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# RELIGION, STATE & SOCIETY

# Editorial

Two of the articles in this issue of *RSS*, those by Mitja Velikonja and Daniel Payne, are concerned with aspects of the relationship between two identities: religious and national. Velikonja compares the 'religio-national mythologies' of Poland and Slovenia. He points out that religio-national mythologies are always a political discourse, with three main functions: integrative (inwardly inclusive and outwardly exclusive); cognitive (interpreting the most important past and present events and foretelling future events); and communicative (providing specific rhetoric). Payne considers Greece, in the context of the Huntington thesis about the 'clash of civilisations', and finds that in Greece today not only is there a close identification, as in Poland, between a particular faith and the nation, but that there is a further dimension to consider. The Orthodox tradition produces a different understanding of man's place in the community from that prevalent in Western Europe.

In examining the religio-national mythologies of two predominantly Roman Catholic countries, Velikonja applies the methodology developed by the American sociologist of religion Michael Sells in his analyses of the 'Christoslavic' religio-national mythology of the South Slavs, particularly the Serbs. Payne also makes reference to Sells, quoting Sells' own definition of 'Christoslavism': 'the belief that Slavs are Christians by nature and that any conversion from Christianity is a betrayal of the Slavic race'.

Velikonja observes that nation-building processes in Central and Eastern Europe differed considerably from those in the West: cultural, linguistic and religious elements were of vital importance. Payne analyses this difference. In the West, he argues, from the time of the Renaissance and Reformation 'the church as an institution had less and less control over defining the identity of that individual; this function fell increasingly to the nation-state ... . As national identity was increasingly emphasised, religious identity became ever more privatised.' Thus 'national identity was secularised and religion became a secondary attribute of the individual'. In the East, by contrast, where many of the nation-states emerged only in the nineteenth century, national identity was not separated from religious identity. Payne quotes Ina Merdjanova ('In search of identity: nationalism and religion in Eastern Europe', *Religion, State & Society*, 28, 3, 2000, pp. 233–62) who argues that eastern nationalism 'was based to a great extent on religious-cultural differences, it developed within and through religious communities and institutions, and it used religious symbols and certain elements of religious doctrines'. In Greece, says Payne, 'The conflation of nationality and religion was consolidated by the rise of the nation-state, and this brought about a synthesis of state, nation and religion that affected understandings of citizenship and identity'.

Within this general pattern of Eastern European nation-building processes there are of course differences among the various nations. Velikonja points out that while in

Poland Catholicism was identified with opposition to the communist regime, particularly from the time of the rise of the Solidarity movement, 'the situation in Slovenia in the 1980s differed starkly ... the Catholic Church was "ready to sacrifice much, including its open support for the opposition" for the sake of being in "partnership" with the regime after the difficult postwar period'. In Slovenia the protagonists in the democratisation process in the 1980s were mainly civil society and cultural movements rather than Catholic movements. In general, Velikonja finds that the religio-national mythology of Slovenia has historically dramatised Slovenia as the bastion of 'European culture' rather than (as in the case of Poland) of 'Latin Christendom'. In Slovenia, 'It is clear that other components such as language and culture came to the fore: the religious factor itself was not as strong in the nation-building process ...'.

As noted above, Payne points to another area of differentiation. He argues that in countries with an Orthodox tradition a distinctive understanding of human rights has developed, different from that of the western tradition. He describes how in Greece the Orthodox understanding of human rights has come into conflict with the norms required by the European Union. 'This conflict can be understood as a conflict between the Orthodox understanding of the identity of the human person deriving from the collective and the western liberal understanding of the human person as an autonomous individual.' At its final reduction, this means that 'the right of religious freedom as interpreted in Greece is not the right of the individual to believe as he or she desires, but rather it is the freedom of the church to exist. This understanding is reflected in the Greek law forbidding proselytism.'

With the entry of Greece into the European Union the state has been obliged to adopt the various institutions and values of Western Europe. Payne argues that the Orthodox tradition of regarding the state as the protector of the collective tradition and way of life of the nation, compounded with the distinctive Orthodox understanding of 'religious freedom', means that the current tensions are particularly acute. 'The church now sees the state as a betrayer of Greek national identity and is reasserting its own role as caretaker of that identity.'

One Eastern European country with its own distinctive character as far as religious identity is concerned is Ukraine: here no exclusive 'religio-national mythology' has developed. As Catherine Wanner points out in her article in this issue of *RSS*, 'Ukraine means "borderland", and its strategic and valuable location as a crossroads, as a bridge between diverse cultural traditions, has created and perpetuated a tradition of religious pluralism'.

Wanner argues that today's rivalry among numerous competing confessions and jurisdictions produces a situation in which

> *de facto* there is a greater degree of freedom for other faiths to exist and for individuals to worship as they choose ... . As all the national churches compete among themselves for dominance, a new space is opened up for nontraditional faiths and new religious movements to establish roots in Ukraine.

In this context she examines the factors that lead individuals in Ukraine to convert to various forms of Evangelical Protestantism. Amongst these she identifies the fact that Protestant services are highly participatory, with individual contributions welcomed, and that converts tend to build mutually supportive communities that not only affirm members' faith and offer moral support but also provide an economic and material safety net in the unpredictable and morally corrupt Ukrainian public arena.

Wanner sees conversion as a process involving more than just a reorientation of religious belief: it equips the individuals involved with new tools and perceptions for dealing with the world around. Conversion

> can be a swift means of redefining concepts of self and other through cultural appropriation and of marking this new collective identity with group membership and the subsequent behaviour modification this mandates. By becoming a believer, one redefines fundamental cultural categories, such as familiar and foreign, space and time, power and agency, and gender and class.

