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Revival of religion in the Republic of Albania

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is, in a sociological perspective, to seek evidence of the innovations of the religious picture in the Republic of Albania, after the collapse of the monist system. At the heart of the work is the pursuit of principles that enable the integration of religious values into social values, while theological doctrines are intertwined with sociological approaches. Based on the relevant doctrines, traditional experience and the external religious factor, in the Republic of Albania, efforts were made to re-establish religious organizations, as the previous system had outlawed religion. A common feature of traditional dominations and beliefs that were newly introduced in the Republic of Albania, after 1990, is being Abraham beliefs. As such, they follow the same moral principles and attitudes regarding religious values, as well as their integration into social values. Recognition and interpretation of values is treated in relation to the efficiency of activity in the current conditions, of a pluralistic, global world with a series of socio-religious problems. The approximations and divergences and disagreements between the traditional denominations and the cults and sects prevalent in the Albanian society after 1990 are examined. Although religious freedom is respected, clans, sects or hardliners extremist groups, for their purposes, have used methods outside religious principles. This has led, in special cases, to motivated, among religious beliefs, deviant behavior, which led to suicide. The integration of religious values into social values is treated as an instrument that enables the extension of the religious organization in matters of the public sphere. Religious morality would remain abstract if it were not in line with social values. It is argued that the integration of moral values is of common interest to both religion and society. The phenomenon of integration serves the education of believers, but not only, with values for family, work, relationships with people. It is argued that the organization should be involved in public discussions on a range of time phenomena such as: abortion, homosexuality, conflicts, radical attitudes, religious symbolism in public schools, etc., which require new mentality and social, professional skills. Proper methodological conception in the perspective of sociology and field research, the interaction between them, is an added value that must be used effectively. Conducting field observations, with the method of qualitative research, through observations and in-depth interviews, especially semi-structured ones with believers and clergy of different faiths enabled to make analyzes, discussions, to reach relevant findings and conclusions. The obligation for the organization, the clergy and the believers, remains the implementation of the requirements of divine morality in close connection with civic performance, for the believer to be a devout worshiper and an active citizen. The study in the Region of Tirana, allows, due to its potentials, to reach conclusions at the national level.

Keywords: social programs of religion, social values, denomination, religious cult, sects, social cohesion.

1. The social weight of religion

Interpretation of social values by religion is a problem that contributes to the issue of social environment. As such it has attracted the attention of social science scholars. In this study, the analysis focuses on the communities that formed the religious picture in Albania, after 1990. Their role in the formation and consolidation of social values is evidenced. Religion has been and remains a high potential for the development of social values. This is evidenced, both in terms of the intensity of its activity and the extent of it in the social environment. According to the Pew Research Center, approximately 84% of the world's population is associated with a religion (Pew Research Center 2017).

The paradigms of modernization and secularization have prevailed in the thinking of the social sciences about religion. By the middle of the last century, some sociologists believed that thanks to modernist and rationalist developments, the mission of religion would move towards completion. Paradigms affect mentality and social development. In this regard, Charles Taylor argues that before secularism, being a believer was considered a condition for having a natural order. After that, the natural order would be called the secular one. (Taylor C., 2007: 530).

The post-secular paradigm and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 also marked a reassessment of the role of religion in public life and international relations. By the end of the last century, the reconsideration of religion from a sociological perspective had begun. Thus we can refer to Peter Berger, Jurgen Habermans, etc. Jose Casanova wrote the book, *Public Religions in the Modern World*; while B. R. Wilson, wrote *Religion in the Sociological Perspective*, etc.

According to Samuel Huntington: During the Cold War the world was significantly polarized along the ideological spectrum (Huntington, S., 2004: 38). Whereas in the new world, after the Cold War, the most important, ubiquitous and dangerous conflicts will not be between social classes, rich and poor, or between other economically defined groups, but between peoples belonging to different cultural wholes. (Huntington, S., 2004: 28).

