

There are many important messages in this volume, which should not be overlooked by those who are responsible for educational systems and policies in their countries, and in this capacity, as educational policy-makers and/or leaders, they should take the issue of equity in education seriously. One message, however, is to be particularly emphasised here: equity in education has again become one of the most important and sensitive issues in almost all advanced countries, even though – in the course of the past several decades – they had achieved significant progress in reducing inequality in access to higher education. Most of the post-communist countries are still delayed in taking this challenge seriously, though educational inequality in these countries is higher than in most of the advanced countries, and, as some analyses have indicated, it tends to be growing rather than diminishing. Therefore, in these countries, this volume should become one of the basic textbooks in the sociology of education and educational policy, with the great hope that the new generation of policy makers will be more perceptive to the issue of inequality and equity in education than their predecessors.

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Linda Woodhead – Paul Fletcher – Hiroko Kawanami – David Smith (eds.): *Religions in the Modern World. Traditions and Transformations*

London – New York 2002: Routledge,
393 p.

Broadly speaking, the scientific study of religions in Central Europe (not only post-communist) has usually oscillated between two main perspectives. It has centred either on the historical study of religions, i.e. the study of the development of their theologies and their attitudes toward the state and society, or on a comparative study of different reli-

gious practices (in the sense of the German *Religionswissenschaft*). Both these perspectives have rich historical roots, but they now seem quite old-fashioned. Nowadays, this situation has unfortunately led to the conviction that the study of religions “cannot be concerned with [for example] modern Western esotericism” (Hugo Stamm: *Achtung Esoterik. Zwischen Spiritualität und Verführung*. Zürich – München 2000: Pendo Verlag, p. 35–36), which is certainly one important manifestation of modern ‘unofficial’ piety. If this were true, one must ask why governments and NGOs have paid for the study when there are no up-to-date results to be had from it?

I am convinced that our undergraduates will be able to be successful in the public or business spheres only if we are able to teach them about contemporary issues and not just historical ones. Of course, the majority of religious traditions have important historical roots, and their sources and resources sometimes lie deep in the past. But while these foundations are of consequence, they teach us quite little about the modern and contemporary metamorphoses of religions. Therefore, for future civil servants or business agents, knowledge about the foundations of Christianity or any other religions is much less useful than knowledge of their contemporary social and political impact in different countries or social groups. As a leading American sociologist of religions and culture, and one of the contributors to the *Religions in the Modern World. Traditions and Transformations*, Peter L. Berger has stressed that scholars “should pay less attention to Iranian mullahs, and more to Harvard professors and to ordinary people in London or Paris” (p. 294). And the very same is true for the above-mentioned overemphasis on history. This is why one must strongly welcome this book, edited by four Lancaster scholars, as it is primarily concerned with – unlike the vast majority of other *prolegomena* to religious studies – the contemporary state of religions. Broadly speaking, it focuses on the sociology of religions, a subject which was

largely neglected in Europe during the last half of the 20th century (although it featured work from great predecessors, like M. Weber, E. Troeltsch and others).

The book is divided into two parts. The first and longer part (p. 13–288) is mainly descriptive and deals with twelve different religious traditions and their actual development. The second part analyses five main topics and moves on to cover the contemporary religious, social and cultural scenes, and issues that are shared by all religions (p. 289–377). One could question the selection of the most important religious traditions – they include the so-called world-religions (like Buddhism, Christianity or Islam), the religious traditions of certain geographical areas (Africa, China, Japan and the religions of Native Americans), and two main ‘new’ religions – New Age and the New Religions Movements (NRMs). Why, for example, does the selection include Sikhism and not Jainism, which is usually mentioned among the world-religions (which is not true of Sikhism), when both traditions have a similar number of adherents? The answer lies in the sociological perspective of the book; while a great number (about one-half of the population) of Sikhs are influential worldwide, Jainist promises of *stabilitas loci* make it impossible for them to travel or even migrate. So Jainism, regardless of how interesting its theological content is, has become important only to the Indian and not to the general study of religions. This perspective is widely overlooked by many scholars (who are rooted not in *sociology* but in the *history* of religions in quite a narrow sense).

