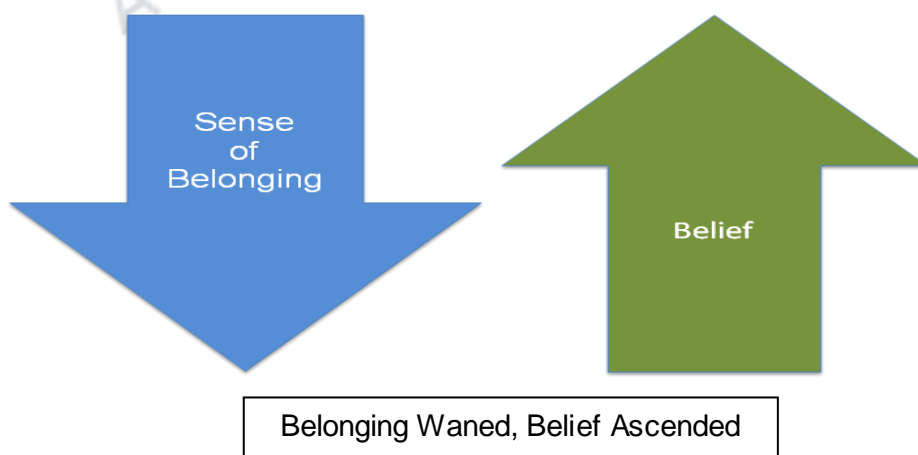


RELIGION AND MODERNITY

The transformation of society from pre-modern to modern have been one of the prime focal points of sociologists interested in the study of religion - more specifically, the secularization process. However, to address questions those seek to discover when does one form of society paves way for another, or whether such metamorphoses have perceptible and corresponding denouements on particular cultural forms, is an arduous task for a researcher. Coming straight to the terminology, in simple terms, to define modernity, it can be said that the process refers to the certain socio-cultural norms, attitudes and practices that surfaced in post-medieval Europe and gradually disseminated in other parts of the globe in various ways and at various times. In consequence to the newer characteristics it ensues and brings about, the process of modernity is believed to be comparably dynamic than any previous types of social order. Technically speaking, it is a complex of institutions, which, unlike any earlier culture, resides in the future rather than in the past. As such, central to this process of modernity, is emancipation of religion and consequent secularization, amidst many other notions.

As far as the topic on head concerns, it must be pointed out that there is a need to appreciate the flourishing ambit of sociological work in the sphere of religion and modernity. A careful reading of the available data on this leads us to the relationship between the two. Studies show that religion has not become obsolete, rather new and somewhat fascinating behavioural patterns of belief and behaviour have emerged in the present world, especially among the youth. These patterns have nothing much to do with traditional forms of religion, where expectations centre on such beliefs like the elderly are more religious than the young. In countries like Poland, Ireland or Italy where the church is stronger, not much change could be noticed since the church continued controlling the beliefs and behaviours of the people, which in turn brought about a rebellious attitude among the youth. But in societies where the church is weak, there surfaced a belief in an immanent God and a conviction in afterlife. Whether these shifts are permanent or not has not yet been deciphered, but their coincidental occurrence in many parts of the European continent itself gives us something to reflect upon. An explanation can be found in the fact that as belonging wanes, belief ascends; and hence, new avenues open up for newly liberated believers.



Here, equally significant are the theoretical contributions which can be divided into two groups, one of which includes those whose background and inspiration falls within the fabric of sociology of religion, that also simultaneously takes note of its theoretical tendency. The other group includes those who function within mainstream sociology but are also conscious of the presence of religion in late modern societies. There has not been much serious conversation between the two- a point already mentioned in the works of James Beckford. In Beckford's *Religion and Advanced Industrial Society* (1989), the 'insulation' and 'isolation' of the sociology of religion from the principal flow of sociological thinking was the predominant theme. The social processes of insulation and isolation are shown to have directed the sociology of religion in a way which ensures its continuing marginality to the concerns of most sociologists. The fact that some sociological conceptualizations of religion have been embraced by religious actors and by agents of religious change has done little to check these processes.

Later, in his *Social Theory and Religion* (2003) which is a constructivist approach to studying religion, Beckford highlights the processes 'whereby the meaning of the category of religion is in various situations, intuited, asserted, doubted, challenged, rejected, substituted, recast, and so on' (2003:3). Theoretical perceptivity along with empiric data set up the arrangement to induce new thought processes through this work. This technique is often applied to a variety of issues like secularization, pluralisation, globalization and religious movements.

