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RELIGION AND PATTERNS
OF
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**RELIGION AND PATTERNS OF SOCIAL
TRANSFORMATION – OR: HOW TO INTERPRET
RELIGIOUS CHANGES IN POST-COMMUNISM?**

Sociologists of religion agree there is a characteristic compatibility between religious institutions and social structures at any stage of social development. Changes in society are related to religious changes. These kinds of changes were a core interest of classical sociologists. Emil Durkheim (1902) discussed how changes of labour division accompanying the process of transformation from traditional to modern society affect the social status of religion. In discussing these relationships, he identified the moment of religious *individualisation*.

Weber (1920-22) devoted his research to the identification of social groups who carry religious traditions; he showed the relationships between the social structures of India, China, and Israel, and the development of Hinduism and Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, and Judaism. In this, he also demonstrated the relationship between religious and economic processes, and found the evidence for the rationalisation of religion, in keeping with his view of the *rationalising* tendency of Western Culture. Robert Bellah (1964) summarised the development of religion as a process showing at each stage the relation between the form of religion and the features of a society. Niklas Luhmann (1982) admitted that modernity models religion and in consequence causes *the development of dogmatics*. These examples illustrate that there are many themes and motifs in sociological thought, but that their common feature is an acknowledged **relation and relevance between religious and social forms**. Having reflected upon these relations, the cited sociologists identified characteristic features of religions in certain periods, looking at them in longer or shorter temporal perspectives. It is also a good context to question the transforming society and the place of religion in it.

The decline of communism had its own symbols – terms like “glasnost” and “perestroika” – that narrated the politics of opening the Eastern Block to the world. They were easy to find on the international front pages in the late 1980s. The photos of the collapse of the Berlin Wall illustrated the ending of the ‘sphere of Soviet influence’. Terms like “round table” and “Velvet Revolution” epitomise the bloodless character of the transformations which resulted in the changes in Central and Eastern Europe.

Having in mind classical concepts of mutual relevance of religious and social processes, what could be treated as a good starting point to reflect on the “nature” of society being in the process of transformation, leaving the Communist past and joining capitalistic and democratic world of Europe?

One of the possible views is considering of the transformational changes from two different perspectives: systemic and subjective. In the first case, political change seems to be the most distinctive – the replacement of a one-party system with a multiparty democratic system. As a result, societies of Central-Eastern Europe became subjectively politicised. The last decade can be characterised as a great differentiation of the political scene into left-wing, Post-Communist parties, many right-wing parties, and a consequent variety in the composition of governments. Parliamentary and presidential elections expressed the mobilisation as well as the political attitudes of society. The possibility of having an influence on political reality was a real change in comparison to the past.

The other novelty could be observed in economics. After the collapse of communism a Communist, a centrally-managed, planned economy was replaced by a free-market economy and the system of capitalistic production. Its consequences increased unemployment and variation in salaries. For the first time these societies experienced social stratification based on strongly differentiated incomes. On the personal level, society divided into layers, moving from the shared poverty of communism to a society with a very prosperous elite and growing poverty. In the succeeding years, transformation affected other areas: the educational system, health service, and public insurance system. These changes are ongoing.

From a subjective perspective, the view of a normal ‘man on the street’ (or a component of social awareness of changing reality), the process is perceived mainly in the context of the problems it brings. Nostalgia is common, at least in those areas where the transformation process is perceived as having worsened the situation. Socially and economically underprivileged

groups experience fear of changes, fear of the entrance to the European Union and fear of an uncertain future.

Lest this analysis be considered one-sided, we must remember to mention the other side of transformation: the positive opportunities brought by change, and those who have benefited from them, those who have been the carriers – to use Weber's terms – of transformation and democratisation. The new economic possibilities presented by the free market have been utilised by those social groups predisposed to gain from them: the former political elite, who have made use of their knowledge of economics; the young, dynamic and qualified, who have introduced to the employment market such professions as manager, insurance agent, stock broker, advertising copywriter, and moreover the members of trades and guilds, those professions which during communism formed the exceptional enclave of 'private business'. Freedom therefore, pregnant with possibilities for all, has been exploited effectively by a few.

