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Religious Sensemaking and Social Exclusion in the Western World

Abstract: This paper contains an analysis of the possible forms and functions of religious sensemaking in modern society. Based on the thesis of desecularisation the author discusses the changes caused in the relationship between individual and religion by the altering system of social relationships, along with a more detailed analysis of the relationship between social exclusion and religious sensemaking. The author argues that owing to the complex nature of modernity people's uncertainty absorption mechanisms prefer distinction schemes that apply clear sensemaking distinctions which remain stable over a longer period of time. The author finds that the key role of religious communication lies in that it can more effectively shape the identities of people than other social mechanisms, in the sense that it can offer an experience of certainty. The author discusses the situation of social exclusion as a particular area of religious sensemaking when the person's fundamentally positive self-evaluation that has developed in the existing sensemaking situation reflecting on the individual himself can no longer be or can hardly be maintained any longer.

Keywords: religion, religious sensemaking, desecularisation thesis, identity, social exclusion, system theory, social and communication theory

Religion and Religious Communication in Social Scientific Discourse

The relationship between modern society and religious sensemaking has, from the very beginning, been something of a neuralgic point for those working out interpretations of modernity. This is said because the dawning new era, rooted in the tradition of the enlightenment, defined itself as the very opposite of the religious view of the world. In the context of interpretation showing modernity as the process of becoming rationalised, religious sensemaking presented thereby inevitably the perspective of an earlier era. From this aspect religion expressed the worldview embodying traditionalism, an ideology that is to be defeated, one that it is time to surpass, or in other words, the world of myths ([Horkheimer/Adorno 1981](#)) endangering the 'project of modernity' ([Habermas 1998](#)). In this way the interpretation of modernity was often linked, on the one hand, to a drive to diminish the role of religious sensemaking, and on the other hand with the description of the process whereby transcendent contents referring back to an earlier historical era are gradually eliminated. Modernity was, in this way, identified as the process of secularisation.

This change in society has, also in the field of the sociology of religion in the narrow sense of the term, also brought about interpretations discussing the dying away of religion or at least the pushing aside of religious sensemaking ([Wilson 1969; Martin 1978; Aldridge](#)

2000; Bruce 2002, 2011a; Dobbelaere 2004).¹ The most essential change in this particular field has, during recent decades, been the very process whereby instead of questioning the role of religion in modern society, interpretations emphasising the possibilities of religious sensemaking in the circumstances of modernity, have gained ground. (At the same time, a revision of the secularisation thesis has also taken place.)² As a consequence of the change in perspective, trying to explain the disappearance of religion from modern society is no longer the most exciting problem for the sociology of religion. Instead, researchers have been trying to find out why religion has survived in the changed social circumstances and what particular forms religion takes in a modern society (Casanova 1994, 2009; Berger 1999; Stark and Finke 2000; Hammond 2000; Hervieu-Léger 2000; Lyon 2000; Norris and Inglehart 2004; Taylor 2007; McGuire 2008).

Later on we will discuss religion's role in modernity, still on the basis of the desecularisation thesis, applying the elements of the system theory approach and, in particular, Niklas Luhmann's social theory analyses (Luhmann 1987, 1998). This study analyses the relationship between religious sensemaking and modern society in a general social theory framework, in view of the relationship between the subsystems comprising and functionally structuring modernity.³ This study is primarily an analysis of the western region of global society since this is where the functional structuring of modernity that has repositioned the role of religion in society has developed in its purest form. By focusing on a particular segment of this extensive field of study, I will scrutinise changes in the relationship between individual and religion triggered by the altered system of social relationships and in this regard I will also analyse, in more detail, the relationships between social exclusion and religious sensemaking in the western region.