2. The need for religious revival

The research focuses both in terms of discovering the traces left by the monist system in the lives of believers, as well as in following the pace of development, in terms of democratic pluralism. The monist state (1944-1990) maintained an extremist atheist attitude towards religion, which went as far as banning religion and destroying religious institutions. The intensification of the fight against religion aimed at eradicating the religious worldview and closing down religious institutions, as it did. Albania was declared "the first atheist state in the world". Article 55 of the 1976 Constitution reads: "The creation of any organization with a fascist, anti-democratic, religious and anti-socialist character is prohibited."

The regime itself felt that this was an absurd policy. Religion and beliefs were deeply rooted in the popular mentality and the war against them was not easy. It was therefore demanded that: "We must wage our struggle against religion either against the religious dogma itself, against its philosophical, idealistic and mystical views, as well as against the religious disciplines that have entered, into the daily customs of those who believe, even of those who do not believe, but who sometimes follow them unknowingly, without care. (Hoxha E., 1969: 206-207.)

The passage of Albania on the democratic system enabled the revival of religion. In the early 1990s, religion was re-constructed on the basis of the historical background and world experience of the last decades. Religion found its position in society, as an institutional factor, as well as family, school, other social structures. In addition to the dominant religions, other religions were introduced. Legislation, international conventions and treatments from a sociological perspective are a great help for the recognition of rights and their impact on social environments.

Currently, the basis of the relationship between religion and the state are the constitutional guarantees and the European Convention on Human Rights, which is an integral part of the Constitution. Article 9 of the Convention states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion..." (ECHR, 2010: 11). According to this article of the Convention, guarantees for the freedom of religion were created for all religions and worshipers.

The Constitution of the Republic of Albania is based on democratic principles and the organization of entities must comply with them. (Article 9 human rights). "The Republic of Albania is a unitary and indivisible state" (Article 1).

The state and religious communities mutually respect each other's independence and cooperate for the benefit of each and everyone (Article 10). The efforts, in legal and organizational terms, had a great impact on the revival of religion. Article 10, point 4 stipulates that: "The state and religious communities mutually respect each other's independence and cooperate for the benefit of each and everyone." (Constitution of the Republic of Albania, 2016: 3).

3. Approaching religious and social values

Beliefs, both traditional and newly introduced, have different perspectives on different ways in which a religion represents itself in front of its own believers and others. Members of a religious community form their own beliefs and attitudes about other groups: their religions, traditions, cultures. But, all religions aim at the perfection of the values of the believers and their spread in religious and social environments, displaying all the virtues associated with the best of humanity. This also refers to the fact that different divisions belong to the Christian domination; orthodox, catholic, protestant, etc. As within Islam, references can be made to: Sunnis, Shiites, Baha'i, Halveti sect, etc., as well as their various subdivisions as sub-sects.

They aim at perfecting human character, encouraging people to treat others as they themselves wish to be treated. Efforts to extend this principle to the world order have involved many theologians, from all faiths. They demand, as Muslim theologians put it, in the 1993 Declaration towards a Global Ethics, that the "Golden Rule" be observed as an unconditional central ethical norm. The "Golden Rule" is the ethic of reciprocity, which encourages the treatment of others as you would like to be treated.

Christianity: "Do to others what you want them to do to you." (Matthew 7:21) Also in Islam: Loving your brother "None of you believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself." (An-Nawawi's Forty Hadith 13). The Qur'an states: "Believers are brothers, so make peace between your brothers." (Qur'an, 49:10) "Help one another for good and righteous deeds, and do not push one another into sin and aggression." (Qur'an, 5: 2)

The application of this principle finds application not only among traditional beliefs, but also among newer beliefs, which have the predisposition to link religious ethics (divine morality) with social aspects. The Baha'i Faith Web site begins with the phrase "This space of the Baha'i Faith in Albanian welcomes you to inquire about spiritual, moral and social truths and principles..."¹ Albanians warmly see both traditional and newly introduced groups, which are the subject of study.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau has highlighted the alignment between tolerant values both religiously and socially. This is accompanied by the definition of intolerance. "... Theological and civil intolerances...are essentially the same." (Rousseau, 2017: 67). Religious intolerance can lead to uncontrolled actions, which produce acts of violence, even wars and clashes of civilizations, as Samuel Huntington points out.

