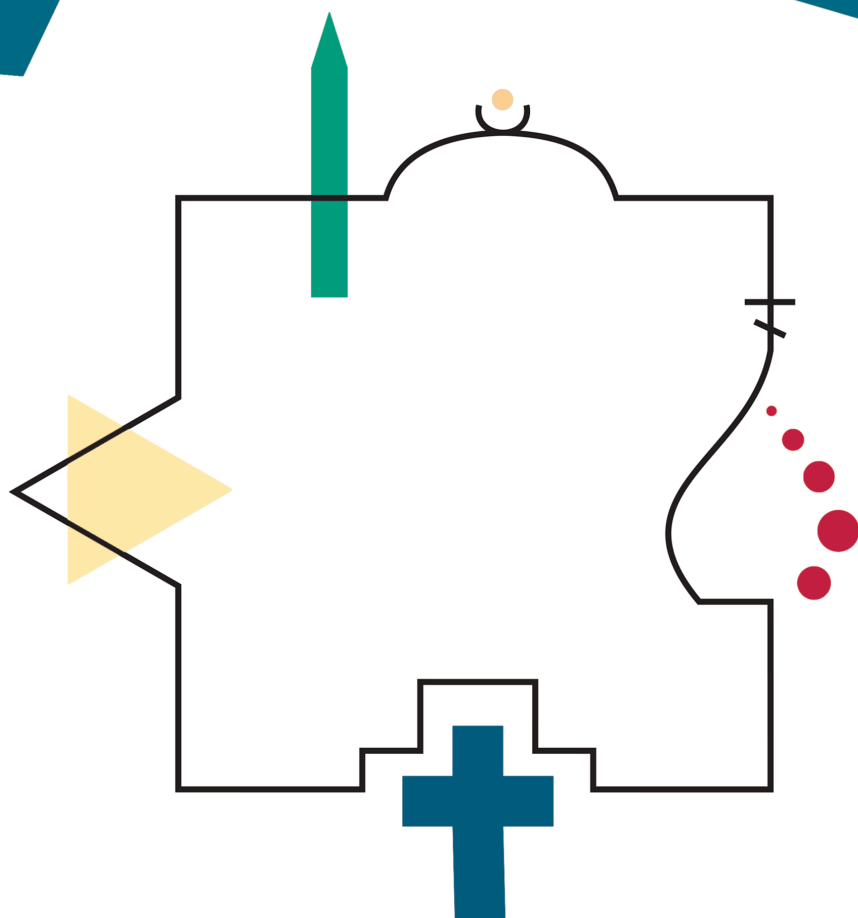


THE EXPERIENCE OF FAITH IN SLAVIC CULTURES AND LITERATURES IN THE CONTEXT OF POSTSECULAR THOUGHT

Edited by
Danuta Sosnowska
Ewelina Drzewiecka



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Danuta Sosnowska

Introduction

To some extent, this book is a result of the conference which took place in October 2017 at the University of Warsaw under the title “The experience of faith in Slavic cultures and literatures in the context of postsecular thought.” The organizers intended to gather specialists from different Slavonic countries to discuss how religiosity is experienced today in areas that share Slavic traditions. It was obvious that the meeting would only be a starting point for this discussion because conferences that undertake such a task (address the question from the standpoint of Slavonic experiences of faith) are still rare.¹ Especially taking into account that the meeting was not a debate between scholars conducting research in only one field, it aimed to confront various perspectives of religious studies, literary studies, social and political studies and, of course, fields like anthropology and philosophy. Indeed, it can be useful to introduce different points of view when modern belief or unbelief is examined.

¹ However, Polish researchers conduct advanced research in areas such as literature and post-secularism. See, for example, *Postsekularyzm i literatura*, *Wielogłos*, no. 2 (2015). <http://www.ejournals.eu/Wieloglos/2015/2-24-2015/>; Piotr Bogalecki, Alina Mitek-Dziemba, and Tadeusz Sławek, eds., *Więzi wspólnoty: literatura – religia – komparatystyka* (Katowice: FA-art, 2013); Agnieszka Bielak, ed., *Metamorfozy religijności w literaturze nowoczesnej* (Lublin: KUL, 2016); Piotr Bogalecki, *Szczęśliwe winy teolingwizmu. Polska poezja po roku 1968 w perspektywie post-sekularnej* (Kraków: Universitas, 2016); Tomasz Garbol, ed., *Literatura a religia – wyzwania postsekularności* (Lublin: KUL, 2017). Cf. conferences, i.e.: “Więzi wspólnoty. Literatura – religia – komparatystyka” [The Ties of Community. Literature, Religion, Comparative Studies] (University of Silesia in Katowice, 2012), “Literatura a religia. Tradycja badawcza i jej reinterpretacje” [Literature and Religion. Research Tradition and its Reinterpretation] (The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, 2018). See also: Piotr Bogalecki and Alina Mitek-Dziemba, eds., *Drzewo poznania. Postsekularyzm w przekładach i komentarzach* (Katowice: FA-art, 2012).

We hope that this confrontation of different approaches to modern religious issues will also be fruitful in this book, which contains literary studies and social or philosophical diagnoses. In the editors' opinion an interdisciplinary or – if one would like to be more critical – eclectic approach to the issue better reveals its complexity, diversity and richness than a one-dimensional exploration of the subject. Having considered that literature is not a mirror for any society, we treat it as a creative or expressive force in the process of emerging social imaginaries. By this literature, naming the hopes and fears of religious experiences completes or reveals – in its own way – the aspects of modern religiosity which can be observed in social processes or religious ideas today. Moreover, literature is capable of defining some experiences anew.

During the aforementioned conference, not every Slavonic country was an object of scrutiny, but Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czechia, Macedonia, Slovakia, Serbia, Poland, Russia, Ukraine were considered. Similarly to the conference, this book presents experiences of faith in Slavonic countries and literatures only partially as some countries do not appear in the reflection presented in the book. However, we treat this edition as encouragement to further discuss the issue – as we hope the debate will be continued. This is a task which is worth undertaking as today's religiosity in Slavonic countries is not very well understood. In a recently released book, Michele Dillon wrote:

Although the Church is universal, the everyday realities in any particular locations give rise to a great deal of pluralism in how faith is practiced and understood. Each particular society's setting presents its own nuances, complexities, and challenges.²

In fact, religiosity in Slavic countries calls for scholars' attention because its 'nuances' are not sufficiently known. Dillon, who anchored her research in the context of American Catholicism, mentioned that "[...] some tensions of which I write are also present in Western Europe, Australia and Latin America."³ It is worth noting the exclusion of Eastern Europe from Dillon's reflection, in particular, Slavic countries. This is not a complaint against the author, but only a desire to emphasize that the religious situation in Slavic countries often remains out of sight of researchers, especially Western ones.

Meanwhile, although the position of Slavic religions shares many factors with the situation of religion in the modern world, it has also some typical

² Michele Dillon, *Postsecular Catholicism. Relevance and Renewal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1–2.

³ Dillon, *Postsecular Catholicism*, 2.

traits resulting from the complex Slavic cultural heritage and history, including the communist past. Reflection on specific features of local religious experiences and examining this phenomenon in the context of global processes enriches knowledge of modernity and its relation to secularization and desecularization. The purpose of the book is to address today's state of belief in Slavic countries, where religion was not only affected by the process of modernization before World War II, but also where after the war the position of the Church was influenced by communist policy and religiosity was then confronted with the process of transformation.

The authors of the texts collected in the book, some of whom took part in the conference and some of whom did not, look for different forms of spirituality and/or religiosity, thus proving how rich and often ambiguous the material they work on is.

In this book, 'postsecularism' is an important context for dealing with local aspects of religious experiences as they are expressed in Slavic cultures (literatures) and social processes. Not every author uses postsecular thought as an interpretation tool for examining specific phenomena; however, even if for some articles it seems to be an 'outside perspective', this horizon ties this book together. It marks an important perspective where sacred/profane, believers/non-believers, faith/doubt, trust/distrust, belongs/believers are not separated by walls and moats. Past decades have witnessed advances in postsecular thought which offer a very efficient approach to many modern religious phenomena. 'Invisible' or 'weakened' religiosity or hybrid idioms of faith can be seen as dissolving religion when traditional narratives are used. Moreover, heresy, blasphemy, or mockery of faith seem to be unacceptable for followers of 'true' religion. Therefore postmodern literature, which often uses parody, the grotesque or irony when introducing religious issues into literary worlds, gives the impression that it only plays with religion. However, when we enter the domain of postsecular thought and the interpretations it offers, the non-dogmatic or anti-dogmatic phenomena I have mentioned can be seen in a totally different way.

Although not all religious experiences in the book are described as 'postsecular', all of them have something to do with either breaking with religious orthodoxy or putting orthodoxy under question.

As the editors of the book, we do not state that something like 'Slavic religiosity' exists. Conversely, as everywhere in the world, religiosity in Slavic countries is incredibly complicated due to differences between cultural and historical traditions, varying rates of social development and differences in its character, different social stratifications and dominant classes, different attitudes to traditions and so on. It seems, however, to be worth introducing this

Slavic ‘piece’ to the mosaic of modern religiosity just as a ‘piece’, not only as Polish, Czech, Slovak or Bulgarian ‘cases’.

This collective book includes articles by well-known professors whose achievements are appreciated in their home countries, as well as young researchers just starting their professional careers. We hope that this mixture of generations can positively contribute to extending our perspective because a personal point of view on how religions and the status of religiosity are changing today is an important factor in perceiving religiosity as such. Apparently, one’s position on the ‘generation ladder’ determines forms of spirituality as well as the status and character of the religious institution with which one might be familiar. As far as religiosity is concerned, such subjectivity which is formed by personal experience, which itself was shaped by a ‘strategic moment’ of observation, can be valuable because it might open a field of vision where religiosity is a non-theoretical, non-abstract phenomenon – a real thing. This subjective approach contrasts with the secular theory which generalized the concept of ‘a secular age’ – to quote the title of the groundbreaking book by Charles Taylor.⁴

Considering various aspects of religiosity today – not only the forms observed in Slavic countries but also outside of them – we are at the point where we are trying to redefine the meaning of secularization and desecularization. The secular theory which has been used for decades strictly separated believers from unbelievers, the latter of which were supposed to be atheists. The insufficiency of this theory is obvious today, as has been shown by Charles Taylor and many others. Researchers emphasize that too many religious phenomena are marginalized when secular theory, treated in a dogmatic way, is applied to modern religiosity. It might be useful to illustrate this insufficiency by referring to the example of the current religious situation in Czechia. Figures show that the number of people in that country who are adherent of official, traditional Churches is falling year by year, but simultaneously the number of people is rising who are interested in exotic cults and who believe in such things as amulets, horoscopes, magic forces, etc. Belief in horoscopes, amulets, etc. is attractive for half the adult population of Czechs. One third use the services of healers and various representatives of alternative medicine; 46.5% have a positive attitude to so-called paranormal phenomena.⁵ Thus, on one hand Czechia confirms the stereotype of being one of the most secularized countries, but on the other hand this is a country of believers, even if one

⁴ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁵ Jiří Vavroň, “Věříme magii, kartářkám, amuletům,” *Právo*, no. 24 (303) (2014) (31. 12. 2014): 1–2.

might find the object of these beliefs is not really serious nor deserving to be treated as religion. However, it sounds like a joke to call Czechia ‘a country of Gandalf’ as the frivolity in this expression should not hide the real challenge of interpreting this statistic.⁶

A Czech specialist in religious studies, Pavel Hošek,⁷ some years ago published a book under a significant title *Gods are returning (A bohové se vracejí)*.⁸ It recapitulates the diagnosis concerning the loss of strength of religiosity in recent centuries and its current regaining of power, which results in faith coming back to modern societies, including Czechia. In the chapter entitled “Religiosity is coming back,” a panorama of rediscovering of religion is sketched from the 1970s to the present day. The process of faith returning to public space did not necessarily mean societies again revolving around the Bible and traditional Church institutions. The challenge was posed to Christian Churches in the 1970s and later, especially in the West, where awakened needs for spirituality fueled the search for new forms of religiosity outside of Christianity. However, the Church also became more active and more open in some Slavic countries, especially Poland. Both ‘little stabilization’ and consumerism as a lifestyle, both of which were promoted by the communist powers, might have helped in adapting some of the ideas of the Second Vatican Council, especially those intended for young people. The Polish Church wanted to be a spiritual leader and had to respond to the needs and questions of contemporary seekers if it aimed to rule people’s hearts and minds. As a child, then as a teenager and lastly as a student I observed these big efforts which were made to attract not only young people but also so-called ‘believers yet still seekers’, or even non-believers who still did not declare themselves materialists. New forms of religious movements were developed inside the churches to create a new attitude to religion that was more personal, engaged and

⁶ In the introduction to a book *A Czech Perspective on Faith in a Secular Age* Pavel Hošek wrote: “Czech society is in many respects a test case and a ‘laboratory’ of secularizing trends and their inner dynamics [...]. It is one of the most secular societies in the world. What makes Czech secularity quite interesting is the fact that it does not consist of widely held atheist convictions or materialist philosophy or complete spiritual indifference.” And quoting a Czech researcher, Dana Hamplová, he added that many Czechs are interested in non-materialist interpretation of reality and they have an active interest in alternative spiritualities. See: “Introduction. Towards a Kenotic Hermeneutics of Contemporary Czech Culture,” in *A Czech Perspective on Faith in a Secular Age*, ed. Tomáš Halík and Pavel Hošek (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015), 2–3.

⁷ Pavel Hošek (born in 1973) is a Czech theologian and a researcher in the field of religion. He is the head of the Department of Religious Studies at the ETF UK and the head of the Department of Systematic Theology, Philosophy and Religion at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Prague. He deals with the relationship of theology and religion and interreligious dialogue.

⁸ Pavel Hošek, *A bohové se vracejí* (Jihlava: Mlýn, 2012).

practical – a religion which could be present in one's everyday life. The 'Open Church' slogan that was so important for Catholics in Poland in 70s and 80s is a typical example of this trend. A radical change in the orientation of the Polish Church which was so striking after the transformation started in 1989 and directed it towards a much more conservative position and painfully disappointed a lot of people who highly valued the previous paradigm of religiosity. It is worth adding that this Polish 'Open Church' also influenced some young Czechs from the generation born in the 1960s.

This 'episode' with the 'Open Church' and the subsequent collapse of this idea shows how dynamic the situation in religiosity was, even in a country which is widely perceived as traditionally Catholic.

Returning to the book *Gods are returning*, with regard to the present situation Hošek warns against religious phenomena which he treats as sects, as well as the religious fanaticism and terror that can be born from fundamentalism. A crucial question for him is the role of the Church in easing this kind of tension between believers; however, the likelihood of the Church successfully playing this role is uncertain. Although prospects for this dialogue are not very optimistic, Hošek observes that religious institutions could contribute to resolving the problem of growing fanaticism,⁹ but the Church would have to change its approach to many current problems.

Examining the cultural background which fosters or blocks today's religious revival, Hošek cannot avoid the question about the relation between faith and postmodernity. He interprets the latter in opposition to modernity, whose worldview has broken down. He also questioned the crucial ideas of modernity: emancipation from religion, tradition, and backwardness as something to overcome. Postmodernity, with its disbelief in progress, distrust in the power of reason and strong suspicion of dominant narratives makes people ask again what the sense of human existence could be. Hošek uses the well-known metaphor of culture as a market regulated by supply and demand. The sacred is listed among the offered goods, which is not in itself a real cultural revolution, bearing in mind that in the history of the Church there used to be medieval 'markets' where the relics of saints as well as the most holy relics were bought and sold – where specialized relic hunters profited from human religiosity. If a modern market in which religion has become a commodity

⁹ This declaration seems to be too idealistic therefore one can have one's doubts as to whether it will succeed. Obviously, it is unlikely to accomplish the mission in near-term. On the other hand, the idea how religion could commit to the peaceful coexistence of differing religion was developed by other scholars and examined by them in different way. See e.g.: Ulrich Beck, *A God of One's Own: Religion's Capacity for Peace and Potential for Violence*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2010).

has some new features, it is variety of items. Artefacts belonging to different religions as well as non-formal cults are ready to be sold. Hošek stresses that ritual objects, spiritual literature and meditative courses are successfully put on the market even in Czechia, despite the stereotype that it is a deeply secularized country.

At this point it may be worth adding a small comment about religiosity and postmodern literature. Although the term 'postmodern' has been widely identified with a deconstructive, cynical, or even nihilistic attitude, especially in the world of art (and literature), postmodern spirituality is a hallmark of many literary works today. Literatures in Slavic countries may provide numerous examples of works that cannot be understood without taking their spiritual dimension seriously, even if spiritual and/or religious meanings are presented by artists in a scoffing or iconoclastic manner. However, it must be remembered that the postmodern religious system of thought, if one tries to extract this from a postmodern literary work, is based on realities viewed as plural and subjective, and, as such, dependent on the individual's worldview. Analyzing the features of postmodern spirituality, Dudley A. Schreiber wrote:

The challenge for postmodern spirituality lies within its vulnerability, within its regressive and narcissistic elements. Central to postmodern ascription and construction is a profound ambivalence towards articulation; it seems naturally apophatic in object and subject [...]. Profoundly different to the pre-modern and modernist dogmatic style, postmodernism tends to cower from preaching and teaching an experience, preferring to create spaces for groups and individuals to have their own. Inspiration lies not inside the ground of being in a traditional sense, but arises out of a rationally observable tension of productive anxiety. Intelligence and inspiration are co-terminus, co-temporal, co-existent and interdependent, ontologically dynamic.¹⁰

Interpreting postmodern literature from such a standpoint could reveal a different aspect of its tendency to make a mockery of religion. It is not religion as such which is an object of farce, but traditional religious imagery and its old-fashioned language, which is badly suited to human experience, especially since the tragic history of the 20th century. Postmodern artists show that the systems of principles or ideas that were spread by traditional Church Instructions and addressed to the faithful did not stand the test of time. It is

¹⁰ Dudley A. Schreiber, "On the Epistemology of Postmodern Spirituality," *Verbum et Ecclesia*, no. 33 (1) (2012). https://www.researchgate.net/scientific-contributions/2067386052_Dudley_A_Schreiber (Accessed 29 September 2018).

difficult to believe today in the Old, Good God who takes care of mankind or to have trust in winged angels that serve as God's intermediary, sent to earth to protect humans. All this is childish and is shown as childish by postmodern literature that caricatures typical religious representations as burlesque, absurd forms of human naivety. In a more general way, Martin Kočí commented on the urgent need to seek a new religious language since the old one makes it impossible to understand a God who is beyond the control of human desires for sense or human eagerness for justice:

Our religious language tries to bring God under control, to assimilate God within our ready-made systems of meaning, to turn God into a reassuring projection of our own need and desires. Such a religious language is a barrier against God's strangeness [...].¹¹

Postmodern literature destroys the image of a 'well-known God', sometimes in a very blasphemous way; however, even given the state of commodification of religion today, it seems insufficient to interpret all these literary games as only playing with the new 'toy' that religion has become in the super-market of modern culture. Of course, some works are nothing more than toys, but such a narrow explanation, if applied, results in only scratching a surface that covers something much more important and serious. The question is, how can this 'something' be brought to the surface? Postsecular thought can be useful in such a case.

Coming back to the book by Hošek, the author analyzes the term 'Czech atheisms' which – as should be stressed – is one of the most important concepts to consider in order to understand Czech religiosity. He also tackles the religious situation in Czechia after the Velvet Revolution, addressing the different reasons for the low interest in traditional Church institutions that is characteristic of Czech society. His arguments coincide with the diagnoses previously formulated by such Czech researchers as Zdeněk Nešpor, Dušan Lužný, Petr Fiala, Dana Hamplová and David Václavík. So far, Hošek's diagnosis has not brought much that is new, but his book is interesting for me because the author is not only a theorist, but also an activist for religious dialogue and an active member of his Church. He represents the committed attitude towards religiosity which I described above.

From this point of view, the most interesting part is the last chapter of the book, entitled "Postmodernity and the Gospel" ("Postmodernita a evan-

¹¹ Martin Kočí, "A Postmodern Quest: Seeking God and Religious Language in a Postmodern Context," in *A Czech Perspective on Faith in a Secular Age*, eds., Tomáš Halík and Pavel Hošek (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015), 87.

gelium”), in which Hošek deliberates on the challenges that are faced by the Church nowadays and the mistakes made by it. He regrets that this institution neither understands modern people nor tries to understand them; its conservative approach closes the Institution into its own hermetic world – it “answers questions which are posed by nobody.”¹² At the same time, real problems that cause common anxiety are left unanswered or even barely noticed. Hošek stresses that it is not enough for the Church to pay attention to problems which have been marginalized, e.g. sexuality and gender equality. A real challenge nowadays is to find a proper language of communication with the postmodern human being. The Church, which has never been only an organization or institution, should better fulfil its substantial role in the community, where people could develop the forms of religiosity so distinctive of modern spirituality: inner prayer, meditation, even mystical experiences.

Hošek’s intention was to write not a scientific book, but a popular one that introduces the reader to the most burning problems of today’s religiosity. Supposedly, he also wanted to suggest what kinds of expectations people are entitled to have of the Church and how the Church should change to fulfil its mission today, when postmodernity sets the horizon for the experiencing of faith.

Three years after this publication, Hošek wrote the “Introduction” to a book that he co-authored, in which he states:

Religious faith is going through an unprecedented transformation in the contemporary world. One of the major causes of this transformation is the fact that we are living in ‘a secular age’, to use the phrase chosen as the title of the now famous book by Charles Taylor. Traditional religious institutions do not seem to be very quick in adjusting their programs and ways of communication to the contemporary cultural situation. This volume [...] is to help the contemporary Church to understand better what is going on with religious faith in contemporary societies and to adapt its pastoral activities and methods to changing cultural conditions.¹³

As one can see, the same aims which were formulated in the previous publication are now repeated, showing some burning problems and expectations involved in relations between the Church and society. These issues still remain troublesome and, most importantly, they occur not among so-called ‘dwellers’, but among contemporary seekers. In referring to the formula *simul fidelis et infidelis*, which is so important in Tomáš Halík’s consideration of

¹² Hošek, *A bohové se vracují*, 113.

¹³ Hošek, “Introduction,” 1.

modern religiosity,¹⁴ Hošek stresses that there is ‘a grey zone’ of people who orbit around religiosity and spirituality in one way or another. This zone is still barely known, which results in a deformed image of faith today. Hošek writes:

The grey zone is in fact very diverse and multifarious. It includes ‘apathetists’ (those who are basically indifferent towards religion), it also includes those who are attracted by various kinds of new spiritual options such as Westernized versions of Eastern religious traditions or esoteric spiritualities. Among both regular and less regular Church-goers (who may be more or less loyal Church members though perhaps not completely satisfied with its contemporary shape) and also among people who call themselves ‘spiritual but not religious’, and even among those who are radical critics of contemporary Christianity and call themselves atheists, we find many sincere seekers.¹⁵

He describes the situation in Czechia but his comments might be more or less attributed to religiosity in other Slavic countries. Since seekers are important not only in Czechia, the key question today seems to be how to understand them and their needs.¹⁶ Hošek repeats the suggestion by Tomáš Halík not to distinguish seekers and dwellers but to replace this distinction with a more fundamental difference between ‘open-minded’ and ‘closed-minded’ people:

The former remain open to Mystery, Love, and Hope. The latter sometimes prefer to have things, including spiritual things, ‘under control’ (at the same time, we must remember that not all dwellers are necessarily closed-minded).¹⁷

This suggestion is crucial, not only because it makes it possible to introduce into the horizon of religious questions the intellectual heritage of such important persons as Karel Havlíček Borovský, Tomáš G. Masaryk, Karel Čapek and Václav Havel, all of whom played an essential role in Czech culture and who “[...] were neither atheists, nor ordinary Church believers, but were definitely seekers” – as Hošek wrote.¹⁸ This ‘open-minded’ approach to

¹⁴ Tomáš Halík is not only a co-author of the book *A Czech Perspective on Faith in a Secular Age*, but he is also treated as an intellectual leader by the team of his younger colleagues with whom he realized the project resulting in the mentioned book. Other authors frequently refer to his ideas and diagnosis about modern religious situation.

¹⁵ Hošek, “Introduction,” 3.

¹⁶ Considering this question, Hošek refers to the article by Tomáš Halík: *Vzdáleným nablízku* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 2007).

¹⁷ Hošek, “Introduction,” 3.

¹⁸ Hošek, “Introduction,” 3.

religiosity once more indicates literature – or more generally culture – as the space where experiencing faith is freely expressed beyond the Instruction of the Church in a way which arises from the basic level of human existence and emotions. Literature gives voice to those who might believe or desire ‘something beyond’, even if they remain full of suspicions towards this ‘beyond’, or are ironic and generally distanced towards the Church and its instructions, or are simply outside it. Hošek stresses the necessity of “the idea that the Church must be in touch with people who do not profess Christianity and who perhaps just vaguely desire ‘something beyond’.”¹⁹ This opinion, to which I come back for a moment, resulted in another declaration:

We strongly believe that the calling of the Church includes listening attentively to, and trying to understand, the actual questions people are asking, as they are articulated in one way or another in art, in philosophy, in the climate of society, in changes of public opinion, in media, and so on. This means being well versed in contemporary culture and its artistic and philosophical reflection, and searching for ways to engage in a meaningful dialogue.²⁰

Hošek enumerates the features of contemporary culture which are particularly important when considering the issue of religiosity today: “the post-rationalist, post-ideological, post-traditional, post-optimistic, post-individualist and post-materialist.”²¹ These are aspects of contemporary culture which have to influence experiences of faith in Slavic countries and elsewhere.

As regards the issue of ‘something beyond’ which I mentioned before, one of the authors of the discussed book refers to the basic meaning of religious experience formulated by Friedrich Schleiermacher, a German philosopher and theologian who described the fundamental religious ‘instinct’ as ‘the sense and taste for the infinite’.²² This observation was important not only at the time of romanticism, when ‘intuitional’ religiosity was an object of stormy change (which makes some scholars treat this period as the very beginning of ‘postsecularism’), but it is also important today. Today this ‘taste for the infinite’ finds its echoes not only in various forms of religiosity which might be an object of social research, it is present also in literature (culture) as a witness of human desires for spirituality.

¹⁹ Hošek, “Introduction,” 4.

²⁰ Hošek, “Introduction,” 5.

²¹ Hošek, “Introduction,” 8.

²² Pavel Roubík, “The Myth of the ‘Nonreligious Age’: A Sociocultural Transformation of Religion in Modernity,” in *A Czech Perspective on Faith in a Secular Age*, eds., Tomáš Halík and Pavel Hošek (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015), 68.

Continuing, however, the issue of specific features of our culture, we should return to detraditionalization, which – as Martin Kočí, another author of the book concludes – is also characteristic of our times. This implies that “[...] traditions and identities (religious, secular, political, etc.) do not pass from one generation to another. An individual identity is not pre-given any more. Neither Christianity, nor any other basic story is able to grant an unquestionable and secure identity in a postmodern context.”²³ In such a situation one who accepts an open approach towards a religiosity issue can see more and understand more. The conclusion of Kočí sounds strong as well as dramatic:

In sum, the Church, in its commendable effort to approach people beyond its own borders, must be aware that there is no common Christian background. Perhaps there is no common background at all.²⁴

Kočí suggests that ‘the third way’ between militant atheism and dogmatic theism is anatheism: “Anatheism is a wager on faith which is open to dark nights, doubt and uncertainty.”²⁵

This is a standpoint *de novo* that directs us towards literature because it has a special ability to express God’s strangeness and it can “[...] direct our eyes at the altar of an unknown God,” as Halík suggests.²⁶ This ability might not be overrated today, when – instead of being based on the Catechism – there is a need for “[...] the ambiguity of religious language, we should avoid the temptation of explanation. Rather, our struggle must evoke a perplexing, yet marvelous experience of standing in front of mystery; both *tremendum et fascinans*, as Rudolf Otto aptly puts it.”²⁷

The book consists of three parts, of which the first is an introduction. The second part recapitulates different approaches to the issue of religiosity as they were presented during the conference in 2017. The third part gathers texts which can be divided into two groups: essays analyzing different cases of Slavic literatures as records of faith experiences that overstep the ecclesial order are included in the first smaller group. The authors explore literary works edited in the 20th century, mostly in the 1990s. However, there are also articles studying literary texts that were written earlier, even in the 1950s; for example, there is an essay about a Czech poet, Jan Zahradníček. Because Zahradníček was imprisoned by communist powers during the Stalinist era,

²³ Kočí, “A Postmodern Quest,” 85.

²⁴ Kočí, “A Postmodern Quest,” 85.

²⁵ Kočí, “A Postmodern Quest,” 89. Kočí refers to the concept by Richard Kearney.

²⁶ Kočí, “A Postmodern Quest,” 91.

²⁷ Kočí, “A Postmodern Quest,” 95.

when persecution of Catholics, particularly in Czechoslovakia, was extremely brutal, his faith had to go through a dramatic confrontation with the totalitarian system. This was why 'yes-no' answers based on the catechism did not correspond to the situation in which faith was his way to survive. This 'borderline situation' (Karl Jaspers) was not only a test of his Christianity, but also – and this aspect is more interesting for us – a test of faith as such.

The article about Zahradníček gives insights into the question of how religiosity was put under the most severe trial of political fanaticism and ideological pressure, as was the situation of religion in the East, but not in the West. In countries where the communists seized power, they tried to destroy the Church as an institution, but their attacks on individual believers had a more personal character and left traces of inner battles in which people also had to fight against their personal fears, uncertainty and doubt. It was really a 'dark night' of faith, lived in the obscurity of a prison cell. In such a situation, 'uncertainty and doubt' towards religion were not the result of the transformation of the experience of faith which is characteristic of religiosity today. In the case of this Czech poet, his 'uncertainty and doubt' were born from the tragic existential experience of a human being. Zahradníček's fight to keep his faith shows how little is still known about this side of modern religiosity, because barely thirty years have passed since it became possible to study the martyrdom of Christians in communist countries. Knowledge of how the literary testimonies left by people who were victims of the system could enrich or even change the picture of religiosity in Slavic countries is still before us.

I have referred only to the one essay that tackles the issue of literature as a record of experiencing faith. The literary texts presented in the book demonstrate the insufficiency of forms of faith which 'are ready to use' and which are unable to 'feed' the desires of a contemporary man who misses the spiritual life. At the same time, literature opens a new dimension for the spiritual call.

The second group of essays in the book introduces a socio-cultural perspective in considering the religious processes in Slavic countries. Some of the papers bring a wider viewpoint to the presentation of the religious situation in various countries (e.g. a text by Roman Kečka, who outlines the state of religiosity in today's Slovakia). Other texts introduce some phenomena which could easily be overlooked, but they are significant when mapping 'Slavic' religiosity (e.g. a text by Marta Zimniak-Haľajko).

At the end of this introduction it is worth coming back to the issue of ideology as a crucial factor which influenced the field of faith in Slavic countries. Adapting Western theories concerning religious transformation and analyzing secularism and 'postsecularism' (mostly in the context of modernity and

the collapse of the ideas of modernity) could marginalize the political factors which are so important when considering religiosity in Slavic countries. Experiencing faith in these countries should be considered from a ‘double’ perspective: Firstly, the universal one which those countries shared with the West and which is the result of modernity and postmodernity. Secondly, the ‘local’ perspective that is determined by politico-historical conditions which are still being worked on by researchers and which are still an object of dispute. As has been said, for many years censorship in these countries blocked any research in this field. Today’s return to the issue takes place in a situation in which it is very simple to ‘universalize’ the question and – as a result – to waste what is local because it is mingled with something more global. As the editors of the book, we hope that the ‘local’ cases presented here might contribute to a better understanding of the issue.

As has been already said, our publication does not claim to present a holistic image of religiosity in Slavic countries. Our intention is to demonstrate some thought-provoking cases and to combine different perspectives in analyzing the issue of religiosity in our part of Europe. As editors, we strongly believe that a comparative approach to the subject can reveal some specific aspects of the experience of faith in the Slavic ‘world’. Since even in countries where religiosity seems to be well recognized, introducing a sociological perspective to a closer look at local cultures and their ways of expressing religious questions opens less well-known perspectives. For example, Poland is believed to be a conservative Catholic country, and this is true at least to some extent. However, the conviction that Polish religiosity is so evident that it could serve as a juxtaposition when considering, for example, Czech religiosity, seems to be too generalized. Looking at modern Polish literary culture, one can observe that it traces the same feeling of religious uncertainty as Czech literature does. The title of a book published in Poland in 2018 reads *I wish you were here*²⁸ and this wish (which expresses a complaint about God) has its continuation in the words of one of the poems analyzed in the book: “There is nobody to talk to / but even if finally there is someone / what they lack most of all is the words.”²⁹

²⁸ Mieszko Ciesielski and Katarzyna Szewczyk-Haake, eds., *Szkoda, że cię tu nie ma. Filozofia religii a postsekularyzm jako wyzwanie nowych czasów* (Kraków: Instytut Myśli Józefa Tischnera, JMR Trans-Atlantyck, 2018).

²⁹ “Nie ma z kim pogadać, / lecz nawet jeśli już jest, to przecież najbardziej / brakuje słów” (a fragment of a poem by Tadeusz Różycki *There is no answer (Nie ma odpowiedzi)*). I quote after: Magdalena Piotrowska-Grot, “Wyrastanie z raju. Rola eschatologii w polskiej poezji po roku 1989,” in *Szkoda, że cię tu nie ma. Filozofia religii a postsekularyzm jako wyzwanie nowych czasów*, eds. Mieszko Ciesielski and Katarzyna Szewczyk-Haake (Kraków: Instytut Myśli Józefa Tischnera, JMR Trans-Atlantyck, 2018), 134.

Perhaps considering the state of today's religiosity, research on it is an 'art of details'.

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Ewelina Drzewiecka

The Postsecular Point of View

KEYWORDS: postsecular, conference overview, Slavic cultures and literatures, religious experience, modernity

ABSTRACT: The paper is a subjective overview of the international conference “The experience of faith in Slavic cultures and literatures in the context of postsecular thought,” held in Warsaw on 16–17 October 2017; it aims to comment on the nature of the postsecular approach, as well as the problems and potential of research into religious experience in Slavic modernities.

The international conference “The experience of faith in Slavic cultures and literatures in the context of postsecular thought,” held in Warsaw on 16–17 October 2017, was organized by the Institute of Western and Southern Slavic Studies of the University of Warsaw, the Faculty of Polish Studies of the University of Warsaw, the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Slavic Foundation. Its reference point was a claim by Peter L. Berger, a former proponent of secularization theory and one of the most important sociologists of religion, that today’s world is “as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever.”¹ Having in mind the famous conceptualizations of José Casanova, Thomas Luckmann and Jürgen Habermas on the specific nature of the religious in modern society,

¹ Peter L. Berger, “The Desecularization of the World. A Global Overview,” in *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, ed. Peter L. Berger (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1999), 2.

the conference organizers decided to focus on Western and Southern Slavic cultures as they are perceived as being able to reveal various subjects and experiences that cannot be captured with the traditional dichotomies, such as the sacred–profane or the religious–secular. The organizers suggested postsecular thought as a hermeneutical perspective due to the fact that it provides a new approach to relations between the religious and the secular, but in Slavic countries it has been adapted to different extents. For this reason, the conference was not devoted to ‘postsecularism’ as a particular view, but to modifications of *images of religiosity* which could provide a more nuanced sense of the issue thanks to *postsecular ideas*. The aim was to open a discussion about the modes of the religious/spiritual experience under the conditions of local modernities, to popularize both the hermeneutical perspective and the Slavic research material. This is why the conference received financial support from the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education that is allocated for activities disseminating science (‘DUN’), according to contract no. 695/P-DUN/2017.

The conference was attended by twenty-one scholars from Bulgaria, Czechia, Holland, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine and the United Kingdom. The program consisted of two keynote lectures (“Religious and sexual nationalism: theo-politics of blasphemy in Central and Eastern Europe” by Srdjan Sremac and “The secular, the sacred, and the three stages of postsecular/post-postsecular in Russian literature: past and present” by Ivo Pospíšil), two panel discussions (“A specific nature of contemporary religious experience” with Nonka Bogomilova, Roman Kečka, Kamila Klingorová, Stanisław Obirek, Srdjan Sremac and Yuri Stoyanov; “Secularization, desecularization, postsecularism” with Karina Jarzyńska, Roman Kečka, Stanisław Obirek, Ivo Pospíšil and Michał Warchala), and four modules of individual presentations (“Religion beyond orthodoxy” with Paula Kiczek, Magdalena Maszkiewicz and Nemanja Radulović; “Religious experience in gender perspective” with Nonka Bogomilova, Dominika Gapska and Kamila Klingorová; “Belief or mockery – A real alternative?” with Elżbieta Benkowska and Ola Hnatiuk; “Literature, religion and the search for methodology” (held in Polish) with Ewelina Drzewiecka, Anna Gawarecka, Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa and Danuta Sosnowska). The conference ended with a presentation of the film “Not to judge” by Magdalena Lubańska and Pawlina Carlucci Sforza (35 min), which received a prestigious documentary film award from the Grand OFF World Independent Short Film Awards. It was preceded by a special lecture by Lubańska: “Post-memory of the suffering of the Homo Sacer in the region of Subcarpathia, Poland: A post-secular anthropological view as an introduction.”

The keynote lecture “Religious and sexual nationalism: theo-politics of blasphemy in Central and Eastern Europe” by Srdjan Sremac from the Depart-

ment of Religion and Theology at Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam was held on the first day of the conference. It raised the question of the relation between religion and nationalism based on a particular vision of sexuality. The subject of the analysis was the discourse of Church leaders in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe on the famous Eurovision performance by Conchita Wurst. The potential of blasphemy, which in this case was moved from the religious to the political sphere and subordinated to anti-Western rhetoric, was interpreted in the postsecular framework of the prophetic.

The keynote lecture, “The secular, the sacred, and the three stages of post-secular/post-postsecular in Russian literature: past and present” by Ivo Pospíšil from the Department of Slavic Studies of Masaryk University in Brno, was held on the second day of the conference. It raised the question of the specific context of Slavic literatures which led to a specific attitude towards the problems of the sacred and the secular. The author explained that some Slavic countries barely experienced the Western stages of cultural development or did not experience them at all; he argued that the absence of the Reformation in Russia resulted in the unfinished process of secularization, which manifested itself in permanent postsecular returns to “the sacral kernel of arts and literature.”

Although the keynote speakers represent different scientific approaches to different research materials, it is particularly meaningful that both of them referred to the issue of the ambiguous relation between the ‘West’ and the ‘East’, given the Western claims of being the ‘universal’ framework, which very often turns out to be a source of misunderstanding and frustration within the framework of European culture. Sremac stated that Central and Eastern Europe are sometimes seen by Western Europe as homophobic, which is related to the notion of an antimodernist, conservative, intolerant Other. Pospíšil brought up the popular notion of the imperfect imitation of Western models by Slavic cultures, but he agreed that the history of so-called Western Europe was a complicated process and there is hardly any parallel which might correspond to the contemporary understanding of the East and West.

The conference raised three basic issues: images of modern religiosity in Slavic countries, meanings of the postsecular and related concepts such as (de)secularization, (re)sacralization, (dis)enchantment, and the postsecular framework in Slavic-focused research.

Images of modern religiosity

As far as images of modern religiosity are concerned, the two main perspectives that guided reflection at the conference were literary studies and the sociology

of religion. The starting point was statistical data on contemporary denominational declarations of the populations of Slavic countries. In this context, issues of stereotypes and well-established images of national cultures arose.

Talking about the “Contemporary religious experience in Czechia,” Kamila Klingorová from the Department of Social Geography and Regional Development of Charles University in Prague reminded the audience that the well-known fact that about 80% of citizens declare themselves as non-religious is a result of the historical development of Czechia, particularly key events such as the Protestant Hussite movement (14–15th century), the Battle of White Mountain (1620), Recatholization (17–18th century), the Expulsion of Germans after WWII and the communist regime. Focusing on the situation after the revolution in 1989, she showed that initially the religiosity of the Czech population significantly decreased, but the current situation can be described as a postsecular turn as there are various ongoing processes of desecularization, spiritualization and individualization of religion. One of these phenomena, (re)sacralization of public spaces and landscapes, was discussed in detail in the second presentation by Klingorová, “Women’s everyday experience with religion and spirituality in post-secular Czechia. A geographical approach.” Showing the results of her research with Tomáš Havlíček and Zdeněk Vojtíšek, it focused on the spatial dimension of the religious experience, i.e. how ordinary women turn places that are not primarily associated with religion or spirituality into sacred or spiritual ones through their embodied, emotional, and spatially varying practices.

In his presentation “Postsecular or post-traditional? Slovakia between tradition and secularization,” Roman Kečka from the Department of Comparative Religion of Comenius University in Bratislava argued that about 75% of the population declare a religious denomination, which often leads to a simplified view that the Slovak religious landscape is monolithic and traditional. It is still obvious that the traditional institutional form of religiosity is dominant, nevertheless its nature is more complicated than is usually claimed. Kečka stated that according to sociological research, Slovakia has actually seen a very dynamic post-traditional turn characterized by belonging to a church and attending its services, and at the same time being open to new spiritual possibilities outside the institutional ecclesiastical milieu. This ‘post-traditional Christianity’ in Slovakia is experiencing a process of transformation and adaptation of traditional religious forms in the conditions of a modern pluralistic society.

A complicated image of modern religiosity emerged from the remarks of Nonka Bogomilova from the Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and Yuri Stoyanov from the Near and Middle East Department of SOAS University of London. Both confirmed

that the Balkans can be seen as a region that is marked by religious pluralism and syncretism, torn between a return to tradition and the search for new religious forms – between official declarations and everyday practices. Particularly interesting was Stoyanov's presentation on the subject of religious syncretism in the historical dimension and in relation to the current situation. He pointed out the crucial role of the experience of the Byzantine and Ottoman models of culture in the history of the Balkans and in this context gave a few examples of attempts to create syncretic religious systems. He also gave some case studies from Bosnia and Herzegovina, showing that peculiar clericalization and religious purism should be taken into account when investigating the contemporary situation, because religious borders are no longer porous, but increasingly sharp.

The phenomenon of the intertwining of the private–public and religious–secular spheres in the context of the experience of post-communism was also a subject of the presentation by Ola Hnatiuk from the Center of East European Studies of the University of Warsaw and Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. It was devoted to “New dimensions of religiosity in contemporary Ukraine (on overview of the changes of public space, 1989–2017)” and showed not only the religious and ethnic diversity of Ukrainian society, including the complex situation of the local Orthodox Church(es), but also some very interesting cases of the public activity of various (quasi)religious groups. The first case was the huge movement of Greek Catholic believers in the late 80s, who while fighting for legalization of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in the USSR organized the first public service and Christmas celebration in Kiev Opera House. It was very interesting to be reminded that the famous quasi-religious movements of that time (e.g. the Kashpirovsky TV programs, the Ukrainian Sacred Republic, which was a peculiar project created by Ukrainian fantasy writer and former dissident, Oles Berdnyk, and the White Brotherhood) as an alternative to the official atheism were supposed to protect society against the Greek Catholics. The second case was a new kind of religiosity in public space which appeared during the Maidan protests in 2013–2014. According to Hnatiuk, the day-and-night prayers and speeches on the square that were established by an ecumenical temple and were given by the head of the Orthodox Church and the Greek Catholic Church, as well as Chief Rabin of Kyiv can be treated as an example of a new phenomenon in Ukraine – an ‘ecumenical religiosity’.

The second basic issue developed by the conference participants was an interpretation of quasi-religious motifs in cultural texts from the perspective of literary and cultural studies.

Magdalena Maszkiewicz from the Institute of Slavic Studies of Jagiellonian University in Cracow raised the question of “Unorthodox experience of faith

in Ivan V. Lalić's and Miodrag Pavlović's poetry: a comparative study." She presented two models of unorthodox yet Christianity-related religious experience in the poetry of the 20th century Serbian authors Ivan V. Lalić and Miodrag Pavlović, arguing that in their works these poets reflect on the existential situation of the contemporary human being by re-interpreting texts of culture from antiquity to modern times. Maszkiewicz's presentation was a comparative analysis of their poems referring to Christian texts: the Bible, and Byzantine and Orthodox literature. The rebellious and blasphemous approach of the lyrical speaker was interpreted not as a mere negation of the traditional idea of holiness, but as an attempt to overcome the classical oppositions in thinking about the world and humanity, among which there is a dichotomy between the immanent and the transcendent.

Nemanja Radulović from the Department of Serbian and South Slavic Literatures of the University of Belgrade raised the question of the development of Slavic Neopaganism since the 1980s. In his presentation "The reception of the Book of Veles and the disenchanted world," he stated that desecularization is apparent not only in the revival of traditional religions, but also in many forms of esotericism which influence various streams from high to popular culture and contemporary folklore. Referring to Christopher Partridge's term 'occulture', he analyzed how the reception of the Book of Veles – a mystification purporting to be a text of ancient Slavic religion and history – is characterized by a deep ambiguity of the sacred and the secular. He argued that the programmatic antimodernity of neopagan groups turns toward the resacralization of the disenchanted world ('reconstructed' as New Age), but while doing so they still act within the concepts of modernity and, above all, national identity.

Anna Gawarecka from the Institute of Slavic Studies of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań gave a presentation entitled "Surprise or approval? The picture of religious experience in Františka Jirousová's 'Vyhnanci' (*The Exiles*)," in which she shows that the progress of atheization and secularization of Czech society can be seen as a result of the restlessness and disintegration of firmly established traditional models of identity. The subject of analysis (the novel *The exiles*, published by Františka Jirousová in 2010) was interpreted as an example of the existential anxiety caused by the lack of a common axiological denominator or a platform of understanding which would be respected by all members of society and constructed on the basis of uniform and generally shared axiological systems. It was argued that the fact that the novel was awarded the high-profile Jiří Orten Prize for literature in 2011 is evidence that questions concerning the role of authentic religious attitudes have resurfaced in Czech public discourse and have regained the importance they seemingly had lost.

The subject of interest of the conference participants was not only various literary texts, but also cultural phenomena in a broad sociopolitical context. In her presentation “Women’s spirituality in postsecular Serbia,” Dominika Gapska from the Institute of Slavic Philology of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań showed how the spiritual tradition of the past, i.e. the cult of female saints and the female monastic tradition, creates codes of meaning in postsecular Serbia. She pointed out a significant growth of interest in religion among Serbian women – who are rediscovering the role of spiritual mothers as counsellors and guides in religious and social matters – and argued that the monastic life is now reclaiming its position in society. Functionalization or actualization of the religious senses can be observed in the fact that female saints are presented as major figures in Serbian history and culture.

Paula Kiczek from the Institute of Western and Southern Slavic Studies of the University of Warsaw focused on Czech philosopher and dissident Milan Machovec, who was an initiator of the so-called ‘seminars of dialogue’, which were created as a platform for dialogue between Marxism and Christianity in the early 1960s at Charles University in Prague. In her speech “Faith beyond doctrines – faith in dialogue: reflections on the philosophical anthropology of Milan Machovec,” she presented Machovec not only as an important thinker who had close relations with Erich Fromm and Ernst Bloch, but also as an emblematic example of a man who – with disillusionment with traditional faith and with experience of the totalitarian regime and the crisis of civilization – encountered the world and the ambiguous possibilities it offers. Tending to turn towards the Socratic practice of questioning persistent dogmas, his main concern was to seek a deep understanding of the spiritual needs of contemporary people.

Different material was proposed by Elżbieta Benkowska from the Faculty of Languages of the University of Gdańsk; she gave a presentation entitled “We believe only in BKS... Religious motifs in the chants of Polish and Serbian football fans.” She interpreted religious motifs in football songs from the perspective of a social function of religion and people’s desire for belonging and strong identification.

Research problems

The image of modern religiosity captured by the conference was modern *par excellence*: it was ambiguous and related to the specifics of the everyday life. As shown by the sociologists and literary scholars at the conference, this

experience manifests itself in mixing orders, going beyond, overcoming opposition, and looking for alternative sense horizons. However, this diverse review of 'modern religiosity' also revealed many problems, both plainly articulated and hidden, and thus it requires comment.

In the presentations and discussions, the problems of describing religiosity were pointed out from the point of view of methodology. It was stated that the perspective of sociology of religion focuses on statistics and asking questions about declarations; however, the situation is more complicated as it is influenced by the pluralization and heterogenization of views, as was emphasized by Bogomilova during the panel discussion. In this context, both the questions and the answers become problematic. As summarized by Kečka, 21st century people are asked questions from the 19th century. Another question was whether popular concepts of 'desecularization' and 'postsecularity' are suitable in the context of Slavic countries. There were also serious doubts relating to the traditional notions and chronology of these phenomena due to the fact that the sociological approach is shaped by the Western conceptual dictionary.

The participants of the conference agreed that the understanding of modern religiosity or phenomena of spirituality requires a serious revision. They stressed that the individual or subjective context should be taken into account and for this the concept of 'lived experience' or 'lived religion' seems to have particular potential. The second context which should be considered is the context of local conditions, i.e. the history of Slavic cultures, which are different than Western ones. The struggle for national identity was a recurring motive, as were postcommunism and postmodernism. It should be stressed that Slavic modernities were also influenced by the atheism enforced during the communist regime(s), which changes the perception of the 'return to religion' after 1989.

The second research problem which arose during the conference was the diversity of notions and scopes of understanding of the postsecular. Of course, postsecular thought is heterogeneous in its very core as it covers not only many disciplines but also methodological and political positions, so it seems more legitimate to talk about it as a set of features that are subordinated to various contextualizations. Moreover, the scope of the conference was only to bring up the notion as a hermeneutical perspective. Nevertheless, the terminological issue manifested itself especially during the discussions. No solution was found, possibly due to the fact that the main reference point for the scholars was the reflection of sociologists of religion and philosophers of modernity, both of whom focus on religiosity and religiously experiential specifics in general. As a result, there was a broad understanding of the subject, which is

understood as the relation between religion and modernity (where modernity is perceived as a period marked by secularization).

As a co-organizer and participant of the conference, but also as a proponent of the postsecular turn, I would like to take the opportunity and comment more on the issues that emerged during the event. My goal is to present the postsecular point of view in the context of general questions of the religious, both in research and in Slavic studies.

First, it should be noted that in this context the ‘return of religion’ – and thus the coexistence of the religious and the secular – can be seen as the next stage of cultural development. The object of analysis is various forms of religiosity founded in unexpected contexts, i.e. syncretism, heterogeneity or purism. In this sense, most of the presentations at the conference can be seen as ‘thematization’.² As I argued before, this is the most popular and widespread approach in postsecular studies, but also to some extent it is a misleading type of postsecular approach. While in the case of sociology or philosophy reflection is focused on multidimensional determinants of these phenomena, in literary studies it is about the interpretation of their textual testimonies, including games with religious codes (and thus paraphrases). The subject of research is usually a contemporary search for the spiritual experience in the conditions of Western secularity.³

In general, we can observe some terminological chaos among scholars, both in relation to the postsecular as well as in its connections with other phenomena and concepts, not only desecularization and resacralization, but also postmodernism, especially when literary play with religious motifs is taken into account. Due to the fact that ‘postsecular’ may apply to both the subject (when describing forms of contemporary religiosity) and the approach (when developing a specific interpretation of religious subjects, etc.), these two orders of meaning are often mixed. Moreover, two facts should be distinguished: the return to the religious among contemporary researchers and the emergence of new religious-like phenomena in the modern world.

As Tracy Fessenden pointed out,⁴ researchers who deal with new forms of religiosity (and have a pretension to undermine the Enlightenment’s

² Ewelina Drzewiecka, “Myśl postsekalarna w badaniach slawistycznych. Próba spojrzienia,” *Studia Litteraria Universitatis Jagellonicae Cracoviensis*, no. 9 (1) (2014): 29–44.

³ See e.g. John A. McClure, *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007); Amy Hungerford, *Postmodern Belief: American Literature and Religion Since 1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁴ Tracy Fessenden, “The Problem of the Postsecular,” *American Literary History*, no. 1 (2014), 154–67. DOI: 10.1093/alh/ajt066; Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

conceptual system) are still caught up in progressive history, as they see in these new forms a new – better – stage of religious development. In essence, their approach only changes the definition, but the usual temporal pattern remains valid. In fact, they are still within the framework of the grand narrative of modernity, according to which religion and secularism are a confirmed alternative. In this sense, they represent a secular approach.

The prefix ‘post’ is not about the chronology of the occurrence of the phenomena: it is about finding a way out of well-established patterns of thinking. Nevertheless, these two orders overlap quite often – the meaning of secularization as a concept is a separate problem. Are we talking about the ‘classical’ sense or the reinterpreted one? Postsecular thought has undermined the theory of secularization, understood within the framework of a progressive narrative. Processes of modernization and the ‘disenchanted’ of the world are recognized here as mutually conditioning and therefore proceeding in parallel. However, the essence of the transformations that are typical of modern times is not the gradual disappearance of religion, but – as Charles Taylor formulated it⁵ – they are a change in the conditions of belief which can be described by semantic shifts within the ‘religious–secular’ relationship. Moreover, since the processes of secularization are indeed heterogeneous (but also disproportionate), one cannot speak of homogeneous modernity in terms of the effect of secularization phenomena, but of its many local variants that appear according to the specificity of a given culture. Postsecular thought does not reject secularization as a social process, it only problematizes it by raising the question of the character of the Enlightenment, perceived as liberation from the captivity of traditions/religions thanks to scientific stereotypes. In this sense, secularism is the grand narrative of (Western) modernity. In this context, one can agree with the thesis that “all philosophically serious discussions about religion conducted in a postsecular perspective revolve around the interpretation of this one, exemplary modern motive: the death of God.”⁶

In this perspective, postsecular thought situates itself in the ‘dialectical between’; it is a kind of immanence open to the ‘religious’ and thus can participate in the transformation of experience.⁷ This is why the postsecular approach is not only thematization, but also deconstruction – a particular search for ‘religious’ paradigms within the secular. Importantly, religion

⁵ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁶ Agata Bielik-Robson, “Przedmowa,” in *Deus otiosus. Nowoczesność w perspektywie post-sekularnej*, eds. Agata Bielik-Robson and Maciej A. Sosnowski (Warszawa: Krytyka Polityczna, 2013), 8.

⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Glauben und Wissen* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001); Bielik-Robson, “Przedmowa,” 7.

is defined as a worldview or a kind of sense-making horizon which is historically fluid and can only be captured in opposition to the concept of secularity. This approach is thus in open conflict with the secularization thesis as it questions its very tenets and points out that the relation between the secular and the religious is dialectic. As Talal Asad showed,⁸ the ‘secular–religious’ relation is contextual and discursive, i.e. its elements are defined and valorized depending on the cultural context. Moreover, this binary opposition is in fact a construct. It is the (cultural) institutions that have built the difference between the secular and the religious. These are the terms which have been and are used to establish boundaries for discursive contexts and the identities of those who speak within them.⁹

And so, postsecular thought offers a tool to investigate this ‘religious–secular’ tension. Here, secularization becomes only a loose term for certain phenomena, defined each time for the needs of a given cultural context, i.e. in regard to its specific boundaries and reference points. In this sense, it is a function of the *pluralization of modernity*, as shown by Peter L. Berger, Charles Taylor or Anthony Giddens.¹⁰

Entangled in the discourse of modernity, postsecular thought asks questions about the effects of modernization. In this way, it links to recent theories concerning translation, adaptation and cultural transfer. It is especially inspiring if viewed in the context of reflection on Westernization or, more specifically, the (seeming or alternative) secularization of non-western cultures. The focus is on revising concepts (genealogies) and problematizing the role of institutions. The question is about the nature of the so-called ‘Center’ and about the reasons behind cultural change. It is precisely in this context that the Western-centric character of the scholarly discourse becomes evident. As a result, there is a need to create a new suitable research language which would take into account the local conditions, including the relevant religious context.

And so, postsecular thought investigates this change in the conditions of belief; it is also a term for the changes in contemporary humanities and social sciences.

⁸ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

⁹ Michael W. Kaufmann, “The Religious, the Secular, and Literary Studies: Rethinking the Secularization Narrative in Histories of the Profession,” *New Literary History*, no. 4 (2007): 607–27.

¹⁰ See e.g. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Taylor, *A Secular Age*; Peter L. Berger, *The Many Altars of Modernity. Towards a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age* (Boston and Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

Postsecular potential

As was indicated during the panel discussions, the advantage of the postsecular approach is not only the recognition of sacred or religious language or moments in history, but also the revision of the canon and methodology. The argument that this is a Western term and perhaps should not be used in the context of Slavic cultures is valid *only* if it is defined as a thematization and is thus related to the progressive narrative. If the postsecular is seen as an attitude towards the ‘universal’ conceptual dialectics, research on Slavic ground is not only possible, but necessary. As Peter Coviello and Jared Hickman suggested,¹¹ the general idea is to provide a study of the past which is *free from the bondage* of the secularization thesis, and so it consists of epistemological and methodological *self-interrogation*, which means a changed vision of modernity that would eschew the *irrelevant* category of secularity. This would be a specific reference to the call for saving modernity. At the conference, this was strongest in the statements of Stanisław Obirek from the American Studies Center of the University of Warsaw and Michał Warchala from the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Pedagogical University of Cracow. Both these scholars in fact saw the need to interpret the world in order to create distance from traditional judgments, fixed canons of knowledge and concepts.

Referring to the famous claims of Habermas, Warchala called postsecular thought a way of saving secular humanistic discourse, or even a new paradigm of analysis of religion within the Western modernity. He stated that this approach is new, but the phenomenon which is described by it has a quite long history. The hermeneutical aim is to retranslate religious symbols into a language of the liberal public sphere so a new kind of consciousness or language can appear – a consciousness which would take into account the religious and the secular and oscillate between them successfully.

In this regard, Obirek presented some interesting attempts to overcome the existing dichotomy of ideological positions. He mentioned the debate between Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger in 2004 in Munich, a long interview for BBC television conducted by Richard Dawkins as a part of the program “The genius of Charles Darwin” with the Jesuit and astronomer George Coyne, and three inspiring books: *The many altars of modernity. Toward a paradigm for religion in a pluralist age* by Peter L. Berger, *Sacred stories, spiritual tribes. Finding religion in everyday life* by Nancy T. Ammerman and *The practice of everyday life* by Michel de Certeau. He agreed that the religious pluralism of

¹¹ Peter Coviello and Jared Hickman, “Introduction: After the Postsecular,” *American Literature*, no. 4 (2014): 645–54. DOI: 10.1215/00029831-2811622.

the modern world is a hermeneutical key to interpreting religious changes, but in order to analyze religious phenomenon appropriately it is necessary to take another step and overcome the traditional dichotomy. Obirek's view on the Polish Catholic Church as being unable to deal with the challenges of democracy and globalization should be seen in precisely this context. It seems that Karina Jarzyńska had the same ideal in mind when arguing that a postsecular way of thinking which differs from the mainstream narration about Polish heritage could enrich modernity research in Poland.

And so, the postsecular turn in scientific research means not only recognition of religious language, but also in-depth problematization of senses and petrified oppositions. The subject of interest should be the mixing, intersecting and overlapping of religious and secular senses – going beyond the binary dichotomy, looking for new ways of understanding.

What (and how and when) is defined as secular or religious?

Who (and how) translates the meanings?

Postsecular propositions

Among the conference presentations, there were also some attempts to apply tools or hypotheses of postsecular thought in hermeneutical practice. In his lecture on religious and sexual nationalism, Sremac not only used religious language in a secular context, but also referred to the conceptualizations of Gianni Vattimo and John D. Caputo. However, in the light of the meta-language problem, the propositions of Danuta Sosnowska and Magdalena Lubańska were even more interesting.

In her presentation “Postsecular versus postmodern interpretation? The religious issue in Czech literature after 1989,” Sosnowska argued that thanks to postsecular thought the question of the usage of religious motifs in contemporary Czech literature can be perceived not as an example of postmodern play with the Christian tradition or even a sign of a consumption of sacral language, but as an attempt to reveal dangerous stereotypes of thinking – inadequate yet comfortable notions on the most important questions about existence. She recalled the philosophical assumptions of Jean-Luc Nancy and Tomáš Halík in order to claim that by undertaking the transcendental theme – by showing metaphysical yearnings – Czech literature became a critic of Czech culture, with its materialism and mundane character.

Lubańska focused on the “Post-memory of the suffering of the Homo Sacer in the region of Subcarpathia, Poland.” Relying on interpretive tools developed in the form of the post-secular theory proposed by Talal Asad and Giorgio

Agamben, she talked about the post-memory of the atrocities committed in 1945–1946 in a Subcarpathian forest near the town of Przeworsk and asked about the status of phenomena which are unclear, mixed or liminal; why and how do they escape the traditional oppositions?

There were also conceptualizations regarding research on Slavic cultures in general that were based on the assumption that postsecular thought has become a prerequisite for reorganization and revalorization of research on so-called Eastern Europe, including the Balkans (due to its unique path of development that is related to different socio-cultural, i.e. Byzantine and Ottoman, experiences). If modernity is defined broadly and universally, then studies on ‘small cultures’ can go beyond the traditional interpretative ‘pattern – copy’ or ‘center – periphery’ models. It is possible to establish that there is incoherence in the Western narrative about itself in relation to its own ‘other’.

In this context, I gave a presentation entitled “Postsecular thought and literary studies: new perspectives.” I argued that the discourse of literary studies is of primary importance for the study of the relationship between religion and modernity, firstly because of its entanglement in the grand narrative of secularism, and secondly because of the character of literary studies. Taking into account remarks by Jordan Stein and Michael Kaufmann, I suggested that literary studies can play a crucial role in unearthing the provisional nature of the grand narrative of secularism because they are particularly sensitive to the provisionality of the studied objects, and so they can unearth the ‘inequalities’ and ‘inconsequences’ of the secular discourse. By this token, they can disturb the coherent and linear vision that is based on a simple cause-and-effect chain. In this sense, I claimed that scholars should turn their attention to literature and literary studies rooted in ‘Eastern European’ cultures because, as they are ‘peripheral’, they can reveal the underbelly of the modernization narrative, and thus bring about a re-evaluation of the ‘Western’ narrative of modernity. For this reason, I proposed the adoption of a research orientation that would merge the crypto-theological (or deconstructive) approaches and epistemic sensitivity, which is a feature of literary studies.

In her speech “Weak thought, deep trace: observations on the migration of ideas in the Balkans,” Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa presented the results of the grant project “Migrating ideas in the Slavic Balkans (18–20th centuries)” (NCN 2014/13/B/HS2/01057), arguing that a systematic analysis of the local discourses brings to light the way in which seemingly secular and rational elements turn out to be ambiguously enmeshed with theological paradigms. Taking into account Michel Foucault’s view on the history of ideas as a “discipline of fluctuating languages, of shapeless works, of unrelated themes,” she noted that this was indeed particularly apparent when applying the instruments of postsecu-

lar studies to reflection on the processes of negotiation that affect the semantics of migrating ideas that shaped modernity in the southern Slavic area. She suggested that the overall picture is far more complicated than Walter Benjamin's metaphor of the 'dwarf' of theology might suggest – that the 'automaton' actually seems to be concealing not one but many 'dwarves of theology', who as often as not cast Manichean shadows of their own. Moreover, she raised the question of the epistemological significance of the 'small cultures' by calling in Constantin Noica, a Romanian thinker who chose to treat the fragile and the weakened as the starting point in his philosophical explorations – an intellectual choice in tune with the anti-dualist aspects of his thinking regarding the problem of linguistic and ontological modality. It was claimed that when viewed from that perspective, any questions about the connection between linguistic structures and the heterogeneity of theological forms that manage the characteristic failed or failing projects (such as 'capitalism' without capitalism, 'conservatism' without conservatism, 'fascism' without fascism, 'racism' without racism, etc.) emphasize the need for further and more comprehensive analysis of migrating ideas at a higher level of meta-meta-reflection.

Both proposals defended the specificity of the Slavic material but also established a new connection with the issue of the West as an interpretive model and a source of ideas. These attempts at *being in-between* (here: the traditional modes of reading) could be seen as being particularly fruitful as they do not close themselves to Western thought; this is a dangerous look from the outside, but also they do not get involved with the local resentment and trauma of modernization.

The conference showed that investigating the religious in the Slavic area *is* problematic. It brought to mind or even revealed many important issues. As stated by Klingorová during one of the panel discussions, Slavic religious experience is "messy," but maybe it is better to say that the Slavic experience of modernity is messy. Bearing in mind that this 'Slavic experience' is only a metaphor – a mental shortcut – we should remember that it *is* torn between the specificity of the local context and Western-centric unification. Investigating this phenomenon is indeed full of potential. The postsecular approach is particularly worth attention and application just as a *weak or weakening thought*. The aim is to weaken both yourself and the other...

