irrational always exceeds rational in it.

Marxist social theory also spoke about vanishing of religion. Marx considered religion as result of estrangement and form of “false consciousness”. But his sociological analysis of religion was one-sided. He didn't appreciate properly the role of religion in society. Marxist sociology of religion was utopian theory, falseness and unfeasibility of which well appeared in the period of downfall of Marxist ideology in our society, when not religion, but Marxist theory and Marxism itself had vanished.

After Marx Weber offered us to think on the question if there is such a social function in which religion is irreplaceable. Due to sociological analysis of this question, he concluded that without religion it will be difficult for man to consider his own life critically; religion always delivers new ideas for him; according to Weber, religion possesses potential of radical social alterations (Protestantism is meant). Weber is also the author of theory of lose of sacral. He

thought that domination of technology and bureaucracy in modern society determines man's consciousness and aspirations by pragmatic interests, and by caring about comfort forms the type of society where everything is determined and defined beforehand. In this case, aspiration for high ideals, love of beauty and heroic inspiration are lost together with religion. He brought in a notion of "disenchantment", for denoting this process. He proceeded from concept of conflict between religion and modern consciousness and like Comte predicted the victory of last upon religion. In modern society, Weber sees lessening of role of religion in establishing of banal utilitarianism by rational sight of the universe, which, from the side of religion, is perceived as a syndrome of insanity, caused by hypertrophy of rationality.

In spite of such unpleasant predictions on future of religion from the side of classical sociological theories, religion continues its existence in usual rhythm. Moreover, in many countries in the XX century (for example, Georgia) religious renaissance takes place, that points to the fact that existence of sacral continues. That gives sociologists possibility of saying that religion is a specific phenomenon and it always takes part in man's life in this or that form. Durkheim was just pointing to that when said that eternal dwells in religion; that religion is not illusion and a false vision of universe, but the most living reality compared to other social institutes, equalizing of which with science or ideology is impossible, though religion somehow contains some ideological moments. Religious man will not like Durkheim's attitude towards religion, in spite of its positive contents, as it gives sociological conception of religion, and it means that religion is interesting for Durkheim as much as it provokes social energy in humans; Durkheim as sociologists is interested in religion because he sees in it strong factor developing a man into member of society (generally, it must be said, that opposition between science and religion negatively affected possibilities of sociology of religion, but since this opposition was neutralized and equal primacy of knowledge and faith was recognized, it became possible to speak on sociology of religion more freely. Today it is most interesting and distinguished among sociological disciplines, not only by its subject, but because values of secular, civil and super-secular, super-civil meet in it, and it is the place of meeting of earthly and heavenly).

Durkheim like Weber noticed the direction of society and that is why he thought that traditional religions can not answer or do not correspond to social experience of modern human and society. And that is why he supposed that their transformation in

future was irreversible. In his opinion, a new type of society will need new religion. If it is so, when the question of future of religion must be put in another foreshortening. Namely, is it possible for society to be without religion? If we understand religion as Durkheim does, when the answer to this question will be negative. But the existence of sacral will be in force, as society can not exist without holy, sacral objects. Need in sacral always will be. But the God who traditional religion offered us will be overcome (Bohnhoeffler). In the process of seeking of key of mysteries of society, great representative of sociological religion did not take into account the most important thing – that true religion and religious faith are always new and modern. We see that existence of traditional religions is the fact. Hence, it is not difficult to say that in a certain sense classical theories of Comte, Durkheim, Marx and Weber on religion were wrong and that religion is eternal.

Despite of it, a number of problems is left, which presents the question of future of religion negatively. Such is Tillich's idea on the crisis of theism. What Tillich calls crisis of theism is the result of rationalization of spiritual and social life, pointed by Weber. In spite of this, these processes do not create real danger for existence of religion. P. Berger (American sociologist, representative of social-constructivist direction in modern sociology, the head of Institute of Research of Culture, Religion and World Problems of Boston University) also focuses his attention to this question. In his opinion, religion understood the progress of modern society well. Instinct of self-saving became stronger in it and it adjusted to modern society (P. Berger means Catholicism and Protestantism in this case). In his words, religion is in good relations with modern society. That means that it is limited only by the private live of the members of this society and has lost the former function of central, "universe-constructing" institute. As for pressure from the side of state, it happens when state uses religion as a guarantor of its own legitimacy and etc, i.e. religion exists in modern society nominally, as a museum exhibit, because following the development of society, ethnos, culture and state lose religious meaning step by step. But it does not mean the end of religion. In modern sociologists' opinion, it means only the end of traditional forms of religion.

