

THE IMPACT OF RELIGION ON THE INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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ABSTRACT

THE EVOLUTION OF THE ETHNIC CONSCIENCE, THE FORMATION PROCESSES OF THE NATIONAL IDENTITIES, THE CREATION OF NATION-STATES BASED ON NATIONAL IDENTITIES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTERNATIONAL ORDER BASED ON THE SUZERAIN NATION-STATE, AS A MAJOR ACTOR IN THE GLOBAL ARENA, TOOK TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SPECIFIC DYNAMICS.

FURTHER TO THE FEAR FOR THE MENACES AT THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY, ON THE BACKGROUND OF RISING VULNERABILITIES, THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SECURITY AND RELIGION APPEARS AS A VERY CONCRETE ELEMENT IN THE PROCESSES OF DEMOCRATIC REFORM OUT OF THE DIFFERENT REGIONS OF THE WORLD.

THERE IS THE POSSIBILITY OF REGIONAL CONFLICTS INITIATING; WE HAVE TO BE CONTINUOUSLY CONCERNED WITH THE PROBLEM OF MASS DESTRUCTION ARMS; ON A GENERAL VIEW WE CONFRONT OURSELVES WITH A SERIES OF NON TRADITIONAL MENACES, TRANSNATIONAL AND UNPREDICTABLE TO WHAT THE SECURITY CONCERNS.

KEYNOTES: RELIGION, THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, THE MODERN SOCIETY, REGIONAL CONFLICTS

When and in what extent did Religion get to play a more and more important part in the global policy? An External Affairs Council report in Chicago claims that this tendency is in unfolding for at least two decades. But even this estimation under evaluates the deepness of the beginnings. The real increase – or more precise the resurgence – in the influence of the religion started in the years 1960s and kept accelerating since then.

The year of 1960 found the Catholic Church on the verge of a fundamental reevaluation of what means to be a catholic, a Christian, or a human generally speaking. According to the II-nd Council of Vatican, the Church decreed the right to religious freedom, and the states were supposed to respect now the fundamental right of all people to

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choose their own religion. Armed with this new understanding of things, the local actors have become empowered to contest the autocratic regimes (in some cases, the II-nd Council Vatican has put the local Clerics in very difficult situations, because these ones were the allies of the same regimes.) Similar dynamics were put at stake also in the period of the years 1980, when Pope John the II-nd contested the communistic regimes of Eastern Europe, offering to the citizens an alternative set of ideas and ideals with the fundament in Religion. Both catholic polish people and the German Lutherans were this way encouraged to change their atheistic totalitarian system.

Then, we take into consideration the Iranian revolution of 1979. The weight center of this revolution was not on the streets of Teheran (even if there it was the most visible), but in Universities and mosques, where students, teachers and imams were putting under the question mark basic notions of that what means to be Shiite. These reinterpretations have started in 1960 and have opened the way for the fall of Shah. The same with all the revolutionary states, the clerical regime from Iran was forced to adapt to the constraints of the existent state system, but the religion remained the central element in the identity of Iran, the legitimacy of its rulers and policy until nowadays. A stunning characteristic regarding the most recent demonstrations against the Iran regime is the fact that nobody is asking himself if it should still be an Islam regime, this is an already established fact. The Iran is and will remain an Islamic Republic; the fight in Iran is only for what form will be taken into the future.

We lost the signification of the Iranian revolution, we ignored the Pope's power and we lost the events from 11 September. Why? Because some of us didn't succeed to integrate religion in the international relationships, not even by now. The last book of Stephen Prothero, "*The Religious Alphabetization*", has proved that the majority of people stay still ignorant regarding the basic principles of different religious traditions, even if a good part of the questions asked were connected to Christianity, the main belief between the questioned persons.

In conclusion, the ignorance is each person's enemy and this will exacerbate two problems more and more vital in the next few years.

First of all, it is the way in which the Religion, the religious organizations and the religious actors are favored by the low costs and the extension of the communication volume at international level. The Internet and the cellular communication have underlined the power of ideas, independent of the material wealth.

The power of ideas has reduced excessively in the states with a big material wealth and this thing can explain why some of the occidental observers treat as isolated incidents recent events with religious character

In the second place, going further from knowledge to formulating policies, in order to understand and enter in scene with religious actors from Easter, we have to ‘educate’ our political elites in what concerns Religion, to teach those that govern, without any intention of conversion. In conclusion, we need to find out if it is possible to grow the level of understanding of the religious actors without falling on a sliding slide of a politics based on faith, rising this way a menace on a long term of a religious open war.

