RELIGION AND THE FUNCTIONING OF MODERN SOCIETY

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The religious factor is the element with the longest continuity in the whole spectrum of the social space. The combination of various practices in everyday life with mystical habits and later with institutionalized forms of faith has contributed to the formation of a strong bond between man and divinity interceded by the religious institution. This has enabled the formation of powerful social systems (states, empires) led through a religious system-dependent normative system. The end of the eighteenth century produced the first re-establishment of the society of new norms of coexistence that were based on new principles distinct from those on which the states had functioned up to that point. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries represent a period of contrasts characterized by a strenuous struggle of the state's detachment towards the church.

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Ever since the dawn of humanity, the religious factor has been playing a strong role in the process of creating the collective identity of a large mass of individuals. The primary needs of the individuals like providing food and personal security motivated them to organize and to search the protection of social collectivities (tribes, cities and later states). Even if all these structures were providing a regulatory framework necessary for the group to function, there were other requests of spiritual meaning which were above their skills. This kind of need was intensely exploited by a number of entities which through different means determined the appearance of structures that could satisfy the expectations of people. As in the case of the group identity created by the states, the ecclesiastical institutions were organized after a certain typology (ceremonial, clothing, common language) which, later, generated a strong feeling of identity. Most of these institutions summed up to transmitting their teachings in a restricted geographical area. Together with the development of technology there has been an expansion of some of these ideas at large geographical distances and the values that were promoted contributed to the creation of the so-called religions with universal valences (Christianism, Islam). Analyzing the evolution of global society from the perspective of the factors that contributed to modelling group thinking, religion constructed one of the determining factors in creating norms and rules.

The appearance and development of the ruling system inspired by religious principles

Antiquity was characterized by the existence of a polytheist-type of cultural religion, capable of influencing people at a reduced community level. As the bounds of the ancient empires were furthering away from the dominant center, from a political, economic and cultural point of view there was a tendency of expansion of religion and the powerful cultures were imposing in relation to the least representative ones. In its full glory, in the Roman Empire there were a number of religious entities specific for every part of the empire and entities that were supposed to tolerate each other[1].

The big change that produced a big division of this world occurred because of the appearance of Christianism. This produces a rupture in this order inside the Roman world where there could coexist, relatively peacefully, all the forms of spiritual manifestation of the people inside the empire or the neighboring ones[2].

The new religious philosophy offered its followers an integral vision which was spreading unicity and excluded the others forms of religious manifestation. This unifying vision contradicted the rules and institutions on which the Romanian society was operating. In a first phase, Rome ordered the annihilation by force of the potential danger to its political stability, trying to destroy the new faith in its training space, Palestine. Christianity was

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benefiting of a well-established organizational structure[3] and was exploiting vulnerabilities of the Roman world; it surpassed the space limits and succeeded in gaining a lot of followers, many of them being slaves and poor people.

From the point of view of the system functionality in analysis of religions, the European continent represent an interesting case study. Even if it had not represented the space of Christianity, at the end of eleventh century it was considered a Christian continent. This process happened in two steps, the first one was in the first century when, concomitantly with the spreading of Christianity in Middle East, Africa and Asia, the missionaries had preached the Bible in Greece, Italy and Gaul (France today). The second step happened between the ninth and eleventh century when the conversion of Slavic tribes, Hungarians and the others migrant tribes took place[4].

Managing to overcome the tense moments which had appeared as a result of violent interactions with Roman authorities from the first part of the process of extension within borders, in 313, through the Milano edict, the Roman Emperor, Constantin the Great recognized Christianity as an important religion. The new religion managed to become the greatest one in 380 when Emperor Theodosius approved the Tesalonic edict through which this cult became the official religion of the empire[5].

The battle for supremacy inside the Christian church manifested early; in the beginning, this institution recognized three bishops, in Rome, Alexandria and Antiohia, while in 451 two more bishops were added in Constantinople and Jerusalem[6] after the council of Chalcedon.

