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articles

RELIGION AND POLITICS: A Possible Reading of the Current State of Affairs, with an Emphasis on Post-communist/Post-atheist spaces

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Abstract

Religion and politics are constitutive dimensions of both human identity and social life. The aim of this work is to trace some of the current topics, theories and paradigms mapping the dynamics between religion and politics in the contemporary world. The article therefore presents the current state of the debate on religion and politics. It also seeks to introduce the reader to the various trends of interpretation occurring within the shift from a domination of secularizing social sciences to a more integrative, holistic approach to the understanding of religion and its place in our contemporary world. Moreover, the study brings into discussion similar topics assessing a more neglected side of research, namely, questions of the study of forced atheisation/secularisation, post-atheisation taking place in post-communist/post-totalitarian spaces. Although this type of literature abounds in western academic circles, in ex-communist contexts is far from being satisfactory. Thus, this work indirectly advocates for the importance of including the study of religion and politics within the departments of politics/social sciences in the academia of the ex-Communist spaces.

Keywords: religion and politics, secularisation, post-secularisation, de-secularisation, post-communism, post-atheisation, globalization, education.

Both religious and secular mentalities must be open to a complementary learning process if we are to balance shared citizenship and cultural difference. (Habermas, 2008)

Religion and politics are constitutive dimensions of both human identity and social life. Since they are fundamental elements of human existence they are intrinsically interdependent and interconnected. Contrary to the ultimate prophecies of modernism and against the often violent political exercises imposed by totalitarian atheist regimes of the twentieth century, religion and politics remain essential elements of our existence. Therefore, religion and politics, including their complex dynamics, are essential realities which cannot be ignored. Peter Berger, one of the most influential scholars of contemporary religious phenomena has rightly stated: "Those who neglect religion in their analysis of contemporary affairs do so at great

peril" (Berger, 1999, p. 18). Jonathan Fox, in his recent and probably one of the most important contributions to the analysis of religion and politics dynamics, mentioned: "No serious social scientist opposes the principle that religion is an important, relevant, and significant social, political, and economic force that is deserving and worthy of study." (Fox 2013, p. 27)

The main aim of the current work is to present the current state of the debate by tracing some of the main topics, theories and paradigms that are mapping the dynamics between religion and politics in the contemporary world. Although this type of literature abounds in western academic circles, in ex-communist contexts are far from being satisfactory (Fox, 2013; Stan and Turcescu, 2011). Thus, this work is indirectly advocating for the importance of including the study of religion and politics within the departments of politics in ex-communist, ex-atheistic spaces, "Religion and Politics" being already a well-established study matter in many Western universities.

A Personal Introduction to the Current Context of the Debate

Returning to Romania at the end of my studies in the UK in 1998, I had the first attempt of introducing "Religion and politics" as a subject of study within the Department of Politics at the West University of Timisoara. The question I received was "What does religion have in common with social sciences?" For almost half a century the academic world in Eastern Europe was entirely dominated and controlled by the official ideology of the party-state, which was essentially atheist. From a Marxist perspective, religion was "the opium" used by the exploiters in order to "amputate any revolutionary tendency" of those exploited, thus rending progress impossible. As such, it had to be eliminated at any cost. "The New Man" of the "socialist society multilaterally developed, marching on the triumphant road towards Communism", as the Marxist-Leninist jargon has often put it, was expected to "mature" and thus to be able to reject/annihilate religion altogether. As it will be seen later on in this work, this was a radical form of secularism which, paradoxically, metamorphosed in a radical "secular religion". Such sequels were still prevailing in the early 90s of the XXth century.

Although not as abruptly, but around the same time and somehow in a similar vein, while conducting postdoctoral research in Oxford I was informed by my supervisor that, as a political scientist, he also finds it difficult to combine social studies with the study of religious teachings and

traditions within the academia in the UK. This was because in Western Europe the place of the study of religion within social sciences was also driven by the same ideology of secularism, albeit more sophisticated as well as less aggressive than in the East.

Hence, both in the Eastern and Western academic worlds, the study of religion and its connections with society were conducted within clearly-cut hermeneutical frameworks dominated by various forms of the same ideology labeled as "secularism". As Peter Berger, the influential sociologist of religion, rightly observed, 'There exists an international subculture composed of people with Western-type higher education, especially in the humanities and social sciences, that is indeed secularised. This subculture is the principal „carrier“ of progressive, Enlightened beliefs and values. While its members are relatively thin on the ground, they are very influential, as they control the institutions that provide the „official“ definitions of reality, notably the education system, the media of mass-communication, and the higher reaches of the legal system' (Berger, 1999, p. 10). As it will be seen throughout this work, secularism is the ideological result of the various forms that secularisation theories took. Such theories rightly and objectively observed that the advancement of modernity meant a certain recession of religion from the public sphere. Based on such data, secularisation theories were, nevertheless, perhaps too quick in predicting the gradual but constant demise of religion from social/political life while, in their more radical forms, they predicted its total eradication.

