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vývoj a novinky v této oblasti alespoň pozorně sledovat, protože „metodologický“ vlak, který jednou ujel, se dohání jen obtížně.

## Rozhovor s profesorem Lutherem H. Martinem

Aleš Chalupa, FF MU, Ústav religionistiky

Kateřina Řepová, FF MU, Ústav religionistiky

Radek Kundt, FF MU, Ústav religionistiky

V okamžiku, kdy k nám pronikla informace o budoucím pobytu<sup>1</sup> profesora Luthera H. Martina na brněnském Ústavu religionistiky, si redakční rada časopisu *Sacra* začala pohrávat s myšlenkou žádosti o případné interview. Nakonec jsme se k tomuto kroku odhodlali a naši žádosti bylo mile vyhověno. Rozhovor se konal ve středu 18. října 2006 v jedné z pracoven Ústavu religionistiky. Přítomni byli profesor Luther H. Martin (jak se ostatně od hlavního hrdiny očekává), za redakci časopisu *Sacra* pak Aleš Chalupa, Jan Blaško a Jakub Havlíček. Přepisu bezmála hodinového rozhovoru se ujali naši kolegové Kateřina Řepová a Radek Kundt, kterým tímto patří náš velký dík. Naše další poděkování patří rovněž doktorovi Daliborovi Papouškovi, který naši žádost o interview profesoru Martinovi s předstihem tlumočil, a také ostatním, zde bezejmenným, členům redakční rady, kteří se na jeho přípravě jakkoli podíleli.

Rozhovor jsme se rozhodli publikovat v angličtině, abychom co nejméně ubrali na jeho autentičnosti a živosti. Při přepisu jsme se dopustili jen minimálního množství úprav a vynechávek, vesměs u vět a odboček, které se týkaly některých témat zmíněných nebo probíraných během kurzu „Cognitive Science of Religion“ a které by nebyly pro většinu čtenářů srozumitelné. Před samotný rozhovor jsme navíc umístili, jako krátké seznámení s postavou profesora Luthera H. Martina, jeho stručný akademický medailonek.

Profesor **Luther H. Martin** (\*1937) v současné době působí na Katedře religionistiky Vermontské univerzity v Burlingtonu v USA a rovněž na Institute of Cognition and Culture Královské univerzity v Belfastu v Severním Irsku. Jeho badatelský zájem je dlouhodobě zaměřen na problematiku helénistických náboženství. Českému čtenáři je z této oblasti znám především díky své knize *Hellenistic Religions: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1987), která vyšla rovněž v českém překladu (Luther H. Martin, *Helénistická náboženství*, Brno: Masarykova univerzita 1997, přel. Iva Doležalová a Dalibor Papoušek).

Profesor Martin je také významnou postavou na poli religionistické metodologie. Nově se angažuje především v oblasti kognitivní religionistiky, kde se pokouší o vyhodnocení jejího možného přínosu při studiu starověkých náboženství (viz např.

<sup>1</sup> Ten se nakonec mohl uskutečnit díky laskavému udělení štědrého grantu z prostředků Jihomoravského kraje.

L. H. Martin – H. Whitehouse [eds.], *Theorizing Religions Past: Archaeology, History and Cognition*, Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press 2004). Na tato témata publikoval velké množství studií a článků jak ve specializovaných vědeckých časopisech, tak v knihách a sbornících (viz např. „Performativity, Discourse and Cognition: ‘Demythologizing’ the Roman Cult of Mithras“, in: W. Brown [ed.], *Rhetoric and Reality in Early Christianities*, Waterloo: Wilfried Laurier University Press 2005, 187–217; „Contributions of Cognitive Science to the Historical Study of Religions, with Reference to the History of Early Christianities“, in: P. Luomanen – I. Pyysiäinen – R. Uro [eds.], *Explaining Early Judaism and Christianity: Combining Cognitive and Social Perspective*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, v tisku).