For similar reasons I must emphasise the carefulness and quality of the selection, with its attention both to geographical areas that have been the subjects of special developmental circumstances and to the ‘modern traditions’. In China, for example, many different religions have become eclectically mixed, or ‘Sinicised’, so there is no reason to speak separately about Confucianism, Buddhism or even Christianity in China, but rather simply about religions (or religion?) in China as

such. Also, the distinction between New Age religions, which have nowadays become a mainstream ‘cultic milieu’, and the different, much more particularistic NRMs, is of important analytical significance. That is to say, the emphasis on the contemporary situation (while in all cases the authors also briefly refer to the historical development of the traditions and their resources) both leads to significant questions being addressed and provides a general overview of the main religions of our time.

There are some misunderstandings or even errors in these chapters, but they are much fewer than in other similar books. These misunderstandings usually spring out of the struggle to ‘translate’ non-Western terms and beliefs with Western words; for example, using the term ‘enlightenment’ in the case of Buddhism (p. 44; I would prefer to talk about an ‘awakening’), or the term ‘sect’ in the case of Japanese religious schools (p. 115). Fortunately, given the fact that the book is comprised of contributions from seventeen prominent scholars, these questionable issues appear quite marginal. Consequently, the book should prove essential reading for anyone wishing to study religious traditions and their contemporary manifestations and changes. Five papers in the second part of the book constitute an even more important contribution to the field of study. They present findings of interest not only to scholars of religious studies but also to all sociologists, social anthropologists, political scientists and others, who are trying to understand (post)modern society.

P. L. Berger emphasises the contemporary ‘desecularisation’ of many societies and the two main exceptions to this development (Western Europe and the highly skilled elite), while also pointing out that the belief in an inevitable connection between pluralisation and secularisation certainly needs revising (p. 296). The Cambridge scholar David Lehmann stresses that globalisation means not only the homogenisation of cultures but also the proliferation of new and reformulat-

ed boundaries, in the process of which religion plays a prominent role (p. 299–311). It was this very development that led recently to the formulation of the hypothesis of ‘many globalisations’ by P. L. Berger, S. Huntington and others (*Many Globalizations. Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World*. Oxford – New York 2002: Oxford University Press). Lehmann also distinguishes between two religious globalisations. The first, a ‘cosmopolitan’ globalisation of religion, was characterised by the far-reaching spread of different kinds of European Christianity; it predated modernity, and it is still vital today. The second form of globalisation, usually labelled ‘fundamentalist’ or ‘charismatic’, runs counter to the trends of our own times, and is “driven not by elites but by a mass of independent actors, who pick and choose elements from different cultures” (p. 299). This second globalisation can be characterised by its great ability to adopt local customs (which reinforces the above-mentioned ‘heterogenisation’), and by the important aspect of coping with social ills by means of emphasising the practical ethic (an obsessive attention to the control of sexuality is one example, while the reduction of *machismo* in Central America is another). A similar issue, the religious comeback on the public scene and in politics, is studied by Jeffrey Haynes, who underscores the differences between the so-called First and Third Worlds (p. 316–329).

Linda Woodhead, chief editor of the book, draws attention to the role women play in contemporary religions (p. 332–352). She mentions the same distinction Haynes does, but she is also aware of the misunderstandings that the second wave of feminism (which started the scientific study of gender relations) left on this kind of study (p. 332). For this reason she argues that “contemporary *Islamism* [as well as charismatic Christianity, see p. 350–351] serves many Muslim women as an indigenous form of feminism” (p. 346), a point of view that unfortunately is certainly not common among Western fighters for ‘universal civil rights’. Also, accord-

ing to Woodhead, the success of some NRMs can be explained by their appeal to single women (a category almost unknown in traditional society), who are marginalised by the so-called world-religions.

