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# Religion in Modern Contemporary Western Societies:

## Rupture and Continuity

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# ABSTRACT


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This study addresses the complex relationship between religion and society. The continuous existence of religion in contemporary Western societies represents the main issue of debate. Classical and contemporary sociological theories of religion are employed in order to explore the nature of religion, on one hand, and the place and form of religion within society, on the other. In doing so, major concepts such as secularization, modernity, and church are explored. It will be argued that religion is present in contemporary modern societies, even if it appears different from the forms it had in the past. This theoretical framework is used to address religion in two particular contexts, Quebec and Ireland. This thesis ultimately supports the necessity for theoretical approaches to religion that encompass the entire social environment.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# Introduction

Sociologists of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century looked at Western societies as secularized areas (especially Western Europe and Canada, but other areas of the world were also included), and considered religion as a "relic" of the past. The French school of sociology of religion held that "sociology of religion is the sociology of an imminent death", as Francoise Champion argues quoted by Constantin Cuciuc (Cuciuc, 1996: p 164)[1]. However, secularization theory was already shaken by the resurgence of religion in some parts of the globe (the conflicts in Yugoslavia, fundamentalist Islam, and new religious movements are but a few examples). The European Union recently presented a draft constitution that will be voted in the near future that considers Europe as an area in which Christian values are universal and of paramount importance. They argue that Europe developed in strict relationship with Christianity. After September 11 2001, religious issues emerged on the public and political arenas of Western societies. Religion made the front page of numerous newspapers that previously mentioned it only rarely in second tier articles. After these events, religion appeared again on the public stage as a major actor. The resurgence of religion fuels debates that address the relationships between the Islamic and Christian Worlds. Social theorists even argue for a de-secularization of society or the end of secularization.

This thesis holds that religion is inseparable from society, and that religion is an omnipresent phenomenon. In modern societies religion is not a dead topic as some theorists argued in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The thesis reconsiders the concept of religion in its entire complexity, in order to be able to address the relationship between religion and modernity. Religion is a system of norms, values and symbols relevant to all of humanity,

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[1] Note: All the translations in this thesis from Romanian to English are done by the author.

which are evolving with society as a whole. The church represents only the visible institutionalized part of religion. Only the church is weakened by what is often called secularization. Otherwise, secularization represents the process by which religion interacts with modernity. This represents the paradox of religion in modern societies. On the one hand, parts of it are weakened, and, on the other hand, parts of it are unaltered. The arguments are constructed beginning with classical sociological theory on religion (Comte, Durkheim, Marx, Weber, and Simmel) and followed by contemporary theorists (Parsons, Luhmann, Luckmann, Casanova, Berger, Hervieu-Leger and Martin). The classic sociologists offer a comprehensive study of religion and they consider that religion is a vital part of society. Contemporary theorists recapture the classics' understanding of religion and its place and significance in society. Once the theoretical arguments are put forward, an analysis of two particular religious contexts (Quebec and Ireland) is offered to support them.

Theorists, such as Weber and Parsons, argue that modern society emerged in the Western World, (i.e.: Western Europe and North America), in strict connection with the predominant Christian religion that is present in these areas. They hold that modernity is inseparable from the religious background of the West. This thesis focuses on the Western World and its predominantly Christian religion, since theories of religion, both classic and contemporary, mainly address modernity and this particular religion in the West.

Religion provides a spiritual link with the sacred, an ethical and moral code for the community, and an ultimate reference for any human question. Due to the powerful symbols embedded in it, religion is one of the pillars of human society. At present,

however, the state also provides ethical and moral codes for the community, through constitutions and codes of laws. For example, in many European countries the codes of laws punish theft and crime, dictate the legal form of marriage, and delimit normal acceptable behaviour from antisocial behaviour (Haguenau-Moizard, 2000).

Social theory, philosophy, history and theological studies have tried to understand the true nature of religion for centuries. Some of their definitions are considered too inclusive and some are too exclusive. When dealing with a too narrow definition of religion, theory can be accused of being intolerant, as it fails to include some religious manifestations that are not part of the religious practices of the majority group. In the same way, when the definition is too large, the notion will become too general to address its particularities.

From the classical theorists, such as Marx, Weber, Comte, Durkheim and Simmel, through to such modern theorists as Parsons and Bauman, sociologists of religion have tried understand the relationship between religion and society. Meredith McGuire, in "Religion: The Social Contexts", categorizes the different definitions given to religion in two main types, substantive definitions and functional definitions. "**Substantive definitions** try to establish what religion *is*; **functional definitions** describe what religion does" (McGuire, 2002: p 8). The functional definitions capture the relations between society and religion. McGuire holds that sociologists have delimited different functions of religion:

> "Some of the functions [...] include the provision of ultimate meaning, the attempt to interpret the unknown and control the uncontrollable, personification of human ideals, integration of the culture and legitimation of the social system, projection of human meanings and social patterns onto a superior entity, and the effort

to deal with ultimate problems of human existence" (McGuire, 2002: p 11).

Some of the functions address the individual and some of them address communities or even the entire society. The latter are often called social functions[2].

This thesis centers on some of these types of functions, in an attempt to understand the place of religion in Western Societies and the links between religion and the rest of society. It distinguishes the concept of religion from church because in many debates they are used as one concept, when in fact the church represents only one visible and manifest instrument of religion (i.e.: in the debates in the United States regarding the Catholic priests, sometimes the Catholic religion is confused with a particular local church). This thesis holds that secularization is related to the church, while modernization is related to religion. The church, representing institutionalized religion, is eroded in modern societies, and it is loosing its importance and control over society. The current form of institutionalized religion is no longer compatible with present society. Religion, at the same time, adapts itself to the new form of society, giving birth to new forms of religiosity, such as individual religions, private religions or public religions.

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[2] Zamfir states that religion has four main types of functions in society. First, religion has a cognitive function that means that "religion is a system of answers to questions regarding life and the world in general, questions left unanswered by science" (Zamfir and Vlasceanu eds., 1992: p 509). Second, religion has an unlimited power of action. Subjected to this limited power of action, people have tried and continue to try to obtain help from supernatural forces or deities, to help them succeed in their goals in life. Third, religion has an anxiety reduction function, "eliminating or limiting human anxiety in situations that exceed human control". Fourth, religion has social functions, preserving solidarity and social order within society (Zamfir and Vlasceanu eds., 1992: p 509-511).

# Overview

The first chapter introduces the concept of religion, as it was interpreted in the classical theories of Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, Max Weber and George Simmel. The selection of these theorists provides an overall view of religion in classical sociology. Most contemporary theorists follow one or more of these classical approaches. The classics developed an approach to religion and its relevance and relationship with society. They considered that only this type of approach is relevant for sociology, and as religion is a social fact, it has to be studied inside society. August Comte understands religion from a positive approach. In his work he states that religion was irrational, however he later concludes that religion is normal for society, and he underlines their unity. Comte delimits three universal stages of human development: the theological, the metaphysical (or philosophical), and positive. Religion, in his approach, is the core of the first stage, when man has explained the unexplained through supernatural beings (gods). Religion has its birthplace in this stage of human development, and religious explanations were used to understand the reality. In the second stage, religious explanations were replaced (or sometimes used together) with metaphysical explanations. The positivist stage supposes that positivist science replaces all other explanations. For Comte, religion is an artifact of the theological stage that will disappear in the present stage. He emphasizes the relations between social life and religion, and mainly the educational role of religion. In the positivist stage religion is said to have an educational role.

Emile Durkheim is the first of the sociologists to design a well-defined problematic for the study of religion and society. In his book, "The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life", the French sociologist explores archaic forms of religion in an Australian tribe. He states that religion is not irrational and that it is founded in society. For him, society is not only a community of people, but first of all, a system of ideas, values, beliefs and sentiments. These together form the social representations that are not the sum of individual representations. These social representations are the essential components of a society. Religion is born from within society, and it is formed by religious representations that are in fact social representations. Durkheim considers that religion is the preserver of the culture inside a society, and that religion offers cohesion for society. Religion is, for him, both, born in society and gives birth to society. Namely, Durkheim holds that religion is the deification of society. His definition of religion includes the concept of church that is indispensable, for a properly defined religion. Durkheim regards secularization as a decline of the church that may take different forms.

The writings of the young Marx[3] identify a specific form of economy embedded in religion and described religion as a past (bad) stage in human evolution. Marx holds that religion is a stage of human development, produced by the human but a stage that has to be replaced by a new, more evolved one – the stage of science. Real happiness cannot be attained while religion exists, because religion is the false knowledge of society. Marx argues that religion is the distorted reflection of society. This reflection, however, is the mirror image of an unequal capitalist society. Religion is strictly related

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[3] There are of course other interpretations of Marx's work on religion. Liberation theology, for example, takes Marx's notions (social classes, religion) and employs them to argue for the need of a theology that would defend the disadvantaged. Ron Rhodes addresses this link between liberation theology and Marx (http://home.earthlink.net/~ronrhodes/Downloadable.html).

to capitalism and exploitation, and it is used to preserve and reinforce the existing social order. He is somehow similar to Durkheim, but while the French sociologist sees religion as providing solidarity and reinforcing society, Marx only sees a particular type of unjust society being reinforced by religion.

Max Weber develops a study of religion that looks at the birth of religion and at what defines a religion. Weber follows the development of the main manifest forms of religion, connecting them with the advancement of society. The German theorist develops an approach to religion that takes Durkheim's ideas further. Weber addresses the founding of world religions, stating that a religion can appear only when there are: a prophet, a community of followers, and a clergy (Weber, 1978). The theorist also underlines the differences between religion and magic, stating what, for him, defines a religion. He looks at different religions and concludes that different social classes and different occupational classes have different types of religiosity, more conservative or more modern, and that different state organizations adopt different types of religion. He begins a historical analysis of state development linked and influenced by the development of different types of religions. Weber describes a critical connection between advances in society and advances in religion. For him, advancements in societal organization, (i.e.: capitalism), only occur when advancements in religion, (i.e.: Protestantism), are available. Here he links the notion of predetermination, a core concept in the protestant church, with the concept of rational capitalism that is, gaining money and investing it in a rational way, in order to accumulate more and more. Weber argues that only the presence of Protestantism has permitted the jump from barbaric capitalism to rational capitalism. Weber is the first to draw the image of Western modernity in terms

of its relation with Western religion. Max Weber holds that secularization means that religious institutions are loosing their control over social life.

George Simmel develops Durkheim's idea that religion is the preserver of social cohesion in society, arguing that at the base of society building there are religious concepts that confer it eternity, unity and stability over time. However, he focuses on the individual relationships, and theorizes the religiosity of the basic forms of human interaction.

Religion, therefore, has different meanings for the classical sociological theorists. While all of them agree more or less that religion is one of the driving forces of human society, the evolution of religion is seen differently. Durkheim and Simmel consider that religion, at its inner core, is transcendental, and eternal, while Comte and Marx, slightly differently, look at religion as an artifact of the past and a past stage of human evolution. Secularization of course has different definitions for them: it only affects the manifest parts of religion (for Durhkeim and Simmel), while for Marx it has to erase religion as a whole from society. Weber takes a different approach to religion and secularization; he is only studying and interpreting manifest forms of religion and historical facts. He is not trying to propose a general theory of religion and to predict what will happen. However he links the development of Western society with its predominant religion.

The second chapter of this thesis addresses the concept of religion in contemporary social theories. At the same time, it underlines the continuity that exists between classical and contemporary theory of religion. Classical theories are developed and adapted to contemporary contexts. First, we present different definitions of secularization, in order to exemplify the large number of meanings that are included in it.

Next we address Parsons' and Luhmann's theories of modernity, since all of the authors discuss religion and secularization in connection with modernity. We then follow through different contemporary theorists of religion and modernity to delimit the common elements regarding secularization and to explore the meaning of religion in contemporary modern societies.

Talcott Parsons continues the work of Weber on religion. He addresses the relations between society and religion, incorporating the study of religion in his theoretical framework of structural functionalism. He defines the place and function of religion in modern societies. Parsons applies Weber's model of the birth of capitalism and its relationship to Protestantism to explain the advancements in human societies through history. In so doing, he links Christianity with the advancement of societies in the late middle ages, from a feudal system to more modern forms of state organizations. He focuses his attention on the relationship between modernity and religion. The main notion in his work is the concept of differentiation. Parsons describes the process of division of a unit into two or more units, within a system, whereby each of the new units take on and better fulfill one role of the former unit. The relationship between state and religion is a continuous series of differentiations that produces advancements in society. Parsons understands secularization as a series of differentiations, by which religion has lost control over the laws, politics, nation, and finally over the economy. Despite the fact that religion has lost its institutional influence over society, he claims that the influence is still exercised through the attachments of individuals to religious values. That is, Parsons argues that secularization is in fact a reinforcement of religion, and not as a diminishing factor that affects religion.

Religion, for Niklas Luhmann, is present in modern societies, even if its functions are different from the past. Luhmann draws his image of pre-modern and modern society, and, in both cases, he delimits the place of religion. In the past, religion shaped the entire social environment. In modern societies religion influences directly only its own sub-environment. Its functions for the entire society are subtler, and more indirect. Religion has an overall function in society that is to provide an end to the infinite regression of meaning.

Thomas Luckmann distances himself from Parsons and Luhmann. His theory is not a systemic theory. What matters for him is at the level of the individual. Modern religion is more a private religion, but its function is the same as Durkheim argued; it is a deification of society. Nowadays, religion pushes for autonomy, one of the defining values of modern society. Peter Berger, in a similar vein, argues that modern religion defends the private sphere of activity against the invasion of market irrationality. Religion is significant only at the individual level, and religion in modern times is a private affair.

Gerd Baumann argues that the most common interpretation of secularization is flawed. Baumann explains that the state has replaced traditional forms of religion with its own civil-religion. Civil-religion is composed of all the symbols, values and morals of the state, that are received as supreme and ultimate. The symbols and values are religious, even if they are not in the traditional way of understanding religion. Baumann argues that through secularization the non–religious has taken control of the former religious-related norms, values, and institutions. Secular values, institutions and laws have replaced them. Baumann, however, is saying that the new system, due to its ultimate and decisive role in

every-day life, is similar to religion. Its religiosity comes from its powerful and absolute role in society. For Baumann modern religion is not an individual activity but something that it is embedded in the very structure of the modern state. For him, society has become more religious, not more secular.

Contemporary European theorists, such as Danielle Hervieu-Leger and David Martin, look at the specificity of religion in modern Western World. Hervieu-Leger draws a similarity between modernity and contemporary religion, and their aspiration for society. David Martin argues that secularization is present only in the Western World, and that secularization is not a necessary outcome of the interaction between modernity and religion. He puts forward factors that can accelerate or block secularization in specific areas. In doing so he finds that the relation between religion, state and culture is significant in each context for the outcome of modernity.

Jose Casanova develops a more comprehensive approach to religion, modernity and secularization. He delimits the process of secularization from its possible, but not inevitable, outcomes. He also speaks about a de-privatization of religion in contemporary modern society.

In the third chapter we employ the concepts of religion, modernity and secularization, as they are developed in the first two chapters, to look at two particular areas of the Western World. As stated above, secularization seems to occur only in Western societies, namely, Western Europe, Canada, and more recently, Eastern Europe. Different studies of religion support the idea that there is in fact a decrease in religiosity, which is measured mostly by church attendance. The separation between the state and the church is also evident upon analysis of how the links with the church have been severed

by the various country's laws and constitutions. The most evident separations have occurred in politics, where the church is no longer a major actor, as it was in the mid to late Middle Ages. Further, the educational system, in most cases initiated by the church, has become a secular institution. Secularization did not occur abruptly or on a specific date. The process was slow, sometimes taking centuries to occur. The present situation is specific to the various Western countries, as they have different levels of secularization when compared to each other. While there is a clear decrease in church attendance, the majority of the population in these countries still declare themselves as religious (Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox). This supports the argument that the church was secularized, while religion as a whole only adapted or evolved alongside with the modernization of societies. It is relevant to see why there are also some exceptions between the Western countries, and by this, we understand countries in which religion and secularization followed a different trend compared with the majority of countries in the Western world.

Quebec and Ireland surface as two examples of areas that did not follow the pace of modernization and secularization of the others. In Quebec, secularization occurred late in the sixties, while in Ireland it is just occurring. Raymond Lemieux and Jean-Paul Montminy follow the history of the Catholic Church in Quebec, and draw the similarities and differences between the Quebec Church and the other Catholic churches. The profound importance and influence of the Catholic Church on the French-Canadians can be understood as a reinforcement of the idea that religion is the preserver of cohesion and culture for a community. What happened during and after the Quiet Revolution in Quebec can be seen as a differentiation that occurred within Quebec society, where

religion has conceded its role as preserver of culture (and identity) to another category, language. The crisis, for Lemieux and Montminy, is not a crisis of religion in Quebec, but an identity crisis for the Catholic Church. For the first time in the history of the Catholic Church in Quebec, religion has become something more private, and the church as an institution, has lost most of its role in linking the believer with God. The present religious conflict in Ireland, and the fact that religiosity still holds one of the highest levels in Ireland compared with the rest of western countries, implies that secularization (and differentiation) have not occurred in the same way as in the other Western societies. However, a recent referendum concerning abortion implies that Ireland is in fact as "secularized" as other Western areas. For the Irish, religion is a private affair, "une religion à la carte", as Reginald Bibby describes religion in Quebec. Statistics alone cannot grasp the complexity of religion and its liaison with society.

In conclusion, we reconstruct the main arguments of this paper concerning the place of religion in society, and we raise some possible questions that would have to be addressed by a study of society and religion in the contemporary world.

Religion is more than Sunday mass. The classics have captured the transcendental, hidden role of religion, namely, the preservation and transmission of society's ideals from one generation to the next. In this sense, religion is unaltered by modern society. The church, that was the flagship institution for a long period of time, has encountered critical changes during the last century. Secularization has occurred, and for that reason, the traditional Christian church has lost or loses enormous direct influence on society. At the same time, religion is only adapting to the present forms of

societies. Religion still is a sacred mirror of society and still reinforces its perennial core values.

One of the forms that religion takes is private religion, where the clergy and the church are eliminated from the believer – God relationship. Institutionalized religion is eliminated from the believer-God relationship. Religion does not lose its place in society as it evolves into a private religion. As the classics underlined, religion has symbols, values and norms embedded in it that permit human society to exist. Becoming private, moving toward the personal level, religion just follows the general trend of a more individualistic society.

# Chapter I. Classic Sociology of Religion

From the beginning of modern sociology (as we know it now, even if under different names), theorists have incorporated the study of religion, as a social phenomenon, into their concepts of society. Of paramount importance to this thesis is the presentation of their concepts of religion in their complexity. These include religion as a social phenomenon, religion as an institution, the symbolism of religion, and its effects on society. It is obvious that all classical sociologists have regarded religion as an important object of study, and that their theories of society were not complete if they did not address the notion of religion. This suggests from the beginning that religion is (or was for some of them) a core element of human life. We do not hold that religion was a good or a bad social phenomenon for the classics; rather, we argue that its presence in the works of the classics points out its importance.

