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In today's world, the contacts and relations between peoples from different ethnic and religious communities are increasing. This is the context in which research into the religious factor in social development has become more and more important. Traditionally, the study of the connections and dependencies between religion and the geographical environment has created one of the main sub-discipline areas of cultural geography. In the last few decades the spatial aspects of religion have also attracted the attention of scholars in other scientific disciplines.

At the beginning of 2011 the Faculty of Geography at the University of Belgrade published in Serbian language (Cyrillic) a new scientific monograph entitled *Geografija religija* (Geography of Religions). The author of that book is Mirko Grčić, a professor of human geography. In this work, which is the result of long-term research, the author presents a solid scientific background in the fields of human and physical geography, theology, history and philosophy. It is an interdisciplinary study which applies a complex set of disparate scientific approaches – genetic, geographical and comparative. According to the author, the subject of the geography of religion is “a study of genesis and evolution of religious communities in geographical space”. One of the main goals of the geography of religions is to study the influence of

geographical factors on the processes of the genesis and diffusion of religions in different countries and regions of the world. On the whole, the monograph pays special attention to the importance of sacred places – which is the subject of sacred geography. The latter's chief difference from the geography of religions is that it does not focus upon ‘religion in space’, but rather ‘space in religion’ (p. 52).

The first thing that is noticeable for the reader is that in contrast to other authors, Mirko Grčić does not analyse religions, civilizations and cultures from the intellectual perspective of the of the nation or religious community to which he belongs. He demonstrates a pluralistic approach when assessing and comparing the outlooks on different religions. The author concludes that in order to live in a humane way, our contemporary society should exclude anthropocentrism and selfishness, not only in relation to other people, but also towards nature. Nowadays this trend in science is regarded as synonymous with the idea of sustainable development (p. 19).

The book is divided into 15 chapters. In the first three, the author deals with some important philosophical and theoretical notions, questions and dilemmas connected with science and religious views of the world. They are: “Religion as an element and factor of culture”, “Religion and

philosophical view of the world”, and “The geographical environment and religion”. The author considers the relationships between man and nature, between science and religion, between positive knowledge, intuition and superstition, as well as between religion and political ideology. Special attention is paid to one of the universal and eternal questions of religious philosophy and the geographical theory of religions, namely the relationship between the geographical environment and religious beliefs. In that discourse, the author defends the thesis that it is impossible to exclude the geographical factor when explaining the genesis and evolution of the world’s religions, in contrast to the view that is often suggested in the social sciences. As the author states, the ‘Kingdom of God’ is not a particular locality, but all great religions have their sacred spaces, holy places to which worshippers turn towards when they pray (p. 447).

Mirko Grčić’s outlook becomes apparent in the way he considers the influence that nature has on the formation of human conceptions about the law of life, about the regularities of space, time structure and evolution, and also the importance of nature as a barrier to the spread of beliefs or their merger. The author considers the objective historical circumstances due to which all world religions originated on the Eurasian mainland and the frontier zone. The geographical features of this area are emphasized. These are the contrasts of the land and sea, mountains and lowlands, dry and humid climates, forests and deserts, agriculture and animal husbandry. This zone witnessed a significant evolution in human history, such as the emergence of a rational human being, the beginnings of agriculture, the rise of agrarian civilization and the establishment of monotheism.

The fourth chapter, “Polytheism of ancient civilizations”, presents the genesis, evolution and contemporary distribution of shamanism, the religions of ancient river agrarian civilizations (China, Egypt) and the ancient Mediterranean civilizations (Greek and Roman). This chapter also deals with the geographical peculiarities of the pagan religions, especially with the religious systems of people who lived in the forested areas of Europe – the Celts and the old Slavs.

The fifth chapter, “Dualistic religions of the Middle East”, contains an analysis of Zoroastrianism and some related religions such as Zuvranism, Masdaism, Jesidism, Mandeism. The great histori-

cal impact of Zoroastrianism on the East (Aryan Vedic cults) and the West (Avramic) religions is also considered.

The sixth chapter is entitled “Monotheism in the country of Cannan”. It deals with the geographical and historical context of the genesis of monotheism in the biblical land of Cannan, today’s Palestine. The considerations of the different geographical aspects of religions are amply supported by field research in the Holy Land in the Near East. Its geographical position at the crossroads of three continents and the factors of the geographical environment which influenced the evolution of monotheistic religions are analysed. The cause of the evolution of religion from polytheism to monotheism is detected in the drastic changes in the environment, and the natural contrasts and different cultural paradigms of agriculture and livestock culture (pp. 97-134).

