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Towards the typology of recent religious and spiritual identities (the case of Slovakia)

My contribution is intended as a qualitative pendant to the recent more quantitatively orientated sociology of religion based on surveys. So first I will try to focus and put in question some recent terms frequently used in recent sociological approaches and afterwards I will try to introduce some new and maybe useful typology of recent religious and spiritual identities, let say in modern (or postmodern) or global society. And only short remark, this space (modern, globalized, in Giddens sense “lifted out of local context”) in the case of Slovakia is identical only with urban areas. And we should have in mind that still more than 50% of inhabitants reside in rural areas where the situation is somehow different, because of local cohesion and local context. This fact is mostly omitted in sociological surveys, but this would be topic of another discussion.

So if we are talking about the modern, nontraditional or new religious or spiritual identity (because as a trend the spirituality is not necessarily intertwined with the religion itself) this kind of identity is typical for youngsters and elite (high-school educated) milieu. For this urban stream of religiosity is typical increasing of interest in nontraditional types of churchliness in traditional churches (in the more distant way) and increasing of interest in new religions and parareligious movements. I can mention here the problem of traditional category of “churchliness” also in very traditional context – for instance in Orthodox Christianity. Ina Naletova, from the university of Vienna at last conference of international project REVACERN focusing the religion and values in Central and Eastern Europe, mentioned her personal experience from the fieldworks research in Moscow. She presented there a picture of orthodox church with a long line of believers in-front of the church. Inside of a church there was mass. The church inside was half empty. Nevertheless the Orthodox believers outside of the church were waiting several hours in cruel winter just to kiss the icon inbuilt into the external wall of the church. They somehow participate on the mass and the church activities but in new way. They were and at the same time were not the church participants. This new, more distant forms of churchliness in traditional churches may be traced by the term “extra muros churchliness”, instead of traditional more “intramuros churchliness”. As a next characteristic of these new forms and stresses in religious praxis the shift of accent from former collective religious participation towards the intensive individual religious or parareligious experience would be mentioned.

The sociological research of this urban-postmodern spirituality is facing totally new forms of churchliness. And it was the category of churchliness, “belonging to church” that was the core of former sociological surveys. During the several more qualitatively orientated researches in urban milieu (for instance Tatiana Barchunova research of neo-protestant movements in Russia, and Kováč-Podolinská research of university students in Slovakia) the questions of new forms of churchliness, new forms of commitment, and new forms of conversion rose up. During the Barchunova research not one case of singular conversion occurred. She discovered that her interviewees either consequently or simultaneously belonged to several faith-based communities and very often they did not see any problems of belonging to different communities. During the Kováč-Podolinska research the cases of purely intellectual conversion of students that never joined any faith-based community, cases of belonging to religious community but never felt being transformed and cases when “actual transformation of identity behaviour, and world view commonly called conversion took place over a relatively prolonged period – often months or even years – and does not appear to be accompanied by high levels of emotional arousal.

Coming out of these qualitative researches I tried to elaborate the typology of recent religious and spiritual identities based on various combination of categories “to belong”, “to practice”, “to believe”, which would help to improve quantitative methodology of sociological research of religion.

1. experimental confessionality
  2. multileveled religiosity
  3. parallel confessionality
  4. migrative confessionality
  5. composite belief
  6. fuzzy faith.
1. EXPERIMENTAL CONFESSIONALITY: religious conversion is an on-going process which can be a series of conversions with a lack of persistent commitment to one particular faith-based community. Individual takes the participation in the frame of concrete confession as experiment: “first act and then believe case”. Here we face the special types of conversion: intellectual one and prolonged one (instead of traditionally more emotionally defined conversion). Prolonged conversion involves the processual approach: first acting as a convertit, for to experience (to taste) the concrete confession. Commitment and belief would follow it afterwards but also would not (because it is experiment with uncertain result).

