

UDK 316.37:2  
Short scientific article**BETWEEN BELIEF, INDIFFERENCE AND DISBELIEF...<sup>1</sup>****Mariya SERAFIMOVA<sup>2</sup>**  
Southwestern University "Neofilt Rilski"

*Abstract:* The modern man of the 21<sup>st</sup> century chooses his preferred beliefs and values in a pluralistic world, where conflicting values co-exist. The rapid pace of technological change, the dominance of impersonal institutions, and the complexity of modern society has left many individuals feeling adrift, isolated, and lacking any sense of meaning or purpose to their lives. They are surrounded by satellite television, radio, computer networking, and, of course, the Internet. There is a profusion of data, but very little knowledge that connects people. Perhaps one of the greatest ironies of our postmodern world is that we have more capacity for communication than any other time in the history of humanity and yet, there is a widespread feeling of disconnection. The social and religious situation, the attitudes of the people towards the faith and the Church and the overcoming of basic prejudices should be taken into account. All these require an objective analysis of the living conditions of the contemporary Bulgarian.

*Keywords:* religion, Republic of Bulgaria, religious literature.

**1. Data obtained from a representative sociological survey**

Bulgaria has a total area of 42,855 square miles, and its population is approximately 7 million according to a 2011 census. According to a study from February 2011 by the country's National Statistical Institute, approximately 76% of citizens are Orthodox Christians, and approximately 10.1% are Muslims, while the remainder includes Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Gregorian-Armenian Christians, Uniate Catholics, and others. The Government registers 106 denominations officially. Over the last twenty years, Bulgarians are becoming increasingly alienated, especially the ones living in big cities. This is a natural process, which intensifies during periods of crisis. In such times, everyone is mainly trying to survive and forces were changed with strong bands from left to right and vice versa. In practice, there is no political class in Bulgaria. That is probably why Bulgarians do not trust institutions. On the one hand, a growing need was affirmed among the young – a need for answers to the fundamental

---

<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at International Scientific Conference *Facing Social Traumas: A Challenge for Sociological Research*, Faculty of Philosophy, within Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Skopje 23-24 April, 2015.

<sup>2</sup>e-mail: serafimova@abv.bg

questions, for something more spiritual, for some kind of an explanatory system. The past is no longer a perfect world, which regulates things. On the other hand, they are clearly repulsed by the confrontation in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. This and the mercantile intentions of some representatives of the clergy act negatively on young people's general attitude towards religion. Statistical data from the official census campaigns over the decades shows the religious affiliation of the population at the times of different censuses.

Religious	1910	1920	1926	1934	1946	1992	2001	2011
	<b>Number</b>							
Total	4,337,513	4,846,971	5,478,741	6,077,939	7,029,349	8,487,317	7,928,901	5,758,301
Eastern-Orthodox	3,643,918	4,062,097	4,569,074	5,128,890	5,967,992	7,274,592	6,552,751	4,374,135
Muslim	602,078	690,734	789,296	821,298	938,418	1,110,295	966,978	577,139
Catholic	32,150	34,072	40,347	45,704	-	53,074	43,811	48,945
Protestant	6,335	5,617	6,735	8,371	-	21,878	42,308	64,476
Judaic	40,067	43,232	46,431	48,398	43,335	2,580	653	706
Armenian-Gregorian	12,259	10,848	25,402	23,476	-	9,672	6,500	1,715
Other or undeclared	706	371	1,456	1,802	79,604	15,226	7,784	281,287
Undefined	-	-	-	-	-	-	308,116	409,898
	<b>Structure in percent (%)</b>							
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Eastern-Orthodox	84.0	83.8	83.4	84.4	84.9	85.7	82.6	76.0
Muslim	13.9	14.3	14.4	13.5	13.3	13.1	12.2	10.1
Catholic	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.8	-	0.6	0.6	0.8
Protestant	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	-	0.3	0.5	1.1
Judaic	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Armenian-Gregorian	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.4	-	0.1	0.1	0.0
Other or undeclared	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.1	0.2	0.1	4.9
Undefined	-	-	-	-	-	-	3.9	7.1

Source: *Results of the Census (1994), vol. 1, NSI, Sofia.*

The Southwestern University "Neofit Rilsky" can be regarded as a contact zone, where cultural, political, historical and religious events, destinies and interests interweave. The region where the university is located is one of the

best examples for ethnic diversity, which is characteristic of the Republic of Bulgaria.

