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APOCALYPTIC VISIONS AND THE PROBLEM OF REALITY

The chiliastic belief in the fulfillment of world's history which was typical of early Christianity has been considered heresy since roughly the 3rd century. Nevertheless the belief has periodically reappeared until our times, gaining larger or smaller popularity, becoming the basis of the millenaristic movement of functioning by itself, depending on the circumstances. Recently we can observe in Poland a vivid circulation of apocalyptic prophecies - though a regular movement does not emerge and the phenomenon still remains marginal in relation to traditional religion. Out of the 25 prophecies making the basis of the present analysis about 1/3rd are timed around the late 70ties and early 80ties. I obtained the texts from several different sources, usually in a natural way, being myself an element of spontaneous and informal distribution. Most of them are manuscripts and typed copies. They circulate from hand to hand, sometimes copied and shortened. The "samizdat" way of distribution makes them independent of state censorship and, at the same time, it makes them operate outside the official church circulation.

Out of all features of religion in general and the apocalyptic prophecies in particular, we are interested in the aspect which co-originate and integrates the "finite province of meaning" according to religious foundations. This Schutzian term refers to distinctive worlds of experience. Alfred Schutz, following William James, speaks about "multiple realities"<sup>1</sup>. The man participates in many different provinces of meaning of which every one can be at a time "bestowed the accent of reality" and opposed to the illusive.

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<sup>1</sup>A. S c h ü t z, On Multiple Realities, "Philosophy and Phenomenological Research" 1945, vol. IV.

Various worlds of fantasy, the world of dreams, the child's world and in particular the world of everyday life (in a way the "paramount" one, which marks the outline of basic meanings) are such provinces. The separate identity of these worlds in relation to each other is due to the fact that the experience of each of them is internally coherent, not contradictory, and consistent with a relevant "specific cognitive style"<sup>2</sup>. A direct passage from one world to another, a kind of natural transformation is impossible. The shifting of the accent on the reality is accompanied by an existential shock, connected with rapid modification of the tension of consciousness specific to each given world.

From this point of view the question about the place of religion in human life becomes a question about the relation between the reality of religion and the world of everyday life. This relation is socio-structurally conditioned and it is historically variable. According to Thomas Luckmann one can distinguish between two diametrically different arrangements of the social foundations of religious reality<sup>3</sup>. In the first type, characteristic of archaic and primitive communities, the whole social structure forms the social basis for religious reality. Religion is widespread among various parts and institutions of the society. There may be differences in the social distribution of religious reality, esp. generational and sexual, but these differences are not structurally "necessary". Religion pervades the kinship system, the division of labor and the exercise of power. On the subjective side, the meaning of ordinary conduct, insofar as it is defined and sanctioned by social institutions, is linked either directly or indirectly to that sacred reality. Sacred norms make conduct legitimate in a great variety of social situations and at all relevant stages of individual life.

An opposite kind of arrangement of the social means of transmission and maintenance of the religious reality is characteristic of the modern industrial society. Here we come across a full specia-

<sup>2</sup>"Specific tension of consciousness, specific epoché, specific form of spontaneity, specific form of experience of ego, specific socialization, specific time perspective".

<sup>3</sup>T. Luckmann, The Structural Conditions of Religious Consciousness in Modern Societies, "Japanese Journal of Religious Studies", March-June 1979, vol. 6.

lization of religious functions in the chosen modes of organization which, because of the label "religious", are separated from other forms of social life. Therefore a set of institutions are engaged in supporting and transmitting the religious reality. Since a certain moment in the history of Western culture the process of institutional specialization has been accompanied by the phenomenon of cultural pluralism. Late in the Middle Ages the "social universality of religion" vanished and as a result many potentially competing systems of ideas which were tied to their individual social bases were created.

At the level of individual consciousness the phenomenon of institutionalization of religion described by Luckmann gave rise to a definite space-temporal demarcation between everyday experiences and the religious sub-universum. To be more specific the religious institution is present in everyday life as a moral authority or by means of political action but the religious reality as such is distinguished from the world of everyday life and is adequately labelled.

Apocalyptic prophecies question this demarcation line in a manner more than decisive, because they imply a world in which religious experience is an integral part of everyday experience. The glossators (editors) of prophetic texts discover with surprise that the Church is not enthusiastic about apocalyptic visions. The integrity, religious legitimacy and the rooting in the everyday life of this new universum, generated by the texts, are effects of the apocalyptic contents and, in the second place, of the site and circumstances of revelations.

