



YUGOSLAV SOCIETY FOR THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF RELIGION
FACULTY OF MECHANICAL ENGINEERING – UNIVERSITY OF NIŠ
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
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edited by
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CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS CHANGES: FROM DESECULARIZATION TO POSTSECTULARIZATION

RELIGION

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**Contemporary Religious Changes:
From Desecularization to Postsecularization**

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*Processes, Trends, Extents and Limits of Religious Changes in the Contemporary
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Theoretical Underpinnings and Empirical Proof*

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(DE)SECULARIZATION IN THE XXI CENTURY: EMPIRICAL VERIFICATION OF THE REVITALISATION OF RELIGIOSITY IN SERBIA

Summary

The purpose of this paper is a clarification of the terms and processes of desecularization and modernity, which are inevitable when one regards religious changes in modern post-industrial societies, as well as in postsocialist ones. Empirical researches confirm that even the most secular Western Europe does not have a homogeneous religious society. In the second part of the paper the authors will use key empirical research in an attempt to show revitalisation of religion in Serbia as well. The nineteen-nineties brought war, crisis and transition, but they also brought a functional change for the Serbian Orthodox Church. This paper will address some of these changes: 1) religion is not just a personal thing any more, it assumes a certain place in the public sphere; 2) a new law of religious freedom (2006) changed the legal status of religious communities; 3) religious centers and temples are being rebuilt and built; 4) religions have gained their place in the media (public and private), and religious radio and tv stations are also created; 5) religious communities are receiving financial support, as well as tax breaks from the state, and they are gradually taking control over their property which was previously nationalised. There is also an reemergence of Religious education in Primary and Secondary Schools, religious service in the military and in the hospitals, so it is necessary to monitor these processes in future.

Key words: (de)secularization, empirical researches, Serbian Orthodox Church, Europe, Serbia.

INTRODUCTION

The challenge of modernization and secularization of religion today is being met by the religization of modernity (Vukomanović, 2009: 10). Religion, as an integral part of the globalization process, interact with different ideological, political, cultural and economic systems. On the other hand it become a safe haven for "cultural defence", both nationally and locally. The term *Return of the Sacred*, which is being broadly used in debates about the dominant tendencies of religious situations in (post)modern societies, was introduced to the sociology of religion by Daniel Bell in his memorial lecture dedicated to Hobhouse in 1977.

In order to define secularization we need to reexamine the concepts of religion, modernity and secularization. The way we perceive secularization will determine the way we understand religious revitalisation. Depending on what we imply by the term of secularization we can explain religious revitalization, whether secularization means the differentiation between secular sphere and religious institutions, a decline of religious beliefs and practices or the withdrawal of religion into the private sphere. If we are to talk about secularization, religious revitalization and sacralization we need to keep in mind the fact that religion has once again emerged in

those parts of the world where secularization occurred. *Theoreticians* all agree on one thing, Europe is a place of empirical verification for the theory of secularization. Non the less, when people report on the results of the *European Values Study*, they use the term “church-free spirituality” instead of the term secularization because Europeans *did not lose their* “religious” needs.¹

We consider that secularization, same as it's opposite process of desecularization, is a reversible process (Radisavljević Ćiparizović, 2006). According to some authors, like Yinger (Yinger, 1970) the process of desecularization is a part of the “eternal cycle of religion”, which is immanent to human nature, so the only question that makes sense is “in which way is someone religious?”, and not “is he religious at all?” Desecularization is an inevitable term when one regards religious changes in modern industrial and postindustrial societies, as well as in postsocialist and transitional societies. In her book *Sociology of religion* Grace Davie writes that after the predomination of the established theory of secularization, today's religious revitalization sparks a sociological debate in an attempt to theoretically clarify what is empirically evident - the presence of religion in different forms which manifests itself in the individual and social plane. That leads to new religious forms, besides old ones, which influences individuals, and the society itself. Luckman writes that religion in modern society is in no way invisible, while Davie says that secularization seems to be extrinsic to modernity, so you can be entirely “modern” and entirely religious. There are different opinions by those authors who claim that modernization inevitably leads to secularization. For example K. Dobbelaere and B. Wilson remain fervent supporters of the secularization theory stating that it still has some explanatory value concerning modern social processes (Radisavljević Ćiparizović, 2016: 74). On the other hand Peter Berger, a former supporter of the secularization paradigm, feels that desecularization has become a permanent phenomenon (Berger, 2008:12).

