

Peter Torok. *Hungarian Church-State Relationships: A Socio-Historical Analysis*. Budapest: Gloria, 2003. 194 pp.

It is an understatement to say that during the last decade there has been an increased interest in analyzing the issue of religion in the Central and Eastern European societies. While this preoccupation led to the emergence of a variety of studies related to this general theme, however, it is equally true that few scholars attempted the intellectually challenging task undertaken by Peter Torok -an Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Szeged (Hungary).

"...Torok grounds his inquiry not on the fashionable secularization paradigm that fails to explain the current empirical evidence collected from Central and Eastern Europe but rather on the investigation of the macro-sociological model advanced by Luigi Sturzo."

the church and state.

Concretely, in his recently published book, *Hungarian Church-State Relationships: A Socio-Historical Analysis*, Torok's major objective is to provide a detailed chronological account of the Hungarian past with a particular emphasis on the complex dynamic between the local church and state from the conversion of the Hungarians to Christianity to the 2002 parliamentary elections. Based on the systematic reflection upon the interaction between the Hungarian church and state, the Hungarian sociologist also endeavors to elaborate some hypothetical predictions regarding the evolution of this relationship in Hungary. Lastly, but not least, it is apparent that Torok intends to demonstrate that a thorough analysis of the Hungarian case can serve as a reference point not only in strengthening some previous sociological claims but also in building up to date sociological theories relevant to the *latest* developments between

It is for these reasons that Torok grounds his inquiry not on the fashionable secularization paradigm that fails to explain the current empirical evidence collected from Central and Eastern Europe but rather on the investigation of the macro-sociological model advanced by Luigi Sturzo. This approach is all the more important as it allowed Torok to conceptualize "a set of analytical questions" to be applied in the Hungarian context. Toward the same end, Torok offers a useful review of the specialized literature dealing with both the key notions employed in the study of church-state relations and the influences of globalization on the role of religion in the public sphere.

In connection with the above, the central issues that Torok attempts to clarify are: the type of diarchy that can be applied to the symbiosis between the Catholic Church and the Hungarian state in different socio-historical frameworks; the contribution of Romano Catholicism and Protestantism to the Hungarian nation-building as well as state-building process; the role of the church in the regeneration of the Hungarian civil society; the impact of the "new" denominations on the links between the historical churches and the state; the potential of the Hungarian ecclesiastical leaders to shape international affairs; the outcome of the polemic on the "appropriate" position of the church in the public sphere; the capacity of the middle class to influence the interdependence between the church and state and so on.

Despite Torok's merit in addressing consistently a complicated subject, the *Hungarian Church-State Relationships: A Socio-Historical Analysis* is marked by a number of limitations. This is especially evident when considering the historical narrative. For example, with few exceptions, Torok relies heavily on primary and secondary sources of Hungarian origin in reconstructing the past. In certain instances, this is of great assistance to those readers with no knowledge of the Hungarian language. At the same time, however, the lack of alternative perspectives as well as the presence of some presumably unscreened historical clichés specific to the Hungarian historiography makes it more difficult for a professional historian to consider Torok's book a truly serious work. The same conclusion can be reached vis-a-vis the inclusion of some factual inaccuracies as well as spelling errors, not to mention the inconsistent method of listing the sources at the end of the book.

With these in mind, one may suggest that the *Hungarian Church-State Relationships: A Socio-Historical Analysis* may still find its place in the upper level undergraduate courses dealing *inter alia* with the history of religion, identity, nation-building, state-building, nationalism, and politics in Hungary and East Central Europe. This preference is also supported by the book's highly didactic quality.

Loredana Tirziu, West Virginia University

© 2005 by Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe. All rights reserved. ISSN 1553-9962

 [Contents](#) | [Main Page](#) 