

RELIGION IS A SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

*Maria Serafimova**

Religious representations are collective representations, which express collective realities. The rites are a manner of acting which take rise in the midst of the assembled groups which are destined to excite, maintain or recreate certain mental states in these groups. Collective representations are a result of an immense cooperation, which stretches out not only into space but into time as well. To make them, a multitude of minds have associated, united and combined their ideas and sentiments. For them, many generations have accumulated their experience and knowledge.

The dichotomy between the sacred and the profane

According to Emil Durkheim, the human conscience regards the sacred and the profane as two different kinds, two worlds that have nothing in common. The passage of things from the one world to the other is possible only via 'true metamorphosis'.

For all their diversity, however, Durkheim argued that all these forms are reducible into two fundamental interdictions: *the religious life and the profane life cannot coexist in the same place, and they cannot coexist in the same unit of time.*

Sacred places function as fixed reference points in the secular world. They offer a potential avenue for bridging the gap between the secular and the spiritual. The labyrinth of human relations with the sacred is incredibly complex and impassable. Sacred places connect very different and important realities.

The sacred is ambivalently perceived as a blessing and a curse at the same time, as 'mighty' and fascinating, but on the other hand, as vulnerable to the attacks of the worldly. It exists in a separate space and time and is enveloped in rituals. Ceremonies open the gates to the world of gods.

Law, morals, even scientific thought itself, he observed, were born of religion, long remained confounded with it, and are still somewhat imbued with its spirit. It is simply inconceivable, therefore, those religions, which have held so considerable a place in history, and to which, in all times, men have to receive the energy which they must have to live, should be made up of a tissue of illusions.

What sort of science is it, Durkheim asked, whose principle discovery is that the subject of which it treats does not exist?

* Ph.D., Associate Professor, Chair of Sociology, South-West University 'Neofit Rilski'; e-mail: maria_serafimova@hotmail.com .



In *The Sacred and Profane*, Mircea Eliade begins his discussion of sacred place as it relates to the idea of the 'holy' in Rudolph Otto's work *The Holy*. He agrees with Otto that the sacred is not some abstraction that has very little to do with our everyday lives.

The Holy One, that is, the infinite presence of the 'wholly other,' encounters the finite human with the sacred and thus brings transcendence to the human world.

In his chapter on *Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred*, Eliade presents the three building blocks of every sacred place: disruption, orientation, and communication. These are categories not only because they are important for understanding sacred place. Sacred place then, in Eliade's thinking, 'breaks upon' a profane world - a world in which there is no difference. As opposed to so much of modern or new age thinking, a sacred place is a place of disruption and difference.

Profane space or chaotic space would be a world where there are no differences, where place is the same in that one place and is no more significant than another. Creation without difference would be a creation without sacred place. The whole world then would be profane space which, of course, is a world of chaos, confusion, and relativity.

Another way of saying this is that in our postmodern culture individuals look to themselves in order to orient their worlds. Yet we need more than ourselves to bring meaning to our worlds. Nevertheless, the sacred in its' classical form seems to be losing ground. 'What are your sacred places?' One says everything - from being alone in a car, to spending time in the desert, a barn, or a field, to a particular table in a coffee shop.

No doubt, sacred space exists for the primary purpose of placing us in communion with the sacred world. Because we live in a secular world, because we no longer live in the garden, we experience great alienation, and it is here that sacred place offers the potential avenue to bridge the gap between the secular and the sacred. Eliade reminds us that we yearn for sacred place so we can find a fixed point in an otherwise relative world.

Religion, for Durkheim, is not 'imaginary,' although he does strip it of what many believers find essential. Religion is very real, because it is an expression of society itself, and indeed, there is no society that does not have religion.

People perceive as individuals a force greater than themselves, which is social life, and give that perception a supernatural face. Humans then express themselves religiously in groups, which for Durkheim makes the symbolic power greater.

In fact, Durkheim defines society by its symbolic boundaries: it is the sharing of a common definition of the sacred and the profane, of similar rules of conducts and a common compliance to rituals and interdictions that defines the internal bonds

within a community. He posits that the boundaries of the group coincide with those delimitating the sacred from the profane.

The great French sociologist argued that religion is eminently social, providing a source of solidarity and social control. Each institution, such as the corporation, marriage, the family, non-profit organizations, and political offices, is separate and different.

However, all institutions are subordinate to the rule of law, which keeps them functioning in harmony. Law serves as an indicator of social solidarity and, specifically, of the passage from mechanical to organic solidarity, which can be observed in the evolution of law from a repressive to a restitutive system. Durkheim's concept of justice is defined and explored in the context of his quest for establishing a 'science of moral facts'. Justice is taken as being the basis of moral order in modern societies.

