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## THE DENATURATION OF RELIGION

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**Abstract.** This study examines the transformation of religion in modern societies through the sociological use of the biochemical concept of denaturation. Rather than viewing modernization, secularization, digitalization, and consumer culture as forces leading to the disappearance of religion, the study argues that they reshape its forms, institutions, and practices while preserving its core meaning-making, metaphysical, and social functions. Adopting a theoretical and interpretive methodology, the research analyzes modernization and secularization theories alongside studies on digital religion and consumer society. The findings indicate that digitalization decentralizes religious authority and expands religious participation beyond traditional spatial and temporal boundaries. Consumer culture, meanwhile, turns religious symbols and practices into marketable and experiential elements, increasing religion's public visibility in new ways. Although institutional and collective forms of religion become fragmented, its ontological and ethical functions persist. The study concludes that religion survives as a dynamic and hybrid phenomenon, continuously adapting to modern conditions while maintaining its essential role in individual and social life.

**Keywords:** Sociology of religion; Modernization, secularization; Denaturation; Form and essence

## ДІННІҢ ДЕНАТУРАЦИЯСЫ Мехмет Ата МИРЗАОҒЛУ

*Ауыл және орман шаруашылығы министрлігі, Анкара, Түркия*

## ДЕНАТУРАЦИЯ РЕЛИГИИ Мехмет Ата МИРЗАОҒЛУ

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**Аңдатпа.** Бұл зерттеу биохимиядағы денатурация ұғымын әлеуметтанулық тұрғыдан қолдану арқылы қазіргі қоғамдардағы діннің трансформациясын қарастырады. Зерттеуде модернизация, секуляризация, цифрландыру және тұтынушылық мәдениет діннің жойылуына алып келетін үдерістер ретінде емес, оның негізгі мағына қалыптастырушы, метафизикалық және әлеуметтік функцияларын сақтай отырып, діни формаларды, институттарды және тәжірибелерді қайта құрылымдайтын факторлар ретінде түсіндіріледі. Теориялық және интерпретативтік әдіснаманы негізге ала отырып, зерттеу модернизация мен секуляризация теорияларын, сондай-ақ цифрлық дін мен тұтынушылық қоғам жөніндегі еңбектерді талдайды. Зерттеу нәтижелері цифрлық технологиялардың діни биліктің тек дәстүрлі діни мекемелердің қолында болуын әлсіретіп, адамдарға кез келген уақытта және кез келген жерден діни өмірге қатысуға мүмкіндік беретінін көрсетеді. Ал тұтынушылық мәдениет діни рәміздер мен тәжірибелерді нарықтық және тәжірибелік сипаттағы элементтерге айналдырып, діннің қоғамдық көрінісін жаңа қырынан күшейтеді. Діннің институционалдық және ұжымдық формалары бөлшектенуге ұшырағанымен, оның онтологиялық және этикалық функциялары сақталады. Зерттеу қорытындысында дін қазіргі заман жағдайларына бейімделе отырып, жеке және қоғамдық өмірдегі іргелі рөлін сақтайтын серпінді әрі гибридті құбылыс ретінде өмір сүруін жалғастырады деген тұжырым жасалады.

**Түйін сөздер:** Дін әлеуметтануы; модернизация; секуляризация; денатурация; форма және мән.

**Аннотация.** В данном исследовании рассматривается трансформация религии в современных обществах посредством социологического применения биохимического понятия денатурации. В отличие от подходов, трактующих модернизацию, секуляризацию, цифровизацию и потребительскую культуру как процессы, ведущие к исчезновению религии, автор обосновывает, что они изменяют её формы, институты и практики, сохраняя при этом её основные смыслообразующие, метафизические и социальные функции. Опираясь на теоретическую и интерпретативную методологию, исследование анализирует теории модернизации и секуляризации, а также работы, посвящённые цифровой религии и обществу потребления. Результаты исследования показывают, что цифровизация способствует децентрализации религиозного авторитета и расширяет возможности религиозного участия за пределы традиционных пространственных и временных границ. Потребительская культура, в свою очередь, превращает религиозные символы и практики в рыночные и опытно-ориентированные элементы, усиливая общественную заметность религии в новых формах. Несмотря на фрагментацию институциональных и коллективных форм религии, её онтологические и этические функции сохраняются. В заключение делается вывод о том, что религия продолжает существовать как динамичный и гибридный феномен, адаптирующийся к условиям современности и сохраняющий свою фундаментальную роль в жизни личности и общества.

