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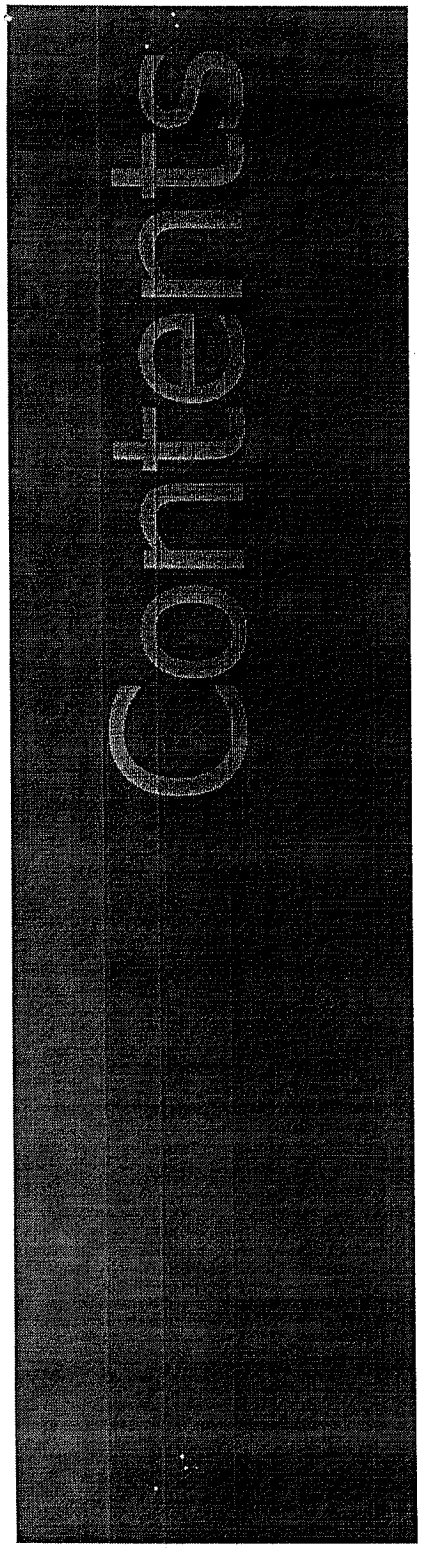

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Multidimensional Approach to Religion: a way of looking at religious phenomena

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Abstract: Modern societies have by nature a corrosive effect on traditional forms of religious life and lead to decline in the scope and influence of religious institutions and in the popularity of religious beliefs. This article argues that prophecies of traditional secularization theory failed to predict the future of religion in the contemporary world. Although modernity caused a degree of rupture between religion and society, there has also been a global revival of religion in the last two or three decades. In order to understand the transformation of religion and its comeback, various manifestations and expressions of religion must be analyzed. This article shows that religion is a multidimensional phenomenon. One's acceptance of and position towards a supernatural being, towards an ultimate reality and its manifestations involve a multidimensional process that includes attitudes, beliefs, emotions, experiences, rituals, and community and belonging. This article concludes that a multidimensional approach to religion, if revised and re-developed by taking into account the varieties and specificities of Islam, can help us better understand the Muslim world, enable us to make cross-cultural comparisons about the status of religions, and finally to equip us to make better predictions about the future of religion.

Current developments and recent social and cultural transformations under the forces of globalization indicate that the prophecy of traditional secularization thesis seems to have failed to capture the ongoing influence of religion. Proponents of secularization theory such as Bryan Wilson, Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann and Karel Dobbledare established an unavoidable and casual connection between the beginning of modernity and the decline of traditional forms of religious life. Generally speaking theorists of secularization process argued that religion would lose its influence on social and political life once the society absorbs the values and institutions of modernization. For Wilson[1] for example "secularization relates to the diminution in the social significance of religion". Shiner[2] on the other hand, identifies six types or areas of secularization with several predictions about the future of religions. Before we move onto the analysis of whether these predictions came through or not in the real world, it will be a useful exercise to remember the range of prophecies. Shiner's first type of secularization is the decline of religion, which pointed out that "the previously accepted symbols, doctrines and institutions lose prestige and influence. The culmination of secularization would be a religionless society"[3]. The second type of secularization - "conformity with this world" -

