

Religiosity in Central and Eastern Europe. Facts and Interpretations

It is commonly acknowledged that the current situation in Central and Eastern Europe reflects two great social cataclysms. The end of the second World War and the Communist takeover meant the beginning of an artificial *social experiment* that generated significant changes. This experiment failed. The second cataclysmic event, which occurred in 1989, again precipitated radical changes in the socio-economic relationships. In fact, three different models followed each other not only in the political, but also in the social order. In the meantime, the roles and the relational positions of the elements in the social system as well as the individuals' possibilities have changed. These changes dramatically affected religion. Before 1945, religion had been one of the *main pillars of the societal order and the state*, but under the Communist era it was *persecuted* and pushed to the private sphere. Since 1989, it has resumed to be a *public actor* whose precise role, however, has not been finalized yet (Bremer 2008, Pollack, Borowik, Jagodzinski 1998, Spieker 2003). The fact that the second half of the 20th century is not only a sequence of different political systems but also a process of modernization makes the situation even more complicated. Due to the dictatorial nature of this process, we may call it a "*Communist type of modernization*". While it is true that many question the validity of the secularization hypothesis, the different sociological schools developing at the turn of the 20th century predicted that as a necessary result of modernization the role of religion and religiousness would be driven into the background (Dobbelaere 2002, Wilson 1982). The peculiarity of the Central and Eastern European situation is that the effects of the totalitarian system have been mixing with those of the changes in the socio-economic system. Further problems are created by the national and denominational specialties influencing most probably both the speed and the character of these changes. A final obstacle in the interpretation of the situation is that neither the spread nor the significance of religion and religiousness in Central and Eastern Europe has objectively been clarified.

It has become evident that during the change in social climate beginning in 1989 religion has resumed an important role. The question is how it has happened and what direction it will take. Some of the great longitudinal comparative analyses of the past years, including the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), the World Value Studies (WVS, c.f. Halman 2001, Inglehart 2004, Zulehner, Denz 1993) and the Aufbruch, focusing on Central and Eastern Europe (Tomka, Zulehner 1999, 2000, Zulehner, Tomka, Naletova 2008) have offered a certain factual material for the answers. However, the explanation of empirical facts in a comprehensive way can only be theoretical. Consequently, the multi-leveled changes can be interpreted only hypothetically and debated freely. This debate has begun in many fields. The following considerations formulated in theses intend to contribute to this debate.

1. The societal changes following 1945 resulted not from natural social processes and needs but were the consequences of the division of Europe, the presence of the Red Army and thus the establishment of the Communist block. Accordingly, the social transformation after WWII was neither natural, nor reflective of the resumption of the prewar processes but were the result of an external intrusion into the social life. It is without doubt that the history of Central and Eastern European societies would otherwise have proceeded if the Soviet power had not been present. The validity of thesis is not diminished by the fact that the new social systems were established through foreign weapons and political pressure by local inhabitants who in their politics not only followed Soviet ideas and patterns but also took into consideration the realities of their own countries. It also meant that the social changes were *forced* and supported by only a smaller segment of the society while the majority in most countries opposed the way these changes were carried and resisted them as they could. However, the unpredictability of political arbitrariness, the tension between the political power and the people, furthermore, the contradiction between the plans and the lack of necessary means to realize them lead to the increase of *social problems* and *discontent*. A characteristic syndrome of this discontent in the seventies and eighties was the increase of mortality rate (what the demographic literature named East European mortality pattern) and consequently, the decline in life expectancy (Cornia, Panizza 2000).

2. The fledgling Communist systems soon became totalitarian; that is, they intended to totally transform the society, what is more, they also wanted to change human life in its foundations. For this, they turned radically against the previous social order and traditions. The aggressive social policy criminalized the upper strata of the pre-Communist society, disarranged the middle class; and the collectivization of agriculture weakened rural society. The reorganization of political system resulted in the elimination of the social institutions, including the political parties, movements, and the different safeguarding and professional organizations which played a role in the establishment and maintenance of previous public order and life (Hankiss 1989). In a short time, the churches remained the only institutions representing the traditions and the continuity with the previous system, which also meant that willy-nilly they became the *single institution of opposition*. Regarding the question of power, the Communist systems, relying heavily on Marxist ideology and Soviet policy patterns, had all the reasons to be militantly anticlerical and anti-religious. The nationalization of ecclesiastical institutions and the elimination of the public role of the churches were followed by regulation of personal religiosity and the persecution of numerous religious activities. As a result, religion was confined to the churches and private life. A part of the upgrowing generation received no religious upbringing. During Communist times, the number of those who declared themselves religious and those who actually practiced religiosity declined strongly both in comparison with the previous system and in its own trend.