The most apparent way to disprove secularization is by use of empirical evidence based on experience because since the mid '70s, or the late '80s for postcommunist societies there is an increase of religious revitalization in different spheres of religious and social life. Comparative empirical data regarding religious situations in modern societies show with out a doubt that not only religion did not disappear, but it never retreated to the private sphere, and in some contemporary societies, traditional and modern, it impose itself as the main creator of public life.

There isn't a unique stance concerning which model is the dominant one: “believing without belonging” (Davie 1994), or “belonging without believing” (Davie 2005), or “neither believing nor belonging” (Voas; Crocket, 2005). The hub of British sociology of religion is composed of *noninstitutionalized* forms of religion, new religious movements and New Age, religious minorities and religious organisation and its role in modern life (Davie, 1994). At the center of French sociology of religion lies an interest in new structures of religious communities, social consequence of religious pluralism, especially the urgent question of Islam, and the separation of religious faith from religious-institutionalized dogmas (Hervieu-Léger, 2000). We agree with the German sociologist Knoblauch when he states that the religious situation in Europe is so diverse and uneven that it can not be judged by the same standards (Knoblauch, 2004: xi).

¹ <https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/about-evs/research-topics/religion/>.

Besides the distinctions between modernity and postmodernity (Davie, 2008: 90) theoreticians also indicate that there are differences and distinctions between different concepts of modernity. According to *Eisenstadt* concept of "multiple modernities" indicates that we cannot identify modernity with the transference of western models to other parts of the world (Gavrilović, 2008: 53-59).

Theoreticians of secularization thought that the only way religious organizations can remain a part of society is if they adjust to the secularised world. Berger came to a different conclusion: "The fact is not only did religious communities survive, but they are flourishing in that extent in which they refused to adjust to some supposed demands of the secularised world" (Berger, 2008: 14).

The results of a research done by the *Pew Research Center* show that people in West Europe believe in a Christian God the least, unlike people in Central and East Europe. The research involved 1400 citizens from each of these European countries, and religiousness was measured thru questions involving participation in religious ceremonies, daily prayer, belief in God, and total belief in the importance of religion for the individual (*Politika*, 17.2.2019)². Armenia was at the top of the list with 79% of believers, Georgia was second with 73%, followed by Moldavia, Romania, Bosnia, Grece and Serbia in seventh place, while Croatia was in eight place (B92, 20. 2. 2019).³

One of the types of desecularization is an emergence of fundamentalism occurring as a reaction to the change brought on by modernisation. As a form of such deprivatization, Casanova recognizes protestant fundamentalism and Catholic reactions to abortion. Also, alongside the questions of contraception and genetical engineering, religion can emerge as an authority in environmental protection in modern societies.

DESECULARIZATION IN SERBIA

During the nineties people from former socialist countries started to turn towards religion, because of the collapse of socialism which left an ideological vacuum. The collapse of communism led to significant religious changes, and also led to changes in religious situations in almost every East European, and Middle European country. And while one social, cultural and symbolic system was nearing its end, another which was marginalised for a long time has been given a chance for (re)affirmation. Desecularization at first spread among the Catholic population during the '70s, but later during the end of the '80s and early '90s, it spread to the homogeneous Orthodox population, a population which was a full decade behind in desecularization, as they were more prone to secularization.

Complex causes of mass conversion to atheism of the traditional Orthodox population, and the complete marginalization of the Serbian Orthodox Church (referred below as SOC) had a deeper historical background. According to historian Radmila Radić, SOC was unable to conduct an inner reform during the XIX and XX century and become an initiator of modernization processes in Serbia, due to internal and external circumstances. Namely, SOC emerged from World War 2 as depleted,

² "Belief in God" <http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/422931/Vera-sa-sumnjom-u-Boga>

³ "West filed with non-believers: Serbs in 7. Place just above their neighbours." https://www.b92.net/zivot/vesti.php?yyyy=2019&mm=02&dd=20&nav_id=1507663.

