

JANUSZ MARIAŃSKI  
Higher School of Social Sciences, Lublin

## Secularization and Desecularization in the Post-Secular Society

**Abstract:** The concept of the post-secular society; the dialogue between wisdom and faith might be – with a certain degree of probability – interpreted as a manifestation of desecularization. That religion, with its transcendent reference, may help in the many fields of modernity, sounds quite paradoxical. The chance for stabilization of the ambivalent modernism only with the use of communicative, secular powers of reason is, at least, doubtful. The European theory of secularization needs to be corrected in the contemporary world. A dialogue between secular reason and the reflective religious consciousness is crucial. This article discusses the situation of religion in the post-secular society – both secularization and desecularization.

Some Western sociologists, more and more often, speak of the de-secularization processes or even of the end of secularization; of the “re-enchantment” of the world. They indicate new forms of spirituality and religiousness, the possible coexistence of religion and modernity, the revival of religion, re-spiritualization processes, and religious megatrends. These new forms of religion and spirituality have specific roles of barometers of social transformation, which can be more general in nature.

**Key words:** post-secular society, secularization, desecularization, non-church, new spirituality, religiousness.

With the crisis of the Enlightenment utopia and entering a new phase of social development (the so-called post-modern society), new ideological as well as socio-cultural trends have appeared, to a certain extent favoring non-church religiousness. Today more and more often deterministic logic is being questioned, according to which social and cultural changes connected with the differentiation of society must unconditionally lead to the “disenchantment of the world” and finally to the disappearance of religiousness (the myth of universal secularization). The German

philosopher and sociologist, Jürgen Habermas, even speaks of the post-secular society – that is one “where in the environment constantly undergoing secularization, religious communities still exist”<sup>1</sup> – and of the continuance of religion in an environment perpetually undergoing secularization.

In 2004 at the Catholic Academy in Munich, Jürgen Habermas discussed the relationship between rationality and religion with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger<sup>2</sup>. “It is not about the very fact that religion remains in a more and more secular environment and that society still respects the existence of religious communities. The term »post-secular« does not only show recognition to religious communities for the functional contribution that they make due to reconstructing the desired motivations and attitudes. In the public consciousness of the post-secular society a rather normative insight appears, resulting in the consequence of a political way of dealing with non-believers, and those who believe. The post-secular society is permeated with the awareness that »the modernization of the public consciousness« encompasses and reflectively transforms the religious and earthly mentality, disproportionate in terms of time. By understanding the secularization of society as a complementary life process, both sides might also treat seriously their contribution in solving controversial issues in an open forum”<sup>3</sup>.

Habermas emphasizes that religion in modern times was forced to resign from the claim for the monopoly of interpretation and the overwhelming shaping of life due to the secularization of knowledge, the neutralization of state power, and the popularization of religious freedom. Religion must first of all renounce pressurizing and believing citizens should reflect upon their place and laws in the modern pluralistic society as well as accept the social pluralism and secular principles as sources of constitutional regulations. The dialogue between religion and rationality is possible within the liberal political culture, also the epistemic status could be granted to religious beliefs from the viewpoint of secular wisdom.

The post-secular society and the liberal constitutional state should accept religion, support its development, and protect the “normative intuition” preserved in religion which is beneficial for the post-secular society. Both partners should learn from each other and treat each other seriously. It is about tolerance, which presents itself as a rule of freedom and cooperation between religion and rationality. Habermas distances himself from the Classic anthropology of the Enlightenment, which eliminated religion from social life. He is in favor of the model of a liberal post-secular state, with a neutral worldview, where those who believe, and non-

---

<sup>1</sup> J. Habermas, *Wierzyć i wiedzieć*, “Znak” 54: 2002, no. 9 p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> J. Habermas, J. Ratzinger, *Dialektik der Säkularisierung, Über Vernunft und Religion*, Verlag Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> J. Habermas, *Pluralizm i moralność*, translated into Polish by W. Buchner, “Tygodnik Powszechny”, 2005, no. 18, p. 6.

believing citizens, lead a dialogue based on partnership, and cooperate for the good of the whole community<sup>4</sup>.

The concept of the post-secular society, the dialogue between wisdom and faith can be interpreted, with a certain probability, as an indication of desecularization. Religion, with its transcendent reference may be helpful in a number of fields of modernity, though this sounds quite paradoxical. The opportunity to stabilize the ambivalent modernity only with the use of communicative, secular powers of reason is questionable, to say the least. The European theory of secularization needs to be adjusted within the contemporary world. The dialogue between secular reason and contemplative religious consciousness is essential. This article discusses the situation of religion in the post-secular society – both in terms of secularization and desecularization.