3. If secularization is defined as religion's diminishing role for both society and individuals and is taken simply as a factual judgment then it is unquestionable that the Communist period was characterized by a strong secularization. However, the situation is quite different if we rely on the sociological theory of secularization and take secularization as a concomitant of modernization. For its essence is the development of society's macro system, whose manifestation is the differentiation of those functions which are necessary in the life of a society. Consequently, the different societal sectors, such as the

private and public lives, economy, politics, public order, entertainment, education, health care, the sphere of ideology, etc, become independent subsystems and separate from each other. Differentiation and segmentation also creates the autonomy of these subsystems, and – reversely – the relegation of overarching theoretical and practical regulations into the background. In this process, ideologies of all sorts become depreciated; religion as a general view and way of life loses its social obligatory power. Its influence is confined only to certain areas of life, and is relevant only to certain people, i.e. the number of believers diminishes (Tschannen 1992).

In sum, since the traditional role of religion is part of the unified organization of the socio-cultural system, according to the secularization theory, the segmenting effects of modernization abolish the social foundation of religion and lead to the decline of religion. For several reasons, this theory is applicable only to a limited extent to the Communist countries. First, with regard to the Communist societies we can talk only about partially *autonomous* social development. Furthermore, instead of differentiation, the Communist system intended to *centralize* social life under the political power of the party. Finally, instead of differentiating according to the functional needs of the society, the Communist system was characterized by a *bipolarization* where the party leadership faced the rest of the society. Under these circumstances religion had an important role in the preservation of traditions, the cohesion of communities, and opposing the total expropriation of people. Consequently, *while modernization probably weakened the position of religion also in Central and Eastern Europe, the political arrangement strengthened it*. Whereas the politics of the party-state persecuted religion, its social and cultural arrangement induced religion and the churches to become the institutions of opposition and preserving traditions, thus creating a new, fertile soil for religion which was non-existent in Western societies. Thus within the conceptual framework of sociology we can talk about secularization under the Communist era only to a very limited extent. However, it is worth of considering whether the theological and social conservatism of churches is a result of the persecution of previous decades and the rigid behavior of protecting themselves against persecution. This conservatism might also be the result of the fact that the then persecutors are still influential players of today's public life.

4. It is without doubt that during the decades of Communism not only the public role of religion but also the incidence of religiosity and its influence over private life declined. Non-believers, as an independent category, became present in society; and their proportion increased. Some considered it mainly as a result of political constraint (Beeson 1982, Nielsen 1991). This explanation might be partially right. What is more, it is possible that in the case of many people the abandonment of religion was simply a behavior by which they conformed themselves to the official expectations. For in the two decades following the change of the social system, an opposite trend was observable. The proportion of those claiming to be non-believers, let alone that of atheists, in most countries declined strongly as indicated by the results of both the World Value Studies (Table 1) and the Aufbruch surveys. The latter one, however, also pointed out that the proportions between 1998 and 2008 changed only slightly (Zulehner, Tomka, Naletova 2008).

Table 1. The proportion of people claiming themselves to be non-religious and (**in bold**) atheist in

certain Central and Eastern European countries in different times (between 1990 and 2000). (Source: WVS)

Country	Different time	1990 (1991,1993)	1996 (1997)	1999 (2000)	1999 in the proportion of 1990
Bulgaria	1997	55,8+ 8,1 = 63,9	41,1+ 6,1 47,7	= 42,1+ 6,2 = 48,3	75,6
Czech Rep.		52,8+ 5,5 = 58,3	---	48,5+ 8,3 = 56,8	97,4
Estonia		75,6+ 3,2 = 78,8	59,7+ 4,7 64,4	= 51,6+ 6,6 = 58,2	73,9
Belarus	2000	49,6+ 9,1 = 58,7	26,2+ 4,1 30,3	= 27,5+ 3,3 = 30,8	52,5
Croatia		---	22,3+ 6,5 28,8	= 11,7+ 3,1 = 14,8	51,4
Poland	1997	2,7+ 1,0 = 3,7	4,6+ 1,7 = 6,3	4,4+ 1,2 = 5,6	151,4
Latvia		42,1+ 3,5 = 45,6	33,5+ 2,2 35,7	= 20,3+ 2,8 = 23,1	50,7
Lithuania	1997	41,8+ 3,1 = 44,9	15,5+ 1,1 16,6	= 14,2+ 1,5 = 15,7	35,0
Hungary	1991	39,4+ 3,8 = 43,2	---	35,5+ 5,5 = 41,0	94,9
(former) DDR	1997	42,8+ 19,9 62,7	= 46,2+ 25,9 72,1	= 49,1+ 22,3 71,4	= 113,9
Romania	1993	24,2+ 1,3 = 25,5	---	14,4+ 0,8 = 15,2	59,6
Slovakia		28,2+ 6,0 = 34,2	---	14,1+ 4,4 = 18,5	54,1
Slovenia	1992, 1995	18,5+ 8,3 = 26,8	23,3+ 7,6 30,9	= 21,3+ 8,5 = 29,8	111,2
Ukraine		---	31,7+ 4,3 36,0	= 21,8+ 2,8 = 24,6	68,3