Secularism as an ideology is therefore essentially anti-religious. As rightly observed recently, 'Anti-religious secularism is more than an academic theory. It is a normative disposition' (Hoover and Johnston, 2012, p.2). Moreover, it also tends to be a value statement. As the same authors observe, '[Secularisation] assumes not only that modernization is likely to have certain functionally subversive effects on religion but also that secularity is the *correct* direction of history. Religion is thought to be a regressive and irrational force, and individuals would be better off if they left it behind entirely' (p.2). This was expected to be so within the positivist paradigm of the Enlightenment, humanity being engaged on the irreversibly modernizing path driven by the rational (and moral) independent agent.

However, as most scholars of religion currently observe, things are not as simple as they seem. For instance, acknowledging that he did once belong

to such an 'elite group of secularists', Bergerin 1999 asserted that "a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labeled 'secularisation theory' is essentially mistaken" (1999, p. 2). As it will be also seen throughout this work, academics began shifting towards more integrative approaches to the study of religion. In the wake of such events as the fall of the Communist metanarrative/political regimes in Eastern Europe, the tragic 9/11, the more recent raise of violent radical religious-political movements such as the Islamic Caliphate, secularism seems not to hold anymore. Religion continues to be with us, and sometimes in far more visible ways than before. As such, it seems to evade the rational framework of interpretation provided by the dominant theories of secularisation. Berger talks now about "de-secularisation", Habermas (2007, 2008) asserts that we are in an "era of post-secularisation;" Martin (2002) considers that the "spiritual revivals" of Latin America constitute significant proof of the major shifts in the way religion is being brought back in the attention of public life and in the lives of contemporary people. For Taylor, our 'secularist states' must now focus not on eliminating religion from public life but rather on 'maximizing basic goals of liberty and equality between basic beliefs' (Taylor, 2010). And the list can go on, including newer theories of post-secularisation which acknowledge the potential implications of religion at global level as well (Kurth, 2009; Wuthnow and Offutt, 2008).

Having briefly identified the changing epistemological framework, the present study is intended to assess the main interpretative paradigms of the dynamic relationship between religion and politics. It will therefore seek to introduce the reader to the various trends of interpretation occurring within this shift from a domination of secularizing social sciences to a more integrative, holistic approach to the understanding of religion and its place in our contemporary world. Moreover, it will also bring into discussion similar topics assessing a more neglected side of research, namely, questions of the study of forced atheisation/secularisation, post-atheisation taking place in post-communist/post-totalitarian spaces.

Possible approaches to the study of religion and politics: In dialogue with Jonathan Fox

Any approach meant to assess the interpretative paradigms of the complex relationship between religion and politics cannot ignore Fox's (2013) recent study *An Introduction to Religion and Politics: Theory and Practice*. Fairly ambitious in his aim, Fox seeks "to give the reader the theoretical tools to

understand the intersection between religion and politics anywhere in the world at any point in modern history” (p. 4). Despite its somehow unrealistic ambitions, the study presents however, the core directions for the approach of this topic, being therefore a good starting point for the present analysis.

Fox builds its study on two main trajectories or pillars. The first one presents the main theories used to analyze the ways in which religion can influence politics. He is doing this with the purpose of “to provide a theoretical toolbox that will give a student of religion and politics the means to analyze religion’s intersection with politics in any setting” (p. 2). The second part of Fox’s work describes the practical aspects of the relationship between religion and politics, this being a comparative study based on empirical data he has coordinated and which assesses the state policies of 177 countries regarding the area of religion (*Religion and State Dataset*). This part investigates the main trends of governmental policies regarding religion from four main perspectives: 1) the official/state religions, 2) the legal and financial support offered by the state to various religious groups, 3) regulations and state control over the main religion, 4) religious discrimination against minority religious groups (p. 4). Fox’s concluding claim is that the empirical studies from the second part of his book show that “all theories from the first part of the book are relevant and significant” (p. 211).

From Fox’s perspective, the theoretical framework for the interpretation of the complex relationship between religion and politics must have as a starting point the religious belief systems, the doctrines that shape religions and the diverse theologies defining religious phenomena. As he states: “The concept of religious beliefs motivating behavior is, from my perspective, the most central element of religion’s influence on politics” (p. 214). These beliefs shape: 1) religious practices, 2) religious institutions and leaders and most importantly, 3) religious identities both as a group and collectively. Besides the analysis of the religious belief systems, the theoretical frame for the study of religion and politics must be complemented by studies centered on political and / or religious interests backed up by rational choice theories. The overall epistemological framework, however, is offered by the various forms of secularism, of “secular belief systems” (p.214ff). This is supported by Fox’s empirical results showing that the antagonism between religion and secularism was

universally present (although at different stages) in all 177 states included in the study.

