

RELIGIOUS CHANGES IN MACEDONIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract. *The revitalization of religion in Macedonian society can be perceived through the process of de-privatization of the religion, i.e. the abandonment of the private, often called invisible sphere and its obvious and fervent appearance on the public scene. The intensification of religious life in the religious collectivities themselves, more and more imposes and enters the public sphere, followed, for example, through their general greater presence in the media, stressing the place and the position of religion in the structuring of the national collectivity itself, animation of the issues related to the restitution of seized property, religious education or religious instruction, as well as many other issues that are of interest to the believers and citizens in general. The public role of religion is obviously oriented, in general, towards its ethic dimension and the need to conceive, to develop and to realize the commitment of the religious communities in the spectrum of social activities.*

Key words: *public religion; personal religious identification; religious practice, morality.*

1. INTRODUCTION

„ Why not imagine
European public space
as an ethical ... framework...?
Niliifer Göle

Religion in contemporary Macedonian society is specifically profiled. On the one hand, it has existed for decades on the margins of society, or the "private sphere". On the other hand, religious collectivities make attempts to properly position themselves in the emerging social circumstances. The changing of the social structure contributed to Macedonian citizens, somehow overnight, becoming "more aware" of religion, trying to

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catch up with current events. The long existence¹ of religion in the private sphere indirectly influences its actions on the public scene. Moreover, lengthy transition years and the changeability of the social actors on the scene, as well as the situation within the religious groups, contributed significantly, to them being primarily oriented towards the right-inclined political structures, which in the most part colour the national identity. In this context, the function of religion is seen primarily through its role as protector of the national identity, strengthening its symbolic function (Cacanoska 2008).

Clear revitalisation of religion in Macedonian society can be seen through the process of de-privatization of religion (Casanova 1994) or abandoning the private, often called the invisible sphere, and its apparent and zeal expression on the public scene. Intensification of religious life in the religious collectivities themselves increasingly thrusts and enters the public domain, followed, for example, with their greater presence in the media, highlighting the place and position of religion in structuring the national collectivity, animating the issues about the return of seized property, then, religious education or religious science, as well as many other issues that are of interest to the believers themselves and the citizens in general. The public role of religion is obviously oriented towards its general ethical dimension and the need to devise, develop and implement engagement of religious communities in the spectrum of social activities (Casanova 1994).

The issue of religion and morality is very complex, especially during the transition period, but in this paper, that is project, it was only partially researched. Often in public discourse a connection is made between religion and morality, suggesting that religion should be a "source" of moral behaviour and should help overcome the present crisis of values. Modern religious polarization of morality is based on the concept of public religion, suggesting that religion should provide adequate support to individual and public morality in society. Religious leadership, through its mission, in the pragmatic meaning of the word, gives important input to the revival of the leading tenets of ethical conduct of religious collectivities. Spiritual leaders are often in the public eye, so that many times their behaviour is subject to articles in the media, it is commented on the social networks and citizens and believers, more openly express their considerations, views and criticism of their actions. It is not seldom that critical tones pervade from the very religious groups, reflecting the different considerations and tendencies in them. In his review of the crisis in the Church, Professor Grozdanovski states that "this crisis should make the Church more resistant, more spiritual, more moral and should strengthen the faith within, in its leadership, clergy and Eminence, then within the believers and finally before unbelievers. ... So, it should establish moral, ethical values and not as a theological-scientific or theological-educational knowledge, but concrete, practical life knowledge – faith and morality shown and proven in life". He indicates that the church must practically demonstrate nurturing moral values ... (Grozdanovski 2007).

Considering other self-critical signs of moral of religious communities, I believe that it is important in public-opinion projects to see the attitude of the citizens that is believers, towards the moral in their or other religious collectivities. It should also be noted that Macedonia has twice introduced and twice abolished religious science in primary schools. As a substrate for the subject, religious ethics was offered, that is taught, in primary schools as an optional subject.

¹ During the period of socialism, in Macedonian society the attitude towards religion changed, gradually reducing the "atheist restraints".

2. THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE PAPER

Religion in European countries, as Dave says, is specific, reflecting the impact that the complex past has had thereon, and naturally the impact of the elements which it will acquire at the turn of the twenty-first century. What Europe and also the post-communist milieu, to which Macedonia belongs, is characterized by, is a high rate of specified nominal congregation, but a low rate of religious practice. Revitalization of religion in Macedonian society, particularly clearly shaped the structuring of believers in the population in certain periods of very high rates of nominal believers, but of traditionalism in religious practice.

The basic theoretical framework of the area of religion is based on the concept of public religion. De-privatization of religion as a global trend suggests that "religion has abandoned its defined place in the private sphere and is transferred to the unidentified sphere of civil society, participating in the revitalized process of competition, interrupted legitimacy and marking of its boundaries again" (Casanova 1994). Public life of religion advocates the more active participation of religious groups at the level of the state, political system and civil society. The state determines the legal framework of the life of "religion". In the range of the political system "religious collectivities can fight for certain positions," according to which they could affect the general political developments. Usually, the main determinant of the first two levels indicates the basic defense and movement around the acquired privileges, while the third level is developed on the principle of social justice and defense of human personality (Cacanoska 2010).

Based on the draft study, the issue of the role of religion in the sphere of morality can partially be problematized or tackled, specifically how religion affects the profiling of individual or public morality of citizens. In his paper *Saving, Secularization and Demoralization* Wilson places the focus on the phrase secularisation and demoralization (Wilson 2001). Referring to the empirical indicators of the religious map of Europe, Dave Grace claims that in European societies, religion has a relatively small role. Furthermore, Rodney Stark also examines the role of religion in the creation of morality in contemporary society, via its violation through unacceptable patterns of social behaviour, indicating its relatively low impact. The Croatian sociologist Sinisa Zrnishchak goes even further by asking the question: "If religion cannot demonstrate its power to maintain the moral order in post-communist countries, does that mean that we are dealing with long-term... effects of the communist order? Post-communist revitalisation has no power to significantly change this effect? What is the purpose of religion in post-communist societies?" (Zrniscak 2004).

3. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Religion within the project of ISPPI, Public Opinion 2014, is represented by a short set of three questions. The main aspects of these questions are: individual religious determination, attendance of places of worship and the attitude of the respondents towards the importance of moral values he/she is taught by his religion. Religious affiliation was included in the group of independent variables. The last question about religion and morality is set within five-level Likert scale by measuring the intensity of agreement, i.e. disagreement with the proposed statements. Mainly, the research questions concerned the determination of personal religious identification, the frequency of attendance of the place of worship and the third question concerned the relation of morality and religion.

Usually during the conceptualization of the sample (1200 respondents from Macedonia), to satisfy its representativeness, the majority of respondents belonging to Orthodox i.e. Islam, and those belonging to the Catholic i.e. other religious collectivities in the Republic of Macedonia are represented with symbolic rates.

In the direct conceptualization of the research into the changes that occur in the religion sphere as part of the project – Public Opinion 2014, the following research questions are put forward:

1. How is personal religious identification structured? How is religious practice structured according to the indicator –attendance of the place of worship?
2. How do believers perceive the importance of the moral norms they are taught by the religion?

Based on the established research interest I established the proper hypothetical framework:

1. It is assumed that after the conflict in 2001, according to personal religious identification, the high rate of believers will gradually reduce. Religious practice will not adequately follow personal religious identification.
2. Religion will basically be a relatively weak foundation for the development of morality, which can be seen by the respondents' answers to what extent believers respect the moral values taught by their religion.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Personal religious identification and religious practice

The initial idea of religiosity of the population in the Republic of Macedonia is obtained by the independent variable that is defined by the determination of their own religion. Usually the majority of respondents declare themselves members of Orthodoxy or Islam, and by symbolic rates belonging to the Catholic or other religious collectivities in the Republic of Macedonia. Only 3.3% of the respondents said that they do not belong to any religious collectivity. Confessional identification has an obvious symbolic and identity framework, which is due to the traditional religious life of the Macedonian population and, above all, the need to identify a family religious milestone.