Working out a definition for religion is still a very difficult task despite the hundred-year tradition of the sociology of religion. One common feature of older and more recent attempts at coming up with a definition (Beckford 2003; Turner 2006; Bruce 2011b; Woodhead 2011; Borowik 2011; Davidsen 2012) is that each of them has traditionally been dealing with the contents of religion in an action theory context. Luhmann and his followers' (Beyer 2006; Pace 2011) perspective of religion embedded in a system theory however, views religion as a particular field of social communication. In this way we regard communication as a relationship between two persons aiming at coming to an understanding where the participating parties are trying to work out shared meanings through interpreting each other's cognitive schemes only through communication contents. Since the Luhmannian perspective highlights sensemaking in the process of communication, exploring how religion can create certainty in an ocean of contingencies, in studying religion it focuses on religious belief. On the other hand however, this does not rule out the possibility of

¹ On the tradition the sociology of religion and on recent approaches also, see Grace Davie's summary work (Davie 2007).

² The question dealt with has also changed in relation to the interpretation of regional changes in the exercising of religion. What needed to be clarified in the heyday of the secularisation thesis was why the deep religiousness of the United States of America was not following the European secularisation pattern. Today the exceptional European situation is being interpreted all over the world in the context of strong and indeed, increasingly strong religiousness (Berger 2001, 2005; Davie 2002).

³ We have no room here to discuss regional differences in modernity and their religious implications in substance since it would take analyses to a monographic depth (see Norris/Inglehart 2004).

analysing from the Luhmannian perspective the social actualisation of religious belief, that is, religious practice.

Religion can be identified in society on the basis of the special form of communication. Religion is distinguishing the visible from the invisible. In this sense religion always deals with a dual reality: on the one hand with the immanent, the actual, and on the other hand with the transcendent, imaginary reality. Consequently, communication can be regarded as religious communication when it views the immanent from the aspect of the transcendent. From the distinction between immanence and transcendence or, as Peter Beyer proposed, between blessed and curved (Beyer 2006: 62–116) then it follows that religious communication (also as a particular actualising of the code value of transcendence (Luhmann 2002: 7–52) or blessed (Beyer 2006)⁴) is capable of expressing experience and thoughts beyond day-to-day experience. Accordingly, the events of the world are given a religious meaning only from the perspective of the transcendent or, in Beyer's work, of the blessed, consequently sensemaking will be a special function of the transcendent or the blessed. In view of that Luhmann's analysis and his followers (Beyer, Pace) stick with the substantive concept of religion when in defining religion they attach priority to the transcendent or the supra-empirical aspect (McGuire 2002: 8–14). Thus in the sections below we will analyse the possibilities of religious sensemaking understood as described above, in an era of modernity when religious communication can take place under societal conditions that are significantly different from those prevailing earlier on.

Religion in a Functionally Structured Modern Society

The system theoretical description of modern society identifies profound changes in comparison to the earlier premodern era that affect even the contents and social position of religious sensemaking. This is said because the evolution of the functionally structured subsystems questions even the earlier self-explanatory supremacy of religion in explaining the phenomena of the world. Certain constituent elements that are getting increasingly distanced from religious contents have been evolving in the macro-structure of society (Martin 2005). Accordingly, modernity entails a differentiation of the secular sphere in the course of which such subsystems are getting emancipated from religious institutions and norms) (Casanova 1994, 2006).

As one of the segments of secularisation, from the aspect of religious sensemaking, this results in the questioning of its former role defining the whole and the entirety of rationality through the rationalities of the subsystems that are independent of religious sensemaking. The universalism of religious communication becomes relativised in the functionally structured society of modernity. Religion's so typical distinction between what is inevitable and what is impossible, is less and less structuring the connections of communication. In contrast to the earlier historical era social communication of modernity has come to be determined in essence by contingencies (Luhmann 1987).

⁴ For more details on the historical metamorphoses of religious communication and its organisation into an autopoietic system see the relevant parts of Niklas Luhmann's posthumous religion sociology work (Luhmann 2002: 187–224, 250–277).

