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## Introduction

To some extent, this book is a result of the conference which took place in October 2017 at the University of Warsaw under the title “The experience of faith in Slavic cultures and literatures in the context of postsecular thought.” The organizers intended to gather specialists from different Slavonic countries to discuss how religiosity is experienced today in areas that share Slavic traditions. It was obvious that the meeting would only be a starting point for this discussion because conferences that undertake such a task (address the question from the standpoint of Slavonic experiences of faith) are still rare.<sup>1</sup> Especially taking into account that the meeting was not a debate between scholars conducting research in only one field, it aimed to confront various perspectives of religious studies, literary studies, social and political studies and, of course, fields like anthropology and philosophy. Indeed, it can be useful to introduce different points of view when modern belief or unbelief is examined.

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<sup>1</sup> However, Polish researchers conduct advanced research in areas such as literature and post-secularism. See, for example, *Postsekularyzm i literatura*, *Wielogłos*, no. 2 (2015). <http://www.ejournals.eu/Wieloglos/2015/2-24-2015/>; Piotr Bogalecki, Alina Mitek-Dziemba, and Tadeusz Sławek, eds., *Więzi wspólnoty: literatura – religia – komparatystyka* (Katowice: FA-art, 2013); Agnieszka Bielak, ed., *Metamorfozy religijności w literaturze nowoczesnej* (Lublin: KUL, 2016); Piotr Bogalecki, *Szczęśliwe winy teolingwizmu. Polska poezja po roku 1968 w perspektywie post-sekularnej* (Kraków: Universitas, 2016); Tomasz Garbol, ed., *Literatura a religia – wyzwania postsekularności* (Lublin: KUL, 2017). Cf. conferences, i.e.: “Więzi wspólnoty. Literatura – religia – komparatystyka” [The Ties of Community. Literature, Religion, Comparative Studies] (University of Silesia in Katowice, 2012), “Literatura a religia. Tradycja badawcza i jej reinterpretacje” [Literature and Religion. Research Tradition and its Reinterpretation] (The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, 2018). See also: Piotr Bogalecki and Alina Mitek-Dziemba, eds., *Drzewo poznania. Postsekularyzm w przekładach i komentarzach* (Katowice: FA-art, 2012).

We hope that this confrontation of different approaches to modern religious issues will also be fruitful in this book, which contains literary studies and social or philosophical diagnoses. In the editors' opinion an interdisciplinary or – if one would like to be more critical – eclectic approach to the issue better reveals its complexity, diversity and richness than a one-dimensional exploration of the subject. Having considered that literature is not a mirror for any society, we treat it as a creative or expressive force in the process of emerging social imaginaries. By this literature, naming the hopes and fears of religious experiences completes or reveals – in its own way – the aspects of modern religiosity which can be observed in social processes or religious ideas today. Moreover, literature is capable of defining some experiences anew.

During the aforementioned conference, not every Slavonic country was an object of scrutiny, but Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czechia, Macedonia, Slovakia, Serbia, Poland, Russia, Ukraine were considered. Similarly to the conference, this book presents experiences of faith in Slavonic countries and literatures only partially as some countries do not appear in the reflection presented in the book. However, we treat this edition as encouragement to further discuss the issue – as we hope the debate will be continued. This is a task which is worth undertaking as today's religiosity in Slavonic countries is not very well understood. In a recently released book, Michele Dillon wrote:

Although the Church is universal, the everyday realities in any particular locations give rise to a great deal of pluralism in how faith is practiced and understood. Each particular society's setting presents its own nuances, complexities, and challenges.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, religiosity in Slavic countries calls for scholars' attention because its 'nuances' are not sufficiently known. Dillon, who anchored her research in the context of American Catholicism, mentioned that "[...] some tensions of which I write are also present in Western Europe, Australia and Latin America."<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting the exclusion of Eastern Europe from Dillon's reflection, in particular, Slavic countries. This is not a complaint against the author, but only a desire to emphasize that the religious situation in Slavic countries often remains out of sight of researchers, especially Western ones.

