Notes and News / Aus dem philosophichen Leben

The 40th Anniversary of the International Course on the Future of Religion

Inter-University Centre, Dubrovnik, April 25–29, 2016

From April 25th to April 29th 2016 at the Inter-University Centre in Dubrovnik, the 40th international interdisciplinary scientific conference *Future of Religion* jubilee was held under the theme of "The future of religion: the religion of the future?" First-time organized in 1977, it is the second longest-running course at the Inter-University Centre in Dubrovnik, right after the *Philosophy of Science*, and the longest-running manifestation managed by the same director.

As Rudolf J. Siebert wrote in the article "The Critical Theory of Religion in the Inter-University Centre, Dubrovnik, Croatia, 1975–2016", published in his last book *Future of Religion: Creator, Exodus, Son of Man and Kingdom* in co-authorshop with Michael R. Ott (New Delhi: Sanbun Publishers, 2016), in the early 1970s Ivan Supek visited Western Michigan University and invited everyone to visit the Inter-University Centre for Postgraduate Studies in Dubrovnik, which he founded a year earlier. Siebert responded to Ivan's invitation and went to IUC in 1975 to take part in Supek's course "Philosophy of Science", as well as in Branko Bošnjak's course "Phenomenology and Marxism". The idea of establishing a new course was born during the year of Siebert's visit. The Course started in March 1977 (cf. Berta Dragičević, Ørjar Øyen (eds.), *Fragments of Memories of Life and Work at Inter-University Centre Dubrovnik 1971 – 2007*, IUC, Dubrovnik 2009, p. 121). The first two Course co-directors were Rudolf Siebert and Branko Bošnjak, but the latter was afterwards succeeded by Srđan Vrcan, Nikola Skledar, and finally Mislav Kukoč, who remained the co-director to the present day.

Initiating such a course in a formally socialist country might seem surprising, but it would be easier to understand both the cultural and the theoretical reasons for its establishment if we keep in mind the new popularization of certain religious figures (such as Thomas Münzer, who was interesting to both Friedrich Engels and Ernst Bloch), the interest in religion among the theorists of Frankfurt School (notably Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno), the interest in analysing the relationship between religion and political ideologies, and the interest in re-thinking Jesus' idea of the "communism of love". Even the last Korčula Summer School opted for "Marxism and Religion" as its next year's topic. Therefore, it can be said that, at the time, religion became quite interesting and contemporary topic, especially when related to Marxism and the idea of communism. In sense given, it was then decided that the global

political and religious situations and events, and especially their interrelation, are to be discussed at the Course.

Course's philosophical and general theoretical inspiratio was primarily found in the Frankfurt School. A desire to develop critical theory of religion or dialectical religiology out of critical theory of society was the main driving force. However, this did not lead to excluding those who were not close to critical theory. Indeed, the latter dispositions typically made up the majority, and thus attending the Courses were the representatives of the most diverse positions: from positivists to the members of Praxis school of thought from Zagreb, Belgrade and Budapest; from the followers of Max Weber's theory to those who focused on deconstruction, phenomenology and hermeneutics.

It is not easy to provide a detailed account of all the main Course focuses in the last 40 years, but they can at least be listed: firstly, there was the question of antagonism between the religious and the secular, then of the influence of the religious identity of community (either religious or secular) on the Enlightenment, then the relationship between different religious affiliations and (sub)denominations, barbaric tendencies to manipulate religion in reaching its own goals, and finally, inner developments in religions (from their rise to their disappearance). Special questions concerned the political role and the influence of religions. Why is religion trying to reassure its political role? Is it because it knows it is its only hope to stay relevant in the broader society or because it has an inner need to fulfil itself as a political project as well? Furthermore, what is common for contemporary religions and what can their general moral requirements be based on? Are religions still relevant today or are they just pretending to be? How could we save the concept of religion itself in times when no religion can offer a satisfying theodicy? Perhaps Adorno's famous and most wrongly interpreted words on the possibility of poetry after Auschwitz can be paraphrased and expressed in a question: is it barbaric to write theodicy after Auschwitz?

