

A comparison of the level of religiousness in Slovakia and the Czech Republic already evokes immediate interest in these countries. The possibility to learn about the theory of collective memory in relation to religious memory piques this interest even more. In thematising mutual proximity and solidarity between these two countries, the difference in the level of religiousness became almost a structural element. Just a few days ago, I came across this issue in connection the anniversary of Chart 77. The low number of signatures in Slovakia was explained by the fact that dissent in Slovakia was concentrated in the circles of believers (Christians) and those people had certain mistrust towards Czech dissent, which contained significant number of former members of the Communist party. Although Czech historian P. Blažek explains these differences in another way, this is a good example in regard to the differences in collective memory in the religious sphere.

We certainly have to take into the consideration the differences in religion and religious affiliation between Slovakia and the Czech Republic that have been commented on for almost a century, i.e. since 1918. The author cannot start otherwise. Although she reminds us of the difficulties in a direct comparison of data gathered after 1990 from the Census or other sociological surveys with older data (from the years 1921 – 1950), the difference between these two countries is obvious. The last surveys (1991 and 2001) – either based on the respondent's membership in a certain church or a declaration of their belief – show that the differences are substantial: while in the Czech Republic hardly a third of population declares religious affiliation, in Slovakia it is more than four fifths. In the final conclusive sum of thesis about collective memory that can also be applied to the analysis of religious memory and religiosity in modern societies, the author draws our attention to D. Hervieu-Leger's thesis that "modern societies, mainly European ones, are less religious not because they are more rational but because they are less capable of maintaining memory." Kvasničková applies this thesis to the differences between Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Other data also point to this thesis. In Slovakia, for instance, many more churches have been built in the last fifteen to seventeen years. (The church is a symbol and institution of faith as well as a reproduction of memory.) There are also incomparably more church holidays in Slovakia, which is also a part of collective religious memory. Other connections indicating this difference are a higher attendance of church services, and a lower divorce rate and abortion rate in Slovak regions with the highest religiousness as an outcome of action connected with principle and transferred in people's religious memory.

However, it is possible to ask then why these positive data do not provoke a revival and a return to those forms of religious collective memory that are practiced in Slovakia and which would positively influence some health, demographic or moral aspects of the society in the Czech republic? Instead, we can see that the number of religiously indifferent people or even atheists is continually increasing in the Czech Republic?!

Apparently, the problem is – as it is in the analysis of religiousness generally – deeper. The author might have paid more attention to the statistical data from the year 1910 presented in the introductory chapter. The history of the difference (between these two countries) is a difficult topic for any social scientist and the issue cannot be solved merely by the sociological analysis of current data. After all, the author touched on the topic several times by pointing out the problematic substance of the Hussite movement, reformation, recatholisation and the impact of austrocatholicism in Bohemia. This continued until after the formation of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918 when fragmentation affected every sort of critique of the Catholic Church and the following scepticism, rational judgement and individual experience in faith, church, and religion in Czech society. Still in 1910, more than 94% of the population in Bohemia were members of the Catholic Church, while in Slovakia less than 70% were. This was an impact of the Habsburg's Austrian Empire on religion in Bohemia, whereas in Slovakia, much more liberal Hungarian laws were in effect in the religious sphere. This was caused by the anti-Vienna interests of the Hungarian aristocracy. (For example, in Hungary, a civil wedding ceremony was considered equal to the church one in Hungary, while in Austria and thus in Bohemia as well, only a church wedding ceremony was legal and therefore divorce was not allowed).

This means that the development in Czechoslovakia after 1918 modified conditions that had differentiated Bohemia and Slovakia in a special way.

The category of collective memory is an essential and important part of this work. In the explanation of the category through an overview of the most significant theories of religious changes, the author points out the meaning of the historical reconstruction of past, the way societies remember their past, and how this memory is modified by social changes. Because at present, both collective and religious memory are fundamentally reshaped by changes occurring, not only over generations but within one generation. The author reminds us that the category of collective memory has not been applied often as a theoretical concept in Slovakia and has not been used in the analysis of religious memory. Therefore, she focused on its interpretation and on the analysis of the social change phenomena using this category. She draws on work by Maurice Halbwachs who introduced the category of collective memory. For Halbwachs, identifying family, class, and religious collective memory determines changes in the modern society (the differentiation of original collectives, the separation from their original memories, the autonomisation of their members, and the process of uprooting them from their original collectives) which radically influence collective memories. He also distinguishes collective memory from tradition and history and points out how by repeating, adhering, or sanctioning, collective memory turns into a ritual, myth, or holiday.

