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# EASTERN ORTHODOXY TODAY: DIVERSITY OF ROLES ON THE BALKAN SCENE

## Religion and Globalization

The close connection and subordination of traditional religions and Churches with/to some contemporary social-political projects, besides being a consequence of secularization, is also one of the dimensions of globalization. P. Beyer expects that two basic trends in the process of inclusion of religion in the global world will be realized, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. The first is related to the privatization of the religious, its transformation into a private matter, an element of the formation of personal identity. The other unfolding tendency is the politicization of religion and the Church, their linkage to collective /national, ethnic/identities. Religion becomes a means, an instrument, and turns into a kind of civic religion. The Church is left with a symbolic authority, while the real authority is shifted to the state /Beyer 1999: 2 1-25/.

The secularization paradigm, which was basic in the scientific approach to religion during most of the 20th century, is undergoing serious revision today, in the time of globalization. Peter Berger considers it not a paradigmatic characteristic, but one of the cultural dimensions of contemporary religion /Berger 2001: 445/. The processes involving decrease of the unifying force of the nation-state, the revival of local forms of identity and sociality /ethnic, religious, cultural communities/, of regional and transnational alliances, have served to animate religious feelings and have redefined the cultural borderlines of religion. Some of the phenomena that demonstrate most convincingly the return of religion to the global public scene are: 1/ the transnational spiritual and institutional „networks" created by traditional religions and Churches, especially the Catholic Church; 2/ the increasing inclusion of religious affiliation among the constituting and unifying symbols of ethnic and cultural communities and identities; 3/ the appearance of religious movements and associations not committed to any religious tradition, any nation or ethnic group, but often representing a kind of synthesis, a *bricolage* of various religious ideas and practices /Casanova 2001: 425-429/.

This specific property of religion to serve as an emblem of transnational unities, as well as its universalistic spiritual dimension, are actively utilized in the formulation of paradigms of the „new world order". Even as large-scale a cultural genre as the philosophy of history has also been resorting to the

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uniting/dividing potential of religion and has defined the new borderlines be-
tween civilizations on the basis of religious divisions /S. Huntington, some Rus-
sian and Balkan philosophers, both past and contemporary/.

### The Balkans and the „Orthodox Civilization"

Of course, the theories concerning the division of humankind along the
lines of religious principle, and especially the oppositions Christianity vs. Islam,
and Eastern vs. Western Christian traditions, are by no means new phenomena
in the fields of culture and ideology. Starting with the Enlightenment and down
to our time, together with the decreasing influence of religion and Church, there
has been a clear tendency for religion to be interpreted as a part of the structure
and functions of the social system: as its organic element or a subsystem
/Weber, Durkheim/; as subordinated to the moral sphere /Kant/; as a sub-stage
in the self-evolution of the Absolute Mind /Hegel/, as a form of individual and
social alienation /Feuyerbach, Marx/; as a „tone" of social communication
/Simmel/, etc. The qualitative changes that have taken place in Christianity as a
faith and an institution, both in the West and East, during the second half of the
20th century have shown that Christianity has become more dependent on and
responsive to the fundamental cultural specificity of each particular society in
which it exists. The murdered and then reanimated God has lost His sacral,
absolute immunity and is drawn into involvement as a collaborator and partici-
pant in various human enterprises, strivings, yearnings.

This line of thinking often leads some contemporary authors to distin-
guish an Orthodox cultural zone (civilization) as a separate cultural-historical
entity. But: 1/ Although they have many common socio-cultural features, the
separate Balkan countries of so-called Orthodox Civilization are separated by
important economic, political, and cultural differences, which led to the forma-
tion of their separate national states in the 19th and 20th cent.; 2/ Their common
Orthodox creed not only failed to harmonize relations between these states, but
became a spiritual and ideological cause for rivalry during the centuries; at
various times Bulgaria, Russia, Greece, Serbia, Rumania have competed for
leadership as the center of Orthodox statehood; 3/ There are many spiritual and
moral features ascribed to Orthodoxy that are due rather to national mentality,
to ethnic paternalistic communitarian traditions, which Orthodoxy has adapted
to rather than initiated. In other cases a process of interaction and interweaving
of factors has taken place, in which it is hard to distinguish cause from effect,
essence from form. Many researchers point out the existence of a strong pagan
cultural substratum behind the refined facade of the Orthodox doctrine; 4/ The
close link between Orthodoxy and the national statehood in all Orthodox coun-
tries was destroyed at the time of the totalitarian regimes (except in Greece) and
Orthodoxy lost much of its social support; 5/ The revival of Orthodox reli-
giousness after the fall of the totalitarian regimes is a rather complex phenome-
non, and to all appearances it will follow some of the basic tendencies in con-

