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ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC¹

By Lubomir Martin Ondrasek

Lubomir Martin Ondrasek, a native of Slovakia, is a doctoral student in Religious Ethics at the University of Chicago Divinity School and also serves as an adjunct faculty member in Christian Social Ethics with Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Boston, MA. He earned his M. Div. from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and M. Th in Christianity and Culture from Harvard University. In 2008, he was awarded a Summer Internship by the University of Chicago Human Rights Program to explore the issue of religious freedom, especially as it relates to the government regulation of religion in Slovakia.

During the last two decades, following the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe, there has been significant progress towards religious freedom in the Slovak Republic. Today, Slovak citizens are no longer persecuted, harassed or intimidated for their faith as they were before 1989 and religious communities are able to manage their own affairs independently of any instruction, intervention or intrusion by the State authorities. Freedom of religion and belief is legally protected by Article 24 of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, Constitutional Act No. 23/1991 Coll., which introduces the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, and also by Act No. 308/1991 Coll. on freedom of religious faith and status of churches and religious societies as amended (Act No. 394/2000 Coll.). The last Act, along with Act No. 201/2007 Coll. (before Act No. 192/1992 Coll.), stipulates conditions for the registration of churches and religious societies (hereafter "churches") with the Church Department at the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, which oversees relations between the state and churches. Other important documents defining the relations between Church and the State are: The Basic Agreement between the Slovak Republic and the Holy See (Act No. 326/2001 Coll.) and the Agreement between the Slovak Republic and Registered Churches and Religious Societies (Act No. 250/2002 Coll.).

However, as this report seeks to demonstrate, there is a certain incongruity between declared and actual religious freedom, especially as it relates to the present legislation governing the registration of churches in the Slovak Republic. This incongruity, I believe, compromises freedom of religion by discriminating against churches which have fewer than 20,000 adult members – the strictest demand of any of the 55 participating states of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Despite numerous criticisms from Human Rights organizations and concerned individuals against the registration law passed in 1992 (Act No. 192/1992 Coll.), instead of loosening the conditions for registration, the Slovak Parliament passed an even stricter law in 2007 (Act No. 201/2007), which requires churches seeking registration to have not 20,000 *supporters*

¹ This is an abridged version of the Slovak report "Stav náboženskej slobody v Slovenskej republike: správa z letnej stáže," which is to be published in the *Institute for State-Church Relations Yearbook 2008*. Bratislava, SK: Institute for State-Church Relations, 2009. I want to express my deep gratitude to the following people for their ready alacrity to share their views with me, either in person or in writing, on religious freedom in the Slovak Republic: Mgr. Abdulwahab Al-Sbenaty, Mgr. Karol Badinský, Mgr. Viliam Bařka, Doc. PhDr. Martin Bútor, PaedDr. Noema Brádňanská, Ph.D., PhDr. Radovan Āikeš, Ing. Ján Henžel, Ph.D., ThDr. Ján Hradil, Th.D., JUDr. Ján Juran, Ing. Ján Klas, CSILic. Jozef Kováčik, Ing. Peter Kolath, Mgr. Tomáš Kriřka, ThLic. Michaela Moravčíková, RNDr. Frantiřek Miklořko, Mgr. Andrea Poloková, Mgr. Daniel Šobr and MUDr. Ivan Zuřtiak. Although each of the aforementioned persons significantly contributed to my own understanding of the explored issue, I alone bear responsibility for the views expressed herein.

(adult persons domiciled in the Slovak Republic, who are willing to sign the petition in support for registration of a given church), but 20,000 *members* (adult Slovak citizens domiciled in the Slovak Republic, who submit “honest declaration” attesting to the membership and support for registration of their church, knowledge of basic tenets and teachings of their faith community, understanding of the rights and responsibilities of their membership, home address and personal identity number). Presently, there are eighteen registered churches in Slovakia and it is noteworthy that only six of them have actually reached the threshold of 20,000 members. The vast majority of the registered churches that do not meet the high numerical census were granted State consent to practice their faith before the regime change in 1989. The Roman Catholic Church maintains the dominant position in the Slovak Republic – according to the 2001 census, there are 3,708,120 Roman Catholics who make up 68.9 percent of the population.

