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UNDERSTANDING RELIGION IN THE WRITINGS OF EARLY SOCIOLOGISTS

Abstract

Owing to social processes, first and foremost the industrial revolution and political revolutions during the 19th century, sociology developed as a science studying society in its entirety, and at the same time its branch developed – sociology of religion. Classical sociologists, i.e. early sociologists, also studied religion, which they saw as an illusion whose historical existence was justified because it somewhat brings cognition of natural and social phenomena closer to the man. Within religion they saw patterns for further development of society, transforming the traditional religion into a new religion. During one century of dealing with these issues, their total theoretical opus could be rounded off with common points that tell us that, besides the fact they formed sociology as a science, they pointed out the inevitability of religion's transformation and the course such transformation will take. The aim of this paper is to use concise comparative review of how religion was understood by early sociologists in their social ambience and point out their main religion-related theses as a hint of society's secularization and conceptual impetus for sacralization of politics.

Key words: *early sociologists, Comte, Durkheim, Marx, religion, Weber.*

“Religion has been compelled by science to give up one after another of its dogmas.”

Herbert Spencer

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INTRODUCTION

Under the influence of ideological currents significant to that period (the Enlightenment and conservatism), and owing to the social processes, first of all industrial revolution and political revolutions which led toward the transformation of the “Western society”,² during the 19th century sociology was developed as a science studying society in its entirety.³ The idea of necessity of such a science was initiated by the French early social theorist⁴ Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825), who suggested that the new science should be named social physics. His student Auguste Comte (1798-1857) brought this into action, putting sociology into classification of sciences in his work *Course of Positive Philosophy* (*Cours de la philosophie positive*, 1830). Auguste Comte is considered the founder of sociology, and together with his contemporaries is classified as one of classical sociologists, which in literature are also often called early sociologists. However, even though Comte and Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) preceded them with theoretical exposition of sociology, in the eyes of modern sociology David Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) and Karl Emil Maximilian Weber (1864-1920) have taken the place of founders of this science, and together with Karl Marx are classified among the most significant creators of modern social sciences. Their common characteristic is that in their works they all dealt with the issue of religion, perceiving it as an illusion whose importance decreases as the society develops and which ought to go through a transformation. The key question early sociologists used as a starting point is “how is social order possible in a society founded on legality of the principle of expansion of individual interests, while not becoming a source of crisis or permanent conflicts, and finally dissolution”?⁵

² Žažar Krešimir, „Modernost i klasična sociologija: Ambivalentnost klasične sociološke teorije“ [„Modernity and Classical Sociology: The Ambivalence of Classical Sociological Theory“], *Revija za sociologiju*, Vol XXXIX. (2008), No 3: 183–204, Zagreb, p. 186-189.

³ Until then, society had been studied within philosophy.

⁴ Based on his ideas, Karl Marx later developed the theory of scientific socialism.

⁵ Acquaviva Sabino i Pace Enzo, *Sociologija religija – problemi i perspektive* [*Sociology of Religions - Problems and Perspectives*], Societas, Zagreb, 1996, p. 27-28.

The aim of this paper is to use concise comparative review of how religion was understood by early sociologists in their social ambience and point out their main religion-related theses as a hint of society's secularization and conceptual impetus for sacralization of politics.

AUGUSTE COMTE – COMPARISON OF RULE OF POSITIVE SCIENCE WITH RULE OF RELIGION

“Religion is an illusion of childhood, outgrown under proper education.”

In accordance with the trend of that time which was reflected in the distancing from the theological way of thinking in natural sciences and accepting the scientific one, Auguste Comte supported the idea of establishing a new, “scientific” religion. It is a so-called religion of humanity, in which otherworldly values are replaced by worldly values (e.g. society progress), and science, first of all sociology, replaces religion. He even came up with a so-called positivist church, which would be universal because it would celebrate human culture, where the “clergy” would be composed of scientists, first and foremost sociologists. He wanted a transformation of the society into a more humane form, believing that reason and science are the only guides of humanity capable of establishing such social order without tilting toward theological or metaphysical obstructions. Still, he did not dispute the progressive role of religion in the development of society, specifically emphasizing its significance in the first of the three phases in the history of society – theological, metaphysical, positive. In the theological phase, the level of intellectual life is the lowest – owing to his superstitious nature, the man attributed supernatural characteristics to causes of natural and social phenomena, which enabled the emergence of religion. Religions offered the man somewhat rational answers in accordance with features of that time – to the extent that reason could comprehend both natural and social occurrences. In the metaphysical phase, the man slowly began to liberate himself of ideas based on mythology, seeking an explanation for the divine being in nature

