THEMATIC FOCUS: NEW FORMS OF MODERN RELIGIOSITY IN EUROPE

Introduction Religion in Post-secular and Post-communist Europe – Trends, Visions and Challenges

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'In Europe, God is neither as dead nor as alive as some now maintain'
(Lambert 2004: 44)

Anthropologists in their quest to define the key symbols or the root metaphors of contemporary modern living in Europe suggest that popularity is a strong indicator of dominant culture thematics (Ortner 1973; Fernández 2002). Among the most significant phenomena of the new era is religion, and currently the most topical is discussion of the new visibility of religion in the public sphere (Zinser 2007).

Recent social theories have offered us a new scenario of twenty-first century Europe, one in which religion will play a significant role. On the basis of the 'zero-sum-theory', the sum of modernisation and religion is always zero: the more modernisation, the less religion (Boeve 2005: 100). But religion is alive and well in a hyper-modernised era. Research in the last quarter century revealed a rise in Europe of those who hold religious beliefs. While some (e.g., Bruce 2002) still tell us that the death of God continues, secularist theory is being undermined by others. Peter Berger (1999), Zygmunt Bauman (2001), or more recently Jürgen Habermas (2005, 2006) and Charles Taylor (2004) are pointing toward a new cultural landscape and employing terms like 'post-secular' to describe it.

In the last quarter century Europe has also faced some significant political changes. The crash of communism in the countries behind the Iron Curtain caused an unprecedented situation in the social sciences, both on the 'western' and 'eastern' sides of a hitherto divided Europe. Western scientists predicted a deep impact of communism on the religious habitus in post-com-

munist countries. It now looks as if the religious landscape of post-communist Europe is very much more diverse, and one can hardly talk about the direct effect of communism in this case. Instead it is necessary to take into consideration the national and historical conditions embedded in the pre-communist religious culture in each of the given countries.

The main goal of the current AJEC issue is to offer a new insight into the ongoing processes of religious transformation in modern Europe, with special focus on their ‘multi-coloured’ surface. Each of the published essays gives important empirical data on the post-secular situation in modern European societies.

The AJEC collection was also intended to represent the ‘new season of manuals on research methodology in the religious studies’ (Pace 2009) and thus contribute to the vivid debate in the social sciences in their search for open and flexible approaches. Therefore a variety of disciplines and methods is offered here. Some of the articles give an account of the limits and problems inherent in recent approaches, be it in the secondary analysis of the results of several major European and international investigations, from the European Value Study (EVS) to the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) or national case studies.

An Insight into Post-secular Europe

In the age of postcolonial multicultural reflexivity and apparently resurgent religiosity a ‘post-secular’ turn came to be observed. The ‘post’ in ‘post-secular’ need not automatically signal antisecularism, or what comes after or instead of secularism. For many, the key ‘post-secular’ move is simply to question and probe the concept of the secular (McLennan 2007: 859). What we have faced in Europe recently is a pluralistic transformation of religion that, in Western Europe, tends slightly to desecularise the most laicised countries (France, for example) and, on the other hand, to further secularise the most confessional ones (Sweden, for example). Habermas (2005: 26) promotes ‘a vigorous continuation of a religion in a continually secularising environment’. A body of data indicates strong survivals of religion in Europe, most of it generally Christian in nature, alongside of a widespread alienation from the organised churches (weakness of religious participation and ‘churchliness’). Berger (1999: 10f.) refers to the emergence of a ‘massively secular Euro-culture’; Cox (1999: 139) points out that Christianity in Europe is moving from an insti-

tutionally positioned model towards a culturally diffuse pattern, and that it therefore begins to be more and more difficult to measure by such standards as church attendance rate and baptism statistics. On this topic an important range of publications has recently appeared, as reflected also in the articles by Titarenko, Knoblauch, Rosta, Nešpor and Podolinská in this AJEC issue.

In the era of post-secular Europe, a trend towards detraditionalisation is generally asserted. Besides the important questions of what tradition is and how it is transmitted and reproduced, another important question has been raised: is religion still a vehicle for maintaining tradition?