The concern regarding the role that the religion plays in the international relationships plan has become quite serious in the last period and draws more and more attention. Even if the subject started to concretize in the years 1990, this had as basis even from the beginning the big costs of neglecting the religious dimension of the conflicts on the globe, that in the last period have become disquieting.

It was overcome this way the illuminist prejudice that eliminated the religious life from the contemporary society and previewed to the religion a role more and more diminished in the modern world. After the “cold war’s“ end, the nature of conflicts changed. The majority resulted out of “confrontations of communities’ identity, based on race, ethnicity, nationality or religion.”

This hypothesis was intensely mediated through Huntington’s study, regarding the “civilizations encounter”². Huntington claims that in the world after the Cold War, the most important distinctions between people are not of an ideological, political or economical nature. They are of cultural nature. Huntington defines civilization like being the largest level of recognition with which a person can identify, one that refers to the values, social norms and institutions that run the society. Huntington analyses the differences between race and civilization; race is not influenced by history, social norms or values in the way that the civilization can be influenced, thus, being possible that individuals pertaining to the same race to be deeply differentiated by the civilization, or

² Huntington Samuel P. – *The encounter of the civilizations and the remaking of the world order*. – Filipeștii de Târg: Samizdat, s. a. – 320 p. The book is one of the best-sellers of the XXth century that presents the civilizational approach of realism in the international relations theory. It treats at length the appearance, development and the decay of the antique modern and contemporary civilizations, according to each one’s cultural level.

² E. Mirri, *La Metafizica i Nietzsche*, Alfa, Bologna, 1961, p. 89; G. Penzo

that individuals coming from different races to be united by the civilization. Huntington admits that the civilizations are flexible, without precise, concrete beginnings or endings. With all these, he claims that the borders that divide the civilizations could be ambiguous but they are real and important. The civilizations are not political structures but they could represent a number of political units (more nations, more states, etc.). He contends Religion as a central unit of the civilizations' characteristics and he uses it as a variable in the identification of some of the most prominent civilizations.

Huntington also wishes to underline the fact that the occidentals have to understand that their culture is unique, but not universal. Before trying to Occidentalize a region it should be taken into account the cultural substratum of the respective region. The Huntington's view regarding the tensions that appear between different cultures is complementary to a more sophisticated view, which sees the conflict "not as a confrontation of civilization degrees, but more as one between local cultures (grouped in civilizations) and the global civilization that results after the <<civilization process>>".

An analysis over the evolution of perceiving religion in the previous century highlights the fact that the entering in the XX century was dominated by a generalized skepticism regarding the role and future of religion in the modern society. There was even a time when the occidental-European thinking took to the extreme the consequences of the epistemological positivism, "the suspicion's prophets" announcing with a lot of emphasis the retrograde character, the inutility and the imminent disappearing of Religion. Strongly influenced by the anthropological theology of L. Feuerbach (1841), Marx was the first social theoretician that saw in Religion one of the principal factors that oppose to the progress and social change. "Religion is the peoples' opium", "it is only the illusory sun that rotates around the man as long as the man does not rotate around himself" claimed Marx in the year 1844.

Out of his perspective, the Future' society, in which class differences will be eliminated and that will give birth to the new man, it will be one in which the religion will be a question of history. Moving forward in the same direction, Nietzsche announced in 1885 through the lunatic in "*So Zarathustra said*", the death of God and the birth of *der Ubermensch* (super man), that doesn't know another law beside his own will, because not long after, Freud with his psychoanalysis to pretend to give the final hit to religion and religious person. *The future of an illusion* (1927), the work in which Freud talks freely on the theme of the role and future of religion, was ending in a cynical tone, with

programmatic action pretences that wished to solve in an irrevocable way this “illness” of the modern society³.

At the crossing of the XX-XXI centuries, religion still occupies an important space in the life of social communities, despite the fact that the secularization and rationalism have become foundations of modernity, on the background of their radical transformation provoked by the scientific, informational and biological revolution. Religion (associated with specific institutions) ensures the social cohesion, offers a motivation in life to the human communities and the individual. It wields in numerous cases the social control and of the social education function. In certain times, religion even substitutes the political ideology, firstly there where it represents an element of the social group’s identity.

Further to the fear for the menaces at the national and international security, on the background of rising vulnerabilities, the connection between security and religion appears as a very concrete element in the processes of democratic reform out of the different regions of the world. Eventually, these reforms are correlated with extension processes of the economical, political and military structures. The impact over the international relations has two types of approaches and namely the measure in which religion plays a role in the internal and international dynamic on one hand, and what elements of the religious phenomenon have priority in this regard on the other hand. The studies over these themes are more or less convincing. Out of methodologies we mention codification of main religious systems through which it could be tangled the resemblance of Islamism with the Marxism and the positioning at the other end, in the nonaggressive doctrines categories – of Buddhism and Jainism⁴.