In this regard, it is worth thinking once again about the idea of overcoming the existing dichotomy of ideological positions or languages, thus allowing distance from one's own ideological positions or languages. Here is a passage from a Polish example of a dialogue between a scientist and atheist (Jerzy Vetulani, a neurobiologist) and a theologian and believer (Grzegorz Strzelczyk, a priest):

Humanistic reflection is important for a scientist for at least three reasons. First, a theologian or philosopher can ask interesting questions that give rise to neurological research. This may be, for example, a question about the existence of free will, which the neurological equivalent of scientists will try to discover. Science develops due to both technological development and the right issues. I do not expect a new brain scan from a theologian, but to formulate inspirational questions that will force me to find convincing answers.

Second, a theologian saves and analyzes theories that appear in the history of culture. Philosophical and religious concepts of the soul or sources of morality may carry interesting intuitions, develop our understanding of the subject, suggest a different perspective.

The third issue is to consider the ethical and societal consequences of scientific discoveries. A theologian can help to capture scientific problems in the broader context of everyday human experiences and dilemmas that bring about the progress of science.¹²

Is this not a perfect expression of a postsecular approach to knowledge as such?

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Michał Warchala

Postsecularity: Theoretical Concept and Historical Experience

KEYWORDS: postsecularity, Romanticism, Jürgen Habermas, modernity, Max Weber

ABSTRACT: My purpose in what follows is to use ‘postsecularity’ as a transhistorical concept that underpins a new reading of modern religious history. My understanding of postsecularity is inspired by Jürgen Habermas. The postsecular is thought based on the dialectical conjunction of a farewell to traditional religious orthodoxy *and* a plea for a heterodox revival of religious intuitions and symbols. My main contention would be that postsecularism thus understood is hardly a new phenomenon and that it is in fact a persistent undercurrent within Western modernity, bringing together such authors as William Blake, Franz Rosenzweig, and Max Weber.

Introduction: The varieties of postsecular experience

The concept of the postsecular is gaining prominence in contemporary research on religion and religious phenomena. In a recent article, James Beckford, one of today’s leading sociologists of religion, distinguished no less than six ‘clusters of meanings’ (as he calls them) that are associated with the term ‘postsecular’ in contemporary social sciences and humanities.¹ As Beckford observes, these meanings are ‘varied’ and sometimes ‘incompatible’ as the ‘postsecular’ tends to be an umbrella term which covers a whole range of

¹ James Beckford, “Public Religions and the Postsecular. Critical Reflections,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, no. 51 (1) (2012): 1–19.

views and attitudes: from the anti-secular or ‘presecular’ attitude of Radical Orthodoxy theologians (John Milbank, Phillip Blond and others), who use the term to criticize the very core of the modern disenchanted approach to religion,² through those who want to reconcile religion and secularism, to those who treat postsecularity as a basic phenomenon that organizes our contemporary public space. Among these ‘clusters’, there is one that relates to the study of contemporary art and literature and finds among it specimens of a new postsecular mentality that focuses on traces of transcendence and transcendent ‘Otherness’. There is a feminist strand of postsecularism exemplified by Rosi Braidotti which argues that religious faith or piety may actually foster both political subjectivity and some sort of ‘affirmative ethics’. Finally, there are writers such as Slavoj Žižek, who, according to Beckford, reject the concept of postsecularism altogether as they view it as an undercover rescue operation for the religion and theology they find definitely dead.³

‘The highest-profile cluster’ of postsecular ideas according to Beckford is associated, however, with the name of Jürgen Habermas. In the chain of publications starting with his *Glauben und Wissen* lecture of 2001,⁴ Habermas, the heir of left-wing critical theory, openly appreciates religion as the last resort of true humanism, a treasury of meanings that could help to morally enhance our inevitably secular, liberal public discourse. When developing Habermas’s arguments, we may infer a dialectical conjunction of two theses. The first says that secularization of the Western world is an accomplished fact: we live in a disenchanted world and a ‘return’ to ‘traditional’ religious frameworks that underpin social and political life is no longer possible. But – and here comes the second contention – it is precisely that secular emancipating reason that today needs help from the outside, lest it be destroyed by its own unintended consequences. What can help to restore balance between moral and functional/instrumental aspects is religion – regarded not as a substitute for reason but

² Cf. esp. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Phillip Blond, *Post-secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (London: Routledge, 1998) as well as John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999).

³ Beckford, “Public Religions and the Postsecular,” 4 ff.

⁴ Translated into English as “Faith and Knowledge” in Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, trans. Hella Beister and Max Pensky (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 101–15. Habermas’s postsecular arguments were further developed in his debate with Joseph Ratzinger – see Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*, ed. Florian Schuller, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006) – in the essay *Notes on a Post-Secular Society*, www.signandsight.com (Accessed 20 May 2014), in the collection of essays *Between Naturalism and Religion*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), as well as in the debates collected in *An Awareness of What is Missing. Faith and Reason in a Post-secular Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010).

as its external ‘corrective’ and somewhat forgotten treasury of symbols, signs, and intuitions which may complement the content of secular idioms and secular discourse. This dialectic is the core of my conception of postsecularity.

I. The postsecular moments

Postsecularity thus defined can be a convenient (trans)historical concept with which to explore and, possibly, read anew the religious contexts of the post-Enlightenment modernity. To be more precise, it allows systematic deconstruction of the most commonplace narrative of modernity as a cold war – or ‘face-off’, as Charles Taylor puts it – between secularism and religion, belief and unbelief, or ‘faith’ and ‘reason’.⁵ I will argue that ‘postsecularism’, in the sense of the dialectical conjunction of a farewell to traditional orthodoxy *and* a plea for a somewhat heterodox revival of religious intuitions and symbols, is hardly a new phenomenon, that, in fact, it is a persistent, although not always conspicuous, element of our Western modernity. There are important historical ‘clusters’ (to use James Beckford’s term) or constellations of postsecular ideas within the post-Enlightenment period.

The Romantic constellation

The first important response to the Enlightenment critique of revealed religion – best exemplified, perhaps, by Kant and his anti-metaphysical thrust – comes from German and British Romanticism, especially in its most creative early phase marked by the emergence of a ‘visionary company’ of writers such as the brothers Schlegel, Novalis and Hölderlin, Schelling and young Hegel in Germany, and Blake, Wordsworth or Coleridge in Britain. It is Romanticism that may be seen as the first postsecular moment in modern history – marked by the awareness of the ‘wound’ (in Hegel’s memorable expression) inflicted by the enlightened, rationalistic ‘disenchantment’ and the urgent need to heal it. The proposed ways of healing, however, would vary immensely among the major Romantic authors.

Now, what is so paradoxical about Romanticism is that if we apply the simple binary oppositions and standard labels of belief/unbelief or faith/reason, the Romantics will turn out to stand simultaneously on both sides of the opposition – and controversies among commentators are the best testimony

⁵ Cf. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 337.

to that paradox. The Romantics were *both* atheists and deists (from the viewpoint of institutionalized orthodoxy) and fervent believers (from the radical Enlightenment perspective) protesting against the ‘flattening’ of the world by the newly born ‘dissecting’ and ‘calculating’ modern spirit. They were *both* Christian – as they reworked traditional Christian imagery and vocabulary – and post-Christian in their fervent prophetic flight towards the ‘new earth’ (Wordsworth) and ‘reformed humanity’ (Shelley). This creates a conundrum in which all the more or less general terms such as ‘religion’, ‘Christianity’, ‘atheism’, ‘Gnosis’, ‘paganism’ or ‘orthodoxy’ seem at once too limited and too far-reaching to account for the complexities of the Romantic breakthrough. As a consequence, commentators grapple for new interpretative constructs that would give justice to seemingly self-contradicting Romantic attitudes in the matter of religion, hence such desperately patched-up terms as ‘believing unbelief’ or ‘disconcerting sacredness’.⁶ We may attempt to resolve this conundrum only by applying a theoretical framework subtle enough to reflect the subtleties of Romantic ‘subtler language’ itself. Such a framework may be constructed, I contend, with the notion of postsecularism as its basis.

According to the proposed view of Romanticism-as-postsecularism, the Romantics, while protesting and even revolting against ‘flatness’ and the ‘mechanical’ character of the Enlightenment worldview, accept nevertheless most of what their predecessors fought for in the domain of religious belief. They are deeply indebted to the Enlightenment struggle for religious freedom, its religious individualism and critique of institutionalized Christian orthodoxy – in other words to the intellectual ‘disenchantment’ of the world that had started earlier but culminated within the Enlightenment. Romanticism enters the intellectual whirlwind which was its outcome and, at its most creative, critically reworks a number of Enlightenment ideas such as Rousseau’s ‘natural religion’ or the Kantian ‘religion of reason’. It profoundly misses the happy ‘totality’ that had once unified reason, feeling, faith, morality and sensibility, but realizes that a simple return to a ‘golden age’ (be it Schillerian ancient Greece or Novalis’ medieval Europe) is impossible. Living in a disenchanted and disrupted world, the unity of which might solely be artificial or ‘mechanical’, the only thing one can do is to re-invent older religious symbols, metaphors and concepts (Biblical, theological, mystical, etc.) and fit them into new spiritual patterns. The ground of these latter, however, can only be the individual human mind, that very mind which triggered a crisis and wreaked

⁶ Michael O’Neill trying to disentangle the connections between religion and atheism in Shelley – cf. Michael O’Neill, “A Double Face of False and True: Poetry and Religion in Shelley,” *Literature and Theology*, no. 25 (1) (2011): 34–46.

havoc in the old world, leading humanity out of the enchanted cosmos. What the mind and its principal faculty, i.e. imagination, produce is, first of all, the new 'subtler language', the subtler poetical idiom which incarnates the spiritual pattern mentioned above and in which the old religious symbols find their place. This idiom is itself neither 'religious' in the sense of belonging to institutionalized tradition, nor strictly 'secular' in the sense of 'opposed to religion' or 'trying to get out of religion'. It oscillates between the poles, approaching one of them only to return to the other with renewed force. As David Jasper aptly put it, in the works of major Romantic writers "language and imagery migrated from a 'religious' to a 'secular' world, perhaps later to be reborn into new adumbrations of the religious and the spiritual."⁷ It thus delineated the space in which what had been primarily religious was being secularized and what had already been secular sometimes showed its deeper religious roots as a consequence of being put side by side with older religious symbols. Thus the genuinely postsecular idiom was born.

A modernist re-opening

The Romantic postsecular constellation, with its core dialectical insights concerning the necessity to accept certain aspects of secularizing processes *and* to save religion in new forms, finds its follow-up in the period of modernism. In the present context the term 'modernism' should be read as covering roughly the years between the publication of Nietzsche's first works (his *Birth of tragedy* appeared in 1872) and the Nazi rise to power in Germany. The continuity, however, between the conceptual core of Romantic postsecularism and its modernist counterpart is most clearly visible, I contend, not in poetry or literature but, rather unexpectedly, in the newly born social sciences, especially in Germany, where these engage in the 'anti-positivist turn' which engenders among others the sociology of Max Weber. It is precisely the critique of positivism and its 'scientific' pretensions that opens the road for the second wave of postsecular ideas.

In Weber's *verstehende Soziologie* we can observe the most interesting evolution of the attitude towards religion, one that constitutes an interesting *pendant* to much of Romantic postsecularism. Within Weber's work the impulse of enlightened 'disenchantment' – on the level of theory and historical reconstruction – of beliefs and the religious outlook first comes to a halt and then

⁷ David Jasper, *The Sacred and Secular Canon in Romanticism. Preserving the Sacred Truths* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 8.

crumbles in overwhelming disappointment. The logic underlying this evolution involves the complicated dialectic of nature and reason that permeated Weber's life and that resembles in part the Romantic postsecular developments discussed earlier, as well as the idea of mystical way towards individual salvation. This latter idea, as Joachim Radkau showed in detail in his recent biography of Weber, gradually turned into an obsession and was responsible for his fascination with the poet Stefan George, who became for him an exemplary modern 'prophet'.⁸

The development of religion, Weber argues both in his most famous *Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* and in the later essays on the sociology of religion, has always been powered by the process of 'rationalization': from ancient Judaism, which enters the path of historicity and separates the otherworldly God from his people peregrinating in history, all the way through Protestantism, which engenders the most rational form of religious ethics – 'inner-worldly asceticism'. As Weber observes, the more 'rational' (i.e. preoccupied with a total meaningful vision of the cosmos) religion becomes, the less useful and more irrational its genuinely 'religious' core of faith appears to be, until it is eventually replaced by the rising power of natural science, to which rationalized theological thinking had once given birth.

In his socio-historical writings, Weber thus seems to repeat the essential gesture of the 'enlightened' philosophy of history – in the manner of Kant or Hegel he declares religion to be subsumed under or merged with reason, thereby retaining its ethical element but losing all its 'irrational' ingredients. Repetition, however, brings about ultimate failure and the (bitter) awareness of this can be seen not only in the famous 'iron cage' passage of Weber's *Protestant ethic*, but especially in Weber's great late essay *Science as a vocation*. Science, Weber argues, does not live up to being modern world's new spiritual foundation, not only because it is an 'always unfinished project' which consists in constant self-questioning and self-denial, and thus cannot satisfy the human desire for completeness, but also because in terms of morality the rational, universalist and disenchanting world becomes its own opposite and slides into the gap of regressive, 'polytheistic' relativism.

Just as it was when Hellene sacrificed to Aphrodite, and then to Apollo, and, above all, when everyone sacrificed to the gods of his particular city, so it remains today, although the magical and mythical, though inwardly true, plasticity of those

⁸ Joachim Radkau, *Max Weber. A Biography*, trans. Patrick Camillier (London: Verso, 2011); cf. also Wolf Lepenies, *Die drei Kulturen. Soziologie zwischen Literatur und Wissenschaft* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1985).

acts has been stripped away. It is fate that reigns over these gods and controls their struggle, certainly not 'science'.⁹

On the contrary, Weber's argument undoing, as it were, its own Enlightenment assumptions unleashes by its very undecidedness a new postsecular dynamic and opens up new ways for mediation between 'enlightened' secularity and religion.

Two of these possible ways were actualized in the short run. The first was in truth not a mediation at all but rather a 'decision' to cut Weber's knot of conflicting values by undermining the very foundation that made it a meaningful dilemma. This was the way of the crushing critique of modernity undertaken by Carl Schmitt and the whole generation of his followers. This reaction changes the Weberian *post*-secular dynamic into a vigorous *antise*cularism and antimodernism, both of which view modernity as crippled in political, social, and moral terms by a fundamental fallacy of repressing the religious meaning of its main concepts and institutions. Modernity, according to this view, becomes sort of a *Schein*, or (false) appearance – a historical error that deforms what was earlier a harmonious unity of theology, morality, and political thinking.

The second way out of the seemingly dead end of Weberian 'polytheism' is more conciliatory and may be regarded as more genuinely postsecular in the sense I used this term here. It was the way taken by the German Jewish thinkers, who, all being spiritual descendants of the *haskalah* (the Jewish enlightenment of the 18th and 19th centuries), attempted to reappropriate and revision the religious heritage of Judaism by weaving it into a wider tapestry of post-Kantian and idealist thought. This is religious tradition transformed into a philosophical *neues Denken*, or 'new thinking', to borrow a phrase from Franz Rosenzweig, one of the most prominent representatives of that group. In his *Star of redemption*, Rosenzweig takes a magnificent detour through German idealism, mainly Schelling's philosophy of the middle and late period with its critique of Hegel's system, to put forth a dialectical combination of idealist philosophy and Jewish religious tradition. The trajectory of Walter Benjamin, another heterodox Jewish thinker, is even more adventurous: from his patient reconstruction of Romantic cultural criticism in *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik*, through apocalyptic musings and exercises in Jewish messianism, up to a weird blend of Jewish eschatology with dialectical materialism, as articulated in *Theses on the philosophy of history*, an

⁹ Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *Max Weber's Complete Writings on Academic and Political Vocations*, trans. Gordon C. Wells, ed. John Dreijimanis (New York: Algora Publishing, 2008), 44.

obscure meditation featuring what may be regarded as an epitome of the modernist postsecular wave – the famous image of the puppet and dwarf:

The story is told of an automaton constructed in such a way that it could play a winning game of chess, answering each move of an opponent with a counter-move. A puppet in Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent from all sides. Actually, a little hunchback who was an expert chess player sat inside and guided the puppet's hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophical counterpart to this device. The puppet called 'historical materialism' is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight.¹⁰

II. By way of conclusion

There are obvious and easy-to-grasp historical and intellectual continuities between the two postsecular constellations analyzed above and the contemporary use of the postsecular as a theoretical concept, especially in Habermas, but also in Žižek, who adapts Benjamin's image of the puppet and dwarf in his 'perverse' analysis of the social and political relevance of Christianity.¹¹ Interesting as it might be, this genealogy of (post)modern developments is, however, of secondary importance if compared to the larger question of how my present notion of postsecular waves may contribute to the ongoing debate on secularization. In fact, these two issues are not as remote from each other as they may seem. Let me then conclude with a modest and short suggestion related to this topic.

In his much quoted *Public religions in the modern world*, José Casanova, one of the most important 'revisionists' of the 20th century theory of secularization, argues that instead of discarding this theory altogether (as some postmodern theorists or proponents of a 'desecularization' paradigm clearly propose), we need a theoretical approach flexible enough to "explain that some secular worldviews are essentially anti-Enlightenment and religiously motivated resistance to them may very well agree with the spirit of Enlightenment." It should also be an approach capable of conceptualizing and exploring the

¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 253.

¹¹ See esp. Walter Benjamin, *The Puppet and the Dwarf. The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2003).

‘contingencies of still unfinished modernization and secularization’, thus a theory solidly grounded in, and taking seriously into account, a diversity of historical experience.¹² Can the postsecular explanation presented here, grounded as it is in a historical study of British and German Romanticism, be a step towards this kind of ‘flexible’ theorizing about secularization? This, in any case, would be a cautious and modest conclusion I can offer to the reader.

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¹² José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 38.

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Stanisław Obirek

The Experience of Faith in a Postsecular Context

KEYWORDS: religion, religious experience, postsecularism, change of paradigm, belief and disbelief

ABSTRACT: The concept of religion and of the divine is very complex; in fact, it is a human construction which is closely related to culture and its development. This is particularly clear when we consider dynamic changes in religious institutions, the Catholic Church included. The same should be said about religious experience. The religious experience was defined by William James at the beginning of the twentieth century in his classic book, *The varieties of religious experience*. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Charles Taylor took up some of James' ideas in his book *Varieties of religion today*. The religious context of time is present in both books, which were the outcome of the Gifford Lectures delivered at Edinburgh University. In traditional descriptions of religious phenomena, atheism and disbelief were usually not taken into account; however, the last two decades have brought a radical change. In this paper I will try to demonstrate that the postsecular context by the end of second decade of the twenty-first century gives us a new opportunity to define religious experience that allows us to overcome the traditional tension between religious and secular worldviews. I will even propose that it is possible to speak about a new paradigm in religious studies.

A few introductory remarks

I am aware that I am entering some very delicate territory in religious studies. It is almost inevitable in a short article to simplify the extremely complex

reality of religion. Since I am writing from an anthropological point of view, in my understanding of religion I follow the definition formulated by Clifford Geertz¹ in his essay “Religion as a cultural system” because it offers an inclusive approach and does not leave aside various phenomena that are sometimes omitted in religious studies. According to Geertz, religion is “(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality, that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.”² This kind of definition of religion fits perfectly in the democratic and pluralistic context of the modern world and is not subjected to theological controversies. In the first part of my essay I will try to demonstrate that Catholicism is reconcilable with liberalism, particularly since the Second Vatican Council. Subsequently, I will concentrate on the fact that for many religious people this kind of religiosity constitutes a real threat that causes defensive and even aggressive reactions. I will give just one example of this kind of attitude because there is a huge amount of literature concerning religious fundamentalism. In the final part of my essay I will try to demonstrate that the postsecular worldview is an appropriate answer to religious and secular fundamentalism.

The attempts of the Catholic Church to cope with liberalism

The Catholic Church, not without reason, is perceived as an example of an authoritarian institution. I would like to quote the American philosopher Judith Shklar, who is well known for her studies on liberalism. According to her, and it is easy to detect the Kantian tradition in her conception, “Every adult should be able to make as many effective decisions without fear or favor about as many aspects of her or his life as is compatible with the like freedom of every other adult.”³

I have to add that Shklar is right when she includes Catholicism among the obstacles to realizing the ideal of liberalism in the modern world:

It is difficult to find a vast flow of liberal ideology in the midst of the Catholic authoritarianism, romantic corporatist nostalgia, nationalism, racism, proslavery,

¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 87–125.

² Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 90.

³ Judith Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear,” in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, ed. Nancy L. Rosenblum (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 21.

social Darwinism, imperialism, militarism, fascism, and most types of socialism which dominated the battle of political ideas in the last century.⁴

The Catholicism which I am going to present as a possible partner for the secular worldview departs from the authoritarian tradition. What I have in mind is liberal Catholicism, as defined in an email which I got from Paul Lakeland, a Catholic liberal theologian from Fairfield University, USA. Lakeland spoke in the name of many when he wrote that for him to be a liberal theologian means the following:

A liberal theologian is one who, as steeped in the tradition and with as much reverence for it as more traditional or conservative theologians, sees his/her work as always in dialogue with the secular world rather than confrontational. In Vatican II terms, *ressourcement* is always at the service of *aggiornamento*. Of course, in times like the present when the American episcopate is quite reactionary in many respects, liberals become seen as adversaries. But liberals and conservatives love the church equally. What makes the difference for liberals is that their agenda is drawn from that Vatican II whose influence is currently being undermined by those who are less liberal. The liberal list of causes would therefore be something like: church as people of God, episcopal collegiality, synodal government, the importance of leadership roles for the laity, the transformation of patterns of ministry, openness to other religious traditions, openness to the world.⁵

Since Paul Lakeland stressed the importance for him of the documents elaborated during the Vatican II Council and emphasized the importance of this new approach for liberal Catholic theology, I will dedicate a few words to this event. In other words, without Vatican II the concept of liberal Catholicism does not make sense. The two most important declarations of this Council were *On religious freedom (De libertate religiosa)* and *Our age (Nostra aetate)*. Without these two documents, the development of Catholic theology in the last fifty years in the USA would simply have been impossible, and this theology can be considered as a kind of commentary to these documents. Or, more precisely, both documents became a departure point of dialogue with modernity. According to John O'Malley, Vatican II was first of all "a language event."⁶ For the first time, Catholic theology spoke in a positive way about other religions and about the capacity of humans to take responsibility for their

⁴ Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear," 22.

⁵ Personal email 18 November 2017.

⁶ John O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 12.

religious choices. The new language in theology was a sign of a new attitude toward the possibility of formulating religious convictions in words. I think that we can say that the Catholic Church changed the paradigm of its view of other religions – it moved from religious exclusivism towards inclusivism or even pluralism.⁷

One of the most important Catholic thinkers to articulate this new way of thinking (independently of Vatican II) was the American, Jesuit Walter Ong (1912–2003).⁸ As far as I can see, he was the first Catholic theologian in the twentieth century who looked for inspiration outside of Christian theology and took seriously the possibility that religious conviction might change as an outcome of a dialogue with other cultures and religions: “The dialogic approach means you don’t know where you are coming out. You stand to be modified by the other man; he stands to be modified by you.”⁹ The theological consequences of this way of thinking are enormous. Namely, it means that it is not doctrinal formulations that are at the center of theological reflection, but rather human beings. In other words, before we can start a dialogue between religions, we have to realize that we meet as human beings. How far this new approach will lead us, it is impossible to say, but it seems that this kind of dialogue is the only way to avoid the dangerous aspects of fundamentalism.

There is a similar way of thinking in Karl Rahner’s writings. In 1954 he wrote an essay entitled “Chalcedon: ending or beginning?” (“Chalcedon – Ende oder Anfang?”) for the 1500th anniversary of the Council of Chalcedon, formulating in it the most important Christological concepts. For the question “ending or beginning” his answer was “both!” A dogmatic and clear formulation is usually the end of a long and painful process of searching for a theological solution as well as the beginning of a new understanding.¹⁰ Rahner’s point is basically that we cannot look at a written text as dead letters, but rather we

⁷ Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions. From Confrontation to Dialogue* (New York: Orbis, 2001).

⁸ Thomas J. Farrell, *Walter Ong’s Contributions to Cultural Studies. The Phenomenology of the Word and I-Thou Communication* (New Jersey: Hampton Press, 2000).

⁹ “An Interview with Walter J. Ong Conducted by George Riemer (1971),” in *An Ong Reader. Challenges for Further Inquiry*, eds. Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (New Jersey: Hampton Press, 2002), 91.

¹⁰ Cf. “Once theologians and the ordinary magisterium of the Church have begun to pay attention to a reality and a truth revealed by God, the final result is always a precisely formulated statement. This is natural and inevitable. In no other way is it possible to mark the boundary of error and the misunderstanding of divine truth in such a way that this boundary will be observed in the day-to-day practice of religion. Yet while this formula is an end, an acquisition and a victory, which allows us to enjoy clarity and security as well as ease in instruction, if this victory is to be a true one the end must also be a beginning.” See: Karl Rahner, “Current Problems in Christology,” trans. Cornelius Ernst in *Theological Investigation*, vol. I (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1963), 149.

must see it as a point of departure for a living and dynamic interpretation of the Church's concrete documents. It is also important to emphasize that Karl Rahner was one of the most influential theologians during the debates of Vatican Council II, and his interpretation of the documents is particularly significant.¹¹ Speaking at the Weston School of Theology in 1979, Rahner stated that "The Second Vatican Council is, in a rudimentary form, still groping for identity, the Church's first official self-actualization *as* a world Church."¹² This search for identity is particularly salient in regard to other world religions. Rahner and Ong do not sanctify any one text, even a holy one. Rather the opposite: both encourage the search for new and more adequate theological and dogmatic formulations, and a new interpretation of the Holy Scripture. Peter Phan, an American theologian from Georgetown University, writes in a similar spirit when he speaks about "being religious interreligiously,"¹³ or about multiple religious belonging. According to him:

There is then a reciprocal relationship between Christianity and the other religions. Not only are the non-Christian religions complemented by Christianity, but also Christianity is complemented by other religions. In other words, the process of complementation, enrichment and even correction is two-way or reciprocal.¹⁴

Accepting other religions as a partner on the way to the final salvation is the only way for the Catholic Church to regain the credibility which was lost in the past century and to win the trust not only of adherents of other religions, but also of non-believers.

This liberal and critical approach of Catholics towards their own religious tradition is not shared by all Catholics. It is possible to say that the opposite is true because a growing number of members of this Church not only try to reject the reforms proposed by the Second Vatican Council, but also stigmatize as heretics and traitors those who follow and develop impulses from this event. Sometimes these reactions assume an aggressive form referred to as religious fundamentalism. This phenomenon can be observed not only in the Catholic Church, but also in other religions.

¹¹ See Karl Rahner, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," *Theological Studies*, no. 40 (4) (1979): 719–27.

¹² Rahner, "Towards a Fundamental," 717.

¹³ Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously. Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004).

¹⁴ Peter C. Phan, "Multiply Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church," *Theological Studies*, no. 64 (2003): 502.

Temptation of religious (or secular) fundamentalism

The best documentation of religious fundamentalism is documented in the monumental five-volume edition edited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *The fundamentalism project*, in which experts in religious studies from all over the world participated.¹⁵ A quick overview of the contents of this voluminous documentation shows that no religion is exempt from the temptation of fundamentalism. A more disturbing portrait of religion, namely the close relationship between radical religion and violence, emerges from the many case studies that were presented in two recent publications by Mark Juergensmeyer and Jeffrey Kaplan. In the connection between nationalism and religion, Mark Juergensmeyer sees a kind of new cold war;¹⁶ Jeffrey Kaplan analyzes and shows the violent face of new radical and usually right-oriented movements like Christian Identity churches and different examples of radical religions in America.¹⁷

I would like to leave the question of violence aside and reflect on a different and less known aspect of religious fundamentalism which is not as dangerous as the cases analyzed by the aforementioned scholars: the tendency of conservative theologians to withdraw from the modern world, which is stigmatized as a civilization of death, and to create an alternative reality. This tendency has gained strength and popularity in recent years thanks to the writings and activities of Rod Dreher, particularly his book *The Benedict option*.¹⁸ Dreher also tries to popularize his ideas in his regular blog in “The American Conservative” and in articles for liberal media like “The New York Times.”

A good illustration of his ideas can be found in his article “What must survive a corrupt Catholic Church,” published in “The New York Times.”¹⁹ It is a good illustration of Dreher’s conservative ideology. First of all, he mentions why he converted to Catholicism as a young man:

When I converted to Catholicism in my 20s, I seized my faith like a sword to be wielded against the world and the church’s enemies. Arrogant, proud, triumphalist –

¹⁵ Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *The Fundamentalism Project*, vol. 1–5 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991–1995).

¹⁶ Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

¹⁷ Jeffrey Kaplan, *Radical Religion and Violence. Theory and Case Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁸ Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2017).

¹⁹ Rod Dreher, “What Must Survive a Corrupt Catholic Church.” *New York Times*, 15 August 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/15/opinion/catholic-church-sex-abuse-pennsylvania.html>.

that was the kind of Catholic I was as a young man. That was not the church's fault: It was mine. And then it was all taken away from me.

I would say that it is a typical history of a young American conservative. Now, when he lost his confidence in the Catholic Church, he converted again, this time into Orthodoxy:

I left Catholicism for Eastern Orthodoxy, not because I expected to find a church free from sin, but because for various theological reasons, I thought it—not Protestantism—was the only way out. I needed valid sacraments, and I needed them in a church where I would not be overcome by fear and rage. In Orthodoxy, God gave me the graces of healing.

Again, I would say, this is a typical path for someone looking for firm and certain ground.

But what was more important than his personal way of practicing Christianity in the Orthodox Church was a strong and judgmental attitude towards those who did not share his way of life. Even more, Dreher and his followers present an alternative civilization – the Benedict option – which means “By making monasteries, of a sort, of our homes and hearts, we may develop the spiritual disciplines necessary to endure this seemingly endless trial and to keep the light of faith burning brightly amid this new Dark Age.” I do not think that this is a realistic proposal for our time. I think that a good alternative could be found in the postsecular worldview that is already practiced by some religious and secular people.

Is postsecularism a good alternative to any kind of fundamentalism?

It is important to situate the reality of postsecularism in the context of the vivid debate which has been taking place in Europe and the USA since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Involved in this debate are representatives of different humanistic disciplines from which I would like to mention some examples of philosophers of religion (Leszek Kołakowski, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor), political scientists (Olivier Roy, Kristina Stoeckl), sociologists (Zygmunt Bauman, Ulrich Beck), sociologists of religion (Peter L. Berger, Michele Dillon), theologians (Joseph Ratzinger, Jorge M. Bergoglio), and cultural anthropologists (Hent de Vries, Tomoko Masuzawa).

A special place should be reserved for the sociologist of religion, James Beckford, who in 2012 gave a concise panorama of the different usages of the concept of postsecularism. Beckford named two Catholic theologians who in 1966 (Andrew Greeley) and 1982 (Richard John Neuhaus) mentioned postsecularism as a way to describe the situation of Christianity in the USA. As he observed, the usage of 'postsecular' has become more varied and complex in the twenty-first century. Beckford grouped all the variety of usages of 'postsecular' into six clusters: (1) Secularization, Deniers, and Doubters; (2) Building on the Secular; (3) Reenchantment of Culture; (4) Public Resurgence of Religion; (5) Politics, Philosophy, and Theology; and (6) A Plague on All Your Houses. At the beginning of his article the author clearly stated that "The conclusion will be that the notion of postsecularity is problematic in itself and that it offers no help in explaining some important features of public religions in Britain."²⁰ And at the end of his article he gives a very critical conclusion: "My own skepticism about concepts of the postsecular stems from their failure to throw light on some of the most pressing issues concerning religion in public life today."²¹ I have to admit that the critical evaluation of the concept of postsecularism made by Beckford might be convincing; nevertheless, I will try to offer my own hypothesis, which is based mainly, although not only, on the Polish experience of dialogue between believers and non-believers.

It seems to me that with the introduction of the concept of postsecularism we gain a new analytical tool to interpret the present human condition. As we will see, the traditional categories of secularization and desecularization, privatization and deprivatization, return of religion or politicization of religion are no longer adequate to describe the new position of religion in the public sphere and its relation to secular reality. In a certain sense, with the acceptance of the concept of postsecularism it is possible to speak about a change of paradigm in religious studies in the sense given to this term by Thomas Kuhn in his classical study *The structure of Scientific Revolution*: "To be accepted as a paradigm, a theory must seem better than its competitors."²²

So, let me start with a concise definition proposed by Kristina Stoeckl, the director of the Postsecular Conflicts Project at Innsbruck University (I find this definition persuasive but also open for further clarifications). It is very important to notice that in this new, postsecular context religion is not the same as it was before. As stated by Stoeckl: "Religion in post-secular society

²⁰ James A. Beckford, "Public Religions and the Postsecular: Critical Reflection," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, no. 1 (2012): 1.

²¹ Beckford, "Public Religions and the Postsecular: Critical Reflection," 12.

²² Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 17.

is not the same as the one in a pre-secular society. The return of religion is not a falling-back into something that was there before. When we think about the post- as parable, we see that the religion that is presumably 'returning' has meanwhile changed as well."²³ Also, the relationship between religion and secularism has changed:

The co-existence of religious and secular worldviews, of religious and secular outlooks on society and politics, of religious and secular modes of understanding one's individual life, create tensions. Postsecularity is a condition of permanent tension.²⁴

In other words, we need a different look at religion but also a different evaluation of secularity. For this reason, I would like to mention the complexity of the new approach to the concept of religion in recent religious studies.

Before giving a few examples of how postsecularism is understood by some representatives of this theory, let me share with you my own experience of a "permanent tension" between religious and secular worldviews. It was in the year 2000 when, as the editor of the "Spiritual Life" ("Życie Duchowe") quarterly, I invited some believers and some non-believers to answer a questionnaire concerning their respective worldviews. It was my pleasant surprise that many of them not only answered but were also grateful for being asked. Finally, the answers were published in the anthology *What connects us? Conversations with non-believers*. At the end of this experiment I also asked Leszek Kołakowski to write the introduction. He agreed and entitled his interesting essay "Belief is valid, and disbelief is valid." As far as I know this essay was not translated into English so let me quote some passages from it as it seems to me that they illustrate perfectly what is today considered a post-secular worldview. Kołakowski described the essays contained in the book *What connects us?* as follows: "it is a confrontation between faith and non-faith, a confrontation that is not only civilized, but is overall permeated with an intelligent desire to understand the other side."²⁵ Kołakowski stated that not only are belief and disbelief both valid, but also underlined that both are necessary to culture. And what is even more important than the existing and

²³ Kristina Stoeckl, "Defining the Postsecular," (paper presented at the seminar of prof. Khoruzhij at the Academy of Sciences in Moscow in February 2011), 2. <http://www.pecob.eu/flex/cm/pages/ServeAttachment.php/L/EN/D/7%252Fd%252F1%252FD.1f1f8fddc2dd41df40ac/P/BLOB%3AID%3D3100>.

²⁴ Stoeckl, "Defining the Postsecular," 4.

²⁵ Leszek Kołakowski, "Wiara dobra, niewiara dobra," in Leszek Kołakowski and Maria Wolańczyk, *Co nas łączy? Dialog z niewierzącymi* (Kraków: WAM, 2002), 13.

creative tension between these two positions is vitally needed for the development of our culture. Kołakowski also indicated the sources of the validity of disbelief: "The validity of disbelief is supported daily by the hatred and arrogance of those believers who are called out to hatred and arrogance by bad priests."²⁶ I would like to mention a few names of the agnostics who gave answers in my questionnaire: the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, about whom I will say more later, the lawyer Ewa Łętowska, the sociologist Hanna Świdaziemba, the philosopher Jan Woleński, the literary critic Michał Głowiński, and the writer Stanisław Lem. The believers who responded included the philosopher Elżbieta Wolicka, the publicist Jan Turnau, the sociologist Ireneusz Krzemiński and the theologian Waclaw Hryniewicz. Some, such as Jerzy Prokopiuk, described themselves as gnostics. All of them are public intellectuals with recognized academic achievements.

For me personally, the experience of collecting and editing different voices became the stimulus to write a text in which Bauman's writings were set alongside the writings of John Paul II. I would like to refer to a fragment of this text which seems to me to fit the postsecular context. Namely, the comparison of two completely different thinkers such as John Paul II and Zygmunt Bauman. The former published an apostolic exhortation called *Ecclesia in Europa*; the latter in 2005 published a book, *Europe. An unfinished adventure*. It is possible to say that *Ecclesia in Europa* is a kind of summation of John Paul II's concerns about Europe and its Christian legacy. In the book by Bauman, *Europe. An unfinished adventure*, we find a witty reflection on the unpredictability of a continent which for thousands of years stood for the world's development of civilization. One can certainly question the appropriateness of this juxtaposition. John Paul II's reflections emerge from a clearly delineated tradition of Western Christianity, whereas Zygmunt Bauman's thoughts cannot be easily traced to any one source. One could even say that in Bauman's book we find a programmatic distaste for certainties. The only thing that unites them is concern for the poor. Is this a little, or a lot? Naturally, Zygmunt Bauman devoted his entire life to the possibility of conquering the aporia of social formations, finding an answer in socialist sensitivities, and since his early childhood Karol Wojtyła believed that religion is the most appropriate answer to the anxieties of the human heart. Gesturing towards a common denominator – sensitivity to poverty – I do not intend to suggest that the Pope is a socialist, or that Zygmunt Bauman is a religious thinker, but I do want to suggest that different points of departure do not need to mean that meeting is

²⁶ Kołakowski, "Wiara dobra, niewiara dobra," 13.

impossible.²⁷ As we will see in the next part of my reflection, the similarities between Zygmunt Bauman and Jorge Bergoglio are even more striking.

A good example of the practical consequences of accepting a postsecular worldview is the meeting between Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger in 2004 in Munich. It was an academic exchange between two German intellectuals who had never met before and whose widely recognized academic achievements were related to completely different fields. Habermas is a well-known philosopher who was not interested in religion, whereas Ratzinger was a very influential Catholic theologian known for his critical attitude towards modern culture. In this debate, the term post-secularism was introduced by Habermas (who followed the German sociologist Klaus Eder and his article from 2002) as a way to create a dialogical space for secular and religious positions. In his response Ratzinger not only accepted the proposed term but saw in postsecularism a chance to overcome the existing impasse between religious and secular worldviews and underlined the positive contribution of critical thinking for the purification of religious fanaticism. To illustrate this process of mutual learning, I would like to quote just two statements in which they both recognized the necessity to hear one another. Habermas said:

In postsecular society, there is an increasing consensus that certain phases of the 'modernization of the public consciousness' involve the assimilation and the reflexive transformation of both religious and secular mentalities. If both sides agree to understand the secularization of society as a complementary process, then they will also have cognitive reasons to take seriously each other's contributions to controversial subjects in the public debate.²⁸

In his lecture, Ratzinger accepted Habermas' suggestion by saying "With regard to the practical consequences, I am in broad agreement with Jürgen Habermas's remarks about a postsecular society, about the willingness to learn from each other, and about self-limitation on both sides."²⁹

A very similar approach to the mutual relation between the religious and the secular dimension of our reality and with the practical application of post-secular thinking is present in Ulrich Beck's aforementioned book with the interesting subtitle "Religion's capacity for peace and potential for violence."

²⁷ Cf. Stanisław Obirek, "Dwa oblicza prorocstwa. Jan Paweł II i Zygmunt Bauman wobec Europy," in *Dokąd zmierza Europa, przywództwo, idee, wartości*, eds. Halina Taborska and Jan S. Wojciechowski (Pułtusk: Wydawnictwo Typografia Pułtusk, 2007), 132.

²⁸ Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*, ed. Florian Schuller, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 46–47.

²⁹ Habermas and Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization*, 77.

It is worth mentioning that Beck, just like Habermas, was not particularly interested in religious questions. Only in this book, published in 2008 in German and in 2010 in English translation, did Beck decide to deal with religion as an important element of the public sphere, and he wrote that

The secular society must become post-secular, i.e. skeptical and open-minded towards the voices of religion. Permitting religious language to enter the public sphere should be regarded as enrichment, not as an intrusion. Such a change is no less ambitious than the general toleration of secular nihilism by the religions.³⁰

My final example is the last book by Zygmunt Bauman, *Retrotopia*, which could be seen as his intellectual legacy. In the final chapter entitled “Epilogue: looking forward, for a change” he made an enthusiastic reference to Pope Francis’ texts and gestures. Specifying a number of problems which humanity has to cope with in the present moment of its history, Bauman finds one person who is able to supply an adequate answer: “I found in Pope Francis the person among public figures of considerable great planet-wide authority who is bold and determined enough to raise and tackle this sort of question.”³¹ Bauman quotes extensively from a speech given by Pope Francis on the 6th of May 2016, when he received the European Charlemagne Prize. For Bauman, the Pope’s speech was inspiring because he saw in it a concrete suggestion to resolve some of the world’s problems. For Bauman “The intention behind Pope Francis’ message is to bring the fate of peaceful cohabitation, solidarity and collaborations of humans from the fuzzy and obscure realm of high politics.”³² For this reason, Bauman concluded his book with a positive note: “The chances of fruitful dialogue, as Pope Francis reminds us, depend on our reciprocal respect and assumed, granted and mutually recognized equality of status.”³³ The postsecular understanding of religious and secular mutuality is exactly about this.

Bauman’s appreciation for Pope Francis was confirmed by Michele Dillon: “The Catholic Church has many resources that well match the postsecular turn.”³⁴ Dillon made reference to Habermas’ concept of ‘contrite modernity’, which she applied also to the Catholic Church. Moreover, in the light of the recent

³⁰ Ulrich Beck, *A God of One’s Own: Religion’s Capacity for Peace and Potential for Violence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 156.

³¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Retrotopia* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 138.

³² Bauman, *Retrotopia*, 139.

³³ Bauman, *Retrotopia*, 140.

³⁴ Michele Dillon, *Postsecular Catholicism: Relevance and Renewal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 165.

statements made by Pope Francis in the context of the Pennsylvania clergy sex abuse case, we can see that this “contrite Catholicism” might be real: “With shame and repentance, we acknowledge as an ecclesial community that we were not where we should have been ... realizing the magnitude and the gravity of the damage done to so many lives.” At the end of the letter, Francis says “it is essential that we, as a Church, be able to acknowledge and condemn, with sorrow and shame, the atrocities perpetrated by consecrated persons, clerics, and all those entrusted with the mission of watching over and caring for those most vulnerable.”³⁵ It would be interesting to confront this letter with Francis’ trip to Ireland (25–26 August 2018), but this a separate topic which needs a special study. As Dillon wrote, “A contrite modernity, just as contrite heart, does not give to despair over past failings. Rather, it has the values and cultural resources to amend its shortcoming, and to steer society back on track so that it can better realize its potential.”³⁶

Postsecularism versus pluralism

It is an open question if postsecularism could constitute a change of paradigm (Charles Taylor expressed his skepticism when I asked him what he thinks about this). We are still at the beginning of this debate, but I hope that I have suggested some examples of constructive application of the postsecular way of thinking in which religious and secular values are perceived not as opposed to each other but as a complementary perspective.

This perspective is present in Bauman’s *Retrotopia*:

We need to brace ourselves for a long period marked by more questions than answers and more problems than solutions, as well as for acting in the shadow of finely balanced chances of success and defeat. But in this one case, in opposition to the cases to which Margaret Thatcher used to impute it, the verdict ‘there is no alternative’ will hold fast with no likelihood of appeal. More than at any other time we – human inhabitants of the Earth – are in an either/or situation: joining either hands, or common graves.³⁷

A good illustration of this new approach is the book *The many altars of modernity. Toward a paradigm for religion in a pluralist age*, published by Peter

³⁵ Pope Francis [Jorge Mario Bergoglio], “Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God.” 20 August 2018. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180820_lettera-popolo-didio.html.

³⁶ Dillon, *Postsecular Catholicism*, 2–3.

³⁷ Bauman, *Retrotopia*, 140.

Berger in 2014. In this book, Berger used the religious pluralism of the modern world as a hermeneutical key for interpreting religious changes.³⁸ Nancy T. Ammerman, a student of Berger and a sociologist of religion from Boston University, claims that in order to analyze the religious phenomenon appropriately, it is necessary to overcome the traditional dichotomy:

The sociological study of religion is not neatly contained in binary categories of organized v. individual, religious v. spiritual, theistic and transcendent v. nontheistic and immanent. All these things are contained within the discourses about spirituality we heard; and all of them exist within religious institutions, as well as outside those institutions.³⁹

This approach also corresponds to the postsecular worldview which is the subject of my reflection in this paper.

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³⁸ Peter L. Berger, *The Many Altars of Modernity. Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

³⁹ Nancy T. Ammerman, "Spiritual but Not Religious? Beyond Binary Choices in the Study of Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, no. 2 (2013): 276.

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Nonka Bogomilova

Religion Today: ‘Public Decline’ in an ‘Anthropological Refuge’?

KEYWORDS: contemporary religion, subjective religion, secularization vs. desecularization debate, philosophical paradigms, sociological approaches

ABSTRACT: The paper examines diverse theoretical standpoints on issues related to the interpretation of contemporary religiosity. A distinction is made between, on the one hand, authors who acknowledge as indisputable the secular, non-religious nature of the contemporary times and, on the other hand, authors and ideas that consider the contemporary world as totally religious; between interpretations of the existential horizon of religion as providing a unique and irreplaceable transcendental meaning and support to the mortal individual, as opposed to those viewing religion as a transient cultural condition in the course of the maturing and autonomous self-assertion of the individual and society. These general theoretical and value-based interpretations, developed in particular by the philosophy and sociology of religion, are taken up here in order to understand the dynamic processes developing in the modern/postmodern religious situation, registered by sociological research and fieldwork or observed in various regional phenomena. The emptying of religion of its social ‘infrastructure’ role – the global framework of the social body – shifts the ‘point of application’ of religion from the social to the individual level, to human subjectivity. The methodological turn from the group and community to the individual is analyzed as both culturally justified and very limited. This investigation tries to clarify the issue: is ‘subjective’ religion an ‘anthropological residue’ doomed to depletion, or an essential element of ‘revived’ religion?

Debates at cross purposes: an overview

The questions that arise as we try to understand contemporary religiosity and the dynamic processes unfolding in it cannot be adequately discussed without touching upon more general theoretical questions concerning the nature and meaning of religion, its beginning and/or end, and its relation to society and individuals. In the modern theoretical perspectives (particularly in the philosophy and sociology of religion) that define the epistemological and methodological horizon of religious studies, the debates on these issues are continuing – debates that started as far back as the time of the Enlightenment. Some of the more important topics of discussion are related to understanding the nature and definition of religion in the perspective of the rational vs. the irrational. Another topic is the autonomy of religion (the 'sui generis' approach) as opposed to its functional tie to factors lying outside it (the 'reductionist', 'functionalist' approach). The existential horizon of religion is viewed in the opposed perspectives of religion as providing a unique and irreplaceable transcendental meaning and support to the mortal individual, or, in contrast, as a transient cultural condition occurring in the course of the individual's maturing and autonomous self-assertion. This variety of viewpoints has been characteristic of both the age of Enlightenment/modernity (with a strong preferential emphasis on human reason) and in contemporary/postmodern theoretical thinking.

While it preserves this anthropological Enlightenment-related emphasis, the debate also displays certain tendencies to reconcile reason with faith, science with theology, Theos with Anthropos, to bring these pairs into harmony and/or dialogue. Moreover, quite a few contemporary authors, including philosophers and sociologists, in stating that 'God is dead' (as philosophers most often express themselves, citing Nietzsche) or is 'half-dead' (as sociologists tend to conclude from social research on modern religiosity), esteem that this fact represents an irreplaceable cultural loss, an existential catastrophe for humans. To counteract this 'cultural loss', they propose a variety of theoretical and praxiological strategies, ranging from a reinterpretation of religion, of the Bible and of secularization, to obligatory teaching of religion in secular schools.

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 and the loss of a lasting, intransient meaning to human life and historical development. Proposing a third, middle path between the two extreme

viewpoints, some authors discern traces of lost religiousness in other cultural forms and phenomena such as art, philosophy, and the new utopias.

It is hardly necessary to explain at great length how important these general theoretical and value-based interpretations are for understanding the dynamic processes developing in the modern religious situation, as registered by sociological research and fieldwork, or as observed in various regional phenomena. However, some of the arguments in support of their importance will be outlined in this article.

Regardless of the aforementioned variety of interpretations of the contemporary situation of religiousness/irreligiousness, most authors agree on at least one point: religion today, in its quality of social/collective, public phenomenon, has used up its importance or is dwindling in importance.

The social ‘decline’ of religion: ideas and interpretations

The contemporary French philosopher and historian Marcel Gauchet has offered a comprehensive political–philosophical theory, proposing an in-depth analysis of the causes, nature and historical forms of the process in question. He assumes that religion is a historical phenomenon that has a beginning and an end, and is not tied to the eternal, extra-temporal needs of the individual.¹ He instead interprets religion as essentially linked to its own social existence, so that the center of gravity of religiousness lies in its connection to its social foundation: the latter is the ‘global articulation of the social body’, the domination of the collective order over individuals.² He considers religion as a centuries-old garb, a form of deep-rooted anthropological structure that, in the course of its development, eventually rejects its own form.³ Gauchet traces religion’s principle and the purest manifestation of its essence to the time before the appearance of the state, when the natural and collective forms of life were predefined for individuals – were posited for them as primeval and unchanging – and the present was seen as entirely dependent on the mythical past.⁴ The formation of the ‘great’, ‘universal’ religions, which constitute God as a transcendent and alienated reality – as a ‘total otherness’ – he sees as representing successive stages of the weakening and breakdown of this ‘pure’,

¹ Marsel Goshe, *Razomagiosvaneto na sveta*, trans. Evgeniya Grekova (Sofiya: Zhenifer-Hiks, 2001), 147.

² Goshe, *Razomagiosvaneto*, 33, 37.

³ Goshe, *Razomagiosvaneto*, 26.

⁴ Goshe, *Razomagiosvaneto*, 30.

'first' religion,⁵ and the appearance of the state, as a penetration of the total otherness of God into the social space.

The modern, individualistic age shifts the 'point of application' of religion from the social to the individual level, to human subjectivity; the tendency in question posits the visible and invisible in a single reality, that of subjectivity. This process is realized in a paradoxical way in the two spheres: the this-worldly and the other-worldly. The more powerful and distanced from humankind God becomes (in theology and religious philosophy), the more independent and free humankind becomes. Illustrating this paradox, Gauchet describes the spirit of Protestantism as the spirit of the autonomous individual, who communicates with the Almighty God directly, without institutional mediation, engaging God as a collaborator in man's 'earthly' (goal-setting) ventures and works.

The emptying of religion of its role of social 'infrastructure' – the global framework of the social body – Gauchet links to the modern practice of the collective constitution of the social whole and of the democratic state from the 'grass roots' upwards by the citizens.⁶ This movement is radically different both from the reproduction and invariable repetition of the collective order 'sanctified' by the 'first' religion, and from the statehood that, sanctified by the transcendent God, dominates over individuals. In Gauchet's view, religion has now used up its social 'points of application' and remains as an 'anthropological residue' in the form of a subjective religious experience, as the presence of the invisible amidst the visible – an "anarchic and mobile set of personal religiosities, they themselves being vagrant and diffuse – doomed likewise to gradual disappearance."⁷

In assessing Utopian ideologies (the style of thinking marked by dualism and typical primarily of philosophy, with its splitting of truth from appearance, the sensible from the intelligible world, the immanent from the transcendent), Gauchet qualifies them as 'shelters' for religiosity. Art too is a 'continuation of the sacred with other means'.⁸ This viewpoint is shared by the sociologist Jean-François Lyotard: God has withdrawn from the world, abandoning it to the actions and works.⁹

In the analysis of religion briefly outlined above, one finds interweaving methods drawn from philosophy, history, political science, anthropology, and sociology; one also finds in it a continuity with – but likewise a break with –

⁵ Goshe, *Razomagiosvaneto*, 12.

⁶ Goshe, *Razomagiosvaneto*, 140.

⁷ Goshe, *Razomagiosvaneto*, 247.

⁸ Goshe, *Razomagiosvaneto*, 307.

⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, *Moralités postmodernes* (Paris: Galilée, 1993).

certain 'Enlightenment'-related interpretations of religion, those of G. W. F. Hegel and L. Feuerbach. In the concept of the 'disenchantment' of the world, included in the title of Gauchet's book and indicating its general spirit and meaning, we find an echo of Max Weber's ideas and approach. The viewing of religion in the functional context of social reproduction and development, which in a sense Gauchet shares, points to a kind of continuity with one of the most influential approaches to religion of the 20th century, that of Emile Durkheim.¹⁰ This paradigm, although widely used and methodologically fruitful, has its critics today who find it gives support to a functionalist approach to religion and is moving away from the 'truth' of religion, from religion's inner psychological core, which is at the center of attention of the phenomenological approach, or more generally speaking, the so-called 'sui generis' approaches.¹¹

The French philosopher Georges Bataille also assumes that researchers have interpreted religion in terms of its secular functions and meaning. Moreover, the very division of the world into earthly and divine, into a real object order and a divine sacral order, motivates humankind to subordinate the latter to the former: reason and morality "rationalize and moralize the divine, and in this process, morality and reason are deified."¹² Even Rudolf Otto, the famous theologian, psychologist and founder of the phenomenological approach to religion who strives for a pure concept of 'religion' as a psychological core without worldly admixtures, ultimately allows for the presence of some moral and rationalistic elements as a necessary complement to this core, and as something that can be isolated from it only in theoretical abstraction. The numinous, as the deepest, innermost essence of the holy, is a kind of raw material, a void that is filled with secular content in the course of the historical-cultural cultivation of religious feeling, of the Divine, the sacred.¹³

The Polish philosopher Leszek Kołakowski is far more definite in his understanding of the nature of religion as emancipated from the function of satisfying social and psychological needs,¹⁴ and as irreducible to norms and morality. In his interpretation, religion has the unique function of creating

¹⁰ James Beckford, "The Sociology of Religion 1945–1989," *Social Compass*, no. 37 (1) (1990): 46.

¹¹ Christopher Pearson and Matthew Schunke, "Reduction, Explanation and the New Science of Religion," *Sophia*, no. 54 (1) (2015): 47–60.

¹² Zhorzh Batay, *Teoriya na religiyata*, trans. Svetlana Pancheva (Sofiya: Hristo Botev, 1996), 53.

¹³ Rudolf Otto, *Idea of the Holy*, trans. John Harvey (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1936).

¹⁴ Leshek Kolakovski, *Religiyata ili ako nyama Bog*, trans. Katya Mitova (Sofiya: Pero 10, 1996).

meaning for human life and history, and hence is an irreplaceable 'homeostatic mechanism'.¹⁵

But even authors gravitating to these approaches also detect a modern tendency of the 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 "parceled out,"¹⁶ it "acquires an abstract, inner, subjective character."¹⁷

In fact, this debate likewise began as far back as the Age of Enlightenment: Immanuel Kant's 'moral' religion, placed 'within the limits of reason alone', stood in opposition to Friedrich Schleiermacher's 'emotional' religion, free of secular ties, rising above all those ties in significance and meaning.

A confusion of concepts in the sociology of religion

This essential link between the religious and the social on the one hand, and, on the other hand, this conclusion, rather widespread in the social sciences, regarding the 'decline' of religion as a public phenomenon, raise the question as to the need for new methods and theories with which to study religion's new kind of existence. Added to this, the use and continuing influence of epistemological paradigms that treat religion in the context of the social (Durkheim and others) put in doubt the status of 'religion' with regard to its subjectivized forms, as an 'anthropological residue'.

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, Bryan 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.¹⁸

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*.¹⁹

¹⁵ Kolakovski, *Religiyata*, 37.

¹⁶ Rozhe Kayoa, *Chovekat i sveshtenoto*, trans. Evgeniya Grekova (Sofiya: Kritika i Humanizam, 2001), 143.

¹⁷ Kayoa, *Chovekat i sveshtenoto*, 146.

¹⁸ Beckford, "The Sociology of Religion 1945–1989," 55.

¹⁹ Thomas Luckmann, "Transformations of Religion and Morality in Modern Europe," *Social Compass*, no. 50 (3) (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.²⁰

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.²¹ He considers the secularization not a paradigmatic characteristic, but one of the cultural dimensions of contemporary religion,²² 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.

And though Berger nevertheless accepts the secularization paradigm as valid for Western Europe (expecting the same trends to appear in Eastern Europe as well), he sees taking place in the greater part of the world a typical rise of conservative religious movements related to Evangelism (Pentecostalism), Islam, etc.²³ According to Berger, these movements serve as a 'religious inspiration', or as a stimulus for various modern cultural transformations, such as the formation of a new ethos of work and education oriented to the values of the Protestant ethic (in the case of the Pentecostalism); or else, they promote anti-Modern practices as in the case of the Islamic revival.

Although Berger calls for researchers to make a distinction between 'religious inspiration', 'religious motivation' and 'religious rhetoric',²⁴ it is usually very difficult (and at times unprofitable, for various reasons) to theoretically extract the 'religious' element from these complex cultural and political 'mixtures'.

José Casanova argues that some of the phenomena that demonstrate most convincingly the return of religion to the global public scene are 1) the trans-

²⁰ Luckmann, "Transformations," 276.

²¹ Pitar Bargar, "Desekularizatsiyata na sveta. Globalen pregled," in *Desekularizatsiyata na sveta: Vazrazhdashtata se religiya i svetovnata politika*, ed. Pitar Bargar, trans. Stanimir Panayotov (Sofiya: Kritika i Humanizam, 2004), 16, 17, 21.

²² Peter Berger, "Reflections on the Sociology of Religion Today," *Sociology of Religion*, no. 62 (4) (2001): 445.

²³ Bargar, "Desekularizatsiyata," 21.

²⁴ Bargar, "Desekularizatsiyata," 33.

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, nation or ethnic group, but often representing a kind of synthesis, a *bricolage* of various religious ideas and practices.²⁵

However, this vagueness in the sociological interpretations of the boundaries and domain of religiousness in its various social practices puts in question the very definition of these practices as 'religious'. For instance, Slavoj Žižek, like Marcel Gauchet, sees the Protestant ethic – in its quality of incentive toward economic activity – as a devaluation and restriction of religion, as a reduction of religion to an instrument in the struggle for survival.²⁶ Lyotard makes a similar assessment of contemporary Islam, seeing it rather as a name of a total civilization, a modality of human being-together, rather than a religious belief.²⁷

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.²⁸ 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,²⁹ among whom

²⁵ José Casanova, "Religion, the New Millennium and Globalization," *Sociology of Religion*, no. 62 (4) (2001): 425–9.

²⁶ Slavoy Zhizhek, *Ponezhe ne znayat kakvo pravayat*, trans. Milen Ruskov (Sofiya: Kritika i Humanizam, 2001), 224.

²⁷ Lyotard, *Moralités postmodernes*.

²⁸ Steve Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

²⁹ Greys Deyvi, "Evropa: izklyuchenieto, koeto dokazva praviloto?" in *Desekularizatsiyata na sveta: Vazrazhdashkata se religiya i svetovnata politika*, ed. Pitar Bargar, trans. Stanimir Panayotov (Sofiya: Kritika i Humanizam, 2004), 100–1.

she observes, with concern and alarm, an ‘ignorance’ of Christian doctrine as a norm for modern Europe.³⁰

These conclusions are relevant to the observed trends in religiosity in the 31 countries covered by the European Value Surveys from 1980 to 2008.³¹

Sociological surveys and analysis at the end of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century have stressed the similarity in the tendencies in most European countries 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.³²

The well-known British sociologist of religion, Bryan Wilson, considers the contemporary trends in religiosity to be a reaction against some of the extreme aspects of secularization, i.e. excessive rationalization, bureaucratization, scientism, social standardization, rather than its complete rejection as a concept.³³

The French scholar Jean-Paul Willaime observes that the general spirit of the contemporary European religious situation is characterized by secularity (*laïcité*) of a global kind and of a Catholic, Lutheran, Muslim or interconfes-

³⁰ Deyvi, “Evropa,” 121.

³¹ Santiago Pérez-Nievas and Guillermo Cordero, “Religious Change in Europe (1980–2008),” 2010. <https://www.sisp.it/files/papers/2010/santiago-perez-nievas-e-guillermo-cordero-726.pdf>.

³² Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World*, 25–69; Grace Davie, *La religion des Britanniques, de 1945 à nos jours*, trans. Christopher Sinclair (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1996), 79–81, 129–57; Denis Janz, *World Christianity and Marxism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 31–51, 68–82, 97–109; Miklós Tomka, “Religion, Church, State and Civil Society in East-Central Europe,” in *Church-State Relations in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Irena Borowik (Kraków: NOMOS, 1999), 42–62; Victor Roudometof, *Nationalism, Globalization and Orthodoxy. The Social Origins of Ethnic Conflict in the Balkans* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 2001), 229–40; Ivan Iveković, “Nationalism and the Political Use and Abuse of Religion: the Politicization of Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Islam in Yugoslav Successor States,” *Social Compass*, no. 49 (4) (2002): 523–36; Nonka Bogomilova, “Reflections on the Contemporary Religious ‘Revival’. Religion, Secularization, Globalization,” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*, no. 24 (4) (2004), <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol24/iss4/1>; Meredith McGuire, *Lived Religion. Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Roberto Cipriani, “Religions and Churches,” in *Handbook of European Societies. Social Transformations in the 21st Century*, eds. Stefan Immerfall and Göran Therborn (New York: Springer, 2010), 439–63; Vjekoslav Perica, “Serbian Jerusalem: Religious Nationalism, Globalization and the Invention of a Holy Land in Europe’s Periphery, 1985–2017,” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*, no. 37 (6) (2017), <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol37/iss6/3>.

³³ Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

sional type. Secularization is a real process of loss of the total power of religions over society and the individual.³⁴ The most recent observation of Olivier Roy in a comparative European perspective shows the bureaucratization of religion and new forms of state intervention.³⁵ The micro-level and regional analyses confirm the macro-level observations regarding the development of a 'utilitarian conception of religion', of preliminary 'personal devotion',³⁶ 'the growing significance of personalized ways of being related to the sacred or supernatural'.³⁷

In his conceptual article of 1990, the British sociologist Beckford drew the general conclusion that the social functions of religion, with which sociologists were occupied after 1945, had decreased, but the social importance of religion, in a new form, had perhaps increased. This new form requires new conceptualization. Hence, the author compares the nostalgia for the old, classical theories of the time of the emergence of industrial society with nostalgia for old gods.³⁸

The meta-theoretical level of analysis is defined by several key methodological issues. 1) Is the secularization paradigm no longer valid or does the notion of secularization need to be reformulated? 2) What is the borderline separating religious from quasi-religious formations and practices, such as the new religions, religious mobilization in conflict situations, the connection of religion with various worldly movements of feminist, fundamentalist, Marxist, or environmentalist kinds, etc.?

Subjective religion: an 'anthropological residue' doomed to depletion, or an essential element of 'revived' religion? (methodological issues)

In the last 20–30 years, as a result of the growth of individualism as a principle informing all spheres of postmodern culture, certain categories have come to the fore in the methodology of religious studies which highlight individual

³⁴ Jean-Paul Willaime, "Introduction," in *Des maîtres et des Dieux. Ecoles et religions en Europe*, ed. Jean-Paul Willaime, with collaboration by Séverine Mathieu (Paris: BELIN, 2005), 10.

³⁵ Olivier Roy, "Religious Freedom and Diversity in a Comparative European Perspective," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, no. 19 (1) (2017): 89.

³⁶ Evgeniya Ivanova, "Islam, State and Society in Bulgaria: New Freedoms, Old Attitudes?" *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, no. 19 (1) (2017): 48.

³⁷ Christian Zwingmann and Sonja Gottschling, "Religiosity, Spirituality and God Concepts. Interreligious and Interdenominational Comparisons Within a German Sample," *Archive for the Psychology of Religion*, no. 37 (1) (2015): 99.

³⁸ Beckford, "The Sociology of Religion 1945–1989," 45–64.