and not outside this world – causes of occurrences and the essence of life are explained with philosophical principles. The contradiction of this phase is in the fact that it features the establishment of ethical and legal norms, as well as a big number of wars at the same time. In the third, positive phase, when interpreting occurrences in nature and society, the man liberates himself of abstract explanations, relying on scientific knowledge based on positive, real and verifiable empirical evidence. Auguste Comte compared the rule of positive science with the rule of religion, whereby in positive religion humanity takes the place of mythological gods and division of power is modelled on feudal division between the pope and the emperor – the scientist takes the role of the pope, while the industrialist⁶ takes the place of earthly ruler. It is a path of social progress that leads toward disappearance of religion, where religion is merged into a higher level of human mind and psyche – science.⁷

ÉMILE DURKHEIM – SIGNIFICANCE OF RELIGION'S COHESIVE ENERGY

“Social man...is the masterpiece of existence.”

Émile Durkheim was born and raised in a rabbi family, and even though he himself went to a rabbi school, in time he became an agnostic under the influence of socialist ideas. Even besides this, he dedicated a significant part of his sociological opus to religion, which is why he is rightfully considered the first sociologist of religion. The question of religion opened up for him while he was seeking answers to other questions. That is how in his work, which was incidentally a doctoral dissertation, *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893), he concluded that religion's cohesive strength is stronger in agrarian and rural society and weaker in the industrial one, and therefore the urban world has much more disorder and lawlessness. While

⁶ In terms of division of labor and position in society, Comte distinguished four classes: scientists, practical class (industrialists, bankers, traders), workers, farmers.

⁷ Acquaviva Sabino i Pace Enzo, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

the agrarian society is characterized by strong collective consciousness and a bigger sense of belonging to a community, especially a religious one, the civil society is individualistic, with weak order and legality. He accepted the inevitability of religion's existence in society, believing that creating social order begins by segregating a man, an animal or an object as sacred, with the aim to better legalize "rules and collective values, which ought to be imposed with successful achievement of social cohesion".⁸ Therefore, he sees church as cohesive strength of social community, wherein the strongest process of cohesion, i.e. maintaining collective consciousness, unfolds in rites, which is why Durkheim gives them big significance. Representing the thesis that religion's role and significance weaken in modern society, instead of religious connections Durkheim suggests developing practice of mutual aid according to the principle of solidarity. In his second work, *Suicide* (1897), which is the first scientific study on suicide, he also expressed some ideas on the function of religion. Analysing the statistical data, he noticed a higher suicide rate in protestant countries compared to catholic ones, wherein it is also significantly higher than the one in Jewish societies. He explained this trend with the fact that protestant community relies more on the subjective responsibility of the individual, in difference to catholic and Jewish milieus, which rely more on community. This is how, using the empirical method, he confirmed his earlier stance that the feeling of belonging to a collectivity⁹, especially on a religious basis, connects people more tightly. He further developed these ideas in his third work, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, first published in 1912. The very title originated in the fact that the work was created while studying totemism of Australian Aborigines, for which Durkheim then stated was elementary, the simplest form of religion. Relying on the results of the research on totemism, Durkheim analysed in which way rituals and rites

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁹ Durkheim is the most significant representative of collective-psychological theories in sociology and the originator of functionalism in sociology. He deemed that society possesses collective consciousness, which cannot be considered a mere sum of individual consciousnesses, but individual consciousness is identified with collective one based on the principle of internal solidarity of society, thus neutralizing the sense of imposition. Such an attitude is subject to reasonable criticism, as Kont neglects influences of interest, which may be covertly or overtly coercive.

