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**ФІЛОСОФІЯ РЕЛІГІЇ**  
**PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION**

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DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/hst-2024-19-96-16>**TRANSFORMATION OF THE IDEA OF THE SACRED IN MODERN SOCIETY****OKSANA, PANKO<sup>1</sup>****Abstract**

The ideas of modern man about the sacred are considered, which today is understood not only as metaphysical, religious, but increasingly characterizes everyday aspects of life that are of particular importance for the individual and society. **The purpose** of the article is to study the idea of the sacred in modern man, society in the conditions of secularization. **The tasks** are to analyze the views of researchers regarding the transformation of the concept of the sacred; find out the influence of the modern cultural situation on this process; to consider the peculiarities of experiencing the sacred as secular. The transformation of the idea of the sacred means spreading the understanding of it, which expresses the significant values of a person, society, phenomena, objects, ideas, symbols, relations of a secular nature. This expanded understanding of the sacred, initiated by E. Durkheim, is shared and developed by a part of modern researchers. The views of scientists regarding the change in the idea of the sacred are analyzed. It is proved that such beliefs are established in connection with the deepening of secularization, which means the reduction of the social influence of religion and the related understanding of the sacred, the spread of the values of individualism, consumerism, hedonism, the priority of the material over the spiritual, the immanent over the transcendent, value relativism. It turns out that the modern economic and cultural situation leads to a decrease in the distance between the sacred and the profane, the sacralization of everyday things, and the finding of meaning in everyday life. It is noted that the transformation of the idea of the sacred from a metaphysical, religious to a broad interpretation that assigns an increasingly significant role to secular values, practices, and things leads to an increase in human dependence on the social, material world, psychological experiences and the deprivation of life of a deeper meaning, mystery, and completeness. In modern society, there are various ideas about the sacred. There are preserved views on it as something that relates to the metaphysical, divine dimension of being and is synonymous with the holy, inherent primarily to people who associate themselves with a religious tradition. Although various spiritual trends, practices, and their adherents have their own characteristics, this metaphysical sacred appears to be the complete opposite of the profane, giving a person a sense of something greater than himself, forming a holistic picture of the world, directing his activities, giving meaning to life in a qualitatively different dimension and perspective. With the development of secularization, there is a decrease in the influence of religion in society and the idea of the sacred formed by it, there is a demarcation of the concepts of the sacred and religion, which were previously considered identical. An expanded understanding of the sacred strengthens – that which means objects, symbols, things, and practices that are important for man and society, reflects everyday interests, ideas, and practices, is more dependent on the individual than on the influence of tradition and the church.

**Key words:** sacred, religion, secular, secularization, desacralization, values, everyday life.

**Statement of the problem** The sacred over the ages embodied the important values of truth, goodness, and beauty, which gave human life fullness and meaning, was a guide in everyday life, and supported the foundations of a person's life world. Its characteristic features were summarized by R. Otto in the well-known phrase *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, which reflect it as internally "completely different", incomparable with everyday experience, that which is above and beyond our rational being, the abode of the hidden highest part of our nature, which cannot

to find satisfaction in satisfying our simple sensual, physical or intellectual desires and needs. He interpreted the sense of the sacred as a radically different mysterious experience that simultaneously fascinates and frightens, leaving no room for doubt, independence, neutrality, which, however, is not available to everyone (Otto, 1924). The sacred plays an important role in renewing life, explaining and overcoming life's difficulties, vulnerability, lack of meaning, denotes something that has important value, causes awe and respect, is socially recognized and protected by strict rules (May S., 2021: 32). It includes certain places, persons, time and actions (temples, priests, holidays, worship) (Taylor Ch., 2007: 446).

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The sacred is traditionally associated with transcendent reality and supernatural forces, belongs to the main concepts in religious doctrines, which emphasize the radical difference between it and the profane. As noted by R. Otto, the sense of the sacred is the main element of religiosity, the innermost core of religion, an a priori category in which rational and irrational are combined (Otto, 1924:140).