When sociologists speak of future of religion, they comprehend concept of religion in different ways. Representatives of classical sociology of religion mean traditional conception of religion; but the conception of modern researchers of sociology of religion is somehow different from traditional, because, as much as it would not be disputable,

they think that in the conditions of domination of democracy, pluralism, freedom and other similar basic values in modern secularized society, God is represented as a tyrant and religion is monopolized (for ex. G. Zimmel). According to G. Zimmel the question is in following: traditional religions will not be able to conserve their values in time, which does not forebode desacralisation of society, but crisis of theism. In this case his ideas correspond Tillich's ideas, who sees future of religion "beyond theism", but that means the transformation of traditional religion into so-called civil religion. Religiousness in modern society becomes the part of mass culture, but such theism could be worse than atheism. According to Tillich's prognosis, finally, religious faith will lose religious garment, and will stay only faith, which does not have own body – church, cult, theology. Such is non-standard, modern conception of religion that is probably difficult to imagine.

R. Bell gave us sociological portray of religious faith by means of nontraditional religions as it had been presented by Tillich in the middle of XX century. In his books "Habit of heart. Individuality and "Commitment" in "American life", religion is presented as one of the common structural elements of public life of USA, by means of which Americans are included in the life of own parish. The conclusion of this modern investigator of religion is following: the role of religion in American society, like other institutes has essentially changed. It doesn't only deal with the lessening of role of religion; loss of importance of religious doctrines is equal to the end of religion. Side by side with transformation of American society, religion undergoes transformation too, which was followed by the limitation of religious social space. In opinion of American believer, his relationship with God oversteps the limits of religious identity. For that, he doesn't consider it necessary to be follower of any religion. In opinion of American sociologists, it is the ultramodern stage of religion and religiousness, which they call postmodern stage. Before that, American society passed "early modern" stage of religious progress. That is why they differ from each other religions of high developed and developing countries. In American sociologists' opinion, what form religion will get at "early modern" stage is much dependent on the socio-cultural transformation, which modern society experiences. In such case, traditional religions will face great difficulties. In the opinion of A. Schuetz, American sociologist and founder of phenomenological sociology, religion will have only personal character in such type of society, and nothing more. Quite different situation is in developed countries. Here traditional religions, feeling

forthcoming danger, fight for keeping their identity as far as possible, but the processes of motion from historical to "early modern" religion have already started, though the level of including of modern newest technologies in public life in these countries is very low. Here we deal only with similar tendencies or blind, thoughtless export of similar technologies, which do not correspond to the level of development of society. In spite of this, religion does not concede its positions and tries to save itself by working out the skill of adaptation to needs of modern societies. In this case, the task of first degree is overcoming of process of secularization and modernization or coping with it, finding proper alternatives for it and so on.

Prognosis of E. Toffler, famous social futurologist and author of scandalous book – "Future Shock" – on future of religion is also of great interest, and unlike such types of prognosis of other researchers, is optimistic and hopeful. In Toffler's opinion, speed of current processes in modern society and high degree of freedom will be a great shock for humans. He calls it "shock of future". In his book he analysis in detail unimaginable scale of transformation, which does not leave anything unaffected in human and in society. Religion is the only exception in this total and comprehensive process, and it still retains its being and, correspondingly, its future is full of light (4. p. 146-147).

The mounting influence of modern newest informational technologies is the basis of pessimistic and nihilistic ideas on future of religion. Many new terms appeared in religion of sociology to nominate processes taking place in sphere of religion. Among them one, comparatively outdated, term is TV-evangelism, which means using of TV and media-technologies for preaching testament topics. In fact, it is American-Protestant version of evangelistic practice (2. p. 563). Internet-practice is ultramodern version of TV-evangelism in this sphere. This issue belongs to most painful and debatable issues nowadays. There is no finally established, principal position about it not only among sociologists, but also among the representatives of traditional religions. Two main positions are marked out in different opinions: some see unprecedented transformation, final of traditional religions and the beginning of "a new religion", so-called virtual religion, in it; others do not notice any transformation of religion and consider current processes only as effective usage of modern means of communications, passing of information in religious practice.

