

*Frank Cibulka and Zachary T. Irwin (editors)*

## **Liberals, Conservatives, and Mavericks. On Christian Churches of Eastern Europe since 1980. A Festschrift for Sabrina P. Ramet**

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Using case studies and unravelling national contexts, this book explores how religion re-emerged as a powerful moral and political force in Eastern Europe after communism. Blending history, theology, and social analysis, it examines how various understandings of what religion ought to represent in public life shaped post-communist societies, focusing primarily on "liberals, conservatives, and mavericks" and their role in defining the public role of religion in the specific countries. The book is a *festschrift* for Sabrina P. Ramet, a distinguished American researcher who specializes in the study of religion, politics, and social change in Eastern Europe, especially the former Yugoslavia and post-communist countries.

In the introductory chapter, Zachary T. Irwin offers an interesting conceptual framework in which religion confronts the tensions arising from the strained relationship between intrusion and sufficiency on the one hand, and separation and community on the other. He argues that such a framework can be helpful in understanding the various situations presented in the book's contributions. Jerry J. Pankhurst and Alar Kilp, in their contribution on Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), emphasize different career stages that mark him as a key figure who contributed to the return of religion to public life in post-Soviet Russia. Kirill faces numerous challenges, including the legacy of Soviet adaptation of the church, pressure from liberal values, and strained relations with other Orthodox bodies. As a continuation, Kathryn David examines the role of Patriarch Filaret as a key figure in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the last decades. His career reflects the instrumentalization of Orthodoxy in Soviet Ukraine and also illustrates the continuity of the Soviet legacy in Ukrainian church politics, where Orthodoxy continues to be used as an instrument of the state. The re-emergence of the public role of religion is also noted in Ireneusz Krzemiński's chapter on the Polish broadcaster Radio Maryja, a Catholic radio station founded in 1991 that has become a key promoter of national-Catholic ideology, combining strong nationalism, traditional Catholic values, and political activism. However, the station continues to shape contemporary Polish political debate, sparking controversy within and outside the Catholic Church over the role of religion in society. Robert F. Goeckel analyses religious issues and church-state relations in Eastern Germany, highlighting leadership challenges, political influences, and the church's adaptation to post-reunification societal changes. Frank Cibulka analyses the views and activities of the prominent Czech theologian Tomáš Halík and his maverick position within the more socially and theologically conservative and authoritarian Czech Catholic Church. In his contribution, Milan Vukomanović situates the controversy surrounding the theory of evolution in Serbia within the power struggle between the liberal and conservative wings of the Serbian Orthodox Church, profiling these wings by age, regional origin, and political ties to nationalist regimes and leaders. Christopher Adam's article about Gábor Iványi, a Methodist priest and politician, emphasizes his fight for justice, both in the communist and post-communist eras. Iványi's position is that the role of the church is to be a voice for the marginalized, even when that means confronting the powerful, thus making him a unique figure in the contemporary Hungarian church and political scene. Agáta Šústová-Drelová notes that the Slovak Catholic hierarchy played a central role in shaping national identity and sovereignty throughout the 20th century, often becoming intertwined with nationalist politics. After 1989, it split between pro-democratic and nationalist bishops, and later internal conflicts further exposed divisions within the Church. These dynamics show how the hierarchy has been both a symbol of national unity and a contested arena for debates over democracy and political authority. Lavinia Stan analyses the life and

resistance of the Romanian Orthodox priest Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa, who was imprisoned twice for his public opposition to the communist regime. Stan concludes that Calciu's case is embarrassing for the Romanian Orthodox Church, as it reveals its collaboration with the regime and inconsistency in protecting its members. Daniela Kalkandjieva analyses the different reactions of Orthodox churches to the COVID-19 pandemic, pointing out how some churches adapted and some not to social distancing measures and temporarily suspended public worship services. Kalkandjieva concludes that the pandemic has highlighted the differences between global and local approaches to Orthodoxy. Siniša Zrinščak and Frane Staničić situate the position of the Catholic Church in Croatia through historical changes in its relations with the state, from a privileged position in the 19th century, through repression in socialist Yugoslavia, to renewed influence after 1990. They conclude that historical circumstances and political changes mark the position of the Catholic Church, which, despite its privileged legal status, faces social resistance to its political role and the perception that it is too focused on power and wealth. Jože Pirjevec describes the historical development of the Slovenian Catholic Church, from its origins in the Carolingian Renaissance, through the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, to contemporary challenges in post-communist Slovenia, emphasizing how the Church has played a key role in shaping Slovenian national identity and social life over the centuries. In his contribution entitled "The Curious Case of the Macedonian Church", Zachary T. Irwin analyses the history and current state of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. He concludes that the settlement of the dispute between the Macedonian and Serbian Orthodox Churches in 2022, with the recognition of autocephaly, represented a significant step for the stability of the country and the region, but that issues such as the rights of the Serbian minority and relations with other churches remain unresolved. In his contribution, Isa Blumi analyses the role of religion in post-communist Albania, highlighting how external interests, such as Western missionary organizations and the Greek Orthodox Church, sought to capitalize on the fall of communism to reintroduce Christianity, but faced resistance from the local population and secular trends. Blumi concludes that neoliberal globalization and secularism have become more dominant than traditional religious values. In her own contribution, Sabrina P. Ramet considers the political dimension of religion, especially Christianity, noting that monotheistic religions, despite their messages of love and peace, often show intolerance towards other communities. Ramet concludes that although religion satisfies basic human needs, its politicization and mixing with moral and dogmatic issues can lead to harmful consequences, whereas personal moral integrity and empathy towards others are needed.

Overall, the contributions reveal the tensions between orthodoxy and modernity, conscience and authority, and belief and politics, demonstrating how religion continues to define public debate and offering a profound reflection on its role in shaping contemporary Eastern European identities. The contributions in the book combine theoretical analysis with a wealth of data on specific religious-political contexts, providing the interested reader with the opportunity to understand the ever-changing role of religion in the public life of this part of Europe. In the conclusion, Frank Cibulka emphasizes that Ramet is one of the most significant intellectuals of our time, thanks to her extensive contributions to the study of religion, politics, culture, and history, and that this collection is just part of her lasting impact on the academic community.