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## BOOK REVIEW: RELIGION IN POLITICS AND THE POSITION OF RELIGIOUS POLITICAL PARTIES

Marek Hrušovský\*

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LENČ, J.: *Náboženstvo v politike a pozícia náboženských politických strán. [Religion in Politics and The Position of Religious Political Parties]* Trnava: Univerzita sv. Cyrila a Metoda, 2015. 244 p. ISBN 978-80-8105-708-3.

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**Jozef Lenč** has long been engaged in the religious aspects of politics, mostly from the position of Islamic tradition interfering with European culture. In his first monograph, he summarizes religion's impact on the politics formation and presents the position of religion in the modern liberal-democratic world. He focuses exclusively on the three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) in the context of religious political parties. The author points out the repeated rise of religiosity in the world, particularly after the 1970s of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (victory of Likud in Israeli elections, the beginning of the John Paul II. pontificate, Iranian Islamic Revolution). **Lenč** argues that since aforementioned period, religion has played an important role in the policy-making process and that religiosity is experiencing a renaissance.

In the introduction of his volume, **Lenč** presents three basic hypotheses. However, regarding the scope of the reviewed monograph they seem to be slightly problematic. Although his universal definition of political party is generally acceptable, it seems to be lacking necessary theoretical reduction (both in geographical and in regime sense) applicable to religious political parties (i.e. criteria of definition of political party are too broadly defined, not reduced to exclusively liberal-democratic regimes). The text structure is symmetrically divided into two parts. The first part, constituted by chapters 2 to 4, defines the relationship between religion and politics. The second part – chapters 5 to 7 – deal with the political parties' typology and its possible interference with the field of

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religious political parties. The principal models analysed in the monograph are Birkmann's model of political parties' classification and application of Gunther and Diamond's model from the study released in 2003 in Party Politics.

In the second chapter, the author focuses on defining key terms of his monograph: the definition of politics and the definition of religion. Definition of politics is elaborated in chronologic order from Ancient Greece philosophy (Aristotle) and Islamic philosophers (ibn-Khaldun) and their impact on the European philosophy. Besides politics, this chapter defines political power as a centrepiece of human action. The author does so through the works of Niccoló Machiavelli and Max Weber. In author's opinion, social structure, or the so-called *ummah* (in Islamic societies community of believers), has a specific role in politics. Without *ummah*, the existence of society or Islam as such is not possible. The comparison of *Ummah* to Aristotelian polis, however, is quite problematic because the *polis* is too institutionalised part of society (or the state). In this case, *demos* seems to be more appropriate to describe this concept. Broader and more interesting part of this chapter is a definition of religion. Faith as the primary category of religion is analysed based on the books of Karen Armstrong and Hans Kung, supplemented with critical commentary from Alija Izetbegović's monograph *Islam between East and West*. The author repeatedly confronts daily living faith of Islam with ritualised beliefs of Judaism and Christianity. In his perception, we may use the concepts of Christianity and Roman Catholicism interchangeably, because the most visible manifestations of faith (see page 24) are closely connected with that denomination.

Examination of the relationship between monotheistic religions and politics constitutes the most substantial part of the monograph. **Lenč** focuses attention on specific approaches to the politics and especially on the place of politics within individual religions. Extremely interesting is the merger of two of three religions. Although Christianity is generally associated with Judaism as representing a common cultural and historical area, Islamic perception of common foundations of Judaism and Islam is presented as well. However, we consider extensive quotations from Rejwan's study *Islam and Judaism. Cultural Relations and Interaction through the Ages* present in the reviewed monograph far too numerous and distracting. The common Muslim-Jewish view *de facto* simplifies the perception of politics from the Muslim perspective. Although **Lenč** elaborates on historical traditions of Jews, as well as on the basic traditions of Judaism, he does so only within close connection with Islam. The convergence and fault lines between political aspects of the mentioned religions are predominantly referred to

by quotations from the Quran and Alija Izetbegović's monograph. The functioning of democracy and Islam is not perceived antagonistically (ibn-Rushd), although it is acknowledged that religion plays more important role. From the perspective of Islamic philosophy, democracy is not, and should not be, in contrast to Islam. Islamic politics is according to **Lenč** based on five key principles. These are: direct sovereignty of God's commands over the behaviour of individuals (as the society); state has primarily enforced the laws of God; all relations of the society are managed through (and by) God's covenant; superiority of written legal document (The Quran) over the other legal norms; and trust (probably inevitable faith) of the believer to the God and state authority to the God. **Lenč** citing Fletcher claims that the tensions between Church and State present in the Christian world cannot arise in an Islamic world. Distinguishing the Muslim-Jewish tradition from Christianity in the perception of the state was fundamental in the separation of state and politics from faith. State and its institutions were perceived by Christianity as evil and sin. **Lenč** is considering the Church, within the meaning of Catholic dogma, as a hierarchal active actor in politics. Another determinant was also the "secularisation" of Christianity, i.e. its limitation to the questions of morality and political order. In this context, Christian Church is included among interest groups by **Lenč**, which would not be possible in case of Islam.

