

Post-Secularity and “Modernization with a Soul”

Abstract: *This text deals with the research project of the Center for Religious Studies which implicitly encompasses the issue of post-secularity. The issue is actually a dilemma whether post-secular means transformation or continuation of secular neglecting of the transcendent sense of spirituality. Additionally, the meaning of the concept of “religion” which looks for a meaning on “this side” only and which originates from the human spiritual need for understanding of the telos of being is discussed. However, considering the spirit of the time of dominant modernization, which abandons the concept of otherworldliness, institution of religion becomes obsolete, especially when it loses its own spiritual connection with the “other side”. In spite of this, it reveals that the idea of spirituality is important and that the crisis of material goods and the need for a sustainable organization in the environment brings us back to the non-material values. In this way, spirituality ceases to be considered as a part of religion, or its alternative. Spirituality may also be a way by which the world and human nature may be viewed. The possibility of confirmation of these assumptions is, however, given only in a partial way, as the explicit questions on spirituality are not posed here.*

Keywords: *modernization, environment, post-secularity, religion, spirituality*

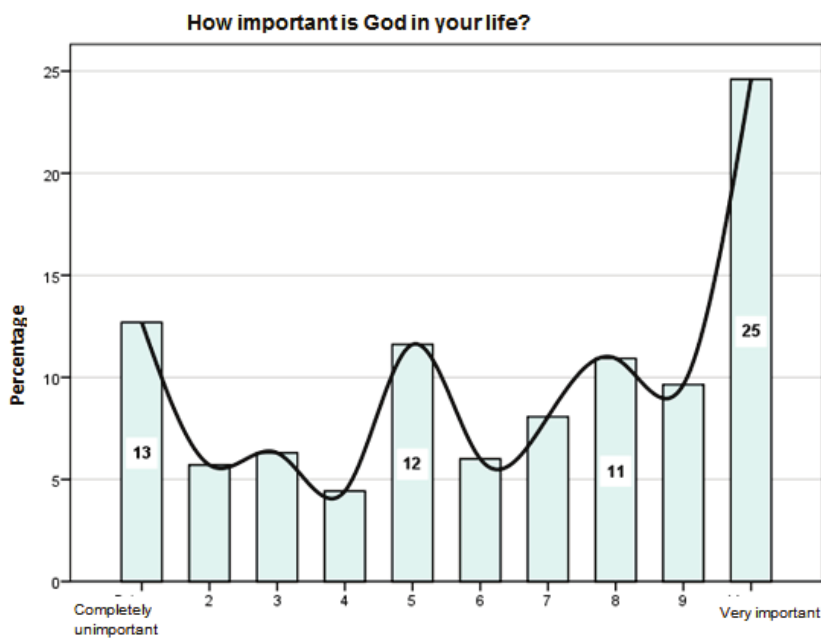
The expression “modernization with a soul”, can be found in the introductory text of the research project presented on the website of the Centre for Religious Studies (CreS)¹.

¹ The draft of the research of CReS, entitled: “Post-secular Turn: Religious, Moral and Socio-Political Values of the Student Population in

Table 3. Attitude of students in Serbia towards the existence of God.

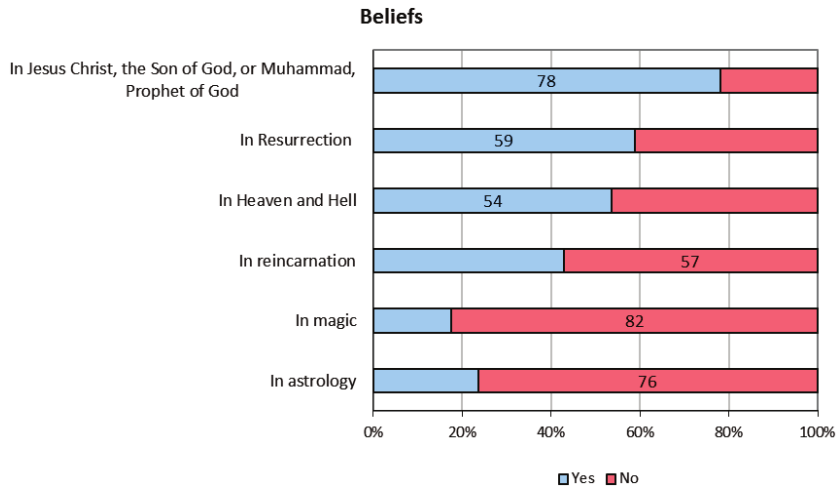


Table 4. The importance of God for the life of students in Serbia (in percentages).