Hence, we can already note that the dominant interpretative paradigm of the relationship between religion and politics in Fox's study remains rooted in a certain form of secularism. Currently, as we have already noted above and as we will argue in more detail later on in this work, such ideology is being gradually replaced by theories of post-secularism. Such theories acknowledge that religion cannot be eliminated from public space. They do not 'predict' a gradual evolutionary trajectory from "irrational" forms which supposedly dominated earlier forms of social cohabitation towards more "rational" ones in which religion will be given up entirely in the public sphere, if not in the private one as well.

On the contrary, the study of the impact of religion within post-secular paradigms takes into account, for example, the importance of religion in political mobilization, the ability of religion to reinvent itself often using the secular context rather than becoming a victim of it (Toft et al, 2011). Religion is also studied from the perspective of its role in defining identity at an individual and community level as well (Kunovich, 2006; Spohn, 2009). Further studies analyze the impact of religion on conflict situations (Huntington, 1996), discrimination (Van de Vyer, 1996) and external affairs (Wuthnow and Lewis, 2008; Hoover and Johnston, 2012).

The correct conclusion of Fox's study, however, emphasizes one important truth, namely that religion is relevant and highly influential for the political life. Far from being a creation of exterior economic and social factors (as in Marx, Freud or Durkheim), religion is acknowledged as a reality that has its own existence rooted in beliefs, theologies and the doctrines constitutive of its foundations. Religion is therefore a controversial reality with its own dynamics often going against the secularizing predictions according to which it has a decreasing importance in the public life. Moreover, religious identities are real and can be extremely influential. Fox's empirical study shows, for instance, that almost half of the nations on the globe, officially or unofficially, claim to profess a certain religion with which the vast majorities of citizens identify. Within such context, there are two potential dangers: 1) discrimination, when the political establishment offers excessive support to such dominant religion and 2) fundamentalism, when the political establishment becomes one with the dominant religion (a merge between politics and religion). Moreover, this context can fuel

internal and external conflicts deeply rooted in religious phenomena and its complicated interactions between religion, politics and conflict, both at a national and international level. Having had a brief introduction of Fox's work, we can now turn to some more critical considerations which in their turn offer us the possibility to move further towards a more holistic approach to the question of the study of religion and politics.

Some critical considerations

Fox's laborious effort of bringing to our attention the complex relationship between religion and politics has several significant merits. From our own work's perspective, the main contribution is that he offers a meaningful map which can guide the researcher involved in such a complex field, as well as suggesting a coherent hermeneutic key. This consists in arguing that the epistemological theoretical construct must start with the study of the content of religious beliefs, dogmas and theologies. In other words, the starting point in interpreting the influence religion has on politics must be the study of the underlying doctrines, theologies themselves. In this respect, Fox indirectly acknowledges the need to depart from the dominating secularist framework. As already hinted above, secularism starts from the presupposition that such religious dogmas are contingent, being the result of other external factors such as economy, social, political realities, etc. Moreover, with the advancement of modernity, religions are marching on the irreversible way which leads to the fading of their influence. Hence, their content has only secondary importance. What matters about religion is not its *substantial* teachings but how it *functions* in relation to politics and social life.

Fox seems to sense this major shortcoming in the predominant epistemological framework. He does not only create space for the study of religious beliefs and their underlying theologies but he actually claims to place such concepts at the foundation of the interpretative theoretical model of the relationship between religion and politics. In Fox's view, the interpretation of the relationship between religion and politics needs to start with the analysis of the dogmas and religious beliefs themselves.

However, albeit paradoxically, the potential strength of his work mentioned above runs the risk to become its own limitation. Despite his stated theoretical framework, when conducting his assessments Fox tends to remain captive to the positivist-secularist approach. For example, repeatedly he declares that his study "describes and examines how social

science literature understands religion and politics” (p.15); or, the theoretical study “focuses on how social scientists have understood the role of religion in politics” (p. 137). Moreover, in direct continuity with the secularizing positivist theories and apparently contrasting his own theoretical framework which states that the starting point in understanding religion must be the religious dogmas and teachings themselves, Fox warns us from the beginning that “this book uses a social science approach” (p. 4), continuing: “for the purposes of the exercise of applying a social science perspective to understand religion’s influence on politics, we must set aside whatever beliefs we have regarding religion. It is not important whether we believe in a religion or believe all religions are no more than constructions that have no truth to them. ... We must objectively examine how religion influences political behavior without allowing any of these preconceptions to color the analysis.” (p. 5).