The representatives of the secularization theory explain this decline with industrialization, urbanization, the rise of the middle class, increasing level of education, the general weakening of traditions, and the increase of personal autonomy (Pollack 2003). These were existing factors indeed, although it might be disputable whether the personal autonomy of people would increase under the despotism of totalitarian or later authoritarian party-state. At the same time, it would be a mistake to ignore that totalitarianism as well as the disintegration of centralized planned economy introduced in the seventies disarranged the predictable order of everyday life and created insecurity for the individuals. The absence of order (anomy) manifested itself in the atomization of society, lack of communities, withdrawal into private life, furthermore, in the confusion of values and goals. This process affected negatively both religion *per se* whose basic nature is originally communal and its capability of providing meaning and morality. Thus due to the increasing defenselessness in face of the powerful party-state under the so-called

Communist modernization, not only social differentiation but probably also the *general disarrangement of social and cultural order* and the decline of social autonomy contributed to the weakening role of religion (Hankiss 1989, Tomka 1991).

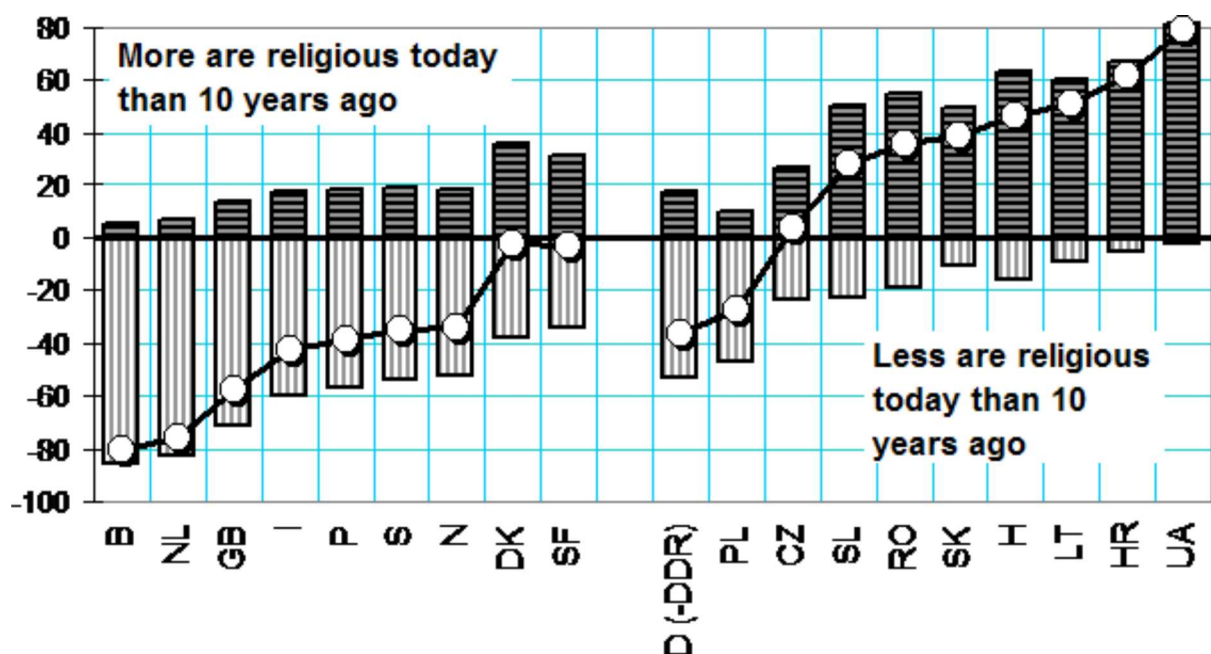
5. Special attention should be given to the differences of religious changes in different time periods and countries. While in most countries of the region bloody persecutions of religion occurred and the big 'historical' churches became the symbol of opposition, religiosity slightly rose at the turn of the forties and fifties, then it declined mildly, but it remained basically stable *till the end of the fifties*. The *sixties and seventies* were characterized by a *spectacular decline of religiosity* and the diminishing role of churches. While ecclesiastical leadership was still without a definitive power and role, *beginning with the end of the seventies* a so-far hidden dimension of the church began to appear, namely the activity of self-motivated religious groups. At the same time, *interest in religion* and the acknowledgment of religiosity began to spread. Although during the decades of Communism on the whole the role of religion declined, the tendencies in three consecutive periods were different: relative stability was followed by significant decline and then a smaller increase (Pollack, Borowik, Jagodzinski 1998). This rise provided the basic attitude towards religion during and following the change of social system. The differences among the time periods are demonstrable in the whole region proving a socio-political harmonization of changes in the Communist block which was partly due to a similar exposition to the tendencies of global politics.

