

Miguel Glatzer and Paul Christopher Manuel (editors)

Faith-Based Organizations and Social Welfare – Associational Life and Religion in Contemporary Eastern Europe

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The volume *Faith-Based Organizations and Social Welfare – Associational Life and Religion in Contemporary Eastern Europe* by Miguel Glatzer and Paul Christopher Manuel was published in 2020 as part of the Palgrave Studies in Religion, Politics, and Policy series. Their first volume, *Faith-Based Organizations and Social Welfare: Associational Life and Religion in Contemporary Western Europe*, was also published in 2019 in this series, and also explored a similar theme but in the Western European context.

The volume is a collection of studies whose main purpose is to present and analyse the role of faith-based organisations in Eastern Europe. The volume sheds light on how faith-based organisations have become key actors for social welfare, potentially supporting democratic structures, but also ready to cooperate with authoritarian regimes in some contexts. In addition, the authors, Glatzer and Manuel, give a theoretical and regional framework for the volume, emphasising how these organisations contribute to social services, thereby legitimising the new role of religion in public life, a topic particularly relevant to the diverse religious landscape and complex political history of Eastern Europe.

The volume is divided into three major chapters, with a varying number of sub-chapters. Alongside the three main chapters, there is a praise note at the beginning of the volume, where distinguished academics, researchers and professors summarise their appreciation of the editors and their latest volume, emphasising the outstanding importance of the work, especially for those interested in religion and social welfare. The volume is followed by a foreword by Timothy A. Byrnes and a preface by the authors. In his foreword, Byrnes points out that, in addition to highlighting the important role of religious actors in the social sphere, the volume raises important questions such as whether the social and political role of religion in Europe might be different if the complexity and diversity of the continent is taken into account, or what roles religion might play beyond the traditional approach, whether in a national or continental context. Moreover, the volume explores the political role of religion and poses provocative questions, such as whether it could pose a threat to democracy in the light of the fact that religion remains a complex and multifaceted aspect of individual and social life, which plays a dominant role and is a central political force on the European continent. Overall, Byrnes concludes that the volume as a whole shows that the relationship between religion and democracy can only be understood if we first take a broader understanding of Europe as a basis for defining what counts as religion and the method needed to assess the role of religion in Europe. The foreword effectively outlines and encapsulates the key themes of the volume, the questions it seeks to address, and emphasizes that by progressing from broader concepts to more specific elements, we can first establish fundamental definitions. This approach leads to the methodological basis necessary for analyzing international contexts. The three major chapters of the volume are preceded by the articles by Miguel Glatzer and Paul Christopher Manuel, and by Viktor Poletko, who attempt to sketch this contextual framework in their introduction to the volume and in their articles *Religion, Civil Society, and the State: Dynamics in Eastern Europe*.

The first part of the volume details the situation of Orthodox countries. Daniel Schulte and Linda Cook examine the social services and political engagement of the Russian Orthodox Church, with a particular focus on its state support and social influence. In his study, Bogdan Mihai Radu shows how the Romanian Orthodox Church has become a central actor of social welfare and political activity in the post-communist period. In the final article of the first part, authors Olena Bogdan, Denys Brylov and Tetiana Kalenychenko look at the situation in Ukraine, and more specifically at the role of Ukrainian churches in strengthening social cohesion and crisis management since the events of 2013-2014.

The second part of the volume gives the reader an overview about the majority Roman Catholic countries. Firstly, Dawid Tatarczyk discusses the political influence of the Polish Catholic Church, and Dinka Marinović Jerolimov and Nikolina Hazdovac Bajić show how the Croatian Catholic Church and the state work together in the field of social services, Igor Bahovec looks at the role of the Church in civil society and faith-based charitable activities in Slovenia, while last but not least András Máté-Tóth and Tamás Szilágyi explore the role of Hungarian religious organisations in the non-profit sector, with a special focus on social and educational services.

In the third and final chapter, Ringo Ringvee writes about Estonia's low religious status and the contribution of religious organisations to social services, while in the concluding chapter, the Czech situation is presented by the Czech couple Zdeněk R. Nešpor and Dana Hamplová, who show that despite a religion-free society, religious organisations play a key role in social welfare systems.

The volume's individual chapters illustrate the different roles of religious organisations in social and political life with country-specific examples, showing that religious organisations are not only spiritual actors, but also have a significant impact and involvement in other areas.

On the whole, the volume shows that the social role of religious organisations is not only of historical but also of contemporary importance, and thus the book is useful not only for those interested in the sociology of religion and social work, but also for those interested in education, social policy and even community building.
