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BOOK REVIEW

Tomislav Tadić (auth.). Essays in Sociology of Religion. Hazardousness of Public Religions (Academia Analytica, Sarajevo, 2020, p.202.) *

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During the development of sociology of religion as a new discipline in the twentieth century, the pioneers of the field were often at pains to stress that modernization, which goes hand in hand with secularization, inevitably leads to a demise of religious influence and privatization of religion, or, in other terms, withdrawal of religion into the private sphere. Therefore, it is not wrong to say that the dominant paradigm of sociology of religion was constituted in relation to the so-called “secularization hypothesis” or the belief that religion as a victim of secularization processes is in crisis, and that the demise of religious influence in the public sphere is the fate of the modern world.

However, it soon became clear that things were not so simple. In recent years, it has become evident that religion is “alive and well” and thriving all over the world. In the light of understanding the impact of globalization and religious

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revivalism that takes the form of *New Religious Movements*, the rise of fundamentalist currents around the world, the return of religion to the public sphere, and arising levels of religiosity, it has become clear that the secularization hypothesis is a modern, scientific myth. Hence, it is not surprising that the secularization hypothesis as a scientific paradigm and not so long ago unquestionable fact of the modern age became the subject of scientific and public debate which in sociology is referred to as the “secularization debate”.

Secularization debate has shown that the secularization hypothesis, in the context of contemporary sociology of religion, is nothing more than a sociological "zombie category" whose heuristic potential has worn off under the ravages of time. However, David Martin along with other protagonists of the revised secularization theory points out that secularization as a sociological concept has not been abandoned. Revised theory of secularization, being exploited from teleological conceptions of history, still represents a plausible methodological frame for understanding religion.

One of the more recent attempts to implement the revised theory of secularization in the analysis of religion in the modern world, with special reference to the transitional societies of Southeast Europe, is right in front of us. The book authored by Tomislav Tadić, assistant professor of sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo, is an epitomized compendium of sociology of religion. The work published under the title *Essays in Sociology of Religion: Hazardousness of Public Religions* (2020) represents a collection of manuscripts that were written as a result of Tadić's sociological inquiries conducted within the *Scientific&Research Incubator* (ZINK). Sociological endeavours assembled into mentioned study offer a systematic overview of the contemporary sociology of religion and use its scientific potential to understand the underlying reason of the “return of religions”.

Multidimensional character of manuscripts that were written as a result of critical reflection on both the state of the discipline and the global, intrinsically religious scene, allows them to be read and understood through different interpretive levels. Primarily, essays in which the remarks on the revised, “strong methodological program” of the discipline are presented represent a direct contribution to the project of establishing revised scientific paradigm of the discipline. However, *Essays in Sociology of Religion* are far from dealing only with methodological issues of contemporary sociology of religion. Even essays that, *prima facie*, aim to acquaint the reader with the methodological foundations

of sociology of religion, in essence, critically reflect on the changes on a global scale that have primarily led to the revision of its scientific paradigm.

In order to understand the issues faced by the contemporary sociology of religion and elaborate an encompassing analysis of religion in the modern world, Tadić recalls the debates surrounding the birth of sociology of religion which make it clear that scientific analysis of religion is historically inseparable from the subject matter of social sciences. A cursory look at the state of the discipline, as Tadić points out, reveals how the sociology of religion chronically suffers from the same disease. Namely, the crisis that constantly shakes the scientific basis of sociology of religion, from day one until now, is reflected in its inability to determine and define the subject matter of the discipline. Said in the words of the author, “there is no consensus on *what religion is* (either in its *essence* or in *action*)”.

Sociologists have approached the task of defining religion in different ways in different historical epochs. The overview of theories of religion reveals that numerous theorists, anthropologists and sociologists alike, have tried to offer a universal definition of religion. However, it is crucial to emphasize, as Tadić points out in essays dealing with methodological aspects of sociology of religion, that any attempt to offer a universal and unambiguous definition of religion represents a methodological hazard. Referring to one of the most famous contemporary anthropologists of religion, Talal Asad, Tadić points out that:

“definitions that are nominally, taken for granted as universal are in fact particular and ethnocentric and must necessarily be understood as the result of broader historical, cultural, political, artistic, economic and other social circumstances” (Tadić, 2020: 21).

