

Uliszák Radosław, 2006, The Presentation of Religion in Czech and Polish Geography Textbooks, (in:) "Náboženství a věda", Bubík Tomáš, Prázný Aleš, Hoffmann Henryk (red.), Pantheon, Univerzita Pardubice, Pardubice

The Presentation of Religion in Czech and Polish Geography Textbooks

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The knowledge of different religions, their geographical spreading out and their basic assumptions can be an important component in youth education. First of all it can provide a better understanding of cultures and their functioning in different regions of the world in the era of global economy and developing international tourism. It is worth considering how authors of geography textbooks approach present disseminate this knowledge.

In Polish schools the issue of religion occur curricula of many school subjects, the most often in History, Polish and Geography. The situation is similar in Czech schools, where geography is one but not the only subject taking up this issue.

The problems of religious geography are not widely addressed by schoolbooks authors. Maybe should they be more broadly present in the youth education? This need is noticed by the authors of currently in force programme basis of geography

teaching in Polish secondary schools. One of the points of this programme basis indicates the need to recognize of population diversification: racial, ethnical, linguistic, religious and cultural, which should be taught during geography lessons.

Czech and Polish geography textbooks for secondary schools

Geography as an individual teaching subject is present both in Polish and Czech secondary schools. For this analysis, a selection of textbooks available on publishing market was made. After preliminary review, sample textbooks from secondary school from both countries were chosen. All of them are addressed to the students of similar age. Both Polish and Czech students attend secondary schools of upper level at the age of 16-19.

In Czech secondary schools a total of 17 geographical textbooks were allowed to use, including 10 with social-economic geography contents. From this number three was selected for this analysis. The common feature of Czech textbooks is their arrangement of contents traditionally used in regional geography. This is largely conventional encyclopaedic arrangement, in which the attention is focused on broad social-economic characteristics of particular regions and selected countries.

In Polish school in grammar and technical schools 35 textbooks were accepted for use. Some of them, usually addressed

for first years, contain physical geography contents. Social-economic geography is present in forms two and three. There are all in all 21 such textbooks and four were chosen for this analysis.

Contents in study of religion and religion geography in geography textbooks

Among selected Czech textbooks religion geography takes the least place in the textbook „Geografie. Socioekonomická část“ (Mirvald et al, 1998). To tell the truth there is one chapter entitled „Národy světa a úloha náboženství v jejich životě“, but actually only one passage was devoted to religions. Students can learn in it about the division of religions into primitive, national and universal. The following chapter, in which more information about world religions could appear is part entitled „Civilizace – budoucí základ rozdělení světa?“. Unfortunately, only included map „Lidské civilizace“, showing main civilization circles refers to the distribution of main religions but without any commentary on this subject.

A little more discussed contents is in the second of selected Czech textbook „Regionální zeměpis světadílů“ (Bičík I. et al, 2003). It lacks the characteristics of main religions or spatial distribution of their believers. The issue of religion appears in the chapter „Hlavní světové civilizační oblasti“, where attention was drawn to the influence of Christianity on developing European cultural circle.

Similarly, as in the case of Europe, the information about Islam occurs on the occasion of the characteristics of Persian Gulf countries („Státy Perského zálivu – moře ropy v bezvodné poušti“). The information about Hinduism is given in the introductory chapter on southern Asia („Jižní Asie – mezi velehorami a oceánem“). On this occasion it is also indicated that Pakistan and Bangladesh were formed as Muslim countries as opposed Hindu India („Pákistán, Bangladéš, Srí Lanka – trojúhelník neklidu“). In the textbook „Regionální zeměpis světadílů“, there is only one map about religion. It concerns the distribution of believers of prevailing religions on the Indian subcontinent. To sum up – in the textbook the characteristics of Islam and Hinduism occurs and the information about the occurrence of particular religions sporadically complements the description of particular countries and regions.