### Secularization in the post-secular society

Until recently, the thesis that secularization is inseparably connected to social modernization persisted in sociology. According to this theory, religion in the conditions of modernity loses its ability to legitimize and construct social and moral order, its social significance continually diminishes, and it can be sustained only in the crevices and niches of the main trend of social life. Secularization is not the “by-product” of certain forms of social life, but its essential quality. The sacred will not disappear from the everyday life of people, and it can remain in the private sphere, at most. The popularization of secularism, expressed in philosophical doctrines, constitutions and state structures becomes similar to institutionalized religion in many respects<sup>5</sup>. In its extreme forms it denies religion the right and ability to shape public matters and the fate of people in the future.

The relationship between modernity and religion was presented according to the scenario of crisis, while secularization was treated as inseparably connected to social modernization, resulting in the drop of religious practices and the decline of the religious consciousness of society. Some sociologists declared the triumph of secularization in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (“the more modernized society, the more secularized it is”). In the conditions of progressing technical and economic as well as cultural processes of modernization, societies were becoming more and more “de-churched” (the fall of the significance of the Churches of Christian denomination and weakening church bonds). Undoubtedly, the tension between modernity and religion contributed to the fact that a lot of people left the Churches of Christian denomination.

---

<sup>4</sup> Z. Teinert, *Habermas i Ratzinger: wiara i wiedza w dobie sekularyzacji*, “Poznańskie Studia Teologiczne”, 2006, 20, pp. 156-169.

<sup>5</sup> J. Beckford, *Teoria społeczna a religia*, Translated into Polish by M. Kunz, T. Kunz, Zakład Wydawniczy NOMOS, Krakow 2006, p. 267.

On a more general level, secularization is connected most often with structural and functional differentiation. The law, science, economy, politics, education, and upbringing are becoming independent from the Church and religion. They are driven by their own codes and rules of functioning, and they have their own developmental dynamics. Neither of the social subsystems has power over other subsystems to influence, instruct and regulate them. Social differentiation in its various forms excludes the uniform religious interpretation of the world. In the contemporary world we are dealing with the continual emancipation of the secular reality from the control of religion and the Church. Moreover, The Church is intentionally eliminated from the sphere of public life. Not only is the axiological neutrality of the state propagated, but also secularism is as if becoming the official ideology of the European Union, some sort of a new "religion" of Europe (anti-Christian trends in Europe).

Some sociologists declared the triumph of secularization and secularism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the days of religion seemed to be numbered. The churches of Christian denominations were treated as relics of the past, history was heading towards secularization, or even secularism, and religion would be ultimately abandoned. Traditional theories of secularization were to some extent normative in their nature, since they assumed the fall of religion as an objective in the history of mankind. What is more, doing away with God – according to secularistic perspectives – will help to solve all world problems, secular humanistic values will be enough. The academic-rational progress will finally lead to blotting the idea of God from human consciousness. Secularization is irreversible, we are entering the post-religious era. Secularized societies will function without religious points of reference.

Secularization was regarded as something positive, which just needs to be accepted without reservation, while the cultural marginalization of religion was seen as an inevitable process, impossible to stop, and irreversible (society without God). In the conditions of progressing modernization and the secularization connected to it, religion is constantly becoming less relevant socially. Secularization is transforming into European secularism. Modern Europe should be unreligious, the twilight of religion is unavoidable (the program of secularism). Christianity is especially losing its social status and power in Western societies, a very rapid process of de-Christianization of these societies is noticeable. It is pushed aside to the private sphere, becoming a specific subculture. The secularization processes were considered to be a predominating way of describing the transformation of religion in modern societies.

According to the secularization thesis, religious vitality is diminishing from generation to generation, while the distance from the Church is increasing. In turn, the distance from the Church is a preparation for the distance from religion<sup>6</sup>. In

---

<sup>6</sup> G. Pickel, *Religionssoziologie. Eine Einführung in die zentrale Themenbereiche*, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Springer Fachmedien, Wiesbaden, 2011, p. 395.

sociology until the end of the 1980s, a thesis prevailed which held that in the process of social modernization, religion was systematically losing its significance and on three levels – more or less simultaneously: a) Macrosocial plane, on which there was the separation between Church and State, the social differentiation was shaping, independent social subsystems were also emerging (e.g. economy, politics, science, culture) independent from religion. In these conditions the religious worldview lost its universalist monopoly, it underwent relativization; b) On the mesostructured plane the pluralization of religious offers occurs; c) On the microstructural plane the participation of entities in church activities is losing its significance, e.g. through continuous fall in participation in religious practices<sup>7</sup>.

The Churches were accused of the desire to assign absolute priority to religious thought, deprecating the significance of reason and progress. Religious changes in Europe, aiming at secularization, were regarded as a model or example for all modernization or transformation around the world, while religiousness in America was presented as an “exception” to the European norm. Especially ideological secularism and engaged atheism in the missionary character included normative offers, indicating the inevitable fall of religion and sometimes seeking the source of incessant problems and conflicts in religion, and also problems of a political nature. Excessive faith and trust in progress, rationalization, efficiency, science etc. created a specific “lay religion”. A modern and enlightened European is freed from traditional religions and affirms the secular concept of life, in a manner out of necessity. The manifestations of a religious revival observed from time to time were interpreted as the increase of fundamentalism or just temporary inhibition of the processes of secularization. In social reality both various forms of secularization (secularizations) and various forms of secularism (secularisms) should be mentioned.