With that being said, it becomes evident that the early theories of religion defined religion in contrast to the dominant social, cultural and political trend of secularization. To define religion as a social phenomenon, and to subject it to scrupulous scientific analysis as a "social fact", meant, in the context of early theories of religion, to elaborate a theoretical analysis of the presumed decline of religious influence in the public sphere, a decline that was understood as one of the basic characteristics of the modern world. In accordance to the secularization hypothesis, it was believed that there is no place for religion in the modern world rationalized by science and industrial forces.

An overview of early theories of religion, anthropological or sociological, reveals their socio-evolutionist background. Anthropologists such as Edward B. Tylor, who defined religion as "belief in spiritual beings", perceived religion as an illusion of premodern societies whose future is uncertain in the modern, industrialized societies of the West. From the perspective of contemporary sociology of religion and according to Malcolm Hamilton's classification of definitions of religion, Edward B. Tylor's "minimal definition of religion" is categorized as *substantive*. Substantive definitions of religion, in the words of the author, "try to give an answer to the question: what is religion in its essence, that is, what is religion in itself".

On the other hand, sociological functionalists like Émile Durkheim, who emphasized the social function of religion, offered a *functional* definition of religion.

"Functional definitions of religion question the social functions of religion in various types of social reality and explicate, as Radcliffe-Brown puts it, 'religion in action', while, in Hamilton's view, functional definitions, that he interprets as 'inclusive', define religion as 'anything which performs the function of religion or operates in the similar way even if not conventionally thought of as such' (Hamilton, 2003: 40)" (Ibid, 23).

Sociological functionalists, brought up in the spirit of social evolutionism, by emphasizing the functional aspects of religion, namely its integrative function, anticipated the demise of religion. It was believed that new forms of solidarity inherent to modern societies, which Durkheim conceptualized as "organic solidarity", will serve as functional equivalents of religion and replace its role. In the light of everything said above, we are free to conclude that religion, in the sociological discourse of early theories of religion, was defined and equated with traditional forms of religious life, namely monotheistic religions. Therefore, it is not surprising that sociologists, analysing the changes in the patterns of traditional religiosity, thought of the contemporary world as thoroughly secularized.

However, the encounter of sociology of religion with religious revivalism in the second half of the twentieth century required from the discipline to revise the scientific paradigm, namely the secularization hypothesis, on which it was founded. Revised secularization hypothesis revealed the fallacy behind the

assumption “the more modern we are, the more secular we will be”. The logical error of such interpretations lies in the fact that the rationalist interpretations of religion and its decline in the modern world failed to observe the emergence of the new forms of religious life. However, Mircea Eliade, was among the first historians of religion to point out that “the disappearance of ‘religions ’does not necessarily result in the disappearance of ‘religiosity’”(Eliade, 2002: 7).

Ever since that, sociologists who contributed to the revision of the secularization hypothesis and, consequently, to the redefinition of religion, pointed out to the persistence of traditional monotheistic religions, the establishment of new religions in the context of *New Religious Movements* and, most importantly, the emergence of new *sacralized forms of identification* inherent to modern societies. Accordingly, the aspirations of sociologists were directed towards formulating a definition of religion that would semantically and meaningfully encompass the broad mosaic of religious life of modern societies. The project of creating a *polythetic* definition of religion broke up with the traditional conception of religion that defined religion as a “belief system based on the assumption of the existence of supernatural being”. The shift from defining religion through the prism of understanding traditional monotheistic religions to understanding religion as a form of “the sacred” and its constitutive, "religious elements" has made possible for sociologists to understand and analyse religion in all the varieties in which it appears in the modern world.

Tadić, aware of the above, together with other pioneers of sociology of religion, points out that it is necessary to "reconstruct the elements of religion in the field of contemporary sociology of religion". Reconstruction of the constitutive elements of “the religious” which, according to Milan Vukomanović's theory, are defined as “religious discourse, religious experience, religious activity, religious community and religious institution” aims to provide a plausible platform for analysing the figurations of “the religious” or “the sacred” in the modern world. Thanks to the reconstructed elements of the religious, sociologists are able to analyse, as David Martin puts it, the “varieties of secularization”, and to understand the “intersection of culture, religion and politics” (Marcela Cristi) within the framework of conceptual analysis of the sociology of religion.

