The European "East" and "West" in a Religious Context: Are There Two Europes?

Prof. DSc. Nonka Bogomilova
Anthropology Department, Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge, Bulgarian
Academy of Sciences
nonka_bogomilova@mail.bg

Summary

The paper examined the religious context of the „two Europes" (East – West) thesis as regards: a) comparative analysis of the processes and trends in contemporary religiousness; b) legal dimensions of the relations between State and Church ("onthological primacy" of the State) and the problems of the inter-religious dialog.

Comparative analysis of these tendencies indicate certain general similarities. Analyzed are the causes for both the differences and similarities in these processes, and special attention is devoted to the secularization as a continuing process in "both Europes".

Keywords: contemporary religiosity, two Europes, religious "revival", religion and state, secularization trend.

A revival of Religion in EE?

The conclusion that a "revival" of religiousness is taking place in most Eastern European, especially 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 by 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 (Tomka 2002: 540, 544-545, 547) 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 Eastern European, post-communist countries are not in a particular, exceptional situation (Bogomilova 2004). For instance some growth in religious identification for this period can also be observed in Italy 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 (e.g. Poland, Rumania, Croatia) as well as others with some of the lowest (e.g.

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 Rumania (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%).

Of course, comprised in the sum total of people registered as religious, there is a percentage of people for whom the increase in religious behaviour stems from a deep personal change, from spiritual growth, and is closely connected with a specific religious experience of the sacred. But such change and growth, which arrange the entire life world of a person around God and the sacred, are usually a slow and painful process, accessible to only a few. When mass public changes and trends in the religious sphere are considered – changes that have occurred in a comparatively brief period of time – serious analysis and argumentation is necessary before such phenomena can be defined as specifically religious. A survey carried out in the spring of 1998 (Tomka1999: 45) 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 (Mitev 1994: 216), Bulgaria is situated around the middle of the scale, together with Rumania and Slovakia (Bulgaria was not included in the quoted 1998 survey of some ten Central and Eastern European countries).

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 general group amounts to 89.1%, in Slovenia - to 83.3%, in Rumania - 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 (Borowik 2002: 499-500; Zrinščak 2002: 511). 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.

The cited data do not provide sufficient grounds for drawing a categorical dividing line 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 Rumania, while the lowest have been indicated in Catholic Slovenia and Czech Republic, and in Orthodox Bulgaria.

Sociological surveys and analysis in the end of 20th century have stressed the similarity in the tendencies in most of these countries (Bruce 1996: 25-69; Davie 1996: 79-81, 129-157; Janz 1998: 31-51, 68-82, 97-109; Tomka 1999: 42-63; McGuire 2008; Cipriani 2010: 439-463) in the following respects: 1). A decreasing number of deeply devoted religious believers; 2). A decreasing number of participants in religious rituals; 3). An increasingly personal, individual vision of God; 4). 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, etc.

Those conclusions are relevant to the observed trends in religiosity in 31 East and West European countries covered by the European Value Surveys from 1980 to 2008 (Pérez-Nievas and Cordero 2010)

Types of relationships between State and Church in the European countries. Is there a European identity/standard in this sphere?

It is generally considered that, in the developed Western democracies, there are three basic models of Church-state relationships, characteristic of the epoch of secularisation: 1). The model of a state Church expressing a predominant religion (Finland, Greece, Great Britain); 2). The model of divided existence and co-operation, where the Church is separated from the state but is part of society (Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain); 3). The strict separation of church from state (France – the only European country with a categorical separation between Church and state) (Horvat 2004).

Another proof of the secular nature of European statehood is the absence of any reference to confession-based religious theses and ideas in the preambles to the constitutions of the European countries. Such references exist in the preambles to the Greek and Irish constitutions. The secular principle of separation between Church and state is evident in the new constitutions of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe: in some of their preambles there is reference to God (Poland, the Ukraine); others refer to their religious traditions (Czech Republic, Slovakia); still others make no such reference or simply have no preambles to the constitution (Romania, Latvia, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan). In the most frequent case there is no reference to God (Belarus, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Russia, Slovenia, Serbia) (Shmid 2004).