Profesor Luther H. Martin je členem redakčních rad prestižních odborných časopisů, zabývajících se problematikou náboženství a historických studií obecně (např. *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historique*, 1990–doposud; *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 1988–doposud), a rovněž spolueditorem několika knižních sérií (např. *Cognitive Science of Religion Series*; Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2003–doposud; společně s Harvey Whitehousem). Od roku 2006 je rovněž členem redakční rady časopisu *Religio: Revue pro religionistiku*, který vydává ve spolupráci s brněnským Ústavem religionistiky Česká společnost pro religionistiku (dříve Česká společnost pro studium náboženství).

\* \* \*

**Sacra:** What do you think of the role of the academic study of religion in the contemporary western society? What should we do?

**Luther H. Martin:** Daniel Dennett, the American philosopher, has recently pointed out that increasingly social and political policy decisions are being made by different governments around the world based on very little scientific information about religion, so practical reasons. It would seem that there needs to be a great deal more information, scientific information rather than confessional information, what-do-people-believe-they-believe kinds of information available to people in high places, is one concern. A second is more abstract, religion seems to be a human universal, a human social universal, and as such we will learn something about what it means to be a human, if we can explain why human beings are and continue to be religious. Related to that, thirdly, people interested in the study of culture, if you can figure out religion you can probably figure out any other cultural problem. Religion seems to be much weirder than most cultural problems with these claims to superhuman agency, and so forth. So if you can figure out why, there seems to be a nice access into human culture as well as human nature. That's all these political reasons.

**Sacra:** Is there really a way for the information from the academic study of religion to get through to the politicians or to the public generally? Because it seems to be quite difficult.

**L. H. Martin:** There are political issues there. You know, great scientists have no problems making authoritative pronouncements about the value of religion, whereas people in religion would consider themselves foolish making public statements about subatomic particle physics. Why is this? Religion is easy, science is hard. Everyone knows that mastery of a science is an educational specialty that takes a lot of hard work. Everyone feels qualified to speak about religion, because it is a natural

by-product of the activity of human brains. So everybody thinks they have something interesting and significant to say about religion. This includes politicians. Politicians don't seem to think or to recognize there are the historical social scientific cognitive studies of religion from which they might learn something. During the Iranian hostage crisis I used to give lectures in which I would just say clearly no one in the US government has the slightest information of what Islam is all about. Why Reagan sent the Ayatollah an autographed copy of the Bible? It's just nonsense. And I made these statements in one of these lectures, these were for adults, retired people, some old guy at the back raised his hand and he says "no, you are wrong. I was the assistant secretary of state for Middle-East affairs". And he says: "we had brilliant Islamicists on the staff and they produced daily briefings. The problem is the higher-ups wouldn't read them". That's the problem: they don't think they need it. The knowledge is there but people on decision-make capacities don't think they needed specialized knowledge about religions because they are religious and they know what religion is.

**Sacra:** Isn't this political negligence you are talking about a problem for all cultural studies?

**L. H. Martin:** Absolutely! I mean one of the interesting things about cognitive sciences is that what human beings do quite easily is produce religious stuff across the board. And that everybody thinks they know what religion is or isn't. Of course, these cognitive productions are shaped socially and historically, so the religion my society has produced is clearly true and superior. Because my society, not just my religion, but my society generally is true and superior, and so forth. So yes, absolutely. And that's not going to go away because that's the way our brains work, or seem to work, and tie all that up with coalitions, in-group, out-group and kin groups. Gods are always the gods of my group. Some understanding of those sorts of things I mean, like we were saying, we don't need to be neuroscientists but we should not make statements that contradict the neuroscience. Politically this could be religious all we want but it shouldn't make policy that contradicts what we know about what religion is and what it does and how it does it.

**Sacra:** What is the position of the academic study of religion in contemporary USA? Are there really some pressures from the government?