Over time there were two centers of power, one in Rome and one in Constantinople. Each of the two bishops tried to attract as many believers as possible in their own sphere of influence, either through direct conversion of some people, or by attracting on their side some leaders who recognized the primacy of the other bishopric. Once their political and economic power grew stronger each of the two religious leaders The Pope and The Patriarch firmly asserted that they represent "the only authentic expression of Christian truth"[7].

Despite all these misunderstandings, the church continued to operate unitedly until the second half of the 11th century, especially as the bishopric of Rome had to overcome the difficult period that it had suffered. As a result of the loss of support for the imperial authority Western Roman collapsed in 476. The papal power gradually recovered as a result of the conversion and subsequent taxation of most of the West European population as well as the recognition by its principals of its authority. As a result, in 1054 there was the first rupture of the two power centers and the appearance of the two Catholic and Orthodox Christian churches. This event was known to posterity as the "Great Schism"[8].

Simultaneously with the religious division of Europe, the Muslim world succeeded in encompassing and converting to the emerging Islamic religion an important part of the Christian world. This apparent disaster subsequently contributed to the cultural reconstruction of Europe. Although today we are accustomed to seeing this space as a profoundly conservative and traditionalist one, at the time of its expansion, the new religion proved more permissive than Christianity, accepting to preserve a large part of the scientific work conceived during antiquity, at that time it was condemned to being forgotten and forbidden to the general public by the Christian church. In the period 750-1100, unlike Christianity, Islam had long been open to science and technology, allowing the development of important cultural centers. Starting with the twelfth century, religious fundamentalists imposed their view of breaking the Muslim world by new scientific discoveries. One of the causes that led to the scientific regression of the Middle East was that the newly created religion did not separate the secular component from the religious one. In the vision of spiritual leaders: "The ideal state would be a theocracy, and in the absence of such an accomplishment, a good ruler leaves matters of soul and mind to the chief theologians"[9].

In the meantime, the discord between the two religious power centers of the Christian world grew in intensity and contributed to new breaks, the most important of which was the 16th century Protestant reform. At present, we can distinguish at least five distinct religious spaces on the territory of Europe: the Catholic, the Orthodox, the Lutheran, the Calvinist and the Muslim areas, to which we can add the intercalated spaces within, where the influence of the neo-protestant cults strongly grew,

especially in the last half of century. Even though nowadays, due to the low number of believers and the fragmentation of this community, Jews can no longer hold a distinct cultural space, one must not minimize the impact that Jewish culture had on the European continent for nearly two thousand years.

Unlike the Orthodox Church, which coalesced with the Byzantine emperors and afterwards with the Christian princes in the ruling of the states from the Eastern and South-East Europe, the Catholic Church achieved the performance of effectively ruling the secular power. For a long period of time, they had imposed primacy, forcing the kings and princes of Central and Western Europe to recognize the statute of "perfect society" and receive support directly, militarily, financially in the actions they wanted to undertake[10]. Papacy had created a nominative framework (the so-called theory of indirect power, which is symbolized by the triple crown, worn by the *suveran pontiff*)[11] by which they forced the monarchs to take part in the Holy Wars (the Crusades) and later imposed the obligation of providing consistent support to the Catholic missionaries, who preached the Catholic faith in the outer space of influence, especially on the American continent.

The beginnings of consolidating the secular power of the national state

The legitimization of the Christian Church position in the European society produced, during the next centuries, powerful effects upon the functional norms of the states as well as for the rules of cohabitation in smaller communities. The building of cult places on the territory of every inhabited place, no matter their dimension, a crucifix or a statue of Virgin Mary at the crossroads of every roads and other distinctive elements of the new faith had become very rapidly customs from which there could be no exception[12]. This step was completed by the introduction of some new norms of social cohabitation which no longer referred to the Roman right, but to Christian moral principles, which later built the fundamental functioning of the society.