Last but not least, there is the contribution by Paul Heelas on the present move from (organised) ‘religion’ to a broader and more individual ‘spirituality’ (p. 357–374). This shift has witnessed a great expansion of new spiritual outlets, books, journals (or ‘astrological corners’ in journals and newspapers) and TV channels over the past twenty or thirty years. In brief, (post)modern de-traditionalisation may be understood as a turn to the self, while the ultimate authority is ascribed to one’s own reason, conscience or intuition (in some cases dealing with sacral texts), rather than looking to a transcendent authority. Heelas finds this shift not only in the NRMs and in the widespread ‘cultic milieu’ but at the same time among the traditional churches, too. The ultimate authority (which he calls the ‘HS factor’, p. 370) in all cases promises release from the wrong kind of selfhood to the best possible life in the here-and-now. (And from this point of view it makes no difference whether ‘HS’ means the ‘higher self’ in the New Age or the Holy Spirit in charismatic theistic spiritualities).

As I have already noted, while the first, descriptive part of the book is useful, the second, analytical part deals with the most important issues of our time. It is thus of great significance for sociologists who need to update their knowledge by using the latest perspectives in the study of religion. While the Anglo-Saxon scholars do so (and the book reveals this very well), the situation of Central European scholarly unfortunately seems to be just the opposite. Therefore, one may strongly recommend a careful reading of this synthesis. Of course, there are some important topics that the editors overlooked. I could mention, for example, relations between piety and art, which seems to be an important topic in modern societies (see e.g. Mircea Eliade: *The Quest. History and Meaning in Re-*

ligion. Chicago – London 1969: University of Chicago Press, p. iii, 65), the issue of the so-called secular/implicit religions, which includes not only totalitarian ideologies but also modern science (see Mary Midgley: *Evolution as a Religion. Strange Hopes and Stranger Fears*. London – New York 2002: Routledge), and others. The latter overlooked topic would be of great importance to the post-communist societies, especially over the course of the enlargement of the European Union and the contemporary discussion on common 'European values', but it must not be addressed from only the narrow historical perspective (as it has begun to be done, for example, by René Rémond: *Religion et société en Europe*. Paris 1998: Éditions du Seuil). Here I am coming back to the issue I started my review with – the importance of changing the over-historicised and the exclusively elsewhere-centred perspective in Central European science. The book I have described in these lines would thus seem an important contribution to our theoretical and methodological struggle for a genuinely modern scientific study of religions and their social impact.

Zdeněk R. Nešpor

Tomáš Kostecký: *Political Parties after Communism. Developments in East-Central Europe*

Washington, D.C. Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Baltimore – London 2002: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 213 p.

Kostecký's book comes across as impressive. The Contents of the book catches the reader's attention with its interesting selection of subjects and logical ordering of the text into six chapters: 1. An Overview of Party Development (1850–1989); 2. A New Day: Parties in the Post-Communist Period (1990 to the Present); 3. The Party System: A Product of a Country's History and Culture? 4. The Party System: A Reflection of Social Cleavages? 5. The Party System: A Product

of the Rules of the Game? 6. Political Party Development in Post-Communist East-Central Europe: In Search of General Patterns. The potential reader is also drawn in by the book's ambition of dealing with four countries in Central Europe – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia: "This text looks at party development in the post-Communist era in East-Central Europe from a comparative perspective, thereby avoiding the traditional concentration on domestic problems... In doing so, it examines the relationships between party development in the post-Communist era and the underlying historical, cultural, socio-economic, and juridical factors, and then assesses the importance of those relationship both in each country and in the region as a whole." (p. 6) The task perhaps could not have been formulated in a more attractive manner, or in a more exacting and extensive one. Given this fact, and given the limited amount of space to work with, the reviewer is unable to look at all four of the countries, but must limit the focus here to only the Czech Republic and the overall extent to which the author has fulfilled his aim.

The book presents the four countries, especially in the first three chapters, with the aid of parallel descriptions rather than analytically or in a comparative analysis. The descriptive parallels also dominate in the ensuing chapters in which the author considers the presented information in greater detail. For the most part the information is interesting, and thus the reader need not always notice that the text is actually dealing with something other than what was indicated in the Contents or Introduction. According to these, the text should be looking at political parties, but in fact it is discussing the individual countries in general and the various problems the countries are experiencing, which here includes the rate of abortion, even though it could not always be said that this is a subject that is usually dealt with in relation to how political parties are organised and function. In the book, the usual termi-