‘religious experience’;³⁹ thus, subjectivity becomes central to the understanding of the divine.⁴⁰ Researchers are trying to capture the changes taking place in religion and are intensely discussing the phenomena of ‘believing without belonging’,⁴¹ ‘living religion’, ‘practiced religion’, hybrid forms, the so-called cultural improvisation in the sphere of religion which passes the boundaries of different religious and cultural traditions.⁴² In this ‘cultural improvisation’, researchers distinguish syncretic cults derived from popular religiosity, retro-active cultures, vitalist and holistic beliefs that combine transcendent and immanent energies and forces in a way that shapes a sort of counterculture echoing global culture.⁴³ This, as it were, ‘return to the neo-magical’ is shaping personal religiosity into a kind of kaleidoscope ‘bricolage’ or ‘cocktail’ of different and heterogeneous beliefs, and thereby additionally stratifies the already complex religious sphere of our times.

This is the approach applied by Meredith McGuire, the well-known American sociologist and anthropologist of religion, in her book *Lived religion*. Unlike her previous work *Religion and social context*, which was devoted to the study of religion as a social, group phenomenon, this book takes a completely different approach, constructing a new integral methodology for research in this area. In the introductory parts of her book, the author declares her aim to raise a methodological challenge in principle to the traditional treatments of religion and religiosity typical for contemporary researchers, and specifically to the widespread standard sociological interpretations.⁴⁴ Her direct impressions and observations of conduct, emotions, and body language have suggested to her the idea that, before dealing with theoretical generalizations and total interpretations, researchers should come closer to ‘lived religion’, to religion as it presents itself in everyday experience, to the desires and feelings of individual people.

This methodological turn from the group and community to the individual has its cultural justifications: the new religious movements, with their

³⁹ Peter Versteeg and Johan Roeland, “Contemporary Spirituality and the Making of Religious Experience: Studying the Social in the Individualized Religiosity,” *Fieldwork in Religion*, no. 6 (2) (2012): 120–33. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273082766>.

⁴⁰ Raymond Lee, “La fin de la Religion? Réenchantement et déplacement du sacré,” *Social Compass*, no. 55 (1) (2008): 66–83.

⁴¹ Grace Davie, “Global Civil Religion: A European Perspective,” *Sociology of Religion*, no. 62 (4) (2001): 455–73.

⁴² McGuire, *Lived Religion*.

⁴³ Cristian Gumucio, “Les nouvelles formes de religion dans la société globalisée: un défi à l’interprétation sociologique,” *Social Compass*, no. 49 (2) (2002): 167–86.

⁴⁴ McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 4.

hybrid, syncretic character, are spreading to an increasingly large social space and coming to include elements of popular religiosity, of magic, while emphasizing the non-traditional practices of healing, eating, social communication, etc. These religious movements usually involve some not particularly large groups of people, and hence the experience, conduct and feelings of the individuals in them are especially important, being a kind of force that constructs and grounds the form of the new religion. As McGuire put it, "the Western image of a religion as a unitary, organizationally defined, and relatively stable set of collective beliefs and practices" should be challenged.⁴⁵

The British sociologist James Beckford traces this trend back decades and discusses the influence of certain trends and methods in philosophy, historiography, linguistics, etc. on the change in topics and approaches of sociology. As a result of the increasing influence of phenomenology and linguistics in the 1960s, social research came to include other, previously 'unnoticed' topics such as the adoption of new religions by individuals, detachment from religion, etc. Among the changing fashions in sociological theory that were influenced by analytic philosophy and historiography, Beckford includes the emerging micro-sociological focus on everyday life structures that is typical of Anglo-American and French sociology. These influences and transformations involved enhanced interest in the study of popular and implicit religion.⁴⁶

But in addition to its advantages and heuristic value, this methodology centered on individuality and subjectivity has its limitations.

The Canadian sociologist Roberto Miguez turns his attention to an important issue that might shed additional light on the debates regarding the changes occurring in the field of religion today, and the theoretical instruments with which these changes may be understood. He examines the trends and methods in contemporary sociology as reflecting new philosophical paradigms, among which is the paradigm of reformist epistemology. Based on a radical critique of the absolute claims of the paradigm of rationality, this new paradigm, according to Miguez, grounds the stance of radical subjectivism. According to it, each individual has his/her basic beliefs which are unique to him/her and are maybe not shared or understood by any other person. Religious trends build precisely on such unique and individual basic beliefs. In this connection, Miguez discusses the view of the American philosopher and theologian Alvin Plantinga. Such an approach permits a reconciliation beyond theism and atheism, as Plantinga assumes that each individual has as

⁴⁵ McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 186.

⁴⁶ Beckford, "The Sociology of Religion 1945–1989," 53.

something unique to him/her certain fundamental beliefs that are not susceptible to critique or rejection.⁴⁷

Migueluez views the influence of this paradigm on sociology as leading to the disappearance or elimination of the sociological approach. Extreme subjectivism and irrational indeterminism exclude applying a sociological approach to practices and conduct, since the very social function of individual behavior is put into question. Thus, the individual sociologist him/herself is defined as a single subject holding unique basic beliefs, so that the social validity of his/her ideas may be questioned.⁴⁸

The reduction of religion to verbal testimonies, conduct and beliefs of individuals enables capturing and recording only 'privatized' religion filtered through personal identity, concepts and relations: it ignores the cultural and social influence of religion as a collective phenomenon, as Beckford concludes.⁴⁹ Pointing out the role of the group and the authority in religious experience, Versteeg and Roeland state that "Subjectivization in religion is not the spiritual equivalent of the modern autonomous subject who controls his world through experience and self-discovery."⁵⁰

Along with the need to clarify and renew the concepts and methodologies of these sciences, one of the causes of the vagueness and contradictions in the interpretation of religion is related to values: the possibility vs. the impossibility of living without religion.

The yearning for religion vs. a life without illusions

Marcel Gauchet believes that an especially strong yearning for religion springs from the clashes and challenges of the age of individualism, from the difficult effort of being a subject with free will who is responsible for his/her 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..."⁵¹

In the middle of the last century, even the Protestant theologian and philosopher of religion Paul Tillich, in his classical work *The courage to be*, called

⁴⁷ Roberto Migueluez, "La philosophie des religions et la sociologie des religions," *Social Compass*, no. 49 (2) (2002): 160.

⁴⁸ Migueluez, "La philosophie des religions," 160.

⁴⁹ Beckford, "The Sociology of Religion 1945-1989," 52.

⁵⁰ Versteeg and Roeland, "Contemporary Spirituality," 131-2.

⁵¹ Goshe, *Razomagiosvaneto*, 312.

upon people to accept with stoicism and courage the absence of God.⁵² He encouraged people to mobilize their spirit and their will and apply them to creativity and life, even when all the 'transcendent sources' of culture have dried up: the courage to create and live with others ('to be part') can bring power even to the culture-killed God. F. M. Dostoevsky maintained that inter-human solidarity stems from the metaphysical suffering and loneliness of people abandoned by God. Lyotard also concludes that the continuing and irrevocable absence of God is partly compensated for and becomes immanent in art and esthetics, even as it induces the melancholy of postmodern man and postmodern thought, deprived of an eschatological perspective.⁵³

In a culture marked by the absence of God, some outstanding 20th century authors posited the line of thought that involves 'the courage to live without God': Max Weber, for whom science is the only honest way of living and of communicating with a young audience in a time that is remote from God; Sigmund Freud, for whom religion, as an 'illusion of culture', is a transitional stage in man's movement from childhood and dependence to maturity and freedom; Erich Fromm, who believes man's chief task is to achieve and assert one's Self through freedom and creative activity; and many of the proponents of existentialism, who offer various strategies for overcoming the absurdity of being, etc.

Especially in the last 20–30 years, in parallel and in contrast with this urge to live 'courageously' and without illusions – to produce meaning without the help of religion and God – some contrary viewpoints have proliferated which assert that religion and culture must find a mode of coexistence and that religion and God are vitally necessary as the only cultural form that creates meaning and gives existential support to humans. These issues were discussed by Gianni Vattimo, Richard Rorty, Santiago Zabala, Jacques Derrida, and others. In this line of thought, authors often use neutral concepts such as 'post-religion' or 'post-Christian' instead of secularist ones (culture, age, etc.). They assert that religion is experiencing a revival at the start of this millennium. Zabala sees the ideas of Vattimo and Rorty regarding 'weak thought' – a thinking that replaces the search for truth with the endeavor to engage in dialogue and charity – as leading to faith.⁵⁴ In this context, Rorty agrees with Vattimo's reinterpretation of secularization as dominated by private, privatized religion, and as an 'authentic religious experience'.

⁵² Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven, CT etc.: Yale University Press, 1980).

⁵³ Lyotard, *Moralités postmodernes*.

⁵⁴ Santiago Zabala, "Religiya bez teisti i ateisti," in Richard Rorty and Dzhani Vattimo, *Badesh-teto na religiyata*, ed. Santiago Zabala, trans. Kristiyan Katsori (Sofiya: Kritika i Humanizam, 2005), 24.

According to Vattimo, this trend is based on a view of Incarnation as God's all-giving friendship with man. In this perspective, God is not a dominant subject but a friend and partner.⁵⁵ This turn of perspective produces a 'revival of the sacred in multiple forms'.⁵⁶

Leszek Kołakowski is among the authors who acknowledge religion and God as the only and irreplaceable cultural form that creates meaning and gives existential support to man. He expresses doubt in the power and ability of man to create a "universe with meaning and purpose" outside faith, through philosophy, art, logical procedures.⁵⁷ Coming near to Vattimo's idea regarding truth as charity, Kołakowski asserts that the Dostoevsky's famous thought, "if there is no God, everything is permitted," is not only morally valid but represents an epistemological principle.⁵⁸ But unlike Vattimo, he accepts as relevant the traditional position of man with respect to God, the position of humility, repentance, helplessness, distance, sinfulness. According to him, the boundary between good and evil disappears where religion and faith are lacking; human beings cannot do without religion as they are weak and not self-sufficient.

Conclusion

My attempt to outline some of the contemporary discussions and interpretations of religion shows these as in a process of theoretical fermentation. As the concepts and methodology of religious studies continue to be thought out, the opposition will probably continue between the two value-based and existential strategies that underlie them: between the yearning for religion and a life lived without illusion.

Translated from Bulgarian by Vladimir Vladov

⁵⁵ Richard Rorti, "Antiklerikalizam i ateizam," in Richard Rorti and Dzhani Vatimo, *Badesh-teto na religiyata*, ed. Santiago Zabala, trans. Kristiyan Katsori (Sofiya: Kritika i Humanizam, 2005), 54, 59; Richard Rorti, Dzhani Vatimo, and Santiago Zabala, "Kakvo e badesh-teto na religiyata sled metafisikata?," in Richard Rorti and Dzhani Vatimo, *Badesh-teto na religiyata*, ed. Santiago Zabala, trans. Kristiyan Katsori (Sofiya: Kritika i Humanizam, 2005), 92.

⁵⁶ Dzhani Vatimo, *Sled hristiyanstvoto*, trans. Kristiyan Katsori (Sofiya: Kritika i Humanizam, 2006), 35.

⁵⁷ Kolakovski, *Religiyata*, 52.

⁵⁸ Kolakovski, *Religiyata*, 79.

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Postsecular or Post-Traditional? Slovakia between Tradition and Secularization¹

KEYWORDS: Slovakia, secularity, religiosity, desecularization, postsecular, post-traditional

ABSTRACT: This article discusses today's complex religious situation in Slovakia, pondering the adequacy of the concepts usually used in this context. The last three decades have shown that the Western concepts of secularization, desecularization and/or post-secularism do not completely fit the Slovak religious reality that obviously goes beyond the Western conceptual horizon. While the countries in Western Europe are undergoing a postsecular turn, this does not seem to be the case in Slovakia, which has instead seen a very dynamic post-traditional turn characterized not only by belonging to a church and attending its services, but also by an openness to new spiritual possibilities outside the institutional ecclesiastical milieu. In the conditions of a modern society, post-traditional Christianity in Slovakia is experiencing transformations and adaptations of traditional religious forms. The case of Slovakia suggests that the contemporary academic study of religion has to learn how to ask correct, up-to-date questions on religion and non-religion to get the big picture and the details of the dynamics of the actual religious landscape in Slovakia.

The political change in Slovakia that followed the events of November 1989 was an important turning point in terms of the postulation of religious freedom and new relationships between the state and the churches. Scholars were challenged by the task of how to understand religion in new societal conditions.

¹ The paper was elaborated within the project VEGA 1/0435/16.

There was no antecedent tradition of sociological research of religion in Slovakia. There was no established sociology of religion. At that time, the only institutions dealing with religion were three theological faculties² that could not cooperate with other European faculties and were controlled by the state and by the secret police; there was also the Institute of Scientific Atheism, founded in 1971,³ which investigated religion under the perspective of Marxism–Leninism and worked actively against religious beliefs. State socialism supported forced secularization. Before 1989, the last census that inquired of religious affiliation took place in 1950. Under state socialism, religious affiliation was regarded a private issue and religion was considered ‘satisfaction of private needs’. Religious affiliation was not asked about until the 1991 census. In the early 1990s, scholars faced the question of how to research religion and religiosity as the Marxist–Leninist methods were no longer applicable and there was no other approach in the official Czechoslovak sociology at that time. In an effort to approximate Western academic standards, they naturally adopted the methods and concepts applied in religious and secularity research in the West.

The ‘big Western concepts’

The leading theory in the decades preceding the 1990s was Peter Berger’s secularization theory.⁴ Berger and other advocates⁵ of the secularization paradigm were convinced that religion and the modern world were incompatible – the end of religion would come in the era of industrialization, urbanization and modernization. This theory had a global ambition to predict that each society that passes from the pre-industrial to the developed form must undergo secularization. In the 1990s, this mainstream approach in the sociology of religion was challenged by voices criticizing its Eurocentric and Christianocentric

² The Catholic and Lutheran Faculties were in Bratislava and the Orthodox Faculty was in Prešov. However, they did not have the status of academic institutions and were not a part of a university; they were officially ‘cultural institutions’ under the Ministry of Culture.

³ Its predecessor was the Department of Scientific Atheism, founded in 1960 as part of the Institute of Philosophy at the Slovak Academy of Sciences.

⁴ Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy. Elements of Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967).

⁵ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, “Sociology of Religion and Sociology of Knowledge,” *Sociology and Social Research*, no. 47 (1963): 417–27; Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1967); Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); David Martin, “The Secularization Issue: Prospect and Retrospect,” *British Journal of Sociology*, no. 3 (1991): 465–74; Bryan R. Wilson, ed., *Religion: Contemporary Issues* (London: Bellew, 1992).

perspective.⁶ Analyzing trends in religious developments in the world, comparing Europe, the United States of America and the so-called third world countries, the supporters of the secularization theory, among them Peter Berger, limited the validity of the theory in Europe by speaking about its 'exceptionalism'. When, after years of forced secularization, the Central and Eastern European countries were returning to religion, the idea turned out to be valid only for the Western part of Europe.

Thus, in the 1990s scholars in the post-communist countries found themselves in the debate on the relationship between religion and secularization. Two main approaches were discussed: the theories of desecularization and neo-secularization.

For Berger, the return of religion was a natural reaction to the pressure of secularization and to the fear of new threats. The pluralism and relativism of secularized society caused psychological uncertainties that led to the need for stable permanent values.⁷ Religion was no longer a private issue. A sign of desecularization was the deprivatization of religion, which was becoming newly interconnected with societal and political structures.⁸ Religion did not turn back to its traditional ecclesial form, but it renewed its presence in the form of 'unchurched religiosity'.⁹ It was possible to speak about 'invisible religion' when religion was an expression of an inner search and of new ways to one's spend time.¹⁰ Religious beliefs were just a product offered on the vast market of ideas and perspectives of self-realization. Was this, however, the case in Central and Eastern Europe? Was it adequate after years of forced secularization to speak suddenly about desecularization? Was there a religious turn in Central and Eastern Europe? Had religion vanished in the previous decades and was it coming back to Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s?

The second tendency the Central and Eastern European scholars had to deal with was the approaches of neo-secularization. Some authors observed that the traditional forms of religiosity were not being replaced by new, alternative

⁶ Grace Davie, *The Sociology of Religion* (London: SAGE, 2007); Laurence R. Iannaccone, Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, "Deregulating Religion: The Economics of Church and State," *Economic Inquiry*, no. 2 (1997): 350–64; Olivier Tschannen, "The Secularization Paradigm," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, no. 30 (1991): 396–415.

⁷ Peter L. Berger, *Vzdálená sláva: Hledání víry ve věku lehkověrnosti*, trans. Pavel Pšejja (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 1997), 40–2.

⁸ José M. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁹ Hubert Knoblauch, "Europe and Invisible Religion," *Social Compass*, no. 3 (2003): 267–74; Hubert Knoblauch, "Popular Spirituality," in *Present-day Spiritualities – Contrasts and Overlaps*, eds. Elisabeth Hense, Frans P.M. Jaspers, and Peter Nissen (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 81–102.

¹⁰ Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion*.

ones.¹¹ Instead of a return of religion, they noticed a decline in attendance of church services and a loss of respect for the impact of the church in such areas of life as morality, education, sexuality or the family. Modern people lift out of their traditional relations and they do not accept the church as a trustworthy institution.¹² Thus, individuals lose relation to their denomination and their religiosity is located outside of ecclesial and religious structures. 'Believing without belonging', whose typical trait is individualization, has become a sign of modern religiosity that does not count on participation and engagement.¹³ 'Invisible religion' would then acquire a negative meaning in the form of the retreat of the influence of religion and the erosion of this institution and personal faith. Was this, again, a theory that could describe what people experienced in Central and Eastern Europe and did this neo-secularization paradigm fit their reality?

Two contradictory theories were available to the Central and Eastern European scholars who attempted to grasp the societal reality and to put it into a Western theoretical framework. Religious life became part of the massive transformation processes that occurred immediately after the fall of state socialism. Forced secularization interrupted religious traditions and devastated religious institutions. The churches faced the dilemma of whether to look for a point of return or to reconstruct religious life on the ruins of what remained. Generally there were visible tendencies towards the desecularization and deprivatization of religion.¹⁴ Some works analyzed the transformation of religious life on the example of the relationships between state and churches.¹⁵

¹¹ Detlef Pollack, "Religiousness Inside and Outside the Church in Selected Post-Communist Countries of Central and Eastern Europe," *Social Compass*, no. 3 (2003): 321–34.

¹² Anthony Giddens, *Důsledky modernity*, trans. Karel Müller (Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství, 1998).

¹³ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994).

¹⁴ On religiosity in Central and Eastern Europe see Miroslav Tižik, *K sociológii novej religiozity* (Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského, 2006), 218–330; David Václavík, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost* (Praha: Grada, 2010); Zdeněk Nešpor, ed., *Jaká víra. Současná česká religiozita a spiritualita v pohledu kvalitativní sociologie náboženství* (Praha: Sociologický ústav AV ČR, 2004); Miklós Tomka, *Expanding Religion. Religious Revival in Post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011); Steve Bruce, "Modernisation, Religious Diversity and Rational Choice in Eastern Europe," *Religion, State & Society*, no. 3–4 (1999): 265–75; Sabrina P. Ramet, *Nihil Obstat. Religion, Politics, and Social Change in East-Central Europe and Russia* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998); Mary L. Gautier, "Church Attendance and Religious Belief in Postcommunist Societies," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, no. 2 (1997): 289–96.

¹⁵ Miroslav Tižik, *Náboženstvo vo verejnom živote na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Sociologický ústav SAV, 2011); Irena Borowik, ed., *Church-State Relations in Central and Eastern Europe* (Kraków: Nomos, 1999); Irena Borowik and Miklós Tomka, eds., *Religion and Social Change in Post-Communist Europe* (Kraków: Nomos, 2001); Pollack, "Religiousness."

To understand the specific situation of Central and Eastern Europe, several international surveys researched religiosity in some post-communist countries. The discussions in the 1990s and 2000s came to the conclusion that neither the secularization nor the desecularization theses were completely valid for the region. It was appropriate to speak about the return of religion or religious revivalism as religion had never gone away, it was only hidden under forced secularization. The terminological tools of the privatization, deprivatization, secularization and desecularization of religion, and of Christianization and atheization did not completely fit the situation in Central and Eastern Europe and needed to be more complete and better specified. In the terminology of believing/belonging/practicing, more subtle distinctions were necessary for post-communist Europe: belonging/non-believing/non-practicing, believing/non-belonging/practicing, or belonging/non-practicing/believing seemed to be specifically appropriate. The research had to be more flexible and sensitive to the societal and political transformation.

Slovak researchers of religion

In the 1990s and 2000s, Vladimír Krivý,¹⁶ Ján Bunčák,¹⁷ Adela Kvasničková,¹⁸ Tatiana Podolinská¹⁹ and Miroslav Tížik²⁰ undertook research of religiosity in Slovakia. These scholars pointed out the return to religion, the intensification of religious faith and the rise in attendance at churches and religious societies in the 1990s. The inhabitants found churches an important and acceptable element of Slovak societal life and they trusted them, but at the same time they rejected the direct or indirect influence of churches on political life in

¹⁶ Vladimír Krivý, "Slovensko: sociokultúrne problémy modernizácie," in *Slovensko v 90. rokoch. Trendy a problémy*, ed. Zuzana Kusá (Bratislava: SÚ SAV, 1994), 86–94; Vladimír Krivý, "Hodnotové orientácie a náboženské prejavy slovenskej verejnosti v 90. rokoch," *Sociológia*, no. 1 (2001): 7–45; Vladimír Krivý, "Náboženské prejavy v 90. rokoch," in Olga Gyárfášová, Vladimír Krivý, Grigorij Mesežnikov, Michal Vašečka, and Marián Veľšic, *Krajina v pohybe. Správa o politických názoroch a hodnotách ľudí na Slovensku* (Bratislava: IVO, 2001), 265–95.

¹⁷ Ján Bunčák, "Religiozita na Slovensku a v stredo európskom rámci," *Sociológia*, no. 1 (2001): 47–69.

¹⁸ Adela Kvasničková, *Náboženstvo ako kolektívna pamäť: prípad Slovenska a Čiech* (Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského, 2005).

¹⁹ Tatiana Podolinská, "Quo vadis Domine? K typológii súčasných náboženských a duchovných identít na Slovensku," *Slovenský národopis*, no. 2 (2007): 135–58; Tatiana Podolinská, "Súčasná diskusia na tému náboženstva v období neskorej modernity," *Slovenský národopis*, no. 4 (2008): 432–44; Tatiana Podolinská, "Religiozita v dobe neskorej modernity: prípad Slovensko," *Sociální Studia*, no. 3–4 (2008): 53–86.

²⁰ Tížik, *K sociológii novej religiozity*; Tížik, *Náboženstvo*.

Slovakia. The population was mostly religious, but at the same time they were anticlerical: they rejected any power of the clergy in societal life and were very critical of the attitudes of the church's hierarchy. One symptom of this 'religious, but anticlerical' position was the division in public opinion about the role of Jozef Tiso (1887–1947), the head of the fascist Slovak state and an actively serving Roman Catholic priest.

Krivý introduced into Slovak sociology the category of the 'core of believers' of religion, with a set of variables for exploring religious dynamics in Slovakia.²¹ The 'core of believers' means deeply religious people with an intense measure of belief, belonging and practice, and it describes the pool of believers who constitute religious life in Slovakia.

Tížik analyzed the specific desecularization 'from above'. According to him, the state power lost its secular dimension and was Christianized because the state institutions stressed the importance of Christian religion as the source of the symbolic capital.²² Christian religion – particularly the Catholic religion – had penetrated the public space; it was present on the state symbols (there was the double cross of St. Cyril and Methodius on the state coat of arms, on the Slovak flag, and on the State Seal), in public media, in the school system, and even on Slovak banknotes (before the introduction of the euro). Slovak political parties symbolically and legally granted especially the Catholic Church and partly the Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession a privileged place in society and integrated religion into the symbolic character of the state. Church representatives became important factors of societal life, also indirectly influencing political life. The public reacted to the politically initiated desecularization 'from above' with aversion and preferred that churches did not intervene in political and state issues.

Collecting data on religion in Slovakia

To get an idea of the religious landscape in Slovakia, research data, which had been missing for decades, were indispensable. After 1989, several censuses, national research and an international comparative survey (most of them comparable within the Visegrad group countries of Slovakia, Czechia, Poland, and Hungary) were undertaken: the censuses of 1991, 2001, 2011,

²¹ The 'core of believers' set contains variables as follows: self-declaration as a believer, religious faith, self-identification with an established church or religious society, attendance at church services at least once a month, importance of God on a scale of 8–10, at least occasional personal prayer, a great deal of confidence in one's church. Krivý, "Hodnotové orientácie," 14.

²² Tížik, *Náboženstvo*.

the European Values Study (EVS) in 1991, 1999, 2008, 2017 (the 2017 data is yet to be analyzed), the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) in 1998 and 2008, and the Aufbruch project in 1997 and 2007.²³ There were other national surveys of religiosity in Slovakia, such as Equality and Minorities in Slovakia in 2008 and Democracy and Citizens in Slovakia in 2014. The surveys are accessible in the on-line archive of the Slovak Academy of Sciences.²⁴

The Religious Atlas of Slovakia provides statistical indicators on religiosity and maps the religious structure of the country based on data from the 18th century.²⁵ Even if the Atlas authors consistently elaborated all the available data, they came to the conclusion that the religious structure of the population in the area of today's Slovakia had had a very complicated historical development whose transformations are partially explicable by means of the existing data. Nevertheless, a number of hidden factors emerged from the context of daily life that were not necessarily accessible with visible statistical indicators. For scholars dealing with religion, investigating the religious dynamics of Slovakia and the wider Central and Eastern European region and monitoring the strengthening or weakening of the religious structure remain an 'extraordinary challenge' from the point of view of the diversity and transformation of the traditional forms of religiosity.²⁶

Religion in the censuses after 1989

The 19th–21st century censuses demonstrate that the area of today's Slovakia in the Kingdom of Hungary, Czechoslovakia and the modern Slovak Republic has always been strongly religious. Over the last three decades (Fig. 1), at least 70% of the population have declared a religious affiliation, with a predominance of the Catholic church in almost all regions. More than 65% of inhabitants have belonged to the (Roman or Greek) Catholic church. The number of Lutherans (Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession) has experienced stagnation.

²³ Miklós Tomka and Paul M. Zulehner, *Gott nach dem Kommunism. Religion in den Reformländer Ost (Mittel)Europas* (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 1999); András Máté-Tóth and Pavel Mikluščák, eds., *Kirche im Aufbruch. Zur pastoralen Entwicklung in Ost (Mittel)Europa – eine qualitative Studie* (Ostfildern: Patmos, 2001); Miklós Tomka, Paul M. Zulehner, and Inna Naletova, *Religionen und Kirchen in Ost (Mittel)europa. Entwicklungen nach der Wende* (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 2008).

²⁴ Slovak Archive of Social Data. www.sasd.sav.sk (Accessed September 2018).

²⁵ Juraj Majo and Dagmar Kusendová, *Náboženský atlas Slovenska* (Bratislava: Dajama, 2015).

²⁶ Majo and Kusendová, *Náboženský atlas*, 42.

The number of the 'nones' consistently increased in the 1991, 2001 and 2011 censuses. In Slovakia, the 'nones' are a typical modern phenomenon – in the censuses of 1921, 1930, 1940 and 1950 they never exceeded 0.5%. The number of people declaring affiliation to traditional churches has changed, increasing from 1991 to 2001 and decreasing from 2001 to 2011.

Fig. 1

Slovak Republic Censuses 2011, 2001, 1991 – Religion						
In 2017, there were 18 registered churches and religious societies in the Slovak Republic.						
Year	2011		2001		1991	
		%		%		%
Total population	5,397,036	100.0	5,379,455	100.0	5,274,335	100.0
Roman Catholic Church	3,347,277	62.0	3,708,120	68.9	3,187,383	60.4
Greek Catholic Church	206,871	3.8	219,831	4.1	178,733	3.4
Orthodox Church	49,133	0.9	50,363	0.9	34,376	0.7
Evang. Church of Augsburg Conf.	316,250	5.9	372,858	6.9	326,397	6.2
Reformed Christian Church	98,797	1.8	109,735	2.0	82,545	1.6
Jehovah's Witnesses	17,222	0.3	20,630	0.4	10,501	0.2
United Methodist Church	10,328	0.2	7,347	0.1	4,359	0.1
Christian Congregations	7,720	0.1	6,519	0.1	700	0.0
Apostolic Church	5,831	0.1	3,905	0.1	1,116	0.0
Unity of Brethren Baptists	3,486	0.1	3,562	0.1	2,465	0.0
Seventh-Day Adventists Church	2,915	0.1	3,429	0.1	1,721	0.0
Church of Brethren	3,396	0.1	3,217	0.1	1,861	0.0
Federation of Jewish Communities	1,999	0.1	2,310	0.0	912	0.0
Old Catholic Church	1,687	0.0	1,733	0.0	882	0.0
Czechoslovak Hussite Church	1,782	0.0	1,696	0.0	625	0.0
New Apostolic Church	166	0.0	22	0.0	188	0.0

Bahá'í Community	1,065	0.0	-	-	-	-
Church of J.Ch. of Latter-Day Saints	972	0.0	58	0.0	91	0.0
Others	23,340	0.5	6,214	0.1	6,094	0.1
No affiliation ('Nones')	725,362	13.4	697,308	13.0	515,551	9.8
No data	571,437	10.6	160,598	3.0	917,835	17.4

Data source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic <https://slovak.statistics.sk> (Accessed September 2018).

In the 2001 census, the number of the church-affiliated people peaked. The churches awaited the results apprehensively as they had seen that the census in the Czech Republic, just three months before, had brought a dramatic drop of 30–40% in affiliation to traditional churches. In Slovakia, the churches feared the same scenario. The Catholic bishops published a special pastoral letter inviting believers to declare their Catholic faith in the census.²⁷ They appealed to Slovak history, tradition, religious persecution during the ‘atheization’, ancestors, conscience and the future. In the letter, they used the word ‘silent’ six times. The logic of the message was as follows: Many of you have lived your faith and got your children baptized ‘as if’ secretly and silently. The census is similarly ‘a silent, but important event’ – you do not have to be worried as nobody will know what affiliation you declared. You belong to the church even if you doubt your faith or your marriage broke up and you live your faith silently – you are still sons and daughters of the church. You are invited to declare your faith silently in the census because you feel in your heart that you belong to the church. They recalled the 1991 census in which 3.5 million citizens declared they were Catholics; for the bishops, it was a great declaration of faith after the ‘long atheization’. They reasoned that sociological research confirmed the rise of religiosity and illustrated it with the example of Poland (yet there was no word about the Czech situation). At the end of the pastoral letter, the Slovak bishops called upon the believers to “profess Him [Christ] silently” in the census. The result of the May 2001 census was surprising: the number of adherents increased in all churches and religious societies. The Catholic church (both Roman and Greek), the biggest church in Slovakia, had increased almost 9.2% in the decade 1991–2001 (in the meantime, the Catholic church in the Czech Republic had decreased 12.2%).

²⁷ Pastiersky list k sčítaniu ľudu, máj 2001. <https://www.kbs.sk/obsah/sekcia/h/dokumenty-a-vyhlasenia/p/pastierske-listy-konferencie-biskupov-slovenska/c/pl-scitanie-ludu> (Accessed September 2018).

This change was interpreted as a sign of a massive religious turnaround when people were no longer afraid to confess their faith and profess their religion. The next census in 2011 revealed, however, the opposite trend: a decrease of religious affiliation to the traditional churches. Only the number of members of new, small churches and of 'nones' increased.

How to explain this tendency in term of the censuses?

The key point seems to be the number of people who did not answer the question about religious affiliation: in the 1991 census, 917,835 (17.4%) left the question unanswered; in 2001 the number fell to 160,598 (3%) and in 2011 it again rose to 571,437 (10.6%). This is explicable by the societal and political context: in 1991 people were cautious about declaring their affiliation. Many of them remembered the Prague Spring period in the 1960s, when they openly manifested their religious attitudes and were religiously active. In the so-called normalization period in the 1970s, as a result of the invasion of the Warsaw Pact armies in August 1968, the state returned to its anti-religious attitude and discriminated against religiously active people. The citizens remembered that public manifestation of their religious beliefs had backfired. These memories were recalled in the 1991 census: in fear of the same scenario, they chose not to answer the religion question at all. The 2001 census mirrored the stabilization of societal conditions: only 160,598 people (3%) left blank the question of their church affiliation. This abrupt growth of religious adherence was possible because 757,237 people who had claimed no religious affiliation in the 1991 census were now divided between the churches and religious societies, thereby increasing the indicators. The only number that fell in 2001 in comparison to the 1991 census was the no data indicator.

This rise of religiosity could have been caused by several factors. On one hand, people were no longer afraid of persecution because of their religious beliefs and could feel free in their spiritual search. They needed certainty in the uncertain times of the transition from state socialism with an over-regulated economy to the liberal capitalist society that they experienced as a get-rich-quick 19th century wild capitalism in which everything was possible and nothing predictable. In centuries-old Christian traditions they saw spiritual and psychological support that helped them get through turbulent times. On the other hand, the Catholic Church in particular portrayed itself as the victor over the Communist evil and adopted the position of a martyr who had suffered injustice. At the same time, it presented itself as the guardian of the national tradition going back to St. Cyril and Methodius. The social capital that gained from both these positions was obvious and resulted in more believers, clergy and members of revived religious

orders. The church expected to profit from its new position by asserting its ecclesial interests.²⁸

In the following decade until the 2011 census, the churches, particularly the Catholic Church, interpreted the census data on confession in a triumphalist manner and requested that its strengthened position be visible in public and political life. The Basic Treaty between the Holy See and the Slovak Republic from 2000 was supplemented by an agreement on the armed forces in 2002 and by an agreement on Catholic education in 2004 and was to be completed by ratification of the agreement on the right to conscientious objection in 2006. The Christian Democratic Movement insisted that the latter agreement be ratified. The Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda refused it and the Christian Democratic speaker of the National Council and three ministers resigned, leading to an early parliamentary election three months before the ordinary term. After the election, a new coalition was formed of the social-democratic party, the Slovak nationalist party and the political party of the former autocratic Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar (Movement for a Democratic Slovakia). The democratic public perceived the new government of Robert Fico, a former Communist, as a step backwards that made possible the return of nationalist and autocratic politicians. Many citizens considered the Christian Democratic Movement's intransigent demand for the ratification of the agreement with the Holy See guilty of the fall of the government and the victory of Robert Fico. The triumphalism and demands of the Catholic Church and the political development between 2001 and 2011 probably contributed to the decline of adherents of traditional Christian churches, particularly of the Catholic Church. The number that increased was that of the 'nones' (725,362; 13.4%) and of the new, small churches (all of them 0.1% and less). More than half a million people (571,437; 10.6%) provided no data.

International surveys on religion in Slovakia

The international EVS and ISSP surveys gave more detailed information on religiosity in Slovakia. Analyzing the three EVS waves (see Fig. 2), it emerges that the level of religious faith, church-attendance and self-identification with an established church or a religious society increased. Confidence in the church increased between 1991 and 1999 but decreased between 1999 and 2008. In the people's opinion, the church should focus exclusively on religious and spiritual issues and not interfere in politics.

²⁸ Tížik, *Náboženstvo*, 144–238.

Fig. 2

	EVS 1991 (%)	EVS 1999 (%)	EVS 2008 (%)
Believers – based on self-declaration	69.1	76.8	74.0
Believers in God	63.6	76.0	77.7
Self-identification with an established church	71.6	76.9	79.8
Attendance at church services: at least once a month	40.3	49.7	48.3
Great importance of God in human life	40.9	48.5	53.1
Frequency of private prayer: at least occasionally	60.1	64.8	64.9
Confidence in the church: at least a great deal of confidence	49.0	64.8	59.3

Data source: Slovak Archive of Social Data.

Stratification of the religious landscape in contemporary Slovakia

Using the EVS and ISSP data, Tatiana Podolinská elaborated a more nuanced picture of the religious landscape in Slovakia, distinguishing three ‘big B-s’ (belonging, belief and behavior [practicing]), but without mechanically applying the usual Western concepts and schemes.²⁹ She used the ‘core of believers’ concepts elaborated by Krivý (see above) and suggested some other categories to stratify the spectrum of religion and non-religion in contemporary Slovakia. She formed three basic types and divided them into subtypes.

1. Institutional (‘intra-church’) religiosity: traditionalists and post-traditionalists³⁰

The ‘core of believers’ are described as traditionalists, characterized by seven indicators of religiosity, corresponding to both formal public demonstrations of faith (belonging) and personal religious life (believing and practicing). As a result, the average number of such traditional believers is about 33%. Among them, the retired are the biggest group and women are overrepresented; they live mostly in rural environments (although in the 2000s, the rate in urban areas more than doubled), they have ‘full secondary’ education (with a high-

²⁹ Tatiana Podolinská, “The Religious Landscape in Post-Communist Slovakia,” *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*, no. 1 (2010): 85–101.

³⁰ Podolinská, “The Religious Landscape,” 88–94.

school diploma) and ‘higher education’ and most of them are Catholics (more than 80%).

The second group in this category are the post-traditionalists at around 30–33%. The categories of believing and practicing are decisive here. The post-traditionalists are divided into three subtypes:

‘Religious privateers’ mirror the privatization of religion. Their church attendance rate (‘rarely’ or ‘never’) is low as they prefer implicit, private forms of religiosity. Their conformity with the church’s doctrines is significantly lower than that of traditional believers. The ‘sacred canopy’ of belonging is still important for this category.

In Podolinská’s opinion, ‘Religious minimalists’ constitute a specifically Slovak category. As being a member of a church or a religious society is still the most common way of participation in Slovak society and culture, the reason for belonging to a church is for ‘minimalists’ not primarily religious, but is based on family tradition, social conformity, sentiment, cultural interests, or pragmatic and opportunist reasons (declaring religious affiliation is found necessary for being a ‘nice person’ and is acceptable in professional, business or political activities). The minimalists belong to a church, believe in God, but never or rarely pray and attend church services only for societal reasons.

The third subtype is labeled as ‘intra-muros’ consumers of ‘extra-muros’ spirituality. Such believers have deep religious faith and follow the traditional way of practicing it. They do not hesitate, however, to ‘add’ to their ecclesiastical praxis some alternative that is often not recommended by the church, or even prohibited spiritual and religious ‘ingredients’. They seek and respect individuals such as healers or fortunetellers who claim to have access to supernatural powers. They read horoscopes and wear talismans or amulets. As long as their extra-ecclesial practices help them in their lives, they see no reason to give them up even if they know their church finds it sinful.

2. Non-institutional religiosity³¹

Podolinská counts among non-institutionally (extra-ecclesial) religious people those who reject any form of church-related activity: they neither believe in God nor belong to a church nor practice any ecclesial rituals and habits. They consider themselves believers, but the content of their religious beliefs have nothing in common with established forms of Christianity or any other religion; they do not believe in a personal deity. They do believe in (or accept, or realize, or whatever they may call it) ‘higher powers’, in ‘Life’, in spiritual abilities, or they just acknowledge that there is ‘something out there’ or ‘something

³¹ Podolinská, “The Religious Landscape,” 95–7.

supernatural' or 'something between Heaven and Earth'.³² The difficulty with this category is its diffusive character as there are plenty of possibilities and combinations to be taken into consideration when considering the varieties in this group. The most significant indicator to categorize someone into this group of non-institutional religiosity is their refusal to believe in the 'traditional' personal God and their acceptance of a 'higher power' (this is why she also calls them non-traditionalists).

3. 'Secularists'

In her stratification, Podolinská counts non-believers and atheists as 'secularists'.³³ They do not believe in any personal god or an impersonal higher power; they do not belong to any church or religious society, never attend church services or pray, and do not trust any church or religious institution.

Fig. 3

In %	Believer	Non-believer	Convinced atheist	Don't know + no answer
EVS 1991	69.1	16.2	3.4	11.4
EVS 1999	76.8	13.2	4.1	5.9
EVS 2008	74.0	14.3	2.9	8.9

Data source: Slovak Archive of Social Data.

In the EVS data (Fig. 3), there were relatively small numbers of people declaring themselves convinced atheists. The 'secularists' remain a minority, and in Slovakia they prefer to describe themselves as non-believers as, in the public eye, the term atheist still carries the negative connotation of the Communist attitude towards religion and Churches. If an atheist in Slovakia declares himself or herself as an atheist, he or she must be a really convinced atheist to do so. A typical Slovak 'secularist' is a man aged 30 years with high school diploma from a town with 10,000–50,000 inhabitants.

³² The Czech religious scholar and theologian Tomáš Halík calls this attitude "somethingism" (in Czech "něčismus") and finds it the largest religion in the Czech Republic. Tomáš Halík, *Co je bez chvění, není pevné. Labyrintem světa s vírou a pochybností* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 2007), 78–9.

³³ Podolinská, "The Religious Landscape," 99–100.

Limits of surveys on religion and non-religion

The censuses are demographically relevant, but they do not provide information on the differentiation in attitudes of religious people. They give information on affiliation, but not religiosity. In the EVS and ISSP surveys, the questions about religiosity are more detailed and varied. Elaborating the data, Slovak scholars have difficulty with how and whether use the big Western concepts to describe the religious landscape in their country. Some new more nuanced categories seem to be necessary. The question is whether answers to these formulated questions cover the religious and contemporary world view reality of the population in Slovakia. Surveys such as EVS and ISSP (and others) research 'typical' manifestations of religiosity, raising questions on faith in God or a 'higher power', attendance of religious services, frequency of prayer, belief in amulets, talismans, telepathy, reincarnation, the power of healers, the effect of horoscopes or the possibility of foretelling the future. The results interpret the answers to these questions. If a 'traditional religious dimension' is characterized by affiliation to church and church-related religiousness,³⁴ people who answer these questions positively are described as 'traditionalist'. What then about people who do go to church regularly, believe in God, pray often and practice their faith, but interpret their religious activities in a modern, theologically up-to-date way and consider themselves progressive, liberal believers? In the categories used in EVS and ISSP they would be 'traditionalists'. If for the 'post-traditionalists' group the category of non-practicing is the most important indicator, are then people who do not practice their faith but whose beliefs about God correspond to traditional Christian theology and spirituality still 'post-traditionalists'? In the surveys, people are asked whether they believe in an afterlife, heaven, hell, and the devil. What then is the value of the answers when the responses can only be 'yes', 'no', 'do not know', 'did not answer'? What idea of afterlife, heaven, hell, and the devil is behind such questions? The respondents may have a variety of ideas behind these concepts – anywhere from a medieval, almost naturalistic idea, to one that is post-modern and theologically very sophisticated. Thus the 'traditional' questionnaires of these surveys are a source of interpretations of exact answers on inexact questions that do not cover the variety of attitudes and ideas that are present in the 21st century religious landscape of Slovakia. When researching 21st century religiosity with these kinds of questions, we run a serious risk of asking 19th century questions.

The second problem we face when researching modern religiosity is how to deal with non-religion. In the Slovak censuses after 1989, the 'nones' are the

³⁴ Podolinská, "The Religious Landscape"; Pollack, "Religiousness."

second largest group after the Roman Catholics. The number of members of the Lutheran Church (Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia), which is the second biggest Slovak church, represent half of the 'nones'. Despite a significant and growing number of the 'non-religious', the research generally tends "to pay them little attention or treat them as a monolithic minority religious position alongside other minority groups; as a residual category, or abnormality."³⁵ The sociology of religion should not consider them as a statistical outlier,³⁶ but should conceptualize all phenomena that stand in a relevant relationship with the religious field.³⁷ It is also a challenge for academic scholars of religion to enlarge their study of the dynamics and changes in the contemporary religiosity in Slovakia.

Some final remarks

In its constitution, Slovakia is defined as a secular state. The censuses and sociological research have demonstrated that about three-fourths of the population claim to be religious, which often leads to the simplified view that the Slovak religious landscape is monolithic and traditional. The conclusions drawn from a more nuanced elaboration of the data show that even if institutional religiosity still dominates among religious people in Slovakia, its traditional character is being replaced by a religiosity with post-traditional traits.³⁸ Both traditionalists (described also as the 'core of believers') and post-traditionalists belong to a church and believe in God, but the latter do not practice it. Thus the religious turn after the fall of state socialism and forced secularization is not a return to the traditional religiosity but is a post-traditional religiosity inside the institutional church. Due to the turbulent history of rapid changes and transformations in the 1990s, the current religious situation in Slovakia (and in all countries of Central and Eastern Europe) is something the inhabitants have no prior experience with. To describe it, scholars use methodologies developed in Western countries that mirror their specific context, but which

³⁵ Chris Cotter, "The Critical Study of Religion: An Invitation," <https://nsrn.net/2018/09/10/the-critical-study-of-nonreligion-an-invitation/#more-87846> (Accessed September 2018).

³⁶ Frank L. Pasquale, "The Social Science of Secularity," *Free Inquiry*, February/March 2012, 1–12. Web version. <https://commons.trincoll.edu/understandingsecularism/files/2012/10/The-Social-Science-of-Secularity.pdf> (Accessed September 2018).

³⁷ Johannes Quack, "Outline of a Relational Approach to 'Non-religion,'" *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, no. 4–5 (2014): 439–69.

³⁸ Tatiana Podolinská, Vladimír Krivý, and Miloslav Bahna, "Religiozita: Slovensko a jeho susedia," in *Ako sa mení slovenská spoločnosť*, ed. Vladimír Krivý (Bratislava: Sociologický ústav SAV, 2013), 181–256.

are limited when applied, for example, in Slovakia. Interpreting the Slovak religious landscape in the dichotomous terms of secularization vs. desecularization, privatization vs. deprivatization, ‘intra-muros’ vs. ‘extra-muros’, seems to be too narrow. More attention has to be paid to the big yet still under-researched category of ‘no-religion’ in Slovakia. As discussions among academic scholars of religion show, contemporary research must learn to ask the correct up-to-date questions to get the big picture and the details of the dynamics of the actual religious landscape in Slovakia.

Abbreviations

EVS – European Values Study

ISSP – International Social Survey Programme

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Another Rationality. Spirituality, Conspiracy Theories and Social Engagement in Polish Rightist Social Movement Networks

KEYWORDS: New Age, new spirituality, conspiracy theories, social engagement, social movement organizations

ABSTRACT: The article explores the relations between ‘New Age spirituality’ and other forms of social representations and activities in new right-wing social movement organizations in Poland. It attempts to reveal relations between alternative spirituality, conservatism, conspiracy theories and the reformatory social concepts present in these organizations. Contrary to popular expectations, in the case of these organizations new spirituality is not related to escapism; similarly, tendencies towards embracing conspiracy theories are also not accompanied by defeatism. It will be argued that among the members of these groups, both beliefs in conspiracy theories and new spirituality may serve as mobilizing instruments for activities that aim to ‘change the world’ and for building a feeling of collective optimism.

This article attempts to trace the relations between ‘New Age spirituality’ and other forms of social representations and activities in new right-wing social movement organizations in Poland. Discovering these relations was possible due to the author’s long-term participant observation of these groups, in which the main subject of interest was alternative visions of economy and

related economic reform proposals, including changes in money issuance and the introduction of basic income in the form of a national dividend. Unexpectedly, it turned out that among the members of the 'new economy' movements, one could observe a significant proliferation of a nationalistic worldview, along with beliefs in numerous conspiracy theories and metaphysical attitudes that could be described in terms of New Age spirituality. The relations between a quest for a 'new economy', alternative spirituality and a particular type of conservatism have a prominent impact on the social activities of movements that are pushing for a change in the economic order. Contrary to popular expectations, in this case new spirituality is not related to escapism; similarly, tendencies towards embracing conspiracy theories are not accompanied by defeatism. It will be argued that among members of these groups, beliefs in both conspiracy theories and new spirituality may serve as mobilizing instruments for activities aiming to 'change the world' and for building a feeling of collective optimism.

The current analysis is based on a field study of a network of mutually cooperating social movement organizations that was conducted between 2014 and 2018. The main research method applied in this study was participant observation, complemented by exploration of the groups' publications (books, reports, web pages, films). The field study was conducted in Warsaw, with the main focus – at least at the beginning – on groups concerned with issues of the 'new economy' (Fundacja Jesteśmy Zmianą – the 'We are Change' Foundation, Konfederacja na Rzecz Reform Ustrojowych Koreus – the Koreus Confederation for System-wide Change). Gradually the study was extended to include groups cooperating with these organizations. Some of them were involved in 'new spirituality' (e.g. Niezależna Telewizja – Independent Television), others were concerned with ecological agriculture (e.g. International Coalition to Protect the Polish Countryside), complementary and alternative medicine (e.g. Centrum Terapeutyczne Max Hemp – Max Hemp Therapeutic Center), and conspiracy theories (Klub Inteligencji Polskiej – Polish Intelligentsia Club, Stowarzyszenie Stop Zorganizowanym Elektronicznym Torturom – The "Stop Organized Electronic Torture" Association). All of the groups are small yet have a rather noticeable media impact. A study of groups based outside Warsaw was done by reading their publications and obtaining information from their representatives at meetings and congresses. Access to internal mail was also an important source of information about the groups, their activities, ideas, events and cooperation. The findings of the current study presented here have a generalized nature; it was not possible to include detailed presentations of particular organizations due to the size limitations of this publication.

Organizational forms

Despite demanding the introduction of some forms of universal basic income and generally favoring such approaches to reforming the workplace as the introduction of participatory management, Polish right-wing movements for a 'new economy' refuse to cooperate with the leftist (Marxist or anarchist) organizations that also support these issues. The reason for this is mostly ideological, merely related to different preferences for economic models or disagreements about sources of financing universal basic income. The majority of members of the movements for a 'new economy' are in their middle age or older, with rightist conservative political preferences; however, as is particularly unusual in the Polish context, they generally do not have strong ties with the Catholic Church or express traditional religiousness. At meetings, the members of movements for a 'new economy' did not limit their discussions to issues of economic changes, but also spent a significant amount of time on disclosing the entire corrupt 'system'. For the purposes of exposing the 'system', members referred to the whole spectrum of conspiracy theories, which – in various combinations – served them as diagnostic tools. To overcome the potential destructiveness of the bitter conclusions about the condition of the world, members of groups looked for sources of optimism. It was the 'new spirituality' upon which they were able to build optimistic attitudes, and which helped to calm emotional outbursts during the heated debates. At some critical points, group meetings were quite often interrupted with meditation sessions. On several occasions, the meetings were attended by spiritual masters, coming to pass news from the 'spiritual world'. Such spiritual news was always positive, proving that progress is possible – at least in 'other dimensions', where difficulties could be coped with (more or less easily). The gathered members were considered to be chosen ones: being particularly mindful and possessing a unique willingness for spiritual growth and self-perfection, they could cope with these projects which aim to make the world better.

It would be easy to expect that this eclectic and at first glance incoherent collection of views of the world would weaken the appeal of ideas of a 'new economy' or even discredit them among potential followers. However, after expanding the subject of study by including a more extensive network of inter-related social movement organizations that cooperate, one could observe that they share a rather coherent vision of the world and have common forms of activities. This coherence arose as a product of mutual efforts, discussions and exchanges of opinions, not all of which were unconditionally accepted. In the course of these inter- and intra-group communication practices, even

conflicting and controversial ideas were mutually reinforced. The organizations in this informal network were bound together by something that could be described as a New Age attitude, or at least some of its elements. These included beliefs in 'other dimensions' (inaccessible to rational cognition) and in the possibility of communication between different dimensions, appreciation of other than intellectual forms of learning and experiencing of the world (which increased openness to new ideas), praising a holistic approach and paying particular attention to issues of health and well-being. The latter are perceived in terms of relations: they believe that health can be achieved by looking for harmony with nature and other beings, whereas a lack of such harmony along with pollution and corruption lead to illness. The healing processes of individuals and the world are understood in terms of restoration of (the lost) order; the preferred methods of effective healing should be searched for among the solutions offered by complementary and alternative medicine. Members of the studied groups believe that nutrition has the largest impact on the health of individuals and on the population in general, therefore food should be ecologically produced, locally sourced and free of GMO. Support for local production is significant not only in the context of ecological small-scale farming or harvesting, but also because it is a form of support for 'our', i.e. Polish, producers and at the same time is beneficial for national natural resources. The praise of local self-sufficiency is directly linked to freedom, which is the ultimate value. Freedom means the right to make individual decisions (for example, regarding therapeutic practices) and decisions concerning the environment. Freedom also means the duty to introduce participatory democracy in business and in the economy. In this context, one can better understand why all these organizations – so different and yet mutually cooperating – embrace the proposals of the 'new economy', especially solutions that lead to autarchy that promise peculiar ways of achieving economic freedom, including the introduction of 'sovereign' money (interest-free money, free from usury, independent from international financial and banking systems, used for local needs of consumption and production, locally issued either by the National Bank of Poland or by issuers of complementary currencies). These organizations also favor the idea of unconditional universal basic income in the form of a dividend from national resources, but not in the form of social benefit or unconditional minimum income financed from increased taxes. Sharing, partnership and complicity (within national or local communities) are some of their common demands. Some of those groups are against restrictive intellectual property rights and call for the introduction of absolute transparency in the political realm and for direct participation in governing, as well as in the process of production of knowledge about the 'common

world'. With great self-confidence and regardless of their intellectual capabilities, these organizations prepare suggestions for improving the political, economic, healthcare and even technical systems. Hence the support for individual 'inventions': schematics of 'innovative' (in the opinion of members of these organizations) devices are published online and those who are willing can construct them (a significant number of these items are 'healing apparatuses'). Such self-confidence is also related to the members' greater openness to new ideas: those ready to postulate unconventional solutions will also be more likely to accept them from others.

The community that is referred to here is formed by a loose network of institutions and social movement organizations that aim to promote reforms in the fields of economy, the natural environment, technology, healthcare, education and politics. Some of them label themselves as independent media, others as think tanks and grassroots activists. Their members, as was already mentioned, are mostly elderly or middle-aged people – younger participants are rather a rarity. It seems that this network is rather well established; its members regularly organize collective events and periodically call for unity under a common umbrella.

Regular undertakings are mostly related to spirituality: New Age festivals and conventions, such as Festiwal Wibracje (Vibrations Festival) and Zlot Ludzi Nowej Ery 'Harmonia Kosmosu' (New Age People 'Space Harmony' Rally). Participants at these annual events can attend workshops and lectures on such issues as alternative diets and methods of healing, the 'new economy', new spirituality and communication with other dimensions (including such topics as extraterrestrial contact/UFOs, 'life after life' etc.), meditation, alternative technologies (for example, 'natural' construction techniques, 'nanowater' – the production of water with special qualities), alternative agriculture (permaculture) and political systems (online democracy, allowing a greater degree of participation in political life).

In recent years there have been several attempts to further integrate the community in order to increase the efficacy of its activities. The most recent was in 2018 at a congress of 'Free People' (the most obvious result of which was a signature of declaration and the establishing of an internet-based platform of cooperation) and in the course of building a project for Ślążańsk Republic – a prospective local community based on models of participant democracy, complementary currency, 'ecological' agriculture, and systems of alternative knowledge (grounded on 'new spirituality' and conspiracy theories).

The coherence of the community that is the subject of this study is maintained due to several core organizations, which are also major suppliers of ideological messages for the entire network. A key role here is played by

Niezależna Telewizja (Independent Television). It organizes various regular events and propagates 'alternative' ideas, primarily 'spiritual' ones. An important role here is also played by ecological farmers' organizations, which fight against GMO (for example the International Coalition for the Protection of the Polish Countryside), as well as by movements demanding reforms in the field of healthcare (such as 'anti-vaccination' movements and groups demanding the legalization of marijuana for medical purposes). The movements for a 'new economy' are less significant, yet they are always visible in moments of consolidation and are supported by debtor organizations such as Stowarzyszenie Stop Bankowemu Bezprawiu ('Stop the Banking Lawlessness' Association). Finally, there is also a group of opponents of 'invasive technologies', especially those aimed at 'mind control': Stowarzyszenie Stop Zorganizowanym Elektronicznym Torturom ("Stop Organized Electronic Torture" Association).

Mental frames and social engagement

The popularity of conspiracy narratives (this term is suggested by Franciszek Czech¹ and is rather more comprehensive than 'conspiracy theories') in the studied groups has its roots in common feelings of deprivation and lack of control over political, economic and social processes. Modern healthcare and its rationale, which is produced by expert discourses, take control over healing processes from individuals. In extreme cases this could lead to compulsory actions, such as obligatory vaccinations. Globalization has taken control over things that used to be controlled locally: land (and ways of its cultivation) and other resources. Global capitalism and the financial system remotely affect local financial institutions via displaced, nontransparent and incomprehensible agents. Hence, defense against the 'system' means protection of the 'indigenous', be it 'national' or 'local'. Narratives that would be capable of disclosing the 'system' are conspiracy narratives – various stories about the 'new world order' (NWO). This community refers to global narratives – local ones are used less frequently. This is the opposite of what happens among ordinary internet users in Poland, among which – as observed by Czech – the most widespread are conspiracy narratives classified as 'local' or 'specific'. Among the social movement organizations (SMO), the most popular conspiracy narratives are about 'chemtrails' (condensation trails left by jet aircraft, supposedly

¹ Franciszek Czech, *Spiskowe narracje i metanarracje* (Kraków: Zakład Wydawniczy NOMOS, 2015), 12–13.

containing harmful toxic chemical agents that are dispersed in the sky), mind-control technologies (experimentally used either against randomly selected individuals or against those who oppose the 'system'), fraudulent activities of the global pharmaceutical industry (in its extreme version – 'vaccination genocide'), world government (in its extreme version – run by Masonic or Illuminati secret societies) and the machinations of global financial circles that are enslaving the world by means of usury (in its extreme version – under the lead of the sinister Rothschild family). Even though conspiracy narratives wrongly indicate the sources of problems, they nevertheless could serve as a diagnosis of social concerns: in this case, this relates to technologies and systems which escape the democratic mechanisms of control. As written by Mark Fenster, "[conspiracy theory] can correctly identify present and historical wrongs [...] Conspiracy theory does not pose a threat from outside some healthy center of political engagement; rather, it is a historical and perhaps necessary part of capitalism and democracy."² In addition Fenster notices what seems to be the real reason and value of creating 'counter-knowledge': "Conspiracy theory rejects an existing political or social order but does so in the belief that a better one is possible – one that, in some conspiracy theories, would be more democratic and more equitable."³ Thus, using conspiracy theories does not lead to pessimism, it rather encourages and motivates activities that aim to build a world in which currently endangered values would be implemented. These values are being realized in a group culture in which freedom of expression, openness and equality are appreciated.

The worst evil in the opinion of members of these groups is the evil of censorship, including the censorship of rationality. Total rejection of 'censorship' leads to a situation in which everybody can express his or her own opinion and all theories and voices are considered equally valuable. In practice these principles not always can be fulfilled; quarrels and criticism are quite common, yet even when they occur there is an understanding that some fundamental rules have been broken. The equality of all narratives (including conspiracy narratives) leads to the dominance of those that are most frequently repeated and widely accepted. Roughly speaking, these are the dominant global narratives mentioned above. They constitute a standard of common knowledge 'about the world', referred to at meetings only by keywords, without deeper interpretation, which is often thought to be a feature of conspiracy

² Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories. Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008 [1999]), 11.

³ Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories*, 12.

thinking.⁴ The task of interpretation takes place elsewhere – in different environments using conspiracy narratives.

One should remember that conspiracy narratives, as noted by Claire Birchall, belong to “discursive forms of popular culture [...] that systematize and contextualize ideas about the world and specific events” and as forms of popular culture are situated “between serious and playful”;⁵ hence, they are also forms of entertainment and emotional concentration, which can increase their motivational power for group activities.

The key claims of community described here demand attention and are not at all irrational. Similar ideas occur in various circles, including leftist ones. However, ideological factors prevent ideological adversaries from cooperating on the issues they stand for. Restricting GMO production, increasing the proportion of ecological agriculture, democratization of decision-making processes in various fields (ensuring that decisions are made locally), expanding patients’ rights by allowing them to make decisions concerning their health and increasing their control over therapeutic practices, greater public control over the spheres of healthcare and technology, reforming the banking system – these demands are discussed by many different groups and are capable of changing social representations as well as current practices. It seems that the studied community can not only express certain collective emotions, but also could somehow influence opinions or even offer inspiring proposals of particular solutions (although not necessarily easy to implement), for example relating to complementary currencies and municipal banking. Hence, in this context it is hard to agree with Fenster’s claim that “Conspiracy theory ultimately fails as a universal theory of power and comprehensive approach to historical and political research, however, because it not only fails to inform us how to move from the end of the uncovered plot to the beginning of a political movement, it is also unable to locate a position at which we can begin to organize and respect people in the complex, diverse world that it simplifies.”⁶ Although Fenster studied the functioning of conspiracy theories in social movements, these were mainly communities of fans and millenarianist movements that failed to transform epistemological conspiracy frames into projects of social activities.

⁴ See e.g.: Marcin Napiórkowski, “Co ukrywają teorie spiskowe?” in Marcin Napiórkowski, *Władza wyobraźni. Kto wymyśla, co zdarzyło się wczoraj?* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2014); Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories*.

⁵ Claire Birchall, *Knowledge Goes Pop. From Conspiracy Theory to Gossip* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006), 21, 32.

⁶ Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories*, 289.

One can observe that conspiracy narratives serve as a bonding agent that unites different groups in a wider network. However, a conspiracy outlook can also be divisive: it can promote a climate of general suspicion, leading to feuds and disintegration. In such situations, antagonisms can be overcome with the help of a New Age attitude and practices of ‘new spirituality’. Shu-Chuan Chen aptly notices that New Age spirituality helps in performing ‘emotion work’: “At the interactive or interpersonal level, emotion work – such as the act of ignoring outbursts – is used in the New Age practices examined here to deal with emotional conflicts between members. Participants are encouraged to be mindful of their emotions as well as to express their feelings, and to give their emotions positive meanings.”⁷ The next emotional function of the New Age attitude is to lighten feelings, or, as written by Paul Heelas, to carry out “resistance against the erosion of the expressive, that crucial aspect of the ‘fully human.’”⁸

While conspiracy narratives serve as an epistemological tool for the studied community, the New Age attitude is responsible for its ontological dimension. Although not all the members of the movements described here share this attitude, its regular public recalling reinforces common sets of beliefs and values. According to Dorota Hall, in Polish circumstances a New Age attitude can actually peacefully coexist with popular forms of Catholicism.⁹ This was also true in the case of the community described here: manifestations of symbolic forms of Catholicism and a New Age attitude occurred at the same meetings and congresses; however, the unifying and dominant frame was provided by the New Age outlook. As already stated, the New Age “might be used to justify nationalism and politically conservative forms of traditionalism”;¹⁰ this hypothesis was also proved in the current study.

Ellie Hedges and James A. Beckford specify the following beliefs that, in their opinion, constitute a New Age attitude:

⁷ Shu-Chuan Chen, “Theorizing Emotions in New Age Practices: an Analysis of Feeling Rules in Self-Religion,” in *New Age Spirituality. Rethinking Religion*, eds. Steven J. Sutcliffe and Ingvild Sælid Gilhus (London and New York: Routledge, 2014 [2013]), 240.

⁸ Paul Heelas, *Spiritualities of Life. New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 231.

⁹ Dorota Hall, *New Age w Polsce. Lokalny wymiar globalnego zjawiska* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, 2007); Dorota Hall, “The Holistic Milieu in Context: Between Traditional Christianity and Folk Religiosity,” in *New Age Spirituality. Rethinking Religion*, eds. Steven J. Sutcliffe and Ingvild Sælid Gilhus (London and New York: Routledge, 2014 [2013]).

¹⁰ Norichika Horie, “Narrow New Age and Broad Spirituality: a Comprehensive Schema and a Comparative Analysis,” in *New Age Spirituality. Rethinking Religion*, eds. Steven J. Sutcliffe and Ingvild Sælid Gilhus (London and New York: Routledge, 2014 [2013]), 115.

1. Hope that the seeds of a significant improvement in the quality of human life have already been sown and are ready for cultivation by individual human beings who have the required combination of knowledge, trust, diligence and patience to give expression to their 'authentic' selves, instead of merely conforming with routines and roles;
2. Criticism of aspects of the prevailing modes of living in advanced industrial societies as being materialistic, shallow, unreflective and unfulfilling to the point where the natural human potential for creativity, compassion and play is stifled. There is also criticism of religious and ethical systems which arouse feelings of guilt for infractions of supposedly absolute obligations, rules or standards;
3. Openness to fresh ideas about the interconnectedness of all life forms and the value of taking personal responsibility for living one's life in ways which anticipate, and accord with, a better ordered and more fulfilling world where authentic selves can realize higher values. An experimental and pragmatic attitude to new ideas, experiences and practices is common among New Agers;
4. Appreciation of the merits of seeking to minimize human disruption, corruption and exploitation of the natural world conceived as complex systems of normally harmonious and self-equilibrating forces, as symbolized in some pre-modern belief systems.¹¹

One might suppose that, regardless of metaphysical beliefs, this set of traits would be accepted by most members of the studied groups. Optimism, hope, openness to new ideas and the ability to link them into holistic systems and activism – these attitudes, which are common among the members, correspond with New Age traits. Apparently, openness to new experiences and attention paid to practice might have a vital role. In Dominic Corrywright's opinion, a study of practices is crucial in order to understand New Age systems of knowledge and spirituality:

Other knowledges may be performative and active. Spiritualities are knowledges of experience and commitment within eclectic frameworks of belief. The personal religiosities of those within New Age spiritualities assert that knowledge is experiential, doctrinal and relational.¹²

¹¹ Ellie Hedges and James A. Beckford, "Holism, Healing and the New Age," in *Beyond New Age. Exploring Alternative Spirituality*, eds. Steven Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 170–1.