If we turn from wondering what purpose religion serves to asking ourselves how different systems of religious belief are created and reproduced in time and space, we discover that church attendance and activity in faith-based communities or religious voluntary organisations may be very important factors in forming one's social capital in local conditions.

The contribution of Wood provides an example of how religion offers an exclusive good and plays a significant role in local economies, particularly where migrant communities are concerned. His in-depth ethnographic analysis shows multiple facets of interactions between migrants and the local context, and successive waves of migrants too. A selective re-activation of tradition and a new openness to religion in the second generation of migrants in Wood's study elucidates the process of social reproduction of a religious habitus as a contextually rooted and dynamic issue.

The essay by Knoblauch scrutinises a phenomenon of spirituality that is often quoted as the most significant factor in the process of religious revitalisation in post-secular Europe. On the basis of data evaluation of the international survey *Religious Monitor*, Knoblauch claims that spirituality should not be conceived as being an 'alternative' to religion, because it is to be found in church-oriented religions as well as among those who have often been labelled 'irreligious'. Knoblauch claims that spirituality in any sense has become part of the common culture in such a way that the term *popular spirituality* should be coined in this connection.

Even though among young Christians a religious renewal is noticeable, for the whole of the younger generation (18–29-year-olds), there is an increase in 'believing without belonging'. Lambert (2004: 35) states that 'the younger the person, the more likely they are to be irreligious'. Rosta's contribution in this issue concentrates upon the religiosity of youth (15–29-year-olds) in Hungary, using the empirical data from three waves of the national survey *Youth Study*

(2000, 2004, 2008). The results show that religiosity becomes more private, individually defined and remote from churches. Nevertheless, according to his analyses, even though the religious decline among the young generation is visible, religiosity is still important for the majority of the young.

Insight into Post-communist Europe

The religiosity of post-communist Europe is still a bit of an enigma to ‘Western’ social science, and a lack both of adequate methodologies and terminology is frequently reported (Tomka 2006). Therefore, the core of the AJEC collection is intended as an insight into concrete post-communist religious landscapes.

Post-communist Europe faces a post-secular era too: a visible revitalisation of religion is accompanied by a growth of unchurchliness, spirituality and ir-religiosity. Nevertheless, national forms of religious plurality, the historically conditioned religious habitus of each of the given countries, and particularly the parallel way of both privatisation and deprivatisation of religion in the public space has resulted in the religious trajectories of post-communist Europe being very diverse and divergent.

Titarenko in her essay draws out the role of religion in modern society in the so-called Slavic post-Soviet countries (Russia, Ukraine and Belarus), evaluating data from the European value studies. The crash of communism has also caused the growth of religion in these Orthodox Church countries. Nevertheless, democracy, religious plurality and the suddenly opened market of beliefs also resulted in the privatisation and individualisation of religion (‘believing without belonging’). At present the above-mentioned post-Soviet states, and especially Russia, are still very secular in comparison with the majority of European states. Titarenko points out that the phenomenon of combinations of Christian and non-Christian beliefs are typical for post-Soviet states. In post-communist Belarus the author demonstrates a case of post-Soviet religious pluralism with a high level of tolerance among believers of different denominations and movements as well as non-believers.

The Czech case, as another example of religious diversity in post-communist Europe, is examined in the contribution by Nešpor. The Czech Republic is often presented as the irreligious or even anti-religious country *par excellence*. Starting with the interpretation of data taken from two recent sociological surveys Nešpor continues with the interpretation of ethnographic data gath-

ered in the Czech town of Česká Lípa, arguing that, while the town shows an extreme version of irreligiosity in the context of the whole Czech population, the collected ethnographic data reveal different combinations of using spirituality and religious self-identification. The research thus confirmed the necessity to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches.

A contrasting picture to the Czech case is offered in the contribution by Podolinská. The author claims that the evaluation of data collected in Slovakia through the EVS and ISSP surveys radically questions the picture presented of Slovakia as the ‘citadel of traditional religiosity’ in Europe. Podolinská discovers that despite the statistically high proportion of ‘traditional believers’, a post-traditional turn in the Slovak religious scene is visible. During the last post-communist decades overall confidence in the Church has been on the decline; there is a strong tendency towards privatisation of religion and minimalisation of religious participation alongside a growing tendency to consume extra-church spirituality. These trends Podolinská considers to be symptomatic of the religious dynamics in post-communist Slovakia and coins the term ‘post-traditional religious turn’ for them.