Religious self-identification of the respondents is a key segment of religiosity in general. In terms of their attitude towards religion, 83.7% of the respondents or 1004 out of 1200 respondents (Public opinion project – 2014) defined themselves as believers, while 12.4% have chosen the modality “I am something between believer and non-believer” and another 4% (3.9%) defined themselves as non-believers. The rates of self-determination of the individual "attitude" toward religion are found as religious nominal rates, indicating the self-perception of citizens about their attitude towards religion.

The data for this type of question can be compared with corresponding data from previous studies, which are part of a research project conducted in ISPJR. The comparison shows that in the 1970's in the Polog region there was a relatively high rate of believers,² which increased by ten per cent in the post-communist period. The transition process in

² It should be taken into consideration that this project only refers to Dolni Polog. Moreover, this is the first sociological research on religion in Macedonia.

the pre-conflict period (2001) has the lowest rate of believers in the studied period (65.13%). However, after the period of conflict in 2001, the rate of believers grew extremely rapidly and peaked at 93.5%. In the last survey of 2014, that rate was reduced and stabilised at around 83%. Through the movement of rates of personal religious identity, the profiling of religion in Macedonian society can largely be sketched, while defining the pulse of the central event in the post-socialist period, the conflict of 2001.

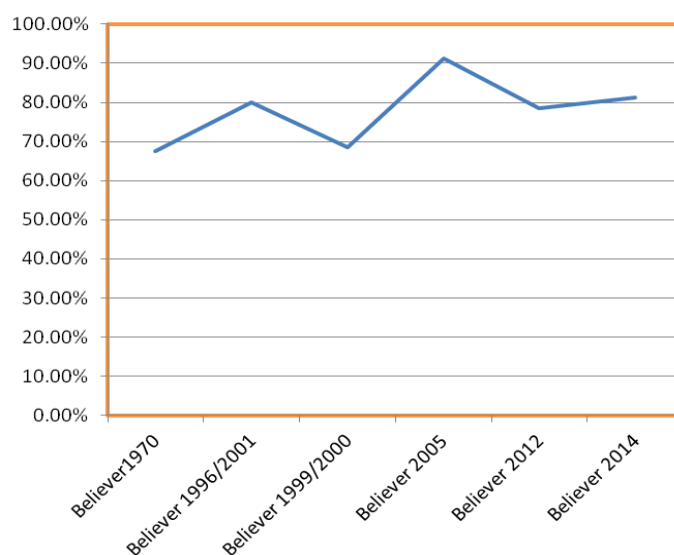


Chart 1 Produced by the per cent of believers in different research periods (1970, 1996/2001, 1999/2000, 2005, 2012 and 2014).

When comparing rates of religious self-identification with the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Macedonia is among the highly religious countries, recording rates similar to those in countries such as: Moldova (77.1%), Poland (76.5%) and Croatia (76.5%), significantly separating itself from the neighbouring Serbia (68.2%) and Bulgaria (52.2%) (Ančić and Zrniščak 2012).

Another important dimension, clearly visible from the data, is the process of overflow of the undecided in the believers structure in 2006 and the later re-filling of the same category by 18% (2014 – 12.4% or 148 respondents). In simpler terms, as the category of believers grows, the modality of the undefined is reduced. Hence, in the research in 2006 it has the lowest rate of 3.4%, and the largest in the pre-conflict period, and at the end of the first decade of the transition period, 25.6%.

Striking is the trend in the crossing of data on personal religious identification with the data on education in the survey of 2014, that, as the level of education is growing from primary to university education, the rate of believers is decreasing. 96.1% of those who have completed their primary education declared themselves believers, while the lowest rate of believers were among those with a college or university education (75.6%).

Based on this indicator, Macedonia is closest to Moldova (15.5% of believers go to church every Sunday) and "follows" European trends, noting relatively high rates of self-determination as believers, but with significantly lower rates of regular religious practice. Macedonian believers, according to this indicator of religiosity, could be described as believing, but not belonging (Davie 2005). The religious practice of the Macedonian congregation is associated with the central events celebrated in the life of every human being, and the celebration of major religious holidays.

