

## REFLECTIONS ON THE CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS “REVIVAL” RELIGION, SECULARIZATION, GLOBALIZATION

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The close connection and subordination of traditional religions and churches with/to some contemporary social-political projects, besides being a consequence of secularization, is also one of the dimensions of globalization. As a process in which religious thought, practice, and institutions tend to lose their social significance /B. Wilson/, secularization raises a dilemma before traditional religions and churches: either modernize and become part of the changing socio-cultural environment, or become marginal and remain but a remnant of the past. According to the eminent sociologist of religion, Peter Berger, the subordination of religion and the church to modernization would be tantamount to a kind of cultural suicide. If religion were reduced to being a tool of the political, the ethnic, the existential, it would lose its specific cultural features and mission. The latter could only be preserved through a creative and selective attitude to the values of modernization. P. Beyer expects that two basic trends in the process of inclusion of religion in the global world will be realized, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. The first is related to the privatization of the religious, its transformation into a private matter, an element of the formation of personal identity. The other unfolding tendency is the politicization of religion and the churches, their linkage to collective (national, ethnic) identities. In this process the nation, not religion, becomes the fundamental value. Religion becomes a means, an instrument, and turns into a kind of civic

religion. The Church is left with a symbolic authority, while the real authority is shifted to the state.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately the term “religion” is often employed without preliminary discussion of the contents of religiousness and without the necessary distinction between it and its social uses as a motivation, emblem, and an emotional mobilizing factor in conflict situations, as a form of secondary and arbitrary sacralization of various associations and human activities. In such cases the external and formal marks of the religious, such as affiliation, delimitation from others, identification with a territory and community, are put to functional use; the contents of religion that once determined its origin, such as adhering to a certain ethos and observing a specific moral code (particularly characteristic of Christianity) remain in the background.

The secularization paradigm, which was basic in the scientific approach to religion during most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is undergoing serious revision today, in the time of globalization. Peter Berger considers it not a paradigmatic characteristic, but as one of the cultural dimension of contemporary religion.<sup>2</sup> The processes involving decrease of the unifying force of the nation-state, the revival of local forms of identity and sociality (ethnic, religious, cultural communities), of regional and trans-national alliances, have served to animate religious feelings and have redefined the cultural borderlines of religion. Some of the phenomena that demonstrate most convincingly the return of religion to the global public scene are: 1) the trans-national spiritual and institutional “networks,” created by traditional religions and churches--especially the Catholic Church; 2) the increasing inclusion of religious affiliation among the constituting and unifying symbols of ethnic and cultural communities and identities; 3) the appearance of religious movements and associations not committed to any religious tradition, any nation or ethnic group, but often representing a kind of synthesis, a *bricolage* of various religious ideas and practices.<sup>3</sup>

This specific property of religion to serve as an emblem of trans-national unities, as well as its universalistic spiritual dimension, are actively utilized in the formulation of

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<sup>1</sup> Beyer, P. “Privatisation and Politicization of Religion in Global Society. Implications for Church-State Relations in Central and Eastern Europe.” In *Church-State Relations in Central and Eastern Europe*. Krakow, 1999, pp. 21-25.

<sup>2</sup> Berger, P. “Reflections on the Sociology of Religion Today.” In *Sociology of Religion*, vol. 62, No. 4, 2001, pp. 425-429.

<sup>3</sup> Casanova, J. “Religion, the New Millennium and Globalization.” In *Sociology of Religion*, vol. 62, No. 4, 2001, pp. 425-429.

paradigms of the “new world order”. Politicians, humanitarians, religious leaders have repeatedly stated that Christianity is the value and spiritual emblem of a united Europe. A proposition coming from Poland would have the belief in God be included in the text of the Constitution of United Europe as a uniting value for Europeans. Even as large-scale a cultural genre as the philosophy of history has also been resorting to the uniting/dividing potential of religion and has defined the new borderlines between civilizations on the basis of religious divisions (S. Huntington, some Russian religious philosophers, both past and contemporary).