¹² Dominic Corrywright, *Theoretical and Empirical Investigations into New Age Spiritualities* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 254.

During his field studies, Matthew Wood found that practices and systems of knowledge in New Age communities are built via networks of cooperation: “the groups and events that may be thought of as fixed points in the network were themselves in flux, being open to the introduction of different and often challenging ideas, practices and people”,¹³ the latter was also true in the case of the current study. Thanks to practical bias and mutual inspirations in this network of communities, projects that are autarchic and independent of the ‘system’ emerge, aspiring to become laboratories of social change. The following are some examples of such projects’ complementary currencies (“Zielony” [“Green”] currency), ecological farms and ecovillages, numerous independent internet-based media, education programs (such as Navigators After the Future, created by the “We Are the Change” Foundation), or the aforementioned Ślążańsk Republic initiative, an attempt to implement various ideas circulating in the community (including direct democracy, complementary currencies and municipal banking, ecological agriculture and construction, natural therapies and the archive of conspiracy narratives). Pursuing autarchy does not mean withdrawal from activities for the public benefit. Members of the studied network of groups conduct active ‘educational’/promotional activities, lobby for change, and have political ambitions, particularly on the local level.

Among scholars studying the New Age there is no consensus concerning relations between ‘new spirituality’ and social engagement. The results of the current study allow the assumption that ‘new spirituality’ encourages various types of social engagement. Previous research in Holland came to similar conclusions after conducting a survey of a representative sample of the Dutch population. The survey showed that “people involved in new forms of spirituality are less socially engaged than the affiliated or traditionally religious but are more engaged than ‘secular’ people.” New Age followers “are more committed to organizations for environmental protection, peace, or animal rights. [...] The most important spirituality variable that predicts social engagement measures is connectedness with self, others, and nature. [...] As for attitudes of solidarity, the most important factors for both philanthropy and values are level of education, connectedness, and spiritual transformation.”¹⁴

All in all, it would be reasonable to ask about the potential appeal of the aforementioned world reconstruction projects for a wider social audience. It seems that the synergy of the studied network has unexpected effects both

¹³ Matthew Wood, *Possession, Power, and the New Age. Ambiguities of Authority in Neoliberal Societies* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), 7.

¹⁴ Joantine Berghuijs, Jos Pieper, and Cok Bakker, “New Spirituality and Social Engagement,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, no. 52 (2013): 775–92, 775, 778.

on its dynamism and on how it can influence external reality. On the one hand, this synergy strengthens the network's structure and allows it to develop; it modifies ideas and directs activities. This all happens due to the specific patterns of social activities in the form of the analyzed social representations and practices. Yet, the same set of social representations and practices, which are sometimes incoherent, at some point can weaken the network by causing an outflow of groups and individuals that find it hard to accept certain elements of ideology or the dominant beliefs of the community. The same can be said about the prospects of influencing the wider social environment. Alliances between organizations can lead to greater visibility and increase their power (as was the case with the joint demonstration of 'anti-vaccination' movements and borrowers negatively affected by mortgages in Swiss francs), but they can also weaken interest in particular issues among their potential audience and allies. Therefore, for example, 'new economy' ideas might remain undiscussed outside their community and would not attract the wider attention of experts and society. In this case, such ideas remain inapplicable.

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Jolanta Mindak-Zawadzka

Bosniak Identity and the Bogomil Tradition: Medieval Dualist Heretics as Desirable Ancestors of Present-Day Post-Yugoslav Muslim Slavs

KEYWORDS: Bosniak identity, Yugoslav Muslims, Bosnian Church, Bogomilist roots, Torbeshes, Gorani

ABSTRACT: The paper deals with the presumed Bogomilist roots of Yugoslav Muslims (Bosniaks), recently appearing as a crucial element of a new Bosniak ethno-mythology. It tries to examine the social and political reasons and circumstances concerning the recent expansion of this concept, especially on the internet.

The post-secular perspective in examining and interpreting contemporary relations between faith and modernity developed, as we know, in what we call the West. It seems that trends similar to Western ones, only in a local costume, also appeared in at least part of post-communist Europe, i.e. Poland.

In Poland, declarations of membership of the institutionalized Roman Catholic Church (which also has a strong political position in the state) still predominate; however, some communities (chiefly urban) are starting to be critical of the ritual character of Catholic practices and the clergy's materialism. This often leads to the choice of atheism, but a longing for personal contact with transcendence inclines many people to form various small, spiritually active and authentic communities within the Catholic Church or to find ways of satisfying their spiritual needs in Protestant communities/churches of the 'second wave of the Reformation' (evangelical), or even to invoke pre-Christian religious traditions (neo-paganism/native faith).

The latter trends, which are statistically marginal for now, nevertheless do suggest that Polish society is subject to certain broader processes of change that are global in nature. This 'Pole equals Catholic' equation, which is being revived in the currently governing political circles, serves to consolidate the traditional version of national identity rather than to defend or strengthen Poland's position on the wider international scene or in relations with the country's neighbors.

The situation is completely different in the central Balkans. After the breakup of Yugoslavia (in the final decade of the 20th century), many changes and redefinitions took place in political and mental space.

To replace the 'brotherhood and unity' (*bratstvo-jedinstvo*) promoted by Josip Broz Tito and his government, old slogans relating to the national interests of individual nations were revived. Placed on a pedestal, national/ethnic distinctness inevitably led to the increased importance of religious denomination as one of the main pillars (next to language) of the collective identity of the various national communities among former Yugoslavs. And yet again, similarly to what happened in the 19th century, denominational distinctness assumed a political rather than a theological character.

As we know, three denominations were the most important in Yugoslav territory: two Christian ones (the Orthodox and Roman Catholic faiths) and Islam (essentially Sunni). Tito's state was largely secularized. The Polish situation (with the aforementioned 'Pole equals Catholic' equation that is still alive and has its political supporters) was perhaps most similar to that of the Croats, among whom, however, Catholicism manifested itself mainly in traditional customs and was more likely to appear in public discourse in times of political tensions and breakthroughs than in daily life. In the case of the pragmatic Slovenes, Catholicism supported the process of national rebirth but does not seem to play any major political role in the present day.

Nations that were traditionally Orthodox (Serbs, Montenegrins, Macedonians) valued their own cultural heritage, which was strictly connected to the history of the Orthodox faith in these countries, but on a daily basis the religious aspect of their lives in Tito's times might have been hard to notice (apart from, possibly, major religious festivals that were tied to local traditions). This was especially visible in Macedonia, probably due in part to the multinational population and the lack of a Macedonian autocephaly.

At the turn of the 1980s and 1990s,¹ I had the opportunity to observe the peculiar kind of religious and cultural training to which Macedonian public

¹ I.e. after Tito's death, when decentralist national tendencies, especially Serbian and Croatian, were growing more strongly.

television subjected its audience. It concerned traditional Christmas customs and the relevant terminology. In those days, Macedonians were also returning in large numbers to old Easter rituals (especially painting eggs red and visiting Orthodox churches), in which television played its part, giving appropriate instructions. This 'training', which was technically religious and cultural but in fact patriotic and national, clearly testified to the Macedonians' previous strong secularization.

Yugoslav Muslim circles functioned differently. Insofar as the Christian faith in Yugoslavia was professed mainly by people from the Slavic nations represented in the country,² Muslims in Yugoslavia included both non-Slavs (mainly Albanians, but also sections of the Roma population and ethnic Turks who were a relatively small group) and Slavs, mainly from Bosnia (and Herzegovina), Sanjak (a region on the Serbian-Montenegrin border), Kosovo, south-eastern Serbia and western Macedonia. Further on in this paper, attention will focus on Slavic Muslim communities, as these are the main groups in which the idea of invoking the medieval Bogomil tradition emerged and is now rapidly spreading.

Before moving on to take a closer look at this phenomenon, it is worth considering the character and social role of Islam professed in the Balkans, and in regions of the former Yugoslavia in particular.

Islam came to the Balkans with the Ottoman Turkish invasion in the 14th and 15th centuries (although contact with Muslims was reported earlier). In Yugoslav territories, Islamization affected representatives of all the national/ethnic communities within the Ottoman Empire's borders, but to the greatest extent concerned Bosnians and Albanians.³ The Ottoman state did not actively suppress Christianity (or 'People of the Book', a term encompassing Christians as well as Jews), but it definitely favored Muslims, regardless of their ethnicity.

When the Ottoman Turks left the Balkans (partially in the 19th century and ultimately after losing the First Balkan War in 1912), the Muslims lost their privileges and, having become citizens of national Christian states, in practice (though not formally) became second-class citizens, treated as an

² Namely Croatians, Slovenians, Serbs, Montenegrins and Macedonians, but also Vlachs, i.e. Balkan Wallachians, descendants of a population that had been Latinized linguistically during the Roman Empire's rule in the Balkans, living in Serbia and Macedonia, among others, and belonging to the Orthodox faith.

³ Various interpretations of this fact have been offered, including a hypothesis linking an inclination to convert to Islam with inhabiting territories where the border of membership in the Eastern or Western Church was fluid and therefore ties to a specific denomination were weaker (Orthodox and Catholic influences clashed in both Bosnia and Albania). Bosnian Muslims, i.e. Bosniaks, tend to explain their ancestors' conversion to Islam with the existence of a separate (schismatic) Bosnian Church in the Middle Ages (cf. further on in this text).

unwanted vestige of the recent occupying forces – the Ottomans. This was also reflected in the lexical layer: Muslim Slavs (from Bosnia and other regions) were popularly referred to as Turks, a term that was essentially considered neutral, as opposed to various equivalents of the Polish *poturczeniec* (cf. *potura*, *poturica*, *balija*, etc.),⁴ which were of a stigmatizing character.

Insofar as Albanians (who were in the Ottoman Empire until 1912) had cultural support in the 20th century, or at least a point of reference, in the Albanian state Muslim Slavs had no protector, not even a symbolic one, that they could count on. Trying to preserve their right to their separate culture and customs (saturated with elements of oriental origin), they did not undergo secularization *en masse*, even though such a trend did become visible in the 20th century in large urban centers (especially Sarajevo).

It is worth emphasizing that the traditional Balkan Islam professed by the autochthonous European population, whose ancestors were most probably largely Christians in the Middle Ages and who had Christian neighbors in more recent times, was very different from the fundamentalism of Middle Eastern origin that today is present in our media and often in our awareness, and also among some (not very numerous) post-Yugoslav Muslim circles.

This traditional local model of Islam, which Magdalena Lubańska calls “adatic,” i.e. “customary,”⁵ developed not only in the Bulgarian territory to which Lubańska’s work directly refers, but in the whole Balkans, including the territories of the former Yugoslavia. According to this idea,⁶ “adatic Islam is an amalgam which developed in the Ottoman Empire and which was subject mainly to the cultural influences of the Middle East [...], Turkey and local Balkan traditions,” towards which it showed tolerance. The author also invokes⁷ H. T. Norris’s ideas of traditional Balkan Islam, seen more as a certain (pre-modern) lifestyle, an important element of identity, a set of traditional customs, and less as a coherent dogmatic system. As is the case for all Muslims, the most important holiday is Kurban Bayram (commemorating the sacrifice of Abraham/Ibrahim), but the ritual calendar also features some holidays of Christian origin (one characteristic example being the Muslim version of the worship of St. George – Djurdjevdan), although in their Islamic version such holidays are given a new, non-Christian interpretation.

⁴ Cf. e.g. Jolanta Mindak-Zawadzka, “‘Balija’ czyli ‘poturica’ – od piętna do stereotypu (na podstawie dyskusji internetowych),” *Studia z Filologii Polskiej i Słowiańskiej*, no. 44 (2009): 141–51.

⁵ Magdalena Lubańska, *Synkretyzm a podziały religijne w bułgarskich Rodopach* (Warszawa: WUW, 2012), 116–43.

⁶ Lubańska, *Synkretyzm a podziały*, 116.

⁷ Lubańska, *Synkretyzm a podziały*, 116–17.

When federal Yugoslavia disintegrated, national states were (re)created on its rubble, in which the Muslim population was not only a minority but also an element perceived as culturally foreign and inferior. The countries whose nations had opposed the Ottoman Turks in the past promoted the ethos of brave Christians fighting against Islam, and all the countries glorified the tradition of national and denominational ties and monuments of Christian culture. Collective memory founded on Christian national traditions, reflected in masterpieces of native literature, became an important element of school education. Slavic 'Turks', i.e. Slavic-speaking Yugoslav Muslims, found the situation confusing,⁸ which strengthened their focus on Islam as the core and source of their cultural identity.

At the same time, these Slavs – who were non-Croatians (being non-Catholics), non-Serbs and non-Montenegrins (being non-Orthodox) – faced the problem of developing the attributes of ethnic distinctness and a narrative of national identity. Several elements of a nation-building nature were and still are important to the post-Yugoslav nations: a separate name for the ethnos (ethnonym), a separate denomination, a separate national language (whose name reflects its connection to the given nation), and a story about early/original settlement in a given territory. At around the turn of the 21st century, the Yugoslav nations were fascinated by their early histories, not so much historical events as mythical ones, finding their roots in various ancient peoples of Europe and Asia Minor while also cultivating the memory of their earliest (medieval) historical past. In such an atmosphere, Slavic-speaking Muslims could hardly remain inactive. Their largest community lived and still lives in Bosnia and Herzegovina, so this is where successive trends related to national identity issues emerge, later spreading eastwards to the territories of Sanjak and Kosovo, and partly also Macedonia.

From the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, when they won the right to be treated as a separate nation, Bosnian Slavic-speaking followers of Islam used the ethnonym *Muslimani* ('Muslims in an ethnic sense'). Over the following decades, their example was followed by their fellow believers from Sanjak and Kosovo, which was reflected in censuses (in earlier years they had usually declared themselves as Turks). After the breakup of Yugoslavia (in the last decade of the 20th century), the ethnonym *Muslimani* became inadequate for the needs of a cultural and religious community with growing national aspirations stimulated by the external political situation.

⁸ In this context, cf. Jolanta Mindak-Zawadzka, "Poturczeńcy od Turków straszniejsi. Odmiennie wspólnoty pamięci na wspólnej (serbskiej) ławie szkolnej" in *Przemilczenia w relacjach międzykulturowych*, eds. Joanna Goszczyńska and Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa (Warszawa: SOW, 2008), 301–9, among others.

Thus, in 1993, *Muslimani* from Bosnia adopted the ethnonym *Bošnjaci* (English: Bosniaks, Polish: Boszniacy), referencing the medieval name of the Bosnian population (*Bošnjani*). The new ethnonym had two main merits: it did not restrict national identity to religious identity (although Islam is still the focus of self-identification) and it highlighted old ties to a defined territory, in the sense that Serbs have Serbia, Croatians have Croatia, and ‘former *Muslimani*’, i.e. Bosniaks, have Bosnia.⁹

Today’s *Bosniak* differs from the *Musliman* of the late Tito period in more than ethnonym. As mentioned previously, the historical and cultural circumstances in the region (and neighboring territories) shaped a version of Islam that was tolerant of its infidel neighbors: not overly rigorous as far as observing the various cultural dos and don’ts of religious origin was concerned, with some elements of religious syncretism. Good neighborly and even friendly relations with Christians (who were also not very ardent in practicing their faith) in particular characterized the multiethnic population of Sarajevo, with a rich tradition of bourgeois culture (even if this was an oriental version thereof). The war in the 1990s completely wiped out that world forever.

Sarajevo and other cities saw an influx of Muslims from rural areas who were stricter or more traditional in their customs and less used to interdenominational contact, while the participation of Middle Eastern mujahideen in the fighting against Serbs or Croatians opened the way for infiltration of the fundamentalist, Wahhabi (Salafi) Islam from the Arab countries (and also, although to a lesser extent, Shia Islam from Iran and neighboring areas). Many women not only returned to wearing traditional Muslim clothing (headscarves and loose trousers) but began covering themselves in the Middle Eastern way, wearing burqas (a trend that seems to be slowly on the wane today). Some men also adopted a characteristic look (prominent facial hair, shortish trousers). The old–new clothing was only an external manifestation of an emerging new Islamic ideology. It did not conquer the minds of the majority of Bosniaks, but it definitely resulted in the growing importance of denomination in their daily lives, in language (the earlier and previously partially abandoned vocabulary of oriental origin started being promoted, especially on the internet), and in the landscape (old mosques were rebuilt and new ones erected with the distinctive spires of minarets).

One could say, therefore, that on the one hand Bosniaks underwent and are undergoing the same processes as other post-Yugoslavs (a growing social and especially political significance of denomination), and on the other they

⁹ Neither the Serbs nor the Croats agree with this interpretation as both groups also see Bosnia as a part of their historical national territory.

have joined global trends through a limited yet perceptible interest in fundamentalism within their own religion.

However, their situation is still more difficult than that of Serbs or Croats. They have to contend with being branded as the descendants of traitors – renegades who renounced the Orthodox/Catholic faith in Ottoman times and converted to Islam for financial benefits. Stigmatization from Serbs (especially those from Republika Srpska – the Serb Republic, i.e. the Serbian part of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Croats is an ongoing and relevant trend, as evidenced by content that is easily found on the internet.¹⁰

A defensive response to this situation gave rise to a desire to prove, first of all, that the ancestors of today's Bosniaks were always tied to the territories of Bosnia, and the history of medieval Bosnia was their national history (and not the Serbs' or the Croats'); secondly, their ancestors renounced neither the Orthodox nor the Catholic faith because they were never members of these denominations. This brings us to the key issue of the Bosnian Church (*bosanska crkva*). Although relevant historical sources are not satisfactorily numerous, we do know that a church of schismatic character developed in medieval Bosnia (and was accused of heresy from outside Bosnia), one that blended elements of functioning that were typical of the Orthodox faith and of Catholicism. As we know, in the late 19th century Croatian historian Franjo Rački promoted the hypothesis that the Bosnian Church had in fact been Bogomilist. This idea was quite popular at one time, but today the academic community is inclined to reject it.¹¹ The Bosniaks, meanwhile, seem to be going in the opposite direction, getting more and more attached to the idea and incorporating it into their national mythology.

Who were the Bogomils and where did the idea of their connection to Bosnia come from? This was a religious and social movement that developed in the 10th century in Bulgarian territory, absorbing elements of various earlier denominations, mainly from eastern parts of the Byzantine Empire. The Bogomils were dualists who based their teachings on a unique interpretation of the Bible. They saw the world as being torn between a good spiritual element and an evil material one. They condemned the latter, and with it also the institutionalized state and church authorities, the elaborate organization of the church, the building of churches, etc. They also promoted a return to the simplicity of life of the early Christians. However, we know too little about their ideological beliefs and the way they operated to be able to see this

¹⁰ In this context, cf. e.g. Mindak-Zawadzka, “‘Balija’ czyli ‘poturica’”

¹¹ For arguments refuting the Bogomilism of the Bosnian Church, cf. e.g. Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia. A Short History* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), especially chapter 3.

phenomenon in a clear light. This is due to the fact that surviving sources are mostly polemics and anathemas from the Orthodox (Eastern) Church circles that opposed them – mainly the Greek Orthodox and partly the Bulgarian Orthodox faiths – so it is hard to ascertain just how reliable the image of the Bogomils is in these texts.¹²

What we do know is that the Bogomils developed their activity not only within today's Bulgaria but also in western regions of today's Republic of Macedonia, and their influence was also noticed and subjected to harsh persecution in Serbia.¹³ The 12–14th centuries were a time when religious movements also intensified in Western Europe (cf. the Cathars, Waldensians, Albigensians in France, Patarenes in northern Italy and on the Dalmatian – today Croatian – coast). Many sources suggest that the Bulgarian Bogomils maintained contact with Western European 'heretics' and even influenced the development of their doctrine.

In the light of these facts, a tempting concept is that it was the Bogomils, fleeing persecution in the eastern part of the Balkans, who ended up in Bosnia and founded their church there. As mentioned earlier, today's historians (from outside Bosnia) are increasingly strongly rejecting such origins of the Bosnian Church because physical traces linked to its activity seem to contradict what we know about Bogomilist theology and social functioning. Nevertheless, Bosniaks are hanging on to this concept with all their might. Why?

There appear to be several reasons. First of all, as already mentioned, in post-Yugoslav territories and especially in Bosnia, Catholicism is associated with Croatian identity, while the Orthodox faith is associated with Serbian identity. Hence, the Bogomilism of the medieval Bosnian Church would be proof that the inhabitants of medieval Bosnia, i.e. the Bosniaks' ancestors (according to the Bosniaks' vision) were always culturally and denominationally separate from both Croatians and Serbs (which both those nations continually question). Consequently, they never renounced the foreign (to them) Orthodox and Catholic faiths when converting to Islam, so they do not deserve to be branded as traitors, materialists and opportunists who "prodali veru za večeru" ("sold their faith for a meal," i.e. for material goods).

But there is another aspect to this, namely the relationship between the faith professed in the Middle Ages, before the Ottoman Turks came to the Bal-

¹² In the Polish literature of the subject, cf. especially Georgi Minczew, Małgorzata Skowronek, and Jan M. Wolski, *Średniowieczne herezje dualistyczne na Bałkanach* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2015) (including the references), but also Grażyna Szwał-Gyłybowa, "Haeresis bulgarica" w bułgarskiej świadomości kulturowej XIX i XX wieku (Warszawa: SOW, 2005) (In English: Grażyna Szwał-Gyłybowa, *Bogomilism. The Afterlife of the "Bulgarian Heresy,"* trans. Piotr Szymczak [Warszawa: Instytut Sławistyki PAN, 2017]).

¹³ In Serbia the name *Babuni* was used, linked to geographical names in Western Macedonia.

kans (and Bosnia), and Islam. Posting statements on this subject has become a favorite internet pastime of many amateur historians and theologians – people who usually study completely different issues (not to mention the extremely active and prolific online author, retired math teacher Fikret Hafizović). The idea of a theological affinity between Bogomilism and Islam, above all based on true monotheism,¹⁴ is gaining in popularity. According to this concept, the ancestors of the Bosniaks were always monotheists (“the oldest in Europe”) and as such founded their Bosnian Church. The conversion to Islam after the Ottoman Empire conquered Bosnia in the 15th century was an ‘administrative’ change and not an ideological, truly confessional one. The authors of such arguments post long-winded disquisitions online, stylized to resemble (popular) scientific publications, and have an audience who read and discuss them. It is worth pointing out that support for the idea of Bogomilist roots does not translate into any inclination to recreate the Bogomils’ religious practices or even beliefs. Their ‘descendants’ from Bosnia remain Muslims, denominationally and culturally.

It is interesting that concepts assigning specific content to the idea of a separate Bosniak national identity gradually travelled and still travel eastwards to Sanjak, Kosovo, and some of them also to Macedonia, since it is unlikely that Slavic Muslims from these regions came up with the same idea at a similar time completely independently of one another.

The earliest idea, namely that the ethnonym *Muslimani* should be abandoned for the name *Bošnjaci*, was accepted most quickly (outside Bosnia and Herzegovina) in Sanjak, which neighbors on Bosnia and in the past was often assigned to the same larger administrative units as Bosnia. The expansion of the Bosniak ethnonym to include Slavic Muslims in Kosovo met greater resistance, but also there the name has largely been adopted (despite the lack of historical ties to Bosnia, but based on denominational and cultural unity/affinity). It practically did not take root in Macedonia.

Wherever the Bosniak identity was adopted, the Bosnian language¹⁵ was also accepted as a nationwide code – a standard useful in artistic creativity, in education and in all official situations. This applies, let us repeat, to most communities of Slavic-speaking post-Yugoslav Muslims, apart from those in Macedonia.

Activity aimed at linking ethnic/national roots to the Bogomil movement has a slightly different geographic distribution. As outlined above, the concept

¹⁴ I.e. believing in the existence of only one God – Allah – as opposed to Christianity’s Holy Trinity; Jesus/Isa is considered a prophet and not a divine person, which – let us add – is compatible with the Quran but not with Byzantine Orthodox sources on the beliefs of the Bogomils.

¹⁵ *Bosanski književni jezik*, codified in Sarajevo, one of the ‘heirs’ of the Serbo-Croatian language community that was abandoned for ideological reasons.

that the Bogomils were the ancestors of today's Bosniaks developed earliest in Bosnia, based on the supposed (though rather doubtful) Bogomilism of the medieval Bosnian Church. The grounds for this were, in a way, prepared by Rački and his supporters. However, the possible Bogomilist past of their people also started being considered by the cultural leaders of Muslim communities from regions where the Bogomils actually had been (or could have been) present in the Middle Ages: the northern slopes of the Shar Mountains in the Prizren region in Kosovo, in a region called Gora in the Albanian-Kosovan-Macedonian borderland, and in western Macedonia, along the border with Albania. The Slavic-speaking Muslim population in these regions was and still is traditionally called Torbesh by their (Slavic and Albanian) neighbors. The etymology of this name has never been unequivocally traced, but one explanation speaks of it originating from the word *torba* ('bag'). Some neighbors relate this to the motif of 'selling' one's (Christian) faith (in Ottoman times) for a bag of cheese or flour, while others say that the people in these regions had distinctive bags, which supporters of the Bogomilist hypothesis link to the image of an itinerant Bogomil-preacher carrying his sacred books in a bag. This is the interpretation which, together with the Bogomilist origins of their distinctness, has been embraced in the past decade by one of the socio-political movements among the Macedonian Torbeshes (the Rumelia movement led by Šerif Ajradinoski), vying for recognition of their ethnic distinctness.¹⁶

Around the same time (slightly earlier), an extensive study in book form was published by a Gorani from Albania, Nazif Dokle.¹⁷ Recently deceased, he was a leading intellectual and regional cultural activist among the Albanian Gorani, the author of numerous studies as well as a great dictionary of the Gorani dialect. He worked on his book for many years and presented its ideas in Kosovo at the start of the first decade of the 21st century. Albanian Gorani (contrary to those in Kosovo and Macedonia) were isolated from the outside world during communism and underwent intensive Albanization. To prove that the Gorani (Albanian as well as those from neighboring post-Yugoslav regions) had Bogomilist roots, Dokle felt a need to show that the Albanian Gorani were also Torbeshes,¹⁸ and as Torbeshes they were descendants of medieval Bogomils.

¹⁶ Cf. the BA thesis of Tatiana Kobierska, MA (*Torbeseze w globalnej wiosce. Dyskurs na temat działań macedońskojęzycznych muzułmanów na rzecz uznania ich za odrębną grupę etniczną Torbeszów*, 2015), defended at the University of Warsaw's Institute of Western and Southern Slavic Studies in 2015, and also various statements from and about Ajradinoski on Facebook.

¹⁷ Nazif Dokle, *Bogomilizmi dhe etnogjeneza e torbeshëve të Kukësit* (Tiranë: Geer, 2009). Cf. Nazif Dokle, *Bogomilizam i etnogjeneza Torbeša Kukske Gore*, trans. Sadik I. Idrizi (Prizren: Alem, 2011) (access: Goranski sajt, <http://mlicanin.weebly.com>).

¹⁸ This is an interesting example of the social evolution of a regional-ethnic name. Until quite recently, the name *Torbeš* was considered offensive, while today, as a kind of bridge on the way to securing a link to the medieval Bogomils, it can often be seen as attractive and even desirable.

Although this idea emerged among the Albanian Gorani, it is clear what the Kosovo Gorani (the most numerous and socially most active group) thought of it from the fact that Dokle's work was published very quickly in print form in Prizren in 2011 as well as online,¹⁹ in a Bosnian translation by Kosovo's Gora region's leading intellectual, Professor Sadik Idrizi.

Also in this case, despite the interest being shown in the Bogomils by Gorani and Macedonian Torbeshes, their search for evidence of a Bogomilist past is not accompanied by any demand to modify or change their denomination: the Gorani and Torbeshes remain orthodox Sunnis.

Recently there is also growing interest in Sanjak in the presumed Bogomilist roots of the local Islamic population (Bosniaks). The most important supporter of this trend is Sulejman Aličković.²⁰

As we can see from the necessarily brief argumentation above, the idea of the Bogomilist roots of different post-Yugoslav Slavic Muslim communities is used by them to build their ethno-mythology and to prove their distinctness and age-old presence in the territories they inhabit today, which means its character is mainly political and sociocultural, while essentially not involving any need to search for the theological specificity of the Bogomil movement and/or attempt to reconstruct the Bogomils' practices.

Nevertheless, traces of this last kind of interest in the Bogomils can also be found in the post-Yugoslav space. In Croatia there is at least one 'neo-Bogomilist' community (in Zagreb), with a charismatic (and eccentric) leader, Ivan, who is trying to resurrect the Bogomils' dualist ideas in a spirit reminiscent of the New Age.²¹ However, this has nothing to do with the Bosniaks, it is material for a completely different story...

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¹⁹ Dokle, *Bogomilizam i etnogeneza*.

²⁰ Cf. Sulejman Aličković, *Bogomili Sandžaka* (Tutin: Bosna Historija, 2008), see also <http://bosniaci.net/prilog.php?pid=48773>.

²¹ Cf. e.g. the critical press item *Ivan je član sekte bogumili, koja je nastala u Zagrebu*, <http://www.telegraf.rs/vesti>. This community also has an online presence, as Bogumilski Centar (cf. <http://bogumili.com>).

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Yuri Stoyanov

Modern and Post-Secular Alevi and Bektāṣī Religiosities and the Slavo-Turkic Heretical Imaginary

KEYWORDS: post-secularism, heretical imaginary, South-East Europe/Balkans, Alevism, Bektāṣism, identity

ABSTRACT: The problem of contemporary and post-secular Alevi and Bektāṣī religiosities in Turkey, South-East Europe and in diasporic milieux in Western Europe and North America has been attracting some increasing attention since the late 1980s. Following decades of suppression of Alevi and Bektāṣī religious and cultural traditions by the aggressive secularism of the respective Eastern Bloc Communist regimes, the process of reclaiming Alevi and Bektāṣī identities in the Orthodox-majority cultures in South-East Europe and in post-secular settings has followed its own distinctive dynamics in the last three decades. While post-secularism exposed Alevi and Bektāṣī communities to locally and transnationally coordinated Sunnification pressures and Twelver Twelver Shi'ite pro-active programmes, both trends within these communities and in the post-Communist South-East European cultures in general continue to reimagine and rearticulate their identities in the framework of the Slavo-Turkic heretical imaginary which was initially formulated in the nation-building historiographies of the late Ottoman and early post-Ottoman periods.

During the last few decades a series of publications in the field of Islamic, Balkan, Turkish studies (and related areas) have addressed a variety of aspects of contemporary and post-secular Alevi and Bektāṣī religiosities in Turkey, South-East Europe and in diasporic milieux in Western Europe and North

America. These publications inevitably ventured into the treacherous and contested areas of the evolving debates over the recognition and definitions of the complex of teachings and practices which possibly can be identified as Islamic ‘heresy’, ‘heterodoxy’ and/or ‘gnosis’, in both previous religio-political and current contexts.

Such debates have been particularly vigorous in the case of the various Balkan and Anatolian non-conformist and Shi‘ite-leaning and -influenced ethno-religious groups (which came to be categorized by the generic term *Kızılbaş* [which has largely been replaced by ‘Alevi’, while also remaining interchangeable with it]) and the *Bektāşīyya*, which after a somewhat obscure rise and nascent history in the early Ottoman era, ultimately came to be recognized and functioned until 1826 (the year of its formal abolition) as one of the main Ottoman Sufi *ṭarīqat*/orders. The intensity of these debates has been conditioned largely by the convoluted and dissonant process of transmutation, interplay and contradictions between traditional and ascribed (in the post-Ottoman period) Alevi and Bektāşi identities in Asia Minor and the Balkans since the late Ottoman period. This process has been also affected by the enduring and extant complex of Sunni elite and popular negative stances and clichés concerning Alevism based on inherited confessionalist Sunni discourses on the perceived doctrinal and ritual ‘deviances’ of the *Kızılbaş* communities. In the Ottoman era this admixture of stereotypes and attitudes could be used to rationalize and provoke legal and discriminatory measures against these groups.

At the same time, the distinct and ongoing Alevi revivalism in Turkey and the Alevi diaspora in the last three decades or so has developed an impressive religious, cultural and social dynamic vis-à-vis the progress of the Sunni-based unitarian *Türk-İslam sentezi* (“Turkish-Islamic Synthesis”) project of the 1980s and the consequent expansion and electoral ascendancy of political Sunni Islam in contemporary Turkey. Inevitably, much of the recent and persisting intense disputes about (or within) traditional Balkan and Anatolian (as well as West European diasporic) Alevism have been concentrated on the problem of the historical, received and reconstructed Alevi markers of identity/ies. While the role of Shi‘ism in Alevi doctrines and cultic life remains a major topic in any of these disputes, attention has been also drawn to the possible influences of pre- and non-Islamic religious trends on Alevism and Bektāşism. Such postulated influences have ranged from pre-Islamic Turkic Central Asian beliefs and rituals to Eastern Christian (Armenian, Greek or Slavonic as well as orthodox, heterodox or dualist) doctrinal lore and cultic observances which naturally necessitates interdisciplinary approaches in the study of the eclectic complex of beliefs and practices underlying what has

been frequently construed as the phenomenon of Alevi-Bektāṣī syncretism.¹ As with other Near Eastern syncretistic groups such as the Yezidis and Ahl-e Haqq, Alevi/Bektāṣī syncretism has been defined and approached as a conglomerate structure² whose various components need to be stratified, so that the earliest and foundational strata could be thus identified.³ The separation of the core layers, variously recognized as ancient Anatolian, pre-Islamic Turkic/Central Asia shamanistic, Shi'ite- and Sufi-related, as well as Iranian (especially in Kurdish- and Zaza-speaking Alevi circles) as well as identifying the posited Eastern Christian (Armenian and Greek in Asia Minor, Greek and Slavonic in the Balkans), naturally could reflect a variety of often contrasting ethno-confessional and ideological agendas.

The striking plurality of approaches to and discourses on historical and modern Alevism represents also the outcome of the diverse and contrasting trends in early research on Alevism and Bektāṣīsm. The early study of Alevism and Bektāṣīsm was to a great extent inevitably and variously affected by the nation-building and confessional ideologies and prerogatives of the different, national historiographies of the late and post-Ottoman era, maturing amid political conflicts, initially in the Balkans, then in Kemalist Turkey. At the same time, some characteristic and influential currents in the early research on Alevism and Bektāṣīsm developed under the impact of the stated or inferred theological and missionary concerns in many of the main early Western accounts of their beliefs and observances (some of these narratives were produced by actual missionaries).⁴

¹ The phenomenon of 'Alevi/Bektāṣī syncretism' has been systematically explored in a series of studies of Irène Mélikoff, most of which have been assembled in her volumes of selected articles: *Au banquet des quarante: exploration au coeur du bektachisme-alevisme* (Istanbul: Isis, 2001) and *Sur les traces du soufisme turc: recherches sur l'Islam populaire en Anatolie* (Istanbul: Isis, 1992); as well as in her monograph, *Hadji Bektach: un mythe et ses avatars: genèse et évolution du soufisme populaire en Turquie* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

² For an early definition and analysis of such 'conglomerate-like' belief system, see Vladimir Ivanov, *The Truth-Worshippers of Kurdistan: Ahl-i haqq Texts* (Bombay: Matḥā' -i Qādirī, 1950), 31–75 (in which the respective layers of this structure are identified as ancient animism, solar cult lore, popular Mazdaism, Christian sectarian teachings as well as Islamic Shi'ite Ismaili and Safavid-related strata).

³ The most methodical use of such stratification approach can be discerned in Irène Mélikoff's studies of Alevism and Bektāṣīsm; see especially: Mélikoff, *Sur les traces du soufisme turc*, 41–61 and Mélikoff, *Hadji Bektach*, 4.

⁴ For Protestant missionary campaigns among the Alevis and their *modus operandi*, see Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, "The Emergence of the Kizilbas in Western Thought: Missionary Accounts and their Aftermath," in *Archaeology, Anthropology and Heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia: the Life and Times of F.W. Hasluck, 1878–1920*, vol. 1, ed. David Shankland (Istanbul: Isis, 2004), 328–53; Hans-Lukas Kieser, "Muslim Heterodoxy and Protestant Utopia. The Interactions between Alevis and Missionaries," *Die Welt des Islams*, no. 41 (1) (2001): 89–111.

Contemporary research on Alevism and Bektāšism has been enriched and transformed by the progress of the evidence-based investigation of diverse primary source material and hitherto inaccessible state or private archival collections, especially over the last few decades. An increasing number of relevant manuscript source material has been made available in general and critical publications and translations of (accompanied on occasion by commentaries on) principal primary sources. These include the *Menakīb-nāmes* and *Vilāyet-nāmes* of important Alevi and Bektāšī sacred personages; the manuscripts of the two versions of the Alevi doctrinal-catechistic work, the *Buyruk*; the *Maqālat*, the “sayings” ascribed to the reputed founder of the Bektāšī order, Hacı Bektaş Veli (c. 1300?), the religious hymns, *nefes*; etc. Pioneering art-historical, architectural and anthropological work has been undertaken at a number of the most prominent Alevi and Bektāšī religious and cultic sites and complexes, *tekkes*, *zaviyes*, *türbes*, etc. in Asia Minor and the Balkans. The outcome of this work includes publications and surveys of inscriptions, funerary stele and iconography explored at these sites. The progress of interdisciplinary work among Balkan and Anatolian Alevi groups (and those who perceive themselves as affiliated with Bektāšism) has been also impressive. Ethnographic and anthropological research in particular has made inroads into such vital spheres of Alevi belief and ritual systems as the oral diffusion of various types of internally controlled knowledge within the community (variously pertaining to cosmogony, cosmology and anthropogony, on one hand, or the transmission of religious authority within its distinct institution of hereditary religious leadership, the *dedelik*, and/or Sufi *silsilas*, on the other). Although the early history of *Kızılbaşism* and Bektāšism still presents a series of vexed religio-historical problems, expanding historical research has broken new ground in a variety of vital areas. These areas concern, for example, the diverse primary evidence of the early history of the Bektāšī order (historiography, polemics, hagiography and early shrine complexes), its interrelations with antinomian dervish groups (Kālenders, Abdāls of Rūm, Hāyderis, Cāmīs and Şems-i Tebrīzīs) and their incorporation into the Bektāšī network in the sixteenth century.⁵ Further advance has been achieved on the fortunes of *Kızılbaşism* and Bektāšism in the classical Ottoman era and the post-sixteenth century trajectories of *modus vivendi* accomplished between the various

⁵ Ahmet T. Karamustafa, “Kālenders, Abdāls, Hāyderis: The Formation of the Bektāšīye in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Süleyman the Second and his Time*, eds. Halil Inalcik and Cemal Kafadar (Istanbul: Isis, 1993), 121–9; Ahmet T. Karamustafa, “Origins of Anatolian Sufism,” in *Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society: Sources, Doctrine, Rituals, Turuq, Architecture, Literature and Fine Arts, Modernisms*, ed. Ahmet Y. Ocak (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2005), 67–95.

Anatolian and Balkan *Kızılbaş* groups and the Ottoman central and local authorities, as well as the role of the Bektâşi order in these processes.⁶

These recent advances in research have not always been reflected (or could be indeed actually misrepresented) in the ongoing socio-religious debates and controversies regarding the historical fortunes and the current religio-political orientation of Alevism and Bektâşism. These disputes and controversies have initially developed under the impact and manifold pressures of Kemalist modernity in Republican Turkey and in the changed climate of the more recent prominence and advance of political Islam in the country. Starting with the early Kemalist period, Alevi socio-religious organization and its hereditary religious leadership, the *dedelik*, as well as its traditional religious life revolving around the Alevi and Bektâşis sanctuaries, the *cemevi* (Alevi assembly houses of worship) and the respective *cem* ceremonies, were exposed to the various secularization reforms of the Kemalist modernization movement. One of the centrepieces of these reforms, the ban on the Sufi orders and closure of their convents in 1925, inevitably had a strong impact on both the status and religious roles of the Alevi religious leaders, the *dedes* and the functioning of the Alevi sacred places. Among other factors, the extensive effects of migration to urban areas and immigration abroad as well as expanding secularization led to the emergence of secularized Alevi élites who began to challenge the traditional authority of the *dedes*, exploiting a variety of new channels, including journalistic and literary publications.⁷ Apart from such largely generational conflicts, these processes of modernization, secularization and immigration influenced also the general politicisation and growing popularity of leftist ideologies among the Alevis in the 1960s–70s as well as the more recent formation and increasing activism of transnational networks of Alevi associations.

⁶ See, for example, Suraiya Faroqhi, *Der Bektaschi-Orden in Anatolien (vom späten fünfzehnten Jahrhundert bis 1826)* (Vienna: Verlag des Institutes für Orientalistik der Universität Wien, 1981); Suraiya Faroqhi, "Conflict, Accommodation and Long-Term Survival. The Bektâşi Order and the Ottoman State (Sixteenth–Seventeenth Centuries)," in *Bektachiyya, Etudes sur l'ordre mystique des Bektachis et les groupes relevant de Hadji Bektach*, eds. Alexandre Popovic and Gilles Veinstein (Paris: Geuthner, 1995), 167–81.

⁷ On the ongoing restructuring of the *dedelik* institution in new communal settings, both in Turkey and among West European Alevi diasporas, see, for example, Ali Yaman, *Kızılbaş Alevi Ocakları* (Ankara: Elips, 2006); Martin Sökefeld, "Alevi Dedes in the German Diaspora: The Transformation of a Religious Institution," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, no. 127 (2002): 163–86; Markus Dressler, "The Modern Dede: Changing Parameters for Religious Authority in Contemporary Turkish Alevism," in *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies*, eds. Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 269–94; Özlem Göner, "The Transformation of the Alevi Collective Identity," *Cultural Dynamics*, no. 17 (2) (2005): 122–4.

Accordingly, stances on the left of the Alevi political spectrum highlight and draw on the received attitudes seen to be shaped by the historical Alevi anti-establishment, non-conformist and oppositional standpoint, moulded and reinforced in the course of long-standing confrontations with persecuting secular and religious institutions. Such stances can concurrently understate and minimize the religious core of and esoteric elements in Alevism, while resorting to vocabulary and rhetoric approximating those used in popular Marxism and sociologized adaptations of liberation theology (pro-Kurdish emancipation standpoints can also be accommodated into such leftist ideological frameworks).⁸ Influential currents in contemporary Alevi political self-consciousness remain grounded in Alevi aspirations to support and take part in the modernizing reforms of Kemalism, aspirations articulated with a 'progressivist' rhetoric, drawing on a series of posited analogies between secular modernity and Alevi core values like liberalism, humanism, religious tolerance and freedom.⁹

Such modernist positions co-exist in the Alevi socio-cultural space with religionist Sunni-leaning and Sufi-oriented circles (which largely aim to 'standardize' Alevism within the framework of the diverse Ottoman Sunni Sufi traditions and orders)¹⁰ as well as other groups seeking to alter

⁸ On these currents, see for example, Karin Vorhoff, *Zwischen Glaube, Nation und neuer Gemeinschaft. Alevitische Identität in der Türkei der Gegenwart* (Berlin: K. Schwarz Verlag, 1995), 102–5; Faruk Bilici, "The Function of Alevi-Bektashi Theology in Modern Turkey," in *Alevi Identity: Cultural, Religious and Social Perspectives*, eds. Tord Olsson, Elisabeth Özdalga, and Catharina Raudvere (Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute, 1998), 52–3; Tahire Erman and Emrah Göker, "Alevi Politics in Contemporary Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies*, no. 36 (4) (2000): 104–5, 108, 110–1; Markus Dressler, *Die alevitische Religion. Traditionslinien und Neubestimmungen* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2002), 124–91, ff.; Élise Massicard, *L'Autre Turquie. Le mouvement aléviste et ses territoires* (Paris: PUF Proche Orient, 2005), 101–3.

⁹ On these currents, cf. Karin Vorhoff, "Let's Reclaim our History and Culture!" – Imagining Alevi Community in Contemporary Turkey," *Welt des Islams*, no. 38 (1998): 240–2; Karin Vorhoff, "Discourses on the Alevis in Contemporary Turkey," in *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East*, eds. Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, Barbara Kellner-Heinkele, and Anke Otter-Beaujean (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 100–1; Erman and Göker, "Alevi Politics in Contemporary Turkey," 111–2; Markus Dressler, *Die civil religion der Türkei. Kemalistische und alevitische Atatürk-Rezeption im Vergleich* (Würzburg: Ergon, 1999), 83–113, ff.; Markus Dressler, *Die alevitische Religion*, 224–43, ff.

¹⁰ On the Sunni-leaning trends in contemporary Alevism, see for example Reha Çamuroğlu, "Alevi Revivalism in Turkey," in *Alevi Identity: Cultural, Religious and Social Perspectives*, ed. Tord Olsson, Elisabeth Özdalga, and Catharina Raudvere (Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute, 1998), 81–2; Reha Çamuroğlu, "Some Notes on the Contemporary Process of Restructuring Alevilik in Turkey," in *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East*, eds. Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, Barbara Kellner-Heinkele, and Anke Otter-Beaujean (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 28–9; Erman and Göker, "Alevi Politics in Contemporary Turkey," 106.

the sense of direction of Alevism towards the type of legalist Twelver Shi'ite Islam established in the Islamic Republic of Iran after 1979.¹¹

Post-secular religio-political developments and discourses in Turkey following the end of the Cold War (conditioned by factors such as the collapse of Communism in the Eastern Bloc countries and the consequent diminished appeal of socialism, the expansion of political Islam, etc.) intensified the tensions between the secularizing modernist and religionist trends in modern Alevism. At the same time, the restructuring processes in Alevism have already brought about designs and efforts seeking to start a scripturalization and standardization of Alevi doctrinal and ritual traditions which are now continuing also in post-secularist settings. With their inevitable transformative effect on Alevi socio-religious life and accompanied by related projects to 'modernize' Alevi/Bektâşî theology,¹² such developments find their analogies among other religious minority groups in the Near and Middle East (considered 'heterodox' by the respective majority 'normative' traditions).¹³ Intensifying in current post-secular environments, these developments would also explain the revitalization of religious references and vocabulary in current Alevi self-representational discourses, especially in Turkey and the Balkans. These developments are also directly related to the ongoing debates over

¹¹ On Twelver Shi'ite proselytism and publishing programmes (arranged by the Islamic Republic of Iran), focused on Alevism in Turkey, see, for example, Bilici, "The Function of Alevi-Bektashi Theology," 55–7; Erman and Göker, "Alevi Politics in Contemporary Turkey," 105–6; for some of their more radical offshoots, see Ruşen Çakır, *Ayet ve Slogan Türkiye'de İslami Oluşumla* (Istanbul: Metis, 1990), 155–64.

¹² On this process, see, for example, Çamuroğlu, "Alevi Revivalism," 82–3; Çamuroğlu, "Some Notes," 30–1; Bilici, "The Function of Alevi-Bektashi Theology," 57–9; Tord Olsson, "Epilogue: The Scripturalization of Ali-Oriented Religions," in *Alevi Identity: Cultural, Religious and Social Perspectives*, eds. Tord Olsson, Elisabeth Özdalga, and Catharina Raudvere (Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute, 1998), 199–209; Anke Otter-Beaujean, "Schriftliche Überlieferung versus mündliche Tradition – zum Stellenwert der Buyruk-Handschriften im Alevitum," in *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East*, eds. Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, Barbara Kellner-Heinkele, and Anke Otter-Beaujean (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 224–6; Şehriban Şahin, "The Rise of Alevism as a Public Religion," *Current Sociology*, no. 53 (3) (2005): 465–85; David Shankland, "The Buyruk in Alevi Village Life: Thoughts from the Field on Rival Sources of Religious Inspiration," in *Syncretismes et hérésies dans l'Orient seldjoukide et ottoman (XIVe–XVIIIe siècle)*. *Actes du Colloque du Collège de France, octobre 2001*, ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris and Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2005), 311–24; Massicard, *L'Autre Turquie*, 150–60; Markus Dressler, "Religio-Secular Metamorphoses: The Re-Making of Turkish Alevism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, no. 76 (2) (2008): 286–8, 304–5.

¹³ For comparable contemporary developments among the Ahl-e Haqq, see, for example, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Breaking the Seal: the New Face of the Ahl-i Haqq," in *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East*, eds. Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, Barbara Kellner-Heinkele, and Anke Otter-Beaujean (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 175–95.

the inclusion of Alevi-related topics into the mandatory religious courses in the Turkish state school system as well as the successful campaign for the integration of Alevi religious curricula in German and British public schools.¹⁴ They also predicate the plans for the establishment of high schools and modern educational programmes for the Alevi *dedes*,¹⁵ evidently devised to bring higher theological learning to Alevi clerical leadership comparable to that required for Sunni and Shi'ite religious scholarship. Finally, among West European Alevi diasporas such processes co-exist with attempts to highlight the convergence of Sufi and humanistic ideals in Alevi religiosity (while understating its Islamic theological and historical contexts) to present an image of Alevism built on the modern model of a world religious philosophy, endowed with own universal spiritual traits and appeal.¹⁶

Likewise with their co-religionists in Asia Minor, the Balkan Alevi and Bektāṣī communities have been subjected to similar processes of migration, immigration, urbanization and secularization which characterized the advent of post-Ottoman modernity and lately, also post-secular realities. But the dynamics and consequences of the parallel processes in post-Ottoman Turkey and the Balkans also differed in a number of significant ways, conditioned by their contrasting sets of socio-political and ideological factors. Significantly, these ideological factors included the question of the nature and origins of the modern Slav-speaking Muslim groups in South-East Europe (Bosnia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia and Greece) which was one of preoccupations of nationalist historiographies and nation-building narratives in the late Ottoman and early post-Ottoman periods. The expansion of concern with and debates on the then vital ethno-confessional and religio-political dimensions of this problem occurred in a period when Alevism and Bektāṣism were already implicated in popular and elite discourses in the broader area of Christian-Islamic inter-relations and inter-change in the Ottoman empire. Treating the ethno-genesis and confessional orientation of the Slavophone Muslim, Alevi and Bektāṣī Balkan communities in similar reconstructed historical contexts

¹⁴ On the pioneering introduction of Alevi lessons as part of the compulsory Religious Education curriculum in British schools, see Celia Jenkins and Umit Cetin, "From a 'Sort of Muslim' to 'Proud to be Alevi': the Alevi Religion and Identity Project Combatting the Negative Identity among Second-generation Alevis in the UK," *National Identities*, 2017. DOI: 10.1080/14608944.2016.1244933.

¹⁵ On these initiatives, see, for example, Şahin, "The Rise of Alevism as a Public Religion," 476 ff.; Dressler, "The Modern Dede," 276–87; Dressler, "Religio-Secular Metamorphoses," 299–304; Martin Sökefeld, *Struggling for Recognition: The Alevi Movement in Germany and in Transnational Space* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), 147–78, ff.

¹⁶ On these attempts, see, for example, Dressler, "Religio-Secular Metamorphoses," 292–3, 304–5; Vorhoff, "Discourses on the Alevis," 101.

of Islamicisation and Turkification, made possible the conceptualization of models of Slavo-Turkic continuities and imaginaries, with enduring impact and appeal in South-East Europe.

The origins, initial settlements and migrations of the *Kızılbaş* groups and the Bektâşî order in the Balkans is indeed one of the most intriguing religio-historic problems arising from the religious and political history of the early Ottoman empire. The ongoing research on the Islamic heterodox communities in the central and eastern Balkans (whose self-definitions variously refer to their Baba'i, Bektâşî or *Kızılbaş* background) has generated sufficient evidence that at least some of these groups most likely descend from pro-Safavid *Kızılbaş* deportees re-settled there by the Ottoman authorities in the sixteenth century. Other groups may arguably trace their ancestors to heterodox Turkoman groups (some of whom may have been led by dervishes and charismatic leaders) who settled into the Balkans in earlier periods.¹⁷ Generally, the study of the expansion, history and religious topography of the *Kızılbaş* communities and the Bektâşî order in the Balkans has been hampered by the extensive damage inflicted on a number of *Kızılbaş*/Alevi and Bektâşî cultic sites in the period of the formation of the post-Ottoman Balkan states.¹⁸ During this period of political and military conflicts in the region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some of the traditional Alevi and Bektâşî networks were fragmented and some of their communities found themselves displaced. By that time the Bektâşî order, moreover, had already endured extensive and unrecoverable losses following its suppression and the consequent confiscation of its religious edifices and property after 1826.

Early publications on Balkan Alevism and Bektâşîsm had an insufficient and restricted access to pertinent internal and external historical and doctrinal source material. Still, early Western accounts focused on Anatolian and

¹⁷ See the recent surveys of the evidence and research in Frederick De Jong, "Problems Concerning the Origins of the Qizilbaş in Bulgaria: Remnants of the Safaviyya?," in *Convegno sul tema: La Shi'a nell'Impero Ottomano (Roma, 15 Aprile 1991)* (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1993), 203–16; Nevena Gramatikova, *Neortodoksalniyat islyam v balgarskite zemi. Minalo i savremennost* (Sofiya: Gutenberg, 2011).

¹⁸ See, for example, the discussion of the precarious situation and damage and destruction wreaked on the Bektâşî order in Albanian and Greek Epirus in Nathalie Clayer, *L'Albanie, pays des derviches: les ordres mystiques musulmans en Albanie à l'époque post-ottomane (1912–1967)* (Berlin: Harrassowitz, 1990), 181–5; Harry T. Norris, "Bektashi Life on the Border Between Albania and Greece," in *Archaeology, Anthropology and Heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia: the Life and Times of F.W. Hasluck, 1878–1920*, vol. 1, ed. David Shankland (Istanbul: Isis, 2004), 309–28; Harry T. Norris, "The Bektashiyya Brotherhood, its Village Communities and Inter-religious Tensions along the Border between Albania and Greek Epirus at the Beginning of the 20th Century," in Harry T. Norris, *Popular Sufism in Eastern Europe: Sufi Brotherhoods and the Dialogue with Christianity and "Heterodoxy"* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 78–92.

Balkan *Kızılbaş* and Bektāṣī communities, their religious beliefs and customs, which were written and published in the late Ottoman period reflected the first-hand observations of Western historians, diplomats, anthropologists, travelers or missionaries. These experiences, moreover, were gathered at *Kızılbaş* and Bektāṣī cultic sites and complexes, many of which were gravely damaged during the conflicts leading to the Ottoman Empire's break-up and post-Ottoman state-building. Such early reports also could record oral traditions and cultic observances which since then may have virtually vanished, but will have also to be treated critically due to the obvious Orientalist, theological and missionary predilections underlying these accounts.¹⁹

In post-Ottoman South-East Europe and Kemalist Turkey the first studies of and reports on Alevism and Bektāṣīsm inevitably variously betrayed the principal goals of the evolving competing regional nation/state-building programmes and strategies. Against the background of the dramatic ethno-confessional conflicts and transmutations of the period, the consequent approaches to the beliefs and history of Alevism and Bektāṣīsm were strongly influenced by the grand interpretative narratives of Islamic-Christian interrelations in the Ottoman era, as formulated and elaborated in the contemporary Balkan national historiographies. The *raison d'être* and trajectories of the advancing Islamicisation in Ottoman-era Anatolia and South-East Europe as well as the ethnic, cultural and linguistic background of the Slavophone Islamic communities and enclaves in these regions was and remained one of the major problem areas in these rival historiographies. Accordingly to one of the persistently influential and exploited (from the mid-nineteenth century onwards) interpretative schemas the Balkan and Anatolian dissenting sectarian communities representing the two principal trends of medieval Eastern Christian dualism, Bogomilism and Paulicianism,²⁰ converted *en masse* to Islam in the early Ottoman period. This conversion scenario was based on the uncritical assumptions that late medieval Bogomil communities (at that stage largely Slavophone) and the increasingly Slavicised Paulician groups chose to convert as a whole to Islam in reaction to their long-drawn suppression by the secular and ecclesiastical establishments of the medieval Balkan-Byzantine world.²¹

¹⁹ Karakaya-Stump, "The Emergence of the Kizilbas in Western Thought"; Kieser, "Muslim Heterodoxy and Protestant Utopia."

²⁰ On the provenance, historical development and doctrinal systems of the Christian dualist movements and trends in the medieval Eastern Christian world, see the anthology of translated primary sources in Janet Hamilton, Bernard Hamilton, and Yuri Stoyanov, eds., *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World c.650–c.1450* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998).

²¹ For a survey of the early formulations and principal arguments of these theories and some of their more recent reinstatements, see Yuri Stoyanov, "On Some Parallels between Anatolian

Utilized initially to explain the progress of Islamicisation in early Ottoman Bosnia and Herzegovina (which underwent a period of confrontation between Roman Catholicism and the schismatic Bosnian Church just prior to the Ottoman conquest),²² this conversion model was subsequently extended at one time or another to most of the Slavophone Islamic communities in the Balkans. Large groups in the extant Balkan Slavophone Muslim population (who predominantly follow Hannafī Sunni Islam) were accordingly branded descendants of medieval Christian heretics.²³ While subsequent research and the accumulation of diverse evidence increasingly demonstrated the untenability of such sweeping scenarios of large-scale conversion among Balkan heterodox and dissenting groups, in the earlier stages of the promulgations of these theories, the Alevi and Bektāṣī communities were especially liable to be implicated and exploited in such models and narratives of postulated massive conversion of Christian heretical communities to Islam.

The growing popular and scholarly interest in and arguments for Christian or Christian-influenced elements in the strata of Alevi-Bektāṣī syncretism could be ideologized and theologized to be integrated into the emerging post-Ottoman ethno-confessional constructs and physical and religious territoriality aspirations. The strategies adopted by the respective new political and religious élites in the post-Ottoman Christian-majority successor states intended to cope with the inherited multi-confessional polities in their territories and remold collective identities display some telling parallels and contrasts. Some of these analogies and dissimilarities can be clearly discerned, for example, in the strategies and policies implemented in the post-World War I kingdoms of Yugoslavia and Greece. The earlier quests and arguments for

and Balkan Heterodox Islamic Traditions and the Problem of their Coexistence and Interaction in the Ottoman Period,” in *Syncretisme et hérésies dans l’Orient seldjoukide et ottoman (XIVe–XVIIIe siècle)*, *Actes du Colloque du Collège de France, octobre 2001*, ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris and Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2005), 83–90.

²² The Bosnian church had developed as a clerical body, schismatic both from Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy and the exact nature and evolution of its inter-relations with Christian dualist movements in the Western Balkans and Western Europe have attracted a prolonged and ongoing debate, especially in the last few decades – see Yuri Stoyanov, “Between Heresiology and Political Theology: the Rise of the Paradigm of the Heretical Bosnian Church and the Paradoxes of its Medieval and Modern Developments,” in *Political Theologies of the Monotheistic Religions. Representation of the Divine and Dynamics of Power*, ed. Giovanni Filoramo (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005), 161–80.

²³ See, for example, Konstantin Irechek, *Istoriya na balgarite*, trans. A. Diamandiev and I. Raev (Sofiya: Strashimir Slavchev, 1929), 271, 289; Aleksandar Teodorov-Balan, “Balgarskite katolitsi v Svishtovsko i tyahnata cherkovna borba,” *Letopisi na Balgarskoto knizhovno druzhestvo*, no. 2 (1902): 123 ff.; more recently, Stavro Skendi, “Crypto-Christianity in the Balkan Area under the Ottomans,” in Stavro Skendi, *Balkan Cultural Studies* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1980), 240.

Christian provenance for *Kızılbaş*ism and Bektāšism were partially integrated during this period into the historical, religious and general discourses accompanying the establishment of nation-building historiographies. A variety of conjectures and dubious evidence were produced and started to be exploited in spurious reconstructions of historical and religious genealogies, aiming to prove that Alevi and Bektāšī communities actually were descendants of Slavonic Christian groups (orthodox or heterodox), forcibly Islamicised in the Ottoman era.²⁴ Such discourses naturally also tended to downplay or ignore the Muslim dimension of their teachings and rites and supplied the principal notions which formed the core of the indigenization approach to Alevi and Bektāšī identities, which in the framework of reconstructed Slavo-Turkic continuity, aimed to recognize and trace their origins and foundational beliefs in local Slavonic Christian (or even pre-Christian) folk cultures and habitats.²⁵

Although proceeding slowly and unevenly (especially in the South East European Communist countries during the Cold War period), subsequent research on Alevi and Bektāšī religious and cultic sites in the Balkans (some of which have been reclaimed by the respective communities over the past thirty years), anthropological fieldwork and work on Ottoman-era source material has made a number of crucial contributions to Ottoman religious, political and cultural history, Christian-Muslim and Suinni-Shi'ite interrelations, especially in the field of local studies.²⁶ The conclusions and publications of this evidence-based research are particularly important for the future study of the role of the dervish orders and especially Bektāšism in the Ottoman colonization of the Balkans, the unfolding patterns of Christian-Islamic syncretism, the phenomenon of crypto-Christianity and some other related fields.²⁷ Despite the massive and growing evidence to the contrary, however,

²⁴ For symptomatic arguments that at least some of the *Kızılbaş* and Bektāšī-related groups in the eastern Balkans descend from Christian (or heretical Christian, i.e. Bogomil) communities, see, for example, Dimitar Marinov, "Narodna vyara i religiozni narodni obichai," *Sbornik za narodni umotvoreniya, nauka i knizhnina*, no. 28 (1914): 423 f.; Vasil Marinov, *Delyorman (Yuzhna chast)*. *Oblastno-geografsko izuchavane* (Sofiya: Vasil Marinov, 1941), 54 f., 79–80.

²⁵ See the analysis of this indigenization approach in Yuri Stoyanov, "Early and Recent Formulations of Theories for a Formative Christian Heterodox Impact on Alevism," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, no. 37 (3) (2010): 266–7.

²⁶ See the surveys of the development of the local studies of the Alevi and Bektāšī groups in South-east Europe in Nevena Gramatikova, "Changing Fates and the Issue of Alevi Identity in Bulgaria," in *Ethnology of Sufi Orders: Theory and Practice: Proceedings of the British-Bulgarian Workshop on Sufi Orders 19–23 May 2000, Sofia, Bulgaria*, eds. Antonina Zhelyazkova and Jorgen Nielsen (Sofia: IMIR, 2001), 567–81; Lyubimir Mikov, *Kultova arhitektura i izkustvo na heterodoksalnite myusulmani v Balgariya (XVI–XX vek) bektashi kazalbashi/alevii* (Sofiya: "Marin Drinov," 2005), 21–33, ff.

²⁷ Analysis of the importance of this newly accumulated evidence of Alevism and Bektāšism for these fields in Stoyanov, "On Some Parallels."

the claims and theories postulating a pre-Ottoman Slavonic Christian identity of the Balkan *Kızılbaş* and Bektāşī groups has endured into the post-Communist period, continuing to be exploited in fanciful and populist historiographies of the Balkans in the Ottoman period.

In the post-Communist period more recent reiterations and elaborations of the notions of the Slavo-Turkic heretical imaginary continue to resort to simplistic and outdated methodologies to accommodate the extant or newly made available evidence into a general preconceived model of a Christian Slavonic dualist (Bogomil) origin for Alevism. The proposed claims for and reconstructions of a Bogomil/Christian Slavonic dualist formative impact on Alevism in areas like organizational hierarchy, socio-political stances, angelology, diabolology, visionary mysticism and eschatology are on the whole either anachronistic or historically flawed and untenable.²⁸ Other attempts to identify and define medieval Christian Slavonic dualist (Bogomil) and Paulician layers (with alleged parallels to and resonances of late antique Gnosticism) in Alevism and Bektāşism have been further prejudiced employing very dubious methodologies and strategies (which have included the falsification of primary source material)²⁹ to blatantly implement obvious ideological and ethno-confessional agendas.