It confirms the hypothesis that by the gradual distancing from the conflict in 2001, the rate of worshipers will reduce, according to personal religious identification. The maneuvering, according to the data, takes place through the modality of the undecided ones or those who define themselves between believer and unbeliever. The practice of the believer population in Macedonia does not follow in the footsteps of personal religious identification. Only 15.5% of respondents regularly attend religious institutions. The occasional attending of religious institutions during main religious holidays is dominant.

4.2. Religion and morality

The multidimensional relation of religion and morality is only suggested in one question of the short set of questions about religion in this project. In the public opinion poll of 2014, within the section on religion, we asked the respondents to express the intensity of their agreement i.e. disagreement with the statement: "The moral values we are taught by religion are very important to me?"

Table 2 Data from the processed question "The moral values I am taught by religion are very important to me?" crossed with the data on gender structure (Public opinion project – 2014)

How much do you agree with the statement: "The moral values I am taught by religion are very important to me?"	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
1. Strongly disagree	5.8%	6.5%	6.2%
2.	10.3%	9.6%	9.9%
3.	28.6%	27.7%	28.2%
4.	19.7%	19.3%	19.5%
5. Strongly agree	35.6%	36.9%	36.3%
	Total	100%	100%

As can be seen in the table above, the highest rate of the answers (36.3%) is concentrated on the modality "strongly agree" with the offered statement. A significantly lower rate (28.2%) is the one of answers on "central intensity", according to which the respondents neither agree, nor disagree with the statement that "the moral values they are taught by religion are very important to them". The lowest is the rate of respondents who disagree with this statement (6.2%) or those who believe that "the moral values that we are taught by religion are not important to them at all".

Table 3 Data from the processed question “The moral values I am taught by religion are very important to me?” crossed with the data on ethnic affiliation (Public opinion project – 2014)

How much do you agree with the statement: “The moral values I am taught by religion are very important to me?”	Ethnic affiliation				
	Macedonian	Albanian	Turkish	Other	Total
1. Strongly disagree	7.7%	1.9%		11.8%	6.2%
2.	12.2%	1.3%	13.0%	19.4%	9.9%
3.	38.2%	8.0%	24.1%	19.4%	28.2%
4.	22.1%	14.0%	25.9%	14.0%	19.5%
5. Strongly agree	19.9%	74.8%	37.0%	35.5%	36.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The highest rate of agreement with the offered statement was expressed by the respondents who were Albanians (74.8%), while among the respondents who were Macedonians this rate is far lower and the goes down to 19.9%. The ration to the rates that refer to the disagreement with the given statement is also similar, but the trend goes in the opposite direction. Namely, far higher is the rate of the respondents – Macedonians, who disagree with the declared statement (7.7%) from the rate of the respondents – Albanians, which is 1.9%.

Table 4 Data from the processed question “The moral values I am taught by religion are very important to me?” crossed with the data on education (Public opinion project – 2014)

How much do you agree with the statement: “The moral values I am taught by religion are very important to me?”	Education				Total
	Uncompleted elementary	Elementary	High	Advanced and higher	
1. Strongly disagree	7.1%	4.4%	5.4%	7.9%	6.2%
2.	7.1%	7.8%	10.1%	10.8%	9.9%
3.	32.1%	21.1%	31.7%	26.1%	28.2%
4.	28.6%	18.9%	18.8%	20.1%	19.5%
5. Strongly agree	25.0%	47.8%	34.0%	35.2%	36.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

By crossing this question with the socio-economic status of the respondents we receive output data according to which most of those who agree with this statement are the housewives (66.2%), followed by the farmers (45%), then the public services employees (44%), pensioners (34.7%), the unemployed (32.2%), students (31.3%) and finally private sector employees (30.1%). Subsequently in the outcome results the explicit disagreement with the statement “the moral values that we are taught by religion are very important to me” was expressed by farmers, housewives, public sector employees and so on.