Key words:

religion, secularization, modernity, revival of religions, religious experience, Islam

predicted that "the religious groups or the religiously informed society turns its attention from the supernatural and becomes more and more interested in this world"[4]. The third type of secularization - "disengagement of society from religion" - claimed that "society separates itself from religious understanding which has previously informed it in order to constitute itself an autonomous reality and consequently limits religion to the sphere of private life[5]. The fourth type, described as "transposition of religious beliefs and institutions", prophesized that functions of religious knowledge, behavior and institutions would have a world-based outlook.
"Desacralization of the world", as the fifth type of secularization, predicted that the world would gradually be deprived of its sacral character and become an object of rationally explained sphere, rationality replacing supernatural beliefs mysterious approaches. The sixth type of secularization, taking the form of "movements from sacred to a secular society", on the other hand refers to social change, and indicates that the secularization will be completed when all the decisions in society are based on rational and utilitarian considerations rather than religious principles[6]. Contemporary developments on the globe and recent debates in social sciences indicate that such comprehensive claims and predictions of the secularization theory have only limited validity and success, most of them being confined to Western Europe. Davie[7] describes this as en exception rather than the rule, even though the old thesis holds, evidencing that in the last two hundred years secularization has made an immense progress[8].

Although modern societies have by nature a corrosive effect on traditional forms of religious life and lead to decline in the scope and influence of religious institutions and in the popularity of religious beliefs[9], as Bell[10] notes, existential questions of culture remain inescapable and "some new efforts to regain a sense of the sacred point to the direction in which our culture – or its sentient representatives - will move." After observing the global rise of religion, Peter L. Berger[11], who was once the proponent of secularization theory, admits "that the assumption that we live in a secularized world is false. The world today, with some exceptions.... is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever". He argues that the whole body of literature explaining secularization and its repercussions is essentially mistaken. Modernization did not necessarily led to the decline of religion. Even in highly modernized societies like the European ones, religion succeeded to preserve its presence especially in individual consciousness if not institutionally. Regarding the relation between religion and secularization in Europe, Daniéle Hervieu-Léger makes a strong point in her acclaimed book *Religion as a Chain of Memory* where she argues that a *chain* connects an individual believer to a community, and the *tradition* (or the collective memory) constitutes the basis of the existence of this community. Hervieu-Léger[12] contends that "by placing tradition, that is to say reference to a chain of belief, at the center of the question of religion, the future of religion is immediately associated with the problem of collective memory." Modern European societies, especially France, she argues, have experienced a crisis of collective memory to some degree which led to a break in the chain depriving the memory of religion. She[13] concludes however that the chain that connects memory to religion is being re-invented in modern European societies.

Recent developments and contemporary social, cultural and political transformations clearly show that religion is an important force today. There is an increasing tendency towards religion in USA, the Middle East, the East Asia, the South America, the Eastern Europe and numerous other places. Transnational religious networks are being formed and communication revolution en-

abled religion to become a global reality in world politics. Scholars and thinkers spend tremendous effort to analyze the nature and transformation of religion both in its traditional and modern forms. This article aims to chart influential approaches to understand this universal phenomenon known as religious commitment and to examine leading theories concerning dimensions and measurement of different aspects of religiosity and religiously informed behavior. Political scientists, anthropologists, psychologists and sociologists have been concerned with various aspects of religion and its influence on individual and society as well as with the measurement of religiosity and religious commitment since the establishment of these disciplines. No matter how we define religion, it has many aspects and dimensions. As pointed out by Wearing and Brown[14] the question of dimensionality remained a persistent question in the analysis of religious beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. In the last two decades sociologists and psychologists of religion have spent considerable time and energy to the conceptualization and measurement of religious commitment[15]. Discussions on the nature of religious commitment moved from simple and reductionist arguments as whether religiosity is a unitary phenomenon or a multidimensional matter towards more sophisticated issues culminating in synthesis of various theoretical frameworks which were developed for the analysis of this complex phenomenon. In order to make a meaning of current developments as a whole and to see in which areas secularization is effectively taking places, it is a necessary exercise to look at relevant theories.

There are numerous definitions of religion. Since there is no universally agreed meaning of religion it may mean different things to different people. As Thrower[16] points out in the concluding chapter of his book *Religion: The Classical Theories*, the first thing that will strike anyone trying to answer the question of what is religion, "will be the sheer number and variety of (these answers), the second will be the realization of how little, if anything, these answers have in common and the third (...) will be the realization of how culture bound the majority of these answers are." As the purpose of this article is not to delve into many meanings of religion, suffices it so say that depending on social and cultural contexts and their mind-sets, people perceive and understand religion in different ways. Even within the same religious tradition there are varieties of interpretations regarding the meaning of religion and its relations to individual and society. Religions cannot be perceived as monolithic belief systems because monolithic approaches to religion fail to appreciate the variety of religious experiences and expressions of religious orientation[17]. As displayed throughout human history religions are not static but dynamic forces. It is this dynamism and fluidity, which enable religions to survive on personal as well as societal levels.