**L. H. Martin:** There are no pressures from the government but the academic study of religion in the USA is religious. Again, Daniel Dennett calls most people who do the study of religion the academic friends of religion. Again religion is good, religion is desirable, religion is beneficial. People involved in the academic study of religion wouldn't say it is just Christianity that is good and beneficial, all religions are good and beneficial and people who fly planes into high buildings in the name of God have simply perverted use of religion, it is not true religion. So again you get an example, even in the academic study of religion, of how cognitive processes are informing the way that study is structured. You get very little critique of religion. If you have a science, even a historical science or social scientific science ... look, this is how it works, this is bad stuff, this is good stuff. You don't get that in religion. We're going to describe it and we assume it's benevolent, we will describe it and that's all we're going to do.

**Sacra:** That's really something we are taught that we have to be objective...

**L. H. Martin:** Yeah.

**Sacra:** ... that we cannot be engaged in assessment.

**L. H. Martin:** There is more of this in Europe than in the USA. But Europe is not completely free either.

**Sacra:** In fact still there is or you can meet discussion concerning this question whether the science or the study of religion should be somehow directed to some involvement in practice or not? There is still some search for the applications of religious studies in the real world.

**L. H. Martin:** If you do physics, are you going to engage in theory research or technology? Most people leave the technology to the industry, in the academic study of religion the practice of religion should be left to the industry, the churches. That's not what we do. I think by the way you talk about the objective ... Masaryk University may be the only department of religion in Europe, or it's certainly one of the very few, at a university that does not have a divinity or a theological school attached to it.

**Sacra:** There are some historical reasons...

**L. H. Martin:** I understand, I know the historical reasons, but still there has never been a theological faculty at the Masaryk University, ever?

**Sacra:** No, never.

**L. H. Martin:** That's not the case in most other European universities and it is not the case, by the way, at most major universities in the United States.

**Sacra:** The trouble is that even some new institutes for the study of religions in the Czech Republic, for example in Pardubice, are founded by people from theological faculties.

**L. H. Martin:** That's fine, let them do it. Again this is what is consoling to me about cognitive science: that will never change. This is why Marx and Weber are wrong: religion will never go away. It will be reinvented and expressed in different ways but will always be there. So we don't care what goes on at this institute or that university, the question is what goes on here, what goes on in your own study and can you maintain the kind of scholarly criteria. Again this is a very interesting place to be, at the Masaryk University, for this reason. In Germany the chairs of *Religionswissenschaft* are at *theologische* faculty, in Aarhus, which is one of the leading institutes, departments of religion and theology are the same. Anyway, the people in the department of religion and theology are doing the academic study of religion, they're doing cognitive science, but still in that context. And what I have learned is the context you are in, the students and colleagues you engage with and the kinds of questions they raise then influences the kind of work you are doing. So if you have people around you who are constantly raising theological questions and you are not interested in theology, you become defensive. But that shapes your scholarship, it's not objective. People in these kinds of context ... it's like with my good friend Dan Wiebe, who claims now to be an atheist and was until recently a dean of divinity as an atheist and he does crazy things. He goes to chapel every day. "You say you are an atheist. Why do you go to chapel every day?" Well, it's in a divinity school, it's what one does, go to chapel every day. And hear all this crazy stuff ... his colleagues are all theologians and it would be like trying to do cognitive science in an institute for psychoanalytic study. You have to engage fully in theory constantly, and that is going to shape your thinking and your research, just in response. That becomes part of your job ... your students are raising this kind of questions... so to be in a context where you don't have to lay off the bet, deal with theological issues,

part of the curriculum of the faculty, it is a huge advantage. Now what you do with this? It is another question. Because one thing, cognitive science has done some work on this, *Homo sapiens* are interested in is the question of meaning; that becomes a cognitive bias. It is a part of understanding our world in terms of agents, in terms of agency, if we are organizing our world in terms of agency, it is intentional. If agents are intentional, there is meaning there, there is teleology there, there is purpose in there, there is intelligent design and one of the things that people either don't like or really have a hard time accepting about natural selection is that it's completely non-directed non-teleological, non-purposeful mechanism for describing complexity. And that is really beautiful. Here is a principle that can explain complexity in the absence of design or teleology or meaning. What is the meaning? What does it mean that there are chimpanzees? Well, there's no meaning. Evolution has no teleology apart from us drawing evolutionary trees with us at the top of the scale... that is what I meant.

