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Rebić's "Opći Religijski Leksikon (A General Lexicon of Religion)" - Book Review

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Opći Religijski Leksikon A General Lexicon of Religion . Adalbert Rebić, editor. Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža , 2002. 1062 pages, hard cover, one volume.

The publication of a major encyclopaedia or a lexicon is always a significant event in any country. If the publication is the first of its kind ever to appear on the national cultural scene, and if it covers a particular field which has traditionally been ignored by the ruling ideology or monopolised by a prevalent religion, then the sheer fact of its appearance deserves loud approval. Thus, the emergence of the pioneering *General Lexicon of Religion* in Croatia in September 2002 constitutes a major contribution and a landmark for the national culture. The *Lexicon* will be an essential reference book on religion in Croatian for many years to come.

The project of this *Lexicon*, which numbers 1062 pages, over eleven thousand entries and numerous maps, charts and photographs in colour, took about ten years to complete. The editorial board, headed by a prominent Roman Catholic professor and Old Testament scholar, enlisted the help of thirteen editors who were in charge of the following thematic areas: 1. Catechistics, 2. Liturgics and ethics, 3. Eastern religions, Slavic, Germanic, Baltic and Celtic religions, 4. Hagiography, 5. Greek and Roman religion, 6. Philosophy, 7. Protestantism, 8. Islam, 9. Catholicism, 10. Judaism, 11. Eastern Orthodoxy, 12. Church history, 13. Biblical studies. These editors of thematic sections recruited more than 120 experts who authored texts for designated entries. However, final editing was in the hands of the editorial board. As a result the *Lexicon* entries are not attributed to their primary authors.

The *Lexicon* sets out to list a large number of persons, phenomena, facts, doctrines, and other notions related to a variety of religions and religious experience. One of the criteria for the inclusion of material is its relevance to the Croatian religious history and traditions. This is quite appropriate and indisputable. As Croatia is a country in which Roman Catholicism is the predominant religion, the overwhelming majority of entries are related to Roman Catholic topics. This can be gleaned from the distribution of the thematic areas above, and the first reviews of the *Lexicon* in the Croatian press have made note of this fact.

Furthermore, the *Lexicon* also professes scientific neutrality and objectivity free of “confessional one-sidedness”. However, Roman Catholic ecclesiastical and theological slant permeates the treatment of some topics. It is probably inevitable in the circumstances, but it is still somewhat disappointing in view of the fact that the publisher is the major state-funded

Institute which should presumably aspire to “neutrality” in regard to the description of religious phenomena.

How will non-Roman Catholic Christians of Protestant background, some of which are of evangelical persuasion, respond to the *Lexicon*? They will certainly point to certain positive features. For example, there are fourteen authors among the contributors who belong to this camp, which is a high percentage in comparison with their relatively small total numbers in Croatia. REE readers may recognize N. Gerald Shenk (Mennonite), Miroslav Volf & Judith Gundy Volf (Presbyterian), Peter Kuzmić (Pentecostal & one of the 12 editors), Davorin Peterlin, Peter MacKenzie, Ksenja Magda, Antonia Lučić (all Baptist). Other non-Catholic contributors worthy of note are Vlado Deutsch (deceased, Lutheran), Mladen Turk (Lutheran), Endre Langh (Reformed), Jasminka Domaš (Jewish), Julia Koš (Jewish), Hilmo Neimarlija (Islam), Ševko Omerbašić (Islam) and Jovan Nikolić (deceased, Serbian Orthodox). Further, several prominent Croatian Protestants and evangelicals have been included in a major national reference book. As far as I have been able to ascertain, five Baptists, two Pentecostals, and two Lutherans are mentioned in the body of the *Lexicon*. Finally, entries for certain theological notions or Biblical expressions have been written by Protestants and evangelicals.

However, these readers will also point to certain shortcomings. Further, the definition of “baptism” is given as “one of the seven sacraments established by Jesus Christ” with no reference to other views. Also, in the entry “Protestantism” this “confession” is divided into churches (Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican) and sects (Anabaptists, Mennonites, Quakers and others). This, first, implies that Anabaptists are an existing denomination, which is not correct, and second, the division betrays a Roman Catholic theological viewpoint rejected by many other Christians. As for theological notions, it may be noted that there is an entry for “conversion” but not for “repentance”.

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