Following decades of stagnation of Alevi and Bektāşī religious and cultural traditions under the pressure of the aggressive secularism of the respective Eastern Bloc Communist regimes, the process of reclaiming Alevi and Bektāşī identities in the Orthodox-majority cultures in South-East Europe and in post-secular settings follows a distinctive dynamics. While newly exposed to local and transnationally coordinated Sunnification pressures and Twelver Twelver Shi'ite pro-active programmes, emanating from the Islamic Republic of Iran, both trends within these communities and in the post-Communist South-East European cultures in general continue to reimagine and rearticulate their identities in the framework of the Slavo-Turkic heretical imaginary. In some cases this occurs in the framework of a post-secular application of the so-called 'pre-continuity' approach,³⁰ (continuously utilized in the Balkans from the late nineteenth century onwards), in which a postulated pre-Ottoman

²⁸ Analysis and critique in Stoyanov, "Early and Recent Formulations," 268–72.

²⁹ See the analysis of such falsifications of original textual evidence in Hamza Aksut, Hasan Harmancı, and Ünsal Öztürk, *Alevi Tarih Yazımında Skandal* (Istanbul: Yurt Kitap Yayın, 2010), and Stoyanov, "Early and Recent Formulations," 271–2.

³⁰ Nathalie Clayer, "The Issue of the Conversion to Islam in the Restructuring of Albanian Politics and Identities," in *La perception de l'héritage ottoman dans les Balkans*, ed. Sylvie Gangoiff (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), 95–128 (discussing the case of Albanian Muslim identities – the distinct dynamics of the development of Bektāşism in late Ottoman and post-Ottoman Albania and its revival in the post-Communist period remains outside the scope of this article).

Slavonic heretical past becomes the basis for the re-legitimization of the identity of Slavonic- and even Albanian-speaking Muslim communities in South-East Europe.

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Ewelina Drzewiecka

Reception of the Bible in Modern Bulgarian Culture: The (Post)Secular and the National

KEYWORDS: Bible, modernity, postsecular, national, Bulgarian culture

ABSTRACT: The paper raises the question of the Bible's reception in modern Bulgarian literature and literary studies in the perspective of postsecular thought. The main question is interpreted with relation to the place of the Bible in the Orthodox cultural context, as well as the well-established autostereotype of Bulgarian literature as reflecting the pragmatism and religious indifference of Bulgarians. Focusing on the case of Nikolay Raynov's (1889–1954) blasphemous novel *Between desert and life* (1919) and the discussion on Pencho Slaveykov's (1866–1912) 'religiosity', the paper reveals the problems with both the notion of 'religious' within the framework of modernity and the pressing issue of the Bulgarians' (ir)religiosity from the point of view of national identity. In this context, the question of how Bulgarian literary studies are bound by the secularization narrative manifests itself as fundamental. The history of the interpretation of the 'religious' in literature seems to be a very good indicator of the Bulgarian path to modernity.

The Bible and modernity

As far as the Orthodox tradition is concerned, the specific value of the Bible is usually mentioned. Its message as the Holy Tradition is actualized in liturgy and iconography within the space of the temple, so knowledge of it is ritualistic. Other sources of knowledge are vernacular folk legends and popular readings, most of them transferred by the oral tradition. On the other hand, as Bulgarian texts from the period of the National Revival testify, the Bible itself

functions as a cult object, not as a book which is actually read.¹ This non-reading is caused not only by the low literacy of the population but also the fact that the Holy Scriptures are written in incomprehensible Church-Slavonic language. The complete modern and Orthodox Bulgarian translation of the Bible, uniting the faithful of the Orthodox Church, dates back only to 1925. Previously, the Holy Word was provided by Protestant translation, as well as by different foreign – and not always religious – works.

In the process of transition to the modern paradigm, the status of the Bible has changed. The text has started to function in two autonomous orders: religious and aesthetic. Secularization manifested itself in moving away from the original context and gaining knowledge in a new way through secular books, usually Western, i.e. written in the Catholic and Protestant cultural contexts. Two changes – in the social meaning of religion and in the relation between the ‘religious’ and the ‘secular’ – have become crucial.

In Bulgaria, the transition towards modernity was related to the National Revival and became a fact at the turn of the 20th century and especially in the inter-war period. Interest in the issue of religion was already evident in the context of the struggle for the independent Bulgarian church, but also within the experience of the activities of local Catholic and Protestant missions. The Enlightenment and positivist popular polemical and exegetical texts, including reinterpretations of evangelical history, were transplanted here through the Greek and Russian languages, and then German and French. For example, Ernest Renan’s famous book *The life of Jesus* (1863) was published in Bulgarian in 1893. Two years later, a second edition was published. A few important polemics against it were immediately translated as well. At the beginning of the 20th century, texts which by discussing the life of historic Jesus presented in fact teachings or theories beyond the orthodoxy were also translated, primarily the works of Leo Tolstoy and Henri Barbusse. Many new religious doctrines, freely using elements of Christian tradition, gained great popularity: the views of Tolstoy, Helena Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical Society (1875), Édouard Schuré, author of a famous study *Great initiates* (1889), and Rudolf Steiner, founder of the Anthroposophical Society (1913).

As a result, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a Bulgarian intellectual had access to two sources of knowledge about the Bible: the Orthodox liturgy and tradition (mainly orally transferred) and foreign, often non-orthodox, literature. The weaker the connection with the church rituals, the greater the influence of secular paraphrases. Interpretations of the Bible within

¹ Nikolay Aretov, “Paradoksalnata balgarska receptsiya na Bibliyata prez epohata na Vazrazhdaneto,” *Slavia Meridionalis*, no. 16 (2016). DOI: 10.11649/sm.2016.005.

the extra-liturgical context are simplified. This weaker connection also means mixing the folk tradition, still very vivid among intellectuals, and the cultural elite's reading, including critical reflection of the Protestant liberal exegesis and the materialist critique of religion. Finally, the Bible becomes a cultural text, freely quoted and reinterpreted beyond the authority of the Church; knowledge of it is originated and spread in the non-Orthodox cultural context.

The tension in perception of the Holy Scripture and the religious motives in literature was particularly evident in Bulgaria during the interwar period. A very good testimony is the case of Nikolay Raynov (1889–1954), a well-educated intellectual from the beginning of the 20th century. He was not only a writer and poet, but also an artist and scholar. He had a theological (orthodox) education, as well as an artistic one. After the Great War he popularized theosophy, giving lectures, translating texts and editing journals. He was influenced by the aesthetic ideas of Nikolay Roerich. In 1924, he established a theosophical lodge, "Orpheus," and five years later a Masonic lodge, "Percival." He was also the translator of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer into Bulgarian. In 1919, he published a scandalous novel *Between desert and life*. It was not only the first paraphrase of the Gospel narrative in modern Bulgarian literature, but also a fine example of this author's syncretic thought, and as a consequence the reason he was supposedly excommunicated from the Bulgarian Orthodox Church due to his blasphemous vision of the Mother of God as an adulteress, although he denied that he had created an image of a harlot. Arguing in the spirit of rationalism, he criticized the belief in the universal Church dogma of the virgin conception of Jesus (and the Catholic dogma of the immaculate conception of Mary), indicating that it ultimately leads to human inequality.

The novel *Between desert and life* (*Между пустинята и живота*) is a paraphrase in terms of both content and plot structure.² By creating a biography of an 'authentic' Jesus of Nazareth – a man of moral and spiritual perfection – it refers to the famous work of Renan. The main character, Yeshu bar Yosef, is an illegitimate child who grows up in an atmosphere of hatred and learns to live alone. However, having discovered his messianic identity, he decides to become publicly active. He falls into conflict with the elite of the Jewish people. His message is not properly understood, so he dies on the cross as the greatest blasphemer and criminal. Although there are many different images of Yeshu in the novel, representing different interpretations of Jesus

² Cf. Ewelina Drzewiecka, "Lyubovta e varhovna omraza". Transformacje pojęć chrześcijańskich w powieści Nikołaja Rajnowa 'Mezhdu pustinyata i zhivota,'" in *Chrześcijański Wschód i Zachód. Formy dialogu, wzory kultury, kody pamięci*, eds. Izabela Lis-Wielgosz and Wojciech Józwiak (Poznań: Instytut Filologii Słowiańskiej, 2012), 449–62.

(madman, bastard, prophet, rabbi, messiah, *Übermensch*, Son of God), in each case his divinity in the orthodox sense is negated. The rejection of the dogma of the Incarnation is not limited, however, to the claim about natural conception but is expressed above all in an indication that he was an unwanted and unloved son of sin. The denial of the other fundamental truth of Christian faith – the Resurrection – is not only a logical consequence of the first negation, but also leads to understanding of the crucifixion as a shameful and completely senseless death.

Analysis of the novel's reception, as well as of all of Raynov's works, shows that there were two different and mutually exclusive interpretations.³ Both of them, however, confirm the problem of a 'modern apocryphon' as a text which simultaneously functions religiously and aesthetically, and thus potentially suggests two styles of reading – allegorical and mimetic (in terms of Michał Głowiński⁴) – which are typical of literary critics and theologians (or Orthodox writers), respectively. In this case, both groups focused on the blasphemy, not the literary values of the novel. It is interesting that both groups overstepped their own competence and entered each other's field, which suggests that the distinction between the 'religious' and the 'secular', the 'orthodox' and the 'aesthetic', had not yet been established. The church circles discredited Raynov by referring to the ideal of science and arts, which in fact reveals the weakness of Christian apologetics as well as the presence of a modern (enlightenment-positivist) formation among Church readers.⁵ Here is a comment by an Orthodox deacon, Hristo Dimitrov:

[...] у българския поет – семинарист Библията се подхвърля на груби и жестоки нападки и насмешки. Защото Н. Р. е голям книжник буквояд, за да не бъде в състояние да ни разкрие великото значение на тая книга за съвременна духовна култура. Той е не по-малко повърхностен, за да не търси основите на християнския мироглед само в библейското богословие. Оттук неговата съвършена неспособност да отдели това, що има живо отношение към нашите мисли и идеали, към живото убеждение на съвременността, и което затова заслужава благоговение и запаза – от това, що съставя само проста окаменялост, преживени особици още на обичайно право и вярвания, които

³ For more, see Ewelina Drzewiecka, "Apokryficzne identyfikacje. O wartościowaniu autorskich parafraz biblijnych na przykładzie recepcji powieści Nikołaja Rajnowa 'Mezhdru pustynjata i zhivota,'" in *Konstrukcje i destrukcje tożsamości*. Vol. 3. *Narracja i pamięć*, eds. Ewa Golachowska and Anna Zielińska (Warszawa: SOW, 2014), 449–67.

⁴ Michał Głowiński, *Dzieło wobec odbiorcy. Szkice z komunikacji literackiej* (Kraków: Universitas, 1998).

⁵ Drzewiecka, "Apokryficzne identyfikacje."

са изработени от дозаконната история на еврейския народ и са свързани с обикновенния ход на историческото развитие.⁶

Subsequently, the novel was perceived literally as a false religious treatise or a poetic work which was in fact neither artistic nor original. This fundamental misunderstanding was due to the fact that the text was read according to the reader's worldview system. As Ivan Snegarov, a famous at that time Bulgarian Church writer and historian, claimed:

Българският враг на Богочеловека надмина и Волтер по волнодумство, и Ренена по натуралистична фантазия. [...] Н. Райнов се опитва да разклати вярата на милиони люде не чрез научни съображения и разсъдъчни изводи, а чрез... гавра.⁷

Literary critics also focused on the right to transgress tradition. Lyudmil Stoyanov, a famous modernist writer at that time, stated:

И като завършвам книгата на Николай Райнов, в която има все пак много красиви неща, достойни за безсмъртие, аз се питам – и питам ония, що умеят да чувстват дълбоко и правдиво – не е ли тя едно “едро” святотатство? В един минал век тя би била изгорена публично – днес тя ще вдигне само шум. И ще остане в числото на апокрифните книги, любима храна на духовните фанатици и жива вода за нищи-духове.⁸

⁶ “The Bible is exposed to great cruel attacks and mockery by the Bulgarian poet-seminarian. Because N. R. is a scrupulous expert in the law, he is not able to reveal to us the great meaning of this book for contemporary spiritual culture; he is no less superficial to seek the foundations of the Christian worldview only in biblical theology. Hence, his complete inability to separate what has vivid meaning for our thoughts and ideals, for the living view of modernity – and what for this reason deserves deep reverence and preservation – from what is only contained in mere petrification, the peculiarities still present from customary law and beliefs that developed in the pre-legal history of the Jewish people and are related to the normal movement of the historical development.” Hristo Dimitrov, “Nitsheansko-modernistka filosofiya v sveshtena kostyumirovka (Po povod novata kniga na N. Raynova – ‘Mezhdu pustinyata i zhivota’),” *Sila*, no. 41 (1919): 6.

⁷ “This Bulgarian enemy of God-man outperformed both Voltaire in bold speech, and Renan in a naturalistic fantasy. [...] N. Raynov tries to shake the faith of millions of people not by scientific considerations and conclusions, but by ... mockery.” Ivan Snegarov, “Nov opit za razrushenie na Hristovoto uchenie,” *Tsarkoven vestnik*, no. 7 (1919): 50.

⁸ “And when I finish the book of Nikolay Raynov, in which, despite everything, there are many beautiful things to be immortalized, I am asking – and I am asking those who know how to feel deeply and truly – is it not a ‘great’ sacrilege? In the past centuries, it would have been publicly burned, but today it will only raise a noise. And it will be included in the apocryphal books, the favorite nourishment of spiritual fanatics, the living water for the limited spirit.” Lyudmil Stoyanov, “‘Mezhdu pustinyata i zhivota’ ot Nikolay Raynov,” *Sila*, no. 38 (1919): 11.

Even those who defended the idea of an artistic transgression in general did not approve of Raynov's book. It turns out that this right belongs only to the greatest, and this writer was not considered as such.

The case of Nikolay Raynov shows not only the clash of the two orders of the functioning of the Bible in modern culture, but also problems in perception of literature which deals with biblical (or religious) motives, which in the artistic context function by various paraphrases, quotations and associations, so misunderstanding of the source is very probable. Both the source and the author's vision can be misunderstood due to the application of inadequate conceptual frameworks in the process of reading. As a result, decontextualization may occur at all stages of interpretation. Under the conditions of secularization of society, reading of the Bible and Bible-related literature is conducted mainly without basic theological preparation or even general knowledge about the Holy Scriptures; it is based mainly on the subject of the text, which is conceived through the prism of Western critical experience. The modern sources of knowledge are decontextualized quotations, allusions and paraphrases. This non-familiarity with the biblical source – this non-knowledge – is valid not just for writers but also literary critics. The question of reception and interpretation of the Bible, including the Bible in Bulgarian literature, refers to the way in which these phenomena are culturally perceived, which in fact raises the question of the relationship between the religious and the secular.

The Bible and the postsecular

The subject of my research is literary paraphrases of the Gospel story in the 20th and 21st centuries.⁹ The analysis was performed through the prism of postsecular thought, understood as a research perspective which aims to strengthen a serious yet non-reproductive and not quite orthodox reflection on the widely understood theological and religious issues. The starting point of such a broad reflection is the thesis of secularization established in the middle of the 20th century, according to which the processes of modernization and disenchantment of the world are mutually determined and therefore go in parallel. Postsecular thought disputes this claim by questioning the issue of the Enlightenment project itself as a liberation from the prejudices of tradition. Its non-orthodoxy consists, on the one hand, in questioning the well-established 'religious–secular' and 'transcendent–immanent' oppositions,

⁹ For more, see Ewelina Drzewiecka, *Herezja Judasza w kulturze (po)nowoczesnej* (Kraków: Universitas, 2016).

and on the other in reinterpreting religious tradition (especially Judaic and Christian) with semantically changed categories from the field of theology and philosophy.

In my research, I applied the deconstructional version of postsecular thought,¹⁰ which is based on the presumption that the religious/theological is at the foundation of even the most secularized treatment. This relates to Walter Benjamin's famous allegory that begins his study *On the concept of history* (1940) about a dwarf hidden beneath a table who secretly pulls the strings of a puppet. The postsecular deconstruction aims to decrypt the religious paradigms that define the horizon of modernity. In this sense, in bringing the opposition between the orthodoxy (i.e. compatibility with the source) and the heterodoxy (i.e. abandoning the source) up to date, literary adaptation of Biblical motifs is not only a paraphrase as defined in literary studies (in which it involves basic respect for the source meaning), it is also a paraphrase filtered through the philosophic approach stressed by Agata Bielik-Robson and becomes a personal interpretation of the canon that unveils further epistemological possibilities, as it manifests itself as a 'crypto-theological' message.¹¹

And so, analysis from this point of view draws attention to the cryptothological engagement of authors, researchers, as well as the 'local' experience of modernity. The exploration of these worldviews is particularly fruitful, although we are not talking about a consciously accepted and followed view or an ideological system, but about the 'theological' foundations behind them, which – according to postsecular thought – is understood through shifting of meanings. Once again, it must be emphasized that the understanding of religion is broad here: it is rather an omnipresent paradigm, a conceptualization that changes historically, and its notion reveals itself in opposition to the notion of secular. The 'religious–secular' opposition is contextual and discursive.¹²

Therefore, the second effect of postsecular deconstruction is a new look at the concepts of 'religious' and 'secular', which are defined and valorized according to the cultural context, as their binary opposition is constructive. The question is how and why different concepts and practices are classified as

¹⁰ For more, see Ewelina Drzewiecka, "Myśl postsekularna w badaniach slawistycznych. Próba spojrzenia," *Studia Litteraria Universitatis Jagellonicae Cracoviensis*, no. 9 (1) (2014): 29–44. DOI: 10.4467/20843933ST.14.003.3050.

¹¹ Agata Bielik-Robson, *Inna nowoczesność. Pytania o współczesną formułę duchowości* (Kraków: Universitas, 2000), 265–94; Agata Bielik-Robson, "Na pustyni." *Kryptoteologie późnej nowoczesności* (Kraków: Universitas, 2008).

¹² Michael W. Kaufmann, "The Religious, the Secular, and Literary Studies: Rethinking the Secularization Narrative in Histories of the Profession," *New Literary History*, no. 38 (4) (2007): 607–27. DOI: 10.1353/nlh.2008.0004.

secular or religious (and whether in secular literary studies there is resistance against the religious). Revealing the cultural context of the functionalization of the biblical motives and classifications of different ideas and practices as secular or religious became a key testimony of the cultural changes. This is the third result.

In the case of Bulgaria, several conclusions can be made regarding the functioning of the Bible in the conditions of modernity. In modern Bulgarian interpretations of the Gospel narrative, it is clear that from the three main paradigms of modern European culture – Judeo-Christian, Gnostic and Rationalist – the dualistic Gnostic tradition prevails. This Gnostic tradition, however, is interpreted superficially (selective) and in many cases leads to existential nihilism. According to the specifics of so-called everyday thinking (in terms of Teresa Hołówka¹³), writers actualize the biblical narrative impeccably, through simplifications and associations. They reproduce Western European or Russian models of interpretations, often in a way typical of popular culture – through repetition. Their adaptations of canonical and apocryphal motifs refer to heterodox ideas (artistic, philosophical or scientific) generated in the process of Enlightenment polemics with the Christian revelation and religion in general. In the end, knowledge of biblical (and church) tradition is gained through popular culture, although it always seems to be interpreted individually.¹⁴

The way the Biblical storyline functions reveals major changes in Bulgarian culture, so we can indeed talk about three historical periods: before 1944, after 1944 and after 1989. Until World War II, two types of ‘modern apocrypha’ emerged. The first, by using biblical motifs, suggested ideas which at first glance do not contradict theological thought and thus lead to dialogue with the Judeo-Christian tradition; however, on more careful reading, it often turns out to be under the influence of leftist thinking. Thus, this period was dominated by ‘apocrypha’ of the second type, which actualized Gnostic-dualistic thought, both in esoteric and socialist (and atheistic) variants. All of this shows not only that in the Bulgarian culture the biblical narrative was adapted to a heterologous order, but also that the atheistic and the gnostic way of conception of the world (represented by leftist and occult thought) were more and more influential.

During the communist regime, the usage of religious motives diminished, as the functionalization of the Judeo-Christian tradition had a rather polemical purpose and very often expressed Aesopian language or literary play.

¹³ Teresa Hołówka, *Myślenie potoczne. Heterogeniczność zdrowego rozsądku* (Warszawa: PIW, 1986).

¹⁴ For more, see Drzewiecka, *Herezja Judasza*.

Significantly increasing interest in the biblical storyline has been noticed since 1989, as the Bulgarian intertwining of postmodernism and post-totalitarianism has led to attempts both to revitalize the Christian sources of native culture and to deny a single axiological center. In general, the newest Bulgarian 'modern apocrypha' testify to a total alienation and a desire for liberation from the world of lies. At the same time, however, they show the implications of Gnostic thinking without the crucial ontological dualism, i.e. thinking based on overturned spiritual monism. Looking for an efficient strategy of survival in the only dimension, the material one, they concentrate on the relation between knowledge and power and the violence associated with them. All of the newest 'apocrypha' are modern parables of evil in which the main representative of the denounced 'great narrative' is the Christian church.

Another question is the matter of the status of these texts in Bulgarian culture. This relates to the well-established autostereotype of Bulgarian literature as "poor in regard to religious motives," realistic, and reflecting the supposed pragmatism and religious indifference of Bulgarians. It raises the question of the genesis and character of Bulgarian literary studies as a scientific field. The question of why the generation of key interwar intellectuals generally did not pay attention to religious themes is in fact about how they understood religion and the Bible in the area of literature (art). In this sense, their diagnoses of the Bulgarian identity should be read as symptoms of changes in Bulgarian culture. One may even say that the thesis of the Bulgarians' irreligiosity is, in general, an expression of the 'great narrative' of the secularization (or modernization) of Bulgarian culture. In this context, it is particularly interesting to know how researchers recognize these texts. What do they do with these interpretations?

My research showed that they often do not know the biblical tradition, although they deal with this issue as professionals, and they use in their reading different worldview definitions that lead to conceptual misunderstandings and superficial application of concepts. Their non-knowledge is also based on heterodox interpretations and depends on their personal, often popular, everyday understanding of the issues, on the specifics of their scientific field within which the main philosophical classifications function, and the 'religious-secular' opposition. This is precisely the case when revealing the cultural context of the classifications of different ideas and practices as secular or religious became a key testimony of the cultural changes.

In this regard, the general view on the novel *Between desert and life* is particularly meaningful. On the one hand, it is perceived as blasphemous, on the other as unsuccessful. Even the critical affirmation by Toncho Zhechev situates itself in the perspective of the question about the status of religious

transgressions. Although it was written after 1989, it actually was part of the interpretative framework of the communist period, when every polemical rise against the institution of church and religion was judged favorably. Here, anti-canonity is interpreted as a sign of spiritual search, the author's autonomous religious glow, which must be against fossilized dogmas. Zhechev's interpretations relate to the vision of great individuals who are by nature outside the institution because it limits them:

Но целия въпрос е в това, че има периоди в историята и културата, когато ценността на богоборческия дух е въвн от съмнение, проправя нов път към морално очистване и истинска, а не обредна вяра. В богоборци като Байрон, Ботев, Ницше, от чието коляно безспорно е Райнов, има много повече духовен огън, жажда за истинска вяра, нека кажем направо – религиозно горене, отколкото в князете на църквата, в църковните чиновници или кротките овчици. [...] И не от днес християнската църква въвн всичките си разклонения пренебрегва, губи свещения огън, който гори в душите на най-великите християнски мислители. Отлъчва ги от себе си, защото не канонически, а живо, с поведение и страст подражават на нашия Бог Исус Христос. [...] Голям и независим ум като Николай Райнов има право на свои [лични предпочитания – Е. Д.] и той е защитил това си право както е могъл, воювайки срещу мъртъвящите догмати, тревожно изразявайки собствената си духовна и религиозна жад.¹⁵

Although he explicitly identified himself with the Christian confession, Zhechev revealed a heterodox view of the essence of religious experience, while allowing the Church to lose the function of a depository of faith. In this way, he saw the iconoclastic narrative of Raynov as a testimony to his glorious struggle with the mystery of the Incarnation. However, a paradox is evident in this reading. On the one hand, Raynov's novel is described as 'moralizing'; on

¹⁵ "But the whole point is that there are periods in history and culture when the value of the God-Spirit is beyond doubt, thus making a new path to moral cleansing and true, not a ritual faith. In gods like Byron, Botev and Nietzsche (and Raynov undoubtedly comes from the same branch), there is much more spiritual fire, a thirst for true faith – let's say straight, a religious burning – than in the princes of the church, the church officials or the humble sheep. [...] Not only today does the Christian Church overlook all its branches, losing the sacred fire that burns in the souls of the greatest Christian thinkers which it threw away because they could not imitate our Lord Jesus Christ, not canonically, but vividly, with a particular behavior and passion. [...] A large and independent mind like Nikolay Raynov has a right to his [personal preference – Е. Д.] and he has defended this right as best he could by fighting the dead dogmas, worryingly expressing his own spiritual and religious thirst." Toncho Zhechev, "Neslyato i nerazdelno," *Kultura*, no. 19 (1994): 1–2.

the other as “the expression of the Bogomil’s spirit of negation,” which suggests that it actually has a nihilistic overtone, as it refers to the famous Bulgarian medieval dualistic heresy. It seems to be a consequence of Zhechev’s overinterpretation as a result of the omission (misunderstanding?) of the original message, which was deeply rooted in Theosophical thought. This is the way in which Zhechev’s reading is an example of an approach and semantic categories that are popular with Bulgarian literary critics in regard to the place of the biblical in Bulgarian literature. The issue of the place of the Bible in modern Bulgarian literature is closely related to the question of understanding the religious, which is closely related to the issue of Bulgarian cultural identity, or more precisely to the issue of how Bulgarian(ess) is seen by the intellectual elites.

The Bible and the national

The interest in the religious and biblical aspects of the modern literature is only visible in the 1920–1930s with regard to the discussion of the Bulgarian identity and its place in Europe. It is precisely in this context of the contradictory experience of modernization that the famous thesis of Boyan Penev – which is being repeated to this day, not only by a so-called ordinary Bulgarian but also by many intellectuals, including literary critics – should be understood.

С своя рационализъм и с практичността си той се спира на онези ценности, които произлизат от службата, семейството, отечеството, държавните и обществени задължения. В това се изразява неговия принципиален религиозен индиферентизъм. За него религията се свежда към обредност, а не към едно по-дълбоко настроение на душата. Религиозно съзнание, чувство на единство с абсолютното, с Бога не му е свойствено. [...] Отбелязаните особености на българската психика пластично изтъкват и в литературата.¹⁶

The analysis of three classical studies quoted to this day in this regard by Boyan Penev (“The basic features of our contemporary literature,” 1921), Georgi

¹⁶ “With his rationalism and practicality, he [the Bulgarian – E. D.] keeps those values that come from the service, the family, the fatherland, the state and the public duties. This is how his principle religious indifference is expressed. For him, religion is reduced to righteousness, not to a deeper mood of the soul. Religious consciousness, a sense of unity with the absolute – with God – is not his own. [...] The marked peculiarities of the Bulgarian psyche are also pointed out in the literature.” Boyan Penev, “Osnovni cherti na dnešnata ni literatura,” *Zlatorog*, no. 4–5 (1921): 241–2.

Konstantinov (“The religious spirit and the image of Jesus in the Bulgarian literature,” 1927)¹⁷ and Atanas Dalchev (“Religious feeling in Bulgarian poetry,” 1929),¹⁸ shows that the key is the understanding of “religious” and thus “religious art.” This is where significant internal inconsistencies and contradictions manifest themselves; they become interesting evidence of the overlapping of various conceptual layers in the process of Bulgarian modernization.¹⁹

For Penev, as the quotation above shows, religious consciousness is associated with a sense of unity with the absolute, with God. There is a question of mysticism, spiritual introspection, the need for metaphysical character, the search for universal morality; literature must document these by presenting a connection with the eternal. However, although he believed that Goethe’s model or the Polish romantics should be followed, he criticized writers who make first attempts in this respect as he saw them as non-original. On the one hand, he recognized that realism stems from the Bulgarian soul, on the other hand he resented the binding of Bulgarian artists to reality and the national identity.²⁰

Konstantinov started by defining religiosity as “a mental manifestation as a constant inclination to mystical deepening in order to seek the distant ethical and meaningful foundations of being.”²¹ He pointed out that Bulgarian literature is “alien to any mysticism of all religiosity,” but at the same time he claimed that “all of our old literature, which knows only religious and religious books, is not Bulgarian folk literature.”²² On the one hand, he complains that the Bulgarian is not religious, but crude and pragmatic; on the other hand, he praises the age of Bogomil, which is both an exception and an expression of original, native martyrdom and a search for existential truths. He admitted religious motives had emerged in the new literature, but they were “extremely dry and resinous”²³ and so reduced to purely public issues. In the end, however, he came to the conclusion that a Bulgarian religion exists, and it is expressed precisely in the original features of Bogomil: clarity, justice and severity.

¹⁷ Georgi Konstantinov, “Religiozen duh i obraz na Isusa v balgarskata literatura,” *Balgarska misal*, no. 7–8 (1927): 494–508.

¹⁸ Atanas Dalchev, “Religioznoto chuvstvo v balgarskata lirika,” *Filosofski pregled*, no. 4 (1929): 405–11.

¹⁹ Evelina Dzhevietska, “Za myastoto na bibleyskiya tekst v novata balgarska literatura. Receptsii – interpretatsii – predizvikatelstva,” *Literaturna misal*, no. 1 (2017): 3–26.

²⁰ Penev, “Osnovni cherti.”

²¹ Konstantinov, “Religiozen duh,” 494.

²² Konstantinov, “Religiozen duh,” 497–98.

²³ Konstantinov, “Religiozen duh,” 503.

Dalchev emphasizes that “religious experience is individual” and “the personal identity of the religious experience is a sign of its authenticity.”²⁴ The poet suggested there is a religious poetry, indicating the names of Dostoevsky and Rilke, but he also seems to say that the religious experience, when poetically expressed, is deliberate and loses its essence. In the end, Dalchev rejected the idea of the religious as a guarantor of the poetic, the instrumentalization of religious requisites, and aestheticization of the personal experience.

The various inconsequences and contradictions reveal the fact that two different dimensions of the modern experience overlap: the national and the universal. The first presupposes the cult of Bulgarian(ess) and the vision of art as an expression of the national/folk spirit. Subsequently, literature is perceived as authentic precisely when it expresses the national and thus affirms the national identity, i.e. performs a remedial function. That is why when criticizing Raynov’s novel *Between desert and life*, Konstantinov stressed that it “has very little religion in itself,” but also it “does not make any connection with the people’s soul.”²⁵ On the other hand, however, there is a general striving for the universal which implies a worship of the individual experience achieved in the sphere of the spiritual. In this regard, literature should be an expression of this experience, so it appears to be an answer to the universal human demand, and thus, according to Penev, it becomes ‘non-subjective’. That is why it must be sincere, ‘from the heart’, and ‘non-literary’ (according to Penev), ‘non-mannerist’ (according to Konstantinov) and ‘non-aesthetic’ (according to Dalchev). Then it gives testimony to the national spirit or personal experience and thus affects the reader. The element which connects the two orders turns out to be the category of ‘authenticity’, which in the first case means the native, the Bulgarian, and in the second, one’s own, the spiritual. Of course, the dream of authenticity is the leitmotif of modernity, but here the important issue is how it is transformed through the national prism.

The assessment of religious/biblical motifs in Bulgarian literature is subjected to the idea of the authenticity which is understood both as ‘non-aestheticized’ and ‘non-foreign’. The decisive criterion is the ‘Bulgarian(ess)’ – of course, perceived essentially as grounded on the achievements of the local National psychology. The literary work should be original in both senses of the word, without foreign influences (i.e. coming from the Spirit) and without secondary processing (i.e. being of the Heart). And precisely in this perspective, it is necessary to interpret the fact that Bulgarian biblical paraphrases or other works with religious motives are accused of being a copy of the foreign,

²⁴ Dalchev, “Religioznoto chuvstvo,” 405.

²⁵ Konstantinov, “Religiozen duh,” 508.

a secondary aestheticization and, subsequently, an artificial application in the native context.

The thesis that Bulgarian literature is non-religious (regardless of whether it is accepted positively or negatively) stems from the national-psychological perception of realism as a national trait (which itself is related to the National Revival image of literature), but it gains its power as a result of the clash with the modernist model – and more precisely with Polish Romanticism and the Russian Silver Age. It documents the cultural process of adopting European models, and even the idea of catching up.

The canon of Bulgarian literature obviously expresses ‘Bulgarian(ess)’ and that is why it is non-religious. However, this irreligiosity means only that religious motives do not function individually. The religious/biblical is not autonomous as it is above all a sign of national identity. This merging of religious identity with national identity is also a fact among the analyzed authors. In Penev’s interpretation, it can be noticed when the critic complains that the Bulgarian poet, even when dealing with religious motives, is bound by a particular notion of the Bulgarian people. Konstantinov stated this explicitly when commenting on the period of the so-called Turkish yoke and the National Revival.

This is also evident among the advocates of the thesis of the Bulgarian poet’s religiosity, originating mainly from church circles. Particularly interesting in this regard is an article by Archimandrite Evtimiy, “Are Bulgarian poets and writers religion deniers” (1942), in which the author’s analysis of different kinds of “negative attitude towards religion” leads to the conclusion that “in terms of a positive attitude towards the Christian faith of our people”²⁶ the first place is given to Todor Vlaykov, a village teacher and in fact an average writer who focused on the peoples’ problems. The criterion is the attitude to the subject, regardless of the meaning of the author’s gesture and the ideological dimension of the aestheticized religious motifs. The aim is to show that religion is present in Bulgarian literature, especially in a historical narrative, which proves its importance in the life of Bulgarians today. The pastoral perspective is fundamental, and the argumentation is based on double negation:

Един положителен отговор на този въпрос би бил твърде силен аргумент против църковната ни вяра и с възможността на такъв аргумент християнският апологет трябва постоянно да се съобразява. Едва ли обаче може да се

²⁶ Evtimiy, “Otritsateli na religiyata li sa balgarskite poeti i pisateli,” *Godishnik na Sofiyskiya universitet. Bogoslovski fakultet*, no. 19 (1942): 33–4.

оспорва, че дори и един повърхностен поглед върху новобългарската литература от гледна точка на този въпрос не може да намери никакви данни за положителен отговор на него.²⁷

Identifying religious identity with national identity serves to confirm the historical role of Christianity. Its artistic thematization has a pedagogical function. Literature must remain in close connection with the Church as a metonymy of the moral-religious worldview of the Bulgarians. In this way, even Church circles reduce religion to the national, ritual, natural, so the intellectualized ‘logos of the Greeks’ remain in the background. The people’s (i.e. folk) religiosity stands as a positively valued national religiosity.

The religious is characterized either as a folk religiosity or the religiosity of intellectuals, but in both cases this semantization is an act of the elites. The question of the instrumental usage of the religious/biblical is a common feature of the critics analyzed here as it is perceived as an obstacle to authenticity. In this perspective, it should be pointed out that the terms ‘the religious’ and ‘the secular’ are used to establish boundaries of different discursive contexts, as well as the identity of those who speak within their frameworks,²⁸ so the question of literary studies, which are both formed by the secularization narrative and play an important role in the development of this narrative, arises.

The paradox of Bulgarian literary studies is that, on the one hand, the thesis of the irreligiosity of Bulgarian literature is constantly repeated; on the other hand, the question about the nature of Bulgarian writers’ religiosity/worldview system is still being raised. This tension itself shows how the religious is understood and what the attitude towards it is. This is a mirror of modernization and identity problems. The change in the attitude towards religion and in its ideological understanding is even more noticeable in the history of the interpretation of the ‘religious’ of Bulgarian writers. Readings are selective and depend on extra-literary conditions. However, this is not only about the ideological commitment or the bias of critics – otherwise so clearly visible in the quote above – but about the conceptual horizon of the period, which testifies to profound changes in culture.

²⁷ “A positive answer to this question [whether Bulgarian writers are religion deniers – E. D.] would be a very strong argument against our Church belief, and the Christian apologist must constantly comply with the possibility of such an argument. It is hard to argue, however, that even a superficial glance at the new Bulgarian literature from the point of view of this question cannot find any evidence of a positive answer to it.” Evtimiy, “Otritsateli,” 3.

²⁸ Kaufmann, “The Religious.”

In this respect a very good example is the case of Pencho Slaveykov (1866–1912), one of the greatest Bulgarian modernist poets and a very well-educated representative of the cultural elite at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. He studied philosophy in Leipzig and then became a close co-worker with Dr. Krastyo Krastev, a famous Bulgarian intellectual and publisher, and even a director of the National Theater and the National Library in Sofia. He became an ideological leader of the writers gathered around the most important and influential modernist magazine, “Misal,” as his main aim was artistic and social modernization of Bulgarian culture. He was recognized as the father of Bulgarian poetry in his lifetime, but during the communist period, due to the negative attitude towards ‘bourgeois’ and ‘decadent’ modernism, he was moved to the background of the national canon. His worldview system, however, was always a subject of inquiry, which proves the importance of both the question of religion itself and the writer, who was perceived as an incarnation of the National character.

Analysis of the Bulgarian readings of the ‘religious’ in Slaveykov’s works reveals an interesting evolution of the meanings and key transformations in the role of ‘religion’ in the society.²⁹ There were two views in the interwar period, one of which was presented by Ivan Kolarov,³⁰ Atanas Dalchev (in his study mentioned above “Religious feeling in Bulgarian poetry” from 1929)³¹ and R. Rusev (in a short answer to a letter of a reader of “Filosofski pregled” from 1932).³² All of them saw Slaveykov as a man who is unbelieving, non-religious, although Ivan Kolarov interpreted it from the point of view of materialism and the other two interpreted it in relation to their philosophical and aesthetic views of art. Dalchev had a negative opinion about it:

Философски пантеизмът се отрича като религия. Не е трудно да се види, че и при нашите поети той не е от религиозно, а от естетично естество. “Богът в природата”, това значи: за тях природата е божествена, т.е. прекрасна и величествена. Одухотворяването на нещата е било винаги същност на поезията. Бог е в случая една метафора, един поетичен образ. Тоя Бог с невидимото крило – мигар той не е един ангел, който Славейков по погрешка взима за Бога? Вазов и Славейков не са религиозни натури. Когато Пенчо Славейков се спира отделно върху идеята за Бога, той го хваща като рожба на човешкото съзнание, сиреч измислица или илюзия (“Симфония на безнадеждността”).

²⁹ Evelina Dzhevietska, “Pencho Slaveykov i religiyata,” in *Pencho Slaveykov. 150 godini ot rozhdaniето mu*, ed. Miriyana Yanakieva (Sofiya: Boyan Penev, 2017), 244–58.

³⁰ Ivan Kolarov, *Filosofiyata i estetikata na Pencho Slaveykov* (Sofiya: Vitosha, 1914).

³¹ Dalchev, “Religioznoto chuvstvo.”

³² R. Rusev, “Pencho Slaveykov i hristiyanstvoto,” *Filosofski pregled*, no. 3 (1932): 290–1.

Безсмъртието поетът вижда в делото на човека и в паметта на потомството. Такива възгледи са невъзможни за едно религиозно съзнание.³³

The second view is typical of the Church writers who see Slaveykov and his famous epic poem “Bloody song” (“Karvava pesen”) as a covenant for the Bulgarian people – that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church should have self-esteem and concern for the people’s spirit. The approval is again subjected to the strategy of double negation: the writer who “by no means is godless or a man of indifference to the supreme questions of faith”³⁴ “cannot be declared a principal enemy of all the traditional and religious.”³⁵ In any case, however, the point of departure is religion, conceived as a traditional, doctrinal realization through the ecclesial cult and thus as part of Bulgarian society. The identification of religion with a particular vision of Christianity is still valid.

Interpretations from the Communist period referred to the same sense horizon. Religion, however, was identified not only with the Church, but also with theism in general. So, Slaveykov was proclaimed an atheist; sometimes his alleged monism, pantheism, or even rationalism was mentioned. When his Nietzscheanism was pointed out, it was only in regard to the philosopher’s famous attitude towards Christianity and mysticism.³⁶ In this perspective, all the modernist requisites and religious/biblical motives did not bother interpreters. For Stoyan Karolev, the figure of God was a symbol of the human ideal.³⁷ Ivan Sarandev explicitly stated that frequent speaking of God does not mean religiosity.³⁸ Anti-clericalism sounded particularly strong here. In this context, the poet’s negative opinion about the Russian church, as well as his refusal to adhere to the Church’s order concerning the repertoire of the National Theater, was also emphasized.³⁹

³³ “Philosophically, pantheism is denied as a religion; it is not difficult to see that even in our poetry it is not religious but aesthetic. ‘God in nature’ means that nature is divine to them, i.e. beautiful and majestic. The animation of things has always been the essence of poetry. God is in this case a metaphor, a poetic image. This God with the invisible wing, is he not the angel that Slaveykov mistakenly takes for God? Vazov and Slaveykov are not religious people. When Pencho Slaveykov stops occasionally on the idea of God, he sees him as a creation of human consciousness, as a fiction or an illusion (‘Symphony of hopelessness’). The poet sees immortality in the work of man and in the memory of his offspring. Such views are impossible for a religious consciousness.” Dalchev, “Religioznoto chuvstvo,” 407.

³⁴ Stefan Tsankov, “Balgarskata pravoslavna tsarkva ot osvobozhdenieto do nastoyashte vreme,” *Godishnik na Sofiyskiya universitet. Bogoslovski fakultet*, no. 16 (1939): 226.

³⁵ Evtimiy, “Otritsateli,” 20.

³⁶ Stoyan Karolev, *Zhretsat voyn*. Vol. 2 (Sofiya: Nauka i izkustvo, 1976), 148–50.

³⁷ Stoyan Karolev, *Zhretsat voyn*. Vol. 1 (Sofiya: Nauka i izkustvo, 1976), 94.

³⁸ Ivan Sarandev, *Pencho Slaveykov. Esteticheski i literaturno-kriticheski vazgledi* (Sofiya: Balgarski pisatel, 1977), 23.

³⁹ Karolev, *Zhretsat voyn*. Vol. 1, 95–9.

Interpretations after 1989 suggest a new approach. The analysis of religious motifs leads critics to the same problems, but the conclusion turns out to be different. The paradoxes of Slaveykov's 'creed' are established, but they do not seem to be a problem, so they are ignored. It is as if the connection with atheism and materialism imposed in the previous period was an even bigger reason to establish the presence of mysticism and religiosity in any form. The notion of religiosity is understood associatively; it has a meaning that is more rhetorical and impressive than concrete and essential.

Conclusion

The discussion of Pencho Slaveykov's 'religiosity', along with the case of Nikolay Raynov's 'transgressions', confirms two things: on the one hand, problems with the notion of the 'religious' within the framework of modernity; on the other, the pressing issue of the religiosity of Bulgarians, which should be solved by conclusions about writers as representatives of the nation. In this plan, the poet's reading becomes an argument and a symptom at the same time: an argument for or against traditional religion or religion in general – a symptom of changes in the meaning of the religious – as it turns out to be constantly recontextualized and polemical, and ultimately modern, which means related to modernity as the era of overturning the 'religious–secular' relationship. What is important, however, is that the very notion of religiosity remains crucial.

In this way, the controversial experience of the modernization and the alleged secularization of Bulgarian culture is revealed as being characterized by the transition to an individual, non-institutional attitude towards religion and by its lack of any connection to traditional cults. In the end, 'religion' becomes a 'basic concept' in the sense of Reinhart Koselleck,⁴⁰ referring rather to the vague idea of religiosity (in the Bulgarian case) as a sign of something positive and socially important, as an expression of (some) spirituality conceived as a guarantee for (some) morality, which is even more emphasized as it has the status of the main argument against the 'inconvenient' (auto) stereotype of religious indifference. That is how modern thinking about the 'religious–secular' opposition manifests itself. Based on the Protestant 'good–evil' opposition of religion, it favors religion which is invisible, fully absorbed, and in this sense safe to handle during the march towards the

⁴⁰ Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

progress of humanity;⁴¹ however, it is still present in human life as a sign of goodness in the sense of Enlightenment philosophy. Therefore, a key word in thinking about the religious in literature is 'spirituality', which is understood as the next stage of development, liberated from the superstition of dogmatic institutions.⁴² In this context, the question of how Bulgarian literary studies are bound by the secularization narrative is indeed fundamental and the thesis of Bulgarians' irreligiosity is particularly significant. The history of the interpretation of the 'religious' in literature seems to be a very good indicator of the Bulgarian path to modernity.

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⁴¹ Tracy Fessenden, "The Problem of the Postsecular," *American Literary History*, no. 1 (2014), 154–67, DOI: 10.1093/alh/ajt066; Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁴² Cf. Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton, NJ and Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2005); Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption*; Fessenden, "The Problem of the Postsecular."

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Unorthodox Experience of Faith in Ivan V. Lalić's and Miodrag Pavlović's Poetry: A Comparative Study

KEYWORDS: postsecular studies in literature, Serbian poetry, Lalić, Pavlović, unorthodox, experience

ABSTRACT: The paper aims to present two models of unorthodox Christianity-related religious experience in the poetry of two twentieth-century Serbian authors: Ivan V. Lalić (1931–1996) and Miodrag Pavlović (1928–2014). In their works, both poets reflect on the existential situation of contemporary humans by reinterpreting cultural texts from antiquity to modern times. This paper is a comparative analysis of their poems that refer to Christian texts, including the Bible as well as Byzantine and Orthodox literature. In Lalić's poetry, especially in the books *The letter/The writing* (*Pismo*, 1992) and *The four canons* (*Četiri kanona*, 1996), God is presented as capricious and unpredictable, yet silent and mostly absent. The lyrical subject feels doubt, enhanced by the experience of death and evanescence; nevertheless, love inspires him to constantly search for a relationship with God. However, the effort of faith seems to have only one direction and depends exclusively on the subject's will. Pavlović plays an ironic game in his works with Christian texts of culture, especially in the book *The bright and the dark holidays* (*Svetli i tamni praznici*, 1971), in which the sacred constantly mixes with the profane. The rebellious and blasphemous approach to Christian texts that is represented by the lyrical subject is not a mere negation of the traditional idea of holiness. Most of all, it can be understood as an attempt not only to overcome classical oppositions in thinking about the world and humanity, among which there is a dichotomy between the immanent and the transcendent, but it is also an attempt to rearrange the whole of reality. In poems by Lalić and Pavlović, modern consciousness is in throes with the experience of transcendence.

The subject of this paper is a comparative study of the poetry of Ivan V. Lalić (1931–1996) and Miodrag Pavlović (1928–2014) in a postsecular perspective. These two authors – two Serbian poets who published their first poems in the mid-1950s – have been chosen for this study because of their works' openness to such reflection. Namely, these two poets critically consider pre-modern narratives in a dialogue with Judeo-Christian and Orthodox texts of culture, as they explore questions of transcendence, the sacred, salvation, resurrection, prayer, and theodicy. Their poetry encourages postsecular thought precisely because of the coexisting questions of modernity and religion. If we agree that postsecularism – first as philosophical thought, then as a social phenomenon, and in the end as a way of interpreting artefacts of culture¹ – was a result of opposing the thesis of secularization,² which assumed that modernization is inevitably related to rejection of religious experience, then some significant pieces of Lalić's and Pavlović's poetry certainly belong to this paradigm.

In terms of the field of postsecular studies in Slavistics, as proposed by Ewelina Drzewiecka,³ the main subject of the following research is an interpretation of pieces of poetry as a record of unorthodox experience⁴ of faith expressed through paraphrases of religious codes, mostly as profanation, doubt, or polemic dialogue. Taking under consideration also the question of local modernity and its postcolonial context, it is important to emphasize that the works of Lalić and Pavlović represent the aim of overcoming the stereotypes that treat one culture as a prototype and another as a copy. They dispute the dichotomy between one culture being central and another peripheral by emphasizing the continuity between European culture and post-Byzantine, Orthodox, and Serbian culture. These authors undertake critical reflection on the religious tradition of their local backgrounds, but the game with texts and codes itself is part of the global tendency of modernity as a cultural and intellectual formation.

If we wish to use the word 'postsecular' with regards to the works of Lalić and Pavlović, we should take into account the characteristics of their poetry

¹ Karina Jarzyńska, "Postsekularyzm – wyzwanie dla teorii i historii literatury (rozpoznania wstępne)," *Teksty Drugie*, no. 1/2 (2012): 194.

² Ewelina Drzewiecka, "Myśl postsekularna w badaniach sławistycznych. Próba spojrzenia," *Studia Litteraria Universitatis Jagellonicae Cracoviensis*, no. 1 (2009): 31 and Jarzyńska, "Postsekularyzm," 194–5.

³ Drzewiecka, "Myśl postsekularna," 38–44.

⁴ The understanding of the term 'experience' here is anthropological and has been acquired from Michał Paweł Markowski, "Antropologia, humanizm, interpretacja," in *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy*, eds. Michał Paweł Markowski and Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Universitas, 2010), 149–50.

and specify the term accordingly. Firstly, it is important to emphasize that the experience behind their texts is rarely articulated explicitly in the manner of a direct confession. Therefore, while researching the postsecular elements of their poetry, we should focus above all on dialogues with various pre-texts,⁵ whose signs may not be present only as symbols and motives, but also in the use of specific language and genres. Reflection on the experience of faith in Lalić's and Pavlović's poetry has to be part of broader thought that concerns their relation to tradition as such. Considering that their works are based mainly on reinterpretation of existing cultural texts through an active and creative approach towards the cultural and literary heritage of Serbia, the Balkans and Europe, we will see quite clearly that their dispute with Christianity is an inherent part of their dialogue with tradition.

Secondly, while speaking of the cultural and literary context of postsecularism in Lalić's and Pavlović's poetry, we need to be aware of the specific situation of Orthodox Christianity in Serbian culture, where the post-Byzantine paradigm was continuously dominant until the Baroque period. It was not until the end of the 18th century that disputes emerged among Serbian intellectuals between the adherents to the Orthodox model of culture and those to the folk one. Both of these groups considered themselves representatives of the truly native culture and consequently opposed the 'foreign' occidental European tendencies that were supported by enthusiasts of the secular ideas of Enlightenment (such as Dositej Obradović). As a result of the disputes that took place in the 19th century, the folk model of culture became dominant.⁶ Thus, although Orthodox Christianity remained one of the crucial elements of the Serbian national ethos, Orthodox literature and art has been marginalized since then.

This historical context shows that through their critical dialogues with Christian texts of culture, Lalić and Pavlović not only explore the universal question of spiritual experience in a disenchanted world of modernity, disputing the secularization thesis, but they also enrich the local perspective. Namely, by developing the unorthodox attitude towards religious texts, the poets aim to rediscover vitality in some significant but forgotten parts of their own community's cultural heritage.

In the context of this study, another important question is if and how the poetry of Lalić and Pavlović may be related to postsecular literature as defined

⁵ I am using the term 'pre-text' in a similar way as Manfred Pfister does in Manfred Pfister, "Koncepcje intertekstualności," trans. Małgorzata Łukasiewicz, *Pamiętnik Literacki*, no. 4 (1991): 184–208.

⁶ Dorota Gil, "Tradycje serbskiej kultury – modele skodyfikowane i wykreowane," *Studia Literaria Universitatis Jagellonicae Cracoviensis*, no. 4 (2016): 176–8.

by John A. McClure in his work *Partial faiths*. As far as this author is concerned, the key characteristics of Anglo-Saxon postsecular fiction are that:

[...] the stories it tells trace the turn of secular-minded characters back toward the religious; [...] its ontological signature is a religiously inflected disruption of secular constructions of the real; and [...] its ideological signature is the rearticulation of a dramatically 'weakened' religiosity with secular, progressive values and projects.⁷

Considering Lalić's and Pavlović's poetry, it is difficult to talk about a turn back to a religious mode because the lyrical subjects in these poems seem to be very comfortable and familiar with Christian codes, which may suppose that they have never fully left the religious paradigm to become 'secular-minded' non-believers. The ontological condition of the worlds presented in this poetry is not by definition secular either, so there is little room for the religiously driven interruptions of a profane reality. However, what can be found in Lalić's and Pavlović's works is a rebellious attitude towards a well-known but 'weakened' religious tradition which, with regards to contemporary human experience, needs to be modified and enriched in order to regain its authenticity.

Lalić and Pavlović, each in their own way, argued with Christianity in their poetry, combining two different tendencies. On one hand, their literary reflection on religious experience implies that it is impossible to liberate oneself from the problems of transcendence because they are a key to the most important questions of humans. On the other hand, the critical, ironic, and even irreverent attitude towards religious codes suggests that the poets consider the traditional ways of religion to be archaic and inadequate in terms of the experience of a modern subject, therefore they are making efforts to rearticulate and revive the questions of transcendence. Both of these tendencies might be interpreted as postsecular.

Ivan V. Lalić

The two last books of poetry by Ivan V. Lalić entitled *The letter / The writing* (*Pismo*, 1992) and *The four canons* (*Četiri kanona*, 1996), especially the latter, are a record of a human being struggling with transcendence. In these books, God is unpredictable and distant while the subject experiences evil and searches for a remedy by trying to form a relation with the divine.

⁷ John A. McClure, *Partial Faiths. Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 3.

Most explicitly, the doubts of the contemporary ‘partial believer’ (to paraphrase John A. McClure’s term) in *The four canons* are present in the motif of ‘the book’, meaning the Bible. Namely, the lyrical subject repeatedly quotes the Bible, but always with a subtle hint of incredulity or in circumstances that make the text illegible and hard to understand: “I moli za me, neka mi oprosti strah moj / Što me, kaže mi knjiga, po svome satvori liku,”⁸ “Gospod je velik ratnik, ime mu je Gospod, kaže knjiga, / Tako nečitka u ovoj poznoj svetlosti [...]”⁹

Apart from intertextuality based on the Bible, the polemical dialogue here is also visible in the genre. Namely, this book of poetry is a modern reinterpretation of a canon – a genre of Byzantine literature, developed, among others, by St. John of Damascus. Typically a canon contains biblical themes and praises of God, but it is articulated ironically by a doubting lyrical ‘I’:

Gospod rastavlja i opet sastavlja stvari
Izrecive i čulne: on lomi, kida i spaja,
Lemuje, lepi, zavaruje, stapa bez šava
Kad mu se prohte: talase mora, na primer.
I čini da iznemogli opašu se snagom.¹⁰

God (compared to a gardener or a nurse in this particular poem) acts in the world in the way that his omnipotence allows him to: he creates and destroys, he gives and takes away, and he does it all ‘whenever he wants’. This quote is a good example of the subject’s attitude towards God. On one hand, the speaker honestly admires and worships the divine figure, but on the other he feels harmed and resigned as he is unable to understand God’s reasons.

The characteristics of God in *The four canons* are therefore arbitrary omnipotence on one hand and absence and indifference on the other, thus making him an unfriendly being who is impossible to understand. Struggling with doubt, the subject speaks to God, constantly asking himself if he is actually having a dialogue or a monologue. Faith in Lalić’s last books is always

⁸ Ivan V. Lalić, “Kanon prvi 4,” in Ivan V. Lalić, *Strasna mera, Dela Ivana V. Lalića*, vol. III (Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, 1997), 187: “And pray for me, my fear may he forgive / he who created me in his image, says the book” (all poetry quotations are translated into English by the author of the paper).

⁹ Lalić, “Kanon prvi 1,” 181: “The Lord is a man of war, the lord is his name, says the book / so illegible in this late light.”

¹⁰ Lalić, “Kanon prvi 3,” 185: “The Lord brings things together and divides them again / All that is explicit or sensual: he breaks, he tears, he combines, / he bends, he glues, he welds, he merges without a stitch / Whenever he wants to: the sea waves, for example / And the exhausted he dresses in strength.”

preceded by a question, by a certain kind of 'if', even though the 'if' may be sometimes quiet and barely audible:

[...] kad treba, viči, kad treba, zavapi,
Bez obzira na lošu akustiku; onaj koji te sluša
(Ako te sluša) očistiće smetnje na vezama.¹¹

The subject's experience that makes him 'call out' to God is of both an individual and collective nature. The former is existential horror, expressed in images of dark places, the realm of night, shadows, emptiness, and insomnia.¹² This state is probably the result of the disturbing consciousness reflected in many of Lalić's poems, mostly in the last period, like in the *Ten sonnets for the unborn daughter* (*Deset soneta nerođenoj kćeri*) cycle, the poem *The loneliest time* (*Nikada samlji*) from the book *The letter*, and earlier, for example in the cycle entitled *The acts of love or Byzantium* (*O delima ljubavi ili Vizantija*), in which the lyrical 'I' remains constantly between the existent and the non-existent world. The subject is certain that every existing thing that lives and develops is condemned to destruction and there is no escape from vanishing.

The collective unrest appears in poems in which the subject refers to a tragic experience in history. A good example are the references to the Holocaust and the atomic bombing in World War II in poem number 7 in every canon. The pre-text of these poems is the biblical story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were sentenced to death in a burning furnace by King Nebuchadnezzar because they refused to bow down to a golden statue he had made (Book of Daniel, chapter 3). Lalić paraphrases this story, comparing the biblical furnace to ovens in Nazi death camps and the heat to the mushroom cloud after an atomic explosion, giving the biblical text a whole new horrifying dimension:

U vreloj peći trojica su;
Sedrah, Misah i Avdenago:
Tri svežnja dobro uvezana,
Za ništavilo tri paketa [...]
Tri Jevrejina i anđeo:
Drukčije no u Majdaneku...

¹¹ Lalić, "Kanon prvi 6," 190: "[...] shout when you're in need, cry out when you're in need / Regardless of bad acoustics, the one who is listening / (if he's listening) will clear the noises on the line."

¹² The theme of insomnia, as the state of both horror and openness to epiphany is also developed in *The letter*, for example in the poem *Glory to insomnia* (*Pohvala nesanice*).

No parabola izbavljenja
Upornija je od nesreće [...]¹³

In the last canon, the above lines develop into a very precise comparison:

Vavilonska peć je igračka naspram peći
Moćnih logorskih krematorija, gde je, sem toga,
Anđelima pristup bio onemogućen; a plamen,
Ubica carevih slugu, plamen je šibice, naspram
Jarosti žara što zrači iz megatonske gljive...¹⁴

In *The four canons* the subject persistently strives to form a relation with God, looking for a remedy to the tragic experience, but his questions remain unanswered. A positive figure in this book though, is the Holy Mother, who is the opposite of a distant and silent God and at the same time a mediator between people and God. Love for her is a relief for the subject, saving him from the horror of believing in an omnipotent, mysterious God whose intentions are unknown. The prayers to Holy Mother, found mostly in the last verses of each poem, sustain the subject's aim for love and faith, despite his tragic experience. She also plays a similar role in the book *The letter*, for example in the poem *John's of Damascus whisper* (*Šapat Jovana Damaskina*).

As we can see, in Lalić's late poetry there are significant modifications to the Christian code, but they are not a deconstruction. In his vision, God is distant and alien, but he exists. The subject's doubts concern not the question of God's existence, but whether he is here and if he is interested in the fate of humans. Lalić's poems are an expression of his rebellious attitude to God's omnipotence and indifference, but the figure of God itself belongs to the traditional Christian beliefs.

Miodrag Pavlović

Miodrag Pavlović enters the dialogue with religious texts in a significantly different way. In the book *The bright and the dark holidays* (*Svetli i tamni*

¹³ Lalić, "Kanon prvi 7," 192: "In a hot furnace there are three; / Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego: / Three bundles tied up well, / Three packages for nothingness [...] Three Jews and an angel: / Nothing like in Majdanek... / But the parable of salvation / Is more persistent than a disaster [...]"

¹⁴ Lalić, "Kanon četvrti 7," 249: "The furnace of Babylon is a toy compared to furnaces / Of powerful camp crematories, where / Angels were not allowed anyway; and the flame, / That killed the king's servants, was the flame of a match compared / To the fury of fire coming from the atomic mushroom cloud..."

praznici, 1971) the poet deconstructs traditional oppositions related to religion such as sacred–profane, transcendence–immanence, spirit–body. As Karina Jarzyńska noted, “the simplest way to deconstruct the religious is profanation, which in the literary field means putting the above elements in a comic, grotesque, or vulgar register.”¹⁵ This statement can also be related to Pavlović’s book, due to the fact that profanation is a significant part of its poetics.

In many poems from this book, the signs of the religious code are evoked as part of grotesque visions. The many examples of this include the poems *The book about the sacrament* (*Knjiga o sakramentu*), in which the meeting space with the sacred is a toilet, *The last dinner* (*Poslednji obed*), where The Last Supper is transposed into a vision of a consumerist paradise, *The poet is rising from the dirt* (*Pesnik ustaje iz zemlje*), in which The Universal Resurrection is carnivalized, or *As soon as the lid is lowered* (*Čim se poklopac spusti*), a parody of Christian beliefs related to life after death.

Speaking of carnivalization, we should mention an important characteristic of the world to which Pavlović invites his reader in *The bright and the dark holidays* (the title itself suggests the gnostic provenience of the poet’s vision), which is the upside-down world figure. In the first poem of this book, entitled *A praise of the opposite* (*Slava naličja*), light, whose traditional image is related to truth (including the truth of religion), is presented as a hostile power that mocks humans and is violent to them. All this takes place in a world without morality in which human beings are condemned to loneliness and separation from their past:

I kad odlazi svetlost nam se ruga.
Ko će na prozoru da me drži
i da se brine za moj vid?
U kojoj dubini svoda sinjeg
možemo otkopati oca,
iza koliko bregova da nađemo druga?¹⁶

In some poems the upside-down world appears also in a special sense, like in the poem *The last dinner*, in which the collective subject is positioned ‘upside down’, with the sky below and the grave above.

¹⁵ Jarzyńska, “Postsekularizam,” 304.

¹⁶ Miodrag Pavlović, *Svetli i tamni praznici* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1971), 7: “And light is mocking with us as it flees. / Who is going to hold me by the window / and take care of my sight? / In a profound dome of sons / where can we unbury a father, / behind how many mountains can we find a friend?”

In Pavlović's world, morality is also inverted. In some poems, like *One more martyr* (*Još jedan mučenik*) or *The return of the prodigal son* (*Povratak poročnog sina*), there is a theme of injustice that is experienced by people who follow moral rules, while villains remain satisfied and unpunished. According to a Serbian interpreter of Pavlović's poetry, and also a poet, Ljubomir Simović, this vision proves the author's disapproval of the fact that the idea of transcendence had been abandoned by the people, which resulted in their moral decline. Referring to this, Simović argues that Pavlović's works indicate a demand that people should recover the idea of transcendence in order to save themselves.¹⁷

This idea is difficult to agree with, considering that Pavlović constantly refers in his works to the situation of contemporary humans who have been torn away from the old world order, which suggests that the poet does not seek a way back to transcendence in a pre-modern sense. I think it would be more reasonable to understand Pavlović's goal of transcendence as, like Blumenberg would say, "the transfer of the infinity to finiteness,"¹⁸ which according to Agata Bielik-Robson leads to a precognition of "the rich immanence."¹⁹ Once liberated from God, the ideal being who possesses exclusive rights to real existence, it might be problematic to expect his return. What can be expected though is that the world would become enriched. In this vision, everything that belonged to the realm of infinity and transcendence and everything that is finite and immanent comes together in a common universe – one world. The claim that the world is one of the most important categories in Pavlović's poetry can be proven by a poem entitled *Silouan* (*Silouan*). Its main character, an orthodox monk of Athos mountain,²⁰ first doubts God, saying the words "Boga niet, niet, niet!";²¹ then he experiences sacrifice and transformation which results in a new, positive message: "svet, svet, svet!"²²

The idea of the world's reorganization appears mostly in the poems in which revelations, the words of prophets, and ultimately the arrival of the Messiah, contrast with a cut-and-dried world order. These are, for example, *Learn the song* (*Naučite pjesan*), *The birth* (*Rođenje*), and the triptych

¹⁷ Ljubomir Simović, "Bitka na granici nestajanja (predgovor)," in Miodrag Pavlović, *Velika Skitija i druge pesme*, ed. Ljubomir Simović (Beograd: Srpska književna zadruga, 1972), XIII–XIV.

¹⁸ Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 47, after Agata Bielik-Robson, "Literackie kryptoteologie nowoczesności, czyli o pierwszeństwie świata," *Wielogłos*, no. 2 (2015): 20.

¹⁹ Bielik-Robson, "Literackie kryptoteologie nowoczesności," 20: "immanencja bogata."

²⁰ Silouan the Athonite.

²¹ Pavlović, *Svetli i tamni praznici*, 33: "There is no, no, no God!"

²² Pavlović, *Svetli i tamni praznici*, 33: "The world, the world, the world!"

