

Religion and Society in Central Europe

PTF CU, RL022
Summer Semester 2023
Monday 10:05-11:30
Peter Morée

Course Description

The aim of this course is to understand the complex and even contradictory role of religion in the history and present of Central European societies. The primary focus will be on the territory of the Czech Republic, but also countries like Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Austria, Germany and the Baltic state of Estonia will be examined under this perspective. Some of these countries like the Czech Republic are very secularized (only about 14 % membership of religious communities), whereas others rather belong to the most religious in Europe (Slovakia). These differences lead to the question whether the role of religion in these countries is also dissimilar or even incomparable, or whether it is possible to define a common denominator for the public function of religion in Central European society.

Course Learning Objectives

By the end of this course the students will be able:

- To analyze the role of religion in Central Europe in a historical perspective
- To understand the differences between the several regions of Central Europe and Europe at large concerning religion
- To understand and to work with different perspectives on the role of religion in the public space

Course Requirements

Readings

Reading of the texts required for each class and being ready to discuss them in the class, because this course expects vivid discussion. Each reading will be introduced by a student in turns (see presentation).

All readings and further information concerning the course will be available at the Moodle portal of PTF.

Presentation

One presentation conveying in an attractive way the subject, background, connected issues, questions and positions. Details will be discussed during the first week of the course. A hand-out is a part of the presentation in class.

Final Paper

The final paper of about 10 pages (2500 words) is related to the theme of the course. We will discuss this in class.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1

Introduction to the theme, arrangements

Week 2

The debate about religiosity, secularization and institutional religion: setting the terms

Central questions: what do we understand by religion, faith, secularization etc.; what are the different approaches; how do faith communities reflect the situation?

Required reading: Meerten ter Borg, Non-institutional Religion in Modern Society, 2008

Week 3

The situation: Religiosity in Central and Eastern Europe

Central questions: what is the situation of religion in Central and Eastern Europe; what are the differences to Western Europe; which are the models of explanation?

Required reading: Miklós Tomka, Religiosity in Central and Eastern Europe. Facts and Interpretations, in: Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe, Volume III (June 2010)

Week 4

The Historical Perspective: Reformation and Recatholicization

Central questions: what was the development of religion in its relation to public and political life during the 15th to the 17th c.

Required reading: Wolfgang Reinhard, Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and the Early Modern State. A Reassessment, in: The Catholic Historical Review, Jul., 1989, Vol. 75, No. 3 (Jul., 1989), 383-404

Week 5

The Historical Perspective: Enlightenment, Modernity, Nationalism

Central questions: what was the development of religion in its relation to public and political life during the 18th to the 20th c.

Required reading: Patrick Cabanel, Protestantism in the Czech historical narrative and Czech nationalism of the nineteenth century, in: National Identities, Vol. 11, No. 1, March 2009, 31-43

Week 6

Communism and Religion

Central questions: what was the development of religion in its relation to public and political life during the second half of the 20th c.

Required reading: Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, "Forced" Secularity? On the Appropriation of Repressive Secularization, in: Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe, 2011, 4 (1), 63-77

Week 7

Site Visit

Week 8

After the Fall of the Berlin Wall: the Return of Religion?

Central questions: what became the role of religion in the public space after the end of communism; did religion reconquer post-communist societies

Required reading: Stephen White et al., Religion and Political Action in Postcommunist Europe, in: Political Studies: 2000, Vol. 48, 681-705

Week 9

Religion in contemporary Czech culture

Central questions: which images of religion and religious figures do we find in contemporary Czech film and literature

Required reading: Ivana Noble Ph.D. and Tim Noble, Christ Images in Contemporary Czech Film, in: Journal of Reformed Theology, 1 (2007), 84-106

Week 10

Religion and State

Central questions: what are the models of state-church relations in the EU and in Central Europe; what is the development of them

Required reading: Silvio Ferrari, State regulation of religion in the European democracies: the decline of the old pattern, in: Gabriel Motzkin, Yochi Fischer (eds), Religion and Democracy in Contemporary Europe, London: Alliance Publishing Trust, 2008, 103-112

Week 11

Religion and Violence

Central questions: how are religion and conflict related in post-communist Central Europe

Required reading: Matjaž Klemenčič, Religious and Ethnic Diversity in the Second Half of the 20th Century: War and Political Changes in the Territories of Former Yugoslavia, in: Ausma Cimdina (ed.), Religion and Political Change in Europe: Past and Present, Pisa: Università di Pisa, 2003, 195-209

Week 12

Religion and Human Rights

Central questions: what are the reasons for the ambivalent relation between religion and human rights; what are the tendencies in the several post-communist countries

Required reading: Dorota A. Gozdecka, Religions and legal boundaries of democracy in Europe: European commitment to democratic principles, Helsinki: University of Helsinki (Dissertation), 2009, ch. 5: Freedom of expression versus freedom of religion and discussion of the essence of democracy, 171-202

Week 13

The Perspective of Religion

Central questions: what can be expected in the next decades concerning the role of religion in society

Required reading: Kees de Groot, Three Types of Liquid Religion, in: Implicit Religion, Vol. 11, No. 3 (2008), 277-296

Rounding up and evaluation