

FOREWORD

You have in your hands the last yearbook of the MTA-SZTE Research Group for the Study of Religious Culture. For five plus one years, that is, for six years we enjoyed the support of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. However, because of the personnel conditions we were unable to submit an application for a further research period.

As we take our leave it is worth briefly recalling our research plans and the results achieved. Our research aim can be summed up as a comparative process analysis of the changes and renewal of 19th to 21st century Hungarian religious culture (Christian, Jewish, Muslim, neo-pagan), applying methods of cultural ethnology and anthropology.

The 20th century was characterised first by the intertwining of the church and state institutional systems, then by their confrontation, and finally their separation, following the changing political and ideological regimes. Parallel with this the relations between the denominations and towards the state also underwent a transformation, new religious movements appeared, and the focal points of spirituality shifted.

The Christian world-view and values were increasingly pushed into the background. This was also manifested in the religious, cultural, individual and collective rites of weekdays and feast days and their changes over the 20th century. At the same time the role of religion acquired greater importance among the Hungarian groups who found themselves in minority status with the Trianon peace/dictate ending the First World War that awarded large Hungarian territories to the neighbouring countries. There the traditional Christian churches play a role in preserving identity. Socialism imposed restrictions on the Christian world-view. Our research group studied many documents on the persecution of small Christian communities in the archive of the communist state security services. A generational fracture occurred in the transmission of world-view and values, creating the need to research the relationship between religion, church and youth, between modernisation and Christianity.

The role of women in society increased from the turn of the 19th to 20th century. Their place in religious life also changed. Greater emphasis was placed on general culture and child-raising within the family, the role of mothers, relations between the genders and the institution of marriage came to be seen in a new light. With the rising level of literacy new genres appeared: prayer books published specifically for women and children.

Today's "secularizing", "laicizing" and "mediatizing" global mass culture appears in Hungarian contemporary religiosity, also at the virtual level. The role, forms and rites of real and virtual (small) communities have increased in importance. Denominational schools ceased to exist when they were nationalised in 1948. Their relaunching after 1990 was related to the political changes and defi-

ned a new role for church schools in contemporary religious and social life. The intellectual leaders of religious communities (priest, teacher, cantor) have always played a role as models, and transmitted religious, cultural and scientific knowledge and moral values. As a result of the social changes in the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries their role in public life had increasingly diminished.

Secular and religious values now coexist. The institutionalised churches and the practice of religion have fallen into the background, but the demand for spirituality has not. The role of religion is important, especially in creating the historical sense of identity, but it is not the sole factor in shaping values. Christian values have always been represented by the blessed and the saints. In this way the 20th century canonizations of blessed and saints can be the expressions of social aspirations specific to the time. Because of the persecution of churches and religion in the 20th century there are many martyrs.

The new religious movements that are appearing have made the technical achievements of modernisation an integral part of their tool set. In the relationship between modernisation and Christianity, elements of popular culture appear within the frames of vernacular religion. Use of the new means of communication (internet), and of light music for religious purposes characterises mainly the religiosity of young people. But they also play an important part in the Catholic charismatic revival and in the explosive spread of the Pentecostal charismatic movement.

With the demand for the mystic, and as a consequence of migration caused by globalisation, various individual, esoteric forms of religiosity, the Eastern religions (especially Islam), and the neo-pagan movements have taken root in Hungary. The two decades since the change of regime in the 1990s have reshaped Hungary's cultural and religious palette and launched a variety of processes for the reconstruction of identity. The phenomenon of contemporary neo-pagan-Christian religious syncretism has religious, cultural and political dimensions.

The spread of Islam in Hungary (Europe) is influencing Christian religious practice, but Islam too is undergoing transformation in the (Hungarian) European cultural and political space. Under the influence of the changes, Christian denominations are drawing closer together within the ecumenical movement. An interdenominational dialogue has also begun between the non-Christian religions present in our society and the traditional Christian denominations, behind which we find the growing number of mixed (Christian-Muslim) marriages. The resulting integrational/disintegrational influence is not yet a source of social conflicts in Hungary (in the Carpathian Basin), in contrast with countries further to the west, although its influence is substantial.

We are convinced that our researches have given suitable answers to timely questions. We have achieved a great deal. But the changes in society are generating ever newer problems and in response our researchers need to propose research programs related to the three world religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam). I believe that the case studies in this volume clearly reflect this denomina-

tional attachment, as well as the methodological diversity and many-sided approach to religious phenomena.

For years support from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences ensured congenial working conditions and research opportunities for young researchers in the Szeged workshop for the study of religious culture. My associates and the so-called sending researchers rewarded this support with innovative research topics, systematic self-training, PhD dissertations and the publication of a whole series of books and studies. Over recent years they have become integrated into the institutional frames of Hungarian and international academic life and regularly present papers in Hungarian and foreign languages on their research topics. And they are also present on the various forums for the dissemination of knowledge.

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Gábor BARNA
editor