### **Different Religions, Similar Changes**

I see this tendency as reflecting the essence of the much debated process (notion) of secularization. Understood in this way, secularization is a tendency evident even in Islamic countries, where religion is increasingly connected with political, national, social projects and interests. It is a known fact that in Modern times politics, law, and the state have gradually taken over the educational, moral, protective functions of the Church and of religion. Although carried out by different means and in various forms, this process is evident throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century in almost all countries with a predominantly Christian population. Sociological surveys in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have stressed the similarity in the tendencies in most of these countries in the following respects: 1) a decreasing number of religious believers; 2) a decreasing number of participants in religious rituals; 3) an increasingly personal, individual vision of God, etc. We may conclude that, as far as the social and cultural status of the separate confessions of Christianity are concerned, all three divisions have been undergoing similar changes. Various researchers have shown that the declared level of religiousness and the degree of participation in Church rituals are higher in proportion to the degree to which religion serves as an integrating factor for the community. Here the transcendent entity of which the individual becomes a part is the group, and therefore religion becomes mostly a form of “belonging to a group.”

### **The Orthodox Religion and the “Orthodox Civilization”**

Many Orthodox religious philosophers, especially the Russians of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Berdyayev, Solovyov, Florenski, etc.) relate Orthodoxy and Orthodox culture to a kind of spirituality, emotionality, community feeling in which moral values are prevalent, thus placing Orthodoxy in opposition to the predominantly utilitarian values of

Western Christian culture. This line of thinking often leads these authors to distinguishing an Orthodox cultural zone (civilization) as a separate cultural-historical entity. According to many of these thinkers, Orthodoxy is spiritually superior to Western Christian civilization and has better prospects for the future. While some of these observations are true and perceptive, the conclusions of such religious-philosophical ideas often serve to justify the century-long rivalry between the two parts of the Christian culture. This type of thinking has the quality of inertia in making of Orthodoxy a distinguishing trait, an emblem of a comparatively homogenous, closed cultural and social system, radically different from the Western Christian one. This attitude is often expressed in the formula "either-or". O. Spengler a century ago and S. Huntington recently have reanimated a more modern version of this kind of mythology. Intermediate in time was A. Toynbee, who defined the two branches of Christianity as "sister civilizations". But there are many arguments against that form of cultural division: 1) Although they have many common socio-cultural features, the separate countries of so-called Orthodox civilization have important economic, political, and cultural differences, which led to the formation of their separate national states in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> cent.; 2) their common Orthodox creed not only failed to harmonize relations between these states, but became a spiritual and ideological cause for rivalry during the centuries; at various times Bulgaria, Russia, Greece, Serbia, and Romania have competed for leadership as the center of Orthodox statehood; 3) the close link between Orthodoxy and the national statehood in all Orthodox countries was destroyed at the time of the totalitarian regimes (except in Greece) and Orthodoxy lost much of its social support; 4) the revival of Orthodox religiousness after the fall of the totalitarian regimes is a rather complex phenomenon, and to all appearances it will follow some of the basic tendencies in contemporary religiousness in Western countries, i.e. the individualization of faith, religious pluralism, implicit religion, the phenomena of "believing without belonging" and "belonging without believing."

Of course, there are many features common to the countries of the so-called Orthodox civilization, characteristics related to the economic, political, cultural specifics and traditions, whose historical origin can be analyzed concretely. For instance there are many spiritual and moral features ascribed to Orthodoxy that are due rather to national mentality, to the paternalistic communitarian traditions, which Orthodoxy has adapted to rather than initiated. In other cases a process of interaction and interweaving of factors has taken place, in which it is hard to distinguish cause and effect, essence and form. Many researchers point

out the existence of a strong pagan cultural substratum behind the refined facade of the Orthodox doctrine; medieval heretical movements have also restricted the social and spiritual space of official Orthodoxy. But, as we know, similar processes have taken place in Western Christianity as well.

### **The Religious “Revival” in the Post-Communist Countries**

In every one of the post-communist countries, immediately after the start of the democratic changes there was a rapid process of stratification and division of society based on material, political, ethnic, cultural-religious, etc., status. The traditional confessions and Churches, especially in countries with a single predominant confession, proved to be potential and actual bearers of a kind of unifying, consolidating spiritual and institutional resource. In the post-totalitarian period, the presidential institution, seeking a stabilizing, unifying foundation for society amidst pluralism and strife, and concerned by the instability of state power, was particularly prone to resort to the Church: by definition the traditional religion personified the much needed social fundament.

