Basic principles for the scientific study of religion and culture

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Initially I would like to make reference to some reasons that urged me to look into the issue of principles, which should necessarily be followed in the scientific study of religion and culture, and record some of those. I consider that research in general, and the choice of specific research directions, as well as occupying oneself with research methodology, always carry some special meaning; they are not random. There is always a challenge the researcher aims to answer. For this, I saw fit to mention the reasons that led me to the recording of the principles mentioned below. It is possible that they could be further elaborated and specialized. Moreover, one could claim that those are methodological principles applicable to research in the social field in general.

First, the social changes that occurred in the '90s overturned the global bipolarity and led to the transformation of the socio-political establishment in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, they contributed to various worldwide changes and developments in the economic, political and cultural field. The new social and political situation that was created gave rise on the one hand to the upgrading of the role of religious factor at the global level and on the other to the appearance of various claims on the part of religious institutions. Through these claims they seek to improve their position and role in the social field and recover part of the authority they lost in the frame of modern societies. These claims are occasionally uttered either directly or, as it is usual, indirectly, especially in Europe and Northern America. This happens because religious institutions always consider that they still have the position and authority they used to have, or thought they had in the past, and therefore seek to regain a part of the authority they lost.

Towards the same direction, i.e. the promotion of religious institutions’ claims, through the construction of “language games” as L. Wittgenstein would say, turn those who seek either to access religious institutions or serve their own purposes, considering that in this way they will definitely be accepted by them. To this category
belong mainly intellectuals who function as “organic” intellectuals of religious institutions who primarily aim at promoting their pursuits.

Yet in some cases there appears a broader and emphasized use of religion, as well as of local traditional culture, either positive or negative. As to this, the role of mass media is catalytic. At times, they present religious events in an exaggerated manner, as they are after the spectacle and the creation of impressions, paying little attention to whether they present reality or simply create a virtual reality.

At this point, in order to avoid misinterpretations, we should point out the difference between, on the one hand, the issue of respect of the right to be religious as well as the obligation of the state to safeguard the human right to freely take one’s position towards religion - no matter what that is, and on the other, the issue of religious institutions’ claims to interfere in public life and aim to promote religious pursuits.

Second, the socio-political changes, which were mentioned above, facilitated the migration or movement of a big number of people from various places around the world towards Europe. Many of those are carriers of a different culture and a mentality of a different relationship with religion. This change causes differentiations within Europe and provokes discussions as well as research on issues regarding the relationship between religion and society and culture.

Third, work at university should indispensably be expressed through the development of science, whose manifestation is research that leads to the production of knowledge, which in its turn is disseminated in the form of education. But this is not self-evident to all, i.e. the development of science and research with a view to producing knowledge. On the contrary, they prefer to carry out ideological work aiming either at personal benefit or at serving the purposes of the groups they are members of. Regardless, though, of what all those understand, it is essential to study scientifically the role of religion within society for social reasons. Science has an obligation towards society to work in a strictly critical way and provide it with information, among others, about the role of religion. If this task is not carried out by those who occupy themselves with the study of religion, then others will try to take over their position. Gaps in research and knowledge are not justified by society. If a void is left, others will rush to fill it in. This is absolutely sure, as there is an
increasing number of scientists but scarcity of financial resources and research topics.  

Fourth, the experience that I have acquired over the period of three decades urges me to try and express it, by addressing the questions that were raised over these years. In fact, it is a kind of reflection on the whole work that I have performed either on my own or in collaboration with other colleagues. What I have come to realize is that science cannot be targeted. Scientific research is or should be beyond any other purposes except its own. It should be non-evaluative, as M. Weber thoroughly developed and maintained.  

After those introductory comments, I would like to mention some basic, in my opinion, principles that should be taken seriously into consideration during the realization of scientific research of religion and culture. This is a brief report; it is not exhaustive, therefore one could add other principles as well.

1. One cannot study religion or culture scientifically through a “confessional” and “culturalistic” perspective and restriction. Conversely, one has the obligation, as is the case with the study of all social phenomena, to be detached from the object of study, not seek to use the object of study for serving other purposes, namely one should act as a third party, as an observer. Any emotional, confessional, ideological, political or other commitment on the part of the researcher, does not function positively but on the contrary leads to a wrong direction; it obstructs objectivity and the ability to delve into the topic not only while carrying out research but also while recording and interpreting the relevant data. This is particularly the case when one examines the relations between religion and society, its role, or its potential role, within society and so on. This kind of research is especially useful in places where ideological perceptions on the role of religion in general, or Orthodoxy in particular, are developing within society.