The advantages of registration are very significant: through it, first and foremost, churches acquire legal subjectivity (*právna subjektivita*), which enables them to function as a legal entity; they also gain the right of access to public facilities, including public schools, health care facilities and military installations; the clergy of these churches can perform the State recognized wedding ceremonies, and last, but certainly not least, they have the right to receive financial support from the State budget for the salaries of the clergy, subsidies for operating their central offices as well as other economic benefits. Unregistered churches are not able to enjoy any of the aforementioned rights and privileges, are often pejoratively labeled as illegitimate “sects,” and the general public tend to look askance at them.

In July 2008, I had an opportunity to conduct an extensive interview with František Mikloško at the National Council of the Slovak Republic, discussing the current legislation that governs the registration of churches. Mikloško is the senior member and the former Chairman of the National Council (the sole constitutional and legislative body of the Slovak Republic) and a 2009 Presidential Candidate. Interestingly, he is also a former (and rightly admired) dissident, and Vice-Chairman of the Committee on Human Rights, Minorities and the Status of Women. Mikloško was one of the key players who contributed to framing the restrictive legislation and his views are representative of a fairly large segment of the general public. During our conversation, it became apparent that there are four basic reasons for Mikloško to support the amended Act No. 192/1992 Coll. First, according to Mikloško, this law helps maintain the traditional religious environment by supporting historically established churches. He holds that non-traditional religious communities should not be easily granted legal and social status equal to churches with historical roots in Slovakia, but that they should prove their viability and contribution to society before being granted registration and related generous benefits. Mikloško argues that the majority of presently registered churches also had to wait to be recognized by the State for many decades, in some cases, centuries.

Next, he is convinced that during this transitional time the “small and economically weak Slovakia” must remain “especially vigilant.” Stressing that the country had lived for forty years in isolation, when “the free world has escaped us and we lack orientation,” it is difficult for people to distinguish between a legitimate religious community and a destructive sect, which may adversely affect the well-being, of particularly, young people. He remarked that he knows a person who succumbed to the influence of a destructive cult and this strengthened his conviction about the significance of being cautious. Furthermore, Mikloško stated that there is the danger that some of the lesser known religious communities may have ties to groups, which conceal their dark intentions behind the cloak of religion. At this perilous time when, as Mikloško metaphorically expressed, “Europe is in flames,” “bombs are falling all around,” and we are “in the midst of a

third world war," politicians bear responsibility for their citizens' well-being. It was apparent from our conversation that on this particular question, Mikloško decided to err on the side of caution.

Surprisingly, Mikloško admitted that the amended registration law is "discriminatory" towards smaller churches and a threshold of 20,000 members is "disproportionate, exaggerated and an unachievable number that was determined on the ground of expedience to prohibit additional churches from registering." He does not think, however, that this law violates human rights in any way and compromises freedom of religion in Slovakia. These, according to him, are guaranteed by the Slovak Constitution to all citizens. He concluded this argument saying that no one is persecuted for their religion and unregistered churches are able to gain legal status and freely conduct their activities by registering as civic associations.

One more argument, that Mikloško only alluded to, but is frequently used as the principal argument, can be given in support of the present restrictive registration law: Martin Kuruc, a member of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, Minorities and the Status of Women, stated that "comparing situations in other countries of the European Union with Slovakia is irrelevant, because these states do not spend comparable amount of government subsidies for support of churches." Jozef Kováčik, a spokesperson for the Catholic Bishops' Council, made the point even more explicitly: "[to decide on registration requirements] is fully in the State competence, because it provides subsidies for the churches." In short, this argument generally proceeds along these lines: the State does not put any restrictions on religious freedom and if it decides, for some good reason, to show preferable treatment to some of the churches, it is its prerogative.

Our assessment of the status of religious freedom in Slovakia will mainly depend on whether or not there is a nexus between freedom of religion and the conditions of registration. Ján Juran, Director of Department of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, does not believe that this is the case. As he puts it: "Fundamental human rights and freedoms are equally guaranteed to members of both registered and non-registered churches and religious societies. ...[they] may freely conduct their activities regardless of whether they are registered or not."² However, this statement seems to be only partially true because it limits the robust concept of religious freedom to the right of freedom of conscience (the *forum internum*) while not sufficiently taking into account the right to freedom of public display of religious belief (the *forum externum*)³, which is compromised in the Slovak Republic.

