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Larissa TITARENKO

On the Shifting Nature of Religion during the Ongoing Post-Communist Transformation in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine

Remarks on Irena Borowik's articles "Between Orthodoxy and Eclecticism: On the Religious Transformation of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine" (2002, *Social Compass*, 49(4): 497–508) and "Orthodoxy Confronting the Collapse of Communism in Post-Soviet Countries" (2006, *Social Compass*, 53(2): 267–78).

The author discusses the issues of religiosity in Belarus, Ukraine and especially Russia raised by Irena Borowik in her articles in Social Compass: the revival of religiosity after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the mixed nature of contemporary beliefs and religious practices among the post-Soviet population, and specific features of the Russian Orthodox Church, its relationship with the state and its current problems. The author combines empirical data on religiosity in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine with the particular historical circumstances of this region that made it possible to apply the theoretical framework of such theories as post-communist trauma, modernization and multiple modernities.

Keywords: religion · Orthodox Church · former Soviet Union · post-Soviet transformations · modernization

L'auteure entend discuter les mêmes problèmes concernant la religiosité en Biélorussie, en Ukraine et, particulièrement, en Russie, que ceux qu'Irena Borowik a soulevés dans son article de Social Compass: le renouveau de la religiosité après la chute de l'Union Soviétique, la nature mitigée des croyances contemporaines et des pratiques religieuses de la population postsoviétique, les traits spécifiques de l'Église russe orthodoxe, sa relation avec l'État et ses problèmes actuels. L'auteure combine des données empiriques concernant la religiosité en Russie, en Biélorussie et en Ukraine, avec les circonstances historiques particulières de cette région, qui ont rendu possible l'application du cadre théorique de théories telles que le traumatisme postcommuniste, la modernisation et les modernités multiples.

Mots-clés: religion · Église orthodoxe · ex Union Soviétique · transformations postsoviétiques · modernisation

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The ongoing European integration and enlargement of the European Union eastwards has encouraged discussions on religious change in several geopolitical regions, especially in post-communist countries on the new border between the EU members and the rest of Europe. This region is not yet the focus of research for EU scholars. That is why Borowik's articles "Between Orthodoxy and Eclecticism: On the Religious Transformation of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine" and "Orthodoxy Confronting the Collapse of Communism in Post-Soviet Countries" are so important and useful for students of religion. Current sociological journals do not often publish papers that shed light on this aspect of post-communist transition in the former Soviet countries. Borowik's articles provide a relatively rare source of information for the international sociological community to learn more about religious change in this region, and also empirical data to prove the author's statements. The present author is personally involved in some comparative research on these issues as a member of the European Values Studies network (EVS), which has researched values for more than 20 years, and keeps abreast of publications on empirical data by authors living outside this region. This enables a broader outlook and discussion of the process of religious revival from the global or at least the European perspective. The editorial board of *Social Compass* is to be thanked for publishing Borowik's articles. At the last two ISSR conferences, sessions on religiosity in Russia and CIS were attended by many scholars, which suggested that it might be interesting for the sociological audience to pursue this topic. Hence this article, which attempts to explore further this challenging area.

In both articles Borowik touched upon several important problems of post-Soviet societies. Religion is only one of these, although the central one for the present author.

It is clear that the problem of religiosity in post-Soviet states is a special one, and its analysis depends on the approach of the author. Irena Borowik chose the empirical approach: she gave some field observations and provided some survey data for readers, giving some generalizations at the end. However, the analysis of religiosity needs some theoretical concepts for the explanation of data that go beyond the limits of description. As G. Davie stressed (2004: 74), contemporary sociology of religion in Western countries needs "conceptual tools that are necessary for a proper understanding of the modern world and of the place of religion within this". Referring to the post-Soviet states, we also have to take into account the whole picture of this region that can be constructed on the basis of some theoretical approaches applicable to data. Unlike M. Tomka (2006), who clearly stressed the need for a special methodology for studying Eastern Christianity, Borowik did not clarify her theoretical position, paying more attention to empirical data.

What follows will comment on the issues raised by Borowik. Some of her statements seem to be precisely correct when reflecting the religious situation in the region, while others seem to be contested problems. Certainly, Irena Borowik gave a correct description of the situation in the Soviet period: believers, communities and institutions and their religious practice were enormously hindered. She also correctly interpreted the current state of

religiosity (including of the many practical difficulties faced by the Orthodox Church) and its importance for Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. As Borowik describes, contemporary post-Soviet social and political conditions are more favourable for the functioning of religious institutions and for the religious self-realization of people, and this is certainly also relevant.