The differences between the classical theories regarding religion go beyond the role, the meaning, and the value of religion for society. There are different approaches to its study, from anthropological studies, historical and economic approaches, philosophical understandings, to the study of religion through its relations to the rest of society.

The French school (represented here by Comte and Durkheim) proposes a general sociology (a positive science) that puts society as its main object of study. Society for them is somehow a super being, imposed on the individual members, and transcending them. Economic advancements (they look at industrialization, as it was the main economic trend of their era), morality and solidarity are key issues for Comte and

Durkheim. Their approach to religion is strictly linked with their general concept of society.

The German School (Marx, Weber and Simmel) develops a different understanding of sociology. For Marx at the base of society there are three elements: the classes, the economic mode of production and the mode of exploitation. He studies any aspect of society in relation to his structural triad. Marx studies religion from this perspective. Weber understands sociology as the science that interprets the action of human groups, and their interactions with each other. For Weber, the individual is not important by himself, but relevant as part of different groups. In his theory, Weber is always looking at the actions and relations between different associations (groups) of individuals. For him, religion is a human form of action, and it is important to properly understand it and its relations with other human actions. There is also another main concept in weberian sociology: rationalization. As society advances, rationality plays a more and more important role. Weber tries to understand the emergence and "the expansion" of rationalism, and for him religion (a particular type of institutionalized religion) plays an important role in the rationalization of western societies. Simmel is somehow different from all the above theorists though somehow similar at the same time. The goal of sociology is, for Simmel, to try to understand the relations between individuals. Society, for him, is not a "super organism", but only a creation of individual activities. Institutions are the forms that these individual interactions take. His approach on religion focuses on inter-individual beliefs and relations.

In this chapter we follow the development of the concept of religion in sociology, from Comte to Simmel, including here Durkheim, Marx and Weber. It is relevant to

notice that all the "fathers" of sociology have addressed religion in their theories. Moreover, religion is for some of them at the core of their theories. We delimit what religion means for each of them. They also address the issue regarding the complex relationship between religion and society. We focus on the particular approach of each theorist, underlining their main concepts. We present similarities and differences in their approach, as well as major points of congruence or divergence.

## Auguste Comte

August Comte is the theorist who proposed the term "sociology", and by this he meant a science that will study the human society just as natural sciences study the natural world (for example biology, physics, etc.). He is considered as one of the first classic sociologists. He proposes that the development of human knowledge followed three stages: the theological stage, the metaphysical stage and the positive stage. He holds that each of our main concepts has passed through these three stages:

> "The law is this: that each of our leading concepts – each branch of our knowledge – passed successively through three different theoretical conditions: the theological, or fictitious; the metaphysical, or abstract; and the scientific, or the positive" (Comte, 1993: p 8).

He explains further each stage, starting with the theological stage:

> "In the theological state, the human mind, seeking the essential nature of beings, the first and the final causes [...] of all effects – in short absolute knowledge – supposes all phenomena to be produced by the immediate action of supernatural beings" (Comte, 1993: p 8).

He means by the above that humans are overcome by the complexity of surrounding experiences. They need to understand the origins and the final causes of these experiences, and are unable to provide realistic answers to these issues. Their solution is to invoke the actions of supernatural beings, as explanations for them. Religion is part of this stage, and Comte draws three steps in the development of the theological stage, that will correspond to animism, polytheism and monotheism

The second stage, the metaphysical stage, introduces abstractions instead of supernatural explanations of reality, as the following quote demonstrates:

> "In the metaphysical state, which is only a modification of the first, the mind supposes, instead of supernatural beings, abstract forces, veritable entities (that is, personified abstractions) inherent in all beings, and capable of producing all phenomena. What is called the explanation of the phenomena is, in this stage, a mere reference of each to its proper entity" (Comte, 1993: p 8).

This stage is a negation of the theological stage, replacing the supernatural by abstractions. The particular form of knowledge in this stage is philosophy.

Finally, the positivist stage means that sciences (such as natural sciences) are used to explain and study reality through concrete observations. One no longer looks for ultimate causes anymore, but rather tries to understand the relations between different phenomenons:

> "In the final stage, the positive, the mind has given over the vain search after absolute notions, the origin and the destination of the universe, and the causes of phenomena, and applies itself to the study of their laws – that is, their invariable relations of succession and resemblance" (Comte, 1993: p 8).

Concrete and objective observations are the tools of knowledge in this stage, and its form is science. All the previous forms of knowledge such as religion and philosophy have to be analyzed through science.

Religion, in his approach, is the core of the first stage, when man has explained the unexplained through supernatural beings (gods). Religion has its birthplace in this stage of human development, and religious explanations were used to understand reality. In the second stage, religious explanations were replaced (or sometimes used together) with metaphysical ones. The positive stage presupposes that religious and metaphysical explanations are slowly excluded. For Comte, in this approach, religion is an artifact of the theological stage that will disappear in the present positivist stage, because it is irrational and of no use to the modern individual, who has to focus on practice and reality, not on supernatural (religion) and abstract concepts. He states, however, that while monotheism is the most advanced form of theological knowledge, on the other hand the most advanced form of positive knowledge "would be ... to represent all phenomena as particular aspects of a single general fact – such as gravitation, for instance" (Comte, 1993: p 9). Here Comte draws a similarity between the evolution of the undesired past form of knowledge and the present suitable one. Comte also implies that all sciences have passed through these different stages, and even the most advanced sciences have retained influences from the two earlier stages of development.

Later in his works, Comte observes the relationship between social life and religion. He states that religion has an important educational role in society. He then concludes that religion is normal for the society. He sees the "perfect" religion as a "scientific religion", where different confessions do not exist, and where God has no place (Cuciuc, 1996: p 151). However, if a critique is to be addressed to Comte, it can be that he never sees religion as a form of knowledge evolving through these three stages; he embeds it only in the first stage.

For Comte, religion is an artifact of the past, of the theological stage of human development. The only important role that religion plays in his concept of society is education. His approach to religion is influenced by his approach to the evolution of knowledge, which he links with the evolution of human society. The positivist era represents for him the ultimate perfect human achievement.

Comte addresses the significance of religion in a past form of society. However, his approach is relevant for this thesis, because he captures the shaping role of religion on human communities. Durkheim takes Comte's theory further and, in doing so, he states the vital place of religion for society.

## Emile Durkheim

Emile Durkheim is the first of the sociologists to design a well defined problematic for the study of religion and society. He presents, like Comte, a development schema for societies that designates as one of its main concepts the economic advancement of the industrial era. However, Durkheim distances himself from Comte by arguing that these economic advancements are eroding the morality of the members of the societies, and the solidarity of the society is wrinkled.

Durkheim presents the limits of Comte's study on religion and also proposes his own theory of religion. For him, science and philosophy are born in religion, which, in the past, had fulfilled their roles. It is important to note that morality is essential for Durkheim. Morality is at the base of human society and at the same time, the society gives power to this morality. Religion holds that a society's morality is superior to

individual morality, such that religion is what holds the society together, or reinforces the society's cohesion. "In fact, society itself is sanctified in religion, in this way becoming something divine" (Cuciuc, 1996: p 153).

In his book, "The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life", the French sociologist explores an archaic form of religion present in an Australian tribe. However, his study of this primitive religion in a simple society allows him to grasp the meaning and function of religion in any society. He states in his own words that:

> "… We are not going to study a very archaic religion simply for the pleasure of telling its peculiarities and its singularities. If we have taken it as a subject of our research, it is because it has seemed to us better adapted than any other to lead to an understanding of the religious nature of man, that is to say, to show us an essential and permanent aspect of humanity" (Durkheim, 1968: p 2).

He holds that in studying an archaic religion, no preexistent religious beliefs will be used as causes or explanations, and the simplicity of the society will not interfere and/or hide significant aspects and relations between religion and the society. At the same time, Durkheim argues that because all religions are true, "all answer, though in different ways, to the given conditions of human existence" (Durkheim, 1968: p 3), what he will find while studying archaic religion would be relevant to more modern religions.

Durkheim starts by arguing that religion is at the base of all key ideas that form our knowledge, such as time and space. All our concepts are shaped by it. "They are born in religion and of religion; they are a product of religious thought" (Durkheim, 1968: p 9). Time was measured as an interval between religious practices or events, and only then did it become relevant. Space was initially related to the religious value that it

represented for the tribe. Time and space become relevant for the society when they developed as collective representations with a meaning:

> "... Religion is something eminently social. Religious representations are collective representations which express collective realities; the rites are a manner of acting which take rise in the midst of the assembled groups and which are destined to excite, maintain or recreate certain mental states in these groups. So if the categories are of religious origin, they ought to participate in this nature common to all religious facts; they too should be social affairs and the product of collective thought" (Durkheim, 1968: p 10).

For him, society is not only a community of people, but first of all, a system of ideas, values, beliefs, sentiments and notions. These together form collective representations, which are not the sum of individual representations. Individual representations cannot build a society. Only the collective representations bring together and preserve the experience and knowledge of many generations. These collective or social representations are the essential components of a society. They appeared before the individual, but not before the society. A man can go beyond himself/herself when he/she is a part of the society because of these collective representations.

Durkheim looks at unilateral definitions of religion, in order to come to an integrative definition. These unilateral definitions focus on particular characteristics that were considered as central to religion. He presents facts to contest these "central" characteristics, in order to present what he truly believes a religion represents. First there is the notion of supernatural, and the general idea that religions are explanations of the supernatural, where the supernatural stands for facts that cannot be explained by other sciences. Durkheim dismisses this by arguing that supernatural explanations (miracles) were not religious inventions, because the ancient civilizations could not distinguish

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between the "natural order of things" and the supernatural. It is only the modern theory of universal determinism that links everything together and categorizes everything that is contrary to its laws as supernatural. For the ancients, what they could not explain were not mysterious things, but simply "beautiful, rare or terrible spectacles" (Durkheim, 1968: p 27). Religion has always offered explanations for regular facts and activities, just covering them with a sacred connotation.

Second, he turns his attention to the definitions of religion that consider it to be the link with divinity. Durkheim finds unilateral approaches limited because there are religions that are not centered on a divinity (for instance Buddhism), and even those religions that have deities have rituals that are not based on them:

> "Thus there are rites without gods, and even rites from which gods are derived. All religious powers do not emanate from divine personalities, and there are relations of cult which have other objects than uniting man to a deity. Religion is more than the idea of gods or spirits..." (Durkheim, 1968: p 35).

Dismissing these unilateral definitions, Durkheim develops his own notion of religion. First, he states that "religious phenomena are naturally arranged in two fundamental categories: beliefs and rites" (Durkheim, 1968: p 36). The beliefs represent opinions, and they are collective representations, while the rites are modes of action. The rites reinforce the cohesion of the society, by reaffirming the community's common values. Rites are different from any other forms of human action by their special target that is the object defined by belief. Here Durkheim introduces his two main categories that are unique to religion: the sacred and the profane. Religious beliefs are based on this dichotomy, which delimits very clearly the entire world into these two categories. The religious beliefs are representations of the sacred things and show their relations with the

profane world. He holds that this separation of the world into sacred and profane is the clearest distinction that can exist; "it is absolute" (Durkheim, 1968: p 38). The sacred thing is the perfect thing, while the profane is the impure thing. There is a clear antagonism between these two worlds. However, they cannot exist separately and together they cover the entire human world. A profane object can become a sacred object only through a long and profound initiation, which will erase all its profane characteristics. There is no object that can hold both attributes of being sacred and profane at the same time. With these two newly exclusive and at the same time inclusive concepts, Durkheim now states that religious beliefs show the nature of the sacred and its relation with the profane, while religious rites direct and control the human comportment towards the sacred.

Before providing the definition of religion, Durkheim delimits religion and magic. "Magic, too, is made up of beliefs and rites" (Durkheim, 1968: p 42). Where magic differs from religion is that it has more primitive beliefs and rites, and all of them have a pure utilitarian goal. At the same time, both of them have been critiques of each other, even at war. However the great difference is present in their followers. Religious believers are individuals united by their faith and they will form a community, only because they shared the same religion. Magic, on the other hand, will not produce its own community. Magic will only have followers, which are not widespread throughout the entire community. They will remain individuals, more or less. Religion will produce a church (a religious community), while magic will produce only a "clientele". The relation between the magician and the people practicing or benefiting from magic is only an economic one. It will not provide them with the morality to become an independent

community. Magic may seem similar with personal religions, but the difference is that these personal religions are regulated by the dominant religion. The individual from a private religion is still a member of the church of the dominant religion, that will provide him/her with the beliefs and rites, in order to relate him/her with the sacred.

Durkheim states his definition of religion, based on the characteristics and attributes he exposed earlier:

> " A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" (Durkheim, 1968: p 47).

For Durkheim, religion consists on two crucial elements: first, the collective representations and practices related to sacred things and secondly, the community. He emphasizes the collective character of religion.

Having these two key characteristics in mind, Durkheim looks to what he deems to be the most elementary form of religion in his opinion; namely totemism. He holds that all the members of totemic religions form a large family, and from here, they respect a number of rules. They are exogamous, they help each other, and they defend their totemic community. The values, the norms and the qualities of their community are projected onto the totem. In fact, the totem is the sacred projection of their community. By praying to the totem, the community is praying to itself. Religion, in this way, "is the consecration of the social life" (Cuciuc, 1996: p 157).

Returning to the sacred/profane dichotomy, it seems that the community is the profane part, while its projection is the sacred one. In everyday life, the community consists of good things and bad things at the same time. There are "good citizens" and "bad citizens". However, if religion is the projection of the community, and if religion

addresses the sacred, will this mean that religion is the reflection of a pure, ideal society? For Durkheim the answer is no. In all religions, evil is present, and it is not a profane thing. "Satan is an essential piece of the Christian system; even if he is an impure being, he is not a profane thing" (Durkheim, 1968: p 420). Religion is the sacred projection of the real community, with all its characteristics, good and bad.

Durkheim, like Comte, holds that religion gave birth to philosophy and science. Likewise, morality and law first appeared as parts of the religious system. All of these categories make their first appearance in religion, and only after that does human society differentiate them. Religion, for Durkheim, is born in society and, at the same time, develops society:

> "[...] It may be said that nearly all the great social institutions have been born in religion [...]. If religion has given birth to all that is essential in society, it is because the idea of society is the soul of religion" (Durkheim, 1968: p 418-419).

As societies advanced, they interacted with other societies. Sometimes, their deepest principles were shaken and changed, and from here their religion was altered. Durkheim states that all societies need to reaffirm their collective values from time to time in order to preserve their cohesion. He considers that today's meetings of citizens are not so different from religious rituals of the past. In this way, religion is always present. In his own words, "[...] there is something eternal in religion which is destined to survive all the particular symbols in which religious thought has successively enveloped itself" (Durkheim , 1968: p 427).

Religion, as mentioned earlier, consists of a system of practices and a system of ideas. Durkheim considers that the system of ideas found in a religion is not any different from a philosophical system. The same ideas are found in faith and reason. The only

difference is that in religion, these ideas are superficially covered in a veil of mystery. Once this veil is lifted, a complex system of representations related to human realities is uncovered. Science may appear to be opposed to religion, but in fact, is just the same system of thought without the veil. Science has separated from its source, religion, and has taken the role of analyzing nature from it:

> "[...] Both pursue the same end; scientific thought is only a more perfect form of religious thought. Thus is seems natural that the second should progressively retire before the first, as this becomes better fitted to perform the task" (Durkheim , 1968: p 429).

Durkheim argues that religion is not disappearing at the time of his writing. Rather it is only giving away some of its functions to other entities, that are born from it and that are fulfilling these roles better now. At the same time, religion consists of a system of ideas and a system of practices, and is acting on two planes: action and thought. Science, on the other hand, is only acting on the plain of thought. Science does not push for action. Science, for Durkheim, will always be incomplete, and this is unacceptable for the individual. It can never be used instead of religion as a whole. Religion is complete, that is why the individuals will always turn to religion in their lives.

Religion represents for Durkheim the deification of human society. Religion provides solidarity and persistence for society. It integrates the individuals in society. However, as it is a sacred reflection of society itself, it is not imposed over it. Rather it changes as society changes. Religion, for him, is an essential characteristic of any society, as this thesis holds too. Marx argues as Durkheim that religion is a mirror of society. However, for him, the image is distorted and religion is just a false knowledge of the world.

# Karl Marx

Karl Marx is not as concerned as Durkheim with social solidarity. He is arguing for a more equal society. The present form of society is an exploitative society, where one class benefits from the other classes. He develops a sociology based on this premise, and considers that exploitation is at the base of the societal structure. Everything, in his approach, is linked more or less with this problematic.

In his critique of Hegel, Marx holds that religion is a stage of human development, produced by the human, but a stage that has to be replaced by a new, more evolved one – the stage of science (dialectical materialism). Real happiness cannot be attained while religion exists, because religion shapes society and religious knowledge is flawed (Marx, 1978: p 53-54).

In "On the Jewish Question" he addresses the notion of religion and the relations between state and religion and secularization. For him, religion is "[...] nothing more than stage[s] in the development of the human mind – snake skins which have been cast off by history, and man as the snake who clothed himself in them" (Marx, 1978: p 28). Marx discusses the role of religion in the modern state and the need for real emancipation that can only be attained when we no longer differentiate between man in civil society and man as a citizen of the state. He states that secular states (France, USA) are in fact non-secularized states, because religion has been abolished only at the state level, while religion is still present at the private level. "Thus the state may have emancipated itself from religion, even though the immense majority of people continue to be religious. And the immense majority do not cease to be religious by virtue of being religious in private"

(Marx, 1978: p 32). Secularization for him is not complete if it only pushes religion from a public sphere into the private sphere. A truly secularized society is a society where religion does not exist, where people are not religious, where science has taken all the roles of religion in society. Later in the article, Marx argues that capitalism is in fact produced by the Christian and Judaic religions. He holds that "money is the jealous god of Israel. [...] the God of Jews has been secularized and has become the god of this world" (Marx, 1978: p 50). Therefore, for Marx, to get rid of capitalism, religion should be abolished.

In his critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right and in his theses on Feuerbach, Marx states that religion is a concept invented by man, and in fact, religion is only the reflection of the world humans live in. "Man makes religion; religion doest not make man" (Marx, 1978: p 53). Religion represents man's knowledge about the world, and it is man's point of reference. However, because the real world is unjust, religion is unjust. In religion, suffering reflects the suffering of the people in the real world, while happiness spoken by religion is an illusion. At the same time, the illusions provided by religion cover in shadow the real modes of emancipation and happiness. Religion is a barrier to the real mode of emancipation and happiness. For this, "religion is the opium of the people" Marx, 1978: p 54).