It is worth mentioning that interviewed religious actors, representing non-registered churches, unanimously and unequivocally disagreed with Juran's appraisal. Abdulwahab Al-Sbenaty, who was then the Chairman of the General Association of Muslim Students in Bratislava, opposed amending the registration law, which *de facto* prevented the Muslim community from gaining legal status. He openly stated that the new legislature was "directed against them from the very beginning."⁴ Peter Kollath of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness commented: "that which was discriminatory in 1992, has now become even more discriminatory." Kollath considers the current registration law "unjust" and believes that "the threshold of 20,000 members makes the law discriminatory, unconstitutional and opposed to basic human rights." Daniel Šobr, a spokesman for the Christian Fellowships, regards it as "clearly restrictive, aiming to complicate

² Ján Juran, "Guaranties of Religious Freedom in the Slovak Republic," in *Islám v Európe: náboženská sloboda a jej aspekty/ Islam in Europe: Religious Freedom and Its Aspects* (Bratislava, SK: Institute for State-Church Relations and Centre for European Politics, 2005), 192.

³ See Paul M. Taylor, *Freedom of Religion: UN and European Human Rights Law and Practice* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁴ *Hospodárske noviny*, March 30, 2007.

and prevent the registration rather than permit it." Šobr thinks that "the religious freedom in Slovakia is not as it should be; it is not actually as declared in the Constitution," and he raises this astute question: "How a church which does *de facto* not exist is supposed to gather twenty thousand members and then register? It is virtually infeasible." Ivan Zuštiak of the Unitas Fratrum associates himself with views of the Prosecutor General of the Slovak Republic Dobroslav Trnka⁵, holding the present enactment to be "discriminatory and unconstitutional." Moreover, he expresses certain concerns in relation to the conditions for registration and possible negative consequences, witnessed through the history, as "any retrieval and gathering of personal data is a sensitive issue, the Holocaust matters still fading out in Europe, when the data on religious persuasion were collected from people too and later misused against them."

The decision of the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic, if the discussed law is unconstitutional, is still pending, nonetheless, even now we can positively state that the law is problematic and unsustainable in the long run. The fundamental question for us should not only be whether the unregistered churches are free in their religious expression, but also if the range of rights and duties for registered churches is the same as for those not registered; and if it is not, why is that. We must ask, if the condition is acceptable or must it be changed, and what specific solutions could help bring about the change. The role and responsibility of the State functioning on the principles of democracy is to ensure that no individual or religious group is legislatively less-favored against others and that the principle of equality is met to the highest degree possible. This *inter alia* reduces possible social tensions, creating conditions for reaching lasting peace in society. At present, this principle is not fully upheld in the Slovak Republic.

The effort to preserve "traditional religious environment" is certainly legitimate, but, only to the extent so as not to prevent any segment of religious population in the society from enjoying the same rights as guaranteed to registered churches. From the ethical point of view, it would be no less problematic if the privileged churches were using an arm of the State to preserve their dominant status in society, whether actively endeavoring to preclude the same rights for all of the other churches or passively watching their struggle for legitimate equalization. The registration of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) in October 2006 was one of the most critical recent events in the development of state-church relations in the Slovak Republic. Though the church was able to collect the more than required 20,000 signatures in a short period of time, not everyone supported their effort to register – whether due to suspicion, prejudice, or disagreement with their teaching. The Catholic Bishops' Council expressed their opinion on the Mormons' signature campaign as follows: "Representatives of the Mormon church were turning to possible signatories with request to sign the petition for their registration in the spirit of religious freedom. We alert the believers that by their signature they approve and support the operation of this religious group whose teaching is not in line with teaching of the Catholic Church. We call on all Catholics to take this fact as a matter of their own conscience and not to sign the petition and not to betray the Catholic Church wherein they were integrated in baptism." This controversial and unfortunate statement that many Catholics themselves do not identify with (I think, in line with the important document of the Second Vatican Council *Dignitas humanae*), raises several critical questions not only for people of Catholic faith: If we agree with registration and equality of other churches and religious groups whose teachings are not in line with ours, does this act constitute a lack of loyalty to our church? Should the Christians (but also Jews, Muslims or adherents of any other confession) feel that they are betraying their faith, if they support other churches in the free

⁵ Dobroslav Trnka, *Návrh na Ústavný súd Slovenskej republiky, GÚs 3/08-1* (Bratislava, SK: Generálna prokuratúra Slovenskej republiky, 2008).

