

MÓNIKA FÖLDVÁRI

RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS OF EUROPE

POLLACK, D., O. MÜLLER & G. PICKEL, eds. (2012) *The Social Significance of Religion in the Enlarged Europe: Secularization, Individualization and Pluralization* (Farnha & Burlington: Ashgate) 264 pp., 23.5 cm, ISBN 978-1409-426-219, £58,50.

The basic question of the book, the social significance of religion, has always been a central issue in the sociology of religion. Because the answer to this question depends on how we define and study religion, a wide range of views have been developed in this field. If we want to understand social changes in modern Europe, we have to take religion into account. There is, however, little agreement on the fundamental tendencies of religion and their consequences. Disagreements originate partly from theoretical considerations and partly from empirical research. The chapters of the book edited by Detlef Pollack, Olaf Müller and Gert Pickel are interesting in terms of both.

The empirical study of religion has some deficits. One of them is that data analysis is often only superficially connected to theoretical considerations. In this volume, seeing the necessity of a comparative analysis through recourse to theoretic concepts of religious change, the authors take into consideration three main theories of the relationship between religion and modernity: the secularisation theory, the individualisation theory and the economic market theory.

To put it simply, secularisation theory suggests that the process of modernisation goes hand in hand with the decline of the social significance of religion. As a critique of the secularisation theory, the individualisation theory states that religion is not necessarily losing its significance in general in the modernisation process. De-churchification does not mean a general loss of the significance of religion but a shift to the private sphere: religion becomes increasingly invisible. Finally, according to the economic market model the religious pluralisation in modern societies has a positive effect on the vitality of religious communities.

A further shortcoming of the empirical study of religion is that comparative international studies on a wide empirical basis are rare, and the majority of them focus only on traditional, church-related religiosity. The authors of this volume wish to take a step towards a wider and more precise systematic analysis of religion in modern Europe.

The chapters written by well-known experts of the sociology of religion present the analysis of the religious situation in nine countries, using mainly but not exclusively representative data from the C&R 2006 survey (*Church and Religion in an Enlarged Europe*). The volume examines countries from different regions of Europe

and with different religious traditions: from Western Europe Finland with a Protestant, Ireland with a Catholic background and Germany as a mixed denominational country; from the post-Communist countries Estonia with a Protestant, Croatia and Poland with a Catholic, Hungary with a mixed, and Russia with an Orthodox religious tradition. Eastern Europe, with its particular historical and ideological background as distinguished from that of Western Europe, provides an opportunity to study the three theories of modernity and the social role of religion.

The aim of the survey was to study the social significance of religion primarily at the individual level by analysing data, in addition to the C&R, also from the EVS (*European Values Study*), the ISSP (*International Social Survey Programme*) and other international surveys. Nevertheless, other social levels were also taken into consideration. On the mezzo (organisational) level the connection between modernity and organisational-structural changes within the churches, while on the macro (societal) level the relations between the churches and the state, media and similar structures were explored. The examination of mezzo and macro levels became possible through an analysis of church and national statistics and documents.

The researchers, relying on the tradition of Charles Glock, distinguished three dimensions of religiosity: religious identification (belonging to and the feeling of being connected with a religious community, church or denomination), religious praxis (rites and cultic performances) and religious experience and faith. These dimensions are analysed not only in the case of Christianity but in the case of non-Christian and extra-ecclesiastical forms of religiosity as well. Belief in astrology, spiritualism, magic and occultism, belief in amulets, stones or crystals as well as the belief in the spiritual dimension of life are the indicators of extra-ecclesiastical religiosity. One more question had fundamental importance for the purposes of the research: the role and place of religion in the private life of respondents. The data of the C&R survey contains information not only about respondents' religiosity and frequency of church attendance but also about their assessment of the significance of religion for everyday life and society.

Individual studies in the book, analysing changes of the social significance of religion in a particular country, are quite interesting in themselves, but perhaps the most remarkable part of the volume is the last chapter on the international results, a systematic comparative analysis of the nine countries by the editors (229–56). The main questions of this chapter are these. What can we say about the changing role of religion in Europe? To what extent can secularisation theory explain religious change? As I mentioned above, we can distinguish three levels of religious change: societal, organisational and individual. They can be related to and interact with each other. In the course of analysing the religious situation in the nine countries, these levels are considered separately.

Secularisation on the level of society means that as a result of functional differentiation religion has lost its overarching importance. It no longer constitutes the overall framework of the interpretation of the world. Functional differentiation between religion and other parts of society was grasped by questions about the accept-

ance of religious influence in the fields of politics, science and education. As the results show, the separation of religion and politics and the separation of religion and science are widely accepted in Europe, not only in the countries examined but, according to the ISSP survey (1998 and 2008), in other countries as well. However, the results are quite different in the case of the educational system. The strict separation of church and schools is supported only to a limited extent. That might be conceived as evidence that in Europe the Christian cultural heritage is (still) widely accepted and valued. In case of all indicators, the Catholic countries showed a more open-minded attitude towards the presence of religion in schools than the Protestant ones.

On the organisational level the authors examined the financial and personal resources of religious institutions and organisations. The data were not fully adequate but showed that in Europe organisational developments do not go hand in hand with the churches' ability to integrate, to increase church membership and to carry out their mission successfully. One of the approaches in the sociology of religion that deals with the organisational level, the economic market-theory is therefore not supported by the data.