She also argues that Ukraine has traditionally known a high level of religious observance. Pointing out that some sociologists of religion believe that an active and competitive 'religious marketplace', such as Ukraine has become, itself generates high levels of religious participation (on this subject see Steve Bruce, 'Modernisation, religious diversity and rational choice in Eastern Europe', *Religion, State & Society*, 27, 3/4, 1999, pp. 265–75), Wanner concludes that religion in all its variety will be increasingly important in Ukraine. She goes on to consider the social implications of the growth of Evangelical Christianity in Ukraine. She notes the increasing presence of clergy in prominent public arenas, and in political life. 'Over time, along with other aspects of western culture and ideology which are indigenously adapted to local cultural values and practices, evangelical communities will contribute to the social fabric and a new moral order in Ukraine.'

Velikonja points out that religion has played a paradoxical role in Eastern Central Europe: although it has contributed to the process of democratisation, it has also frequently acted as an undemocratic force, particularly in Catholic countries. He quotes Grace Davie to the effect that the Catholic Church in Poland 'repeatedly tries to dominate the democratic process rather than participate as one partner among many', and Sabrina Ramet as describing contemporary Polish society as 'democratic but not liberal'. Nevertheless he discerns a range of different views within the Catholic Church in both the countries he is studying: from modernist to traditionalist, from open and conciliatory to fundamentalist.

The two countries studied by Velikonja, Poland and Slovenia, are about to become members of the European Union. The question of the role of religious communities in shaping the future of these countries is therefore calling for a swifter resolution than in Ukraine.

> Catholicism in both nations stands at a crossroads: between the principle of universalism and the claims of local national culture; between its intimate, moral and social dimensions and the (meta)political dimension; between 'ecclesiastical absolutism' ... and sincere acceptance of cultural and religious pluralism; between patronage and openness; between the temptation of Catholic *reconquista* and *aggiornamento*; between traditionalism and modernism; between exclusivism and a conciliative orientation; between serving and ruling. The Catholic Church must adapt to new, increasingly differentiated situations and accept the fact that religionational mythology is only one of many mythological constructions and perceptions in contemporary Slovenian and Polish societies, and that it cannot count on monopoly.

In Payne's perspective, many of the items in this list of alternatives confront the Orthodox Church of Greece; and here the issue is made more urgent of resolution

still, since not only does Orthodoxy bring an alternative light to bear on central issues such as human rights, but Greece is of course already a member of the European Union.

May 2003                                                                    PHILIP WALTERS

# Notes on Contributors

**Janice Broun,** an Oxford graduate, is a specialist writer on religion in communist and postcommunist societies. She has had several articles published on Bulgarian religious affairs since the early 1980s, and book reviews on a wide variety of aspects of religious life in Central and Eastern Europe. She is the author of *Conscience and Captivity: Religion in Eastern Europe* (1988) and of six contributions to *Censorship: a World Encyclopedia* (2001).

**Serge Keleher,** ordained in 1967, is an archimandrite of the Greek Catholic Church and serves the Greek Catholic congregation in Dublin, Ireland. He is the editor of *Eastern Churches Journal,* author of *Passion and Resurrection: the Greek-Catholic Church in Soviet Ukraine* and translator-reviser of the book-length biography *Metropolitan Andrew (1864–1944)* originally written in French by Fr Cyril Korolevsky. A research associate of the chair of Ukrainian Studies, University of Toronto, Fr Serge has been visiting Ukraine frequently since 1981. In 1991 Metropolitan Volodymyr Sterniuk presented him with the Metropolitan Andrei Sheptyts'kyi medallion for his participation in the struggle to restore legal rights to the Greek Catholic Church. A total of 50 of these awards were given; Fr Serge is the only laureate who is not an ethnic Ukrainian.

**Daniel P. Payne** is a PhD fellow at J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies, Baylor University, Waco, Texas. He is instructor of world cultures in the Baylor Interdisciplinary Core Program and instructor of religion at Bethany College, Lindsborg, Kansas. He received his MDiv at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Brookline, Massachusetts. His main research interest is Eastern Orthodox political theology and he has made presentations on Yannaras, Sergei Bulgakov and Orthodoxy and secularisation.

**Sabrina P. Ramet** is professor of political science at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim, Norway. Born in London, England, she moved to the United States at the age of 10, earning her AB in philosophy at Stanford University in 1971 and her PhD in political science at UCLA in 1981. She is the author of seven books, one of which (*Balkan Babel*) is now in its fourth expanded edition.

**Mitja Velikonja** is a lecturer in the sociology of culture and a research fellow in the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, and a visiting professor at the Centre for European Studies of the Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland. His main research interests are contemporary Balkan and Central-European religious, national and cultural processes and political mythologies. He is the author of the book *Religious Separation and Political Intolerance in Bosnia Herzegovina* (2003) and of

two books in Slovenian on related topics, and has contributed chapters to various anthologies.

**Catherine Wanner** has a doctorate in cultural anthropology from Columbia University and currently teaches in the Department of History and the Religious Studies Program at the Pennsylvania State University. She is currently at work on a book entitled *Communities of the Converted: Religion and Migration After the Fall of the Soviet Union*. This study examines the growth of evangelical communities in Ukraine in tandem with issues of migration. She is also the author of *Burden of Dreams: History and Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine* (1998), a study of cultural politics and the politics of historiography in Ukraine following the collapse of the Soviet Union.