At the same time, there were rather significant differences among the countries. The prominently high religiosity of the Polish society has been known for a long time. So far it has been incorrectly viewed as simply a national peculiarity and explained by the earlier division of Poland and the role Catholicism played in the preservation of national identity. Since international comparative data have been in wider circles available, it is known that regarding the strength of traditionalism Romania is slightly more religious, Moldavia, West Ukraine and the East-most part of Slovakia about as religious as Poland (Tomka, Zulehner 1999, Zulehner, Tomka, Naletova 2008). The very strong traditional religiosity is not the characteristic pattern of one country or nation but the peculiarity of a *geographic region including countries and denominations*. Another result of the researches conducted after the fall of the Berlin Wall is the realization of such a significant secularization in the former DDR, Czech Republik (and perhaps Latvia and Estonia) which is salient even in international comparison. The question is how these regional differences could be interpreted? In our hypothesis, the explanation is the presence or disintegration of traditional village societies. The most important factor in the secularization of Central and Eastern Europe is the sudden thrashing of the inner cohesion and tradition-preserving power of rural society during the collectivization of agriculture. (In some countries, it is not an exaggeration to state that thrashing must be meant literally. The entry of peasantry into co-operatives was forced out by physical coercion.) This can be seen both as Communist type modernization and an event of disintegrating social communal life. In certain cases, for example in mountainous regions, the creation of large state-farms did not change the technology of production and collectivization did not reduce local labor demand. At other locations at the time of collectivization industrialization did not have a significant attractive force or the underdevelopment of transportation hindered commuting to urban

workplaces, and consequently people stayed in the villages, and the communal tradition remained definitive. The most religious regions are those where the villages preserved their inner order and social significance.

6. There was an international reaction to the fact that in the first decade of the processes of changing the social systems (but not later!) the Central and Eastern European population experienced a significant religious growth while their Western counterparts witnessed religious decline everywhere in their own countries. In this regard, the World Value Studies (Diagram 1) and the Aufbruch research produced completely consonant results. However, it cannot be excluded that it was a result of a *threefold optical illusion*. It is without doubt that interest in religion became 'visible' and perhaps this interest even grew. Furthermore, from the mid eighties the prestige of the churches increased as well. This was the period of the visible disintegration of the party-state. This is the time when the population realized that the political and social system – conceived up to that point as more or less stable – was in a ruinous condition. This was contrasted by the people with the stability of the churches which was believed eternal or at least which survived Communist persecution. What is more, in a process called by sociologist as the substituting function, people expected the church fulfill those functions that had earlier been executed by the state, local public life or secular social institutions. The increased value and role of religion and the churches must be seen in comparison with the other segments of social life and with the disintegrating institutions of the Communist state. The first optical illusion is that perhaps not so much religion rather the *measure or standard applied to the evaluation of religion changed*.

Diagram 1.: The proportion of people presuming the growth or decline of religious persons and the difference of both in some Western and Central and Eastern European countries ten years after the change of the social system (Sources: WVS 1999)



The second optical illusion rooted most probably in a process manifested itself parallel with the changing of the social system. Many details and forms of the hidden religious life became visible and

public around that time. Previously persecuted and hiding communities and religious orders appeared as public bodies. The believers were not afraid any more to profess their faith publicly. Due to the changes in public feeling, a segment of non-believers declared themselves believers, especially if they had a guilty conscience. Thus even an areas where for all practical purposes nothing changed in religious practice, the outsiders, i.e. the majority of the society, suddenly perceived a boom of religiosity.

