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QUANTITATIVE APPROACHES TO THE RELIGIOUS PHENOMENON

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Claudiu Herțeliu, *Metode cantitative în studiul fenomenului religios* (Quantitative Methods in the Study of Religious Phenomena), (Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Napoca Star, 2009), 227 p

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Understanding religious phenomena has been one of the major preoccupations and challenges of social sciences and the humanities. It is difficult to identify a period of time when religion could have been of no interest to historians, sociologists, philosophers and other categories of researchers in the socio-human space. Post-world war Romania has witnessed a quasi exclusion of religion from the research processes performed inside socio-human institutions. The last two decades of the 20th century registered a re-launching of the interest in research on religious topics. The effort made in order to fill in the gap that characterized the scientific knowledge of the religious phenomenon during the communist period mobilized, to a certain extent, researchers in various areas: sociologists, demographers, statisticians, historians, psychologists etc.

Claudiu Herțeliu has attempted and managed to include his work titled *Quantitative Methods in the Study of Religious Phenomena* among the outcomes of such scientific reflection and activity. His approach is influenced by Weberian thought and this is evident from the beginning of the work that includes certain concepts and aspects that characterize Max Weber's system of thinking, not to mention the author's earlier papers that betray his affinity with Weber. The Introduction and the first chapter of the book outline the author's position in the proximity of religion, delineating some theoretical similarities, some preferred fields or domains that apply and successfully use the quantitative methods of research, namely religious marketing and market, the couple 'geopolitics – religion', religion and economy. Considering religion as a market product might be of interest but it could also result in criticism and disapproval. The author launches a series of challenges to what the present-day study of religious phenomena means, such as the study of religion from the perspective of

the market, the strategies of religious marketing or quantitative approaches, some of them excluding the well-known theological conceptions etc. These are new and bold approaches to the study of religion in the Romanian society and the development of such methods would better express, from a scientific point of view, what has been going on at the level of religious acts in Romania, i.e. the secularization and the laicization of the religious phenomenon. The author's preference for the Weberian type of analysis is to be found in the connections he makes between the religious and the economic life of the individual, the family and the community.

Claudiu Herțeliu's theoretical and methodological path reflects the need of today's Romanian statisticians to provide minute details of the information registered in official documents. However, before such endeavor in the field of details, any attempt to make the statistical analyses of the Romanian religious realities in the last 100 years reveals a considerable set of further problems: the lack of data for longer periods of time, the impossibility to make comparisons between Romanian regions, the lack of instruments and methods for collecting data etc.

The author attempts to establish connections between measuring religious phenomena and religious marketing. It is an approach that legitimizes the conceptual and methodological frame proposed by the author. The domains he refers to are not singular and the applicability of such a measuring and registration of religious data has positive scientific outcomes for all researchers on population study – demographers, sociologists, historians, geographers, economists etc. By facilitating the possibility to apply the system of indicators and the patterns of analysis, the author wishes to register the effects of the religious phenomenon at the macro and the micro-economic level. Thus, the author elaborates a system of indicators that support the quantitative methods of research meant to enable the comparative analyses of the intra and the inter-confessional, of the intra and the inter-communitarian, and of the national or the international. The need to complete and, if necessary, to elaborate new elements in the system of indicators that view the religious phenomenon is evident for any researcher at present. The effort to understand religious phenomena on objective, scientific grounds has been an important endeavor from the beginning of sociology (see the theories elaborated by the founders of sociology, Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, in their delineation of the religious phenomenon). Herțeliu follows the same path and the system of indicators that he projects has the role to coherently and consistently analyze religious phenomena, in a quantitative way. The importance of religion to the electoral behavior, the influence of religion on the formation of political attitudes, the links between religion and the system of values are directions that have been taken in the second half of the 20th century and the first half of the 21st. The transformations of the religious in contemporary society has

generated analysis and studies in social sciences that all provided conceptual schemes, instruments and analysis patterns meant to enable better understanding of the connections between politics, economy, culture, politics and psychology.

Two important parts of the book, chapters 3 and 4, deal with the methodological aspects of the religious phenomenon. The third section of the work presents, in a systematic and standardized way, the system of indicators and their structure, containing a series of subsystems that include various categories of indicators: indicators of context (socio-cultural, demographic, political, economic), indicators of classification of the religious system, participation indicators, level and structure indicators, indicators of spiritual resources etc. Large sections in the book are meant to present these indicators and this is done in a standardized manner as the description of each indicator is based on the same set of elements: *name, purpose of use, method and relation of calculation, necessary data for the calculation of the indicator, data resources, the aggregation level, the interpretation of the indicator, quality standards and the characterization limits of the indicator* (p.66). The author uses a great number of indicators in the analysis of religious phenomena; yet, the list remains open and further indicators could be added to Herteliu's list because the dynamics and the complexity of religion entail periodic revisions of any system of indicators.

In chapter 4 Claudiu Herteliu presents the statistical methods of analysis of the links between the variables used for the study of religious phenomena, including the coefficients, the tests and statistical patterns used for the analysis of nominal, ordinal, dichotomic or categorizing variables. The addressee of this part of the paper, and of the whole book, actually, is a specific public that is interested in quantitative approaches, sharing the ground of statistics, demography, sociology, economy and undoubtedly interested in religious phenomena.

The present book is legitimized from the point of view of the statistician preoccupied with socio-economic and religious realities, in trying to delineate a conceptual and methodological framework meant to facilitate analyses and evaluations of the religious phenomenon from a quantitative point of view. Such attempt is to be considered for at least two reasons: little involvement of public and private institutions in the process of making such a system work and the connections and influences exercised on religious phenomena in diverse cultural, economic and social fields. The efforts made by research teams in the field of the sociology of population or of demography are adequately reflected as their work facilitates the evolutive presentation of the religious phenomena to a certain degree, depending on the consistence of official statistical information. The book provides a thorough presentation of the rich Transylvanian religious phenomena, covering detailed and consistent statistical data registered starting with the second half of the 18th century

(with the 1784-1787 census made during emperor Joseph II). The data that covered more than two decades were brought to the attention of the interested public by a multidisciplinary team, made up of sociologists, historians, demographers and anthropologists, coordinated by professor Traian Rotariu. The institutionalization of the research approaches in the field of demography and the sociology of population is meant to facilitate the construction of coherent interpretation and analysis patterns used by all researchers regardless of their temporal or space belonging. This is the hope that Claudiu Herțeliu refers to when attempting to contribute to the institutionalization of systematic, objective and standardized measuring of the social space. It is also the ambition of any social scientist that makes use of statistics when studying a population placed in a certain area or in a certain period of time.

A positive outcome of Claudiu Herțeliu's theoretical and methodological approach or of any similar approach would be to have it developed within an institutional framework meant to enable: (i) the increase of the quality and the efficiency of statistical research that uses official statistical information; (ii) the systematization of statistical data in order to support best decisions in the field of religion, education, macro and micro-economy etc. The system of indicators used by the author is perfectible; nevertheless, the attempt of the author to establish the methodological framework for quantitative methods is successful. The creation of the necessary frame of reference for the gathering and analysis of data regarding religious phenomena facilitates the possibility to make comparisons between various communities or the opportunity to do analysis inside a religion or between religions (at local, national and international level). The set-up of such a system and of the subsystems of indicators is followed by the attempt to integrate these approaches into diverse components of public life (aspects of macro-social nature: economy, administration) or into the private sphere (micro-social or micro-economic approaches). In other words, it is expected that the statistical data about the religious phenomenon and the quantitative analysis should contribute directly to the elaboration of better public policies and better decisions.