While secularization should be understood as a social process, wherein religion is becoming less relevant in modernizing conditions or modernized society, secularism denotes such a state of society, wherein religion no longer has social significance. Secularism in turn is an ideological form, which demands eliminating the influence of religion from all spheres of human life<sup>8</sup>. From the sociological point of view various levels and dimensions of secularization, secularity, and secularism should be studied.

Within the last 40 years an accelerated process of secularization has been noticeable in Western Europe. Societies were becoming more and more de-Christianized, even if they still preserved a Christian facade. The sacred was being eliminated both from

---

<sup>7</sup> P. Siegers, *Spiritualität – sozialwissenschaftliche Perspektiven auf ein umstrittenes Konzept*, „Analyse & Kritik“, 2014, vol. 36, no. 1, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> G. Pickel, *Religion, Religiosität, Religionslosigkeit und religiöse Indifferenz. Religionssoziologische Perspektiven im vereinigten Deutschland*, in: *Konfessionslosigkeit heute. Zwischen Religiosität und Säkularität*, Hrsg. von Miriam Rose, Michael Wermke, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, Leipzig, 2014, p. 50.

social life and from people's cultural products. Politics, economy, science, culture, and other fields of social life gained their independence from religion and Christian morality; they were earning their own systems of regulation and legitimization of their activities. The interpretative mandate of religion was seriously weakened. In postmodern societies there is no longer one system of values and norms embracing all fields of life. Social life, to a much larger extent, is driven and coordinated by various pragmatic rules, not connected with religion and religious morality. This process can be defined as a transition from the global and monocentric order to pluralized social and political life. In secularizing societies, individuals gained the opportunity to choose given elements from the Christian doctrine, together with a specific "law" of distancing themselves from the Church as an institution as well as separating morality from religion. The outlines of what is Christian are becoming less defined. They are becoming more varied, less churched, more pluralistic.

In contemporary pluralistic societies the religiousness "funded" by the Church is becoming less relevant, but it does not mean the disappearance of religiousness. Religion still remains a significant cultural and social phenomenon. The religious landscape is changing, but the "institutional deregulation of the religious sphere characteristic of contemporary societies does not at all mean that they have become indifferent to all spiritual or religious quests"<sup>9</sup>. In the conditions of secularization, the institutionalized religion is partially losing its integrational power in social dimensions. Independently from this process, however, the Church perspective predominates on the level of religious semantics. Most people in sociological research, defining their attitude towards what is religious, refer to traditional religious semantics. The closer the bond with the Church, the more often the surveyed persons define themselves as religious, while the weaker the bond – the less often. Nevertheless, the religious field is clearly changing, especially its internal structure. In the structure of the religious field, a shift towards the individual is taking place, which more and more often defines religiousness, as if on "their own account" (*Bastelreligion*). At the same time new religious movements are acting more and more visibly in the religious market, offering alternative styles of religious and moral life towards the traditional Churches. In the conditions of the increasing popularity of individualization, the distance from all social and political institutions is growing, also the distance from institutionalized religion, i.e. from the Churches of Christian denominations. What is institutional is becoming less relevant in shaping the personal religious identity, the erosion of churchgoing occurs<sup>10</sup>. From the perspective of

---

<sup>9</sup> D. Hervieu-Léger, *Od „praktykującego parafianina” do „pielgrzyma”*. *Katolicyzm wobec wyzwań religijności „pielgrzyma” – elementy refleksji socjologicznej*, "Przegląd Powszechny", 2001, no. 12, p. 356.

<sup>10</sup> F. Kaufmann, *Ist das Christentum in Deutschland zukunftsfähig?*, in: *Kirche – Idee und Wirklichkeit. Für eine Erneuerung aus dem Ursprung*, Hrsg. von Richard Heinzmann, Verlag Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 2014, p. 253.

secularization the decline of social significance of religion was described in modern societies. The critics of secularization theories indicated using too narrow a category of religiousness, as it was defined by the Churches of Christian denominations. By using a narrow category of religiousness the advocates of the theory of secularization did not notice that social modernization favored the emergence of new, individualized forms of religiousness, chosen on a free basis by individuals. The pluralization of religiousness is taking place, both within conventional religiousness and outside of it.

Socialization heading towards church religiousness is becoming less relevant, it is not necessary for social integration. Religious faith can be chosen by individuals in an independent way, accordingly to their needs and predispositions. The undergoing transformation of religiousness is to a certain degree a consequence of the popularization of expressive individualism and logic of consumerist orientations in Western societies. The model of institutionalized religiousness defined by the Church is accepted by the minority of believers, it does not determine the necessary frame of reference for faith. Individuals can choose their own faith, what suits their needs and preferences from various offers.