As it was written in the report of the Course held in 1977, this event was "concerned specifically with the problems of the rise and decline of positive religions in the perspective of the general or comparative science of religion or religiology, particularly the philosophy, phenomenology, sociology, psychology, theology and history of religions" (Rudolf Siebert, Branko Bošnjak, "Report of the Course 'The Future of Religion: End or Renewal'", IUC, Dubrovnik 1977). This has remained to be one of the most constant preoccupations of the Course which turned into an important spot of intellectual exchange and cooperation.

During the last 40 years, the *Future of Religion* course had participants from around 20 countries, and from different academic disciplines, from psychology to anthropology, from theology to history, and from sociology to philosophy. In addition, the participants also embodied a wide diversity of religious affiliations, from agnostics and atheists to monotheists and the followers of different forms of secular humanism and enlightenment. It also hosted a number of world-famous scholars, from Jürgen Habermas and Hans Küng to Judith Butler. Author's papers presented at the Course were published in four books, several scientific monographs and international scientific journals, including *Synthesis Philosophica*.

This year's Course included eleven lectures (papers). Expressed in a form of a question, the main focuses of this year's *Future of Religion* course were: what is the "future of religion, and the religion of the future, as well as (…) the possible future of secular enlightenment" (R. J. Siebert)?

The first lecture was "Introduction: 40th Anniversary Book: The Future of Religion and the Religion of the Future", delivered by Rudolf J. Siebert, founder of the Course. Mislav Kukoč, the second co-director of the Course, continued with an appropriate lecture related to the jubilee. As one of the oldest participants (active since 1981), Kukoč presented information on the topics, guests and scopes of the Course in the past 40 years and recalled many memories. Gottfried Künzlen, who also joined the IUC's Future of Religion course in 1981, also spoke about the memories of his experiences in Dubrovnik. Unlike Siebert and Kukoč, Künzlen also presented an overview of the contributions and subjects he covered during the past decades at this Course.

Anita Lunić, the youngest Course participant, presented the results of the research on Max Scheler's phenomenology of religion and its influence on war discourses which the author saw applicable in contemporary post-Yugoslavia societies. The same geographic area was in the focus of Nonka Bogomilova, who recently published a new book on the religion, law and politics in the Balkans in the end of the 20th, and the beginning of the 21st century, as well.

Dinka Marinović Jerolimov and Nikolina Hazdovac Bajić presented the results of their research on the organization of non-religious persons and atheists in Croatia. The relationship between green movements and religion was in the focus of Branko Ančić who conducted a sociological research on the religious conditionality of ecological attitudes. This research was very interesting, and it showed a concrete level of consequences that religious affiliation can have on other aspects of life.

Today's position of religions, and their actual problems were in the focus of Aurelia Margetić and Dustin Byrd. Margetić presented her experiences in working with Christian and Muslim Refugees of War in Germany, both with the ones that arrived recently from Syria, and the ones who arrived long time ago, mostly from the former Yugoslavia countries. She analysed openness towards new refugees, their relationships, reasons for leaving home country, and readiness to accept both other's differences and new cultural framework. On the other hand, Dustin Byrd presented his paper entitled "Sorry Charlie, Gentle Objections to Islamophobia Cartooning" that raised numerous questions about the relationship between religious and cultural freedoms, and the necessity to protect general liberal values within society (which also include questioning religious and other particular identities and ideological or closed discourses).

Finally, Mike Ott and Rudolf J. Siebert gave presentations on the future of religion: its perspectives, possibilities and scopes, with the main focus on the question of the future role of religion or, to put it in other words, why it is still necessary. The answers to this crucial question, of course, differ. But what is important is that in all the discussions, regardless of personal religious affiliations, everyone stayed open towards (the fact and the influence of) religion in contemporary society, as it cannot be simply neglected. Despite the great anniversary and decades of studying, this subject remains more than actual, and this Course again proved itself as a productive meeting place of the representatives of different approaches and different religious affiliations: the place of dialogue.

Anita Lunić