Relatively much advanced information on religion geography, more than expected from the title, is included in the textbook „Hospodářský zeměpis. Regionální aspekty světového hospodářství“ (Baar V. 2003). For example, in the chapter „Západ střední Evropy“, social and economic effects of the Reformation in Catholic Church for western Europe were indicated. In the chapter „Jihozápadní Asie a severní Afrika“ a map showing the territorial development of Islam to 9th century is included as a commentary to the text about islamisation and Arabianisation of discussed region.

The part entitled „Jižní Asie“ includes the fullest, found in the Czech textbooks, characteristics of Hinduism and Buddhism made on the occasion of discussing the Indian subcontinent. However, it does not include global look on world religions.

To make an analysis of Polish textbooks, four of them were chosen. All of them contain more geographical contents in comparison with Czech textbooks. In all of them the issues of religion geography are discussed. It should be noted that the authors of academic books on religion geography (e.g. Jackowski 2003, de Blij and Murphy 2003) agree that it is extremely difficult to estimate the number of believers of particular religions or generally believers. However, the authors of Polish school textbooks attach importance to statistics. They usually quote data showing the number of believers of particular religions in the world.

The first of selected Polish textbooks is „Geografia“ (Makowska ed., 2002). Already in the introductory part, along with the characteristics of different economic systems, the authors draw attention to the relationship between religion and agriculture. They write about it in the chapter „Historical and cultural conditions of ways of farming“. They give an example of agriculture in the basin of Mediterranean Sea. They describe the presence of cultivation of vineyard on the northern side (Christian population) and almost complete lack of them on the southern side with similar conditions

(the domination of Islam believers). The authors do not give any more examples of religion differentials or the effect of religion on economy. They do not even mention religion as a differential factor of world agriculture, although they discuss other causes such like: the ownership structure of farms, mechanisation, labour force and others (chapter „Natural and beyond natural factors of agriculture differentiation“). The second place where the authors of this textbook mention about the effect of religion on human life are religious conflicts (including military conflicts). They discuss closer the examples of the Near East conflict (Israel and Arabian countries) and Balkan conflicts (the former Yugoslavia countries) and they discuss the issues resulting from the actions of Islam fundamentalists. In the part considering tourism the most important pilgrimage places in Poland are shown (Częstochowa, Licheń, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, Grabarka).

In the second of the textbook under research (Kop J. et al, 2003), the authors begin with the presentation of religious contents from the graphs illustrating the time of origin of particular religions, the population structure according to the number of believers and the map of distribution of main religions. They also characterise distinguished features (including religion) of selected cultural circles (Islamic culture, Anglo-American culture and European culture). Finally they give examples of influence of some belief rules on

economy (Kop J. et al 2003, p.61) indicating the impact of Protestantism on developing capitalist economy, functioning of caste division in India and limitations of pigs breeding in Islamic countries. In the chapter „Civilisation changes of the world“, an example of difficult assimilation of Islamic immigrants in western Europe is given and problems connected with this. The authors of this textbook notice the role of religion mentioning pilgrimage tourism not devoting much attention to this, however. Similarly, describing the causes of world conflicts (Israel – Arabian countries, terrorism, India – Pakistan, conflicts in Africa) the authors do not show religion as one of their causes.

The third of discussed textbooks (Korba J. et al, 2003) devote the whole chapter to the issues of religion, entitled „Religious differentiation of world population“. The authors show there the distribution of particular religions in the world and present the characteristics of main religions. The influence of religion on society is also shown along with short characteristics of cultural circles (European, Slavonic, Anglo-American, Latin American, Islamic, SubSaharian Africa, Chinese, Japanese, South-Eastern Asia, Indian, Australian, Pacific). In the part devoted to selected regions of the world, in the chapter about India, the religious differentiation of population is mentioned. The example of the influenced of Hinduism on economy is also given, mentioning the huge cattle

stock in this country. In turn, the characteristics of Saudi Arabia contains the information about the rules according to the Koran law which determines social life. Also in the section concerning military conflicts religion is presented as a one of the reasons of wars in Balkan Peninsula, Northern Ireland, Chechnya, Kashmir, Tibet and Nigeria.