Visions take place everywhere: during solitary meditations, but also during farm work or in a dream. Sometimes they are experienced in public places (e.g. at a well) and are witnessed by many people. Persons who experience visions are in a way predisposed to this role, due to their piety and purity of heart but on the other hand their commonness, lack of education and accidentality is stressed. They have visions which carry them away for a moment from their petty worries. "The instrument of the Holy Virgin is a peasant woman, mother of six children she has brought up with her hard-working hands; she lives in a big city in Hungary, unknown to the world [...]. All her education is four grades of primary school". Similar presentations repeat frequently.

Another form of direct manifestation of transcendence (besides revelations) are the observed or merely foretold miraculous signs. "The first sign shall show when all the creatures start sweating blood. The second sign when the sun, the moon and the stars are red of colour and the blood red light shall they shine". The core of the miracle is its paradoxical character, binary opposition to naturalness. "The more the world is now hostile towards the supernatural, the more miraculous and extraordinary will be the facts which will put to shame this denial of the supernatural". What used to be natural, is still natural after the miracle, gaining merely an ironical dimension.

The catastrophic time perspective is a basic modification of the structure of the world and at the same time an integrating factor. Thus, an additional social differentiation, a dichotomic division into those predestined to be saved (to survive) and those to be damned becomes relevant because the plagues shall not affect everybody to the same extent. "On this Coming there shall be mercy and also a terrifying punishment [...]. The Angels summoned to do this duty shall be armed with swords. They shall turn against those who don't believe in revelation and who commit blasphemy". Nearly all prophecies introduce new specific forms of religious actions. Sometimes it is a special prayer, counting rosary, a new holiday, a novenna or erecting a chapel at the site of revelation. A central area and central symbols are usually also established in this way. All this is connected with the fulfillment of the prophecy and is done to avert the flow of events or to diminish the punishment.

The culmination of the integration of the catastrophic consciousness is the vision of the world as a whole. The very word "world" is constantly repeated. General judgements and total descriptions dominate. The world is perceived in its development, but its history is seen as a sacred history, with the clear perspective of the decline and elevation. "The world fails to stop offending God by mortal sins [...] There multiply murders, theft, all kind of slaughter, depravation of young souls, abortion, homosexuality condemned by God Almighty. Sin has become standard practice in life. Even the highest judges in all countries of this world are lenient towards the sin. What you have sown, you will reap [...]. The wars are punishment for the sins of man, his greed and his meanness".

Generally speaking, the basic characteristic of the apocalyptic (catastrophic) consciousness is a double structure of the perceived world: the experiences of reality, retaining their primary meanings, reveal in a way their double bottom. The primary sense which is purely pragmatic obtains its "ultimate" complementation. In particular, a new dimension is given to this level of human action which is based on the assumption of continuity. Now we can see the "alienation" of social institutions: they lose their obviousness and at the same moment become problematic. That is why utmost reserve is required as far as the social data are concerned. "When you open your door, you enter the world which is now led by governments and even the agents of hell in the Church of My Son, by financial dynasties, national and international governments, leading to conflict. You must protect your mass-media, even those, that called themselves Catholic, Roman-Catholic. Infiltration, My Children, is now everywhere".

Here we have the catastrophic consciousness with specific religious assumptions and foundations, where the reality of religion does not want to separate itself from everyday life. To the contrary, it is deeply rooted in it, pervading all its areas, resulting in paradox and in a new layer of meanings. Those, who live on apocalypse will not meet at esoteric mysteries. It is rather housekeeping and a matter-of-fact approach that is required. "As early as today we must put some holy wax in the basement windows and the key holes and in the Three Days of Darkness one must seal up all little holes. Prepare dried bread and rolls for a long time and now from time to time eat a little piece of holy bread, that will protect you from fear, from starvation and from thirst".

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#### WIZJE APOKALIPTYCZNE I PROBLEM REALNOŚCI

Artykuł jest świadectwem szerszych zainteresowań autora, dotyczących nieortodoksyjnych tekstów parareligijnych (tzw. przepowiedni) oraz możliwości ich analizy w fenomenologicznych kategoriach A. Schutza, a także przy zastosowaniu socjologicznych koncepcji T. Luckmanna, odnoszących się do przemian religijności w społeczeństwie współczesnym.