

András Máté-Tóth and Cosima Rughiniş (eds.)

**Spaces and Borders:
Current Research on Religion in Central and Eastern Europe**

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This is a very fine collection for those interested in the CEE (Central and Eastern Europe) region, and in innovative methods for researching religious themes. The volume abounds with solid papers by younger “third generation” (post-WWII) scholars, who have used very sophisticated ideas and methods in addressing questions about the role of religion in CEE. The research, reported in eighteen chapters, deals with many different CEE countries. It contains some of the best work done under the auspices of the REVACERN (Religion and Values — Central and Eastern European Research Network). REVACERN is supported by the European Union’s Sixth Framework Program, which was headed by András Máté-Tóth, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Szeged in Hungary, who is the co-editor of this collection.

Each paper had to cover at least three societies — some included many more than that. Thus, the volume is very comparative in nature, offering many valuable insights into the role of religion in contemporary CEE societies and elsewhere. The volume contains three major sections: “Experiencing Religion”, “Strategies of Religious Elites” and “Religion and Politics”.

There are four excellent papers in the first section (“Experiencing Religion”), including Gábor Feleky’s, which focuses on New Age definitions and operationalizations. The paper offers a rich summary and critique of many studies of the New Age in CEE as well as in NW Europe. This chapter reveals considerable confusion and ambiguity in research in this area, and suggests some valuable ways to proceed. Tomáš Hrustič describes the work of the Jehovah’s Witnesses among the Roma in eastern Slovakia. He points out that the JWs do not accept normal definitions of ethnicity when recruiting Roma, and that those Roma who join them appear to change their values and self-identification. Michaela Ondrašínová writes about the relationship between religion and spirituality, adopting a constructionist perspective. She used a qualitative, content analysis approach, focused on the Czech Republic, and found that the border between institutional religion and “de-traditionalized spirituality” is not as clear-cut as some recent scholars have claimed. Rafal Smoczynski’s chapter centres on the experience of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in Poland in his research on “folk devils” and counter-stigmatization strategies. This is an interesting study of how ISKCON fought back against efforts to stigmatize the group in Poland and dealt with the moral panic about New Religious Movements (NRMs) there. The report — which reminds this

writer of something similar happening in Hungary a decade earlier — is quite theoretically sophisticated. This chapter should be read by any scholar interested in how NRMs deal with social control efforts and how they defend themselves.

The second section (“Strategies of Religious Elites”) also contains some valuable research reports. Önder Çetin describes how Muslims, Bosnians and Bosniaks interacted and acted in Sarajevo, Sandžak and Belgrade during the crisis times in the 1990s (which continue, of course, even if more muted). He engages in a critical discourse analysis, applying a content analysis of relevant publications in those regions, and looking at fatwas and fatwa-like advice. In this rich study, Çetin focuses on Bosniak religio-political identity, and on the idea of Serbia and Bosnia as a homeland. Milan Fujda reports on the acculturation of Hinduism in the Czech Republic, describing what happened to this individualized religion under communism and afterwards. Hinduism survived under communism by being below the radar (reminiscent of Miklós Tomka’s writings on smaller religions in Hungary during the same time period). However, this religious tradition now seems to be succumbing to competition from traditional churches, which did not do well under communism but have now rebounded.

Dumitru Minzarari’s chapter focuses on the interaction between the State and the Russian Orthodox Church in post-Soviet Russia. This insightful paper describes the ROC influence on the development of the new Russian society, pointing out the effects of the Church not favouring democratic values. What is happening in Russia is contrasted with the tradition of separation of church and state in western societies. The Russian tradition of close linkage between church and state is sharply different; it is a deterrent to Russia’s modernization. The last chapter in this section, by František Šístek, addresses the effects of clericalisation on nationalism using the clash between the Serbian and Montenegrin Orthodox churches as a vehicle. The MOC used clericalisation as a weapon in the battle for independence, linking religion to the movement for separation. Šístek says that this effort has contributed to religion making a comeback in Montenegro by using the nationalistic fervour that had developed. Balkan nationalism is increasingly “church-centric”, which again demonstrates significant differences from how most western liberal democracies operate.

