

RELIGION AND SOCIOCULTURAL UNIVERSALIA

Dobrinka Peicheva

Religion and Sociocultural Universalialia (Abstract)

The problems, which arise in Bulgaria, concerning cultural interaction of media and religion are unstudied in needed extent. These problems are closely related with the fundamental changes which took place in the year 1989 in many countries of Central and Eastern Europe. A peaceful renunciation of further development of communism took place and a new course towards the western values of democracy and market economy was adopted.

The problems are connected with the circumstance that religion had a specific role even during the so-called atheistic period of the development of Bulgarian society. On the other hand, even now there is no common view and strategy for collaboration with church and different media in Bulgaria. It is not hard to explain why this was so during the atheistic period in our country. But it is very strange that nowadays the interest of the media in religion and religious education is still very weak.

Another important issue is that whenever it exists, media interest in religious affairs is focused mainly on the problems and scandalous events in the Church that followed the shift towards democracy – it is worth speculating on these problems. Furthermore it is very difficult to find a clear and simple solution to them because the situation is complicated by deposits from the past and the apparition of new religious structures.

A third major aspect is concerning the consequences of the shift towards democracy and market economy, in which the revaluation of social, cultural and religious universalialia, is accompanied by contrasting opinions and evaluations. The Church doesn't contribute for denying and changing of attitudes to importance and significance of events, facts and examples from Bulgarian history, including from Bulgarian church.

It doesn't orient people that European appurtenance of our country is good for Bulgarian people and has to be desirable for them. The Bulgarian Church doesn't learn people striving to freedom and democracy. It had not opinion for communist monuments, or for significant persons from our history etc, etc. And that is because of some problems and contradictions of the church, from one hand, and from other hand, because of its disagreements with new realities and orientations in Bulgaria, connected with some political partiality and favour.

It has turned out that church doesn't defend and survive socio-cultural universalialia. The Church doesn't contribute for revelation of nature of socio-cultural universalialia to be constant, to be passing down from generation to generation. Our religious and political practice establish, that intransitives of socio-cultural universalialia may be breaking, that intransitives is not guaranteed and safeguarded from political impact.

The other conclusion is that our official Bulgarian Church is not free from political interference. Socio-cultural universalialia therefore is not predominantly intransitive. They depend on political reappraisal of situation.

Key words: Bulgaria, media and religion, Orthodox Church, communism, church and society

The scientist Wilbor Shramm has offered a communication approach that is known as “stupefying of recipients”. It was based on the idea of simultaneous elimination of old social support and provision of new one, of undermining the existing social relations and offering the new. In that way, the whole 45 years period, known as communistic, could be defined as a period of elimination of religion support, of undermining of Bulgarian religion. It was a period of manifesting the atheistic continuous reconstruction and reflection of the well known in the world Marxist ideologem “religion is opium of people”. Atheism was recognized as a norm of official social behavior and every other form of religious accompaniment was noted as provocative and contra-behavior (Korubin J.,2005).

Orthodox Christian holydays and rituals (Christmas, Easter) were inaccessible for the ordinary layman. Official church holydays, if such religious events were still organized by the church as formal acts, were accomplished with atheistic selected people, faithful to the communist party.

The religious holydays were strongly supervised and watched over. Television and radio translations were covered with the best west performances, that otherwise weren't accessible for Tv and radio audience, keeping people away from the church and the rituals. Officially the church independence from the state, was manifested but in practice the communist party intervened in religious affairs, concerning even church administration and mainly in the choice of religious leaderships.

Religious values and norms were marginalized in its possible bounds, religious traditions and observance were denied and persecuted all along the line. Basic religious values - brotherhood, equality, justice, mutual aid, human love, tolerance in relations etc - were incorporated in communistic ideology. The communistic ideology formally denied religion but many of its values were adopted and incorporated as communistic values. For example brotherhood, equality justice, mutual aid, camaraderie, love to people etc.

The communistic ideology considered itself a new realistic “religion”. If one of the main religion mission to make people believe in God and in its religious values, to internalize and follow them, thus communistic party mission was making people believe in its ideology and to follow it steadily.