At the same time, in recent decades, the attention of researchers has been paid to the expanded understanding of the sacred, where it denotes things and relationships that are important to a person, and appears to be of higher value, regardless of whether it is understood in metaphysical, transcendental terms. The result of such a transformation is the increasingly widespread use in scientific works instead of the concept of "holy" and "sacred" which denotes such a broader understanding. Proponents of this interpretation often refer to the definition of religion by E. Durkheim as "a system of beliefs and practices regarding sacred things – things that are separated and forbidden", according to which the sacred is not identified with the religious, but is understood as something different from everyday practices, things that are revered, feared and protected by certain prohibitions. Sacred things are recognized as having absolute and non-utilitarian value, constituting the core of society, being absolute, inviolable principles on which the social order is based, ensuring the necessary social solidarity and cohesion (Righetti N., 2014: 134). Also a certain number of other researchers note similar changes in ideas about the sacred a thorough study is needed to find out the factors that determine such a broad interpretation of the sacred, its manifestations and significance in human life.

**The purpose** of the article is to study the idea of the sacred in modern man, society in the conditions of secularization. **The tasks** are to analyze the views of researchers regarding the transformation of the concept of the sacred; find out the influence of the modern cultural situation on this process; to consider the peculiarities of experiencing the sacred as secular.

**Presenting main material** Features of the modern era are cultural relativism with an inherent tendency to abandon metanarratives, including religious, the destruction of binary differences, including the sacred/profane, the reduction of the distance between the sacred and the profane, when a person increasingly finds the sacred in various secular spheres, expanding the boundaries of "sacred secularity",

the virtualization of the sacred, a pastiche of many religious traditions, in which it is combined as a rational as well as the irrational, consumerist approach to the sacred, simulativeness, individualism, agnosticism and departure from the traditional practice of devotion and faith, skepticism towards traditional institutions, giving preference to playing with the sacred. E. McEvan, evaluating samples of postmodern culture, claims that the postmodern sacred has no ontological basis, which characterizes the traditional sacred, does not refer to the referent of truth and is created exclusively for the purposes of capitalist consumption. It becomes possible only through the destruction of religious metanarratives, imitating the traditional sacred (McAvan E., 2007: 42-45).

The researcher emphasizes that the postmodern sacred is mostly consumerist, allows you to get pleasure from playing with the transcendent without obligations or even the need for faith inherent in religion, oscillating between faith and disbelief (McAvan E., 2007: 74). Postmodern sacred texts differ from traditional religious texts in that they usually cannot be believed, they are a set of symbols of appropriation, which, according to J. Baudrillard, has become another set of symbols for the postmodern game (McAvan E., 2007: 105). Emphasis on the imagery of modern culture brings it closer to the myth and, in turn, is one of the ways to restore the myth-sacrum at the social level (Lernatowicz A., 2017: 352-354).

Reducing the distance between the transcendent metaphysical and the earthly, giving a person primary importance to worldly affairs causes a change in the interpretation of religion, which is defined as one of the possible ways of finding the sacred, meaning, values, as N. Demerat notes, "religion becomes only possible, although very important the source of an expanded concept of the sacred" (Cusack C. 2008: 229). D. Vliegthart defines "secular religion" as a practical or intellectual search for meaning, authority beyond the "I", which promises a fundamental transformation of man in the world. In it, the highest authority can be God, spirit, nature, energy, consciousness, transcendental "I", can refer to society or the state; the fundamental transformation of the personality may refer to salvation from sin, liberation from ignorance, psychological realization, etc. (Vliegthart D., 2020: 270).

The sacred is increasingly understood not only as a synonym for the metaphysical, religious, which refers to transcendent reality, but also in a more general sense denoting any experience that surpasses

the everyday, things that are given special meaning, give value, accompany the constant process of creation and transmission of traditions, in connection with which this term is used more and more often instead of "holy".

