

6<sup>th</sup> International Kraków Study of Religions Symposium

## Religion and Cultural Shifts: from Axial Age to (Post)Secular Age

Jagiellonian University, Kraków, 13-15th November 2017



### CALL FOR PAPERS

#### Keynote speakers:

Gordon M. Burghardt (The University of Tennessee, Knoxville)

Ralph W. Hood (The University of Tennessee, Chattanooga)

Guy G. Stroumsa (Martin Buber Professor Emeritus, The Hebrew University at Jerusalem)

Guido Vanheeswijck (University of Antwerp, University of Leuven)

Understanding different forms of religious life requires taking into consideration wider civilizational background against which religious beliefs and practices make sense. Religion as a vital element of culture not only has inspired great historical shifts but also has been shaped by them in crucial ways. The perfect illustration of this interdependence between religion and other important aspects of culture – political, moral, intellectual – is The Protestant Reformation. During our conference we would like to focus on two major epochal changes – the Axial Age and the Secular Age – and reflect upon both religious sources that underlie them as well as the impact they had on religion itself.

We would like to invite scholars from different areas of study to present their papers in one of the **two panels**: “The Axial Age” from Jaspers to Bellah and beyond – epochal turns in the history of religions, and “Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* – Ten Years After”.

#### **I) “The Axial Age(s)” from Jaspers to Bellah and Beyond – Deep Cultural Turns in the History of Religions**

The notion of the Axial Age, introduced to the philosophy of history by Karl Jaspers, subsequently was transferred to the historical sociology by S. N. Eisenstadt, who exchanged the singular “axiality” for the plural “multiple axialities”, i.e. different models of civilizational dynamics for different civilizations. This was followed by a revitalization of the axial age notion in comparative studies of civilizations, cultures and religions. Finally, in

2011, Robert Bellah employed the achievements of evolutionary biology, ethology, cognitive science and evolutionary psychology to describe an evolution in methods of transcending sociobiological determinants through the creation of alternative realities from the Paleolithic to the Axial Age. Offering his account of “deep origins” of religion Bellah also drew upon the notion of animal and human “play” (Huizinga, Burghardt).

Our aim is to pose questions about the “axial age”, or rather “axial ages” while linking them with the results of research on changes in the religious and cultural systems that conditioned the emergence of civilizations. Is ‘axiality’ a coherent notion applicable to comparative research practices? Could the notion of axiality serve as a tool facilitating the periodisation of the history of religion within the context of the history of civilisations?

The panel on Axial Age will invite paper presentations dealing with (but not limited to) the following themes:

- “Building blocks” of religion from the perspective of human evolution;
- “Deep origins” of ritual and religion: genetic explanations of ritual and the concept of animal and human play;
- Before/Outside Axial civilizations: dynamics of tribal religions;
- Specificity of the Axial Age, Axial civilizations and Axial breakthroughs;
- Axial processes of reconstruction of socio-cultural orders according to transcendental visions;
- Axial reflexivity: critical examination of world orders / socio-cosmic orders, creative ideation and pluralism of transcendental visions (religious visions, cultural concepts, political ideologies);
- Axial pluralism of visions and its consequences: *surplus of meaning* open to conflicting interpretations, crystallization of orthodoxy and heterodoxy;
- Axial *broadening of horizons*: opening up of potentially universal perspectives in contrast to the particularism of more archaic ethnocentric societies and more archaic modes of thought;
- Religious elites as carriers of axial visions: from ritual and magical specialists to authority of wisdom (prophets, sages, philosophers, monks, ascetics, mystics);
- Axial transformations in developments of ancient religions: from mythos to logos, from orthopraxy to orthodoxy, from divination to meditation, from ritual violence to compassion, from religious socialization to privatization of religion, from religion of cosmos to religion of self.

## **II) Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age – Ten Years After*”.**

In 2017 it will have been 10 years since Charles Taylor’s remarkable book entitled *A Secular Age* was published. The book gave rise to a great multidisciplinary debate gathering leading scholars from various fields of study (religious studies, philosophers, sociologists, theologians, historians) and thus became the essential point of reference for anyone interested in the topic of religion and modernity. Considering the paramount importance of

this book for a contemporary studies in religion (i.e. the status of religious convictions in a pluralist society, the nature of religious experience, cross-pressures between belief and unbelief) we would like to dedicate this panel to a discussion of the main themes of Taylor's *opus magnum*. In particular we would like to focus on topics such as:

- Notions of the secular, secularization, secularism and the problem of their validity in theoretical accounts of contemporary moral-spiritual condition.
- Adequacy of Taylor's approach to Western secularity in the light of proliferation of various conceptions of post-secularity (post-secularism).
- Taylor's *Reform Master Narrative* and its relation to the Löwith-Blumenberg debate about the legitimacy of the modern age.
- Medieval theologico-philosophical conceptions of the "natural" and the "supernatural" and their consequences for the making of modern "immanent", "self-sufficient" orders.
- The "resurgence of religion" in the public spheres of Western societies and the plausibility of Williams James's take on religion as a matter of individual experience.
- Theories of modern secularity in the context of new spirituality, individualization of religion, and religious pluralism
- The inevitability of mythical thinking in a (post)secular age
- The Axial Age as a historical and conceptual framework for a (post)secular age
- William James's critique of the "ethics of belief" (William Clifford) and its relevance for the contemporary debates between believers and unbelievers
- Religious sources of Western secularity

Scholars of all disciplines are invited to contribute papers that engage with – but are not limited to – the above topics.

Papers in English should not exceed 20-25 minutes. Proposals including paper title, abstract (up to 200 words), name, and affiliation of the candidate should be submitted (preferably in .doc, .docx or .pdf format) by **1st May, 2017**.

Notification of acceptance: **25th May, 2017**.

Please send all abstracts to: [religions.confer@gmail.com](mailto:religions.confer@gmail.com)

Conference fee: **350 PLN or 80 EUR**.

Conference website: [http://www.religions.confer.uj.edu.pl/en\\_GB/](http://www.religions.confer.uj.edu.pl/en_GB/)