influence strengthening of community. He expressed a stance that belief is not the question of free choice, inequality or power, and connected religion to the nature of social institutes.¹⁰ Even in this he kept to his stance in *The Division of Labour in Society* that the influence of religion weakens with the development of modern society, while science takes over a larger influence. He concluded that scientific terms have roots in religious ideas, but that religion, even though attempting to trump science, must firstly get to know it and “be inspired by it”. In deliberation of the world one can go further than science, but one must also start from it: “One can affirm nothing that science denies, deny nothing that science affirms, and establish nothing that does not directly or indirectly rest on principles taken from science. From then on, faith no longer holds the same sway as in the past over the system of representations that can continue to be called religious. There rises a power before religion that, even though religion’s offspring, from then on applies its own critique and its own testing to religion. And everything points to the prospect that this testing will become ever more extensive and effective, without any possibility of assigning a limit to its future influence.”¹¹

MAX WEBER – ASCETIC PROTESTANTISM AND SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM

“The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the disenchantment of the world.”

Max Weber grew torn between unreligious convictions of his lawyer father, later politician, and religious devotion of his mother, who was protestant. His entire life could be described as constantly being torn apart because within him there was a constant battle between two sides of the same problem. His

¹⁰ Giddens Anthony, *Sociologija*, prema 4. engleskom izdanju [Sociology, according to the 4th English edition], Nakladni zavod Globus, Zagreb, 2007, p. 537.

¹¹ Durkheim Emile, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, The Free Press, New York, 1995, p. 433.

scientific opus is very broad and various. Nevertheless, the essence of his scientific dedication to economics, law, history and politics, all in the first half of his life, is a humanistic approach to destiny of a man in a world of bureaucracy. He showed interest for sociology after several years of scientific abstinence after a nervous breakdown (1897). Regardless of his previous interdisciplinary scientific opus, since returning to science (1903) till the end of his life (1920) Weber considered himself a sociologist. Even though according to his own words he did not have inclination toward religion he believed it plays an important role in social life. Unlike Durkheim, he did not see religion as the consequence of social action through politics, economics or science, but as their cause. Weber found basis for such an approach in the historical fact that reformation preceded the emergence of capitalism. In order to corroborate his claim that capitalistic economic order has a religious basis, or rather that the spirit of capitalism was developed modelled on some elements of protestant ethic, in his study “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism”, Weber focused on the search for an answer to the question of why capitalistic manner of production was not developed in other parts of the world and within other religions besides the ascetic Protestantism, which developed in the 16th and 17th century.¹² Still, Weber dissociated himself from supporting “such a foolish and doctrinaire thesis that the spirit of capitalism” emerged “as a result of certain effects of the Reformation”, or rather “that capitalism as an economic system is a creation of the Reformation”, because some forms of capitalist businesses are much older than the Reformation.¹³ What is the spirit of capitalism? For Weber this is diligence and dedication to work, but not with the goal to enjoy acquired material wealth – work is set as the purpose of life. It is precisely ascetic Protestantism, embodied primarily in Calvinism, that has severe moral principles, among which there is business-like manner, i.e. dedication to work as the most sacred duty. In accordance with radical understanding of predestination, God pre-determined winners and losers, wherein an individual’s

¹² Đurić Mihailo, *Sociologija Maksa Vebera [Max Weber’s Sociology]*, Matica hrvatska, Zagreb, 1964, p. 113. and 119.

¹³ Weber Max, *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Routledge Classics, London and New York, 2001, p. 49.

awareness of this evokes a sense of deep loneliness.¹⁴ The man does not know his destiny in advance and the only thing left for him is to completely dedicate himself to work in order to remove doubt about god's grace. In other words, worldly success in vocation that God determined for the man is the only sign that he was predestined for salvation by god's grace. It is what motivates him to have disciplined dedication to his vocation, regardless of the fact whether he has subjective feeling that his work is being exploited or that he is acquiring his own capital. According to Weber, it is precisely that "peculiar idea... is what is most characteristic of the social ethic of capitalistic culture, and is in a sense the fundamental basis of it".¹⁵ Such as God expects Christians to take social action¹⁶ in accordance with his commandments and purpose "for the greater glory of God" (*in majorem gloriam Dei*), it is how capitalist economic order imposes norms of economic action upon an individual, norms that he ought to fulfil so as not to be thrown out into the street (rejected by God). Even though in his interpretations protestant ethics with positive attitude toward work and worldly successes are brought into connection with the occurrence of the spirit of capitalism, Weber emphasized that this did not distance reformers from religious issues. What's more, he believed it would be wrong to conclude that developing the spirit of capitalism can be attributed to the effects of Protestantism or considered to be something Protestantism is striving toward.¹⁷ Rationalising life this way, Calvinist ethics, developed under the wing of reformation Protestantism, did not purposely create the spirit of capitalism but it unconsciously gave incentive to capitalist model of economy with glorification of earning money as a measure of dedication to vocation. Developed on the model of strict protestant ethics was business moral, upon which capitalist rationality of managing production and finances was further built. Weber believed this later brought damage to religion because capitalism

