At the beginning of the third millennium, religion, it is doubtless, plays a very significant role in the life of contemporary civilization – far more important than what was until recently expected. Whether the topic is the influence that religious institutions have on actual political streams, or it is the consequences of religious convictions on creating new/old systems of value; whether we have on mind collective or individual identity praxes coloured diverse religious insights, or we talk about growing problems of effectuation and maintenance of the principle of secularization within modern states, the phenomenon of the revival of religion unfolded a series of questions and dilemmas related to ideological and spiritual foundations of contemporary world.

One of those questions surely is related to the nature of the new religiosity: a question to which even today we are not able to offer a sole and unambiguous answer, in spite of numerous academic studies dedicated to this issue over last few decades. Religious revival has differently manifested itself in different parts of the globe, reflecting local historical, social and cultural specificities, as well as a values vacuum, especially conspicuous in ex communistic countries. Anyhow, an attempt to understand new/old religious forms dictated a thorough analysis of their sources, contents, meanings, and ranges.

Studies of religion in Serbia have, over last two to three decades, acted in accordance with upward trend. Cognition of religion as culturally and socially relevant phenomenon and overture toward theoretical, methodological and thematic innovations caused creation and development of abundant anthropological, sociological, politicological and other research platforms, directed to various aspects of religious exposure.

It can be said that a certain theoretical and methodological corpus of papers on religion and religiosity in contemporary society of Serbia had been formed by so-far studies, a corpus that is based on notice and interpretation of the fundamental characteristics of phenomenon and that stands for a solid basis for further research. Primary elements of that corpus are defined by determination of historical and cultural context in which a revitalization of religious worldviews happened. Decades-long governance of atheism as a state ideology actually disrupted spontaneous processes of secularization, typical for the whole modern world, particularly for that part which we name Euro-American civilization. Therefore, the comeback of religion in ex communistic countries could be defined as a process of de-atheization rather than de-secularization, for it had its strongpoint in negating the values of atheistic ideology. In these circumstances, de-secularization was a desultory (which does not
mean unimportant) consequence of the post-atheistic state of society and culture. Another significant element of this process, also related to the specific historical and cultural context, pertains to interconnection of ethnic and confessional identities of the population of the ex SFR Yugoslavia. This interconnection has coloured new/old forms of religious behaviour in a special way, often stressing its historical, not eschatological aspects. Equation of religious and national affiliation has conditioned, on one hand, intensive politization of religion and religious institutions, while being a sign of weakness of religious institutions and of advanced process of their inner secularization on the other. Explicitly or implicitly consenting to political manipulations of religious discourses, for the sake of confirmation and expansion of re-seized public space, traditional religious institutions carried out the marginalization of their “true” believers, as well as of their fundamental dogmas. Together with global trends of pluralization, fragmentation and mercantilization of society, this gave birth to a third important characteristic of the process of comeback to religion, and that is proliferation of various and numerous religious attitudes and praxes, as well as of their hybrid forms – from popular, folkloristic, pagan, mystical, esoteric approaches and insights, to those which find their basis in teachings of churches and of religious communities.

Nevertheless, it should be stressed that cultural and historical context of revitalization of religion (in our case) didn’t affect only the diversity of religious phenomena and creating different types of religiosity. Almost with equal strength, it also shaped interpretations of this phenomenon in scientific and other public discourses. Intellectual heritage of the epoch in which religion had default negative sign has, together with dominant positivist spirit of modern science, often deprived researchers (still it does) of a possibility to perceive those less tangible dimensions of religious experience of post/modern man. In such a manner, for example, traditional (and still current) anthropological dichotomies classify concepts of irrational and mystic on the same side of binary relation, as opposed to concepts of rational, secular, profane. However, the question is if thus situated dichotomies reflect the reality of religious man?

Individual spiritual quest, mystic in its one important segment, represents a source of collective religious movements and phenomena up to present-day. The complexity of the latter ones in modern world in fact continuously suggests the necessity of a new or repeat qualitative review of the inner, individual religious experience. Is man religious nowadays, and, if so, in which manner? Does his religious and mystical experience differ from the same experience of the man of pre-modern society, and, if so, how? Does his religiosity belong to the sphere of rational, creative, and constructive relation towards reality, or it stems from increasing irrationality, i.e. from suppressed, repressed and deserted feelings of fear and uncertainty? Is mystical experience of contemporary man limited on small segments of his reality or it is related, like in past pre-modern contexts, to the whole of life, grasped as permanent rotation and intertwining of immanent and transcendent? Does contemporary man “escapes” into religion due to inner compulsions triggered by superstitions and magical relation...
towards acting and non-acting, or his relation towards mystic is placed in firm faith, which mystery transforms into knowledge?