In a place like this, one can easily see the existence of different phenomena and processes, related to the diverse aspects of traditional and modern religiosity in the Bulgarian society in whole.

The survey investigating the attitude towards university education was conducted in the years 2006, 2009, and 2013 by different teams of specialists from the *Department of Sociology* of the *Southwestern University "Neofit Rilsky"* and from the *Institute of Sociology* of the *Bulgarian Academy of Sciences*.

The answers to the question - *What kind of literature do you read?* – which was included in the questionnaire, are strongly related to the priority direction of our interest. They have been deduced out of an extract of some 3,000 young people (high-school students) and parents who have been surveyed.

A question inquired about the type of literature that the person reads. "The Bible" was one of the possible answers in the questionnaire.

**Table 1: Structure of the preferred types of literature**

<b>What kind of literature do you read?</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Relative quota</b>
Fiction	761	32.9%
Scientific literature	529	22.9%
Magazines and newspapers	823	35.6%
The Bible	56	2.4%
The Koran	22	1.0%
Other	43	1.9%
I don't read	77	3.3%
General	2,311	100.0%

The fact that only 56 of the participants (or 2.4%) have read the Bible is very indicative. It is also indicative that the most preferred type of literature among the young is "Magazines and newspapers", which outlines their major intellectual directions and those of their parents, which is even more disturbing. The results from a representative inquiry conducted by the National Statistical Institute create a possibility for comparative analysis and drawing conclusions. This study included more than 5,000 people. The fact that under 1.6% have read the Bible is indicative, while the people that regularly read newspapers and magazines has increased from 34.6% to 45.8%. The fact that people read scientific literature shouldn't be disregarded as well, while the number of people who read fiction has increased slightly – from 32.9% to 33.5%.

**Table 2: Structure of the preferred types of literature**

What kind of literature do you read? (select up to three answers)	Number of participants	Relative quota
Fiction	2,892	33.5%
Scientific literature	1,325	28.5%
Magazines and newspapers	3962	45.8%
The Bible	141	1.6%
The Koran	77	0.9%
Other	245	2.8%
General	8,642	100.0%

In May 2009, with the permission of the Department of Education team of the Department of Sociology, together again with the Institute of Sociology (which was in charge of the field work) a second survey was conducted on the topic: *Place of the Southwestern University "Neofit Rilsky" in the minds of Bulgaria, related to higher education* (among students who had completed their secondary education and among their parents, from 28 municipalities in Bulgaria).

**Table 3: Structure of the preferred types of literature from parents**

Kind of literature	N	%
Fiction	710	36.5%
Scientific literature	437	22.5%
Magazines and newspapers	710	36.5%
The Bible	27	1.4%
The Koran	11	6%
Other	20	1.0%
I don't read	30	1.5%
General	1,945	100.0%

The following data were obtained, which can be used for comparison and tracking of dynamic processes that are the subject of our research interest. The following table clearly demonstrates some reduction in rates related to reading the Bible and the Koran.

The fact that the relationship between scientific literature and newspapers and magazines is changing the direction of reducing the reading of newspapers and magazines should not be ignored.

The comparison of the statistics clearly shows the unenviable place of religion in the contemporary Bulgarian society. The results of this latest survey show lower rates of reading, especially of religious literature.