The third section (“Religion and Politics”) closes the book with several very interesting papers. Milda Ališauskienė reports on the status of religious freedom in the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. She uses an approach that differentiates three levels of analysis: macro, meso, micro. Focusing on the macro, she describes the institutional changes in the three societies during the 1990s when they entered the European Union and the Council of Europe, and the subsequent effects on their freedom of religion. There were important differences. Lithuania is predominantly Catholic with the Church having special recognition for the State. Latvia and Estonia are more pluralistic, and emphasize separation of church and state. Lithuania has less freedom of religion at the micro level and more anti-cult movement activity takes place there, influenced by French efforts to promote the anti-sect and anti-cult approach to minority faiths implemented in France.

Branko Ančič’s chapter reports on religiosity and social expectations in CEE, presenting data from nine countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Ukraine) by affiliation and selected beliefs. Great variation is found among these nations through the use of sophisticated statistical analyses. Indeed, there seem to be more differences than similarities. The author concludes that socio-cultural issues are more important than socio-political ones, with Romania being the exception to that general conclusion. Victor Cebotari’s chapter offers data on national pride values comparing Western Europe with CEE — in particular, the relationships of ethnicity, religion and nationalism. Cebotari describes how the communists forced new identities onto CEE societies; but after 1989–90 that changed, and old identities resurfaced. He then reports comparative data on 20 nations — in-

cluding selected Western countries, former Soviet countries, and SE Balkan states — by measuring degrees of national pride among ethnic groups. His analysis shows that some minorities integrated well into Western Europe societies, although there are important exceptions. He discusses the social construction of identities and how they are changing in recent times in CEE nations. Davor Marko writes about media stereotypes of “other” (Islam) media coverages in Bosnia, Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia. In this very thorough analysis he has found different themes (apologetic, “clash”, Islamophobia) and styles (reductionistic, personalization, ignoring). This impressive chapter is a model on how to deal with controversial topics with content analysis.

Dorota Hall reports on the national identity and values of Polish youth using quantitative and qualitative research on chaplaincy students in several Polish cities. She compares her results with data from general Polish citizens. These are separated into the two important identities of Polish and Catholic. She rejects political uses of religion symbolism, arguing against such manipulations as misleading and misguided. Bogdan Radu’s chapter discusses religious determinants of democratic values focusing on four Orthodox countries and Poland using World Values Survey data. He poses the question of whether different forms of religion promote democratic values differently. Radu discusses the important role of Vatican II, which changed the Catholic posture considerably. He also offers a criticism of Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis, which he says is a naïve statement. He argues that Orthodoxy is not monolithic, and that support for democracy varies by social, cultural and historical context.

Cosima Rughiniş describes the political secularity of religious people in Eastern Europe using World Values Survey data. Her analysis offers a multi-variant analysis of data on 10 European countries, and concludes that the majority are secular in their ideas and attitudes about the relationship of church and state. Again, Romania seems to be an important exception to her overall finding. Tamás Szilágyi’s chapter is a timely one, given recent developments in Hungary. He focuses on the quasi-religious character of Hungarian right-wing radical ideology, and says that right wing groups seek attachment to the Catholic Church. However, the Church may publically reject any ties while sometimes appearing to join forces with them on issues such as gays, abortion, etc. This is very much a historically-oriented chapter, dealing with both older and newer right wing groups. Additionally, he discusses ties between religious leaders and political parties in Serbia, Romania, Hungary, and Slovakia; Romania and Serbia have moderate support for right wing ideologies, but Slovakia and Hungary appear to have low support.

Overall this volume is an impressive demonstration of the quality of research on the role of religion in CEE. It showcases a group of young scholars who are already making their mark in fields dealing with religion. The book should not be ignored by scholars of religion from other regions, as the data and the accompanying analysis are thorough and convincing. It is very informative and coherently organized. The volume is rather expensive, but well worth the cost.