In face of the social demand for a unifying resource, not all national Churches were capable of assuming such a role. Besides traditional cultural-historical authority rooted in the remote past, national Churches needed to have also won moral authority by their behavior during the totalitarian regime.

The conclusion that a “revival” of religiousness is taking place in most post-communist countries has often been argued on the basis of sociological inquiries, carried out regularly since 1990. Immediately after the start of democratic changes, a quick growth in the number of religious believers was registered in these studies, together with a growing interest in the Church and hopes about its social role. According to the findings of the large-scale European Values Study of 1999,<sup>4</sup> the religious identification in the period 1990-1999 does indeed display an upward trend in Russia, Latvia, Bulgaria, and, to a lesser degree, in Hungary and Czech Republic, but also a downward trend in Slovenia and the Eastern part of Germany. A comparison with corresponding trends of change in other European countries shows that post-communist countries are not in a particular, exceptional situation. For instance some growth in religious identification for this period can also be observed in Italy

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<sup>4</sup> Tomka, M. “Tendances de la religiosité et de l’orientation vers les Eglises en Europe de l’Est.” In *Social Compass*, vol. 49, N4, 2002, pp. 540, 544-545, 547.

and Sweden, while in Great Britain, Spain, Austria, France, and the Western part of Germany there is a more or less perceptible decrease in this respect. The post-communist countries include countries with some of the highest degrees of religiousness in Europe (Poland, Romania, Croatia) as well as some of the lowest values for this parameter (Slovenia and Czech Republic). There are certain differences between post-communist and other European countries with regard to expectations and hopes regarding the social and cultural role of the Church. The highest shares of respondents in Romania (74.7%), Lithuania (74.4%), the Ukraine (63.1%), and Poland (62.7%) feel that the Church can contribute significantly to solving the moral, family, spiritual, and social problems of society. Among the most skeptical about the role of the Church in solving these problems are: the Eastern part of Germany (27.6%), Bulgaria (33.9%), Czech Republic (36.4%), Estonia (38.5%). In the middle range of the scale are Hungary (42.3%), Belarus (44.5%), Slovenia (46.8%), Latvia (52.8%), Russia (55.1%), Slovakia (59.7%), and Croatia (60%).

The decade since the beginning of democratic changes has been marked in most countries by the loss of trust, by crisis and concussion in the changing institutions and spheres that are the support of collective and individual identities, i.e. the state, the school system, the judiciary, culture, the armed forces. This was one more cause for the trend of rechanneling the need for security and stability of the individual and society toward religion and the Church, a traditional institution less liable to abrupt changes and shocks. Hence arose higher trust in the Church (compared with other institutions) in most post-communist countries than in most West European ones. The citizens of Austria, France, Great Britain, Sweden, Finland, Belgium, Spain, Denmark indicate smaller degrees of trust in their respective Churches than in other public institutions, as evidenced by the European Values Study of 1999.<sup>5</sup> According to the data of that survey, in most post-communist countries (with the exception of Estonia, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Czech Republic, and the Eastern part of Germany), people place greater trust in the Church than in other institutions. This difference is particularly perceptible in Romania, the Ukraine, Croatia, Slovakia, and Russia.

Of course, comprised in the sum total of people with increased religiousness, there is a percentage of people for whom the change in religious behavior stems from a deep personal change, from spiritual growth, and is closely connected with a specific religious experience of

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<sup>5</sup> Tomka, M. "Tendances de la religiosité...", p. 547.