### **Desecularization in the post-secular society**

Sociologists, most of whom a few decades ago were convinced of the irreversible secularization of Western societies and of the fact that the matters of religion were a thing of the past, today are much more cautious in their evaluation and predictions. It turned out that the crisis of the Churches of Christian denominations as well as the twilight of the authority of the institutional Church do not mean, in this respect, the disappearance of religious interpretations of life and reality, i.e. the decline of religious consciousness (secularization of consciousness). Some sociologists adopt the concept of the post-secular society following Jürgen Habermas. Those sociologists, who do not consider the secularization processes exclusively in the categories of social modernization, are growing in number. Many other contextual factors, historical in nature, regarding the relationship between Church and State, as well as national identities, should be taken into account. It is not enough only to consider the social modernization.

Contrary to the, at least until recently, almost universally accepted theory of secularization, more and more often, even with reference to Western Europe, desecularization processes are being discussed. Sociologists are increasingly seeking new models, which would explain more clearly the transformations in religiousness and the bonds with the Churches (from institutionalized to individualized forms of religiousness). Alongside the church-based religiousness (often selective, inconsistent, undogmatic, and/or reduced), still dominating in many countries, various forms of non-church-centered religiousness as well as a new spirituality, which is syncretic

in nature, are emerging. Paul Heelas proclaims even spiritual revolution, according to which there is a transition from religion to spirituality and a specific sacralization of modernity<sup>11</sup>. In the contemporary sociology there are disputes around the theory of secularization. Attempts to delegitimize it are made. The socio-economic modernization in the modern world does not exclude the chances to desecularize it. Secularization is not a necessary and inevitable process, undergoing linearly and directionally until the complete disappearance of religion and religiousness. Not all countries must, unavoidably, go through the same path that Western Europe is following, according to the one common pattern.

The process of secularization, which until recently seemed to be unstoppable, was – at least partially – blocked. Various forms of religion began to be regaining their place in the public sphere, opposing the trend trying to relegate religion to the private sphere. The statement that civilization is heading towards secularism and the disappearance of religion does not seem as certain as until recently. The process of “de-privatizing” religion meant that institutions and religious powers issued a cultural, social and political challenge, based on secularization, raising for discussion the alleged neutrality of the State towards values and again formulating the consolidated distinction between the public and private sphere, between public and private ethics. A slow return of religion to the sphere of public life is the case, e.g. the movement of “Solidarity” in Poland, the Islamic revolution in Iran, the return of a Muslim presence in many social contexts, the Catholic movement in Latin America, and the revival of Protestant fundamentalism in many countries. Even in secularized Western societies the voice of main religious communities can again be heard in the international arena<sup>12</sup>.

Secularization was developing first of all in urban environments, and in these environments today we are observing more and more often various indications of desecularization emerging in new forms of religiousness and spirituality. The research on European systems of values has confirmed that at the turn of the century there was a slowdown in secularization processes, and even in many European cities (with the exception of *inter alia* Paris) an increase in the indicators of the so-called subjective religiousness was observed. The transformational processes of religiousness were happening in various directions and with different strengths, which created a basis for formulating the thesis on the “return of religion”, even in public life. When solving economic, political, cultural, integrational, and intercultural

---

<sup>11</sup> P. Heelas, *The spiritual revolution: from 'religion' to 'spirituality'*, in: *Religions in the Modern World. Traditions and transformations*, L. Woodhead, P. Fletcher, H. Kawanami, D. Smith (ed.), Routledge, London 2002, pp. 357-377.

<sup>12</sup> V. Possenti, *Religia i polityka na przełomie tysiącleci*, “Społeczeństwo. Studia, prace badawcze, dokumenty z zakresu nauki społecznej Kościoła”, 2005, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 438-439.



coexistence problems, questions concerning values arise, sometimes along with the question relating to religion in the background.

Those who question the theory of secularization often emphasize the phenomenon of the transformation of religion into spirituality, they indicate the processes of individualization and religious pluralization. The pluralization of the religious sphere entails a multitude of religions in society (interorganizational pluralism) and religious diversity within separate religions and Churches (intraorganizational pluralism). It does not seem that the processes of religious pluralization will be brought to a halt in the near future. Such intensification of world markets and lifestyle favors shaping the processes of religious individualization. Due to both social processes the religious field is changing, to a certain extent it is widening, definitely it is diversifying very intensely<sup>13</sup>. Some sociologists, e.g. José Casanova, are speaking of the increase in the significance of religion as an important public issue in the world – even in Europe<sup>14</sup>.

