

James T. Richardson (ed.), *Regulating Religion: Case Studies from Around the Globe*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2004. +570 pages

While the title of this superbly edited book refers to religion in general, it becomes immediately clear from the contents page that the Editor's focus was on minority religions. In his introductory chapter, Richardson claims that for the analysis of regulating minority religions a historically informed sociological approach may be the most revealing. *Regulating Religion* is a rich source of information indeed for sociologists of religion, sociologists of legal control; yet the students of other academic fields, such as legal experts, political scientists, and historians of law can also benefit from studying this text.

"Richardson's concern with the freedom of religion, especially the freedom of minority religions or new religious movements, is well-known and highly appreciated."

The subtitle of the book promises case studies from around the globe. The lack of such studies from Africa and the Near East, and the omission of an explanation of why studies from these 'corners of the world' are missing would prove disappointing if the reader did not find informative and illuminating analyses about the legal situation of Western Europe, the former Communist countries, North and South America, Australia, India and the Far East. Furthermore, France, Germany, Poland and the United States inspired more than one study. And if the case studies were not enough, we could take delight in reading works more analytical in their approaches. The first part of the book, titled "Special Problem Areas in Western Europe" and the analyses of some US court cases

in the final section offer readers such delicacies.

In the introduction, Richardson discusses five theoretical perspectives, which might be useful in the reader's endeavor of trying to gain not only information but also more insights in the complexities of legally regulating religion. These perspectives include the (1) operation of discretion and discrimination, (2) William Chambliss' ideas on making law and public policy, (3) diffusion theories, the (4) role of the courts, and at last, but not least, (5) Donald Black's theory on behavior of law. For the readers of *Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe*, William Chambliss' theory on the dialectic processes by which law and social policy develop is especially important. Chambliss' approach demonstrates how discretion is worked out on the part of key institutional players. As Richardson points out, the ideas of Chambliss can be applied very well to the rapid changes in law and policy in former Communist countries. Lacking the resources of North American libraries, Central and Eastern Europeans can only regret that Chambliss' theory is not explicated by Richardson at least to the same extent as, for example, Black's ideas on the behavior of law.

Richardson's concern with the freedom of religion, especially the freedom of minority religions or new religious movements, is well-known and highly appreciated. This concern can be found in his analyses and many other writings in this book. The Central and Eastern European reader might point out that the oppression of religion for several decades in the countries under the orbit of the Soviet Union

created such a situation in which not only minority religions, but traditional, so-called majority religions require special attention. Richardson himself notes in another volume that “[n]urturing the traditional churches to a reasonable extent should perhaps also be a part of any calculus for religious freedom in these societies.”¹ Since the focus of *Regulating Religion* is on minority religions, those who are concerned with, or whose main concern is the situation of majority or traditional religions might find this approach somewhat incomplete.

But even for religionists and sociologists of the mainstream, this book is must reading. Richardson’s undertaking of inspiring, collecting, and editing the case studies is admirable and deserves full recognition. One can only hope that in due time, he will continue his work within a broader analytical framework.

Péter Török, Editor / *Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe*

¹ Richardson, J. T. "New Religions and Religious Freedom in Eastern and Central Europe: A sociological Analysis" Pp. 257 – 283 in Borowik, I. and Babinski, G. (eds.), *New Religious Phenomena in Central and Eastern Europe*. Krakow : NOMOS, 1997. The the founding conference of International Study of Religion in Eastern and Central Europe Association.