

The Religion-Politics Nexus in East-Central Europe: Church in the Public Sphere of Post-Secular Societies

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Abstract: The paper deals with the perplexing role religion plays in the politics of the post-communist societies of East Central Europe. Building upon three theoretical models describing the role of religion in public life (Rawls, Habermas and Wolterstorff), it examines the strikingly different ways in which the local churches and their leaders enter the public spheres in these countries, in particular when addressing international issues such as European integration. This empirical material allows us to critically reflect upon the suitability of these three models for an analysis of these societies. In addition, other notions related to the religion-politics nexus, such as the Habermasian concept of 'the post-secular society', will be discussed as well. Methodologically, the paper is based on a comparative study of the Czech and Slovak Republics. Even though these two countries had long shared a common state, their respective levels of (institutionalised) religiosity are very different, which makes the two countries two extreme cases on the religiosity scale: While the Czech Republic is arguably the most atheistic country in the world, in Slovakia, the influence of the (Catholic) church is very strong.

Key words: religion, public sphere, foreign policy, post-secular society, liberalism, Czech Republic, Slovakia

INTRODUCTION

The secularisation thesis belongs to the most enduring theoretical claims in both sociology and the history of religion. Even though the thesis, which can be briefly summarised as the process that leads to 'the diminution of social significance of religion' following a society's modernisation (Bruce, 1992: 11), is still defended by a number of prominent sociologists,¹ its claims have been subject to thorough critiques at least since the 1960s.² Among the arguments raised in efforts to refute the thesis, the most ubiquitous are those claiming that (1) the previous ages were not as religious as they might seem from our perspectives and that (2) our age is not as secular as Westerners, and in particular Europeans, tend to believe (cf. Wilson, 1998).

However, a third argument, which is most relevant for political scientists, is gaining in importance as well. It revolves around the claim that – contrary to the secularists' belief – religion has not been losing its institutional authority over political matters in most parts of the world but has been rather re-gaining in political importance after several centuries of retreat. This argument adopts two basic forms – one general and the other more specific. The general version of the argument posits a universal upsurge in the political relevance of religions across the globe, as demonstrated by the rise of fundamentalists in all three of the monotheistic religions as well as some other religious groups (such as Hinduism) (Juergensmeyer, 2003; Almond, Appleby and Sivan, 2003; Emerson and Hartman, 2006). The specific version of this claim focuses on particular developments in some geopolitical regions or within particular religious traditions. Hence, some scholars talk about the renewed prestige of religion in post-Communist Europe (Russia, Poland, the former GDR) (Froese, 2004). Others mention the rise of new religious movements within western Christianity (Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose, 1996) or in Islam (Choueiri, 1997).

Political philosophers responded to the secularisation controversy in three distinct ways: The first, which is most typically taken by liberals such as John Rawls (1993) and Robert Audi (Audi 1996), insists that irrespective of the evidence about the growth of the political power of religion (or the lack thereof), liberal democracies have to adhere to the distinction between the public forum, in which only secular, rationally constructed arguments are allowed, and the private (or at least non-public) sphere, where religious beliefs may be expressed in a language which would be otherwise inaccessible in the public arena. The second stance, which is frequently adopted by the opponents of traditional liberalism (N. Wolterstorff, P. Weithman), argues that the failure of the secularisation thesis is concomitant with the inadequacy of the liberal distinction between the private and the public spheres and testifies to the need to re-define the role of religion, which is essentially social as well as political and thus cannot be reduced to the status of a privatised belief (Wolterstorff, 1996; Eberle, 2002). There have been several attempts at finding a compromise formula that would retain the general commitment to the secular nature of the state while simultaneously allowing for greater and more symmetric participation of religious citizens in the public deliberation and legislation. Habermas' conception of the postsecular society is a prominent example of this (Habermas, 1998 and 2002).

If we take these three models not only as 'realistic utopias' (Rawls, 1999: 126), but also as attempts to grasp the current situation that describes the way religion is active in liberal societies, the key question that arises is which of these three positions best reflects the relations in the triangle state-society-religion. To answer this *empirical* question, we will proceed in three steps. First, we will describe in more detail the three theoretical positions mentioned above – that of John Rawls, the alternative account given by Jürgen Habermas, and the vaguer yet also influential position of

Nicholas Wolterstorff. In particular, we will show that the basic distinction between the three models lies in their distinctive answers to the question of how far religious citizens have to translate their beliefs into secular language. The Rawlsian liberalism interprets the translation as the basic condition for a proper functioning of a democratic society. The late Habermas proposes some refinement to the traditional liberal doctrine, claiming that this translation must take place in the *informal* public sphere in the course of a mutual self-reflective dialogue between the church and the society. Wolterstorff and some more radical critics of liberalism insist that this translation should not be as strict as Rawls believes and that believers should not be forced to transcend their own comprehensive doctrine in their reasoning.

