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# **Church, State and Society in Eastern Europe**

By  
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The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

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# Foreword

George F. McLean

Hungary is an exceptional point for observing the relation of Church and State in Central European society. As one of the capitals of the great Austro-Hungarian Empire it possessed a long and exceptionally rich political culture as well as a richly favored and diverse religious culture. Its scholars and scientists were truly leaders in the world. It was not a country without a state or a Church without a country as Poland had been for so long; in Hungary the two were balanced and mature.

It can be understood then how harshly obtrusive was the imposition of Marxism and Russian rule in the aftermath of the Second World War and of Yalta. It is not surprising that the first major popular challenge to this oppression of the whole region and its memorable suppression took place in Budapest within a decade of the end of the war.

Hungary then settled down under the full pressure of material reeducation and atheist indoctrination by the Soviet masters, which it endured fully for the next 25 years. Decisions were made by the party, rationalized by the academy and taught by the educational system from the universities on down.

It is against this background, richly described by professor Miklos Tomka, that this work proceeds with careful statistical evidence to delineate the efforts in which he personally participated to revive the religious life of the people of Hungary in the aftermath of their liberation in 1989. He shows the particular challenges experienced by the hierarchy as well as the people. He analyzes the effort to inspire hope in a people whose identity had been challenged not only by the Soviet past from which they are emerging, but also by the global future into which they were entering.

The story told here with the full panoply of sociological methodology, materials and techniques is one of an heroic people, heavily burdened and facing extreme challenges. This volume gives reason for hope that they will survive and flourish in the century into which we now proceed.



# Introduction

George F. McLean

This volume consists of a collection of papers in sociology by Professor Tomka, examining the condition of the Churches and believers in East Central Europe under Communist governments and in the aftermath of the Communist collapse (c. 1989, 1990-).

Part I, "Coping with Persecution," entails three chapters.

Chapter I, "Religious Change in Communism and in Post-Communist Reconstruction in Central Europe," explains the millennia-long history of the region, followed by the handing over of the region to Russian domination after World War II, and then the strategies of the Communist States against religious belief. Lastly, the author critiques—the terms of the region's new post-Communist situation—the relevance of the West's free-market solution to governmental policy and religious diversity.

Chapter II, "The Marginalization of Christians under Communism in Eastern and Central Europe," explains the marginalization of Christianity during the Communist period, and the special problems this generated for the normally more highly structured traditional Churches (Catholicism, Orthodoxy) when Communist fell and adjustments to the new post-Communist reality became essential. Two of these problems are (1) the relative religious autonomy to which lay believers had become habituated (developed in clandestine cells of believers); and (2) the game of catch-up thrust upon the regions' religious hierarchies as they suddenly met Western influence and global change.

Chapter III, "The Religious-Non-Religious Dichotomy as a Social Problem: A Case Study," written while Communist was still in power, takes Hungary as its case study, using questionnaires and compiling statistical data according to the sociological empirical method. Supplying many pertinent tables and charts, the author demonstrates that under Marxism the percentage of non-believers increased in proportion to income, profession, and locate (the urban population being less religious), and in inverse proportion to age. Such a scenario entailed sociological problems with which the Communist government had to cope.

Part II, "Church, State and Civil Society," consists of four chapters.

Chapter IV, "Division of Labour and Cooperation between Church and State in Hungary before the Second World War," describes the "interweaving of Church and State" through many centuries of Hungarian history. The process of dissociating Church and State began after the first Vatican Council and continued until the end of World War II, with mixed results.

Chapter V, "The Separation of State and Church in the Communist Societies of Eastern Europe," explains the tension-ridden situation which beset the Churches and especially the Catholic and Orthodox Churches under Communism. To secure some formal assurance that Church worship and sacramental life could continue, the hierarchies entered into formal agreements with the State. These agreements sometimes resulted in the Episcopate's censure of lower clergy and of laity who agitated in the society-at-large for human rights, full religious freedom, etc. Thus, the Church-State tension was ironically internalized within the Churches themselves.

Chapter VI, “Religion, Church, State and Civil Society in East-Central Europe,” argues (1) that in the era after the fail of Communism, the Churches have become “the biggest corporate players” in the region; (2) that careful distinctions must be made when analyzing the region, because each country, ethnic group, etc., differs significantly from the others; (3) that one of the major differentiations internal to each group is biographical age—the generations differ enormously from each other in religiosity, etc. The author supplies the relevant sociological data (statistics, tables, charts).

Chapter VII, “The Contribution of the Churches in the Liberation from Below: On the Nature of the Transition in East-Central Europe,” analyzes the sociology of the post-Communist period, showing that the region remains in crisis. The inherited mind-set of cynicism and of loyalty only to oneself and one’s family is difficult to change. The former Communist elite often continues in power, though now with Capitalist faces. The Churches must contend with growing libertinism and often with greed and economic decline among the general population. Under Communism, the Churches’ struggle is both “from below” and in the open.

Part III, “Religious Policies in Hungary before and after 1989,” consists of three chapters.

Chapter VIII, “Church and Religion in a Communist State, 1945-1989,” traces the phaseology of relations between religion and the Communist State in Hungary. The first phase was outright persecution of religion; the second phase was the arrangement of formal protocols between the State and the Episcopacy; and the third phase was the pretense of normality while the State in fact disintegrated and religious activists dared to emerge from the underground.

Chapter IX, “Religious and Church Policy after the Collapse of Communism,” analyzes the problematic of ensuring both a “free Church” and a “free State” in post-Communist Hungary. Statistics show that Hungarians who describe themselves as “not religious anymore” and “not religious yet” outnumber those who belong to a Church. The author describes a Hungary struggling to decide how equitably to involve the Churches in education, healthcare, military chaplaincy, the media, etc., without infringing on the rights of non-believers.

Chapter X, “The Churches and the Church Policy of Post-Communist Socialist Government,” treats the problem of how Hungary is to work out relations between the Church and the State in its new democratic format. It is proposed that the political activity of the Churches should include (1) safeguarding the religious rights of their members; (2) advocating for the most vulnerable members of society-at-large, such as the socially deprived, minorities, large families, conscientious objectors, etc.; and (3) militating for specific norms of public good and social justice according to the social teachings of the Church in question.

Part IV, “Scientific Study of Religion during and after Communism,” consists of two chapters.

Chapter XI, “The Sociology of Religion in Communist Countries: Functions and Preconditions before 1989,” describes in detail the formats for the professional study of sociology of religion in the pertinent Communist States. There were three formats: (1) special governmental institutes quasi-monopolized by the Communist party (as in the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Romania); (2) Marxist and non-Marxist curricula and (sometimes) institutes (as in the German Democratic Republic and Poland); and (3) neutral institutes claiming just to compile empirical data (Hungary).

Chapter XII, “The Sociology of Religion in Eastern and Central Europe after the Breakdown of Communism,” sets forth the author’s observations about the sociology of religion as a discipline and its professional role in society (in the region) for the immediate future. It concludes with five



main points, namely, that sociology of religion should: (1) supply to the public-at-large at least a rudimentary knowledge of the social functions of religion; (2) demonstrate the relevance of religion, in terms of numbers, institutions, etc., so it can exert a proper “political force”; (3) educate the population about religious history and ethics, so that religious fundamentalisms and prejudiced secularisms are neutralized; (4) find a solution to the current dilemma in which all sides fear the science of sociology because it can be manipulated by partisan interests; and (5) establish an authentic sociology of religion institutionally, since experience has shown that when it flourishes, the freedom and autonomy of higher education flourishes.