Even the chapter on “Religious worldviews, Beliefs, Doctrines and Theologies” – which is meant to be the pillar of Fox’s theoretical framework (see p. 214) – is also dominated by sociologists of religion and social scientists. From the start, the reader is warned according to positivist lenses that “social scientists study human behavior and political scientists focus on political behavior” (p. 56), but there is no space for political or moral philosophers and theologians who are dealing with the religious phenomena from within. Besides some exceptional studies showing how religious beliefs, dogmas and dominant theologies are a significant force with multiple meanings manifested in a variety of behaviours (for example Norris and Inglehart, 2004; Ammerman, 1944; Silberman, 2005; Toft et al, 2011), the majority of research operates by assessing forms and not content, *functionality* and not *substance*. In other words, such studies are more concerned with assessing how the links between religious beliefs and political behavior function rather than being interested in the essence of such beliefs, with all their major claims and the sophisticated implications resulting from them.

Postmodern interpretative paradigms emphasize quite clearly that it is relatively naive to believe that we can be free of our own systems of values when we talk about the public space. Even more so when we talk about religious beliefs, which due to their claim of offering an exhaustive framework of the interpretation of the meaning of all existence, are deeply rooted in complex identity processes (both at an individual and group level). Hence, such beliefs cannot be easily renounced; neither can they be ignored by the scholars aiming to understand connections between religion

and the public sphere. The importance of taking the content of religious beliefs themselves into consideration, and not only filtered through the eyes of a “rational, objective” researcher who operates within the social sciences paradigm becomes obvious. It comes to no surprise then, that in Fox’s approach theologians, religious thinkers (radical, fundamentalist or moderate), moral/political philosophers remain largely un-noticed and unrepresented. The divide operated by the positivist paradigm, which considers the “objective” scientists (using rational-empirical methods within social sciences) as somehow “superior” to those who are “subjective” (using intuition and conceptual analysis in theology, political or moral philosophy) is therefore wrongly perpetuated. The voices of the later remain unheard and as it will be argued in this work, this is a shortcoming in need to be addressed.

A more coherent approach with Fox’s acknowledgment of the importance of the content of religion in understanding its influence in politics should have, therefore, included fundamental studies of the relationship between religion and politics seen not only by social scientists but also from the inside of such religious systems of thought. A good example in this respect is the recently published *Essential Readings on Religion and Foreign Affairs*, which includes alongside contemporary social scientists, classical theologians such as Augustine or important contemporary theologians and moral philosophers (Hoover and Johnston, 2012). As we will see further, it is important that such approaches will be included, if we really aim to genuinely understand the complexity of contemporary religious phenomena and its sophisticated connections with everyday life.

Another limitation of Fox’s study is the absence of a more solid discussion on the role of religious traditions in shaping the relationship with the political establishment (with reference to Islam, for example). Finally, the last limitation which is actually going to be briefly addressed in this paper is the limited study of the relationship between religion and politics in totalitarian/post-totalitarian Marxist-atheist regimes, as well as of a substantial analysis of secular religions. All such shortcomings will be addressed in the second part of this paper.

Doctrinal approaches of the relationship between religion and politics

As we could see in Fox’s study, understanding the religious beliefs, dogmas and theologies that are placed at the foundation of the contemporary religious phenomena are important in understanding the

dynamics between religion and politics. Their study according to their own claims is essential in the process of mapping such a complicated and fluid territory. As it was underlined already, religious beliefs are at the foundation of identity both at an individual and collective level. An awareness of the religious groups' perspectives on and their ideologies regarding politics will facilitate more realistic dialogue leading to more efficient "communicative action" (Habermas) which is so important for the contemporary democratic construct. In post-secular democracies "the religious and the secularist" are invited to engage in complementary processes of reciprocal learning. In Habermas' (2008) words, 'Both religious and secular mentalities must be open to a complementary learning process if we are to balance shared citizenship and cultural difference.'

Such studies referring to the relationship between religion and politics are articulated inside all universalist monotheistic religions: from radical, fundamentalist perspectives to ones carefully and academically argued, balanced in regard to the goal of peaceful cohabitation within liberal democracies of the global era in which we live. A good example in this respect is the volume coordinated by Peter Berger, where important representatives of all five major world religions reflect on their own understanding of the relationship between religion and politics (Berger, 1999). Following this model, we will only briefly present such perspectives coming from some of the main religions with a global impact.