In the second step, we will introduce our research design, explaining the choice of our two case studies (the Czech and Slovak Republics) as well as the discursive areas on which we focus (European integration). Third, we will present the results of the discourse analysis in our two cases studies. In a final step, we will discuss the suitability of the three models for our case studies and we will draw some general conclusions that may contribute to a better understanding of the situatedness of the religious in our contemporary societies.

RELIGION IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE: RAWLS, HABERMAS AND THEIR CRITICS

This section will briefly outline the positions pertaining to the role of religion in the public sphere of Rawls, Habermas and some of their critics. In particular, attention will be given to the crucial role the translation of religious language into secular language plays in both the liberal interpretations and the critical evaluations thereof. Although a common stereotype about both Rawls and Habermas would be that they underestimate the role religion plays in the public life of modern societies, they have both turned to a closer inspection of this particular issue in recent years (cf. Domrowski, 2001: vii ff; Chambers, 2007).

In the case of Rawls, this is connected with the major change in Rawls's theoretical evolution, the shift from defending liberalism as one particular comprehensive doctrine in *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls, 1971) to the claim that what he expounds are free-standing political principles independent from any comprehensive doctrine, but rather built on an overlapping consensus of reasonable doctrines (Rawls, 1993). The focus on free-standing political principles, however, implies that reasons supplied by religion (i.e. by a comprehensive doctrine), expressed in their original metaphysical formulation, must never enter the public forum unless they are later supported by public reasons that would be equally accessible to all, i.e. to religious as well as to non-religious citizens.

For Rawls the practical application of publicly accessible and understandable justification is the condition *sine qua non* for a functioning liberal democratic public de-

liberation: If the state acquiesced to one particular moral doctrine and gave it precedence over another, for instance by granting the arguments derived from this doctrine public validity without recourse to ‘public reason’ (for the definition of this term, see Rawls, 1997a and 1997b), the resulting situation would be either that of a hegemonic position of one particular religious group over the society or the breakdown of public order and an explosion of religious struggle. This obviously does not mean that a stance defended by a religious citizen that is in accordance with his or her religious belief is not permissible at all, but rather that ‘a responsible citizen in a liberal democracy ought not support (or reject) a coercive law on the basis of religious convictions *alone*’ (Eberle, 2002: 12, emphasis added).

This position has been hotly contested ever since it was first formulated, the most common critique being the split identity objection: Religious citizens are required to artificially divide their identity into the private, religiously motivated self and the public self whose acts are based primarily on public reasoning, whereby a person’s public reasoning can even run counter to the same person’s privately held beliefs about proper actions (cf. Yates, 2007; Wolterstorff, 1997; Weithman, 2002). Even though this objection certainly deserves close scrutiny, Rawlsian liberalism is not as radically secular and restrictive as these critics claim: Rawls does not operate with the simple dichotomy public-private but differentiates between the public sphere proper (or the public forum), the non-public sphere of civil society (or the background culture) and the private sphere. Rawls claims that the reasoning within the voluntary associations rooted in the background culture can use modes of reasoning different from the public reason (Rawls, 1997a).³ The proviso Rawls introduces here is that religious views may be introduced into public debates if sufficient public reasons supporting these views will be provided later, at the appropriate time (Rawls, 1997b: 783). But in spite of all these qualifications, he is quick to add that the ‘the ideal of public reason does hold for citizens when they engage in political advocacy in the public forum.’ In other words, various moral and philosophical positions can be expressed in public but they are not allowed in the more narrowly defined *public forum*, where only public reasons can be legitimately accepted.