The change in the style of living has meant a change in values. Also significant is the growth of print media and the effect of that growth on public opinion. Journalists have exposed the corruption, penetrated the organised crime, critiqued and debated many aspects of the societal world-view: even such a sensitive issue as child abuse within the family, until recently the taboo in societies of the region.

In these transformations is religion present and if so – how? Does it relate to the objects that the classics of the sociology of religion dealt with? Are religions and churches involved in transformation of economy, politics, styles of life, values? Is religion the source of integration or desintegration in transforming society? Does it involve itself, own structures and modes of acting in the processes of adaptation or rather form expectations, directions and influence changes of other sectors of society in order to adapt them to its own aims? What are the social attitudes towards religions and churches and what are the differences in comparison to the Communist times? In these rolling transformations, this democratic life and all that it brings – pluralism, freedom, the rule of law, existing civil society and the formation of political society – are religion and its accompanying institutions appropriate to these changes?

These methodological dilemmas are strongly present in this book, but also in other studies that do not focus on Central and Eastern Europe but other areas, mainly on the Western societies. Two recently published books, written by James Beckford and Karel Dobbelaere, are here of a particular interest.

Elaborating already discussed question why during the second half of the twentieth century social science has marginalized religion (Beckford, 1989), in his latest book the author explains social-constructionist approach aimed at better understanding of the way how people understand, experience and use religion in their everyday life. Respectively: ‘Without denying the existence of anything other than text and discourse – and building on well-established insights into the constructive and destructive possibilities of social interaction – I seek to analyze the processes whereby the meaning of the category of religion is, in various situations, intuited, asserted, doubted, challenged, rejected, substituted, re-cast, and so on’ (Beckford, 2003:3).

Our intention is not to discuss the presumptions and consequences of using the social-constructionist approach towards sociology of religion, but to point at an attempt of the new approach to a contradictory and paradoxical reality, a reality in which religion plays various and often hardly comprehensible roles. This variance has been highlighted several times in the analyses of the Post-Communist reality where in many cases religion becomes the object of ideological and social struggles, what often hides its other, not less important, social roles. Therefore, it is not only the issue in which way religion (mainly dominant churches) is adapting to the new pluralistic social circumstances scientifically relevant, but in which way it builds (by means of various answers offering to various people at various levels) the new social reality, regardless how much this construction of the new reality is encumbered by social conflicts.

In order to understand the past, contemporary and future social roles of religion in Central and Eastern Europe, scientists often use the secularisation theory. If there has already been some skepticism regarding the features of Communist modernisation (and consequently about secularisation as an apparent manifestation of the process of the functional differentiation of society), the connection modernisation – secularisation in its entirety is on the agenda of the recent modernisation development (at least in the majority of Post-Communist countries). This is the reason why it is interesting a re-publishing of the fundamental study on secularisation by Karel Dobbelaere (1981, 2002), which is as having been impregnated by the notion of a necessity of returning to the original idea of complexity of secularisation, articulated in differentiating the three dimensions – societal, organisational and individual: ‘The concept of secularisation should be only used if one referred to all three levels at the same time. However, this proposal did not produce the expected results’ (Dobbelaere, 2002:13). Indeed, it is really a matter of a complex task

and a sensitive concept and the study itself indicates again how it is often difficult to associate the influence of one level to the second and third and vice versa. We can even say that an attempt of understanding the connection between the dimensions diverges a necessary attention from the processes within one dimension, for example, the processes that occur on the individual level where there is an evident tendency of not only individualistic-pluralistic relationship towards religious traditions (bricolage, religion à la carte, patchwork etc.), but also of recomposition that stresses the new human needs as well as the new religious answers. Another fact is pointed out in this new edition of the study that is specifically relevant for Post-Communist countries: bringing the actors back in! Consciously or unconsciously, the protagonists constantly re-shape and change social processes and relations and this dynamics has a considerable impact on the difference of the role of religion and the Church in different societies.