Religious commitment entails more than one dimension. As McGuire[18] rightly notes 'there are many facets of religion.' One's acceptance of and position towards a supernatural being, towards an ultimate reality and its manifestations involve a multidimensional process comprising attitudes, beliefs, emotions, experiences, rituals, the community and the feeling of belongingness. Hill and Hood[19] argue that 'any construct as complex as religion is likely to be multidimensional in nature' 'because religion deals with people's ultimate concerns and provides both personal and social identity within the cosmic or metaphysical background.' Research on religious commitment supports this observation and indicates that religiosity is not a one-dimensional experience in individuals' lives[20]. This means that religious orientation has various dimensions. One of the earliest theorists on the dimension of religiosity proposed a four-dimensional model in approaching religious orientation and religious

group involvement[21]. Lenski, from the point of view of the content, identifies these dimensions as follows: 1- the 'associational' dimension, which includes frequency of religious involvement in worship and prayer services; 2- the 'communal' dimension, which relates to the preference and frequency of one's primary-type relations; 3- the 'doctrinal orthodoxy', which refers to the intellectual acceptance of the prescribed doctrines of the church; and 4- the 'devotionalism', which involves private or personal communion with God through prayers, meditation and religious behavior. As these dimensions indicate, religious commitment has cognitive, relational, behavioral and ritualistic components

Glock[22] has also contributed to the discussions on the conceptualization of religious orientation by proposing a five-dimensional model[23] of 'conceptual framework for the systematic study of differential commitment to religion.' Glock argues that despite the great variety of details, all world religions share general areas in which religiosity is manifested. These are the five core dimensions of religiosity: 'the experiential', 'the ritualistic', 'the ideological', 'the intellectual', and 'the consequential'. According to Glock[24], the 'experiential dimension' of religiosity refers to the achievement of direct knowledge of the ultimate reality or to the experience of religious emotions in the form of exaltation, fear, humility, joyfulness and peace. The 'ideological dimension' gives recognition to the fact that all religions expect that the religious person should hold certain beliefs to which followers are expected to adhere. The 'ritualistic dimension' includes specific religious practices expected of religious followers to perform either individually or communally. Among them prayer, worship, pilgrimage and feasting can be mentioned. The 'intellectual dimension', in Glock's framework, is constituted by the expectation that the religious person should have some knowledge about the basic tenets of his/her faith and its religious scriptures. The 'consequential dimension', on the other hand, encompasses man's relation to man. This means that the 'consequential dimension' includes religious prescriptions, which determine the attitudes of the adherents as a consequence of their religious belief. Glock argues that these are the core dimensions of religious commitment being shared by different religions of the world.

On the basis of this five-dimensional explanatory framework, Stark and Glock[25] attempted to document the nature of religious commitment in America and added several sub-dimensions to the original framework. In what concerns religious belief 'orthodoxy', 'religious particularism' and 'ethicalism' were used as indicators for measuring the religious belief. 'Worship', 'communion', 'organizational participation', 'financial support', and 'saying table prayers' or 'grace' were used, on the other hand, as the main indicators of performing religious practices and rituals. Later, Faulkner and DeJong[26] devised items and developed a scale in order to test Stark and Glock's five-dimensional model of religiosity. Faulkner and DeJong used 23 items of the scale to see the interrelationship among the five dimensions of religiosity. Their findings led them to conclude that these dimensions were positively related. After the analysis of correlations among the five dimensions of religiosity, they also argued that their findings 'indicate the interdependent nature of these measures of religious involvement'. However, Faulkner and DeJong[27] pointed out that 'the degree of relationships differs for the various dimensions. This diversity in degree of relationships lends support to the view that religious involvement is characterized by several dimensions'. Nudelman[28] also tried to measure the dimensions of religious commitment by using the model proposed by Glock[29], Stark and Glock[30]. After analyzing data on Protestant and Roman Catholic Church members, Nudelman concluded that 'devotion'

and 'participation' appeared to be two important dimensions of religiosity. Based on his findings, he further argued that religious commitment was neither a one dimensional nor a multidimensional phenomenon.

