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# **Geography of religion in Slovakia since 1990**

## **1. Introduction**

**G**eography of religion is one of the traditional sub-disciplines of human geography. The interest of geographers in religious issues can be identified already in the works of the ancient Greeks. Many classical scholars had noted the relationship between the geographic environment and religion (Mikoš 1988, p. 51). In the later period of the early Middle Ages, religious issues were analyzed by Arabic geographers and representatives of Celtic monastic schools in Ireland. According to the German geographer, M. Büttner (1976, p. 306), the establishment of “geography of religion” as an independent sub-discipline can be traced as far back as the 16<sup>th</sup> century. As a result of a variety of changes, geography ceased to follow the ideas of old Greek philosophy and transformed itself into a teleologically-oriented discipline. This shift was associated with the Protestant Reformation in Europe, where the Melanchton reform of science was based on the concept of a “close God” in the doctrine of Martin Luther. Geography needed to broaden its cognitive and research interests and initiate a radical change in its approach to learning. The old geography, influenced mainly by the ideas of Ptolemy, was limited to cartographic production. A new set of expectations presumed that geography would now be interested in the exploration of nature and humanity. The new approach would treat the surface of the Earth as a permanent site of God’s activity (Mikos, 1988, p.53). Since the time of these early beginnings, geography of religion has undergone a complex paradigm shift, which has been evaluated by a number of researchers in the field – e.g. Büttner 1976, 1985, Cooper 1992, Deffontaines 1948, Jackowski 2003, Kong 1990, Levine 1986, Matlovič 2001a, Matlovič and Žigrai 2002, Mikos 1988, Rinschede 1999, Sopher 1967 and others.

The purpose of this paper is a brief overview of the development and main directions of research in geography of religion in Slovakia.

## 2. Geography of religion in Slovakia prior to 1989

The development of geography of religion in Slovakia was significantly influenced by general trends in the development of geography as a research discipline. The beginnings of modern geography research in Slovakia reach back to the interwar period, and were connected with the establishment of a geography seminar at Comenius University in Bratislava in 1923. However, interest in religious-geographic issues can be traced back even earlier. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, several schools were established under the supervision of religious institutions such as the Jesuit University in Trnava and Košice and the Evangelical College in Prešov. The work of Jesuit researchers is presented by M. Szent-Iváni in his *Dissertatio paraliipomenica rerum memorabilium Hungariae* including a collection of marvelous pictures and sculptures of the Virgin Mary of Hungary (P. Eszterházy). The *Topographia magni regni Hungariae* of 1718 is ascribed to M. Bonbardi and includes a hagio-topography of Slovakia (Martinka, 1955). A number of valuable religious-geographic facts about Slovak lands may be found in the works of Protestant scholars – e.g. *Notitia Hungariae novae historico-geographica* from 1735–1742 by Matej Bel, and *Geographisch-historisches und Produkten Lexikon von Ungarn* from 1786 by Ján Matej Korabinský.

The foundations of modern Slovak geography were laid by Czech professors coming to study at the Institute of Geography in Bratislava – e.g. Jiří Viktor Daneš (1880–1928), František Štůla (1883–1943), and Jiří Král (1893–1975) (Lauko 2006). The most important person associated with the establishment and institutionalization of geography in Slovakia was Ján Hromádka (1886–1968), who educated the first generation of Slovak geographers such as Štefan Bučko, Štefan Fekete, Ján Hetteš, Ladislav Kvietok, Teodor Lamoš, Michal Lukniš, Matej Papík, Pavol Plesník, Dominik Polakovič, Anton Šíma, Eduard Šimo, and Ján Verešík. The first pioneer of geography of religion in Slovakia was Štefan Fekete, who published a major monographic work, from which only the *Map of spatial differentiation of religions in Slovakia according to population census of 1930* was published as part of a geography monograph titled *General geography of Slovakia („Všeobecný zemepis Slovenska“)* by J. Hromádka (1943). In 1947 a pioneering study of Slovak pilgrimage sites was published by Fekete. Hromádka (1933, 1934, 1949) analyzed the religious characteristics of the inhabitants of Orava, a county of Bratislava and Malacky, in Czechoslovakia. A similar approach was applied by M. Lukniš (1946) in his micro-geographic analysis of eastern Slovak Jakubany. Slovakia became an area of interest to Czech geographers in papers published about the Czechoslovak Republic in general – e.g. J. Korčák (1935). Important geographic issues were also analyzed in papers written by historians, sociologists and ethnographers. This includes B. Matušík (1937) on the situation of religion in Turiec, V. Chaloupecký (1928) on the organization of the Catholic Church in Slovakia, and O.R. Halaga (1947) on the emergence of Greek Catholicism in eastern Slovakia. A number of important issues were also discussed in a sociological analysis of Slovakia by A. Štefánek (1944).