2. **MULTILEVELED CONFSSIONALITY:** individual undergoes a series of conversions (series of various “classic” conversions or one prolonged conversion, reflected as spiritual educative process). All spiritual experiences are regarded as accumulation rather than negation of the prior experiences. Conversion involves neither mere syncretism, nor a simple and absolute break with a previous social life. Here we can see the model of multifaceted believer. In the cases of emotional discomfort or conflicts among rank-and-file members, or in the cases of the crises of leadership they prefer to quit rather than contribute to the solution of the problem. It is connected with the preference of spiritual freedom before the church or even confession commitment. Nevertheless, individual is able to identify the concrete confession to which he/she feels recently attached. This confession is preferred and somehow privileged to previous experiences. Nevertheless individuals did not reject them totally, and interprets them as necessary steps/degrees of the spiritual educative process (You know, the Jehova witnesses were my elementary school, the World of Life my secondary school and now, with Christian assemblies I at the university).
3. **PARALLEL CONFSSIONALITY:** Simultaneous attending of several churches at once, with no hierarchical preference (“she told me that when she is with Ortodox Christians she defends Buddhists and when she is with Buddhists she defends Orthodox Christians.”) There is no conversion or there are simultaneous conversions at the same time. Individual resigns at model of unconditioned belonging and commitment.
4. **MIGRATIVE or NOMAD CONFSSIONALITY:** is connected with series of conversions or re-conversions. Here we face the traditional conversion (negative regarding and total rejecting of previous spiritual experiences) but this conversion does not last and can repeat. Individual does not feel definitively attached to the concrete confession and his commitment to one confession could be flexible bypassed by commitment to another confession. Individual is religious emigrant, he moves from one church to another. In this process he undergoes the series of total conversions.
5. **COMPOSITE BELIEF:** the belief without the churchliness, belonging, and without the “classic” conversion. It is more individual world view, composition of already existing beliefs and confessions, via method of individual bricolage. Individual is able to define the constitutive elements of his/her belief: I belief in Jesus Christ, reincarnation, horoscopes, I can feel my astral body and its chakras, I am afraid of evil ghosts and demons and I believe in distant healing or harming..). Individual

knows what he/she is believing in but ignore to attach to any of existing confessions. It is the totally creative spiritual approach: one-man belief and one-man rules, one-man praxis – without the necessity of collective petrification or collective presentation. Individual is not able/ or does not want to choose at the religious market with confectional confessions. He prefers to create ones own spiritual framework instead, only for ones own spiritual needs and consum.

6. FUZZY FAITH: there is a religious mind but one can not speak about conversion at all: “one can not say I am not a believer. But what I believe in I do not know. I don’t deny faith, No! May be, I believe in a universal reason... Yes, there can exist some divine laws since there are people who believe in them and they exist some divine laws since there are people who believe in them and they exist for such a long time! Or may be, humanity needs to believe in these laws- and it created them for itself. To tell the truth, it is not important for whom they exist and why, if they are helpful somebody. ...It is not true to say that I am not a believer. ...I believe that in this world, in my notions of the world. I believe that there is a come-back... It is not possible to say that I am a person without faith, i.e. I am not defining it in a strict framework, since it does not make sense. The more faith is defined the more illusory it becomes and gets abstracted for me... This concept of fuzzy-faith does not allow to rise a question about conversion in the technical sense, only make it possible to classify it as a belief without conversion. It is faith without of belonging, without confession and without even the elements of some confession. Individual is not able/ or does not want to choose from the existing offer at the religious market, not only any existing confectional confession but also not any elements of existing confessions. He even do not feel need to create ones own concrete spiritual framework.

Above mentioned typology reflects the rate of deconfessionalization, typical for recent urban space a its dynamics based on presence, repetition, selfhood or absence of conversion, belonging and commitment. It is just a draft of possible typology, aiming at the stressing the fact that recent sociological research of urban religiosity should be shifted from the focusing on confession (measured by churchliness) towards the research on nontraditional types of religious identities which are attached to concrete confession only in formal way or witch not attached to it at all. Sociometrical data collected by traditional surveys operating with traditional categories as churchliness, conversion and commitment may document only data concerning the passive or formal religiosity, and do not fit the actual situation.