The Roman authorities gradually lost the vast majority of privileges, including the right they had previously exercised to set the points of interest in community life[13]. Time measurement, one of the fundamental elements of any society, had put on the religious attire, with major events in community life being celebrated in accordance with the liturgical calendar[14]. According to the rules imposed by the church representatives, the time allocated to the day and night was equally divided, which meant that the hours running at these time intervals had different values depending on the season (except for equinoxes). This custom has prevented European entrepreneurs for a very long time from being able to make a judicious planning of working time.

The lack of a standardized time measuring instrument restricted individuals and the community in which they had the opportunity to establish working meetings or to regulate their own or employees' work. These shortcomings were corrected only when the European society allowed the construction of mechanical clocks whose dial indicated equal time intervals. This innovation was applied only in the northern European states (mostly Protestant) as a result of the fact that the representatives of the Catholic Church opposed a strong resistance for almost a century[15]. Initially the new clocks were placed in the towers of the mayor's offices, thus marking a consolidation of secular power to the detriment of the ecclesiastical one. Since then, European capitalists have been able to better dispose of their employees' time, thus increasing the productivity of their work and in the same way constantly increasing the amount of commodity for each timeframe. Adam Smith rightly remarked this change of thought, concluding: "Increasing the wealth of nations is directly driven by the development of effective labor forces[16]."

An interesting episode during the struggle against the protestant reform is the "out-of-the-line behavior" of some of the Catholic princes and kings who hesitated and then resisted to some measures proposed by the Papacy to restore the old social order.

The national interest began to impose itself above the religious principles, leading to the emergence of military alliances based on modern principles that ignored the norms on which society had been based until then. Although the King of France had received the title of "Rex Catholicissimus" during the great social transformations of the seventeenth century, he supported the Papacy and later openly supported the coalition of protests of Sweden, Prussia and principles in northern Germany in their struggle against the Catholic Habsburg Empire,

but at the same time the declared opponent of France[17].

One of the most important politicians of this century, the French Cardinal Richelieu became the prime minister of the kingdom led by King Louis XIII, building a new foreign policy strategy that promoted the principle of state rationality, ignoring the ecclesiastical guidelines that promoted the unity of faith. His policy promoted the principle of centralizing power and creating modern tools to enable royalty to directly manage revenue. In this regard, he ordered the founding of different positions such as head of government, representative of the government in the territory responsible for the collection of taxes and duties[18]. Accused by his opponents of failing to honor his duties as a man of the Church of Richelieu, he motivated his actions by the primacy of the secular duties over the religious ones that he considered to be personal issues: "Man is immortal, his salvation is in the afterlife", "The state is not immortal, and its salvation is now or never"[19]. By deciding to support Protestant principles, he tried to avoid creating a colossus in the center of Europe (the Habsburg Empire) which at one time contested the position of France. His action was fully justified because France had managed to preserve its position on the continent for more than 200 years until the "inevitable" Chancellor of Prussia, Otto von Bismarck, managed in 1870 to reunite the German space after the model of the national state.

Louis XIV continued the policy of consolidating central power by ensuring the loyalty of a new political class not based on the principle of heredity but on the ones of competence and fidelity to the monarch. He removed a part of the prerogatives of the old feudal seniors, and in order to combat possible upheaval, he ordered the constitution of the Versailles Court in which each of these aristocrats had the "privilege" of belonging to or sending one of his family's representatives.

This way he encumbered the nobility and imposed on them the duty to provide financial or military support without being able to condition this in any way. The Duke of Saint Simon recorded in his memoirs this sad moment for the French aristocracy: "He (Louis) was fully aware that although he could crush a noble with the burden of his disgrace, he could not destroy either him or his noble filiation, while a state secretary or a similar politician could have been brought with his whole family to the social extermination from which he had been raised"[20].