## 2. Results of focus group discussion

In an attempt to obtain the necessary authentic and thorough information, quantitative and qualitative methods were combined. This meant that for the purposes of the final analysis, the data from a representative sociological survey were combined with the additional analysis of the focus groups discussions and with the results from *participant observation* and interviews. The whole process of the survey may generally be divided into three stages.

The results were certainly impressive and with the purpose of obtaining additional in-depth information, the next step was to organize *focus groups* discussions.

Six discussions of this kind were organized. The focus groups consisted of representatives from different strata of the Bulgarian society. The locations where different discussions were held were deliberately selected – the capital, a big city and a town – the cities of Sofia, Plovdiv and Blagoevgrad, respectively. All of the participants (60 persons) were between 20 and 70 years of age.

A group was composed, consisting of believers who actively practice a certain religion. The other groups were focused on irreligious people, students from secular and theological faculties, manifest atheists, and experts respectively.

Discussions with focus groups are interactive and it is very important to know that they tend to create new notional connections between the participants of different groups. Quite often, this reveals unexpected aspects of the previously gathered information.

The description and the comparison of the focus groups allows the examination of the opinions, the evaluations, and the decisions of the different participants.

It is not a conventional practice to include percentages and quotas in a report about a focus group. Guarantees for the representative nature of the extract or the criterion for selecting participants is not required either. This method is not based on a quantitative approach but rather on specific techniques of in-depth analysis.

The problems discussed can be grouped into several issues:

- People who declare themselves irreligious think that the modern way of life is predominantly materialistic and deprived of any kind of spirituality.
- Some consider the contents of the Bible incomprehensible. Even though they possess a Bible in their homes, they hardly ever open the book.
- Therefore, a person that has merely read the text of the Holy Scripture is not an obvious believer.
- Some of the most convinced atheists are very well acquainted with the Word of God.

- Some of the people in this category think of God only during major religious festivities and that is the only time they actually visit a temple.
- A certain proportion of the people are repulsed by the continuous confrontation inside the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.
- Some are unhappy with the educational activity of the BOC and the insufficient charity initiatives. They think that the Church neglects the actual problems of Bulgarian society.
- Some explain their own indifference towards the Bible with the lack of religious orientation in their families.
- Many people are repulsed by the religious propaganda that is broadcasted by the media on different occasions. They consider it too aggressive.

The next step in the research were the *interviews*\* with forty respondents, which completed the "picture" of religion in the Bulgarian society.

The respondents were young people with different religious orientations, different outlooks, businesses, artistic and scientific intelligentsia. Without exaggeration, one can claim that this was a very interesting and effective research effort.

The problems discussed can be grouped into several problem rounds that are expressive enough to confirm, complement or bring out a new emphasis on issues that were investigated.

### ***Bulgarian society and the "spiritual coma"***

- A conclusion that the atheistic period in the history of Bulgarian society is a factor in the spiritual vacuum in the Bulgarian society.
- The institutions of church are self-discrediting.
- Young people need spiritual direction and they are not the only ones.

### ***The Influence of religion in the Bulgarian society***

- The Bulgarian has a healthy dose of skepticism.
- Many people are influenced by popular culture.

In general, according to the respondents, there can be no society without religion. It has its place in social space, but it is something very individual. Most say that everyone in the modern society "*believe in their own thing*".

In the opinion of young people, the Bible is just a book, like many others. Many youths have difficulties in understanding the biblical text. Here is the expressed opinion of one of the participants in the focus groups:

*"I've read enough of it, several times. Well, the Bible, literally spoken or retold, I'm sorry but, most of it, in my opinion, does not represent any religious interest, really. It isn't something that inspires. It's the story of a semi-nomadic people from the Bronze Age, roughly told but it is just like that. At the same time, I encounter a great number of contradictions inside it, too many facts with no*

---

\* Maria Serafimova conducted the interviews, which consisted of open-end questions.