For him, getting rid of religion is the only way in which man can emancipate himself:

> "The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of man, is a demand for real happiness. The call to abandon their illusions about their condition is a call to abandon a condition which requires illusions" (Marx, 1978: p 54).

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Marx considers that only the present unjust and unhappy society that we are living in requires religion. An ideal, perfect society, where everybody will be equal and happy, will not require this "drug" called religion. While man cannot emancipate himself/herself and cannot know himself (and Marx argues that philosophy and science will help him/her to pass these steps), man will have religion and he/she will need religion (Marx, 1978).

Marx is similar with Durkheim when he considers religion as a mirror of society. However, he holds that the interests of the ruling class reproduce the effect of religion on society. Religion does not provide solidarity and integration; it legitimizes and defends an existent power relation and it is defending it. In this sense, religion is, for Marx, a tool of the oppressors. Marx sees the paramount role of religion for society. In this sense, he reinforces the argument that classical theorists considered religion a vital characteristic of the human world. Weber does not provide a definition of religion. Rather, he looks at the complex relationship between religion and society.

## Max Weber

Max Weber takes a different approach to the study of religion and society. For him, sociology studies the relations between human groups. An individual in one society has different statuses, (i.e.: at any given moment, he/she is a member of different groups). For example, a man can be at the same time a member of the "group" of workers, the "group" of fathers, the "group" of politicians, etc.. What are important for sociology, in Weber's approach, are the relations that appear inside society between these different groups.

Religion, in this context, is one of the activities present in society. Weber studies the relations between religion and the rest of the society. The relation is not stable and varies in time. At the same time as religion has an impact on society, the society has an effect on religion. Weber also holds that to be able to study these relations, one has to look at particular historical and cultural aspects, which will allow us to predict how the relations will develop in the future.

In "The Sociology of Religion" Weber states very clearly that he is not interested in the nature of religion, but in its outcomes as a particular form of social action. "The essence of religion is not even our concern, as we make it our task to study the conditions and effects of a particular type of social action" (Weber, 1978: p 399). He holds that religious actions are "relatively rational behavior", and that most of them have economic goals. He examines primitive forms of religions, identifying the economic needs and goals that supported the emergence and the development of religion.

In the first phases, religion was no more than an enterprise, and the meaning of the religious act was to persuade and influence the Gods, and to achieve a specific goal. As religion advanced, it entered the stage of symbolism, where religion attached an eternal symbol to the activity. By doing this, religion protected the economic activity embedded in it. To defy religion, by altering the economic activity, meant to defy the Gods. Religion was the preserver of a predetermined economic activity. In ancient Rome, a new type of God developed. It was the family God, and each roman family has its own deity. These deities protected the family as a whole, and their social function was to preserve the economic activities and social hierarchies inside the family. The outcome of this particular form of religion was a "strongly cohesive group" (Weber, 1978: p 411).

Not all of the families' gods were equally powerful. Due to strong patriarchal structures, the god of a more important family (for example the head of the local community, or the head of a kin) was the more powerful god in comparison to the gods of the less important families. This allowed and supported the development of hierarchical structures of power (economic and political). Eventually, as the community enlarged, these family gods transformed themselves into local and political deities, that became the deities of larger communities. This "greater" god didn't replace the family gods, but, rather, added a deity of greater importance to all families. In this way, the independent families were united into a big economic and political community, under one god. This type of religion is specific to the development of cities in the ancient world (Weber, 1978: p 400-415).

The next step in the evolution of religion was the emergence of monotheistic universal religions. Weber holds that in the ancient city (and in the ancient states) there was a conflict at the individual level between two types of existent deities: the local god and the family god (Weber, 1978: p 416). While the local god was the more powerful one, the family god was the deity more "used" by the individuals. While the local gods were related more to universal phenomena (world changing events), the family gods were related to daily activities. There was one major difference between the two types of gods. First, from rational reason, a unique universal god will provide better cohesion (and control) for the economic and political activities of the community, and second, the universal god developed its clergy. Slowly, the outcome of rational thought and clergy activity was that the family gods were erased, and the universal god emerged as the only deity. This trend of evolution was not worldwide. In some areas, universal monotheistic religion didn't appear, mainly because of two factors. The local clergy resisted to lose

control over its economic and political influence. Secondly, for some individuals a small deity that can be influenced for different daily goals was more appealing that a single, powerful god that stayed untouched by the actions of the believers (Weber, 1978: p 416-417).

Here, Weber turns his analysis to the differences between magic and religion. At first glance, they seem similar, but Weber (as Durkheim did) underlines the characteristics of each of them. Weber holds that there are two types of actions a man can develop toward a deity: coercion and worship. By employing coercion, a person actually forces a deity to help him fulfill a specific goal, while by worshipping the believer tries to gain the approval of the god for his/her action. It can be argued that coercion is utilitarian, while worshipping is symbolic. The religious behavior evolved from coercion to worshipping, with utilitarian action loosing its importance and transforming itself into a symbolic action. Weber states that:

> "The relationship of men to supernatural forces which take the forms of prayer, sacrifice and worship may be termed "cult" (Kultus) and "religion", as distinguished from "sorcery", which is magical coercion" (Weber, 1978: p 424).

This dichotomy has, as a direct effect, the emergence of two different types of individuals that were practicing them. On one hand, there are the priests, and on the other hand there are the magicians. Weber calls them "professional functionaries"; individuals that are trying to influence or coerce the deities (Weber, 1978: p 425). The priests are a permanent organized group, while the magicians are practicing independently and sporadically. There are similarities sometimes between the two, but the priests have the general characteristic of being members of an organized system, while the magicians are self-employed. The magician is also defined by his/her personal gift, "charisma", while

the priest is learning his vocation. The most important difference between the two is the presence of a stable community in the case of the priest, and its absence for the magician. The magician lacks a continuous stable community, because he/she is more or less a self-employed professional, who uses his/her skill only when asked, and usually for a price.

Weber also underlines the effects of failure and success for the two types of functionaries. In case of failure, the magician can sometimes pay with his/her life, while the priests can argue that the god is to blame for the failure. Or, the god can be abandoned because he is not the "true god", The magician has to constantly demonstrate the expertise of his/her deity in order to reaffirm his/her personal charisma, while the god (of the priests) needs only a few "striking successes" to develop a lasting image (Weber, 1978: p 427-429).

As he continues the study of magic and religion, Weber looks at how religious ethics developed from primitive magical taboos. Earlier established taboos became norms through rationalization. For example, the taboo of protecting the wild life and/or nature, for the good of the tribe, developed into the norm of protecting the community and its environment (Weber, 1978: p 432). The interdiction of intra-family marriage, in order to have healthy offspring, also became a norm in most religions. At the same type, economic activities were embedded into religious norms. These norms had an important effect on the future economic development of the community. All these taboos were based on a dichotomy of good and evil. They are norms to protect the individuals against the evil, so they revolved against the notion of evil. The distinctive ethic of universal religions includes the concepts of sin and salvation. If a particular community suffers (due, for instance, to a conquest or a natural disaster), this can mean that the god has

punished the community for its sins. Sin becomes the ultimate measure between the believer and his/her god. Any wrongdoing or evil action or intention was categorized as sin. All acts committed in violation of the accepted norms also constituted sins. It is important to underline that the concept of sin is directly related to the concept of the universal god. Any sin is reported and directed to this unique god. All individuals have to pay for their sins trough piety and to try not to "fall in sin" in order to obtain salvation, (i.e.: ultimate acceptation from the god). The concepts of sin and salvation were missing in pre-monotheistic universal religions. These two concepts were introduced by the prophet, who through his prophecy has developed an organized and centralized system of ethics (Weber, 1978: p 437).

The existence of the prophet is one of the necessary factors for the emergence of a religion. The prophet, for Weber, is an individual that possesses charisma, "who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment" (Weber, 1978: p 439). It is not relevant if he proclaims a new religion or if he just renews an existing faith. The important characteristic of the prophet, and at the same time the one that differentiates him from the priest, is that he bears his message based on his personal charisma. Charisma for him is a "personal gift" (Weber, 1978: p 440). The priest, on the other hand, obtains charisma by being part of the group of priests. The coming together of these two elements, of prophetic message and a prophet's charisma, is responsible for the emergence of a new religion. The magician, who is also a charismatic individual, lacks the prophetic message, further differentiating magic from religion. Weber further categorizes the religious prophets into two types, namely the ethical prophet (for example Muhammad) and the exemplary prophet (for example Buddha). The first type preaches

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the teachings of a god, its morality and ethical code, and its laws, while the second offers an example of ideal life. The prophet has the role of offering an integrated, unified meaning of the world to the believers (Weber, 1978: p 450). The role of the priests was to codify and conserve for posterity the prophetical revelation. The community that emerges from the prophet, its priests and its believers becomes a united community that looks at the world as an unified object.

After he establishes what a religion consists of, and what is different in religion from magic, Weber looks at how different social classes (strata) adopt different types of religion, or what religion offers to different classes. He holds that the urban dwellers are more religious than the peasants, with peasants manifesting an increase in their religiosity only to defend themselves against political or economic domination (Weber, 1978: p 468). At the same time, the Christian religion, based on a rational ethic, appealed more to the population of the cities, especially to the traders and craftsmen (Weber, 1978: p 479). The most disadvantaged classes (economic and political) never manifested interest for a special type of religion, and the modern proletariat opposes religion (Weber, 1978: p 484-486). Weber underlines, though, that even if different classes adopt the same religion, its meaning is different for them. Salvation for the dominant classes offers legitimacy, while salvation for the disadvantaged groups means compensation.

Salvation can have different forms in world religions. It can mean economic or political liberation, or the liberation from demons or bad spirits. For Weber, what is important is how and where individuals can reach salvation. Salvation can be attained in this world ("this worldly") or in the god's world ("other worldly"). Ritual is one of the manners in which one may obtain salvation. This is present in most religions, but its

effects are specific to each of them, due to their ritualistic characteristics. For example, the Judaic religion demands an educated believer, explaining why the Jews were usually the most educated members of their community (Weber, 1978: p 526-529). Salvation can be obtained also by the means of good works, that is, a lifelong conduct closely following the religious ethics (Weber, 1978: p 532-534). Salvation through self-perfection is characteristic of eastern religions and presupposes a personal quest for perfection, often a mystical one (Weber, 1978: p 534-538).

There is also another important feature of salvation. It is crucial for different religions if salvation is obtained by the individual or if it is offered by somebody else (usually the religious institution of that religion or the god). In the first case, the individual pursues salvation through his/her own activities:

> "Salvation may be viewed as the distinctive gift of active ethical behavior performed in the awareness that gods directs this behavior, i.e, that the actor is an instrument of god. We shall designate this type of attitude toward salvation, which is characterized by a methodical procedure for achieving religious salvation, as "acetic"" (Weber, 1978: p 541).

The ascetic can have two attitudes toward the world: he/she can exile himself from it, believing that his/her isolation will drive him/her to the final salvation, or he/she can work in this world to be assured of salvation. In the first case, the individual will separate himself from any social activity, practicing an isolation called by Weber a "world rejecting asceticism". The second type of individual will get involved in social activities that will conduct him/her to salvation. This attitude is called an "inner-worldly asceticism" (Weber, 1978: p 542).

Asceticism supposes that the individual is acting (isolating himself or participating in social activities). Contemplation, on the other hand, means that the

individual will not act in any way to obtain salvation, rather he/she will just separate this world from the other world, and he/she will consider that this world is just a passage to the next world - the really important one. This type of individual will not act in any way in order to obtain salvation; instead he/she encompasses himself/herself in mysticism. The mystic cannot gain rational knowledge of this world, because god has the ultimate knowledge. He/she will not initiate any rational action to pursue any religious goal in this world. The ascetic, by contrast, will try to maximize his/her rational decisions and activities in order to be sure of salvation. He/she will constantly rationalize and reorganize his/her conduct in life and his/her religious organizations (Weber, 1978: p 544-551).

Contemplation gives birth to inactivity, while asceticism stresses the importance of action. Weber finds that the eastern religions are contemplative religions, while the Western religions are ascetic religions (Weber, 1978: p 551). He considers that there are five major differences between the Western religions and the Eastern religions. First, the concept of one god was imported in the Western religions, holding a status of omnipotence and ultimate god. In order to gain salvation, one must conduct in an ethically way toward him/her. In the Eastern religion, mysticism was one of the way in which the believer can come closer to god. At the same time, because the Eastern religions were religions of intellectuals, they reinforced the mystic link between the individual and god. This is the second difference. The third difference consists in the fact that the Western religions emerged in areas where there were strong legal systems (for example the Roman Empire). The link between the believer and god was sees as a legal relation with salvation obtained in a legal way. In the east, the legal systems were

missing. Fourth, the East reinforced mysticism and ecstatic rituals, while the West distanced itself from them. Last, but not the least important, the West was defined by strong organized institution (the church), while the East never developed such a systematic, rationally organized, institution (Weber, 1978: p 552-556). Even if he does not affirm now, Weber is slowly drawing a map of causes and elements that influenced the rationalization and modernization of the Western society.

In the case of salvation granted by the outside, the individual and his/her activity has no direct influence on the outcome. The church or God offers him/her salvation. Weber differentiates here three main types of salvation (Weber, 1978: p 560). There is the salvation granted by the religious institution that requires only membership to grant it. This is the case with the Catholic Church, where the church grants salvation because it is empowered by its god. In the other two types, salvation is granted directly by God, but there is a major difference between the two types. In the first type, salvation is granted only as a reward to the actual faith of the individual. That is, the only thing that matters to obtain salvation is the faith, that sometimes can push the believer to act in a certain ethical way, according to his/her religion. The other type is subtler with the main idea being that of predetermination. God selects from the beginning everybody's fate. The actions and the beliefs of the individual appear as having no influence on the outcome, because its end is already chosen. However, a believer can have the proof of his/her final salvation in his/her life. If he/she thinks he/she is to be granted salvation, that means that God chose him/her for his/her value. In order to have this possible future long life value, he/she has to act in accordance with its religious ethics to the best of his/her abilities, such as in the case of the Protestants (Weber, 1978: p 572-576). In another case of

predetermination, however, the Muslims considered that because the outcome is already drawn, and that life in this world has no influence on the life in the other world, they can do nothing to influence or at least to have the proof of their future destiny (Weber, 1978: p 574).

Weber holds that religions, due to their strong ethics and their strong influence on the action of the believers, have a profound effect on the other non-religious aspects of the society, mainly on economics, politics, sexuality and art. Religion has a "stereotyping effect" on the actions of the believers; hence it is prescribing forms of economic and political activities (Weber, 1978: p 577). Its powerful ethics drives the actions of its followers, having a profound effect on the economic life of that society. Weber is not arguing that religion is the only factor that prescribes the economic life, but rather holds that it is one of the factors that determine economic activity. Laws are sacred in religion, and legal and economic laws become sacred also. This can have as effect a relative reluctance of religion vis-à-vis economic reform. Religious ethics covers the entire world and it presents and defends its "theoretical attitude". As societies advance, religion enters a conflict with the new secular institutions. The economic actions present inside society can no longer be stereotyped by religion, because religion is in opposition to them. The conflict that arises due to religion in the actions of the believer – pushed in one direction by his/her society and in another one by his/her religious ethics – is one of the most important factors in social evolution. Weber describes how intra-family assistance developed, as religion evolved from a family god to a universalistic god, into assistance to the others members of the community, and finally assistance between different social

strata. Family membership has evolved, in religious terms, from the natural family to the entire society (Weber, 1978: p 579-583).

Usury was one of the key concepts that was tolerated or not by religions. All religions that pushed for the implication of the believer into this world were against usury. The idea was that usury is not a natural economic activity, is only a quest for money, that will not profit the community. Protestants, which have as their main ethic rational conduct in this world, have permitted usury, as a rational profit-making activity, because "Protestantism interpreted success in business as the fruit of a rational mode of life" (Weber, 1978: p 588). Charity also developed under religious guidance, becoming a systematic rationalized institution. Protestants limited the charity from all the poor individuals towards only those that cannot work. A man who was able to work but was asking for charity or begging, was considered responsible for his/her own fault, therefore redesigning and rationalizing charitable activity toward a specific part of the population.

As religions emerged, they were at the beginning under the control of political powers. Usually the high priests were also important political members of their community. However, as the priests start to organize themselves and no longer depend on political power, religion usually enters in conflict (sometimes only ideological) with the political (Weber, 1978: p 591). Most religions reject war, or the unjust war, and this was one of the main differences in attitudes between the religion and the political authority. The positions that religions adopted were of two kinds: to openly combat the political entity, or to accept its presence as another sin of the humans, as the best way to govern in this world. Religious revolutions were rare and lasted a short time. Religious anarchy as a form of government is very rare, and present only in small congregations (like some neo-

protestant sects). Usually, religion retreats from politics, and regards all political affairs as secular affairs, separated from the religious ethics it preaches. In doing so, religion becomes a passive critic of the political realm (Weber, 1978: p 596-597).

Regarding their attitude toward sexuality, most of the world religions are on common grounds. They reject sexuality, the erotic in sexuality, and they confine sexuality to the family, and only with procreative goals (Weber, 1978: p 605). This religious rejection of sexuality is caused, on one hand, by the belief that sexuality is an animal trait, which brings the human closer to animals, erasing his/her mystic qualities, and, on the other hand, by a structural rationality. In order to protect the family and the larger community, sexuality is to be limited. If sexuality is not restrained, conflicts and tension may arise inside the community. At the same time, sexuality has to have as its goal the procreation of offspring that will assure the continual existence of the community. More limits were added as society became more complex, in order to protect marriage, women, and children. Prostitution, birth control, and deviant sexual practices were banned (Weber, 1978: p 606-607).

Having delimited the core concepts of religion, and its evolution and relation with the rest of the society, Weber studies the development of rational economics and its link with a particular form of religion. He holds that even if it is argued that Judaism has been the force that produced rationalism and capitalism, this interpretation is flawed. Rational thinking, and from here, rational capitalism, is linked with Protestantism, something that is not developed directly from Judaism. It is true that the Jews, throughout history, were involved in profit-making affairs, and they developed a more rational activity than that of the other members of the society. For instance, they sustained financial institutions of the

Middle Ages. However, they had some limits. First, because they considered themselves a pariah people, their actions were not entirely oriented toward an emergence of a new rational society. Rather, they were just surviving in the world God offered them (Weber, 1978: p 612). Second, their ethics were different regarding their own kind and outsiders. In relation with other Jews, they have to respect a specific ethic and morality, which were missing in their relation with the outsiders. Their activities were never cohesive (Weber, 1978: p 615). Finally, predetermination is missing in the Jewish religion. Due to this, their life-long activity was not a rational ascetic activity, because they weren't looking for a proof of salvation, as the Protestants were. At the same time, the pre – protestant Christians were ascetic, but not rational, especially in their economic activities. As stated above, profit based on usury, on the others, was forbidden.