The very thing that associates not only these two studies but also a lot of others from this book that are emphatically focused on West-European societies, is the matter of validity of scientific reinterpretation of the social reality. Evident discontent with the existing theories within sociology of religion whose immanent reductionism can not explain without increasing difficulties the difference of the social roles of religion what is more evident in the analyses of Post-Communist societies as well.

The first issue that strikes and provokes researchers is the existence of an extreme variance in Post-Communist countries, from a very high rate of non-religious to those with an outstandingly low percentage of non-religious. As an addition to this, there are also differences within a particular country. The level of religious identification (answer on the question: "I am religious person") vary from 94.4% in Poland, 84.8% in Romania, 84.5% in Lithuania and 83.7% in Croatia to 43.2% in the Czech Republic, 41.7% in Estonia and 27.5% in Belarus (Halman, 2001). In this respect Poland is the most religious and Belarus the least religious country taking into account the whole Europe. Religiosity is higher in Italy, Austria or Portugal than in Slovenia, Hungary or Bulgaria. With some slight differences, the same image is produced by measuring religiosity through Church attendance. Malta is with Poland the most religious country (87.2% and 78.2% respectively of those who attend Church at least once a month) and the Czech Republic (11.7%), Estonia (11.2) and Russia (9.2%) are the least religious together with Sweden (9.3%), France (11.9%) or Denmark (11.9%). But, can we just conclude that Russians or Czechs are simply irreligious or secular? Or, can we say that Poles, Romanians and Croats

are not so religious that researches indicate because religion in these countries has different social roles, such as those connected with particular cultural and national identities? Are the indicators of religiosity, which are obviously an outcome of various social relationships – and for that very reason – of lesser importance? May we question the religious image of some country by doubting the motives of such religiosity? Ideological intricacy of religion and ideological interpretative matrix are linked with many threads and it is for sure a field of the future interest of the sociologists of religion in Central and Eastern Europe. We believe that the studies published in this book, especially in the first chapter, represent a solid base for this field. What comes under scrutiny now is a comparison of the Eastern European countries with Italy and Finland – the two countries where secularisation is at full work, but it can not entirely describe all religious tendencies, especially those more noticeable in these countries by the end of 20th century.

The next very intriguing issue, and which is also treated in various ways in the texts of this book (specifically the chapter: Challenges of Post-Communist Societies), is the matter of a consequential reach of an increased or revived religiosity in many Post-Communist countries. For example, approval of abortion for single women is not so consistent with the image of religiosity, in some countries almost completely unattached to religious views. Slovenia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Croatia, Belarus and Russia are the countries in which such approval is greater than 50%, in many cases higher than in Germany or Great Britain (Halman, 2001). Religiosity is also not able to shape socially acceptable behavior. Cheating on tax is according to opinions of respondents generally higher in Post-Communist Europe than in Western Europe.

In any case, theologically-normative image of a social role of religion does not correspond to the real role and functions of religion. Do the Post-Communist countries, however, share some specific features in this area, as the recent research of R. Stark (2001) suggests? Firstly, he contended that it is the image of God, and not attendance at church services, which helps religion maintain moral order. Secondly, he suggested that the link between religiosity and some moral norms is the weakest in the Post-Communist Europe, what is a consequence, as he explains, to a great extent, of the position of religion in communism. Stark's research was focused on only some of Post-Communist countries that took part in the World Value Study 1990-1991, but his findings and theses are very intriguing which will for sure incite a new research-work interest.