¹⁴ "By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.", *ibid.*, p. 57 (fusnote 8).

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁶ Under social activity, Weber here considers only activity within political, ecclesiastical and other joint organizations.

¹⁷ Đurić Mihailo, *op.cit.*, p. 115.

weakened it with its focus on the material, so the process of rationalization, which grew out of the protestant type of religiosity, actually leads toward secularization.

KARL MARX – RELIGION IS THE OPIUM OF THE MASSES

„If people are to know and understand the real world, they must give up superstitious beliefs because they have a narcotic effect on the mind.“

German philosopher, economist and sociologist Karl Marx, next to Émile Durkheim and Max Weber, is considered one of the main creators of modern social sciences. Marxism, a philosophical doctrine based on the criticism of the English political economy, French utopian socialism and German idealistic philosophy, was named after him. Historical materialism is a starting point in Marxism and a specific method of researching social phenomena. It is a materialistic conception of history, for which Marx's closest associate Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) said that it "starts from the proposition that the production of the means to support human life and, next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure; that in every society that has appeared in history, the manner in which wealth is distributed and society divided into classes or orders, is dependent upon what is produced, how it is produced, and how the products are exchanged".¹⁸ On this basis Marxist view of religion was built as well. Despite the fact that he received his PhD on topic of Epicurus's theory of religious understanding of the world, religion as a comprehensive system of values was not focus of Marx's scientific interests. However, expressing personal views on the place and role of religion in society was inevitable for one of the founders of communism, especially if one bears in mind that he brought development of society in connection with a form of religion in Protestantism. Marx believed that the cult of abstract man in Protestantism makes this form of religion in Christianity the most

¹⁸ Engels Frederick, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Charles H. Kerr & Company, Chicago, 1908, p. 94, <https://archive.org/details/socialismutopian00engeuoft/page/94>.

appropriate one for a society of commodity producers, which is characterized by relationship toward its products as though they are commodities, i.e. values, therefore bringing “their individual private labour to the standard of homogeneous human labour”.¹⁹ In accordance with the opinion that social, political and spiritual life are overall conditioned with the manner of production of material life, a view of determination of consciousness was created: “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness”.²⁰ If it is like that, then different social conditions throughout the human history have contributed to establishment of different religions, or even different teachings within one religion, so the “truth” a certain religion advocates is brought into question. If it does not take into consideration the material basis, then “every history of religion is uncritical”.²¹ Social conditions are such that people are estranged from their own work and its product, and therefore from themselves, so in the inability to achieve control over the world they live in, they create a conviction that that world is a product and under the rule of a higher force, to which they relate their beliefs based on fears and hope. From a Marxist standpoint, religion has an ideological task because it serves the ruling class to take the workers’ attention off the problems of their exploitation, inequality and injustice. Marxism considered all modern religions and the church to be instruments of bourgeoisie reaction for defence of exploitation of the working class.²² They see religion as “the fantastic reflection in men’s minds of those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces”.²³ Thanks to religion, people learn

¹⁹ Marx Karl, *Capital*, Volume 1, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 2015, p. 80, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf>.

²⁰ Marx Karl, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Charles H. Kerr, Chicago, 1904, p. 11, <https://gruppegrundrisse.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/a-contribution-to-the-critique-of-political-economy-marx.pdf>.

²¹ Marx Karl, *Capital*, *op. cit.*, p. 330 (fusnote 4).

²² Lenin V.I., *Religion*, CPGB-ML, London, 2012, English translations reproduced from Marxists Internet Archive, http://ciml.250x.com/archive/lenin/english/lenin_religion.pdf, p. 18.