The Protestant, in contrast with the above, is the symbol of ascetic rational thinking and rational activities. The Protestant ascetic believes in predetermination. What he/she can hope during his/her life is to have a proof of his/her salvation. This leads him/her to pursue an ethical rational life, trying to maximize his/her ethical conduct, because maybe salvation was granted due to this future behavior (Weber, 1978: p 616). He/she will push for rationality in all the domains of his/her activities, including the economic domain. His/her economic goal will be to always have a profit and reinvest for another profit, not just to accumulate a wealth to permit him/her living in luxury. It is not material good that matters, but, rather, continuous economic performance. This is totally different from the wealth of the Jew, or the wealth of the Muslim, or the wealth of the Catholic, that were perceived simply as goals in and of themselves. The pre-protestant economic life is called by Weber barbaric capitalism, because it shares some traits with

modern capitalism. However, the core concept that the Protestants introduced was rationalism. Money should not be just stored and spent on luxury, but reinvested to obtain another profit that will also be used. Society advanced only when barbaric capitalism met with the protestant ascetic rationalism.

Religion, for Weber, or a specific form of religion, has been one of the factors that produced modern society. For him, religion is not an artifact of the past; it is only one of the human activities present in human societies. The role of religion is not to provide legitimacy (as Marx claims) to an existent unequal power relation. Religion is not just the deification of human society as Durkheim holds. Religion, for Weber, is one of the human activities that are relevant for society, interacting with and influencing other human activities (economy, politics), and ultimately shaping the evolution of society. Its morality and its ethics protect and develop human communities. Weber, in essence, finds that western society is profoundly shaped by its Christian religion.

Weber's approach is similar with Comte's, Durkheim's, and Marx's theories, when he states that religion is inseparable from society. In contrast with their thesis, Simmel's study of religion and society moves from the macro level to the micro level.

## George Simmel

As mentioned before, George Simmel understands sociology differently than his German colleagues. The individual is at the base of society, and sociology has to focus on individuals interacting with each other, not at groups or communities. It can be said that his sociology looks at society from the bottom to the top, while Comte and Durkheim

look from the top to the bottom and Marx and Weber dissect it from the middle. For them, religion is relevant as it is an individual form of interaction and as it is shaping individual relations.

Simmel develops Durkheim's idea that religion is the preserver of social cohesion in society, arguing that at the base of society building there are religious concepts that confer it eternity, unity and stability over time. Simmel holds that the general mistake that has been repeated in approaching religion is that it has been tried to identify only one of these concepts as source of religion. He argues that there are multiple sources for religion. The essences of religion for him are pre-religious and are to be found in human relations:

> "Thus we may be assisted in understanding the origin and persistence of religion if we discover, in all sorts of relationship and interests, certain religious elements which may lie beyond [...] religion, elements which represent starting points to that which has achieved independence and coherence as 'religion'" (Simmel, 1997, p 277).

Simmel follows, in this sense, Durkheim's understanding of the origin of religion, as being a projective representation of society. The most important factors for the existence of a society are in Simmel's approach custom, laws and morality. All of these have been integrated for the first time in a unified system by religion. Simmel, however, goes further by arguing that basic human relations like devotion, patriotism, loyalty, are based on religious concepts. All these relations are pre-religious, finding, however, a coherent and symbolic value in religion.

Basic social life presupposes individuals that interact, coexist, help each other and work together. As society advances, laws, morality and institutions appear to reinforce it. Here is where religion appears. The basic human relations were projected into the

spiritual form, into religion, that added to them a sacred perennial character, and then retransmitted them onto society.

To support his argument, Simmel looks at a number of key religious concepts. Faith, for him, "first appears as a relationship between people" (Simmel, 1997, p 280). Faith exists in the relation between the child and his/her parents, between two friends, between one and his/her community. Faith, in religion, implies more than that, implying emotion, and an unquestionable devotion. It also means devotion toward the religious values, that, reflect back to society means devotion to society. For him, faith has a critical social role for society; "[...] it is certain that without it society would disintegrate" (Simmel, 1997, p 281). Faith, as a concept, is not born in religion, but through religion faith receives "a pure and abstract form" (Simmel, 1997, p 281).

Unity in Simmel's conception is another core concept of religion and human society at the same time, with the unity of the community being essential for its existence. Simmel looks at how in the beginning the unity of one family or a small group was the unity of one small religious group under one god. Each family had its own god, as the unity of the family was the critical element. As society evolved and the family began to loose its character of the main group in society, animist religion evolved into polytheistic religions and finally into monotheistic religions with the new God providing unity for a much larger community. Unity provides internal peace for the community and God is the ultimate representation of unity. Here Simmel also explains the concept of heresy, and why the heretics were persecuted. They were not a great danger for the church, but a critical danger for the unity of society.

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Finally, Simmel approaches the concept of God, as the ultimate unified representation of what is valuable in society. God represents tradition, justice, and love. He not only has these characteristics, but "He is them" (Simmel, 1997, p 286). In this way, God embodies the perfect moral values, and also represents "the ethical and social modes of behaviour which the individual must perform" (Simmel, 1997, p 286). By incorporating these characteristics, God gives power and immortality to the society's core values. An individual having faith in God, therefore, is said to have faith in his/her society.

Simmel distances from Comte, Durkheim, Marx and Weber. His focus is no longer at societal level. He emphasizes the importance of individual level. Religion for him is relevant as it is relevant for individual relationships. The meaning of religion for Simmel is similar with the meaning for Durkheim, keeping this level-difference in mind. Religion is transcendental and perennial inside human relations. Religion is a significant feature of society, inseparable from it.

It can be argued that Comte's and Durkheim's approaches to religion have something in common, in that there is of an eternal, vital element in religion, critical for the existence of society. The next two theorists though approached religion from a different angle. While Marx identifies a specific form of economy embedded in religion and described religion as a past (bad) stage in human evolution, Weber develops a study of religion that looks at the birth of religion and at what defines a religion. Weber follows the historical development of the main manifest forms of religion, connecting them with

the development of the society. Simmel finds the eternal element of religion in individual interactions.

Religion, therefore, has different meanings for the classical sociologists. While all of them agree more or less that religion was (is) one of the driving forces of human society, the evolution of religion is seen differently. Durkheim and Simmel consider that religion, its inner core, is transcendental and eternal, while Comte and Marx differ slightly from each other. They look at religion as an artifact of the past, a past stage of human evolution. Weber does not take sides in this dispute. He presents religion and its relation with society. However, as a more rationalized society is becoming more fragmented and less capable of surviving, religion can reinforce its cohesion.

This thesis addresses the notion of religion in present times. The classics did not have the contemporary society in front of them in order to discuss this issue. However, in their theories on modern societies they included religion as one of essential characteristics of human life.

It is relevant for this paper to present briefly what the classics thought about modernity and religion, in order to address the similarities or differences between their positions and contemporary theorists. Concerning the theorists presented in this chapter, there are two main positions regarding religion and future modern societies, Comte and Marx, on one hand, and Weber and Durkheim on the other. It seems improbable to classify them into these two categories, but there is good reason in doing so. Comte and Marx announced that the "death" of religion would have beneficial outcomes for the society. Comte considers that religion no longer has a place in the "positivist" era of society, where everything should be controlled by rational thought. Similarly, Marx holds

that religion is strictly related with the exploitative form of society that exists. Religion reinforces the inequality inside society, and, at the same time, society fortifies its religion. In order to establish a society where equality is the main characteristic, Marx advises that we should get rid of religion and all the other characteristics of the older form of society. Neither theorist discusses the concept of secularization. Instead they are arguing for it as the only way in which the society will evolve into a better one. Durkheim and Weber, on the other hand, analyze secularization, and its effects on both religion and society. Rather than taking sides, however, they present the facts and the possible outcomes. Durkheim considers that a society without religion cannot exist, because religion (its morality and its ethics) provides solidarity to the society. The emergence of a new religion that will have the individual as its object of cult will be the outcome of secularization. For him, secularization is mostly affecting the church, as an institution:

> "... the church losing power, separation between church and the state, the incapacity of the religious institutions of controlling the civic institutions and the life of the individuals, the intellectuals distancing themselves from the church,, church incapacity of producing an intellectual elite" (Hervieu-Leger, 1993: p 38).

Durkheim considers that modernity will push individuality to its limits, creating "autonomous" individuals (Durkheim, 1964). Religion will become an individualistic private affair. Its role, however, will remain unchanged, and will continue to be that of integrating and providing solidarity for the society. The only thing changed is that sacred/profane symbolism is no longer embedded into a church, but into each individual. The new private religion will be different from the church-type religion in this manner.

Weber holds that in the Middle Ages, the world is separated into two realms: the religious realm (the church) and the secular. However, because religion is predominant

and the state is closely related to the church, religion controls both realms. The secular sphere has to find its place into this duality controlled by the religious sphere. Secularization, for Weber, erases the boundaries between secular and religious spheres of society. At present, there is only one realm, the secular realm, which is composed of many small sub-realms, with religion being one of them. Secularization is a power transfer, or a replacement, of the religious sphere with the secular sphere. However, Weber is concerned that the rationalization of Western society, and the fragmentation of its values, can lead to disintegration. Religion, for him, provides more stable and unified sets of values to its followers, thus religion can be a counterweight to the disintegration of society.

We presented the classics' understanding of religion and their take on modern societies in order to be able to address the notion of religion in present times. Modernity, secularization, differentiation, individualization and privatization are the distinctive factors of the late 20th century and the beginning of 21st century concerning religion in westerns societies. In the next chapter we discuss contemporary views of the interaction between modernity and religion.

# Chapter II. Modernity, Religion, and

# Secularization in Contemporary Social Theory

The classical sociologists, presented in the first chapter, understand religion as a complex process that was present in their contemporary society. Their approaches on religion are different, but all of them converge in the sense that they argue that religion is present in society. However, they argued that there is something happening in modern society, that would alter the nature of religion or at the very least, the nature of the relationship between religion and society.

The contemporary sociology of religion, especially in Europe, has preached the decline and eventual disappearance of religion in the second part of the twentieth century (Cuciuc 1996). Secularization, for the majority of scholars, represents the phenomenon that religion encountered, at least in the Western World. Empirical studies, centered on indices such as church attendance and religious practice, are used to support claims that religion is a dying phenomenon in the West. From the interaction of modernity and religion, secularization emerged, and, in doing so, apparently has killed one of the sources.

Most of the theorists who included religion in their studies have regarded secularization as an outcome of the interaction between modernization and religion. Their understandings of it are, however, different. In this chapter, we begin by introducing various understandings and definitions of the concept of secularization. Afterward, we discuss modernity through the theories put forward by Parsons and Luhmann. Their takes on modern society include religion as a vital part of society. Following the presentation of the main concepts – modernity, religion, and secularization – we reflect on the

complex relationship between them throughout different contemporary theorists, i.e.: Luckmann, Berger, Baumann, Hervieu-Leger, Martin and Casanova.

## Notions of Secularization

The concept of secularization is not very well defined in sociology. Under its umbrella there are different understandings, definitions and outcomes for religion and society. At the same time, the sociological concept is dissimilar to the "common" meaning of the term. The common meaning of secularization is used to designate, more or less, any form of struggle against the church. It is more an ideological term employed by politics. Henri Desroche holds that in the social sciences, there are three schools of sociology of religion (Cuciuc, 1996: p 182). First, there are Marxist sociologists (as well as sociologists from the communist countries) which consider religion as an artifact of a past age of human development and usually understand secularization as an inevitable process that will have as its outcome a non-religious society, or more, a society were religion is just a word to designate something that existed in the past. On the opposite side there is the school of sociologists belonging to different religious groups, which exacerbate the role and place of religion (usually of their specific religion) and negate the existence of the process of secularization. They argue that there are no transformations occurring in religion or in the church. Excluding from the mass of sociologists these two traditions, which can be recognized as the two extreme poles in the debate, there are still a large number of theoretical currents left to explore, mainly the theories developed in laic universities and academies, independent from a political and religious point of view

(Cuciuc, 1996: p 182). Their views on secularization vary between the two poles, negating its existence or exacerbating its influence. For example, Jose Casanova states that the position of positive sociology reduced the concept to testable hypotheses and, in doing so, erased much of its complexity (Casanova, 1994: p 12).

The word secularization has its roots in Latin (saeculum), where it means "forever" or "the mortal world", as opposed to "the God world". During the middle ages, the second meaning (that has been changed into "this world") was used. Secular meant anything that was not under the religious control. From the $17^{th}$ through to the $19^{th}$ century, secularization meant the transfer of religious properties (mainly land) to civic control. In fact, in this period, there were a lot of expropriations with the state taking control of former religious properties, beginning mainly in Western Europe and slowly advancing through Eastern Europe.

Peter Berger states that secularization means an undefined process of modernization and differentiation in human society, by which religion tends to become more and more personal (Beckford, 1989). Similarly, Albert Luchini, the former president of the International Association of Sociology of Religion, states that secularization supposes the move of religion from the public sphere into the private sphere (Luchini, 1975). Larry Shiner tried to categorize all the meanings of secularization present in the work of different sociologists. He outlines six different types of definitions, putting together the common elements of different approaches (Shiner, 1967). The first category of definitions states that secularization means a decline of religion that will produce, in time, a society without religion. The second type of definition implies that secularization means the transference of group interests from the sacred realm to the

secular world. Thirdly, secularization means the separation of religious ideas and religious institutions from the other parts of the society. The fourth set of definitions understands secularization as moving religious activities into secular activities. The fifth type regards secularization as a loss of the sacred character of the world. Finally, the sixth type of definition states that secularization means the passing from a sacred society to a secular society. In France, the notion of "laïcisation" is used instead of secularization. By employing the term, the French theorists argue that a more powerful form of secularization is occurring in France, underlining the idea that even the relation to the sacred is severed. Contemporary theorists cannot agree on the nature of secularization. However, most of them agree that:

> "[…] l'Europe de l'Ouest (à laquelle il faudrait cependant adjoindre le Canada) est la seule aire géographique où les hypothèses classiques concernant l'inévitable <<sécularisation>> des sociétés modernes trouvent leur réalisation " (Hervieu-Leger, 1996: p 10).

This also means that religion is modernizing itself only in strict relation with the advancement of society. The Western world has evolved more quickly than the rest of the world, from a Western point of view of economics, politics and other state institutions. This probably explains why Western theorists do not explore secularization or laicization in other areas of the world as much as in Western societies.

The view of the relationship between religion and modernity changed dramatically in the middle of the twentieth century. As the sociology of religion evolved as a discipline, it became centered on itself. The theories were no longer concerned with the relationship between religion and the state, but rather on internal practices of religion. Empirical studies became centered on the relations between practice and attendance,

clergy and individuals. Also, as capitalism entered golden era, expanding on most of Europe and North America, it brought with it rationality. Rationality of politics, rationality of the economy, rationality of sciences, and rationality of beliefs are now the important issues, leading sociology of religion to proclaim "the death of religion", the final result of secularization. Modern society no longer has place anymore for religion. In fact, as Beckford argues, by becoming a closed community, the sociology of religion was unable to look further than empirical data and traditional religious practices (Beckford, 1989). This is no longer the classical view of religion, as a complex phenomenon, with its important relationship with society. However, the empirical data did not support their theories. Though it was true that religious practices were diminishing, the level of religiosity remained high[4]. New theories were needed, that would account for more than traditional practices, and more importantly, that would address religion in its entire complexity and as part of human society.

In order to present these "new holistic" theories on religion and modernity, we selected theorists that add a new facet to the complex nature of religion in modernity, and to its complex relationship with society[5]. It is important to note that there is also a shift in the understanding of secularization, that moves from two extremes interpretations toward a middle position.

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[4] See Appendix Table I. Religious practice is measured through Church attendance, while the level of religiosity is measured through the importance of religion, God and belief in life after death.

[5] The positions presented here do not cover the entire debate on secularization and religion in contemporary societies. There are sociologists, such as Bryan Wilson, who consider secularization an omnipresent process in society, which will have, as an effect, the disappearance of religion. "Secularization relates to the diminution in the social significance of religion" (Wilson, 1982: p 149). Other sociologists contest this point of view, holding that secularization renews religion. A good example in this case is the work on religion done by Rodney Stark, who states that secularization is "the harbinger of religious change" not the "final twilight of the gods" (Stark and Bainbridge, 1985: p 130).

# Modern Religion in Modern Society: Parsons and Luhmann

Talcott Parsons develops the weberian theory of religion and society. Parsons addresses the relations between society and religion, applying Weber's model of the birth of capitalism and its relationship to Protestantism to explain the advancements in human societies through history. In doing so, he links Christianity with the advancement of societies in the late middle ages, from a feudal system to more modern forms of state organizations.

Parsons' theory argues that a specific type of society emerged in the Western Christian World, namely modern society: "the society of Western Christendom ... provided the base from which what we call the "system" of modern societies "took off"" (Parsons, 1971: p 1). Parsons holds that modern society is constructed from different sub-systems, each of them fulfilling a specific function and working harmoniously together at the same time, with sub-systems appearing through the process called differentiation. Parsons describes the process of division of a unit into two or more units, within a system, whereby each of the new units takes on and fulfills better one role of the former unit. Or another role can appear that needs a new unit to fulfill it. The units are relatively independent from each other and from their former parent (Parsons, 1971: p26). However, there is an overall rationale of the entire society that covers all the sub-systems. Modernity, for Parsons, is characterized by this high level of differentiation, compared with traditional societies. Social sub-systems are separated from each other, each of them fulfilling a specific role. However, taken together, they form the social system. Society is not fragmented. The sub-systems are autonomous from each other, but they act together,

with each of them fulfilling specific functions for the whole system. Values play an important role in the system. As the system advances from a monolith, fulfilling a multitude of tasks, toward a structured organization of sub-systems, there is a need for universal values. In the past, as there were non-differentiated societies, the values were common. In modern societies, though, there is the risk that each sub-system develops its different scheme of values. If the whole system has to work together, there is the need for "value generalization". This does not pre-suppose that the values are imposed by a super-entity, but merely that the system of values has to become more generalized in order to adapt each sub-unit (Parsons, 1971: p27). Parsons argues that although values are legitimized by different institutions, they are ultimately legitimized by religion (Parsons, 1971: p 9). Religion, in modern society, has universalized its values. The inclusive religious values are now values of the entire society.

Modernity, for Parsons, is a highly differentiated form of society, with utilitarian rationalism, capitalism, and individuality as its main characteristics. The emergence of modernity in the Western World is a historical process, in which each of the following was an important step: rationalization, industrialization, democracy and education for the masses (Parsons, 1971: p 74, 94). The relationship between state and religion is a continuous series of differentiations that produces advancements in society. Parsons draws the relationship between the evolution of Christianity and the evolution of western society. He holds that the first major differentiation occurred when the Christian religion appears. For the first time, a truly universal religion emerged. That is, while other religion, such as Judaism, demanded for religious and membership based on ethnicity. Christianity, on the other hand, demanded only religious membership. Any member,

regardless of ethnic background was welcome (Parsons, 1971: p 31). This evolution produced the first differentiation between state affiliation and religious affiliation. Christianity also developed on a greco-roman background, importing many of its rules and laws, later transmitting these to the newly formed kingdoms of medieval Europe.