Let us turn to the second influential view of religion in the public – that of Habermas. Even though comparative studies of Rawls and Habermas often exaggerate the different stances they take vis-à-vis the role of religion in the public sphere (Yates, 2007), once we take into account the intellectual exchange between the two (starting from the exchange in 1995: Habermas, 1995; Rawls, 1995), it is clear that their positions demonstrate a great – and growing – similarity. Habermas also draws a clear line beyond which religious arguments are not permissible. In a strikingly similar manner to Rawls, Habermas claims that ‘the institutional thresholds between the “wild life” of the political public sphere and the formal proceedings within political bodies are also a filter that from the Babel of voices in the informal flows of public

communication allows only secular contributions to pass through.’ (Habermas, 2006: 10)

Unlike Rawls, however, Habermas identifies the informal public sphere (nigh synonymous to the Rawlsian background culture) as the appropriate locus of translation of particular reasons specific to individual (not only) religious groups into the publicly accessible language of the formal public sphere: ‘The truth content of religious contributions can only enter into the institutionalized practice of deliberation and decision-making if the necessary translation already occurs in the pre-parliamentarian domain, i.e., in the political public sphere itself.’ (ibid.) In addition, for Habermas, it is not so much the content of the deliberations in the public sphere that is most relevant, but rather their procedural aspects (Habermas, 1999). Theoretically, this opens up more space for those who want to defend a political stance grounded in a religious belief. Habermas himself, in his defence of the ‘post-secular society’, cites at least two reasons for why this greater openness towards religious reasons should be supported even by the secular state. The first is a direct response to the split identity objection. Habermas insists that we should not ask religious citizens to give up their private reasoning in the political public sphere if this should ‘endanger their religious mode of life’ (Habermas, 2006: 10). The second reason points to the (so far) irreplaceable role of religion in the public sphere, where religious actors are often capable of discovering hidden intuitions or of recreating lost elements of meaning and identity (ibid.). Habermas believes that the informal public sphere should be the site of mutual dialogue among different groups with different sets of beliefs where all of them engage in self-reflexive exposure of their values and aim at the translation of their specific principles into a language that would be understandable to outsiders as well. Importantly, this task does not pertain only to religious citizens since it requires that secular citizens also remain ‘sensitive to the articulation power of religious languages’ (Habermas, 2002: 71).

It is exactly the obligation to translate religious reasons into secular terms that is seen as the critical juncture by the opponents of the liberal view of religion in the public sphere. For instance, Nicholas Wolterstorff claims, in his oft-quoted passage, that ‘it belongs to the religious convictions of a good many religious people in our society that they ought to base their decisions concerning fundamental issues of justice on their religious convictions. They do not view it as an option whether or not to do it... Their religion is not, for them, about something other than their social and political existence.’ (Wolterstorff, 1997: 105) This is, however, related to the second, more provocative, claim that because of the unbearable burden on religious citizens, we cannot ask them to translate their arguments in the informal public sphere and that the same applies to the public sphere in general, i.e. including formal reasoning in the legislature as well as the judiciary. Paul Weithman (2002), among oth-

ers, criticises Rawls' requirement of translation as unnecessary and discriminatory. According to Weithman, basing one's own arguments on his or her moral or philosophical doctrine and being able to give reasons for why the measure advocated is equally good for everyone from the point of that particular doctrine is a sufficient condition for participation in public deliberation. In other words, it is again, as with Wolterstorff, the need for translation into the secular language that is challenged as inappropriate. The three positions towards the role of religion in the public sphere, which we sketched above, are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1

	Position I (Rawls)	Position II (Habermas)	Position III (Wolterstorff, Weithman)
Distinction between formal and informal public spheres	Yes	Yes	No
Formal public sphere/public forum	Secular reasons	Secular reasons	Non-secular reasons
Informal public sphere / background culture	Non-secular reasons dominant	Secular and non-secular reasons	Non-secular reasons
The locus of translation	Unspecified	Informal public sphere	None

It is clear that there is a broad overlap between Rawls and Habermas in terms of justificatory liberalism (the grey fields in the table) – for both of them, (1) advocacy of a measure is justified in the formal public sphere as long as it is supported by secular reasons; (2) in the informal public sphere, the plurality of voices can include non-secular reasons as well; and, as a consequence, for both, (3) the distinction between these two types of public reasoning is vital. The most important difference between them, on the other hand, lies in Habermas' assertion that the informal public sphere is the place where translations from one language into the other must take place. In this sense, the Rawlsian background culture is more restrictive than the Habermasian informal public sphere. While background culture is primarily concerned with discussions within particular associations (e.g. churches) (Rawls, 1997: 99), Habermas sees the informal public sphere as including both deliberations within these bodies and deliberations between them. Hence, a mixture of secular and non-secular reasons is present in the informal public sphere as the particular associations try to enter into dialogue with other associations and hence feel the need to translate their reasons into terms that are intelligible for citizens with other comprehensive doctrines. Position III in the table starts from the premise that there is no need for that kind of translation. As a result, the distinction between the two kinds of public spheres is not necessary, and reasons based on comprehensive