**Ключевые слова:** Социология религии; модернизация; секуляризация; денатурация; форма и сущность.

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## Introduction

The social and physiological processes that enable the development of self-awareness also contribute to an individual's understanding of other people. This process of consciousness formation is equally important for both the individual's self-understanding and the development of the organized social group to which they belong, as well as society at large (Mead, 2020, s. 271). Within the context of this reciprocal interaction between the individual and society, religion emerges in modern societies as a fundamental factor shaping both individual processes of awareness and social organization. When discussing the role of religion in this interaction, it is crucial to recognize that its visibility and influence manifest in diverse forms; here, various forms of secularity guide our understanding of the social positioning of religious belief and practice.

All three forms of secularity, in some way, point to "religion": first, as a phenomenon that retreats from public life; second, as a type of belief and practice that either declines or persists; and third, as a specific form of faith or commitment examined within the conditions of the contemporary era. But what exactly is "religion"? Providing a definitive answer is challenging, as religious phenomena in human life are highly diverse, making it difficult to encapsulate them under a single definition. Attempting to identify commonalities between the lifestyles of pre-modern societies—where the understanding that "religion is everywhere" prevailed—and contemporary societies, in which beliefs, practices, and institutions are defined within specific boundaries, is a complex, perhaps nearly impossible task (Taylor, 2007, s. 15). While these varying forms of secularity complicate understanding the role of religion at both individual and societal levels, they underscore the importance of analyzing the presence and influence of religion in modern societies.

In modern societies, religion continues to exist not merely as a system of beliefs but as one of the most ancient, profound, and resilient dimensions of social structure. However, this existence has never been under as intense transformative pressures as it is today. Phenomena such as globalization, individualization, digitalization, secularization, rationalization, and the spread of consumer culture profoundly affect religion's symbolic domain, institutional structure, practices, and social visibility.

In this study, instead of relying solely on commonly used concepts in the literature, the notion of denaturation—borrowed metaphorically from biochemistry, where it describes the disruption of a protein's natural structure by external forces—is employed as an analytical framework. When exposed to certain physical or chemical effects, proteins undergo structural disruptions; while some intrinsic properties are lost, previously hidden internal groups are exposed, and the molecule exhibits new characteristics (Öner & Öncel, 2013). Denaturation refers to the "unfolding," "disruption," or "reorganization" of a protein's three-dimensional structure. However, the protein's fundamental chemical bonds—its essence—typically remain intact. Thus, although the structure is deformed, the entity persists. Religion is conceptualized in this study precisely as such a phenomenon: a social and cultural organism whose structure is altered under modern pressures, yet whose essence persists, encompassing religious and societal formations that must continuously redefine themselves to adapt to changing conditions.

This metaphorical approach renders both the societal transformation processes of religion more tangible and highlights modernization as a transformative force. The study aims to position the concept of denaturation as a sociological analogy to examine how religious practices, institutions, and notions of sacredness are reshaped in modern societies.

This study focuses on a specific area of research, examining the role of digitalization and consumer culture in the transformation of religion. These two phenomena stand out as the most visible dynamics reshaping both the practical dimension of individual religiosity and the legitimacy structure of institutional religion. Thus, the denaturation metaphor offers a more focused analytical perspective amid the broad and diffuse effects of modernization.

