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Being prophetic in a secular society: a new call?!
Summary & challenges for the future

Sr. Nicole Grochowina repeated the words of Bob Dylan: "The order is rapidly fading". This is happening on a societal level (individualization, moral relativism, …), political level (intolerance towards minorities, religious actors, ….), communicational level (digitalization, fake news, echo chambers) and religious level (multi-religiosity, etc.). Certainties of the past are replaced by uncertainties and 'fluid or temporal' certainties.[i] How do religious communities, movements and organizations react on this?" ☐ The new order of a "fluid" societal context, creates not only uncertainty, but also an actual situation where religious communities, movements and organizations feel themselves 'out of control', because of a decreased and unclear societal role and function: a situation where fear and 'actions of fear' as Grochowina mentioned, rules, combined with feelings of being meaningless.

In his book, Frank Furedi speaks about a general 'Culture of fear'.[ii] . Like many other social actors, religious communities and organizations have started to 'secure' themselves, not by taking out insurance, but by isolating themselves, and isolating their own group from as many intrusive influences as possible that could disrupt the internal regulation of group. This counter-strategy against fear and insecurity that they apply will be rather counterproductive in the post-secular context of society.

How is it that, in general, religious communities, movements and organizations have ended up in a sort of apparent 'state of dormancy' and are rather latently continuing their social functioning on the social background, while in a very near past they were prophetic[iii] and the visible and invisible 'fire' or driving force behind social and pastoral action, innovation and even profound societal change, especially for those who were excluded from the society.

Grochowina translated this into the question: "What measures do religious institutions take to encode the signs of the time they are living in? What conclusions are they drawing from this? How does that shape the processes they are involved in and the spirituality and charisma they are grounded on?"

In the next Alinea , I'll provide five statements. Each statement contains both a challenge and a normative condition for encoding the signs of the time and being prophetic 'again' (to realize a new call) as religious communities, movements and organizations in a post-secular time.

Five statements:

1. Avoid isolating yourself as a religious community and organization as a counter strategy for fear.

2. Embrace the new societal context: from secular to a post-secular society

a. Religious communities, movements and organizations receive a fundamental and inspirational advice from an unexpected side, namely from the 'pope of secularism' Jürgen Habermas. For Habermas, the fact that we have become aware that although religion no longer has the meaning to society and to the lives of many people that it used to have, it has not become completely meaningless, but is still relevant. Therefor a communicative practice or a dialogue need to be established. And if

you're acting authentic (maybe a different way to express being prophetic?) in the public sphere, know the basics of your religious tradition.

b. According to this new societal context: religious communities, movements and organizations receive some strategic advice of Grochowina: "Do not learn to swim, but jump into the water!", or also from Callebaut: "just start, don't think too much', or from Stoppels: "walk on the water".

3. Accept the external and internal diversity as a fact, not a threat.

a. Accept a reality check. Stoppels directly refers to this in his first of three offset stakes: "We do not choose each other", so we can't longer avoid each other, and we have to deal with others.

b. Which attitude is needed for this? Tolerance. This refers to what Droste mentioned: the virtue of tolerance will be needed to realize this.

4. Rediscover, question and retranslate one's own identity – take time for a 'public sabbath'

a. Different authors have mentioned the importance of the concept of 'identity' in being prophetic. An understanding (or self-knowledge – Hasselaar) of both the identity of individuals and of the group where the individual belongs too, is crucial. Maybe a 'public sabbath' can be an helpful instrument to initiate this reflection process?

In my own work 'identity' is the starting point for individuals and/or groups to concentrate and to answer on new and old ecclesial and/or social dynamics and problems. Three concepts are important, and they're logically interconnected with each other. The starting point is identity, followed by the catalyst of non-violent communication: if you've an understanding of your individual and collective identity, you'll be able to communicate on a more non-violent way. This specific kind of communication will directly influence the way how you lead a group or an organization. This leadership will (must) be recognized by others (alterity), and will affect your identity-construction.[iv]

5. Be 'generous' for others and yourself

Use the five forms of capital or the 'available resources' that will be needed to be prophetic: the spiritual capital (the tradition), social capital (the people), the cultural capital (the ideas peoples have about themselves on a certain moment, time and space)[v], the physical capital (the buildings) and the economic capital (the money and belongings). These five resources are interwoven with each other, but the starting point must always be the spiritual capital.

Conclusion

Although the secular society is intriguing, it can easily be seen as something negative. But in the different contributions I notice there's still hope and a future for religious communities, movements and organizations. But, the reality is hard, and for being prophetic, religious communities, movements and organizations face serious challenges. The next question is: "How do religious communities, movements and organizations will concretize this, and witch support is needed?"In my opinion, both the reflection and an offer of tools and support, need further investigation.

ICL-Model (Wim Vandewiele, 2018)

[i] Cfr Zygmunt Bauman,Liquid Modernity, Polity Press & Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000;Id., Liquid Times. Living in an age of Uncertainty, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2007. See also the contribution of Tom Callebaut and the fluid boundaries.

[ii] Frank Furedi, Culture of Fear: Risk Taking and the Morality of Low Expectation, Continuum International Publishing Group, 1997; The Politics of Fear. Beyond Left and Right, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005.

[iii] See the contribution of Sr Catherine Droste.

[iv] Triangular ICLModel (Identity, Communication, Leadership). See Wim Vandeiwiele, KUL_Presentation_Colloquium_%20Ealing%20Abbey_02032019.pdf, 2018.

[v] Culture can change: Callebaut showed us the transition of 'sacred spaces to generous spaces', Stoppels the transition from 'we' to 'I'. See their contributions.