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András Máté-Tóth

University of Szeged (Hungary)

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EUROPE WITH(OUT) A HEART AND A SOUL?

By **András Máté-Tóth**

Máté-Tóth is professor for religious studies at the University of Szeged, Hungary. matetoth@rel.u-szeged.hu He is also an Advisory Editor of and former contributor to OPREE.

What Kind of Soul are You?

"You don't know what kind of spirit you are," Jesus said to his disciples, James and John, as they wanted to condemn a Samaritan village because it didn't want to receive him (Luke 9:55). I would like to start my article by transforming Jesus' statement and by using it for Europe: "Europe – Jesus could say today – You don't know of what kind of spirit you are." But Europe has many answers to Jesus' statement. Europe is not without a soul, it was never an empty body and it is not one today.¹

Different observers of the deep transformation in Europe after WWII and after 1968 argue that the main changes in Europe's spirit show a direction from materialism to post-materialism (Inglehadt), from Christianity to post-Christianity (Ch. Taylor), from a clear and harmonious identity to an unclear and disharmonious one (Z. Baumann), and from a cultural symphony to a cultural cacophony. Changes and transformations in Europe's 20th and 21st centuries are deep and bring tremors and shock to both the common people and to the representatives of politics, culture, and science. Perhaps Europe was never harmonious, and perhaps the golden age of Europe is only a projection of our neurotic age today. Perhaps globalization and the overall access to the internet trigger the feeling in people today that there is no more stability and security in the entire world. All people have the chance to observe that everything is in motion, but the directions are unclear. Everybody shares

¹ Paper given in Utrecht, Netherlands, January 21, 2019. My participation was supported by the Stichting Communicantes, Netherlands.

statements, but there is no norm and canon to evaluate the truth and validity of the billions of positions. Perhaps an adequate approach to Europe should be to embrace that the paradigmatic change is the loss of any kind of orientation. Yesterday one could say we are moving from this point to that, from A to B. But today, we can no longer be sure what A means and what B means. The world of Europe changed and not in the direction of its peregrination. It lost its only map and found an innumerable number of different maps. This is, in my view, the fundamental spiritual status of Europe, and therefore the two main approaches to this status can either be the acceptance or the rejection of the loss of secure orientation. So, back to Jesus' statement, "You don't know of what kind of spirit you are," Europe can answer, "yes, Lord, we are too many spirits."

In the framework of the lost orientation or the confusing plurality, I am trying to concentrate on recent Central and Eastern Europe (hereafter CEE). First, I offer for discussion a social anamnesis of the collective consciousness of CEE (the *wounded collective identity*), and second, a grounded fantasy concerning the chances of Christianity (*miser cordia passionis*).

Woundedness as an Appropriate Approach

In my framework, designated by the term 'woundedness,' I attempt to set my starting point of the analysis in the regional memory of pain, tragedies, insecurities, and fears transmitted by various societal actors. My main argument is that besides the relevant and essential approaches to CEE from the points of view of the economy, history, social history, political science, and global studies, it is also necessary to draw an analytical observation regarding the spiritual /emotional dimension. By doing so there is, on the one hand, always a danger of becoming a part of the very neuroticized political discourse and a danger of giving up the necessary methodological distance from the emotional waves. But, on the other hand,

neglecting the dimension of woundedness would exclude one of the most important impact factors in the region.

Wounds

When the memory of collective wounds is to be considered as the focus of the collective identity of the region, then the most appropriate research question regarding religion can only be: What kind of function does religion play in societies in relation to the wounded identity? Path dependency, in this framework, does not mean the differences in the transformation in CEE in the light of the values of modernity of Western European societal development. The basic issue is, accordingly, not how delayed modernity in CEE is compared to the West (as Bibó asked), but how social and cultural characteristics mirror the wounded collective identity.

Collective identity is the basic self-interpretation of a given group or society, it contains different elements of consciousness, partly stable and partly changing in a dynamic harmony, which makes it possible for individuals to belong to this common orientation and for the group to have a “we-consciousness.” Wounded collective identity is characterized by a definitive motif of the memory of a special set of indirect experienced collective traumas. What I claim is that CEE is uniquely characterized by a special common set of directly and indirectly experienced traumas, which is the leitmotif for its collective identity. Five main wounds can be differentiated in the center of the collective memory of the region—although with different combinations and accents, they all are present in every society of the region, making the region unique among other regions of Europe or of the world.