A review of the literature reveals a wide range of studies that examine the social position and functions of religion within the context of modernization, secularization, digitalization, and broader cultural transformations. These studies develop diverse theoretical approaches that interpret religion in modern societies as weakening, transforming, or acquiring new forms, while addressing key dimensions such as individual religiosity, institutional structures, religious authority, and ritual practices from multiple perspectives. In this respect, the existing literature offers a framework that conceptualizes religious change in the modern world as a multi-layered and dynamic process.

In his study, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Berger, 1967), Peter L. Berger introduces the metaphor of the “sacred canopy,” providing a conceptual framework for understanding how religion makes sense of the social world, legitimizes institutions, and how this canopy may be torn under the conditions of modernity. Engaging with the denaturation metaphor, one can explore the relationship between the “preservation of essence” and the “transformation of organizational form” within a historical-sociological context.

Charles Taylor, in *A Secular Age* (Taylor, 2007), approaches secularization not merely as a decline in belief but as a transformation of modern emotional, ethical, and existential frameworks. His broad phenomenological and historical perspective offers a philosophical and historical foundation for the denaturation metaphor, particularly regarding the question of “why the essence is preserved while the form changes.”

José Casanova’s *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Casanova, 1994) examines the transformation of religion in the public sphere and highlights its differentiated roles in modern state-society relations.

Heidi A. Campbell, in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* (Campbell, 2013), addresses the digital religion literature, analyzing phenomena such as online practices, digital preachers, and virtual communities.

In Baudrillard’s *Tüketim Toplumu* (Baudrillard, 2021), it is observed that consumption has become central to the creation of social status, identity, and meaning in modern societies, and the study examines this within this framework. The work addresses the effects of consumption on individuals and society from cultural, psychological, and social perspectives. In this context, it draws attention to the simulation- and sign-based nature of modern life.

Ertit’s work *Sekülerleşme Teorisi* (Ertit, 2020) examines the individual and social functions of religion in modern societies within the framework of secularization, focusing on its transformation. According to him, secularization is characterized by the decline of religion’s social presence, that is, the decrease in the prestige and visibility it holds. This process is further strengthened by modernization, urbanization, and scientific and technological advancements. In his later study, *Endişeli Muhafazakârlar Çağı Dinden Uzaklaşan Türkiye* (Ertit, 2025), he interrogates prevailing perceptions of religious tendencies in Turkey, revealing that individuals increasingly distance themselves from religion under the influence of modernization, urbanization, and social transformation processes.

Berger’s studies examine the social and individual functions of religion in the context of modernization and secularization. *Kutsal Şemsiye Dinin Sosyolojik Teorisinin Ana Unsurları* (Berger, 2011), he emphasizes religion’s role in legitimizing social order and providing meaning to individuals, while acknowledging that secularization may constrain religious authority. *Rumors About Angels* (Berger, 2012) illustrates how religious experiences have become individualized in modern life, yet religion still retains its capacity to produce meaning.

Talal Asad’s *Seküler Çeviriler: Ulus-Devlet, Modern Benlik ve Hesapçı Akıl* (Asad & Aydar, 2020) conceptualizes secularization not as mere disenchantment but as a transformation related to the cultural and political arrangements of modern societies. Asad examines how the processes of nation-state formation, the development of modern individual identity, and the logic of calculative reasoning shape the practices and societal understanding of secularization.

While a considerable body of national and international literature addresses modernization and secularization, the existing scholarship often does not examine transformation processes through sociological metaphors or concretely discuss the structural reshaping of religion. In this context, the contribution of the present study lies in employing the denaturation concept as a metaphorical framework to explain how religion is reconfigured in terms of form and function in modern societies, thereby enriching the conceptual debate on modernization and secularization.

## **The Metaphorical Framework of Denaturation**

### **The Scientific Definition of Denaturation and Its Metaphorical Potential**

In scientific terms, denaturation refers to the disruption of a protein’s three-dimensional folded structure due to heat, pH changes, chemical agents, or mechanical forces. This structural disruption prevents the protein from performing its functions, as a protein’s functionality is tightly linked to its specific structure. However, it is noteworthy that the protein’s fundamental chemical backbone typically remains intact during this process. In other words, its essence is preserved while its form is transformed (*Protein denaturation*, t.y.). For this very reason, denaturation carries significant metaphorical value for the social sciences. In social processes, transformations often occur in which the essence is preserved, but the form changes. Technological change, demographic mobility, emerging value

systems, and global culture influence the outward appearance of religious institutions and rituals, yet religious needs and beliefs persist.