The media, literature, art – practically everything in Bulgaria maintained religion image changing. The support of atheistic communistic norms was demonstrated by means of elimination: through making the religious subject taboo for the media; caricaturing of religion in literature and art; spreading of atheistic readers; underestimating and satirizing of “a strayed” believers; explications of the fantasy and unscientificity of God with pretension to create new thinking about private property, as exploiting in its matter, about richness which is impossible to be created with legal means, about market economics as bad thing etc. “Man for man” is an enemy in a competitive environment, according to communistic ideology and practice. Centralized economy and its perfections were preferred.

The 45 years atheistic-cultural model was a piece of evidence that, structured cultural values and norms, and their frame was determined by the actual society and the specific of the existing social ideals, forming an immanent for the concrete society values system.

Of course even the communistic ideology couldn't intervene the individual consciousness. Many people believed in secret in religion, in God. The most important rituals were practiced in secret at home. Furthermore, even representative of the high level party management, as we has learned later, have also practiced religious rituals secretly at home.

After the breakup of 45 years communistic regime began a new process of fundamental changes as a rejection from communistic ideology and practice and revival of socio-cultural universalia. That means:

- Conceptions of what is meaning of important, good, desirable, relevant,

feliculously;

- Comprehensions for ideals and its comparatively weight – internationalism, patriotism, national sovereignty, brotherhood, friendship, equality, freedom;
- Signs and symbols – point of view for heroes, significant persons, monuments, models, patterns etc;
- Norms – formal and informal rules of behavior and sanctions;
- Ethno-forms- holydays, traditions, customs, attitude to religion.

Everything, that was typical for the communistic regime, has got a different or even contrary meaning. Denied heroes and eminent persons from communistic period, have got worth acknowledgement nowadays, others, that were communist heroes, have stand back

The revival of socio-cultural universalialia was made mainly by means of mass communication. They have turned out to be an effective instrument for changing of political and economical status quo, for reorganization of cultural values and norms in democratic direction. In initial changing period of time and after that, the media, especially television set, have influenced on reappraisal of situation and on image of realistic values and norms by means of specially created media performances and messages (for concentration-camp, for forseed etatization and expropriation of private ownership etc)

This process was accomplished by all possible channels – interpersonal, group and mass communications. Mass communications contents were in support of democratic and religious values and norms, making suggestions, that these norms were supported and well kept from society.

A study under my scientific management has proved, that well known forth theory of mass communications - the theory of cultural norms - have not yet been interrogative one. Our study has demonstrated that in society with basic changes, mass media can influence in forming and affirming new norms and values (Peicheva D., 2001)

In fact revival of eliminated values, norms and rights has overspread with particular sharpness and wishes for religion and religious values, norms and rituals to be established.

The Church has been filled up with layman freely expressing their faith. Furthermore an appearance of new religious aggregations and denominations was observed that have received possibility to express freely their faith and to be legitimated in accordance with Bulgarian legislation.

Today in Bulgaria there are 22 registered and 6 unregistered churches such as: Armenian Apostolic Church, Catholic Church, Bulgarian Lutheran Church, Union of Gospel Baptist Churches, Church of 7th Day Adventists (3) Witness of Jehovah, Union of Jews in Bulgaria, Muslim Church, Society White Brotherhood etc. Unregistered church are -New Age, Unit Church of Moon, Scientology, God's children etc.

Revival of religious values and rituals is also realized within the other churches. Mosques of Muslims have been filling with Muslims free expressing their faith, synagogues too. The whole palette of religious faiths and religious sympathy has been situated in a free of ideological blast trajectory, tracing new behavior models. They have been based on religious and ethnical tolerance between different smaller or bigger groups and within them. Religious tolerance is general behavior style in Bulgaria.

Former limited rights of Protestants and Catholics, on one hand, and rights of other religious denominations, on other hand, have received some new measurement, connecting with its spread. A new thinking appears, that Bulgarian Orthodox Church statute has to be equal to the other Churches.