Poems about the water (Pesme o vodi). In these poems the sacred and the transcendent appear as 'cracks' in reality, as hints or miracles that violate the binding metaphysical laws, and they become a starting point for a revolutionary transformation of the whole reality, including not only people, but also nature, culture, and civilization. A good example here is the poem *The birth*, a paraphrase of a biblical story about the birth of Jesus:

Jaganci s brda pozdravljaju brata,
konji na morskoj obali ržu
jer kraljevi idu peške po pesku
sa mirtom u ruci
i hramovi se dovikuju kroz mrak;
ne znaju više gde su.
U cvetu koji se neprekidno širi
nad zemljom ko jarko kopno
svako sad traži novi stan.²³

This description of chaos and change as the initial reaction of the whole world to the birth of Christ might be the author's conclusion to the process described by Michał Warchala as "killing God by modernity," which means "opening the way for the new spirituality."²⁴ In this perspective it does not seem likely that the poet is demanding that the world is reenchanting in terms of returning it to the state from before disenchantment; it is rather a call for the world and humanity to move forward and rearrange in a new situation. Taking this into consideration, we may notice that Pavlović's poetry fits in with the postsecular problem of *the death of God*, which is, according to Hegel (and referred to by Bielik-Robson) a precondition of suppressing religion in philosophy, as a "constant reflection on God who has left, and the disappearance of simple, direct transcendence."²⁵ This, according to the postsecular

²³ Pavlović, *Svetli i tamni praznici*, 84: "Lambs hail their brother from a hill, / horses nicker on a sea shore, / because kings go walking on the sand / with holly in their hands / and temples call one another through the dark; / they do not know where they are anymore. / In a flower that constantly diffuses / upon the earth like a burning land / everyone is now looking for a new home."

²⁴ Michał Warchala, "Co to jest postsekularyzm. (Subiektywna) próba opisu," *Krytyka Polityczna*, no. 13 (2007): 179: "Uśmiercenie Boga przez nowoczesność jest więc otwarciem drogi ku nowej duchowości."

²⁵ Agata Bielik-Robson, "Deus otiosus: ślad, widmo, karzeł," in *Deus otiosus. Nowoczesność w perspektywie postsekularnej*, ed. Agata Bielik-Robson and Maciej A. Sosnowski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2013), 8: "[dla Hegla] 'śmierć Boga' to warunek konieczny zniesienia religii w filozofii, jaką w swoich wczesnych pismach teologicznych nazywa wprost 'spekulatywnym Wielkim Piątkiem' a więc nieustanną refleksją nad odejściem Boga, nad zanikiem prostej bezpośredniej transcendencji."

approach, means that pre-modern religiosity needs to be replaced by more progressive, ambiguous forms of experiencing spirituality.

Conclusions

In this study of selected postsecular themes in Ivan V. Lalić's and Miodrag Pavlović's poetry, I have presented two models of unorthodox experience of faith. The first, represented by Lalić, is a skeptical dialogue with the religious code of Orthodox Christianity in which the doubting lyrical subject discusses the traditional image of God. The unpredictability, capriciousness, and silence of God make the subject uncertain and rebellious, and faith cannot be a calming remedy to these problems. The other model, represented by Pavlović, starts with a deconstruction of the religious code and its traditional oppositions that results in a reorganization of reality, a new spirituality, and a changing of the ways of understanding the world.

Both poets could be therefore linked to the tendencies of postsecularism, which are, as John A. McClure defined it, "a mode of being and seeing that is at once critical of secular constructions of reality and of dogmatic religiosity."²⁶ The appearance of such ideas in these two poets' works proves that reflection regarding the situation of modern humans, who are shaped by the project of the Enlightenment and their later disappointment in it, was present in the Serbian poetry of the second half of the twentieth century and resulted in some original concepts.

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²⁶ McClure, *Partial Faiths*, IX.

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The Secular, the Sacral, and the Three Stages of the Postsecular in Russian Literature: The Past and the Present

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ABSTRACT: This article deals with the general problems of the secular and postsecular, but mainly with the specific features of Russian cultural and literary development characterized by the conception of the pre–post effect (the imperfect imitation of Western models that leads to new artistic revelations) and by unfinished secularization, the consequence of which is the permanent presence of sacral elements. In Russian literature, there are three stages of postsecularism that are related to romanticism, modernism and postmodernism; these are demonstrated on the examples of two case studies (Bondarev, Vodolazkin). The general characteristics of Russian postsecularism are closely related to the typical Russian unfinishedness, incompleteness and openness, thus indicating a new development potential that leads to new poetics and constituted artifacts.

The problems of postsecularism have been dealt with many times since the 1990s, but most intensively since the beginning of this century. The most respected conception is that of Jürgen Habermas (born 1929), mainly due to the popularity of its author, a famous German neo-Marxist philosopher who is well-known for his theory of communication, modernist discourse, and analysis of the recent stages of contemporary capitalism and the normative models of democracy today.¹ Habermas's study of postsecular society has become

¹ *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, 1981; *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*, 1985; *Legitimationsprobleme im Spätkapitalismus*, 1973; *Die Normalität einer Berliner Republik*, 1997.

the most popular,² although there are a few others that were more elaborate and inventive.³ Some researchers speak of “partial faiths,” but we should rather speak of the permanently re-established religious *Weltanschauung*.

The specific situation of Slavonic literature generally relates to the history of Slavonic nations in the West, South, and East that led to the specific attitude toward the problems of the sacral and secular in literature. There were several turning points. The original cradle of European civilization in the Mediterranean was split into two halves after the East–West Schism in 1054. Subsequently, the invasions of various nomadic tribes (the Mongolian–Tartar occupation of Eastern Europe and The Ottoman Empire in the Balkans) resulted in disintegrated and detached religious institutions – the Latin Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church – which solved problems in different ways. While in the West and partly also in the South, the Slavs adopted the processes of the Reformation, the East only tried to reform the church. Moreover, literature as such had a sacral character not only in the Middle Ages, but also much later, practically up to the 17th or even the 18th century. The total or partial absence of the Renaissance, Humanism, Mannerism and the Reformation was interrupted by the Baroque style and poetics that covered nearly all of Europe from the extreme East over to the extreme West – as a synthetic style which, of course, strengthened the restored sacral elements in the arts and literature.⁴

The anniversary of the Reformation last year evoked a cluster of questions and reflections related to the problem of the whole epoch of which the Reformation is just a part. This cluster of questions, which contains all the epochal currents from the Renaissance to Rococo and Neoclassicism, surfaced differently in the West and in the East. Let us identify South-East Europe with East-Central Europe (Ostmitteleuropa). Although the term ‘Westmitteleuropa’ is not very frequently used, its range is barely identifiable or, at least, its boundaries are rather vague. We find the decisive solution in the book *Literature of*

² Jürgen Habermas, “Secularism’s Crisis of Faith: Notes on Post-Secular Society.” *New Perspectives Quarterly*, no. 25 (2008): 17–29.

³ See, for example, Manav Ratti, *The Postsecular Imagination: Postcolonialism, Religion, and Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013); Jolyon Agar, *Post-Secularism, Realism and Utopia: Transcendence and Immanence from Hegel to Bloch* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014); John A. McClure, *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007); Aleksandr Morozov, “Has the Postsecular Age Begun?” *Religion, State & Society*, no. 36 (2008): 39–44.

⁴ See the anthology of European Baroque poetry composed by the Czech literary critic and scholar Václav Černý, *Kéž hoří popel můj* (Praha: Mladá Fronta, 1967), which also covers the East-Slavonic poetic production.

the Slavs,⁵ first published many years ago by a Czech slavist, Frank Wollman (1888–1969), who thought of the Mediterranean as the cradle of all European civilization that goes back to the old civilizations and cultures of the Far, Middle and Near East, with an outpost in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. The division into the West and the East was regarded as a mere innovation in terms of the split of the Roman Empire into the Pax Romana and Pax Orthodoxa: the Western Roman Empire later transformed into the Holy Roman Empire, the split was further completed by ‘the German nation’, and the Byzantine Empire unraveled in 1453. Unfortunately, the contemporary denomination of the West and East in Europe refers to the Cold War and the Iron Curtain policy after the Second World War.

Nevertheless, we should admit that this division has a real core: it was a comparatively long process of splitting that began from the division of the Roman Empire into two halves; later, the East-West Schism of the Church and various historical events determined the development of many European areas. Considered as more than just a religious movement, the Reformation’s complex holistic character did not appear everywhere in Europe, even though it was a complicated process of a global attack, a prolonged impact on politics, economics, culture, arts and literature. Thus, the fluent evolution of arts and literature, for example in the Eastern part of Europe, reminds us more of an imperfect imitation – like a torn net of currents, absent or present only as a tiny spring or a streamlet of meanings.

The specific development of Slavonic literatures led me to the conception of the so-called pre–post effect. This concerns more the Eastern Slavs, among them more Russians than Ukrainians or Byelorussians, and Southern Slavs, at least Bulgarians, Macedonians and Serbs. The pre–post effect consists in the imperfect imitation of Western models. The history of so-called Western Europe was a complicated process and there is hardly any parallel which might correspond to the contemporary understanding of the East and the West. Although the Reformation sometimes appeared as a phenomenon leading to the disintegration of the hitherto existing universal structures of European thought, it actually led to the contrary: a new attempt to restore and renovate the former unity of thought, thus forming a unified cultural and artistic whole, albeit by the gradual interiorization and desacralization of religion that began the secularization processes. Thus, the absence of the Reformation as

⁵ Frank Wollman, *Slovesnost Slovanů* (Praha: Vesmír, 1928), reedited: Frank Wollman, *Slovesnost Slovanů*, eds. Ivo Pospíšil and Miloš Zelenka (Brno: Tribun EU, 2012), German translation: Frank Wollman, *Literatur der Slawen*, eds. Reinhard Ibler and Ivo Pospíšil, trans. Kristina Kallert (Bern: Peter Lang Verlag, 2003).

a complicated trans-religious society-wide process is mirrored in Russian culture by the unfinished process of secularization of Russian literature.

Russian literature as such went through three stages of postsecular development because Russian process of secularization was realized in a less complex manner; this can be demonstrated, for example, on the case of the Russian novel. The permanent postsecular return to the sacral kernel of arts and literature could be exemplified by the development of Romanticist currents, Leo Tolstoy's theory, or the Russian Silver Age (modernism). Though the state was officially secularized, the Old Church Slavonic language as a sign of sacral literature with elements of East-Slavonic dialects existed until postmodern times both in Russian everyday communication and in *belles-lettres*. Suffice to consider Yuri Bondarev, born 1924, and his novel *The Bermuda Triangle* (*Бермудский треугольник*, 1999), or Evgeny Vodolazkin, born 1964, and his novel *Laurel* (*Лавр*, 2013).

Let us return to the investigation of the specimens of each stage in Russian literature. However, the differences between the sacral and the secular and postsecular started not suddenly, but gradually from the mid-1950s. We can even state that the specific unfinished secularization of Russian literature lends its character to the postsecular phase. Russian literature has never lost its sacral character, so each stage of its development is a circle containing both sacral and secular elements.

The first stage between the sacral and the secular in Russian literature is related to the beginnings of Neoclassicism and Enlightenment in the 18th century. Thus, the singular stages of the development of Russian thought refer not to criticism of religion, but only to the separation of the state and the Church.

The period of Peter the Great was characterized by utilitarianism and mercantilism adopted from French and English environment. Ivan Tikhonovich Pososhkov (1652–1726), who was imprisoned and died in 1725 in the famous Petropavlovsk fortress, expresses in his book *The book of poverty and wealth* the significance of Russian merchants as the starting point of the Russian Third Estate.

In Russian literature, the 18th century and the first third of the 19th century is characterized by sentimentalism, pre-Romanticism and Romanticism. These partly revolted against the Christian religion and the Orthodox Church, but the poetry of Vasily Zhukovsky and older Pushkin returned to religion.

The roots of the unfinished Russian secularization were caused by the problems of Russian incompleteness and unfinishedness (the Decembrists, Russian terrorism, the problem of the First Russian Revolution 1905–1907), which turned out to be the initial stage of the revitalized sacralization of Russian thought – the second step of Russian postsecularism. Many identify

the post-revolutionary stage with the postsecularist stage, among others the famous collection of essays *Milestones* (Bexu, 1909). The unfinished realization of political doctrines are reflected in the books of Leon Trotsky and Lev Davidovich Bronstein *The revolution betrayed* (1936) and Isaac Deutscher *The unfinished revolution: Russia 1917–1967* (1967).

One attempt to reform the Russian economy was undertaken by Pyotr Arkadyevich Stolypin (1862–1911) with his parliamentary and gradual agrarian reform that was cut short by his assassination. The unfinished secularization of Russian literature is widely known, especially in representative Russian novels. In the 20th century, there were three waves of postsecular thought: Russian modernism, especially after 1907, then the period of thaw under Communism and Russian postmodernism. The surprising postsecular return to religious thought retained the lasting development potential of Russian culture because of the pre–post effect that supports the openness and unfinishedness of the whole political and cultural process. The future of Russian thought promises new interesting combinations and further openings for development.

The period of Russian postmodernism in the 1980s and 1990s brought some other examples of postsecularism. In the majority of his dystopian literary artifacts, Vladimir Sorokin (born 1955) demonstrates the problems of the absence of faith in the postmodernist world, e.g. *Marina's thirtieth love* (*Тридцатая любовь Марины*, published 1995), *The novel* (*Роман*, 1994), *The blue fat* (*Голубое сало*, 1999), *Telluria* (2013), the “ice trilogy” (ледяная трилогия): *Ice*, *Way bro*, *23000* (2005) and *Manaraga* (*Манарага*, 2017).

Viktor Olegovich Pelevin (born 1962) dealt with the problems of faith from the very beginning of his literary career. In 1989, Pelevin started to work for the journal “Science and Religion” (“Наука и религия”), in which he dealt with Eastern mysticism. His first short story was called *The magician Ignat and men* (*Колдун Игнат и люди*, 1989). Some of Pelevin’s short stories and the majority of his essays manifest an inclination to religious feelings, presenting the human world as a space of the supernatural, mysterious, and uncognizable (e.g. *Palmistry on the runes for a runic oracle of Ralph Bloom* [*Гадание на рунах или Рунический оракул Ральфа Блума*, 1990]; *Ultima Tuleev* [*Ultima Тулеев, или Дао выборов*, 1996]; or *Underground heaven* [*Подземное небо*, 2001]). This is also partly true of his poetry *Elegy* (*Элегия*, 2003) and nearly all his novels, like *Omon Ra* (*Омон Ра*, 1992), *The life of insects* (*Из жизни насекомых*, 1993) – with its evident nod to Čapek’s play *From the life of the insects* – *Čaparev and Emptiness/Void* (*Чанаев и Пустота*, 1996), *Generation “П”* (1999), *The sacral book of werewolf* (*Священная книга оборотня*, 2004), *Empire V* (2006), *Batman Apollo* (*Бэтман Аполло*, 2013), *iPhuck 10* (2017).

One striking specimen of the postsecularism in Russian literature towards the end of the 1990s is Yuri Bondarev's novel, *The Bermuda Triangle*, which is a strange mixture of communist conviction and a permanent return to Russian Orthodox traditions.⁶

Yuri Bondarev (born 1924 in Orsk) became famous for his novellas (повести) on war: *The youth of the commanders* (*Юность командиров*, 1956), *The battalions ask for fire* (*Батальоны просят огня*, 1957) and *The last salvos* (*Последние залпы*, 1961). He became even more popular with his prose works that criticize the cult of Stalin's personality: *The silence* (*Тишина*, 1962) and *The relatives* (*Родственники*, 1969), with its frequently quoted depictions of Stalin's burial. Later, Bondarev was a sharp critic of the Soviet artistic elite, that is, in his novels *Choice* (*Выбор*, 1980) and *A game* (*Игра*, 1985), both of which anticipated the *perestroika* and *glasnost*.⁷ Both novels stem from the criticism of intellectual disillusion, describing the Brezhnev era writers and the Soviet gilded youth. This is the beginning of Bondarev's later criticism of *perestroika* intellectuals who gravitated towards all things Western and capitalist. Bondarev opposed Russia under Yeltsin. The former described Moscow as a ghostly Western metropolis reminiscent of Los Angeles in which the Russian elements were gradually disappearing. Bondarev uses the story of a traditional Russian painter, his family and friends as the background of the suppression of the 1991 Soviet August Coup, which is still a taboo subject in the mass media. As a Russian communist, Bondarev paradoxically searches for the roots of Russia as a nation in religion, Christian faith and the Orthodox church. Bondarev stratifies his language strictly axiologically. Foreigners, mainly Americans and Russian gilded youth who benefit from the wild and massive privatization, speak a degraded language of new Russians and corruptible journalists, whereas those who defend the Russian national traditions – a peculiar blend of Soviet and religious roots – speak a solemn language pervaded by the strata of Old Church Slavonic. The third language is that of the members of the OMON security troops. To the very end, *The Bermuda Triangle* is a novel-tragedy.

⁶ Yurii Bondarev, *Biermudskii trieygolnik* (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 2000). See also Ivo Pospíšil, "Žánrová struktura a emblematicnost apokalyptického románu Jurije Bondareva Bermudský trojúhelník a souvislosti," *Slavica Litteraria*, no. 5 (X) (2002): 53–62; Ivo Pospíšil, "Jurij Bondarev a jeho Bermudský trojúhelník (Recenze z ukázkami)," *Alternativa Plus*, no. 3–4 (2002): 38–43; Ivo Pospíšil, "Jazyk literárního díla jako axiologický nástroj: román Jurije Bondareva Bermudský trojúhelník (K životnímu jubileu prof. Jána Doruly)," in *Život slova v dejinách a jazykových vzťahoch. Na sedemdesiatiny profesora Jána Dorulu*, ed. Peter Žeňuch (Bratislava: Slavistický kabinet SAV, 2003), 265–78.

⁷ See: Ivo Pospíšil, *Spálená křídla: malý průvodce po české recepci ruské prózy 70. a 80. let 20. století* (Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 1998).

The auctorial narrator can depict even the most drastic scenes in a calm manner that avoids gore and vulgarity. The people demonstrating against Yeltsin speak in quite a different way than the vulgar members of the OMON troops, using words that refer to the religious world, God, good and evil, and apply a modernized form of Old Church Slavonic, regarded even in modern Russian as something dignified, noble and sublime:

– Господи, спаси и сохрани от живота, – послышалось тягостное, вперемежку со вздохами бормотание, и пожилой мужчина в стареньком плаще, с белым, как высушенная кость, лицом, вытянув морщинистую шею, страдальчески сплюнул под ногу, как если бы его выворачивало рвотой. – Это я язву уговариваю, себе говорю... Язва, Господи спаси, разыгралась, – договорил он, обтирая позеленевший рот. – Двенадцатиперстная... так вот. Я пулеметчиком воевал... Ежели бы... Ежели бы со мной был родной мой ДП, я бы ни одного диска... я бы этих... а бы ни одного диска целым не оставил, – сказал он, отдышавшись, – Убийц убивать надо... Смерть за смерть. Как на войне... / - Ма-алчать, сучье отродье! – Плоскогрудый вскочил, стукнулся головой о потолок машины, выматерился, озлобляясь, взмахнул дубинкой. – Это кто – убийцы? Кто? Вы – убийцы! Это ваши сучьи снайперы гробили милиционеров! Ишь ты, убийцы, ишь ты!⁸

The language of the auctorial narrator connects all the language strata like the omniscient narrator of Leo Tolstoy, whose distanced and aestheticizing view is expressed by the restrained language:

Теперь Москва не была прежней доперестроечной столицей, большим, не очень шумным, не очень нарядным городом, простым, теплым, близким скромной, несовершенной красотой. И тогда невозможно было подумывать, что наступит время, когда старый солидный город родит ощущение размалеванной, с накладными ресницами дурочки, вылезшей из “мерседеса” на панель, в поддельных алмазах и синтетических мехах. Все изменилось

⁸ “God, save me from this stomach,” there was some heavy mumbling mixed with sighs and an older man in a threadbare cloak, face white like a bone, extended his wrinkled neck and martyrously spat under his feet, as if to vomit. “I curse this ulcer,” he explained, “dear Jesus, how this ulcer hurts again.” He finished his sentence wiping his green lips. “In the duodenum... and so. In the war I had a machine gun... If... if only I had my rifle... no belt ... I would... I would not spare any belt,” he said catching his breath. “Murderers should be killed. Death for death. As in the war...” / “Shut up, motherfucker!” The policeman with a flat chest raised himself, hit his head against the ceiling of the car, cursed, and angrily swung his club. “Who are these murderers? Who? You are the murderers! It was your bloody snipers who killed the policemen! Look, murderers, you see.” Bondarev, *Biermudskii triougolnik*, 5.

в Москве после распада Союза, произошло, казалось, великое переселение народов, подобно средним векам. Площади, улицы, проспекты, перекрестки забиты миллионами машин различных марок мира, повсюду образовывались непробиваемые пробки, создавая огромное железное тело, бессмысленно и слитно работающее розогретыми моторами. Весь город торговал, по-азиатски шумел, кричал маленькими базарами, в проходах метро спекулянты торговали с рук, стояли ряды инвалидов и нищих, детей, весь город был сплошь застроен палатками и палаточками, откуда полновластными хозяевами выглядывали смуглые лица, на тротуарах заставленных лотками и навесными зонтами, небритые парни и потрепанные девицы предлагали апельсины и бананы, в ларьках призывали к соблазну этикетки виски, джина ... В последние годы бросалось Андрею в глаза и непривычное изменение в одежде – в женском одеянии появилась бесстыдная открытость ног и бедер или брючная маскулинизация, мода, подхваченная из американских фильмов, из телевизионной рекламы, в мужской одежде господствовало среднее между джинсами, ночной пижамой с лампасами и расписанной чужестранными девизами спортивной курткой. И как-то изменились лица на улицах, в троллейбусах, в трамваях, стали редкими бывшая столичная любезность, отзывчивость, улыбки, смех, случайно завязавшийся разговор. Было заметно: в метро все тупо смотрели перед собой, сидели с каменным выражением, прохожие шли и бежали по тротуарам, не видя друг друга, а встретясь на миг взглядами, отводили глаза, похоже, боясь нежданного грубого слова, оскорбления, наглого приставания, напуганные прессой и телевидением, уличными убийствами. Что-то больное, противоестественное, угнездившееся в городе, порождало безнадежность, замкнутость душ, одичание, страх. И порой странно было Андрею подумать, что Москва еще оставалась центром России, столицей не так давно могущественной державы, этот древний русский город сорока сороков, ныне обращенный в колониальную окраину, увешанную безвкусной мишурой фальшивого, никому неизвестного праздника.⁹

⁹ “Moscow was no more the former capital it was before perestroika – the large, neither noisy nor pretty city, but simple, warm, and with its own modest, imperfect beauty. Even then one could not imagine a time when the sturdy old city would appear as if a moron in make-up that walks out of a Mercedes to a brothel with fake eye lashes, false diamonds, and counterfeit furs. Everything changed in Moscow after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, as if there happened a medieval migration period. Millions of cars of all the brands in the world clogged the squares, streets, alleyways, and crossroads only to create a gigantic iron body, unnecessarily bred by red-hot engines. All the city did business with Asian-like noise and cried on uncountable small bazaars, profiteers traded in the subway passages crowded with invalids, beggars, and children, big and little tents occupied the whole city and dark faces glanced from them domineeringly on the passersby, unshaven boys and scruffy girls offered oranges and bananas on the pavements full

Of course, Bondarev's axiological use of language in *The Bermuda Triangle* is extreme, as is his black-and-white vision of the world, even despite the seemingly attractive link between the two traditions that may become part of Russian official policy: the Tsarist tradition and the principles of the former Soviet life.

The recent developments in Russian literature in the first third of the 21st century also represent a new postsecularism: a teleological return to the authentic medieval Christian tradition of the 'unhistorical novel', which understands time as a fluent current undivided into artificial historical periods. The Middle Ages and the contemporary world form an overarching unity of human lives and actions.

In my view, Evgeniy Vodolazkin (born 1964) responds to the tendency of recent prose works toward the so-called virtual authenticity¹⁰ represented by Vladimir Sorokin in Russian, Michal Viewegh in Czech and Viliam Klimáček in Slovak literature. All three combine avant-garde and postmodernist approaches as a background for the categories of the grotesque and the absurd.¹¹

of stands and umbrellas, the kiosks tempted with bottles of whiskey and gin.... Andrei noticed a recent change in clothes – women presented an obscene transparency of legs and hips or wore masculinizing trousers – a fashion borrowed from American films and TV ads, while men's fashion was dominated by something between jeans, striped pajamas, and sports jackets adorned with foreign inscriptions. / And the faces have somehow changed in the streets, on trolleybuses and trams; now, you only very rarely met the former kindness typical of the capital, the amicability, the smiles, the laughter, and accidental conversation. People on the subway stared dully without focus, they sat with straight faces and no eye contact, fearing aggressive insults and banditry, scared of the street murders by the press and TV. Something sick and pathological haunted the city, it bred hopelessness, loneliness of the soul, brutality, and fear. Andrei sometimes wondered why Moscow remains the center of Russia, not so long ago the capital of a global superpower, this eternal Russian city of countless churches was now turned into a colonial periphery adorned with vulgar trinkets of an unknown feast." Bondarev, *Biermudskii triuegolnik*, 113–114.

¹⁰ See: Ivo Pospíšil, "Proza virtuální autenticity a existenciálního znejištění," *Sborník prací filozofické fakulty brněnské univerzity (SPFFBU, Slavica Litteraria)*, no. 10 (X) (2007): 5–20; Ivo Pospíšil, "Trivialita a hledání virtuální autenticity jako nového dialogu," in *Dialog kultur IV. Sborník příspěvků z mezinárodní vědecké konference pořádané ve spolupráci se Slavistickou společností Franka Wollmana při FF MU v Brně a Českou asociací rusistů. Hradec Králové 23.-24. 1. 2007*, ed. Oldřich Richterek (Ústí nad Orlicí: Oftis, 2007), 21–7; Ivo Pospíšil, "Na hranici fikce a nonfikce: virtuální autenticita a tvorba Arnošta Vašíčka," in *Almanach NITRA 2013*, eds. Jozef Vladár and Natália Muránska (Nitra: Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre, 2014), 135–41.

¹¹ See: Ivo Pospíšil, "Český kvázipostmoderní román: poetizace automatismu a zrození 'nového člověka' (*Případ nevěrné Kláry Michala Viewegha*)," in *Retoriki na pametta. Yubileen sborník v chest na 60-godishninata na profesor Ivan Pavlov. Fakultet po slavyanski filologii, kat-edra po slavyanski literaturi*, eds. Boyan Biolchev, Valeri Stefanov, Kalina Bachneva, Panayot Karagiozov, and Janko Bachvarov (Sofiya: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Ohridski," 2005), 498–504; Ivo Pospíšil, "*Lekce tvůrčího psaní a kvázipostmodernistická poetika Michala*

Uncertainty and ambivalence are the elementary features of the poetics of virtual authenticity. The new Russian prose represented by Vodolazkin opposes these trends by looking for the revitalization of the phenomenon of Russian culture. Vodolazkin is a philologist, a specialist in old Russian literature and a medievalist; his work balances between fact and fiction. The fascinating novel *The laurel* expresses Vodolazkin's conception of the "unhistorical novel" ("неисторический роман"). The story in *The laurel* goes back to the 15th and the 16th centuries to depict the life of a boy who becomes a natural spiritual healer – a hermit with extraordinary spiritual abilities. The link between the medieval and contemporary world is the main feature of Vodolazkin's novel.

Recently, Vodolazkin published another novel, *Aviator*, based on the miraculous story of a political prisoner who became an object of medical experiments involving the impregnation of his body with a liquid which preserved all vital functions, and after many years the man revives. He was thought to have died after the October Revolution and awakes during the Yeltsin regime. The novel mixes various attitudes and thematic elements with a dominant existential symbol: the aviator through the ages.

The various stages of postsecularism in Russian literature represent a very specific and interesting example that reflects the unique role of the unfinishedness of Russian literary artifacts as its dominant feature. The postsecularism enables the literary artifacts to preserve the openness that was accessible to other approaches and attitudes: open to multistratified returns to religiousness, enriched by the stages of a secular vision of the world.

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Xavier Galmiche

Metaphysical Yearning – A Czech Tradition

KEYWORDS: alternative spirituality, Czech culture, Czech literature, religiosity, Catholicism

ABSTRACT: This paper intends to give a wide panorama of alternative spirituality as a basic feature of modern Czech culture. Although the image of Czechia as the most dechristianized country in Europe is very popular, this must be considered a stereotype. Despite the fact that secularization of Czech society and culture has been a long-term process, the metaphysical thirst which could be manifested in the culture has not been eradicated. Instead, it has been redirected towards new forms of searching for transcendence. A fundamental episode of this reflection on religiosity took place in around 1900, when opportunities for spirituality beyond confession (any confession, not only the Catholic one) were considered and the role of Churches was questioned. It was also the time when original experiments were performed by artists in order to synthesize different spiritual ideas (e.g. František Bílek's 'mystical syncretism'). The author of this article argues that there is an 'underground river' of Catholicism in the relationship one can have with the sacred in everyday life. Analyzing different examples of literary works, he shows how Czech writers are rooted in spiritual tradition, even those who are not associated with this idea (e.g. Karel Čapek). Other examples of 'classical' Czech authors are also given in the text demonstrating how sensitive they were to spirituality and transcendence. Although such writers as Vítězslav Nezval reduced or marginalized spirituality, this tendency was balanced by artists who manifested their metaphysical needs (e.g. Vladimír Holan and his 'metaphysical existentialism'). Different forms of spiritual experiences can be observed throughout the 20th century in Czech literature and they find echoes in the works of authors of the neo-avant-garde, for example in the post-baroque writing of Bohumil Hrabal.

De-christianisation and the underground river of catholicism

The image of Czechia as ‘the most de-christianized’ European country has long been smugly brandished by hasty amateurs of psycho-sociology. However, this highly biased stereotype does not stand up to analysis. Obviously, Czech culture self-identifies largely by the process of secularization, in which it recognizes the principles of Protestantism, taken broadly, and those of its own variety, in particular Hussitism, a fact it has emphasized since the times of the Czech National Revival. Czech society is thus an emblematic object of the study of de-christianization, viewed as a process affecting political, social and cultural dimensions.

Nevertheless, this critical culture (with its distrust of clericalism, the tradition of ‘micro-churches’ [if not sects] and its inclination towards the debate on the faculties of the human mind [namely faith, psyche and reason]), rather than erasing metaphysical yearnings, has merely realigned them with the pursuit of truth: it has not allowed itself to forget that, in the face of mystery, reason ought to be humble. A crucial passage for this form of thought was played out in the intellectual history of the so-called ‘fin-de-siècle’ by means of a debate on the possibility of spirituality without a religious denomination: in this period of fundamental questioning of the legitimacy of Churches to interfere in decisions of political powers, there are numerous examples of original experiments dedicated to producing a synthesis of the spiritual. One example can be found in the development of ‘mystical syncretism’, whereby František Bilek, spurred on by his discovery of French Édouard Schuré’s work, *The great initiates*, published in 1889, became its most recognized representative in Bohemia. Czech culture had modernized wellsprings of gullibility and bad faith without cutting off its access to sources of the spirit, the universal spirit; it is not its least paradox that its anti-dogmatism contributed to a growth, albeit glossed over, of inner spirituality and an awareness of the sacred.

Spirituality as an underground river

We can therefore bring up to date a continuity of a spiritual and religious reference in what can be called ‘the underground river of Catholicism’, understood as a repository of images and motifs illustrating a connection to the sacred in everyday life. A little-considered example among the canonical authors can doubtlessly be found in the work of Karel Čapek. We could consider the moral virtues enacted in his great novels with political connotations

(an appeal to altruism in *War with the newts* [*Válka s mloky*], for instance), but here we will invoke his books for children. In *Nine fairy tales* (*Devatero pohádek*), a traditional, supernatural universe (a village, an inn, a farm with animals, fairies, ghosts, goblins and genies, etc.) is condemned by the modern world. Ponds inhabited by undines are disturbed by modern works (*The water-sprite's tale*); rusalkas will try their luck at becoming Hollywood starlets (*The great doctor's tale*). Today, we are highly familiar (perhaps, too familiar) with this sort of demystification, but in the 1920s it was a complete novelty. A resumption of the ancient recipe of the burlesque (placing noble characters in commonplace and ludicrous situations), also in the specific field of fairy tales, was a fashion in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century: suffice to consider Oscar Wilde's *The Canterville ghost*, published in 1897, a depiction of an American family who settle in a haunted castle and, far from being frightened by the ghost, enter into a humorous and congenial relationship with their host. Like many other Czechs, Čapek cultivated a familiarity with the reticent and utilitarian thought of the English-speaking world. A relationship to a belief which is both fatalist as well as nostalgic with respect to the supernatural characterizes Karel Čapek's skeptical modernism; we discover this in his didactic texts (in *R.U.R*, *Rossum's Universal Robots*, from 1921, or in his 1936 *War with the newts*), which are precociously anti-totalitarian and adherent to lay virtues such as politeness and kindness to strangers. Transmission of such values by a religion to which one no longer subscribes, but whose legacy is to be preserved, is rendered through language, replete with biblical and evangelic references and expressions, most notably in the category of swearwords.

A good illustration of the phenomenon is *The mailman's tale* (*Pohádka pošťácká*), in which the protagonist, the mailman Kolbaba, embodies the figure of a lay saint: he devotes a year of work to finding the addressee of a wrongly addressed love letter and, thus, enables the sentiment of the lovers to continue. The postal service, dedicated to communication of the human kind, appears to be a modern avatar of the compassion of the Gospels, and the story offers a representation of a world where beings and objects experience a mutual empathy: Frantík, the author of the wrongly addressed letter, drives a wonderful Bugatti, but it steers clear of going fast, since it is miserable:

“No jo,” řekl pan Kolbaba, “však pročpak vám taková krásná bugatka tak pomalu a smutně jede?”

“Protože ji řídí smutný šofér,” pravil truchlivě černý pán.

“Aha,” děl pan Kolbaba. “Račte dovolit, vašnosti, proč vlastně je ten pan šofér tak smutný?”

“Protože nedostal odpověď na psaníčko, které dal na poštu před rokem a dnem.”¹

In key moments of the narrative, the author draws on a storehouse of popular expressions from the realm of faith, particularly more or less taboo swear-words. When mister Kolbaba discovers the addressee of the misplaced letter, she is miserable due to the year-long wait and contemplates dying:

“Pozdravbůh, slečno Mařenko,” zavolal pan Kolbaba. “To si šijete svatební šatičky?”

“Ba ne,” pravila smutně slečna Mařenka, “to já si šiju rubáš do rakvičky.”

“Ale, ale,” řekl soucitně pan Kolbaba, “jejej, jejdanečky, jeminkote, jemináčku, jezuskote, snad to nebude tak zlé? Copak vy, slečno, marodíte?”²

We interpret the recurrent borrowings as a sign of Čapek’s awareness of ensuring the transmission of Christian morality by means of stories evoking his contemporary, secularized world. A children’s book is one of the principle carriers of this sort of transmission.

A persistence: Vítězslav Nezval versus Vladimír Holan

There are many more examples of Czech authors who became national classics, providing throughout the 20th century – beginning with the foundation of Czechoslovakia – illustrations of the sort of persistence of spiritual yearning at the heart of a culture that seems to have found one of its constitutive elements in a secularization pushed as far as possible. One could, for instance, highlight a concomitance of opposing approaches in two Modernisms – those of Vítězslav Nezval and of Vladimír Holan. Vítězslav Nezval in his work,

¹ “Ah, yes!” mister Kolbaba consented. “And why then is she going so slowly and so sadly, the beautiful Bugatti?” / “Because she is being driven by a sad driver,” a man dressed in black explained gloomily. “Oh, well,” mister Kolbaba said. “Pardon my asking, but why is her driver just so sad?” / “Because he never received a response to a letter he sent a year and one day ago,” the man in black replied. Karel Čapek, *Cinq contes pas comme les autres*, trans. Xavier Galmiche, illustrated by Josef Čapek (Nantes: Memo, 2017), 83.

² “A very good morning to you, Miss Mařenka,” cried mister Kolbaba. “Is it your wedding dress that you are sewing?” / “By Jove, no!” Miss Mařenka replied dejectedly. “It is rather a linen cloth I am making for my tomb.” “Wow, wow, wow,” mister Kolbaba sympathetically replied. “In the name of baby Jesus, the chalice, the host, the tabernacle, why so grave? Are you ill, my dear?” Čapek, *Cinq contes pas comme les autres*, 86.

Modern trends in poetry (later titled *MBS*)³ – an anthology of great authors of Western modernity in poetry prefaced by an analytic presentation of these trends – addresses the issue of what he terms an ‘idealism’ proper to the Symbolist school, and his analysis is a systematic de-valorization of a metaphysical residue transmitted by poetry. Following a method inspired by historical dialectics, he writes:

Since, nowadays, we are aware of the achievements of modern psychology, of psychoanalysis, we are capable of understanding ‘the nature of Symbolism in a much more precise and a much more scientific manner’ than the Symbolists themselves. The symbol is a reality, unconscious in nature, veiled in an image. The Symbolists, who were partisan to an idealist philosophy, believed that the symbol is an idea veiled in an image. Many of them have actually sought to express ideas veiled in images, thoughts they often regarded as being highly elevated and metaphysical. ... Nowadays, we do not consider the most interesting characteristic of Symbolists to consist in the ideas they pursued. Nowadays, we value their symbols not for their idealist aspect, but for [their] richness of evocation.⁴

For Nezval, poetic evolution is the long march of incremental emancipation of imagination from the straitjacket of logical thought, including that of idealism, which makes it possible to cast fresh light on those ideas of poets of old “regarded as being highly elevated and metaphysical.” This operation of cleansing – indeed, a recovery of the evocative force of Symbolism at the cost of its spiritual program – at times has a semblance of facile provocation, whereby Modernism, the avant-garde poet and the left-wing bohemian deride outdated, elitist and reactionary ideas. Thus the ‘classical’ modernist doctrine, represented in the Czech context, among other theorists, by Nezval, construed

³ Vítězslav Nezval, *Moderní básnické směry* (first edition: 1937) (Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1984).

⁴ “Symbolismus není v své podstatě ničím jiným než snahou uplatnit v poezii fantazijní výraz. [...] Mallarmé podle svého vlastního přiznání klade vedle sebe básnické obrazy jako broušené klenoty, mezi jejichž fasetami má neustále prýštit světelná hra paprsků. V jedné své básni v próze popisuje jízdu na jezeře, při níž pronásleduje básník jakýsi zvláštní šelest, který se zdá být šelestem ženských šatů [...] Symbol není skutečnost, je to jen její znak. [...] Jsme-li si dnes vědomi výsledků moderní psychoanalytické vědy, psychoanalýzy, dovedeme pochopit podstatu symbolu přesněji, vědeckěji, než to dovedli symbolisté. Symbol je obraz zahalená skutečnost nevědomého rázu. Symbolisté, kteří však byli stoupcem idealistické filozofie, domnívali se, že symbol je v obraz zahalená myšlenka. Mnozí z nich skutečně se snažili vyjádřit obrazem zahalené, mnohdy podle jejich mínění vznešené a metafyzické myšlenky. [...] Dnes už nevidíme na symbolistech jako nejcennější vlastnost jejich díla mylenky, které sledovali. Dnes si ceníme na jejich symbolech nikoliv už jejich idealistické stránky, nýbrž bohatství.” Nezval, *Moderní básnické směry*, 22–23 (author’s emphasis).

the metamorphosis of Christian trans-substantiation into poetic illumination at the price of de-sacralization.

It must, nonetheless, be acknowledged that this method of reduction of spirituality, even if it appeared dominant in the social discourse on art of the time, was immediately opposed by contemporaries: for example, by what can be referred to as Vladimír Holan's 'metaphysical existentialism'.⁵

Starting with his collection *Breezing* (*Vanutí*) and continued in other collections written during the 1930s (*The Arc* [*Oblouk*, 1934], *Here you are, rock...* [*Kamení, přicházíš...*, 1937]), Holan's return to Symbolism seems far removed from the imperative of modernity proclaimed by Nezval. The poems express an honest need to seek ontological speculation in the practice of poetry, for an opening up to the invisible world of higher powers, compared to which the positives of reality sung by Poetism seem rather drab, no matter how multi-colored they might be, and their overjoyed wonderments seem slightly superficial (the desire had been announced as early as 1930; the first title of *Triumph of death* had been *Profundity* [*Hlubina*]).⁶ Hence, the entire collection, *Breezing*, seems to be animated by a need for refinement, for spiritualization. In his authentically Mallarméan aspiration, Holan commits poetry to the attempt at regressing towards the preverbal, and the word to being – *breath*.⁷

No, leave me be, I tremble that I might be made
an eye for eyelids of mystery;
the prophets are yours, when you're no longer yourself –
leave me be breath, merely breath.

No, leave me be, I tremble that I might be made
a hand for the lyre of mystery;
the poets are yours, when you're too much yourself –
leave me be breath, merely breath.⁸

⁵ See: Xavier Galmiche, *Vladimír Holan, le bibliothécaire de Dieu (Prague 1905–1980)* (Paris: Institut d'Etudes slaves, 2009), 249. Czech translation: Xavier Galmiche, *Vladimír Holan, bibliotéckář Boha*, trans. Lucie Koryntová (Prague: Akropolis, 2012).

⁶ See: Vladimír Holan, "Bagately", in *Sebrané spisy*, ed. Vladimír Justl, vol. XI (Praha: Odeon, 1988), 341–2.

⁷ A state before the articulation, a kind of virtual, latent existence of the word (see Mallarmé: a word which would be silent).

⁸ "Ne, nech mne, děsím se, že k víčku tajemství / měl bych se okem stát, / kde nejsi sebou už, tam proroci jsou tví – / mne nechej vát, jen vát. // Ne, nech mne, děsím se, že k lyře tajemství // měl bych se rukou stát, / kde nejsi sebou už, tam básníci jsou tví – / mne nechej vát, jen vát." *Prayer* (*Modlitba*; first edition: *Vanutí*, 1932), Vladimír Holan, "Jeskyňě slov", in *Sebrané spisy*, eds. Vladimír Justl and Pavel Chalupa (Praha and Litomyšl: Paseka, 1999), 70.

Neo-Symbolism is construed as a search for ideality, expressed by processes transforming reality into an archetypal vision, seen less as objects than as essences, almost as idealities. For this reason, Holan collected these texts under the title, *a cave of word*, clearly echoing the Neo-Platonist reference to the cave.⁹ The poet put forward his ‘program’ – justifying the hermeticism it entailed and the one with which he had been charged – in a letter to Vlastimil Vokolek from the 24th of April 1931: “Supplant words with symbols. Whence the incomprehensibility.”¹⁰ He even sometimes alludes to it explicitly, as in the title of the poem “The cries of the symbol”:

No, you will not appear, you are not, and however jealously
you dissemble yourself away from silences!

...

And you yourself dissembled, you are, and herefore jealously
you will appear in the silences!

Admittedly, Holan relinquished an exploration of mystery: the illusion of Symbolist initiation was therefore replaced with an affirmation of an art of incomprehension (*nepochopení*), which is, in turn, an art of ungraspability (*nechápaní*); the critic, Oldřich Králík, had discovered in the publication of *Lemuria* (composed between 1934 and 1938) how “Holan proclaims his ‘incomprehension’, the choice of self-concealment and grievous wonder: ‘the mere fact of not grasping, placing one’s breath in a song or in a horror located beneath the sky or beneath the soul, may encourage a presaging of the passage, which appears and which extends, from imitation to being.’”¹¹

On closer inspection, the Czech culture of the 20th century is not so much one of secularization, but rather a culture of a constantly reiterated debate on modes of interpretation of the need for spirituality: the controversy is repeated, for example, in the post-Baroque literature of Bohumil Hrabal,¹² and more

⁹ The phrase will become a title of a poem in the collection *Torment (Bolest)*. Vladimír Holan, “Příběhy,” in *Sebrané spisy*, eds. Vladimír Justl and Jitka Vrbová, vol. VII (Praha: Odeon, 1970), 119.

¹⁰ “...Klást symboly za věci. Odtud zdánlivá nesrozumitelnost,” Vokolek was the publisher of *SplICES* (1932), a text written at the same time as *Breezing*.

¹¹ “Holan hlásá ‘nepochopení, mlčení a bolestný úžas: ‘pouze nechápaní, kladoucí svůj dech zpěvem nebo úlekem pod nebe nebo pod duši, mohlo se osmělit napovědit zjevující a zatahující přechod od preludu k bytosti.” Oldřich Králík, “Holanova próza,” *Řád, revue pro kulturu a život*, no. 9 (1943): 182.

¹² See: Sylvie Richterová, “Observations sur une dimension mystique chez Bohumil Hrabal,” in *Bohumil Hrabal, palabres et existence*, ed. Xavier Galmiche (Paris: Presses universitaires de Paris-Sorbonne, 2002), 161–70.

generally, in the attempts of the avant-garde to transmit in their poetics a narrative of a miracle (similarly to Jiří Kolář, Hrabal discovers in history – both individual and collective – miraculous moments, whereby “the unbelievable becomes reality”). Obviously, openly Catholic writers – Bohuslav Reynek, Jan Zahradníček, Jan Čep, among others – have allowed ‘religious’ motifs to subsist in their texts, extolling the allure of clerical institutions subsisting in a century which cared little for them. The example of a text by Miloš Doležal is worth quoting here:

On St. Anne’s

When for his first mass
 on the day of Saint Anne
 Evžen Pecka the freshly ordained priest decided to preach
 he mounted a rostrum donned priestly robes
 The Baroque church packed to the rafters fell silent
 as did the flock of folk
 and Evžen Pecka his finger lifted initiated
 “I see” but then forgot all of his speech
 He tried again: “I see...”
 “I see...” he could remember nothing
 And then the quiet crowd let out his father’s cry
 “You see the flagstone thus goes down”
 The whole church died with laughter¹³

Yet beyond this religious ‘subculture’, great problems of spirituality have subsisted, transformed within Czech culture, which we might also regard as characterized by a tradition of introducing alternative modes into traditional spirituality.

Translated from French by Piotr Sylwester Mierzwa

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Josef Vojvodík – Jan Wiendl

“*Priests in Prisons*”: Religious Experience in Extreme Circumstances – The Theopoetics of Jan Zahradníček’s (1951–1960) Poems Written behind Bars¹

KEYWORDS: Jan Zahradníček, theopoetics, “Humanism without God,” “live in God,” freedom, totalitarianism, aesthetic resistance

ABSTRACT: In April and July 1952 Brno and Prague were the scenes of show trials of alleged “agents in the service of the Vatican and the USA,” contrived by the Communist state security apparatus to dispose of opposition Catholic intellectuals and writers. The trials ended with one death penalty, one sentence of life imprisonment and long prison sentences of seven to twenty-five years. Those convicted included one of the most striking exponents of 1930s and 1940s modern Czech verse, Jan Zahradníček (1905–1960), who was jailed for thirteen years. In the extreme conditions of incarceration Zahradníček never stopped writing poetry, or rather reciting it to his fellow-inmates, who learned the poems by heart. On his release from prison under the general amnesty of May 1960 Zahradníček – in the five months of life left to him – reconstructed the poems. This essay focuses on the theopoetics of his prison poems which picked up on the main topic of his postwar poems (1946–1951): the crisis of man and the tragedy of a humanism without God. Zahradníček’s prison verse is typified by both its striking theopoetic dimension, arising out of the poet’s solidly Catholic faith and religious experience, and its anthropopoetic dimension: in other words, poetry being for man something fundamental, in certain circumstances vital to him and his survival, and affecting him in quite basic ways. It is a special form of

¹ This work was supported by the European Regional Development Fund Project “Creativity and Adaptability as Conditions of the Success of Europe in an Interrelated World” (No. CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/16_019/0000734).

freedom within one's compressed self and a special form of intensified self-awareness. The poems of Zahradníček's dark years behind bars are not only testament to religious experience in the extreme conditions of brutal totalitarian dictatorship, but also to the fact that under extreme conditions an aesthetic force becomes a force of aesthetic resistance, and to *how* this manifests itself.

The relationship between poetry and religion is down to the former's being firmly anchored in worship, ritual practices and so in the communal genesis of collective and individual magical, cultic and mythological/religious ideas and practices that are, like ecclesiastical institutions, dogmas and the religious ethos, transformed in poetry, in various ways, into specific forms of expression, adapted and staged performatively. Literature shares with religion the property of 'symbolic form' that is capable, as Cassirer has shown, of embodying an image of, and a way of accounting for the world in language that can then be enunciated.² Zahradníček's poetry may also be said to be religious verse in these universal and special senses on the grounds, above all, that it takes modes and conditions of speech to orchestrate and adapt specific forms of religious discourse (primarily prayer, psalm and hymn), whose addressees are – besides God and the Virgin Mary – saints, the nation *The psalm of twenty-two* (*Žalm roku dvaadvacátého*), Christian Europe, the Catholic Church and the Pope *Hymn for the coronation of Pope Pius XII* (*Hymnus ke korunovaci papeže Pia XII*), but also his partners in misfortune *Priests in prisons* (*Kněží v žalářích*) and family members, some addressed directly by the poetic subject himself. Of the essence, however, is the relationship between the forms of religious discourse in Zahradníček's verse and twentieth-century social – or rather socio-political – and aesthetic modernism. Within Czech literature, Zahradníček's religious verse is a telling example of the unsustainability of the prejudice whereby modernity and piety are implacably opposed. It must also be stated that even in those poems that evince an attitude clearly founded on the Church and confession of faith, the poetic discourse of the lyrical *Ich* retains its aesthetic autonomy, which goes with the very genre of subjective lyrical verse. Zahradníček's prayer-poems of the dark years of his incarceration exemplify, above all else, not only the poeto- and anthropogenic potential of the prayer, but also, without hyperbole, the importance of poetry to survival.

² The relationship between poetry and religion as 'symbolic forms' is discussed by Bernd Auerochs in his compendious monograph on the relation between art and religious functions. Bernd Auerochs, *Die Entstehung der Kunstreligion* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 21–33.

In an essay on the prayer as a poetogenic structure Stefan Keppler³ distinguishes its four basic aspects:

1) Its *disposition as a medium* (*mediale Verfassung*), residing in the fact that prayer is a unique medium by which to utter the unutterable and invisible, being totally mimesis-resistant, and so it heads for the outer edges and marginal values of language and thereby to specific poetic strategies. Even in Zahradníček's verse of the time of terror of the war years, but particularly in his prison poetry as poetry of a state of crisis, the prayer is a kind of "border-line-phenomenon" of poetic discourse, as Keppler aptly describes it. This is particularly evident wherever our comprehension runs up against an uncrossable border, where a sense is brought face to face with a counter-sense and where a context that constitutes something otherwise positive collapses in the face of the unforgivable, the unacceptable, the intolerable, as in, say, *The psalm of 'twenty-two*:

Slyš, Bože, slyš!

Když zpívat mám, jen k tobě zpívat mohu,
když mlčet mám, jen k tobě mlčet mohu.

Od úst mých k sluchu, k sluchu po vši
zemi
přervána cesta slov, čas hluchoněmý

ted' žalář můj – a mám-li k tobě blíž,
jenom jak ze dna studní na oblohu.

[...]

Rozumět strašno, strašno nerozumět,

spíš jako strom vichřicí celou šumět,
to úděl můj, to úděl můj...

Mé srdce jiskra bdělá,
jež z kovadliny srdce tvého odletěla,
ta rozumí, to stačí – (435, 442)⁴

Hear me, oh, God, hear!

Meant to sing, I can sing only to Thee,
meant to keep silent, I can keep silent only
to Thee.

From my mouth to being heard, heard
throughout the land
the pathway of words broken, a deaf-mute
time

is my goal now – and if I am closer to Thee
'tis only as from well bottoms to the sky
above.

[...]

To understand is harrowing, harrowing
not to understand,

my lot is more like a tree's, all a-rustle
amid the tempest, that is my lot...

My heart a vigilant spark
struck from the anvil of Thy heart,
it understands, and that is enough –

³ Stefan Keppler, "Gebet als poetogene Struktur. Systematische Aspekte, die Wissenskonfiguration um 1900 und Rilkes 'Stunden-Buch,'" in *Anthropologie der Literatur: Poetogene Strukturen und ästhetisch-soziale Handlungsfehler (Poetogenesis)*, eds. Rüdiger Zymner and Manfred Engel (Paderborn: Mentis, 2004), 338–9.

⁴ Zahradníček's poems are cited herein from: Jan Zahradníček, *Knihy básní*, eds. Jitka Bednářová and Mojmír Trávníček (Praha: Nakl. Lidové noviny, 2001). Page nos are given in brackets.

2) *Performance*, originating in the powerful inner tension that typifies prayer, that is, the pragmatic mission of a prayer linked to pre-set and reiterated rhetorical techniques (refrains, repetition, etc.) and to the prayer’s intensity and authenticity, its – by the measure of its intensity – unrepeatability.

3) *A relationship to time and reality*. By its very essence, a prayer, even in the most mundane circumstances, is a gateway to the out-of-the-ordinary and the hallowed; it leaves the present behind. The optative in religious discourse, used to convey a request or a wish (forms with *may* or *let*), or also as a hymn of praise, leaves the reality of the present behind and tends towards what is possible. In this sense, in addition to its metaphysical disposition, a prayer can avail itself of a non-metaphysical link to the transcendent that works even in the conditions of a secularised society.⁵

4) *Anthropological basis*. A prayer has its roots in the anthropological disposition that drives man to communicate even in an objectively non-communicable situation in which his spirit turns to the spirit of a numinous being. Hence prayers can figure independently of religion, even in the daily life of a more or less secular society largely neutral in matters of the church and religion. And yet even here a prayer functions either as an anthropologically grounded ‘reflex’ (not only in emotionally charged and extreme situations), or within the basic forms of such everyday culturally focused activities as storytelling or playing games in which poetry has its roots.⁶

For the Christian believer a prayer is also an act of the imagination by which he may enter the otherwise closed domain of what is in other circumstances invisible, but also the sphere of his inner reality. For the gaoled poet, his prison cell is not just a space of transcendence and encounters with God, it is where such an encounter is deeply felt and also articulated as an anthropologically conditioned, fundamental life experience, as in the poem *Visitor (Návštěva)* (from the collection *Fear house [Dům strach]*):

<i>Ještě dýchám.</i>	I am breathing still.
<i>Je mi chladno.</i>	I am cold.
<i>Mám hlad.</i>	I am hungry.
<i>Ještě dýchám a slyším dech</i>	I am still breathing and can hear the breath
<i>Kohosi blízko. Jsi to ty,</i>	of Someone close at hand. It is Thee,
<i>Pane,</i>	Lord,
<i>jenž vstupuješ dveřmi zavřenými...</i>	who entereth by the closed door...
<i>Buď vítán.</i>	Welcome.
<i>Vězni nespoutatelný věci pouhé.</i>	Thou unchainable prisoner of a mere object.
<i>Drochytko chleba,</i>	Thou mite of bread
<i>již kladou na jazyk umírajícím</i>	that they place on the tongues of the dying
<i>a zdvíhající nad zástupy. (628)</i>	and raise high above the throng.

⁵ Keppler, “Gebet als poetogene Struktur,” 339.

⁶ Keppler, “Gebet als poetogene Struktur,” 340.

One of the late poems, *An ode to prayer* (*Óda na modlitbu*) from *Four years* (*Čtyři léta*), may be read as a metapoetic reflection of the chief aspects and ‘functions’ of religious discourse in a lyrical poem, but also as the quintessence of Zahradníček’s theopoetics and a reflection of the anthropopoetic, metapoetic *and* sociopoetic dispositions of lyrical verse:

<p><i>Kdo máte zalíbení v lidském hlasu, jaké to ticho nad ním prostírá se. Pro slova urputná rty zamčeny propouštějí jen ostrý sípot hlásek polknutou slzou ještě zvlhčený. (735)</i></p>	<p>Ye who relish the human voice, what a silence stretches out above it. For relentless words the lips are locked admitting but the sharp rasp of the sounds of speech and still damp from a choked-back tear.</p>
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In prayer, language reaches its extreme values for the very reason of seeking to utter the unutterable, to link the uttermost:

<p><i>Ta slova nelze žádným písmem zapsat, jež z úst se nesou klenbou sedmi duh. (735)</i></p>	<p>These words cannot be recorded in any script as they arc from the mouth through seven rainbows.</p>
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Lyrical verse can ‘speak’ without having to call things by their names and is therefore disposed, also historically, by how it has evolved, to be a medium of prayer. The question might certainly be raised whether a lyrical poem can transmit a mystical experience so intense that it defies being put into words, an experience that relates to something absent and beyond the reach of language proper.⁷ *An ode to prayer* attempts to express just such an experience through its performative aspect, which fosters the anthropogenic dispositions of the poem’s religious discourse, distilled in the idea of the paradoxical power of prayer:

<p><i>Ta slova vroucně pronášena v duchu, jež prudce podtrhuje lidský tep. (735)</i></p>	<p>Those words delivered fervently in spirit, sharply accentuated by the human pulse.</p>
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Spirit, breath, the human pulse, air, hearing and passivity are fused into a force capable of defying fear, the “troubled waters of the world” (735), and transmuting powerlessness into power and strength:

⁷ The poetogenic structures of prayer are discussed by Stefan Keppler, “Gebet als poetogene Struktur,” 338–55.

A z moci bezmoci,
když na krok vidět není,
modlitbou zasahovat v sám
střed dění.

And from the power of powerlessness,
when you can't see one step ahead,
use prayer to weigh into the very heart
of events.

Although – or precisely because – the words of a prayer are delivered in *spirit*, they acquire a force, the vigour to “weigh into the very heart of events” and

s anděly kopí lámat v Boží při,
co o hruď zdrávasů letících bez umdlení
třpyt hvězdy jitrní tmou se rozráží.

break spears with angels in the godly fray,
as a breastplate of Hail Marys flying tirelessly
dashes the glint of the Daystar asunder
through the dark.

(736)

The image of an “inner temple” constructed by prayer “out of breath, darkness and silence” evokes the “Tempel im Gehör” (“you erected temples for them in their inner ear”) of the last line of Rilke’s *Sonnet to Orpheus*⁸: a myth that has become internalised becomes a symbol of the metamorphic power of poetic language while also being shifted onto the plane of the sacred.

It is already plain from these lines just how far removed Zahradníček was from the type of poetic religious discourse within the symbolist tradition of art as a (surrogate) religion and of the poet as the mediator of a redemptive event, acting in the role of ‘priest’, ‘prophet’, ‘messiah’, ‘saint’, etc. For Zahradníček the poet the question of religious experience is not primarily a matter of art and aesthetics, as it had been for Otokar Březina, Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic, Stefan George and other poets of Symbolism, but – as for T. S. Eliot or Pierre Emmanuel – an ethical-existential challenge. When in 1939 Eliot published three lectures under the title of *The idea of a Christian society*,⁹ delivered in Cambridge in March 1939 at the behest of the Fellows of Corpus Christi College, he was keen to note, in light of the events of September 1938:

⁸ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies and The Sonnets to Orpheus* (English and German edition), trans. Alfred A. Poulin, Jr. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Comp., 1977), 84–5.

⁹ As Eliot states himself, the lectures arose in response to the events of September 1938: “The term ‘democracy’, as I have said again and again, does not contain enough positive content to stand alone against the forces that you dislike – it can easily be transformed by them. If you will not have God (and He is a jealous God) you should pay your respects to Hitler or Stalin. I believe that there must be many persons who, like myself, were deeply shaken by the events of September 1938, in a way from which one does not recover; persons to whom that month brought a profounder realisation of a general plight.” T. S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture. The Idea of a Christian Society and Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (San Diego etc. Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1960), 50.

We are all dissatisfied with the way in which the world is conducted: some believe that it is a misconduct in which we all have some complicity; some believe that if we trust ourselves entirely to politics, sociology or economics we shall only shuffle from one makeshift to another. And here is the perpetual message of the Church: to affirm, to teach and to apply, true theology. We cannot be satisfied to be Christians at our devotions and merely secular reformers all the rest of the week, for there is one question that we need to ask ourselves every day and about whatever business. The Church has perpetually to answer this question: to what purpose were we born? What is the end of Man?¹⁰

Eliot pauses over the problem of the ‘reality’ that man in modern Western society is constructing and shaping and in whose values he believes: a rationally grounded and supposedly secure reality that he treats as the reality of the world. But that is not the whole of reality, for reality also includes, as Eliot writes, an order not laid down by man and not taking its bearing from man. Eliot calls it the order of “permanent conditions upon which God allows us to live upon this planet.”¹¹ However, man cannot see this order and its reality, failing to perceive it also because of overlaying and remoulding it with his own concepts and his own order. In this sense religion is an inversion, a regression to the original sense. The Second World War, as Eliot foresaw in his lectures, revealed conclusively the “[T]he unarrestable collapse of the supports upon which we have relied,” *La Saletta*, 557 (“[N]ezadržitelné zřícení opor, na něž jsme spoléhali”). In Zahradníček’s verse, poetic experience and religious experience blend into each other and come together in this ‘regression’ as inversion, preservation and a new metamorphosis:

*S každým rokem, jež pohřbíváme
v paměti světla,
minulost roste v nás jak dálky, z níž
rosně vane,
z níž nadějí zelená se.
Pocitujeme úctu k minulosti, jež zůstává.
Ale to nám nebrání,
abychom se nevydávali v tmu, bláto
a plískanici,
k těm zeleným sálům zítřků a pozítřků
prázdných dosud.*

With every year that we bury in the
memory of light
the past grows in us as a faraway place from
which comes a dewy waft,
from which come the green shoots of hope.
We feel respect for the past that remains.
But that does not prevent us
from heading into the dark, the mud and
the driving sleet,
towards the green halls of still empty
tomorrows and days thereafter.

¹⁰ Eliot, *Christianity and Culture*, 77.

¹¹ Eliot, *Christianity and Culture*, 49.

*Pociťujeme úctu k minulosti, korouhvi
pošlapané,
již zdvíháme, již očišťujeme z lži, pomluv
a krve, ale to nám nebrání*

*začínat znovu tváří v tvář budoucnosti,
začínat s rozehvěním svou velkou
a čistou báseň.*

*Svou vůlí, svou dobrou vůlí ze zlata
možnosti
vytepat verš a báseň.*

We feel respect for the past, a banner
trodden underfoot
that we raise and clean of all falsehood,
calumny and blood, but that does not
prevent us from

starting over in the face of the future,
starting, all a-tremble, our great and pure
poem.

By an act of will, our good will, hammering
it out,
line by line, from the gold of opportunity.

Towards the year's end (Ke konci roku) [from the collection *Four years*, 720]

The specific quality of Jan Zahradníček's verse from his time behind bars, grouped after his death by Bedřich Fučík into two separate collections – *Fear house* (*Dům Strach*, 1981, containing verse dating from 1951–1956) and *Four years* (1969, verse from 1956–1960) – is immediately attributable to a number of factors. It would be wrong to claim that this final stage brought the poet to a new type of poetics. Since in this period of Zahradníček's verse, most of which he committed to memory, with only sporadic opportunities for him to keep a written record,¹² we find both shortish, solid lyrical structures and drafts of larger-scale poetical compositions replete with metaphors that evoke a broad natural setting, but also expression-free, concise sequences that map and reappraise the relation between man and the world. Here we also meet (especially in the second collection) a mixture of strictly metrical verse and rhythmically relaxed formations. It is as if Zahradníček's prison verse was a reflection of almost all the stages in the poet's development that had preceded the final period of his life and creative output. This sense is further bolstered by the numerous intertextual allusions to his earlier works, not to mention certain passages in his diary for 1960.¹³ And yet we can see an obvious transformation in Zahradníček's formulation of the new side of life brought about by his arrest in Brno first thing on 14 June 1951, which to a degree put to the test the previous constants in the poet's view on life, the world

¹² See, for example, the poems from the period Zahradníček spent in prison found in 2002 in the Pardubice archive of the security services, or the notebook discovered containing poems from his time in the notorious Mírov and Leopoldov prisons. See: Jan Zahradníček, *Verše: Leopoldovský sešit poezie*, ed. Jan Wiendl (Brno: Moravská zemská knihovna, 2017).

¹³ Jan Zahradníček, *Dílo III*, eds. Mojmír Trávníček and Zejda Radovan (Praha: Český spisovatel, 1995), 289–330.

and the principles by which these are ordered. It has of course to be noted that an actual worthwhile artistic response to such a critical predicament cannot be taken for granted. Suffice it to recall how, instead, many outstanding poets and artists simply fell silent in the face of the sheer extremity of the reality represented by a Nazi or Communist prison. Others, finding themselves in a like situation, treated their art more as a device by which to focus the mind, but one that stood outside the mainstream of their work.