The second important differentiation for Parsons occurred when, in the Middle Ages, a society where power was transmitted mainly through hereditary rights, the church decided that its monks and priest should respect celibacy. This rule adopted by the church announced the future bureaucracies, where the functionaries do not transmit their jobs to their offspring, but rather the organization hires the employees. At the same time, the church attracted scholars, in order to develop its theology and knowledge of the world. This has two effects. First, it contributed to the evolution of human knowledge, and secondly, it created the necessity for the counter-current, the Enlightenment (Parsons, 1971: p 40-48). This set religion apart even further, as it was no longer the only possible source and realm of knowledge. In this way, Parsons establishes connections between the development of modern society and religion. From this point of view, his work continues the work of Weber on religion.

It should be noted that, most of Parsons' work on religion addresses contemporary problems regarding religion in modern societies. He is developing a specific understanding of religion, as one of the sub-systems of his social system. For Parsons:

> "Social systems are those constituted by states and processes of social interaction among acting units. If the properties of interaction were derivable from properties of the acting units, social systems would be epiphenomenal, as much "individualistic" social theory has contended. [...] Society is a" reality sui generis" (Parsons, 1971: p 7).

As mentioned above, the social system is characterized by values, norms, roles and collectivities. It is constituted by smaller sub-systems, which fulfill different roles. These sub- systems are interacting with each other. Religion is one of the sub-systems. Through differentiation, religion has conceded some of its former functions to other different sub – systems, like the state, the market and the justice system. However, religion still has functions in the present society and it is still here. Through differentiations, new institutions are fulfilling former religious roles while they acquired some of the religious values. Religion still provides, even indirectly, the main core values of society, even if they are institutionalized by other sub-systems. The former religious values are not values of different institutions. Everyday, an individual faces the task of choosing from a multitude of institutionalized values, where some of them may be different or even contradictory. As James Beckford states:

> "Parsons claimed that religion not only "rationalizes" systems of institutionalized values by mitigating discrepancies between expectations and perceived reality but also constitutes the value system to varying degrees" (Beckford, 1989: p59).

Religion confers stability and strength over time to the core human values, and at the same time, pushes (motivates) the individual to choose and to accept its values. Parsons states that "the 'core' function of religion in the social system life [is] the regulation of the balance of motivational commitment of the individual to the values of society" (Parsons in Beckford, 1989: p 61). This is slightly different from Durkehim's or Weber's ideas that religion provides the main values for society. Religion, in this case, becoming an individual choice, only motivates the individual to conform according to his societal values, values that are no longer religious values. They were religious values, but through differentiations, they were institutionalized by different societal sub-systems.

In a time when everybody sees a society where religion tends to disappear, and secularization is the process that is contributing to this, Parsons holds that religion still has a place in society, and that the common usage of "secularization" is misleading. He understands secularization as a series of differentiations, by which religion has lost control over the laws, politics, nation, and finally over the economy (Parsons, 1971: p 99). Despite the fact that religion has lost its institutional influence over society, he claims that the influence is still exercised through the attachments of individuals to religious values. Religion is not disappearing from society, it is just moving closer to the individual level. Hans Joas, explaining the late work of Parsons on religion, argues that Parsons understood secularization as a reinforcement of religion, and not as a diminishing factor that affects religion. (Joas, 2001) Parsons claimed that in eliminating the clergy, the link between the believer and god became stronger as the believer was closer to god. Furthermore, Parsons provides a critique to Pitrim Sorokin, who claimed that secularization is a long and drown out process, through which society is becoming more and more non-religious. Sorokin sees the protestant revolution as one of the main secularization processes. Parsons, on the other hand, states that Protestantism (and reformation) had emancipated the individual form the church tutelage, putting him/her in direct relation with God:

> "Luther broke through this tutelage to make the individual a religiously autonomous entity, responsible for his own religious concerns, not only in the sense of accepting the ministrations and discipline of the church but also through making his own fundamental religious commitments" (Parsons, 1999: p 35).

By doing so, religion has started to regulate the whole of everyday life of the individual, not just the laic activity (the activity inside the church). The barrier between the secular

and the church was broken with the entire society becoming a new type of church where individuals were at the same time subjects and clergy. He considers secularization not a slow departure of religion from society, but rather, as a closer and closer form of communion between the former and the latter.

> "The secular order may change in the direction of closer approximation of the normative models provided by a religion, or by religion more generally... [a] change in the world in the direction of institutionalization of religious values" (Parsons, 1999: p 57).

Parsons' theory of modern society and religion holds that modernity consists of a series of differentiations, by which societal structure evolved from a monolith that fulfilled all the functions at the same time to a multitude of sub-units, each of them satisfying a specific function, better than the old monolith. The entire structure of the system has utilitarian-rationalistic goals. The road to modernity is a series of differentiations, in which religion plays an important role. Religion exists in modernity, as an individual religion, that puts the believer in direct connection with God. At the same time, some religious values become more inclusive and more universal. They are adopted by other institutions, and in the end, by the entire society.

There are other important systemic theories, which develop structural functionalism, and address the place of religion in society.

Niklas Luhmann develops a general sociological theory that elaborates further Parson's structural-functionalism. He holds, contrary to Parsons, that rationality is not at the basis of social systems while at the same time, there is no rational overall organization of society. As society evolves, it becomes increasingly differentiated and complex. It develops more and more differentiated subsystems, each with its own

environment. The human individual cannot grasp this evolving complexity, understanding only a relatively simple environment. The main function of social subsystems, then, is to provide this simple environment. Each subsystem develops its own set of meanings, actions and code of communication, relative to its environment, that is called by Luhmann a "reduction of complexity" (Beckford, 1989: p 79). This reduction of complexity is achieved by new sub-systems, which appear through what Luhmann calls "functional differentiations" (Luhmann, 2000: p 197-198). This type of differentiation means that on a horizontal level the system differentiates itself into new sub-systems with each of these new sub-systems fulfilling a function. Modern society is characterized by these horizontal functional-differentiations, while pre-modern societies were hierarchical and stratified (Luhmann, 2000: p 197). This leads Luhmann to argue that modern society is segmented horizontally into autonomous sub-systems, which are not ranked in a specific order. In comparison, pre-modern societies were stratified, with some sub-systems having priority over others. He does not claim that there is no longer a hierarchy or stratification in contemporary societies; rather he claims that functional differentiations are the most predominant types of differentiations occurring. There are interactions between the newly formed sub-systems. These relations, however, are not relations of domination or exploitation. That is, neither sub-system imposes itself over other sub-systems. Luhmann names this relation "structural coupling":

> "[T]he term "structural coupling".... Has the advantage of making clear that there is no casual determination of the state of one system by the other, but there is simply a channel of reciprocal irritation, or also one-way irritation" (Luhmann, 2000: p 208).

Structural coupling can be interpreted as loose effects of one system onto another one. If there is no longer a dominant system, this would mean that there is no longer a dominant ideology.

Luhmann holds that morality, as presented by Durkheim, is no longer relevant to an entire society, formed by multiple autonomous sub-systems. Morals are used by each sub-system in its own environment: "function systems use the moral code to fight disintegrative or pathological cases in their own codes" (Luhmann, 2000: p 213). It must be noted, however, that even if morals, as an ideology, no longer dominate all the sub-systems of society, having lost its privileged dominant sub-system, it is still relevant for the systems, in each particular context of their environment.

The new sub-systems are also characterized by their own power of self-reference. Specifically, they do not need to rely only on other sub-systems to define themselves. Rather, the sub-systems are legitimized mostly from within, while maintaining their own internal rationality (Luhmann, 1998: p 16-17).

Luhmann explains the emergence of modernity following key concepts like functional differentiations, technology, individuality, capitalism and rationality (Luhmann, 1998: p 7-8). Modernity, for Luhmann, is "a release of individuality" (Luhmann, 1998: p 4), made possible by functional differentiations. One of the differentiations that released this individuality is technology: "the emancipation of individuals ... is an unavoidable side effect of this technologizing" (Luhmann, 1998: p 6). To sum up, modernity for Luhmann is defined by functional differentiation and autonomous equal sub-systems, each with its own environment at its reduction of complexity, and with different codes of meaning developed inside them.

As mentioned above, former forms of societies were not as evolved and differentiated as modern types. They were relatively simple systems, and religion was a relative simple system of meanings that was able to cover the entire social environment. Luhmann's approach to religion and its function for society is based on his notion of contingency. "Anything is contigent that is neither necessary nor impossible" (Luhmann, 1998: p 45). That is, a selected course of action is selected from a multitude of available possibilities, neither of them imposed. The problem of contingency is not significant in the earlier societies, because the available possibilities were limited. However, as the multitude of choices increase, the question arises: 'why choose one course instead of another'? Religion solves this question through its concept of God. God offers all the multitude of available choices, so there is of little importance which should be followed, as all of them are legitimized by God (Luhmann, 1998: p 50-51). Present societies are, however, complex and extremely differentiated, consisting of multiple complex environments. The problem of contingency is solved by different sub-systems through their internal logic. Contingency is resolved by the political system based on the value of "common good" (Luhmann, 1984: p 10) or by the economy, where everything must acknowledge the limited quantity of supply available (Luhmann, 1984: p 10). Religion in modern societies is just one of the subsystems, but it is also a very complex one. It can no longer grasp the whole human social system and therefore it cannot resolve the contingency problem for all the sub-systems. However, it still plays an important role for the system. A meaning in the system is based on another meaning that is based also on another meaning and so on. Luhmann sees in this "the danger of an infinite regress of meanings" (Beckford, 1989: p 81). Religion provides the ultimate meaning, and puts an

end to this search for the priori meaning (Luhmann, 1984: p 7). Luhmann considers that religion, even if it is only a subsystem, is slightly different from the other subsystems of the social world. Religion still provides a function to the entire system.

Religion for Luhmann is present in modern societies, even if functions are different from the past. Before, it directly shaped the entire social environment. Now, religion directly influences its own sub-environment. Its functions for the entire society are more subtle, and more indirect. Morals (which are inseparable from religion) are relevant for modern societies, but not as a whole. Morals only count in particular contexts of each environment. Religion has an overall function in society, that is to provide an end to the infinite regression of meaning.

## Individual and Private Religion: Luckmann and Berger[6]

Other contemporary theories distanced from the view of society at the structural and functional level. Instead of focusing on the macro makeup of society, theorists look at the inter-individual relationship.

Thomas Luckmann's sociological theory is different from the structuralism developed by Parsons and Luhmann. Luckmann does not see of paramount importance society as a structured system, where each subsystem is defined by its function. What matters for him is the interaction between individuals and their relationship with society.

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[6] The private/public debate is not the issue of this thesis. Hannah Arendt, Jurgen Habermas and Nancy Fraser devoted some of their studies to this dichotomy (Arendt, Hannah. "The Public Realm: The Common", in *The Public Face of Architecture: Civic Culture and Public Spaces*, Glazer, Nathan and Lilla, Mark eds., New York, 1987; Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere" in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Calhoun, Craig ed., Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992; Habermas, Jurgen. "The Public Sphere" in *Jurgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader*, Seidman, Steven ed., Boston, 1989).

In this sense, he continues Durkheim's work on religion, arguing that "the very relationship between individuals and society is religious" (Beckford, 1989: p 101).

Luckmann in "The Invisible Religion" holds that religion is not disappearing today. Luckmann believes, as Beckford states that:

> "religion is a structural as well a cultural feature of all societies and that its 'invisible' functions are no less important for not being empirically available for observation and measurement" (Beckford, 1989: p 102)

Luckmann holds that the development of a significantly historical world-view for the individual is a religious phenomenon (Luckmann, 1967: p 78). Religion selects what is relevant and assures its continuous existence. Socialization is religious, because these word-views are in fact social forms of religion. This understanding of religion as a world view corresponds to pre-modern societies, in which it was possible that one institution offered an encompassing system of reference. The church, as an institutionalized form of religion, managed the relation between individuals and the system of values. In modern societies, there are no longer institutions that can impose their "world-views" onto individuals. Each institution has a segmented system of values, which no longer cover the entire society. The church has lost its power of offering significance for anything in society (Luckmann, 1967: p 100-103). Individuals no longer rely on institutions to interact with the social environment. In the case of religion, they circumvent the church and relate themselves directly to religious values and norms:

> "The social form of religion emerging in modern industrial societies is characterized by the direct accessibility of an assortment of religious representations to potential consumers. The sacred cosmos is mediated neither through a specialized domain of religious institutions nor through other primary public institutions" (Luckmann, 1967: p 103).

Former religious values and symbols are institutionalized by other systems in contemporary societies or are public values. At the same time, individuals have developed their own religiosity, choosing what they want and rejecting what was in contradiction with their interests from the mainstream religion. In a sense, individuals develop private religions, which, though seen as religion, they are not institutionalized. However, these norms and values of private religions do not have stability and unity. There are different religious values and norms available to the individual. He/she can choose one, as his/her neighbor chooses another one. Nobody is imposing onto them one of the systems. Modern religion reinforces the modern ideal of human autonomy. "The modern sacred cosmos legitimizes the retreat of the individual into the "private sphere" and sanctifies his/her subjective "autonomy" (Luckmann, 1967: p 116). What are imposed are the concepts of autonomy and individuality. Beckford concentrates Luckmann's main idea as follows:

> "The distinctiveness of Luckmann's analysis of the problem of religion in industrial society lies not so much in his account of the differentiation of institutions and the specialization of religion but more in his argument that these thoroughgoing transformations of church-oriented religion have done little to affect the function of religion" (Beckford, 1989: p 104).

Luckmann argues that modern religion is not essentially different from pre-modern religion. Durkheim argued that religion is the deification of society, and Luckmann holds that modern religion still plays the same role. Autonomy and personal freedom are now core values of society that are defended by the modern forms of religion.

Peter Berger[7] takes Luhmann's concept of modern religion further, looking at other functions it fulfills, offering another non-functionalist account of modernity and religion. He agrees that through the modernization process, a highly differentiated society emerged, in which the "classical" institution of church has been eroded. By giving away its functions to other different institutions, religion no longer controls the entire area of society, especially the economic life (Beckmann, 1989). Rationalism and management are now in control of this vital part of society. However, he holds, as Beckmann underlines, that:

> "The growth of bureaucracy, in association with economic growth, had created a widening gulf between the public world of state, politic and work and the private world of family, community and self" (Beckford, 1989: p 91).

In so doing, the values, the meanings and the symbols of private life are in danger of being replaced by the (ir)rational logic of the market. These new values and meanings cannot offer stability for the individuals or for the family. They are also not giving an ultimate meaning to life and death. In the era when religion dominated the society, these were some of its major functions (or even its crucial functions for Berger), whereas now, according to Berger, a new form of religion, (i.e.: a private religion), fulfills these roles. This type of private religion is a voluntary religion in which each individual can choose to have one, or choose not to. It is a private affair. As long as it is staying a private affair, it is fulfilling its roles. It cannot defy the economic rationality of the market, and implicitly, the modernity of society, because in doing so, it would destroy the rational values and symbols of modernity. When it is only acting at the private level, it offers

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[7] Peter Berger later revised his approach to secularization (Peter Berger ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, 1999). However, the interpretation discussed in this thesis represents a good example of how secularization is seen as moving religion into the private realm.

stability and meaning to the individual and family life, which fight, on a regular basis, with an increasingly differentiated and economic rationalized society:

> "... the focus of 'voluntary' religion on the sphere of the relatively fragile nuclear family makes no such threats to modernity: it merely accentuates the segregation of personal meaning or identity from affairs in the public sphere" (Beckmann, 1989: p 94).

In this sense, Berger argues from the same position as Luckmann, proposing that modern religion reinforces modern society.

At the individual level modern religion is seen as a private affair. However, this individual religion is not the only form that religion takes in modern societies. Some authors argue that the entirety of modern society is religious.

## Modern State as Civil Religion: Baumann

Gerd Baumann is one of the contemporary theorists of religion, who argues that in modern societies, a new form of religiosity emerged, called "civil religion". This religion is different from the common understanding of religion or of modern religion.

Baumann argues that the most common interpretation of secularization is flawed. "The nation-state tends to be secular-ist, but is by no means secul-ar" (Baumann, 1999: p 44). Baumann explains that the state has replaced traditional forms of religion with its own "civil-religion". Civil-religion is composed of all the symbols, values and morals of the state, that are received as supreme and ultimate. These symbols and values are religious, even if they are not in the traditional way of understanding religion. He defines religion as everything important in society. Namely, Baumann's concept of religion is the

distinction between good and evil, that which directs our lives, and "the meaning and morality of life" (Baumann, 1999: p 21). He holds that due to the way it was constructed historically, the distinction between what is and what is not religious is flawed. For Baumann, religion is absolute. Everything in pre-modern societies was linked, more or less, with religion, because every action was inspired and measured by religious standards, values, and morals. However, in these types of societies, religion was based on the sacred, on God. On the contrary, in today's societies religious values and norms have been replaced by civil ones imposed and sustained by the state (Baumann, 1999: p 44-45). In their place now there are laws that punish crimes and theft. We no longer rely upon the biblical teachings to argue that crime is bad. Rather, contemporary societies have substituted these "commandments" with institutions that defend the morality of the family. Today, somebody who commits a crime knows that the law will punish him/her whereas before he/she had to deal with biblical punishment.

Baumann argues that through secularization the non–religious state (in the traditional understanding of the concept) has taken control of these former religious-related norms, values, and institutions. Secular values, institutions and laws have replaced them. Baumann, however, states that the new system, even if it has no link with the sacred or with God, given it is so ultimate and decisive in every-day life, is similar to religion. Its religiosity comes from its powerful and absolute role in society. By replacing old religions with civil religion, the state not only became the clergy of its own new civil religion, but also its "God". In short, modern religion is, for Baumann, not an individual activity, but something that it is embedded in the very structure of the modern state. For him, society became more religious, not more secular.

All theories presented until now in this chapter discuss modernity and religion in a general context. Secularization is a concept that is mostly employed regarding Christian religions in Western World. In order to properly explore the relationship between modernity and religion, then it is important to put it into a more specific context, that is the Western World.

## Modernity and Religion in Western World: Hervieu-Leger and Martin

European theorists focus their studies of religion and secularization, focusing primarily on the particular context of the Western World. After a long period of time in which the French sociologist talked about the death of religion that was supported by empirical studies (massive drops in religious practice), they started to question their theories because of the emergence of new religious movements and an apparent constant level of religious membership in Western Europe.