the sacred. But such change and growth, which arrange the entire life world of a person around God and the sacred, are usually slow and painful; they are accessible to only a few. This is what studies of religiousness in Western countries have shown. When mass public changes and trends in the religious sphere are considered--changes that have occurred in a comparatively brief period of time (from a few months to several years), serious analysis and argumentation is necessary before such phenomena can be defined as specifically religious. This line of reasoning is supported by findings of sociological surveys on religiousness in the post-communist countries. A survey carried out in the spring of 1998<sup>6</sup> shows that the percentage of "deeply" religious or "definitely" religious respondents represents a relatively small share of the total number of people defining themselves as religious. The percentage is smallest in Germany (2.1%), in the Ukraine (3.8%), in Slovenia (5.1%); it is largest in Croatia (33.3%), in Hungary (22.6%), and in Poland (19.5%). With its 12% of "deeply religious" respondents, registered in a 1994 study,<sup>7</sup> Bulgaria is situated around the middle of the scale, together with Romania and Slovakia. Most of the people who identify themselves as religious place themselves in the categories marked by hesitation and vagueness: "religious to a certain degree," "neither religious, nor non-religious," "somewhat non-religious." In Lithuania this category amounts to 89.1%, in Slovenia to 83.3%, in Romania 81.6%, in Poland 77%. Past studies that were detailed enough to permit substantial analysis of this type of "hesitant" faith have usually registered the respondents' lack of knowledge of religious doctrine, their acceptance of only part of the religious fundamentals, lack of interest in or consistent observance of church rituals, lack of correspondence between religious convictions and daily behavior, etc. The highest degrees of such characteristics have been registered in Belarus, Bulgaria, Estonia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, and Hungary<sup>8</sup>. Actually these trends are typical for most West European countries; scholars have pointed out as their major causes the individualization of faith, freedom of belief, the breakup of collective identities supported by traditional religions, etc.

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<sup>6</sup> Tomka, M. "Religion, Church, State and Civil Society in East-Central Europe." In *Church-State Relations in Central and Eastern Europe*. Krakow, 1999, p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> *Relations of Compatibility and Incompatibility between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria*. Sofia, 1994, p. 216.

<sup>8</sup> Borowik, I. "Between Orthodoxy and Eclecticism: On the Religious Transformations of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine". In *Social Compass*, vol. 49, N4, 2002, pp. 499-500; Zrinscak, S. "Roles, attentes et conflits: la religion et les Eglises dans les sociétés en transition," p. 511, In: *Ibid.*

The cited data do not provide sufficient grounds for any categorical division between European countries as regards the processes and trends in religions and churches. Together with this, there are differences within the group itself of the post-communist countries, distinctions that can hardly be accounted for by purely religious or confessional factors. For instance, both the highest and lowest degrees of religiousness have been registered among some Catholic and some Orthodox countries. The same is true for the levels of trust in Churches. The highest degrees of trust has been registered in Catholic Croatia and in Orthodox Romania, while the lowest have been indicated in Catholic Slovenia and Czech Republic, and in Orthodox Bulgaria. These facts cast doubt on the veracity of analyses that draw dividing lines based on the observed religious changes between countries with a developed democracy as opposed to post-communist countries, secularized vs. de-secularized cultures, Orthodox vs. Catholic countries, etc.

### **Religious-Political Synthesis**

Preserving the monopoly of a predominant religious confession over other, minority religions in a country represents an important line of interaction between religion and politics in post-communist countries. The more strongly the ethnic-politic project of the predominant ethnos is connected with that group's religious predominance, the more effective and excluding for minority religions is the interaction between religion and politics. Although religious intolerance is considered typical mostly for Orthodox countries<sup>9</sup>, it is also characteristic of Catholicism in those countries where religion has become interwoven with the nation-state, e.g. Poland and Croatia. In all these countries the traditional churches require state political support in order to preserve and enhance their social positions and restrict the competition of the new religious movements. The latter represent a growing challenge to the conservative aspects of traditional religions: the new movements offer more modern religious ideas and practices, and a more emotional and attractive form of communication. Although in constitutional and legal terms the freedom of religious belief and religious communities has been declared in post-communist countries, in fact in most of them the religions of the minorities and the new religious movements are in a disadvantaged position. A more

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

complicated procedure for registration and performing activities has been established for them than for the traditional confessions.