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1 Recent Greek bibliography shows that if any field connected with religion is left unexplored, by people involved with the study of religion, it becomes very quickly occupied by historians, philosophers, political scientists etc.
3 The term “culturalism” expresses any attempt to overemphasize and promote culture at the expense of social, economic and political dimension. See Kulturalismus. In: Werner Fuchs-Heinritz u. a. (Hrsg.): Lexikon zur Soziologie, Opladen: Westdt. Verlag, 1994, p. 381.
2. One may consider that theories -economic, social, philosophical, political, religious and so on- especially old ones, apply or may apply within the social and cultural frame they were shaped. They may express the level of scientific research at that point but they may as well have been formulated to serve specific ideological, political or other purposes. Therefore, researchers may refer to older theories within the frame of research history, but they are not justified to use them as “authority” in order to analyze modern reality or tackle its problems. The practice of considering old theories and perceptions as “authority” leads to dogmatism and nourishes ideologies or rather obsessions. Instead, researchers should overcome those in their effort to analyze and record the data of the time whose religion or culture they study. It seems a little funny to live in an era that challenges authority and, at the same time, have those, who appear to contest authority in general, use old theories or perceptions as a means of evaluation of reality actually recognizing those theories as authority. Put very simply, they seem to argue that their authority is valid, but not the authority used by anybody else. It is far more reasonable, though, to argue that all should be re-examined and rationally tested. With respect to any theory or perception that was created or formulated in the past one should not necessarily question its value at the time it was created. Nevertheless, the fact that it is not necessary to question its “value” at the time it was created does not automatically mean that it may be of particular value and may function as “authority” in our time.

One could mention here as an example the phenomenon of secularization and the ensuing theories. It is not mandatory for those who are involved with the study of religion to prove whether the theories that were formulated in the 60’s still apply and whether their assessment as to what was going to happen in the future came true. On the contrary, using as indicators certain data they should record modern reality, which differs from region to region. Literally, it sounds rather funny to argue that there is no secularization (in the sociological sense of the word) in modern Europe. The best evidence for secularization is what religious organizations maintain accusing the modern world that it «has distanced itself from God and religion», despite the fact that

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this “aphorism” does not express the real meaning of secularization. Yet secularization is not identified with the imposition of atheism, it means the gradual formulation of social conditions that result in the restriction of religious institutions’ influence on the social field.

3. The research and study of religion and culture is an “end in itself”. It cannot be a means to achieve other goals. Of course, this research, once completed, can then be used for other purposes. Every completed scientific work is free to use, provided it is not distorted, especially through selective use. The most important thing, though, is that one cannot claim to study religion scientifically while at the same time their research or work simply acts as a guise to promote other purposes. Serving other purposes leads to the deliberate distortion of research so that those purposes are served. The same goes for research and study of any social phenomenon, especially for the study of social problems. It should be particularly noted here that one distances oneself completely from the field of science when science is used as a vehicle for the promotion of other purposes, which include serving ideology or ideological objectives of religious groups and institutions, as well as political formations and groups. Ideology, which as Harold Bloom remarks is the death of thought and human being, hinders researchers from seeing reality objectively. They see it through the lens that imposes on them the pursuit of realizing the objectives of the organization they serve. But this sidesteps both reason, a basic aspect of science, and a key objective that science has or should have, i.e. the liberation of human being from myths.

I will give an example to illustrate this aspect. I studied some time ago, the article of an economist who, as it appears from the way he worked, had the hidden ideological goal to support that the Greek labour market is characterized by discrimination based on religion. His article was in fact published in an English-speaking sociological journal. Here follows the story of the article. As part of his research, the author himself sent letters with enclosed CVs of “hypothetical people” to

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5 A typical example is the introduction of “Religious Studies” at various Universities in the U.S. that came to replace the theological studies that were confessional. The apparent goal was to upgrade the curriculum and provide more scientific studies from universities belonging to religious institutions. But considering their programmes one can easily see that under the heading “Religion” or “Religious Studies” there are clearly confessional theological studies.