Examining the various emphases and even the philosophy of this legislature in Germany, France, Great Britain, Spain, L.Bloß writes that it: "appears to draw a highly differentiated picture of the European Union as a whole being divided into several major legal approaches in this arena." (Bloß 2003). But these European models of state-Church relations are not static. There is a trend towards reduction of the relative weight of state Churches and towards granting greater rights to other confessions; in recent years this tendency has become evident in Sweden and Finland, in Italy, Spain, and Portugal.

"Ontological primacy" of the state over the religion and church during the secular 20th century (Zylberberg 1990: 93) and in the presence defines the tendency for each European country, not subject to the form of the government – democracy, totalitarianism, welfare states etc. The "project" of the state, not subject to being called "a dialogue", "interaction", dictate, "protectionism", "ethnical management" etc., is to control the social positions of the church, to instrumentalize it for its own purpose or to marginalize it. In democratic regimes, it is realized through democratic means – legislation, consensus; in totalitarian regimes - both with violence and compulsion.

The reason of the comparatively poor presence of the religious pluralism in the contemporary world is namely the state's pursue to support the historically created, or even to form missing symbiosis between ethnos and religion, nation and religion for the purposes of strengthening the very statehood. In this context, the mono-confessional character of the given nation is potentially "favorable" circumstance for its strengthening and the strengthening of the statehood, but the way of realization of the later depends on the type of the state and its regulation: monistic or pluralistic, secular or religious etc.

As concerns developments in the 20th and early 21st century, most authors definitely believe that, within these complex relationships, the state's "ontological primacy" has been established, that the political factor tends to cross over into the sphere of religion with growing aggressiveness and without "asking for admittance". In some societies, this penetration meets with some resistance; in others, with well-calculated hospitality.

The US author Fenggang Yang has studied 190 countries (a research presented at the world conference of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion at Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 2009) and concluded that the state practices four types of relationship with religion and churches There may be monopolism: the domination of a single religion; pluralism: support for religious variety; oligopoly - religious variety is acceptable but the state shows preference for certain confessions and oppresses others; complete prohibition of all religions (Yang 2010: 194-205). As regards these types of relationships between the state and religions, Yang presented the following picture: in 40 of the studied countries religious pluralism has been established; in 16 countries there is a historically and culturally determined preference for certain religions; in 50 countries certain religions are privileged; in 41 countries a single religion is privileged; in 43 countries a state religion has absolute monopoly; in 2 countries, China and Albania, for certain periods of time all religions were prohibited.

Some interesting ideas and a typology have been proposed in connection with these traits by a large-scale collective research project that included some of the most authoritative European analysts of religion. In the introduction to the monograph published on the basis of the project, it is pointed out that the religious factor has played an important role in European countries for the formation of nation-states. The territorial division of religious affiliation has formed the confessional geography of Europe.

In this large project, introduced by J.-P. Willaime, the European countries are divided into three categories depending on the specific place and role of religion in the context of the respective nation and state-political sphere, and on the resulting situation of confessional variety in each country.

A.When religion produces the nation: Italy, Greece, Denmark:

Willaime continues his analysis in pointing out Greece, Italy, and Denmark as cases of national identity being tied to a predominant religion. Despite the formal and legally stipulated religious pluralism there, a single religion holds a privileged position in each of the three countries: respectively Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Lutheranism. The same is true to a great extent for Russia and Turkey. In these cases the state manifests itself as either a nationalistic institution or a support for pluralism and variety (Willaime 2005: 11-13).

This group of countries is presented as characterized either by the predominance of two confessions (Catholicism and Protestantism) or by the growth of a pluralistic Christianity, as in the case of Great Britain, despite the central importance of the Anglican Church for society and education in the latter country.

C.The clash of religious and secular tradition - Belgium, Spain, Russia, Turkey:

The introduction to the part dealing with this group of countries points out that each of them is characterized by two contradictory features: the presence of a single religion informing the history and culture of the country, combined with a strongly critical tradition regarding religion, i.e. Belgian free-thinking, Spanish anti-clericalism, Russian atheism, and Turkish republicanism.

D.France: the classical example of separation between state and Church.

Europe and secularization

In sociology, the theory of secularization has, for decades, starting in the 1950s and 1960s, attempted to give explanations for these processes and phenomena. As particularly active authors with respect to this problem the famous British sociologist James Beckford points out David Martin, Karel Dobbelaere, Brian Wilson, Danièle Hervieu-Léger, and others. In their studies, the theory of secularization retains its connection with the more general theories of modernization and continues to acknowledge the decreasing role and functions of religion in the modern world (Beckford 1990: 55).