Among values which point to spirituality, anthropological-traditional-cultural-religious border areas of knowledge, i.e., beliefs such as metempsychosis, magic or astrology can be added.

Table 5. Dogmatic and non-dogmatic beliefs of students (in percentages).



Philosophical orientation of the text actually needs quality more than statistical quantification, so that the interpreter of the research, like me, can only thank the organizer for the insight in comments of the research, because the dimension of qualitative personal response actually appears in the text added by respondents on the margins of the questionnaire. These comments are just as important as they point to weaknesses of the questionnaire. Thus, for example, it showed that the item 36, “What is your attitude towards religion?”, does not have the offered option that a person belongs to a traditional religious group, but does not believe in its teachings. A person who processed these answers felt that the example for this is a girl who checked two responses – no. 1, that she belongs to a traditional

religion, and no. 3, that she does not belong to a traditional religion; in the next question she checked that she belonged to the Orthodox religious group, while as the answer to the question of believing in God, she replied she did not believe in anything above mentioned and added a comment that “there is a higher power, another dimension”.

Nevertheless, a significant lack for reflecting post-secular spirituality is that the research did not examine how spirituality is understood. The attention to this is drawn by a comment of one respondent, who, on the margins of the questionnaire while completing the questions on the importance of different areas of life, under the item 1 – religion, wrote “spirituality” and circled “very important”.

In anticipation of such data for any future research, we can search for some answers to the question: Why is spirituality important? Perhaps the most elegant assumption that has begun to be scientifically tested is that spirituality is one of fundamental human needs. If so, then the need is frequent, but in this case the problem is that in the current environment its achievement is neglected. Superficial consumerism, which is a constant of modern society, prevents reviewing and corrects attitude towards both the external environment (natural and social), and its own inner life. Consequently, a lot of people have the sentiment of spiritual emptiness, i.e., the feeling that something is missing.³

The dominant modernizing worldview does not allow human problems to be perceived fully, as organic problems of

³ Understanding of this disadvantage includes the assumption of its internal origin (i.e. the assumption that it arises from personality itself and its development, that it originates from Lacanian theory, derived from the “linguistic turn” of structuralism). However, given that no person belongs to oneself, but to others, no one can avoid the influence of problems that come from the world (and this inevitably involves complementing assumption of Foucauldian provenance) (Đurić 2012).

human life and human society. It is, however, important because people depend on the conditions in the environment to a great extent – the whole world of life and human beings can thrive only in synergy with the environment.⁴ The mere awareness of the fact that the purpose of the whole should be taken into account is a good enough reason to finally reevaluate modern culture and society. Even if we leave aside the problem of otherworldliness, there is a whole circle of practical issues that can be understood better by taking into account people's spiritual needs.

The purpose of post-secular “modernization with a soul” may be in understanding that many areas will *benefit* by accepting spirituality, because it can improve our relationship with education, mental health, death, and understanding of ourselves. Such a utilitarian approach to spirituality is possible even in the acceptance of asceticism – restraint that is valued more than preference for material goods, pleasure and so on. It is oriented towards the crisis of material goods in the society and the individual, and does not consider virtue as a stimulus for improving its part of human nature. Rowson relies only on the fact that the persistence of environmental problems shall get people to “take spirituality seriously” and “change their behavior”. Not only personally, but also on the social level, the meaning of immaterial

⁴ This, according to Robinson (Ken Robinson), is especially important in educational institutions, as these are institutions of the systems dealing with the young. Instead of knowledge being standardized and depersonalized, it should go back to the fundamental question, and that is the development of personality. Since education is a part of culture, it is essential for this party to be represented as well, and to be in function of social economy. But above all, human potentials should be taken care of, since they are the one that can enable transformation. It is essential to be conscious of the fact that education involves the human system which operates on the basis of relationships: emotions, interest, inspiration. Therefore, for good education it is necessary to engage every student, and it requires the ability of each to be recognized. This is the essence of a social change.

aspirations will be seen due to the crisis of material goods and because the concept of economic growth has proved to be environmentally problematic, and the adjustment to the possibilities of the environment and sustainable organization of the system will become necessary (Rowson 2013).