6 See the interview of Harold Bloom in the greek newspaper “To Vima” 25-9-2011 p. 16.

several companies that had posted job vacancies in the daily press. In those CVs there was mention of candidates’ “hobbies”: a group of candidates stated that they were members of a cinema club, another, members of a Pentecostal association and a third one members of a Jehovah Witness association. Then he mentions that he immediately received responses to the first group, whereas the responses for the second and the third ones were either delayed or never actually came. The processing of this data led to the conclusion that the Greek labour market is characterized by discrimination on religious grounds, meaning that the “Orthodox” are favoured at the expense of people who belong to other religious communities. The good data processing though, does not automatically make the research objective. Good research depends on the quality and accuracy of data, which relies on the combination of questions that have been posed and ways that data was collected. The output is dependent on the input that was given for processing. The data processing method does not have a “colour”, but the data itself can have a “colour”. Therefore, the use of incorrect or false or forged for various reasons data leads to analogous results after its processing.

This particular research is wrong altogether for the following reasons: Research that is carried out through the use of forged letters and CVs, that do not belong to real people, raise serious issues of scientific deontology. In reality, the data was collected in a wrong way, therefore what was processed does not correspond to real information. If one declares, as is the case with the first group, that he is a “member of a cinema club”, this does not automatically mean that he is a “Christian Orthodox”. There is no causal relationship between these two attributes. Secondly, the labour market does not necessitate in any case the declaration of religious identity by those seeking employment. Thirdly, the researcher did not behave in the same way as a job seeker who acts on the basis of a special psychology. This means that real unemployed people, who seek employment, take special care as to what to

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8 For epistemological aspects regarding the empirical research of religion see Chr. Tsironis. “Concept-centric or Method-centric research? On paradigm war in the interdisciplinary study/research of religion”. In: Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion, vol. 3 (2012).

9 The term “Christian Orthodox” is in inverted commas because the writer of the article in note number 7 used it inaccurately.

10 According to the Directive 2000/78/EC of the European Council for “the equal treatment in employment and occupation” no discriminations are allowed in the labour market on the basis of religion or convictions. For this reason, no such data is required on the part of job seekers. Churches and religious bodies or communities are the only exception to this rule as those are justified to have special confessional requirements on the part of the candidates. In addition, religious freedom is consolidated by the Greek Constitution 1975/1986/2001/2008 (Article 13, par. 1).
mention in their CV; they avoid giving any redundant details about themselves. Fourthly, the labour market is suspicious of those who afford strong religious convictions and have the tendency to declare this aspect of their personality, even though this is not necessary; so this has nothing to do with the fact that they mentioned their Pentecostal or Jehovah Witness identity. Let alone that the unsolicited declaration of one’s religious identity might raise suspicions that this person is a fanatic. This is considered to be negative regarding the individual’s team spirit and cooperation skills. What is most important though, is that a proper CV should not include personal data of this kind. Hobbies and religious beliefs are totally different things. Indeed, in the U.S.A., labour market advisors recommend that in a job application the candidate should not make mention of any personal data except the strictly professional qualifications which should be written in a way that they could be easily verified by a computer programme.

In this sense, if a researcher knows beforehand where his research should lead, i.e. if he knows the outcome in advance, then this research serves other purposes and ideological aims. The good processing of “manipulated” data, as is the case above, does not make valid the research outcome. The only exception to this is when someone has already carried out a lot of research programmes and knows, judging from experience, their probable outcome, then he may write an overview article that actually summarizes conclusions reached in previous research. In the aforementioned example though, the researcher had in mind to “prove” that in Greece the “Christian Orthodox” are favoured and that there are religious discriminations against adherents of certain religions. He probably wanted to serve other ideological and political purposes or he just wanted to appear to be doing interesting research based on good data processing. But this does not relieve him from setting a hidden goal to serve other purposes, and therefore not carrying out proper research of either religion or society.

