

Guest Editorial

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In the year 2000, eight cities were proclaimed European centres of culture, thereby becoming centres of intense integrative cultural activities. Krakow in Poland was the only city then outside of the European Union which participated in this programme. The slogan of the programme allotted to Krakow was ‘spirituality’.

The reasons for the popularity of the term ‘spirituality’ in the contemporary arts and sciences are very complex. The notion of religion is associated with the experience of sacrum related by an institution, while spirituality in our times describes the sphere of human experiences ‘beyond the Church’. Therefore, this notion reflects the process of the privatisation of religion and the individuation of religious outlooks. Religious authority moves into the centre of man and the idea of the God-Man, described by Carl Gustav Jung one hundred years ago, is an expression of it.

Sociologists of religion such as Thomas Luckmann or Peter Berger try to describe in their works the process of the “shrinking of transcendence” and “expanding of religion” on those areas of social life and culture with which the religious experience was not associated or from which it was even separated. Such sacralisation means the methods and techniques of psychotherapeutics, artistic, political or even economic activities cannot be described on the same basis as before. In any case, contemporary humankind wants to participate in ‘what is spiritual’ and still seeks deeper meaning in life. Sacrum was not driven away from the world, but has changed its form radically to respond to questions of ‘ultimate care’.

These are (in our opinion) the reasons for the staggering career of the word ‘spirituality’, which in traditional scientific descriptions just meant the ‘inner life’, sometimes with a very advanced character (Gustave Thils). In Karol Górski’s work (1986), spirituality is only perceived in the practices of some monastic groups, such as the Jesuits or Franciscans. Today, very general definitions of this notion sometimes appear, such as Robert Emmons’s understanding of spirituality as “the personal expression of the ultimate care” (Socha 2003). Emmons studied those human activities where the need for “ultimate care” was satisfied. However, these activities were not always religious.

This special issue of JASANAS presents papers which undertake an analysis of notion of spirituality. The collected papers are drawn from the conference “Development of the New Spirituality in Monocultural and Pluralistic Societies”, held by the AGH University of Science and Technology and the Jagiellonian University on 9th to 11th June 2006 in Krakow. Alongside the papers we present

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reviews of several of what we consider to be the most important publications which take into consideration the specificity of the New Spirituality in Polish society in the last ten years.

The papers presented here can be placed thematically into three main problems of the phenomena of New Age. Dorota Hall, Aleš Črnič, and Franz Höllinger publish results of empirical research on the presence and character of New Age in the different areas of the political and social life of European societies (Polish, Slovenian and Austrian). Papers by Stanisław Burdziej and Krzysztof Olechnicki address the issue of the reaction of individuals, groups and religious institutions to New Age movements in contemporary culture. Enzo Pace and Tadeusz Doktor write about theoretical aspects and the methodology of research on New Spirituality in the social sciences.

References

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