doctrines can be present in public deliberations of any kind, including those of legislators and the justice.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The greatest single difference between the positions discussed above lies in the differing requirements about when religious citizens and their organisations are supposed to translate their claims into the secular language, which is accessible to both the members of the particular religious community and the rest of the society. The question, however, is whether religious groupings and their members are capable of such a translation. And even if the answer were positive, an additional question mark hovers over their willingness to do so. To explore this issue, we used an approach based on two elaborate analyses of (critical) discourse analysis (Milliken, 1999; Wodak and Meyer, 2009).

We chose two countries – the Czech Republic and Slovakia – and we analysed public statements by the Roman Catholic Church and its prominent adherents in these two countries. Obviously, it would be nigh impossible to analyse all public appearances of the church's representatives so we chose just one topic – the church's attitude towards the European Union. The choice of the two countries was based mainly on the fact that they have many characteristics in common but substantially differ as far as religion is concerned. The two countries have very similar cultures and languages and a common history (both were part of the Habsburg Empire, and for most of the twentieth century, they were the two parts of Czechoslovakia). Both of them are member states of both the European Union and NATO, and their economic developments have been similar (with Slovakia being slightly poorer, but developing faster). The single most conspicuous difference is the different levels of religiosity in these two countries.⁴ Notwithstanding the fact that the Catholic Church is by far the largest religious group in both of the countries, Catholics constitute more than two thirds of the populace in Slovakia (68.2 percent (the 2001 census, see *The World Factbook a*)) but only approximately one quarter of the Czech population (26.8 percent (the 2001 census, see *The World Factbook b*)). Interestingly, the share of people who answered 'unspecified' or 'unaffiliated' to the question of their religious affiliation reaches only 16.2 percent in Slovakia, while the share of Czechs identifying with either of these two positions is extremely high and almost equal to the percentage of Slovak Catholics (67.8 percent). Thus, the analysis of the Catholic Church in these two countries can be methodologically rewarding since they represent two extreme cases in terms of levels of religiosity and are possibly also different in terms of the needs of the Church to address other religious groups as well as non-believers.⁵

We tried to reduce the probability of intervening factors playing a role in our research in three ways. First, as was already mentioned, we selected two very similar countries with differences pertaining mainly to religion as the objects of our study.

Second, we focussed solely on the statements and public involvement of the Catholic Church. Other denominations are very active in both countries (the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren and the Czechoslovak Hussite Church in the Czech Republic; the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession and the Reformed Christian Church in Slovakia), but since these churches have different roots and backgrounds, it would be hard to ascertain whether their (un)willingness to translate their arguments into secular language is due to the differences in the countries' religiosities or whether it is rather grounded in their own histories. Even though these churches are often part of the same international ecumenical bodies, an international comparison of them would still be difficult since they often have a different heritage (e.g. the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren was created as a church to unify Lutherans and Calvinists). The Catholic Church, on the other hand, is a transnational organisation with a centralised hierarchical structure to which the representatives of the national Catholic churches in both of the countries are responsible. Therefore, differences in the Czech and the Slovak Catholics' involvement in the public sphere cannot be attributed to differences in church teachings or the institutional structure for these elements (as these are the same in both cases) but rather to the differences in national context that override their commonalities.

The third way in which we assured clearer results was in that we selected an appropriate topic for our analysis. The commonly analysed discussions about euthanasia, abortion or rights of same sex couples are strongly conditioned by national contexts. They are often stirred by legislative proposals of both Catholic politicians and their opponents, and the frequency of their media appearances, as well as their style, follows different patterns in different national settings. That is why we chose an *international* topic that was relevant for both nations at the same time and to the same extent – the European integration. Two issues were the most prominent within this broader topic – the countries' simultaneous accession to the Union in 2004 and – after their accession – the deepening of the integration process (in particular, the lively debate about the reference to God in the EU constitution⁶).

Our analysis included both the formal and the informal public spheres. In the formal public sphere, we explored all the contributions by the Christian members of the two countries' parliaments pertaining to parliamentary discussions about European integration. Obviously, it would be very difficult to ascertain which MPs are Christians and which are not, so we overcame this problem by analysing the contributions of those MPs who were members of Christian parties in the national parliaments (the Christian Democratic Union – Popular Party in the Czech Republic (KDU-ČSL) and the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) and the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party (SDKÚ-DS) in Slovakia).