Religion's sensemaking that covers all of the components and aspects of a society therefore definitely comes to an end at the end of the historical era characterised by stratification. However in the integration of modern society it has a role that, in a special context, is different from the roles of the other subsystems. Based on the recognitions of the Luhmannian religion sociology (Luhmann 1977, 1984, 1994a, 2002)⁵ and in contrast to Parsons's and Bellah's analysis this particular role is not attributed to religion's capability of integrating society. Although the moral content of the religious message is often viewed as a factor that is capable of laying down the foundations for solidarity in society, nonetheless we have serious doubts as to whether it can constitute the basis of social integration in the complex system of relationships of modernity. For if one keeps an eye on the polysemic features of modernity that appear in the different rationalities of the subsystems, one finds it highly doubtful whether the moral message comprised in the religious content is capable of providing for a unity over the various subsystems having their different rationalities. It is considered to be unlikely, particularly because the functionally structured subsystems of modern society equally apply rationalities (e.g. viability, lawfulness, informativeness, beauty etc.) that are different from religious sensemaking in their own specific communications and it necessarily entails a decrease in the role of moral integrating sociality (Luhmann 1993: 432). The subsystems organise their communications with an 'amoral' distinction in the functional structure of modernity whereby it self-evidently renounces society's moral integration (Luhmann 2008: 259–260),⁶ even if moral communication indubitably has an integrative function as well, as a symbolically generalised communication medium (Luhmann 2008a).⁷

One consequence of the social change is that the shared worldview that can be conveyed by religion can no longer integrate the communication of the diversely structured social subsystems. Although both Parsons and Bellah considered religion to be a form of social consensus, religion provides such core values for them that this may be a basis for order, stability and cultural homogeneity (Parsons 1960, 1968, 1973, 1974; Bellah 1970, 1985). It follows from the Luhmannian analyses that modern society's macro level (at the

⁵ For Luhmann's religion sociology see also the works of Peter Beyer (Beyer 1994, 2001).

⁶ The process of society's modernisation can, in this aspect, be described in terms of a dual trend. In parallel with the relativising of moral communication, religion's moralisation also takes place. In other words, while in the premodern societies religious communication had (particularly in its relationship to the outside world) been morally indifferent, with morality religious communication is permeated by the moral recognition-contempt distinction. (According to Armin Nassehi this change reflects religion's response to the subsystems' secularisation endeavours. Nassehi finds that religion that has been forced into the defensive by the subsystems' rationality that is independent of religion, can go on the offensive again using the instrument of moralising and this would explain religion's strongly moralising message particularly towards individuals, in modern society [Nassehi 2003]. The increased role of morals is indicated by the fact that it is actually considered by Peter Beyer to be the second code of religion in modernity [Beyer 2006: 87–88].)

⁷ The recognition-contempt code of moral communication applies a distinction preselecting the possible connections of communication by identifying desirable and undesirable (or even forbidden) acts for individuals. In social compensation this results in a decrease in complexity in social communication that also orientates further connections of communication by confirming societally preferred actions. In this sense moral communication can even create more or less common values. This then, even if it cannot provide an ultimate basis for social communication, may strengthen the integration of society by the deliberate exclusion (or repressing) of certain actions.

societal level) that religion plays no fundamental integrating role unifying subsystems.⁸ These however, do not mean that the shared values manifested in the religious messages play no role in the organisation of social communication. The values can contribute to communication having such stable structures that result in a higher likelihood of further connections in communication (Luhmann 1991). Accordingly, religion could express such common values even in the circumstances of modernity that help successful connections of an increasingly complex social communication and to this extent they even have a positive impact on system integration. Structural connections between the functional subsystems of modern society however, are not based on values stemming exclusively from religion, rather, they are one of the communication media enabling system integration (Luhmann 1998: 190–412).