Meanwhile, although the position of Slavic religions shares many factors with the situation of religion in the modern world, it has also some typical

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<sup>2</sup> Michele Dillon, *Postsecular Catholicism. Relevance and Renewal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1–2.

<sup>3</sup> Dillon, *Postsecular Catholicism*, 2.

traits resulting from the complex Slavic cultural heritage and history, including the communist past. Reflection on specific features of local religious experiences and examining this phenomenon in the context of global processes enriches knowledge of modernity and its relation to secularization and desecularization. The purpose of the book is to address today's state of belief in Slavic countries, where religion was not only affected by the process of modernization before World War II, but also where after the war the position of the Church was influenced by communist policy and religiosity was then confronted with the process of transformation.

The authors of the texts collected in the book, some of whom took part in the conference and some of whom did not, look for different forms of spirituality and/or religiosity, thus proving how rich and often ambiguous the material they work on is.

In this book, 'postsecularism' is an important context for dealing with local aspects of religious experiences as they are expressed in Slavic cultures (literatures) and social processes. Not every author uses postsecular thought as an interpretation tool for examining specific phenomena; however, even if for some articles it seems to be an 'outside perspective', this horizon ties this book together. It marks an important perspective where sacred/profane, believers/non-believers, faith/doubt, trust/distrust, belongs/believers are not separated by walls and moats. Past decades have witnessed advances in postsecular thought which offer a very efficient approach to many modern religious phenomena. 'Invisible' or 'weakened' religiosity or hybrid idioms of faith can be seen as dissolving religion when traditional narratives are used. Moreover, heresy, blasphemy, or mockery of faith seem to be unacceptable for followers of 'true' religion. Therefore postmodern literature, which often uses parody, the grotesque or irony when introducing religious issues into literary worlds, gives the impression that it only plays with religion. However, when we enter the domain of postsecular thought and the interpretations it offers, the non-dogmatic or anti-dogmatic phenomena I have mentioned can be seen in a totally different way.

Although not all religious experiences in the book are described as 'postsecular', all of them have something to do with either breaking with religious orthodoxy or putting orthodoxy under question.

As the editors of the book, we do not state that something like 'Slavic religiosity' exists. Conversely, as everywhere in the world, religiosity in Slavic countries is incredibly complicated due to differences between cultural and historical traditions, varying rates of social development and differences in its character, different social stratifications and dominant classes, different attitudes to traditions and so on. It seems, however, to be worth introducing this

Slavic ‘piece’ to the mosaic of modern religiosity just as a ‘piece’, not only as Polish, Czech, Slovak or Bulgarian ‘cases’.

This collective book includes articles by well-known professors whose achievements are appreciated in their home countries, as well as young researchers just starting their professional careers. We hope that this mixture of generations can positively contribute to extending our perspective because a personal point of view on how religions and the status of religiosity are changing today is an important factor in perceiving religiosity as such. Apparently, one’s position on the ‘generation ladder’ determines forms of spirituality as well as the status and character of the religious institution with which one might be familiar. As far as religiosity is concerned, such subjectivity which is formed by personal experience, which itself was shaped by a ‘strategic moment’ of observation, can be valuable because it might open a field of vision where religiosity is a non-theoretical, non-abstract phenomenon – a real thing. This subjective approach contrasts with the secular theory which generalized the concept of ‘a secular age’ – to quote the title of the groundbreaking book by Charles Taylor.<sup>4</sup>

Considering various aspects of religiosity today – not only the forms observed in Slavic countries but also outside of them – we are at the point where we are trying to redefine the meaning of secularization and desecularization. The secular theory which has been used for decades strictly separated believers from unbelievers, the latter of which were supposed to be atheists. The insufficiency of this theory is obvious today, as has been shown by Charles Taylor and many others. Researchers emphasize that too many religious phenomena are marginalized when secular theory, treated in a dogmatic way, is applied to modern religiosity. It might be useful to illustrate this insufficiency by referring to the example of the current religious situation in Czechia. Figures show that the number of people in that country who are adherent of official, traditional Churches is falling year by year, but simultaneously the number of people is rising who are interested in exotic cults and who believe in such things as amulets, horoscopes, magic forces, etc. Belief in horoscopes, amulets, etc. is attractive for half the adult population of Czechs. One third use the services of healers and various representatives of alternative medicine; 46.5% have a positive attitude to so-called paranormal phenomena.<sup>5</sup> Thus, on one hand Czechia confirms the stereotype of being one of the most secularized countries, but on the other hand this is a country of believers, even if one