Perhaps on the second thought we realize that it does not matter whether the final values are reached on the utilitarian or deontological way. Namely, if intangible aspirations are justified on the basis of combining economic and environmental principles, then we should not insist on the difference between whether a belief in spiritual progress is seen as a way to more easily accept restrictions, or as a motive for self-improvement. In this context, it becomes justified that the problems of spirituality, given their importance, cease to be reserved for philosophy and religion, and answers are beginning to be searched for elsewhere.

Having in mind the *telos* of a whole, then what is good in itself and what is useful for our purposes should be the same. When our goals are wrong (when they are not good, true, right), then what seems really good for us is different from what is good to the whole; although we should know that, without the common good, nothing good awaits us in the future. It is therefore important to have a theological view, because only in this sense usefulness and goodness are equated. Only what is useful for the purpose of the whole, can be essentially good for individuals belonging to it. Of course, it is important not to distort the meaning of words, and not to abuse common good for personal purposes. On the other hand, it is important for individuals to understand that not everyone immediately sees all the necessary parts of the whole – the environment they belong to. Thus, detection of “the other side” is not available to everyone, but it is important for everyone to find their place in the general scheme

of things, and one shall know that it is true when one feels in accordance with one's environment. This is the only way for personal spiritual development and transformation of his human nature, which is a part of everything and therefore knows how to appreciate the sacred, both in this world and beyond.

Therefore, such a worldview that leads the human spirit to uncertainty between incredible dogmas of religious doctrines and persuasive methods of scientific probability should be overcome. Both areas of society, each in its own domain, also appear as institutions of power, that never notice the emotional needs of people. When we add the connection between spending/profits, which dominates the society, and does not save the nature, it becomes clearer why consumerism does not manage to destroy the sense of absence and terrifying emptiness permanently and totally. Raising awareness is the precondition for freedom to review the basis and further prospects for the system functioning and to find a way to change the view that the progress is considered a technological development only, and to disregard the spiritual development of people.

In this light, interpretation of the research reveals the opinions of young people, who are the future of the society, as a stimulus to consider what must or what should be changed urgently, and what opportunities there are for some adjustments – individuals as well as social systems. Human resources, as well as all resources of the world, are stored deep and are often hidden. In order to reach them, favorable conditions should be acquired, which could mean a call to “modernization with a soul”.

The research results, that is, the responses obtained from the questions and sets of questions, demonstrate value judgments of academic youth in Serbia to different kinds of problems. The research has, in fact, included a wide range of problems that can be grouped as follows:

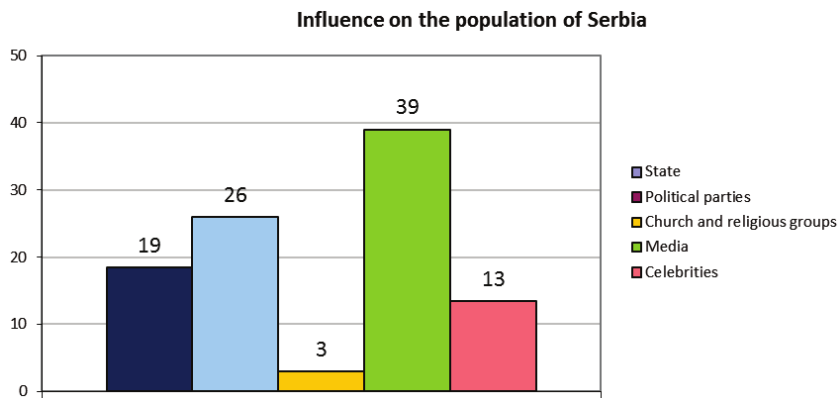
- 1) *attributing importance to* leisure time and different areas of life: (religion, work, family, friends, politics, education); trust, solidarity, freedom of choice and control of one's own life; relationship to power and class; reliance on others; conditions important to the community; home relations, relations with children, marriage, homosexuality, parents, responsibilities, work, household independence; attributes that are important for socializing; belonging to groups; understanding of Serbian, understanding of nationality and national distance towards other nations;
- 2) *behavior*: corruption (bribery, tax evasion), promiscuity (extramarital affairs, casual sex, prostitution, homosexuality), abortion, scientific experimentation on human embryos, in vitro fertilization; divorce, euthanasia, suicide, capital punishment, genetically modified food, drugs;
- 3) *responsibility*: individual and / or state, government or businesses, the unemployed, competition, income level, public or private property;
- 4) *goals of Serbia in the next ten years*: maintaining order in the country, giving more rights to people to express their opinion about decisions of the Government, fight against the rise of prices, protection of the freedom of speech;
- 5) *changes*: the importance of work, technology development, submission to the government and authority, and the importance of family life, problems of youth (p32), who should solve problems, trust in institutions, associations;
- 6) attitude towards religion, religious affiliation, belief in the existence of God, the importance of God in people's