### **The Applicability of the Denaturation Metaphor to the Sociology of Religion**

Religion, an indispensable element of societies both historically and today, shapes social structures, guides collective behavior, and exerts both positive and negative influences on social transformations. From this perspective, religion functions as a dynamic and active social element that is nourished by the societal conditions in which it exists, while simultaneously possessing the capacity to reshape those very conditions (Okumuş, 2018,). When human society is conceived as a structure that constructs its own universe of meaning, religion emerges as one of the fundamental components of this constructive process. Religious beliefs and practices play a central role in how individuals understand and interpret both themselves and the world around them (Berger, 2011, s. 51). The symbolic world constructed by religion imparts meaning to human life and shapes it. Furthermore, religion defines the values and norms that help maintain social cohesion (Mirzaoğlu, 2025). Consequently, religion establishes a system of meaning that is both individual and collective in all societies. This system of meaning is complex, multi-layered, and functional, much like the folded structure of a protein. Under the pressures of modern processes, this folded form of religion experiences “unfolding”: certain rituals lose their functions, some institutions lose authority, and some symbols fail to retain their former influence or are reinterpreted in new contexts. However, the human quest for the sacred, metaphysical needs, and the drive to produce meaning -that is, the “essence of religion” - does not disappear.

In this regard, the denaturation metaphor does not conceptualize religious transformation as “destruction.” Rather, it is more accurately understood as a structural reshaping. Accordingly, the theoretical framework of this study aims to explain how religion in modern societies is “refolded,” “reconfigured,” and acquires “new functionality.”

### **The Limitations of the Denaturation Metaphor and Its Sociological Implications**

Like any metaphor, the denaturation metaphor carries explanatory power as well as inherent limitations. In biochemical processes, denaturation often points to an irreversible structural disruption; in contrast, religious structures, due to the dynamic nature of social reality, possess the capacity for reorganization and self-repair. Therefore, the metaphor should not give the impression that religion completely “unfolds” or is destroyed under the pressures of modernization. Furthermore, while denaturation is a unidirectional chemical reaction, religious transformations are complex, multidimensional processes shaped by cultural and political conditions. The strength of the metaphor lies in making structural change visible. However, it alone is insufficient to explain the mechanisms of resistance and regeneration inherent in religious life. Accordingly, the metaphor functions as a useful analytical tool for describing transformation, but it should not be regarded as a closed model that fully accounts for religion’s holistic sociological responses.

### **Modern Society and the Transforming Form of Religion The Pressure of Modernization: Sociological Heat Effect**

Change, as a law of life and a tradition of the universe (Okumuş, 2019, s. 19), manifests in every aspect of life through various factors, continuously reshaping societies’ ways of thinking, institutions, and social relations. Modernity, by implying a departure from previous ways of life, entails both a separation from traditional lifestyles and the emergence of a new social order (Aktay, 2021). While the term “modern” carries the meaning of “new,” modernization denotes “a state of rupture” (Ertit, 2020). This characteristic of the transition from traditional to modern makes changes in religion-society relations particularly visible. Here, religion represents the aspect left behind, while the orientation toward the future emphasizes the idea of progress independent of religion (Özay, 2020, p. 100). The transformations that modernity has brought about in the religious sphere play a critical role in understanding how the secularization process has developed.