A decrease in the belief in the self-evident nature of the shared religious values⁹ appears in the description of the structure of social change. The polysemic nature of the values of modern society is reflected by the changes in the structure of society observed during recent decades. Accordingly, along with the changing of the structure of society, value propositions are increasingly expressing the social semantics of the given milieu and they are growing increasingly distant from those principles—which can be shared by all—this could constitute the common value base of the society, regardless of milieu membership (Schulze 1993). In the altered social environment the clearly fixed value propositions of the religious message cannot so much expect to express the semantics of the whole of society, and thus to function as the basis of integration. Though this does not rule out the possibility of religious sensemaking enabling social integration on the basis of the common principles of a given (milieu) group, yet it will not necessarily match the viewpoint of the entirety of a milieu, for the very reason of the fact that milieus' semantics are of a primarily non-religious nature. If however, religious sensemaking is capable of integrating even certain social groups (Casanova 2001: 434–438; Martin 2002; Csordas 2007), this commitment to such sensemaking is bound to comprise certain social conflicts in the communication with other milieus rejecting these values.

In another aspect however, there is a serious potential for religious sensemaking in modern society as well. Starting off from the recognitions of the Luhmannian system theory its attributes can be interpreted in view of the typical changes in the patterns of communication in society. At this point I am referring to the segment of the Luhmannian analysis according to which the communication of the modern society cannot exist without resolving uncertainties caused by its very own operation. One key feature of modernity is, however, that the inevitable and the impossible are both dissolved in the efforts of the society's functionally segregated subsystems at achieving completeness (Luhmann 2006). This is said because

⁸ The Luhmannian social theory differs from the religion concept of his former mentor Talcott Parsons, particularly as explained in the latter's later work even its view of the role of religion (see Joas 2001).

⁹ This transformation is shown in an explicit and implicit way by two important works of the sociology of religion. In their comprehensive work, undertaking a global scrutiny of religiousness, Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart (Norris/Inglehart 2004) find in the western world a decrease in the role played by transcendent contents and an overall secularisation of shared values. Although Rodney Stark and Roger Finke's rational action theory (Stark/Finke 2000) argue that the 'demand' in society for the religious message has remained unchanged, in relation to the American large denominations they describe a continuous process of liberalisation in the religious principles and an adjustment to the values of the secular society.

the rationality of all of these function systems of modern society—as the various particular facets of society (e.g. economy, arts, education, schooling etc.)—is striving for totality beyond any doubt. Each of those specific areas can, however, only apply and enforce this general validity in its own subsystem’s own communication and outside the given subsystem it has no significance determining or dominating communication. In other words, it means only the possibility of a universal orientation that, when reaching the boundaries of the subsystem, finds itself in a different context of meaning.

The possibility of religious sensemaking lies particularly in this specific feature of modernity. Just as the self-evident role of religion in the premodern society could also be explained by the organisation of the entirety of sociality, its sensemaking capability that can be observed in general in the circumstances of modernity also becomes suitable for interpretation through a restructuring of the general features of social communication. This is said because the functional structuring of modernity entails a multi-directional change for religion that brings about the questionability of the religious content in the course of the evolution of the autonomous rationality of the functional subsystem. Another specific feature of modernity is, besides this trend that is indubitably eroding the dominance of religion, that it creates by far the most complex organisation in comparison to all previous societies. The increase in complexity however, results not only in an increase in the load bearing capacity of the various subsystems but it also entails an inevitable increase in the possibility of instability.

Accordingly, owing to the internal closedness (universalism) of the various subsystems and the possibility of the connection of a new communication, the organisation of communication is of a dual nature: the subsystems indicate what has a communicative value for themselves, without determining the contents of new communication. This then increases the contingency communication in society. Moreover, the increased instability of the various subsystems and the entirety of the complex society entails increased and more unexpected structural changes than had been observed in earlier eras. This then carries the risk of a high complexity system—resulting in high instability—becoming inclined to respond to its own instability (Luhmann 2009: 206–207). This specific feature of modernity affects not only the contingent connections of social communication but also individuals themselves. No matter how the system tries to tackle the problem by expanding the expectation structures, one of the key questions of modernity from the aspect of persons’ identity is to what extent the complexity of sociality is linked to the structural characteristics of the system of the psyche. Is the individual really capable of living with the modern combination of certainties and uncertainties and the resulting—and, moreover, constantly changing—instabilities?