Interconnection of Church and state and philosophical approaches to their study are mentioned in the analysis of Saint Augustine and Hans Kung texts. **Lenč** states that the essential difference between the Muslim-Jewish and Christian perception of how religion influence politics, caused by the existence of specific organisation within Christianity, which controls the *entire* Christian religious community, unlike in Islam or Judaism. Christianity is not for the first (nor last) time identified as Catholic. For this reason, it would be also appropriate to translate biblical quotations from the ecumenical translation of Bible, than the translation from Vulgate.

Renaissance of religiosity of modern societies elaborated by Gilles Kepel became the basis for the fourth chapter. In an essayistic way, **Lenč** develops the breakpoint of the renaissance of religiosity during post-modern arrangement of social relations. The most controversial part of the chapter seems to be the so-called "Judaisation" of Israeli politics after the electoral success of the Likud party in 1977 general election. Author also accentuates the change in the position of the Catholic Church in the Eastern bloc after the onset of the Pope John Paul II as socially significant, and the Iranian Islamic Revolution as an overrated

phenomenon, though it must be pointed out that it would be interesting to perceive the events of the Iranian Revolution from the Sunni perspective. We can agree with the author on the strengthening of the impact of religion on the politics following the above-mentioned events. The impact may be temporarily weakened, but it cannot be completely removed.

Definition of the religious party from the perspective of political party theory is a follow-up of author's previous publication on the subject. The original research article was published in Slovak Journal of Political Science in 2006. The author adds religious determinants to the universal definition of the political party. Criteria and functions applied to the most political parties (European, liberal-democratic) are retained in the chapter. It would be appropriate to replace obsolete parts of definition. Parts of definition claiming that political party seeks public support (without direct election?) remain questionable, given the fact that the definition of public support is not clear. Does it postulate that the support acquired in the electoral process is not required? Religious parties are always parties of one confession. A vital link between religious tradition and undistorted interpretation in order to preserve the authenticity is problematic for the religious parties in each of the studied religions.

Classical typology of political parties draw attention to the basic distinguishing criteria between different political parties based on ideologies, program or party systems. The author focuses on the summary of classifications from Duverger to Neumann, while not forgetting Kirchheimer, Panebianco or Sartori. In the second part of the sixth chapter, he applies Birkmann's classification model on religious parties. **Lenč** actually focuses on how, after introducing the religious factor, changes the nature of the definition. The question is whether one perceives religion as an ideology or as a particular program of a political party. The existence of the catch-all Christian party cannot be accepted; catch-all parties have nothing in common with religious political parties. They are without ideology. From the perspective of the CDU/CSU in Germany, it is only Christian in name, the politics and policy are universally Conservative and economically Liberal (in European meaning), not Christian-democratic. Circumstances of the party birth need no further comments.

The final chapter is based on Gunther and Diamond model from 2003, in which authors have classified religious parties as mass-based parties, and divided them into denominational and fundamentalist. The author's substantiation of the religious aspects of the model is vague. After a detailed analysis of the models of elite, mass, electoral and ethnic parties, **Lenč** comes with the addition of a model

of the ethnical-religious party. He divided the model into ethnical-confessional and special congress parties. However, in the case of liberal democracy, one cannot talk about religious congress parties. The combination of ethnicity and confession causes uncertainty of the criteria in Islamic countries. The summary on page 210 on religious catch-all parties, religious programmatic parties and religious personality parties may be considered as unnecessary. The first group in terms of religion actually does not exist, programmatic parties do not differentiate between democracy and authoritarian regime, while personality and personality parties are not primarily connected with religion.

*Religion in Politics and the Position of the Religious Political Parties* is a good and inspiring basic monograph except for the critique that the political science author intervenes in social psychology, political philosophy, anthropology and culture, creating an interesting opinion mosaic about the impact of religion on politics. Interactions between them are characterised especially in the first part. Definition of religious political parties has several pitfalls. The author only in very limited way touches upon ideological (and as he states programme-related) part of religious parties, and more detailed division of monograph on Christian religious parties, Jewish religious parties and Islamic religious parties is absent. It is however possible that such research was not the intention of the author and his hypotheses confirm this assumption. On the other hand, the monograph suffers from the lack of fundamental resources – Kalyvas, van Keersbergen, Muller (in the area of Christian religious parties: mass-based, denominational, fundamentalist); Julian Schwedler, as well as Sultan Tepe (both with significant recent contributions to the research of non-European religious parties). Gunther-Diamond model, the basic analysed text of the monograph, has been repeatedly criticised in Party Politics articles, a fact that should be at least mentioned. The linguistic correction would be more than desirable. References to the analysis of Buddhism and Hinduism to the politics mentioned in the first three chapters has later disappeared.

To conclude, we may identify with **Lenč**'s conclusions. Religion has played and will play an important role in politics. Secular society may change to a religious and fundamental society (Christian or Muslim) due to external and internal transformations of EU policies. Research of the religion in the context of the politics is thus more than necessary. Religiosity, despite the current religious structure of European population, may steer radicalisation. That is why Christian, Jewish and Muslim political parties should be primarily democratic, only secondarily confessional. Outside European culture, it is a wishful thinking.