<sup>4</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Jiří Vavroň, “Věříme magii, kartářkám, amuletům,” *Právo*, no. 24 (303) (2014) (31. 12. 2014): 1–2.

might find the object of these beliefs is not really serious nor deserving to be treated as religion. However, it sounds like a joke to call Czechia ‘a country of Gandalf’ as the frivolity in this expression should not hide the real challenge of interpreting this statistic.<sup>6</sup>

A Czech specialist in religious studies, Pavel Hošek,<sup>7</sup> some years ago published a book under a significant title *Gods are returning (A bohové se vracejí)*.<sup>8</sup> It recapitulates the diagnosis concerning the loss of strength of religiosity in recent centuries and its current regaining of power, which results in faith coming back to modern societies, including Czechia. In the chapter entitled “Religiosity is coming back,” a panorama of rediscovering of religion is sketched from the 1970s to the present day. The process of faith returning to public space did not necessarily mean societies again revolving around the Bible and traditional Church institutions. The challenge was posed to Christian Churches in the 1970s and later, especially in the West, where awakened needs for spirituality fueled the search for new forms of religiosity outside of Christianity. However, the Church also became more active and more open in some Slavic countries, especially Poland. Both ‘little stabilization’ and consumerism as a lifestyle, both of which were promoted by the communist powers, might have helped in adapting some of the ideas of the Second Vatican Council, especially those intended for young people. The Polish Church wanted to be a spiritual leader and had to respond to the needs and questions of contemporary seekers if it aimed to rule people’s hearts and minds. As a child, then as a teenager and lastly as a student I observed these big efforts which were made to attract not only young people but also so-called ‘believers yet still seekers’, or even non-believers who still did not declare themselves materialists. New forms of religious movements were developed inside the churches to create a new attitude to religion that was more personal, engaged and

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<sup>6</sup> In the introduction to a book *A Czech Perspective on Faith in a Secular Age* Pavel Hošek wrote: “Czech society is in many respects a test case and a ‘laboratory’ of secularizing trends and their inner dynamics [...]. It is one of the most secular societies in the world. What makes Czech secularity quite interesting is the fact that it does not consist of widely held atheist convictions or materialist philosophy or complete spiritual indifference.” And quoting a Czech researcher, Dana Hamplová, he added that many Czechs are interested in non-materialist interpretation of reality and they have an active interest in alternative spiritualities. See: “Introduction. Towards a Kenotic Hermeneutics of Contemporary Czech Culture,” in *A Czech Perspective on Faith in a Secular Age*, ed. Tomáš Halík and Pavel Hošek (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015), 2–3.

<sup>7</sup> Pavel Hošek (born in 1973) is a Czech theologian and a researcher in the field of religion. He is the head of the Department of Religious Studies at the ETF UK and the head of the Department of Systematic Theology, Philosophy and Religion at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Prague. He deals with the relationship of theology and religion and interreligious dialogue.

<sup>8</sup> Pavel Hošek, *A bohové se vracejí* (Jihlava: Mlýn, 2012).

practical – a religion which could be present in one's everyday life. The 'Open Church' slogan that was so important for Catholics in Poland in 70s and 80s is a typical example of this trend. A radical change in the orientation of the Polish Church which was so striking after the transformation started in 1989 and directed it towards a much more conservative position and painfully disappointed a lot of people who highly valued the previous paradigm of religiosity. It is worth adding that this Polish 'Open Church' also influenced some young Czechs from the generation born in the 1960s.

This 'episode' with the 'Open Church' and the subsequent collapse of this idea shows how dynamic the situation in religiosity was, even in a country which is widely perceived as traditionally Catholic.