The social transformations that have emerged in the modern era, particularly along the lines of secularization,

have profoundly affected the perspectives of modernizing societies on religion. This transformation has led to significant changes in religion-society relations worldwide; however, these changes have manifested in different forms and content across societies, depending on their unique historical and cultural contexts (Okumuş, 2015a, p. 174, 2018, p. 298). The direction of change varies according to a society's psychological condition and the extent to which it adheres to its internal values (Okumuş, 2015b, p. 77). The concept of change also points to a process of renewal (Mirzaoğlu, 2025b, p. 68). Although renewal may be approached as change, it does not occur randomly; it is seen as a conscious transformation directed toward what is correct and good. True renewal requires openness to change and deliberate, conscious effort for positive transformation (Okumuş, 2024, pp. 114-115). Within this context, secularization emerges as a prominent concept. According to Ertit, secularization refers to the gradual weakening, over a specific society and period, of the social prestige and determining influence of religion, quasi-religious structures, folk beliefs, and generally all forms of transcendence-based thought on daily life (Ertit, 2025, p. 1). Whether an era or society becomes secular depends on the conditions of spiritual experience and the nature of related pursuits (Taylor, 2007, p. 3). Although secularization is often considered a global phenomenon of modern societies, it has not spread uniformly in all of them (Berger, 2011, p. 197). This indicates the conceptual and practical variations encompassed by secularization. Sociologically, the phenomenon of worldlyization is part of, and a component within, the broader process of modernization (Berger, 2012, p. 167). Within this framework, understanding the scope and effects of secularization also involves examining how contemporary social developments transform or reinforce this process. Looking at current developments, it appears to be a structure resisting secularization. However, ultimately, ruptures have occurred within the boundaries of the secular paradigm, strengthening it in the process. Every social and cultural upheaval, unintentionally or not, reinforces secularization. (Aktay, 2021, p. 231). Okumuş's perspective on modernity and secularism points to an important issue here. According to him, religion has transformed in various forms alongside modernity and secularism. This transformation has a crucial aspect often overlooked by social scientists: religion has not completely withdrawn from social life. On the contrary, it continues to permeate various areas and influence social structures (Okumuş, 2007, p. 14).

When viewed within this context, the transformative effect of modernization on social structures, expressed through the metaphor of denaturation—like heat denaturing a protein—leads to changes in the form and function of religious practices. Modernization acts here like a high temperature that releases the protein. Thus, the integrative role of traditional rituals diminishes, the authority of religious institutions is questioned, and individual choice becomes more prominent than traditional religious obligations. The most important point is that people do not become “irreligious,” but under the influence of high social “heat,” religious life takes on a new form. The disintegration of social structures and the weakening of social solidarity point to a new type of religious organization that allows individuals to experience their religious experiences more autonomously.

These transformations are also observable within the family institution. When we examine religiosity within families, we see that the religious knowledge and practices previously passed down by elders have transformed. Thus, family religiosity has shifted towards professionalized guidance shaped and directed by experts, consultants, or digital content creators. This constitutes a new form of religious socialization. This situation best represents a transition from an internal transmission process to external, institutionalized guidance.

The transformation of rituals into cultural consumer objects leads us to a new perspective. Thus, religious practices, intersecting with market dynamics, are reduced to aesthetic, touristic, or symbolic value. It is necessary to consider the danger posed by this process. Because in this case, the meaning of the ritual in social memory will change, transforming it from an element of belief into a cultural object that is experienced and consumed.

When we consider these phenomena together, we witness that the “heating” and “oppressive” conditions of modern society have not completely eradicated religious structures. In fact, they are transforming them into new forms. While traditional structures are dissolving with social change, religion functions differently to fill their place, defining its own legitimate boundaries in order to produce new meanings, practices, and forms of organization.

### **Cultural pH Change: New Worlds of Values**

Religion is an institution that possesses inherent depth, permanence, and the capacity to create influence. In this respect, it occupies a unique position. Religion triumphs over culture in shaping individual behavior and social order (Çınar, 2009, p. 35). Although religion has this powerful influence, it does not actually operate independently of cultural and social transformations. As cultural conditions change, religious practices and discourses must be reinterpreted, both individually and socially. Even if religion and culture are separate in social life, they interact and mutually influence each other in various forms, content, and levels (Okumuş, 2017, p. 14). As culture changes, religious practices are reinterpreted in new contexts, much like the effect of pH on a protein. Discourses emphasizing individualism, freedom, popular culture, and psychological well-being are transforming the language of religiosity. Religious discourse is increasingly intersecting with modern concepts such as personal development, happiness, therapy, and meaning management. This process can be understood as a “metaphorical pH shift”.