Religious practices, and even the most intimate religious acts, have social meaning and social context. Religious activity helps make individuals aware of their community, enables them to symbolically express the social order and gain an objective awareness of society.

Religion could help to legitimate the purposes and actions of the society, strengthen the determination of the people, help build up the sense of identity. A number of researchers distinguish ritual on one hand from ceremony and etiquette on the other, on the basis of whether these are accompanied by, respectively, sacral or secular symbols.

The 'good' side of differences

Tradition typically requires a collective legitimizing of a memory of a past that may or may not have really existed. Tradition and imagination create and constitute imagined dynamics that can embrace any object. In the traditional and the modern there are two ideal-typical poles, each human community, each human formation can be defined with reference to those two ideal poles.

The present day Bulgarian society is situated somewhere inbetween. In all cases, it is a mixture combining the pole of traditionalism, defined by continuity with the past, and the pole of modernity, defined by change, novelty and innovation.

The contemporary Bulgarian society has been formed by communist atheism and is in a transition from totalitarianism to democracy. Atheism as an extreme form of secular monopolism has significantly influenced the attitude that Bulgarian society has towards religion. The influence and social prestige of religious institutions is diminishing.

A process of alienation of politics from the moral laws can be observed. The claims



that individual religious values of a person differ from the values of society allow every norm to be broken and render politics into something very different from human life, regarded as a whole. This gives freedom to people with power to intensify their 'ungodly' activities, which 'actually benefit the society'.

During the times of totalitarian rule in the Bulgarian society, the ruling circles could be reproached for being insincere and hypocritical, concerning religious issues. It is also stated that the Orthodox religion in Bulgaria has a domineering role which is guaranteed by the Constitution, but which is not democratic. The government tried to explain this situation by the fact that other parts of the Constitution explicitly guarantee freedom of religion and equality of all citizens, regardless of whether they are believers or atheists. Statistical data from the official census campaigns during the decades shows religious affiliation of the population in the times of different censuses¹.

1. Distribution of the population by religion and years of census

Religious denomination	1920	1926	1934	1946	1992	2001	2011
Number							
Total	4846971	5478741	6077939	7029349	8487317	7928901	7 364570
Eastern-Orthodox	4062097	4569074	5128890	5967992	7274592	6552 751	4 374135
Muslim	690734	789296	821298	938418	1110295	966978	577139
Catholic	34072	40347	45704	-	53074	43811	48945
Protestant	5617	6735	8371	-	21878	42 308	64476
Judaic	43232	46431	48398	43335	2580	653	706
Armenian-Gregorian	10848	25402	23476	-	9672	6500	1715
Other or undeclared	371	1456	1802	79604	15226	7784	281287
Undefined	-	-	-	-	-	308116	409898 ¹
Not shown	-	-	-	-	-	-	1 606 269
Structure - %							
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Eastern-Orthodox	83.8	83.4	84.4	84.9	85.7	82.6	59.4
Muslim	14.3	14.4	13.5	13.3	13.1	12.2	7.8
Catholic	0.7	0.7	0.8	-	0.6	0.6	0.7
Protestant	0.1	0.1	0.1	-	0.3	0.5	0.9
Judaic	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Armenian-Gregorian	0.2	0.5	0.4	-	0.1	0.1	0.0
Other or undeclared	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.1	0.2	0.1	3.8
Undefined	-	-	-	-	-	3.9	5.6
Not shown	-	-	-	-	-	-	21.8

Source: NSI, Census 2011.

¹ The text commented shares, calculated only for persons who selfdefined.

According to a February 2011 study by the country's National Statistical Institute, approximately 76 % of citizens are Orthodox Christians and approximately 10.1 % are Muslims, while the remainder includes Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Gregorian-Armenian Christians, Uniate Catholics, and others. A total of 106 denominations are registered officially with the State.

There is no Bulgarian and no Turkish religion. Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism each have several denominations, which do not coincide with ethnic boundaries. There could be people, nation with several religions, and in this sense Bulgaria is a fine example. The capital of Bulgaria, Sofia, is well known as 'the Triangle of Religious Tolerance' because of the existence of the St. Nedelya Church, the Banya Bashi Masjid and Sofia Synagogue within a distance of few meters from one another. The Bulgarian constitution gives full support to freedom of religion and people are not restricted to adopt any particular religion. Such a positive development is even more significant, having in mind the extremely grave economic and social situation in the country. Bulgarian pluralism can be defined as a positive one.