temporary religiousness in Western countries, i.e. the individualization of faith, religious pluralism, implicit religion, the phenomena of „believing without belonging" and „be1onging without believing" /Dobbelaere 1995; Bruce 1996; Davie 1996; Janz 1998; Tomka 1999/.

Unfortunately the mythological potential of these misused concepts has not been exhausted. Once activated, this potential may escape the control of well-meaning people like scientists and the clergy. Every spiritual-ideological constitution of a civilization that uses a religious affiliation as its emblem could revive age-old memories and stereotypes of mutual prejudices. The contemporary Balkan conflicts are likewise permeated by similar „religiously" motivated aggressive and defensive strategies. In this respect Serbian nationalized Orthodoxy and Croatian nationalized Catholicism were equally intense during the war between the two ethnic communities. Religious affiliation was among the arguments for ethnic cleansing on both sides. The Islamic affiliation of the main part of Kosovo's population was employed by both sides to present the conflict as a regional case of a global civilization clash between Orthodoxy and Islam. In the officially atheistic Bulgaria, the coercive renaming of the Turkish minority sought justification, particularly in the 1990s, in the contradictions between Orthodoxy and Islam.

The words of the Apostle Paul sound beautiful but helpless in such a situation: „Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become iounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned but I have not love, it profits me nothing. /1 Corinthians, 13:1, 2, 3/.

### The Orthodox Grounding of the National Mission Mythologies

The last two decades of the 20th century were difficult years of agitation and ordeals for most Balkan nations. These years saw the disruption and transformation of the entire life-world of these peoples, of their labor and political relations, their spiritual values and ideological illusions, their interpersonal ties. Although the internal social erosion of the communist system was a prolonged evolutionary process, its final phase in this region took a turbulent, nearly catastrophic turn in a rather brief period of historical time. The causes for this were related to globalization and its tendency to compress time and space, to sweep away or appropriate ever more different and resistant social forms /Prodanov 1999: 38-41/.

I perceive the revival of religiously grounded national mythologies and their active inclusion in the political processes in the Balkan countries over the past two decades as a symptom of, and an attempt at, a conservative, collective, and tragic response to this drama. Within these mythologies, which imply the

idea of superiority and domination over other cultures and peoples, religious differences were also actively involved: Orthodox Christianity, Catholicism, Islam were defined as fundamental components of these mythologies. This ideologically mediated synthesis between ethnic and religious affiliation, underlying the new state formations, revived and intensified religiousness. Sociological surveys in the Balkan countries made on the eve of and during the conflicts show a sharp increase in the number of religious believers and a close link between faith and ethnic belonging /Blagojevic 1996: 219; Cvitkovic 1997: 48-49; Ivekovic 2002/. Naturally, such quick transformation can hardly be based on profound and overall spiritual changes in the personality. It is rather a matter of ethnic mobilization of faith, and its instrumentalization as a key identifying characteristic of the respective entity.

The comparative analysis of the religious-ethnic synthesis in Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece in the time of globalization would bring out certain similarities, but it would also make visible the particularities and differences in the working and results of this attempt at modern use of mythological tradition on the basis of the Orthodox religion.