In the informal public sphere, the texts chosen for discourse analysis covered the three most relevant venues through which religious arguments are expressed – (1)

statements issued by bishops (most frequently those of the whole bishops' conferences), (2) individual statements of other prominent Catholics (both lay and ordained), typically in the most read newspapers, and (3) radio or TV appearances of either of these. As we limited the amount of available texts by choosing just one main topic, we explored all the available materials, which were pretty evenly spread both over time and over the two countries. The texts cover the period of 2002–2009, with the vast majority covering the years around the Czech and Slovak EU entry (2003–2005). Their distribution is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of the analysed texts

	Formal public sphere	Informal public sphere
Czech Republic	18	32
Slovakia	27	23

In each of the texts from the informal public sphere, we mainly focussed on six features: Three were linked to the 'we-you-they' triangle. First, we wanted to know how the speaker identifies him- or herself: Does he or she speak in the name of all Christians, the citizens, the Catholic Church, or the bishops? In short, who is the 'we' in the text? Secondly, we explored the related issue of whom the speaker wants to address – the whole society, Christians, Catholics, fellow priests, etc. (the 'you' problem). Thirdly, it is equally important to see who represents otherness in these texts. In some cases, the speaker may posit a church-society dichotomy or a Christians-non-believers distinction, but sometimes the speaker may be very explicit, identifying specific persons as those opposing the church.

The other three features analysed the structure of the texts. First, we were interested to know whether the religious position is presented with or without argumentation. In other words, some texts simply state what the church believes or, more frequently, what it forbids without exactly saying why this should be so. In these cases, the texts rely on the church's authority instead. Second, if an argument was present, we wanted to know whether this argument draws from an internal, religious base, grounding its strength in scripture, church tradition, Christian values or past church pronouncements, or whether it applies arguments accessible to non-Catholics as well. Finally, we identified the argumentative strategies, in which the 'we-you-they' distinction is related to the kind of argumentation used.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

In both the formal and the informal public spheres, the attention was directed almost exclusively to two topics: the EU accession and the reference to God in the EU constitution. What the actors in the formal public sphere of both countries shared

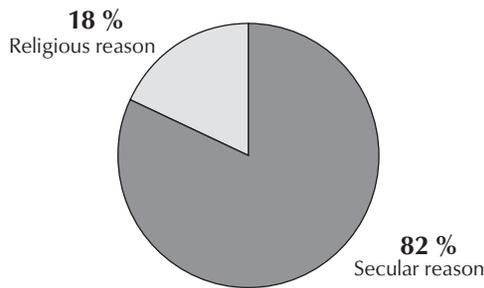
was the general approach to interpreting the role of the EU. In contrast to the dominant rhetoric in both republics, which very much stressed the role of economic advantages and the reduction of the welfare gap between the current EU members and the candidates (cf. Braun, 2008), the Christian deputies' key word was 'a community of values' (document 1). In all discussions about the advantages and disadvantages of the countries' entry into the Union, their argumentative strategies cautiously avoided all allusions to the 'Christian nature' of the EU and instead focused on advocating the conception of the EU as 'the greatest realised peace project in world history' (document 2) or 'a democratic community' (document 3). Hence it seems that the relevance of values and the conspicuous absence of stress on economic benefits indicate that their rhetoric is indeed a translation of more specific Christian values.

However, while in the Czech Parliament, Christianity was almost never explicitly mentioned as the source of the support for European integration (with only one exception, document 4), in Slovakia, deputies often clearly indicated that they see a direct connection between EU's values and those of Christianity, e.g. when speaking about the way in which 'the Christian view of humanity and life will be projected into such a unique process as the life of nations' (212) and the question of 'which of the Christian virtues and values will be preferred when taking concrete political decisions' (document 5). Similarly, even though the main reasons for giving support to the EU entry were always of a secular nature, secondary arguments with religious contents were present in Slovakia and entirely absent in the Czech Republic. For instance, the influential Slovak deputy and later European Commissioner J. Figel' claimed that 'today's Europe is not in need of inventing new architectures, but rather of building on the proven ground. Schuman, Adenauer, De Gasperi, the founders of the European Communities, who were inspired by the Christian faith, were successful' (document 6). In other words, while this translation is clearly a process taking place in the Slovak formal public sphere, no clear evidence is present in the Czech case, where the translation seems to be finished already when the argument enters the formal public sphere.

