
Preface

Secularization has been described as an inevitable process that characterizes modern society in Lithuania and elsewhere. Secularization is usually understood as the decline of religion both in the public sphere and the life of individuals. Among sociologists of religion secularization – both as a theoretical concept and an empirical reality – has been a hotly debated topic since the middle of the 20th century. The debate has focused on the question whether secularization had to be understood as a complete disappearance of religion from the social life in the course of social evolution or it only refers to a type of religious change. What is missing in these discussions even today is a solid base of empirical data that would illustrate the variety of practical manifestations of secularization in support of either argument.

The research project “Peculiarities of the Process of Secularization in Lithuania: Intersections of Private and Public Religiosity” (Agreement No. VAT-22/2010), funded by the Lithuanian Science Council, aims to study religious change/secularization in Lithuania by investigating the impact of religion on the public sphere and on the ideas of national identity, changes in religious organizations, forms of individual religiosity and spirituality as well as the presence of new religions. Thus, the project addresses the question what it means to be religious in contemporary Lithuania.

This special issue of the journal “Culture and Society” contributes to the development of the sociology of religion in Lithuania. It presents findings of the first stage of the project. Describing the academic discussions on the concept of secularization and emphasizing the multidimensional character of secularization theory, its contradictions and evolution, the articles point towards new directions in the secularization debate.

The articles are organized in three parts. The first part comprised of the contributions of Jolanta Kuznecovienė, Milda Ališauskienė and Ingo W. Schröder focuses on the debates about secularization in the sociology and anthropology of religion. Kuznecovienė critically reviews a variety of secularization theories and concludes that the future sociological research in this field should focus on the construction of a new theoretical paradigm more suitable to explaining religious change in contemporary societies. Ališauskienė¹ analyzes

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changes within Peter Berger's secularization theory and their assessment by the sociologists of religion. Schröder's article discusses the complex ways the concepts of secularism and secularity are used in anthropological research.

The second part is dedicated to the relationship among individual, religion and society. Milda Ališauskienė and Ina Samuilova discuss the impact of Soviet modernization and forced secularization on individuals' religiosity in Soviet and postsoviet Lithuania. Egdūnas Račius and Vaida Norvilaitė describe the influence of secularization on the Muslim community in Lithuania. Their research findings on converts to Islam reveal a variety of attitudes towards the role religion in the public sphere.

The last part of the journal deals with the church-state relations. Donatas Glodenis analyzes models of the church-state relations from the perspective of rational choice theory. Rusnė Juozapaitienė's article focuses on a particular aspect of these relations, the institution of marriage as a possible empirical example of the secularization process in Lithuanian society.

We hope that the articles in this special issue of the journal "Culture and Society" will provoke discussions and open up new perspectives for further research on religious change, contemporary religion and religiosity in Lithuania.

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Guest editors