From a Christian perspective for instance, there were through the ages and there still are a significant number of approaches to politics based on the main Christian dogmas. They range from Augustin's *City of God* through most of the main representatives of the "cannon" of the history of Christian political thought (Thomas D'Aquino, J. S. Mill, Hobbes, etc) to modern utopias such as Kuyper's (1880) "spherical sovereignty" or the idealistic forms of contemporary political theologies based on Jesus (i.e., *Jesusian* politics developed by Lindberg in 2007) together with many other more realistic and relevant perspectives. For example, following Vatican II, the Catholic Church constantly articulates coherent answers, theologically based to the main issues facing contemporary society. It also singles out the imminent dangers of modernity, of radical secularisation, of fundamentalisms of any sorts or possible interethnic/ interreligious conflicts. This is done either through Papal Encyclicals or through the voice of its theologians. Some Encyclicals are well known, such as: *Rerum Novarum* referring to political economy, work and capital; *Pacem In Terris*

dealing with peace issues, justice, love and freedom; or the newer ones such as *Caritas in Veritate* (2009) placing truth and love at the foundation of the church's social doctrine; or *Lumen Fidei* (2013) discussing the dialogue between faith and reason and between faith and the common good.

From the perspectives of various theologians and moral/political philosophers, it is worth mentioning the major contributions of the prolific dialogue on the role of religion in post-secular democratic societies between Cardinal Ratzinger and one of the most important political thinkers of our times, Jürgen Habermas (Habermas and Ratzinger, 2005). Other contemporary thinkers religiously engaged with major contributions in the articulation of perspectives based on the Christian faith related to contemporary politics are Charles Taylor (the contemporary self in *Sources of the self*, Christian morality in the contemporary world, in *The Secular Society*, etc), Jean Bethke Elshtain (religion and conflict, just war, Christian faith and democracy, etc), Michael Novak (1993 - *The Catholic ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, etc.).

Eastern Orthodox Christianity has produced significantly less reflections on the relationship between Christianity and politics. This is perhaps due to the totalitarian communist regime which was programmatically atheist but also due to general lack of concern to adapt to modernity or to enter into dialogue with it. Orthodox theology is more dominated by its tradition of seeking "harmony", a "symphonic" relation with the political establishment rather than assuming a critical/prophetic role (Rogobete, 2006). There are however some contributions assessing topics such as: Orthodoxy and democracy (Stan and Turcescu, 2000, 2011), Orthodoxy and human rights (Rogobete, 2004, Stan, 2010) Orthodoxy and conflict (Rogobete, 2011). Worth mentioning is also the recent critique coming from some Eastern Orthodox scholars in regard to president Putin's attempt to politicize Orthodox theology (Papa Nikolaou and Demakopoulos, 2014).

The Islamic literature in political theology abounds and an assessment of it goes beyond the scope of this work. It is worth mentioning, however, that one can find a full range of approaches: from radical fundamentalisms arguing that religion is politics and the secular state is a heresy which needs to be eliminated (Ayatollah Khomeini, Sayyid Qutb, Abul Ala Mawdudi, etc.) to more balanced perspectives (Yusuf al-Qaradawi) as well perspectives seeking the integration of Islam in the life of contemporary liberal democracies (An-Na'im 2008, Abou El Fadl).

The Jewish schools of political theology have also a wide range of approaches. From radical *Sionism* to balanced authors such as Daniel Elazar who creatively articulates a political theology of the covenant applied to democracy, constitutionalism, modern civil society. Michael Waltzer is another respected author with major contributions in political ethics, Jewish law applied to contemporary law, just war, etc (in works such as *God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (2012), *Law, Politics, and Morality in Judaism* edited by Walzer (2006); issues related to globalization in *Toward a Global Civil Society* (1995)).

Towards a Holistic Approach

Within newer interpretative paradigms, all such contributions as presented above should play a role in the understanding of the dynamics between religion and politics. Whether Papal Encyclicals, Islamic Fatwas, assessments coming from the academia or from those religiously involved, they all must have a voice. The new epistemological framework should eliminate arbitrary hierarchies, the "ascendant" linearity of positivism as well as any ultimate universalizing claims. The study of the dynamics between religion and politics should certainly continue to be carried by those who operate within the social sciences paradigms operating with empirical objective instruments. A holistic approach, however, must go beyond the limits of social sciences elaborated within a positivist framework. Referring exactly to this topic of the hermeneutics of the relationship between religion and politics, Wuthnow (1991) rightly stated:

Social theory is a kind of hegemonic discourse with respect to all other discourses. It claims to see more objectively, more rationally, more factually, and from a wider horizon than any other interpretation. But taking religion seriously means granting it parity as an interpretive framework. This is why social theory prevents us from understanding what it means to be an "infidel" civilization. That term grows out of a different framework entirely. To understand it requires abandoning social science as a privileged framework and shifting toward a view of multiple discourses, each illuminating the meaning of events in different ways. (p.14)

The theory of modernity with its secularizing scenarios offers an important objective framework to interpret the relationship between religion and politics but it has limitations. A healthy dose of modesty should be observed. Such evolutionist secularizing view of social reality according to which modern society will inevitably depart from religion is a limited view.