It is hardly possible to contest the assertion that the uncertainty absorption of individuals prefers distinction schemes that bring about unambiguity and stability in the medium of societal communication exposed to unceasing changes and instabilities. Owing to the increased dynamic of social communication, persons need, in addition to the above, schemes that will retain their sensemaking distinction enabling individuals’ orientation, even in a longer run. This is the system of relationships where religious communication can, rather than in other areas of sociality, resort to shaping persons’ identity, to the extent that it can offer the experience of certainty in the sea of uncertainties of modernity. As Luhmann

put it, religion's social function is to render the undeterminable—the world that cannot be closed from the outside (from the aspect of the environment) and from the inside (from the aspect of the system)—determinable. That is, religious communication can best create a possibility for reflection on the unity of the world in that the orientation of the system of religion aims at the universal, in contrast to other systems (economy, law etc.), each of which focuses only on the functioning of a single subsystem of society.

Accordingly, religion plays a key role in social integration. This effect however, is reflected not at society's macro level but in the strengthening of the connection between the functional subsystems, just as had been assumed by Parsons's functionalist analysis. Functionalist subsystems are less in need of religion's sensemaking role than were earlier eras, but religion may play a major role in people's social orientation. In contrast to the theory of the slow demise of religion we can rather highlight the possibility stemming from the complexity of modernity for religious communication. In other words, it is not necessarily a decrease in the functionality or importance of religion that we perceive in the process of modernity as have been perceived so often by representatives of sociological tradition (see also Bruce 1992; Glendinning-Bruce 2011; Bruce 2011a), but an adaptation to the conditions of modern society.

Social Exclusion and Religious Sensemaking

In this study we cannot analyse the possibilities of religious sensemaking in every last segment of modernity. From this point on I will focus on one particular area of the whole complex set of issues. I will examine how in relation to the subsystems the universalism of religion appears as a communication channel that provides for the involvement of persons excluded from the functionally organised subsystems in the western world. (The trends noted here apply to other regions of global society as well, but the structure of modern social subsystems has most fully evolved in the western world that is dominated by Christianity. In view of that this is also where the resulting structural changes are the strongest.) To do so, I need to refer back to the late period of Luhmann's social theory. For in his late studies (Luhmann 1998; 2005, 2008d: 226–251), alongside the dual concept of inclusion-exclusion, Luhmann takes account of the possibility that in the course of the operation of functional subsystems providing for the inclusion of everybody in general, even a significant proportion of the population may happen to be excluded from the communication provided for by the subsystems.¹⁰ The reason for this is that differentiation that is the essence of modernity, is not only accompanied by the separation of the various subsystems (if the various subsystems create rationalities, definitely segregated from those of the other subsystems, organised on the basis of their own autonomy) but the structural connections and dependencies of the various subsystems also increase (Luhmann 2005: 268; Luhmann 1998: 745). In other words, modern society creates a structure of subsystems depending on one another to such an extent that even the day-to-day operation of any given functional subsystem is only possible through very close connections to the other subsystems.

¹⁰ According to Luhmann the issue of exclusion has spawn interpretations of multiple perspectives but each equally fitting in the system theory framework (Stichweh 2000, 2005; Stichweh & Windolf 2009).

This increased mutual reliance among the various subsystems however, entails not only an increase in mutual dependencies. In regard to the persons participating in communication among subsystems this may result in that if they get excluded from one subsystem, then this exclusion is very likely to lead to their losing their communication connections with the other subsystems as well. To illustrate this by way of an example: one who has no identification cards or other similar documents cannot participate in organised training, then he will have no job, cannot marry legally, his children will not get registered etc. Owing to the very strong structural connection and dependency among subsystems this process leads to exclusion, instead of the inclusion by the subsystems. Though this exclusion may produce a negative integration (which may affect a significant proportion of the population particularly in Latin-American countries) for those excluded from everywhere, but it renders exclusion from the subsystems of the functional structuring constituting modernity into a process rather difficult to reverse. One consequence of this then is that the persons concerned are quite naturally at the bottom of the hierarchic structure of society (besides negative integration) since being excluded from the subsystems is bound to entail losing access to the sources of success in society.