This new background to Zahradníček's life and art can be broadly described by reference to earlier stages in his artistic career. These earlier periods, each usually defined by one, at most two collections, may be described as each representing a largely monothematic, highly condensed snapshot of how he would formulate a particular attitude to life and art. Suffice it to compare the differing semantic contexts of the collections *The temptation of death* (*Pokušení smrti*, 1930); *Return* (*Návrat*, 1931); *Cranes* (*Jeřáby*, 1933), *Thirsty summer* (*Žíznivé léto*, 1935), or *Greeting the sun* (*Pozdravení slunci*, 1937), *The old earth* (*Stará země*, 1946) and *The veil of Veronica* (*Rouška Veroničina*, 1949), etc. Thus comparison of these frequently contradictory, though nearly contemporary monothematic wholes – 'stages on the way' – may be treated as the paradoxical background to the proverbial internal dynamics and integrity underpinning Zahradníček's oeuvre, where previous stages – no matter how contradictory in terms of meaning – condition those that follow, all contributing to the development of the remarkably interconnected, integrated, multilayered architecture of his work overall.

This basic plan behind Zahradníček's work was broken by the time he spent in prison. What we see now is more a set of heterogeneous, piecemeal responses as the poet (still using his tried and tested poetic methods) comes to terms with the 1951 shock of his arrest and imprisonment. This set ultimately comprised two core areas: the experiences of a political prisoner, and the experiences of a father and husband, and on the basis of these Zahradníček erected an alternative order of life and art which, though destabilised by external circumstances, is set deeper in its core foundations, now treated to a fundamental revision. It was doubtless this that Bedřich Fučík exploited as he moulded the conception of the two final collections, arranged to comport with the previous dominant intention of Zahradníček's work, *Fear house* grounded in the former experience, *Four years* in the latter. However, both collections are replete with a range of standpoints that, compared to how the poet's oeuvre had been evolving previously, are new or topical.

The poet-prisoner as the writing subject and as the object of a punishing power

Within twentieth-century Czech literature, Jan Zahradníček’s poetry written behind bars, alongside Josef Čapek’s *Poems from a concentration camp* (*Básně z koncentračního tábora*), and the verse of Václav Renč or Ivan Martin Jirous, is not only a prime example of authentic *prison* poetry, but also unique evidence that there are poems that secure life, and that means more than merely *surviving*. Their aesthetic *force* becomes a force of aesthetic resistance.

Foremost in prison literature is not depiction of the circumstances behind bars, but literary representation of reality as experienced and lived. But what makes such poetry (or literature generally), the portrayal in verse of the prison situation, in particular Zahradníček’s prison poetry, so specific? Several major aspects. Writing *in* a space and writing *about* a space invariably comes about within the field of tension between affect and literature as the place where affects are ‘spatialised’. To put it succinctly, the poems included in *Fear house* are by and large poems of *space*, while those of *Four years*, as indeed the title hints, are poems of *time*.

Part of the affective casting of space is the boosting of the opposition between another’s and one’s own, between *I/we* and *they*, between a space of safety and a space of endangerment, and the amplification of the tension between material and non-material space, space as a *place* in which to experience the ‘depth of life’ in an ambivalent, but also metaphysical, sense. The experience of ‘depth’ is already set out in *What the blackbird sang to the arrest* (*Co zpíval kos zatčenému*), the poem with which *Fear house* opens:

<i>Je radost, je radost, je radost i tady dole, kde žal světa dno má.</i>	(593)	There is joy, there is joy, there is joy even here below, where the world’s grief hits rock-bottom.
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Similarly from *Fear house*, the title poem:

<i>s kočičí lhostejností hledí sem dolů do té hloubky, do všech čtyřiaadvaceti pokojů najednou</i>	(611)	with feline indifference he looks down into this depth, into all twenty-four rooms at once
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or

<i>svůj výkyv každodenní z propasti do propasti</i>		my daily oscillation from chasm to chasm
<i>A walk around my cell (Procházka po cele, 617)</i>		

<p><i>k trupům, jež se mohou podle potřeby vyměnit, zatímco tvář zůstává jednou provždy.</i></p>	<p>to bodies that can be switched as the need arises, while a countenance remains itself forever.</p>
<p><i>Nevím, z které půjčovny masek je přinesli, ale skutečné nezdají se.</i></p>	<p>I know not from what mask-rental place they came, but unreal is how they seem.</p>

(610)

The entire poem expands on the theme of the disorganisation of identity, loss of self, the degradation of lived reality and the loss of one's world.¹⁴ Unlike the personal tone of the speaking subject in the majority of poems, the style of this poem is dry-as-dust, reading almost like a formal record

<p><i>Vyslýchá se. Ve všech čtyřiaadvaceti pokojích najednou. Vždy jeden a dva a nezbytný ovšem psací stroj. Ti dva s nudou se přehrabávají v cizích útrokách. A ten chudák jak na trní.</i></p>	<p>Interrogations are going on. In all twenty-four rooms at once. Always two against one, and the inevitable typewriter. Jaded, the two poke about in the other's entrails. And he, poor chap, is all on edge.</p>
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<p><i>Tak začíná Hodina Bičování [...].</i></p>	<p>Thus commences the Flogging Hour [...].</p>
---	--

(610)

The emotionalisation of space here is striking, and so is its temporalisation. The interrogation being carried out “in all twenty-four rooms at once” is a metaphor for it: the number 24 as unit of time for a day is, as it were, engulfed by the space in which “interrogations are going on.” Time in *Fear house*, where all the hours/“rooms” are identical, filled with the selfsame activity, “interrogation.” For the incarcerated “poor chap all on edge” time has ceased to exist, events having lost their diachronic perspective in favour of an all-embracing simultaneity expressed by the adverbial “at once.” Comporting with this is the fact that communication, dialogue, which unfolds and “happens” in time, is replaced by “interrogation” that makes no sense: *Here words have no meaning (Zde slova nemají smysl, 610)*, since everything is by its nature spectrally unreal, being but a staged run-up

¹⁴ Unique evidence of a parallel to how this stolen world is brought into the present in Zahradníček's verse is the sporadic correspondence with his wife Marie from his cell – see: Jan Zahradníček, *Mezi nás prostřána noc – dopisy z vězení ženě Marii* (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2008); on this see also Zahradníček, *Knihy básní*, 946–8.

*k panoptikálnímu vystoupení té smutné
zvrhlosti,
k té zběsilé maškarádě polomasek
a polotváří. (611)* to the freak-show performance of that
woeful perversion,
that frenzied masquerade of half-masks
and half-faces.

As we shall show, the spatialisation of time is specially important to the speaker of Zahradníček's prison poetry with regard to the poetics of reminiscence, though in *Fear house* space is without time, without gravitation, a universe "with its own motion round its own axis" ("se svym vlastnim pohybem kolem sve vlastni osy," 611), the main symptom of which is "emptiness," the vacuity of sense, humanity, identity: if the interrogators are but masks that "seem unreal," the interrogatees are

*očíslované hromádky neštěstí,
jež na všechno kývnou... (611)* numbered bundles of misery
that nod yes to everything...

The experience of unreality, of a "spectral existence" of hallucinations, visions and dreams creates the peculiar tension and rift between the world of isolation behind bars and the world outside, but also a tension in the dual and no less spectral existence of the *Ich* that is writing as the author-prisoner finds himself in a dual 'role': as the *subject* doing the writing and the *object* of the power doing the punishing. He is also in a situation of absolute isolation when in solitary confinement, where he can only meet his own self and is on the brink of losing any sense of reality: *The sun in my cell (Slunce v cele), In solitary (Samovazba)*. The poem *A walk around my cell (Procházka po cele)* opens with the lines:

*Jaké ticho. To po celách přecházejí
tím pohybem kyvadlovým,
jak žalární fantas žene je.* The silence. They're crisscrossing their cells
with that pendulum motion,
driven by delirium.

*Na jednom konci to okno neokno,
na druhém konci ty dveře nedveře,
a mezi nimi celé hodiny, celé věky
sem a tam. (615)* At one end the un-window,
at the other the un-door,
and between them, for whole hours, whole ages,
hither and yon.

This experience of "unreal reality" becomes fraught with danger in the very paradox of its "heterotopias of deviation," as the phenomenon was called by Michel Foucault in his well-known 1967 lecture entitled *Of other spaces (Des espaces autres)*.¹⁵ Unlike utopias, heterotopic spaces really exist and yet have

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics*, no. 16 (1) (1986): 22–7.

<p><i>jež nikoho nepouštějí, jež nikam nevedou. Zavřeno. A oni klíč ztratili k minulosti. A budoucnost zakázána. (615–616)</i></p>	<p>doors that admit no one, that lead nowhere. Locked. And they have lost the key to the past. And the future has been banned.</p>
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and:

<p><i>Nevím – to vesmír venku je zamřížován. A my tady, my tady na svobodě. Z jha vyňati potřeb a zvyků, z času v zem přímáčkého v bezčasí mrtvých, v dalekozorné prázdno let. Pacivores (Mírožerci, 635)</i></p>	<p>I know not – it's the cosmos outside that is barred. And we here, we're here at liberty. Freed from the yoke of needs and habits, from time squashed into the earth, into the timelessness of the dead, into the void of years stretching as far as the eye can see.</p>
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These are the “inexpressible places” imagined by Henri Michaux in the eponymous prose poems *Lieux inexprimables* (1947, included with the book *La Vie dans les plis*):

Dans les marbres une grande circulation d'écorchés. Précautionneux, précautionneux à l'extrême, ils avancent, mains étendues en avant, car un cheveu, un seul long cheveu volant à leur rencontre, les ferait sursauter horriblement. Souffrance! Souffrance! Et cependant il faut marcher, toujours marcher. Le profil du Seigneur cruel repasse sans cesse sur le mur allongé. [...] Voici les lieux de la marche des ensanglantés. Un orage maintenant, se lève. Dans ces marbres? Qui l'eût cru? Un orage de cordages! Quel supplément prochain de peine pour ceux que le supplice de l'écorchement paraissait avoir déjà comblés. Danger! Danger! qui fouette l'écorché qui ne peut courir! Une pâleur invisible dans le rouge de leur chair à vif, une pâleur quand même envahit tout à coup leur âme en travail (en travers du dernier espoir qui s'était logé en eux face à leur sort maudit, qui peut donc être plus maudit encore.) [...] Voici le lieu du morne et de l'enroulé et de la reprise indéfinie.¹⁶

Eberhard Geisler has shown¹⁷ that Michaux's *Lieux inexprimables* are simultaneously a rejoinder to and criticism of Ernst Jünger's novel *Auf den Marmor-Klippen* (1939; in English as *On the marble cliffs*, 1947), the French

¹⁶ Henri Michaux, *Dichtungen. Schriften II* [Deutsch-Française] (Frankfurt: Fischer Verlag, 1971), 144–7.

¹⁷ Eberhard Geisler, *Henri Michaux. Studien zum literarischen Werk* (Stuttgart and Weimar: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 1993), 110–85.

translation of which, *Sur les falaises de marbre*, was published in Paris by Gallimard in 1942.¹⁸ Not only the “marble blocks,” but also the motif of victims skinned alive, as well as certain other motifs, can be read as clear indicators of Michaux’s critical reception and reflection of Jünger’s “marble cliffs” and, above all, of his mannered (one might go so far as to say Mannerist) aestheticism, springing from the linking of horror, repulsiveness and the beautiful. However, Michaux’s poetic intention in *Lieux inexprimables* goes beyond this plane in a direction close to Zahradníček’s poetic image of the world. Yet despite the peculiar profanatory topicalisation of the ideas that underlie Christian ethics, Michaux’s particular conception of metaphysics, spirituality and transcendence remains the highly visible purview of his poetic image of the world.¹⁹ It is an expression – following revelations of the horrors of World War II, the concentration camps, Hiroshima and other wartime events – of the most extreme collapse and devastation of the conditions in which postwar mankind found itself, not only in a metaphysical sense, but also existentially. It is an image of the evacuation and vacuity of the world into which man appears to have been cast:

*Stmívá se. Mají čím dál víc naspěch,
zmítajíce se mezi oknem a dveřmi
v tom průvanu kosmickém.
(A walk around my cell, 617)*

It’s getting dark. They’re in ever greater haste
as they’re blown about twixt window and
door in that cosmic draught.

In In solitary:

*Nevíme kde. Nevíme kam.
Jen vzdálený štěkot psů, much bzukot
nás utěšuje,
že jsme nebyli deportováni na některou
jinou oběžnici,
že nejsme na Marsu ani na měsíci,
že na zemi dosud jsme. (624)*

We know not where, we know not whither.
Alone the distant bark of dogs, the buzz of
flies consoles us
that we haven’t been deported to some other
planet,
that we aren’t on Mars or even on the Moon,
that we are still here on Earth.

¹⁸ The novel *Auf den Marmor-Klippen* is taken to be one of the first indirect representations of the Nazi terror. Michaux is evidently concerned with the events described in Chapter 15 *et seqq.*, where the two brothers, searching for rare plants, head into the forest of the ‘head ranger’ only to discover, to their horror, human remains. They also discover his cabin, in reality a torture chamber complete with a bench covered in taut human skin. The ranger’s ‘range’ has been seen as an allegory for a concentration camp.

¹⁹ Henri Michaux, in 1914–1918 a pupil at the Jesuit College in Brussels, was not only already reading Ernest Hello, a Catholic writer from Brittany and author of *Physionomies des saints* (1875), which appeared in Sigismund Bouška’s Czech translation in 1898 (and again in 1938), but also works by the Flemish mystic Jan van Ruysbroeck and the Italian female mystic Angela da Foligno.

In the opening sequence of Michaux's *Lieux inexprimables* we are treated to a vision of time standing still in a world and a city in which "terror dwells":

La campagne dort. La ville est morte. Les ombres d'un soir tôt venu et qui n'en finit pas, et qui n'en finira pas, s'étendent, s'étendent. Une voiture plus encroûtée dans l'immobile que la muraille d'une ancienne forteresse occupe une place inchangée, à jamais inchangée. Le lugubre habite ici. Une horloge solennelle marque des heures qui ne comptent plus.²⁰

In the second part of Zahradníček's *Marks of power (Znamení moci)* this collapse of time marks the disintegration of the time-space order of a world where man is 'left to his own devices':

<p>procházel jsem ulicemi, z nichž byl čas vymetený ulicemi sterilizovanými, jež nemohly mítí pokračování tady na zemi ani na žádné jiné planetě v žádném jiném vesmíru Tady už nezáleželo na tom, zda přichází podzim či jaro nastává a tím méně, zda je to zrána nebo se začne smrákat hned ačkoli všechno nasvědčovalo tomu že je pozdě příliš pozdě, aby to mohlo být v některém jistém dni v některém jistém roce našeho letopočtu. (562)</p>	<p>I passed along streets swept clean of time, sterilised streets that could have no continuation here on earth, or on any other planet in any other universe Here it no longer mattered if autumn was coming or it was the start of spring and even less if it was early morning or dusk was about to fall though everything suggested that it was late too late for it to be any particular day in any particular year of our era.</p>
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Jiří Trávniček adds on this: "Man in *Znamení moci* is a being that is being tossed about in the maelstrom of chaos, self-destruction, a being that breaks his own original integrity and accepts the lot of a mere animal, hence one who, losing his metaphysics, is also losing his most natural human essentials – space and time."²¹ The breakdown of the time-space framework going hand-in-hand with the apocalyptic character of numerous motifs in this, Zahradníček's last great composition, not to mention the final message of hope, all constitute an imaginary closure not only to this stage in the oeuvre, but also to the oeuvre as a whole. But in *Fear house* Zahradníček did make one substantial modification. What has almost disappeared from view is that

²⁰ Henri Michaux, *Dichtungen. Schriften II* [Deutsch-Française], 144–5.

²¹ Jiří Trávniček, *Poezie poslední možnosti* (Praha: Torst, 1996), 54.

fiery commitment present in both preceding collections and enhanced there by any number of effective dramatic or poetic figures and methods. It is as if the categories of time and space have split in two in the prison verse. Especially in *Fear house* we meet the train of external reality suggested by the space “down there” – prison, a cell, barred windows, the snoopy spyholes in handle-less doors, echoes of the barking of guard dogs, spectral doodlings on cell walls, but also counting knots in wooden floors. This reality is understood as menacing, best disregarded, kept at arm’s length, to prevent one’s being engulfed by it. This is the space proper to “them,” the space of the forces of ruination as depicted by the poet in *Marks of power*. So we might expect a natural counterpoint to this constellation in the shape of some ‘we’, a community of the persecuted, imprisoned and tortured. In many cases this is undoubtedly so; with authenticity and precision Zahradníček does record and develop artistically many aspects of this fellowship of ‘jailbirds’ – from ‘communicational’ activities of the wall-tapping kind to expression of the profound spiritual kinship among those incarcerated (as in, say, *Priests in prisons*).

However, what we also find in Zahradníček is a hugely delicate defence and carefully guarded train of utterly personal, intimate experience in the interest of which the poet is capable of shunting the entire world of the present to one side and giving the innermost self free rein to reminisce uninhibitedly about all that is near and dear: wife and children, parents and siblings, friends, the landscape of childhood, a landscape of undiluted, untroubled days. This innermost community, consistently reaching beyond the threshold of life and death (besides the living, the dead are also frequently summoned up to be involved in the fate of the poet himself and of his nearest and dearest as their most reliable protectors), expresses the central pillar supporting the spatial dimension that dominates Zahradníček’s prison poetry.

As a reaction to the ever more vexatious exterior world the poet ultimately sets his innermost self’s own experience in a special category that we might call ‘somewhere or other’, a spatial category that falls outside the scope of ordinary ideas. It is a category controlled exclusively by the poet which, once, inspired by a fleeting motif from nature seen through the bars, will remind him of the melancholy landscape of his childhood and teenage years, illuminated by the uncanny half-light of the “lamp of the soul.” Another time, by means of a masterly poetic trick, it will, on the contrary, turn the space of his cell upside down: prisoners are hanging upside down like “lachrymal stalactites,” but in silent harmony and concert, while those walking on the outside, uncomprehending and indifferent, “blunder about like flies on a ceiling” – the poet has inverted space to point with tacit irony to the perverted indifference of the times and the total inversion of the values that make up life:

<p><i>Tak všechno je naruby, všechno je vzhůru nohama i ve vězních ubohých. Jistota v nejistotě, naděje v zoufalství zrcadlí se. Mají hlad. Ale zůstávají dál na nohou. Cosi končí se. A cosi nastává. Temný neklid prosakuje zdmi věznice. (A walk around my cell, 617)</i></p>	<p>So everything's inside out, everything's upside down even in the poor inmates. Certainty is mirrored in uncertainty, hope in despair. They're hungry. But they remain afoot. Something's coming to an end. And something stirs. A dark unrest is seeping through the prison walls.</p>
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Personal experience moulded against the backdrop of a deranged, spectral reality even disrupts ordinary considerations of time. Arrest and imprisonment seem to bring real time to a halt. No matter how in, say, *Marks of power*, time was understood on the metaphorical plane, no matter how it was aimed more at suggesting a global parable outside of time, the emphasis in *Fear house* and even *Four years* is all the more firmly on the plane of timelessness. As this 'timelessness' is amorphous, it facilitated an even greater stepping back from the drastic present and a deeper immersion in the inner world of reminiscence, which becomes a truly real reality. The narrower timelessness of prison – that immobilised 'now', where the key to the past has been lost and the future banned – often flowed smoothly into the more satisfying, boundless timelessness of reminiscing about childhood and growing up, when the reminder of how those times had passed is more akin to a mysterious appeal *Spring beneath Čichna (Jaro pod Čichnou*²²) [*Four years*], or into the recollection of a heady spell with a beloved woman *The Sigh (Vzdech)* [*Fear house*], the recollection of moments spent with his children *Daughter, my daughter (Dceři, Svě dceři)* [*Fear house*] and so on. And it is poetry that – unwritten, held solely in the memory – consolidates this parallel world of reminiscence, brought up to date in scant letters from home or friends. In this situation art gives a boost to one's impaired experience of the everyday and its natural order. It is as if through poetry the poet could really live as an integrated personality, as husband and father, but also as a man conscious of a certain compass of values that must not, indeed cannot, be bettered by the deadening brutality and stultifying stereotype of prison.

The permanent presence of these aspects can be seen as one of the substantial wellsprings of Zahradníček's conduct in court, so admired in the memory of others, and of the kind of stoical impassivity with which he faced the daily duties and vexing 'rituals' of prison life, and that despite his physical constitution and the ordeals he had to face after 1956.

²² A small, tree-clad hill south-west of Třebíč in South-West Moravia.

Closely connected with these attitudes, we also find in Zahradníček’s prison poetry attempts to name in verse the consequences of the experience of the loneliness into which he was cast by his imprisonment. In terms of his overall output this is something quite new, since the sketches on the theme of loneliness to be found especially in his first work, *The temptation of death* (1930), is of a quite different order: back then it had been primarily an act of aesthetic defamiliarisation of reality, an artistic stylisation that expanded his diversely powerful and indeterminate personal experience. Things are different twenty years later: the headlong collision with reality brings with it quite different points of departure and artistic methods; it is as if the harshness of the experience were sufficient unto itself aesthetically and so needed no ‘embellishment’. Zahradníček’s poetry written behind bars goes into reverse, the power of the experience being such as to demand maximum economy of expression, maximum concentration of word and image, so that the totality of the dread of loneliness might be expressed in a mere fragment, the sketchiest hint or a subtle shift of meaning.

The poet himself spoke of the depressing psychological aftermath of this condition. He says: “For me, the worst of all was solitary confinement. That was extremely hard to take. The various smudges on my cell walls would turn into forms that moved, and spoke, gesticulated, and I had to make a huge effort to conserve an awareness of my own identity, to know who I was and where I was and what I was doing. It was really a condition bordering on insanity.”²³

In Zahradníček’s prison verse, loneliness as one of the consequences of this new life experience breaks down into several levels. We meet it in its crudest form in *Fear house*. There the basic sense of loneliness is multiplied by the experience of “outsideness,” of a displaced time-space pattern (as in *Death’s-heads* [*Smrtihlavi*]), and by the experience of loneliness within an actual community – a condition that might be conveyed as ‘loneliness in the company of the lonely’. Zahradníček captures this condition quite clearly in the opening of *In solitary* in the *Fear house* collection:

<i>Mám sousedy vpravo a sousedy vlevo.</i>	I’ve neighbours to the right and neighbours to the left.
<i>A také pod nohama a nad hlavou.</i>	And beneath my feet and over my head.
<i>Tak blízko</i>	So close
<i>a propasti mezi námi těch stropů, těch stěn.</i>	and the gulfs between us of those ceilings, those walls.
<i>Jsmo každý sám.</i>	Each of us is alone.

(624)

²³ Jitka Bednářová and Jiří Trávniček, “Komentář” in Jan Zahradníček, *Knihy básní*, eds. Jitka Bednářová and Mojmir Trávniček (Praha: Nakl. Lidové noviny, 2001), 950–1.

Another level in the portrayal of loneliness is marked by the awareness of a kind of overlapping. The topic outgrows its narrowly individual profile to become the expression of a general condition, a diagnosis of the populism that, while proclaiming the pseudodogma of collectivity and egalitarianism, heightens the sense of orphanhood and abandonment felt by each and every individual throughout the land:

<p><i>Má opuštěnost je naprostá. Všichni odešli. Síroba země prosakuje zdmi věznic a ze všech stran svírá mě. (Báseň o slunci a o svatém Václavu, 647)</i></p>	<p>My loneliness is absolute. All have left. The land's orphanhood seeps through the prison walls and grips me from every side. (A poem on the sun and St Wenceslas)</p>
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We might expect the loneliness theme to have come to a head with the great tragedy that struck Zahradníček's family in late 1956. Instead, however, we find a paradoxical transformation. Despite the true background to *Four years*, loneliness is there transposed into a form of contemplative solitude, intensified by a clearly powerful sense of duty and need fired by the predicament of the lone father and husband. No matter how insuperable prison walls might appear, the need to offer consolation and support comes across with the greater intensity in Zahradníček's poetry, which at precisely this juncture brightens amazingly and branches out into all manner of areas. This paradoxical transformation also expanded the frontiers of the innermost self, so typical of *Four years* in particular.

A major, if not the most important buttress and keystone of Zahradníček's inner world was beyond all doubt his faith. Quite logically, then, religious faith is one the most frequent themes in his prison verse, and on several planes. Perhaps the most widespread aspect here is that of faith as the destiny for which the poet was chosen, which he himself acknowledges and defends and for which he has been persecuted and jailed. This proclamatory side to the religious aspect of Zahradníček's poetry is of long standing in his work, reaching back to the second half of the 1930s and *Greeting the sun (Pozdravení slunci)*, but particular to the poems in *Banners (Korouhve)*. This line peaks in *La Saletta* and *Marks of power*, where, on the basis of a generalising, prophetic, hence suprapersonal stylisation, the poet contrasts the modern world with the firmly established scale of values arising from the Catholic world view.

The most striking artistic output from this is, along with such religiously motivated poems as *Visitor (Návštěva)*, Zahradníček's family poetry, which makes up a large part of both the collections written in jail. A considerable portion of them, in *Four years*, reflects the tragedy that struck the family in

September 1956, when his wife and all three children suffered toadstool poisoning, from which the two daughters eventually died. Exceptionally, the poet was released briefly in order to attend the children’s funeral, with the promise of remission of the remainder of his sentence. However, he was soon forced to return to prison for the four years that remained.

Any interpretation of these poems is fraught with difficulty for a variety of reasons, notably by how markedly interlaced they are with the facts that inspired them. The more the poet was prevented by external forces from giving direct expression to his sense of kinship and compassionate engagement with the fate of his children and his wife, who was obliged to face the terrible situation alone, the greater the intensity with which it is given form through the expediency of his art. Bedřich Fučík, a fellow-Catholic and one-time fellow-prisoner, has this to say: “If the redemptive heroism and ethical potentiality of this art is visible anywhere, then it is right here, in these amorous and paternal salutations.”²⁴

Reading Zahradníček’s family verse from a broader literary-historical perspective, we cannot fail to note another telling feature. Within Czech verse there are very few collections or individual texts so given over to the type of family poetry – poetry for the spouse and children. Yet from within Zahradníček’s oeuvre it would be fairly easy to extract a ‘life’s-work’ anthology of precisely such poems, and that is rare indeed. The remarkable attributes that give this part of Zahradníček’s work the stamp of uniqueness are, on the one hand, the purity of his attitude to his faith and the way it intersects with the distinctive context of poetry and, on the other, and especially, the sheer tragedy in how he brings back, brings to mind, his dead children, a process intensified by both expression of the insuperable barrier of prison and the tremulous coming-to-terms, deep inside, with the children’s death, unimaginable without a firm belief in the higher design of Providence. Jan Zahradníček writes about this in a letter to his wife Marie dated 27 September 1956: “And I myself realise what a great benefaction it is that God has left me you and Jamie, and I acknowledge the ancient and exalted truth that we must praise God always and everywhere.”²⁵ This type of verse is – so far as we are aware – unparalleled in Czech poetry.

In this context we can also see the cause of Zahradníček’s heroic, that is, deeply humble and cognisant, acceptance of the prison stage of his life. In a letter to Miloš Dvořák, also cited in a diary entry for 4 June 1960, he says:

²⁴ Bedřich Fučík, *Píseň o zemi*, eds. Vladimír Binar and Mojmir Trávníček (Praha: Melantrich, 1994), 94.

²⁵ Zahradníček, *Mezi nás prostřena noc*, 51.

Yet it can't be said that that was not a life, that those nine years of my life are nine empty, rotting walnuts, scorned by squirrels, as it says in one poem. It was life of a sort and sometimes perhaps more intense than normal life outside, and above all – it is now part of my life. If someone offered me the chance to delete those nine years from my life and be the man I had been before, I think I would decline the offer because not for anything would I want to be the kind of man I was before I was put in jail.²⁶

A world given over to a sinister timelessness, a world of violence, or “houses of horror” and “indescribable places,” is a world in which a man would, as it were, attempt to be free “once and for all” of the “encumbrance” of a monotheistic authority. The brutal image of the flayed bodies of victims of “indescribable places” also appears, as we showed in the previous chapter, in the conclusion to Zahradníček's *Marks of power*:

<i>a zatím jak svatý Bartoloměj svlečeno</i>	meanwhile, like St Bartholomew, stripped
<i>z kůže</i>	of its skin
<i>po celém svém povrchu člověčenstvo</i>	mankind bleeds horribly all over its
<i>strašlivě krvácí.</i>	surface.
(590)	

The motif of injury to and actual destruction of a body's surface is indicative – in Zahradníček as in Michaux – of the disabling of the relationship, contact, between the world and man, but at the same time, rid of his surface and so of his protective layer, and his identity, man is left at the mercy of the world. If man

<i>celé věky se snažil uniknout ze staré</i>	has tried across the ages to escape ancient
<i>hrůzy</i>	terror
<i>upadáje do nízkého Strachu</i>	lapsing into base Fear
<i>(Marks of power, 590)</i>	

being injured and flayed alive is also evidence of this terror (“Le lugubre habite ici,” *Lieux inexprimables*, 174), the desperate raw nakedness of man in a world of timelessness, with no history, with no past or future.

²⁶ Zahradníček, *Dílo III*, 297.

Man – GOD – Cosmos. The poetics of theo-cosmological and anthropologico-existential conflict

An image of the world in a state of petrification as an era without emotions and memory: a world that appears to have sunk into a time before history, civilisation, “as if we have sunk into some geological period to join the dinosaurs and other monstrosities. And all our private efforts depend on doing our damndest to remember what time it is, what time is showing on the world’s astronomical clock, and if we succeed momentarily, it feels as if we’ve just escaped something awful, but that it isn’t going to last and that in no time we’ll be back with the dinosaurs.”²⁷

Zahradníček’s poems from prison, pervaded by the awareness and experience of a world without time, a world, as it were, unhinged, skewed, torn apart, when “we are still on the earth, and yet so far beyond it” (“na zemi dosud jsme, a přece tak mimo zem,” *In solitary*, 625), develop further the poetics and theo-cosmological theme of *Marks of power*, if on the plane of private, individual tragedy, though this is itself a metonym for collective tragedy. Its beginnings, if we may put it like this, are of the modern age: experience of ‘alienation from the world’ (*Weltentfremdung*) and ‘alienation from the self’ (*Selbstentfremdung*) are, as Hannah Arendt puts it, “a mark of modern times.”²⁸ The core of this dramatic conflict, which for the poet of *Marks of power* is a theo-cosmological and anthropologico-existential conflict, rests in this world. For man in his *terrestrial* life the Earth is the only place of self-localisation, the cosmos a “paradigm of [man’s] self-constitution”²⁹ in the

²⁷ From a letter from Jan Zahradníček to Vladimír Vokolek dated 30. 12. 1948. Returning to the grass-roots of art at the end of World War II has its reasons: after the horrors of war there was also in art and the philosophy of art a powerful and vivid sense now not of a mere “crisis of mankind in Europe,” but of its tragedy and total collapse. As if art were back at the very beginning – *arché*. Jan Vladislav, *Adresát Vladimír Vokolek. Dvacet dopisů Jana Zahradníčka. Čtyři dopisy a pohlednice Františka Hrubína* (Munich: Poezie mimo domov, 1984), 44–5.

²⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Vita activa. Oder vom tätigen Leben* (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1983), 43.

²⁹ Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 240. In 1960, Hans Blumenberg published his *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie* (*Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, trans. Robert Savage [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010]), in which he treats metaphors as one branch in the history of terms. He defends metaphors in philosophical speculation against the anti-metaphorical Cartesian tradition of seeking to create a perfect and definitive terminology. Blumenberg brings in the concept of “absolute metaphor”: ‘transferred’ meanings that cannot be returned to their ‘proper’ meanings and which elude terminological logicity. Metaphors cannot be ‘dissolved’ into terms and remain resistant to terminologisation. They provide answers to seemingly naive, fundamentally unanswerable questions, the validity and significance of which resides in the fact that there is no getting rid of them.

sense that a man as a human, mundane being ‘is’ solely in close union with the cosmos that underlies the ‘mundanity’ of modern man even though the world throws things out of kilter.³⁰ Modern man’s ex-centric position, his ‘tilting’ into ‘insecurity’, will henceforth be an inseparable feature of his *conditio humana*. However, for Zahradníček this is only conceivable as the equation: man – GOD – cosmos. For new-age man the basic question of theodicy, the matter of a *merciful God*, has become hugely problematical, modern man being *no longer* able to find an answer to the question, and this condition is, as the then twenty-four-year-old philosopher and theologian Hans Blumenberg wrote in 1954, that is, at the very time when Zahradníček was writing his poems in the prison cells of an anti-human Communist dictatorship, a “symptom of crisis”: “The crisis of the modern age is connected most intimately with a problem that comes at the start of this age and with which the age has not managed to deal: that of a ‘merciful God’.”³¹ The lyrical speaker in Zahradníček’s poems knows this is a vicious circle paradox: modern man, short of any answer to the basic question of theodicy, is perforce thrown back on his own devices. At the same time, man as a *creature* of God finds himself face to face with God as an utter *absolute*, before which he seeks to ‘make the case’ for his humanity, as a ‘flawed being’.

So the *Fear house* is no mere metaphor for the “terrible houses” of the penal arm of the machinery of totalitarianism; it has its allegorical level that allows it to be read as an allegory of the Fear-instilling, frightening emptiness of the world. Timelessness, emptiness, Fear, isolation, for Zahradníček these are hallmarks of the modern world that has just been through the catastrophe of World War II, with its consequence of casting part of Europe into a new, different kind of totalitarian dictatorship.

It is as if modern man has cut all ties and plunged into a cosmic void, which is, however, but an externalisation of the emptiness within his own self:

<i>Mezi námi je chaos,</i>	Amongst us is chaos,
<i>mezi námi mráz prázdnoty</i>	Amongst us the frost of the
<i>mezihvězdné. (611)</i>	interstellar void.

Living seems to have been reduced to a powerless condition into which we are cast for mere *survival*, though that has lost its very essence. Existence

³⁰ Hermann Timm, “Nach Ithaka heimzukehren verlohnt den weitesten Umweg,” in *Die Kunst des Überlebens. Nachdenken über Hans Blumenberg*, ed. Franz Josef Wetz and Hermann Timm (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1999), 55.

³¹ Hans Blumenberg, “Kant und die Frage nach dem ‘gnädigen Gott,’” *Studium Generale*, no. 7 (1954): 555.

has been transformed into the mechanical toing and froing of an anonymous crowd streaming

do práce. Valí se z práce.

Pochodují.

Spěchají po nákupech. Na procházku.

Nemocné navštívit.

[...]

*A lidé jdou, zastavují se. Jdou, hovoří
zmateně.*

Až k protinožcům je slyšet,

jak ženské se smějí. A tobě do

pláče je.

*Ninive napadá tě, Kartágo, Hirošima,
neboť sám poznals, jak závratně platí
se krok chybný či slovo zbytečné.*

(Bratislavská ulice, 613–614)

to work. Streaming from work. Always
on the go.

They dash about shopping. Going for walks.

Visiting the sick.

[...]

And people go, and stop. They go, they gabble.

They can be heard all the way to the Antipodes,
they laugh like women. And it makes you want
to cry.

You think Nineveh, Carthage, Hiroshima,
for you well know the vertiginous cost of
a false step or a needless word.

(A street in Bratislava)

Fear does not rule just “terrible houses of the kind” (“takové hrozné domy”, 610), but is the basic emotion of modern man, living in his state of “metaphysical homelessness”:

A teď stojíš v své cele a starost

máš o ten svět venku, o tu ulici

jedinečnou

*mezi hvězdami na východě a hvězdami
na západě.*

Nezpívají tam píseň Hospodinovu.

Karabáč slyšíš,

tak otroci pospíchají, tak otroci mlčí.

Neznají ticho dědiců země této. Spíš

Strach,

spíš Strach lomcuje jimi. Slyšíš to

v jejich slovech,

jak jdou, jak jdou, jak do pochodu si

zpívají,

jak urputně vydupávají z útrobu

země

nové ulice, nové otroky, nové hrůzy.

Slyšíš zem naříkat [...]

(A street in Bratislava, 614)

And now you stand in your cell and worry
about the world outside, that unique
street

between the stars in the east and the stars
in the west.

There they don't sing the song of the Lord.

You can hear the horsewhip,

thus do slaves hurry, thus do they keep

silent. They know not the quiet of the

heirs of this earth. More Fear,

it's more Fear that shakes them. You can

hear it in their words,

as they go, as they go, as they go singing

in step,

as from the bowels of the earth they

doggedly wrest

new streets, new slaves, new terrors.

You can hear the earth lamenting [...]

Twentieth-century man's situation, his *place in the cosmos*, considered by Max Scheler in his last work, *The human place in the cosmos* (*Die Stellung des*

Menschen im Kosmos), proved after two world wars to be extremely destabilised and jeopardised: in his existential fear and uprootedness man seeks *some* certainty –

<p><i>Pouhá možnost tě děsí, chtěl bys mít jistotu. Chtěl bys být pojištěn jako před ohněm, jako před zloději před Kristem, jenž je s nimi tam dole...</i></p>	<p>The mere possibility daunts you, you'd like certainty. You'd like to be insured against fire, as against thieves, against Christ, who is with them down there...</p>
<p>(Ó Simone Weilová, 609)</p>	<p>(Oh, Simone Weil)</p>

– but this quest is a mere illusion because, as Scheler had already written in his 1926 essay *Man and history* (*Mensch und Geschichte*): “Wir sind [...] das erste Zeitalter, in dem sich der Mensch völlig und restlos problematisch geworden ist; in dem er nicht mehr weiß, was er ist, zugleich aber auch *weiß*, dass er es nicht weiß.”³² Man’s position in the world is ex-centric, he exists, to use the term coined by the philosophical anthropologist Helmuth Plessner, in a state of self-unsecuredness (*Selbstentsicherung*): only man, unlike the animals, knows his own mortality, and only he bears the entire burden of his ex-centric position and the associated realisation of how fragile his existence is.³³

In the case of Zahradníček, the war and the events that followed only escalated man’s awareness of the fragility of his ‘tilt’ into unsecuredness, notwithstanding his firm belief in human life, human existence, anchored to the concept of God, though without that conviction leading him to any simplistic optimism as regards history. The opposite is true: Zahradníček’s verse of the period 1946–56 is marked by a radical scepticism, reinforced by the period optimism rooted in the building of socialism: “as they go, as they go,

³² “In a history [...] we are the first age in which man has seen himself as entirely, unreservedly ‘problematic’; in which he no longer knows who he is while at the same time knowing that he doesn’t know.” Max Scheler, “Mensch und Geschichte,” in Max Scheler, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 9 (Bern/München: Francke Verlag, 1995), 120.

³³ In his pre-doctoral dissertation *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* (1928) Plessner had already advanced the bold thesis that man’s position in the world is typified by its being *off-centre* (ex-centric), and he defines three anthropological rules that express the manner and “form of being” (*Daseinsform*) of man in the world, which he specifies precisely as “positionally ex-centric” (Helmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch. Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie* [1928] (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975), 311). This is down to the fact that a human being is characterised by its “natural artificiality” (*natürliche Künstlichkeit*); only in part is man a creature of nature, and by standing above himself, as Plessner has it, his “artificiality is a means by which to bring himself and the world into balance” (Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, 321). Artificiality is part of how he exists and therefore, taking it to its conclusion, it is “natural” to him, since without it, i.e. without culture, he could not exist.

as they go singing in step, / as from the bowels of the earth / they doggedly wrest new streets, new slaves, new terrors” (v.s., *A street in Bratislava*, 614); “[...] those pioneers marching towards the as yet uncolonised corners of the future” (“ty pochody pionýrů k dosud neosídleným končinám budoucnosti,” *A walk around my cell*, 615).

All the more assertive is, then, the way his verse written in jail is pervaded by the awareness, indeed conviction that the point about artistic creativity, indeed the point of living is the shaping of forms. It is as if the experience of prison has only reinforced this awareness: the creation of forms is not just an epistemological process, but a “means to self-preservation and the solidity of the world.”³⁴ Hans Blumenberg deems giving lived experience a form to be absolutely man’s original anthropological situation, though not exclusively as a process of creating “symbolic forms” in the Cassirer sense, which Blumenberg picks up on and modifies, but precisely as an anthropologically grounded process of (culturally) “defining the indefinite.”³⁵ In his animalesque *Entsicherung* man as a cultured being needs an awareness of form and how forms are created. For Zahradníček poetry is connected to a theorem of form, but not in relation to outer *formal* characteristics such as the line structure of a poem or its division into verses, but primarily in relation to the shaping, the outward manifestations and mutations of its organic structures, its internal organisation, the structuring and effects of the forces of emergence, shaping and composition on the basis of the “biosphere.” Incidentally, this intention is already visible in his very earliest collections. But in his prison verse the anthropologico-existential dimension, the will to preserve in confinement life’s authenticity, its authentic form, at all cost, went extraordinarily deep. Ultimately, this will amount to nothing short of what the speaker of Zahradníček’s poems enunciates in the lines of his last poem, *Epitaf*: “Life of mine. The only one. This one. And none other.” (“Živote můj. Jediný. Tento. A ne jiný.” [765]).

In the poet’s verse written during and after his incarceration, *landscape*, the space “out there,” is not just a space of subjective freedom, but also one of emergence, metamorphosing, reflexion and his own *ars poetica*. In this sense, and in terms of the perspicacious formulation of Ottmar Ette: “Geographical and philosophical thinking, lyrical verse and theory cannot be treated separately in the context of the constant reconstitution of landscape(s). A lyrical landscape is invariably also the landscape of a theory. Within the concept of landscape

³⁴ Hans Blumenberg, *Arbeit am Mythos* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979), 186.

³⁵ Blumenberg, *Arbeit am Mythos*, 187.

the two are as closely connected as possible.”³⁶ According to picture theorist William J. T. Mitchell, landscape is the universal medium of the system called ‘culture’.³⁷ Landscapes embody and orchestrate, as Ottmar Ette adds,

a model of the movement of life forms and norms [...]. Landscapes are images of motion, imaginings and thinking, writing and life: they reflect the past in its pathways towards the world to come. For they are – not only in geographical or art-theoretical terms, but also from a philological point of view – full of life, and in that light they also assume motion in the sense of *motiones* and emotions. Literary landscapes thus condense vectorially forms and norms, but also the deformations and transformations of life.³⁸

The subject of the poem *On the way (Cestou)* is this experience of the compression of the deformations and transformations of life: “This land is different and they are also different” (“Ta země je jiná a oni jsou také jiní” [663]). The transfer of prisoners from one jail to another³⁹ and the brief glimpse it afforded of an actual landscape after years of incarceration is, on the one hand, a distressing existential experience of self-alienation, de-individualisation and the awareness of having been blamelessly condemned to an inauthentic existence –

<i>za základ vzav si</i> <i>tu posádku ustrašenců, ty bledé tváře.</i>	having taken as base that company of scaredy-cats, those pale faces.
<i>Z nich každý svět pro sebe i mrtvé své</i> <i>vlastní</i> <i>si veze, svůj domov, svou vyhlídku do</i> <i>vesmíru –</i> (663)	For themselves and their own dead each carries the world, their home, their look into the universe –

³⁶ Ottmar Ette, “ÜberLebenSchreiben im Angesicht des Todes. Von den Lebenslandschaften der Literatur am Beispiel der Lyrikerin Emma Kann,” in *Poetik des Überlebens. Kulturproduktion im Konzentrationslager*, ed. Anne-Berénike Rothstein (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 12.

³⁷ William John Thomas Mitchell, *Landscape and Power. Second Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 14.

³⁸ Ottmar Ette, “ÜberLebenSchreiben im Angesicht des Todes,” 18.

³⁹ Prisoners would be conveyed in a bus with the windows blacked out. Because of a breakdown on one such trip, they could alight briefly. After years inside, they found themselves in open country. Zahradníček describes the experience thus: “It was like looking from somewhere beyond the grave” (*jako by se díval člověk odněkud ze záhrobfí*); cf. Bednářová and Trávníček, “Komentář,” 963.

in which man finds himself in the passive role of one condemned to watch his own life,

<i>jenž probíhá za skly oken</i> [...]	which takes its course behind the window glass [...]
<i>I jak léta žalu zpět míjejí ženy</i> <i>každým krokem (663)</i>	And as the years of heartache past pass women at every step

“Those pale faces” of the prisoners, and the objects around as well, are impacted by the deformations of life and the times, by the “marks of power”:

<i>V tom ránu stín, jenž pad na ně, i zemi</i> <i>stíní.</i>	That morning, the shade that fell on me also shades the earth.
<i>Stopy lidojedství, malomocenství zapírané</i>	Traces of cannibalism, ghastly leprous stains
<i>v obludných skvrnách po plotech, po zdech</i> <i>plane.</i>	are aflame all over fences, all over walls.
<i>Ta země je jiná a oni jsou také jiní.</i> (663)	This land is different and they are also different.

On the other hand, the brief view of an open landscape constitutes a dizzy sensual experience that grants, however briefly, a sense of freedom, but also a strange sense of symbolically purging oneself of both past and present, a realisation of and aspiration to immaculacy linked to the idea of the future with the earth being constantly resurrected and the past of a child as yet unencumbered:

<i>Však čistá zase</i>	Yet pure again
<i>zem vstává v pohledech dětí, jak čistý</i> <i>plamen</i>	the earth arises in the eyes of children, as a pure flame
<i>se míhají dívčí stonky, květ obličej z ramen</i>	stalks of girls flash, their flower-faces open wide from
<i>pln blouznivé něhy k obloze rozvívá se...</i> (663)	their shoulders, full of crazy tenderness towards the sky ...

And similarly in the poem *Abide with us (Zůstaň s námi)*

<i>Zůstaň s námi,</i> <i>nevinnosti, v níž se svět obnovuje.</i> (669)	Abide with us, innocence, in which the world renews itself.
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The awareness that human existence is *tragically* unique, each of us obliged to live *our own* life with all those tragic reversals that make no rationally defensible sense, unlike the eternal cycle between heaven and earth. “The clouds above, the waters of the March below flow by” (“Nahoře mračna, vody Moravy dole plynou,” 663), the point of which is simply *to be*, is the source of a particular pain:

<p><i>A zas potoky, stráně... Ten stesk, jemuž porozumí, jen kdo jak oni kles pod křížem, jenž má nésti.</i></p>	<p>And more brooks, hillsides... The sorrow understood only by one who, like them, sank beneath the cross he has to bear</p>
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For the speaker in Zahradníček’s poems, this awareness is not, or course, a source of despair; his faith reopens the space of hope for the future, because hope also works, as Klaus Held writes, following on from Gabriel Marcel’s⁴⁰ phenomenology and metaphysics of hope, as the basic feeling of trust in the durability of the horizon of (our) world and life in it, a durability that takes ever new positive contents that we can grasp.⁴¹ And at the same time, as Held points out, hope features as a mood absolutely open to the unexpected, to whatever event that impacts us as a force that is beyond our will to control. Between both forms, or modalities, of hope – as a mood and frame of mind that is non-deliberate, and hope as an emotion that is intentional, consciously directed at the realisation of positive possibilities – there is a bridge which Held says is our attitude to the world and our awareness of its continuity, its future; no matter how radically it may change, it will remain our world. Held points up the difference between stoicism that strives to hold out against adversity, and apathy (*ápátheia*), i.e. the negation of *pathos*, that means to immunise the stoic against strokes of (mis)fortune. Yet apathy deadens the emotions by which man is consciously linked to world events, and part of that

⁴⁰ In a lecture, “Sketch of Phenomenology and the Metaphysics of Hope,” delivered by Gabriel Marcel in February 1942 at Lyons, he recalls the attitude of the optimist who believes, or has a vague sense, that “matters” (situations, conflicts, difficulties, etc.) will somehow sort themselves out and be resolved. Optimism may be sentimental or have a basis in rational empiricism. But hope is, as Marcel puts it, “supra-natural” by nature, not a problem, but a mystery. Hope has an inherent special power that operates within it if we understand it, alongside faith and love, as one of the gifts (*charismata*) of the Holy Spirit and one of the virtues, but also as an emotion and a mood. See: Gabriel Marcel, “Sketch of Phenomenology and the Metaphysics of Hope,” in *Homo Viator: Introduction to the Metaphysics of Hope* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1951), 29–67.

⁴¹ Klaus Held, “Idee einer Phänomenologie der Hoffnung,” in *Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven der Phänomenologie. Neue Felder der Kooperation: Cognitive Science, Neurowissenschaften, Psychologie, Soziologie, Politikwissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft*, eds. Dieter Lohmar and Dirk Fonfara (Dordrecht: Springer Verlag, 2006), 136–7.

is, as Held points out, sympathy with the suffering of others, the sympathy and fellow-feeling that stirs our emotions. This is where the stoic’s attitude to the world and those about him hits the buffers. Gabriel Marcel had noticed that hope is also characterised by the oddly relaxed way in which it opposes adverse circumstances. The hoper, as Klaus Held puts it, “lives actively, but flexibly in anticipation of victory over havoc, evincing thereby a strength suffused with humility.”⁴² This is possible because within the ‘low-key’ pathos of hope there is another force that makes itself felt and is capable of protecting and saving the hoper from despair, acting as a ‘superhuman’ force, though springing from the same source as ‘human’ force; paradoxically, it is seated even deeper in the self. That superhuman force springs, according to Held, from the tradition of Christian theology and the dogma of the mercy of an infinitely almighty God.⁴³

Poetry as a space of freedom and private autonomy

This is yet another modulation of Zahradníček’s prison poetry in *Fear house*, not just the poetics of the scarily spectral existence of the inmates of the “terrible houses,” but also – alongside the poetics of homesickness and pining for wife and children – a poetics of resignation to and acceptance of one’s lot:

[...] <i>nevysmíváš se.</i>	[...] thou mockest not.
<i>Všechno má místo i důvod svůj,</i>	Everything has its place and reason,
<i>vše mukami vykoupěno v tvém mládí</i>	everything redeemed through suffering
<i>i dávno dřív. (Return, 674)</i>	in thy childhood and long before.

Acceptance of one’s own suffering – but one part of the suffering of the world,

<i>toť šetrné odhrnování roušky bolesti</i>	is the gentle drawing aside of the veil of pain
<i>s těl balzamovaných bēdou, s těl</i>	from bodies embalmed by woe, bodies
<i>průsvitných utrpením,</i>	translucent with suffering,
<i>jak nám je ukázaly poslední války...</i>	as we were shown them by recent wars...
<i>(Return, 675)</i>	

⁴² Held, “Idee einer Phänomenologie der Hoffnung,” 139.

⁴³ Held, “Idee einer Phänomenologie der Hoffnung,” 140.

– this theology of ‘austerity and sacrifice’ gives Zahradníček’s prison poetry a specific dimension: theological, existential and poetic. It is the experience of the metaphysical split that the speaker of *Fear house* is going through and putting into words: split between, on the one hand, following God’s command to accept responsibility for others in their suffering, and on the other, discovering in one’s own suffering the image of an expectant, patient God:

*A mezi zemí a hvězdami já na kříži
s Kristem jsem.
V této hodině konců a v této hodině
začátků,
v tom zoufalství plném naděje
odtržen ode všeho, co mi přirostlo k srdci,
já s Kristem jsem.
Ó jak je to kruté odtržen od všech věcí
k podobě Kříže dorůstat.
Jak je to kruté s Kristem být.
Jak sladké... (Uctívání kříže, 657)*

And twixt earth and stars I’m on the
Cross with Christ.
In this hour of ends and this hour of
beginnings,
in that despair full of hope
cut off from all to which I’ve grown
attached, I am with Christ.
Oh, how cruel it is, cut off from all things,
to grow into a likeness of the Cross.
How cruel it is to be with Christ.
How sweet... (Worshipping the cross)

In the *Fear house* collection, the remarkable poem *Oh, Simone Weil*⁴⁴ (*Ó Simone Weilová*) occupies a special place with regard to this theme:

*Ó Simone Weilová,
jak si vzpomínám,
když cesta má mřížící přerovaná,
na cestu její,
tu malou cestu odříkání a oběti. (607)*

Oh, Simone Weil,
how I recall,
with my own pathway sundered by bars,
her way,
that little pathway of austerity and sacrifice.

Weil noted in her *Cahiers*: “likens us unto God.”⁴⁵ The patiently *waiting* God conceals suffering within himself, but with it also a perspective that is ‘beyond’ all suffering, and the believer finds himself in a similar situation in his own *waiting* for God. From this point of view the entire history of creation, even in times of “darkness” and “the howling of emptiness” (*Worshipping the cross*, 654), is the history not of flight from God, but of tending towards Him, no matter how such a movement amounts to an apparently paradoxical passivity, much as God’s *waiting* and *waiting for* God are also seemingly passive:

⁴⁴ Simone Weil, a French Jewish philosopher (1909–1943), anarchist and later religious thinker and mystic. Her name and reflexions of her ideas crop up in Zahradníček’s correspondence from the second half of the 1940s on.

⁴⁵ Simone Weil, *The Notebooks of Simone Weil. Volume One. Volume Two*, trans. Arthur Wills (New York: Routledge, 2004), 184.

<p>Všech se dotýkají ty rafije na orloji vesmírném. Všem ukazují čas království Božího, které přichází s tím pohybem shrnujícím rozpjatých paží dvou, s tou hrozivě rychlou zdlouhavostí, k níž k sobě blíží se...</p>	<p>All are touched by the hands of the universe's clock. They tell all the time in the kingdom of God, which is approaching with the in-gathering motion of two outspread arms, with the frighteningly fast sluggishness with which it draws nigh unto itself...</p>
<p>Celé dějiny jsou návratem do té náruče děsivě čekající. Celé dějiny jsou útekem před tou náručí děsivě čekající, Před tou harpunou věčnosti prorazivši bok světa, jenž potápí se. A potopit nemůže se. A zachránit nemůže se, leda jím [...]. (Worshipping the cross, 655–656)</p>	<p>All history is a return to that terrifyingly waiting embrace. All history is flight from that terrifyingly waiting embrace, From the harpoon of eternity that has pierced the flank of the world as it tries to submerge. But submerge it cannot. Nor can it save itself, Unless through that embrace [...]</p>

Three basic themes – *certainty, emptiness, waiting* – constitute the semantic core of *Oh, Simone Weil*. In Weil's thinking, emptiness is a condition of revelation of the supernatural, God and His values. "This fulcrum is the Cross. [...] The Cross is this point of intersection."⁴⁶ Misfortune is a "mystery": it is anonymous (like physical suffering), nameless, it plucks us out of time, it is inconceivable, and yet all thought is fraudulent, unless it is the product of misfortune. In *Oh, Simone Weil*:

<p><i>Kudy chodila, žal druhých ji doprovázel.</i></p> <p>Ó vždycky je někdo potřebnější než já a ve dne v noci slyšíš ten klepot na stěnu srdce svého, dokud neuděláme v sobě to prázdno, aby vstoupiti mohl bratr náš. (607)</p>	<p>Whithersoever she went, the woes of others followed.</p> <p>Oh, there is always someone more needy than I and by day and night you can hear the tapping on the wall of your heart, until we create within us that void so that our brother might enter.</p>
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⁴⁶ Weil, *The Notebooks*, 433.

A void as the supreme realisation, an idea that has its origins in negative theology, a void as a state of ecstasy, which is conditional precisely on the void, an opening oneself up to emptiness. The poem *Visitor (Návštěva)* builds up to an ecstatic vision of this fulfilment in mystical unity with God:

<i>Ještě slyším ten hlas.</i>	I can still hear that voice.
<i>Je to velikonoční vyzvánění všech kostelů světa.</i>	It is the ringing of all the world's bells at Easter.
<i>Ó Srdce probodené, jež bušíš přec, je to tvůj hlas.</i>	Oh, punctured heart that is pounding yet, it is Thy voice.
<i>Pojď, Pane.</i>	Come, Lord.
<i>Jak vězeň k vězni.</i>	As one prisoner to another.
<i>Mé srdce je dokořán.</i>	My heart is open wide.
<i>Konečně...</i>	(630) At last...

The demand that Simone Weil makes on herself is extreme: “To accept the woes of others while at the same time suffering on account of them. Acceptance is nothing else but the recognition that something *is*. Suffering is nothing else but contemplating affliction with the mind. To contemplate the fact that affliction exists: that constitutes acceptance and suffering. [...] This irreducible ‘I’, which is the irreducible foundation of my suffering, must be made universal.”⁴⁷ In the final years of her life, right up to her death from exhaustion on 24 August 1943, having refused to take food, Simone Weil pursued this idea with an extraordinary thoroughness (“one must not be *me*”),⁴⁸ which reminds us of the speculations of the Gnostics of later antiquity.⁴⁹ Creation, the created world, is a mere “fiction of God’s,” the creation of a “mere appearance” that has to be smashed, meaning one must shatter the illusion that something other exists besides God. Yet God *surrenders his power* over this world, in which he is present by his absence: “God’s powerlessness. Christ was crucified; his Father let him be crucified; two aspects of the same powerlessness. God does not exercise his all-powerlessness; if he did so, we should not exist, nor would anything else.”⁵⁰ Creation means abandonment, for if God created something that He Himself was not, he had also to abandon the thing created.⁵¹ For the poet of *Marks of power*, so paradoxical an extension of the

⁴⁷ Weil, *The Notebooks*, 293.

⁴⁸ Weil, *The Notebooks*, 293.

⁴⁹ See: Elaine Pagels, *Versuchung durch Erkenntnis. Die gnostischen Evangelien* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1987), 120–56.

⁵⁰ Weil, *The Notebooks*, 191.

⁵¹ Weil, *The Notebooks*, 268–9.

theodicy idea, culminating in an apotheosis of God as the "sole genuine, sole real rule over the world" ("jedin[é] opravdov[é], jedin[é] skutečn[é] vlád[y] nad světem," 590), would doubtless be problematical. However, Weil is thinking of the renunciation of any yearning for all the created *material* things of this world, no matter how beautiful they might be, that one might wish to possess, like Harpagon his pot of gold coins, and this craving is but another illusion to be dashed.⁵² Not just because yearning and hankering can exist without gratification and "satiation," but also because through such hankering we erect a wall "between ourselves and others" (*Oh, Simone Weil*, 608):

*Budem se stydět za svůj Strach, za své
shánění,
tisíc zářících věcí si chtějíce opatřit*

*pro své ošacení či pro svůj byt...
Říká se tomu starost o zdraví, starost
o domácnost.
Ale kdybychom se rozhlédli kolem sebe,
co zbytečností to shromazďuješ
a přechováváš
[...]*

*A ty hradbu z nich stavíš mezi sebou
a ostatními, hradbu mezi sebou
a Bohem, před kterým utíkáš pryč od
nemocnic, blázinců, kriminálů,
od utrpení, od svědectví utrpení
v očích děťátek jež stůňou,
v očích zatčených, jež na léta odvlékají
pryč z domovů,
v očích vězňů, co s rukama
prázdnýma
sedí v hadrech, jež ušity na ně
nejsou. Nevycházejí, nevidí slunce,
obléknout nemohou si
pěkné své letní šaty ani kravatu
uvázat.
A žalobná vůně polévek žalářních
celý svět naplňujíc až k hvězdám
stoupá jak obět přečistá.*

We'll be ashamed of our Fear, our shopping
around,
wishing to procure a thousand glittering
things
for our apparel or for the flat...
It's called concern for our wellbeing, our
home.
But were we to look about us,
how many useless things you amass
and keep
[...]

And you erect a wall of them twixt yourself
and others, a wall between yourself and
God, from whom you flee away from
hospitals, asylums, jails,
from suffering, from the evidence of suffering
in the eyes of little ailing children
in the eyes of the arrested, who are hauled
away from their homes for years,
in the eyes of prisoners who with empty
hands
sit about in rags that are not made to fit. They
don't go out, they cannot see the sun, they
cannot get changed
into their fine summer clothes or even knot
their tie.
And the accusatory whiff of prison soups,
filling the world, ascends right up to the stars
like the purest offering.

(*Oh, Simone Weil*, 607–608)

⁵² Weil, *The Notebooks*, 60.

But it is this “spectral existence,” when “Only the world hears not. The world wishes not to hear” (“Jenom svět neslyší. Svět slyšet nechce,” *A poem for easter [Velikonoční, 620]*), that opens up to the poetic *Ich* the experience of the paradoxical presence of an absent God in which the poem *Visitor* (630) culminates, as if God, “who enters [entereth] through a closed door” (“jenž vstupuje[š] dveřmi zavřenými,” 627), might be recognised only by a tapping on the prison cell wall, in misfortune and pain, God as an “unshacklable prisoner” (“vězeň nespoutatelný,” 626), though hearing the very thing the world does not:

<p><i>Mám sousedy vpravo a sousedy vlevo. [...] A když na sebe klepáme, je to klepání horníků zasypaných mnoho set metrů pod zemí. [...] Tukáme na sebe, jenom abychom se navzájem ujistili, že patříme k těm dvěma miliardám vyhnaných synů Evy.</i></p>	<p>I have neighbours to the right, neighbours to the left. [...] And when we tap to each other it's the tapping of miners buried hundreds of metres below ground [...] We tap to one another just to reassure one another that we are part of those two billion banished sons of Eve.</p>
<p><i>A z obou stran světa roztrženého jak opona chrámová úpění nevýslovné prorůstá námi až v tmu úst a Bůh je slyší. (In solitary, 624–626)</i></p>	<p>And from both sides of a world torn in two like the temple veil an unspeakable moaning grows through us up into the darkness of our mouths and God hears it.</p>

In solitary is followed in the collection by *Visitor*, which is the answer to the tapping:

<p><i>Ještě dýchám a slyším dech Kohosi blízko. Jsi to ty, Pane [...] Pojď, Pane. Jak vězeň k vězni [...]. (627, 630)</i></p>	<p>I'm breathing still and can hear the breath Of someone close at hand. It is Thou, Lord [...] Come, Lord. As one prisoner to another [...].</p>
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For Simone Weil the relation between man and God is exactly as that between two prisoners: “Let us imagine two prisoners, in neighbouring cells, who communicate by means of taps on the wall. The wall is what separates

them, but it is also what enables them to communicate. It is the same with us and God. Every separation represents a bond.”⁵³

But there is here yet another “bond,” one linking the poetics of Jan Zahradníček to the theology of Simone Weil, and that is the idea of the beautiful. Despite her asceticism, the beautiful remains an important perspective of her theology. The beauty of the created, perceptible world, which has its own aesthetic order, makes transcendent experience possible:

Aesthetic order; is related to the possibilities of human perception (what can easily be apprehended by the senses at a given moment) on the one hand, to the transcendent on the other hand. [...] Beauty is experimental proof that the Incarnation is possible. It follows that all art of the first order is, in essence, religious. (That is something we no longer understand today.) All art of the first order testifies to the fact of the Incarnation. A Gregorian melody testifies to it just as much as does the death of a martyr. [...] *The object of science is the exploration of beauty a priori*. The theory of beauty in the arts and the contemplation of beauty within the sciences—these two things must coincide through some hitherto unexplored path.⁵⁴

As early as the second half of the 1930s Zahradníček’s lectures on poetry have things to say about the relation between poetry and sainthood.⁵⁵ Even in jail, “here at the bottom of the flood, at the bottom of everything” (“zde na dně potopy, na dně všeho,” *Pozdrav*, 643), poetry, as the only space in which to be free, is “a mighty means to escaping, to liberty and personal autonomy” (“mohutným prostředkem k úniku, svobodě, osobní autonomii,”⁵⁶) as he wrote back then. The poem *Pacivores (Mírožerci)* opens with a paradoxical inversion of the situation of freedom and unfreedom, life and death, and an open and enclosed space:

⁵³ Weil, *The Notebooks*, 497.

⁵⁴ Weil, *The Notebooks*, 254, 440.

⁵⁵ In a lecture entitled “The poet and life” Zahradníček writes: “In order to have a clearer picture of what a poet is like, many have compared the poet to the saint. They are, after all, the only two beings on earth in whom the thirst for the absolute manifests itself in a manner so fascinating and uncompromising that there is surely something to be gained from taking a closer look at the relationship between them. And we know anyway that many great saints were also great poets and that the strivings of many poets bore features of saintliness. They both, saint and poet alike, strive for perfection, both are hurt by yearning for the impossible, but the difference lies in *how* they try to achieve perfection, and *where* that attempt is made.” (Zahradníček, *Dílo III*, 35).

⁵⁶ Zahradníček, *Dílo III*, 17.