Danielle Hervieu-Leger considers that a discussion on religion, secularization and contemporary society has to begin by addressing the characteristics that are specific to all of them at present. The common denominator here is modernity. Modernity has altered society, religion and individual, bringing its rationality to each aspect of this triad. Hervieu-Leger holds that modernity has three main characteristics: rationality, autonomy and differentiation. The first of them, rationality, has profound effects on the entire society:

> "La modernité occidentale se pressente d'abord à travers la façon qu'elle a de mettre en avant, dans tous les domaines de l'action humaine individuelle et collective, la rationalité, c'est-à-dire

l'impératif de l'adaptation cohérente des moyens aux fins que l'on poursuit" (Hervieu-Leger, Davie, 1996: p 11).

This means that rational science is at the base of every human activity. From rational science we can develop a rational economy, and a rational state. This constitutes the first characteristic of modernity, and the most important one. In a world dominated by rationality, the human relation with society is based on rationalism. An individual participant in society, using its rationalism, develops his/her own symbols and representation of it. He/she is not dependent on society, instead he/she maintains his/her autonomy. In traditional societies, the individual has rules and values imposed on him/her, that he/she has to accept and not change. The third characteristic is differentiation. In modernity, human activities are no longer monolithic, as expressed repeatedly above. They have developed their own sphere, and each of them has its own rationalism. There are different institutions for morality, culture, politics, economy, etc. The process of differentiation started when religion, the former monolith, came to give away its functions to separate entities. What is important here is that the new entities became independent of religion; they are autonomous. "Pour designer ce processus d'émancipation, on parle de <<laïcisation>> des sociétés modernes" (Hervieu-Leger, Davie, 1996: p 13). Religion ceases providing all the values, meanings, and symbols to individuals. Contrary to former societies, religion is no longer the only eternal reference. This does not mean that religion disappears from modern societies. It becomes a private business of each individual, who now can choose it if he/she wants. It is no longer imposed on him/her. It seems that modernity, based on a rationalism imposed by a specific form of religion (Protestantism) is dismantling religion, its former parent.

However, in a society in which only rationalism exists, and in which there is a non-stop strife for a better society, modernity becomes analogous with religion. Each of them offers different imaginary realities: namely, the other world (religion) and the future better world (modernity) (Hervieu-Leger, Davie, 1996: p 17). In modern society, the gap between the "real" world and the "future better" world becomes a space where a new religion appears, that can be seen as new forms of religion or renewed traditional religions. Moreover, in periods of deep societal crisis (economic, political) traditional religion is seen by individuals as a stable safe haven. Hervieu-Leger considers that there is a paradox of modernity concerning religion. On the one hand, modernity shakes the foundations of traditional religion, and starts to diminish it, while, on the other hand, it is creating opportunities for continuous existence multiplication of religions forms, due to its specific instability and unpredictability.

David Martin proposes a theory on secularization strictly related to the Western World context. Martin is an advocate of the "classical" secularization theory. He holds that the dissociation between secular and religious, as predicted and started by the Enlightenment is a fact of contemporary society. In the modern state religion is a private, individual affair, and the separation between church and state is all present. The present form of society has differentiated its spheres from the monolithic religion of the past. He holds that particularly the church is disappearing in contemporary societies: "la séparation de l'Église et de la Société a nécessite une <<opération chirurgicale>> qui a gravement meurtri l'Église" (Hervieu-Leger, Davie, 1996: p 26). However, and this is what differentiates Martin from the "classical secularization" theorists, secularization did not occur worldwide. It is not an inevitable outcome of modernity. In fact, it is only one

particular element of a number of possible outcomes of modernity, being present only in Western Europe and in Canada. Not even all of the Western European countries exhibit the same form and the same level of secularization.

Martin holds that secularization (in Western Europe) was initiated by the intellectual elite of the Christian church, taking different forms depending on each particular society. In France, where the monarchy was closely related to the church, the struggle against the former identified with the struggle against the latter. Separation between the newly emerged republic and religion went further than most of the other European countries. The separation was highly politicized. One of the first political decisions of the laic republic was to separate the church from the state. The complete separation between the republic and the church took place in 1905, when the educational system was liberated from church control. On the other hand, in the United Kingdom, were there was no such strong amalgamation between the state and the church and secularization is not yet complete. Officially the church and the state are still united. The situation is very different in places were religion is strictly linked with national identity (Hervieu-Leger, Davie, 1996: p 30). In Northern Ireland, Bosnia, and other European countries or regions, the political delimitations of states were not done in conformity with the national ethnic communities. If a number of different congregations were involved (Protestants and Catholics, for example), in the struggle to preserve national identity, religion was one of the main differentiating factors. Religion, as one of the cohesive and differentiating factors of the respective community, remained unaltered and the separation between religion and state never occurred. Martin argues that in the case of Eastern Europe another phenomenon took place. Religion, Martin considers, is one of the

main actors that preserve and define culture (Hervieu-Leger, Davie, 1996: p 38-39). During the communist regimes the state tried to impose its newly unrealistic culture and socio-economic system that have no continuity with the past. Religion, in this case, signified both the continuity of traditional culture and a point of resistance to the regime. In Western Europe, the cultural role of religion is used to recall heroes and heroic acts in political debates. Martin argues that a common trend is apparent in Western Europe regarding secularization, only if on the surface of the phenomenon. Similarities are found more or less when church attendance is measured, but at the same time, individuals declare themselves as religious. It is more like being religious, but not being part of traditional institutionalized churches. New religious movements are making their appearance on the European arena, questioning again the "classic" notion of secularization. In fact, Martin holds that:

> "comme Peter Berger l'a indiqué, la tendance contemporaines dominante pourrait tout aussi bien correspondre à une ardente revitalisation qu' à une sécularisation. Si cela est vrai, la problématique à laquelle toute sociologie de la religion en Europe est confrontée, concerne ce qui fait de l'Europe une grande exception" (Martin in Hervieu-Leger, Davie, 1996: p 40).

The factor that explains best the differences is at the level of state-culture-religion relations. In Eastern Europe, as argued before, culture and religion were identified with the resistance against communism. In the United States, as a particularity of the state system put in place after the War of Independence, there was no state imposed culture. A diversity of cultures was given equal privileges and the equal right of existence. In Western Europe, the influential form of culture was high culture (i.e.: the culture of the elites). As these elites accessed power, they dictated their relation with religion. In the

protestant states, the relation between the protestant elites and culture was a very relaxed one, as opposed with the catholic countries, were the former catholic elites imposed a strictly directed culture. These elites were replaced by enlightened elites that imposed their strict laic culture as a response to the former highly aggressive religious culture (Hervieu-Leger, Davie, 1996: p 40).

Secularization is unquestionably a process occurring in the Western World. However, it is still unclear how to define it and how to separate it from other processes of modernization. Contemporary thinkers on religion develop theories that approach secularization in a more comprehensive way.

## Integrative Theory on Religion: Casanova

Jose Casanova argues that today we can no longer discuss secularization as it was defined in the 1950s. Religion today is moving from the private sphere into the public sphere. In order to support his argument, Casanova looks at the evolution of secularization theory, from the Middle Ages up to contemporary times, stating that secularization started when religion was first challenged as the only existent omnipotent knowledge system.

The Enlightenment was the era when religious hegemony over the world was contested in a systematic way. Thinkers and philosophers argued that religion does not hold all the answers regarding human life, while maintaining that there are also alternatives to its dogma (i.e.: the scientific knowledge). The Enlightenment offered for the first time a different view of the world, in which the secular element came first. The

opposition to religion was based on three different issues. First, the Enlightenment denounces the supernatural present in religious doctrine that was a barrier to any other form of knowledge, including modern secular science. Second, it was a critique to religious institutions that argued that the church was the main supporter of monarchic authoritarian regimes. Finally, it denounced God as the main focus of religion, supporting instead that the individual should be put at the center of any activity (Casanova, 1994: p 31-33).

Casanova states that religion before the Enlightenment had two functions: to distinguish "this world" and "the other world", and to delimit inside "this world" between the secular and the religious:

> "There was, on the one hand, the dualism between "this world" and "the other world". There was, on the other hand, the dualism within "this world" between a "religious" and a "secular" sphere. Both dualisms were mediated, moreover, by the "sacramental" nature of the church, situated in the middle, simultaneously belonging to the two worlds" (Casanova, 1994: p 15).

Secularization means that the barrier between religious and secular spheres in "this world" is broken. He holds, much as Weber, that religion is becoming one of the new spheres inside "this world". "...From now one, there will be only one single "this world", the secular one, within which religion will have to find its own place" (Casanova, 1994: p 15). For him, the task of the theories of secularization is to try to understand the new place religion has and its new relationships with the world, as well with the other spheres of the world.

He holds that:

> "the main fallacy in the theory of secularization, a fallacy reproduced by apologists and critics alike that has made the theory

nearly unserviceable for social-scientific purposes, is the confusion of historical processes of secularization proper with the alleged and anticipated consequences which those processes were supposed to have upon religion" (Casanova, 1994: p 19).

Secularization, for him, is the modernization of society, which takes the form of a series of "differentiation and emancipation of the secular spheres – primarily the state, the economy, and science – from the religious sphere" (Casanova, 1994: p 19). He calls this secularization – "the differentiation thesis". To this differentiation thesis, usually (and mistakenly for Casanova) the outcomes of the process are added. First, there are the theories that predict a decline of religion, and possibly the disappearance of religion from modern societies. Second, a number of theories talk about a privatization of religion, which equals, for Casanova, a marginalization of religion in society (Casanova, 1994: p 19-20).

The most important differentiations of religion and society were, in Casanova's opinion, the emergence of modern states, the appearance of the capitalist market and the development of modern science. All these systems were formerly systems under religious control. The emancipation began with the Protestant Reformation. The reformation destroyed the "unity" of the Catholic Church, creating the possibility of new and independent forms of activity. By legitimating and providing power to each individual, the Protestant Reformation legitimated new forms of authority and economics. Religion did not disappear with the Reformation. Instead, it adopted a new form, an individualistic religion that focuses its attention more on the individual than on the church. In doing so, it eliminated the need of church legitimation; with new states,

economies and sciences forming their own legitimacy and allowing them to escape church control (Casanova, 1994: p 20-22).

Casanova holds that these processes of differentiation and emancipation define secularization. This is a real historical process. However, when the process is linked with the possible outcomes, Casanova disagrees that it is relevant any longer. The sub theory that predicts the decline and disappearance of religion, as secularization or result of secularization, is dismissed by Casanova. He holds that empirical studies show in fact an increase of religious membership after the Second World War, mainly for the traditional churches (Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, Islam, etc) (Casanova, 1994: p 26). He supports the view that there is also an increase in membership for the new religious movements, and they are continuing to spread in new countries. The apparent decline of religion in Communist countries was false (Casanova, 1994: p 26). Atheism was imposed and reinforced by repressive regimes, in the goal of eradicating religion, one of their main contesters. In fact, religion remained as powerful as before in these countries, representing a resistance to the communist ideology. The decline of religion in Western Europe (and Canada) is the main exception. However, there are debates around this apparent decline, because the empirical studies do not show both a decline in attendance (practice) and membership at the same time. The levels of membership are still high. Casanova argues that the decline in practice for the established churches means that secularization mainly affects religion in the countries where the former powerful established churches have tried to resist. This is the case for most Western European countries, were the pre-modern state was strictly connected with a powerful church. The example of France is the most important one, a country in which the Catholic Church, as

noted above, was identified with the past form of government, monarchy. The traditional churches are declining in these countries, while new sects, (i.e.: non-established religions), are not showing the same trend. This also accounts for the United States, where a society as modern and differentiated as Western Europe is not exhibiting the same trends regarding religion and established churches, due, for Casanova, to the fact that the church was never related with the state as in the European case (Casanova, 1994: p 26-28).

The second sub theory regards privatization of religion as an outcome of secularization. Casanova holds that, according to contemporary theorists, such as Luhmann and Luckmann, religion in contemporary society becomes a private affair and an optional activity of the individual. In a world dominated by liberal and neo-liberal knowledge, society is becoming increasingly fragmented. The social spheres (economics, politics, culture) become differentiated, as well as individuals and society. The focus of contemporary society moves from the "entire society" to the "single individual" (Casanova, 1994: p 35-37). The individual, as the social actor, has different activities. For example, he/she has to fulfill his/her job (economic activity), he/she can also decide to vote or to participate in political election, or he/she can decide to engage in leisure activities. The main issues, and at the same time the difference from past societies, is that he/she has the power to decide what to do. He/she has the option to choose between participation and non-participation in any of these activities. Religion is just another activity, and the individual can select whether or not to practice it, or to follow its values and morality. The multitudes of options that the individual has before him/her transform him/her into a "buyer", which will pursue his/her own interest. He/she can choose

between secular and religious values, between different established forms of religion or he/she can develop his/her own system of values based on a selection from all of the above. In any case, he/she is the actor, developing his/her own religion that will offer him/her the meaning and sense of life. There is no longer a "religious state", which will impose its system of values and its religiosity on the subjects:

> "The primary "public" institutions (state, economy) no longer need or are interested in maintaining [...] a public religious worldview. In other words, modern societies do not need to be organized as "churches" [....] that is, as moral communities unified by a commonly shared systems of practices and beliefs. Individual are on their own in their private efforts to patch together the fragments into a subjectively meaningful whole" (Casanova, 1994: p 37).

Casanova, however, argues that the privatization of religion is not transforming religion into a "commercial product". Even if religion no longer has the same power to influence society as it once had, it is still offering ultimate values and morality for humanity. Religion is still able to emerge from its differentiated sphere to influence and model other spheres. "[...]Religion has often served and continues to serve [...] as a protector of human rights and humanist values against the secular spheres and their absolute claims to internal functional autonomy" (Casanova, 1994: p 39). Religion, in this sense, provides a barrier to the rational, and at the same time irrational, dehumanized economic drive, that tries to impose its economic values on the entire society. Religion is continuing to integrate and provide cohesion to modern society, though not in the same manner as in the past. Casanova holds that the privatization process was an option and a form that religion took in order to adapt to modern society. This does not mean that religion will stay privatized, and that religion can no longer play an important role in today's and tomorrow's societies (Casanova, 1994: p 38-39).

Casanova holds that even if religion is privatized, it is not just a private affair. He holds that there are enough examples to imply that religion is entering the public arena (Casanova, 1994: p 40-41). Religion offers its vision of the world, contesting the market or state views. In this sense, religion is similar with feminism or republicanism, which also challenge the current dominant ideology. Sometimes, religion and politics meld, producing an amalgam in which it is hard to differentiate between the two. Religion provides an alternative and a critique to different actions or courses of actions developed by other differentiated spheres. By critiquing and openly opposing some of the practices in contemporary society, religion is, in fact, reinforcing democracy and it is protecting the individual. Casanova holds that:

> "religion enters the public sphere to protect not only its own freedom of religion but all modern freedoms and rights, and the very right of a democratic civil society to exist against an absolutist, authoritarian state" (Casanova, 1994: p 57).

Religion also contests some of the actions of other differentiated spheres, arguing that because of the differentiation of modern societies, their activities no longer need to be legitimized or questioned by other spheres (for example, religious resistance to the nuclear arms race). Religion can also defend the:

> "traditional life-world from administrative or judicial state penetration and in the process opens up issues of norm and will formation to the public and collective self-reflection of modern discursive ethics" (Casanova, 1994: p 58).

This is the case when religion questions, for example, laws on abortion. Casanova argues that these three forms of public interventions support his argument that religion is not

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allowing itself to stay at the private level. Religion is entering the public arena in order to defend the individuals, and also to reinforce civil society and democracy.

Casanova considers that today's religion, private and public at the same time, has incorporated the Enlightenment's critique of religion, attacking the other differentiated spheres of modern society that have distanced themselves from the Enlightenment's ideals:

> "Religious traditions are now confronting the differentiated secular spheres, challenging them to face their own obscurantist, ideological, and inauthentic claims. In many of these confrontations, it is religion which, as often as not, appears to be on the side of human enlightenment" (Casanova, 1994: p 243).

Religion, in Casanova's approach, is not defined today by secularization in the common understanding of the term. The fact that modern private religion goes public completely alters the secularization theory. Casanova also delimits secularization as a process, from its possible outcomes.

From what we presented of the different contemporary theorists, it is evident that religion in the modern world is a complex phenomenon. Most of the theorists no longer argue that secularization has as an outcome the disappearance of religion in modern society. The understanding of secularization changed from the one that stated that it is a process that will diminish religiosity and finally erase religion from contemporary society to interpretations which argue that secularization is only the process by which religion is interacting with modernity. The effects of secularization are no longer embedded in the process itself. The effects, as presented by theorists, include the emergence of a new form

of religion, private, individualized and public and, at the same time, the slow fading of traditional established forms of religion. The traditional churches are no longer able to exist in the form they had before. They can no longer be giant monolithic institutions, which manage other social activities. Rather, many of their functions have been taken by other new differentiated institutions, resulting in the church no longer exercising direct control over them. At present, the church can only exist in the public sphere as one of the discussants or as one of the positions in public debates. Church attendance is decreasing because the church no longer represents the main director of human activities. Furthermore, religious practice is just another human activity. However, the role of religion, as offering ultimate core values and morality, is still present. Religion is the only system that can offer an ultimate goal and an ultimate meaning to human life. The difference from the past is that the individual now has the liberty to choose these values by himself. The values are no longer imposed on him/her. Many of these values and morality have also been transferred to secular institutions.

A number of theorists, such as Bauman, go even further, holding that present states have become their own religion. Through differentiations, the modern state has first severed from the church some of its former functions. In so doing, the state has also taken over the symbolism embedded in religion that offered it legitimacy, allowing the state to achieve its own ultimate legitimacy. In this sense, the new "civil religion" is its own church, that is, the state. The new form of religion is not a private religion, but a state-level religion.

Contemporary theories of modernity and religion follow the steps of the classics, mainly Durkheim, Simmel and Weber. Durkheim and Simmel's interpretation of religion,

as the main process that defines the relationship between the individual and society, is present in the work of the functionalists (Parsons, Luhmann) and non-functionalist (Berger, Luckmann), even if their modern interpretations are slightly different. Weber talked about religion offering legitimacy to human action, which is similar to Baumann's argument about the state and its civil religion. Casanova argues that religion is an actor in the public space, defending various aspects of individual life. This is similar to Weber's argument that religion intervenes in issues of sexuality, in order to protect the family.

The common denominator for all the above theories on modernity and religion is that religion is not disappearing. Any macro study on society should include religion as one of the main objects, given that religion is the main cohesive element of society. It offers integration and continuity, while also providing ultimate values and morality. These values are no longer imposed, but the individuals have a pool of common values from which they can choose. Religion shapes society, while also being shaped by it, as they evolve together. The church is eroded because the church presupposed a more or less an authoritarian institution that imposes its values to its members. Religion, in modern societies, adapts to the increasingly individualistic form of life. Today's individuals are supposed to be autonomous and rational, and from here, it means that they can choose their own values for themselves. They no longer need the church (and the clergy) to help them find their ways through life. Religion reinforces these ultimate values and symbols from which the individual can choose. Some of the values are present in other institutions as well, but these institutions alone cannot offer them the same ultimate and perennial meaning. At the same time, some religious values are broader and more universal than in the past. Their function is no longer to distinguish, but to integrate.

