

LOCALISING SECULARISATION THESIS? The View from Poland

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ABSTRACT: The secularisation paradigm has for a long time been the dominant frame of reference for understanding the place and function of religion in contemporary societies. The first secularisation theories (Berger, Wilson, Martin), even if constructed on the basis of the European experience, served as a universal theoretical framework for interpreting the changes in the position of religion in the global world. Along with growing evidence from outside and within Europe on the vitality of religion, the secularisation paradigm was challenged and its applicability was gradually limited.

The aim of this paper is to focus on the adaptation of the model to the Polish context under socialist and post-socialist conditions. Taking into account the cultural embeddedness of the model and its assumed universality, interesting is the question about the extent and the way in which the model has been present and used in Poland.

KEYWORDS: secularisation, sociology of religion in Poland, laicisation, de-Christianisation

For a considerable time during the development of the sociology of religion, the secularisation paradigm constituted the dominant model of theoretical and research studies in the field aiming to interpret the fate of religion in modern societies. Although the paradigm was based on data derived from Christian Western Europe and North America, its assumptions and predictions were universalised and employed within other, also non-Christian cultural contexts to explain the relationship between religion and modernity. From the 1980s the universalised position of the model began to be seriously challenged by the growing number of observations from the religious global scene indicating the persistence or resurgence of religion (Hadden and Shupe 1989; Casanova 1994) and by the new theoretical perspective of religious economy theory (Stark and Bainbridge 1980, 1981, 1996) stressing the persistence of religion in modern societies.

In the course of the discussion, the theory/paradigm became the subject of critical reviews, while at the same time the existence of the secularisation process itself has been often put into doubt. As a consequence the revised versions of the secularisation thesis/theory are often lim-

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ited geographically to the European scene (Davie 2002) and to Christian tradition, and theoretically to the changing role and function of religion at the societal level (Dobbelaere 1999, 2004; Wilson 1992, 1998).

In the context of the cultural embeddedness of the secularisation model on the one hand and its universalisation on the other, particularly interesting becomes the question of the adaptation and usage of the model in different cultural contexts. In these respects Central and Eastern European countries constitute a particularly interesting focus of research. Firstly, here the subject of the secularisation theory itself – that is transformations of religion and religiosity under the conditions of a modern society – was additionally shaped by the impact of the anti-religious Marxist ideologies and policies exercised by the socialist regimes. Secondly, these “exceptional” circumstances also significantly influenced the development of the sociology of religion in the Eastern Bloc. The “implementation” of the ideology by the individual countries varied in terms of duration and strength, but, independently of the specific circumstances of each of them, the ideal was to promote, and, in extreme cases, attempt to establish a society “liberated” from any influence of religion. Often the sociology of religion was supposed to be a handy tool in this project. Taking into account the peculiarities of this context, the leading theme of this article is the question of the presence and usage of secularisation theories behind the Iron Curtain. Of course, the differences between the various cases would mean that answering these questions fully would exceed the limits of this paper. I restrict myself, therefore, to a detailed review of the Polish case. In so doing, I also make references to the subject of the reception of the secularisation model and development of the sociology of religion in the remaining countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