Secularization and desecularization – both processes of the transformation of religiousness – are ascertained in sociological studies, they run parallel in contemporary societies, hence their treatment as totally opposing and excluding phenomena (“either” – “or”) is a false alternative, similar to the strict juxtaposition of “the religious” versus “the secular”. Moreover, the growing indications of the religious revival in the contemporary world allow us to claim that Western Europe is not a “model example”, but rather a “special case”. More and more often not only secularization is spoken of, but also pluralization and individualization of religiousness. Pluralization and individualization are a certain developmental process, and not the achieved state of affairs. The theory of secularization still seems to explain well the processes of social differentiation, that is the fact that secular spheres of human life are becoming independent from the influence of church institutions and religious norms.

In secularized or secularizing societies organized systems of religious faith are undergoing deregulation. The claims of the Churches of Christian denominations as representing the true faith are under relativization, while the legitimization of faith is shifting from religious authorities as guarantors of the verity of faith to individuals, who are responsible for the authenticity of their religious or spiritual beliefs. Their own truth is emphasized as well as the primacy of authenticity. The continuously expanding market of religion and religious symbols, as well as the weakening of institutional control of the Church over the religious beliefs of their

---

<sup>13</sup> K. Gabriel, *Alte Probleme und neue Herausforderungen*, in: *Die Zukunft von Religion und Kirche in Deutschland. Perspektiven und Prognosen*, Hrsg. von Patrick Becker, Ursula Diewald. Verlag Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 2014, pp. 15-18.

<sup>14</sup> J. Casanova, *Eurozentrischer Säkularismus und die Herausforderung der Globalisierung*, in: *Politik, Religion und Markt. Die Rückkehr der Religion als Anfrage an den politisch-philosophischen Diskurs der Moderne*, Hrsg. von Wilhelm Guggenberger, Dietmar Regensburger, Kristina Stöck, Innsbruck University Press, Innsbruck 2009, pp. 19-39.

followers, favors these specific “combinatorics” of individual beliefs. The pace of social and economic transformations, the increasing spatial and professional mobility, and varied cultural transformations undermine the structures of the reliability of all institutions, including those of the church, which in turn shape religious identities. In this context handing down the religious faith within a family is clearly diminishing.

An American sociologist, Peter L. Berger, who was an ardent supporter of the theory of secularization in the 1960s and 1970s, totally questioned this theory in the 1990s, regarding it as totally false. He substituted it with the theory of pluralism, claiming that modernity did not bring the fall of religion, but has led to its transformation. We are not the witnesses of the fall of religion. The modern world is not so much characterized by secularization, as a rather more important phenomenon of religious pluralization. In his latest works Peter L. Berger again seems to be modifying his position. Modernity has brought secular discourse, which means that people are able to resign from religious interpretations of reality in many aspects of life. This secular discourse is emerging not only in Western Europe, or in the intellectual circle, but also in the life of ordinary people around the world. The mistake of the theoreticians of secularization was that they attributed an exclusive position to this discourse and they eliminated the fact that in real life people might find a balance between religious and secular discourse or even turn from one to the other. Social modernization has its secularizational effects, but to a limited extent, it does not entail secularization out of necessity or without exception. It favors both religious pluralism as well as secular discourse. Pluralism – according to Berger – relativizes and questions the cultural obviousness (certainties), although it does not necessarily lead to secularization.

In pluralism people find themselves in a constant competition of various beliefs, values and lifestyles. In many secularized societies people do not feel the necessity to choose between various religious offers, they do not make final decisions, but they leave the questions about the truthfulness of faith open (religiousness without a decision). The classic theory of secularization was modified by the theory of pluralism. Social modernization inevitably involves worldview pluralism, religious and secular pluralism. Religious and secular codes might co-exist and compete. The compatibility of religious and secular discourse, however, have their limits<sup>15</sup>. Even if modernity has contributed to the popularity of the secular discourse in many countries, around the world it has appeared in numerous forms, not only in the variant of Western civilization.

Even if, in post-modern societies, institutionalized Christianity is in decline, an interest in religion does not wane. On the fringe of the Churches or outside the

---

<sup>15</sup> D. Pollack, *Auf dem Wege zu einem neuen religionssoziologischen Paradigma?*, in: P. L. Berger, *Altäre der Moderne. Religion in pluralistischen Gesellschaften*, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2015, pp. 168-173.

Churches various religious movements and communities are appearing. The “undomesticated” or “homeless” religiousness (*unbehauste Religion*) is gaining in importance, which sometimes appears against the background of disappointment with the Church, partially on the grounds of substantial claims for autonomy. This new type of individualized non-church religiousness (religiousness “not funded” by the Church), is every now and then called an invisible religiousness, hidden, elusive, analogical, postmodern, unspecified, syncretic, dispersed, liquid, privatized, disharmonious, diverse, fragmented, ambiguous, forgotten, non-institutional (religion without an institution), and decentralized without focal points.

Secularization theories indicate the continuity of the loss of meaning of religion (especially church religiousness) in the contemporary world, in theories of individualization the decreasing importance of institutionalized religions and the vitality of private forms of religiousness are adopted as the main hypothesis. The theories of rational choice allow for an increase in religiousness within the conditions of the pluralized offers of the religious market. In all likelihood, the future will show which of these scenarios will develop. In any case, secularization theories, also those of a modified form, no longer dominate in contemporary sociology, all the more, not through the only model explaining the transformations of religiousness. Some sociologists criticize them severely or accept them with many reservations<sup>16</sup>.