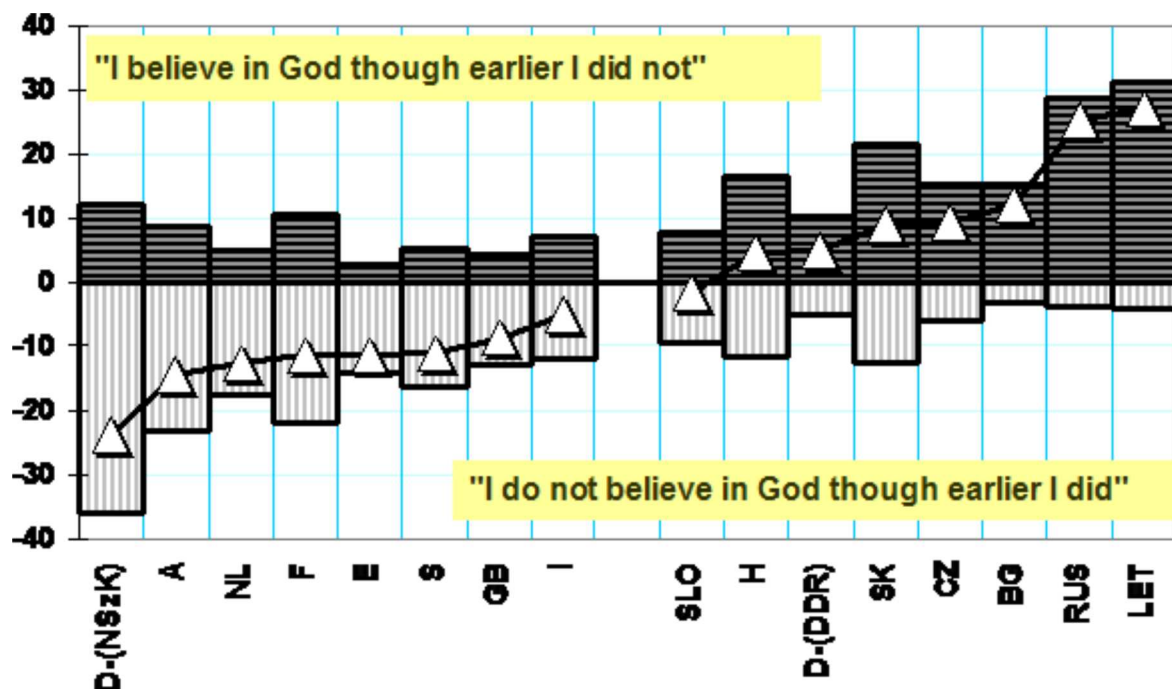
The media and to a certain extent politics are responsible for the third optical illusion. The public visibility and the increase of religion's relative public significance aroused mass media interest.

Religion in the media became a self-generating sensation. For an information on religion and the political negotiations concerning religion and churches some representatives of these institutions were needed. Religion, so far isolated in privacy, became a topic of public life; ecclesiastical dignitaries became celebrities (Tomka 2001). This process undoubtedly resulted in a higher public esteem of religion, but the sensation mongering newscast and its effects on public influence in itself can hardly be called religious upswing.

In sum: we must be cautious and critical about the public opinion regarding religious changes.

7. In general, organized, traditional religiosity, religious belonging, the number of church-goers and practitioners of other religious activities did not increase everywhere and steadily. In three areas, however, the data indicate religious growth. Compared to previous times, many more people *claim* to be religious. *Interest* in religious matters strengthened generally. Finally, while changing and modifying world views has become especially among young adults more frequent, the number and proportion of those turning away from believing in God are smaller than those of who *become believers* (Diagram 2). (The trend in Western Europe is the opposite.)

Diagram 2: The proportion of people (aged 18-30) who lost their faith in God and who started to believe in God, the difference in certain Western and Central and Eastern European countries in 1998 (Source: ISSP 1998)



Claiming or considering oneself to be believer is not the same as religiosity. Nevertheless, it is a sign of changing public opinion regarding religion that while the number of those who claim to be religious is increasing the number of non-religious, let alone that of atheist are decreasing.

Interest in religion is growing. To be precise, however, the increasing interest is not in the matters of institutionalized Christianity but rather in a broadly interpreted transcendence. (In western life the slogan of describing this situation is that many people are „not religious but spiritual”. This expression, however, in Central and Eastern European everyday languages is not common yet.)

It is a fact that while the proportion of believers in God is growing the proportion of materialists is declining. It is certain, however, that many – in most countries a tenth of the population, but in the Czech Republic and Belarus 20 percent, in Bulgaria, Latvia and Slovenia 30 percent – consider God an inconceivable spirit or impersonal power. In another context, 10-15 percent of those who believe in God (in Estonia and Slovenia a quarter, in the former DDR and Hungary a third of the population) do not think that God cares for them.

All in all, while the available data allow only cautious conclusions, every sign indicates that the interest in religion (and perhaps also religiosity) strengthen, the interpretation and practice of religion deviate from traditions as they were established by the churches; and religiosity becomes more diverse and individualistic.

8. A proper evaluation of the situation is difficult because of the changes in the nature and socio-structural base of religion. The context of the changes is the complexity and pluralization of both social structure and culture. *Traditional religiosity* was part and parcel of the general *social order*, rather an environmental condition instead of personal commitment, rooted mostly in tradition-preserving village groups of older, less educated women and to a lesser extent in the conservative, older upper strata.