The last of the chosen textbook (Staniów H., Staniów P. 2005) is one of the most extensive. It is different from others, because it is designed for basic and extended geography education level) and contain much information on religion geography. In the chapter „Religious differentiation“, the authors stress that it is difficult to determine the number of believers of particular religions. In the same chapter on a map the ranges of main religions in Asia and Europe are presented. The relationship between religion and social life and economy are also shown. In this part the functioning of the Koran law, castes in India and taboo connected with consuming pork and beef were indicated. The most important features of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism were shown. In the final part of the textbook the religious background of some world conflicts was presented with the examples of Balkan Peninsula and Kurds.

Concluding, it can be stated that in geographical textbooks there are no place for religion studies. The contents of religion

geography also occur very rarely. In Czech textbooks the elements of religion geography appear sporadically, only on the occasion of discussing particular countries and regions. In Polish textbooks these contents occur in four different issues:

- Distribution of religion believers,
- Religion as one of the elements differentiating cultural circles,
- Religion as one of the causes of military conflicts,
- More seldom as a factor developing economy or the reason for pilgrimage tourism.

The proposals of contents of religion geography in secondary school

It is an open question how and to what extent geography in school should focus on religion geography or religion studies. Taking into account that such knowledge is necessary on the level of secondary school, one should realise the time and content-related limitations narrowing down the issue of religion on geography lessons. First of all there is a danger of simplifying of religious knowledge and shaping it with deterministic character or identifying particular religions with their chosen outside attribute or building up next stereotypes.

It seems that geography is the most predisposed to pass on the description of spatial distribution of believers of main religions

or indicating regions where particular religions or their groups prevail.

Equally important task of geography should be explaining significant relationship between prevailing religion and the functioning of society – their structure and economy. It will allow the students to interpret and understand better the modern world. One of the main research trends in geography, particularly towards landscape was to look for relationship between man and environment. Geography often investigates the human impact on managing the environment. In case of religion issues, the students should be shown how religion develops our everyday life and economy of particular societies.

Which contents in religion geography can be present in school geography textbooks? The review of the school as well as academic textbooks on social-economic geography and religion geography allow the presentation of such proposals. It seems that teaching religion geography can contain three basic groups of issues. The first of them are the main guidelines and the character of prevailing religions: the time of origin, territorial expansion, the most important pilgrimage sites. The second one includes typical geographical information on distribution of believers of particular religions and the causes of such distribution. The third group of issues may concern the influence of religion on society's everyday

life: the shape of economy, the organisation of social life, the developing of cultural landscape or as a background of military conflicts.

The contents of religion geography or religion studies are poorly presented in geographical textbooks for secondary school. Less number of religious contents occurs in Czech textbooks. All of the authors take up the issues connected with religious differentiation of the world. They mostly notice that religion plays an important role in developing culture and even economy in particular countries or regions. These influences result in specific consequences reflected in culture, architecture or economy of individual parts of the world. Geography investigating relationship between human and environment is the science interested of these consequences. This aspect of geographical knowledge is rarely addressed in textbooks. The authors draw even less attention to the diversity of cultural landscape. Cult places, sacred monuments are the destination of pilgrimages but also sites visited by regular tourists. But today's students can also be tourists in the future.

In school geography there is no place for religious studies but there is a place for religion geography. The task of geography in school is, among others, the preparation of young people for living in contemporary world and religious issues can assist this preparation.

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Summary

Knowledge about main features of different religions, spatial aspects of them and believers could be very important element in school education. It could give better explanation of culture foundations and today's structure of society all over the world in the time of globalisation and world mass tourism. Seven Czech and Polish secondary school textbooks were taken to recognize and evaluate their contents in terms of geography of religion. Geography of religion topics are not very common in Czech nor in Polish textbooks. There are less religious contents in Czech textbooks than in Polish ones. Authors usually show religious aspects of society live in Muslim and Hindu countries. Most of them point religions as the source of present conflicts mainly in former Yugoslavia and Near East. Finally proposes for geography of religion were given. Probably the most important things are:

- basic information about main religions, main holy places, shapes of cultural landscape;

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- regional and spatial aspects of main religions and their believers;
- relationship between main religions and structure of society and economy (everyday live, conflicts, tourist attractions).