**Sacra:** Back to that question...

**L. H. Martin:** OK.

**Sacra:** The problem is that I haven't put the question explicitly enough. Because what I wanted to ask about was in fact the part of religion that you called semantic. Can you find some semantic field where the question for the meaning could be asked? Of course I didn't mean to ask about the meaning which is being put on the stuff from the outside.

**L. H. Martin:** But then we need to talk about in which semantic field we move. You can distinguish, in other words, between what people believe and what people believe they believe. And what scholars of religion study is what people, what intellectuals, say their beliefs are, and people tend to believe they believe, though in fact that they don't act on those beliefs. They're not motivating, they're not real. And so what is important to people is having beliefs. That's important. But it doesn't make much difference which beliefs you have. President Eisenhower in his second inaugural address said that "Americans are people who believe". End of sentence. These days 95 % of Americans say they believe in God. In my university class where I ask my students how many believe in God, yes or no, or Cosmic powership, yes or no, 94 or 93 % say yes. If I want to get mean, I'll ask them: "what do you mean about that, what do you mean when you say you believe in God?" It's not what that means, it's important to have the belief. They believe in beliefs, the beliefs are important to have. But it doesn't make an awful lot of difference what they are. This goes back to "religion is good". If you don't believe in Jesus as the son of God, you say you're Muslim, well, it's all Abrahamic biblical stuff. You have beliefs and that's all good. We have a common Judeo-Christian tradition. Or Buddhists have something like the golden rule ... This is not what the theologians say should be going on. Here we have a belief and here's what it means ... and nobody thinks that's meaningful. What ordinary people think is meaningful is that you have beliefs, and religious beliefs, because it's good to have religious beliefs. And the logic doesn't go any further.

**Sacra:** Isn't that because these beliefs are metarepresented? That they have some context in which it is said that they are true, so they are believed.

**L. H. Martin:** No, no, don't even go that far ... you see, beliefs are good to have. Religious beliefs are good to have. Which Religious beliefs you have? What if my religious beliefs require me to fly planes into tall buildings? Is this a good religious

belief to have? Is this a religious belief at all? Well, presumably, according to the voice tapes all scream "God is great" as they hit it. Here is a human action with consequences performed in the name of God, by authority of a superhuman agent. That's a religious act. What do you do with that as a student of religion? With these assumptions that religions are always good, it is good to have these beliefs, what do you do with that? But as a student of religion you got to answer that. So your usual answer is: well, that's not true Islam. And of course this makes you an authority of what is the true practice of somebody else's religion. You don't hear a lot of immams coming and say that's Islam, by the way. You get a few, but not a lot. It's those kinds of questions that I think the students of religion need to focus more on. Not what Buddhists believe. But what do real people, real human beings acting religiously who are claiming to be religious, use religion to justify their actions, what are they doing, why do they do it? Do they think it's meaningful? Yes. As scholars of religion, can we find some sort of inherent meaning in these procedures? Maybe, maybe not, depending on the case that we look at.

**Sacra:** So could cognitive science of religion really improve the methodology of the study of religions or is it just a vague concept of which way we could possibly go?

**L. H. Martin:** It's at the beginning. It is the only theoretical approach to the study of religion that claims to produce falsifiable predictions. If the predictions are all falsifiable ... it's not going to go any place, I'll give up. But I think it has produced already enough interesting suggestions and enough interestingly confirmed predictions that have not yet been falsified. That is more than just a promise. And it does seem to be increasingly picked up on around the world as something interesting to do.

