

From the author

The title of these reflections may be interpreted by believers as an intellectual provocation, or perhaps even an attempt to insult their religious feelings and convictions. I had no and have no such intentions. Their general purpose is to show and demonstrate that in reflections over religion and religiosity there have been attempts both at bringing the world of the *profane* closer to that of the *sacred*, and at bringing the world of the *sacred* closer to the *profane*. No less significant is that both the former and the latter are interesting and cognitively inspiring. The former have as a rule occurred among the faithful, and among those desiring to win new followers over to their faith. The latter on the other hand are mainly seen among those in some way holding different types of belief and religious practice at a distance, or at least striving not to link the matter of their conscience with the issue of how they think, talk and write about religions. It goes without saying that in both one case and the other, attitudes and convictions of such a nature have emerged that it is frequently difficult to say whether we are dealing with a religious or a supra-religious point of view. There have also been incidents (and far from rare) of those speaking out in regard to religion and religiosity presenting a religious point of view in one issue, and a non-religious point of view in another. In each case it had a major impact on the character of the generalisations and appraisals formulated.

I refer in my reflections to those traditions of research in the study of religion that were initiated by Max Weber. This does not mean, naturally, that I consider all of his generalisations and appraisals totally relevant. However, some of them at least are of interest to me, and provide inspiration for my research into religion and religiosity. What I recognise as particularly significant is Weber's treatment of different religions and different forms of religiosity as the kind of product of human activity which, firstly, was and is the collective product of numerous different social groups, that

secondly it has adopted significantly different forms in different places and at different times, and thirdly that in western culture at least the leitmotif of this process was and continues to be the aspiration to achieve as great a rationality as possible.

For a dozen or so centuries, this aspiration was linked to science and scientificity, understood in its different ways. However, up until the modern era, meaning the early years of the 17th century, one did not see radical divergences between its religious and non-religious grasp such that one could say their paths radically differed or took different directions. Of course there were signals earlier on, that thinking about science and practising it without concern for religious authorities could lead to these paths diverging, and on occasion that is what happened. To serve solely as an example I shall mention here the dispute—a resounding affair in the Middle Ages—between Pierre Abelard, who taught at what was later to become the Sorbonne, and the theologians of the day, or the trial of Galileo that reverberated in the first decades of the 17th century and ended with the condemnation of heliocentric views by the Church authorities and judicial institutions. However, the following century saw the appearance in various countries of Europe of philosophers and scholars who became engaged in dispute with their religious milieu not so much through an unfortunate coincidence as of their own accord—if one may thus describe their search for opportunities for such confrontations, and their attempts at demonstrating not only that the “train” bearing the sign *science*, and that bearing the sign *religion and religiosity*, were not only two different “trains”, but also that essentially they were heading in different directions—the former in the direction of knowledge, the latter towards the kind of faith that in general did not have and could not have anything in common with genuine knowledge. They contributed not only to at least some of the existing scientific disciplines being set free of the control of various Churches, but also to the appearance and practice of religious studies as a discipline independent of those beliefs that are based on revelations or theological figures of authority. Their heir, to some degree (but only to some degree), was Max Weber.

He conducted research not only in regard to various religions, but also regarding other spheres of life and social coexistence. He treated religions and the different forms of religiosity as an important but not only important sphere of that life. From the point of view of this scholar, the creators of this life are diverse social groups, while their faith in God or in gods could

have been and frequently was either helpful in this or constituted a major obstacle on the path to achieving their goals in life, and as a rule proved helpful up until a certain moment, while later it only constituted the “ballast” of the past. However, in such a perception and portrayal of religion, Weber was not sympathising with those who perceived it as some kind of “stumbling block” on mankind’s road towards an ever brighter future. On the contrary, he frequently criticised such people for the one-sidedness of their opinions and judgments and placed them—as, for example, was the case with the intellectuals of the Enlightenment—in the group of those socially excluded, and even (through his intellectualistic rationalism) excluding themselves from their social environment (not sharing their faith in it being only reason that could lead to a true salvation for mankind).

The inspiration I have drawn from Weberian thought on religion and religiosity does not signify an uncritical approach to this scholar’s achievements. Besides, certain continuators of Weber’s views have indicated certain simplifications or even mistaken interpretations and portrayals of the transformation and modernisation of the culture of the western world, if only to mention as examples Peter L. Berger, Thomas Luckmann or Niklas Luhman. I also refer to their conclusions and suggestions—such as the need for treating secularisation processes not only as displacing various Churches from their hitherto social positions, but also the entanglement of this process in the resolving of various issues related to worldview, customs, language, and many other things as well. This grasp of the processes of transformation and modernisation, broader than that seen with Weber, is present inter alia in those sections of my deliberations in which the object of analysis is the issue of means of expression and the communication of religious content. These matters have of course been tackled since long ago both by the defenders of religion and by its adversaries. Yet in no other period were they as significant as they are today—not even so much because it often was and is difficult for the defenders and opponents of religion to come to an agreement, as because the means of communicating to the masses, the mass media, have gained such broad recognition and application. This embraces means of communication that transcend traditional language barriers and are, as a broad front, entering the world of the *sacred* that the churches were and are. I have in mind here not only television, or the Internet, but also such means of communication as, for example, Facebook. Today not only ordinary followers use such media, but so too do those offering them their spiritual service—and needless

to say not only in such traditional locations for this as churches, but also in places frequently difficult to locate (and there is not even any need to locate them). Is this testimony to the world of the *sacred* moving closer to the world of the *profane*, or only the former coming to grips with modern technology and devices for communication? Naturally one can have various opinions on this matter. But there is certainly a certain coming to grips occurring here.

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Polish language versions of the individual sections of this book were printed between 2010 and 2017 in “Nauka. Kwartalnik PAN” and „Przegląd Religioznawczy”.