RELIGIOUS AND SECULARIST CLASH – THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION IN COMMUNIST POLAND

The beginnings of post-war Polish sociology can be traced to the 1950s. At first studies on religion and religiosity were an area that tended to be neglected, and it was not until the late 1960s and 1970s that an ever faster development of the discipline was evident. However, Polish sociology of religion constituted a distinctive case among the countries of the Communist Bloc, a fact which was the result of several factors. Firstly, religion in Poland was never the target of an attack mounted on such a wide scale as in the other countries of the region.² Naturally, this statement refers mainly to the Roman Catholic Church, which continued to be an important social force that could not be ignored. Yet the situation of other Churches and religious groups was considerably more difficult. An example might be the repressions dealt to the Greek Catholic Church in Poland. Probably as a result of the Roman Catholic Church’s important social influence, the regime decided against persecution of it to the extent seen in the other countries of Eastern Europe. Secondly, the sociology of religion in Poland was never an instrument of “promotion” of atheism, as was the case, for example, in the Soviet Union, where “scientific atheism” – in spite of its pretensions to the rank of science – was in reality a weapon in the fight against religion (see Borowik 2000, 168; Froese 2004, 37-8). In many cases the research conducted by the Institute of Scientific Atheism in Moscow had more in common with atheist propaganda than objective studies (Ciupak 1990, 20), and many representatives of scientific atheism, fearing results contradictory to their hypotheses, did not undertake any research at all (ibid. 22). In Poland the role of “promotion” of atheism was designated to the current of Marxist religious studies which developed after the war, and which had come about in close connection with the secular movement. As was stressed in the report from a religious studies conference in the 1970s, “[f]rom its very beginnings the secular movement created institutional forms of activation of religious studies scholars working to deepen the processes of secularisation of social life and culture” (Sprawozdanie 1977, 1).

² As extreme examples we can cite the persecution of the Orthodox Church and its followers in the Soviet Union (see Froese 2004) and similar practices under the regime of Enver Hoxha in Albania (Young 1999).

A further characteristic of Polish sociology of religion was its division into two dominant schools: Catholic and Marxist scholars, each researching the issue of studies of religion in society (see Leś 1979, 202; Baniak 1981, v; Borowik 2000, 213).³ This made Poland a unique case among the communist countries, where the only current of study of religion or religiosity (or, to be more precise, studies on the subject of the lack of religion or the subject of atheism) was the Marxist one (Podstawy naukowe... 1977, 107). In addition, the socio-political situation in Poland meant that conducting research on religion was an easier task than doing so in other countries of the Communist Bloc. Examining the development of the sociology of religion in Poland to that in other Eastern European countries, Irena Borowik emphasises that:

(...) in comparison with other countries of the then Eastern Bloc, studies of this kind in Poland were clearly both the most advanced and en masse the most free of infantile ideologisation (2000, 213).

Does this mean that the sociology of religion and its subject of study were entirely free of any influence of ideology? This concern appears mostly in relation to the limiting impact of religion and religious views on the discipline. Edward Ciupak stresses that the sociology of religion must be separated from Christian philosophy and theology:

For a sociologist interested in empirical research – description, classifications of the structure of religious phenomena – and the topic of the social conditions of religion, debates on the external forms and internal essence of religion are of an incidental significance (1965, 23-4).

Similarly, Józef Majka notes that, while the influences of theology and philosophy were evident during the early stages of the development of the sociology of religion, the studies undertaken by Catholic sociologists led to sociology entering the field of empirical research (Majka 1971, 5). Commenting on the post-war Polish sociology of religion Władysław Piwowarski stresses the reliability of conducted studies:

(...) scholars of religious life from both church and state institutions found themselves influenced by diverse ideological and institutional pressures. Despite the difficulties, many sociologists in Poland examined religion in an objective and scientific manner (2003a, 15).

Similarly, Borowik points to a “dualistic” model, which she considers to have been favourable to the academic reliability of both camps (2000, 213).

However, a different assessment of this state of affairs is also offered. For example, Józef Baniak accepts that the sociology of religion in Poland was formed by the existence of two independent currents of research on religiosity and religion, populated by scholars “representing two camps opposing in their ideology and world views”. However, “the ideological element is visible in both the popular and academic publications” of both currents (1981, v). A similar approach is represented by Karol H. Borowski, who distinguishes two positions. One group of scholars – oriented towards Marxism – concentrated only on studying religion in such a way for the results of this research to be able to serve the support and legitimation of the anti-religious policies of the ruling party. The other group, meanwhile, concentrated on general research concerning religiosity. In this case the main goal was to question Marxist theses on the function of religion on society and increasing secularisation in Poland. In other words, it was not reliable studies, but attempts to confirm their own convictions that constituted the main aim of the research of the two groups (Borowski 1985, 393).