In the next chapter we focus on religion, modernity and secularization in two exceptional cases. That is, while theories of secularization address mainly religion in Western Europe and Canada, Western countries show a multitude of courses of modernity and secularization. However, there are more similarities than differences. The main difference regards the time when modernity and secularization arrived in these countries. Some of them have only recently experienced modernity and secularization. Quebec and Ireland represent two of these exceptions.

# Chapter III. Religion in Modern Western World:

# The Cases of Quebec and Ireland.

According to some theories of religion secularization seems to occur only in Western societies, such as Western Europe, and Canada (Hervieu-Leger, 1996). Through a measurement of church attendance, some studies support the idea that there is in fact a decrease in religiosity. Upon analysis of how the links with the church have been severed by the various country's laws and constitutions, the separation of church and state becomes evident. The most evident separations have occurred in politics; the church is no longer the major actor it was in the mid to late Middle Ages. Further, the educational system, in the past managed by the church, has become an institution managed by the state, outside the direct control of religious institutions. It is also argued that modern religion is private and individualistic (Berger, Luckmann). Nevertheless, Parsons and Luhmann believe that religion still has an important role in society.

In this chapter, we address the problematic of religion in two different areas of the Western World, Quebec and Ireland. The historic relationship between society and religion in Quebec and the role of religion in a recent public debate over abortion in contemporary Ireland are explored. Prior to constructing a general picture of religion in these particular areas of the Western World, the reasons for selecting Quebec and Ireland as the two contexts for the relationship between religion and modernity, are outlined

Secularization did not occur abruptly or on a specific date. The process was slow; sometimes it took centuries for secularization to occur. The religious situation is specific to each Western country, as each has a different level of secularization when compared to others. However, there are also common trends to all Western countries regarding religion. While there is a clear decrease in church attendance, the majority of the citizens

in these countries still declare themselves as religious (mostly Catholic or Protestant). This supports the argument that the church has lost importance and relevance while, on the other hand, religion adapted or evolved alongside with the modernization of societies. The secularization of Western World was a slow process, taking many decades. In France, the process took more than a century (1789-1905). Quebec society, however, was secularized in less than ten years. In an area in which the Catholic Church developed as one of the most powerful religious institutions of the Western World, religiosity decreased significantly fast between 1960 -1970. What prompted this rapid process of secularization in Quebec vis-à-vis other countries?

The last two centuries marked the emergence of what is referred to as "modern" societies, especially in the Western World. This is also the area in which theorists of religion analyzed secularization and its effects. European empirical studies indicate low levels of church attendance[8]. However, church attendance in Ireland is still very high, measured as almost double compared with the other Western countries. Ireland represents an exception because the empirical data suggests that the relationship between modernity and religion does not follow the general trend it follows in the Western World. Does this mean that Ireland is still a non-secular society? Can the theories of religion and modernity account for these two exceptions?

First, the specificity of religion in Quebec is addressed, followed by the particular relationship between religion and society in Ireland.

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[8] See Appendix Table I

# Quebec – From Church Controlled Society to Secular Society in Record Time

From many points of view Quebec represents an exception. It is the only place in Canada where there is a majority of French speaking people that has its own government. Secondly, it is among a few areas in Canada that have a vast majority of Catholics, part of a mostly multi-religious country. Third, nationalism in Quebec never exhibited the violence associated with contemporary nationalist movements as in other parts of the world (Northern Ireland, Basque region, former Yugoslavia, etc.). At the same time, Quebec has the highest divorce rate compared with any other Western country[9]. While most of the population still declares its membership to an established church, the level of religious practice is similar to levels encountered in most Western European states. Prior to the Quiet Revolution, Quebec was one of the most religious places in the West. The secularization of Quebec was rapid and extensive. In order to understand the particularities of modernity and religion in Quebec, one has to look at the history of religion in Quebec, that is, the history of the Catholic Church that is central to the social history of Quebec.

The discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus prompted tides of colonization from Europe, at the same time when the church was one of the most powerful institutions in Western Europe society. The new colonists brought their medieval European institutions, including the church, with them. In the new settlements, the church was one of the first things to be built. Alongside with the trading posts it

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[9] See Appendix Table II

represented the center of activity for the small emerging communities. The clerics had to preserve their community, the European colonists, and at the same time, to expand European spirituality to the local populations.

The Battle of the Plain of Abraham in 1759 was the start of a new era for the former French colony. Regarded as a periphery by both England and France, the huge colony with a relatively small population was seen as less important than the Caribbean islands. Nevertheless, it became part of the British Empire. For the first time, the Protestant country had to administer the Catholic majority. The history of conflict between the two churches in Europe was not a good sign for the future of the French Catholics in North America. The Catholic Church in Quebec saw the disappearance of all the other secular institutions of the former French colony over night, along with all its relationships and interests. Moreover, the roles of the Pope and the British monarch were incompatible, as both claimed the authority over the church. New immigrants arrived in the area, but they were no longer Catholic (Lemieux, Montminy, 2000: p 21). They were mostly Protestant, who brought liberal ideas and economic rationalism to Quebec. The gap between the French population, mostly rural and medieval, and the new immigrants, mostly urban and liberal, was increasing. The Catholic Church also encountered another problem: the lack of clergy. There were no longer priests coming from France; local priests were not being educated at a fast enough pace to keep up with the population growth. Raymond Lemieux and Jean-Paul Montminy show that between 1759 and 1830, the number of Catholic followers per priest increased from 350 to 1834 (Lemieux, Montminy, 2000: p 21). The future of Catholicism in Quebec did not look bright.

The survival of the Catholic Church was permitted and reinforced by the most unexpected institution, the British Crown (Lemieux, Montminy, 2000: p 22). Due to the political unrest in the other British colonies of North America, England needed calm and stability in the former French colony. The only way to control the local population without causing any unrest was through one of their own institutions. All of the other French institutions were already replaced by British ones, and the only one that survived was the church. By allowing the local population to manage their own Catholic Church, and to practice their religion freely, the British authorities managed not only to pacify Quebec, but to turn the Quebec Catholics into allies. The Quebec population regarded its church as a pillar of its common identity. For Quebec Catholics, being able to practice their own religion meant equality under the new ruler. They saw themselves as equals with the British settlers. Moreover, the new independent states in the south were not very appealing to Quebecers. Accepting the authority of the British Crown, and being truly Catholic, they regarded the British monarch as the secular ruler that they had to respect. The violent struggle directed against the secular accepted monarch in the south for independence, was not tolerable for a true Catholic. In addition, Quebecers had hard feelings toward the former authority (France), which, they argued, abandoned them. Therefore, the Catholic population accepted British rule, and the Catholic Church was free to exist and evolve as the main institution of the former French subjects. The church was also happy with the arrangement because of two reasons. First, it meant that it could continue to exist and to exert influence over the population, and second, it received official protection from the British Crown against the revolutionary and laic thoughts that were emerging in France. It may seem paradoxical, but under a Protestant authority, these

particular conditions allowed for the development of one of the most powerful Catholic Churches in the Western World:

> "[l]'Église en deviendra ainsi, au Canada français, porte-drapeau d'une collectivité à laquelle elle fournira sinon une identité proprement dite (celle-ci comprenant bien d'autres facteurs, tels la langue et la ruralité), du moins une part majeure des mots pour la dire " (Lemieux, Montminy, 2000: p 26).

In the following period of time (1800-1900), the religious institution increased its authority over the population in Quebec. The Catholic Church involved itself in two important secular activities, education and charity, and in so doing, it gained absolute control over them. These activities later evolved into social and medical services (hospitals, help for the poor, etc). Control over education meant that the population would be socialized according to strict religious values, morality and norms. These would account for the high levels of religiosity in Quebec (Lemieux, Montminy, 2000: p 29-31).

However, by becoming so powerful in Quebec, the church leaned towards conservationism. It was a strictly rural church, which was pushing for an outdated form of economy, namely medieval agriculture. At the same time, the Protestant, British, urban population practiced more modern forms of economic activity, rational capitalism as Weber described it. Consequently, they were able to gain control over the colony's economic development. The newly emerged French-speaking bourgeoisie regarded the Catholic Church, with its rural approach to society, as a barrier to its goals and to the modernization of Quebec. They blamed the societal hinder of French population compared to English population on the church. This distancing of the emerging French bourgeoisie from the church was the first sign of rupture between the church and some of

the former French subjects. The Catholic Church, as an institution, was no longer representing their interests.

There were ruptures inside the church as well. Following the Second World War, during the workers' movements, local priests supported the workers against the industry owners. They invoked the Christian values of equality and solidarity, but in so doing they defied the established secular order. The heads of the church separated themselves from the local clerics, defending the established order (Lemieux, Montminy, 2000: p 47-48).

The rupture between the French bourgeoisie and the church, on the one hand, and between the priests and the official position of the Catholic Church, on the other hand, prepared the ground for war between religion and modernity in Quebec. In this upcoming conflict, there was another important factor to consider: the relationship between nationalism and religion in Quebec.

The Catholic doctrine does not support violence in any form. Revolutions that aim to change the state authority are not encouraged, because the church accepts the secular ruler. At the same time, Christian religions preach the equality of all individuals and the universality of God's kingdom. Religion is universal. Nationalism, on the other hand, pushes for self-determination, or, in other words, for particularism. From these points of view it may seem that there is a clear rupture between nationalism and Christianity. History has sometimes contradicted the incompatibility between the two. When it first appeared during the Roman Empire, it was a religion for everybody. As it became the official Roman religion "the Church [...] eventually fell back into particularism: it came to identify itself with the Roman Empire, despised the barbarians living beyond its borders" (Baum, 2001: p 91). This trend continued throughout history, the church moved

away from universality towards particularism, despite its initial norms and values (crusades, religious wars in Europe, etc.). Instead of being more integrative, the church was more exclusive. Only in modern times religion returned to universalism, arguing for universal love, equality and solidarity. The emergence of nationalism in modern times was a dilemma for the church. On the one hand, it was against the concept of universalism, and the acceptance of secular order. On the other hand, nationalism created democratic societies, meaning more equality for the individuals. Therefore, the position of church toward nationalism depended much on the particularity of each case.

Initially in Quebec the church opposed nationalism, since it would remain a powerful institution sustained by the current British authority. The emergence of a new state was not in the best interests of the church. It wanted to preserve the status-quo. Moreover, nationalism was strictly related to liberalism, industrialization, modernization and secularization, all of them being values opposed by the church. During the 1920's and 1930's, two new trends favoring nationalism appeared inside the church. The main exponent of the first current was Lionel Groulx. Gregory Baum argues that "according to Grand'Maison, Lionel Groulx preached a messianic nationalism" (Baum, 2001: p 99). He argued for an independent Catholic Quebec, in which the values of traditional Catholicism would be respected and reinforced. The economy should be corporatist (the model accepted by the Vatican), and the state should be ruled by a messianic person. The state authority, like the church authority, should be hierarchical (Baum, 2001: p 98-100). This model of nationalism was built on the economic model proposed by the Vatican that opposed modern capitalism. The public responded to Groulx in different ways. It was appealing for some, especially for the youth, because it preached the supremacy of

Quebec Catholic culture over that of the Protestant American culture. The lower-middle class also supported the economic corporatist model that would not sustain the capitalists. The majority of the population rejected the model. Baum argues that this model had no support from the local communities. Democracy (and implicit equality) was missing from its main characteristics.

At the same time, inside the Catholic Church, another trend emerged. This model was built on the universal values and morality of Christianity, with universal freedom, equality and democracy as its goals. This new current went back to the original roots of Christianity (Baum, 2001: p 99-100). The secular world is less important than the "other world" and individuals should accept it, but only if it represents the best form of organization possible. By "best form", it means equality, democracy and justice for all individuals. A more equal and democratic society is preferable to an unjust one. If an independent Quebec becomes a better society, then the Catholic Church supports it. Conversely, if an independent Quebec means another unjust society where some individuals are still oppressed and discriminated, then the church has no support for it. The shift in the church's position is based on the turn that Catholic religion adopted. Universal love and justice is not only for its members, but for all individuals, despite of their religious affiliations.

With its official position, that favors Quebec nationalism only under strict conditions, mainly more justice for all individuals, the church in fact erased the religious dichotomy from the debate. In so doing, the religious factor from the Quebec issue disappeared. The Catholic Church is no longer a factor in the dispute. There is no longer a Catholic/Protestant debate, because the church regards all individuals as equal and love

and justice are universal. Nationalist and federalist discourses can no longer rely onto the religion as the differentiating factor. The Catholic Church no longer regards the Protestant community as the "other". Language and other aspects come to replace religion as a distinguishing factor. The departure of the church from the nationalist debate meant that one of the most powerful and common representations of religion in society disappeared. Religion is no longer related to this important and ever present issue in Quebec.

Lemieux and Montminy argue that the disappearance of religious symbolism and religious images from everyday life was one of the factors that prompted secularization in Quebec after the Second World War:

> "[L]e ... choc sera cause par l'irruption des mass medias, la télévision d'abord, puis les <<révolutions>> successive dans les communications. Jusque-là saturée d'images et de symboles religieux, la culture populaire des Québécois est bientôt gavée d'autres représentations, témoignent d'un monde bien différent de celui de ses communautés d'origine" (Lemieux, Montminy, 2000: p 54-55).

The church, that used to direct more or less all aspects of daily life of the French Quebecers, saw some of its representations replaced by new secular ones. This loss of monopoly over symbolism and representation in the public arena, on one hand, together with the retreat of religion from the political debate around nationalism, on the other hand, combined with the adversity of the new French speaking bourgeoisie toward the church's model of economy and toward the rural life preached by it prompted a rapid secularization. The church was no longer the symbol of identity or the only provider of models and conduits. Some of its preferred forms of activities went against the new forms of modern life and economy desired by individuals. The rupture between the church and

Quebec society happened on two levels. First, at the institutional level, new laws and internal rules were passed which released the educational system and medical services from the church's tutelage (Lemieux, Montminy, 2000: p 58, 62). Secondly, the level of religious practice dropped significantly. Statitstics collected by Reginald Bibby show a decrease in weekly church attendance from 70% of the population in 1965 to 40% in 1970 (Bibby, 1990, p 135). In a society where values of liberalism and individualism were taught, church attendance became a private, optional business for most individuals. The new capitalist economy and urban style of life demanded more and more from individuals. There was simply not enough time left to attend church regularly. The values and symbols of this new world contradicted often some of the traditional values of the church and slowly replaced them. In short, the communitarian values of the church were confronted by the individualistic values of the market.

Lemieux and Montminy argue that the loss of control over education and health services alone does not account for the rapid decrease in levels of religious practice (Lemieux, Montminy, 2000: p 63). In Quebec society the introduction of modernity was a decisive factor. The two theorists consider that prior to the Quiet Revolution the church developed in Quebec a powerful Catholic culture that was shaping, more or less, Quebec society. This culture, however, was designed as a monolith, having its roots in the small rural communities. The rural communities provided the church with a relatively stable mass of believers. The rural form of life was based on and reinforced by its "rural" church. However, the move to urban areas, combined with the arrival of modernity in Quebec, changed completely the problem. First, the cities no longer provided a stable community of believers (Lemieux, Montminy, 2000: p 65). Second, the discourse of the

church was inappropriate for the industrial and post-industrial economic models of the newly developing cities. Third, there was no longer a single discourse, that of the church, but a multitude of discourses (Lemieux, Montminy, 2000: p 65-66). Most of the new discourses emphasized the importance of individual achievement, rather than collective achievements. Religion was no longer the only, and usually imposed option. Religion became a matter of personal choice. In short time, religion in Quebec shifted from an institutional level, encompassing all society to a private, individual level:

> "[...] Autrefois il s'agissait surtout de discerner avec l'aide de l'Eglise et de la communauté ce que Dieu exigeait de soi puis de s'y conformer, aujourd'hui chacun cherche plutôt à savoir ce que Dieu peut lui apporter personnellement" (Ferretti, 1999 : p 169)

Religion did not disappear. Empirical data still show high levels of religious membership. Religion is still important for the Quebec population. However, the church became less relevant. Empirical data indicates that while there is a significant decrease in religious practice, the importance of religion in individual lives remains at high levels (Bibby, 1990, p 140). The religious crisis is not a crisis of religion in Quebec, but an identity crisis for the Catholic Church (Lemieux et Montminy, 2000: p 107). For the first time in the Catholic Church, religion has become something private, and the church as an institution, has lost most of its role in linking the believer with God. In the last decades, the church, unable to respond to these problems during the Quiet Revolution, tried to reclaim some of its former functions. This does not mean that the church tried to become what it was in the past. Rather, the church enters in debates around inequality, poverty, and gender relations, etc. (Lemieux et Montminy, 2000: p 80). The church comes into the public arena, as Casanova holds. The difference, between the church of the past and the

present church, is that the latter's positions no longer claims to be the only possible solution. Its position is just another one among many.

There is another important element regarding religion in Quebec. The rapid secularization and loss of importance of the Catholic Church seem to support the idea that when the church is powerful for a long period of time, the loss of influence is also significant. The decrease in religious practice, as evidence, can be supplemented with another argument. In present days, Quebec shows the highest levels of divorce compared with other Western areas[10]. The public's reaction against the church's control over the family and individual life was overwhelming. This supports the argument that a visible, potent secularization happens in areas where the church was all powerful in the past.

It is interesting that at the moment when Christian religion became more universal, the modern form of religion became more individualized. After the Second World War, the Catholic Church announced the universality of its values. God grants universal love and justice to all humanity, not only to the members of one specific church. The support of these universal values distanced the modern church from the feudal institution that granted love and justice only to its members. At the same time, the traditional religious community, the church, eroded and lost its importance. The church, as the institution, is no longer central for the new form of religion. However, most of the ultimate Catholic values, such as morality, equality, and justice are already values of Quebec society, protected by its laws. In this sense, Catholicism in Quebec became the "society's religion", even being less relevant as a church:

> "En intégrant ainsi ce qui est juge fondamental pour l'avenir du monde, le catholicisme québécois, religion d'appartenance mais non pas religion d'engagement, représente alors l'entente

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[10] See Appendix Table II

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nécessaire sur l'ensemble des valeurs capables de rassembler les êtres humains" (Lemieux et Montminy, 2000: p 88).

Reginald Bibby argues that the Catholic Church in Quebec still represents "le fournisseur religieux dominant" (Bibby, 1990, p 143). The change brought forth by modernity is that the public no longer relates itself entirely to the symbolism and worldview of the church. Rather, each individual picks up whatever he/she wants from the religious market – "religion à la carte" (Bibby, 1990, p 143). If religion can adapt to these new circumstances, the church, however, fails to do so:

> "Son dilemme réside dans le fait qu'alors que l'église parle de foi comme quelque chose qui englobe tous les aspects de la vie, elle se retrouve avec un nombre important des gens qui ne veulent que des fragments de ce qu'elle a à offrir" (Bibby in Sociologie et Societes, 1990, p 143).

