

ELIADE'S HÉLIOS MILAN KOVÁČ

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During the Communist era, Eliade's scholarly works could not be published for two obvious reasons: firstly, his works dealt with religious issues and not in any pejorative way and secondly, he was a Romanian emigré living in the USA. Nevertheless, especially during periods of thaw and reforms, some of his works especially his prose or at least segments of his essays were translated within the realm of literary or religious publishing efforts. Here we can consider essays like *The End of the World in Modern Art or Myths and the Modern Media* published in the Czech journal *Plamen* in 1965 or a chapter of his work *A Myth of Eternal Returns* published in 1969 under the title *History as Theophany* in an edited volume *Christianity Today*. More common during the Communist period was publication of Eliade's prose writing.

It is interesting that the turning point of publishing Eliade's work was not immediately after 1989 but in 1993. The first signal of that year was the Spring issue of *Světová Literatura* where Eliade was introduced as a main topic of that issue on 65 pages. The real breakthrough came as late as 1995 when a Slovak publisher, Ľubica Vychováľ-Jolly based in fact in Paris, published the first volume of Eliade's key work, *History of Religious Ideas*. The subsequent two volumes were published in 1997. During the same period, the three volumes of this Eliade's work were published in Czech translation.

The publication of Eliade's works in the Czech Republic and Slovakia understandably has substantial impact within among the academic community. This Eliade "boom" made an especially large contribution to the already mentioned academic discipline of religious studies. The post-war history of this academic discipline in our country is almost identical with the brief history of publication of Eliade's works on religious studies after 1989. In our conditions they understandably did not remain without results. There are voices who claim that Eliade gained hegemony in the area of theories about religion in both republics more due to historical development (and therefore of publishing conditions), rather than as a result of the quality and importance of his work. Such claims, although they do not lack a certain logic and even usefulness, they are not true.

Eliade's present position in Slovak and Czech religious studies is therefore more the result of the quality and attractiveness of Eliade's conceptions for the experts, than a result of an accidental culmination of publishing conditions and historical circumstances. These caused only a quick dissemination and popularization of his work. The key factor seems to be the innovative character and depth of Eliade's work itself.

Eliade's work in the field of the theory and history of religions, like the work of the majority of significant scholars in this area, resists any attempt to fit it into a preconceived scheme. Therefore, the variety of evaluations of Eliade and his contribution to knowledge is also natural. In the sixties and seventies, there was uncritical admiration of Eliade, but this apparently changed, in the eighties and nineties, into uncritical opposition. In both already historical approaches, the main problem is lack of a healthy critical spirit. They are burdened with subjectivity and tendentiousness, which come literally in colliding waves of fashion. Therefore for the study of Eliade's theories, it is especially important not to let oneself be distracted by these tendencies. Perhaps there is no important person in the world, who made a significant impact on the area where he worked, who did not become a subject of speculation, attracting crowds of both supporters and opponents. However, for an individual there is nothing simpler than to open appropriate books by Eliade, read them, and then express a considered view.

Happily, Slovaks and Czechs who study religion already have this possibility, and their evaluations are generally very sober. The strong Brno religious studies group, especially by means of B. Horyna, took a relatively restrained view of Eliade's theories, but emphasizing multi-dimensional comparative studies, which his approach undoubtedly enables. In every case, Eliade's theoretical project is regarded here as one of the relevant conceptions. The Bratislava experts on religion are somewhat more receptive. In the first issue of their religious studies annual *Hieron* (I. 1996), we learn on the first page, from the pen of Professor Komorovský, about an attempt to found their own school of religious studies "marked by the ideas of M. Eliade, but also by other contemporary currents." "Marked by ideas" is really a very appropriate formulation, it does not mean either their uncritical adoption, or ignoring of them. Slovak religious studies simply declares a desire to deal with these ideas, and Eliade's work really deserves this.

(Translated by Martin Styán)