4. Those who are scientifically involved with the study of religion and culture, as well as those who study society, have the obligation to choose what their research serves: human freedom or the aspirations and pursuits of institutional bodies, whether religious or political or of any other kind. This dilemma is of vital importance because it determines the way research is carried out and/or the way data is recorded and presented. The necessity to choose between the human being and institutions does not necessarily mean that institutions are not indispensable. Simply put, institutions
should serve human needs and adapt to them, not subjugate people and their freedom to serve the aims and ambitions of religious institutions’ leaders or the institution itself in case it functions with relative autonomy, as is the case with the function of religious institutions in modern secular society. The same may happen, without actual awareness, when serving missionary purposes or institutional bodies’ claims. In recent years, the debate on the private and public domain in relation to religion and its function within the public sphere, imply that those who support the aims of religious institutions associate its position with the demand for obligatoriness. As it is widely known, in the developed countries, religion functions freely in the public domain\textsuperscript{11}. Nevertheless, this free function cannot be combined with obligatoriness, as is pursued by religious bureaucracies and their proponents, because that would constitute an infringement on religious freedom, that is enshrined in international declarations\textsuperscript{12} and conventions and is also guaranteed by the Greek Constitution as an individual right in the article 13, par. 1. This is one of the non-revisable articles which therefore affords increased legal force.

5. Methodology and practice of “journalistic” nature should be avoided as they can by no means be characterized as scientific. This does not mean that journalism is a negative activity. On the contrary, when it functions properly it constitutes an essential social function that provides citizens with information. But journalistic methodology and the purpose of journalism as an art does not appertain to science. Especially when one works scientifically, one cannot focus on ephemeral events which they seek to present in such a way that they make an impression or just draw the attention and interest of readers. Even more so, it is not acceptable to describe events that occur at a given time but they are presented in such a generalized way that they colour the entire religion or society or culture they originate from. The key element in this case is that the presentation of specific facts does not justify the generalization and inferences for the whole. It should be noted here that this also applies to events that take place in the religious field which by no means should be presented to characterize the entire society. This might be justified in a traditional society where religion and society are closely connected. In contrast, it should be


\textsuperscript{12} See article 18 or 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.
emphasized that the use of such presentations is not at all justified in modern societies because religion or religions are not identified with the society in which they exist. Such distortions show ignorance of current reality and distancing from the scientific field and scientific methodology. The same applies, however, towards the opposite direction. Neither can one justify the creation of general theories and their use in ways that suggest they are applicable in any case and therefore use them to evaluate a particular case about which one carries out research. Generalizations as well as their use lead to erroneous estimates. Nevertheless, this may also happen when one’s intention is the creation of impressions and not the scientific research of reality. A psychoanalytic approach to research of this kind may reveal the underlying intentions of the researcher.\(^\text{13}\)

The case of the so-called “return of god”, a term that was particularly used in the ’90s, constitutes a characteristic example.\(^\text{14}\) It was a sensational journalistic way to create impressions. This term was used in several ways without stating, though, the essence of things. It was used to state that religion “returns”. But it was never absent so as to come back. Particularly in countries with an Islamic presence it was never absent. During the cold war many of these countries simply mentioned the Soviet Union in order to find their ideological underpinnings. After the collapse of Eastern Europe, however, they turned to religion as an ideological prop. But this has nothing to do with the way this case was presented through the use of the term “return of god”. On the other hand, in Europe no one can argue that things changed fundamentally. Only religious institutions and those who seek to serve them use this

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13 As an example one may mention here an article of V. Makridis about the Orthodox Church in Greece and particularly the cases of Vavili and Giosaki that came to light during Archbishop Christodoulos’ tenure of office and resulted in the conviction of the two men in a court of law. This article was a paper that was presented in a Congress about Orthodox Christianity and was published in a book entitled “The Orthodox Church in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century”. The author claims that he works sociologically; the book came out in 2010, after Archbishop Christodoulos had passed away (January 2008) and been succeeded by Archbishop Ieronymos (February 2008) whose attitude changed the situation of the Orthodox Church in Greece. In this sense, it is pointed out that it is not methodologically correct to be limited to the presentation of transient events, no matter how “provocative” those are, as they cannot be accepted to colour and depict reality as a whole. This method is neither scientific in general nor sociological in particular. It is simply “journalistic”. See this article: Vasilios Makrides, “Scandals, Secret Agents and Corruption: The Orthodox Church of Greece during the 2005 Crisis- Its Relation to the State and Modernisation”. In Victor Roudometof - Vasilios Makrides (eds), Orthodox Christianity in 21\textsuperscript{st} Century Greece. The Role of Religion in Culture, Ethnicity and Politics. Burlington: Ashgate, 2010, σ. 61-87.

case to convince that their claims in the public space should be accepted. Especially in Eastern Europe they seek exclusive spheres of influence thus causing conflict among various religious traditions. But acceptance of all those is equal to denial of the right to religious freedom as well as creation of additional problems in society.

