

**The Institute of Western and Southern Slavic Studies, University of
Warsaw**

The Faculty of Polish Studies, University of Warsaw

The University of Warsaw

The Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences

and

The Slavic Foundation

invite you to

an international conference

**The Experience of Faith in Slavic Cultures and Literatures
in the Context of Postsecular Thought**

Warsaw, 16 – 17 October 2017

Call for Papers

In his “Desecularization of the World” (1999), the renowned sociologist of religion and former proponent of secularisation theory Peter L. Berger writes that “[t]he world today (...) is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever”. This conclusion clearly overturns an approach which has long dominated in European culture. Leading nineteenth-century thinkers, Comte and Marx, believed that industrialisation, urbanisation and improved level of education would inevitably marginalise religion. As this conviction became the dominant view, the complexity of the nineteenth century was erased by “ideological amnesia”. In fact, however, “the age of steam and electricity” was also characterised by warnings against modernisation, recalled today by such scholars as Marshall Berman, Harold Bloom and Antoine Compagnon. A reassessment of this period reveals a

picture of times that were far from simple, torn between a sense of triumph of reason and progress on the one hand, and existential horror on the other, marked both by the decline of the authority of traditional religions and the rise of alternative religiosities.

In spite of this complexity, the twentieth century inherited a conviction that secularisation is a constitutive element of modernisation. Under the conditions of modernity, with its deinstitutionalisation, detraditionalisation, pluralisation and individualisation, the demise of religion seemed evident. A number of sociological surveys confirmed the trend: from the 1960s onwards, the issues of “godless Europe”, “the erosion of faith” and “the decline of the Church” received extensive media coverage creating a reality of its own. On the other hand, criticism of the existing secularisation theory challenged the conviction that secularisation is a linear and irreversible process. The first publications pointing to an inadequate understanding of secularisation and a wrong approach to the description of religiosity appeared already in the 1960s.

According to José Casanova, contemporary European religiosity is characterised by anti-denominational spirit and anti-Church attitudes. Thomas Luckmann, in turn, argues that institutional forms of religion are replaced by its new social forms (“invisible religion”). Anthony Giddens maintains that while traditional religions are in decline, religion as such retains its power. The long-term process of departure from the Church does not mean losing religious perception. Rather, what it involves is privatisation and differentiation of religion, proliferation of non-traditional “believing without belonging” and non-doctrinal religions, hybridisation of religious experience, scepticism as a reverse faith, and the phenomenon which Tomáš Halík calls “timid piety” (*plachá zbožnost*).

An umbrella term for all these processes and for theoretical thought on the twists and turns of modern religiosity, postsecularism escapes a clear definition. Even the time frame of the phenomenon is in dispute: does it go back to the religious unrest of Romanticism, or is it perhaps an entirely modern development stemming from the events of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? It seems that the shock of the attack on the World Trade Centre (11 September 2001) was a breakthrough: it turned out that religious war is not an anachronistic scenario in today’s world. In his famous lecture delivered shortly after the event, Jürgen Habermas talked not only about the tragedy itself, but also reflected on the impoverishment of European culture resulting from its secularisation. His observations intensified the debate between the proponents of the “return of religion” and those who proclaim its demise and stress that it has not been sufficiently criticised. This dichotomy of approaches is reflected in different standpoints of various representatives of postsecular thought (e.g. Thomas

Luckmann, Peter L. Berger, Charles Taylor, Anthony Giddens, Emmanuel Levinas, Gianni Vattimo, Alain Badiou, Jacques Derrida, John Milbank, John D. Caputo, Slavoj Žižek, Jean-Luc Nancy).

As the debate concerning the return vs. demise of religion proved futile, what is required today is a new approach to the relation between the sacred and the profane and a new model of secularity addressing the question of how rather than whether an individual is a religious person. Certain answers can be found by examining the picture of complexity of religious experience provided by literature, which is why some scholars inspired by postsecularism (John A. McClure, Manav Ratti) turn their attention in this direction.

In view of these considerations, our conference will focus on West and South Slavic cultures, which can reveal unrecognised but not unimportant areas of metaphysical subjects and experience that cannot be captured using the atheist/confessional dichotomy. Postsecular thought is particularly useful in this respect, as it requires adopting a new approach to relations between the sacred and the profane. At the same time, we are aware of different level of interest in postsecularism in different Slavic countries. For this reason, our conference is not devoted to postsecularism as such, but to modifications of the picture of religiosity which can provide a more nuanced vision of the problem thanks to postsecular ideas. By examining religious phenomena in Slavic countries from this perspective, we wish to open a discussion about the modes of experiencing the transcendental that belong to the “grey zone” between atheism and institutionalised religiosity. We are particularly interested in the record of this experience in literature and art of Slavic countries in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The proposed subjects include such issues as:

- contemporary (literary and cultural) religious imagination transgressing religious orthodoxy
- a specific nature of contemporary religious experience beyond postmodern interpretation; blasphemy, heresy and constructing hybrid idioms of faith
- the phenomena of “invisible” and “weakened” religiosity
- the phenomenon of “unserious” beliefs in Slavic countries and the state of research on non-confessional religiosity

- the crisis of traditional language of Christian religions; the new languages of literary expression of religious experience; strategies of parody, irony and other forms of derision; Can we go beyond postmodern interpretation?
- religious experience in gender perspective
- communism and the Slavic experience of postsecularism
- postsecular literature: fact or theoretical invention?
- postsecularism in Slavic cultures: the state of research, interpretations of the phenomenon (timeline and characteristics)
- the risks of postsecular approach to religious phenomena: how to distinguish between the right to freedom of religion and belief and the acceptance of potentially dangerous or criminal activity in this domain

Conference fee:

- PLN 100 (full rate)
- PLN 50 (PhD candidates and independent scholars)

Selected papers will be published in a volume of conference proceedings.

The abstract of your proposed paper (in English, 300 words maximum), including your affiliation, should be submitted to cfp.postsecularismstudies@gmail.com by 31 August 2017.

Conference proceedings will be held in English.

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