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Moravěíková and Valová's "Financovanie cirkví a náboženských spoločností v 21. storočí [Financing of Churches and Religious Societies in the 21 Century]" and Moravěíková's "Reštitúcie cirkevného majetku [Restitutions of Church Property]" - Book Review

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BOOK REVIEWS:

Moravčíková, M. and Valová, E. (Eds.) *Financovanie cirkví a náboženských spoločností v 21. storočí* [*Financing of Churches and Religious Societies in the 21st Century*]. Bratislava, SK: Ústav pre vzťahy štátu a cirkví, 2010. 310 pp. ISBN 978-80-89096-46-6.

Moravčíková, M. (Ed.) *Reštitúcie cirkevného majetku* [*Restitutions of Church Property*]. Bratislava, SK: Ústav pre vzťahy štátu a cirkví, 2010. 242 pp. ISBN 978-80-89096-48-0.

Reviewed by Noema Bradnanska Ondrasek & Lubomir Martin Ondrasek

The law (Act No. 218/1949 Coll.) governing the economic support of registered churches and religious societies in Slovakia has not been significantly modified since 1949, and the historical roots of the present model of directly financing religious groups from the state budget reach back into the late 18th century. The nature and function of the relationship between church and state have always been seriously affected by the existing political order — as was particularly exemplified during the forty-year period of the communist totalitarian regime. The purpose of the Communist Party's overarching agenda was to keep the activities of churches under strict state supervision and to minimize their social impact using also economic means. By forcing churches to be economically dependent upon the state, especially through the process of confiscating and nationalizing church properties in the years 1945–1948, the regime directly contributed to the loss of religious freedom. Although the socio-political changes that occurred in Slovakia after 1989 brought restoration of the social status and religious freedom to registered churches and religious societies, the economic autonomy of the churches remains unresolved and the authentic (not necessarily absolute) separation of state and church continues to be incomplete. Currently, the economic linkage between the state and church allows for remuneration of the clergy, churches' headquarters operational support, and various subsidies for carrying out charitable works and the restoration of church/cultural properties.

It is now old news that Slovakia has been searching for a new model of financing churches and religious societies; — all previous efforts to identify and implement such a model have proved abortive. Under the auspices of Minister of Culture, Marek Maďarič, in October 2009, the Institute for State-Church Relations and the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic organized a three-day international conference on "Financing Churches and Religious Societies in the 21st Century." The conference was divided into two sections: The first session was held in Bratislava (14–15 October, 2010) and focused on the broader issue of financing churches and religious societies in various countries; the latter session dealt with the specific issue of church property restitutions and was held in Nitra (16 October, 2010).

The homonymous collection "Financing Churches and Religious Societies in the 21st Century," edited by Michaela Moravčíková, the Director of the Institute for State-Church Relations, and her colleague Eleonóra Valová, presents to both the professional and wider public readership thirty-eight essays by renowned scholars, government officials, and religious leaders from twenty-one countries. Space constraints do not allow for summary and reflection on each of these essays, but as a whole they represent interdisciplinary, erudite, and practical treatments of the multi-faceted economic dimensions of the state-church relationship from a variety of different perspectives. Each essay — whether dealing with the financing of churches and religious societies in neighboring countries such as the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary, or with specific questions regarding church funding in the United States, Brazil, and Japan — reflects the unique context of the state and church relationship, which is formed and influenced by historical, social, political, and other factors. The collection itself is an immensely informative resource, even though it does not provide the reader with any conclusions that might have resulted from the conference.

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,

Bruce R. Berglund and Brian Porter-Szücs, eds. *Christianity and Modernity in Eastern Europe*. Budapest/New York: Central European University Press, 2010. xvi + 386 pp. ISBN: 978-963-9776-65-4. \$55.00 cloth.

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