

Hans-Christian Maner, Martin Schulze Wessel, eds. *Religion im Nationalstaat zwischen den Weltkriegen 1918-1939: Polen-Tschechoslowakei-Ungarn-Rumanien.* Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2002. 219 pp. EUR 41.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-515-08235-8.



Reviewed by Beth A. Griech-Polelle (Department of History, Bowling Green State University)

Published on H-German (January, 2004)

Religion in the Nation-State is volume sixteen of the series addressing the history and culture of *Ostmitteleuropa*. Co-editors Hans-Christian Maner and Martin Schulze Wessel have brought together essays which seek to fill a gap in the existing literature of East European history: the role of religion in the formation of the newly-created nation-states following the end of the First World War. The book is well organized with introductions, then subdivided neatly into three sections. Part One examines the theme of confessional conflicts, ethnic integration and the attempt to build a nation. Part Two explores the relationship of various churches with the new states. Part Three analyzes the meaning of religion for *ostmitteleuropäische* societies. It is a worthwhile book, offering information that has generally not been addressed by many scholars to date.

Maner and Wessel explain that, as a result of the influence of modernization theory, religion has long been regarded as a left-over remnant from an earlier pre-Enlightenment age. They assert that the connection between religion and the formation of new nation-states has not been sufficiently addressed by scholars. They see a connection between religiosity and the nationalism that arose in parts of eastern Europe in the interwar period. They also see the complexity of the relationship. Maner and Wessel ask how a new nation-state negotiates

its powerful position among frequently religious pluralities and its diverse ethnic populations while simultaneously seeking to build a homogenous culture for its citizens. This theme of connections between religion and nation-building is also addressed in an introductory essay by Hartmut Lehmann.

In Part One, Juliane Brandt's essay demonstrates how Hungarian Roman Catholics shared not only a confessional allegiance but a language as well. Yet, Roman Catholics in Hungary were only approximately half of the population. Because of that fact, Brandt explores the confessional divisions within Hungarian society, focusing intently on the evangelical and reformed Protestant Churches. She looks at how the mixed ethnic background of the churches affected shared linguistic and cultural experiences. Her work is also followed up with numerous charts and statistics, although many of the charts offer information regarding pre-war statistics instead of the interwar years. Wessel and Maner's essays address the place of the churches in Czechoslovakia and Rumania, respectively. Wessel's essay shows how the conflict between confessions revolved to a great extent on the issue of which religious group's identity would come to represent the "true" Czechoslovakia of the 1920s and 1930s. Maner's work in this section portrays the attempt of "Greater Rumania" to overcome internal political dis-

union through the demand that “true” Rumanians adhere to one religion (orthodox). All three essays of Part One offer thought-provoking questions about the previously-neglected role of religion, identity and nation formation.

Part Two of the book is devoted to Church-State themes. Werner Benecke’s work provides a case study of Poland’s easterly regions where the Catholic-dominated Polish Republic had to confront the predominantly Russian Orthodox population. What followed was an attempt by the Catholic Church in Poland to overshadow the Orthodox Church most associated with historically real Russian political domination. He also argues that in many cases the Polish government declared itself neutral in the struggle, yet it unofficially supported the work of Polish Catholics. Jaroslav Sebek demonstrates in his essay how the legacy of Catholic Habsburg domination in areas of Czechoslovakia led to an anti-Catholic position for some. In this case, the question was not that of a minority (as in Benecke’s Russian Orthodox of Poland) but whether the Catholic majority could be reconciled with the democratic structures of the new, but short-lived Czechoslovakian Republic. He ends his work by stating that the Nazi dismantling of the Republic led to an upsurge of Catholic-based resistance, clearly connecting this to the notion that Catholic identity was related to the Czechoslovakian nation-state, not to the Nazi one. The third essay of this trio by Norbert Spannenberger stresses the linkage between being Catholic and being Hungarian, where throne and altar, St. Stephen and the establishment of the Hungarian state were all one and the same to many, despite Communist assertions to the contrary. In this instance, Spannenberger demonstrates how characteristics of a confession (being Catholic) combined with the characteristics of nationality (being Hungarian) to form an almost indistinguishable identity. Each one of these essays of Part Two are extremely strong in their presentation, exploring what happens to both minority and majority confessions who have strong associations with being conquered or conquering.

Alexandru Zub and Florin Mueller’s essays lead off the third section of the book. Both Zub’s and Mueller’s essays address the chaotic internal situation of Rumania of the interwar years where questions of identity were

one of many troubles. Zub stresses the ability of the state to use the Rumanian Orthodox religion as a unifying factor in overcoming societal troubles. He argues that the Rumanian Orthodox Church attempted to ease some of the economic and social problems as it also struggled to raise national consciousness in Rumania. Mueller’s essay on the miraculous appearance of a heavenly being in a town called von Maglavit offers the perfect example of how religious beliefs informed Rumanian society. The essay reveals how the lower social strata made pilgrimages to the town and the site became a kind of mass phenomenon yet the political elites of the country remained fairly distant and cautious about embracing the reported miracle. The final essay in the collection is by Eva Martonffy-Petras and addresses the ways in which social teachings presented an alternative to political Catholicism in Hungarian life. In the interwar years, the Horthy regime and the Catholic Church hierarchy tended to work together despite the fact that Horthy was a Protestant. It was mainly the Hungarian Catholic intelligentsia that spread the social gospel among the general population, taking various papal encyclicals and applying their teachings to the perils of living in the modern world. All of these essays address the issue of religious meaning in the social life of the people in a lively and valuable fashion.

Religion im Nationalstaat zwischen den Weltkriegen is a valuable contribution to anyone interested in Church-State dynamics and the role of religion in state formation. Each author helps to destroy the older argument that religion was a leftover from a bygone era. In this book, religion in myriad forms is very much alive, working to be a part of new, modern nation-states. The one element I would have liked to have seen included in this collection that was omitted would be an essay discussing the place of Jews in this religiously-driven, tense atmosphere.

Copyright (c) 2004 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses contact the Reviews editorial staff: hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: Beth A. Griech-Polelle. Review of Maner, Hans-Christian; Wessel, Martin Schulze, eds., *Religion im Nationalstaat zwischen den Weltkriegen 1918-1939: Polen-Tschechoslowakei-Ungarn-Rumanien*. H-German, H-Net Reviews.

January, 2004.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=8630>

Copyright © 2004 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.