These social categories are diminishing quickly and in direct relationship with social transformation, i.e. mainly in more urbanized countries. With them declines the recognition of traditional religiosity. In contradiction, a conscious, often community-oriented religiosity based *on individual commitment* is spreading mildly in the strata of younger, urban professionals. On the one hand, based on membership figures, the decline – in the aforementioned more modernized countries – is larger than the reemergence. On the other hand, it is a committed, individual religiosity, which is replacing a less conscious religiosity relying on traditions and expectations. *The latter is the regulation of lifestyle by custom and social control, the former is the improvement of personal maturity and one of the forms of choosing an individual lifestyle expressed in public commitment as well..* The two can hardly be compared. It is possible that as a result of changes in the social system and modernized lifestyle the number of those claiming to be religious and, consequently, the role of religion decline. It is also possible that despite this decline, in a society disintegrating into many groups and life-styles, religiosity becomes a more marked life-model than it was previously; and its importance in comparison with the incidence and definitive role of other world views and lifestyles increases.

9. The picture becomes even more complex by the denominational differences. Every church developed its own system of faith and practice, a routine of combining religion with everyday life. The extent to which religion is an individual improvisation or institutionally regulated varies from denomination to denomination. The role of the churches and the ecclesiastics is different in each and every case. It is not the sociologist's task to decide which religion is better and which is less good. It cannot be disregarded yet that the conduct of different denominations varied in the last decades; and there are significant social differences among them even today.

In the past decades many had the view that due to secularization and the dialogue among the churches the importance of denominational belonging is diminishing. There is no evidence for this in Central and Eastern Europe. Already in Communist times, it became evident that the tension between the Protestant churches and the party-state was somewhat smaller than between the Catholic Church and the state. This may have contributed to the fact that the Catholic Church could more successfully preserve its communal life, identity, and independence from the state than the Protestant churches. From another point of view, it also meant that the losses during Communist times, measured for example by membership figures, were greater in the Protestant churches than in the Catholic Church. As a consequence, while in almost every country appeared a non-denominational and a-religious group, the excess of Catholics in comparison with the Protestants increased in the denominational compositions of the Czech Republik, Latvia, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia where both denominations are present (Tomka 1996).

The differences were not leveled up by the fall of Communism. Although non-denominational identification is not unknown in Central and Eastern Europe either, what is more, it is spreading among the younger generations, denominational identification lives on even without religious affiliations. The Catholics claim in greater proportions that their religion strengthens and calms them than the Protestants. Religious belief and practice are more widespread among Catholics than Protestants which is partly due to the different ecclesiastical expectations. The proportion of those who do not believe in

God, or are explicitly atheist, and perform neither individual nor communal religious practices is significantly higher among Protestants than Catholics. While more Protestants possess a Bible than Catholics, the latter consider in greater proportions the Bible as divine word and not merely an old book written by human beings. (Table 2).

Table 2: Some characteristic features of the religiosity of Catholics and Protestants in four countries (Source: Aufbruch 1998 + 2008)

		Hungary	Former DDR	Romania	Slovakia
Believe in God	Catholic	84,4	89,2	96,9	93,2
	Protestant	80,7	76,7	94,4	84,5
Goes to church at least once a month	Catholic	33,5	52,1	64,4	59,6
	Protestant	35,4	24,5	58,9	36,5
Prays at least once a week	Catholic	47,3	57,4	80,7	61,5
	Protestant	49,4	35,1	74,1	39,7
Owns a Bible	Catholic	47,8	70,3	61,3	45,8
	Protestant	63,0	67,1	63,4	54,5
Bible is not merely a human product	Catholic	66,8	84,7	87,4	75,4
	Protestant	61,0	85,1	71,2	61,7

More Catholics than Protestant feel that religion is necessary for personal happiness; and that the churches must have a role in the strengthening of democracy. Three-quarters of the population of Central and Eastern European societies consider their own churches capable of providing meaning to life, and answers to the questions of morality and family. While the proportions of those who think that the churches can solve social problems as well are significant, they varies from county to country. Regarding all of these issues, Catholics in each country consider their Church capable in greater proportions than Protestants (but there is no difference in this regard in Hungary). Finally, the voice of those who think that the historical Christian churches spoke publicly too many times is stronger among Protestants than Catholics.

Due to the prescriptions and practices, Orthodox people participate less frequently in church service than Catholics and Protestants do. In the mean time, half or two-thirds of Orthodox faithful enters a church to light a candle, whereas it is not a custom in the other two denominations. Regarding institutionalized (churchly) and heterodox faiths and the incidence of praying (in four countries where both Orthodoxy and Catholicism are present in large numbers) the difference between Catholics and Orthodox indicates that the Orthodox religious identity requires and enforces somewhat less than the

Catholic one. Furthermore, Orthodox religiosity can accommodate more easily heterodox, non-official elements than Catholic religiosity (Table 3). While Orthodox faithful in each country believe in greater proportions than other religious people that „the endurance of religious influence is important for the sake of our world’s future”, they do not think more than average that religious people would be different than non-religious. Finally, they do not profess very often that their religiosity would influence the different areas of their lifestyle.