However, Borowik's arguments invite further comment on such issues as the growth of religious eclecticism and pluralism in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. This increase has not only contributed to the creation of a paradoxical type of believer (usually called "Orthodox non-believer" or "Christian pagan") but also asked the question as to whether some features of post-modern culture, similar to Western postmodernism, really exist in this region or not. This article will not attempt to give a final answer to this question, which has given rise to many articles, books, conferences, etc. in many countries. Nevertheless, we shall introduce some new data and add some notes to this discussion within a possible theoretical framework.

Clarification is also needed on the issue of atheism: was it a myth or a reality in the Soviet Union? Has atheism really been quickly replaced by religious beliefs? Of course, Soviet life was full of social myths; however, according to public opinion and the mass behaviour of the Soviet people, atheism could be considered as having been a real phenomenon in Soviet life (of course, it had nothing in common with the official politics of an overwhelming "scientific atheism" as a total opposition to religion, but this is another issue). In addition, we shall describe some reasons for religious ignorance among the Orthodox believers in post-Soviet states that help to explain the contradictory process of current religious growth.

Let us further analyse Irena Borowik's statements in order to place her research findings into a broader theoretical and historical context. Borowik does not pay special attention to issues affecting global civilization in her examination of the religious situation in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. However, in the aftermath of the events of 11 September 2001 and the Iraqi war in 2003, we cannot now avoid these issues.

Importance of the problem of religiosity for Russia, Ukraine and Belarus

Looking at the problem of religiosity in these three post-Soviet countries, we must stress that this issue is of great practical importance. A well-documented examination of the religious situation in this region can contribute to a better understanding of whether there are some general European values shared by all (or almost all) European nations. The revitalization of religion in post-communist states restored not only the churches' important role in the public sphere but also the basis for widespread support of religious beliefs in private life. As a result, regardless of the existence of different political regimes in particular countries, it is possible to look for some common values in the cultural heritage of the nations, and mainly, as some religious authors insist, in Christian values (Danilov, 2002).

Of course, this highly contentious fact does not add much to the understanding of the multi-cultural picture of present-day Europe, as common values do not mean any convergence between eastern and western European countries, or even similarity between religiosity in east and west. Many scholars from the post-communist states demonstrate this fact. As S. Filatov (1994) has clearly showed, it would be a mistake to place trust in the similarity between eastern and western religiosity, because their current religious developments are different by nature. Several processes have been noted in this regard by M. Tomka (2006): first, religiosity in general, and especially among the younger generation, is growing in eastern European countries, while in western European countries it is declining (in comparison with the period preceding 1990); second, the population in the east trusts churches much more than in the west. These statements are most convincing, as they focus on the specificity of religiosity in eastern Europe and do not undermine the contradictory aspects of the new social life of religion in post-communist states: as Zrinscak (2004b) has described, many of these countries “are even today more secular in comparison with many western European countries”. So it is necessary to explain this situation by taking into account its complexity and its contradictions.

The growth of the role of religion in post-Soviet countries is a significant issue. This phenomenon needs several concepts for its explanation. The theory of post-communist trauma is one of these concepts: as the population in post-Soviet states copes with serious problems in adjusting to the new market reality, many people are psychologically traumatized by these radical changes and therefore turn to religion and other sources of spiritual support. On a public level, religion has become an important institution that can contribute much to the solution of the ideological and moral crises in post-Soviet countries. This new public attitude to religion is especially visible in Russia where religion has become “an integrating factor in a society” (Kaariainen, 2007). Furman, Kaariainen and Karpov have explained this trend in the religious development of Orthodoxy within the framework of Russian historical traditions and their peculiar type of modernization process (2007: 84). Another concept connects Orthodox religion with a unique Russian mentality. According to Mitrokhin (2003), the reasons for the current post-Soviet religious revival can be found in Russian history itself: the post-Soviet population turned to religion, and especially Russian Orthodoxy, because the latter was considered to be the foundation of Russian national culture and the basis of the national mentality. As Tomka has showed, eastern Orthodoxy has its own constitutive principles and needs a different theoretical approach that helps to understand “the inner unity of Orthodoxy, which is religion and culture at the same time” (2006: 261). Taking these theories into account, it is easy to explain the reasons, stressed by Borowik, why Orthodoxy has become a popular “cultural and national identity” in Russia (2006: 273).

Major religious tendencies in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine

Borowik's papers clearly reflect some new tendencies observed in the three post-Soviet countries concerned since the time of Gorbachev's *perestroika* and the end of the communist regimes (i.e. since the early 1990s).