In the case of post-communist Hungary, Rosta poses the question of whether the young generation without experience of communism is more influenced by the ongoing process of modernisation and detraditionalisation or by the impact of religious upbringing and education in a post-communist society in the last twenty years. In contrast to the secularisation thesis, he stresses that transmission of traditional religious conviction is much more likely in families with better educational backgrounds than other parts of society, a phenomenon that points to a more and more elite type of church religiosity in Hungary.

Religious pluralism and the ongoing process of modernisation in post-communist countries have caused the growth of new forms of religiosity and spirituality. How do people in modern post-communist societies engender a ‘meaning of life’ once they reject traditional views (about and of ‘religion’ and ‘science’)?

In the search for the role of spirituality in the modern post-communist era, Hall conducted ethnographic research among Polish spiritual communities. She focuses on the use of scientific vocabulary and sophisticated technical tools in Polish holistic milieus. Firstly she analyses the esoteric magazine *Nieznany Świat* [*The Unfathomed World*]. The data show how the magazine wishes to legitimise the spiritual worldview with the help of a modern ‘sci-

entific' vocabulary including visual representations such as photos. A similar trend could be observed among the spiritual seekers in the Węsiory village famous for its ancient stone circles. Hall shows how the 'scientific' approach is used during the pilgrims' gathering in the village to prove the 'energy' of stones. Hall compares her findings with the 'folk' religiosity also preserved during the communist period, and describes similarities and differences between the observed adherent groups.

A new spiritual movement in post-communist conditions is discussed in the last contribution of this AJEC issue. Using the fieldwork data collected in neo-shaman communities in Slovakia, Bužeková concentrates upon the understanding of the term 'shaman' in the neo-shamanic movement. She points out that the term not only has different meanings as a category of analysis (etic term) but is also used in different ways as a folk category (emic term), and argues that descriptions of shamans are people's representations rather than objective reality. Therefore she sees the usefulness of the term 'shaman' in academic analysis as doubtful.

Trends, Visions and Challenges

Ward (2006: 183) states that the cultural *a priori* assumptions that make any belief believable are constantly changing. In his scenario for the future of religion in Europe, Ward suggests that certain *a priori* assumptions, once dominant, are now declining and being replaced by others.

Arguably, the religious landscape of modern Europe is transforming and restructuring according to the morphing modes of believing, belonging and participating and according to the new forms of production, dissemination and consumption of what was (once) supposed to be a 'religion'. Some authors predict that in the long run, religious views 'inevitably melt under the sun of scientific criticism' and religious communities will not be able to withstand the pressures of cultural and social modernisation (Habermas 2006: 15). Even if the Christian metaphors are deeply resonant in Europe, the faith communities of the future will have to concern themselves with defining what it is to belong and to participate. The same task awaits European social science. Its approach is still explicitly or implicitly influenced by Christian terminology when focusing on 'opposing' distinctions like religion/spirituality, secular/non-secular, and so on.

What is understood by ‘religion’ depends on who is asking. Insofar as the ‘European self’ has developed to its reflexive peak, there is a set of profoundly new questions, for instance: Is religion going to be more and more culturally pervasive? Will religion be functioning as an integrating factor of the life of a society or will it develop forms of hyper-individualism, self-help and custom-made eclecticism that proffer a pop transcendence and need for ‘good vibrations’ (Ward 2006: 185)? Will the phenomenon of spiritualism emerge or is it only a ‘timely’ sign of our era that cultural analysts like Mark Edmundson (1997) call the ‘new gothic’? Is spirituality really a depoliticising and socially atomising force as has been recently stated? And finally, how to grasp this diversity, how to collect and interpret data on this radically changing terrain?

These are crucial questions and a big challenge for the current generation of social scientists: to outline new trajectories of transforming religion in modern Europe, but perhaps without the ambition to draw global trends, scenarios and visions for a while.

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