The appearance of new religious movement is a part of denominational differentiation. This phenomenon is the result of several factors, like the great missionary efforts oriented towards Central and Eastern Europe after 1989, the ripple effect of international Pentecostal revival to Post-Communist region, globalization, the astonishment at Eastern religions, and national nostalgia. In most countries of the region, the order of magnitude of these new religious entities is in the hundreds, whose total membership, however, rarely exceeds 2-3 percent of the population. In those countries where official statistics indicate the number of registered religious entities, the division of these entities might suggest as if their number were increasing. In contrast, the combined membership of new churches and religious movements seems to stagnate. New religious movements proves on the one hand the closeness and conservatism of historical churches, and religious seeking on the other. Their social significance is in all probability exaggerated by both the local and the international media.

Table 3: Some characteristic features of Catholics and Orthodox people in four countries (Source: Aufbruch 1998+2008)

		Belarus	Romania	Serbia	Ukraine
Does not believe in a personal God but does in an impersonal power	Catholic	15,0	3,3	10,4	3,3
	Orthodox	16,8	4,3	12,0	11,5
Sometimes does, sometimes does not believe in God	Catholic	7,5	3,3	10,4	3,1
	Orthodox	18,9	4,3	8,0	11,2
Does not believe in the divine nature of Jesus, or uncertain	Catholic	15,0	9,7	36,4	13,5
	Orthodox	31,5	12,5	33,2	30,3
Does not believe in resurrection	Catholic	45,0	41,6	48,5	22,5
	Orthodox	59,2	42,4	53,9	53,5
Believes in prophecy	Catholic	37,5	19,9	10,4	55,7
	Orthodox	50,5	28,8	16,9	57,2
Believes in healing by	Catholic	42,5	31,8	28,4	43,7

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	Orthodox	62,8	40,1	34,0	49,5
Prays at least once a week	Catholic	53,7	80,7	50,0	85,7
	Orthodox	40,4	78,6	33,2	56,3

10. The whole picture of the Central and Eastern European transformation must include the changes in the ecclesiastical institutional life, consisting partly of rebuilding partly of inner structural changes. The Communist state nationalized the denominational institutions and expelled the churches from public life. One of the first steps of reestablishing democracy was the returning of nationalized properties. The churches reopened several of their previously functioning institutions, furthermore, they established new ones and opened them for everyone. This change indicated democratization in so far it decreased the monopoly of the state in education and health care, while increased the importance of the churches in public life and social organization. The churches have become definitive political actors. At the same time, it is not clarified yet to what extent the inner decisions of these denominational institutions are guided by social needs and what role the professional and ideological aspects have in the running of these institutions. It is also uncertain whether the churches operate their institutions as a 'pillar' separate from the society, or they use them as a connection potentially joining them to the other subsystems and institutions of the society.