Religion is the only one among modern society's functional subsystems that keeps its openness even when the individual has been excluded from all other subsystem of the society. The reason for this is that owing to its specific form of organisation perhaps this is the only subsystem in modern society that has hardly any connection to the other subsystems (Luhmann 1998: 787; 2002). In the circumstances of modernity religion that used to represent the key integration principle in the archaic and in the stratified society—very probably owing to its former omnipotence—is, in this sense, negatively privileged in the structure of subsystems. The reason for this in my view is that in the course of the evolution of modernity all of the constituent elements of society that had embarked on the way towards organising their own autopoieses, could find their own respective self-referentialities in the very dissociation from religion that had played a central role at that time. Consequently, their social communications were oriented not towards religion but towards societal elements in a similar position, also making efforts to rid themselves of the omnipotence of religion. This created the system of strong structural connections among themselves, which more or less excluded religion's subsystem from communication.

However, for the very same reason, the exclusion of religion from the relationships among subsystems can produce a positive connection for individuals excluded from the other subsystems.¹¹ This is said because the distinction applied by religious communication represents a rationality that is a lot less sensitive, in particular *in relation to persons*, to the environmental impacts of the other subsystems on the subsystem of religion, or, as Luhmann would put it, to the irritation caused by the system's autopoiesis. This does not mean that religion is immune to the functioning of the system of structural connections but that—as had already been explained—this system of structural connections is a lot less extensive in the case of religion than in the case of the other subsystems. This is not meant to say however, that religion is altogether without structural connections since religious

¹¹ By applying the system theoretic wording so liked by Luhmann the exclusion of religion from among the subsystems is linked to the individuals involved in the exclusion of subsystem in a way that for individuals this double exclusion results in inclusion by religion.

communication can only be conveyed in organisations and interactions that are connected by multiple links to other subsystems of modern society.

One particular feature of the subsystem of religion is therefore that it is linked to the other subsystems of modern society primarily through its organisations. We are talking about that duality delivered by modernity in which, while the distinction of religious communication shows a high degree of insensitiveness to the other subsystems distinction structure, its organisations are highly dependent on connection to the other subsystems. A religious organisation (particularly the church) can convey contents of belief only if the economic requisites of the organisation are available, if it is aligned to the principles of law that is determined by the society and—along with the rationality of the other subsystems—it takes the contents of political decisions also into account. The same structural connections operate at the system level of interaction as well, where religious communication in each other's presence—similarly to the organisation's system level—needs to be aligned to the rationality of the other subsystems and of the symbolically generalised communication media.

Presumably however, in relation to the fact that religious communication's contents are not linked to the everyday message of sociality but its specifics comprise (transcendent or blessed) contents going beyond the very same everyday issues, indeed sociality itself, religion also relates to the individual—participating and shaping his identity in social communication—in a way that is different from the other subsystems' relation to the individual. While communications relating to sociality are linked to one another on account of their very nature, religious communication can detach itself more than can the rationality of the other subsystems, from communications supporting the *direct* operation of sociality.¹² This type of difference then makes it possible for religion to create connections for the individual even when the individual is excluded by the rationality of the other subsystems from communication. The definitely greater role of the religious message that can be observed in such cases does not simply mean that religious contents can give solace in this clearly depressing situation, they can ease or eliminate the fear of the individual who has been excluded and who has thus ended up in a negative situation in the social hierarchy. The inclusion of religious communication appears in a universal form primarily in relation to the identity of individuals.