SECULARISATION, LAICISATION, DE-CHRISTIANISATION? – A VARIETY OF CONCEPTS

Before looking at the subject of the presence of the secularisation model in Polish sociology

³ There was of course a group of sociologists who did not belong to either of the schools named here, but they were in the minority.

of religion during the socialist period, we should first introduce the terminology used. In the period under discussion, such concepts as laicisation, secularisation and de-Christianisation were often employed interchangeably, frequently without a precise explanation of their meaning. However, comparing the works collected by Baniak in his bibliography *Sociology of Religion and Religiosity* in the category of sociology of secularisation seems to suggest that among Catholic sociologists the concept of “secularisation” was more usually used, while Marxist sociologists preferred the term “laicisation” (see Baniak 1981). A review of these works provides an insight into the meanings assigned to these two concepts. The term “secularisation” is often used to invoke theological discussions – and in this case reference is made to the current known as the theology of secularisation, or even so-called “death of God” theology (see *Concillium. Międzynarodowy Przegląd Teologiczny* 1969). Additionally, allusions are made to English-language sociology of religion and to the secularisation theories which came about in the 1960s. In this context secularisation is understood in a way that recalls the proposals made in some theories of secularisation. The following definition of the concept may serve as an illustration:

This is a social process by which society undergoes a reorganisation of its structures, designating specialised functions to them. Each of the new structures is independent from the others, and especially from the religious institution, which is also given a specialised role (Radwan 1977/1985, 415).

In other suggestions secularisation is understood in a more global fashion – as changes both in the social dimension (institutions and values) and in the individual dimension and that of religion. Majka writes the following on this process:

In the most general terms, daily life, social, political, economic life, academic, technical activity is autonomised in the sense that it creates its own norms, own value systems, own legitimisation systems and separate symbols and even language. All of this is emancipated in a way from the influence of religion (1977a, 7).

Finally, one can speak (...) of secularisation of religion itself (...) This involves the imitation of secularised institutions by the Church in terms both of structure and of the forms and methods of working, and even in terms of the assessment, judgement of the way of working and results achieved (1977a, 8).

The term “secularisation” was also used to describe intentional actions undertaken by the state authorities serving to eliminate religion. Piwowarski, for example, is one who seems to attribute this meaning to the term, writing of the “programme of secularisation” realised by the political authorities in Poland (see 1977, 315).

In the case of the Marxist sociologists, the term “laicisation” is used more frequently, at least at first glance. A look at some of the articles tackling the topic of secularisation or laicisation which appear on the pages of *Argumenty*, the weekly published by the Polish Society for the Promotion of Secular Culture, reveals two key observations. The authors use the term “laicisation” in the context in which “secularisation” is employed in English-language sociology. The following quotation is an excellent example of this usage:

Laicisation is above all an objective process. Civilisational changes, at least in the first phases of industrialisation and the development of the scientific-technical revolution, and also urbanisation, the development of new forms of participation in the culture of recreation and entertainment leading to the crisis of parish priesthood and weakening of daily bonds of the faithful with the Church, lead to a crisis of religious consciousness and growth in indifferentism (Jaroszewski 1972, 13).

A similar tendency is also visible in the following definition:

In fact it was recognised long ago that contemporary civilisation – and especially scientific-technical progress and its consequences in the shape of industrialisation, urbanisation, changes in social structure etc. – in creating objective conditions for spontaneous laicisation processes – are not conducive to either religion or religiosity (Nowak-Buszeko 1977, 7).

Nowak-Buszeko in fact states explicitly that the term “secularisation” is used in the context of such transformations in the West.