**Sacra:** Yes, because the language of the cognitive science is radically different from the language used so far in the study of religions. So it is really very interesting. And I would like to connect my question to that note that when we have now this opportunity given by the cognitive science approach and when the language of cognitive approach is so different. Do you think that there will be some chance to connect it with some of the other methods which have been already used?

**L. H. Martin:** Well, I'm not one of the ones who think that evolutionary psychology is a non-falsifiable worldview. In terms of historiography, I think cognitive science is not going to replace traditional historiographical methods. And I think it can supplement and complement the traditional historiographical methods. And what that means is that it can provide correctives. And I think cognitive science promises, and in some case has already delivered on this, allow us to be more precise in the way we look at our historical data, the way we evaluate and organize historical data, the way we think about them. Historical data is all the production of historical agents. It's not irrelevant, so I think cognitive sciences should be understood as a supplement or a complement to traditional humanistic approaches.

**Sacra:** And for example in the field of sociology I can see some really promising fields where cognitive science can be used. For example in the theory of conversion.

**L. H. Martin:** The American sociological association met in Montreal last summer, they had a section on cognitive sociology, so some sociologists are picking it up. But I mean, there is empirical evidence in terms of group size. Human beings maximum group size that human beings organize into is about 150, give or take. And so you start looking at the anthropological and historical data and it turns out contemporary

hunter-gatherer societies have 150. And you start looking at the organization of armies crossculturally and throughout history and companies have 150. This starts recurring. And this all has to do with memory and short-term processing and how many relationships you can track up. You can't keep track in working memory of more than four people at a time. If you have four people in conversation as we are now, you will have a conversation. If we were at a party and a fifth person walked in, we would split into two conversations. Now, if you look at dramas, if you look at Shakespeare, you never have more than four characters on stage at the same time. Four main characters. And you may have more characters in the play but they're not there talking simultaneously, and then you are up to maybe 27 to 30 as the maximum the audience can follow for character development. And you shift back and forth, clever dramatists, successful ones, have mnemonic devices built into the drama so that you can pick up on a character when they come back, they can't just walk in. These are all cognitive constraints on group size and group interaction. Does that have something to do with sociology? Yes, because beyond 150 people, you need politics. You can't have social interaction. Thirty is more of a coalition size. Look at organizations of armies from platoons to companies and so on, they follow these numbers. Crossculturally, in all kinds, Genghis Khan's army, Roman legions, they all have about these numbers. Now those aren't exact absolute numbers, but it's 150 or so. And that turns out to be the case. That has implications for sociology, it has implications for fiction, it has implications for religion, for religious texts. You start seeing these sorts of things recurring in military organization, in literature, in Shakespearean plays ... there seems to be something to this stuff. The brain, our brain, can only follow so much information in so many different ways at once beyond which it becomes noise ... and you start to figure that stuff out.

**Sacra:** Can you see any parallels between Hellenistic world and contemporary world, I mean in the phenomenon of globalization? Any parallels, at least in a distant sense?

**L. H. Martin:** Actually, I wrote an article about it ... an article on globalization for a conference on religion and globalization. I'm so tired of hearing about problems of globalization. Historians have done that already, we've had globalization, it's called the Graeco-Macedonian empire, it's called the Roman empire, Ashoka Buddhist empire, they've done it. It's the same issues. Will we speak the same language or will we maintain our local language? How we work on our monetary system? How do we engage in trade? How can you engage in trade in different parts of the world without a central bank? Foucault pointed out that the exercise of power is not always a matter of dominance and submission; it's something everyone agrees to. When Romans conquered people first thing they wanted was how can we be Roman citizens? Most people, not all, will buy into an empire. Well, the Maccabees didn't want to buy into it, there are exceptions, the Egyptians didn't like the Romans, but most people were really happy to be Roman citizens, happy to be part of Rome. Most people in the world today are happy about globalization. They love it. We have the Internet, the Euro and we're making more money, they love it. And then these few in the streets, that's always been the case. Why? And again, I think there's some cognitive templates for that are being bought into. Alexander is supposed to have said, according to his biographers, one of his ideologies for his empire is that: "we're all Greeks and we're all kin." Everybody learnt Greek, everybody speaks the same