It is at least restrictive (Taylor, 2007) if not significantly erred in some essential parts. This is clearly seen for example from the radical changes of position of some of the main founders of the theory of secularisation. Let us take Berger (1999) as an example. Although with major earlier contributions to the theory of secularisation, he now speaks of “de-secularisation”, “counter-secularisation” and “resurgent religion”. Secularisation he argues, generates counter-secularisation which can take two forms: 1) The form of radical religious revolutions, which intends to overtake the whole of political sphere bringing it under the religion’s authority (for example ISIS or any other form of radical religious fundamentalism) and 2) various forms of isolationism, retreat within certain subcultures, countercultures in which the religious factor becomes determinant (ie., various forms of Christian evangelicalism).

Habermas, as already mentioned, announces the era of post-secularisation and calls to dialogue the representatives of religion, in order to make their views known in connection with socio-political life. Such dialogue, he argues, is crucial if one wants a correct positioning within the legal framework of liberal democracy. Anthony Giddens spoke in 1991 in Freudian terms of the return of religion in public life as “the return of the repressed”. Within such paradigms, religion is considered and analyzed in its own rights.

Returning to our argument, we can say that Wuthnow correctly emphasizes the need to renounce the hegemony of the interpretative model dictated by modern positivism, arguing in favour of the enriching of the hermeneutic act with new holistic perspectives which can offer windows towards complex phenomena such as spirituality and religion. Religion and spirituality most often surpass any positivist model of scrutiny. To catch the profound meanings of spirituality, much more is needed. In his own words, Wuthnow (1991, p.14) again so aptly states:

Moving beyond the impasse in contemporary theory, therefore, requires us to adopt an interpretive stance towards the role of theory and the more appreciative stance toward religion. I do not mean that we must abandon rigor, or the desire for objectivity, or view religious fanaticism with sympathy. But we must try to interpret the significance of contemporary events in terms of the hopes and aspirations of their participants, including their hopes for salvation and spiritual renewal rather than trying to mold

these events to fit some preconceived views about the secular movement of history.

Wuthnow argues therefore that the interpretative framework offered by the theories of modernity must be extended in at least two further directions: 1) world systems theories and 2) critical theory. With roots in *Analles School*, world systems theories take into consideration the larger global context of social economic realities and implicitly of religious phenomena. Hence, such an approach fosters an analysis that goes beyond the classical discourse defined by national/ethnic versus religion, characteristic to the theories of secularisation. It offers the necessary instruments to interpret the role of religion at international and global level.

Within such a hermeneutical framework there is space for the study of religion in international relations and foreign affairs,¹ with its diverse subsystems such as religion and conflict, religion and peace studies, religion and globalization, religion and human rights, religion and democracy, religion and diplomacy, religion and economic development. Besides such positive aspects, however, a hermeneutic of the religious phenomena circumscribed only to world system theories poses the risk of becoming a determinist approach. It can be dominated by external factors such as the implosion of spacio-temporality, instant communication, instant global commerce, IT revolution, etc. The agency of the human being is at risk of being limited by such predeterminations generated by exterior movements characteristic to globalization.

For such reasons, Wuthnow argues that a holistic approach should also take into consideration elements resulted from 2) *Critical theory*, such as it is reflected in thinkers such as Jurgen Habermas. Having identified two major shortcomings of modernity as being bureaucracy (in Weberian terms) and radical capitalist economy (in Marxian terms), Habermas (1984, 1987) argues in favor of replacing “instrumental”, “technical” reason with “communicative action”. This includes a reassessment of religion and the religious phenomena, an aspect directly approached by Habermas in the dramatic event of 9/11. In his seminal dialogue with Ratzinger on this topic, they argue that it is imperative that religion will have the freedom to have its own voice, it should be listen to and understood if we are to

¹See an excellent collection of fundamental texts on the topic or Religion and Foreign Affairs, in Hoover, D., and Johnston, D, Ed., 2002, *Religion and Foreign Affairs: Essential Readings*, Waco, Baylor University Press.

continue the communicative dialogue so necessary for the contemporary democratic construct (Habermas and Ratzinger, 2005).

