

BOOK REVIEWS

CHURCH AND STATE IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE: THE CHIMERA OF NEUTRALITY, edited by JOHN T S MADELEY and ZSOLT ENYEDI, Frank Cass Publishers, 2003, 245 pp (paperback £19.99/\$32.95) ISBN 0-7146-8329-9 (hardback £70) ISBN 0-7146-53942

The role of religion in Europe has become an increasingly controversial subject. Whether it be the trials of Professor Buttiglione, the banning of religious symbols and clothing from French schools, or the near jailing of a Swedish pastor for his preaching against homosexuality, the emerging question is what the State's attitude toward religion should be. A study which offers a solid conceptual framework for the analysis of recent developments is therefore a desideratum. This book is a witness to the difficulties of such an undertaking. It reprints a group of eleven papers from a 2000 symposium whose proceedings have already appeared in a special issue of the journal *West European Politics*.

The subtitle aims at a unifying theme to the collection and therefore needs some clarification. By 'the chimera of neutrality', the authors in this volume do not mean – as some Church-State theorists do – that the neutrality of the State towards Churches is itself an illusion, in that it often entails the State promoting its own breed of secular religion. No, most contributors in this volume think that true neutrality is indeed achievable and desirable but that contemporary European states have fallen well short of this mark: although claiming to be neutral, 'in a majority of the approximately 50 cases, the State is committed either *de jure* or *de facto* to the support of religious organisations and their aims'. This revelatory statement in the programmatic introduction by John T S Madeley is followed by short essays on Sweden, Ireland, Italy, Greece, Hungary and the Czech Republic, along with comparative studies of Spain and Poland, and of Britain, France and Germany. However, Madeley's methodological considerations are otherwise juxtaposed rather than applied in the case studies, notwithstanding Zsolt Enyedi's admirable attempt to reap the fruit of both in his conclusion.

A naïveté that plagues many of the contributions is exemplified by a remark in Bill Kissane's conclusion to his contribution on Ireland, where he seems to envisage neutrality as State-sponsored enlightenment: 'those who have campaigned for a more plural society in Ireland' are set against the 'tenacity with which traditional values have thus far maintained their grip on the political system' (p 92). He gives no reason why a 'positive neutrality... whereby the State enables the various churches to enjoy equal opportunities to act in public' (p 91) is at odds with a plural society. Does that mean that, irrespective of democratic majority issues, the role of the State is to re-educate those who adhere to 'traditional values' in order to ensure that there is no such thing as a majority religion that undermines 'genuine pluralism'? I take it as a symptom of the same plague that the

contributions in this volume do not concern themselves with any practical or ideological reasons a State might have for being anything but neutral: the onus is placed squarely on the Churches for grasping at political power and influence.

Nor is there much consideration of how the values represented by individual Churches might affect or be affected by the relationship with a secular State: does the degree to which establishment is problematic have anything to do with how 'liberal', that is how indistinguishable from secular society, a Church is? Obviously, a touchstone here is abortion, the subject of an article by Michael Minkenberg: his conclusion is that establishment (be it official as in England or organisational as in Germany) tends to compromise the ability of a Church to speak out against abortion. And so, paradoxically, the liberalisation of Christian teaching, which John Anderson in the volume still sees as a welcome sign of a distancing of Church and State in transitional societies like Spain and Poland, increasingly seems to go together with closer co-operation. Minkenberg hails the readiness of German bishops to be more liberal on abortion than Rome as evidence that, even with the Catholic Church, national compromise solutions can be reached. But by the time of publication, this 'compromise' had already faltered as it became clear that the Catholic community could not sacrifice its teaching on faith and morals for the sake of institutional advantages. In such cases one is struck not so much by the chimera of neutrality of the State, as by the underlying assumption that religion ought to be reduced to a neutered chimera.

Joan O'Mahony and Zsolt Enyedi stand out for problematising the notion of neutrality set forth as a model in the introduction. Enyedi's concrete analysis of developments in Hungary is sensitive to the question whether genuine State neutrality is really possible. Only O'Mahony, though, explicitly confronts this problem as she grapples with the dimensions of freedom from State interference versus the autonomy to act. Her conclusion is that 'in comparison to Hungary, Poland and Slovakia the (Czech) Republic has a poor record in establishing those conditions that would protect and consolidate the opportunities for sustained civic engagement' (p 178). Of course, once such opportunities are accepted as a criterion of a State's support of civic freedom, it seems distinctly illiberal to view majority religions, or more traditional ones, as a threat to pluralism.

Church and State in Contemporary Europe as a collection may profitably be used as an entrée into the subject for each European country, but its lack of a clear conceptual framework does not make it much of a useful guide for understanding those issues that make the relationship between Church and State both so interesting and so problematic.

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