²³ Engels Frederick, *Anti-Dühring. Herr Eugen Dühring’s Revolution in Science*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1947, p. 199, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/>

modesty, abiding by and respecting authority, and through religious rituals they adopt the idea of eternal life as a reward for obedience in earthly life. In religion, the man seeks salvation, an exit out of the world of suffering: “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people”.²⁴ Here it is important to understand that at the time Marx wrote this famous quote, opium was used as an anaesthetic in medicine. One must take into consideration both preceding sentences, as a whole, in order to understand that in these Marx’s words religion is a medicine, an anaesthetic that is worker’s salvation from social suffering he experiences in capitalism. Later on, opium was identified with the matter poisoning the masses, especially by creators of the Soviet communism, and so religion was considered a serious enemy. Not even in one of his theses did Marx stress the need for destruction of religion. On the contrary, he was aware of its necessity in his state of despair and rejection. However, he was also aware that with its promise from the New Testament (Matthew 5:5) – “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” – religion panders to those holding the power, enabling a status quo of the working poverty, so Marx insists on the need for religion to be overcome because “in religion, man is governed by the products of his own brain”²⁵, i.e. “man makes religion, religion does not make man”²⁶. The source of good and evil is not in the predetermined sinfulness of the man, but within him, in his nature, so in accordance with that people ought to become aware that salvation is actually within themselves. In order to achieve true happiness, people must overcome religion, which is “only the illusory sun which revolves round man as long as he does not revolve round himself”.²⁷ For the man to liberate himself of illusions about his condition he must get out of

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²⁴ Marx Karl & Engels Frederick, „A contribution to the critique of Hegel's philosophy of law”, in *Marx & Engels Collected Works*, Volume 3 (Karl Marx March 1843-August 1844), Lawrence & Wishart, Electric Book, 2010, p. 175.

²⁵ Marks Karl, *Capital, op. cit.*, p. 438.

²⁶ Marx Karl & Engels Frederick, „A contribution to the critique of Hegel's philosophy of law”, *loc.cit.*

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 176.

it, break free of the condition that demands existence of those illusions - “The task of history, therefore, once the world beyond the truth has disappeared, is to establish the truth of this world. The immediate task of philosophy, which is at the service of history, once the holy form of human self-estrangement has been unmasked, is to unmask self-estrangement in its unholy forms. Thus the criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of the earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of law and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics.”²⁸ Hence, it is necessary to change the world that imposes the need for religion as “opium”, anaesthetic of suffering in “the vale of tears” (life). Marx did not seek abolition of religion but overcoming it by suppressing it into the private sphere, bringing it down to a personal thing, a process that should be preceded by separation of church from the country. This includes the freedom of religion – manifesting religion according to personal choice, including the right to atheism. Marx’s associate and contemporary Friedrich Engels criticized the suggestion of his follower, a French socialist, Louis Blanqui²⁹ to ban religion, believing that such an extreme would have a completely opposite effect. Even Vladimir Lenin (*Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov – Lenin, 1870-1924*), who did not hide his animosity toward religion in accordance with philosophy of dialectic materialism, supported the stance that believers have to be given equal access to Social Democratic Party, and that later on, by getting closer to the party’s program, they are to be won over with the ideas of workers liberation from the clamps of capitalism.³⁰ His favour of peaceful form of revolution, without violence (including abolition of religion), was confirmed by Marx who told it to his son-in-law, French revolutionary socialist-Marxist Paul Lafargue, on the occasion of their departure from reformist road toward socialism: “All I know is that I am not a Marxist”. He was consistent in his opposition to establishing any form of worship of personality, including himself, as well as any submission to any movement or god. For Marx, the greatest deity has to

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805-1881) – French socialist whose vision of the path to socialism differed from the Utopian socialists’ one in that he advocated violent, revolutionary abolition of capitalism, without concrete ideas about society that would be formed that way.

³⁰ Lenin V.I., *Religion, op. cit.*, str. 21-24.

be human self-awareness. Any deviation from his original standpoints, even regarding the issue of religion, cannot be taken as original Marxism.³¹

CONCLUSION

Sociology of religion is now a developed branch of sociology that studies sociological aspects of religion and religiosity – religion’s function in society, as well as its influence on social changes and people’s behaviour in society. Today we can say with certainty that sociology of religion was developing parallel to the process of forming sociology as a science. Credits for this go to early sociologists, in whose works, each from their own point of view, the authors gave attention to religious issues, trying to understand the economic order from the way religion functions.