Lack of national state autonomy and sovereignty due to occupations by three big hegemonies

The in-between geopolitical and geocultural position of the entire region prohibited for 100 to 400 years for the building and/or rebuilding of sovereign national states. Mainly beginning with the historical period of the rise of modern nationalism, among every major ethnicity arose an irresistible desire for a sovereign national state, which was fulfilled in some cases only after 1991 (the Baltic states), 1994 (the Balkan states) and 2008 (Kosovo).

Forced mobility

Forced mobility of ethnic minorities (ethnic cleansing, deportation; Jarausch 2016) and forced status mobility, i.e., a forced mobility between social strata and career paths according to the loyalty to the new regime.

Prohibition of exercising human rights, especially of ethnic minority rights

One of the main consequences of the lack of state sovereignty and of the looser overlap of the cultural/ethnic and nation state borders is the overall minority status of larger populations in the region. Because of the main logic of ethnicity-based national states and the prohibition of the exercise of ethnic minority rights, the public and official use of the ethnic language was logical but of negative consequence for the basic situation.

Persecution of religion, churches and dissidents

In the period of state supported religion (mainly the Christian religion), non-Christian and small Christian denominations were not recognized and/or were persecuted. This was not only due to the theological logic of the right religion, but also due to the strong connection between the state and the dominant religion and churches. In the long period of communist rule, main religions and the dominant churches—first the Roman Catholic Church, because of

the church center in the Vatican, a capitalist country—were considered enemies and were persecuted, not uncommonly, in a brutal and violent way. Every perspective and institution which did not share the ideology and the goals of the communist rulers were perceived as an opposing power and as dissidents in the same way as people of religious conviction.

Genocides and other mass killings

First, early in the 20th century the communist state caused millions of deaths, and so did the National Socialist dictatorship. More recently, 40 years after the Holocaust, the regular and irregular forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the region around it engaged in genocidal activities. Totalitarian states are referred to by Rudolph J. Rummel as “mortacracies” and “megamurderers.” Geographically, genocides and other mass killings occur with a higher likelihood in CEE than elsewhere in Europe.

After the list of the main categories of the wounds, I would like to make only one additional remark to highlight the interpretative relevance of this framework. Michael Minkenberg in his new book from 2017 wrote about the radical right movements in Central and Eastern Europe, and he concluded that the clear difference between the radical right in the West and in the East can be explained exactly by taking into consideration the impact of these wounds. Minkenberg wrote referring to Brubaker:

Many post-socialist nations could be characterized by a “triadic” configuration of nations between nationalizing states, the existence of national minorities within the new states, and the existence of “external homelands.” It is in this arena where ongoing efforts of nation-building tend to override other issues; they, more than other factors, help explain the mobilization of the radical right.²

² Michael Minkenberg, *The Radical Right in Eastern Europe: Democracy Under Siege?* (Palgrave pivot. New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). 145-46.

The Soul We are in CEE: Collective Borderline Syndrome

CEE can be understood as a wounded region. Historical wounds are still present in the recent public debates through memory politics, and they play a crucial role in rebuilding or establishing societal and state identity. National sentiments, memorials for historical heroes, state budgets supporting national holidays, enforcing historical matters in public school books, and many other phenomena in CEE societies are signs of societal identity building. Nationalism in CEE, for instance, is what I understand as an effective answer to the wounded and consequently unstable collective identity. State representatives and public intellectuals really have no other alternatives to offer a common platform for the population to motivate them in a time of the deep crises of transformation. They use the traumas and wounds to establish the collective identity and as a tool for their struggle for hegemony.

The chosen traumas seemed at that moment to have happened just a short time ago. They are defined as transgenerationally transmitted painful events from the past that a society is not able to mourn and work through. The chosen traumas served as a fuel for actual conflicts and strengthened cohesion in conflicting groups. Old animosities got alive and had to be dealt with again.³

To sum up, we can respond to Jesus' statement from the point of the contemporary CEE: the wounded collective identity, the memory of our historical wounds is what we are. Our behavior, condemning all provocations and dangers from outside, is a consequence of this kind of spirit. The fundamental characteristic of the region is this woundedness, and all general markers of the region as populist, xenophobic, nationalist, backward, corrupt, etc., are to be understood from this perspective of woundedness. Further, the intellectual and Christian effort to give a response to the statement originates from the wounds of the region and should take these wounds into account and, therefore, should be of a healing character.

³ Boris Droždek, "How do we salve our wounds? Intercultural perspectives on individual and collective strategies of making peace with own past." *Traumatology* 16, no. 4 (2010): 5–16. 6.

Challenge for a Public Theology

In the context of the wounded collective identity, the original Christian perspectives concerning the wounds of Jesus Christ and the wounds of the society are relevant. The center of the Christian religion and theology remains with Jesus Christ as the savior, and with the Hebrew term Messiah. The statement concerning the identity of Jesus with Christ, demonstrated by the story about the wounds of the resurrected Jesus, played an important role during the very hard Christological discussions in the patristic time of the first millennium.