<p><i>Nevím – to vesmír venku je zamřížován. A my tady na svobodě. Z jha vyňati potřeb a zvyků, z času v zem přimáčklého v bezčasi mrtvých, v dalekozorné prázdno let. My dosud živi nájemníci hrobů. (635)</i></p>	<p>I know not – 'tis the cosmos outside that is barred. And we here are at liberty. Freed from the yoke of needs and habits, from time squashed into the earth, into the timelessness of the dead, into the void of years stretching as far as the eye can see. We – still living tenants of graves.</p>
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No less oxymoronic is the image of an angel:

<p><i>Ještě, že máme stráž anděla strašného. Jej, chlad žáru, déšť vypráhlosti, ještě v běd plískanici radost hlubší než svět a vítězství na praporech, jimiž necloumá vítr. Ještě že máme vždycky a všude dík vzdávat. (635–636)</i></p>	<p>'Tis good we have the guardianship of a ghastly angel. Dear me, the cold of heat, the rain of barrenness, joy at the driven sleet of woes, joy deeper than the world and victory on banners unshaken by the wind. 'Tis good we have, always and everywhere, to give thanks.</p>
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What first looks like a pun residing in the switched consonants – “stráž anděla strašného”⁵⁷ – is in this poem important metapoetically: just like the poet-prisoner, the poem’s lyrical speaker has his “angel” who guards him, but this angel is “terrible, ghastly.” As an expert on and translator of Rilke, Zahradníček also knew very well his *Duino Elegies* and the famous line from the opening of the *First Elegy*: “Every angel’s terrifying” (“Ein jeder Engel ist schrecklich”). The angel of Rilke’s *Duino Elegies* is a being that has a share in the Absolute, a terrible, paradoxical being, for it combines within itself the spheres of the visible and invisible and (apparently) incompatible opposites (heat and cold, rain and aridity, as in *Pacivores*). Even if the angel were “beautiful,” as the western tradition presents it in art, it remains – for the poet of the *Duino Elegies* – “terrible.” Beauty is merely one part of an immeasurable, vast integrity that for man is frightening in its unimaginability. “Because beauty’s nothing / but the start of terror we can hardly bear, /and we adore it because

⁵⁷ In itself, *anděl strašný*, the dictionary form of the phrase translated here almost literally as ‘ghastly angel’, differs by just one consonant from the expression *anděl strážný* ‘guardian angel’, hence the impression of a pun [D. S.].

of the serene scorn / it could kill us with. Every angel's terrifying."⁵⁸ Romano Guardini interprets the angel in Rilke's *Duino Elegies* as a being that has little in common with the Christian heaven, but is capable, in its overwhelming monumentality, of recognising, also in the invisible world, a higher degree of reality, a being "endowed with numinous energy, great, terrifying and, in its magnificence, destructive to man."⁵⁹ And yet "for Rilke the angel figure [is] a guarantee of the integrity of the world, which combines the visible and invisible in one great whole."⁶⁰ In Zahradníček's poem, too, the angel is like "the cold of heat" and "the rain of barrenness," endowed with the numinous energy to conjoin the most far-removed opposites into a paradoxical whole. But it is this terrifying and painful whole that gives rise to something quite new: as if this painful symbiosis of opposites were a matrix of the poet's involvement in the work of creation. In man as well, there is the coexistence of "angelic wonderment" ("údiv andělský") and "human tears" ("pláč lidský," 635). In this light, the lines "'Tis good we have, always and everywhere, / to give thanks" (636, v.s.) can be read as countering Rilke's: "Ah, who can we turn to, / then? Neither angels nor men, / and the animals already know by instinct / we're not comfortably at home / in our translated world."⁶¹ But both the "ghastly angel" and the poetic *Ich On the Záhoř's bed that is prison*⁶² (*na Záhořově loži žalárním*) can claim "victory," or more accurately, the angel is the "victory on banners unshaken by the wind" (636, v.s.), while the speaker of the poem is victorious precisely by being able to bear the burden ("Each in our own way / we raise our boulder" – "každý po svém / zdvímáme balvan svůj," 635), the pain and the terror. The flames of the prison inferno, into which the lyrical subject of the poem is cast like the pilgrim in Erben's ballad, are transmuted by the power of the spirit into the liberating flame of poetry. At this point the grammatical mode of the discourse also changes: the I, speaking as 'we' changes into the 'thou' of an addressee:

⁵⁸ "Denn das Schöne ist nichts / als des Schrecklichen Anfang, den wir noch grade ertragen, / und wir bewundern es so, weil es gelassen verschmäh't, / uns zu zerstören. Ein jeder Engel ist schrecklich" (Rilke, *Duino Elegies and The Sonnets to Erpheus*, 4, 5).

⁵⁹ Romano Guardini, *Rainer Maria Rilkes Deutung des Daseins. Eine Interpretation der Duineser Elegien* (München: Kösel Verlag, 1953), 40.

⁶⁰ Guardini, *Rainer Maria Rilkes Deutung des Daseins*, 40.

⁶¹ "Ach, wen vermögen / wir denn zu brauchen? Engel nicht, Menschen nicht, / und die findigen Tiere merken es schon, / daß wir nicht sehr verläßlich zu Haus sind / in der gedeuteten Welt" (Rilke, *Duino Elegies and The Sonnets to Erpheus*, 5).

⁶² "Záhoř's bed" alludes to the eponymous ballad by Karel Jaromír Erben (1811–70) in the collection *Kytice*, known to every Czech child and available in English translation (parallel text) by Susan Reynolds, London: Jantar Publishing, 2013, 143–181. To be in the bed is the worst punishment prepared by Satan for Zahoř and is suffered by the pilgrim [D. S.].

<p> <i>zatímco v dálce vlak hučí tmou svobodnou, ty ležíš a bdíš v svědectví nevývratném a jak navečer ve žních z požatých polí van báseň mladá v tvář horoucně dýchá ti. Není to papír, ani černá tiskařská, dech živý ta báseň tvá, co v žalobném účastenství všech mrtvých, všech strádajících slovo za slovem se zvolna odpoutává od dechu tvého a po svém dál žije a po svém dál plápolá prapor básně, báseň tvá Mírožerci, ruce s úpěním zdvižené z té potopy prostřednosti, křik lásky, jež hněvá se.</i> </p>	<p> as a faraway train rumbles through the freedom's dark you lie awake in irrefutable testimony and like an early evening waft in newly harvested fields a young poem breathes fire into your face. 'Tis not paper, not even printer's ink, living breath is this poem of yours that in the plaintive commiseration of all who are dead, all who suffer, slowly detaches itself word by word from your breath and then lives on by itself and then the poem's banner flutters on by itself, your poem Pacivores, arms raised with a wail from out of that flood of mediocrity, an outcry of love that is enraged. </p>
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(636)

So poetry not as the “pseudo-literature” on paper in which “official” poets, hacks and those devourers of peace have got hopelessly bogged down and which “no one listens to. No one argues with them” (“nikdo neposlouchá. Nikdo se nepřes nimi,” *Zvon*, 633), but verse lived authentically in sorrow and misfortune, verse that is life and liberty like the breath and spirit that wafts withersoever it will. The poet is the one who testifies on behalf of others and no one can relieve him of that burden. As Jacques Derrida says:

Technics will never produce a testimony. On the other hand, and we are coming back, when all is said and done, to the logic that asserted itself a moment ago – conversely, whoever testifies and takes an oath pledges, not only to tell the truth, “me, now, here, before you,” but to repeat and confirm this truth right away, tomorrow, and ad infinitum. The present of my testimony must be repeated, and consequently iterability already inhabits the heart of the living present of the testimonial pledge. Testimony, as witness *borne*, as attestation, always consists in discourse. To be a witness consists in seeing, in hearing, etc., but to *bear* witness is always to speak, to engage in and uphold, to sign a discourse.⁶³

If evidence is lacking or thwarted, we are thrown back on the statements of witnesses. The poet must see, even in the midst of hell, and give testimony

⁶³ Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television. Filmed Interviews*, trans. Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 94.

like the author of the *Divine Comedy*, "in the plaintive commiseration of all who are dead, all who suffer" (636, v.s.). The lyrical subject of Zahradníček's poem testifies "on the Záhoř's bed that is prison,⁶⁴ [...] you lie awake in irrefutable testimony" (636, v.s.). The poem-testimony which "lives on by itself / and then *the poem's banner flutters on by itself*," the banner raised by the poet-prisoner "out of that flood of mediocrity" and is "an outcry of love that is enraged." The oxymoronic paradoxicality of the "ghastly angel" (that "cold of heat" and "rain of barrenness") also characterises, in the last line, love as wailing, shouting and rage. A poem, "living breath," that has become flesh: "your poem *Pacivores*, / arms raised with a wail [...]" "In that great eclipse of love" ("V tom velkém zatmění lásky," *Zvon*, 632), "[E]ven to the howling of dogs, / even as the Pankrác clock strikes"⁶⁵ ("[I] za vytlí psů, / i za odbíjení pankráckých hodin", *Pacivores* (636), a poem has to be an angry, uncompromising "outcry of love" in order to be heard – one day. In *A small poetics (Malá poetika)* it is a poem that – like a word, blood or light – smashes through the darkness, even if not yet heard:

*Psi vyjí. Psi vyjí
a z tmy ve mně, z tmy hučících
lesů člověčenství,*

*ó Maria,
slova v přílivu
jako krev na rty hrnou se.
Nikdo mne neslyší,
ale všechny mocnosti světla se
mnou jsou
když chystám se zpívat
v té hodině úzkostné
mezi minulostí plnou zvonů
a budoucností slavnější ještě
snad
tváří v tvář slunci.*

Dogs are howling. Dogs are howling
and from the darkness within
me, from the darkness of the
murmuring forests of mankind,
oh, Mary,
a tide of words
comes surging like blood to my lips.
No one hears me,
but all the powers of light are
with me
as I make ready to sing
in that anxious hour
between a past filled with bells and
a future that may yet be more
glorious
face to face with the sun.

(665)

Typical of Zahradníček's verse of the 1940s and 1950s is the striking extent to which we find the motif of acoustic perception – hearing as both noun and verb. For the ancient Greeks thinking was hearing, as Hans Blumenberg has shown in his study on light as a metaphor for truth, a more indifferent sensor

⁶⁴ See the footnote no. 57.

⁶⁵ Pankrác is where the most notorious Prague prison stands. Today it is mostly a remand centre [D. S.].

than sight when it comes to the mediation of truth. In the Old Testament tradition things are, or course, different; there hearing is placed above seeing, for everything created resides in *the word*. Hence the ‘claim’ of the word dominates biblical tradition, reality manifesting itself within the compass set by the sense of hearing and by hearing as verb: “In this way, as has already been shown, the Creation image of the Word calling out of the void is transposed into an image of light emanating into the darkness [*Dunkel*] of matter, and his explicit view is that the only seeing which does not deceive is that through which beings are presented in their Being.”⁶⁶ In and of itself, a word is addressed to someone; and the conscience or mind also have a ‘voice’, but not ‘sight’.

The subject of Zahradníček’s *A small poetics* is this transposition of the seen into the vocal, albeit it remains unheard despite being vocalised and verbalised. In terms of poetology this prison poem is another that speaks to man’s creative role in the world: in and by means of light, not only does man discover the “objectively solid structures of the world” with which he engages, but as one who *sees*, *knows* and *creates* he becomes the principle behind the creation of these structures.⁶⁷ In this active mental light of the mind’s sight what comes to the surface are, in the words of Hedwig Conrad-Martius, intelligible forms of the things on which a knowledge of reality rests. Being *sapiens*, but also a passively and actively creative being, as *homo pictor*, man is capable of self-realisation. And by self-realisation man has a share in world-creation. Only in the source that artistic creativity draws on, as Conrad-Martius points out, the veriest essence of logos, can transposition from nothing (*ex nihilo*) into being come about. A productive man is capable of creating and, what is more, he is capable of a vertiginous descent into the néant so as to bring from its floor to the surface that which is, by his creation of forms, to reach realisation.⁶⁸ For Zahradníček this is a literal descent to “the bottom of everything” (“dno všeho,” *Pozdrav*, 643), and yet a poet’s creative potential is able to procure even from the bottom what is contained ‘virtually’ in the logos. And at the same time a poetic expression of even subjective feelings of misfortune and pain remains a statement on the woeful and painful condition of the world.

Translated from Czech by David Short

⁶⁶ Hans Blumenberg, “Light as a Metaphor for Truth at the Preliminary Stage of Philosophical Concept Formation,” in *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, ed. David Kleinberg-Levin (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1993), 47.

⁶⁷ Blumenberg, “Light as a Metaphor for Truth at the Preliminary Stage of Philosophical Concept Formation,” 167.

⁶⁸ Hedwig Conrad-Martius, “Schöpfung und Zeugung,” *Tijdschrift voor Philosophie*, no. 1 (1939): 813–5.

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Faith Beyond Doctrines – Faith in Dialogue: Reflection on the Philosophical Anthropology of Milan Machovec

KEYWORDS: dialogue, atheism, postsecularism, Marxist–Christian discussion, responsibility

ABSTRACT: Czech philosopher and dissident Milan Machovec was an initiator of the so-called “Seminars of dialogue” that took place in the early 1960s at Charles University in Prague and were followed by analogical events abroad, mostly in German-speaking circles. The meetings were originally meant as a platform for Marxist and Christian dialogue, although the religious and ideological limits were in fact by a long way overstepped. The meetings were attended by Egon Bondy, Milan Opočenský, Jan Sokol, Zdeněk Neubauer, Ladislav Hejránek, and others. Machovec also established close relations with Erich Fromm and Ernst Bloch. When the process of democratization in Czechoslovakia was brutally stopped in 1968, this so-called ‘normalization’ affected also Milan Machovec. His political opinions and his philosophical point of view – not to mention his dissident activities that were so disturbing to the communist powers – resulted in him being expelled from the university in 1970. Nevertheless, he kept giving lectures in his private apartment and, with the help of the people gathered around him, he built close relations with the Czech Underground. Milan Machovec is an emblematic example of an individual who could be seen today as a promoter of postsecular approaches to all forms of religiosity, starting from those which revealed themselves as ‘political religion’. However, Christianity itself and its worship were also an object of Machovec’s skepticism. According to him, all forms of faith were ‘touched’ with ambiguity due to the disillusion with traditional confession, but also, as far as ‘political religion’ was concerned, religion was affected by distrust

resulting from the experience of the totalitarian regime and the post-war crisis of values. Machovec's way of thinking is far from systematic philosophy, it turns rather towards the Socratic practice of questioning persisting dogmas. His main concern was seeking forms of profound understanding of the spiritual needs of contemporary human beings. The aim of this brief article is to recall the significance of Machovec's thought in the broad context of postsecularism, as well as to show that his intellectual heritage still remains current nowadays.

The purpose of this article is to bring to mind the person of Milan Machovec (1925–2003), a Czech philosopher and dissident who promoted an unconventional approach to the issue of faith and who inspired many people, especially in his lifetime. Machovec's thought did not receive recognition that was adequate to its importance and originality, although it is important to stress that he got much more attention in the Western world than in Central Europe.¹ Except for his works on Czech history (books about Josef Dobrovský² or František Palacký³),⁴ his philosophical work remains almost unknown in Poland. The only Polish article on this subject was written by Robert Puzia. Unfortunately, it would be difficult to treat this text seriously because of its rather scornful and biased attitude towards the Czech philosopher. The author claims that Machovec's concept of God is wrong (i.e. non-Catholic) – as if this would be a relevant criterion for any academic research.⁵

Nonetheless, recent years brought a few notable Czech publications that analyzed the work of Milan Machovec: for example, a few chapters in Michael Hauser's book *Ways out of postmodernism (Cesty z postmodernismu, 2012)*⁶ or the book *Tracing the Marxist–Christian dialogue in Czechoslovakia (Proměny marxisticko-křesťanského dialogu v Československu, 2017)* by Ivan Landa, Jan Mervart and others, both published by The Institute of Philosophy

¹ Zdeněk R. Nešpor, "Význam Eriky Kadlecové a sociologie náboženství marxisticko-křesťanském dialogu šedesátých let," in Ivan Landa, Jan Mervart et al., *Proměny marxisticko-křesťanského dialogu v Československu* (Prague: Filosofia, 2017), 87.

² Josef Dobrovský (1753–1829) – historian and philologist; important figure of the Czech National Revival.

³ František Palacký (1798–1876) – writer, historian and politician; establisher of the Czech historiography; one of the leaders of the Czech National Revival.

⁴ Milan Machovec, *František Palacký a česká filosofie* (Prague: ČSAV, 1961); Milan Machovec, *Josef Dobrovský: studie s ukázkami z díla* (Prague: Svobodné slovo, 1964).

⁵ Robert Puzia, "Milan Machovec – marksistowski 'prorok' humanistycznego dialogu?" *Zeszyty Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego*, no. 1 (2015): 51–66.

⁶ Michael Hauser, *Cesty z postmodernismu: filozofická reflexe doby přechodu* (Prague: Filosofia, 2012), 146–72.

of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic.⁷ Also noteworthy are both publications edited by Pavel Žďárský et al., as they map the exchange of thought in the network of people connected to Milan Machovec.⁸

This article does not intend to overestimate the person and work of Milan Machovec, it instead attempts to show the originality of his thinking about faith in the context of postsecular studies. Postsecularism (as is shown in works of Jürgen Habermas and Charles Taylor) is meant not as any particular movement or period, but as a profound change in perception of reality that came together with the diminishing role of religion in the public sphere, but without complete denial of spiritual needs.⁹ While it is true that Czech society is deeply secularized, one cannot ignore the fact that spiritual reflection is also present among atheist thinkers and that it has much richer tradition than would be expected, particularly in Czechia.¹⁰ Philosophers such as Egon Bondy,¹¹ Jan Patočka,¹² Václav Havel,¹³ Josef Šafařík,¹⁴ Ladislav Hejdínek¹⁵ (and many others) kept bringing up the question of transcendency and unorthodox belief in its various forms. Therefore, the example of Machovec's intellectual activity and his attitude towards religiosity should be taken rather as a case

⁷ Ivan Landa, Jan Mervart et al., *Proměny marxisticko-křesťanského dialogu v Československu* (Prague: Filosofía, 2017).

⁸ Kamila Jindrová, Pavel Tachecí, and Pavel Žďárský, eds., *Mistr dialogu Milan Machovec: sborník k nedožitým osmdesátinám českého filosofa* (Prague: Akropolis, 2005). See also: Pavel Žďárský, ed., *Hovory s Milanem Machovcem* (Prague: Akropolis, 2008).

⁹ Christian Bryan Bustamante, "From Secularism to Post-Secularism: Jürgen Habermas on Religion in a Secular State," *Scientia. The Research Journal of the College of Arts & Sciences*, no. 3 (1) (2014): 8. Cf. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Cf. Dana Hamplová and Zdeněk R. Nešpor, "Invisible Religion in a 'Non-believing' Country: The Case of the Czech Republic," *Social Compass*, no. 56 (4) (2009): 581–97.

¹¹ Egon Bondy (1930–2007) – born Zbyněk Fišer; poet, writer and philosopher; inspirer of Czech underground movement, connected to the group Plastic People of the Universe; his concerns about religion focused, for example, on the relation between atheism and non-substantial theism.

¹² Jan Patočka (1907–1977) – philosopher, phenomenologist, pupil of Edmund Husserl; one of the initiators of the Charter 77 for what he was persecuted and died shortly afterwards; the symbol of dissident movement in Czechoslovakia.

¹³ Václav Havel – writer, essayist, dissident, first president of Czechoslovakia after fall of communism and then of Czech Republic; in his *Letters to Olga* (1983) he approached a question of the faith without an object.

¹⁴ Josef Šafařík (1907–1992) – essayist, philosopher; denouncer of any type of might, particularly of its misuse in the technocratic civilization and in the religious systems; his work was one of the inspiration of Václav Havel's text *The power of the powerless* (1978); most of his texts existed in unofficial circulation only.

¹⁵ Ladislav Hejdínek (1927) – philosopher, one of the proponents of Charter 77; his research concerns, among others, philosophy of faith.

that shows how religiosity was going through a transformation in Czechoslovakia in the early 1960s, approaching forms which are seen today as ‘postsecular’. He could be considered as the catalyst for some tendencies in this field in Czechia, but obviously he was not the only one. Some parallels between his thought and the philosophical reflection of the aforementioned philosophers will be described in a further part of this study.

Although analyzing his biography is not the aim of this article, a short introduction to the life of Machovec is necessary to illustrate the origins and some characteristic features of his philosophy. Milan Machovec was born in 1925 in a secular family that inclined to the worldview of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk.¹⁶ In spite of his non-religious background, he developed a fascination for Christian imaginarium after visiting the Emmaus Benedictine Monastery in Prague.¹⁷ His slight affinity to religion was fully denied after this place was demolished during World War II. The experience of war led him to complete disillusionment with traditional religion; nevertheless, even as proclaimed atheist he did not deny that he perceived the sacred in music and in life itself. Machovec graduated in philosophy and classical philology at Charles University in Prague in 1948. It is important to note that he started his intellectual career during the Stalinist era with the support of a key figure of that time – professor Zdeněk Nejedlý.¹⁸ However, his research concerned topics that were marginalized or nearly forbidden in those days in Czechoslovakia; for instance, the ideas of the aforementioned pre-war president Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk¹⁹ and Saint Augustin.²⁰ Machovec attained a post-doctoral degree for his work *The teaching of John Hus and its meaning for the Czech nation (Husovo učení a význam v tradici českého národa)* at the outset of the Thaw²¹ in the significant year of 1953, just after Stalin’s death.

Even though Milan Machovec proclaimed himself as Marxist and joined the Communist Party in 1948, his opinion of Marxism was extremely distant

¹⁶ Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850–1937) – philosopher, sociologist, initiator and first president of First Czechoslovak Republic; adversary of religious hypocrisy.

¹⁷ Emmaus Benedictine Monastery in Prague – abbey established by the emperor Charles IV in 1347; destroyed after the bombing of Prague by US Army Air Forces in 1945; the towers were rebuilt in modern style soon after World War II.

¹⁸ Zdeněk Nejedlý (1878–1962) – historian, musicologist, politician; ideological leader of postwar academic life; admirer of the Czech National Revival who applied Marxism–Leninism to the interpretation of Czech classics.

¹⁹ Milan Machovec, *Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk: studie s ukázkami z Masarykových spisů* (Prague: Melantrich, 1968).

²⁰ Milan Machovec, *Svatý Augustin* (Prague: Orbis, 1967).

²¹ The Thaw – process of democratization and liberalization of culture in Eastern Bloc countries after the death of Stalin.

from mandatory Soviet ideology and could instead be compared to the explication of Marxism by Ernst Bloch and Erich Fromm. With these thinkers Machovec also shared their interest in the role of Master Eckhart in European culture, as well as a fascination with mystics, heretics and folk religious outcasts as the bringers of real change in society and mentality. This subject matter was presented in the book written with his wife Marketa Machovcová²² (a sociologist of religion employed at Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences) *Utopias of the fanatics and sectarians (Utopie blouznivců a sektářů, 1960)*.

Machovec became an initiator of the so-called “Seminars of dialogue” that started at Charles University in Prague in 1962. These meetings were followed in 1967 by an international symposium in Marienbad, co-organized by the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and Internationale Paulusgesellschaft,²³ and analogical events abroad, mostly in German-speaking circles. Initially, the meetings were treated as a platform for Marxist and Christian dialogue; however, these quite obligatory (at least in Czechoslovakia) labels were not really adequate. Participants at the forum represented much more open worldviews, so ideological and religious limits were overcome. To that circle belonged, among others, Josef Hromádka,²⁴ Jan Sokol,²⁵ Zdeněk Neubauer,²⁶ Ladislav Hejránek, Milan Opočenský²⁷ and Egon Bondy. The debates were available to an open audience and were observed and attended mostly by students and scholars. The meetings were also guested by, among others, Erich Fromm, Karl Rahner²⁸ and Jürgen Moltmann.²⁹ In the late 1960s, Machovec spent some time abroad and – as they found common ground for their interests – established relations with the aforementioned Erich Fromm, Ernst

²² Markéta Machovcová (1932–1978) – sociologist of religion at Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences; co-author of the book *Utopie blouznivců a sektářů* (1960); addressed in the essay written by Egon Bondy and included in the volume *Juliiny otázky a další eseje* (2007).

²³ Internationale Paulusgesellschaft (IPG) – association founded by Erich Kellner in 1955 to support Christian–Marxist dialogue.

²⁴ Josef Hromádka (1889–1969) – theologian, interpreter of Marxism, follower of Karl Barth, founder of the association called Christian Peace Conference in 1958 for what he attained the Lenin Peace Prize in the same year.

²⁵ Jan Sokol (1936) – philosopher, researcher in phenomenology and philosophy of religion.

²⁶ Zdeněk Neubauer (1942–2016) – philosopher, biologist, pundit of Hermeticism; researcher in epistemology and philosophy of religion.

²⁷ Milan Opočenský (1931–2007) – theologian of Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, professor of Charles University in Prague; researched the theological thought of Petr Chelčický (1390–1460; spiritual leader of Bohemian Reformation) as well as relation between Christianity in Marxism.

²⁸ Karl Rahner (1904–1984) – German theologian, member of Internationale Paulusgesellschaft, who influenced the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965).

²⁹ Jürgen Moltmann (1926) – German reformed theologian; author of *Theology of hope* (1964).

Bloch, and a number of renowned (mostly protestant) theologians and philosophers such as Karl Barth,³⁰ Helmut Gollwitzer³¹ and Albert J. Rasker.³² Machovec joined the editorial staff of the periodicals “Neues Forvm”³³ and “Internationale Dialog Zeitschrift,”³⁴ both based in Vienna. He also received invitations to a number of international congresses in Europe, the United States and Israel. Such travels helped him realize projects that would have been difficult to pursue in a totalitarian country.

Machovec’s point of view and dissident activities, specifically his publishing of petitions against the occupation of Czechoslovakia after 1968 in foreign papers (when he was still out of the country), caused him to be expelled from university in 1970, shortly after his return. The political situation in Czechoslovakia changed radically after the Warsaw Pact Invasion in August 1968, which led to re-Stalinization and abridged freedom of speech under the rather cynical name of ‘normalization’. Machovec’s book *Jesus for atheists* (*Jesus für Atheisten*, 1973), with a foreword by Helmut Gollwitzer, received remarkable interest abroad. The book was written in Czech, but the first published edition was in German (translated by Paul Kruntorad). The text was quickly translated into twelve languages.

Meanwhile in Czechoslovakia, the publications of Milan Machovec were removed from official circulation. Still, he continued giving the lectures in his apartment. Machovec managed to connect people from totally different backgrounds, such as academics and representants of underground culture. He kept corresponding with foreign intellectuals (of course within the bounds of possibility in the given situation). Normalization similarly affected a number of other academic teachers, students and artists, but many of them continued their activities in hiding (e.g. Ladislav Hejránek organized meetings on philosophy and theology, Milan Balabán³⁵ lectured Hebraistics, and Ivan M. Havel³⁶

³⁰ Karl Barth (1886–1968) – Swiss reformed theologian, initiator of dialectical theology.

³¹ Helmut Gollwitzer (1908–1993) – German protestant theologian, pacifist, follower of Karl Barth.

³² Albert J. Rasker (1906–1990) – Dutch protestant theologian, initiator of Christian Peace Conference in The Netherlands.

³³ “FORVM” – cultural and political magazine published in Vienna (1954–1995); temporary renamed to “Neues Forvm”; publishing texts of major contemporary theoreticians like e.g. Theodor W. Adorno, Roland Barthes, Erich Fromm or Jean Genet as well as some texts of Czechoslovak exile authors, e.g. Josef Dvořák, Ladislav Mňačko or Ota Šik.

³⁴ “Internationale Dialog Zeitschrift” – scholarly journal on philosophy of religion founded by Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler in 1968 as a platform for a dialogue between Christians and atheists.

³⁵ Milan Balabán (1929) – evangelical theologian, researcher in studies of religion, poet.

³⁶ Ivan M. Havel (1938) – scientist, pioneer of cybernetics and artificial intelligence studies in Czechoslovakia, essayist; brother of Václav Havel.

– scientist and brother of Václav Havel – started a group called “Kampademie,” an unofficial academy on Kampa island in Prague). All these circles were closely connected and created an ‘apartment university’ network. Despite political restrictions all these groups kept up this intellectual exchange, which was perhaps even more lively than its regular academic equivalent. They were also confidentially supported and occasionally visited by foreign sympathizers.

Milan Machovec refused a prominent position at the University of Vienna and decided to stay in Czechoslovakia, even though his career was clearly heading towards ruin. Paradoxically, this Marxist scholar made a living as an organist at The Church of Saint Anthony of Padua in Prague, which brought him back to the passion of his youth. Machovec was one of the first to sign Charter 77³⁷ and other declarations of respect for human rights. He obtained an *honoris causa* doctorate at a protestant theological faculty in Bern in 1987. The laudatory speech was delivered by Horst Georg Pöhlmann.³⁸ Machovec remained an active critic of contemporary society until his late years; he focused on the growing problem of environmental imbalance and social inequality. “The Great Mach,” as he was called by his sympathizers, died in 2003 in Prague. His son, Martin Machovec (born in 1956), was an active member of the Czech underground movement and remains an expert of counterculture literature in Czechia.

At first sight, one might notice nothing but contradictions in the interests of Machovec: as an atheist he explains the Bible and rethinks the role of Jesus; as a Marxist thinker he commits to the teachings of Masaryk. He seems too Christian to be an atheist, too atheist for Christians, too old-fashioned for the modern world, yet surprisingly accurate with his predictions. However, the contemporary reader must not be so misled by Machovec’s somewhat anachronistic Marxist vocabulary as to miss the essence of his ideas. Machovec’s thought is focused on searching for deeper spiritual sense in secular reality, but without going back to religious schemes.

Milan Machovec distinguished three kinds of atheism: naive atheism (thoughtless denial of God), which for Machovec was as dangerous as dogmatic

³⁷ Charter 77 (orig. Charta 77) – declaration for respecting the human rights in communist Czechoslovakia written by Jan Patočka, Jiří Němec, Václav Benda, Václav Havel, Ladislav Hejdlánek, Zdeněk Mlynář, Pavel Kohout, Petr Uhl, Ludvík Vaculík and Jiří Hájek as a protest against imprisonment of the members of music group Plastic People of the Universe in January 1977; document became an ignition of the main dissident movement in Czechoslovakia; signatizers of Charta 77 were oppressed by the communist regime.

³⁸ Horst Georg Pöhlmann (1933) – German protestant theologian, supporter of religious dialogue; co-author of the text written with Milan Machovec: *Gibt es einen Gott? Ein Atheist und ein Christ im Streitgespräch* (Vienna: Gutersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1990).

faith and in its Stalinist version comparable to the Inquisition;³⁹ Promethean atheism (polemical atheism based on criticism of the misuse of religion); and finally post-religious, dialogical atheism, which he considered to be on the same level as theology as it does not deny transcendence and the unknown – it demands what Max Horkheimer called “longing for the totally Other.”⁴⁰ The latter kind of atheism is equivalent to searching for the meaning of human life without a “mythological veil.”⁴¹ Similarly to Ernst Bloch, in his works *Man on his own* (Eng. 1970; orig. *Religion im Erbe*, 1959–66)⁴² and *Atheism in Christianity* (1968),⁴³ Machovec does not take atheism as a symbol of materialism, but as instrument for the spiritual search of the individual. For him, the lack of a traditional God brings a transition from religious illusion to reality, from idolatry to profound spirituality. In this case, transcendence is inseparable from the real world. A similar approach was present in Egon Bondy’s text of “unsubstantial theism.”⁴⁴ At the same time, this process does not make mankind almighty; quite the opposite, it calls for personal responsibility.

Machovec’s request for dialogue prevented short-sighted anthropocentrism. This point of view became the foundation of Machovec’s concepts and, as one can notice, is very similar to Emmanuel Lévinas’ notion of “religion for adults.”⁴⁵ Both of these proposals emphasize the importance of answerability and dialogue not with a phantom of God, but with the “face of the Other” – real human beings.⁴⁶ This iconoclastic approach prevents the conventional degradation of divinity to a “Jack of all trades.”⁴⁷

In his most known book, *Jesus for atheists*, Machovec shows the historical background of the collision of Jewish and Hellenic culture which led to

³⁹ Milan Opočenský, “Křesťansko-marxistický dialog v Praze,” in *Mistr dialogu Milan Machovec: sborník k nedožitém osmdesátinám českého filosofa*, eds. Kamila Jindrová, Pavel Tachecí, and Pavel Žďárský (Prague: Akropolis, 2005), 44.

⁴⁰ Rudolf J. Siebert, “The Critical Theory of Society: The Longing for the Totally Other,” *Critical Sociology*, no. 31 (1) (2005): 57–113.

⁴¹ Machovec Milan, “Interview with Horst Georg Pöhlmann from July 3th 1988 in Prague,” in *Hovory s Milanem Machovcem*, ed. Pavel Žďárský, trans. Ivana Vízdalová (Prague: Akropolis, 2008), 8–10.

⁴² Ernst Bloch, *Man on his Own: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971).

⁴³ Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: the Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

⁴⁴ Egon Bondy, “Nesubstanční ateismus a nesubstanční theismus,” in Egon Bondy, *Filosofické dílo*, sv. II, *Juliiny otázky a další eseje* (Prague: DharmaGaia, 2007), 226–44.

⁴⁵ Cf. Machovec, “Interview with Horst Georg Pöhlmann,” 33.

⁴⁶ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Całość i nieskończoność: eseje o zewnętrżności*, trans. Małgorzata Kowalska (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2002).

⁴⁷ Machovec, “Interview with Horst Georg Pöhlmann,” 40.

misinterpretation of the role of Jesus. Machovec and Ernst Bloch showed the role of Jesus as a historical person whose ideas were misinterpreted and inverted. For Machovec, Jesus represented an anti-authority figure, somebody who called for personal change, but not for the dogmatic institution of the church. According to Machovec, only such an approach can address individuals of (post)modern times, for whom “Jesus as half-god floating above the ground” must be pure nonsense.⁴⁸ An analogical demythologization of the figure of Jesus is present in works of Josef Šafařík, especially in his book *On the way to the finality (Cestou k poslednímu)*, 1992).⁴⁹ However, texts by Šafařík were officially unavailable.

The core of Machovec’s thought was a request for what he called “a planetary dialogue” – an extremely broad idea of the universal dialogue. Nonetheless, the embodiment of this idea in a form of the inner dialogue of a human being had for Machovec the same significance. This thought has a lot in common with the reflection of Martin Buber and Ferdinand Ebner.⁵⁰ Machovec emphasizes the need for “dialogue of me with the world without me.”⁵¹ Machovec saw the only solution in individual responsibility – not only in human life, but also in the eternal (although non-religious) perspective. His understanding of eschatology did not mean an apocalypse or mythical afterlife. On the contrary, it means living with respect for the furthest future and taking into consideration what goes way beyond the realms of earthly existence.⁵² Therefore this approach to eschatology and transcendency was accessible for non-religious individuals.

Machovec considered faith as a form of hope, but this had nothing in common with communist optimism for the future. Quite the opposite, it brings a whole spectrum of warnings on the dangers of human activity and it goes hand in hand with the aforementioned “planetary dialogue.” This approach reminds one of Havel’s non-optimistic concept of faith which was described in his *Letters to Olga (Dopisy Olze)*, 1983),⁵³ which were written during his imprisonment and was inspired by the texts of Emmanuel Lévinas.⁵⁴ A comparable attitude was presented by Ernst Bloch in *The principle of hope* (1954), as well

⁴⁸ Machovec, “Interview with Horst Georg Pöhlmann,” 40.

⁴⁹ Translation of the title after Petr Horák, “On the Way to the Finality (Josef Šafařík),” *Tvar: literární obydlení*, no. 42 (1993): 11.

⁵⁰ Machovec, “Interview with Horst Georg Pöhlmann,” 33.

⁵¹ Milan Machovec, *Smysl lidského života: Studie k filosofii člověka* (Prague: NPL, 1965).

⁵² Cf. Egon Bondy, “Úvaha o eschatologii,” in Bondy, *Filosofické dílo*, sv. II, *Juliny otázky a další eseje*, 213–25.

⁵³ Václav Havel, *Dopisy Olze* (Prague: Atlantis, 1990).

⁵⁴ Milan Balabán, *Víra (u) Václava Havla: noetický sestřih Havlových Dopisů Olze* (Prague: OIKOYMENH, 2009).

as by Vítězslav Gardavský⁵⁵ (a participant of the Czechoslovak Marxist–Christian debate) in his publication *Scepticism as a source of hope* (*Naděje ze skepse*, 1969). These thinkers considered faith not as an issue of fulfilling one's expectations, but as a matter of internal responsibility, which may be achieved only by answering the call of “horizontal transcendence” – that is to say by overcoming one's limitations to support other individuals. Machovec considered trust in any external help, such as religious or political promises of happiness or salvation, to be idle expectations.⁵⁶ In his book *The sense of human existence* (*Smysl lidské existence*, 1957 as a booklet, 1965 extended version), Machovec says, “We don't have any reason for excessive optimism: we are at most at the threshold of the dialogue.”⁵⁷ Machovec stressed the need for a turn towards the human, for defying alienation and lawlessness. He addressed the problems of globalization, the environment and care for the disadvantaged long before ecological thinking became a mass trend.⁵⁸ Similar prophecies can also be found in the essays of another Czech thinker (in exile), Erazim Kohák.⁵⁹

Even though Machovec represented a Marxist point of view, he warned against naivety and the aberration of using it as applied ideology. From a historical point of view, one can see how Machovec's ideas and the meetings he organized became a precondition and philosophical background for the Prague Spring⁶⁰ in 1968 – “socialism with a human face” was not only an empty slogan.

To summarize, Milan Machovec's philosophical project can be perceived in the perspective of the postsecular epoch. Disappointment with traditional religion goes hand in hand with the distress of the technical, unsacred civilization. In spite of the apparent mistiming of Machovec's work, it does not have to be taken as a failure. It rather became an authentic fulfilling of responsibility for the “world without him.”⁶¹ His claim “I existed therefore I am”⁶² can be taken as a challenge for the contemporary human. Lastly, even though

⁵⁵ Vítězslav Gardavský (1923–1978) – writer and philosopher who analyzed the phenomenon of atheism and faith; promoter of dialogue between Marxist and Christians.

⁵⁶ Jan Černý, “Idea transcendence jako prostředek revize marxistického myšlení,” in Ivan Landa, Jan Mervart et al., *Proměny marxisticko-křesťanského dialogu v Československu* (Prague: Filosofía, 2017), 184–6.

⁵⁷ Machovec, *Smysl lidského života*, 252.

⁵⁸ Cf. Milan Machovec, *Filosofie tváří v tvář k zániku* (Prague: Akropolis, 2006).

⁵⁹ Erazim Kohák (1933) – Czech philosopher who remained in exile since 1948, researched philosophy, religion and environment studies.

⁶⁰ Prague Spring – period of political liberalization and loosening of the censorship at the beginning of Alexander Dubček administration from January 1968 till the invasion of Warsaw Pact on 21 August 1968.

⁶¹ Machovec, *Smysl lidského života*, 245.

⁶² Machovec, *Smysl lidského života*, 245.

it may sound odd, Machovec may be continuing his “planetary dialogue” in the eternal conversation on *The consolation of ontology* (*Útěcha z ontologie*, 1967) as he shares the family grave at Malvazinky Cemetery with the author of this work – Egon Bondy.

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The Experience of Faith in Czech Literature after the Turn of 1989 on the Example of *Angel* by Jáchym Topol and *Mefitis* by Martin Komárek

KEYWORDS: Czech literature, postsecularism, postmodernism, anticlericalism, antiecclesiasticism, invisible religiosity

ABSTRACT: After the turning point of 1989, the subject of religiosity was undertaken in Czech literature by the younger generation of writers born in the 1960s. Their presence on the literary scene was noticed at the time and described as a distinctive phenomenon. These writers dealt with religious ideas in a way that ignored Catholic dogmas, religious tradition and the instructions of the Church; they also mixed together religious threads derived from foreign cultures and cults, including non-European ones. These tendencies, as well as the characteristic literary forms preferred by the writers, such as pastiche, parody and irony, justified a postmodern interpretation of this literary topic. The postmodern reading, which is still popular, could be also related to the widespread millenarian moods of the 1990s. My paper aims to present a different interpretation of this phenomenon using the framework of postsecular thought. In this approach, the non-doctrinal, non-traditional descriptions of religious experience which can be found in Czech literature of the 1990s turns out to involve peculiar contact with the transcendental sphere, or a struggle for such contact, or an expression of metaphysical yearnings. The issue is raised of how such religious expressions belong to the modern experience of faith and how they belong to the Czech tradition of religiosity. In addition, two novels by Czech writers are analyzed as an example of the postsecular approach to the issue: *Angel* by Jáchym Topol and *Mefitis* by Martin Komárek.

The aim of my text is to present how experiences of faith which are currently undergoing transformation are described by modern Czech literature and how this phenomenon could be interpreted. My text refers in particular to works issued after the turn of 1989, when a group of young writers, born mostly in the 1960s, entered the literary scene, making some literary critics pay attention to the religious subject that was so characteristic of their works.¹ It also made critics face the question of how to interpret the issue since the works discussed could hardly be treated as an example of religious literature, even if the term 'religious literature' was understood in a broad sense. At this point, it is interesting to note that interpreting this literature simply as a variant of the developing Christian spiritual tradition would have also been insufficient and unsatisfactory. So, the question was (and still is), was the motif of Parousia and other religious references that were present in the literature a result only of the millenarian moods typical of the end of the second millennium? If true, this interpretation would lead to the conclusion that the issue was raised rather accidentally as a reaction to the situation, therefore it would not deserve special attention.

This millenarian interpretation turned out to be prevalent, at least among Czech critics. Presumably, their neglecting of this phenomenon² was also supported by the result of putting these works in the postmodern context (limited to the slogan 'anything goes'). This provoked interpretations according to which the works only played with the subject of religion, as postmodern representatives should do. However, it is not justified to reduce postmodernism to a cynical, playful game with everything that could be or probably even should be treated in a more serious way – in this case this approach prevailed. The religious subject present in the young (at the time) literature was mostly read as one more example of mockery of the 'great narrative', in this case the religious one.³ The approach matched the image of Czech culture, which was considered as deeply secularized and full of suspicion of 'sacred things'.

The approach presented in my text is different. First of all, the context of postsecularism is used while considering the religious topic in Czech literature

¹ Lubomír Machala, *Literární bludiště. Bilance polistopadové prózy* (Praha: Brána. Knížní klub, 2001), 26. He points at the theme of Second Coming (Parousia) as characteristic for the interests of young writers. See also: Holt Meyer, "Apokalyptická konfesionálnost a tradiční zlomy v tradici. Česká literárně-náboženská kultura roku 1632 a roku 1994," in *Česká literatura na konci tisíciletí* (Praha: Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, 2001), vol. 1, 77–88.

² The issue was vaguely noticed in the recent, academic publication: Petr Hruška, Lubomír Machala, Libor Vodička, and Jiří Zizler, eds., *V souřadnicích volnosti. Česká literatura devadesátých let dvacátého století v interpretacích* (Praha: Academia, 2008), 293.

³ See i.e.: Petr Hrtánek, *Kacíři, rouhači, ironikové (v současné české próze)* (Brno: Host, 2007).

and culture. As a result of this way of thinking, the phenomenon of young Czech literature is understood more broadly as an example of new forms of religiosity that were characteristic of those days, not only as the momentary reflection of incidental and passing millenarian moods. In that light, the literature could reveal not only its own, deeper sense, but also indicate some interesting traces of Czech culture as such. In line with my aim, two aspects of the phenomenon will be considered, therefore the text is divided into two main parts.

Firstly, some links between the postsecular approach to religiosity today and Czech religious tradition are the object of examination in the text. Obviously, it is possible to offer only a rough, simplified description of this complex and varied issue. The form of the modern approach to religiosity which is expressed by postsecularism is a huge subject with a long list of related publications. Moreover, comparing it with Czech religious tradition opens up an extensive field of nuanced scientific research which cannot even be briefly reported in such a concise text as this. However, it is necessary to outline some aspects of this issue in order to prepare a better basis for understanding the religious phenomenon in Czech literature.

The difference between the 'past and modern' understanding of experiencing faith (the past understanding divided believers and atheists, and in that form was attributed to Czech society until recently, while the modern understanding explores the forms of spirituality that exist in the domain of so-called 'atheism') is so deep that it consequently creates two distinctive images of Czech religiosity. It also affects the image of Czech culture. While applying the latter approach to Czech literature, the fact that it is rooted in the rich tradition of Czech spiritual desire and anxiety is evident. However, it must be remembered that 'spiritual tradition' does not mean in this case the tradition which gradually developed and remained dependent on worship. In fact, it was tradition that very often was against the principles which can be found in the catechism. Considering it in this context, Czech literature nowadays presents new forms of calling for the metaphysical horizon that is necessary for human beings to live in a sensible way. However, it must be stressed once again that this does not mean that this horizon is indicated by Catholic dogmas and the Instruction of the Church. On the contrary, a huge gap between traditional religiosity and atheism should be noted in order to understand spiritual experiences grounded in Christianity, though they are very different from forms of institutional religion.

Secondly, two interpretations of literary texts will be developed. At this initial point, I refer to only one of them in order to show what kind of explanation of this literary phenomenon I adopt and which I would like to avoid.

I chose *Mefitis*, a novel by Martin Komárek that was released in 1996, as a good example of religious needs and doubts which were manifested in young Czech literature after 1989. The writer (born in 1961) belongs to the generation of authors such as Jáchym Topol (born in 1962), Miloš Urban (born in 1965), Martin C. Putna (born in 1968) and others who were interested in the spiritual subject and who belonged to the same generational formation. All of them examine the experience of faith nowadays in their novels and essays. In 2008, Komárek published *An essay about belief (Esej o víře)*, which was rather coldly received by critics who reproached the writer for trivialization of religious questions and even deformation of Christianity. The truth is that Komárek, who considers himself to be a Catholic, barely respected the doctrinal-catechistic rules of the Church in his works. In spite of the fact that the public response to the essay did not meet the writer's expectations, it did not badly affect the reception of his other novels, even though Catholic dogmas were also averted or negated in them. Yet, his books had more luck with critics, who appreciated them, but without great enthusiasm. These novels were qualified as postmodern fiction and this was helpful for them because every apostasy from Catholic Instruction could be seen as a mark of postmodern literature, with its characteristic features such as specific narrative techniques, fragmentation, paradox and, above all, advocating against any dogmatism or 'great narrative', including religious ones.

In my text, a different interpretation of Komárek's novel and the issue is suggested. It is based on the postsecular idea of 'trace after theology'⁴ – theology itself which was lost, but which had left its vestige. This vanished theological image of the world in a way 'survived' as weak preapprehension of the transcendence a human being can feel with premonition rather than certitude – that something like a 'better world' and a 'better life' exists, that there is something beyond earthly life. Sometimes it is expressed as a form of Pascal's wager: if there is 'nothing beyond', human life has no sense. This 'wager' is repeated in Komárek's novel: "Dlouho se modlil k Bohu, v nějž nevěřil. Zdálo se mu, že nemůže žít ve světě, kde spoluvytváří každým inem koloběh zla."⁵

Although my text focuses on the "trace after theology" expressed in Czech literature after 1989, it is worth mentioning that the same phenomenon is

⁴ Agata Bielik-Robson, "Deus otiosus: ślad widmo, karzeł," in *Deus otiosus. Nowoczesność w perspektywie postsekularnej*, eds., Agata Bielik-Robson and Maciej A. Sosnowski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2013), 36–7.

⁵ "He was praying for a long time to God who He did not believe in. It seemed to him that He could not exist in the World, where every his act contributes to the turn of evil." Martin Komárek, *Mefitis* (Praha: Triáda, 1996), 172.

present also in works which have been written before. The reader should not forget that some writers who introduced spiritual or even religious questions to their oeuvres were very critical of the Church. In fact, they were so critical that they were regarded as ‘real Marxists’, which was why they were treated favorably by the communist powers. Today, their old relations with the totalitarian system might ‘return’ to them in the form of accusations of collaboration with the communist state. This was the case of Jiří Šotola, a very popular writer during the communist era who today is received rather coldly or simply forgotten. However, there are many fragments in his books which contradict the label of being ‘materialist’ or ‘atheist’. For example, in the book *Eighteen Jerusalem (Osmnáct Jeruzalémů)* by Jiří Šotola, the heroes, all of whom are participants of the Children’s Crusade to Jerusalem, discuss the likelihood that ‘something beyond’ exists. They are totally exhausted by their dramatically difficult pilgrimage, some of them have lost hope, while some never had much hope, being rather skeptical of religion – even atheist. Unsurprisingly, one of the heroes admitted that the young crusaders were lying to themselves – that in fact there is nothing beyond what is here on earth. Yet his interlocutor answers that if it is true, there will be nothing to do but to devour frogs, search for lice and steal apples.⁶ That will be their fate. That is the fate of every human being if a metaphysical horizon does not exist.

I referred to Šotola’s book in order to indicate a specific feature of Czech literature, which can be anti-clerical and anti-ecclesial, whilst still being very sensitive to spirituality.

Referring to the first point of the article, it is worth recalling that the first efforts to question the idea of secularization were made in 1960s, but they were absolutely ignored then.⁷ Secularism and even atheism seemed to be the destiny of the modern world. The World Trade Center attack in 2001 is considered as a turning point in the perception of the role of religion in the modern world. Another turning point was the famous 2001 lecture by Jürgen Habermas entitled “Faith and knowledge,” which – along with a long list of texts by philosophers, sociologists, historians of religion – revived the debate about religion in the modern world. Many different points of view were taken in an attempt to understand and describe the nature of modern religiosity that is also reflected in postsecular thought. For the purpose of this article

⁶ Jiří Šotola, *Osmnáct Jeruzalémů* (Praha: Český spisovatel, 1986), 83–4.

⁷ The first attempts of questioning the idea of secularism were made by David Martin (1969) and Andrew Greeley (1972). They challenge the idea stressing the lack of empirical data which could support the theory. However, at the time the theory was so popular, that every criticism of it was dismissed. See: José Casanova, *Religie publiczne w nowoczesnym świecie*, trans. Tomasz Kunz (Kraków: Nomos, 2005), 34.

I would like to recall only one book by a scholar who is included in the circle of postsecular thinkers: *A secular age* by Charles Taylor, published in 2007. His description corresponds very well with the state of Czech religiosity which can be observed in the 19th century and later.

Taylor presents the history of religious transformation resulting from modernization processes. Initially, distrust of the Church as an institution (especially the Catholic Church) and doubts about religious explanations of the world, which resulted in questioning the Catholic model of life, were spread only among a small circle of intelligentsia. Taylor analyzes the process of secularization in order to show how what was originally the approach of a few became popular with the masses. He shows modernity with its standard education, expansion of higher education, emancipation, promotion of literacy skills and availability of news as a precondition of the decline of the Church's authority and changes in the status of faith.⁸ However, he states that the process of secularization was never as systematic and progressive as it was believed⁹ – it cannot be presented as a rising line on a diagram of modern religiosity. In fact, secularization was a very diverse process with significant differences between localities and social classes, and it also had a 'backwards and forwards' pendulum character. Moreover, secularization did not mean privatization and marginalization of religion, as was a credo of secular theories. In addition, at the beginning of the 20th century, it was not effective enough to make the most economically developed countries in Europe (namely England, France) secularized. The image of the process is much more diverse and dynamic.¹⁰

Comparing this description to what happened to Czech religiosity towards the end of the 19th century and then in the 20th century, some similarities are striking.¹¹ However, it has to be stressed that not only modernization but also the position of the Catholic Church as a supporter of the Habsburg dynasty had a strong impact on the secularization process in Czechia. The severe criticism of the Rome denomination that was formulated by Karel Havlíček Borovský,¹² who accused not denomination as such, but the Institution of

⁸ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

¹⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

¹¹ See e.g. *Náboženství v 19. století. Nejčirkevňější století, nebo období zrodu českého ateismu?*, ed. Zdeněk R. Nešpor et al. (Praha: Scriptorium, 2010).

¹² He criticized the Catholic Church many times in his journalism works written in the 40s and the 50s of the 19th century. See e.g. articles: "Neobyčejný katechismus", "Náboženské záležitosti", "Sjezd Biskupský", "Z Moravy", "Die deutschen Hegemonem", "Reformy v církvi", "Biskupský zákaz 'Národních Novin.'" Karel Havlíček Borovský, "Národní Noviny 1848–1850," in *Politické spisy Karla Havlíčka Borovského*, ed. Zdeněk V. Tobolka (Praha: Nákl. České akade-

installing tight relations between power and religion, became part of the discourse of the Czech liberal intelligentsia. However, it would be a mistake to expect this criticism to have a direct influence on people's choices if their membership of the Church is the subject of consideration. After the liberalization of religious policy in the Habsburg Empire, when people could eventually decide what Church they wanted to belong to, their access to the Protestant Church was not spectacular and a lot of people still remained faithful to the Catholic church.¹³ In fact, only a few people who abandoned the Catholic Church joined Protestant Churches; the rest fulfilled their longings for and needs for faith in a way that was invisible to statistical records. Reluctance to join official Churches – in particular the Catholic Church – ended up as classic atheism very rarely but was classified as an atheistic direction.¹⁴ As a matter of fact, so-called 'Czech atheism' hardly ever meant materialism or was atheism in the sense that was advanced in Marxist theory. Atheism in the meaning of materialism was seldom manifested, even in the interwar period.

A similar process was described by Taylor, who wrote that the end of the 19th century witnessed the emergence of an alternative to Christianity. These different religious options fractured the status of the Church and its metaphysical and religious vision. Consequently, fascination that people had for this new spiritual search threatened the Christian (especially Catholic) interpretation of the world. Taylor's remark is very important when considering the process of secularization in Czechia. Such a noticeable phenomenon of breaking away from the Catholic Church as can be observed as a trend in Czech society at the end of the 19th century and later, especially in the interwar period, did not result – as was emphasized – in producing masses of non-believers. On the contrary, those people found their own way to faith, although their belief did not belong to the formal confession.

For example, in interwar Czechoslovakia it was spiritualism that became a local phenomenon not only because of the number of its adherents, but also because of their social origin. They came not only from the intelligentsia, as was standard at the time, but also from peasants. The interest in spiritual movements in the Czech countryside, especially in very undeveloped

mie císaře Františka Josefa pro vědy, slovesnost a umění, 1902). He was not the only critic at the time or later, but the most famous and influential.

¹³ David Václavík, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost* (Praha: GradaPublishing, 2010), 54–5.

¹⁴ See: *Náboženství v 19. století*, 262. Nešpor writes that the number of people who declared "no worship" was: 889 persons in 1880; 1,180 in 1890; 1,894 in 1900, and 11,204 in 1910. However he stresses that "no worship" did not mean "atheism," because those people could be tight with the different forms of non-institutional faith.

regions, was so serious that the Catholic Church tried to fight it using propaganda and more severe methods of punishment such as excommunication and police harassment. These ways to limit the influence of spiritualism were in vain and only Nazism and subsequently the communist regime definitively stopped this cult.

After WWII the status of religion in Czechoslovakia was also complicated because of the involvement of the state in the process of the atheization of society. It is worth noting that communist Czechoslovakia was extremely severe towards people who revealed their faith, all the more so towards those who declared their worship. No wonder that people did not openly come out with their religiosity because of the fear of ideological persecution. Therefore, it was hardly possible to have insight into Czech spirituality, which could be easily overlooked or underestimated as a social phenomenon and cultural factor. This must have affected the image of Czech culture, especially the literature.

However, the aforementioned experiences present only a small part of the image of Czech religiosity at the end of 19th century, in the interwar period, and later. They also contributed to the creation of a social base for today's informal return to religious interests in Czechia. By tradition, Czech culture accepts the satisfaction of religious needs outside of official worship, therefore this country is particularly suited to being a laboratory of modern religiosity.¹⁵ In today's Czechia, phenomena which show the broad thirst for spirituality rarely lead to the official Church and infrequently bring about conversion to Christianity or other denominations. Taylor states that the experience of a lack of belief that is so characteristic of modern culture implies neither coming back to traditional faith nor restoring the position of official Churches.¹⁶ He, as well as other postsecular thinkers, focuses on non-confessional beliefs, treating them as significant religious phenomena that could say a lot about religiosity nowadays. For decades these non-confessional forms of belief were disregarded by scholars who conducted research on anthropological aspects of local religiosity but did not perceive these cults and practices as something that could characterize the modern world. Postsecular thought offers a very efficient approach to numerous modern religious experiences, including those which were underestimated or ignored in the past. In recent decades Czech sociologists and historians of religion have conducted research aiming to reveal this 'invisible' Czech religiosity. The postsecular approach is used by some of them. However, they all treat 'weakened' religiosity or hybrid idioms

¹⁵ See: Petr Fiala, *Laboratoř sekularizace: náboženství a politika v ne-náboženské společnosti, český případ* (Brno: CDK (Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury), 2007).

¹⁶ Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

of faith very seriously. Conversely, when Czech literary studies are regarded, one can notice the absence of the postsecular approach. However, this path of thinking could be very efficient in analyzing modern literature, particularly that which expresses religious experiences. Relying on this presumption, I will consider some examples of Czech literature from this point of view.

This conclusion leads me to the second point of my article concerning the experience of faith in Czech literature after the turn of 1989. The so-called 'Velvet Revolution' deeply changed not only the political situation, but also the cultural one. Czech literature was strictly censored before 1989, so the only books that were accepted for publication were those that did not undermine communist ideology. Although some periods of the political 'thaw' made life easier for some prohibited authors, the official Czech literature was, in general, restricted by the communist powers, which remained reluctant to accept any form of religiosity and reduced this subject in Czech literature. After 1989 the book trade in Czechia 'exploded': prohibited literature, Czech literature in exile, and Western popular literature were released simultaneously. Amid the interesting threads of Czech literature after 1989, there was a new topic concerning religious experience which was addressed mostly by the younger generation of writers, of whom one of the most popular was Jáchym Topol. His book *Sister* (*Sestra*, 1994) seems to confirm his postmodern approach to the issue because he mixed different religious artefacts and used literary strategies such as parody, irony and grotesque – at least, this is how it was read. Yet, his next book *Angel* (*Anděl*, 2002), which was regarded as barely an appendix to the previous novel, is in my opinion a heartbreaking image of emptiness and the senselessness of a world deprived of religious presence in private and public life. It shows how people, especially the young, are dissatisfied and cannot find fulfilment in a world which is over-rationalized – a world devoid of all its magic, mystery, spirituality, a world which cannot offer more than careers and money. The three Christian values of Belief, Hope and Love are recalled in the book as the names (which are more typical of Russian than Czech culture) of the three heroines: Věra (Belief), Naděžda (Hope), and Luba (Love). This allusion does not mean that the religious ambition to recreate some Christian order of the world is revived. On the contrary, the traits of those heroines and their fate prove how twisted and distorted Christian values have become in the modern world. This book is not a declaration of belief – is even not a call for belief – it is rather a description of the dramatic desire for 'something beyond' to exist. However, there are too many obstacles in the way of fulfilling this longing. The poor and hopeless life of Naděžda, who ended her days as a victim murdered by a fanatic religious sect, means not only the death of a crippled little girl. This is also the death of Hope. Referring to the comments of Piotr Bogalecki,

who when analyzing modern Polish poetry from a postsecular point of view stated that “there is no stabilizing presence of Logos,”¹⁷ the same observation can be applied to the world where the heroes of *Angel* live. It means that there is no rock upon which it is possible to rebuild the religious universe.

In that light, the novel *Angel* is worth examining at great length because it was put in the shadow of *Sister* by critics who underestimated the religious reflections expressed in the book. However, these remarks are richer and perhaps more interesting than those in the previous novel.

Although continuing the interpretation of Topol’s novel would be an appealing challenge, the second task of analyzing the next literary piece must be undertaken. As previously stated, the interpretation will focus on Martin Komárek’s 1996 novel *Mefitis*, which also seems to be a spectacular example of playing with the subject of religion. One can observe how the writer violates the dogmas of the Catholic Church. According to Komárek, Jesus died on the cross and his mission of salvation was not accomplished, therefore God decided to send his second son to fulfil God’s Father’s task and save humankind. This son, Emanuel, whose coming on earth is heralded in the New Testament as Parousia (the Second Coming of Christ), is now getting closer to the earth. The writer shows Emanuel, who is flying in a space rocket all the time, being threatened by the forces of Satan and engaging in wars with them. The angels presented in the book look more like bodyguards or gangsters than Messengers from Heaven. They are very human in their characters, ambitions and expectations, as are the demons whose rivalry and battles are caricatured and comic. These images of hell beasts cannot be treated seriously. All the supernatural creatures described in the novel are very far from the traditional vision of spiritual beings who protect and support us by giving their guidance or – on the contrary – lead us into temptation. In fact, the imagination of the writer is inspired more by the film “Star Wars” or comic books than by the religious visions which were deformed by him.

This was one of the reasons that the book was interpreted as a case of playing with religion and an example of a flippant and grotesque approach to it. However, the issue can be considered in a different way. The decorum which was used by Komárek in his description of heaven and hell dwellers reveals a problematic aspect of human imagination when it tries to express the mystery of religion. The author’s naïve vision of religion is the product of such efforts and it shows how childish our language is when adapted to religious questions. Angels and God are by no means child’s play, but they are

¹⁷ Piotr Bogalecki, *Szczęśliwe winy teolingwizmu. Polska poezja po roku 1968 w perspektywie postsekularnej* (Kraków: Uniwersitas, 2016), 66.

often misunderstood by human beings who give them features and attributes that are more analogous to existence on earth than in heaven. The question of anthropologizing the image of God was frequently raised by outstanding Czech Catholic priest, theologian and philosopher, Tomáš Halík. He states that the problem of modern unbelief does not lie with religion itself but with the human desire to adapt to our needs the vision of God as well as all religious expectations and questions. It is not religion which is naïve, but our descriptions and representations.¹⁸

Komárek hyperbolizes the naivety of religious imagination. Actually, what is the difference between a vision of an angel as a chubby little baby-like cherub and the one described by Komárek as a bodyguard wearing a black leather jacket? The writer makes his vision of spiritual creatures more unbelievable, even grotesque, but this is only a result of using hyperbole – it is not a result of treating the issue in a serious or flippant way. With reference to the vision of God in Komárek's book and in Christian culture, we are facing the same mechanism of presentation which was described by Halík as the infantilization of religion.

The narrative strategies used in Komárek's book open new possibilities of interpretation of this work that go beyond the simplified postmodern analysis conducted to date; however, there are also other factors. When asking what is treated seriously in that ironic vision of mankind that so desperately needs Parousia, one has to answer that this is the pain, sickness and unbearable misery of the human body. *Mefitis* presents a tragic vision of devastating illness that makes the existence of biblical Job a basic model of human life. The scenes of the paralyzing pain which is suffered by one of the heroes (and also by his child) and his humiliation by his sick body are extremely suggestive. One can say that the hero, Ludvík, as well as his daughter Jituška incarnate the idea of *Homo Patiens* that was formulated by Viktor E. Frankl.¹⁹ Frankl, who gave lessons of spiritual survival in his books, stressed the nihilism of the answers which physiology, psychology and sociology offer when asked about the sense of existence. He argued that these sciences are able to see only some layers of Being, namely bodily, psychic, and social aspects of human existence, but they ignore the spiritual layers. However, only as a spiritual being with human experience does a person have access to the meaning

¹⁸ The issue was raised also by Martin Kočí, who declared himself as disciple of Halík. See Martin Kočí, "A Postmodern Quest: Seeking God and Religious Language in a Postmodern Context," in *A Czech Perspective on Faith in a Secular Age*, eds. Tomáš Halík and Pavel Hošek (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015), 87.

¹⁹ Viktor E. Frankl, *Homo Patiens*, trans. Roman Czernecki and Józef Morawski (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1984).

and sense of existence – he or she can discover this sense in reality. Frankl showed that a human being can relate to his dolor when the spiritual horizon is open, though the sense of suffering is not ‘given’ or explicable. However, *homo patiens* is able to take an attitude to his pain only when existing within this horizon. Only then is he or she given an opportunity to rise above suffering.²⁰ This idea might be received as too ‘pedagogical’, though Frankl does not ‘label’ spirituality – he does not specify how it should be understood. Moreover, it must be remembered that the man who formulated this theory was a prisoner of Auschwitz.

The questions about suffering that are posed in *Mefitis* should be placed in this spiritual horizon, not in the one which is constituted by the slogan “anything goes.” The novel by Komárek is a provoking example of modern religiosity – full of hesitation, anxiety, suspicions, but also some sort of faint hope.

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²⁰ Frankl, *Homo Patiens*, 281.

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