As in many other fields, the issue of the European integrations gains an increasing legitimacy. Namely, it becomes clearer that, in spite of many doubts and obstacles, New Europe affects many social relationships, even those that by the rule of subsidisation (what is, among other things, the topic of religious tradition and Church-State relations) are not in jurisdiction of the European supranational level. Europeisation, as a process of constructing the new supranational mechanisms and institutions, has a double effect: from the European level towards the national states (an example of the influence of the European Court of Human Rights), and then in reverse order (when the EU issue becomes an issue of social debates, even serious conflicts).

Many of mentioned problems are discussed in the studies published in this book. It is based (after discussions and suggestions have been made) on collection of elaborated and developed presentations from the International Conference, 'Religion and Patterns of Social Transformation' that was organized by the International Study of Religion in Eastern and Central Europe Association (ISORECEA) and the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, Croatia in 2001.

The book consists of four topical units. The first chapter 'Religion and Social Transformation: East and West' consists of six papers which deal with religion, religiosity and spirituality in the countries of Central and Eastern, but also Western Europe. The first study is written by Eileen Barker in which the author, provoked by the issues resulting from the secularisation debate, discusses a plethora of different meanings of spirituality. She examines spirituality through three approaches: two ideal-type models of relations of spirituality towards conservative religiosity and secularism; by selection of some meanings people ascribe to spirituality and basis the results of Pan-European Study on Religious and Moral Pluralism (RAMP) conducted in 1998, which indicate some of the characteristics that were associated with the respondents' understanding of spirituality, thereby suggesting some directions for further investigation. Miklós Tomka analyzes religious changes in some Post-Communist countries and brings up a crucial matter before regarding the relations of religion and modernisation. Namely, the main controversy of modern sociology arises out of secularisation consequences of modernisation development. Tomka demonstrates that the connection between secularisation and modernisation is discernible in Post-Communist Europe as well, but he also takes into consideration some alternative hypotheses while interpreting religious revival. For example, he points to a substantial increase of religiosity of those born after 1960, as well as to the strong link of religion and culture in certain countries.

The complementary texts to the study of Miklós Tomka are those of Olaf Müller and Detlef Pollack who mostly examine data of comparative research 'Political Culture and Central and Eastern Europe' conducted in eleven countries in 2000. While Müller analyzes the three hypotheses on religious changes in Central and Eastern Europe (secularisation, privatisation and revitalisation), Pollack is focused on the relations of the institutional (traditional) and individual (subjective) religiosity. His conclusion is that individualisation is present but still marginal, especially in societies with strong traditional churches.

The next two texts examine the situation in two West European countries – Italy and Finland. They also raise an issue of unambiguousness of relation modernisation – secularisation. By wondering how come that Italian society, although highly modernized and individualized according values, continues to be in many aspects a traditional Catholic society, Enzo Pace introduces a term of 'soft secularisation'. It can be assumed that this concept, similar to the well known Grace Davie's concept on 'believing without belonging', which describes contradictory tendencies of religious changes on the European Continent, will draw the attention of the scientific community. Kati Niemelä examines the Finnish experience that is different from the Italian, but provokes similar questions: In comparison to many other European nations, the Finns are less religious but they identify themselves at an above- average level with the Lutheran Church. On the other hand, in the 90s, many indicators show an increase of privatized religiosity that the author observes in the context of the slump in social security (recession and rising unemployment).

Five papers of the second chapter 'Challenges of Post-Communist Societies' discuss the answers of religion to the new social issues within the frame of the process of Post-Communist transformation. Irena Borowik challenges the connection of religion, development of civil society and democratic transformation in general. The Catholic Church in Poland has been the prime social moving force of democratic changes. Now the Church can hardly respond to the challenges of those changes. The crucial query is how to act and have influence in pluralistic society, what means to use pluralistic-modern means of social power. Małgorzata Zawila analyzes the viewpoints of the Catholic Church in Poland on euthanasia and abortion, the old social issues that now appear in the new social framework. The results showing that there is no necessary a contradiction between the respondents' religiosity and their positive attitude towards abortion and euthanasia, which the author presents in order to illustrate this fact as supportive of the thesis on the presence of a

