

Zdeněk R. Nešpor: *Náboženství na prahu nové doby. Česká lidová zbožnost 18. a 19. století.* Ústí nad Labem 2006: Albis international, 694s. ISBN 80-86971-06-6.

SUMMARY

Religion at the Beginning of the Modern Era. Czech Popular Religiosity in the 18th and 19th Centuries.

The monograph is concerned with the study of Czech popular religiosity during the transition from a “pre-modern”, heteroreferential society, through enlightened modernisation transformations, to the beginnings of a modern, autoreferential society. It is because of this, together with the importance of external institutional changes, that the author has chosen the period from the so-called Rebellion of Opocno (1732) to the issue of the Protestant Decree (1861), which equalised Protestant churches with those of the Catholics. This period of interest includes the issue of the Tolerance Decree (1781), development of the Czech national movement in the first half of the 19th century, the revolution of 1848, and the issue of the so-called Protestant Provisory (1849). The research has combined historico-sociological and historico-anthropological approaches in order to gain a deeper understanding of the religious ideas of unprivileged sections of the public. Due to the character of accessible written sources, the relative lack of popular sources as such and the influence of their origins, consistent attention has equally been paid to the genres on the borders of intellectual discourse and popular religiosity. Among the popular sources, literary works of the period have been widely analysed, as well as their popular reception and influence. Popular and semi-popular texts have been compared with elite literature, both in terms of form and content. Religious literature of the period, printed as well as hand-written, constituted the most important type of source; other narrative or administrative sources, mainly of church provenience, have equally been taken into account. These sources are supplemented by others of institutional origin, including those from the state/patrimonial administration, in some cases with the use of ready-made contemporary editions.

During the period before the issue of the Tolerance Decree in the Hapsburg lands, Catholicism had been the only allowed confession, with some exception and special status given to Judaism, and the early modern state would view as illegal any other religious attitudes which might be expressed by its serfs. Secret non-Catholicism was thus pursued both by the state and by the Church, but the character of such a pursuit, as well as “official” Catholicism as such, had been designated by the secular power/s. The fight against secret non-Catholicism was mainly a fight against the influence of foreign Protestant countries, primarily Prussia, with the negative effect of the pursuit of religious emissaries and prohibited books. More positively, the substitution of (from the Catholic point of view) heterodox literature with baroque popular religious literature, and the verbal presentation of similar ideas through homiletics and missions, was important for the Catholic church, given that more important changes in church organisation and the qualitative improvement of standard pastoral care had not been possible due to a lack of financial resources. After the considerable boom of contra-reformation arrangements during the reign of Charles VI, these were later formalised and then practically unused, especially in the later years of Maria Theresa’s reign, with the exception of the periods of the Silesian wars. The estates and also the state had no real interest in the persecution of secret non-Catholics, both due to fear of their emigration and other negative socioeconomic effects, and due to the new social theories of the Enlightenment. They in fact criticised some specific characteristics of baroque Catholicism, which they tried to erase in very much the same way as the Protestant countries.

Pre-Enlightened religiosity had been built on the principle of confessionalisation, realised in elite discourse mainly by polemical theology, but also by deep individualised “mystico-faithful” piety. *Mutatis mutandis* this had been true both for the Catholics and the Protestants, while in the 17th century reform movements emerged on both sides of the confessional divide, including Jansenism and Pietism. These achieved success in the next century together with new approaches to the relationship between the church and state, like the Enlightened political science and Febronianism. As a result of these transformations, baroque religiosity, although still maintaining its external forms, began to lose its inner content, which allowed it to be criticised and relatively quickly replaced. However, such great (albeit hidden) change had in fact a relatively small impact on semi-popular and popular discourses. With the exception of the literary works produced by non-Catholic emigrants, which was mainly Pietistic and in such a way transformed Czech secret non-Catholicism, popular or popularly assigned literature and its reception remained unchanged, even to the degree that it mainly consisted of reprinted or adapted older books. However, the negative confessional self-demarcation that had found its place in such literature did not signify the full orthodoxy of popular religious ideas, both among Catholics and secret non-Catholics. In fact, attitudes were formed not only through the “official” channels but also by heterodox religious books, the interpretational struggle of popular religious teachers, and last but not least by different local traditions. At the same time it is true that popular religiosity took from those sources only some subjectively important elements, which were then (from the point of view of “high” theology) wrongly transformed and concretized. The awareness of one’s own religious identity was an important characteristic, although it did not however lead to the denouncing of different (secret) believers, except in the case of an increase in their social standing. Hence there existed a certain popular “neighbour” tolerance, which had social roots.