Since certain things that are most valued, considered important and inviolable can be considered both secular and sacred, notes K. Knott, it is worth rejecting the understanding of the sacred as an exclusively religious category, which is opposed to the secular, the idea that the secular cannot be the source of the sacred (Knott K., 2013: 158). M. Evans even claims that the study of the sacred related only to the supernatural or otherworldly, religious did not contribute to the discovery of important secular values, things, customs, symbols, places, while the sacred related to the supernatural is rare in modern society (Evans M., 2003: 41-44). He interprets religion as a special social institution that projects the sacred beyond this world, that connects it with supernatural beings or forces and is a symbolic system that represents and strengthens the power and authority of the sacred. It is religion that most emphasizes the peculiarity, the difference of the sacred, which, however, should not be identified only with it, since, in his opinion, there are different types of the sacred, such as "personal sacred", "civil sacred", "spiritual sacred" and "religious sacred" (Righetti N., 2014: 136-138).

The understanding of the "sacred" as that which has the "highest value", special, forbidden, "unspeakable", causes awe, dependence, integrity makes it possible to use this term not only by believers, but even by agnostic and skeptical individuals who can find similar in their experience. In line with this approach, G. Lynch interprets the sacred as: "defined by what people collectively experience as absolute, unconditioned realities that make undeniable moral claims to the meaning and behavior of their lives. Separate forms of the sacred arise historically and involve the interweaving of symbols, views, morality, and a sense of collective identity. These sacred forms retain their viability in social life through repeated acts imbued with sacred meaning that reinforce their reality for their adherents...the sacred...is a powerful source of meaning that legitimizes ways of treating people that would be unacceptable in everyday, social interaction» (Lynch G., 2012).

A. Taves interprets the sacred in a similar way as "a subset of a larger class of things that people consider special", considering departments of religious studies as "places for studying" things that people consider special and the ways in which people include them and perpetuate them in larger

socio-cultural formations, regardless of whether people consider these formations to be religious" (von Stuckrad, K., 2023: 619). S. Guthrie emphasizes that the sacred as separated and forbidden corresponds to our experience of the Other, which is not revealed directly, but through social experience, following P. Bloom: "The primary encounter with otherness is the paradigm of sacredness... it is not a collision with a disembodied spirit or force, but with another person. The sacred, although it is not limited to the social or does not coincide with it, first opens in society" (Guthrie S., 1996).

The transformation of the idea of the sacred occurs to some extent thanks to modern scientific and technological achievements, as a result of which life has become more predictable, in contrast to the past, when the sacred indicated the insecurity of man, beyond his control, unpredictable events, etc. As S. Guthrie points out, the reasons for the spread of the secular "sacred" in modern society are religious heterogeneity in society, individualism, and the uncertainty of the concept itself (Guthrie S., 1996). Individualistic guidelines lead to a decrease in the importance of religious communities in a person's life, which traditionally transmitted spiritual values and the corresponding understanding of the sacred.

The change in the perception of the sacred is also the result of the process of secularization, when the reduction of the influence of religion in social life leads to giving more importance to worldly affairs, materialistic guidance. The conditions of modern life encourage a person to pay more attention to secular problems and, accordingly, to the secular sacred. Capitalism, with its economic incentives, is an important factor in reducing the influence of the metaphysical religious sacred and establishing an expanded, more everyday version of it. Secularization manifests itself primarily in mass culture with its sacralization of consumption, digital technologies also becoming synonymous with desacralization, when material values gain more and more authority.

P. Costa notes that secularization appears primarily as desacralization, disappointment, synonymous with the decline of the transcendent in favor of the everyday, is the reconciliation of the transcendent with the everyday (Costa P., 2022: 62-64). In contrast to the world in which the place of fullness was understood as something that is outside the boundaries of human life, the modern era sees the fullness of life in the achievement of goals that are purely immanent, giving less importance to

the transcendent (Taylor Ch., 2007: 143). Various national symbols, principles, relationships between people can belong to it, material things, etc. are increasingly considered to be such.

One of the examples of the above-mentioned transformation can be the attitude of modern western man to nature, which, as research shows, can be given a sacred meaning. They describe their "almost sacred" experience with the following characteristics: beautiful, soothing, authentic, enhances the sense of presence in the physical body, which creates a sense of connection with childhood and previous generations, this world, and at the same time feels like an otherworldly experience. At the same time, evaluating their experiences, individuals often try to distance themselves from religious terminology due to the perception of religion as irrational and repressive (Thurfjell D., 2021: 22). The secular sacred is less perceived as an impressive radically different experience that causes a feeling of subordination, dependence as in the religious sacred, to a certain extent it becomes under the control of a person, such that it does not require too much effort to establish contact with him.