Hence, as we argued throughout this work, theologians, scholars directly involved in the religious phenomena, lay representatives, should be invited to dialogue and listen to in their own rights. They should not be forced into the straight jackets defined by the architects of social sciences who claim to know how their thought should evolve. A holistic hermeneutic of the relationship between religion and politics creates therefore a real space for significant dialogue run from equal epistemic positions between social scientists, political and moral philosophers and theologians. The understanding of religious phenomena must begin with a correct understanding of its foundation. Therefore, a holistic approach of the relationship between religion and politics is centered on interpretation of its content (beliefs, dogmas and theologies) and only then on its functional elements (political behavior, legal aspects). A holistic approach seeks to understand the meaning of religion and its role in the life of the individual and society with implications both at national and international levels. The notion of truth being fundamental to the constitution of identity both at individual and group level cannot be ignored anymore. It must be integrated in the active dialogue so necessary in the process of securing a peaceful world at the beginning of the third millennium.

This work so far has offered an overview of the main interpretative paradigms of the relationship between religion and politics beginning with the theory of secularisation which has dominated this area of study and ending with a call to a holistic approach of the religious phenomena and their relationship with politics. The last part of this study will briefly introduce the notion of secular religion as well as mentioning a few further directions for the study of religion and politics.

Secular religions

An interpretive paradigm identified from the 1930 is one that assimilates the two totalitarian political regimes of the twentieth century communism and fascism with forms of secular religions (Voigt, 1938; Aron, 1957; Tismaneanu, 2003, 2012). Marxism and fascism are thus studied from the perspective of the main characteristics of religion. Within such paradigm, it is shown that all the main characteristics of classic religions can be found in the theories, actions and objectives of the ideologies of such totalitarian regimes. They are immanent religions driven by soteriological (salvific,

redemptive ideals) carefully building all dogmas, rituals and the necessary mechanisms for the implementation of the salvific agenda.

The violent Marxist ideology which has colonized Eastern Europe in the form of the communist totalitarian regimes was a radical form of secularisation. It has made *atheisation*, the overt programmatic fight against religion, a priority of state policy. From kindergarten to university, from “factories” to the agricultural fields, the whole educational space and areas of work were invaded in the most concrete ways by the agents of atheisation. The process of atheisation, the fight against “religious obscurantism” was programmatically run in order to annihilate all the religions. What has happened in fact, paradoxically, was not the annihilation of traditional religion but the transformation of the Marxism itself in a secular religion. For a detailed assessment of the Romanian context, the excellent studies of Vladimir Tismaneanu are highly relevant. Looking into the details of the Marxist-Leninist Romanian ideology, he shows with great precision how communism became a religion bringing “the devil in history”.

Further directions for the study of religion and politics

Within liberal democracies, especially in the USA (Fowler et al., 2004) and Europe as well, one can find significant studies regarding the influence of religion and faith on the electoral processes, gender policies, medical ethics, public policies. Other areas of studies within the realm of religion and politics include: religion and political elites, religion and constitutionalism/legislative systems, religion and culture, religion and denominationalism, etc. Referenced works used as starting points in this respect can be Martin Marty and Scott Appleby series (1991, 1993, 1994).

An interesting line of analysis which was not sufficiently explored would be the study of the implications of forced atheisation in postcommunist spaces. What forms did secularisation take in such areas? Can one talk about secularisation in the same terms as in the West? What would be the similarities and the differences? Some theologians of the Eastern Orthodox Church argue that Western secularisation had no impact on the Eastern space (Stan, 2010). What are the consequences for what can be visibly called post-atheisation in these spaces? How does post-atheisation overlaps with western post-secularisation? What is the role of religion in the political life of these contexts? What form does the influence of religion take over the political systems in Eastern Europe? All such questions can become

research projects of their own, thus increasing the body of literature on the study of religion and politics in a rather under-researched area of the world.

Conclusions

The present work was intended to be a plea for promoting the holistic academic study of religious phenomena and the relationship with contemporary socio-politic realities. The study traced the main interpretative paradigms of the relationship between the two entities starting from the recognition that the dominant perspective on religion in the social sciences was the one offered by the theory of secularisation. The main presupposition with which this theory operated is that modernity, the result of the Enlightenment will inevitably bring the elimination of religion both from the public sphere and from the life of individual. In extreme ideological forms such as those dominated by Marxist ideologies in Eastern European spaces, religion was supposed to be programmatically eliminated from the life of the “new man” in Marxist Leninist jargon. Modern society, according to such theories, would be placed on an ascending trajectory oriented towards ever superior form of organization under the domination of the human rational (and moral) agent. The religious factor with all that it presupposes was supposed to be limited or even totally annihilated.