The author is persuaded that it is not true that Czech non-Catholic religiosity, influenced by Lutheran Pietism, in either its elite or its popular form tended towards modern rationality or represented the seeds of it, and thus differed from Catholic religiosity, which was viewed by modernity as an irrational religiosity. The difference between the two orders of rationality was more important, *i. e.* the traditional rationality in both its Catholic and non-Catholic forms and the Enlightenment born on the wings of a modern rationality. The differences between Czech secret non-Catholics on the one hand and the majority of Catholics on the other did not precisely coincide with the boundary between the demystified world and the magical world in terms of Max Weber. This was corroborated by, amongst other research, an analysis of Czech-written religious manuscripts, which showed that popular writing was not merely the preserve of non-Catholics. More significant differences were instead found between Czech-language literature (with parity between prayer books and hymn books) and the German (where the prayer books were dominant); research thus confirmed a tendency towards religious singing in a Czech-language environment and the importance afforded to it in the 18th century amongst both secret non-Catholics and Catholics.

The issue of the Tolerance Decree and the other religious reforms of Joseph II and Leopold II led to great institutional and normative change. The limited toleration of other Christian confessions, including Calvinism and Lutheranism in Bohemia, as well as the new status of Jews, led to the establishment of Protestant churches and to the transformation of secret non-Catholicism either into the ranks of newly tolerated churches, which was the case for the majority of secret non-Catholics, or into so-called “religious fanaticism”, the sectarian movement of the Tolerance period. The religiosity of the Protestant churches was directed by their ministers, who came mainly from Hungary, either towards enlightened rational Christianity (Lutheranism) or towards conservative Calvinism (the Reformed Church), together with the struggle for a connection with the tradition of Czech reformation, especially the Czech Brethren. However, the struggle was in fact newly constructed as such a tradition.

The active traditions of Czech popular non-Catholicism of the pre-Tolerance period also played a role, leading to a preference for Reformed piety as opposed to Lutheranism, and to the preservation of heterodox “unionistic” elements in the religiosity of both these confessions. Protestantism, Catholicism (which had remained the confession of the state) and Judaism were at the same time highly influenced by the domestic political situation, which had undergone certain transformations especially during the reign of Frances I/II. Due to a fear of (possible) popular revolution, the Napoleonic wars and other reasons, more “negative outlets” of the Enlightenment were suppressed to allow for a much narrower understanding of church reformation, explicitly called restoration, although it in fact allowed many post-Enlightenment transformations and in particular subordinated all churches to state control and influence.

Enlightened philosophical, theological and socio-political thought mainly caused the baroque version of Catholicism to be rapidly abandoned, finding its expression both in polemical literature, and in new institutional politics. Religion was rationalised and to a high degree transferred to the ethical sphere, and it provided basis for the education and control of popular sections of society. These processes had a significant impact on Catholic theology, including foundation of pastoral theology, while on Protestant theology they had a weaker but longer lasting effect. The specific situation of Czech Protestantism in fact made greater theological growth impossible. Moreover, new symbols and socially-legitimational concepts had emerged, connected mainly with the state/nation identity and rational/modern progress, which were hostile or at least indifferent to religious identity. These symbols and identities were not yet able to become a substitute for religiosity, even within the intellectually higher discourses found amongst the nobility, the urban population and the nationally-conscious clergy. However, the period of the first half of the 19th century saw the beginnings of this substitution. As a result of this, even the shadowing of the tolerance sectarians, organised by the state, became formalised and performed without real interest.

As a result, popular society was not prepared for the fast transformation of elite discourses; such changes led to panic and in many cases even to antagonistic behaviour. The impression of religious tolerance and other Josephinistic reforms led to the temporary escalation of confessional intolerance strengthened by popular polemical literature, the most radical expression of which was the disturbance often connected with the funeral of a Protestant. The question of confessional identity created further issues, which transformed the knowledge of soteriological positiveness or the struggle for it into an external expression of it, for example iconoclasm, blasphemy, verbal demonstrations of confessional exclusivity and particular re-interpretations of history. This intolerance started to disappear after some decades with the popular reception of the temperate Enlightenment and later national agitation, while the knowledge of confessional identity was marginalised or substituted by different social and symbolic identities. A negative concept of “the other” remained important, however, though the object of it was redefined; confessional identities were replaced with national, regional, social or other distinctions. However, while this appeared to have no direct impact upon the hand-written popular literature analysed, it nevertheless signified very radical change. While in the baroque period traditional forms were connected with new structures (individual religious reading can be taken as an example), the full abandonment of traditional forms was later far more common, often in favour of accepting the churchly orthodox religiosity which led for example to the disappearance of popular religious writing and song making. Meanwhile, the “old” genres continued to exist for some time, kept alive mainly by repetition, but they were in a state of quite visible and rapid decline (typical cases were baroque prayer books, hagiographies *etc.*), displaced as they were by “new” genres, not all of which were religious. Processes of formal and functional substitution took place not only in semi-popular and popular literature, but also in the domain of popular religious ideas.