The next parts of the book are devoted to profound historico-geographical and anthropological analyses of the major religions in the contemporary world. The seventh chapter is entitled “Christianity – Christ’s way of salvation”; the eighth, “Islam – Muhammad’s way of salvation”; the ninth, “Hinduism – a way of sacred world”; the tenth, “Buddhism – the way to nirvana”; the eleventh, “Jainism – a way of self-denial”; the twelfth, “Sikhism – the way of gurus”; the thirteenth, “Chinese religions – look at the world as a system”; the fourteenth, “Shinto – a lot of trails on a holy road”. In the above-mentioned chapters the author elaborates on numerous empirical facts about the most widespread religions and their major divisions. They consist of a comprehensive review of the geography of religions in the world. They also include presentations and analyses of the sacred places of the world that are of regional and local importance, the pilgrims’ itineraries, religious tourism, the influence of natural conditions on the formation of religious practices and doctrines. These analytical chapters present in a comprehensive way the gods, cults, dogmas, rituals, holy books, sacred places, institutional organisations, and the clergy of each religion. Apart from that, the author offers his own profound geographical interpretation on the discussed questions, taking account of the connection between the geographical environment and the spiritual sphere. For instance, he provides comparative analyses of Christianity, the Islam and the Eastern religious systems. While in the Western way of thinking, great moral impor-

tance is given to the struggle of man against his physical environment and his victory over nature is seen as a key to cultural progress, the way of thinking in Hinduism is quite the opposite. In this aspect such a religious system does not negate the conditions of the natural environment. In Hinduism the social rules only continue the laws of nature. The doctrine of fate, which is disposed to degeneration and fatalism, is in reality the connection between the moral and natural laws (pp. 268-273).

The author pays attention to the importance of new religious movements and to their social and political influences in different societies. They are presented in chapter fifteen entitled "Non-traditional religions". The chapter includes consideration of religious peculiarities and the spatial spread of new cults, religions, and sects, called 'non-traditional religions', 'neo-religions' or 'religions of the New Century'. Some of them are analysed: for example, Bahai's religion, Adventism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Tenrism, Unification Church, Krishnaism, Integral yoga, the Movement of Unity.

The *Geography of Religions* includes all the elements of a classical geographic monograph such as: the constructive synthesis of knowledge about the dependencies between man, nature and society; thoughts about the subject on different spatial scales - from the global to those of the national and local. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of the monograph, *Geography of Religions*, the book will be of interest not only for specialists in cultural and, generally, human geography, but also for historians, anthropologists and sociologists.

An additional asset of the monograph is the glossary prepared by the author that presents the most important notions connected with the essence of different religious systems and cults. It is useful not only for beginners who study the geography of religions, but also for readers who are scientifically well-versed in such a complex field of knowledge. The glossary contains almost 300 notions, on pages 453-468. Furthermore, the book includes 30 maps and 20 selected pictures. The coloured thematic maps are helpful for the study of the spatial location of presented phenomena and the peculiarities of the historical and contemporary geography of world, national and ethnic religions, their temples and sacred places, and the historical routes of their territorial spread. The list of references contains more than 200 posi-

tions closely related to the subject. Between them are titles not only in Serbian and Croatian, but also in Russian, Polish, Bulgarian, English, German, Danish, French and other languages.

The value of Grčić's book is that it analyses the current cultural and social problems of civilization in the light of more or less known religious concepts and doctrines, which the author critically discusses. It presents systematically and profoundly the spatial regularities in the rise of great religions and their historical evolution. The book also considers the influence of religious concepts on the emergence and development of political ideologies and movements in Western and Eastern societies. The *Geography of Religions* can be evaluated highly because in contemporary geography it is rare that a single author attempts such comprehensive research on any global and multi-dimensional problem, which is not easy to comprehend and explain in its scientific and philosophical entirety.

To sum up, Mirko Grčić's new monograph *Geography of Religions* is remarkable for its theoretical and empirical achievements, its clear and logically sound structure, its comprehensive narration, and its high theoretical level of geographical synthesis of complex phenomena and notions. Taking into account all the above-mentioned considerations, it can be concluded that the presented book will become one of the most important self-contained works in the contemporary literature on the geography of religion and cultural geography, not just in Serbia but also internationally as well.

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