Religious values are derived from sacred books and texts. According to this worldview, morality is given by God and pervades social life. Divine commandments, in the religious concept of Abraham, are absolute, irrefutable, and unchangeable. In contrast, social norms and values are flexible. They are created, modified and implemented in concrete terms and circumstances social development. At the core of the Abrahamic religions are the Ten Divine Commandments. There is no division between religious and social values. In the theory of Divine Commands religious morality is in a theistic framework, as the source for all principles.

There morality (separation of good from evil, of right from wrong) springs from God and carries the obligation of obedience to worshipers. Believers are required to listen to the commandments of God, pray, and act upon them. Durkheim emphasizes that religion has a real existence. Given this premise, we can accept that the Theory of Divine Order provides an objective basis for morality.

The Ten Commandments of God are not only the foundation of the moral code for religion, but, in one way or another, also for society. Alexis de Tocqueville, in his book *Democracy in America*, pointed out that: Divine commandments are taken as a moral basis, where society, law, justice are built.

In the Divine Commandments, according to the Bible (Exodus 20: 2-17), worshipers are asked: Honor father and mother, do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, and do not covet another's thing. As can be seen, most of it is devoted to the social aspect.

Educating the believer with values brings change in his soul and life. Respect for Heavenly Father, descending to concrete levels becomes worship for people. Believers are required to permeate this relationship, respect for each other, according to the roles they have in family, work and social relationships. Further the reverence of the clergy helps the believer to grow to be a good, righteous, faithful man, just as the Deities would like him to be.

¹ <http://www.bahai.al/>, accessed June 6, 2021

There is generally religious harmony in the Republic of Albania. This phenomenon is observed both in the traditional communities and in some new communities that became the object of study, such as: Protestants (evangelical), Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Helvetia sect and the Baha'i faith. Regardless of the various doctrines regarding God, Allah, Krishna or Muhammad, worshipers consider belief in God or the living prophets, which can have significant effects on their lives.

Among evangelicals and Mormons, belief in Jesus Christ, his model, is seen as the only way for a believer to display individual and social values. According to the concept of the Watchtower, Jehovah's Witnesses refer to the Bible. The Helvetia sect, like the Bektashis and Muhammadans, refers to Allah, His word in the Qur'an, and the messages of the Prophet Muhammad.

To the question: - Do you think that the plurality of groups reduces the integrity of society? Believers admit that there are differences between beliefs, just as there are things in common. The similarities and differences between the faiths are interesting, but they come from the common Abrahamic faith. Supporting, consolidating a clan, sect is not an easily achievable process. Christianity and Islam, it took you more than three hundred years to reach a balance.

The spirit of religious understanding, in the Republic of Albania, transcends religious divisions. Various occupiers and anti-Albanian political circles, in the past, have tried to incite religious conflicts among Albanians. This has made the opposite effect, making tolerance one of the values of Albanian culture. It is also expressed in the Declaration of religious communities in Albania, with the object: Joint commitment to interfaith dialogue, Tirana, 03.05.2018, defined some aspects, such as: "Understanding and religious coexistence within our country has created over the years a beautiful mosaic of diversity". (Ngjallja Newspaper, 2018: 15). "We are convinced that this mosaic should not be taken for granted and we are committed to take care of it, keeping its parts together, in order to preserve and present with dignity this wealth inside and outside the country" (Ngjallja Newspaper, 2018: 15).