“Laicisation”, however, is a term which is also used to describe the actions of various organisations, including the state, with the aim of promoting secularity of social and individual life. This duality is stressed by Władysław Mysłek. Laicisation in the West was the consequence of spontaneous civilisational processes (e.g. the liberation of the mass media from religion, the emergence of a new type of bourgeois life). However, in the socialist countries this process constituted a different case:

(...) the changes in worldview were determined by modification of social relations, the elimination of phenomena of social harm, deep transformations in the culture of social life, and ideological and educational work, the aim of which is complete liberation of the person, including the formation of a new model of his consciousness (Mysłek 1975, 12).

Similarly, Marian Jaworski stresses the significance of the “realisation of socialist humanism” for the development of the process of laicisation in Poland (1977, 12).

There were also attempts to make an explicit distinction between the two concepts. Jerzy Godlewski, for example, defines laicisation as “liberation of all areas of individual and collective life from the influence of religion and religious institutions”. For him secularisation, on the other hand, should be restricted to phenomena which cause:

(...) liberation of public life or its institutions from formal (especially legal) links with the Church and religion, more specifically, with religious ideology; religion is eliminated from non-religious areas of life. Secularisation can encompass various fields and institutions of public life: government, legislation, ownership, education (Godlewski 1976, 4).

The definitions proposed by Godlewski actually constitute a reversal of the application of these terms at least in French sociology, where *laïcisation* is used in reference to the separation of the public sphere from religion, whereas *secularisation* refers to a certain historical process occurring in contemporary societies.⁴

Summarising the arguments referring to the use of terminology we can say that the “problems” faced by Polish sociologists of religion in defining the concept of secularisation resembled the discussions that took place in the West. In the case of Poland, however, there was an additional tendency to use the term “secularisation” to describe not only socio-historical processes, but also the deliberative actions of the state and other actors to promote decline of religion. The aim of these actions was to eliminate the influence and importance of Catholicism and the Roman Catholic Church from social and individual life.⁵

THE SECULARISATION PARADIGM IN COMMUNIST POLAND

During the communist era it is difficult to talk of domination of any theoretical perspective in Polish sociology of religion. The theoretical issues discussed in this period in Western sociology of religion were to a great extent overlooked, and Polish sociologists mostly focused on

⁴ A detailed analysis of the meanings attached to such concepts as secularisation, de-Christianisation and laicisation in British and French sociology of religion is provided by Barbara Leś (1977).

⁵ The term “secularism” is used today to describe such activities.

empirical research whose form resembled the French empirical current. The main theoretical area to be developed was methodological issues, which were crucial for planning and conducting empirical research (see e.g. Majka 1977b).

A review of academic studies published from the 1960s until the end of the 1980s seems to confirm this observation. It shows that the sociology of religion in Poland meant above all sociographical studies on Catholicism, carried out by representatives of both currents – the Catholic and the Marxist. This research focused especially on such topics as:

- rural religiosity and its specific character in Poland (see e.g. Ciupak 1965; Piwowarski 1983)
- urban and rural religiosity and changes in it resulting from the effects of the processes of urbanisation, industrialisation and migration from the country to towns (see e.g. Kubiak 1972; Piwowarski 1971, 1977; Baniak 1990)
- religiosity of various demographical groups (see e.g. Dąbrowska 1981; Praszalowicz 1981; Czekaj and Wódz 1984)
- studies on parishes and changes in them (see e.g. Ciupak 1965; Majka 1971)
- religiosity of Polish emigrants (see e.g. Kubiak 1970; Leś 1988; Żaba 1988).

The most common types of studies were therefore monographs concentrating on specific regions of Poland, or on specific social groups.

The lack of theoretical considerations may to a great degree have been the result of difficulties in accessing the achievements of the sociology of religion in other countries. Despite this, elements of the secularisation paradigm can be found in the research conducted at that time. In some of the studies, hypotheses on the influence of urbanisation and industrialisation on changes in the religiosity of various social groups were tested (changes in the dimension of beliefs, practices, influence and meanings of religious values, religious indifferentism and religious innovations within a given tradition) along with the influence of these processes in the functioning of the institutions of the Roman Catholic Church (changes in the parish, the vocation structure, the social perception of the role of the clergy). With such studies we can refer to testing of the premises of the secularisation paradigm concerning the relationship between the processes of modernisation and transformations in individual religiosity and transformations in the dimension of religious organisation.