6. The results of scientific study of religion, which refers to a specific place and time, cannot be generalized. This means that a case study cannot be used as a means (medium) to characterize the whole; neither can it be argued that what applies in a particular case, it may also apply in all other cases either synchronically, diachronically or inter-locally. Generalizations of this kind may occur as a result of clear choice on the part of the researcher or his way of writing. This practice leads to the big mistake of dehistoricization of data. However, it is quite a usual practice in the fields of social anthropology and theology.

7. Religion is a social and cultural factor that can neither be ignored nor overemphasized. It does not affect many aspects of life; neither does it play an important role in economy, shaping of social relationships etc. Yet many of those involved in the study of religion have the tendency to characterize everything as religious and think they may respond through religion to various issues that concern people and society, regardless of the fact that religion may not possibly exert any influence on those. This may be the case either with religious institutions, because it serves their purposes, or with those who think they improve their position in the scientific field by presenting a broader object of study, or even cover behind all this other pursuits, such as financing, recognition of their role by religious institutions etc.

But the same may happen with pursuing goals in the opposite direction by those who wish to present the negative dimension, and in order to provoke the community or create phobias they overemphasize the role of religious factor. What was mentioned above should be repeated here: the role of religion should be neither downgraded nor overemphasized simply because religious institutions seek to regain lost ground in the social sphere and any interference of religious absolutizations and understandings of social issues limits human freedom and responsibility, restores irrationalism in the social field and leads the social world to a state of stagnation from which it was very difficult to be liberated in the past. One might wonder whether it is possible for religious groups and organizations to express their views on issues that concern contemporary society. It goes without saying that it is. But this should be done through ethical and social analysis and the cultivation of social and ethical
perceptions and values, not through the use of “theological” and religious views, which make the direct approach to such issues difficult as they seek the interference of religious authority in the social field. Moreover, it is difficult to allow interference of ecclesiastical structures and hierarchies in modern society as this would mean severe social and cultural backwardness.

8. The issue that was just mentioned above is of particular importance in Europe. This is the part of the world that is characterized by secularization of both society and politics. This does not mean either absence or prohibition of religion from society; religion, simply, does not play the social role it used to play, neither to the degree that it used to play it in the past. It does not affect people’s life in all its manifestations. Life and relationships are determined by a variety of factors which might or might not include religion. In addition, religiosity does not necessarily entail a stable relation to any religious community since many people give their own content to their religious identity by making it a personal choice. Furthermore, in many cases there may be a merely cultural understanding of religion. For this reason many issues are described socially and not through the use of religious definitions.

Therefore, it is a very big mistake to attribute a religious character to cases that common practice does not do so. This constitutes a clear distortion of reality through promotion of ideological perceptions. A typical example of this is the way of self-definition of European countries. Since the countries in Europe are not defined in religious terms, as this is evidenced by the characterizations in their constitutional texts, it constitutes a distortion of their choice, and of European reality in general, when people “involved” with the study of religion speak of Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant countries etc. The same applies when groups are characterized according to their religious beliefs, while the common practice categorizes them according to their national background. Such a pursuit on the part of researchers constitutes a manipulation of reality that definitely interferes in society attributing to it characteristics that it does not have, or it used to have but it has now secularized them. This is even more so, when one does not only give certain religious titles to societies, but also insists on explaining their situation in terms of religion. This does not mean that one may ignore people who identify themselves as religious. But this does not either mean that one may justify the promotion of the role of religion in all aspects of their life. The extent to which their life is affected by religion is a case study and a
matter of specific assessment and not the result of arbitrary judgement that serves the perceptions and pursuits of those who appear to be researchers of religious data.

9. The views that are expressed by religious institutional bodies can be considered as data. In this case, the research objective may be the recording of trends and their particular understanding. However, research cannot be limited to reproducing stereotypes. It is essential that one examines where those come from and what purposes they serve.