2. Distribution of the population by religious and ethnic group as of 1.02.2011

Ethnos	Total	Are you religious?			
		Yes	No	Non self-defined	Not shown
Total	7364570	3476718	1262531	1012285	1613036
Bulgarian	5664624	2925782	1111111	829935	797796
Turkish	588318	382041	70983	66238	69056
Roma	325343	111976	65974	61757	85636
Armenian	6552	4641	679	684	548
Jewish	1162	308	576	213	65
Wallachia	3684	2270	494	580	340
Karakachan	2556	2066	146	154	190
Russian	9978	5666	1881	1518	913
Greek	1379	961	146	170	102
Macedonian	1654	1219	149	149	137
Romanian	891	534	100	113	144
Ukrainian	1789	1139	253	245	152
Other	19659	12476	2547	2700	1936
Non self define	53391	5167	2631	44465	1128
Not shown	683590	20472	4861	3364	654893

Source: NSI, Census 2011.



All this means that representatives of creeds, other than Orthodox Christianity are in fact in a state of isolation from their religious environment and are dependent to a great extent on the tolerance of the Orthodox Christians.

3. Distribution of the population by major religious faiths and years as of 1.02.2011

Creed	Total	Are you religious?			
		Yes	No	Non self-defined	Not shown
Total	7364570	3476718	1262531	1012285	1613036
East orthodox	4374135	2832969	784813	590510	165843
Catholic	48945	38435	5720	3289	1501
Protestants	64476	57544	1858	4261	813
Muslim sunny	546004	447759	44637	46404	7204
Muslim shia	27407	20547	3575	2722	563
Muslims	3728	3080	359	222	67
Armenian apostolic orthodox	1715	1408	84	196	27
Israelite/Judaic	706	299	277	113	17
Other	9023	5868	1291	1689	175
None	272264	5512	252530	13297	925
Non self define	409898	19760	70234	318395	1509
Not shown	1606269	43537	97153	31187	1434392

Source: NSI, Census 2011.

In the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance proclaimed and signed by the Member States of UNESCO on 16 November 1995 there is an expression stating that education is the most effective means of preventing intolerance. The first step in tolerance education is to teach young people what their shared rights and freedoms are, should be respected, and promote the will to protect those of others.

It is essential for international harmony that individuals, communities and nations accept and respect the multicultural character of the human family. Without tolerance, there can be no peace, and without peace, there can be no development or democracy.

Tolerance is harmony in difference, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of world's cultures, forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. It is not only a moral duty; it is also a political and legal requirement.²

It is necessary to promote systematic and rational tolerance teaching methods that will address the cultural, social, economic, political and religious sources of intolerance.

² Declaration of Principles on Tolerance, Proclaimed and signed by the Member States of UNESCO on 16 November 1995.

Since every part of the world is characterized by diversity, escalating intolerance and strife potentially menaces every region. It is not confined to any country, but is a global threat.

Tolerance is necessary between individuals and at family and community levels. Tolerance promotion and the shaping of attitudes of openness, mutual listening and solidarity should take place in schools and universities and through non-formal education, at home and in the workplace.

The schematic phrase concealing the portrait of the modern Bulgarian is that all Bulgarians have always stressed hospitality and tolerance as their traditional virtues. But in fact Bulgarians are still under influence of the past when Bulgaria was 'closed for visitors' and isolated.

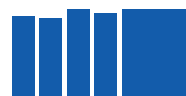
They are comparatively well balanced and manifest tolerance to foreigners as long as they do not knock on their doors. To be perfectly honest, we suffer not so much from xenophobia as from poverty, sociologists in Sofia claim. That is why Bulgaria is opened to the rich and closed to poor citizens, as it hopes to gain profit from the former and is afraid that it will have to take care of the latter.

Over the last twenty years, Bulgarians are becoming increasingly alienated, especially in big cities. This is a natural process, which intensifies during periods of crisis. In such time, everyone is mainly trying to survive and protect their family. During these years the political class and parliamentary forces were changed with strong bands from left to right and vice versa. In practice, there is no political class in Bulgaria. That is probably why Bulgarians do not trust institutions.

The social and religious situation, the attitude of people towards faith and Church and the overcoming of basic prejudices should be taken into account. All these require objective analysis of the conditions, in which the contemporary Bulgarian lives.