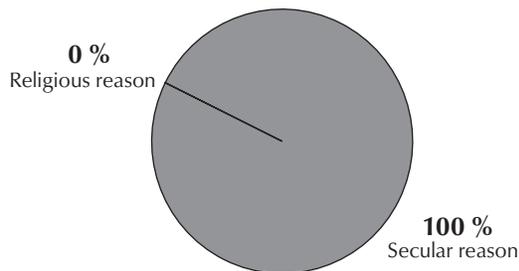
The difference between the finished translation in the more secular country and the translation as a process in the more religious one is even more conspicuous in the other issue pertaining to EU integration that was frequently discussed by Christian deputies – the reference to God in the EU constitution. Both the Czech and the Slovak representatives of the national Christian(-democratic) parties argued in favour of this provision. Yet while the Czech argumentation was always couched in secular language, some of their Slovak counterparts retreated to strongly religious language. To give two examples, we can compare the statements of two religious and strongly conservative deputies who spoke on the issue. The Czech Jiří Karas claimed that God should be mentioned because 'Christians form a vital part of modern

democratic society, to the creation of which they greatly contributed. It was Christianity that changed the barbaric face of the continent, liberated slaves, cultivated culture and science, organised state administrations, and established care for the ill and the socially weak.' (document 4) To strengthen his argument, Karas mentioned the role of other religions that would also welcome the allusion to God in the constitution. On the other hand, Pavol Hrušovský, the chairman of the Slovak parliament (the National Council), fully embraced religious rhetoric when he insisted that 'the lack of Christianity' is one of the main reasons for why the constitution should be rejected without giving any secular reasons for this stance, and he finished his speech by saying 'I pray that in spite of this vote we succeed in maintaining the traditions of our Western Christian civilization for the next generations. Ladies and gentlemen, may God help us in making today's decision.' (document 7) As a result, a resort to religious reasons can be detected in almost one fifth of all the texts in the Slovak case, whereas there is not a single instance of such a strategy in the Czech Parliament (see Graphs 1 and 2).

Graph 1: Slovak formal public sphere



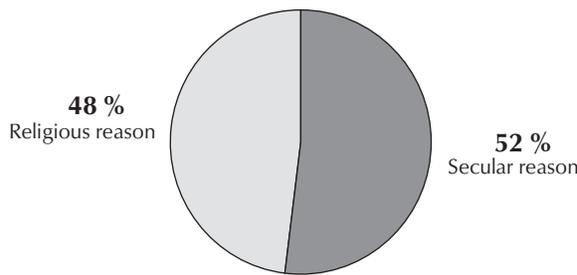
Graph 2: Czech formal public sphere



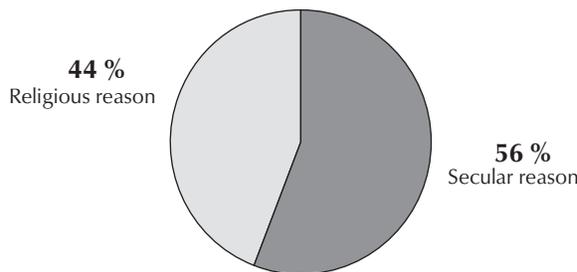
We can now turn to the informal public sphere. The voices here are much more varied and it is often difficult to determine to what extent a particular Catholic voice rep-

resented the official position of the church or his or her own private view of the issue. Altogether 55 documents were analysed in both countries. Generally, Catholic speakers much more frequently resorted to the use of religious arguments in their public utterances than was the case in the formal public sphere. The typical argumentation strategy, which was very different from that of the formal section of the public forum, started with one main argument (either religious or secular), which was consequently backed up by an auxiliary argument of the other persuasion. For instance, Czech Catholic bishops, in their epistle of 2002 (document 8), advocated the Czech EU entry in secular, widely accessible terms by claiming that the step would be 'the logical and appropriate culmination of the post-Communist course of our country' (ibid.) and then added that the European integration process was supported by the Pope as well, thus switching to religious argumentation based on ecclesiastical authority. In most cases, however, it was possible to determine which of the two arguments played the main role; the distribution of secular and religious arguments can be seen in Graphs 3 and 4.