The heuristic potential of the reconceptualized scientific paradigm is especially fruitful and plausible when applied to the analysis of both the societies of Western Europe and the transitional societies of Southeast Europe. It is worth

mentioning that the societies of Southeast Europe represent a “sociological playground” in which the previously mentioned intersection of culture, religion and politics can be observed. Tadić’s scrupulous sociological analysis of religion in the societies that emerged from disintegration of SFR Yugoslavia, with special reference to Bosnian society, reveals the hybrid modalities of the intersection of religion and politics in the public sphere. Speaking of the intersection of religion and politics in the public sphere, it is worth mentioning that David Martin, as one of the pioneers of contemporary sociology of religion, in his work on the relationship between religion and power pointed out to “the importance of analysing religion and politics in the same conceptual framework” (Martin, 2014: 1).

In accordance with David Martin's methodological imperative of analysing religion in the public sphere, Tadić in his essays, from the perspective of Hans Mol's "identity theory of religion", analyses and locates the “intersection of culture, religion and politics” in *ethno-religious nationalism* inherent to Southeast European societies. Namely, as Tadić points out, the specific socio-cultural and historic constellations of the post-war *Lebenswelt* of Bosnian society were antecedent of emergence of particular ethno-religious identities that function as elementary "building blocks" of political religions. Sociological analysis of the religio-political scene of societies created by the disintegration of SFR Yugoslavia shows that religion, in a given state of great social and existential crises when the collective identities of "imagined communities" (Benedict Anderson) are endangered, represents a crucial factor in building a “sacralized nationalist discourse”. The locale of the countries of the former Yugoslavia, as the scene where the most terrible suffering took place in Europe after the Second World War, experienced the fate of constructing the sacred discourse of nationalism and particular ethno-religious identities.

Tadić's sociological investigations show us how religious revivalism can coincide with dominant political ideologies that find their source of legitimacy in religious symbolic systems. The analysis of the intersection of culture, religion and politics elaborated in the essays that make up this work is not only applicable to the societies of Southeast Europe. The theoretical insights presented in the given essays represent a direct contribution to the encompassing understanding of religion in the context of modernity. Thus, even those essays that elaborate an analysis of the social reality of Bosnian society from the perspective of understanding "convergent political religions" and "sacralized national discourse" are widely applicable to other form of sociological analysis of religion because

they point to the danger that lurks in creating particular "political mythologies of the world order". Accordingly, these insights can be helpful when transposed on the project of creating open and global identity in the context of the "century of rearrangements" (Nijaz Ibrulj).

Thus, the work *Essays in Sociology of Religion* tackles some of the most interesting and burning questions of modern age, but it also uses its scientific and hermeneutic potential to point out to the necessity of establishing the platform (political, social and cultural) for *religious dialogue*. In this sense, even Europe, which has always been perceived as "Christian" and which, until recently, was constitutionally defined as a "community based on Christian values", now, in the "century of rearrangements" faces the challenge of creating a new, open and tolerant identity in accordance to the idea of religious pluralism. Tadić, aware of the above, in an essay entitled Challenges of Contemporary Sociology of Religion states that:

"Contemporary Europe has been in direct contact with Islam and Judaism for the last thirty years, and this encounter implies a kind of 'mutation' of European religiosity that British sociologist of religion Grace Davie is talking about. The encounter of European spiritual culture with Islam and Judaism implies the reconstruction and rearrangement of the organizational model of social reality according to new principles; principles that imply shifting boundaries, re-examining the 'challenges of secularization', specifically the relationship between the clergy, the church and the state which in scientific terms takes the form of redefining the 'challenges facing the sociology of religion' as an overarching discipline whose mission is to explain, expose, reveal the nature of this transformation in a fundamental way of experiencing oneself" (Tadić, 2020: 17).

Consequently, the task of the sociology of religion as a critical sociological discipline is that it should illuminate the social reality, to reflect on events and processes that are fundamentally changing and shaping the character of the modern society. Sociology of religion as such, in the era of "religious revivalism" is crucial not only because it serves as a sociological organon for scientifically plausible understanding of religious change, but also because its theoretical insights into the nature of inherently religious modernity participate in creating the basis for a tolerant global society. It seems appropriate, in the light of everything we said above, to conclude this brief presentation of the contribution of Tomislav Tadić, author of the *Essays in Sociology of Religion*, to the modern

sociology of religion with the thought that Tadić's work in particular and sociology of religion in general "contribute to the stabilization of a world that is, more seriously than ever in recent history, facing Huntington's image of the 'clash of civilizations'" (Ibid, 95).