It must be noted that Beckford is not the only one. From mid 1990s, many new writings came to the forefront as edited collections that were put together by Beckford himself and Jon Walliss (2006). Other instances can be found in the conference papers brought together by Paul Heelas in *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity* (Heelas et al., 1998), which addresses directly the relationship between the forms of religion found in both modernity and postmodernity and their relationship to culture. The work has a welcome comparative dimension and also includes a theological discourse. The published sources assembled by Heelas and Woodhead in *Religion in Modern Times*, brings together a vast array of authors and an astounding ambit of religion. Tensions arise between crucial themes like secularization and sacralization, between God without and God within, between exclusivist rejections and liberal universalisms, between increasing privatizations and blooming political militancy and also a befitting attention to gender. As different religious constituencies seek to reposition themselves in an altering world, more than one process can occur simultaneously in a given society. For instance, both secularization and sacralization or both soft universalism and harder exclusivism can be present in a single society.

It can thus be seen that large numbers of citations have been made by different authors to the vast assemblage of sociological thinking that is worried with the ever-changing nature of modernity. On the other hand, there are also some sociologists who are beginning to connect with the question of religion. Berger, Luckmann and Luhmann are social theorists of mid post war decades who have worked with religion in details. More recently, Bryan Turner (1991) and Ernest Gellner (1992) have each in their own way, paid attention to religion.



Ernest Gellner

While Turner's contributions are largely theoretical, Gellner combines an analysis of Islam with a criticism of postmodernism. He digs into a future for religion that evades the extremes of postmodernity on one

hand and fundamentalism on the other, championing an understanding of liberalism committed to the idea of 'truth,' but at the same time, avoiding any claim to possess this.

For others, religion survives but only peripherally. For Anthony Giddens, fundamentalism is but a reaffirmation of ontological or existential security closely associated to 'tradition in a traditional sense' (1994:100). The essence of the argumentation lies in the nature of modernity including its concomitant insecurities. *Postmodern Religion* in Bauman's essay is both similar and different, paying direct attention to the attitudes of postmodern people, recognizing their natural diversity. Fundamentalism is again keyed out as a postmodern form of religion revealing the anxieties and presentiments constitutional to the postmodern condition. The fundamentalist is salvaged not only from sin but also from the agonies of unceasing choice (1998).



Anthony Giddens

The increasing awareness of religion amongst mainstream sociologists is indeed welcome but a steady link unites even the most positive of thinkers. Religion is established as a concept of coping with the fluctuations of late or postmodern life, not as a way of being modern. This explains the engrossment with fundamentalism found in these accounts. Majority of these authors have assumed modernity as a single thing, a unitary construct with a determinable set of characteristics. If this outline and the questions it brings to the fore are taken seriously, the reorientation of the program and the contest to sociological celebration will be sizeable.

New Perspectives to Modernity in European Light

Since the process of modernity arose in post-medieval Europe and has developed since in various ways and at various times in other parts of the world, a great deal of European publications has been considered in this context. In its first chapter, *Europe: the Exceptional Case* (Davie, 2002) gives the parameters of faith in modern Europe, signalling the main forms of religion existing in various portions of the continent. In its last chapter, we find a different view to the same question as it looks at Europe not from within but from without. It works by negation, i.e. instead of drawing the patterns of European religion it brings out the patterns that are absent, taking into account only Christian societies. Had Muslim and Hindu societies been considered as well, the contrasts would have been greater.

Unlike in the US, patterns of European religion do not constitute a religious market. In Europe, the historic churches are comparatively closer to the notion of public utility than they are to a competitive firm. With respect to materials on Latin America, Pentecostalism does not exist as a widespread and popular movement in Europe. The material on Africa puts forward a similar question as it introduces the belief of 'reversed mission' – an idea that pesters an average European used to be a sender in religious matters rather than a receiver. In the Philippines, a rare degree and intensity in religious life is signalled by the nature of Catholicism and the recent growth of Pentecostal growth. In South Korea rapid

modernization is accompanied by an equally rapid growth in its religious life. Both Christianity and Buddhism grew rampantly since 1960s. But the indicators began faltering at the turn of the millennium, thereby giving rise to a different set of sociological questions.

Thus, in global terms, the European observer is compelled to admit that the familiar is not necessarily the norm. Secondly, it's of equal significance to avoid sudden arrival at supposals in terms of value judgements. Patterns of religion found in Europe are simply different than those found elsewhere in the Christian world. For some Europeans our experiences in this part of the world is simply reassuringly familiar that needs no change; while others feel that such changes should definitely be prevented; and to another group both characteristics lead to frustration. All three groups grapple with the same question regarding the way the self-established differences could be explained.