The first trend is the growth of interest in religion among the population and therefore the process of the so-called religious revival mentioned by Borowik (Borowik, 2002: 497). This process is indeed a reality, as can be proved by the growing number of newly registered religious communities of all kinds in these countries (unlike the number of believers, which cannot be statistically registered, the number of religious communities has to be registered by law in these countries). For example, in Belarus alone during the first post-communist decade (1991–2001), the total number of religious communities grew from 800 to 2748, among which the number of Orthodox communities grew by a factor of 2.5, Roman Catholic communities doubled, and various Protestant communities by a factor of 3.5 (Danilov and Martinovich, 2002; Hulap, 2002). As for the number of believers, according to the EVS (1999–2000) data, 52 per cent of respondents in Belarus, 51 per cent in Russia and 56 per cent in Ukraine said they belonged to religious denominations (Halman, 2001), and the majority of these respondents clearly declared their denomination. According to a series of surveys carried out in Russia in 1991–2005 by the Institute for Comparative Social Research, the percentage of believers increased significantly—from 23 per cent in 1991 to 53 per cent in 2005—while the percentage of atheists fell from 35 per cent to 6 per cent (Kaariainen, 2007): a major change in the number of religious communities and believers, compared with the previous period of the communist regime when only a small number of people openly declared their religious beliefs. These changes can be interpreted, within the theoretical framework of transformation, as a search by the former Soviet people for a new (or renewed) cultural identity beyond the previous (ideologically biased) one, the Soviet identity.

The second new important feature of the current religious situation is the officially declared human right freely to follow any religion or to be non-religious (Borowik, 2002: 498). This right (which has now become law, according to the constitutions of these countries) is in total contrast to the previous necessity for persons to be (or at least to declare themselves) atheists. Again, although Borowik is right in saying that the three countries concerned are mainly Orthodox, so that the majority of believers belong to the Orthodox Church—according to EVS data, 77 per cent of respondents in Ukraine and 92 per cent in Russia identified themselves in this way (Halman, 2001)—the whole picture in these countries includes a much greater variety of religious denominations. Like elsewhere in Europe, one can find here all the traditional religions as well as many new religious movements (NRM), such as the New Age communities. For example, by 2002, in Belarus alone there were 89 new religious movements of Oriental (Krishnaites), Christian (Church of Christ), mystical (School of Arkans), pseudo-Christian (Mormons) and other orientations (Martinovich, 2002). In

Russia NRMs are numerous as well (Vorobjova, 2006). In this aspect of the analysis, the situation in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine is not a unique one: the same tendencies are generally typical for the period of postmodernity in the west as Varga (2001) has described. This means that the global religious processes include post-Soviet countries as well (at least to some extent). Currently, these countries are experiencing the same shift “from obligation to consumption” of religion, as Davie (2004) has explained: religion has become more and more a person’s private matter, his or her “free choice” in lifestyle. A similar comment on Russian religiosity has been made by Furman, Kaariainen, and Karpov (2007: 84).

The third feature of the current religious situation mentioned by Irena Borowik is the wide range of eclectic religious beliefs, a real mixture of magic, occultist and traditional Christian dogmas (Borowik, 2002: 499). Borowik also mentioned not only that believers held a mixture of different beliefs, but also that some atheists believed in non-materialistic things such as telepathy (Borowik, 2002: 499). Although Borowik described this feature as typically Russian, in fact it is much more common: according to 1999–2000 EVS data, a combination of different elements of religious beliefs is shared by all three selected countries and even by Europe as a whole. Indeed, while only a part of those believers in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine who identified themselves as Christian (mainly Orthodox) said they shared traditional Christian beliefs in God, sin, hell and heaven, many of the respondents said they had a lucky charm, believed in telepathy and reincarnation, and used astrological forecasts on a regular basis (Halman, 2001).

Among all the respondents from the post-Soviet countries in the 1999–2000 EVS survey who selected all the traditional Christian beliefs (the survey tested for four such beliefs), only 4 per cent did not select any non-Christian beliefs.

According to the traditional Orthodox approach, only those 4 per cent consider themselves “truly Orthodox believers”. At the same time, more than a quarter of the respondents believed in both traditional and non-traditional things while even more (28 per cent) had no such (traditional or non-traditional) beliefs at all (see Table 1) (Titarenko, 2002).