Graph 3: Czech informal public sphere



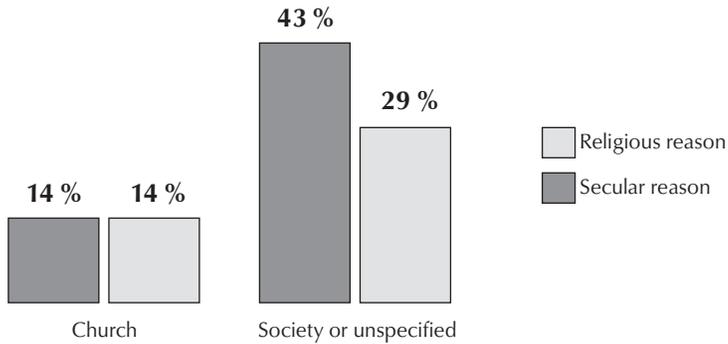
Graph 4: Slovak informal public sphere



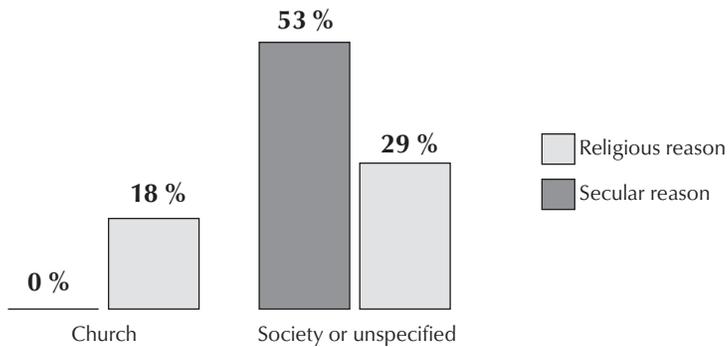
It is evident from these graphical representations that the distribution is roughly the same in both countries. However, differences between the two cases start to arise

if we look at the more specific breakdown of the figure in terms of the target audience. In other words, we were interested in finding out whether religious reasons were used exclusively when addressing church members and secular reasons when speaking to the society in general. Surprisingly, this was not always the case. The result of our analysis is depicted in Graphs 5 and 6.

Graph 5: Distribution according to target audience (Czech republic)



Graph 6: Distribution according to target audience (Slovakia)



It is perhaps not surprising that secular reasoning dominated the church’s approach to the society as a whole. But even here, our preliminary assumption was that given the much more secular nature of the Czech society, the secular argumentation would be more visible in the Czech Catholics’ dialogue with the society than in the Slovak Catholics’ dialogue. The analysis shows, to the contrary, that the share of secular reasoning is even higher in Slovakia than in the Czech Republic. This can probably be attributed to the sharper distinction between the statements targeting the believers and those targeting the society in the case of Slovakia than is the case in the Czech Republic.

This is related to the strikingly distinct ways in which the churches address their members. The Slovak Catholics, in particular the Bishops’ Conference, focus exclusively on religious reasoning when advocating a specific policy – supporting their

claims either by generally referring to Christian values or, more specifically, by drawing attention to the triangle of their tradition, authority (the Pope) and Scripture. The most common way presented Slovakia as the country with the God-given mission to re-Christianise Europe. For instance, Catholic bishops of Slovakia claimed that 'Europe needs a new evangelisation and we should be apostles of Christ's teaching' (document 9). Yet the Czech Catholic bishops, in their analogical messages to Czech Catholics (op. cit. and document 10), adopted very secular arguments, speaking about 'European integration, which is the guarantee of a peaceful and undisturbed future for our continent' (document 10). There is no doubt that Czech bishops also frequently employ religious argumentation, but secular arguments are as present as religious arguments in their messages for Catholic Christians.

If we return to the above mentioned question and try to explain the differences in the formal and informal public spheres in the two countries, then the most probable answer lies in the fact that because the Slovak church does not use secular arguments in its interaction with the believers, Catholics in the Slovak Parliament carry out the translation on their own, and hence, traces of religious argumentation are still palpable in their deliberations, and sometimes an outright return to religious rhetoric can be seen as well. On the other hand, the Czech Christian deputies, who stuck to purely secular arguments, are probably used to this kind of argumentation from their own church and consider the secular arguments valid for Catholics as well – hence the unproblematic exclusive reliance on non-religious reasons in the Czech Parliament.⁷

CONCLUSION

Even though secular reasons clearly dominate the public spheres of both countries, religious reasons take on an important role in the Slovak case while being entirely absent from the Czech Parliament's deliberations. Czech Christian Democratic deputies usually advocate the same position as their Slovak counterparts (seeing the EU in a positive light, favouring the EU entry, calling for the reference to God in the EU constitution), but their references to Christianity always put forward secular arguments for a positive view of the religion. Slovak MPs, on the other hand, sometimes slip into religious reasoning, and even when secular argumentation prevails, the process of translation can be frequently detected in their speeches.