The fraternal spirit is expressed even on festive occasions the congratulation goes beyond the community. Thus, the head of the Albanian Muslim Committee, Bujar Spahiu wished for the feast of *Eid al-Fitr*, 2021, the day of sublime sacrifice: "... all together as much prosperity and prosperity in our families and in our beloved country, Albania". "We pray to God," he said, "for our nation, for the youth, for the teachers, the doctors, the police, the military and everyone who works for the security, well-being and prosperity of our country." (Spectrum, May 12, 2021). The days marked in the religious calendars become holiday greetings for everyone. There are many religions in Albania, but due to the understanding, which is an ancient religious requirement, they are not days of division, but national unity, based on divine and human values.

4. Study methodology

In order to review the activity of the organization, in order to integrate religious values into social values, during the years 2016 - 2021 activities were followed in several religious organizations of the Region of Tirana. Observed, interviewed and in-depth interviewed with believers of the sects of the Christian domination: Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, and in the domination of Islam: *sunni, shiite, Baha'i, Helvetia taricate*. The method used involves reviewing books and research articles in the field. The analysis focuses on religious communities, their role in shaping social values. More specifically, how does religious affiliation affect the well-being of the believer and how is this transmitted to society, through family, community, etc.

By making a systematic review of current phenomena, it is intended to fill a gap in the current understanding of this issue in Albania, after 1990. Evidence of social values, at the crossroads between theology and sociology, increases the predisposition of stakeholders to study further. In methodological terms, the discussion focuses on the following issues:

How does the organization approach the issue of social values? What do the scriptures, theology, and sociology offer about social values? And how does the link between religious and social values affect the community and beyond?

The application of a qualitative research method, especially semi-structured ones and in-depth interviews, enabled the collection of information on community, group and interpersonal relationships. Numerous observations, conversations and analyzes have been conducted to identify this phenomenon, with believers, leaders of religious institutions and clergy in the religious community. "According to Durkheim, but not only, there is nothing better than observing the behavior of individuals in a group to be convinced of the invigorating action that social groups exert on their members" (Borlandi, M, 2012: 367 – 385).

The revision of religious morality, after 1990, takes place in the new circumstances of national and global developments. The attitude of the organization is also expressed towards negative phenomena such as radicalism, religious conflicts, etc.

The activity of the organization is analyzed from a sociological perspective, detailed on a number of social issues, such as: highlighting the socio-cultural aspect of religious ethics; cultivating beliefs in accordance with social norms and values; elaboration of individual and social values in community settings and beyond; respect for civic values by believers in relations with each other, at the community level and between religious communities; the moral support of believers for the difficulties they face in life, the effectiveness of social capital to promote values, to cultivate a sense of mutual solidarity, mutual trust, the interpretation of the capacities of the organization, as a conservative force to deal with phenomena social in terms of globalization, for educating believers in self-actualization and achievement of goals.

The social problems of religion were researched in some religious communities (organizations) of the Tirana Region. The county, in socio-demographic terms, has some features. 1/3 of the population of Albania lives there. The total population of Albania is estimated at 3 million. According to the general census of 2011, in terms of religious affiliation, in the territory of Albania are 56.70% Muslims, 10.03% Catholics, 6.75% Orthodox, 2.09 are members of the *Bektashi Order* (a form of *Shiite Sufism*), 0.14 evangelicals. While 5.49 are self-proclaimed as unqualified believers and 2.5% atheists. The number of those who preferred not to answer for their religious affiliation is 13.79% of the total population.

In the Tirana Region, various believers pray and in conversations and interviews with them, they bring the religious experience of the cities and provinces from which they moved. Believers from other districts, who were temporarily staying in Tirana, were interviewed after the prayer. Even this group of believers has been willing to talk about the organization where they live, about the integration of religious values into social values.

Socio-demographic indicators of the Tirana Region make it possible to achieve generalizations at the national level. Another factor for generalizations is the fact that religious morality, in content, regardless; the religious, cultural mosaic remains the same for all faiths. Contemporary studies highlight the fact that all religions are essentially the same, distilling into a common set of values.