TABLE 1
Correlation between traditional Christian beliefs and non-traditional beliefs,
as a percentage of the total population

		Traditional Christian beliefs		
		Not chosen	All chosen	Total
Non-traditional non-Christian beliefs	Not chosen	28	4	32
	At least one chosen	42	26	68
	Total	70	30	100

As EVS data show (Halman, 2001), a combination of Christian and non-Christian beliefs was typical for believers in the post-Soviet states, regardless of their affiliation with the church or not. Recent surveys conducted by A. Vozmitel in some regions of Russia have confirmed once again that beliefs are not closely connected with church affiliation. Vozmitel investigated the correlation between two variables: the existence of “true Orthodox beliefs” and “belonging to the church”. According to his data, those who belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church demonstrated the highest level of non-Christian beliefs: they engaged in magic practices, believed in talismans and astrology, observed some pagan superstitions etc. (Vozmitel, 2007: 112).

It will be useful to add that along with the growth of non-traditional beliefs, some authors register a significant growth of beliefs in certain fundamental religious doctrines (Kaariainen, 2007), while some others point out that the Russian Orthodox Church does not insist on strong and correct beliefs at all (Naletova, 2004), so that any growth of religiosity is welcome, as the Russian Orthodox church does not want to push aside the so-called “seekers”—people who try to find their own way to God and whose number in 2005, according to some estimation, was 24 per cent of the total population (Kaariainen, 2007).

If we compare this situation with the other European countries, we find a similar picture: many Europeans with Christian beliefs share some non-Christian, non-traditional beliefs. We may conclude that religious consciousness is becoming more chaotic or eclectic, and that many people do not care which dogmas they share, because it is more important to them to believe in something sacred than in nothing. Borowik convincingly states that atheists who also share non-traditional beliefs cannot be considered to be followers of “scientific materialism” (Borowik, 2002: 499). This kind of self-identification was typical during communist times, regardless of the real attitudes and beliefs of people who used this term for identification. In fact, the number of those who identified themselves as atheists significantly dropped after the collapse of the communist regimes, because, as Zrinscak (2004a) clearly explained, “atheism was not a position freely chosen, but . . . an unavoidable part of totalitarian rule”. However, the number of non-believers grew in parallel with the decline of atheists: according to Kaariainen (2007), in 1991, 35 per cent identified themselves as atheists and 7 per cent as non-believers in Russia, while two years later the numbers were 5 per cent and 30 per cent respectively. In mass communist propaganda there was no difference between “atheism” and “scientific atheism”: both terms were used as the application of a Leninist–Stalinist ideology concerning religion, regardless of the fact that this application contradicted Marx’s views on religion. In general, as it is extremely difficult to distinguish atheism from agnosticism, it is likely that some people who officially declared their atheism were never atheists in practice, i.e. they did not fight against religion or follow official views concerning religion; instead, they might have had doubts regarding the existence of God within the framework of so-called *wolnodumstvo*, or agnosticism. Such non-believers could easily become seekers and combine some traditional and non-traditional beliefs as soon as it became possible freely to express their attitudes to religion.

According to Table 1, 42 per cent of people who do not have any traditional Christian beliefs selected at least one non-Christian belief; at the same time, some of them identified themselves as atheists. Such eclecticism is common for Russia as well (Furman et al., 2007). One should add that the situation is not so simple: the number of “true believers”, for whom “religion is very important” in their lives, hardly changed during the first post-Soviet decade, and this is also true of the number of “true non-believers” for whom “religion is not important at all”: for example, in Belarus this change is equal to 1 per cent from 1990 to 2000 (Titarenko, 2001). Belarusian scholar Babosov (2004) also pointed out that contemporary believers have mixed (Christian and non-Christian) beliefs as—according to his research—was typical even during pre-Soviet times, when many believers were illiterate and did not read Bible to learn about Christianity.

It will be worth mentioning the major reasons why the new believers in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine do not know the traditional Christian beliefs (as Borowik did not explain this important issue): there are currently no structures in place to teach these beliefs as a system, and during the Soviet period the system of education was totally non-religious (it was a part of atheist propaganda). First, the post-Soviet states are still secularized: “Religion” is not a compulsory subject in the state school curricula at any level (primary, secondary, or high school). Some initiatives to introduce this subject in Russia have generated enormous resistance, supported by different institutions. Second, there are only a few voluntary Sunday schools in some cities where children can learn the religious dogmas of some religious denominations. Many of these belong to Protestant denominations, which are the most active among the Christian schools of religion, according to Filatov (2004). As for adults, especially those belonging to the Orthodox church, there is no way to learn the religious norms and dogmas, even for those who shifted from non-believers to believers: such people can sincerely (truly) believe in God, but they do not know the whole traditional system of beliefs. Even during the religious service, these people cannot systematically learn what they would like to know.

At the same time, as Borowik correctly pointed out, there are many sources of pseudo-religious information in the media and advertising material: there are horoscopes in the newspapers, in TV programmes, on the Internet, and in journals and the like. A person wanting to learn religious dogmas must be determined; on the other hand, it is very easy to learn about horoscopes, lucky talismans and the like.