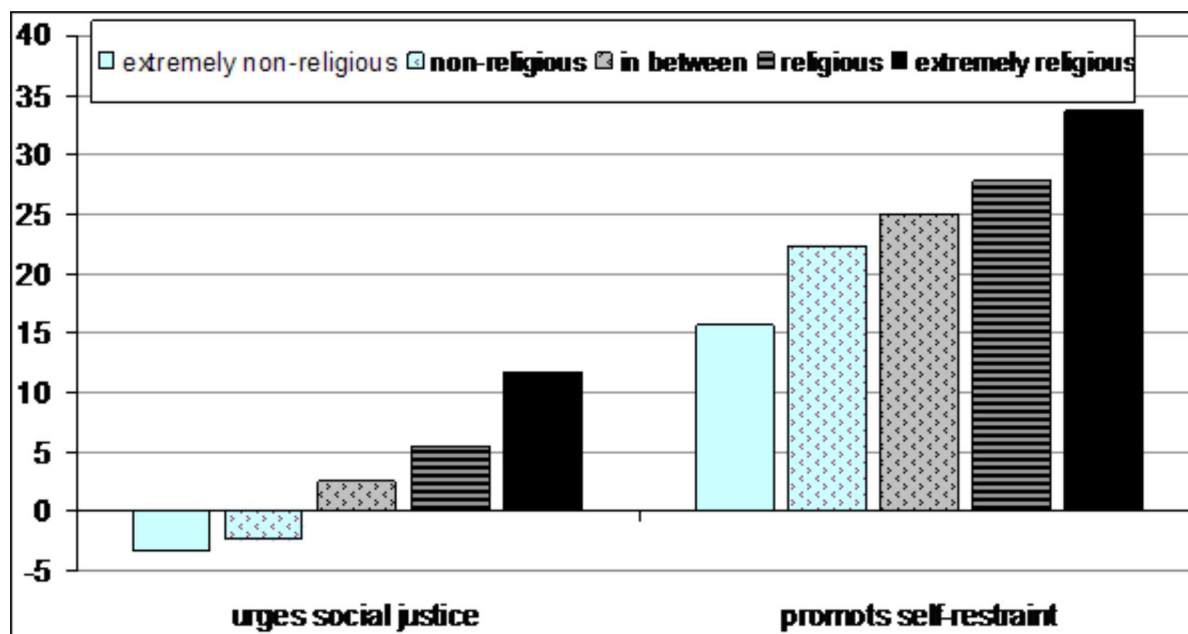
The other part of the changes is a consequence of the shortage in priests. In pre-Communist times the personnel of denominational institutions consisted mainly of priests, religious and deacons. The party-state banned these institutions or regulated them in such a way that their remaining membership in the Post-Communist era is not enough even for the pastoral activity of the churches. Today the personnel of ecclesiastical institutions, including catechists, consist mainly of well trained lay Christians. The previously unlimited definitive role of priests and religious is diminishing. The individual goals and interest, the commitment to not only the respective church but also to the profession, furthermore, the free flow of labor decentralized the previously central control. Two trends meet here: the first is the reorganization, bureaucratization and clericalization (in Orthodox areas this trend seems to be stronger); the second is the decline of the definitive role of the institution and the strengthening of the role of lay people.

11. The last, but perhaps most important question is what role and significance religion has in everyday life. In the years immediately following 1989, a relation became visible: religious people voted mostly for conservative, right-wing parties. Since then, this tendency has weakened; political orientation has become more differentiated. It has also become known that religion can influence not only political preference but at least three other relationships as well. The first is the question of contentedness. Religious people have a meaning in life in greater proportions than non-religious, and – even if age, education, residence, etc. are controlled – they are more satisfied than non-religious. One can say though that this is the opiate-function of religion. It is certain, however, that this satisfaction is not only

a verbal self-delusion, but – according to the data of certain countries – is demonstrated by better health conditions, less sickness time, and – indicating better individual conflict resolution – smaller alcohol and smoke consumption.

The second area is the world of human relationships. In the significantly atomized and individualistic Central and Eastern European societies the religious and other civil communities present in every settlement are the manifold embryos of establishing and building civil society. It is possible that this is the precursor of a radical change in the social organization of religion and the integration of religion into the social system (Casanova 1994). What is more, according to the results of comparative sociological surveys, religious people in Central and Eastern Europe are more open to human relationships than others; they feel greater than average responsibility towards social problems; and both in theoretical and practical aspects, religious people are more socially sensitive than others (Diagram 3). (This is in harmony with the fact that society expects first and most of all social help from the churches. Religious people participate in greater proportions in voluntary philanthropic organizations than non-religious people.)

Diagram 3: The social attitude of people with varying degree of religiosity in the average of certain Central and Eastern European countries measured on a +100/-100 scale (Source: Aufbruch 2008)



The third is the area of preserving traditions and fostering national identity and pride. It is a dangerous area, because it includes the possibility of nationalism, which is connected strongly with the undervaluation of others and xenophobia (Schulze Wessel 2006). It is certain that in the traditionally Catholic and Protestant countries of Central and Eastern Europe religious people have patriotic attitude in greater proportions than non-religious people. (The same cannot be proved in Orthodox countries, despite the fact that in most places Orthodoxy is the carrier of national identity. The possible explanation is that in the traditionally Orthodox Post-Communist cultures religion is less a guide of personal lifestyle, rather a social expectation and norm of that milieu.) For the interpretation of the correlation between religiosity and national feelings we must recall the stronger social commitment of

religious people. A stronger national identity induced by religiosity is not against somebody but is committed for somebody – one's own group. This is one of the forms of social commitment. At the same time, it is without doubt that the glorification of one's own nation can easily become the source of turning other nations and individuals down.

In sum, the Central and Eastern European religious changes indicate the strong social role of religion. The religious revival observed in this region and time period can hardly be harmonized with the hypotheses of secularization theory. It is interesting to note (1) how a previously hidden social dimension manifests itself and becomes tangible; (2) how religious attitudes, the groups of faithful and the organizations of churches transform during social changes; and (3) what role religiosity has in human behavior. It is obvious that despite the prophecies of both Marxism and the ruling sociological theories in the first half of the 20th century, religion is an important indicator and one of the factors with crucial importance in the Eastern-Central European transformation.

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