According to this opinion, nihilistic sociological theories about future of religion purposefully complicate the situation, or, otherwise, it is the result

of their religious ignorance. But today virtualization of religious life is real fact, which, from its side, makes its future rather pessimistic. As though there should not be anything alarming, if computer technologies were used only for preaching, attempt of using it for performing divine mysteries complicates everything. We mean mystery of confession. Its virtualization, which happens today, is quite new and unknown phenomenon. Problem of finality of religion originates just right from here. But today this technology has already got its customers, as much as it would not seem unacceptable from the point of religious view (the facts confirming this interested reader will find in any sociological textbook). There are many various programs, by means of which virtual excursion is possible for visiting any temple in world even without going out from your own apartment. Only visiting would not mean so much, but such a fact, as lighting of virtual candle, is unprecedented. In religious conception, it is heaviest sin, as in this case we deal with profanation of religious act of bloodless sacrifice. But in desacralised society, where "religion has become special effect", it is quite real (5. p. 36).

Informational space is only superficial membrane of spiritual life of humans, that is why virtual and cyber church will never replace real temple. It is only parody and simulation of real temple. Once human will reach out of prison of this simulation and virtual reality and will return to eternal truth and real religious faith. Weary by the illusion of pseudo religion and pseudo truth, he will probably be faced great trial. It is not difficult to understand that artificially created, constructed in virtual space pseudo religion does not have any future and all the experiments in this sphere are doomed to perish. Religious life is living relations with transcendental, which in the case of virtualization loses. Virtual church will never be able to help even the man who because of his health state can not attend church services. It will not satisfy this person's great desire for praying. As regards innovation of getting confession by means of internet, perhaps it is permissible, but, in this case, the question of anonymity of confession should be taken into account. Moreover, it can be dangerous, especially when it concerns spiritual life of a person, because everything this resembles the action of a physician, who never saw his patient and prescribes him this or that treatment. Function of confession is not only absolving of sins, its aim is to make man the member of church again, and it is natural not having desire of entering the church where it does not exist. Virtual church, on the contrary, suppresses desire of visiting temple. It misdirects true religious feelings. Church is Christ's body. In order to become

part of this body, living contact is necessary with it. But internet confession hinders this process. As for preaching and spreading divine word, internet can be good means for it. But preaching is not only audio and video recordings; it is God's living word, which should be spread from ambo. Moreover, internet has got its own rule of speech, which does not correspond to the language of divine service (See: 6). And digital expression of religion is absurd and nothing more, is not it?

While analyzing these questions, reproach, which modern authors express towards the supporters of classical theories, must be taken into consideration. Namely, it is groundless to speak in the language of secular society in the post-secular epoch (See: 7). This reproach really requires consideration, but not with respect to religion, as religion is eternally new and living phenomenon. By conclusions of the same sociologists, nothing can change personal attitude of a man to God, which is observed best of all in traditional religious life. That is why in such situation general conclusion in connection with discussing question can be such: transformation of society is fact, but in the point of religious view, it is not such a fact, which puts existence of world religions under the interrogation.

Rationalization, virtualization of modern society and need in based on intellect managing (net economics) probably will arouse natural inverse reaction in traditional religions, and society will again face the need in irrationalism and mystics. This process will return desacralized society to eternal values, assist the discredit of mass consciousness and bring to the light moral helplessness of omnipotent reason to even greater degree.

Religion has got much more possibility of dialogue with society in the result of modern globalization processes. In spite of many pessimistic predictions of classical or non-classical sociological theories, its fate is much dependent on the moral state of the man, who faces global problems and challenges. Besides, the fact is also worthy of noting, that values on guard of which traditional religion stands: love, peace, tolerance and hope are those common to all mankind values, in case of negation of which future of mankind itself will be doubtful. In this context, future of religion is more optimistic, then modern sociologists predict. Openness of modern religious thought regarding society and diverse cultures also gives ground of optimism. Dialogue between secular and religious responds well to ethics of "planetary consciousness" and common to all mankind idea of solidarity. Isolated various religious reactions existing in modern society indicate to opposition, which follow leveling globalization processes. If more

or less important factor, on which modern society depends, is the dignity of a man – the man living on the earth today – then future of religion will depend

on what kind of socially important share will man put into world where he lives. In short, it will depend on how a man will retain his humanity.