Some researchers widened the scope of scales and measures regarding the multidimensionality of religion. King[31], for example, has developed a framework for the analysis of religious commitment and proposed nine dimensions to measure religiosity. These dimensions are delineated as 1- 'Credal Assent and Personal Commitment' which refers to the acceptance of the fundamental tenets of a religion such as belief in God, the Scriptures, eternal life, salvation etc.; 2- 'Participation in Congregational Activities' which is about taking part in organized religion such as participating in Church activities regularly and actively; 3- 'Personal Religious Experience' which encompasses prayer, repentance and union with God; 4- 'Personal Ties in the Congregation' which includes church membership and frequency of meeting fellow-believers and organizing social events with them; 5- 'Commitment to Intellectual Search Despite Doubt' which relates to critical stimulation and search for meaning; 6- 'Openness to Religious Growth' which includes moral growth and continuous struggle to understand religion better; 7- 'Dogmatism'; 8- 'Extrinsic Orientation'; 9- 'Financial Behavior and Financial Attitude' which refers to donations to church or financial contribution to religious events; and lastly, 10- 'Talking and Reading about Religion' which refers to the frequency of reading Bible and other religious texts and discussions about religion.

These dimensions are similar to those proposed in the earlier research. 'Credal Assent and Personal Commitment' includes for example, Glock's 'ideological', and Lenski's 'doctrinal orthodoxy' dimensions. Similarly, 'Participation in Congregational Activities' is related to Glock's 'ritualistic' and Lenski's 'associational' dimensions. 'Personal Religious Experience' on the other hand, corresponds to Glock's 'experiential' and Lenski's 'devotionalism' dimensions. King and Hunt[32] later revised the early findings and subsequently proposed a new model on similar lines. On the King-Hunt model Roof[33] notes that it had provided the most comprehensive conceptual framework to test the multidimensionality model.

Instead of using the concept of 'dimension' Verbit[34] proposed the concept of 'components' in his attempt to develop a theoretical framework suited for understanding religiosity. Verbit argues that 'religion has several 'components', and an individual's behavior vis-à-vis each one of these components has a number of 'dimensions''. He identifies six components of religion including 'ritual', 'doctrine', 'emotion', 'knowledge', 'ethics' and 'community'. In Verbit's model, these six components of religion are measured along four dimensions as 'content', 'frequency', 'intensity' and 'centrality'. Of these dimensions 'content' refers to the elements of one's religious repertoire and denotes the 'direction' of his/her religious behavior, indicating participation or non-participation in any item of religion. The dimension of 'frequency', on the other hand, measures the 'amount' of involvement of a person in religious behaviors and practices. 'Intensity', as argued by Verbit, refers to the degree of determination or consistency in relation to one's position towards religion. The fourth dimension, 'centrality', measures the importance a person attributes to religious tenets, rituals and sentiments.

Drawing upon earlier models and studying dimensions of religiosity among Catholics, O'Connell[35] also proposed two more dimensions in addition to the five presented by Stark and Glock. O'Connel argued that the consequential scale should be divided into two main dimensions, as individual and societal consequences, to find out the relationships between the dimensions of re-

ligiosity. The same year, Himmelfarb[36] invented a synthesized form of a typology of religious involvement and argued that religious involvement has at least two elements: 'doctrinal beliefs' and 'ritual observance'.

Putney and Middleton[37] on the other hand tried to analyze the dimensions of religious ideology by focusing upon the following aspects: 1- Orthodoxy (the belief in traditional doctrines and creeds); 2- Fanaticism (imposing religion on others; the desire to share religious ideology with others): 3- Importance (personal significance of religion) and; 4- Ambivalence (awareness of holding contradictory attitudes toward religion). More recently Hilty and Morgan[38] devised a Religious Involvement Inventory which measures seven dimensions of religiosity: 1- Personal Faith (time spent to improve the knowledge, understanding and practice of faith); 2- Intolerance of Ambiguity (making decision between two choices to have a clear idea about faith); 3- Orthodoxy (importance, significance and centrality of religion in one's daily life, frequency of communicating with God); 4- Social Conscience (Importance of affiliation to community and institutional identity); 5- Knowledge of Religious History (extent of information about the facts, figures and events in the history of one's faith); 6- Life Purpose (meaning of life, satisfaction or despair with life); and 7- Church Involvement (frequency of attending Church activities and amount of contribution). As it can be seen, once again, the dimensions proposed by Hilty and Morgan have some overlapping themes with the ones identified by the other authors. It can be argued that the common ground amongst these authors and their proposed dimensions is the fact that they view religion as a multidimensional phenomenon and thus measure its various aspects accordingly. Somewhat differently Maranell[39] also joined the group of scholars who have a multidimensional approach to the study of religion. Maranell's religious attitude's scales include the following eight dimensions: 1- Church orientation scale (attitudes towards Church membership, its activities and functions); 2- Ritualism scale (importance, significance and frequency of the ritual of worship, prayer and ceremonies); 3- Altruism scale (co-operation, brotherhood, sympathy and concern for others); 4- Fundamentalism scale (literary belief and conviction in the holy book); 5- Theism scale (belief in the existence and superiority of God); 6- Idealism scale (belief in the establishment of justice, freedom, equality and peace); 7- Superstition scale (attitudes towards irrational beliefs); and 8- Mysticism scale (belief in higher states of mind beyond reason, belief in union with God and in manifestation of the spiritual).