### Repetition and Modernization of the Mythological Archetype

The reverses of fortune in the political destinies of states and peoples have been dramatic in these regions: Ottoman domination destroyed the official statehood and official cultural spheres of the peoples; the opening of the countries to various spiritual, economic, and ideological influences after the creation in the 19th century of the national states in the Balkans, after the creation of the Yugoslav Federation /1918/ and of the „Socialist bloc“ in the 1940s, etc. In parallel with these transformations, the myth of a unifying and dominant political and spiritual center that would transcend and envelop the separate states /which is the prototype of the „God's elect“ myth/ continues to exist, though with a new ideological content. Together with the idea of an Orthodox religious community (gradually discarded in modern times), this alliance, this federation of countries is increasingly seeking grounds in the Slavic ethnic element or rather with compact parts of this element, i. e. the Southern Slavs and the Eastern Slavs. The core of the myth – the religious belief in „God's elect“ – has been replaced by a Slavic ethnocentric idea. The communist idea, which was placed at the core of the myth of a people with a unique historical mission /in this case Soviet Russia and socialist Yugoslavia/ transcends the religious and ethnic boundaries of the nations it unites, and justifies the inclusion of a variety of states and cultures into a „commonwealth“.

It is quite clear and widely accepted that, in modern Balkan history, the myth of the unique mission of state and nation, for the monopoly of which Balkan states still compete, is increasingly becoming a tool for the realization of the separate interests of the rival states, including territorial, economic and national-identity interests. The mythological archetype of the state and national

mission is increasingly becoming the object of political manipulation. In most cases /in keeping with the inertia of the initial archetype/, the myth is used for offense or defense, for imposing or protecting „one's own". The actual cultural-historical causes for this are a result of the limited resources, of the complex interweaving and small differences with regard to language, religion, and ethnic background between the peoples and states in this region (these facts have been discussed by many authors). The supporting structure of this sway of collective memory or mythology over individual reflection and action is specific to Balkan societies and culture: it consists in the collectivist fabric of these societies and the weakness of autonomous individualism, a situation that emerging Western capitalism overcame centuries ago. These collectivist forms and attitudes were additionally fixed during the time of totalitarianism. Of course, this is not to say that this kind of mentality and social behaviour is typical for all periods and all countries of the Balkans to an equal degree. The myth of a God-chosen center with a unique universalistic mission, in its secular form, has also been used in the 20th century in developed Western states. The consequences of this modern usage of the archaic myth are far more important and, in some cases, destructive than so-called „Balkanization".

## The Orthodox-Ethnic Synthesis: Serbia

One of the causes for the different way in which the breakup of the totalitarian systems took place in Bulgaria as compared with Serbia lies in the specific differences between the two countries in the meaning and preservation of what is „theirs" in terms of religion, territory, ethnic identity, resources, mythology. While for Bulgaria „one's own" in modern time proved vigorous only when united with something „alien", e. g. Europe and/or Russia, in Serbia people turned to the historical mythological foundation of their „own" as something superior to the „alien", whether neighboring or distant. I will point out two of the main causes for this difference: 1/ the Serbian national consciousness had preserved over the centuries the force of the myth of uniqueness and national superiority over the „others", and 2/ this construction has been revived and charged in Serbia with extremely aggressive energies for preserving the nation and purging it of the alien /in terms of language, religion, ethnos, territory/, all of this being promoted by the local political elite and propaganda.

Among the myths that have sustained the feeling of uniqueness and superiority over others, Serbian researchers point out the cult of Saint Sava and the Kosovo myth. The sacralization of the dynasty of Stefan Nemanja (1113-1199), including his son Sava, laid in the popular consciousness the foundation of the idea of historical continuity and ethnic kinship. The life of St. Sava was connected with the consolidation and development of Orthodoxy, with the autocephalic status acquired by the Serbian Orthodox Church, with devoted service to the good of the people; all this was strongly mythologized by religious authors and by popular tradition /Kolaric 1996: 520-521/. St. Sava's

deeds and martyrdom were taken to be a sign and a result of divine election and were likened to those of Christ.

In connection with this mythologization, there appeared the idea of the indelible bond between the Serbian nation and Orthodoxy, between ethnos and religion, which was one of the ideological pretexts and criteria for ethnic „cleansing" during the war in former Yugoslavia. Since Orthodox Christianity was a religion shared by several Balkan peoples, it could become distinctive for the Serbian nation only when linked to the personality of St. Sava, thus acquiring an ethnic aspect.