Returning to the book *Gods are returning*, with regard to the present situation Hošek warns against religious phenomena which he treats as sects, as well as the religious fanaticism and terror that can be born from fundamentalism. A crucial question for him is the role of the Church in easing this kind of tension between believers; however, the likelihood of the Church successfully playing this role is uncertain. Although prospects for this dialogue are not very optimistic, Hošek observes that religious institutions could contribute to resolving the problem of growing fanaticism,<sup>9</sup> but the Church would have to change its approach to many current problems.

Examining the cultural background which fosters or blocks today's religious revival, Hošek cannot avoid the question about the relation between faith and postmodernity. He interprets the latter in opposition to modernity, whose worldview has broken down. He also questioned the crucial ideas of modernity: emancipation from religion, tradition, and backwardness as something to overcome. Postmodernity, with its disbelief in progress, distrust in the power of reason and strong suspicion of dominant narratives makes people ask again what the sense of human existence could be. Hošek uses the well-known metaphor of culture as a market regulated by supply and demand. The sacred is listed among the offered goods, which is not in itself a real cultural revolution, bearing in mind that in the history of the Church there used to be medieval 'markets' where the relics of saints as well as the most holy relics were bought and sold – where specialized relic hunters profited from human religiosity. If a modern market in which religion has become a commodity

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<sup>9</sup> This declaration seems to be too idealistic therefore one can have one's doubts as to whether it will succeed. Obviously, it is unlikely to accomplish the mission in near-term. On the other hand, the idea how religion could commit to the peaceful coexistence of differing religion was developed by other scholars and examined by them in different way. See e.g.: Ulrich Beck, *A God of One's Own: Religion's Capacity for Peace and Potential for Violence*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2010).

has some new features, it is variety of items. Artefacts belonging to different religions as well as non-formal cults are ready to be sold. Hošek stresses that ritual objects, spiritual literature and meditative courses are successfully put on the market even in Czechia, despite the stereotype that it is a deeply secularized country.

At this point it may be worth adding a small comment about religiosity and postmodern literature. Although the term 'postmodern' has been widely identified with a deconstructive, cynical, or even nihilistic attitude, especially in the world of art (and literature), postmodern spirituality is a hallmark of many literary works today. Literatures in Slavic countries may provide numerous examples of works that cannot be understood without taking their spiritual dimension seriously, even if spiritual and/or religious meanings are presented by artists in a scoffing or iconoclastic manner. However, it must be remembered that the postmodern religious system of thought, if one tries to extract this from a postmodern literary work, is based on realities viewed as plural and subjective, and, as such, dependent on the individual's worldview. Analyzing the features of postmodern spirituality, Dudley A. Schreiber wrote:

The challenge for postmodern spirituality lies within its vulnerability, within its regressive and narcissistic elements. Central to postmodern ascription and construction is a profound ambivalence towards articulation; it seems naturally apophatic in object and subject [...]. Profoundly different to the pre-modern and modernist dogmatic style, postmodernism tends to cower from preaching and teaching an experience, preferring to create spaces for groups and individuals to have their own. Inspiration lies not inside the ground of being in a traditional sense, but arises out of a rationally observable tension of productive anxiety. Intelligence and inspiration are co-terminus, co-temporal, co-existent and interdependent, ontologically dynamic.<sup>10</sup>

Interpreting postmodern literature from such a standpoint could reveal a different aspect of its tendency to make a mockery of religion. It is not religion as such which is an object of farce, but traditional religious imagery and its old-fashioned language, which is badly suited to human experience, especially since the tragic history of the 20th century. Postmodern artists show that the systems of principles or ideas that were spread by traditional Church Instructions and addressed to the faithful did not stand the test of time. It is

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<sup>10</sup> Dudley A. Schreiber, "On the Epistemology of Postmodern Spirituality," *Verbum et Ecclesia*, no. 33 (1) (2012). [https://www.researchgate.net/scientific-contributions/2067386052\\_Dudley\\_A\\_Schreiber](https://www.researchgate.net/scientific-contributions/2067386052_Dudley_A_Schreiber) (Accessed 29 September 2018).

difficult to believe today in the Old, Good God who takes care of mankind or to have trust in winged angels that serve as God's intermediary, sent to earth to protect humans. All this is childish and is shown as childish by postmodern literature that caricatures typical religious representations as burlesque, absurd forms of human naivety. In a more general way, Martin Kočí commented on the urgent need to seek a new religious language since the old one makes it impossible to understand a God who is beyond the control of human desires for sense or human eagerness for justice:

Our religious language tries to bring God under control, to assimilate God within our ready-made systems of meaning, to turn God into a reassuring projection of our own need and desires. Such a religious language is a barrier against God's strangeness [...].<sup>11</sup>

Postmodern literature destroys the image of a 'well-known God', sometimes in a very blasphemous way; however, even given the state of commodification of religion today, it seems insufficient to interpret all these literary games as only playing with the new 'toy' that religion has become in the super-market of modern culture. Of course, some works are nothing more than toys, but such a narrow explanation, if applied, results in only scratching a surface that covers something much more important and serious. The question is, how can this 'something' be brought to the surface? Postsecular thought can be useful in such a case.

Coming back to the book by Hošek, the author analyzes the term 'Czech atheisms' which – as should be stressed – is one of the most important concepts to consider in order to understand Czech religiosity. He also tackles the religious situation in Czechia after the Velvet Revolution, addressing the different reasons for the low interest in traditional Church institutions that is characteristic of Czech society. His arguments coincide with the diagnoses previously formulated by such Czech researchers as Zdeněk Nešpor, Dušan Lužný, Petr Fiala, Dana Hamplová and David Václavík. So far, Hošek's diagnosis has not brought much that is new, but his book is interesting for me because the author is not only a theorist, but also an activist for religious dialogue and an active member of his Church. He represents the committed attitude towards religiosity which I described above.

From this point of view, the most interesting part is the last chapter of the book, entitled "Postmodernity and the Gospel" ("Postmodernita a evan-

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<sup>11</sup> Martin Kočí, "A Postmodern Quest: Seeking God and Religious Language in a Postmodern Context," in *A Czech Perspective on Faith in a Secular Age*, eds., Tomáš Halík and Pavel Hošek (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015), 87.

gelium”), in which Hošek deliberates on the challenges that are faced by the Church nowadays and the mistakes made by it. He regrets that this institution neither understands modern people nor tries to understand them; its conservative approach closes the Institution into its own hermetic world – it “answers questions which are posed by nobody.”<sup>12</sup> At the same time, real problems that cause common anxiety are left unanswered or even barely noticed. Hošek stresses that it is not enough for the Church to pay attention to problems which have been marginalized, e.g. sexuality and gender equality. A real challenge nowadays is to find a proper language of communication with the postmodern human being. The Church, which has never been only an organization or institution, should better fulfil its substantial role in the community, where people could develop the forms of religiosity so distinctive of modern spirituality: inner prayer, meditation, even mystical experiences.

Hošek’s intention was to write not a scientific book, but a popular one that introduces the reader to the most burning problems of today’s religiosity. Supposedly, he also wanted to suggest what kinds of expectations people are entitled to have of the Church and how the Church should change to fulfil its mission today, when postmodernity sets the horizon for the experiencing of faith.

Three years after this publication, Hošek wrote the “Introduction” to a book that he co-authored, in which he states:

Religious faith is going through an unprecedented transformation in the contemporary world. One of the major causes of this transformation is the fact that we are living in ‘a secular age’, to use the phrase chosen as the title of the now famous book by Charles Taylor. Traditional religious institutions do not seem to be very quick in adjusting their programs and ways of communication to the contemporary cultural situation. This volume [...] is to help the contemporary Church to understand better what is going on with religious faith in contemporary societies and to adapt its pastoral activities and methods to changing cultural conditions.<sup>13</sup>

As one can see, the same aims which were formulated in the previous publication are now repeated, showing some burning problems and expectations involved in relations between the Church and society. These issues still remain troublesome and, most importantly, they occur not among so-called ‘dwellers’, but among contemporary seekers. In referring to the formula *simul fidelis et infidelis*, which is so important in Tomáš Halík’s consideration of

<sup>12</sup> Hošek, *A bohové se vracejí*, 113.