In the case of Polish sociology of religion in that period we can also observe – albeit to a considerably lesser degree than was the case in the English-language strand of the discipline – discussions on the topic of the theory and model of secularisation. Firstly, the question of defining the secularisation phenomena was fiercely debated in both contexts. However, in the Polish case the term “laicisation” was included and the relationship between the two terms was debated. The ideological context of these debates primarily distinguished them from those taking place in Western countries.

Secondly, similarly to the Western sociology of religion, in the Polish context voices can be heard which challenge and question the secularisation model and accuse it of ideologisation. Majka’s questioning of how useful the secularising approach is in the Polish context serves as an excellent illustration. He claims that the secularisation thesis “was formulated on the basis of selected perceptions concerning certain phenomena of contemporary life, to which efforts are made to give a historical depth” (1977a, 5). In other words, the assertions made in the secularisation model are not justified, because there is a lack of longitudinal research as well as data and observations permitting acceptance of the hypothesis about the historical process of secularisation. Janusz Mariański, in turn, questions the universality and inevitability of the secularisation process (1983, 231).

A further dimension of the debate concerns the issue of the interpretation of the data collected in the empirical studies, the relationships between the different variables and changes in religiosity, and discrepancies in interpretation of the impact of modernisation processes

on religiosity. While scholars are often in agreement that the transformations of the various dimensions and the intensiveness of individual religiosity are the result of the processes of modernisation of society, the interpretation of these changes is diverse. For example Ciupak, assessing the future developments of the Roman Catholic Church under the conditions of urbanisation and industrialisation, foresees the appearance of an ever larger group of irreligious people, and assumes that the growing influence of secular activities and development of secular customs in urban centres will cause the social attractiveness of the Church to diminish (Ciupak 1965, 467). Similarly, in his study on the religiosity of the inhabitants of the communist new town of Nowa Huta, Hieronim Kubiak emphasises the destructive influence of industrial civilisation and urbanisation on traditional forms of religiosity. He summarises his observations as follows:

Will the current strong individualisation in relation to religion be accompanied by a rapid process of dying out of religious sensitivity? Based on the general tendencies characterising transformations in religiosity under the influence of the culture of contemporary cities – most certainly (1972, 157).

On the other hand, Piwowarski, summarising the results of research on the effect of urbanisation on rural communities, nuances the link between modernisation and the decline of religiosity. He notes that urbanisation “does not directly invoke indifference in the changing rural environment, to which traditional forms of religiosity are no longer entirely suited” (1971, 342). Drawing on his later research on religiosity, performed in the Puławy region, the same author stresses that intensive industrialisation in urban conditions leads not so much to a decline in religiosity per se as to the decreasing popularity of its traditional forms. In other words, in such conditions changes in religiosity are more marked in “formation of selective attitudes than in lay attitudes” (1977, 365). Baniak comes to similar conclusions in summarising his research in Kalisz. In the urban environment, the thesis assuming the irreversibility of the steadily intensifying process of secularisation, leading to “zero” religiosity, cannot be sustained. In contrast, clearly visible is the emergence of dynamic and intensive selective religiosity rather than religious indifference (Baniak 1990).

The way the secularisation model was tested in Polish sociology of religion is to a great extent reminiscent of the way it was used in the English and French-language strands of the discipline. The similarities are particularly visible in the way the empirical research was designed and carried out – both in Poland and in the West the empirical research on secularisation focused on efforts to grasp changes in individual religiosity in the conditions of an industrial society. The subject of secularisation, therefore, is located in the individual dimension, and often identified with the decline in individual (Catholic) religiosity.

A POLISH DEBATE ON SECULARISATION?