There is a certain privatization of the sacred when, instead of love for God, reverence for the transcendental, the values of the human "I" become more important, which is accompanied by a decrease in the influence of the church, religious traditions, and communities that support and transmit the religious sacred. Along with the decrease in the importance of religious tradition in people's lives, secularization has led to the "deification of the human", the spread of the idea that the person himself is sacred, you need to take your feelings, intuition seriously, follow your personal path, explore and choose what works for you personally. As a result, this sacralization of man and his everyday life had a significant impact in the Western countries on the legal sphere (human rights), political sphere (liberal democracy), social sphere (individualistic egalitarianism), existential sphere (ethics of authenticity), etc. (Costa P., 2022: 61).

However, consumption does not comfort a person, encouraging more and more consumption, which does not leave behind the absolute, supervaluable, therefore, as P. Costa notes, secularization does not free, but rather imprisons people in the oppressive logic of a dense network of apparatuses, "capitalism", "neoliberalism", which does not recognize anything outside itself and is therefore totalitarian by definition (Costa P., 2022: 162-163). Orientation only to the materialistic, rational deprives a person

of the opportunity to more deeply perceive other dimensions of being – religious, moral, aesthetic, the essential side of phenomena, relationships, things. Affirming the values of immanent materialism instead of the transcendent, the instrumentalization of culture deprives a person of inner harmony, depth and meaning and, as A. Drabarek emphasizes, destroys traditional communities and models that provide useful paradigms. Such a selfish orientation leads to internal decay, deprives a person of the chance to be happy because, despite the priority of the individual, a person can achieve ultimate freedom and independence only through the realization of spiritual dependence (Drabarek A., 2017: 14-18). The sacral metaphysical serves as a reference point, albeit an unattainable one, which indicates the way to the improvement of human, protects it from excessive vulnerability, dependence on everyday problems. Secularization, on the other hand, leads to the neglect of the possibility of finding and experiencing the sacred in the supernatural, transcendent dimension of being, which gives human life integrity, completeness, and meaning.

Excessive focus on the purely immanent, earthly, notes Ch. Taylor in his landmark work "The Secular Age", manifests itself in: 1) a sense of the fragility of meaning, 2) the superficiality of human efforts to solemnly depict the important moments of life; 3) voids of the ordinary, which he calls "diseases of immanence", since they arose together with the obscuration of transcendence (Taylor Ch. (2007):309). The modern world lacks depth, and the modern "I" lacks integrity, a deep identity, a person suffers from disorientation and longing, changeable and unsatisfactory feelings, superficiality, streams of meaning that can change his life are cut off from him. He believes that this feeling of being cut off from some great source is also a separation from oneself: "The trouble of the present age is not in the intensity of people's suffering, but in their inability to suffer, enjoy, feel fully and deeply... The disease of the world is a divorce from oneself" (Taylor Ch., 2007: 381).

People continue to long for moments of connection with the transcendent, which are "taken out" from everyday life, examples of which are holidays, tourist trips to places with ancient religious buildings, because in today's reality it is easier to live dreaming of being somewhere else, in a different stream of time (Taylor Ch., 2007: 552). However, according to Ch. Taylor, the current situation is not completely final, the loss of the sacredness of a place, practice or institution can be temporary and mean an intermediate stage in

the religious tradition and the revival of the religious and sacred can contribute to social mobilization (Taylor Ch., 2007: 21).

### Conclusions.

In modern society, there are various ideas about the sacred. There are preserved views on it as something that relates to the metaphysical, divine dimension of being and is synonymous with the holy, inherent primarily to people who associate themselves with a religious tradition. Although various spiritual trends, practices, and their adherents have their own characteristics, this metaphysical sacred appears to be the complete opposite of the profane, giving a person a sense of something greater than himself, forming a holistic picture of the world, directing his activities, giving meaning to life in a qualitatively different dimension and perspective.