10. The knowledge of the relationship between religion and society in the past, i.e. in the traditional pre-modern societies, when there was identification of religion and society, can in most cases relieve us from false aspirations, analyses and assessments. The most important fact is that human beings struggled to rid themselves of a mythified and static world, i.e. the traditional, which prevented on the one hand the development of human personality, freedom and social responsibility and on the other the realization of changes in society and politics. In modern reality, religion and society do not identify with one another in developed societies. This becomes obvious when various human actions and activities are shaped or justified by the use of social language, and not of religious one. But there are always claims to this effect put forward by religious institutions, aiming at expanding the “obligatory” interference of religion in the social field. Those involved with the study of religion are the ones who can more easily than anyone else see through these aims. But when it is they themselves who promote such pursuits and claims and uncritically wish to restore situations that have caused discomfort, then they are not only irresponsible but dangerous as well.

Moreover, when they study societies that have retained to a big extent traditional structures and perceptions, it is unacceptable to make the blunder to consider that society is the negative factor and religion the positive one that could help those societies exit from their problematic pre-modern situation! The paradoxical and incomprehensible fact is when these views are not supported only by people who live there but by “researchers” who live and work in the developed world; instead of thinking and researching based on scientific criteria they react through ideological syndromes of party accession or even emotionally. These two factors, society and religion, are interrelated in traditional societies. For this reason, developments and
changes may be realized through the change not only of society but religion, too, and more specifically through the release of society from the theocratic understanding and imposition. As this association is not easily understood by people who come from such traditional societies, there appear particular problems in the demands of immigrants whose mentality and symbolic world involve a connection between society and religion. So, seeking to ensure their right to religious freedom, they are not merely confined to their demands for proper exercise of their religious duties but also demand the acceptance of other claims that are based on the theocratic concepts of the traditional ideology of their societies.

The knowledge of what was mentioned above is essential in order to study the role of religions in tackling contemporary problems. Apart from the main issue of the relationship between religion and society, which is a basic presupposition for the understanding of contemporary reality, what should be taken into account is the fact that even if all religions are examined as a total, they still do not cover the whole of society. This is even more so, if one examines religions separately, one at a time, and also takes into consideration the dimension of cultural pluralism. All these necessitate a different assessment and evaluation of their ability, or not, to address contemporary problems of social life. In fact, they have no such ability despite what is argued by theological and ecclesiastical circles. The ecclesiastical bodies can, of course, under certain conditions, contribute to the cultivation of ethical values and to the tackling of problems through their auxiliary work. As it is obvious, though, there is a difference in meaning between “tackle” the problems of society and “contribute to their tackling”.

11. A basic obligation of all those involved with the study of religion is the study of the institutional formations and claims of religions. The institutional structure, but mainly the institutional or else authoritarian consciousness and mentality are among the few issues that can be found in all religions, no matter if they may externally appear in various forms. Moreover, one might be right to argue that religious institutions claim for more than anyone else but they are never willing to adapt to modern reality. They always live according to the perceptions of the past and

15 G. Kehrer’s view that the definite object of study in the field of religions is the study of their structural formation and their role in society always remains functional. See G. Kehrer, *Einführung in die Religionssoziologie*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988.
the role and position they used to have in people’s lives and society. Yet their claims contradict not only religious freedom but human freedom in general. This is the reason why it was stated above that those who are involved with the study of religion and traditional cultures should choose as their research criterion human freedom thus responding to the dilemma: human being or institutional claims.

12. Finally, it is necessary to make a brief reference to the issue of relationship between religion and politics, particularly to the problems caused by the use of “theological”, in the literal sense of the word, and religious concepts and perceptions in order to define actions in the social space and especially politics in contemporary reality.

Research on the role of religion in politics and society has always been one of the main goals of sociological analysis of religion. Nowadays this research acquires special importance for a variety of reasons. First, it is interesting in terms of historical knowledge, in the sense that this knowledge might protect us from making the same mistakes that prevailed in the past and reappear in contemporary reality turning into dangerous pursuits.