An interesting subject was the enquiry as to whether it was possible to observe a similar intensification of the debate on secularisation from the 1980s onwards in Polish sociology as was the case in Western sociology of religion. Of course, in attempting to answer such a question it is necessary to take into account the changes in the sociology of religion that were the result of the wider systemic transformations that took place in Poland after 1989. The most important change from the point of view of the adaptation of the secularisation model to the Polish terrain and its popularisation was that a wider number of scholars and readers were given access to the most important publications addressing the issue of secularisation (see Piwowarski 2003b; Luckmann 1967/1996; Berger 1967/1997; Hervieu-Léger 1993/1999; Luhmann 1982/1998; Stark, Bainbridge 1987/2000). Undoubtedly, the opening of the borders contributed significantly to the change in the context for the development of the sociology of religion. It also provided greater opportunities to scholars for participating in various international conferences and fellowships focusing on the issue.

Since the early 1990s, the subject of secularisation has regularly appeared in the work of Polish sociologists of religion. It is addressed mostly in empirical studies and to a lesser extent in theoretical analyses. The former approach focuses on the attempts to test various dimensions of the secularisation process, and at least a few streams can be distinguished here. The first, and most widespread, comprises studies which attempt to test hypotheses concerning the impact of the processes of secularisation on transformations in the religiosity or morality of the individual. This matches what Karel Dobbelaere calls secularisation on the micro level (1999, 236) and to a great degree is a continuation of the type of research carried out during the communist era. This category of research includes studies on transformations of religiosity under the conditions of the modern society and on the religiosity of various demographic groups (see e.g. Borowik, Szyjewski 1993; Sopuch 1994; Sroczyńska 1999; Grotowska 1999; Libiszowska-Żółtkowska 2000; Borowik 2001; Baniak 2005). There are also comparative studies, an undoubted merit of which is the fact that they contextualise changes in religiosity in Poland by providing the wider European dimension (see e.g. Marody 2002; Mariański 2004). A further interesting research thread is attempts to determine the relationship between the processes of secularisation and changes in the area of morality. These authors stress that the processes of secularisation question the “religious foundation of morality” (Doktor 2001, 229) or eliminate from the field of morality anything connected with religion (Mariański 2003, 69).

All these studies point to a level of religiosity that is rather high (especially in comparison with the countries of Western Europe) and quite stable (with a slight declining tendency), independently of the indicators applied. Scholars propose various interpretations of this picture. Mariański states that “[t]he multi-conditioned changes in Polish religiosity, working somewhat more strongly towards decline than revitalisation of church religiosity, can in the final reckoning mean a slow (creeping) process of secularisation and individualisation” (2004, 426). Borowik summarises her research on changes in religiosity in Poland during the transformation by suggesting that they should be interpreted in terms of “privatisation of religion within the limits of faith” (2001, 152). Marody, meanwhile, emphasises in her analysis of the results obtained from examining the European Values Study that changes in the religiosity of Polish society are the result of the effects of two processes: on the one hand, the process of secularisation and individualisation; on the other, that of a local character, showing “an increase in the institutional influence of the Polish Church, both in areas directly connected to religion and in those more or less far away from it” (2002, 165). Summarising this stream of research, it becomes clear that the changes in religiosity in Polish society have been described both in terms of secularisation – understood as a relaxation in the relations of individuals with religious institutions (Mariański) or restriction of the normative influence of religion on the various areas of social life, including the life of the individual (Marody) – or in terms of individualisation and privatisation of religiosity (Borowik, Mariański).

The secularisation process was also tested in research on the changing relations between religion and society as a whole or the relationship between religion and various social institutions. This stream of studies matches Dobbelaere’s societal dimension of secularisation, defined as a “process by which the overarching and transcendent religious system of old is being reduced in a modern functionally differentiated society to a subsystem alongside other subsystems, losing in this process its overarching claims over the other subsystems.” (Dobbelaere 1999, 232). The main theme here remained the issue of the changing role and function of the Roman Catholic Church vis-à-vis the state after the fall of the old regime, and during the transition period. The research shows the difficulty on the side of the Church in accepting liberal democracy’s principle of privatisation of religion and its separation from the state and politics (see e.g. Borowik 1997, 2002; Załęcki 1999; Mariański 2005). We can also include in this

group works that attempt to study the role of the Polish Roman Catholic Church in Poland's accession to the EU, again showing the interplays of religion and politics in the Polish context (see Mazurkiewicz 1999; Leszczyńska 2002; Kucharczyk 2003).