robed, with its priesthood decimated, and without any material bases, or real income due to the agrarian reform, so it was depended on the government aid. "Modus Vivendi between the church and the state was to be achieved through peaceful means, according to state authorities, meaning that the church had to abandon its mission willingly, and withdraw from the public sphere... Total control over the organization of the SOC was achieved in a little less than five years after the war" (Radić, 1994: 352). The so called "inner weakness of orthodoxy" was considered the main reason of opposition towards secularization, especially compared to Catholicism and Islam, and they entailed the following: 1) traditional roles of SOC in the definition of the Serbian national subject and its symbolic connections to the state, 2) decentralized nature of institutionalized orthodoxy, and the lack of a sole administrative center, which would give it support in the fight against social marginalization, do with the new and unfavorable situation. For example, Vatican always provided strong support for the Catholic church in Croatia and Slovenia, 3) Fideism as reliance on faith rather than reason in pursuit of religious truth, and the neglect of social problems. 4) a long time schism in the Church, while it was in emigration.⁴ The results of such forced secularization are best demonstrated by Đorđević's empirical research of the district of Niš, done in 1984 where the percentage of religious practices, celebrations and dogmatic beliefs have reached its all time minimum, ranging from 0,16% to 10,32% of cases (cited according to Radisavljević Ćiparizović, 2006: 35-36).

Religious revitalization in this part is certainly part of a large-scale social process which is implemented in the entire world, and especially in central and southeast Europe, but it is also an autonomous process which has its special characteristics. The results obtained in our study "*Religiosity and Tradition*" confirm the basic hypothesis of a revival of attachment to religion and the church in Serbia in late 1990s, manifested in decade's continuity of high traditional religiosity, but above all through the growth – not spectacular, but evident – of the so-called current religiosity. Beyond any doubt, the image of the so-called typical believer at the end of the last decade of the 20th century is completely changed in comparison with the mode of believers of the 1980s. Thanks to an increase in religiosity of, primarily, urban population, men, highly educated, and the young, previous differences in attachment to religion and the church by place of residence, gender, education and profession have been leveled significantly. In changed social circumstances the credibility of SOC, as the most influential church in Serbian society, has grown (Radisavljević Ćiparizović, 2006: 165-166).

The Serbian Orthodox Church has emerged from a half century of exile into the public sphere, and became once again a significant factor in the reshaping of religious and national identity. After the regime change during the 5 October 2000 SOC not only retained its social position, as the largest church in Serbia, but strengthened it significantly. What was abolished through political actions, and through imposing communist ideology, emerged in a similar, but less violent way. In the July of 2001 in Primary and Secondary Schools was introduced Religious Education as a type of confessional class (Radisavljević Ćiparizović, 2006: 95-105).

⁴ After twenty nine years, during the celebration of Candlemas (on the February 15. 1992) the schism in the Serbian Orthodox Church was ended when His Holiness, the Serbian Patriarch Paul led a procession in St. Michael's Cathedral alongside Metropolitan Bishop Irinej (https://www.saborna-crkva.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=395&Itemid=301).

Then Faculty of Orthodox Theology was reintroduced to the Belgrade University, and priests were reintroduced to the military. After six different versions the law that defines the position of religious communities was finally passed. Nationalised church property is either returned or reimbursed, and temples are either being built or rebuilt. Media presence of priests at public manifestations, or political elites at religious events has been noticed.

Here are some examples from the local press and internet:

Building and rebuilding of churches and monasteries

“Since the nineties Serbian Orthodox Church has rebuilt about 500 of its churches and monasteries. Despite the economic crisis church construction in the last decades is going thru a renaissance in every country where SOC has its diocese - Montenegro, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Croatia, Germany, America. In Serbia alone in the last fifteen years there have been over 200 new temples built, and builders are finishing about a hundred more” (*Novosti*, 2011).⁵

Priests in hospitals

“Within an emerging number of hospitals in Belgrade special chapels have been opened in which patients can pray, confess, take communion and get baptized. First such chapel was opened in Special hospital for cerebrovascular diseases "Saint Sava" two decades ago, and in other medical institutions after that. Today there's barely a hospital without a place for worship. Priests receive lists with patients names and mentions them in daily prayer” (*Danas*, 28.4.2008).⁶

Military priest reintroduced to the service

“After more than seven decades Serbian military will be assigned military priests – eight orthodox ones, and one imam, and one Catholic chaplain. Ceremony was attended by Metropolitan bishop Porfirije, and Archbishop Stanislav Hočevar... Military priests-officers don't carry any weapons, nor will they be able to command” (*Novosti*, 31. 7. 2013.).⁷