Amidst the diverse theoretical standpoints on these issues, we hear the strong voice of authors who acknowledge as indisputable the secular, non-religious nature of contemporary times, yet seek and propose alternative forms and ways to compensate for the existential concerns this fact engenders – fear of death, the loss of a lasting, intransient meaning to human life and historical development. Another type of interpretation seems to propose a third, middle path between these two extreme viewpoints, as it discovers the traces of lost religiousness in other cultural forms and phenomena, such as art, philosophy, and the new utopias.

The French scholar Marcel Gauchet qualifies as "refuges" of religiosity the Utopian ideologies, the style of thinking marked by dualism and typical primarily for philosophy, with its splitting of truth from appearance, sensible from intelligible world, the immanent from the transcendent. Art too is a "continuation of the sacred with other means" (Gauchet 2001: 307).

This viewpoint is shared by the sociologist Jean-François Lyotard: God has withdrawn from the world, abandoning it to the actions and works (Lyotard 1993).

But even authors gravitating to these approaches also detect a modern tendency of withdrawal of religion from the social to the subjective sphere. For instance, Roger Caillois asserts that today, "religion becomes dependent on man, but not on collectivity", "the sacred is interiorized" and "parcelled out" (Caillois 2001: 143), it "acquires an abstract, inner, subjective character" (Caillois 2001, 146).

Today, the latter thesis is questioned by more than a few authors. For instance, Thomas Luckmann argues that religion is not a transitional stage in the evolution of humankind but a universal aspect of the *conditio humana* (Luckmann 2003: 275). He finds that the theory of secularization is based on Enlightenment philosophy, adopted as a methodological basis by the founding fathers of sociology, particularly Comte and Durkheim, and he considers this "dominant paradigm" to have been a mistake (Luckmann 2003: 276).

Peter Berger is even more definite in his criticism of the theory of secularization, which asserts that modernization inevitably leads to a decline of religion. He concludes that a process of counter-secularization is going on in our times; or at least that secularizing and desecularizing tendencies are interacting. He strongly asserts that the world today is generally religious (Berger 2004: 16, 17, 21). He considers the secularization not a paradigmatic characteristic, but one of the cultural dimensions of contemporary religion (Berger 2001: 445), and confirms the conclusion drawn by most of the authors discussed above, that the connection between religious institutions and the faithful is weakening, that churches are losing their hold and authority over society, while still playing, in certain cases, social and political roles. At the same time, he also observes that religious beliefs, in terms of attitudes, feelings and experiences, that is, as a subjective phenomenon, are not decreasing drastically.

A number of contemporary sociologists of religion are more cautious and nuanced in their conclusions regarding the processes and trends in religion today. For instance, Steve Bruce agrees with, and adds new arguments to, the ideas discussed above regarding the individualization, anthropologization, and subjectivization of religion as we see it today, deprived of a shared, universal religious framework (Bruce 1996). The British sociologist of religion Grace Davie, based on her analysis of the results of the European Values Study, waves 1981 and 1990, comments on the changes in two types of indicators: institutionalized religiosity vs. subjective experience, religious feelings, beliefs, ritual practices, etc. She concludes that judging by the former type of indicators, there is a visible tendency towards

weakening of the ties between the faithful and the ecclesiastical institution, while the latter show a certain continuity and persistence of attitudes. On this basis, she concludes that Europe is not so much secularized but rather non-ecclesiastically oriented. Still, according to Davie, the concept of "secularism" refers largely to young Europeans (Davie 2004: 100 – 101), among whom she observes, with concern and alarm, an "ignorance" of Christian doctrine as a norm for modern Europe (Davie 2004: 121). The discoursive and existential dimensions of European identity (Sazonova: 2018) are becoming more secularized.

Marcel Gauchet believes that a specially strong yearning for religion springs from the clashes and challenges of the age of individualism, from the difficult effort to be a subject with free will, responsible for one's destiny and choices. But Gauchet accepts with understanding that we humans today are inflexibly destined "to live stripped bare and in anguish", with "a daily pain that no sacred opium will ever again give us the possibility to forget..." (Gauchet 2001: 312).

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