When we examine this transformation process, we see that it is reshaping the functions of religion for the modern individual. Traditional religious rituals offer a framework that meets the psychological needs of individuals. For example, they participate in daily meditation, prayer, or personal worship practices to manage stress, which is seen as a daily problem, to maintain mental balance, and to progress on the path of self-realization. This increases the functionality of religion at the personal level. In addition, it allows it to maintain a flexible structure at the social level. Especially with today’s advanced technology, communication and digitalization processes, which have developed well, increasing the visibility and accessibility of religion. Thus, digital applications and discourses have also diversified. Digital platforms have accelerated individuals’ access to religious information, enabling its integration into personal life. While preserving its traditional structure, religion is reshaping itself to adapt to new social contexts. The digitalization process has enabled religious experiences to transcend physical spaces, thus giving rise to new forms of worship.

Online worship practices—such as sending prayers to the Western Wall via internet applications, performing Puja ceremonies on digital platforms, or attending virtual church services—represent core features of digital religious practices (Gökbayrak & Işıklı, 2022, pp. 122-123). These examples demonstrate how modern technology transforms religious practices, allowing individuals to personalize their religious experiences. While virtual worship does not completely replace the function of traditional rituals, it expands the spatial and temporal boundaries of religious practice, rendering it more flexible and accessible.

### **Chemical Agents: Digitalization and Consumption**

With digitalization, technology has become a platform for the use of spiritual practices. Thus, religious experiences have begun to take place in online environments. This has given rise to concepts such as digital religion, online religion, virtual religion, and cyber religion (Dağ, 2022, p. 178). Consequently, digitalization facilitates access to religious content and paves the way for new types of communal experiences (Castells, 2005, pp. 479-480). Religious authorities, who for centuries provided guidance and knowledge through direct engagement with communities, have increasingly carried out these functions via digital platforms in the contemporary era. As a result, both the channels for circulating religious knowledge and the ways in which authority gains legitimacy have undergone profound transformation (Mirzaoğlu, 2025c, p. 98). These online spaces transcend the spatial and temporal boundaries of religious practice and create conditions that can have transformative effects on religious structures and experiences. In today’s world, digital platforms, consumption patterns, and flows of global culture act like chemical denaturants on religious structures. While traditional forms unfold, new syntheses emerge: digital sermons, YouTube religious educators, faith-based influencer culture, global Islamic fashion trends, spiritual tourism, and virtual communities. These religious forms illustrate that denaturation does not signify total “collapse” but rather indicates a process of reconfiguration and adaptation.

Consumption should be understood in a similar manner. Here, individuals or societies positioned as consumers become part of a significant process of change. The culture of consumption permeates every aspect of life, rendering “everything” subject to consumption. Accordingly, Baudrillard argues that the consumer engages with objects not merely for their individual utility, but in relation to their overall significance and the broader set of objects to which they belong (Baudrillard, 2021, p. 18).

Consumption, together with digitalization, has evolved from being merely an economic activity into a social and cultural phenomenon. Through consumption, individuals construct their identities and shape their relationships within their social environments. This dynamic also affects religious practices and symbols. Religious products, content, and experiences have become marketable and shareable. For instance, digital religious materials offered on online platforms, religious-themed books, meditation applications, or lifestyle products adorned with religious motifs serve functions of personal satisfaction and social belonging. The consumer no longer focuses solely on the utility provided by a product. The symbolic meanings of products, the cultural and social networks to which they belong, and whether they form part of a lifestyle have become primary factors influencing consumer choices. In this context, digitalization and consumption function as “chemical agents” that contribute to the flexibility and reconfiguration of traditional religious structures. The modern individual reinterprets religious experiences and symbols both through consumption practices and via digital platforms.