These questions already suggest that faith and its ranges could be basic distinctive characteristics in denoting different forms of religiosity with which we encounter today – faith as a state through which mystical experience becomes rational and operative content that fills all the segments of human life. We can assume that following this direction would probably lead us to a conclusion related to a very small number of religious people today. Nonetheless, reality is not that simple or unambiguous. As it was stressed several times, religiosity today includes broad and dynamic plan range of phenomena, relations, beliefs and behaviours, a fact that we tried to suggest already with the title of the collection of papers that the reader has before him. The collection represents an effort to deepen and broaden perspectives of academic overviews of phenomenon of religion and religiosity in contemporary society, as well as an effort to represent some less known phenomena from the area of contemporary religious manifestations to the readership.

First part of the collection brings papers which question basic notions and phenomena referring to the relationship of religion and contemporary culture. The author of the first paper Milica Bakić-Hayden thus offers a wide theoretical and experiential platform for observing various phenomena related to this topic. Relationship of religion and secularization, modern and secular society, of revitalization of religion and globalization… is necessary to observe through relational, not through opposing approach. This turns out to be a valuable methodological suggestion in survey and interpretation of religion in post-communistic Balkan countries in which it appears to be one of the key characteristics of identity, as it is already known. This contribution is followed by a paper whose authors A. Pavićević and I. Todorović endeavored to point out primarily the fact of global identity questioning of contemporary man, and also the relationship between political, social and cultural changes and identity praxes of population of Serbia. Third paper of Croatian anthropologist Goran Šantek brings a case study sui generis, unwrapping a precious insight into inner features of individual religious experience – features that testify about religion as effectual cultural principle that allows “reshaping of conception about one’s own personality”. The last paper in the first part of the collection by the author Mihailo Smiljanić problematizes some issues related to challenges in religious education and its objective influence on students’ life and attitudes.

In the history of the Orthodox Church religious art has always represented a noteworthy part of believers’ liturgical as well as every-day life. Therefore it is no wonder that revitalization of religion as well as of social role of Orthodox Church in Serbia was followed by an increased interest precisely for artistic, above all visual and musical contents that are put into service of a complete liturgical experience. Yet, just like in other segments of religious praxes, here too a multiplication of forms and approaches of artistic expression of the Orthodox doctrine occurred. One of such processes – a process of restoration of ecclesiastical painting focused around the concept of „byzantinism“, together with disparate artistic interpretations of this
concept, is the topic of the paper of the academic painter Todor Mitrović. The sequel in this segment of the collection is a study of Greek anthropologist Katerina Seraidari, who speaks of significance of understanding religious traditions for interpreting their contemporary, popular, and prima facie trivial manifestations. The paper of Milea Stefanović Banović remains in the same course, bringing the results of research on the usage of religious equipment in every-day life of citizens of Serbia.

In the following thematic unity authors point out the prominence of historical aspects of religious traditions in the shaping of their extant forms, whereby the accent lies upon identity praxes which are based on the choice of given religious, ethnic, and cultural symbolic elements. Through the paper of Dragana Radojičić reader thus gets familiar with historical background of the modern emigrations of Russian population in Boka Kotorska, as well as with the manner of establishing a specific relationship between two nations – relationship that the author denominates as a spiritual fellowship. This relation represents a momentous cultural strategy of adaptation of current Russian immigrants. Hungarian anthropologist István Povedak brings a captivating study on syncretism of Christian and neo-pagan religious beliefs and praxes in Hungary. He interprets this phenomenon as a consequence of religious pluralism and freedom of expression, both of which led to a specific dissolution of institutionalized forms of religiosity.

In this volume reader will come across a brief excursion into the field of theological anthropology, in which the author Zvezdana Ostojić brings postulates of the Orthodox interpretation of man, through an analysis of excerpts of abundant philosophical and theological opus of bishop Nikolaj Velimirović.

Last part of the collection provides insights into particular components of popular culture, folklore and literature, which are directly or indirectly linked to the religion. In the paper on holiday congratulations, Milina Ivanović Barišić demonstrates the development of greeting customs in regard to the process of transition in celebrating certain holidays. Contributed paper of Nina Aksić points out the need of re-reading some literary movements and works, since they testify on spiritual principles of the epoch in which they originated. Accordingly, ancient Greek tragedy attests to the history of Greek cult practice – on this matter, through analysis of maenadic rituals and their modern reconstructions and interpretations, as Đurđina Šijaković, the author of the last paper in the collection, writes.

This publication emerged as a result of the work of researchers of the Institute of Ethnography SASA on the project: Identity strategies: contemporary culture and religiosity. Nevertheless, as we have already shown, among authors there are researches from other academic milieus and disciplines. Their contributions testify that the place and the role of religion and religiosity in various contemporary societies are recognized as important, somewhere even fundamental cultural strategies. On the other hand, we were of the opinion that their deliberations, together with papers of the researchers engaged in the project, will contribute to the variety of topics and approaches in the study of phenomenon of religion, and that we will acquire an interesting and useful thematic monograph. Readers shall estimate how successful we have been.