<sup>13</sup> Hošek, “Introduction,” 1.

modern religiosity,<sup>14</sup> Hošek stresses that there is ‘a grey zone’ of people who orbit around religiosity and spirituality in one way or another. This zone is still barely known, which results in a deformed image of faith today. Hošek writes:

The grey zone is in fact very diverse and multifarious. It includes ‘apatheists’ (those who are basically indifferent towards religion), it also includes those who are attracted by various kinds of new spiritual options such as Westernized versions of Eastern religious traditions or esoteric spiritualities. Among both regular and less regular Church-goers (who may be more or less loyal Church members though perhaps not completely satisfied with its contemporary shape) and also among people who call themselves ‘spiritual but not religious’, and even among those who are radical critics of contemporary Christianity and call themselves atheists, we find many sincere seekers.<sup>15</sup>

He describes the situation in Czechia but his comments might be more or less attributed to religiosity in other Slavic countries. Since seekers are important not only in Czechia, the key question today seems to be how to understand them and their needs.<sup>16</sup> Hošek repeats the suggestion by Tomáš Halík not to distinguish seekers and dwellers but to replace this distinction with a more fundamental difference between ‘open-minded’ and ‘closed-minded’ people:

The former remain open to Mystery, Love, and Hope. The latter sometimes prefer to have things, including spiritual things, ‘under control’ (at the same time, we must remember that not all dwellers are necessarily closed-minded).<sup>17</sup>

This suggestion is crucial, not only because it makes it possible to introduce into the horizon of religious questions the intellectual heritage of such important persons as Karel Havlíček Borovský, Tomáš G. Masaryk, Karel Čapek and Václav Havel, all of whom played an essential role in Czech culture and who “[...] were neither atheists, nor ordinary Church believers, but were definitely seekers” – as Hošek wrote.<sup>18</sup> This ‘open-minded’ approach to

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<sup>14</sup> Tomáš Halík is not only a co-author of the book *A Czech Perspective on Faith in a Secular Age*, but he is also treated as an intellectual leader by the team of his younger colleagues with whom he realized the project resulting in the mentioned book. Other authors frequently refer to his ideas and diagnosis about modern religious situation.

<sup>15</sup> Hošek, “Introduction,” 3.

<sup>16</sup> Considering this question, Hošek refers to the article by Tomáš Halík: *Vzdáleným nablízku* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> Hošek, “Introduction,” 3.

<sup>18</sup> Hošek, “Introduction,” 3.

religiosity once more indicates literature – or more generally culture – as the space where experiencing faith is freely expressed beyond the Instruction of the Church in a way which arises from the basic level of human existence and emotions. Literature gives voice to those who might believe or desire ‘something beyond’, even if they remain full of suspicions towards this ‘beyond’, or are ironic and generally distanced towards the Church and its instructions, or are simply outside it. Hošek stresses the necessity of “the idea that the Church must be in touch with people who do not profess Christianity and who perhaps just vaguely desire ‘something beyond’.”<sup>19</sup> This opinion, to which I come back for a moment, resulted in another declaration:

We strongly believe that the calling of the Church includes listening attentively to, and trying to understand, the actual questions people are asking, as they are articulated in one way or another in art, in philosophy, in the climate of society, in changes of public opinion, in media, and so on. This means being well versed in contemporary culture and its artistic and philosophical reflection, and searching for ways to engage in a meaningful dialogue.<sup>20</sup>

Hošek enumerates the features of contemporary culture which are particularly important when considering the issue of religiosity today: “the post-rationalist, post-ideological, post-traditional, post-optimistic, post-individualist and post-materialist.”<sup>21</sup> These are aspects of contemporary culture which have to influence experiences of faith in Slavic countries and elsewhere.

As regards the issue of ‘something beyond’ which I mentioned before, one of the authors of the discussed book refers to the basic meaning of religious experience formulated by Friedrich Schleiermacher, a German philosopher and theologian who described the fundamental religious ‘instinct’ as ‘the sense and taste for the infinite’.<sup>22</sup> This observation was important not only at the time of romanticism, when ‘intuitional’ religiosity was an object of stormy change (which makes some scholars treat this period as the very beginning of ‘postsecularism’), but it is also important today. Today this ‘taste for the infinite’ finds its echoes not only in various forms of religiosity which might be an object of social research, it is present also in literature (culture) as a witness of human desires for spirituality.