While analyzing the differences existing between the contrasting religious groups existing in Europe, two research works strike a chord- one conducted by Ronald Inglehart and his team in the University of Michigan and the other carried out by Shmuel Eisenstadt at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. While the former makes use of the data available from the World Values Survey regarding the empirical testing of the various facets of modernization theory



Shmuel Eisenstadt

the latter is mainly concerned with a theoretical analysis. Eisenstadt uses a diverse number of contrasting cases procuring them from all parts of the world and presents a dynamic and crucial concept concerning multiple modernities. It is in sharp contrast to the existing theories which revolved around the core understanding of either modernity or the modernization process. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences has taken the initiative of publishing the case studies in one of its journals, *Daedalus*, and these have triggered wide ranging discussion on this topic.

An Examination of the Modernization Theory

The theory on modernization is embedded in a strong sense of ideology. The capitalist mode of production along with its accompanying political, social and cultural changes were considered mandatory for ensuring development and thus people felt traditional values prevalent in developing societies should be discarded as they hindered the emergence of capitalism and modernization. Although this view was widespread in the post war period, after two decades it was opposed with much vehemence, particularly by those who had analyzed those societies that had not been modernized. It became evident that the inequalities which existed on a global scale were not due to the backwardness of the people

and their inability to get modernized, but was rooted in the capitalist system itself with its sole aim of profit making at the cost of others. However, this view was also challenged by those who are not just concerned with the elitist class, but with the society as a whole functioning on a global level.

The relationship between economy and other aspects of a modernized society is a much debated topic. While some are staunch supporters of the view that economy is linked with coherent and predictable changes in culture, social and political lives (Inglehart and Baker, 2000:21), there are dependency theorists and cultural relativists who have infallible faith in the fact that this relationship is random. The data available from the World Values Survey supports the first view, but these too are made with some necessary rectifications (Inglehart, 1997; Inglehart and Baker, 2000; Norris and Inglehart, 2004).

This process of modernization is characterized by two subsequent stages- first is the transformation towards an industrial society from a pre-industrial economy, and secondly when this industrialized society further changes itself to a post-industrial system characterized by a service-based, information-oriented knowledge economy. It is hardly surprising that these changes in economy are followed by subsequent changes in the beliefs, values and norms of the society but these may not follow the dictates of the earlier modernization theorists. Modern societies are no longer moving towards a technical, rationalized, mechanical and secular environment; rather more importance is being placed upon improving the quality and standard of life. The emphasis is no longer on just well-being and quality of life, but also on post materialist values.

The question that has plagued theorists for long concerns the long-term development of the industrial societies particularly into new forms of economic and social life. The emerging societies show a profound interest in religious beliefs and a growing fascination with spiritual aspects although it does not, necessarily, get reflected in their institutional commitment. This bears testimony to the fact that European religious beliefs are not static; rather they display a dynamism and continuous evolution.

In addition to this, Norris and Inglehart (2004) bring forward an interesting proposition- the validity of both the following statements. Firstly, there exists a paradox in society. While on the one hand, people in the post industrialized societies are becoming secular in their beliefs and religious practices, the proportion of people adhering to orthodox and traditional forms of religion is increasing rapidly. Society is now characterized by growing secularization, and the need for religion is directly proportional to the degree of human development and prevailing economic inequalities. According to Norris and Inglehart, secularization is an adjunct to modernization since it is rooted in existential security. However their theory is refuted by many sociologists as this view is self limiting and, inevitably, leads to infertility. Thus, it becomes apparent that as society advances, the proportion of people adhering to traditional religious beliefs keeps on growing in leaps and bounds.

Another important criteria introduced by Inglehart and his acquaintances is the variety evident in the nations which are undergoing modernization. Although the course of economic development is similar in these nations, with most of them being adherents of the capitalist mode of production, the pathways for doing so is different for each of them. The systems which emerge reflect precise religious backgrounds being Protestant, Catholic, Islamic or Confucian with their respective value systems. In addition, these post-industrial forms are

inseparable with coherent cultural shifts. These differences in religious beliefs are evident in all societies irrespective of their economic affiliation. Thus, although economic forces try to propel the diverse societies into the same direction they nevertheless end up widening the chasm between them and it becomes highly doubtful as to whether a unified culture would emerge in the near future.