So far, we have discussed the most influential and thus widely cited approaches to the measurement of religiosity. These approaches argue for the view that religious commitment is a multidimensional human experience and its variety cannot be understood within the framework of a one-dimensional interpretation of religious belief and behavior. Religious beliefs, attitudes and behaviors are complex phenomena and therefore one cannot reduce the manifestations and impact of religion to a single variable. Any attempt to understand and analyze such complex processes entails a multidimensional approach to religion because it is self-evident that religion is a multifaceted social reality and psychological experience. However, against the near-dogmatic status of multidimensional understanding of religion, Clayton and Glagged[40] argued that 'religiosity is primarily a commitment to an ideology and the other so-called dimensions are merely expressions of the strength of that core commitment'. This view should not overshadow the fact that despite the existence of a core or a center in any religion, the manifestations of this core element are very rich and the variety of religious expressions and religious

influences warrant the employment multidimensional methods to understand religion.

Conclusions

This article argues that prophecies of traditional secularization theory failed to predict the future of religion in the contemporary world. The old thesis which predicted the disappearance of religion from the social, political and cultural life under the forces of rationality and modernity is no longer valid. Therefore a new approach or at least a revised theory of secularization is needed in order to capture the dynamics of the revival and return of the sacred in the modern secular era. It is true that modernity caused a rupture between religion and society to some degree, however, in the last two or three decades there has been a global revival of religion everywhere except few exceptions. In order to understand the transformation of religion and its return, various manifestations and expressions of religion need to be analyzed.

As the Figure 1 makes it very clear, there has been a heated debate over the dimensionality of religion and many scholars devised different tools to understand this global reality. The analysis of the leading theories, as we have tried to suggest, indicates that the religious commitment and involvement are multidimensional phenomena (*see* Figure 1). The core dimensions of a religious commitment include belief, knowledge, practice and experience. It should be pointed out that each dimension of a religious orientation might have numerous sub-dimensions because of the nature of religious experience. Therefore all theories and explanatory frameworks for the analysis of religious commitments are susceptible to omitting some of the dimensions and sub-dimensions of religiosity. Nevertheless, they are a useful means for identifying the general patterns. As Glock[41] points out, however, 'the real challenge lies in the cross-cultural study of religious commitment'. This reminds us that the conceptual frameworks or at least the overwhelming majority of case studies on which multidimensional scales were established are Judeo-Christian in nature. This is a very serious shortcoming in an increasingly multi-religious world where religions such as Islam rather than Judaism and Christianity are expanding more rapidly. Almost all of the theoretical frameworks discussed in this article were developed after studying predominantly Christian believers and manifestations of Christian religious experience. It is therefore questionable whether these methodological approaches can explain non-Christian religious experience in general and manifestations of Islamic orientation in particular. At this juncture, it becomes clear that more research is needed on subjects other than Christians to test the reliability and applicability of theories and approaches developed by psychologists and sociologists of religion for the measurement of religiosity. Comparative research will also facilitate the development of more inclusive and coherent methodological approaches for the study of 'the varieties of religious experiences'. Although religious revivalism and more dynamic manifestations of religion have been taking place on a global scale, the Muslim world has a unique case because Islam manifests itself effectively in arts, literature, science and politics. Current discussions amongst sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists and political scientists focus on the Muslim world more than on any other. The number of publications, conferences, and news and TV programs confirm the fact that there is an increasing interest in the expressions of Islam. In conclusion, multidimensional approach to religion, if revised and re-developed

through taking in to consideration the varieties and peculiarities of Islam, can help us understand Muslim world better and would enable us to make cross cultural comparisons in what regards the status of religions. In the end, they will also give us the possibility to make better predictions about the future of religion.

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[2] Shiner, L., 'The Concept of Secularization in Empirical Research', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 6, No. 2/1967, pp. 209-216.

[3] Ibid., p. 209.

[4] Ibid., p. 211.

[5] Ibid., p. 212.

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