Radovan's "State-Church Relations in Slovakia. The Current Structure and Trends in the Development of State-Church Relations" - Book Review

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A political scientist that has long been committed to the issue of state-church relations published a very interesting book in 2010, in which he analyzes state-church relations in Slovakia. In his book, Radovan Čikeš is attempting to expand the contemporary debate on the structure of the relations between state and churches and religious communities.

Despite the fact that religion is still a rather marginal issue in the field of comparative politics, interest has risen during the past two decades among small but growing number of scientists. The issues regarding the relation between religion and society are becoming more and more insistent and relevant. Čikeš strives to analyze this issue in the context of state-church relations, which have been in constant conflict since the age of enlightenment.

The book is divided into six main parts. The first part is dedicated to the explanation of the research context, the aim of the work, its subject and method, and specifically the theoretical status of state-church relations. The most extensive part of the book is a detailed analytical overview of state-church relations in Slovakia after 1989. It is connected to the previous chapter, which is devoted to the historical development of state-church relations since the end of the 18th century. In this, as well as the following part, the author analyzes and delineates the initial state-church relations after 1989 in Czechoslovakia and in Slovakia. In addition to an analysis of the political parties’ intentions and program statements of the government coalitions after 1989 regarding state-church relations issues, the author offers a sketch of trends and visions of the development of these relations in Slovakia. Following that is a part called “Systems of state-church relations abroad”, where he compares individual state-church relations systems and in which he refers to the historical context and specific social development in the compared countries. The most compelling part of the book is the last chapter, in which he projects trends and visions of the state-church relations development in Slovakia.

Radovan Čikeš’s book is the most detailed analysis of this topic published in Slovak language so far. The author’s research involves a large amount of relevant literature and other sources. Primarily, the book belongs to the field of political science, but the author uses also legal, historical, and sociological sources. He attempts to meet the goal of his book, which is enriching the contemporary debate on the issue and arrives at a conclusion that in order to comprehend state-church relations it is necessary to consider also the dynamics of the development and understand the individual actors in the process. The publication, however, raises some critical issues. The author avoided formulating his own opinions, which makes the last chapter, on the trends and visions, simply a summary of general trends and possibilities of further structure of state-church relations. His own contribution or deeper reflection on what has been happening in the society is missing in this piece of work. According to Roland Robertson, the behavior of globalization is paradoxical – it brings absolutization and relativization simultaneously. It is a matter of universalization of the particular (global expansion of the western culture) and particularization

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1 Roland Robertson was the first to analyze the topic of „religion and globalization“ in Globalization – Social Theory and Global Culture, Sage Publications Ltd, 1992, p.224.
of the universal (the western culture meets other cultures) at the same time. This paradox is then reflected in the fate of religion; its form and social roles change swiftly; some forms get weaker, while others grow more quickly. Globalization of religion seeks to achieve constructive dialogue, promotes ecumenism, and supports communication between religions on the one hand, while activating religious radicalism and extremism on the other. Čikeš completely avoided these topics, which have significant influence on the structure of state-church relations. State-church relations are defined not only by program statements of the government (in this part of the book it is necessary to appreciate the original contribution of the author) and legal documents, but also by the motion of the society and social pressures that influence those documents and statements.

The author uses a descriptive-analytic approach. When processing the individual thematic areas, he applies the interpretation of contemporary history, which is very flexible in literature. From the point of view of empirical-analytical approaches, the book is based predominantly on the results of sociological research, which give a certain current picture of the given situation, but also its successful incorporation into the course of development.

In general, Radovan Čikeš’s book represents a major contribution to the comprehension of the current structure of state-church relations. The world news convinces us every day that religion (and religious extremism) is and will always be an important factor in politics. Crucial studies of the relationship between religion and politics are rather new. The dominant studies and thinking in sociology and politics have leaned towards the proposition that religion would gradually become irrelevant in social life. Because of the rise of new global trends (such as the economic globalization and democratization), the initial research on the role of religion in politics has to be based on unclear concepts and generalization. This is typical also for the literature related to state-church relations. Nevertheless, as the research agenda in this area progresses, the methodological norms are being established. Researchers today are building the basic foundation, which will allow them to test numerous hypotheses connected with the structure of state-church relations. The study of this field might bring significant advantages for political science. The book is suitable for political scientists, lawyers, sociologists, historians, as well as economists and politicians. It could also be used as a textbook for certain college courses. At the same time, it is written in a direct and straightforward language, which allows it to be an important source of information for not only the general public but also experts.

Reviewed by Lucia Grešková, deputy director at Institute for State-Church Relations, Bratislava, Slovakia


Toward the end of the USSR the nationalities (or ethnicity) question was already coming to the fore. The break up of the Soviet Union resulted not only in the formation of 15 national entities, there was nationalist violence in places, and some autonomous republics within the Russian Federation, or as part of Georgia, are still struggling for self-determination. From Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in particular the Slavic and German population soon fled in the face of mounting violence. Given that as late as 1987 the labels German and Fascist were still used interchangeably in public discourse, it was no wonder that one early transnationally based new society to spring up was Wiedergeburt (Bozrozhdenie), Society for the Fostering of German Culture and Nationality.