expression and practice of their faith? Naturally, many may face a tension between the demands of their faith, on one hand, and the requirements of the pluralistic society they live in, on the other hand. Here I agree with the Director of the Institute for State-Church Relations, Michaela Moravčíková, who in her book *Church and Human Rights*, makes this excellent observation: "On its way through history, the church necessarily has to be exposed to the tension, when it wants to stand firmly on the foundations given by Christ, and reflect the requirements of changing situation in human society at the same time. In this, it is important that the church, while realizing itself and responding to the needs of the people of the age, can make good use of the tensions it is faced with, to be enriched and come even closer to each single human being."⁶ This creative tension many believers experience due to their lives in pluralistic society can actually stimulate them to examine, reassess and ultimately mature their own faith, for as the sagacious Socrates said – "the unexamined life is not worth living", analogically, we could say that the unexamined faith is not worth believing. The basic condition for such examination is an attitude of humility, leading to knowledge that any human grasp of truth is only partial, its interpretation may be mistaken, epistemological certainty is unreachable, and truth is frequently found where we do not expect it.

A well-intentioned prompt for vigilance that was heard from several parties that I interviewed is also understandable. Not every church has the same beneficial effect on the life of individuals and society; some of them can even be considered as having harmful influence. Especially those who were victims themselves in the past or know someone who fell under the influence of a destructive religious group, feel special empathy for them, and righteous anger against manipulative religious leaders misusing their authority and vulnerability of their followers, and consider it to be their moral obligation to offer help to the victims and to support prevention in various ways. It has become apparent during my stay in the Slovak Republic that some suspicion or even fear of Islam is not only fictitious there, which is however not too surprising in the world after 9/11. Ján Juran confirmed my observation – "in Slovakia, as well as in other countries of Central Europe, we see much more fear of Islam, which is probably [also] due to historical development and battles in this region in 16th and 17th centuries." The same kind of ambivalent attitude on possible registration of Muslims could be discerned from statements of representatives of registered churches, too. For example, the Slovak Bishop of the Czechoslovak Husitte Church, Ján Hradil, expressed the following opinion: "If Muslims have a sufficient number of believers, why prevent them from registration? However, they must submit to the culture of Europe." Tomáš Kriška's concern resulted from his understanding of history and influence of Islam: "Still no one was able to refute me, that the roots of Muslim faith are militant and aggressive. (...) and here is where you can really know, if a religion will bring about something positive or negative in the long run." Kriška, who serves as the President of the Baptist Union of the Slovak Republic, went on to say that "There is no doubt that in the countries where Islam is prevalent, it is destructive and often rigid and desperate. (...) We need to understand that if Islam is expressing itself as peaceful, it is usually where it does not have the upper hand; where it does have the upper hand, it is not peaceful at all."

Though I agree that certain religious groups are, in reality, destructive in their influence on the lives of people, as well as that religious extremism in general and Islamic fundamentalism (not Islam) specifically constitutes a real problem, I do not believe that over-restrictive and generalizing measures against unregistered churches on the part of state are the best way to face these dangers in the long run. They may even become counter-productive and work as a catalyst for greater mobilization and radicalization of groups the State is attempting to hinder. We must

⁶ Michaela Moravčíková, *Cirkev a ľudské práva* (Bratislava, SK: Institute for State-Church Relations, 2002), 10.

apply the principle of the presumption of innocence also in this case; the State should limit religious freedom only when there is real danger to public safety. Moreover, nothing seems to indicate that the major problem in the Slovak Republic is too little caution or excessive credulity; to the contrary, it is rather too much suspicion and mistrust prevailing against all less known or unknown churches, when even legitimate churches are often disparagingly referred to as “sects.” For instance, few people know and acknowledge that the Mormon teaching puts strong emphasis on family and healthy lifestyle, or that Baha’i faith takes a stand against all forms of violence, xenophobia, racism, intolerance and national antagonism – values and attitudes that influence the life of society positively. The solution, therefore, does not rest in paternalistic approaches from political and religious representatives that try to limit the access of new churches to the spiritual market using legislative measures. The principal resolution should be primarily in education and dialogue on religious issues that lead to the development of critical thinking and thus to informed conclusions, since the basic problem seems to be a lack of orientation in religious questions, including within Christianity, which is dominant in the Slovak Republic.