Multiplicity of Modernities

It will be impertinent not to mention Shmuel Eisenstadt's work on multiple modernities in this regard. He presents a wholly new picture of modernity, hitherto left unexplored. No other theorist or thinker has attempted to give such an explanation before. Foraging against the lassical sociological theorists and founding fathers, Marx, Durkheim and Weber and even opposing the widely accepted views of the classical theories of modernization, Eisenstadt's views reflect the condition of the modern era along with its accompanying distinctiveness. They were of the firm belief that Europe would be at the centre of the modernization process and all the ensuing traits of modernity predominant in Europe would ultimately overwhelm the rest of the world which would become entangled in its web.

From the very beginning, Eisenstadt (2000) is against the notion that Europe is at the epicentre of the modernizing process and that all societies will reflect similar modernization traits. While perusing Eisenstadt's idea it is important to have an inkling of both the pros and cons associated with it. While comparing the different instances, he explicitly says that the most appropriate way of understanding the past and present of modernity is by visualizing it as 'a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs (2002:2)'. Another point of concern is that these reorganizing principles do not just emerge out of nowhere but are the products of an ongoing and constant interaction taking place between diverse individuals and groups within the sphere of varied economic and cultural conditions. Coming to terms with these ideas makes it infinitely easier to accept one of the crucial contradictions put forward by Eisenstadt - that an understanding or even opposition of Western concept of modernity will inevitably result in its acceptance against all odds.

A fundamental question arising here is what exactly can be defined as the nucleus of modernity. Modernity is viewed as a way of behaving rather than a specific set of characteristics and as such it becomes very difficult to provide an appropriate answer for the question. Earlier, it was believed that modernity would involve a radical transformation of society through human effort. However, as soon as the process was initiated, the heart of modernity was besieged by notions which were contradictory in their very nature. Numerous questions plagued the minds-what would be the accepted political norm in these modern societies? Would these societies be totaling or pluralistic? The hegemonic condition in France and the Nordic countries in contradiction to the pluralistic pattern adopted in Britain reflect this fundamental dilemma. It is hardly surprising then that even a greater amount of contradiction is visible in the cultural and institutional fields, particularly as modernization began to stretch its wings and incorporate the other countries in its embrace. Thus, Eisenstadt correctly assumes that diversity is an integral part of the modernization process.

Eisenstadt's absorption with the nature of the state, particularly with those related to the late societies bears ample testimony to the fact that the changing nature of modernity is central

to his thinking. The process of globalization has brought about a profound transformation in the 'institutional, symbolic and ideological contours of modern, functional and revolutionary states'(2000:16). The political hold over the diverse aspects of economy, polity and culture is fast declining. Modern living is now on longer within the grasp of political institutions. Multiple modernizations continue to proliferate and that too under circumstances that are constantly adapting and readapting to the prevalent conditions.

The modern world is plagued with numerous problems and the emerging plethora of actors, institutions and organizations are ready to shoulder the responsibility. The religious movements, including the ones defined by fundamentalism and the feminist and ecological organizations, whose networks spread throughout the world provide convincing examples. The modern aspects of the fundamentalists are clearly portrayed in their agenda including the nature of their goals and the means of achieving them. They have advanced technologies at their disposal and their nature is truly global. Mirroring their secular brethren, they are defining the concept of modernity in accordance with their own principles.

These diverse aspects of modernity are ready to accommodate the various strands of religion and religious movements. These forms of modernity are like the various forms of religion. *Daedalus* offers Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Confucian examples. Modernity is ever changing, according to Nilufer Gole, capable to rectifying itself. While talking about the novel forms of Islam, Gole says that religion becomes an instrument for self correction. More precisely 'modernity is not simply rejected or readopted but critically and creatively re appropriated' by emerging religious practices in non-Western contexts (Gole, 2000:93)

To conclude, two important points stand out. Firstly, modernity prevalent in Europe is distinct as is evident by theoretical and empirical analysis. Secondly, and most important, these different types are not opposed to each other. Rather they exist as a part of the larger whole and amongst all the other types of modernity which are continuously undergoing changes. Europe is not the prototype of modernity, as such; European sociologists have no right to be arrogant or haughty in this regard. Rather, they should take lessons from the various types of modern societies emerging in different parts of world. They should also consider the fact that any analysis of modernity is incomplete without a discussion of religion. Thus, it becomes obvious that religion is a very important aspect of the modernizing societies and forgoing the aspect of religion equals to the commitment of a grave mistake.

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