Religious Reformation and the birth of the modern state

Historians around the world agree with the idea that the Middle Ages ended in the early 16th century, when small territorial entities were forcibly merged into multinational empires (Eastern Europe developed the Ottoman, Habsburg and later Russian Empires; in India, the Mogul Empire was formed, and the Chinese Empire managed to recover the territories that for a while were able to operate autonomously[21]. The only notable exception to this rule was Western Europe, a space in which feudal entities managed to retain part of the old privileges that later evolved to administrative territorial units that are now known as national states. The attempt of the Spanish Habsburg Empire to establish its hegemony in Western Europe met the hard resistance of the small territorial entities specific to the medieval organization (small kingdoms and principalities, duchies and the Italian republics and Swiss cantons) which canceled the possibility for the global political system to evolve to large, self-centered structures where it could very hardly implement the economic reforms generated by the Protestant reform.

This distinct evolution of the Western European states allowed the creation of the modern-state-system based on the three great principles: "capitalism, national state and citizens' rights"[22]. Aware of the need to introduce extensive social reforms, part of the great empires sought to imitate the model created by Western Europeans (the reforms made by Tsar Peter I in Russia, or the Tanzimat Reforms that attempted to produce an administrative regeneration within the Ottoman Empire), but due to the huge territorial space they were managing and the lack of an efficient communications system, they were doomed to failure.

Influence of the ideals generated by the French Revolution of 1789 on the secularization movement of the state

The French Revolution of 1789 produced a real reform of the civic space; many of the norms of Christian morality which at that time had the status of civic behavior norms were replaced by laws, approved by the new National Assembly set up on

13 June 1789. The new legislative assembly fully took over the social functions that the clergy were currently performing. A "civil status" was created, which through its officials exercised the attribute of citizens' registration, including the legalization of marriages, thus replacing the "sacrament" with a civil contract between equal partners in rights.

Also, the census was not made any more through christening but by declaring the newborn at the city hall. The two sacraments of the church were not fully abrogated but, instead, they became optional, being conditioned by their prior fulfillment of civil procedures. Things evolved a lot in certain states, thus, producing an almost clean rupture from the old habits. In order to get rid of any source of instability based on the different points of view of the citizens regarding religion, France eliminated from the census lists any reference regarding faith[23].

The next step towards reforming the state of France was the strict separation of the secular clergy, which, at that time, was subjugated by a national church autonomous from the Holly See. The only structures that remained strongly linked with the papacy were the monastic orders. Through the laws conceived by the civil authorities, certain principles that were regarded as taboo were touched upon, like the breaking of marriages, an element that was forbidden by the church norms but was accepted by the new ruling system. This element constituted one of the most difficult problems the new laic society confronted with. During the 19th century this subject was reviewed numerous times, finally being abrogated in 1817 and later on reinstituted in 1884[24]. The definitive rupture between the state and the church took place for the first time still in France in the year of 1905.

The ecclesiastical body constantly refused to acknowledge its diminished social role, which, starting from that moment, was only restricted to providing divine services and personally connecting with certain individuals who were using those services. The representatives of the Catholic clergy continued to claim their right of playing an active role in the community asking for the right to establish the moral norms and pronounce itself upon the obedience of those norms and deciding the actions to be taken against those who would defy those principles. The Vatican took a direct initiative towards solving the crisis caused by the decision of the French state to transfer an amount of the Catholic church's in France goods to laic cultural organizations created to replace the representatives of the church who were working in those fields of activity.

Lacking support from the popular opinion in 1918 the French parliament was forced to acknowledge the distinct character that the ecclesiastic institution had inside the civic society. Through the law of separation, the French state granted the ecclesiastic institutions the right to intervene in its problems regarding the administration of institutions that were considered restrictive systems (boarding schools, the military institution, penitentiaries and hospitals)[25]. Moreover, the religious cults acknowledged, no matter of the part they played in society before the French Revolution, were allowed to maintain, using money from the state, priests that would take care of those institutions.

NOTES:

1 Edward Gibbon, *The history of the decline of the Roman Empire. An anthology from the height of the empire until the end of Justinian's reign*, Humanities Publishing House, Bucharest, 2018, pp. 58-59.

2 *Ibidem*, p. 325.

3 Barry Buzan, Richard Little, *Sistemele internaţionale în istoria lumii*, Polirom Publishing House, Iaşi, 2009, p. 223.