Keeping within the system theory context of our point of departure in our definition of identity as well, by identity we mean that autopoietic relationship which comes about through an iteration of operations and at the same time means the structure that recognises the repetition of iteration. In other words, we are talking about an autopoietically organised

¹² Of course in terms of system theory religious communication remains part of social communication even so since no communication is possible outside society. (It is a different question—one that is not discussed in detail here—that people's cognitive schemes and their religious contents are outside the society, constituting the environment of society organised in a systemic way.) The special nature of religious communication in society and particularly in modern society is that while its origin is linked to society (because religious contents are generated through the resolving of dual contingency through communication), in terms of its perspective (in turning towards transcendence) it goes beyond the systems of social relations. (In the historical eras preceding modernity the differences between religious and other communications were not so dramatic because in those eras religious communication focusing in terms of its perspective on the transcendent played a central role. And this positioning provided a primary point of reference even for other social communications that had been subordinated in the hierarchy to religion, thus they were also rather permeated by religion's transcendent content.)

relationship in which reason recognises its own limits in the process of the constitution of reason by applying external and internal reference within itself, *in its own* distinction (Luhmann 2008c: 137–161). In other words, identity is created by the reference of individual's self-referential functioning back to itself, as a meaningful unit. The organisation of the identity of persons is therefore of an intentional nature in the process of sensemaking as self-observation, where the individual has to determine—based on his prior autopoietic functioning—whether the next meaningful impulse is or is not suitable for connection.

Religious communication can appear as a sensemaking mechanism in situations in life where such an 'own' distinction structure becomes problematic. When the person's fundamentally positive self-esteem that has evolved hitherto in the sensemaking situation reflecting on his own can no longer be maintained or becomes very difficult to maintain. When the question of why things with her/him are not the way (s)he would like them to be arises in relation to the individual. In modern society in general, but particularly in developing regions in the situations experienced by large numbers of persons when exclusion from other systems takes place or which the individual experiences as the social situation right from the moment of his birth, the communication of the religious subsystem going beyond day-to-day realities can become a fundamental point of reference. For in this situation self-reflection cannot provide an answer to the question being faced (why are my things not the way they should be) and so the individual has to rely on an external sensemaking conveyed by communication. And this is the very thing guaranteed by religion for the individual that it can convert the indetermination and uncertainty that is experienced by the individual into something determined and certain in relation to all kinds of reasons.

This is a situation in life that needs not simply solace (that is, not only the function conventionally attributed to religion) but very often permits the redrawing of the individual's identity. This is the situation in life in which based on the existing structure of the identity one needs to find the contents of positive self-esteem while by exclusion the system of everyday social relationships communicates to the individual that the social fundamentals of this positive identity have run out. This is the reason why religious communication's distinction can fulfil a positive role in this structural position, since its contents can contribute to the recreation of the individual's positive identity in a way that in many respects (owing to the aforementioned insensitiveness) it is not dependent on impulses coming from the other subsystems that are uniformly conveying the messages of negative contents to which the individual has been exposed.¹³ Consequently then, the experience of the new-found certainty provides greater protection for the individual against mental illnesses (Emmons 1999). On the other hand the positive self-image created by religion affects the individual's social position in return and it provides an effective means for rendering the individual's social behaviour more successful (Saroglou, Corneille, Van Cappellen 2009).

Religion's outstanding role is based on the fact that, as explained above, its sensemaking not simply offers a chance for the individual's day-to-day survival, being the connection

¹³ If the finding of the contents of positive self-interpretation is linked to religious sensemaking, and it can place the individual's identity permanently on a new foundation, religious communication can profoundly overwrite the individual's relation to society as well (Beckford 1985). In this case even the plural sensemaking of modernity can diminish in importance for the individual and he then voluntarily undertakes that radical restriction of his own freedom which is an important element of small closed charismatic religious communities (for the latter see Eileen Barker's work [Barker 1984, 1996, 2003]).

between other subsystems and the person living in exclusion. The excluded individual's connection to the economic subsystem by illegal employment or his relation to other social subsystem (judicial, education etc.) ensures only his social presence but it is hardly likely to create the requisites for positive identification. Accordingly, the importance of religion stems from the fact that with the help of belief offered by religious communication the individual can fill his socially questioned or negatively perceived self-identity with positive content. It is very likely related to the above characteristic of religious communication that in nearly all regions of the global society created by modernity—in contrast to the thesis of religion's dying away and/or of the marginalisation of religious sensemaking—religious sensemaking appears to be playing an increasing role.