One of the most serious problems in legislation about the relationship between the State and churches is that those operating at present as ‘non-registered’ do not have any real possibility to acquire legal subjectivity without circumventing the law by registering as civic associations (*občianske združenia*) or foundations. Despite the fact that the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic tolerates this “legal swindle” – as referred to by Mikloško who also thinks that applying the logic of “legal purism” to this issue is not necessary in this “transitional period” – from various aspects, this condition cannot be deemed as satisfactory. Not only is it the case that, in democratic states, laws should not be complied with and law-breakers penalized selectively, but this condition also pushes churches acting as civic associations or foundations in a tight corner, with constant threats that they could be dissolved by an order from the Ministry of Interior practically at any time. This concern was openly expressed by some representatives of churches registered this way. Last but not least, we must not forget those churches for which such registration would not be in accordance with their religious beliefs and conscience. This was the case, for example, for Baha’i Fellowship and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints before they were registered at the Ministry of Culture, and they were facing unnecessary obstructions related to their operation without any legal status.

There are at least three possible solutions to improve the current state and status of churches that do not meet, and will not be able to meet at any time soon, the conditions of the present registration law, which is one of the most rigorous in Europe. The first solution is creation of a two-step registration model, similar to the one passed in the neighboring Czech Republic in 2002. This model would ensure that new churches can register and acquire legal subjectivity (first step), and after a specific period of time (e.g. ten years) and after meeting other conditions (second step) they can acquire the same privileges as churches that are fully registered. Another solution could be an amendment of the Act No. 83/1990 Coll. on Citizen Association by elimination of §1, sec. 3, which does not allow churches to register as civic associations, and by modification of §12 sec. 3, letter a). This amendment would allow smaller churches to acquire legal subjectivity (without violating the law) through registration at the Ministry of Interior, and upon reaching 20,000 members, they could register at the Ministry of Culture, obtaining further privileges that are now enjoyed by eighteen registered churches.

Although both of these models are better alternatives than the present one, I deem them to be inadequate, primarily because they would not ensure a mutually equal position of churches, as some of the churches would enjoy a privileged position before the State while others would

continue to be less-favored and seen as inferior. Moreover, there may arise a paradoxical situation when some churches registered at the first step under the Ministry of Culture (the two-step solution), or, in case of amendment of the Act on Citizen Association, registered at the Ministry of Interior (the two-line solution), could have several times as many members and demonstrably more positive influence on society than some smaller ones from among the eighteen churches registered presently, yet still not have the right for the same privileges including financial subsidies. Few people would be surprised if the unprivileged churches felt aggrieved by unfair treatment, and it would be just a matter of time before the State would face complaints, charges of discrimination and even lawsuits.

The third solution is admittedly very demanding and requires arduous effort as well as a modicum of good will, but I am convinced that it is the best – to change the present model of the close alliance between state and church for a model of “friendly separation” including economic independence of churches from the State, creating conditions for equality of all churches at the same time. This new model would allow all legitimate churches to register upon meeting certain minimum conditions; it would be more compatible with principles of democratic society and better approximate the requirements of justice – one of the highest ideals ever that can be held by a religious person. Therefore, it should not just be in the State interest, but also in the interest of currently registered churches to support this new model.

Radovan Čikeš, who is dealing with the relationship between the State and churches as well as religious freedom issues at the Church Department at the Ministry of Culture, correctly points to the correlation between loosening the conditions for registration and economic separation of churches from the State.⁷ To make the separation of church and state possible would require changing the way in which churches are now being financed. The present “cooperation model,” characterized by a too close relation of the State and registered churches and their direct financing, has virtually not been changed for sixty years (see Act No. 218/1949 Coll. as amended by the Act No. 88/1950 Coll., No. 16/1990 Coll., No. 165/1992 Coll. and No. 522/1992 Coll.), and before 1989 this model had been used as a powerful instrument to restrict religious freedom and reduce the social influence of church.

In 2008, the State expended about one billion Slovak Crowns from the its budget for the registered churches, which is almost double the amount from 2000, and the present model arguably benefits more the smaller churches, as the financial subsidies are not proportionally distributed based on the number of members. We should also point out, that the New Apostolic Church, Baha'i Fellowship, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Christian Congregations, and Jehovah's Witnesses do not exercise their title to financial subsidies from the State on the basis of their religious convictions, and Seventh-day Adventist Church only receives subsidies for operation of its headquarters. Interestingly, in some smaller churches there are often only several dozens of believers for one minister, and the ministers sometimes lack formal theological education. The State does not interfere with the internal affairs of individual churches and does not have any mechanisms to establish the number of clergy, their qualifications, etc. I do not want to suggest that the State should intervene in religious affairs, I only want to underscore that it creates an exceptionally generous environment for *registered* churches. Increasing financial expenditures from the state budget seems to be problematic in the long run, especially as a large segment of Slovak population are already critical towards the present model of *direct* support for churches, which is

⁷ Radovan Čikeš, “Registrácia cirkví a náboženských spoločností verzus náboženská sloboda.” in *Náboženská sloboda a jej aspekty: Islam v Európe/Religious Freedom and Its Aspects: Islam in Europe* (Bratislava, SK: Institute for State-Church Relations and Centre for European Politics, 2005), 18.

creating a toxic atmosphere in society and high suspicion towards the moral integrity of the church in the eyes of the general public. Finding the best system of economic provision for churches in the Slovak Republic is a complex and complicated matter and its cogitation will thus have to be left for another time⁸.