While such a synthesis was something usual in the Middle Ages, its revival in the last years of the 20th century was a result of the purposeful efforts of politicians and ecclesiastics. Many contemporary Serbian researchers point out the efforts of religiousecclesiastic figures for reviving and modernizing the myth of the uniqueness of Savian Orthodoxy and of the divine election of the Serbian ethnic community, loyal to the saint. R. Radic discusses the attempts of opposing the European man to the Savian god-man, and the belief that the Serbian people is a nation of Christ, entrusted with a world mission referring to the spirit and eternity /Radic 1998: 166/. D. Djordjevic points out that the revival of nationalism during the 1980s in Serbia was a factor for the growing importance of the Serbian Orthodox Church and for the active use of the national-religious synthesis as a feature of divine election, superiority, and intolerance towards aliens /Djordjevic 1998: 155/. M. Blagojevic points out in support of this thesis that in the period 1975-1980, the rate of religiousness in Serbia, excepting Kosovo, was about 25%; while in 199 1-1993, it reached about 42%; and in the last years of the '90s, about 93% /Blagojevic 1996: 219/. When the criterion of „Orthodoxy" is used to define ethnic origin, then not only nonOrthodox ethnic groups, but even non-religious individuals become foreigners and are counted out of the Serbian ethnic community. This process is equally dangerous for the Church, for religion, and for the ethnic community. It makes these elements mutually dependent and interchangeable, impoverishing their separate cultural contents and properties. I. Cvitkovic discusses the confrontation and hostility between the separate religious groups during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He perceives the religiousethnic exclusiveness and uniqueness, upheld by all parties in the conflicts, to be a tool of hatred, selfishness, and hostility, which have become a psychological virus common to all /Cvitkovic 1997: 48-49/. Thus the revival of the historical myth of the exceptional people and its religious mission has led to, or rather is a part of, the following important social processes: 1/ unleashing of community energy towards national isolation and aggression rnaccording to religious distinctions; 2/ degrading religiousness to an ethnic political religion; 3/ reviving, legitimizing collectivist forms of identity at the expense of individual forms; 4/ consolidating the social position of the Serbian Orthodox Church and linking the thurch with the ethnic rather than religious idea; 5/ lighting a charismatic aura around the political elite and especially the leader, the head of state, when he has lost all other political resources of legitimacy.

**The Political Erosion of the Orthodox-Ethnic Synthesis: Bulgaria**

Having reached its peak of effective utilization of the myth of God's elect and of the unique mission during the Golden Age of King Simeon (the early 10th century A. D.), Bulgaria gradually left the historical stage of Balkan missionary mythologies. Historians and philosophers of Bulgarian history have discussed the variety of causes for this discarding of the myth, pointing out the strong influence of Byzantine culture, the division between the people and state leaders with regard to internal and external goals, the dangerous cross-roads location of the country, etc. The attempts in modern times, particularly between the First and Second World Wars, to seek new dimensions for a unique and important national mission did not prove successful and were not widely accepted in cultural and politícal circles, nor in Bulgarian mass consciousness; in other words, they failed to revive and modernize the energy of the medieval mythological archetype. The myth broke down into competing ideas about the specifics of Bulgarian identity: 1/ the idea of Slavocentric identity involving the idea of union of Slavic countries with Russia; 2/ the Eurocentric identity proclaiming the adherence to European values; 3/ the Bulgarocentric one based on the idea of the unique Bulgarian ethnos, the unique religious-pagan synthesis, the unique features of the Bulgarian national character, etc.

At first glance the processes of change that began in 1989 in Bulgaria differ completely from those in Serbia with regard to the Orthodox-based historical mythology involved, especially with regard to the myth of national superiority and „God's elect" nation and leader. In the modern and recent history of Bulgaria this myth has gradually lost its hold on the national consciousness, for the question of the civilization choice of Bulgaria has been usually set in terms of „accession" – whether it be to Russia, to the Soviet Union, or to Europe.