Table 1

| |
|--|
| 49% of the inquired consider that Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOCh) statute have to be equal to the rest religions in Bulgaria. |
| 48% answered no |
| 2% do not know |
| 2% show no interest*. |

Tolerance as one of the immanent features of Bulgarian society in the past has come back. It may be assured indeed that religious tolerance and good neighborhood intra-ethnic behavior model is characteristic to our society. Of course, we should not underestimate any recidivism of the negative consequence, that was connected with so-called “process of Muslim names changing” in the past, when Muslims were given Bulgarian names and it was considered as an attempt of Muslim assimilation. That experiment was made by the former communist regime in 1984-1985. This black, for every country, historical episode of our country has already been denied, as ideology and practice and forgotten in a great extent as a survival from affected people.

Television and radio have contributed so much for overcoming of this difficult process in our country after democratic changes. It was realized by means of creation of special television and radio performances, art-documental pictures etc, as an artistic form of penance and excuse.

Indeed it may be concluded, that religious tolerance and good neighborhood intra-ethnic behavior models are media characteristic of our society after democratic changes too.

In fact democratic changes in people behavior and thinking were not adequately carried out by the church institution. It does not succeeded in adapting the reorganization challenges that have to become in its own frame and in its priority. Some of the most important problems that arose within the Bulgarian church are: the question about the legal of its Patriarch and legal base of his choice, the dispute of church properties etc. These issues have provoked a schism in BOCh, which has resulted in an Alternative Synod. Church in Bulgaria was dethroned as value’s holder church schism

The change in Bulgaria Church that was expected to be like the changes in the other institutions and organizations has not realized. On the other hand, persons, who undertake the realization of the changes in Bulgarian Church, were compromised. The new created Alternative Synod disappointed many people, including not a small part of Synod circle. Mass media became compromise centre, coming from different sources. It was a bright express and comprehensive compromising of the Priesthood, which reflected in a whole compromising of the Church. It has begun processes of media priesthood unmask and church nihilism. Intervention of the state did not contribute at all for giving assistance of renovating church processes, but on the contrary.

One of the Governments in our country registered Pimen Alternative Synod, other took part in the occupation of dioceses. The Democratic forces have supported Alternative Synod, former communistic forces supported the previous, preceding status quo. Conflicts, contradictions, confrontations, and sometimes scene of violence which took place as reflection in television screen, additionally contributed for nihilism and mistrust in BOCh.

The image created for the Church administration was the same as the image for the predatory businessman. Television had reasonably shown them in their real face – priests that were first of all interested in material prosperity, rather than in sermons, or winning the people for the Christian values. Church stopped to be thought as society corrector and a creator of

examples to imitate. Instead of that priests began imitating criminal groups behavior in our country. A priest who was from the Alternative Synod was murdered. Murder was realized from official synod priests.

Here are some of the titles in Central Newspapers during that period after the Law of creed was accepted and after the organized extraordinary church convocation by official church management. Daily paper "Novinar": "The power has made itself church convocation", daily paper "Pari": "Priests meet together incanonic convocation", "New attempt for coup d'etat -"Monitor".

Basic key words in the newspapers in this period were "capture", "occupy", "defend", "murder" etc. Priests were presented as soldiers, rather than spiritual man. Church disconnecting and struggle for superiority and power, has revealed religious themes in small micro-model of socio-political situation in our country in this period of time. On the question "Who is right about this conflict between Official synod and Alternative one", the answers are as follows:

Table 2

| |
|--|
| Official Synod with Patriarch Maksim - 45 % |
| Alternative Synod with Patriarch Inokentii-37% |
| non of all 11% |
| do not know 4% |
| no interest 4%*. |

The most important defeat that Bulgarian Church schism has caused is destruction of religious values myth as values with the highest rank. All kind of schism consequences can be overcome in exception of spiritual destruction of one razed confidence in Church. Church neither kept its well-built organization, nor society percept it as institution, which spiritual and social values people may accept with confidence. Church influence is reduced to an outside rituality, rather than to a consciousness politics for winning believers to Christian values.

Official Church transforms itself into marginal institution without important influence on individual's life. People more and more turn to festive system of religion mainly at home and that became a compensation of satisfaction and integration. People have created their own home religion, borrowing from each other and combining unconsciously different, often contradicting elements, from different religious traditions.