In the countries where, for various reasons (mostly rooted in the distant or recent past of their traditional confessions) religion and the church have failed to become a consolidating social force, they are not attracting strong public interest and trust. Such is the position in the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Hungary, and Bulgaria. In Bulgaria the line of cleavage in society since the start of reforms was not ethnic-based but political, hence religious differences (especially between Orthodoxy and Islam) never became a basis for mutual aggression and contention. The prevalence of political strife over religious-ethnic differences is evident in the political divisions within the Orthodox community itself: the formation and opposition between the two synods of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church reflected and resulted from the political-party division within society at large.

Historically the bearer of strong pan-Orthodox and imperial traditions, after the social changes the Russian Orthodox Church proved to be a suitable support for the presidential institution and a reviver of the worn-out foundations of “Russian” consciousness and self-esteem. Unlike the case of most other post-communist countries, where the increase of religiousness was usually among the older population, in Russia (1991 - 57%, 1996 - 75%) religious feelings extended to a large share of young and educated people.<sup>10</sup> Although it has no serious impact on the electoral or political behavior of the faithful, affiliation with Orthodoxy is often an indicator of the prevalent authoritarian political preferences.<sup>11</sup> Analyzing the social-political dimensions of contemporary Russian religiousness, the sociologist of religion E. Zweerde points out that the growing interest in religion is largely due to the desire for a more egalitarian, less fragmented society that seeks a basis for consolidation in religion.<sup>12</sup> We are drawn to the same conclusion when analyzing the religious attitudes of some believers, attitudes marked by hesitation, vague expectations, ignorance of and failure to practice some fundamental elements of the doctrinal and ritual aspect of Orthodoxy.

The expectations that Russian Orthodoxy will play a consolidating role for society and the lack of an equally influential rival religion preclude the modern functioning of

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<sup>10</sup> White, S., I. McAllister.” Orthodoxy and Political Behavior in Postcommunist Russia.” In *Review of Religious Research*, vol. 41, No. 3, 2000, p. 362.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.370.

<sup>12</sup> Zweerde, E. “Civil Society and Orthodox Christianity...”, p. 37.

religion in the structuring of Russian political space. The formation on a voluntary basis of various religious communities and their equal footing in the activities of civil society is part of the modern liberal-democratic project. Russian society, particularly the state and the political sphere in Russia, are still conservative and restrictive in their attitudes to religious variety, to the religious “market” in the country (the new Law on Religion demonstrates this).<sup>13</sup> This is still a mono-religious society, insensitive and intolerant to religious variety and, consequently, is still unprepared to become part of the global civil society.

The Churches in post-communist countries need the support of the state and legislature and are dependent on the state as regards two other important issues: the restoration of ecclesiastic property rights and the introduction of religious teaching in school. The teaching of religion in school has been introduced in some countries (Poland, Romania, Croatia), although it has met with mixed reactions and reservation on the part of public opinion. In other countries (the Ukraine, Belarus, Slovenia), in harmony with the prevalent attitudes, a general discipline “religious studies” or “religion” has been introduced as an optional discipline;<sup>14</sup> the situation in Bulgaria is similar.

These complicated and contradictory tendencies in the relationship between church and the secular sphere of government and politics, provoke ambivalent public valuations and hopes concerning religious “revival.” Feelings range from excessive expectations and entrusting religion with important social functions, to accusations of loss of religious ideals--more specifically, that religion remains enclosed in conservative clericalism instead of performing its mission of spiritual and moral consolidation of society. On the other hand, in some extreme forms of the synthesis between religion and ethnos or religion and politics, religion seems to play a role that is alien to it, but which is assigned to it due to the weakness and immaturity of other social subjects and institutions such as the state, political parties, secular ideologies, civil society. The development and modernization of the latter will probably place religions and the Churches in their specific place, that of forms of spirituality and social communion which, in their various social activities, are guided by their own specific motivation and ethos.

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<sup>13</sup> Elliot, M., S. Corrado. “The 1997 Russian Law on Religion the Impact on Protestants.” In *Religion, State and Society*, vol. 27, No. 1, 1999

<sup>14</sup> Borowik, I. “Religion and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe. Paradoxes of Transformations.” in *Church-State Relations...*, p. 17.