Among the basic causes for this feature, I would point out the following: First, there is a gap of more than five centuries separating the time that myth was active (the first centuries of the Bulgarian state, especially after conversion to Christianity in the 9th century), from the modern history of Bulgaria. While in this same period of „timelessness" for Bulgaria, in Serbia the Kosovo myth grew in cultural force; by this myth the fall under the Turkish yoke /after the Battle of Kosovo/ was transfigured as a heroic feat of martyrdom in Serbian history. Combined with the myth of unique Savian Orthodoxy, it created a spiritual heritage and gave continuity to Serbian history in the national consciousness. Although it was a factor for cultural and ethnic preservation in Bulgaria as well, Orthodoxy was not connected with the powerful founding myth of ethnicity. Moreover, during the Turkish domination the Orthodox religion tended to acquire an overtone of Greek domination, becoming associated with Greek interests promoted by the Patriarchate of Constantinople. This was one of the causes why the attempts in modern times to unite the national idea with Orthodoxy /except in the process of national liberation from the Turkish yoke/ were not particularly active or successful. National mythology about the values and missionary pro-

jects of the nation were fueled mostly by the idea ofjoi. ning „imported" large-scale mythologies such as European values /science, economic growth, pragmatism/; or the Slavic idea, usually embodied by Russia and connected with values such as warm human relations, spirituality, etc. In the first half of the 20th century Europeanism was less popular than the Slavic idea. The few thinkers that did uphold the idea of a unique Bulgarian ethnic mission, called for a neo-pagan renaissance, not an Orthodox one, and were inspired by anti-Slavic and anti-European emotions; such ideas usually involved authoritarian and totalitarian trends /Dimitrova 1996; Bogomilova 1996/. The period of totalitarianism /1944-1989/ put an end to these orientations and engaged Bulgarian national destiny in a large-scale social project, in which mythology and social pragmatics were tightly interwoven. In Serbia the resilience of the Kosovo myth with its quality of „eternal ethics, unchanging with time" as T. Emmert put it, were utilized as a support both for Yugoslav unity and for proletarian values.

The second reason for the gradual withering of the Orthodox-based national mission myth in Bulgaria and of its related historical myths is connected with the specific features of the Bulgarian political elite. In modern and recent history this elite has been marked by internal divisions and contradictions, by differing foreign-policy orientations, by lack of character and of a sense of its historical mission. The political confrontation between the two basic political parties /UDF and BSP/, had been dividing the Bulgarian society into two hostile factions since 1989, thus depleting the emotional energy of the elite. I would say that the kind of hostile attitudes that existed between ethnic groups and religions in former Yugoslavia became a feature of relations within the single Bulgarian nation. This division affected the Bulgarian Orthodox Church as well, weakening it by the creation of two parallel synods vying for legitimacy /Bogomilova-Todorova 1997: 180-186/. The use of Orthodox religion in the national historical mythology in the course of the changes would have been understandable if the confrontation had occurred along ethnic lines – Bulgarians vs. Turks – a conflict that the Communist Party tried to activate in the 1980s. With the start of changes in 1989 this confrontation was replaced by confrontation between parties: the political division overcame the ethnic confrontation.

Even a rough comparative analysis between two countries, Bulgaria and Serbia, shows the differing status of Orthodoxy in each of them, its complex connection with the respective national cultures, politics, traditions.

## The Global Challenges before the Ethnic-Orthodox Conservatism. Greece.

As a member of the European Union, Greece is actually involved in the so-called global economic changes. But the ethno-Orthodox synthesis in this country has a long and profound cultural history spanning from the times of the Apostles to the present day. N. Kokosalakis analyzes the „deeper ambivalence between Orthodoxy and modernity" as related to the principle of individuality /Kokosalakis 1995: 245/. Similarly to the constitutions of some other Orthodox

countries, the Greek Constitution is ambiguous on the position of religion. On the one hand it declares Orthodoxy as the state religion; on the other, it guarantees religious freedom as an absolute right /Karaflogka 1999: 209-212/. Nikos Kokosalakis, an authoritative researcher of these problems, states that the Greek Constitution reflects a conflict between the liberal humanistic values of the Enlightenment and the metaphysical ideas, beliefs, and values of Orthodox religion /Kokosalakis 1995: 252/. The tension between the Orthodox Church and the state is evident with regard to the civil code as well, involving issues like civil marriage (legal since 1982), divorce, church property, etc. Despite these tensions, the Orthodox Church and the state are mutually dependent and interconnected.