*connection whatsoever. If a person wants to find an integral religious doctrine, a model for living and conduct, a way to know the world, well, I personally think that they won't find it, not without assistance. Instead of finding true faith, you end up being more suspicious than before. There are many examples..."*

The effect of modern mass culture, in all of its forms, serves as an addition to the traditionally neglectful attitude of Bulgarians towards the faith. The invading secularism of the West mingles with the atheistic heritage of the Communist era. The direct consequence of this interaction is an even deeper alienation from the values of Christianity and the Bible. This process concerns the young generation most deeply and that is why the surveys are focused mostly on young people and their reactions to the Holy Scripture and the questions of the faith.

Unfortunately, young people turn to religion only when something bad happens to them, whether they suffer, or have a dilemma that excites them.

The spiritual vacuum, the anomie and the uncertainty have generated a situation of searching for a meaning.

Popular culture, pseudo-folkloric music and all the new tendencies of modern-day life have a dominant role in a young person's perspective of life. Things like morality, faith or knowing the Bible seem like secondary problems. Many among the young are more susceptible to ideas of occultism and exorcism than to those coming from the Churches.

Religious practices, and even the most intimate religious acts, have a social meaning and a social context. Religious activity helps in making individuals aware of their community and enables them to symbolically express the social order and gain an objective awareness of society. Religion could help to legitimate the purposes and actions of the society, to strengthen the determination of the people, to help build up the sense of identity.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Bell, D., 1991. *The Winding passage*, London: Transaction Publishers.
- Berger, P., 1969. *The Sacred Canopy*, Garden City, NY: Doubleplay.
- Crisp, Tony. *Religion and Dreams. Dream hawk*. <http://www.dreamhawk.com/d-relig.htm>.
- Durkheim, E., 1893. *The Division of Labor in Society*.
- Durkheim, E., 1895. *Rules of Sociological Method*.
- Durkheim, E., 1897. *Suicide*.
- Durkheim, E., 1912. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.
- Durkheim, E. 1914a. *The Dualism of Human Nature*.
- Durkheim, E. 1914/1925, *Pragmatism and Sociology*.
- Eliade, M., 1961. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, New York: Harper Torchbooks. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mircea\\_Eliade](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mircea_Eliade)
- Fourastié, Jean, 1981. *Ce que je crois*, Paris: Gallimard.
- Hervieu-Leger, D., 1993. *La Religion pour mémoire*, P., Les éd. du CERF.
- Levi-Strauss, Cl. 1997. *Race and History*, Hr. Botev, p.28
- Wright Mills, Dj. 1959. *The Sociological Imagination*, N.Y.: Oxford University Press.
- Http: //www/ General Directories and Resources; The Field of Religion...What is Religion?html



## ПОМЕЃУ ВЕРБА, ИНДИФЕРЕНТНОСТ И НЕВЕРУВАЊЕ...

Марија СЕРАФИМОВА

*Апстракт:* Современиот човек на XXI век ги избира преферираните верувања и вредности во плуралистички свет, каде коегзистираат спротивставени вредности. Брзото темпо на технолошки промени, доминацијата на имперсонални институции и комплексноста на современото општество доведе до тоа многу поединци да се чувствуваат напуштени, изолирани, со чувство на недостаток на смисла или значење во своите животи. Тие се опкружени со сателитска телевизија, радио, компјутерско вмрежување и, се разбира, Интернет. Постои изобилство на податоци, но сосема малку знаење што ги поврзува луѓето. Можеби една од најголемите иронии на нашиот постмодерен свет е дека имаме поголеми капацитети за комуникација од било кој друг период од историјата на човештвото, а сепак, распространето е чувството на исклученост. Општествената и религиската ситуација, ставовите на луѓето во поглед на верата и црквата и надминувањето на базичните предрасуди треба да бидат земени предвид. Сите овие бараат објективна анализа на околностите во кои живее современиот Бугарин.

*Клучни зборови:* религија, Република Бугарија, верска литература.