Starting in 1948, efforts to develop geography of religion were interrupted due to the rapid emergence of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia. The religious

affiliation of the inhabitants of Slovakia was noted only in the Population Census of 1950. In 1961, 1970 and 1980 religious affiliation was excluded from the population census. Between 1948 and 1989, religious issues were discussed mainly in non-geographic works, which included government propaganda of an atheist nature.

### 3. Research trends in geography of religion after 1990

The revival of interest in the geography of religious issues could take place only after 1990. The first significant event was the Tenth Congress of the Slovak Geographic Society at SAV, held in Bratislava in 1991. Štefan Očovský presented his paper about the principles of the geographic study of religious issues and outlined a future research program. Consequently there appeared several works reflecting the growing diversity of interests of Slovak geographers. The following themes were covered:

a) theoretical-methodological works, related to the formation of geography of religion and its basic theoretical-methodological questions and research aims: Š. Očovský (1992), R. Matlovič (1993a, 1994, 1997a, 2001a, 2001c, 2004, 2005b), R. Matlovič, F. Žigrai (2002), J. Komorovský (1994), Š. Poláček (1998a). Research by R. Matlovič and F. Žigrai (2002) identified and characterized selected paradigms of geography of religion: teleological, missionary-applied, geo-influential, religious-influential, and analytical-influential (Tab. 1).

Another original feature of this approach is the treatment of sanctification as a transformation process acting in post-communist cities (Matlovič 2000b). It is a process that takes place within the functional intra-urban structure. In the narrow sense of the word, it is an expansion of sacred space at the expense of secular space, with sacred space understood as space dedicated to sacred and ritual purposes. In the broader sense of the word, sanctification represents an expansion

Tab. 1. Overview of paradigms in the geography of religion

Paradigm	Major work and author	Period	Basic characteristics
Christian-theological (teleological)	<i>De dimensione Terrae</i> , Peucer	1556	research of the Earth's surface as a space of God's permanent activity
missionary-applied	<i>Systema geographicum</i> , Keckerman	1616	research on religion from the perspective of the needs of missionary activities and Christianity diffusion
geo-influential	<i>Ideen über religiöse Geographie</i> , Kasche	1795	research on the influence of the geographic environment on religions
religious-influential	<i>Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie</i> , Weber	1921	research on the influence of religion on the geographic environment
analytical-influential	<i>Geography of Religion</i> , Sopher	1967	research on the mutual influence of the geographic environment and religion

Source: Matlovič, Žigrai 2002.

of space intended specifically for religious purposes (churches, chapels, monasteries, administrative buildings of churches, seminaries, church supply shops) (Matlovič 2000b). R. Matlovič (2001a) is the author of the first Slovak university-level textbook titled *Geography of religions – an overview of the issue* (*Geografia religii – náčrt problematiky*). The book deals with the development of geography of religion as a scientific discipline. It also addresses the conceptualization of the term “religion”, structure and classification of religious systems, origin of religions, an overview of generic state religions, universal and syncretic religions, relations between religious systems and individual components of the geographic environment, a regional overview of religious systems in selected macro-regions of the world, and spatial differentiation of religions in Slovakia.

b) empirical research designed to analyze religiousness, religious identity and religious structure of the population in Slovakia and other countries, changes in various temporal and spatial contexts as well as factors that drive these changes: J. Žudel (1991), Š. Očovský (1993, 1996), A. Gajdarová, J. Mládek (1993), R. Matlovič (1993 b, 1996b, 1997b, 2000a, 2001d, 2002, 2005a, 2007), J. Brezák (1996), R. Matlovič, R. Ištók (1998), K. Pastor (1994a), F. Podhorský (1996, 1997, 1998, 1999). M. Moravčíková, M. Cipár (1998), J. Bunčák (2001), V. Krivý (2001), J. Majo (2009), J. Majo, D. Kusendová (2007), G. Nováková (2009). The following publications attempt to identify types of regions based on religious diversity: A. Ritomský (1993b), P. Mariot (1995), Š. Poláčik (1996, 1998b), F. Podhorský (2000).

c) empirical research designed to analyze the geographic organization of selected churches: R. Matlovič (1995a, 1995b, 1996a, 1998), V. Kandráčová (1996), K. Ivanička (1999), V. Ira, J. Szóllós (2000).