### **Church and non-church religiousness in the post-secular society**

Traditional societies transform into modern and post-modern societies. In the transition from a traditional society – through modern – towards a post-modern one, the social, moral and religious situation changes radically. One of the features of a new type of society is the lack of a comprehensive vision of life with a well-ordered hierarchy of values, the lack of fundamental points of reference for everyday life. Social bonds, fundamental for solidarity connecting traditional societies, undergo the processes of fragmentation and disintegration. In a society with a high level of structural and functional diversity, a multitude of overlapping and mutually intersecting social roles and their systems, and above all an abundance of individual values and hierarchies of values, are emphasized. The awareness of a wide array of alternatives might either hinder or stimulate the sphere of human activities. In an extremely diverse and fragmented society the rule “either – or”, which restricted choices made by human beings, no longer applies, but a range of possibilities regarding individualized ways of life and lifestyles comes into prominence (the multiple-choice society, the society of options, the permissive society).

---

<sup>16</sup> S. Mandes, *Miejsce religii w społeczeństwie. W poszukiwaniu nowego programu badawczego socjologii religii*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe SCHOLAR, Warsaw 2016, pp. 219-228.

Numerous sociological concepts assumed, at least *implicite*, that “the basic institutional constellations and the cultural program of European modernity that evolved in the West will finally be »naturally« adopted by all societies undergoing modernization”<sup>17</sup>. In fact, there is a multitude of modern civilizations, a diversity of cultural programs of modernity in the contemporary world. An Israeli sociologist, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, speaks of “multiple modernities”, which are not static, but in a state of flux. Also, the Western secularization is not the only form of an expression of modernity, as there are multiple versions of it, also such in which religion occupies a very important place in people’s consciousness. You can be both religious and modern.

In modern societies religion is not the dominating instance maintaining the entire social order, but one of many instances. A substantial part of religious activities was dominated by the logic of market economy. For a number of believers there is no strict dichotomy “either – or” between religious and secular discourse, but a liquid structure, “not this, but also that”. In pluralistic culture the certainty of faith becomes a rare good. The reality of faith becomes multidimensional and polymorphic. You can choose – when looking through various offers – from among many possibilities, or you must even choose this or that religious or nonreligious (secular) option. What is credible for an individual is true and not what is in keeping with tradition.

In modern societies the processes of questioning values and norms of religious morality are intensifying, both in the lives of selective Catholics, critical of the Church and its moral doctrine and in the lives of “leaving” Catholics, who are shaping their morality independently from religion. On the other hand, the processes of strengthening religiousness in the lives of “deepened” Catholics, who are combining religiousness with morality in their everyday life (specific religious virtuosos, religiously sensitive), are noticeable. Generally, however, a gap between widely declaimed religiousness and religiousness on a day-to-day basis is emphasized, especially in the field of marriage and family morality. Spontaneous secularization and socio-cultural pluralism are contributing to the diversity of moral orientations among contemporary people (ethical pluralism). According to many contemporaries, moral principles are based on an individual conscience and not religion (weakened need of religion as an authority and moral guarantor).

Religion, which is chased away, does not surrender easily; it changes its place, moving from the public to the private sphere, and sometimes it returns to the public sphere (the so-called deprivatisation). Religious elements are emerging – with varying degrees – in all domains of human life, while problems connected with the meaning of life (the “foretaste” of religious experience) in the contemporary world seem to be intensifying. Neither science, nor the rationalist thinking are able to fully explain the problems connected with the meaning and aim of human life.

---

<sup>17</sup> S. N. Eisenstadt, *Utopia i nowoczesność. Porównawcza analiza cywilizacji*, translated into Polish by A. Ostolski, Oficyna Naukowa, Warsaw 2009, pp. 444-445.

Sometimes even the secularistic downturn is mentioned. A German sociologist of religion, Karl Gabriel, indicates three parallel processes referring to contemporary religiousness: secularization, individualization, and deprivatisation<sup>18</sup>. According to sociological studies on the values in Europe in the 1990s, the level of the so-called social modernization is not enough to explain the differences in religiousness and churchgoing in separate countries. An important factor diversifying religiousness is the history of the nation and its relationship with the culture of a given society.

In postmodern societies of Western Europe, the Churches of Christian denominations are losing their relevance as authorities that shape the life plans of people, their decisions and beliefs. Church affiliation is becoming one of many options. The crisis of the Church is universally spoken of. In the light of sociological research, we can claim that there is a departure from the outside towards internal stabilization of religiousness on the part of institutions, achieved through the subjectivation of religiousness. Many individuals abandon the Church. They reject the centralized, and in their opinion, authoritative church structures. They are willing to accept the diaconal ministry of the Church, the Church as an institution offering "rites of passage" (baptism, confirmation, church wedding, Christian funeral), oriented towards a "customer".