Orthodoxy in this context is viewed as „the most immediate and most amenable cultural resource, providing not only a cultural response to the global socioeconomic forces but the cultural boundaries for a continued identity. " About 95% of families in Greece are affiliated to Orthodoxy /Kokosalakis 1995: 254-255/. More significant in this context is the encyclical /15. 8. 1990/ of the Archbishop of Athens and all Greece, stating: „It is not at all an exaggeration to say that since the establishment of the Greek state /1830/, at no time has our nation been facing a more serious crisis than today. Our problem is not located only in our weak economy. A cause for greater anxiety are the other aspects of our lives. Our problem is spiritual, ethical and cultural. Like Hercules, the mythical hero, our nation finds itself at the crossroads of choices and re-orientations. Our entry to the new world of United Europe is connected with the agony and the struggle for the safeguarding of our national, cultural and especially our spiritual and religious continuity... Various propaganda from East and West flood our country and make tragic victims among those who have no foundation in the faith and the tradition of our fathers. Para-religions and heresies, various ideologies, even magical cults, imprison our brother Greeks, ostensibly in the name of progress and freedom... Let us then remain steadfast in our faith, our traditions, our ethics and customs, in everything which constitutes the specificity of Hellenism through the centuries... I, therefore, call you all to gather round the Church the strength of unity and the antidote against the discoloration of our Greek-Orthodox identity, our race itself. " /translation of Kokosalakis 1995: 255/.

### Orthodoxy as a Cultural and Ethnic Bridge

Roma Religion. The Roma never presented a cultural-ethnic challenge to the Balkan ethnic communities, because the ethnic self-consciousness of the Roma was not expressed in a cultivated form, was not backed by an army of their own, and for this reason they were perceived rather as „our own" than as „the others" /Moutafchieva 1994: 52/.

Certain specific features in the formation of religiousness and practice of religion among the Roma justify the thesis that, religion is a cultural bridge

thrown by them, a positive sign of goodwill and a striving to equality with the others. One of the basic proofs of this is that they usually adopt the religion of the community in which they live; where the society has more than one religion, they adopt the more prestigious, the more authoritative one. For instance in Bulgaria 44% of the Roma identify as Orthodox Christians, 39% as Muslims, 15% belong to various Protestant confessions, less than 1% are Catholics, and 0. 5% practice Judaism. /Tomova 1994: 25/. For the Roma themselves the change of religion stems mostly from the need for interaction with the macro-society, without affecting deeply the sacred cultural field of the group, which is borne and sustained by many other elements of group consciousness.

This lack of religious fanaticism is recognized by all other ethnic groups in Balkan societies. Yet by an irony of circumstances and especially due to the different value that religion has for Bulgarians and Roma, the Bulgarians are critical of the religious flexibility of the Roma. Similarly, Islam proves to be an unreliable bridge for integration with the Turkish population for those Roma who strive to be closer to a Turkish identity. Despite the diligent observation of Muslim religious rituals and holidays on the part of some Roma, the Turkish community is also hardly inclined to accept them. Thus this attempt at bridging the distance proves to be not particularly successful: what is considered a bridge, a path by the one side turns out to be unacceptable, is negatively viewed by the other. This is one of the main reasons for the success of some Protestant churches among the Roma community. They have given the Roma a feeling of being accepted, of being an equal part of the brotherhood, and turn to worshipers in ways quite close to their temperament, i. e. through the medium of music and singing, rather through obscure preaching.

Another specific feature of Roma religiousness, as pointed out by many scholars, is its syncretic nature, e. g. the observance by some Roma of both Orthodox and Muslim rituals and holidays, their belief that the same God, under different names, underlies all religions, the frequent cases of different confessional affiliations within a single family. Thus, instead of emphasizing the divisive traits of religion (its dogmatic and ideal aspects), the Roma emphasize the role of religion as a communicative means, its festive, vital aspects. But this colorful trademark of Roma religiousness, a patchwork of various elements, has its dark side in superstition. While the modern world was freeing itself from superstitious fears, achieving through science and technology a secure, safe and cozy existence, it did not want to or succeed in associating the Roma to modern worldviews, despite the advance of the human sciences and psychoanalysis, despite the countless works of writers and philosophers celebrating the universal man and care for the Other.