At the individual level three statements seem particularly important:

1. Denominational cultural heritage has a great impact on religious membership, on religious affiliation, on the importance of religion in life, on religious self-descriptions and on belief in God. In historically Catholic countries religiosity is more traditional and institutionally influenced and religious vitality is stronger, religion is more important, and faith in God is more personal than in historically Protestant and mixed countries. Protestant countries report the lowest level of religious vitality, and a high level of religious individualisation.
2. It seems that in the process of modernisation a more diffuse image of God is gaining ground. During the last few years the number of respondents who believe in a higher being has grown, while the number of people who believe in a personal God has decreased.
3. Different forms of alternative religiosity do not substitute traditional religion. On the contrary, the highest proportion of alternative religiosity was found in countries with strong Christian religiosity (Ireland, Portugal). Though the importance of alternative forms (such as belief in magic, spiritualism, astrology, amulets, crystals) has increased, the number of adherents remains low. Christian symbols (cross, rosary) are far more popular than alternative forms.

What are the main factors – according to the authors – that exert a great influence on religiosity in Europe? GDP per capita, one of the measures of modernisation, has a strong effect on the religious field only in Western Europe. There, increasing economic prosperity contributes to the loss of church attendance, church membership and belief in God. By contrast, other factors such as the political suppression of religion by state socialism have a stronger effect in Eastern Europe. Cultural-confessional heritage also seems to be a relevant factor. Catholics have a closer relationship to their church than Protestants, and the proportion of Catholics within the population is in significant relation with the level of religiosity. Moreover, the historical

connection between church and national consciousness (as in Croatia, Poland and Ireland), the political qualification of religion, even the religious interpretation of political events also have a considerable effect on religiosity.

What is the most appropriate theory that can explain religious change in the light of the comparative analysis? As regards the economic-market model, empirical data contradict the assumptions of this theory. The degree of religious pluralism and the degree of separation between church and state do not have such effect on religiosity as was assumed by the economic-market theory. On the contrary, religious pluralisation in Europe has a negative effect on traditional churches, because pluralisation weakens social confirmation. In terms of the degree of separation, the correlation between state regulation and religiosity is not significant.

The individualisation thesis is more useful, but it has some limitations. According to the data the level of alternative forms of religion and spirituality is rather low, and these forms do not serve as an alternative to ecclesiastical religiosity. Rather, the two go hand in hand to some extent. But alternative religiosity and spirituality, which have no comparable impact on peoples' lives to that of traditional religiosity, have nonetheless increased, especially among the younger generations. This change in the dominant forms of religion is at the same time a loss of the influence of religion on people's lives. In this way religious individualisation is integrated into the secularisation processes.

Secularisation theory is highly relevant in Europe if we do not assume that secularisation is a comprehensive, linear and irreversible process. We have to take into account that on the different levels of society the process can have different specificities, and it is also important that secularisation can be overwritten by other factors such as path dependencies (e.g. cultural heritage and political features).

Overall, the strength of the book is the detailed examination of churches and ecclesiastical religiosity in modern society. Each study of the volume gives a carefully drawn picture of the historical background of the churches and denominations, the connection between church and state, the organisational and financial specificities of the religious institutions, and the church related forms of religiosity on the level of the individual in the particular country. The volume gives a comprehensive analysis of the changing significance of the churches on the different levels of society.

The analysis of non-Christian and extra-ecclesiastical forms of religiosity is not so well grounded, especially on the individual level. The indicators cover only a narrow field of beliefs such as different superstitions (belief in amulets, stones or crystals, etc.) and beliefs in non-Christian spiritual trends (e.g. astrology, spiritualism, magic and occultism) and ignore religious practices and several elements of religious consciousness (other, not so extreme beliefs; religious values; explanations of life, death and suffering; views and feelings about one's connection to other people and to the world, etc.).¹ Even the question about the spiritual dimension of life is not the

¹ Some authors tried to examine extra-ecclesiastical forms by analysing religious practices (G. Rosta for Hungary, 187–206) and other beliefs (D. Hall for Poland, 121–42) as well, but these are isolated approaches.

best way to grasp extra-ecclesiastical religiosity, as the expression 'spirituality' can have several meanings. It can be connected closer than any other forms to traditional religiosity (as in the case of Poland). Moreover, religious individualisation that takes place not only outside but also inside the churches cannot be measured by the incidence of extra-ecclesiastical forms of religiosity alone. That is why the conclusions about the individualisation thesis do not seem to be well established.

This deficiency of the volume comes partly from the difficulties of researching religion in modern societies. The problem of grasping the extra-ecclesiastical forms of religion is one of the most burning questions of the sociology of religion. Although the examination of institutional religion is indispensable if we want to assess religious change, one of the central tasks of the sociology of religion today is to elaborate a more general conception and measuring tools of religion that are adequate for contemporary religion, which has become increasingly free of institutional control. The concept of spirituality seems to be a promising solution, but it should be theoretically and methodologically well founded. As the psychology of religion has a remarkable tradition in researching spirituality, the application of its theories and results could point the way forward for sociological research.