So in a broader analysis of Orthodox religiosity we have expanded on Borowik’s explanations and added some details and commentary to her description (2002) of all three major features of Orthodox religion for three post-Soviet Slavic countries. Placing these features into the European context we may conclude that Europe in general experiences religious eclecticism as an indicator of postmodernity: the majority of believers combine some traditional (Christian) beliefs with some non-traditional non-Christian beliefs. This is a tendency to individualize beliefs on the basis of personal preferences that make beliefs uncertain, ambiguous. From our point of view it is possible to interpret the religious situation in Russia, Belarus and

Ukraine as a part of the period of postmodernity rather than as a linear part of the period of post-Soviet transformation. From this view, eclecticism, uncertainty and combination of several beliefs are typical postmodern features, at least for Western countries (Varga, 2001) so that we can find the category of “non-believing practising” or “non-practising believers” in many other European (and probably not only European) countries (Ester et al., 1994).

Even so, for some authors there will be a question as to whether postmodernity could be ascribed to post-Soviet states on the same scale as it can to western countries. From the same methodological view arises an even more fundamental question: whether the stage of modernity could be ascribed to the former Soviet Union (FSU). The core concept is modernization: if we assume that the type of modernization that existed in the FSU followed the western pattern, then the Soviet type of modernization was a real one and similar to the western type. However, according to Eisenstadt’s theory of multiple modernities (2000), which applies well to the FSU, and taking into account the different historical backgrounds of the countries under discussion here, then Soviet modernization differed greatly from the Western pattern. Soviet modernization was forced, speeded-up, incomplete, as it mainly affected industrialization, and rejected the social, cultural and political dimensions that were essential aspects of Western modernization. The deficient character of Soviet modernization produced deficient cultural programmes for further social and cultural development in post-Soviet society, so that the Soviet (and post-Soviet) type of modernization by no means copied the Western type. In this respect, our opinion totally coincides with the opinion of other scholars of religion in post-communist countries (Zrinscak, 2004a, Tomka, 2006).

Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that the Soviet phenomenon was pseudo-modernization. We agree with the modern Russian theory according to which there exists a so-called “Russian institutional matrix” that has generally predetermined the historical development of the country for the last few centuries (Kurdina, 2001). Thus, the incomplete character of Russian and Soviet modernization was a consequence of the Russian institutional matrix, in particular the dominant role of the state, that prevented the process of growth and the diffusion of institutions adjusted to radical economic and technological changes. The matrix also created contradictions during post-Soviet change: on the one hand, post-Soviet states could not escape the global cultural influences and challenges, so that some features of postmodernity have taken root in Russian cultural life, including the sphere of religion—such as Oriental cults, new religious movements, uncertainty, and the like. On the other hand, new elements of postmodernity coexist with many features of the previous epochs—Soviet-type modernity and even patriarchal, traditional society. As a result, it becomes difficult to determine clearly what is real in contemporary post-Soviet societies and what is simulacra; however, this is also a typical feature of postmodernity, as described by Baudrillard (1983).

Even our brief review of the tendencies of religiosity in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, as selected by Borowik, clearly shows the usefulness of theoretical

frameworks for the analysis of data as it helps to discover the underlying processes that shape the surface of religious development.

Russian Orthodoxy as a historical source of religious differences

In order to draw the whole picture of Orthodox religiosity, it might be useful to stress some additional aspects. First, it is necessary to explain the relatively low attendance at religious services in post-Soviet countries in comparison with western European countries. According to EVS data, 35 per cent of western Europeans attend a religious service more than once a month, while only 13.5 per cent of respondents in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine do so (Halman, 2001).

It is true that Orthodox believers do not attend religious service as regularly or as often as Catholic or Protestant believers.

On the one hand, this could be seen as a consequence of decades of Soviet atheist propaganda. If this is indeed the explanation, one should expect a growth of church attendance during the post-Soviet period. Table 2 proves this to be the case. The data show that currently many more people in post-Soviet states attend religious services than they did when they were 12 (under the Soviet regime). Other researchers also confirm this statement. As Kaariainen (2007) has showed, during the period 1991–2005, the

TABLE 2
Attendance of Religious Services in the European Former Soviet States, as a percentage of the total population

States	More than once a month:		Never attend services:	
	now	at age 12	now	at age 12
<i>Orthodox:</i>				
Belarus	14.5	10.9	27.8	49.3
Russia	9.2	5.6	50.1	75.4
Ukraine	16.9	8.1	30.5	57.3
[Sub-total]	13.5	8.2	36.1	60.7
<i>Mixed Catholic-Protestant-Orthodox:</i>				
Estonia	11.1	8.6	37.8	55.3
Latvia	15.1	19.7	34.6	52.3
[Sub-total]	13.1	14.2	36.2	53.8
<i>Catholic:</i>				
Lithuania	31.5	49.0	16.0	13.7
[Total]	16.8	17.0	32.8	50.6
All-European	31.6	56.5	29.5	23.8

Source: EVS 1999–2000.

percentage of Russians who attended services at least once a month grew from 6 per cent to 11 per cent (almost double), while the percentage of people who never attended these services declined from 59 per cent to 38 per cent.