It is a fact that one of the most important achievements of modern man is the separation between politics and religion or, to put it simply, the demystification of politics. Yet there are various attempts to entangle the religious factor into politics. To a lesser extent this attempt is made by conservative politicians whose main objective is to arouse sympathy among people who are religious. To a greater extent there are attempts in this direction by both religious elites and organic intellectuals of religious institutions. Their aim is to involve religious language and religious perceptions in the field of politics and social problems. The generalized crisis that characterizes the world today facilitates any interventions. But the religious intervention in conjunction with the development of populist forms of political and non-rational movements creates an explosive atmosphere that makes the situation even more difficult. Additionally, despite the fact that the use of religious and theological categories in the field of politics does not offer any substantial help to addressing contemporary problems, it actually restores categories and dimensions in society and politics that are neither rational nor controlled by human beings. It is true that humans struggled to escape from this kind of situation and introduce into this space the secular description of reality coupled with the understanding of the fact that it is man who creates society,
culture and politics and he is therefore responsible for changing those dimensions to his benefit. Restoring categories and realities in the field of politics, society and culture that are uncontrollable by humans will lead to a tremendous setback. That is the reason why it is essential for research to pay particular attention to this dimension of the relationship between religion and politics and society. For sure, one will immediately be faced with reactions from religious elites that will argue that they are denied the right of expression and involvement in the social field. But this complaint is not valid because there is always the opportunity for anyone to get involved in the social field. This involvement, however, can be done in a rational way and if one wishes to speak about a change of perspective, then the use of deontology or more generally the use of terminology of an ethical character, that is targeted to humans not to metaphysical forces, is the best way to express one’s concerns about reality and make proposals for exiting from the difficult situations of contemporary reality. Modern man faces numerous difficulties. It is vital to avoid adding to them the problems of the past which necessitated a big effort to put aside.

In most cases the interventions of religious institutions serve communication purposes and do not contribute significantly to tackling the very problems they refer to. They merely seek to make their presence felt rather than contribute to troubleshooting. The same applies to religious movements that claim they struggle to provide solutions to the problems of modern man, when in fact they aim at promoting their own goals, especially doing mission and dissemination of their religious faith. It is easily understood that all this makes the work of researchers particularly useful, since they are obliged to study and announce first to the scientific community and then to society those activities of religious institutions that put the achievements of modern man at risk by constantly pursuing to restore perceptions that dominated the past of human history, especially that of religious authority, which runs contrary to human rights and religious freedom and leads to the mythification of politics and society.

LITERATURE


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Βασικές αρχές για την επιστημονική μελέτη της θρησκείας και της κουλτούρας

Περίληψη

Στο άρθρο αυτό αναλύονται ορισμένες βασικές αρχές που είναι απαραίτητο να ακολουθούνται για την επιστημονική μελέτη της θρησκείας και της κουλτούρας. Για να είναι επιστημονική η μελέτη αυτή δεν πρέπει να είναι ομολογιακή ή ιδεολογική. Οι σχετικές θεωρίες που διατυπώνονται ή διατυπώθηκαν στο παρελθόν συνήθως ισχύουν για την εποχή κατά την οποία διατυπώθηκαν. Στόχος της έρευνας της θρησκείας και της κουλτούρας πρέπει να είναι η εξυπηρέτηση της ανθρώπινης ελευθερίας και όχι η εξυπηρέτηση θεσμικών επιδιώξεων. Η μελέτη περιπτώσεων, και η έρευνα που είναι τοπικά και χρονικά προσδιορισμένη δεν μπορεί να οδηγεί σε γενικέυσεις. Η θρησκεία ως πολιτιστικός παράγοντας δεν πρέπει να υπερτονίζεται ούτε να υποβαθμίζεται, αλλά να εκτιμάται ο ρόλος της με βάση τα πραγματικά δεδομένα. Η επιστημονική έρευνα δεν δικαιολογείται να προσδίδει θρησκευτικό χαρακτήρα σε γεγονότα, καταστάσεις και θεσμικά μορφώματα, τα οποία με βάση τα δεδομένα που τα συνθέτουν δεν έχουν τέτοιο χαρακτήρα. Η γνώση των σχέσεων θρησκείας και κοινωνίας στο παραδοσιακό παρελθόν είναι απαραίτητη για να κατανοούνται οι διαφοροποιήσεις που έχουν επέλθει στη σύγχρονη πραγματικότητα. Βασικό αντικείμενο έρευνας της μελέτης αυτής πρέπει να είναι η μελέτη των θεσμικών διαμορφώσεων και αξιώσεων των θρησκειών, σε συνδυασμό με τη μελέτη των προϋποθέσεων ειρηνικής συνύπαρξης σε ένα πλουραλιστικό κοινονικό περιβάλλον. Τέλος πρέπει να ερευνάται η σχέση θρησκείας και πολιτικής, αλλά και να αποφεύγεται η χρήση θρησκευτικών κατηγοριών στην πολιτική.