The distributions of intensity of agreement with the stated statement related to the settlement can also be analyzed In this context. Namely, explicit disagreement with this statement expressed the respondents who live in the countryside (3.1%), then in the city with up to 30.000 inhabitants (3.6%), followed by respondents who live in a city with over 30.000 inhabitants (8.3%) and finally the respondents who live in Skopje (11.6%) or on average with this statement, the highest disagreement was expressed by 6.2% of the

respondents. This tendency, but in the opposite direction is not “reflected” completely in the item or in the explicit agreement with the statements, in which the answers are distributed from the respondents who live in the countryside (46.2%), then the respondents who are residents of cities with over 30.000 inhabitants (33.3%), the respondents who are residents of Skopje (31.6%) and finally the respondents who are residents of cities with up to 30.000 inhabitants (25%).

Based on the processed data by region, it can be noticed that 49.0% of the respondents, residents of the Polog region, expressed the greatest level of agreement with the abovementioned statement, followed by the respondents who are residents of the Northeast region with 44.1%, and by far the lowest is the rate of the respondents who are residents of the Southeast region, which goes down to 6.5%. The respondents who are residents of the Southeast region, or 40.1% mostly declared themselves to be of “central” intensity of agreement i.e. disagreement with the statement.

Based on the presented data, it may be indicated that respondents are aware of the importance of religion for morality, but in the sphere of practical understanding of the proclaimed and respected moral norms there is a deviation. Therefore, it can be indicated that religion is not an important source of moral values. This connection is more theoretical than real.

5. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Social conditions significantly shape religion as a specific social phenomenon, and also at the same time significantly influence its dynamics. The change of social circumstances contributes to a change in certain elements of the religion, but the changes of the directions of certain tendencies that characterize religion take place relatively slowly.

The data for religiosity can be compared with corresponding data from previous studies, which are part of a research project conducted in ISPJR. The comparison shows that in the 1970's in the Polog region there was a relatively high rate of believers, which increased by ten percent in the post-communist period. The transition process in the pre-conflict period (2001) has the lowest rate of believers in the studied period (65.13%). However, after the period of the conflict in 2001, the rate of believers grew extremely rapidly and peaked at 93.5%. In the last survey of 2014, that rate is reduced and stabilised at around 84%. Through the movement of the rates of personal religious identity, the profiling of religion in Macedonian society can largely be sketched, while defining the pulse of the central event in the post-socialist period, the conflict of 2001.

The public role of religion means that religion passes from the private to the public sphere and that religious collectivities have an active role in the activity of the public space. Precisely this affects the general profiling of the religion. In the post-communist milieu, to which Macedonia belongs, the indicated high rate of nominal group of believers was determined, but also a low rate of religious practice. Based on the obtained results from the research of public opinion in 2014, the stabilization at a high rate of personal religious identification (83.7%) is confirmed. In fact, the revitalization of religion in the Macedonian society determines the religious population to be characterized by high rates of nominal groups of believers, and by traditionalism in terms of religious practice.

Based on the obtained data which refer to the citizens' perception of the importance of the moral values taught by religion, the impact of religion on morality in society is relatively low.

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VERSKE PROMENE U MAKEDONSKOM DRUŠTVU

Oživljavanje vere u Makedoniji može se sagledati kroz proces izlaska vere iz domena ličnog, odnosno napuštanja sfere ličnog, koju često nazivamo i sferom nevidljivog i njenog očiglednog i jakog prisustva na javnoj sceni. Prisustvo verskog života jača u sferi javnog života i prati ga veće prisustvo vere u medijima, što ističe njen položaj u strukturi društva, veronauku, kao i mnoga druga pitanja koja interesuju vernike i građane. Javna uloga vere je očito okrenuta, u jednom opštem smislu, ka etičkim dimenzijama i potrebi da se započne, razvije i realizuje posvećenost verskih zajednica širem spektru društvenih aktivnosti.

Ključne reči: *domen javnog života, lično versko opredeljenje, vera, moralnost.*