On the other hand, the low level of attendance at religious services is closely connected with the very nature of the Russian Orthodox Church, which dominates in all three selected post-Soviet countries. However, as Tomka insists, attendance at Orthodox Church services should not be interpreted in the same way as in the west, where church attendance is an important indicator of religiosity. Tomka says: “The main problem in Eastern Europe is how to grasp religion without the yardstick of an official interpreting agent” (2006: 262). According to Tomka, Orthodoxy differs from western Christianity in several aspects, including the attitude to church attendance, which is a more important criterion of genuine religiosity in the west than in Orthodoxy. Some Russian scholars of religion even state that Orthodox believers are not obliged regularly to attend church (Vassilyev, 1999). Of course, this is a “practical attitude” that does not coincide with the official Orthodox norms, according to which weekly attendance is necessary. However, as Kaariainen correctly noticed (2007), there is always a difference between “Orthodox written norms” and “Orthodox practice”. That is why those who identify themselves as believers and do not regularly attend religious services can still be considered as believers, because Russian Orthodox religiosity is based on people’s self-identification rather than on any formal rituals and practices (Naletova, 2004).

This particular feature of the Orthodox Church has had many other consequences, such as very close ties with the Russian state under the Tsarist regime, low respect for individual rights, and even low levels of knowledge of Christian dogmas. Currently, the Russian Orthodox Church cannot overcome this historical legacy as it has become a part of a traditional popular (folklore) culture, a part of a national mentality influencing the everyday life of all the people in these three countries—whether they are religious or not.

Table 2 also contributes to the argument that it is not only the duration of the influence of Soviet atheist propaganda, but also the nature of the Russian Orthodox Church that creates a clear difference in church attendance. The Baltic republics are a good example: currently as many people in Catholic Lithuania attend church at least once a month as in western Europe, while this is not the case for two other Baltic republics, Latvia and Estonia (according to the survey data, 59 per cent of people in Latvia identify themselves as believers, among them one third Catholics, one third Protestants, and almost one third Orthodox; in Estonia only 25 per cent are religious, half of them Protestant, and the rest Orthodox). As all three republics were Sovietized only after WWII and became independent in 1991, it is the different nature of the dominant religious denomination in Lithuania (and not the Soviet occupation) that explains the dramatic differences in the level of church attendance in these three Baltic countries in recent years. This difference makes the Russian Orthodox Church apparently less successful than the Roman Catholic Church (and this is probably a latent reason why Russian

Patriarch Alexiy II did not allow Pope John-Paul II to visit Russia). As Filatov (2005) concludes, contemporary Orthodox religiosity is badly structured, so that it is very difficult to establish clearly the number of Orthodox believers and even the nature of this religiosity itself.

Borowik's statement that Orthodox religious revival can be characterized "only in external forms" (Borowik, 2002: 501) is highly contentious. The EVS methodology on religious issues elaborated by western scholars (see for example Ester et al., 1994), and tested in several countries, permitted two major dimensions of religiosity for all countries: external and intrinsic religiosity.¹ In regard to the post-Soviet region, both kinds of religiosity (or both dimensions) can be described as important complex indicators of the current religious situation in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, as they can shed light on different manifested and latent aspects of religiosity in these countries.

Our research on external and intrinsic religiosity in six post-Soviet states (three Baltic and three Slavic states taken as two groups, from which only the second group belonged to Orthodoxy) was made on the basis of EVS methodology and the 1999/2000 EVS data. According to this methodology, each of the aforementioned religious dimensions was constructed as a result of several indicators. Thus, external religiosity was interpreted as an integral set of manifested patterns of behaviour (each was measured by a "yes-no" scale): a person's adherence to a religious denomination, attendance at religious services, having any traditional Christian beliefs, and the celebration of "rites of passage."

The key issue for intrinsic religiosity was the self-identification of a person as religious; then four indicators were selected: belief in a personal God, personal importance of God, regular praying outside religious services, and a positive answer to the question as to whether religion gave personal comfort and strength.