On the question "Could you say that BOCh executes its duties and pastor mission, the answers are:

| |
|------------------------|
| categorically no – 46% |
| only some priests 42% |
| yes - 8% |
| don't know 2% |
| no interest – 2%*. |

The same processes of confrontation and two religious managements are observed in Muslim's church. Conclusions are available for them too. Irreconcilable struggle for religious power with all means in two biggest Churches in Bulgaria, allows us to label them as churches without sacred values.

The thing that is common for two significant periods of time in Bulgaria – the so called socialistic and democratic periods is the poor collaboration between religion, media and

religious life. But while in the so-called atheistic period of Bulgarian developing may consider, that there is some reason, that religion presence in media space would be seen as anti-state manifestation, how would be define poor engagement of religion toward media and religious education – with other words why is so weak collaboration between religion, mass media and education system

BOCh has got neither its own radio, nor own television. The national public television has not more that one hour one hour and a half weekly performances with religious themes, connected usually with concrete religious holiday events. Media have been interested predominantly to sensations in religious life, because of some neo-constructions and unpleasant facts in religious life.

Media constructions of religion, or in other words media image of religion is in duty towards church and towards religion's believers in our country, but priests are in bigger duty towards media. That is one of the reasons for the existing negativism to official church, for nihilism processes and consequences for layman, irrespective of some political aspects.

First direction, that requires the efforts of the researchers to study in depth the roots of nihilism and turndown of religious enthusiasm, that characterizes the first years of democratic changes, when brightly expressed religious liberation and tolerance were demonstrated, is media indifference and partiality to one of the two Synods.

The second direction is in political coloration of problems in Bulgarian Church and in legitimating of one of the two Synods through different periods, that reflects simultaneously in backdown and adherence of different layman, in supporting and denying of bases indicators of socio-cultural universalia.

Bulgarian Church schism, which had continued more than 10 years had revealed as fatal reason for turndown of religious enthusiasm that existed in the first years of democratic changes. Media follow the processes in Bulgarian Church and namely schism problems, but too superficially and with some partially tendency, premised from individual and political burdensomeness of journalist and their management. Objectively television and radio participation in this initial period of Bulgarian changes is rather participation in exteriorization of the great Christian events and rituals, in informing for being of some contradiction in the Holy Synod.

The Church in Bulgaria is officially secularized, but unofficially is depending on people with political power. This dependence is still existing (Peicheva D., 2005). Public media follow the model of status quo. Believers more and more close themselves at home, young people look on Christian holidays and customs as a pleasant attraction, as a way of their daily round variety. Changes of socio-cultural universalia couldn't contribute for the change of universalia bearers in very church. This fact has contra-pointed on its own universalia, on turndown of confidence in church. That's why today couldn't be said for "stupefying of recipients" but for losing layman faith.

What about socio-cultural universalia?

The Church doesn't contribute for denying and changing of attitudes to importance and significance of events, facts and examples from Bulgarian history, including from Bulgarian church. It doesn't orient people that European appurtenance of our country is good for Bulgarian people and has to be desirable for them. The Bulgarian Church doesn't learn people striving to freedom and democracy. It had not opinion for communist monuments, or for significant persons from our history etc, etc. And that is because of some problems and contradictions of the church, from one hand, and from other hand, because of its disagreements with new realities and orientations in Bulgaria, connected with some political

partiality and favor.

It has turned out that church doesn't defend and survive socio-cultural universalia. The Church doesn't contribute for revelation of nature of socio-cultural universalia to be constant, to be passing down from generation to generation. Our religious and political practice establish, that intransitives of socio-cultural universalia may be breaking, that intransitives is not guaranteed and safeguarded from political impact.

The other conclusion is that our official Bulgarian Church is not free from political interference. Socio-cultural universalia therefore is not predominantly intransitive. They depend on political reappraisal of situation.

Bibliography

Korubin, Jovan (2005) Multi-Confessional Reality and Relations between State and Religion, in: Religion and politics. Blagoevgrad, South-West University "Neofit Rilski"

Peicheva Dobrinka (2005) Media and Religion in: Religion and politics. Blagoevgrad, South-West University "Neofit Rilski"

* All presented data are published in: www.religiabg.com