**The Orthodox-Philosophical Synthesis**. Academic and Orthodox circles in all Balkan countries, and especially in Russia, have discussed the interrelation and connections between Eastern and Western Christianity, between Orthodox ideas and the Western metaphysical tradition, etc. These researchers have analyzed the institutional and political factors for the division of Christianity,

and have emphasized the common spiritual features of Eastern and Western Christianity. The International conference „Eastern Orthodoxy and Contemporary Europe", held in Leeds, England in 2001, presented these theoretical and religious trends.

Here I would like to mention a specific Bulgarian non-traditional religious society, called the „White Brotherhood". It is based on Peter Dunov's doctrine conceived at the beginning of the 20th century, in which certain reinterpreted Christian elements are combined with ideas borrowed from occultism, theosophy, Indian religious-philosophical thought, and from the teachings of the medieval Bogomil heresy. The ideas of Dunovism have spread to Western Europe, North and South America, and Japan through Bulgarian emigrants and through connections with the Esperanto movement, the Vegetarian and Ecological movements. Dunov believed the aim of Christianity was not to prove the existence of God, but to create connections between all souls, to provide the conditions for spiritual growth in every person. Love was defined as the main principle of the world, as God Himself.

## Romania and Bulgaria among Other European Countries

The conclusion that a „revival" of religiousness is taking place in most postcommunist countries has often been argued on the basis of sociological inquiries, carried out regularly since 1990. Immediately after the start of democratic changes, a quick growth in the number of religious believers was registered by these studies, together with a growing interest in the Church and hopes about its social role. According to the findings of the large-scale European Values Study of 1999 /Tomka 2002: 540, 544-545, 547/ the religious identification in the period 1990-1999 does indeed display an upward trend in Russia, Latvia, Bulgaria, and, to a lesser degree, in Hungary and Czech Republic, but also a downward trend in Slovenia and the Eastern part of Germany. A comparison with corresponding trends of change in other European countries shows that post-communist countries are not in a particular, exceptional situation. For instance some growth in religious identification for this period can also be observed in Italy and Sweden, while in Great Britain, Spain, Austria, France, and the Western part of Germany there is a more or less perceptible decrease in this respect. The post-communist countries include countries with some of the highest degrees of religiousness in Europe /e.g. Poland, Rumania, Croatia/ as well as others with some of the lowest /e.g. Slovenia and Czech Republic/. There are certain differences between post-communist and other European countries with regard to expectations and hopes regarding the social and cultural role of the Church. The highest shares of respondents in Rumania (74.7%), Lithuania (74.4%), the Ukraine (63.1%), and Poland (62.7%) feel that the Church can contribute significantly to solving the moral, family, spiritual, and social problems of society. Among the most skeptical about the role of the Church in solving these problems are: the Eastern part of Germany (27.6%),

Bulgaria (33.9%), Czech Republic (36.4%), Estonia (38.5%). In the middle range of the scale are Hungary (42.3%), Belarus (44.5%), Slovenia (46.8%), Latvia (52.8%), Russia (55.1%), Slovakia (59.7%), and Croatia (60%).

The decade since the beginning of democratic changes has been marked in most countries by the loss of trust, by crisis and upheavals in the institutions and spheres that serve as supports of collective and individual identities, i.e. the state, the school system, the judiciary, culture, the armed forces. As a compensation, trust in the Church (compared with trust in other institutions) has risen higher in most post-communist countries than in most West European ones. The citizens of Austria, France, Great Britain, Sweden, Finland, Belgium, Spain, Denmark indicate smaller degrees of trust in their respective Churches than in other public institutions, as evidenced by the European Values Study of 1999 /Tomka 2002: 547/. According to the data of that survey, in most post-communist countries (with the exception of Estonia, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Czech Republic, and the Eastern part of Germany), people place greater trust in the Church than in other institutions. This difference is particularly perceptible in Rumania, the Ukraine, Croatia, Slovakia, and Russia.