According to our research (Titarenko, 2004: 376–80), the levels of external and intrinsic religiosity do not coincide in the two groups of countries. However, in the Baltic states, there was a bigger difference between these two dimensions (external religiosity was equal to 0,79 on a [0–1] scale where 1 corresponds to the highest level; intrinsic religiosity was equal to 0,63 on a similar scale) than in the Slavic states (0,72 and 0,70 respectively). These results show that (1) the level of manifested (external) religiosity is much higher for respondents in the Baltic states than their "emotional" level of personal involvement (the gap between them was equal to 0,16); (2) an external dimension of religiosity in the Slavic states was lower than in the Baltic states, while the level of intrinsic religiosity was higher; (3) both dimensions were very close to each other in the Slavic states. We may conclude that both sides of religiosity show a consistent coincidence in the Orthodox countries. Also, the results prove the fact that an emotional dimension of religiosity is more important in the Slavic (Orthodox) states than in the Baltic states (with different dominant denominations). As we can observe, there are different trends in religiosity between the ex-Soviet Baltic states and the ex-Soviet Slavic (mainly Orthodox) countries, although both aspects of religiosity (or both dimensions) can be measured in both groups of countries.

The lower level of external religiosity in the Slavic countries indirectly proves that the Orthodox church does not control its believers' behaviour to the same degree as do the Roman Catholic or Protestant churches: as a social institution it still cannot greatly influence the practical life of Orthodox believers and increase their level of attendance or membership. The growth of the number of unchurched believers in Russia was also confirmed by Filatov (2005), Furman, Kaariainen and Karpov (2007), and some other scholars.

Gender and age distribution of religiosity is similar for all these countries: (a) in both cases of religiosity women are in the majority among religious people, regardless of the particular country, and (b) older women (aged 60+) are prevailing among the religious population. This tendency reflects the general trend according to which religion is more important for women rather than for men, and more important for the older generation rather than for the young or for middle-aged people (see for example Zrinscak, 2004a). These facts also coincide with Borowik's conclusion that old women are the most religious part of the population (Borowik, 2002: 504). At the same time Borowik's hypothesis that atheism was only a myth in the ex-Soviet states popularized by ideologists (Borowik, 2002: 498) cannot be proved by our data, as fewer old men identified themselves as religious than women of the same age (60+). It seems that the older generation of men is considerably less religious than women of the same age, so that many people identifying themselves as atheists belong to this men's cohort.

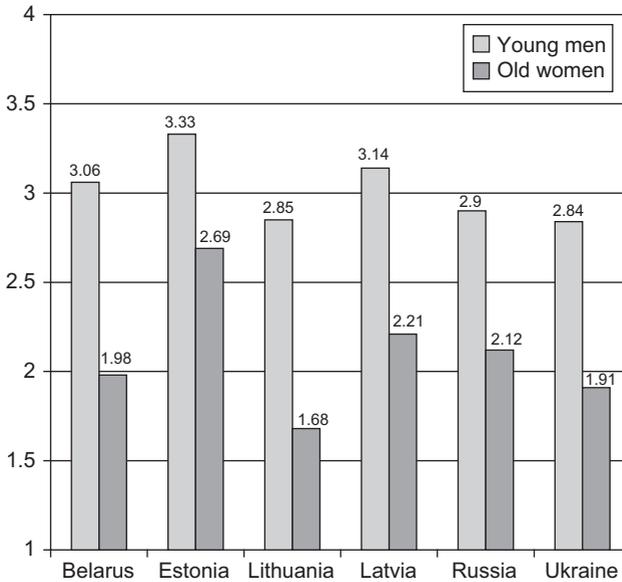
Young men are also less religious than young women. If we compare two extreme age-groups of people divided by gender—young men (aged 18–29) and old women (aged 60+)—we can find that the mean value of religion for young men is close to 3 (on a four-point scale where 1 means "religion is very important", 2 means "religion is important," 3 means "religion is not important" and 4 means "religion is not important at all"), while the mean value of religion for old women is close to 2 (see Graph 1).

So, while for many older women religion is important, for young men, who have been socialized mainly since the breakdown of the Soviet Union, religion is not important. Both old and especially young men are less religious in Orthodox ex-Soviet countries, than women (however, for different reasons).

The current post-Soviet socialization of the younger generation also makes young people less religious, so that the proportion of non-religious among youth in Slavic countries is bigger than among the old people, especially among men. Recent surveys in Russia presented by Kaariainen at the 29th ISSR conference (2007), confirmed this fact.

Some final remarks

To summarize, Borowik has correctly described some confessional and ethno-religious differences in three post-Soviet states. First, she mentioned the higher level of religiosity in the western parts of Belarus and Ukraine (that belonged to Poland or Czechoslovakia until 1939 and were therefore less Sovietized than the rest of the population in Belarus and Ukraine).