Auguste Comte believed that religion’s transformation will come through its coalescence into science as a higher level of human mind and psyche. Science would therefore become the new religion, a positive religion of humanity, which would take the place of mythological gods, and modelled on the feudal hierarchy, social entities would be sacralised – scientists, firstly sociologists, would take the place of clergy, even the pope, while the industrialist would take the place of earthly ruler. Émile Durkheim was aware of the inevitability of religion’s existence in society and he saw big cohesive power of maintaining collective consciousness in church rites, from where he derived his idea of developing modern industrial society based on the principle of solidarity. He also saw science as a form of religion, pointing out that scientific terms have roots in religious notions. Comparing Calvinism with the spirit of capitalism, Max Weber believed that business moral, upon which capitalist rationality of managing production and finances was built, was developed according to the model of moral principle of dedication to work as the most sacred duty in the ascetic Protestantism. From this he further deduced that glorification of acquiring material goods, developed

³¹ Arnove Anthony, “How Marx become a Marxist”, *International Socialist Review*, Issue #109, 2018, <https://isreview.org/issue/109/how-marx-became-marxist>.

on moral principles of a protestant type of religiosity, leads to secularization. Karl Marx, too, brought the evolution of society into connection with Protestantism, supporting the stance that the cult of abstract man makes Protestantism the most appropriate place for the society of commodity makers. Religion's task is ideological because it helps the ruling class to take the workers' attention off the problems of their exploitation, inequality and injustice. Besides this, Marx thought that through religion people learn obedience and acceptance of their position in life as the will of a superior being against which they can do nothing. At the same time, he saw religion as "the opium of the masses", i.e. as a spiritual anaesthetic for the worker that would reduce his social suffering in capitalism. With practical application of Marxism, socialist societies of the 20th century were secularized, but concurrently socialism got some contours of the religion of politics, with the unavoidable sacralization of political leaders, even though Marx opposed the idea of personality sacralization.

Their total theoretical opus fills an entire century of dealing with this issue, and main common points are reflected in the following stances: existence of traditional religions was historically inevitable and useful because religions somewhat rationalized man's cognition of natural and social phenomena; in religious patterns they found ideas to develop modern society by transforming traditional religion into a new one; such transformation would be achieved with secularization of social entities and science is among the most important ones; transformation of traditional religions would eventually lead toward secularization of society. These common points tell us that their significance is not only in forming sociology as a science, or sociology of religion as its discipline, but in the fact that they pointed out not only the inevitability of religion's transformation, but also the direction of that transformation. Before them, Saint-Simon stated that religion cannot disappear, but can only be transformed. However, it was them who expressed the concrete idea of that transformation, which has been confirmed to a smaller or a larger degree with the development of modern society, or rather it is still being confirmed in the time we live in.

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Дарко М. Марковић³²**РАЗУМЕВАЊЕ РЕЛИГИЈЕ У РАДОВИМА РАНИХ СОЦИОЛОГА*****Апстракт***

Захваљујући друштвеним процесима, пре свега индустријској револуцији и политичким револуцијама током 19. века развила се социологија као наука која изучава друштво у целини, а у исто време и њена грана социологија религије. Класици социологије, тзв. рани социолози, у свом раду су се бавили и питањем религије, коју су доживљавали као илузију, чије историјско постојање је оправдано због каквог таквог приближавања човеку спознаје природних и друштвених појава. У религији су видели обрасце за даљи развој друштва, трансформацијом традиционалне религије у неку нову религију. Током једног века бављења овом проблематиком њихов укупни теоријски опус би се могао заокружити додирним тачкама које нам говоре да, осим што су формирали социологију као науку, они су указали на неминовност трансформације религије и на правац у којем ће та трансформација ићи. Циљ овог рада је да сажетим упоредним приказом разумевања религије од стране раних социолога у тадашњем друштвеном амбијетну, укаже на њихове главне религијске тезе као наговештај секуларизације друштва и идејни подстицај сакрализације политике.

Кључне речи: Диркем, класици социологије, Конт, Маркс, религија, Вебер.

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