language, everybody who speaks the same language is Greek and all Greeks are kin. The kinship ideology is innate in any species. All species, most species, recognize kin, including human beings. They think it has to do with smell, with feromones, by the way. It turns out that since most of human history our brains evolved, our social abilities evolved to live in small face to face groups, societies. This small scale that we talked about, that's what we evolved. Our mental processing can't deal with more than 150 people. Typically, in small-scale societies, members of the group are represented as kin whether they're biologically kin or not. They're represented as kin. And then along comes Alexander and he conquers the world and says were all kin, this is really buying into and exploiting an intuitive cognitive template that we all have. You may reject that for some reason, the Hebrews by the way have their own kinship, Jews are a kinship system. They rationalize their union by creating a genealogy back to Abraham, back to Adam ... and they didn't buy this stuff. But most people did. And it works. And you see that today, you know. We're all human race, we're all kin, we're all descendants from the same little group of people in Africa. We have DNA evidence for that. Playing on this, it's more reflexive, but you're playing on, you're exploiting, you have an ideological exploitation of intuitive cognitive mechanisms. It's what's going on and those empires that were successful were those that exploited that. Why Soviet Union failed? There was no kinship in the Soviet Union. It's comrade this, comrade that, but basically that ideology ended in economic determinism. It didn't quite work. And it was held together by force, by external power relation. It has never exploited the possibility of internal bindings of power successfully. They tried to, but they never really bought it off. And the Romans did, Alexander did, the Chinese pretty much did. So the question is not what are the cognitive biases of, I mean, we all know that empires are established by force. But why is it that some succeed and some don't, why is it that some empires that are established by force actually get the support of the people they've conquered? The enthusiastic support of the people they've conquered. What's going on there? And that's clearly a psychological question. Why are you happy being conquered by Rome? And the best example of what this is all about is Monty Python's Life of Brian. There's this wonderful scene when they're trying to plot the revolution and they're sitting around the table and the leader is trying to build up enthusiasm for the attack on the empire: "What have the Romans ever done for us?" And they go around the table: "Well, all these roads and this clean water..." and they start listing, that's sort of it. You know, what have the Romans ever done for us, well, a lot. What has the globalization ever done for people? Well, a lot, for the people who have been left out of the economic structures. So, there's economic, there's social kinds of things going on that explain this. But I don't think it's the whole story. I think it's like language, you know, the input underdetermines the enthusiasm for why I should be a Roman. And I think there are some cognitive templates that we come with that are being exploited. Quite deliberately, Alexander was quite deliberate when he used the kinship terminology.

**Sacra:** So, if I understood it well ... can we say that cognitive science applied to cultural studies is somehow solving all the methodological problems that have been approached by critical historians? I mean there is one very good critic who is trying to show and to get rid of ideological, intentional ballast in academic studies of religion: Jonathan Smith. In fact, he's showing problems with the notions like

religion, for instance. Can we say that the cognitive science of religion is somehow solving these problems by applying better scientific methods?