To a certain extent, popular religiosity at the end of the 18th century and in the first half of the next, both Catholic and Protestant, was a continuation of external religious acts which had their origins in the early modern era and which were understood as the only correct forms of religious expression. However, the transformation of elite religiosity and its direct influence on popular piety was important. Popular piety thus ceased to play a role as a specific religious form, and become merely a simplification of “high” religiosity. This went hand in hand with the connected processes of dechristianisation, the increased understanding of the “superstitious” character of the “old” faith *etc.*; these processes had grounded the decline of religious authority and institutional religiosity. In this sense, one can think about the period (especially) after the half of the 19th century as being a period of secularisation in Czech society. But this was not so much the result of socio-economic processes. Rather it was the result of ideological influences and a struggle between different symbolic universes, especially of the knowledge regime of secularism as understood by José Casanova. Religious ideas of popular society either remained “traditional” and declined, or their social spread became marginalised (which can be seen in later generations of the tolerance sectarians *par example*), or had greatly changed which was usually connected with the reduction of the subjective importance of organised religiosity in individual symbolic universes.

This process was influenced by the revolutionary events of the year 1848, which were understood as religious only by marginalized sections of society (*i. e.* the sectarians), while most of the actors saw them as an opportunity for the stressing of national and socially-emancipational principles, although during the revolution some issues of religious emancipation (for the Protestants and Jews, hitherto only tolerated) also took place. Beyond that, the character of global social and governmental change was reflected by the fact that the state has no objections to such emancipation and allowed it firstly with the so-called Protestant Provisory (1849) and later with the Protestant Decree (1861). Despite the temporary attempt to reverse the situation in the form of the Austrian concordat (1855), all the legal confessions were granted the equal rights after that period and the possibility of such rights for others was opened. In the middle of the 19th century the principles of religion and citizenship were divided (also) in Austria, although the status “with no confession” was not allowed. Such progress was to some degree influenced “from below”, though this pressure favored rather national principles as opposed to those of citizenship, which led to the hypothesis that the divergence of principles of religion and citizenship might be seen as a governmental struggle for the suppression of national identity and the tendency towards self-demarkation.

The destruction of existing power and control mechanisms in the revolution period had led to new boom of polemical literature, which to a certain degree was also religious. In the case of religious literature this meant the spread of the so-called second confessionalisation, which however had its roots already in the beginning of the 1840s, and which led to defensible, anti-modernistic attitudes, especially in the Catholic Church. Catholic theology had to fight not only the existence and equal rights of Protestants, but mainly liberal modernism which either required radical church reforms (in Bohemia, K. Havlíček and his followers) or even actively abandoned the Church (K. Sabina and his legacy; this model remained in the minority at that time). Both (from the point of view of temporary Catholicism) anti-Catholic variants were mutually connected and supported; while the liberals eventually found out the non-Catholic past of the Czechs and used it in their program, certain Protestant theologians created an ambitious, albeit finally unsuccessful, program to unite both their churches and effect a “re-protestantiation” of Czech society on historical and national grounds. The battle between these concepts led to the creation of the so-called “Catholic ghetto”, which tried to hold alleged traditional religiosity on a confessional basis, to the lesser important second confessionalisation on the Protestant side (especially Neolutheranism, but later also the

similar radicalisation of the Reformed Church), while for the wide and ever widening social majority such struggles become less and less important, compared to the national and political movement, or especially later social, class and cognitive identities. Confessionalisation of the 19th century thus has led to the exact opposite of its initial aim, to the progression of inner distance from formally supported religious identities, to “birth registered” forms of faith and its transition to the sphere of folklorisms in the case of the social majority. Making the religiosity of the “survivors” of exclusivistic Catholics and Protestants more official, as well as the lack of religious interests of other people led to the complete decline of popular and semi-popular theologies, which had started in the first half of the 19th century, or in the less common case to their substitution by new forms like spiritualism.

The dezeklesialisation of the symbolic and the sociocultural space of Czech society in the second half of the 19th century was only exceptionally connected with the spread of new religious or organized implicit religious groups, unlike, for example, the society of Czech Germans. It took place in small Protestant churches, usually with sectarian roots, explicitly linked to the tradition of Czech reformation, or in a similar spiritualistic movement. However, the privatization and the marginalisation of religious content was much more common, while the symbolic, socially-legitimational and identificational function of religion was transferred to unreligious entities, primarily the Czech nation. As a result, the disconnection of confessional and national-citizen identities was much more apparent in the Czech lands than elsewhere in Europe, comparable in many ways with the development of French society, including the finally unrealised attempt at state-church separation after WWI, even though in the majority case the much militantly and publicly declared atheism was even more far-reaching. The continuity and changes which Czech religiosity in its ecclesiastical and privatized forms underwent from the end of the early modern era to the 19th century, as well as the transformations of discourses that influenced them, and their mutual relations, thus have introduced an important basis for the study of the later and contemporary lack of religiosity of society. The multitude of socio-cultural institutions, which asserted themselves in terms of the subjective and social exploration of religion and its implicit forms which defined this period, were in fact petrified in social and cultural space, in many cases without knowledge of its real origins and meanings, and thus have influenced and are influencing later development, not only in this particular sphere, but also in the general value attitudes of Czech society and its symbolico-legitimational discourses.