Of course, comprised in the sum total of people registered as religious, there is a percentage of people for whom the increase in religious behaviour stems from a deep personal change, from spiritual growth, and is closely connected with a specific religious experience of the sacred. But such change and growth, which arrange the entire life world of a person around God and the sacred, are usually a slow and painful process, accessible to only a few. When mass public changes and trends in the religious sphere are considered – changes that have occurred in a comparatively brief period of time – serious analysis and argumentation is necessary before such phenomena can be defined as specifically religious. A survey carried out in the spring of 1998 /Tomka 1999: 45/ shows that the percentage of „deeply" religious or „definitely" religious respondents represents a relatively small share of the total number of people defining themselves as religious. The percentage is smallest in Germany (2.1%), in the Ukraine (3.8%), in Slovenia (5.1%); it is largest in Croatia (33.3%), in Hungary (22.6%), and in Poland (19.5%). With its 12% of „deeply religious" respondents, registered in a 1994 study /Mitev 1994: 216/, Bulgaria is situated around the middle of the scale, together with Rumania and Slovakia (Bulgaria was not included in the quoted 1998 survey of some ten Central and Eastern European countries). Most of the people who identify themselves as religious place themselves in the categories marked by hesitation and vagueness: „religious to a certain degree", „neither religious, nor nonreligious", „somewhat non-religious". In Lithuania this general group amounts to 89.1%, in Slovenia – to 83.3%, in Rumania – 81.6%, in Poland – 77%. Past studies that were detailed enough to permit substantial analysis of this type of „hesitant" faith have usually registered the respondents' lack of knowledge of religious doctrine, their acceptance of only part of the religious fundamentals, lack of interest in or consistent observance of church rituals, lack of correspondence between

religious convictions and daily behavior, etc. The highest degrees of such characteristics have been registered in Belarus, Bulgaria, Estonia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, and Hungary /Borowik 2002:499-500; Zrinscak, S., 2002: 511/. Actually these trends are typical for most West European countries; scholars have pointed out as their major causes the individualization of faith, freedom of belief, the breakup of collective identities supported by traditional religions, etc.

The cited data do not provide sufficient grounds for drawing a categorical dividing line between European countries as regards the processes and trends in religions and Churches. Together with this, there are differences within the group itself of the post-communist countries, distinctions that can hardly be accounted for by purely religious or confessional factors. For instance both the highest and lowest degrees of religiousness have been registered among some Catholic and some Orthodox countries. The same is true for the levels of trust in Churches. The highest degrees of trust has been registered in Catholic Croatia and in Orthodox Rumania, while the lowest have been indicated in Catholic Slovenia and Czech Republic, and in Orthodox Bulgaria.

The striving to preserve the monopoly of a predominant religious confession over other, minority religions represents an important line of interaction between religion and politics in post-communist countries. Although religious intolerance is considered typical mostly for Orthodox countries, it is also characteristic of Catholicism in those countries where religion has become interwoven with the ethnos and the state, e.g. Poland and Croatia. In all these countries the traditional churches require state political support in order to preserve and enhance their social positions and restrict the competition of the new religious movements /Doktor 1999; Duvnjak 1999/. Although in constitutional and legal terms the freedom of religious belief and religious communities has been declared in postcommunist countries, in fact in most of them the religions of the minorities and the new religious movements are in a disadvantaged position.

In the countries where, for various reasons /mostly connected with the distant or recent past of their traditional confessions/, religion and the Church have failed to become a consolidating social force, and they are not attracting strong public interest and trust. Such is the position in the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Bulgaria /Misovic 1997; Smrke 1999/.

**Conclusion**

It seems to me that ethnic-religious localism and the universalistic globalism of the traditional religions represent a challenge to the spirit of the Enlightenment and to the ideals embodied in the French revolution. A. Toynbee and many romantic authors have dreamed of a united Mankind worshipping the same God. But the actual social being of religion through the centuries has shown, to the contrary, that religion tends to become a dangerous emotional and institutional force when placed beyond the regulation of law and critical thinking.

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