general process of secularisation and privatisation of religion. Barbara Theriault analyzes the attitude of different churches (in this case, the Catholic and Evangelistic) towards the social situation in former East Germany and which principles, strategies and arguments they used at the time. Marjan Smrke lays down an intriguing thesis saying that a part of religious changes in post-communism (firstly revitalisation of religion and strengthening of its social role) can be explained by the idea of proliferated social, respectively, religious mimicry. Ankica Marinović Bobinac, basis the results of an empirical research, analyzes a dimension of religious knowledge of the adult population in Croatia. She connects different socio-demographic indicators with an ascertained level of comprehension of religious facts and events in the Catholic Church. In the last text of this chapter, Keishin Inaba analyzes comparative data of the European Value Study on the relation of the altruism and religion, on the altruistic motives standing behind a certain religious action.

The third chapter 'Religion in New Europe' consists of the texts in which the role of religion from the perspective of Euro-integration processes is being studied. James Richardson and Alan Garay show in which way the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg reinterprets Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and fundamental freedoms, and a possible influence of such reinterpretation on the Church-State relation in Post-Communist countries. Namely, some countries (as defending parties) have already appeared before this Court. A similar problem is a topic of the study of Aleš Črnič who takes Slovenia as an example of how different definitions of religion and different positions of certain social protagonists have very concrete consequences on the activity possibilities of some, mostly smaller religious communities. Katarzyna Leszczyńska, basis the results of an empirical research, analyzes the attitudes of the Catholic Church in Poland and the Czech Republic towards the European Union and the integration processes, all this from the perspective of characteristic social processes that are in progress – pluralism, liberalism, postmodernism and modernisation. This analysis may also be a starting point for a debate in other countries. Lucian Leustean examines a real process of building New Europe and the role of religious communities.

The last chapter presents the three studies in which the subject of research are New Religious Movements and ecclesiastical movements. Basis an analysis of several comparative empirical investigations, Tadeusz Doktor is testing the theories that focus on the consequences of modernisation, market models and the theory of invisible religion, especially having regard to the new trends which can be applied in the three fundamental forms of religiosity: traditional church

religiosity, sectarian religiosity and New Age religiosity. Stipe Tadić and Vine Mihaljević, basis the results of an empirical research, analyze an up to now uninvestigated theme of ecclesiastical movements within the Catholic Church in Croatia. The study of Péter Török is of methodological nature in which he discusses the problems of collecting data on New Religious Movements, what, as at the time when Gordon Melton started to collect such data, appeared to be the problem in former Communist countries. Researchers may use an example of the interview attached to this study.

A few final remarks.

ISORECEA is an international scientific association that as of 1991 gathers all those scientists interested in the study of religious situation in former Communist parts of Europe. The following books based on the International Conferences have been published so far: *The Future of Religion East and West* (1995, eds. Irena Borowik & Przemysław Jabłoński), *New Religious Phenomena in Central and Eastern Europe* (1997, eds. Irena Borowik & Grzegorz Babiński), *Church-State Relations in Central and Eastern Europe* (1999, eds. Irena Borowik), *Religion and Social Change in Post-Communist Europe* (2001, eds. Irena Borowik & Miklós Tomka). This book is the fifth in a row of published books. An increasing attendance of the ISORECEA's Conferences, especially by the scientists coming from former Communist societies, speaks not only of the position and importance of religion in Post-Communist societies, but it also justifies the basic intention of this association – to allow the experts and scientists who live in these regions to speak about religious situation in their countries. The Conference *Religion and Patterns of Social Transformation* that took place in Zagreb in 2001, what was the basis of this book, showed all the heterogeneousness of theoretic approaches and the efforts to comprehend and explain a complex and multidimensional phenomenon of religion and its presence in different socio-cultural and political contexts.

The papers in this book witness the above said.

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