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<sup>19</sup> Hošek, “Introduction,” 4.

<sup>20</sup> Hošek, “Introduction,” 5.

<sup>21</sup> Hošek, “Introduction,” 8.

<sup>22</sup> Pavel Roubík, “The Myth of the ‘Nonreligious Age’: A Sociocultural Transformation of Religion in Modernity,” in *A Czech Perspective on Faith in a Secular Age*, eds., Tomáš Halík and Pavel Hošek (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015), 68.

Continuing, however, the issue of specific features of our culture, we should return to detraditionalization, which – as Martin Kočí, another author of the book concludes – is also characteristic of our times. This implies that “[...] traditions and identities (religious, secular, political, etc.) do not pass from one generation to another. An individual identity is not pre-given any more. Neither Christianity, nor any other basic story is able to grant an unquestionable and secure identity in a postmodern context.”<sup>23</sup> In such a situation one who accepts an open approach towards a religiosity issue can see more and understand more. The conclusion of Kočí sounds strong as well as dramatic:

In sum, the Church, in its commendable effort to approach people beyond its own borders, must be aware that there is no common Christian background. Perhaps there is no common background at all.<sup>24</sup>

Kočí suggests that ‘the third way’ between militant atheism and dogmatic theism is anatheism: “Anatheism is a wager on faith which is open to dark nights, doubt and uncertainty.”<sup>25</sup>

This is a standpoint *de novo* that directs us towards literature because it has a special ability to express God’s strangeness and it can “[...] direct our eyes at the altar of an unknown God,” as Halík suggests.<sup>26</sup> This ability might not be overrated today, when – instead of being based on the Catechism – there is a need for “[...] the ambiguity of religious language, we should avoid the temptation of explanation. Rather, our struggle must evoke a perplexing, yet marvelous experience of standing in front of mystery; both *tremendum et fascinans*, as Rudolf Otto aptly puts it.”<sup>27</sup>

The book consists of three parts, of which the first is an introduction. The second part recapitulates different approaches to the issue of religiosity as they were presented during the conference in 2017. The third part gathers texts which can be divided into two groups: essays analyzing different cases of Slavic literatures as records of faith experiences that overstep the ecclesial order are included in the first smaller group. The authors explore literary works edited in the 20th century, mostly in the 1990s. However, there are also articles studying literary texts that were written earlier, even in the 1950s; for example, there is an essay about a Czech poet, Jan Zahradníček. Because Zahradníček was imprisoned by communist powers during the Stalinist era,

<sup>23</sup> Kočí, “A Postmodern Quest,” 85.

<sup>24</sup> Kočí, “A Postmodern Quest,” 85.

<sup>25</sup> Kočí, “A Postmodern Quest,” 89. Kočí refers to the concept by Richard Kearney.

<sup>26</sup> Kočí, “A Postmodern Quest,” 91.

<sup>27</sup> Kočí, “A Postmodern Quest,” 95.

when persecution of Catholics, particularly in Czechoslovakia, was extremely brutal, his faith had to go through a dramatic confrontation with the totalitarian system. This was why ‘yes–no’ answers based on the catechism did not correspond to the situation in which faith was his way to survive. This ‘borderline situation’ (Karl Jaspers) was not only a test of his Christianity, but also – and this aspect is more interesting for us – a test of faith as such.

The article about Zahradníček gives insights into the question of how religiosity was put under the most severe trial of political fanaticism and ideological pressure, as was the situation of religion in the East, but not in the West. In countries where the communists seized power, they tried to destroy the Church as an institution, but their attacks on individual believers had a more personal character and left traces of inner battles in which people also had to fight against their personal fears, uncertainty and doubt. It was really a ‘dark night’ of faith, lived in the obscurity of a prison cell. In such a situation, ‘uncertainty and doubt’ towards religion were not the result of the transformation of the experience of faith which is characteristic of religiosity today. In the case of this Czech poet, his ‘uncertainty and doubt’ were born from the tragic existential experience of a human being. Zahradníček’s fight to keep his faith shows how little is still known about this side of modern religiosity, because barely thirty years have passed since it became possible to study the martyrdom of Christians in communist countries. Knowledge of how the literary testimonies left by people who were victims of the system could enrich or even change the picture of religiosity in Slavic countries is still before us.