**L. H. Martin:** Yeah. Jonathan is a really good, profound, classical historian. Increasingly, he's getting a little too postmodernist for me. If you say religion is a social construction, socially contingent construction, then we need to deconstruct the category. What is it constructed upon? You got to start with something, you just cannot start *ex nihilo* and since there seems to be these intuitions about certain common recurring patterns across the board in different social constructions. It raises a question. Is there a common foundation or basis that the social constructions can be constructed upon. That would seem to be the human brain, how the human brain works. Assuming there are common recurring functions of the brain ... which it seems to be. Let me use a crude example of kidneys. Everybody who drinks a lot starts going to pee but of course what you drink will determine ... your cultural specific drink will result in a different chemical analysis of urine. But it's still urine. And urine shares generally certain properties even if there's the specific chemical makeup that is probably going to be determined by what you've drunk. But the kidneys are still functioning in the same way crossculturally. Something like that. So if evolutionary psychology says our brains are evolved organs, all human beings process information and produce representations in the same set of formal procedures. And that all social input and output is constrained by those processes, you can have all sorts of cultural difference you want based on input-output but it's going to be constrained in similar ways, not identical, but similar ways, and that will explain the patterns they produce. Patterns are never identities; by the way, they're patterns. So I think this does not undermine cultural studies.

**Sacra:** I didn't want to say that.

**L. H. Martin:** I know. I'm not saying you did. But it's the question you want to ask, what you want to know. What now seems to be on the table is on the one hand cultural social difference and on the other hand the emerging description of the common human nature. Now what you want to know? Are you interested in cultural difference and cultural specificity and how that works and what's going on or you're interested in these common patterns that underlie it? The way I got into this was just that question. The academic study of religion, *Religionswissenschaft*, emerged in the late 19th century out of comparative religion. These crazy Europeans from their colonial expansions started to realize that there are other religions in the world or stuff that looks like other religions in the world that weren't Christian. And what are you going to do with this? Because there was only supposed to be Christianity in the world. And there's other stuff, too. So they start looking at this stuff and how do you make any sense of it, of all this data. Huge amount, huge databases about the religions of the world and not only about the big religions of the world, about the tribal religions as well. We have all that. We know about cultural difference. Postmodernism has been telling us for 20 years about difference. I'm not sure what else we can learn about difference. Now what the postmodernists claim as they came to the study of religion is that the old European Enlightenment notion of comparative religion was a dead enterprise. You can't compare religions; you can't compare difference by definition. If you compare difference, you got to come up with difference. If you start with difference, if the question you're asking is about difference, you'll come out with difference. So you don't do comparative religion. You

just give it up. If you want to study religion the thing you do ... it depends on what you are interested in ... you study the Roman cult of Mithras for 300 years and that's it, not anything else. If you're interested in China you're going to look at Chinese foot binding for fifty years in Medieval China and in Sichuan province. And it's not possible, for postmodernists, to make any kind of generalization about religion from these specific practices. Well, I was interested in comparison and human beings, not their peculiarities ... but how do we do comparative religion? What do we make of these recurring patterns? Maybe the recurring patterns are just our perceptions that we're imposing. It's a possibility. But how can we do comparative studies and I think the postmodernists are probably right. We cannot do comparative studies if your question is culture. Cultures are different. So how do you do comparative studies at all? And if you're going to do comparative studies you got to find something that seems to be ... that is common, over and against which you can measure the difference. Otherwise the difference is not interesting, everything is different ... so what? Different from what? And if you can find something that is human universals, then a) you can do comparative studies, you have human universals as a basis for your comparison, you have common framework, and b) you've got something common against which to measure difference so that the differences become interesting differences, rather than just different differences, meaningful differences. Now, how are you going to do that? You can start at the quantum level, molecular, but that does not tell you anything interesting. Human beings are embodied creatures. And so maybe at least, let's start at biology. We're living-in-body creatures. And, by the way, we do comparative studies at the biological level. We can compare anatomy. By the way, if I were to slice you open, I would find no surprises apart from pathology. Because if I sliced you open, you would look pretty much the same. And we can predict that and having made that prediction we can try to falsify it by slicing you open. And we're all going to look alike. Little bigger here, little fatter there ... you know, it's the same stuff, it's the same structure ... all these structures work together in precisely the same way, with precisely the same functions, it is a panhuman reality. Well, that doesn't really help me too much in the study of religion but it's suggesting a methodology. The reason why all of these organs work together with the same structures and have same functions is because that is what happens with an evolved species. If you take rabbits and slice them open, they all look the same inside. Because that's what an evolved species is. So then there's this brain thing and the Descartes problem. But what if you look at the brain as an evolved organ that is part of our embodied creatureliness, or whatever you call it ... of course when cognitive scientist talk about the brain they don't mean just that matter stuff up there, the brain is an embodied organ in a system. It's not *just* the brain but the embodied brain. And that's an evolved organ and its structure and function are identical across the board in the species *Homo sapiens*. The structure certainly is. You can dissect brains across culture and they all look alike, they're structured alike. So, now, do they all function alike? And it looks like, basically, they do, though of course those functions are going to be contingent upon the environment in which it is functioning. Just like your pee will be different after you have been drinking tea in China or beer in the Czech Republic. So I got a problem with people who still want to do cultural studies and say: "culture influences cognition and the brain". I just don't buy it. It seems to me that part of our evolutionary history is that we have evolved a certain

