

Diffused Religion Beyond Secularization

Subjects: Sociology

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Diffused religion theory concerns the capacity of a dominant religion in a country to remain solid for centuries.

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1. THE THEORY OF DIFFUSED RELIGION

The primary particular terms are identifiable as religious socialization and enculturation of values. The secondary particular terms are belief, membership/belonging or religious adherence. If there is initial religiosity regarding sensitivity towards the sacred, then, there is most probably some form of participation in rites. But the main trend is towards a reduced relevance of religious structures. Diffused religion may occupy the space left vacant as a result of disappointments and disenchantment due to loss of the credibility of previous influences. Thus, diffused religion assumes the role of a functional substitute for other attitudinal and behavioural references. The most diffused and developed practice is prayer.

2. SOCIALIZATION AND DIFFUSED RELIGION

The value of the inheritance is stressed, culture, socialization and education are emphasized, the variables of socialization are widely considered, the features of religions are illustrated and the resilience of religious belief is confirmed. Every person who comes into the world already finds waiting for him myriad religious options, established over time within different territorial and cultural contexts. This pre-existence is to a large extent also their strength, consisting as it does in a heritage that is transmitted from one generation to another almost without any break. People and organisations, beliefs and rites, values and symbols, traditions and acquisitions are able to resist the most drastic changes and adapt to the less important ones.

3. VALUES AND GLOBAL SOCIETY

Cognitive, affective, and selective dimension of values are analysed, the constitution of interests is reconstructed, values as independent/dependent variables are examined, ethic and values are seen as linked, the universality of values is investigated, religious ideologies are compared and secular impact is evaluated. A wide part of contemporary values has ancient origins belonging to religious inspiration. But it is not always so easy to discern secular values from religious values. However, there are some typically secular values which are accepted by people inspired by religious principles. The main issue regards those who hold religious and secular values. If religious values are presumably conserved by Churches, denominations, confessional organizations, for secular values the state is usually considered to be the main holder.

4. DIFFUSED SECULAR RELIGIOSITY

There are four deals with an *ante litteram* diffused religion which is the Hegel's *Volksreligion*. Afterwards, a peculiar question is afforded: a return to the Axial Age is possible? In any case, religion as a personal-God experience remains as a key point of the sociological analysis. At the same time, beyond the so-called invisible religion, there are many religious and meaningful experiences. Even the religiosity of atheism can be a consequence of secularization. The diffused religion of today is not so different from that of yesterday. Indeed its very persistence is its real peculiarity. If something has changed it has occurred at the secondary level, affecting details, not the substance. So, diffused religion persists as the result of the extensive action of religious socialization.

5. WORLD DIFFUSED RELIGIONS

The European galaxy moves twixt Judaism, Catholicism and Protestantism, the diffused religions of Eastern Europe are mainly Orthodox, Islamic and post-secular; Europe is the novelty of this new century; Europe and India religions can be compared and contrasted; the Latin-American socio-religious context is attracting more attention; the urban space is the nursery of religions diffusion. Therefore, from diffused religion people can go towards world diffused religions. It is quite evident that theory of diffused religion is not devoid of empirical support but, on the contrary, proves to be of greater validity and applicability, in Europe but also in other non-European areas, by presenting conclusive, recurring features. Undoubtedly there still remains that raw nerve of the methodological problem of comparing dissimilar situations.

6. RELIGION AND POLITICS: A PECULIAR CASE

The starting point of diffused religion is the socialization, political events are good indicators of diffused religion, ethic and politics are strongly connected, religious and political pluralism can be combined: these are the main points. Besides, an emblematic case is specifically analysed: the Italian situation. The existence of diffused religion would accentuate pluralism, a tendency towards ideological tolerance, as overall articulation of both basic and contingent political choices. Far from slowing the union between religion and politics, this “pervasive diffusiveness” seems to render it more manifest. However, the “religious field” remains as a fighting place: it forms part of a formulation which is explicitly defined as “political sociology of religion” or “of religions”.

7. RELIGION AND VALUES

The Italian situation is emblematic: Church and state are continuously fighting about values, the influence of the Vatican II Ecumenical Council is relevant and people pass from civil religion to diffused religion. The topics suggested by Robert Bellah of religious ground bass and five types of religions are controversial. The novelty of new values conquering the world is considered and secularization and urbanization phenomena are analysed as combined. Actually, it is precisely the hypothesis of diffused religion which helps to explain the Italian case differently. The Catholicism of Italians is crisscrossed horizontally and vertically by quite heterogeneous strands which reflect regional and territorial backgrounds, social stratification, and contingent historical events.

8. DIFFUSED VALUES

The function of religion in the world is increasing, from diffused religion, there is a transition to “religion of values”, and religious values and social change are linked. Certainly, the presence of values is a constant both in the historic religions, deeply rooted at the cultural level and in the new religious movements still in a phase of growth and re-composition. These values represent idealistic motives, key concepts, basic ideas, parameters of reference and ideological inclinations which watch over the personal and interpersonal actions of individuals and make them reasonable, socially relevant and sociologically classifiable. Every religious experience involves dedication to a cause, and ideal, with a socio-individual involvement which is more or less marked according to individuals' intentions.

9. FROM INVISIBLE RELIGION TO DIFFUSED RELIGION

The levels of diffused religion are differentiated, religious and moral pluralism are new features of contemporary society, moral attitudes and religious characteristics are not in conflict even though contents of religious and moral pluralism are different. Diffused religion also represents a kind of functional substitute for divergence from the ecclesiastical structure. There is a limited tendency toward religious pluralism, whereas moral themes would appear to be much more fragmentary. The cultural setting seems to have a more decisive role than religious affiliation, in view of the fact that attitudes do not change substantially in the groups of those claiming to be religious and those who do not.

10. CONCLUSIONS

Two examples of the diffusiveness of religion are considered: the sacred island of Delos in Greece and religions in Thomas More Utopia island. Both issues are useful to demonstrate what the diffused religion really is. The theory of diffused religion provides various explanations for the resilience of religions, especially where single forms have managed to establish themselves and progress over time. Historical events follow one another leading to changes affecting political regimes, entire economies, organizations and movements, but barely scathe those structures and modalities of religion that have become ingrained over centuries and millennia. There is a persistence of different religions diffused all over the world, with prospects that appear different from those raised at the end of the last century.

References

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