In the present, the world is in an economical crisis, but above this it is in a moral and spiritual type crisis. All over the world are born new pseudo Christian groups, the signs of the times multiply day by day, the man becomes more and more authoritarian, etc.,

³ Silviu Rogobete, *Religion and social change. Few reflexions over the role of religion in the contemporary society*, The New Europe Colege, Bucharest, 2002, p. 124.

⁴ Gabriel Andreescu, "*International Relationships and orthodoxy in the East and South-East of Europe*", *International Studies*, 4/1998, pp. 3-32; central thesis of the article is that “the lawful state principles is under the pressure of clergy and the orthodoxy institutions, in an obvious way the armies of the integration process, in the institutionalized Europe”; as a “key instrument” of stability growth in East and South East Europe, the author proposes “the limitation of the orthodoxy dominance in the countries with an orthodox majority” (p. 31), the premise of the argument being that it exists a natural solidarity between orthodoxy, nationalism and pre-modern traditions”, the orthodoxy manifests in the region under the form of the orthodox nationalism” (p. 25)

all these are signs that confirm more the second part of the affirmation of Malraux: “The XXI century will be religious or will not be at all.”

It is repeated almost obsessively this formula, anytime a discussion about religion starts. What means the “religious” stated by Malraux? We discuss about religion or about spirituality? Or we need to see the religion as a social phenomena integrated in the global development of societies, of which powerful influence over the society is connected to the conscience and fundamental human beliefs?

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* states that the religion “is the recognition made by man of a supernatural leading power and especially of a personal God entitled to be obeyed.” The strict interpretation of this definition would have as a conclusion the non acknowledgment of the polytheistic religions. In “Webster’s New World Dictionary” religion is defined as “any specific system of beliefs and worshipping that often implies a certain ethic code and a philosophy.” The weak point of this definition is the fact that excludes the religions that do not practice the worshipping but correctly highlights two important components of religion: the belief and worshipping to a deity or deities; the ethical behavior towards other persons. These components are comprised in Mathew 22:36-39 “Master, which is the great commandment in the Law? And He answered him: To love your Lord from all your heart, with all your soul and with all your thoughts. This is the great and the first commandment. And the second, similar to this one: To love your keen as yourself.”

William James saw in religion: “the faith that there is an unseen order.”⁵ Alfred North Whitehead: „the religion is the symbolic expression of that what the individual does with his own solitude (loneliness)”⁶. Hall, Pilgrinn and Cavanagh: „The Religion is the symbolic expression of that what man deliberately claims as being of an inestimable value for him.”⁷ Karl Marx: “Religion is the sigh of the suppressed individual, the heart of a world without a heart and the soul of some situations without a soul. It is the opium of the people.” Don Swenson defines religion in sacred terms: “Religion is the individual and social experience of the sacred that is manifested in mythologies, rituals, and ethos integrated in a community or organization.”⁸ Church is a form of institutionalization of

⁵ William James, „*The types of religious experience*”, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia Publishing House, 1998.

⁶ Whitehead Alfred North, “*Religion in progress*”, Herald Publishing House, translation Alexandru Anghel

⁷ *Religion: An Introduction by T. William Hall*, Richard B. Pilgrim, Ronald R. Cavanagh.

⁸ Don Swenson: „*Society, Spirituality and the Sacred: A Social Scientific Introduction*”, Broadview Press – January 1999.

religion, as organizing expression of spiritual life connections with the material life, thing that in practice has created an instable balance between Church and the state. In singular, the church designates the totality of those who confess with Apostle Peter: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mathew 16:16). This confession is “the stone” on which Jesus said he would build His Church, The body of those who have converted to Christ, they baptized themselves in the name of the trinity and they follow Jesus in the middle of a disciplined community. There is only one Church, because there is only one God, a single faith, a unique Baptism (Ephesians 4, 5). Jesus is the head of the Church, which is his body (Colossians 1, 18) and Christians are the members of the body (Romani 8:5). In plural, the churches are the gatherings of Christians in a particular place in order to commemorate and celebrate the Eucharist of Jesus (Evangel) on Sunday. Paul names this way the local communities of Christians: “The Church of God that is in Corinth” (I Corinthians 1, 2)⁹.

