

Péter Török, *Magyarországi Vallási Kalauz 2004* [Hungarian Religion Directory 2004], Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 286 pp. Assistant Professor for Ecumenics and History of Religion For Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe)

There are two good reasons for recommending this book: the first is the necessity of an overview of churches and religious communities in Hungary, the second is the inspiring analysis of concepts and arguments before the description of the respective communities.

"This pioneering book is a must read for anyone working within the liberal arts and religion in the region"

In the Preface (p. 11-13) the author compares his Directory to a guide-book. One possible dimension of religion is personal experience, and even the best guide-book cannot replace the journey. Mostly first-hand information from, or about, the communities is included, but a number of religious groups did not react on the author's request.

In his Introduction, Török gives account of the difficulties of definitions and evaluation(s). While no one has, for instance, been successful so far in defining religion, there are two main approaches: the substantial and the functionalist. Differences in the legislation of various countries make the situation even more complicated. The distinction between official and non-official religion can only be rather technical and would deserve another 'guide-book'. Non-official religions are popular forms of official ones, faith in the paranormal, occultism, secret societies (p. 16-18.). Church, denomination, sect and cult can only be defined in terms of one might describe as Weberian idealtypes. It is only under-informed people who quickly label a religious community as 'sectarian'. In addition, the author cautions that one must keep pace with the dynamism of the respective community (pp. 20, 27).

The churches, communities are described according to the following pattern (pp. 40ff):

1. Hungarian and English name and other possible names.
2. Name and title of the leader/main representative.
3. Center and contact.
4. Publications, affiliated institutions, foundations etc.
5. Year of appearance in Hungary.
6. Religious tradition.
7. Characteristic rules, symbols.
8. Short international and domestic history with sources
9. Places of groups/parishes/communities.
10. Number of persons offering one percent of their annual personal income-tax for the church/community.

11. Websites for further information.

The author gives remarks to each point. The first one is of special importance: the reader is reminded that in Chapter iii, only the term 'church' will be used, even if it is not quite correct in sociological terms. (As a Lutheran theologian I can only say, it is even much less correct in theological terms.) But he only relies on the usage of the Act on the Freedom of Conscience and Religion and on the Churches, 1990/IV. One hundred persons may found a 'church' by presenting an application containing the leaders' names, the statutes and committing themselves to refrain from any anti-constitutional activity. Yet this regulation does not prevent the same persons from founding another 'church' on the next day (as this has already been the case), it neither requires a faith statement and corollary (Is it the right term here?) nor does it check if the founding members believe it or if they believe in anything at all. One might add that the third criterion can hardly be checked by any authority (who feels nostalgia for the inquisition?). Thus the law should be corrected somehow. It can be altered only with a two-third majority and the parliamentary power relations have not yet made that possible.

As is the case with a good guide-book the 'passenger' may eventually receive a word of warning. Most 'churches' are not 'dangerous' either for the individual or for the society. Of course, there may be serious problems and tensions in certain ones, although their proportion is relatively small. One should be careful of groups whose members isolate themselves, divide the world between the 'good' (us) and the 'evil' (them), where, in summary 'the end justifies the means' (pp. 48-51).

In chapter ii (pp. 54-259, about three quarters of the whole book) 138 registered and 6 non-registered 'churches' are described. Of course, the depth and extension of the individual expositions are very different. It may be surprising that the Roman Catholic Church receives only two pages (146-147), but with regard to the great number of links, this is acceptable. E.g. the Mormons (p. 64-68), Baptists (p. 155-158), Unification Church (Moonies) (p.84-87), Krishna consciousness (p. 175-178) needed a longer description. It is a pity, however, that we can only have guesses, for example, on the "Free Church of the Bridge of the Future" with a lady as its 'Grand Cupbearer' (p. 56; ten persons offered the one percent of their income-tax for it in 2001), but the "Heart of the Sun Knight Order" (p. 59) leaves the 'passenger' even in greater darkness. Unfortunately, the same is more or less true for some churches of less enigmatic names, too. The six non-registered 'churches' are also exciting, e.g. "The Family and Ananda Marga" (pp. 249-253).

In Chapter iii, the Appendix (pp. 263-286), the detailed questionnaire for the survey is exposed and the study concludes with a list of the interviewed church representatives.

This pioneering book is a must read for anyone working within the liberal arts and religion in the region. Even if it can never be detailed enough, it is a good 'hors-d'oeuvre': for the laity as they prepare for more advanced reading and for professionals before they delve into their research. At the same time, those of us who appreciated this first effort will hope that the future edition(s) will be even more complete.

Péter Szentpétery, Lutheran Theological University, Budapest

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