I have referred only to the one essay that tackles the issue of literature as a record of experiencing faith. The literary texts presented in the book demonstrate the insufficiency of forms of faith which ‘are ready to use’ and which are unable to ‘feed’ the desires of a contemporary man who misses the spiritual life. At the same time, literature opens a new dimension for the spiritual call.

The second group of essays in the book introduces a socio-cultural perspective in considering the religious processes in Slavic countries. Some of the papers bring a wider viewpoint to the presentation of the religious situation in various countries (e.g. a text by Roman Kečka, who outlines the state of religiosity in today’s Slovakia). Other texts introduce some phenomena which could easily be overlooked, but they are significant when mapping ‘Slavic’ religiosity (e.g. a text by Marta Zimniak-Haľajko).

At the end of this introduction it is worth coming back to the issue of ideology as a crucial factor which influenced the field of faith in Slavic countries. Adapting Western theories concerning religious transformation and analyzing secularism and ‘postsecularism’ (mostly in the context of modernity and

the collapse of the ideas of modernity) could marginalize the political factors which are so important when considering religiosity in Slavic countries. Experiencing faith in these countries should be considered from a ‘double’ perspective: Firstly, the universal one which those countries shared with the West and which is the result of modernity and postmodernity. Secondly, the ‘local’ perspective that is determined by politico-historical conditions which are still being worked on by researchers and which are still an object of dispute. As has been said, for many years censorship in these countries blocked any research in this field. Today’s return to the issue takes place in a situation in which it is very simple to ‘universalize’ the question and – as a result – to waste what is local because it is mingled with something more global. As the editors of the book, we hope that the ‘local’ cases presented here might contribute to a better understanding of the issue.

As has been already said, our publication does not claim to present a holistic image of religiosity in Slavic countries. Our intention is to demonstrate some thought-provoking cases and to combine different perspectives in analyzing the issue of religiosity in our part of Europe. As editors, we strongly believe that a comparative approach to the subject can reveal some specific aspects of the experience of faith in the Slavic ‘world’. Since even in countries where religiosity seems to be well recognized, introducing a sociological perspective to a closer look at local cultures and their ways of expressing religious questions opens less well-known perspectives. For example, Poland is believed to be a conservative Catholic country, and this is true at least to some extent. However, the conviction that Polish religiosity is so evident that it could serve as a juxtaposition when considering, for example, Czech religiosity, seems to be too generalized. Looking at modern Polish literary culture, one can observe that it traces the same feeling of religious uncertainty as Czech literature does. The title of a book published in Poland in 2018 reads *I wish you were here*<sup>28</sup> and this wish (which expresses a complaint about God) has its continuation in the words of one of the poems analyzed in the book: “There is nobody to talk to / but even if finally there is someone / what they lack most of all is the words.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Mieszko Ciesielski and Katarzyna Szewczyk-Haake, eds., *Szkoda, że cię tu nie ma. Filozofia religii a postsekularyzm jako wyzwanie nowych czasów* (Kraków: Instytut Myśli Józefa Tischnera, JMR Trans-Atlantyck, 2018).

<sup>29</sup> “Nie ma z kim pogadać, / lecz nawet jeśli już jest, to przecież najbardziej / brakuje słów” (a fragment of a poem by Tadeusz Różycki *There is no answer (Nie ma odpowiedzi)*). I quote after: Magdalena Piotrowska-Grot, “Wyrastanie z raju. Rola eschatologii w polskiej poezji po roku 1989,” in *Szkoda, że cię tu nie ma. Filozofia religii a postsekularyzm jako wyzwanie nowych czasów*, eds. Mieszko Ciesielski and Katarzyna Szewczyk-Haake (Kraków: Instytut Myśli Józefa Tischnera, JMR Trans-Atlantyck, 2018), 134.

Perhaps considering the state of today's religiosity, research on it is an 'art of details'.

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