According to this perspective, the Church is not first of all a community delivering faith, it is not an institution of social responsibility, but an instance responding to the religious expectations of people, it is for them. The Church, open to human beings and their needs, arouses interest and gains approval. Even if the participation in religious practices in Europe follows a downward trend and remains at a low level, contemporary people are still looking for answers to important questions about the meaning of life and seeking spiritual support in difficult situations in religions and in the Churches of Christian denominations.

Generally speaking, church institutions are losing their social influence; individuals are becoming the center and measure of religious life. They do not only have the opportunity to choose freely in matters related to faith, but to some extent they are "doomed" to make that choice. The selection is not made entirely randomly, it is also influenced socially and culturally. The Churches of Christian denominations are becoming organizations dependent on the choice and decision of people. Their social and religious contours are becoming more and more liquid, breaking away from the supervision of the Church. Hence, we are not only speaking of the Church in a liquid modernity, but of a liquid Church and liquid religiousness<sup>19</sup>.

---

<sup>18</sup> K. Gabriel, *Religionssoziologie. Religion zwischen Säkularisierung, Individualisierung und Deprivatisation*, "Soziologische Revue", 2000, vol. 23, no. 5, pp. 244-254.

<sup>19</sup> W. Świątkiewicz, *Wartości rodzinne i religijne we współczesnej kulturze polskiej*, in: *Po kryzysie?*, G. Skąpska, M.S. Szczepański, Ż. Stasienuk (ed.), Polskie Towarzystwo Socjologiczne, Warsaw 2016, pp. 106-107.

The individualizational thesis allows us to describe the institutionalized churchgoing and private religiousness as well as study diverse forms of religiousness, positioned between the "private transcendence" and "traditional churchgoing". In this respect, the breakdown of churchgoing does not have to mean the weakening of personal religiousness. In the contemporary secularized world, religion is not disappearing, but is changing its forms and shapes. Alongside the traditional Churches various competitive forms and movements are appearing. What is Christian is not identified with institutionalized religiousness or the religiousness shaped by the Church. Trends of religious life formed outside of the church, connected to a specific re-spiritualization of modern times are becoming socially popular. The decline of over-institutionalized religion is accompanied by the "re-assembling" of religious beliefs and elements.

In the conditions of postmodernity individuals affirm their beliefs and perform actions on their own (autonomically); they no longer count on institutional or community support. Constructing yourself as a subject is a priority in our culture. A French sociologist, Alain Touraine, expressed it in an extreme form: "My last word can be only one: everyone has the right to be a subject creating his or her own laws"<sup>20</sup>. Religion is becoming a "subject" chosen individually, at one's own discretion, it is not exclusively administered by the Churches of Christian denominations (the right of an individual to make his or her own choice, also in the religious sphere). The pluralism of values, forcing yourself to choose between values belonging to various axiological systems, favors the promotion of selective attitudes towards a given religion.

Weakly internalized values, personal autonomy, freedom and the emancipation of an individual, have a destructive effect on traditional religious and church bonds. The uncertainty, which arises from the rivalry between different systems of values, leads to religious relativism, indifferentism or even nondenominationalism (denominational "homelessness"). Also, the process of secularization, understood as the loss of the influence of religious and church institutions on the society, favors the shaping of selective attitudes towards religion, as well as the weakening of the credibility of religious explanations and interpretations in the consciousness of believers. As a result, religiousness of many extreme "heterodoxists" is gradually losing its transcendental nature and is acquiring social and cultural dimensions (secularized religiousness, cultural religiousness). Transcendent religions are becoming a "lost world" in the consciousness of those people. The explicit faith (*fides explicita*) is becoming blurred, hidden, anonymous, disorganized, implicit (*fides implicita*).

These and other socio-cultural transformations favor developing various forms of religiousness. In a broad sense non-church (individualized, privatized) religiousness refers to all forms of religious life, which are being shaped outside of the large

---

<sup>20</sup> A. Touraine, *Myśleć inaczej*, translated into Polish by M. Byliniak, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsaw 2011, p. 268.

Churches of Christian denominations (Catholicism, the Orthodox Church, Protestantism), so it includes both traditional sects and new religious movements, not connected with the large Churches. Religiousness of such kind more or less differs from the one propagated and expected by the large Churches of Christian denominations, from the system of values and norms as well as roles expected within church institutions. In the strict sense non-church religiousness refers to those aspects of religious life, which are shaped outside of forms of institutionalized religion (including new religious movements). It is about those believers, who define themselves as religious but at the same time they reject all kinds of institutionalized religion – more or less radically. They believe that the path to God (understood in many different ways) is found not through forms of religion recognized by the Church, but through their personal faith. They have their God, their heaven, their salvation, their little *credo*. The boundaries between separate religions and denominations do not mean much to them. Professing clearly defined faith, according to the *Credo* of the Church, is often defined as fundamentalism. In many contemporary societies Orthodox faith is a matter of the minority of believers, while the Church is becoming less and less needed in the role of an intermediary between humans and the supernatural world.