With the development of secularization, there is a decrease in the influence of religion in society and the idea of the sacred formed by it, there is a demarcation of the concepts of the sacred and religion, which were previously considered identical. An expanded understanding of the sacred strengthens – that which means objects, symbols, things, and practices that are important for man and society, reflects everyday interests, ideas,

and practices, is more dependent on the individual than on the influence of tradition and the church.

This understanding of the sacred is due to a large extent to the peculiarities of modern culture with such features as relativism, pragmatism, simulativeness, skepticism of traditional institutions, an emphasis on individualism, a consumerist attitude to the world, including the sacred, giving preference to playing with the sacred. This contributes to the free creation of one's own values and life, self-discovery. At the same time, the reduction of the distance between the sacred and the profane, the importance of the metaphysical, religious, and giving significance to secular views and practices leads to an increase in human dependence on the social, material world, and psychological experiences.

Lowering the requirements for a person in the search for the sacred, adapted to everyday life can deprive human life of a deeper meaning, mystery, and completeness. Since human needs are not limited to physical, material, social, it is important to create conditions favorable to the development of his spirituality, the satisfaction of a person's desire for transcendence, a deeper knowledge of various ideas about life, in particular its metaphysical sacred dimension.

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## ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЯ УЯВЛЕННЯ ПРО САКРАЛЬНЕ В СУЧАСНОМУ СУСПІЛЬСТВІ

### Анотація

Розглядаються уявлення сучасної людини про сакральне, яке в сьогодні розуміється не лише як метафізичне, релігійне а все більше характеризує повсякденні аспекти життя які мають особливо важливе значення для індивіда та суспільства. Трансформація уявлення про сакральне означає поширення розуміння його, що виражає значущі цінності людини, суспільства, явища, предмети, ідеї, символи, відносини секулярного характеру. Таке розширене розуміння сакрального започаткованого Е. Дюркгеймом поділяє та розвиває частина сучасних дослідників. Аналізуються погляди науковців щодо зміни уявлення про сакральне. Обґрунтовується, що такі переконання утворюються у зв'язку з поглибленням секуляризації яка позначає зменшення суспільного впливу релігії та пов'язаного з нею розуміння сакрального, поширення цінностей індивідуалізму, споживацтва, гедонізму, пріоритетом матеріального над духовним, іманентного над трансцендентним, ціннісним релятивізмом. З'ясовується, що сучасна економічна, культурна ситуація призводять до зменшення відстані між сакральним і профанним, сакралізації повсякденних речей, знаходження сенсу у повсякденності. Зазначається, що трансформація уявлення про сакральне від метафізичного, релігійного до широкого трактування яке все більш значну роль відводить секулярним цінностям, практикам, речам веде до збільшення залежності людини від соціального, матеріального світу, психологічних переживань та позбавлення життя більш глибокого смислу, тайни, повноти. Сучасне суспільство має різні уявлення про сакральне. Збереглися погляди на нього як на те, що стосується метафізичного, божественного виміру буття і є синонімом святого, притаманне насамперед людям, які асоціюють себе з релігійною традицією. Хоча різні духовні течії, практики та їхні адепти мають свої особливості, це метафізичне священне постає повною протилежністю профанному, даючи людині відчуття чогось більшого, ніж вона сама, формуючи цілісну картину світу, спрямовуючи її діяльність, надаючи сенсу життю в якісно іншому вимірі та перспективі. З розвитком секуляризації відбувається зменшення впливу релігії в суспільстві та сформованого нею уявлення про сакральне, відбувається розмежування понять сакрального і релігії, які раніше вважалися тотожними. Зміцнюється розширене розуміння сакрального – як такого, що означає об'єкти, символи, речі та практики, які є важливими для людини і суспільства, відображає повсякденні інтереси, ідеї та практики, більшою мірою залежить від особистості, ніж від впливу традиції та церкви.

**Ключові слова:** сакральне, релігія, секулярне, секуляризація, десакралізація, цінності, повсякденне.

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