The studies addressing changes within religion constitute the third strand of the research testing elements of the secularisation model. This matches the meso level of secularisation as envisaged by Dobbelaere, stressing the pluralisation of religion and emergence of new religious movements of mundane orientation (1999, 235). These studies mostly concern discussions on the topic of changes within the Roman Catholic Church in the new conditions of democratisation (e.g. Gilarek 1999; Załęcki 2001) and in conditions of pluralisation of values and religions (Doktor 1999, 2002). Studies that can also be counted here are those focusing on new religious movements and New Age phenomena often interpreted as examples of phenomena of shrinking transcendence resulting from the secularisation process (Doktor 2001, 202; Mariański 2004, 392).⁶

In recent years there have also been publications – albeit decidedly fewer – undertaking theoretical analyses on the subject of the usefulness of the secularisation model in both European and Polish conditions (see e.g. Mariański 2006a, b; Borowik 2004). In each of these the authors assess the usefulness of the model in contemporary research and its usefulness and/or limitations in the interpretation of the data.

LOCALISING THE UNIVERSAL? CONCLUDING REMARKS

Summarising our analysis of the adaptation of the secularisation thesis to the Polish context and the local dimension of the debates on secularisation, we should emphasise several matters. Throughout the development of this discipline, the secularisation model was present and used in the Polish context. It seems justified even to speak, then – similarly to the context of American or Western European sociology of religion – of the domination of the secularisation paradigm in Polish sociology of religion. Specific to the Polish case, however, is the practical use of this model for construction of research or for interpreting results, without more extensive theoretical deliberations on the model itself. This tendency seems to be a legacy of the widespread sociographical tradition in Polish sociology of religion. It may, however, also be interpreted in the light of the hegemonic position of the Western theoretical sociology which is applied more or less uncritically within other parts of the world.

Before 1989, secularisation was identified with the decline or collapse of the various dimensions of individual religiosity. In this period most studies concentrated on examining the relationship between the changing social conditions and transformations in Catholic religiosity. In later years, this area of study was extended, with sociologists beginning to undertake topics which continued to refer to the secularisation model, but also regarding the non-individual dimensions of the phenomenon, i.e. the religious and social dimensions.

It is difficult to speak of a debate on the secularisation paradigm in the Polish context, where it is more about practical application of various elements of this approach than about theoretical analysis. In the rare cases where such discussions have taken place, generally they do not bring new aspects to the general debate on the subject of secularisation, offering usually the reconstruction of the most recent Western debates. Their unquestioned value, however, lies firstly in “opening” Polish sociology to the influences of the main currents of the sociology of religion, and secondly in adapting the secularisation model (often in a modified version), as

⁶In Western sociology of religion the phenomena of new religious movements or spirituality are also interpreted as examples challenging the secularisation thesis (Stark and Iannacone 1994; Stark 1993) or proving the existence of a sacralisation process (Heelas and Woodhead 2005). Similar interpretations of New Age, challenging the secularisation model are also offered by Polish scholars (e.g. Hall 2007). However, it needs to be stressed that these approaches use a different understanding of religion – those seeing secularisation in emergence of new religious phenomena tend to equate religion with its Christian form, while those speaking of de-secularisation or sacralisation apply a much broader definition of religion, including a wider spectrum of phenomena.

well as new theoretical perspectives, to Polish conditions. These discussions are also a factor which has stimulated new research topics and the construction of new research agenda in the local context, which has often gone beyond the bounds of the widespread studies on Catholic religiosity taking place in Poland.

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