Even if traditional forms of religion are becoming less relevant, at the same time non-church forms of religiousness and spirituality are gaining more and more recognition. New quests for spirituality, a specific return of the sacred, which sociologists are noticing, on the one hand mean departing from the traditional understanding of the meaning with its references to great Transcendence (vertical experience), while on the other hand it is emphasizing life as a value in itself, a source of knowing yourself and personal development (horizontal experience). These new social forms of religion and spirituality are characterized by not much consistent and non-obligatory sacred universe and a low level of transcendence in comparison with traditional types of religion. New religiousness and spirituality are “dispersed” in multiple and heterogeneous contexts. Many of those who abandon organized religions are looking for secularized forms of spirituality, offering a more authentic “path” inside themselves and towards secular forms of holiness. Sociologists are trying to diagnose, interpret, and explain the phenomenon of new spirituality (Paul Heelas), popular religion (Hubert Knoblauch), the return of religion (Paul M. Zulehner), re-spiritualization (Matthias Horx), modern spirituality (Karl-Fritz Daiber), sacralization of the person (Hans Joas) and others. New forms of religiousness and spirituality seem compatible with many qualities of post-modernity, while social modernization does not have to lead to the fall of religion out of necessity.

The popularity of new forms of religiousness and spirituality, going beyond the traditional boundaries set so far between religions, is a new global phenomenon (deterritorialization of religion). More and more often the revolution of spirituality is mentioned, as well as alternative forms of spirituality, post-Christian and post-

religious spirituality, religiousness and spirituality emancipated from the influences of the Churches of Christian denominations. Church religiousness is supported institutionally by the Churches, whereas alternative forms of religiousness and spirituality lack such support and maybe every new generation will develop their own forms of religiousness and spirituality. It all should become the subject of empirical study, to a greater extent.

Individualized religiousness is often syncretic in nature. Syncretism, which from a sociological point of view has no negative connotations, is not a strictly non-church phenomenon. The Churches of Christian denominations are becoming in large measure the Churches of people distanced from religion, often presenting syncretic religious attitudes. In the conditions of forming the so-called supermarket of various religions and a specific imperative of choice, many Christians are shaping their religious attitudes through the selection of components from various religious traditions. The selection criterium is not so much their truthfulness as their own needs or the benefits of the selector (a specific "mixture" of various elements). This new form of syncretism, first of all, concerns the interests of an individual.

### **Concluding remarks**

In new socio-cultural conditions a human being is faced with many choices, which were unthinkable in traditional societies. They concern education, profession, close relationships with other people, political, moral and religious values, or even defining your own identity. In the age of socio-cultural pluralism, religious and church institutions must fight for customers, respecting the principle of competition in the "worldview market". The customers are becoming more and more autonomous and they are seeking spiritual offers appropriate to their needs. Under conditions of forming a pluralistic society faith cannot only be a matter of birth or cultural inheritance, much less be based on the guarantees of social environment. A new approach to religion is connected with a more individual religious experience than with the teachings of the Church, more with what is personal than institutional, more with private than official religiousness. Contemporarily, human beings want to decide on their own on how to attain faith and how to express it. They make their own decisions on what their faith is and how it is supposed to be understood.

Sociologists variously describe new forms of religiousness, loosely connected with the Church (distanced) or non-church religiousness. Grace Davie indicates the competitive religious market in the USA and the distancing from the Churches of Christian denominations in Europe. Individuals, who do not abandon the Church and do not change their religious denomination, prefer a certain distance towards their own Church until they need its help (substitute religiousness). The offer of the Church becomes relevant at life-changing moments (e.g. the birth of a child, a wedding, death) or in the situation of an individual or collective catastrophe(s) (searching for



the support of church specialists)<sup>21</sup>. Even if most Europeans still preserve a general faith in God, the depth and scope of church religiousness have significantly decreased. Those who believe in a personal God, attend Church masses or services regularly, and pray every day are in the significant minority in most European countries. You might wonder about the future of such religiousness, which has no institutional protection or social embeddedness.

Some Western sociologists are more and more often speaking of desecularization processes or even of the end of secularization, of the “re-enchantment” of the world. They indicate new forms of spirituality and religiousness, the possible co-existence of religion and modernity, revitalization of religion, the processes of re-spiritualization and religious megatrends. These new forms of religion and spirituality have the specific role of barometers of social transformations, which are more general in nature. All religions of the world, including Catholicism, undergo constant changes, also in the context of the processes of modernization and globalization, but they are transforming in many ways and at a different pace.

---

<sup>21</sup> G. Davie, *Socjologia religii*, translated into Polish by R. Babińska, Zakład Wydawniczy NOMOS, Krakow 2010, pp. 311-322.