Tensions between the groups sometimes run high. All that leads to disturbance of spirits, not only inside the clergy, but also among the entire Bulgarian society. The crisis is periodically reflected in the media, and every side in the conflict is presented. The several cases last year obviously demonstrated that tolerance between different religions in Bulgaria is largely artificial.

This year Bulgaria's Holy Synod appealed to all Orthodox Christians to give an answer to two of the non-mandatory questions from the ongoing Census in order to declare their adherence to the Orthodox Church. In a statement sent to the media on Tuesday, the Holy Synod asked Bulgarians to provide an answer to the question - *Are You Religious* with *Yes* and - *What is Your Religion* with *Eastern Orthodox* because these



questions are of prime importance for the *national, religious and cultural identity of the Bulgarian nation*.

That was the first direct intervention of an official institution in the *Census*. Political parties based on ethnic and religious principles and nationalists have restrained from such advice.

Though undergoing a transition from totalitarianism to democracy, the contemporary Bulgarian society has been formed by the atheism inculcated in the past.

It was previously known that, in terms of religiosity and interest in the sacred, Bulgarians fall behind most nations of Western and even Eastern Europe. From 1944 to 1989, atheism played the role of state religion and the Churches were systematically persecuted. Several generations were deeply influenced by an atheistic paradigm of education and the repudiation of any kind of religiosity.

People in the country started respecting religious beliefs only sixteen years ago. It would certainly take a lot of time and efforts to fill the spiritual vacuum created in their souls by the aggressive atheistic propaganda. Political and ideological suggestions are the main reason for the suspicious attitude of the average Bulgarian towards religious education.

A situation of searching for a meaning

For the average Bulgarian, faith has little importance regarding the general development of the country. The roles of faith and religion in Bulgaria are so secondary, even for Eastern Europe. They can influence neither the models for public conduct, nor the personal morality of citizens.

On the one hand, a growing need was affirmed among the young. There is a need for answers to the fundamental questions, for something more spiritual, for some kind of an explanatory system. On the other hand, they are clearly repulsed by the confrontation in the BOC. This and the mercantile intentions of some representatives of the clergy act have a negative impact on young people's general attitude towards religion.

Unfortunately, young people turn to religion only when something bad happens to them, if they suffer, or have a dilemma that excites them.

The spiritual vacuum, anomie and uncertainty has generated a situation of searching for a meaning.

Popular culture, pseudo-folklore music and all the new tendencies of modern day life

have a dominant role in a young person's view of life. Things like morality, faith or knowledge of the Bible seem like secondary problems.

The effect of modern mass culture in all of its forms serves as an addition to the traditionally neglectful attitude of Bulgarians towards the faith. The invading secularism of the West mingles itself with the atheistic heritage of the Communist era.

The direct consequence of this interaction is an even deeper alienation from the values of religion. In terms of religiosity and interest in the sacred Bulgarians fall behind most Western nations and even those of Eastern Europe.

The common person has the need to light a candle, pray to God, battle the feeling of loneliness and regain the belief in himself. It is unimportant whether this is performed in a big church, which is in one of the 'attractive centers' of a city or in the chapel of a small village.

Most of Bulgarians do not regard religion as a source of moral support. The majority of the population does not believe that religion can really help in their private life. Things like morality, faith or knowing the Bible seem like secondary problems.

In the years of democracy Bulgarian families, politics, the clergy and the laity have been consumed by their own egocentric passions and have forgotten that young people have the need to share and seek solution for their problems.

There seems to be a process of reversion from the sacred - to the modern sacred. In their efforts to note at the same time the loss of influence that the institutional religions suffer, and the dispersions of the religious symbols in modern societies, a lot of researchers use the term 'sacred'.

The reversion to traditional system of religious ceremonies and holidays is characteristic for the Bulgarian society. This fulfills people's need for collective co-experience, spiritual and social integration.

Many instances can be adduced, of the reviving of traditions, which in new conditions have a purely cultural meaning and function as forms of solidarity. By its' origins and meaning this is a religious ritual, but it assumes a worldly function.

The ritual of sanctification is performed often when a new building, a school or an office is being consecrated. By its' origins and meaning this is a religious ritual, but it assumes a worldly function. The Orthodox Church and other churches in Bulgaria experienced a revival.

Church rituals such as baptisms and church weddings attracted renewed interest,



and traditional church holidays were more widely observed. Christmas under the new regime, was widely celebrated and greatly promoted in the mass media. The spontaneous resurrection of traditional religions in a society being in a transition and crisis can be easily noticed.

The churches and mosques that were scarcely visited by older people before the democratic shift are visited by a greater number of believers, including young people. In some settlements, money is raised to rebuild temples and build new ones.

