How Sacred Is Secular Death? And just how Secular Can Sacred Death Be? A Theoretical Proposal

Abstract:

I aim to show that the average experience of death in late modernity tends to come nearer to the sacred while growing apart from religion; and that, moreover, the average approach of death in late modernity has a strong 'built-in' medical side. I will try to argue that the late modern most frequent approaches of death pay explicit tribute to a very ambitious medical project of Cure and/or Failure. Such project has slowly but surely become a sheltering canopy and replaced religion not only in its means and goals, but also in its power to provide a widely-shared 'savoir mourir'. The impossibility of superposing the notion of 'sacred' and the notion of 'religion', the necessity of considering the experience of the sacred in a broader cultural context, and, finally, the dynamic relationship between the process of secularization and a process of sacralization as a catalyst of modern spirituality are important theoretical aspects that should be taken into account when studying death and dying in present times.

Keywords: *the sacred, the secular, sociology of death and dying, medicine, religion.*