- lives; claims about religion, attitude towards baptism, a symbol of faith, engaging in religious activities, frequency of religious activities, public understanding of religions, participation of religious institutions in public life, social role religious institutions, the adequacy of religious institutions, religious instruction; basic religious education; secondary religious education;
- 7) the relationship between religion and politics; friendship and politics; interest in politics; influence of various institutions on the population of Serbia, assessment of the quality of governing in Serbia, comparison with socialism;
 - 8) *attitudes about*: the success of a multi-party system, social inequalities and a just society, relationship between privatization and economic situation in Serbia, relationship between solidarity and socialism, preferable governing in Serbia; modern secular values: liberalism, capitalism, gender equality, civil society, human rights attitude towards democracy;
 - 9) *causes of conflict in the Balkans*: interests of political elites, interference of foreign powers, nationalism, confrontation of different religions, memories of past conflicts, insufficient knowledge of the culture of neighbors, collapse of socialism and the “warrior culture” of the Balkan nations: political preferences; the future of states belonging to great civilizations;
 - 10) EU accession; reasons for accepting the EU: cultural, spiritual and linguistic similarities, better earnings potential despite higher labor, travel opportunities, reputation, work and study, own business; life changes after joining the EU: unemployment, living standards, economic growth, preservation of the national identity

and culture, social security, personal safety, social inequalities, environmental pollution, corruption, organized crime, emigration of our people, immigration of foreigners, Serbian influence in the world, the influence of foreigners on the events in Serbia; fears about the consequences of joining the EU: loss of social security, national identity and culture, influence of Serbia in the world, reduced number of jobs in Serbia.

Explored students' attitudes include information on the types of relationship towards the existing situation and a possible transformation of values in personal and social level. Will the changes really mean post-secularity and modernization of a soul? – “It remains to be seen,” to use a phrase common in the media, and to note that, according to the respondents, the media (and a single comment from the sidelines says, “along with show business” because “the two are the same”) are the most influential on the population in Serbia.

Table 6. Opinion of students on influence of certain institutions on the population of Serbia (in percentages).



This table displays that the influence of religious-church complex on the population has been estimated as insignificant, which, in line with previous findings, can be seen as a legacy of secularization, that is, the loss of contact with the transcendent sense of spirituality.

Reconstruction of a topic such as *spirituality*, based on the given questionnaires to students and their answer to certain questions or parts of questions, is not completely exhausted. There are more implicit data in the questionnaire indicating the immanent spirituality of the academic youth of Serbia. But given that they require interpretation which would involve additional space, yet insufficient to make the final opinion for lack of explicitly formulated research apparatus, we can specify just one simple example here. It is evaluating circumstances important for a successful union of two people (marriage) that can be associated with thinking about post-secular spirituality, since it reveals spirituality through the experience of what could be perceived as immanent or secular sacred.

In this regard, most of the respondents opted for *mutual understanding and respect* (98% – very important 82% and important 16%). Also a large number of respondents opted for *love* (95% – 81% and 14%) and *loyalty* (94% – 69% and 25%). After that, for many of the respondents *time for friends and activities* are important (93% – 48% and 45%), and lower rated were *good sexual relations* (90% – 52% and 38%), and *children* (85% – 57% and 28%). After that, *shared housework chores* are considered important (83% – 32% and 51%), and *household income* (80% – 21% and 59%), as well as *good housing conditions* (75% – 19% and 56%). About 70% of respondents want *a life separate from their parents*, and only 30% of respondents believe that the same *religion* is important, and even fewer of them find *social origin* as important (about 25%), and the least important are those to whom *similar political beliefs* are important (about 15%).

Based on these elements, we will assume that “immanent spirituality” is close to the investigated sample of academic youth of Serbia, which may seem encouraging, especially when one takes into account the problematic environment. However, the problem to make a decisive conclusion in this regard, or to claim anything more specific in connection with this subject (“post-secularity and ‘modernization with a soul’”), lies not so much in the fact that the number of respondents is quite small compared to the entire population – because it is still an important class of the future intelligence of the society, as it is disabled by insufficient directionality of the research categorical instrument to the answers that would allow creating a clearer picture about this subject. This may be changed in some further similar studies.

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