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СОЦИОЛОГИЯ И ПРЕДСКАЗАНИЕ БУДУЩЕГО РЕЛИГИИ

РЕЗЮМЕ

Вопрос о будущем религии всегда был актуальным в социологии религии, начиная с ее основоположников (Дюркгейма и Вебера). Ряд современных глобальных процессов, происходящих в современном обществе, придали остроты и актуальности вопросу будущего религии, и он стал одним из самых дискуссионных.

Целью социологии религии, как научной дисциплины, изучающей религию, является видение своего предмета в его перспективе и прогнозирование будущего, особенно когда ситуация с религией сегодня достаточно тревожная.

Общепризнанный факт, и в этом нет ничего нового, что человечество находится в постклассической эпохе, а это означает девальвацию классических ценностей. Предшественником начала этого процесса был Фридрих Ницше. Он был одним из первых, кто провозгласил человечеству «Смерть Бога». «Смерть Бога» означала и «Смерть человека», но человечество, одержимое роскошью, комфортом и житейскими мелочами жизни, не обращало на нее должного внимания. Но в конце концов все закончилось тем, что «Бог убил» человечество, «убив Человека». Если XX век клеймится «Смертью Бога», то для XXI века таким клеймом будет «Смерть человека» (существующая действительность настолько пессимистична и ужасна, что даже величайший пессимист Шопенгауэр позавидовал бы проживанию такого эпоха). Не драматизируя данную действительность, можно сказать, что все это очень болезненно отражается на будущем религии.

В настоящее время никто не спорит с тем, что новый тип общества, трансформирующего

общество, развивается одновременно с процессом глобализации, где претерпевает изменения каждый социальный институт. Например, за последнее столетие изменилась культура, экономика, политика, система ценностей и, вероятно, изменится и религиозная жизнь общества. В современном обществе, основанном на высоких технологиях и научном подходе к мирозданию, роль религии отошла на второй план, что заставило современную социологию религии (как и классическую социологию религии) заговорить о ее уничтожении. По словам Роберта Белла, глобализация привела к возникновению «гражданской религии», то есть квазирелигиозной лояльности, где гражданство приобретает религиозную окраску. Все это способствует развитию постконфессионального общества. По мнению социологов, в этом типе общества на передний план выдвигается концепция электронной, так называемой кибер-церкви, которая в конечном итоге рассматривается как источник «виртуальной религии». При этом основной линией развития общества является путь от «сакрального к светскому», от «божественного к мирскому», в ходе которого сакральное общество становится все слабее и слабее и, в конце концов, мы получаем десакрализованное общество. В основе всего этого лежит процесс секуляризации, который в современной социологии религии не так бесосновательно связывается с процессом модернизации. Наряду с понятием «виртуальная религия» в социологию религии вошел еще один новый термин «религиозные инновации».

Религия получила гораздо больше возможностей для диалога с обществом в результате современных процессов глобализации. Вопреки многим пессимистическим предсказаниям классических или неклассических социологических теорий, его судьба во многом зависит от нравственного состояния человека, перед которым стоят глобальные проблемы и вызовы. Кроме того, заслуживает внимания и тот факт, что ценности, на страже которых стоит традиционная религия: любовь, мир, терпимость и надежда, являются общечеловеческими ценностями, в случае отрицания которых будущее самого человечества будет сомнительным. В этом контексте будущее религии более оптимистично, чем предсказывают современные социологи. Открытость современной религиозной мысли в отношении общества и различных культур также дает основания для оптимизма. Диалог светского и религиозного хорошо отвечает этике «планетарного сознания» и общечеловеческой идее солидарности. Отдельные различные религиозные реакции, существующие в современном обществе, свидетельствуют о противостоянии, которое следует за нивелирующими глобализационными процессами. Если более или менее важным фактором, от которого зависит современное общество, является достоинство человека – человека, живущего сегодня на земле, – то будущее религии будет зависеть от того, какую общественно значимую долю внесет человек в мир, в котором он живет. Резюмируя можно отметить, что это будет зависеть от того, насколько человек сохранит свою человечность.