d) empirical research on religious pilgrimages, religious tourism and religious infrastructure: M. Čičo (1992), P. Čuka (1998), J. Zubříková (1999), R. Matlovič (2001b, 2005c), A. Dubcová, A. Krogman (2009), A. Krogmann (2007a, 2007b, 2009a, 2009b)

e) research on relationships between religious issues and other elements of the geographic environment a study by: V. Ira (1996) on the relationship between the ethnic and religious structure of society and the perception of tensions; a study by R. Matlovič (2000b) on sanctification as a transformation process affecting urban environments in the last decade; a study by R. Ištók and R. Matlovič (1993) on the influence of religion on political and geographic structures; a study by J. Szóllós (1998b) on the Christian aspects of global environmental problems; a study by M. Moravčíková and M. Cipár (2000) on the relationship between religiousness and social and pathological phenomena in selected regions of Slovakia; a study by R. Ištók and R. Matlovič (2004) on religious nationalism amidst globalization,

f) cartographic works comprising several aspects of religious issues. This category includes atlas data on the spatial aspects of religious issues in Slovakia: *Atlas of churches, religious societies and religiousness in Slovakia* (*Atlas cirkví,*

*náboženských spoločností a religiozity Slovenska*) produced by Š. Poláčik (2000); 33 specialists, among them six geographers (Š. Poláčik, V. Ira, P. Korec, D. Kusendová, R. Matlovič and J. Szöllös), participated in the creation of *the Atlas of the Catholic Church in Slovakia (Atlas Katolíckej cirkvi na Slovensku)* (Š. Poláčik and V. Judák 2005). Several maps covering religious issues are also included in *the Atlas of Slovak Society (Atlas obyvateľstva Slovenska)* (Mládek et al., 2006). Currently, the team of D. Kusendová, J. Majo, D. Kravjanská, D. Gurňák, D.P. Daniel, M. Benža, M. Sokolová, E. Kowalská, M. Damankoš, M. Kovačka and I. Zmeták are working on *the Historical Atlas of the Protestant Church in Slovakia (Historický atlas Evanjelickej cirkvi a.v. na Slovensku)*.

### 3. Institutional background of geography of religion in Slovakia

Geography of religion does not have a significant institutional background in Slovakia at this point in time. As a formal field of study, it was included in Slovak geography programs at the university level in 1998 at the Department of Geography and Regional Development at the Faculty of Humanities and Natural Sciences at the University of Prešov in Prešov thanks to R. Matlovič. Its creation was assisted by a program called *Cursus Inovati*, which was supported by the Jan Hus Educational Foundation. Geography of religion was later included in many others geography programs at other Slovak universities such as Comenius University in Bratislava, Catholic University in Ružomberok, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, and Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. Various course names have been used including “Geography of Religion” and “Religious Geography”. The first Slovak conference dedicated to this issue was an international conference at Prešov University in 2009 called *Challenges for the Geography of Religion in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The conference was a follow-up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Geographic Congress EUGEO 2009 held in Bratislava and organized by the Slovak Geographic Society at SAV. Research materials presented at the conference were published in a periodical called *Acta Facultatis Studiorum Humanitatis et Naturae Universitatis Presoviensis, Folia Geographica* No. 15.

Geography of religion has also developed as part of Religious Studies programs. The first Slovak program in religious studies – after 1989 – was established by Prof. Ján Komorovský at the Faculty of Arts at Comenius University in Bratislava. The religious studies program was first found at the Department of Ethnology, and since 2003, has been at the Department of Comparative Religious Studies. Religious studies programs have also been developed at the Faculty of Greek Catholic Theology at Prešov University in Prešov (Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies) and at the Faculty of Arts at Catholic University in Ružomberok (Department of Religious Studies and Religious Education). In 1992, the Slovak Society for the Study of Religions was established at SAV. Research institutions that study religion

and churches are represented by the Center for Excellence in Social-historical and Cultural-historical Research at Prešov University in Prešov (established in 2010) and the Institute for State-Church Relations in Bratislava (established in 1997).

## 4. Conclusions

Geography of religion has experienced a relatively complicated development process in Slovakia. Following a promising start during the interwar period, its development was interrupted from 1948 to 1989. New programs came into being after 1989. The interest of the younger generation in the geographic analysis of religious issues is growing. The result of this is a newly emerging diversity of research directions and the creation of geography of religion programs at other universities in Slovakia.

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