### **The Essence of Religion: Undisturbed Chemical Bonds The Continuity of the Sacred Quest**

Extensive writings have addressed the concept of the sacred, yet no universally accepted definition has emerged. The sacred can fundamentally be understood on two levels. First, it refers to phenomena believed to possess a supernatural superiority and, as such, are regarded with unconditional reverence by humans. Second, the sacred represents the dimension of power and meaning that individuals internally feel and experience on a spiritual level (Paden, 2008, p. 101). According to Durkheim, in religion, it is necessary to distinguish between the sacred and the profane. He also states that sacredness can exist in any object, such as a rock, a tree, a spring, or even a pebble, thus giving it tangibility (Durkheim, 2010, p. 65). The metaphysical needs that constitute the essence of religion—such as life, death, fate, and ethical references—maintain their resistance in the face of modernization. Modernization brings about changes in form, but its essence remains. Even as individuals adapt to the living conditions in this new secular order, they continue to pray and participate in rituals.

### **New Forms, Old Essences**

Even though individuals in the modern world may have reduced or evolved traditional religious practices into new forms, the fundamental functions of religion largely continue. It is important to note that this does not represent a complete break with modern religiosity; it is merely a structural transformation. Thus, it should be emphasized that religion continues to function as a personal guidance mechanism in the individual’s mental and emotional world.

In modern society, religiosity is becoming “choice-based.” New modern individuals no longer fully accept pre-established patterns. So what do they accept? This question leads to an important answer. Modern individuals choose elements that align with their lifestyles, needs, and values, and abandon others. The fundamental question that arises at this point is: Is the transformation of modern religiosity a decay or an adaptation to new conditions?

The denaturation metaphor offers a nuanced answer to this question: “The essence is preserved, the structure changes.” Just as a protein alters its structure under heat while maintaining its fundamental chemical integrity, the form of religion changes in response to modernization, yet its *raison d’être* at social and individual levels does not disappear.

From this perspective, modern religiosity can be considered new in form. However, it should also be noted that modern religiosity is largely a new structure that preserves its original essence. Religious elements interact with factors such as popular culture in today’s new and modern world, creating new forms of expression. In this context, innovations brought about by technology, such as prayer practices and digital rituals, are transforming into new forms, particularly focused on personal development and selective belief practices. Thus, it also reshapes the individual’s interaction with religion.

In this study, the phrase “New forms, old essences” actually draws attention to the fact that religion has not weakened in modern society. That is, it is creating a restructuring by indicating adaptation to the new conditions of life. So what does restructuring mean? This restructuring encompasses both continuity and change. Thus, a representation of transformation is formed. In this case, the question arises: is the difference created by change decay

or transformation? The denaturation metaphor in the study carefully provides the answer. That is, the essence is preserved, the structure changes.

### **Sociological Consequences of Religious Denaturation**

#### **Positive Outcomes**

The general definitions of religious decay are a kind of disintegration. When viewed from a sociological perspective, it can actually be interpreted as a consequence of religion's compatibility with modern societies. From this point of view, it can be said that this has various positive outcomes. Considering the denaturation metaphor, the flexibility created through this process allows religion to participate more broadly in social life. For example, a denatured protein can acquire new binding surfaces and adapt to different chemical processes. Religion in modern societies can also penetrate new social contexts more effectively. This situation is serious when we consider it together with the relationship of the new, younger generations to religion. Traditional forms may seem more rigid to the new generation, and thus, individuals' expectations may also differ. The acceptability of flexible structures offers a functional framework here. Of course, when we say that religion is changing form here, we do not mean that matters of faith are being harmed.

Another consequence of the denaturation metaphor is that individual freedoms become compatible with modern understanding. Modern individuals place great importance on "choice" in identity formation. The elimination of compulsory forms and the emergence of practices based on personal preference allow religion to function. Thus, religion finds meaning as a more internalized experience in the individual's spiritual world.