Liturgy in District Prison

“On the second day of the Christmas, on the feast-day of the Assembly of the Most Holy Mother of God, with the service of the Holy Liturgy in the chapel of the Resurrection of Christ in the District Prison in Belgrade. There were present at the service: prisoners of that prison, commanders and employees of the facility, parishioners of the Vozdovac church of Holy Emperor Constantine and Helen, members of the Charity section of the Archbishopric of Belgrade-Karlovci, deacon Branislav Jocić and prison chaplain Revd. Gligorije Marković” (January 2019. Website of SOC).⁸

⁵ „Prayer among scaffolding“

<http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/aktuelno.290.html:352108-Molitvamedju-skelama>

⁶ „Prayer in hospitals“ <https://www.danas.rs/beograd/molitva-u-bolnicama/>

⁷ „Serbian military: military priests in service again“

<http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/drustvo/aktuelno.290.html:446764-Vojna-Srbije-Vojni-svestenici-ponovo-u-sluzbi>.

⁸ “Christmas in the Central prison in Belgrade“

http://spc.rs/sr/bozhits_u_centralnom_zatvoru_u_beogradu.

REVITALIZATION OF RELIGIOUSNESS IN SERBIA: ARGUMENTS OF EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

There are two theoretical frameworks when it comes to interpreting religious revitalization in Serbia. First addresses religion as a public institution, while the second entitles individual needs of believers for religion and spirituality. While the first framework is unquestioned, the second one brings about different, often colliding opinions, and different interpretations of the same empirical evidences made by the leading Serbian sociologists of religion. Dragoljub B. Đorđević takes in to account indicators of traditional relations towards religion and the church which show that this type of relations is the most widespread (Đorđević, 2009: 57-64). On the other hand, Mirko Blagojević takes in to account recent religious behaviour, and uses this recent behaviour to prove the changes made in the initialization of religiousness of the population. Being that the case of Serbia isn't the sole case in Europe, we should take into account different religious situations in different countries. More than half of the people interviewed go to church at least once a month in catholic countries, up to one quarter in confessional mixed countries, in protestant countries a small number of people practice this religious obligation, and the same goes for modern Orthodox Russia. Religious practices and belief in God in Serbia are closer to Catholic countries (Italy and Portugal), and is significantly higher not only compared to protestant (Denmark and Sweden) and confessional mixed countries (Great Britain and Holland), but also higher compared to Orthodox Russia. However, when it comes to regular participation in religious ceremonies of the interviewed believers, then the difference between catholic, protestant, confessionally mixed and orthodox countries is being clearly noticed. Situation in Serbia is then closer to confessionally mixed countries. The structure of believers which was formed during the nineties in Serbia remained intact, it has even grown stronger regarding religious consciousness, and advanced by "crabs walk" in the ritual dimension (Blagojević, 2008: 255).

Religiousness in Serbia in the XXI Century: Results of a Sociological Study

In order to detect any change in religiousness of Serbian citizens in the 21st century we compared results from two sociological studies which refer to: a) confessional and religious self identification of believers, b) traditional and c) current religiousness. On the one hand, considering the fact that both researches were done on a representative sample increases their comparisons, but on the other we are aware of certain limitation in the comparison because the 1999 research was done on a dozen selected indicators. According to the 2010 Research, 93% of the interviewed people declared that they belong to a confession, which is identical to the 1999 research – 93,5%. 77% of these were orthodox, catholics 8,6, evangelists or some other protestant church 0,8, Muslims 6,2, buddhists 0,2 while those who don't belong to a religious community are at 6,6 (Radisavljević Ćiparizović, 2011: 25-42).

Religious selfidentification is also a part of the so called low indicators of religiousness, but they are the most frequently used ones. in the 1999 research 60% were religious, a fifth was undecided (21%) and nonreligious less than a fifth (19%). Our expectations were that the undecided, who are usually a group influenced by different socio-cultural relations, as well as personal dispositions and socialisation (learning of religious behavior) will align themselves across the believer-nonbeliever

halves. And that's exactly what happened, because according to the 2010 research the number of religious people jumped to 78%, but the number of undecided dropped by five times (4%) compared to 1999 while the number of nonreligious dropped insignificantly to 14%.

Table 1. What is your relation towards religion? Are you personally religious?(in %)

Modality	1. 1999	2. 2010
Religious	59	78
Undecided and indifferent	21	4
Not religious	19	14

1. Religion and tradition (Belgrade, Novi Sad and Niš) 1999. (Radisavljević-Ćiparizović, 2006);
2. Religiousness in Serbia 2010. (HKC, 2011).