In the informal public sphere, the Catholic Church in both countries uses similar approaches when addressing the society. Surprisingly, in spite of the much higher share of Catholics in the population in Slovakia, secular reasoning is slightly more present in the Slovak case than in the Czech one. Contrariwise, the Slovak church never uses secular reasons internally, while the internal deliberations in the Czech Catholic Church use secular and religious arguments in equal amounts. In other

words, in the Czech case, the translation is happening not only in the interaction with the society at large, but already in the church itself.⁸

We argue that the Czech case partially corresponds to what sociologists call modernisation of religious consciousness (Habermas, 2006: 13). This is extremely important for Habermas: His notion of the postsecular society is based on the claim that both the society and the church are capable of entering into a mutual learning process that leads to internal reflection on both sides. This reflection (as well as the concomitant self-modernisation) puts Habermas at odds with classical liberalism as well as his own earlier works (among others, Habermas, 1975), where religious belief is usually seen as the absolute opposite of the reflexivity of the modern, rational mind.

Hence, the Czech case (characterised by the low level of political influence of the church, a plurality of religious voices, and a high share of non-believers) comes very close to position II in table 1 (i.e. the position of Habermas: no presence of religious reasons in the Parliament, translation going on in the informal public sphere, some – albeit weak – evidence of a reflexive self-modernisation of the church, etc.). The Slovak case, on the other hand, reflects position I (i.e. the position of Rawls: there is a reliance on secular reasons in the Parliament, yet the translation is being carried out in the Parliament too; the church, exactly as Rawls describes it in his analysis of the public forum, does not use secular reasons internally).

Perhaps not surprisingly, with the rise of religiosity, religious reasoning is more present in the formal public sphere. In other words, this seems to indicate the intuitive understanding that position III (Wolterstorff) would be applicable only in such cases where religious reasons are taken as valid by the whole society. Further research would be needed to see whether in (liberal) societies with an even more pronounced influence of religion in the public life than Slovakia (possibly Poland or Ireland), religious reasons indeed become legitimate arguments in the formal public sphere, and what impact this has both on the outcome of these deliberations and on those minorities in the society that oppose the religious discourse.

ENDNOTES

¹ Among the advocates of the secularisation thesis, we could list Bryan Wilson, David Martin, Karel Dobbe-laere, and Steve Bruce. Others, like Peter Berger, have changed sides and while they previously supported the thesis, they are now critical of it. I am indebted to one of the anonymous reviewers for this remark.

² For various criticisms of the secularisation thesis, see the first comprehensive critiques by Shiner (1967) or Glasner (1977). For more recent discussions about the thesis, see, e.g., the contributions in Bruce and, in particular, those by Brown and Finke in the same volume. For an older but pertinent overview of the debates surrounding the secularisation thesis, see Swatos and Christiano (1999).

³ Here, Rawls claims that ‘another feature of public reason is that its limits do not apply to our personal deliberations and reflections about political questions, or to the reasoning about them by members of associations such as churches and universities.’ (Rawls, 1997a: 95).

⁴ Obviously, there are other historical differences between the two countries, including their different status in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, their different processes of industrialisation or urbanisation, etc. I am indebted to one of the anonymous reviewers for drawing my attention to further differences between the two countries.

⁵ There is a number of distinguished scholars who have explored the church-state relation in this region. In particular, I should mention the international project *Aufbruch* (Pastorales Forum, 1997) or the works by Zdeněk Nešpor (see, for instance, Nešpor, 2004).

⁶ In this text we will use this useful shorthand. However, the precise title is the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe.

⁷ Clearly, alternative explanations exist, such as that because the percentage of Catholics (and Christians in general) in the Czech Parliament is lower, their adherence to secular reasoning is higher. Yet this is disputable since Czech Catholics do not play a marginal role in the Parliament and in the Czech political life, often holding very important political positions, such as that of Minister of Foreign Affairs (the Catholic who held this office was a frequent speaker on European integration in the Parliament).

⁸ Yet we should stress here that our corpus is quite limited, so more research would be needed to confirm our findings. This would mean that other topics need to be addressed since we only used all the available documents regarding the church's position on European integration. That is also why we are starting to explore the church's reactions to the war in Iraq.

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