In the first centuries of Christian theology, in the patristic period, there were several hotly discussed debates concerning a possible harmonization between the deity and the humanity of the Savior. The crucial role played in discussions was the question of suffering. Some schools held that it is impossible for a God to suffer, therefore, suffering can belong only to Jesus and cannot any longer belong to the resurrected Christ. In contrast with Docetism, the interpretation of this is the very relevant scene in which the resurrected Christ shows his wounds to Doubting Thomas, or, more specifically, the skeptic.

The wounds were also often used against Docetism to argue for the real and physical body and suffering of Christ. But in a broader sense, it has served as evidence for the very Christian logic that suffering is a meaningful act from which appears life and happiness. The famous Christian slogan "*semen est sanguis Christianorum*" passed down by Tertullian⁴ demonstrates one of the core elements of Christian teaching and faith, which tries to transform the negative experience of suffering to a positive spiritual source and power. Christ is believed in as the sacrificed winner who has broken up the evidence whereupon pain and death were negative ends of human life. Christianity understands Christ's death and resurrection as a new perspective for thinking and acting. Coherence between suffering and

Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 50, 14.

chance understood in that Christian paradigm offer a possible way to interpret experiences of suffering, not only on the individual level, but also on the societal.

I argue to apply this special approach in order to arrive at an appropriate understanding of the contemporary discourse about CEE. My very short thesis could be formulated as follows: based on historical wounds, a stable identity can arise in the societies of CEE. As the woundedness of the region remains in the center of the regional understanding, so the identity of Jesus Christ remains in the very center of Christian identity; he is wounded and resurrected.

NOT a Vendetta

Vendetta is a violent answer to wounds suffered through afflicted attacks on national feelings of pride. Public remembrance and the politics of mourning can take two directions. The first can be called a vendetta if the real goal of politics is to motivate hate and revenge in the interest of securing social identity in a shared feeling of being wounded and having justification for revenge. This logic of vendetta focuses only on wounds and rejects the chance of a future.

NOT Amnesia

Another perspective for dealing with the wounded past by breaking the perpetual chain of violence is to neglect the historical dimension in public discourses. This kind of public strategy is the opposite of what is called *memoria passionis* (Johann Baptist Metz), and is nevertheless a meaningful aim to not deal with the past but to concentrate on the future. The past is declared in this option as pure nostalgia resulting in less interest in contemporary tasks and challenges. There is something like fear from the sentiments and uncontainable emotions which generally cause only endless discussions and conflicts without any constructive

solutions for recent issues. This logic of amnesia focuses only on the future opportunities and ignores the wounds.

BUT Misericordia

The third way, which can be named rightly as a Christian one, has a definitely different aim in memory politics. Not vendetta and not amnesia, but misericordia. The *longue durée* desire for a stable and secure identity is common in the societies of the entire region. To build up and to strengthen the common identity, it is necessary to accept the woundedness as a common fate of the region, whose roots are not in the enmities of the societies, but in the common geocultural place of the region which is characterized by in-betweenness. Though this change of perspective can possibly change the interpretation of the others, they will then no longer be enemies but societies sharing the same fate. This change is anything but sentimentalism or a purely spiritual change of attitudes. Evidence and consequences of the shared geopolitical history and the position of every society in the region of CEE justify this interpretation.

The very source for this change can be the Christian understanding of humankind as sinful and God as the God of mercy. In the center of the Christian teaching and piety is still Jesus Christ with his teaching and practice of forgiveness and of the relativization of the worldly differences between rich and poor, clerics and laypeople, men and women, etc.

In the colorful history of the Christian churches there is a redline for a return to and rereading of the original sources. History is not only the history of corruption, but also that of renewal. Going back to this original view of the Revelation, Christianity in the region will have a renewed importance, and not as the supporter of nationalist politics and propaganda. Christians and Christian churches will have the chance for an internal rebirth and for an authentic representation of Christ.

Outlook

What kind of soul are you? – I repeated the question of Jesus and projected it to Europe. Concentrated on the Eastern part of the continent, I have argued for a wounded common identity as a fundamental characteristic of the shared soul of Central and Eastern Europe today. I'm convinced that for this region where Christianity as a religion and Christian churches as large institutions have a definitive and more important cultural and societal status than in Western Europe, a renewed Christian perspective can give a healing answer to society. From a soul of condemnation and xenophobia, Christianity should and can motivate societies to become a soul of convivence and misericordia.⁵

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