Berglund and Porter-Szücs' "Christianity and Modernity in Europe" - Book Review

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Marek Maďarič, in his opening remarks, notes that it is “necessary for the state to assume initiative and to start the preparation of a complex legislative regulation of the financing and state support of churches and religious societies according to the new model and consensual agreement” (p. 10). The book under review can therefore be viewed as the first step of this renewed effort to deal with the pressing issue of financing churches and religious societies in Slovakia by comparing and contrasting various systems of economic support of religious groups, hoping that such a critical assessment will lead to the implementation of a fair and functional model for financing churches and religious societies in Slovakia.

The second volume, entitled “Restitutions of Church Property,” is a compilation of twenty essays written by experts mostly from post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Numerous contributors from Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Ukraine, Russia, Romania, and Serbia elucidate the painful historical circumstances surrounding the nationalization of church property and explicate how individual countries have dealt with restitution issues and processes, involving questions of justice, transparency, social rehabilitation, and most importantly, legislation. Some essays deal with the specific objects of the restitutions, but most of the essays seek to describe the complexity of the restoration processes in individual post-communist countries. The collection is suitably enriched by two essays: One clarifies the complicated issue of the expropriation and restitution in Turkey, which relates to the specific context of the existence of religious minorities and the state’s attitude towards them. The second essay offers an overview of the restitution of church property in a Central European context, including Austria. It is worth mentioning that Slovakia has been largely successful in the restitution of church property in contrast to, for example, the Czech Republic, where these issues have been largely unresolved, causing tension in state and church relations.

The conference proceedings, also available in English, provide a valuable contribution to the literature on state and church relations and also have the potential to expand the boundaries of public discourse on theoretical and practical issues related to financing churches and religious societies in Slovakia.

Reviewed by Noema Bradnanska Ondrasek & Lubomir Martin Ondrasek,


Reviewed by James R. Payton, Jr.

Since 2005, the History of East European Christianity Project has been regularly meeting to present and discuss papers on various facets of the experience of Christianity in the region; this book is the result of those endeavors. The editors of this volume were the spearheads of the initiative. They assembled a coterie of scholars from North America, Western Europe, and several nations within formerly Communist Europe to collaborate on this project. This volume is a worthy addition to the considerable library of studies on Eastern European religion.

That is both the strength and a weakness of this collection of essays. The scholars have had the privilege of working intensively in archives first opened two decades ago, in the wake of the collapse of Communist hegemony. In that regard, they had access to material almost entirely unavailable to scholars before that time. The introductory chapter by Brian Porter-Szücs points to the new insights these studies have consequently brought to the fore. However, his eager emphasis on the freshness of these studies overlooks the numerous studies produced in the preceding half-century by a considerable number of scholars on the development of and struggles
faced by religious communities in Eastern Europe during the Communist era. Fresh as the studies in the volume under review are, they had significant predecessors: Trevor Beeson, Paul Oestreicher, Paul Mojzes, and Thomas Bremer (to name no others) offered significant scholarly studies; articles in *Glaube in der zweiten Welt* or *Religion in Eastern Europe* might well have been cited; and the Marxist-Christian dialogues held during the Cold War deserved acknowledgment.

Even so, the introduction rightly points out that the options faced by Christians in the region during the Communist era were more diverse than the alternatives of persecution or craven accommodation — a simplistic assessment too often assumed in popular discussions of ecclesiastical existence in Communist Europe. Porter-Szücs also points out the several new interpretive frameworks utilized by various of the contributing authors. This all resulted, as he points out, in considerable and significant contributions to scholarship on Christianity in Eastern Europe.

A brief review cannot mention all of them. Even so, a few can be noted. Martin Putna offers a stimulating evaluation of Czech Catholicism’s endeavors to find a Christian socio-economic pathway distinct from liberalism, Communism, and fascism. Anca Șincan’s study considers what was involved in actually building churches in Communist Romania: much more construction was permitted than might be expected in a state ostensibly committed to eliminating religion, but she points out that governmental permission could serve Communist purposes in various ways (similar, *mutatis mutandis*, to what transpired in post-Trianon Romania before the advent of Communism, it could have been noted). Katharina Kunter’s chapter contrasts insightfully the ways Czech and German Protestants articulated their position on the controverted concept of human rights. Natalia Shlikhta looks carefully at what was intended by the Soviet leadership, the Russian Orthodox hierarchs, and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic clergy and faithful in the various endeavors associated with the “return” of Ukrainian Greek Catholicism to Russian Orthodoxy. Carefully analyzing the evidence from discrete areas of Poland, James Bjork demonstrates considerable regional diversity in actual adherence to and practice of Catholicism. Patrick Hyder Patterson offers a thoughtful rumination on what Europe as a whole could learn from Eastern Europe’s experience with Islam. The concluding chapter by Bruce R. Berglund offers challenging and provocative suggestions toward a “historical geography of East European Christianity.”

This volume is a worthy and welcome addition, enriched by ready access to archives closed to virtually all previous scholars, to the literature on religion in Eastern Europe. The various chapters end up together offering treatment of most of the nations in the region. There is much here which will be of interest to readers of this journal.

*Reviewed by James R. Payton, Jr. Redeemer University College, Ancaster ON, Canada.*

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Reviewed by John T. Pawlikowski.

Gerald Beyer comes to this study with a twofold background. Trained in social ethics at Boston College he is able to place the Polish social revolution within the broader setting of Catholic social teaching. As a resident of Poland for several years during Poland’s transition from socialism to a capitalist democracy he is well equipped to reflect on this transition from within the context of actual life in Poland during this period. His extensive notes and bibliography show a broad acquaintance of documentary materials and secondary literature both in Polish and in English. This gives the book a strength beyond what an outside evaluator could provide.

Beyer’s work represents a long overdue incorporation of the central and eastern European