In the meantime, religious values, such as love, justice, and equality, have lost their exclusive characteristics, directed only toward the members of the church. They are now universal values of the entire society, defended by its laws and institutions.

It seems that Quebec's particularity regarding religion is strictly related to the historical context of this area. The Catholic Church after colonization developed over the years a particular relationship with the local population and with the British authorities. This relationship literally allowed the church to become the most important manager of French-Quebecers lives and to retain its control until to the sixties. However, during the Quiet Revolution, this control was systemically challenged by the state and modernity. Religion in Quebec secularized relatively late and fast compared with the Western World because of these particularities. Modernity arrived late in Quebec in comparison with most of the other Western areas. However, today's religious situation in Quebec exhibits

all the traits of secularization and modern religion: privatization, individualization, loss of power of the established traditional churches, de-privatization (in Casanova's understanding), and the universality of religious values. The study of religion and society through Quebec's history supports the idea that both are linked together in an indivisible sum.

## Ireland - High Levels of Religious Practice in a" Secular" Society?

Ireland represents another exception to the general trend of the relationship between society and religion in the West. Ireland is the only country in Western Europe showing high levels of religious practice, with the exception of Northern Ireland. The levels of religious membership are also high, but they are similar to those of the other Western areas. A high level of practice would suppose that the church never lost its influence over the Irish population. That would imply further that Ireland is a non-secularized area in the West.

Someone would expect that if religious practice is still very high, the church and its dogma would still play a decisive role over the activities and lifestyles of individuals. In a national referendum over the question of abortion[11], it would imply that the official church's position would prevail.

In Ireland abortion is practically forbidden. The only law that allows abortion states that abortion is permitted only in those situations where the risk of mother committing suicide because of her pregnancy, is real. The only real chance to get an

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[11] The referendum asked if the existing Irish law allowing abortion (in cases where the risk of suicide can be invoked as an acceptable medical reason) should be lifted or not. The referendum took place in March 2002.

abortion is that the mother should obtain it elsewhere (usually in the United Kingdom). Heading up to the 2002 abortion referendum there were several important voices involved in the public debate on the issue. They included the state authorities, the church, pro-life groups, feminist movements, researchers, and women that experienced abortion, directly or indirectly through other women's experiences. All of them took different positions that were revealed in the mass media. Following the voices reported by *The Irish Times* prior to March 2002 referendum on abortion, a classification of these positions is possible. The voices fall into two camps, one arguing for the banning of abortion, the other one arguing for the allowance of abortion.

The Catholic Church (the dominant religion in Ireland) has a long tradition of protecting and valuing life. The Catholic Church regards abortion as the murder of a physically unborn child. However, over the years, the Catholic Church had many of its dogmatic positions dramatically altered and adapted to modern life. Strict positions regarding divorce, for example, were changed, making it much easier to obtain a divorce. Concerning abortion, the position was nonetheless unchanged. Abortion is banned. The official position is that only "direct" abortion is banned, while "indirect" abortion is allowed, as Pope John Paul II officially states:

> "Therefore, by the authority which Christ conferred on Peter and his successors, in communion with the bishops - who on various occasions have condemned abortion and who in the aforementioned consultation, albeit dispersed throughout the world, have shown unanimous agreement concerning this doctrine - I declare that direct abortion, that is, abortion willed as an end or as a means, always constitutes a grave moral disorder, since it is the deliberate killing of an innocent human being" (Pope John Paul II in Defining the undefined key in abortion debate; The Catholic Church's position on the difference between direct and indirect abortion is considered, by Joe Foyle, Irish Times, July 31, 2000).

The church clearly defines direct abortion as the abortion demanded by the parent.

However, the Pope fails to properly define "indirect" abortion. Would these imply that

the Catholic Church has two positions, according to the direct/indirect abortion issue?

No, because the position of the church is very clear, as an Irish archbishop argues:

> ""I take it that you are quite firmly behind Option One in the Green
> Paper[12] - an absolute Constitution ban on abortion. Would that be a
> fair summary of your position?"
> Archbishop Connell responded: "We would have to say that the
> way in which it is put in the Green Paper would perhaps create
> some difficulty, depending on how one understands abortion. If
> you say an absolute ban on abortion, it may include indirect as well
> as direct abortion. So we are unable to say that we would endorse
> Number One, but quite certainly what we believe Number One
> intends is what we would wish"" (Defining the undefined key in
> abortion debate; The Catholic Church's position on the difference
> between direct and indirect abortion is considered, by Joe Foyle,
> Irish Times, July 31, 2000).

Accepting only the indirect form of abortion, but failing to define it properly, the official

position of the Catholic Church remains against abortion in general. The other established

churches, Protestant and Muslim, also rejected "direct" abortion. Here is the official

position of the Muslim community regarding abortion, as it was presented in mass media:

> "Abortion is forbidden as a crime under Islamic law, except where
> there is medical proof that the mother's life is under threat by
> continuing with the pregnancy, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on
> the Constitution heard yesterday. Islamic representatives told the
> committee that the foetus was viewed as "a human being in a
> formative stage and therefore has the right to protection by law""
> (Muslims favour retaining abortion clause in the Constitution
> Islamic Community in Ireland, by Marie O'Halloran, Irish Times,
> July 6, 2000).

The position of the church being relatively clear regarding abortion, it would

suggest that, in a country where religion still has a profound influence for individuals, the

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[12] The Green Paper is the official governmental paper on abortion in Ireland, published on September 10, 1999

result of the referendum will favor the anti-abortion camp. The result of the referendum was contradictory. 49.58% of the population favored a change in the laws, while 50.42% were against any change.

This contradicts the idea that the church still exerts a great influence over the population. The individuals' choices were not based mainly on their church's official position but on other beliefs. There is no direct connection between the high levels of religious practice and individual conduct. The empirical data and the common understanding of secularization do not explain this situation. Again, this suggests that sociological theories must be correlated with the particular context of the process they are interpreting. A high level of religious practice does not necessarily correlate with a non-secularized society. The facts do not stand here to account for the theories that identify a strong relation between religious practice and the church's control on society.

The Catholic Church in Ireland is identified with the national uniqueness. For centuries, the Catholic Irish stood against and fought the Protestant neighbours. The conflict is still present in Northern Ireland. For the communities the church represents only one of the points of reference, tradition and difference. The high attachment to the church is just symbolic. There was no "happy" symbiotic relation in Ireland between the Catholic Church and the Protestant British rulers as there was in Quebec. After partition, the animosity between the two never ceased. In visibly practicing their religion, the Irish are just respecting and reaffirming their historical traditions and heritage.

Irish society is in fact as secularized and modernized as the other European countries. Religion is a private affair. The church entering the debate around abortion is an example of religion becoming a voice in public debates. Religion is no longer

imposing its dogma; it is just offering another option. The individual can choose this option or not. The church has lost its powerful influence over individuals. Some are even arguing that the church is no longer interested in its own local community, as one member of the community from East Donegal (Ireland) holds:

> "I am the Church of Ireland, I am a member of my own Vestry, I am a member of the Diocesan Council, I am a member of General Synod, so I would have a fair insight into the role of our Church throughout the island... I would say that I am very disappointed at the lack of support the church provides to the community, even its own church community" (Separated by Partition, 2000: p 15).

The rupture between the church and population is evident. Moreover, there are ruptures inside the church. The modern church "lacks that caring aspect that the church should have with the individual" (Separated by Partition, 2000: p 15). It is no longer interested in politics and the economy, as it can no longer direct them. It is centering on its internal problems, its clergy. "A lot of time is spent at the Council talking about the welfare of the clergy" (Separated by Partition, 2000: p 15).

Church attendance is high, but is not related to a high level of religiosity. The church adapted itself to this circumstance, by accepting this "superficial" religious practice, as the same individual from East Donegal argues: "I often say that, unfortunately, our church is a Sunday church which goes dormant on a Monday" (Separated by Partition, 2000: p 15).

Ireland's specific religious context suggests that visible religious practice alone does not stand for high religiosity. The established churches are not reinforced by these high levels of attendance. They are encountering the same problems as churches in other Western areas. They become less relevant for the individual, who often does not need them in his/her relation to the sacred. Since modern religion is more private and more

individualized, the importance of clergy is diminishing. The voice of the official church is just another voice for individuals. The ultimate religious values of the past are still present and they are even embedded in the laws of the human society (equality, justice, freedom, the right to live). Some of them are controversial and are still debated. Abortion represents an interesting debate centered on the right to live: the right of the unborn child and the right of the mother to choose (in some cases, when complications occur). Religion has offered its value –the right to live- and it is up to individuals to interpret it, not to the church to impose one interpretation.

Quebec and Ireland support the argument that religion is profoundly altered by the arrival of modernity. However, the forms of these interactions are dependent to the particular contexts of every society. While the results are more or less similar – privatization, individualization, de-privatization, a loss for the official churches-, the forms that these processes take in every area can be different.

Classic and contemporary theories of religion argue that in modern societies religion exists and will continue to exist. The form that religion takes in modernity is different from what it was in the past. However, the overall role of religion in society is still the same. The institutionalized religion, the church, looses its grasp on society, because society changed. There is no longer a whole that can be managed by one institution. Rather, there are different and autonomous spheres of activity and autonomous individuals. Religion shifts from a macro level to the micro level, from the entire society to the individual. The church in present days finds it difficult to adapt to

this new context. For centuries, the church evolved and shaped itself vis-à-vis the entire society. It developed, imposed and defended its system of values based on the inclusion of certain individuals and the exclusion of others. Religion was always universal, but sometimes the religious institutions became very exclusivist. The religious values evolved, became more general and inclusive rather than exclusive. They are now universalistic values. The values need no longer the support of the church to exist. They are now part of modern society. In this sense, these values are no longer religious in the traditional way of thinking about religion and church. Modern religion has no place for the traditional church. Individuals no longer attend church because they no longer fully identify with it. They identify themselves with the universal values. The voice of the church is just another voice for the individual, that can be heard or not in an ocean of voices. The church has to find its place in modern society. Involvement in the local community, entering the public arena to voice its position regarding key issues in society, these can be ways in which the church redefines itself.

# Conclusions

From the beginning of social theory religion has been seen as one of the paramount attributes of human society. Being one of the defining characteristics that separate the human world from the animal world, religion was understood as an indivisible part of society. Society was shaped by religion as the latter advanced. Society itself has even altered religion. Society evolved and changed its form over the centuries and with it, all its processes and institutions have also changed. Religion, as part of society, developed too. The present form that religion has is considerably different from what it was centuries ago. However, as society still represents the same thing for individuals as it had in ancient times, but having a different appearance, religion still plays an important role inside society. The outside form has been changed, but the core of religion is unaltered.

Developing their theories of society, classical thinkers place religion as one of the most important issues to be addressed. For them, a study of society that ignored religion would have been incomplete and inappropriate. Durkheim, Weber and Simmel captured this perennial essence of religion when they laid out their theories of society. Their approaches were diverse, and their concepts also differed, but all of them identify the eternal place of religion within society. The layer at which religion operated is different, being on the individual level for Simmel, on the community and the individual levels for Weber and on the societal level for Durkheim, but the importance of religion is, however, crucial for society. Comte and Marx have also argued that religion was one of the defining attributes of their contemporary societies. In their interpretation, the next phase of evolution of society will replace religion by science, or positive science. Nevertheless,

in taking the place of religion, science would become something very similar with it. Science will provide the core values of society. In this sense, religion just changes its name into science.

Classical sociologists brought forward religion as one of the paramount aspects of society. For them, religion affects, more or less, directly or indirectly, all other domains of human life, such as politics, economy, culture, and private life. Their studies on society include religion as one of the inseparable characteristics of the social context. Religion, for them, is significant not just as an independent object of study, but rather because of its complex relationships with the rest of society. At the time of their writing, the classics did not simply draw upon the bases of sociology, but also captured the complexity of all social life, with religion being but one of its main characteristics. We suggest that their theories can address the religious context of modern societies, including the two cases of Quebec and Ireland, presented in this thesis.

The complex relationship between religion and the rest of society in Quebec during the last three centuries can be better understood by employing the concepts put forward by the classical thinkers. Values, norms, and multifaceted links between religion and politics, religion and economy, and religion and culture are concepts used to understand both particular contexts. The intricate links between nationalism and religion, economy and religion, and ultimately society and religion in Quebec are better understood by utilizing the models and concepts brought by classical and contemporary sociologists of religion. These comprehensive understandings of religion and of the place of religion in society also help to explore the context surrounding the abortion referendum in Ireland.

The arrival of modernity altered profoundly the face of society. The social sciences have become more focused on using rational and mathematical approaches in their studies, sometimes forgetting their real object of study, society. They began focusing on particular human activities, too often ignoring the overall complexity of society. The study of religion became institutionalized as sociology of religion. The object of study, religion, was reduced mostly to visible religious practices and institutionalized religion. The discipline produced theories that focused only on studying religion inside a religious environment. Their concept of religion was limited and frozen in time and it was mistakenly identified with the church. Generally, the conclusion of the majority of their empirical studies was that religion is disappearing in modern societies. However, their theories could not explain some of the findings. For example, the decrease in religious practice was unable to account for the constant high percentages of religious affiliation.

New approaches have surfaced in sociology that have reverted to the classical roots of the discipline. They address society in its entire complexity. Parsons and Luhmann draw an image of modern society, in which religion still exists and still plays a vital role. Modernity emerged in the Western World also partially because of religion. For them, as for the classics, religion is indivisible from society. Their concepts of society and religion are different from the classical ones, but their analyses and arguments are similar. Luckmann and Berger argue that in contemporary society religion exists as private religion, with its focus on the individual. Baumann holds that religion has become a civil religion, distanced from its former institutionalized forms, but fulfills the same role. Casanova considers that religion in modern society is one of the major

public voices available to individuals. Contemporary theorists return to the classical theorists' argument about the inseparability of religion from society.

The religious context of Ireland supports these arguments about modern forms and roles of religion in contemporary societies. The voice of the church is one of the voices in the debate about abortion. Statistical data show high levels of church membership, and a high level of religious practice. These would suggest that the church is still powerful and relevant in Ireland. However, after an in-depth look, theories that hold that former institutionalized forms of religion are no longer relevant and that modern religion is more about a personal choice and personal interpretation seem to be supported.

Secularization is a process that reflects the changes occurring in religion in modern societies. The outcome of secularization is not the disappearance of religion. Rather, it is the weakening of the traditional medieval institutionalized forms of religion (i.e., the church). The church no longer succeeds in imposing its view on the individuals. Religion becomes more individualistic and private, and the link between individual and sacred is more direct. The connection between individual and sacred is not managed by an institution, as in past societies. At the same time, religion enters the entire society, no longer being restricted and managed only by the church. Religious values that were used previously to exclude and discriminate are now universal and inclusive. In this sense, in modern society, religion is more universalistic.

Quebec's religious history is a good image for Weber and Parsons' theory of societal advancement. Religion shaped Quebec society from the time of the Conquest, altering profoundly the political, economic and cultural life. The complex relationship between religion and society, with one influencing the other, gave birth to modern

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Quebec, in which religion is present. The present religion in Quebec is different from what religion was in the past. The church lost most of its predominant and important roles in society. However, the universal values preached by the church are now values of the entire Quebec society, and they no longer differentiate a majority from a minority.

The inner core of religion is a system of values and norms. These values, as society and religion advance, become more and more inclusive and universal. The evolution from family gods to a universal god, as Weber argues, accommodated the need for these values in increasingly larger and more complex society, making institutions (such as the church) that control the entire society no longer possible or needed. Individuals emancipate themselves from the control of these monolithic institutions. The struggle to emancipate man from the control of religion is in fact a struggle of emancipating religion from a past form of religion. Modern private religion is an image of modern society, in which values as individuality are of paramount importance. Religion mirrors society, and at the same time, consecrates it. Thus, religion offers society an ultimate meaning and legitimacy.

Acknowledging that religion is present in any past, present or future society implies that social theory should try to reincorporate the study of religion as a vital part of the aim of sociology, that is, the study of society. The complex relationships and interactions between religion and other societal spheres should be investigated, as classical sociologists did. Parsons and Luhmann put some possible bases for a macro study of contemporary modern society, in which religion is once again considered inseparable from the rest. Studies that focus on identity, politics, culture, communities, and citizenship should address the role of religion vis-à-vis these issues.

# Appendix

Table I - Church attendance and religious personal beliefs in Western World (study done by European Broadcasting Union, 2001)

Source: http://religie.tvr.ro/index/Proiecte_Diverse/EBU/body_ebu.htm

| | Church attendance | Importance of religion | Importance of God | Belief in life after death |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| France | 10% | 34% | 42% | 38% |
| England | 13% | 30% | 31% | 44% |
| Germany | 19% | 47% | 36% | 38% |
| Holland | 21% | 45% | 44% | 39% |
| Belgium | 23% | 47% | 45% | 37% |
| Denmark | 2% | 25% | 31% | 29% |
| Sweden | 4% | 26% | 27% | 31% |
| Norway | 5% | 33% | 40% | 36% |
| Iceland | 8% | 58% | 56% | 71% |
| Italy | 40% | 74% | 69% | 54% |
| Spain | 33% | 61% | 54% | 42% |
| Portugal | 33% | 66% | 56% | 31% |
| Northern Ireland | 56% | 82% | 67% | 70% |
| Ireland | 65% | 84% | 84% | 78% |
| USA | 63% | 82% | 79% | 70% |
| Canada | 33% | 70% | 61% | 61% |

Table II – Personal opinion regarding various issues in Western World (study done by European Broadcasting Union, 2001)

Source: http://religie.tvr.ro/index/Proiecte_Diverse/EBU/body_ebu.htm

| | Acceptance of homosexuality | Acceptance of divorce | Acceptance of euthanasia | Acceptance of suicide |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| France | 22% | 43% | 41% | 21% |
| England | 19% | 40% | 38% | 15% |
| Germany | 29% | 39% | 26% | 16% |
| Holland | 70% | 59% | 58% | 36% |
| Belgium | 24% | 33% | 38% | 14% |
| Denmark | 35% | 46% | 47% | 13% |
| Sweden | 33% | 54% | 40% | 19% |
| Norway | 30% | 40% | 30% | 12% |
| Iceland | 46% | 50% | 34% | 8% |
| Italy | 26% | 46% | 26% | 9% |
| Spain | 20% | 42% | 23% | 7% |
| Portugal | 10% | 42% | 23% | 5% |
| Northern Ireland | 10% | 25% | 21% | 6% |
| Ireland | 19% | 37% | 12% | 8% |
| USA | 18% | 38% | 31% | 9% |
| Canada | 34% | 58% | 47% | 19% |

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