Religion as well as ethnos is directly connected to the identity aspects. Since always, the human kind grouped itself after different types of identity, being tempted, once with the development of society, to adhere to a varied identity range, from ethnic or religious affiliations to the family ones. Thus, a first distinction has to be made between this identity forms. We will distinguish, this way, between inherited identity forms and accumulated identity forms. The inherited identity comprises elements related by birth, family bonds, native heath, elements regarded generally as intrinsic aspects of identity. Due to bonds created by birth we can affirm that the ethnos is an inherited form of identity, related to aspects of language and birthplace, aspects that have in a great measure an inevitable character. The accumulated identity, on the other hand is an aspect generally related to the communitarian factor, to the affiliation to certain organizations. It can be the case of religious, political, educational, or other type of organizations. In all these cases it is a progressively built, adopted form of identity. Building this form of identity can often be a challenge, since it can also comprise the inherited identity forms.

The religion can be equally considered an inherited identity form, as well as an accumulated one. Due to their universal character, the Christianity and the Islamic “umma”

⁹ *The New Testament, reviewed version, edited and commented by Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania*, second edition, reviewed and improved – Biblical and Missionary Institute’s Publishing House of the Romanian Orthodox Church – Bucharest – 1995.

can be considered as generators of an accumulated identity excepting the cases in which the conversion of the population took place through the over posing on the local “pagan” beliefs that were the expressions of some strongly affirmed local identities.

As we were mentioning before, the tendency of the individuals to band around the different identity forms is frequent over the history. Still, the evolution of the ethnic conscience, the formation processes of the national identities, the creation of nation-states based on national identities and the development of an international order based on the suzerain nation-state, as a major actor in the global arena, took to the development of a specific dynamics¹⁰.

The beginning of the XXI century it was proved to be surprising. Even if many nations of the world embrace the values of the representative democracy and of the market economy, creating new opportunities for the realizing of a durable peace, there are however, many challenges at the security, at a national and regional level, as well as at a global level.

Even if the old adversaries from the beginning of the Cold War are in the present, partners in the security problems, the ethnic, economical, social and environmental tensions continue to cause instability.

In this context it can be affirmed that: there is the possibility of regional conflicts initiating; we have to be continuously concerned with the problem of mass destruction arms; on a general view we confront ourselves with a series of non traditional menaces, transnational and unpredictable to what the security concerns.

The events that took place in the last years had and still have also a major strategic impact. An example would be The Campaign against Terrorism, initiated by the United States of America after the events of September 2001 that took in the year 2002, to the elaboration of the New Strategy of National Security of the USA. The campaign against terrorism has consolidated as well the affirmations regarding the necessity of a radical military transformation; although the war against Iraq perspective had become an argument for those who claimed the contrary. Still, the opening of the campaign against terrorism new front in Iraq hasn't closed this chapter, not even by far. In the general frame it is noticed a vivid debate over the modalities through which the security state of society can be installed and maintained.

¹⁰ Mihai-Ştefan Dinu, *The ethnic-religious dimension of security*, The „Carol I” National Defense University's Publishing House, Bucharest, 2007.

The actual security environment is characterized by few tendencies represented by geopolitical and military threats that the nations and their armed forces will also have to in the future. There are distinguished in this context, the regional menaces against the security. Iran and North Korea wish and have the means for triggering a conflict. Numerous regional powers have increased access to material, technological and informational resources that can improve their military capacities. Aside the instability arch that goes from the Middle East till the North East Asia, there is a dangerous combination of regional powers in development or in decline. Many of these states detain numerous military effectives and they already have the necessary means of acquiring or building mass destruction arms¹¹.

From a functional point of view, religion can be considered a positive force. It has relevant social functions, existing in various forms in any society. Religion ensures the social cohesion through the ideas assembly, values and norms necessary to people for forming a common identity. It is the binding agent of a group offering an ensemble of common values. An eloquent example is the Judaic religion that permitted to the Jews, living separately in different regions and cultures for ages, to keep their identity through ideas and religious common practices. The questions connected to the human existence, the goal of the human existence, find their answers in religion, offering a sense in life at an emotional level. Religion is actually the only social “institution” that tries to solve those issues.

Religion can have a social control function because often the society's forms have as a basis religious ideas. The laws as those who forbid the crime and the theft receive along the legal force also a moral force- the source being in “The 10 commandments” - and have a sacred legitimacy. In the same way the divine right of exercise the ruling at kings. In Islam, the law (sharia) finds its source in the Koran. Religion offers in the same time affective and psychological support, also alleviation, that human needs to survive in an insecure and complex world. This support is useful in times of crisis, as the death of a close person. Religion gives a purpose to death and offers an assembly of ritual practices for mourning (“death watch” at Christians, “sina” at Jews) that have the role to ease the sufferance to those remained alive.

¹¹ Alexandra Sarcinschi, *The security Environment in the XXI Century. The non-military dimension of security*, The „Carol I” National Defense University's Publishing House, Bucharest, 2007.

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