A significant benefit of economic separation will not only be increased vitality of churches and the believers taking a greater responsibility for the operation of their own church fellowships, but also an improvement of the social climate. This can only happen provided that the discussions and the process of approval of the new model will be transparent and clearly demonstrate that churches that currently draw subsidies from the state budget do not seek their own interests or to buttress their position only, but are genuinely interested in ministering to their neighbors and standing for what is right and just. The admonitory example of the Czech Republic, where the confidence of people in churches has significantly decreased after, at times, an acrimonious public debate about the restitution of church properties should serve as a warning sign for the Slovak Republic.⁹ One of the herculean tasks facing the contemporary church in the Slovak Republic will be to convince the outside world, but also many of its nominal members, that the Church as an institution can be trusted. It is only a matter of time, I believe, until some of the potentially polarizing issues discussed in this report will be much more vigorously debated in the public square, providing the churches with both the challenge and opportunity to emerge through this process as a more trustworthy institution.

One more, but certainly not the last benefit of the separation results from confessional principles of one of the registered churches – “church as a whole must be a prophetic voice and express criticism towards the state, whenever seeing that this institution is acting contradictory to basic human rights.”¹⁰ From both the history and the present, it is evident that too close alliance and economic dependence of the church on the state has a special power to quiet down or completely silence this prophetic voice, immobilizing the church in the fulfillment of one of its cardinal missions.

In conclusion, both state and church have been struggling for centuries over the issue of how to best define their mutual relationship. Although there is probably no perfect church-state model, there are still better or worse models, and also models that are generally considered unacceptable. As for the Slovak Republic, Moravčíková and Cipár correctly point out that “state-church relations were going through many changes during the past two hundred years, while from today’s perspective their form was constantly inconvenient for both parties.”¹¹ The purpose of this report was to show that even with major improvements in state-church relations that occurred in the Slovak Republic after the demise of Communism, the present state is still unsatisfactory, and also to adumbrate a possible solution for change. It would require a separate paper to explicate why

⁸ The Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic and the Institute for State-Church Relations should be commended for organizing an international scholarly conference on the subject “Financing Churches and Religious Societies in the 21st Century.” The conference will be held under the auspices of the Minister of Culture, Marek Maďarič, in Bratislava and Nitra, Slovak Republic, October 14-16, 2009.

⁹ In his informative study, Ján Mišovič remarks: “It is a paradox that church was more respected before the end of 1989 and in the beginning of 1990 when it was with no property and just little influence on society,” and he adds: “Public feels that in the Catholic Church, the interest in material properties prevails and the spiritual issues are not priority. The status of church was rather diminished than strengthened.” See Ján Mišovič, “Czech Confidence in the Church in Comparison with Other Institutions.” in Borowik, Irena (Ed.) *Church-State Relations in Central and Eastern Europe* (Krakow: Nomos, 1999), 319-320.

¹⁰ The Baptist Union of the Slovak Republic, “Confessional Principles of Baptists, Article 10,” www.baptist.sk.

¹¹ Michaela Moravčíková a Marián Cipár, *Cisárovo Cisárovi: Ekonomické zabezpečenie cirkví a náboženských spoločností* (Bratislava: Institute for State-Church Relations, 2001), 68.

I think the model of “friendly separation” (e.g. USA) is better and more suitable for the Slovak Republic than “strict separation” model (e.g. France). Though the Slovak Republic is still going through the various processes of transformation after forty years of totalitarian rule, and some of the necessary changes naturally cannot be expedited, it is worth asking why two decades after the events of 1989, the church and state are still not genuinely separated, despite the fact that it was one of the demands of the Velvet Revolution. As the involved parties take the next step in the development of state-church relations in the Slovak Republic, it is imperative that they consider not only historical, social, political, legal or economic realms of this subject, but also its ethical and moral dimensions, which have been frequently absent from the discussions up to this point.