5. Deviation from religious principles

Religious freedom is respected in the Republic of Albania. But, there have been aberrant groups: clans, sects, extremist groups, which to pursue their goals, use methods that go beyond the framework of religious principles. This has led, among religious beliefs, to be motivated, in special cases, deviant behavior, which has led to suicide. Taking advantage of the aggravated condition of the layers of believers, they create tragic situations.

Thus we can refer to some recruitment of believers from the terrorist organization ISIS, to fight in Syria. Muslim believers generally think that radical influences come from factors operating outside Albania. Regarding *jihadist*² young Christians think that radicalism has been able to penetrate some young people of the Muslim faith. Which is true, but which cannot be generalized.

Regarding the attitude towards jihadists, some practicing believers, but also clerics said that human life is expensive: Whoever kills a man, said a Muslim cleric, has killed all people. Just as, whoever saves a man has saved all people. Young people generally shy away from *jihadist* recruitment.

The Halveti, Bahai, Evangelical and other believers who have been the subject of the study claim that these problems are not for them. Regarding the recruitments, the Muslim cleric, Y. G. expressed a critical attitude towards the Albanian Muslim Committee, which had not caught the situation in time. Regarding the return from the war camps in Syria, of 14 Albanian children and five women, the Clergyman said: we talked to the families of the recruits. They express concern for the lives of family members.

We can also refer to what has been called the Combine Tragedy, evidenced in 2020. It shows the macabre consequences that can come when concepts about this world are confused with sermons with the next world.

²Jihad (Arabic: Jihad): A war considered by them to be sacred, presented in the name of Islam, as a religious duty for the defenders of this faith.

Two daughters and their believing mother, in the city of Tirana, isolated for almost two years, undertook the act of sacrifice. Initially a girl died. The other daughter and their mother performed creepy rites and rituals, near the corpse, for 15 months, believing in the resurrection.

Case analysis, from various subjects, showed the tip of the iceberg of unresolved problems that seriously harm society, when social phenomena are badly intertwined with religious clans and sects. Mothers and daughters had been Orthodox believers and initially attended Orthodox churches, but later moved to evangelical churches. During the years 2018-2019, they left the church, cut off all ties with relatives and neighbors, getting involved in the absurd purpose of fictitious belief in physical resurrection.

According to numerous media reports, but not only, it is thought that the family became prey to a religious sect, which preached the resurrection after death³. As a result of the family entering the labyrinths of mysticism, this family of believers was destroyed. Further, they also departed from widely held public rhesus beliefs, leading to acts of self-sacrifice. This came as their expectations from other faiths were not met.

When the future of young men and women is blocked, passions overwhelm and discharge valves are sought. Some of them emigrate, others fall victim to drugs, trafficking, prostitution, and so on. A considerable part, seek solace in religion. It is sad to hear how far the macabre indoctrination of the survivor has reached, as she articulates the ghastly phrase: "You do not know what sacrifices we have made to go to heaven!"

Sociology offers effective ways of overcoming social difficulties. Well-known sociologist Emile Durkheim, in 1897, analyzed anomic suicide, which forms a model, on the examination of suicide. According to Durkheim, suicide goes in the opposite direction to the degree of integration of social groups, of which individuals are a part. If the analysis of the event would be done from the book of Suicide, it will be evidenced that in that tragic phenomenon a series of religious, economic, psychological, social factors are involved. This shows the lack of institutional interaction. Sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann note: Durkheim evaluates the process of "... the integration of society through the promotion of solidarity." (Berger Peter L. and Luckmann Thomas, 1991: 223).

In these thirty years, many cults and sects have been introduced in Albania. The Committee of Cults has the opportunity to monitor the situation, respecting the freedoms and rights of religion (according to Articles 10 and 24). They can apply effective methodologies to see how religious practices are performed. How consistent are they with the Scriptures and what values do they promote?

Also, through the relevant structures, their situation regarding funding, donations, membership, flexibility, transparency etc., can be evidenced. All this does not lead to religious restrictions, but the recognition of the real state of beliefs, so that the citizen does not fall victim to any sect. By determining the risk factors, protective factors are stabilized.