This historical change then obviously affects both the contents of religious communication and the structure of religious organisations (historical and small churches alike). Particularly where large social groups are excluded from the subsystems, and a need for this kind of religious sensemaking appears in wider groups of society, the content of religious communication is also getting restructured. The dogmatics evolving in the course of the inherent development of the various religions that has come about through thousands of years of institutionalisation and theological debate, becomes relative for these social group. Relation to matters of belief transmutes in each of the dimensions (social, chronological and objective) (Luhmann 2002: 134–135). Such religious interpretations of the world evolve that are in some cases significantly different from the formal dogmatics in the areas of confirmation in one's belief in the encounter with God, of the one-off nature of the revelation and in that of the close connection between unity and complexity.

Accordingly, this religious communication evolving in local cultic communities, comprising elements of superstition and tribal beliefs as well, refers to itself as belonging to one or another of the main world religions in a way that in a dogmatic sense it is rather more a variety of features that are different from the given religion (Killen/Silk 2004; McGuire 2008; Shibley 2011).¹⁴ This social change thus appears as a fundamental challenge for institutional religiousness and offers ample room for new religious movements. Conflicts emerge on the one hand in relation to the need for managing an increasing number of small communities that have been growing increasingly problematic in the sense of dogmatics but that have often been and are being more successful in tackling the dilemma of involvement and exclusion than institutional religious organisations,¹⁵ and on the other hand to the re-consideration and revision of the principles of institutionalised religiousness. Successful communication in the latter area needs to find connections to these kinds of new religious movements. However, on the other hand the partially accepting of their principles

¹⁴ In addition to examples from the US one may also think of the strong Maria cults widely spread in large negatively integrated social groups in the Latin-American region, whose dogmatics is at least as deeply rooted in the world of beliefs of the indigenous tribes as in the basic principles of Christianity.

¹⁵ As a consequence of the organisational positioning of the above small communities and the different dogmatic principles new religious communities have often appeared and are still springing up outside the large historical churches. In this aspect however, marked regional differences are observed. Latin-American Catholicism with its more tolerant dogmatic principles can, for the most part, integrate these religious groups, presumably not independently either from the fact that such small communities can hardly create group memberships that are effective at the organisation's system level as well. By contrast, in the case of the North-American Protestantism conditioned historically for institutional separatism as a consequence of the non-conformism cult of the puritans these religious communities often form separate units even at the organisational level.

does not deter even the faithful who are seeking for and finding orientation on the basis of the dogmatics of institutionalised religiousness either.¹⁶

Otherwise religious communication will take place increasingly outside the religious institutions or it will continue in a downright non-institutionalised form (Davidson 2012). On the other hand, the increasingly wide-spread appearance of the latter form clearly shows the individual's increasingly prominent social position and sacralisation (Joas 2008) in the communication of modern society; resulting in an increase in the number of individuals belonging to groups characterised as 'believing without belonging' (Davie 1994). Though without disputing religion's elements constituting collective memory (Hervieu-Léger 2000), however, these changes have been and are inevitably diminishing the role and significance of the conventional institutional forms of religiousness, providing ample room for what is referred to as "privatized experience-oriented religion" (Streib-Hood 2011). In other words, in search of certainties the belief "sits less and less easily within the dogmatic frameworks offered by institutional religions" (Hervieu-Léger 2006: 59).

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¹⁶ It is not only the religion concept adopted by the population excluded in increasing numbers from the functional subsystems that is causing problems for institutionalised religiousness. The fact that the number of those who are 'religious in their own way' is much larger according to religion sociology surveys than those practising their faith at church, shows that the ambiguous relation to the dogmatics of historic churches often affects even those getting positively integrated in the subsystems.

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