Traditional Attachment to Church and Religion

We monitor traditional religiousness thru these indicators: baptism of children, the celebration of religious holidays and church burials. Besides confessional religiousness, the traditional religiousness not only remained on the same level, but we observed a slight increase.

Table2. Traditional links with the church and religion in %

Indicators	1. 1999	2. 2010
Baptism of children	84	87
Celebration of religious holidays	87	92
Church burials	86	87

1. Religion and tradition (Belgrade, Novi Sad and Niš) 1999. (Radisavljević-Ćiparizović, 2006);
2. Religiousness in Serbia 2010. (HKC, 2011).

Current Attachment to Church and Religion

Indicators that show current attachment to church are: participation in the Liturgy, going to Church and temple, regular prayer, fast, confession, holly communion. There are about 10% of religious church goers. These percentages are expectedly smaller, but there is a significant rise in every indicator (regular participation in Liturgy almost 10%, 4,1% go to church more than once a week, while 8,7% go to church more than once a week- which means that 13% of people interviewed go to their temples once a week. Every day prayer and regular fasting are almost doubled).

Table 3. Elements of religious behaviour and the congregation

Indicators	1. 1999	2. 2010
Liturgy-almost every time	2,1	9,8
Going to church at least once a week	-	12,8
Everyday prayer	15,9	27,4
Regular fasting	16,8	27,4

1. Religion and tradition (Belgrade, Novi Sad and Niš) 1999. (Radisavljević-Ćiparizović, 2006);
2. Religiousness in Serbia 2010. (HKC, 2011).

Based on these data, we can say that the religious revitalization, and the image of believers has changed the most in the period between the '80s and the end of the '90s. The decade that we observed (1999-2010) only verifies those trends.

Results of Pew Research Center: As much as 87% of people in Serbia believe in God, that is to say 58% is certain in his existence, and 29% aren't. Only 10% of the nation are atheists. Countries in which the majority doesn't believe in God include Czech republic (66%), Sweden (60%), Belgium (54%) and Holand with 53% of non-believers (B92, 20.2.2019).

Table 4. Religious profile of the region (number of people interviewed in porcentages)

	Romania	Grece	BIH	Croatia	Serbia
Religion is very important in their lives	50	55	54	42	34
Attend religious services at least once a month	50	38	35	40	19
Pray every day	44	29	32	40	27
Believe in God with certainty	64	59	66	57	58

Source: Pew Research Center

CONCLUSION

(De)secularization is an inevitable term when one regards religious changes in modern industrial and postindustrial societies, as well as in postsocialist and transitional societies. Comparative empirical data regarding religious situations in modern societies show without a doubt that not only religion did not disappear, but it never retired to the private sphere, and in some contemporary societies, traditional and modern, it impose itself as the main creator of public life.

Europe is a place of empirical verification for the theory of secularization, but things aren't in unison as they seem. This is why we cannot generalize because there are differences between catholic, protestant and orthodox population, between Great Britain and northern European countries. In (post)modern societies secular ideas and values exist side by side with religious values which points to a certain value relativism, that is to say existence at the same time of value orientations which seem to be at different theoretical positions (Radisavljević Ćiparizović, 2006).

Religious revitalization in the XXI century has been just a continuation of a trend that started during the time of crisis, wars and transition in the nineteen nineties. At that time desecularization occurred which lead to the change in the role of religious communities in Serbia. At this time SOC started to provide a new ideological framework for different state institutions, such as military or schools, filling the ideological vacuum left by the fall of communism, showing initiative in doing so, but also with the help of the government. After 2000 this trend was confirmed. This paper already addressed some of these changes: 1) religion is not just a personal thing any more, it assumes a certain place in the public sphere; 2) a new law of religious freedom (2006) changed the legal status of religious communities; 3) religious centers and temples are being rebuilt and built; 4) religions have gained their place in the media (public and private), and religious radio and tv stations are also created; 5) religious communities are reciving financial suport, as well as tax reliefs from the state, and they are gradually taking control over their property which was

previously nationalised; 6) an reemergence of Religious education in Primary and Secondary Schools, religious service in the military and in the hospitals. Even though there are different interpretations of the same empirical evidence, we feel that the result of empirical studies (both domestic and foreign) speaks for the process of desecularization in Serbia.

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