Even among traditional groups there are deviations from the principles. Thus, there are Muslim believers who talk about *Sharia Law*. "I am for *sharia law*," said a believer in an interview. It protects the rights of Muslims. The legislator is only God. It is written in the Qur'an about the Shari'ah: "We gave the Book of the Shari'ah to the descendants of Ibrahim" (Qur'an, 4:54). I have talked to imams, but they do not accept this idea. Nor can Erdogan⁴ be called a Muslim because he does not accept sharia. Laws there are made on behalf of the secular state."

The believer will not know that in Albania, as in all countries of Western Europe and beyond, the concept of a secular state is applied. Institutions (kindergartens, schools, administration, police, health, etc.) are secular. The believer was addressed the question: Why do you love sharia, what do you think are the advantages? "Sharia," said the interviewee "has the law to kill the one who kills, not to keep the people in prison at their own expense." Adultery is a serious crime. But according to the shari'ah one has to prove with four witnesses, etc., which is not easy. The thief's hand must be cut off. "Not to be kept in prison for several years with our taxes", the interviewee continued. The claims of this believer do not coincide with the majority of Muslim believers interviewed. As the interviewee himself claims, "I have discussed these things with other colleagues, who did not agree."

³ Albania Live, 7 July 2020, https://www.youtube.com/èatch?v=wIIG_2ads5E, seen on 10. 07. 2020

⁴Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President of Turkey since 2014.

Beliefs organize activities in different ways. They serve to cultivate the spirit of kindness and social life. As believers and clergy show, paradoxically, despite the restrictions on the state line, at the time of the pandemic, believers found the opportunity to follow religious rites. This explains the great faith they have in supernatural powers. As they felt insecure about life, their faith in God increased, they prayed / prayed for help in the difficult situation that humanity is going through. During the closing days of the pandemic, on-line, multi-contingent flammable games were developed to support them spiritually, psychologically.

Conclusion

After 1990, many sects and religious cults were introduced in the Republic of Albania. Deviation from religious principles in special cases, led to the suicide of believers. The explosion of the masses, which was observed in the process of transition from monism to a democratic system, showed the wrong attitude that had been followed towards religion in Albania. The holy books are a source of religious and social values. They show believers how ideas can and should be concretized in life: family, social issues, relationships with others. Believers may not know much about the social life that takes place in other communities, but they are bound by the spirit of brotherhood that religion promotes. Social practices enable to fill gaps that believers cannot fill in other ways, even religious content. Education with social values is considered by religious organizations as an important element in the development of community life. Social integration, active participation in public settings, enables to free religion from the secular "*tower of isolation*", to make it a force for social change, both within religious settings and in society itself. Radical prejudices are fueled mainly by a lack of information and inter-community understanding. The integration of values is a common good for both religion and society in a broader sense. The role of religion in defining and understanding social values has had an increasing level of scientific attention. This is a great help to the organization. In the works of sociologists, the treatment of the social problems of religion takes place in a secular sociological context, adhering to the nature of religion.

The heads of religious institutions and organizations aim at the integration of believers, who have common values and beliefs. Religious organizations have a high unifying spirit when it comes to social, national issues. At high levels of religious decision-making there is a spirit of understanding and cooperation, which is also reflected in the organization. The religious organization orients the believers to maintain a right attitude towards radical situations. Religious organizations have a great opportunity in addressing the issue of integration of religious values into social values. The organization has a fair perception of religious freedom, its treatment through relevant legislation and international acts. But this does not come down enough to the believer. They are more informed about the contents of the holy books. Thus, the believer tends to follow the traditional spirit and conservatism of the faith, which can curtail freedom of thought. Believers adhere to a belief, which is usually that of their family. It is necessary for the organization and the believer himself to expand the worldview, extending to the social content of the phenomenon. Clerics and educators have an important role to play when dealing with social phenomena. Sociological concepts should be explained clearly and simply, based on the educational, cultural formation of believers. Consolidating social values helps believers to be good citizens in dealing with social issues.

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