Another structure that supports the sustainability of religion is, of course, its capacity to adapt to cultural diversity. Transformed religious forms gain the flexibility to interact with various cultural contexts. Especially in the age of globalization, religion integrates with new cultural expressions, thus demonstrating its ability to reproduce the social context. This is considered a fundamental advantage that enables religion to continue producing meaning.

The metaphor of denaturation describes the adaptation processes of religion in modern societies. Religion does not lose its essence. It renews its form and, in this new form, adapts to developments in the modern world. In this respect, it maintains its functional importance at both individual and societal levels.

#### **Negative Outcomes**

The transformation of religion in today's modern world also has negative consequences. First, religious knowledge is becoming superficial. The disintegration caused by digitalization and consumer culture risks transforming religious knowledge into a symbolic content to be consumed. In this context, the changes occurring in the modern world may lead to a weakening of the body of knowledge that ensures the historical continuity of religion, as a result of the superficialization of religion.

Another potential negative consequence is the loss of authority among religious institutions. For example, the foundations of legitimacy for religious institutions in modern society may erode. With the open use of digital technology, everyone finds something to say. This leads to the replacement of traditional institutional authority with a highly decentralized religious discourse. It can even obscure the source of religious knowledge.

The dissolution of traditional communal structures also constitutes a significant social consequence. Religious communities reinforce trust, solidarity, and a sense of belonging among individuals. In contrast, as modern society changes and a more individualistic lifestyle emerges, collective bonds weaken. Thus, relationships are generally looser, shorter-lived, more selective, and often formed in digital environments. These new forms of togetherness can lead to social problems such as isolation and a loss of belonging.

Another consequence we should consider is the weakening of the social function of rituals. When we look at the social benefit of rituals, they act as carriers of collective memory. Thus, rituals strengthen shared emotions, create a sense of belonging, and make norms visible. However, when rituals become commercialized or aestheticized, they can lose their social function and focus on individual experience. This transformation casts a shadow on the collective dimension of religion.

Considering all of this, these negative outcomes demonstrate that religious degeneration is a source of social tension. Certainly, these new digital pressures of the modern world will not eliminate the essence of religion. However, some disruptions may occur in the social functions of religion.

### Conclusion

This study uses the metaphor of denaturation to explain the transformation of religion in modern societies. As a result of these explanations, denaturation offers a new perspective on debates surrounding modernization. In biological terms, denaturation refers to the loss of a structure's form without entirely losing its essence. Applying this concept to religious structures, the study goes beyond viewing religion as an entity that vanishes under the pressures of modernization; instead, it reveals religion as a social reality whose form changes and which is reorganized with different functions. The accelerated dynamics of change in modern society dissolve the traditional forms of religious institutions and rituals while making the deeper layers of meaning visible; thus, processes that appear as loss actually provide a basis for the emergence of new functions.

The strongest aspect of this metaphor is that it suggests more than interpreting religious change merely as a process of weakening or rupture. Modernization does not entirely eliminate the religious domain. On the contrary, just as a protein exposed to heat reveals previously hidden elements of its inner structure, religious life under modernization brings to light previously unnoticed individual, spiritual, and ethical dimensions. Within this framework, religion is reshaped both socially and individually under the influence of modernization. Institutional dissolutions open the way to personal intensifications, and the weakening of collective forms enables individual processes of meaning-making. This demonstrates that religion continues to exist on a different plane despite claims of secular disengagement; loss of form does not equate to loss of essence, but rather the essence is reinterpreted in new contexts.

This approach, which offers a new perspective on secularization, emphasizes that religion has not only retreated in the modern world but has also taken on new functions and undergone its own unique transformation process. According to this approach, the view that religion will disappear with modernization is weakened because the social role of religion is multifaceted and applicable. This study introduces a new theoretical perspective to the literature. The metaphor offers an analytical framework between individualized religion and institutional religion.

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