GRAPH 1
Importance of religion (means) for two age groups in six countries: young men (18–29) and old women (60+)

Source: European Value Study, 1999–2000.

This is not the case for Russia where scholars did not find regional differences in religiosity.

Second, Irena Borowik focused on the close connection between the Polish minority and Catholicism in current Belarus (although it is not correct that “the presence of Catholics” is “the silent feature of Belarus”: this is an officially recognized historical legacy and a quite visible contemporary reality). Officially, Catholics enjoy the same rights as Orthodox believers: the whole population may celebrate Christmas for either or both of the Catholic and Orthodox dates as they are considered to be state holidays (Hulap, 2002). Because representatives of the Polish minority usually identify themselves as Catholics, their level of religiosity is higher than the average level of religiosity in Belarus in general.

Third, Borowik described the multi-confessional situation in Ukraine, which has political and historical origins and has caused many practical problems and conflicts for the population. Such a dramatic religious situation does not exist in Belarus or Russia, although these countries also have some problems.

Fourth, she confirmed the existence of inter-confessional marriages in western Ukraine and Belarus. There is in fact no problem with such marriages, as they have existed for centuries in this region: it was a pragmatic issue rather than a purely religious issue for most people: a person could use

the so-called situational morality principles that made it possible for them to marry someone regardless of their religious adherence (or to disregard any differences between the denominations, if they had found practical ways to compromise).

Fifth, Borowik described current difficulties experienced by the Russian Orthodox Church, such as lack of clergy and religious literature, property issues, mixed beliefs, etc. However, these difficulties cannot stop the process of a growing role of Orthodoxy in the Slavic countries. A search for a new national identity in fact quite often brings people back to traditional religion (in this case, the dominant religion during the previous centuries), so that “a turn to religion” becomes “a return to the national roots” and engenders respect for national history. This is a significant change in the spiritual development of the Slavic post-communist states.

Borowik also described the social and demographic characteristics of religious people in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine: her portrayal correctly reflects the current situation, which is similar to the situation in western Europe in general.

These points would suggest that the description of the religious transformation of post-Soviet Russia, Belarus and Ukraine in Borowik’s articles is generally correct, even if not precisely complete. So is there anything to add?

When we analyse this transformation as part of contemporary global social and religious developments, we find some similarities that may prove the postmodern character of some features of religious revival in these Slavic countries, as well as other features that may prove the opposite. This means that post-communist reality remains very controversial and cannot be explained by any one-dimensional schema or approach. When we analyse the content of this religious revival in detail, we will not discover that these Orthodox countries are in any way unique from the point of view of religious eclecticism, because a low level of traditional beliefs, a growth in eclecticism, and an increase of religious individualization are global features.

The social-demographic portrait of the most religious people is also common to the majority of European countries (with the exception of those Catholic countries where the number of believers is extremely high, as in Poland, Italy, or Malta). The aforementioned three countries have some visible cultural features that are common to other European countries.

However, regardless of some similarities to be found in European religious development in both east and west, the important difference is that religiosity in western Europe is gradually declining, as is the role of religion in western countries (though it is still an important social factor), while religiosity in eastern Europe, and the role of religion in post-Soviet states, is on a gradual rise. That is why many western people who do not identify themselves as believers are still quite familiar with Christian beliefs and norms, and share them as cultural norms, while many eastern believers do not know about traditional Christian values and norms, even when they sincerely identify themselves as Christian believers.

If we look at religious revival within the political framework of a particular country (Russia, Ukraine or Belarus), it can be seen that this growth does not only indicate a popular desire to “build bridges” with the historical past of

each nation, to restore the historical memory and develop the historical traditional heritage (both spiritual and practical), as Borowik mentioned. This is correct, but it does not reflect some important political reasons for religious revival, analysed by Furman et al. (2007: 33–8). For some groups of political elites, religious revival is also a means to incorporate traditional conservative ideology into the state ideology and mentality of the people, to spread conservative moral principles and to find additional support for the idea of strong political power. Further scholarly debates on these issues will contribute to the understanding of the contemporary nature of religion in different parts of Europe and in the world in general.

NOTES

¹ The concept of intrinsic and external religiosity elaborated by the EVS differs from Allport's concept of intrinsic-extrinsic religiosity: they are used for different purposes, with different indicators to operationalize each dimension. According to Allport, there are two different types of religious commitment, while according to EVS, each type of religiosity can be characterized by two dimensions. The psychological interpretation of these concepts differs greatly.

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