Political pluralism, freedom of speech and religion and other basic features of democracy seem to be realizable. 'A new religious sensibility' is added to it. We see unexpected connections and views, new mixed types, in which the boundary of the sacred, in Durkheim's terms, expands.

An analogy naturally comes to mind with the reasoning of Jean Fourastie in his book entitled *What I believe in?* In general, Fourastie uses very original means in his argumentation: a new synthesis between emotions and rationality, belief and knowledge that he hopes will serve to revive the spiritual side of modern society. There is a rather interesting feature in the typological divisions of people in modern societies. According to the typology offered by Fourastie, human types in a given society are divided into two types. Attala is the young heroine of Chateaubriand's famous novel. Citroen is the no less-famous automobile constructor. The first of these two types embodies the sentimental, affective, intuitive faculties and needs, while the latter signifies the rational, technical, scientific needs. Of course, this distinction is a very rough one. It only points to the fact that people and human groups are different, that there is polarity among them.

Works Cited

- Bell, D.**, (1991), *The Winding passage*, Trans. Publishers.
- Berger, P.**, (1969), *The Sacred Canopy*, Garden Sity.
- Crisp, Tony.** Religion and Dreams. *Dream hawk*. <http://www.dreamhawk.com/d-relig.htm>. (accessed April 17, 2004).
- Durkheim, E.**, (1893), *The Division of Labor in Society*.
- Durkheim, E.**, (1895), *Rules of Sociological Method*.
- Durkheim, E.**, (1897), *Suicide*.
- Durkheim, E.**, (1912), *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.
- Durkheim, E.** (1914a), *The Dualism of Human Nature*.
- Durkheim, E.** (1914/1925), *Pragmatism and Sociology*.

Eliade, M., (1961), *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (trans. Willard R. Trask), Harper Torchbooks, New York. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mircea_Eliade

Fourastie, Jean, (1981), *Ce que je crois*, Gallimard, Paris.

Hervieu-Leger, D., (1993), *La Religion pour mémoire*, P., LES ED. DU CERF.

Wright Mills, Dj., (1959), *The Sociological Imagination*, N.Y.: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS.

[http://www/ General Directories and Resources; The Field of Religion...What is Religion?.html](http://www/GeneralDirectoriesandResources/TheFieldofReligion...WhatisReligion?.html)



РЕЛИГИЯТА - ОПОРА НА СОЦИАЛНАТА СОЛИДАРНОСТ

*Мария Серафимова**

РЕЗЮМЕ Богата база от данни, както и резултатите от различни социологически изследвания, дават възможност за сравнителен анализ и разбиране на многоцветната „картина“ на религиозността в днешните общества. Възможни са отговори на въпросите, свързани с ролята на религията във всекидневния живот на обикновените хора, в реалните им дейности, с влиянието на религиозните общности, в които живеят. Тази „картина“ постоянно се допълва. Отнася се до специфичен тип изследователска перспектива, насочена към търсене отвъд емпиричното, защото дадени процеси невинаги биха могли да бъдат разрешени категорично и окончателно. Поради това напълно естествено е, според мен, социолозите да подхождат към своите обекти на изследване освен със средствата и инструментариума на точните науки и чрез силата на своята своеобразна социологическа чувствителност.

*Д-р, доцент в катедра „Социология“ в Югозападния университет „Неофит Рилски“; e-mail: maria_serafimova@hotmail.com .

РЕЛИГИЯ - ПОДДЕРЖКА СОЦИАЛЬНОЙ СОЛИДАРНОСТИ

*Мария Серафимова**

РЕЗЮМЕ Богатая база данных, как и результаты различных социологических исследований предоставляют возможность для сопоставительного анализа и понимания многоцветной „картины” религиозности в современных обществах. Становятся возможными ответы на вопросы, связанные с ролью религии в ежедневной жизни обыкновенных людей и их реальной деятельности, а также и с воздействием на религиозные общности, в которых они проживают. Эта „картина” постоянно дополняется. Это относится к специфическому типу исследовательской перспективы, направленной на поиск вне эмпирического, так как данные процессы не во всех случаях могли бы быть разрешенными категорическим образом и навсегда. Ввиду этого, вполне естественно, по мнению автора, является то, что социологи подходят к объектам своих исследований, не только со средствами и инструментарием точных наук, но и используя силу своей своеобразной социологической чувствительности.

*Д-р, доцент на кафедре Социологии, Югозападный Университет имени Неофита Рильского; e-mail: maria_serafimova@hotmail.com .