The secularisation theories are undeniably important. They correctly identified the natural tendencies, intrinsic to modernity of separating religion from politics, from the social life of modern societies. Within such societies based on liberal democratic systems, religion tends to be separated from politics and up to a point this is a reality. Theories of secularisation were and still are able to explain a series of behaviours and tendencies characteristic to our world. Up to a point such theory creates an optimal framework for the objective assessment of religious phenomena, based on rational and empirical methodologies. They offer for instance the right framework to interpret the political behavior of various religious groups within liberal democracies (voting tendencies, etc). As it was seen throughout this work, important sociologists of religion like Berger, Habermas, David Martin and others, belonged to this group, having major contributions to the articulation of the theories of secularisation and its relationship with contemporary society.

However, *secularism*, the ideology resulted from the various theories of secularisation, seems to be misleading. The realities of the end of the second millennium and the beginning of the new one, the failure of the political project of Marxist Leninism, the tragic event of 9/11, the recent rise of extremist Caliphate of Iran and Levant have forced and continue to force us to reconsider the role of religion in contemporary life. Secularism can neither explain nor understand the ongoing presence of religiosity in contemporary life. It cannot offer an explanation for the rising number of followers of extreme radical religious movements coming from educated middle class liberal democratic societies. Where does the attraction for radical fundamentalist movements come from for such groups? Religious practices are constitutive part of both human identity and social structures and therefore cannot be contained in the straight jacket imposed by secularism. Such perspectives are reductionist, naïve at least in their claim to be able to isolate the religious factors from its internal structures which are in fact defining elements of the human identity (both individual and social), regardless of the level of instrumental knowledge of technologisation.

Therefore, new interpretative paradigms of the relationship between religion and politics are necessary. As it was argued, the same authors who initially conceived the various forms of the theory of secularisation, shifted their views talking about de-secularisation, counter-secularisation, resurgent religion. Secularisation generates counter-secularisation which can turn into religious revolutions ranging from various forms of peaceful isolationism to extremely violent conflicts carried in the name of religion.

As it was also seen in this work, our era can be rightly called a “post-secular” era, a time when various actors, including religious ones, must be listened to and invited to participate in the dialogue needed for the consolidation of prosperous and peaceful cohabitation. All these are necessary if we are to avoid the “violent return of the repressed”. Inside such paradigms, religion is and must be taken into consideration and assessed on the basis of its own claims, not only from the perspectives imposed by the secularized interpretive paradigm.

Thus the central argument of the present work was that the academic study of the complicated relationship between religion and contemporary social political life is first of all necessary and secondly, it must be a holistic exercise. It must be therefore freed from the limitations imposed by the

paradigms dominated by the theories of secularisation and its secularist ideology and open towards an understanding of religious phenomena as they are understood and presented not only from outside but from the inside as well. The voices of those who cannot or those who are not prepared to renounce their own faith and their religious practices should be heard. This does not at all mean to renounce objectivity or to accept radical claims. It simply means that scholars should take more into account their aims and their aspirations. This may, indeed, add “indeterminacy to our models of history ... everything becoming messier” but certainly “truer to the world in which we live” (Wuthnow, 1991, p.14). It is the painful way of achieving unity through inclusion rather than the easy way of achieving it through exclusion (Venturi).

A holistic hermeneutic of the relationship between religion and politics should create a real space for significant dialogue run from equal epistemic positioning of social scientists, moral and political philosophers and theologians as well. This is a necessary pre-condition, if what is intended is a constructive dialogue capable of generating coherent policies so much needed for peaceful cohabitation in a free world.

The study of religion and politics, as it was argued here, must then go beyond the assessments circumscribed by the relationship between the state/ethnicity and religion/denomination. In the era of globalization, the religious phenomena cannot be contained within spaces defined by states, politics or denominations. The claim to universality characteristic to all major religions coupled with the main features of globalization places the interaction between religion and politics at a global level. The analysis of such dynamics must take into account these elements if it is intended to have a correct grasp of the fact and to be able to make predictions as accurate as possible.

Finally, the approach of the study of the interaction between religion and politics must take into account, the radical changes that strong ideologies can go through. As it has been seen with Marxism which started as a political ideology, it paradoxically turned into a secular religion, (pseudo-religion), more dogmatic and more violent than any form of traditional religious fundamentalism.

Having seen some main characteristics of the holistic approach, by way of closing it is worth mentioning that it is still much to be done in this area of

study. As mentioned in this work, there is a felt need for the study of religion and politics in postcommunist spaces. There is still no clear articulation of the impact of secularisation and there is no talk about what post-atheistic, post-secularist elements can be identified in the beliefs and the behavior of East European, former communist nations. There are no in-depth studies of such topics as the influence various religious groups have on drafting of legislation constitutionalism, voting patterns, and so on. All such questions represent the challenge for future research and an invitation for a constructive dialogue between social scientists, moral and political philosophers and theologians, coming from post-atheistic/pots-totalitarian societies.

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