4 Thimoty Yates, *The expansion of Christianity*, Lion Hudson Plc, London, 2004, p. 27.

5 James Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, Wiley–Blackwell, New York, NY, SUA, 2006, p. 196.

6 Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church*, Doubleday Publishing House, New York, NY, SUA, 2004, p. 84.

7 Rene Rémond, *Religion and Society in Europe*, Polirom Publishing House, Iaşi, 2003, p. 27.

8 https://www.britannica.com/event/Schism-of-1054

9 David Landes, *Avuţia şi sărăcia naţiunilor. De ce unele ţări sunt atât de bogate, iar altele atât de sărace*, Polirom Publishing House, Iaşi, 2013, p. 62.

10 René Rémond, *op.cit.*, p. 33.

11 The wearing of triple crown model was adopted from the Ancient Orient where several characters were attested as being crowned with such a royal symbol. Papacy took this custom by the end of the 12th century, when the first type of crown was created as a symbol of the Church superiority over the state. Lately, in the 14th century, Pope Boniface the 7th wore a second crown, which this time symbolized the superiority of the Catholic Church over every person and their soul. A third crown was created in the year 1340, when the Papacy was in a crisis and was forced to temporary set their headquarters in Avignon. The new crown symbolized the triple power of the *suveran pontiff* upon the sky, the earth and the soul, the *suveran pontiff* taking again the title of "Pontifex maximus". Before, this title was granted to the Roman emperors, who had the attribute of being the supreme religious rulers, thus

trying to look after the secular status of the empire. Starting with the year 382, Emperor Gratius Flavianus Augustus confiscated all the properties which produced income to the pagan cults. This action attracted the antipathy of the pagan senators. To defy this, he was forced to give up his supreme religious title, but this attribute was immediately attained and taken by the bishop of Rome. Subsequent, the triple crown remained one of the most important symbols of the Catholicism, being even today on the flag of Vatican; *see* Ramsay MacMULLEN, Christianizing The Roman Empire AD 100–400, Yale University Press, 1984.

12 René Rémond, *op.cit.*, p. 27.

13 The leaders of Rome had the right to request the creation of timetables in which they had the right to register the legal holidays and the days for commemorating important facts from the past of the state. One of the most important time-measuring instruments was the Julian calendar, ordered by Julius Caesar to Sosigenes, the astronomer in Alexandria, and which came into use in 45 BC. Ch. He divided the year into 365 days grouped in 12 months with a brisk year every four years, but with a small imperfection of 11 minutes each year (every 128 years resulted a day in minus). Also, some months of the year took the names of these leaders, the month of July was named in honor of Caesar, and August in honor of his nephew Octavian Augustus, the first Emperor of Rome. The next recast of the calendar was set on February 24, 1582, at the order of Pope Gregory XIII, whose name he took over - the Gregorian calendar. Richards, E.G., Urban, Sean E.; Seidelmann, P. Kenneth, eds. Explanatory Supplement to the Astronomical Almanac (3rd ed.). Mill Valley, Calif.: University Science Books, 2013, p. 595.

14 René Rémond, op. cit., p. 27.

15 David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations. Why some countries are so rich and others so poor*, Polirom Publishing House, Iaşi, 2013, pp. 57-58.

16 *Ibidem*, p. 58.

17 Henry Kissinger, *Ordinea mondială. Reflecţii asupra specificului naţiunilor şi al cursului istoriei*, Rao Publishing House, Bucharest, 2015, p. 26.

18 *Ibidem*, p. 25.

19 *Ibidem*, p. 26.

20 *Ibidem*, p. 35.

21 Immanuel Wallerstein, Randall Collins, Michael Mann, Georgi Derluguian, Craig Calhoun, *Are capitalismul un viitor?*, Comunicare.ro Press, Bucharest, 2015, p. 156.

22 *Ibidem*, p. 145.

23 René Rémond, *op.cit.*, p. 54.

24 *Ibidem*, pp. 55-56.

25 *Ibidem*, pp. 209-210.

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