range of possibilities by which genes can be expressed. The environment can trigger responses within a particular range of genetic possibility. Our genetic potential, but not just anything. So again, of course, the people that want to look at cognitive science and how culture influences cognition, they are going back to the question of difference. Of course, but we know that. So my question is, having figured out that culture is different, is there anything common to human beings that would allow us to do comparative studies? Go back to comparative religion ... what is the theoretical basis of comparative anything? Comparative politics, comparative law, what's the basis, how do you do that? At the social level, cultural level. At biological level it is done. And I think it's interesting for people who are interested in study of religion especially to the extent that study of religion means the study of comparative religion to raise this kind of question. And we're more or less successful at working them out than we can apply them to the studies of people who just wanted to study medieval Chinese shoes or something.

**Sacra:** Thank you very much for the interview.

## Letní škola religionistických studií v Szegedu

Jana Zlámalová, FF MU, Ústav religionistiky

Na přelomu srpna a září (21. srpna – 2. září) pořádala nedávno založená katedra religionistiky v Szegedu již druhý ročník Letní školy religionistických studií.<sup>1</sup> Ze šesti evropských zemí<sup>2</sup> se na tuto téměř dvoutýdenní konferenci sjelo více než třicet studentů i významných odborníků věnujících se religionistice či sociologii náboženství. Hlavním cílem bylo společně diskutovat o současné, především střeoevropské religiozité a o náboženských změnách, ke kterým v této oblasti v průběhu posledních let dochází. To naznačovalo i téma letošního setkání: *Religiousness in a Changing World*.

Diskuze a výměna názorů se odehrávaly především na základě každodenních přednášek, konaných v budově filozofické fakulty szegedské univerzity. Až na některé výjimky, kdy byl program vyhrazen pro celodenní exkurzi, měly všechny dny velmi podobný program. Dopolední část byla věnována některému z přítomných lektorů, aby pohovořil o určité problematice zapadající do jeho odborné specializace a která zároveň představovala cenný příspěvek k probíranému tématu. Odpoledne k řečnickému pultu postupně přistoupili dva až tři studenti, kteří si pro tuto příležitost připravili přibližně půlhodinový příspěvek.

Přítomným posluchačům se tak během devíti vyučovacích dnů nabízel možnost vyslechnout si téměř dvacet pojednání na nejrůznější témata, z nichž osm přednesli

<sup>1</sup> Katedra religionistiky, náležející k filosofické fakultě Szegedské univerzity (bývalá Univerzity Attila József), vznikla v roce 1999 jako první vysokoškolské pracoviště v Maďarsku věnující se vědeckému studiu náboženství. Jejím dnešním vedoucím je András Máté-Tóth.

<sup>2</sup> Konkrétně se účastnily tyto státy: Česká republika, Maďarsko, Polsko, Rakousko, Rumunsko a Slovensko.