However, the author pays more attention to Halbwachs' follower, the French sociologist of religion Daniele Hervieu-Leger. The author offers a brief but complete explanation of the basic terms, procedures, structural phenomena

concerning religion as collective memory in Hervieu-Leger's work. It is important to remember the methodological innovation of her "attempt to escape from traditional polemics drawing on the ethnocentric constraints of definitions of religion which were based on the contents of faith" as well as from the unproductive extensive functional definitions which were applied to all symbolic products of society. (p. 40) According to Hervieu-Leger, these polemics are sterile and unproductive for the sociology of religion. Kvasničková's explication is very inspiring for those interested in interpreting the issue of religion through the category of collective religious memory. Therefore, Kvasničková's text plays an important role in Slovakia, since this issue had until recently been approached exactly in a way that Hervieu – Leger considers sterile. It is useful also for its explanation of phenomena that are similar to religious faith but have not been usually included into analyses of religious faith (such as a belief in horoscopes, magic and witchcraft --which people like if do not believe in but, at the same time, they believe because „what if.“-- or sport, political, or collective events analogical to religious events, such as the May 1st manifestations). I can only remind the author that it is possible to work out the category of collective or political memory on phenomena that accompany our „catching up with“ modernity.

To certain extent, the author does work this out in the final part of this book, although she herself does not consider the theoretical reflection of collective memory to be the best starting point for an empirical study of religion. She supposes that „the forms of folk religiousness“ (p. 67), as a source of Christian traditions and collective religious memory in Slovakia, are different from the traditions reflected in the Czech republic. At this point, the work by Hervieu-Leger offers several possibilities for analysis. And the fact that the tradition of folk religiousness is stronger in Slovakia and that the Czech intellectual elite has more virtues should especially perturb the Slovak religious elite.

In the final structuring of religious memory, the author uses the concept and scheme by British sociologist G. Davie. This scheme could be used in the analysis of the Slovak case – not only by reading about it (which is very useful as well) but also by its application in the analysis of religious phenomena. The author applies the scheme to the phenomenon of *participation in ceremonies*, but does not do so to other phenomena like *memory in representation*, *memory guards* (churches and church communities), *mediated memory*, *insecure memory*, *alternative memory*, memories of sacraments, pilgrimages, saints, or churches. Besides dealing with participation in ceremonies like baptisms, weddings and funerals, which Hervieu – Leger mentions in connection with amnesic praxis, she also pays attention to prayers and church services. (She notes, for example, the revivalist almost divine act of collective prayers in the November 1989 manifestations that were also broadcast on TV.) She reminds us of the revival in the attendance of church services after 1989 in Slovakia and the increased number of these services. She accepts the phenomenon of „the seasonal conformists“ and says that „the majority of those who declare themselves Christians rely on the fact that the churches are maintained by few for all“. (p. 74) She also examines the data from before 1989 which show that religiousness in the Czech Republic was continuously in decline in comparison to Slovakia. In the 1991 census, there was 30% difference in religiosity between the Czech and Slovak populations. The author reminds us of the paradoxes of modernity. For sacraments like baptisms, for example, the number of church ceremonies is on decline while rituals like the baptism of books, animals or other artefacts are on the rise. Another example would be that for heterosexuals the marriage certificate is only a piece of paper, while for homosexuals it is almost a sacred document. Similarly, we could mention funerals for animals. I have an impression of a somewhat heretical or neo-pagan character to this shift that draws on the denial, disparagement, loss, and resignation of the original meaning of the religious collective memory. I suppose that such a shift in meaning of ceremonies and rituals can happen only if the understanding of religious sacredness and divinity has been blurred and lost in profanity.

I respect the author's heuristic evocations, and the way she tries to mediate the categories of both collective and religious memory to Slovak academics and broader public as well. In comparison to the tradition maintained in Slovakia for decades, these categories permit a completely different view on social phenomena connected with religion, faith and people's religious convictions. The religious phenomena should stay a part of sociological inquiry in Slovakia, also in regard to the socialist past despite the dominance of the philosophical viewpoint on this issue.

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